

## The Measure of Spacing

The spacing variations in *Alexander's Letter* fall somewhere between those in the pedantic style of Ælfric's text illustrated earlier and the poetic style of the *Beowulf* text which now follows it in the Nowell Codex, much of it copied by the same scribe. Its style is principally paratactic, a sequence of sentences reporting events in simple sequential order, with liberal use of the connectives **ond** and **pā**. The best approach is to read aloud continuous text from a facsimile, 'reading' the spacings along with the letters. But for this edition it is necessary to offer an outline of some features of the spacings.

Because transcription of spacings between letter-strings is the distinctive element of this edition, a careful account of the principles used in interpreting the manuscript should make the text easier to understand and use, harder to misunderstand and misuse.

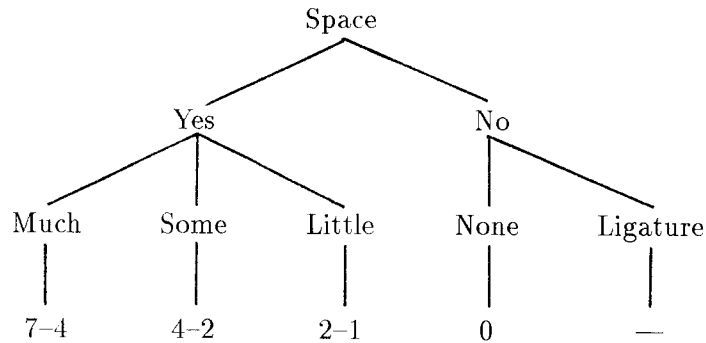
First, any transcription cannot enhance the original text. It abstracts in the act of copying, rendering the new text to some extent less than an exact copy.

This effect will be the right one if it leads to further understanding of the text and does not lead to misunderstanding. Representing the spacing variants with integer numerals 0–7, the system adopted for the graphotactic notation of the *Beowulf* text, seems to be as good as any might be: a finer scale would yield many more forced choices where the differences are not that clear, while a coarser scale would conflate some of the differences that are clear.

Initially the manuscript text was transcribed from beginning to end with a gap left at every point in the sequence of letters where spacing was left in the manuscript. A gap was also left between words, between prefix and root morphemes, and between root morphemes within words. Subsequently, the spacings in the manuscript at these gaps and boundaries were transcribed in numeral notation—0 for no-space, 1–7 for some space (and 9 for end of manuscript line and 8 for spacing that cannot be measured or is in doubt).

The transcription of the spacings is just that—a transcription. The interpretation of the new text is a different matter altogether, which seems to be analogous to interpretation of phonological data. In this analogy, the numeral notation 0–7 corresponds to broad phonetic transcription with a few diacritics to refine it just a bit. There remains the crucial interpretation on the model of phonemic analysis—those units defined by functional contrasts. For the text of *Alexander's Letter* (and for *Beowulf*, and the text of Ælfric's *Grammar* cited earlier), the 'emics' of the spacings seem to be something like that shown in the diagram below. The overlap in this general schema (1–2, 2–4, 4–7) will usually not occur within an immediate context; and within any range, particularly the 4–7 range, distinctions may still occur.

If the 'etic' transcription is interpreted in 'emic' terms (and if indeterminate <sup>9</sup> and <sup>8</sup> are replaced by / and ?), the general consistency of the spacing variations becomes clear.



(1) Scale of measure. It may be helpful to compare measurement of spacings in this text to an ancient and still useful mode of measuring land distances, where the unit is the 'pace.' It will vary according to a number of factors.

Length of the measurer's legs.

Manner of pacing (deliberate, practiced, 'calibrated,' unpracticed ....)

Whether fresh or weary.

Whether attentive or inattentive.

Whatever the case, in any continuous measuring

1 pace is more than none,

2 paces is always more than one,

3 paces is always more than two,

4 paces is always more than three, and so on.

But about here the numbering gets less definite as a measure of distance, in manuscripts, maybe a little larger than in literal pacing.

And what about measures not laid down as paces: Is it '3½,' or 'over 3,' or 'under 4,' or 'nearly 3½'?

Thus, 1 is not strictly notation for exactly half of 2; it stands for more than 0 and less than 2.

And since 7 is the limit for this system of notation (and very seldom used), how wide is it? More than 6, or course, and that's all one can say. See the 7-spacing at 129r.9, for example.

Very wide spacings—5, 6, 7 in the notation—occur in nearly every instance at a clause end. Seldom is a clause-end spaced as less than 4 or 3.

There is no false precision expressed in this transcription. There should accordingly be no inferences or cavils based on manipulations of numerals without regard to the features of the manuscript that they represent. For example, 7<sup>0</sup> **pā** vs. 7<sup>1</sup> **pā** or æt-<sup>3</sup>-**ēode** vs. æt-<sup>4</sup>-**ēode**.

Or specifically, consider the difference between 0 and 1 spacing. Many times there has been hesitation in transcribing a spacing as 0 or 1. Most frequent is the position after the abbreviation 7, or with a preposition such as **mid** or **to** and the word following. The general rule has been this: if the letter following such a form

is not in normal juxtaposition for letter in its immediate context, the notation is 1, and not 0; there seems to be no point in utilizing fractions, much less even one-place decimals: the distinction is between some space and no space.

(2) Letter Shapes and Spacing. This topic can give rise to considerable confusion. G. Storms, for example (*ES*, 52 (1971), 157–159), challenged an attempt to analyze the spacing in the *Beowulf* text: ‘But where do Anglo-Saxon letters begin or end?’ Many lack a ‘clear vertical downstroke,’ such as *x o c e þ ð b d*. Others have ‘flourishes and curves’ to begin and end them. A particularly harsh review by C. J. E. Ball many years ago of *Suprasegmentals, Meter, and the Manuscript of Beowulf* went further to claim that the notation of spacing was inaccurate (and the analysis based on it of no value, therefore) ‘because the author consistently ignores the hair-line and run-off strokes of final *e*, *l* and *r*’ (*RES*, 21 (1970), 476).

Confusion and controversy of this kind arise from different (and some unsound) notions of what should be measured. If one is just taking dimensions to see whether a pattern will emerge, any measure is as good as any other so long as it is taken and reported accurately. On the other hand, if one is taking dimensions in an attempt to understand a pattern, all the measures need to represent relations among elements in the writing that are of the same order. What happens if one ignores the run-off stroke—the tongue—of the final *e* at a clause boundary, or at a line-end?

The question to resolve is whether significant measurement of the horizontal distance is to begin from the ending of the tongue of *e*, for example, to the first vertically aligned marking of the next letter, or is the measurement to begin from the ‘body’ of the final *e*? See, for example, the lengthened tongue of *e* at line end 116r.7, and compare it to other word-final *e* forms on this page; and then compare to non-final *e* forms. Or consider the final *e* at phrase-end as at 117r.4–5: <sup>4</sup> **Ond** <sup>3</sup> **in** <sup>0</sup> **macedō** <sup>9</sup> **niam** <sup>3</sup> **ic** <sup>1</sup> **eft** <sup>2</sup> **ge** <sup>-1</sup> **læ** <sup>1</sup> **ded** <sup>4</sup> **wære** <sup>4</sup>.

When *e* is not ligatured to a following letter, such as *a* or *n* as it usually is, even a very slight spacing which otherwise would be interpreted as 0 (i.e., no spacing) is interpreted as 1-space. E.g., 107v.20 <sup>9</sup> **þā** <sup>0</sup> **ic** <sup>2</sup> **þē** <sup>1</sup> **wrīte** <sup>4</sup>, 108r.3 <sup>3</sup> **ā** <sup>0</sup> **ge** <sup>-1</sup> **wunelice**.

My decision to use the latter method rests squarely on the following judgment. Length of tongue of *e* (or of *æ*) is regarded as a function of the spacing between letter strings, not the other way around. One can think of the space where the tongue is extended as being undefined, in the sense it hasn’t been closed at the time the tongue is drawn. But only in that sense. Undefined does not mean space is not being left. The measure of the spacing will be whatever it would have been if some other letter had preceded it. Simply, the tongue of the *e* would not be extended unless there was (to be) a wide spacing for a firm graphotactic reason. The same holds true for the final stroke of *e* at any other place spacing is (to be) left, whether the spacing is wide or narrow.

The run-off strokes of ‘final’ *l* and *r* also need to be considered in relational terms rather than as if they were somehow autonomous. The notion of ‘final’

*e*, *l*, and *r*, it will be remembered, is not defined by the concept of word in the graphotactics of this text; ‘final’ is the last letter before a prototypical division by spacing of letter-strings whether representing words, morphemes, or syllables.

The pattern of spacing is consistent for all instances when run-offs are seen as extensions into a planned space and not as the causes of right-displacement of a following letter.

Ultimately, the correct interpretation of the tongue of *e* and *æ*, the run-offs from *r* and *l* (and one should add *f*) and other variant letter shapes in relation to spacing must be made in terms of the text of which they are parts. They can be regarded in the same way, say, as morphophonemic alternates, which are distinguished by contexts but do not distinguish meanings. In the matter of these letter shapes, as in the matter of the spacing in general, pattern will appear, and will be meaningful, if the variants are correlated with larger linguistic patterns. Otherwise they are at best absolute but inert, at worst impediments to textual analysis.

(3) Other Factors in Assessing Spacing. The writing has a great deal of regularity and consistency, most easily illustrated in identical constructions occurring close together. There is remarkable consistency of letter forms and spacings in identical words, as 111v.11, 14 **wilnade**, and in adjacent **hē þ** and **þ hē** (in the same two lines). Further examples:

109r.11    **un<sup>-1</sup>-ā<sup>-0</sup>-rīmed<sup>-1</sup>-līcan**

109r.12    **un<sup>-1</sup>-ā<sup>-0</sup>-rīmed<sup>-1</sup>-līcan**

110v.1    <sup>3</sup> **7<sup>1</sup> wun<sup>1</sup>de<sup>4</sup>don<sup>3</sup>**

110v.4    <sup>4</sup> **ge<sup>-1</sup>-wundo<sup>3</sup>dan<sup>3</sup>**

But there are differences to be reckoned with. One such difference is found in writing that varies from compact to loose. For instance, at 116r, 2 and 7, **micelnisse** occurs twice, the latter form a good ten percent larger. An individual word may have loose letter-spacing, as 121v.19 **eg-londe**, 122r.17 **eg-lande**, or 123r.9 **ge-wæcte**.

At 110r **-berende**, **-berendan**, **-beorendan** occur all within the space of five lines, with both spelling and spacing differences.

A prosodic slow-down may be being registered at the end of 125v.14–16, especially in **hæf<sup>1</sup>de**, **hēaf<sup>1</sup>de**, **hor<sup>1</sup>nas ... hor<sup>2</sup>num**, in just two lines:

<sup>3</sup> **ænig<sup>3</sup> hæf<sup>1</sup>de<sup>4</sup> þ<sup>0</sup> dēor<sup>9</sup> þrīe<sup>4</sup> hor<sup>1</sup>nas<sup>2</sup> on<sup>0</sup> foran<sup>2</sup> hēaf<sup>1</sup>de<sup>4</sup> 7<sup>0</sup> mid<sup>2</sup> þæm<sup>9</sup> hor<sup>2</sup>num<sup>3</sup> wæs<sup>2</sup> egeslice<sup>4</sup> ge<sup>-1</sup>-wæpnod<sup>3</sup>.**

On fol. 130v the spacing variation is accompanied by variation in spread of letter-strings—as the copying job nears its end. Or, if one looks at fol. 131v, then 131r, then 130v, and compares the spread of letters and spacings to any ordinary folio preceding, a grade of differences easily recognized. The *pattern* of variation is essentially the same, and the millimeter measure is entirely irrelevant, even distorting.

Or for that matter, spacing varies from time to time for unobvious reason. Already on 107v.7–10, ‘close formation’ spacing alternates with looser measure for

juxtaposed letters, especially in lines 9–10. Then there is what may be an end-of-clause ritardando: 117r.4 <sup>1</sup> hīe <sup>2</sup> mec <sup>2</sup> ealles <sup>9</sup> middan-<sup>2</sup>-geardes <sup>3</sup> kyning <sup>3</sup> 7 <sup>1</sup> hlāford <sup>3</sup> mid <sup>9</sup> hēan <sup>3</sup> sīgum <sup>3</sup> ge-<sup>0</sup>-weor<sup>1</sup>pe<sup>1</sup>den .<sup>4</sup>

‘Clitic’ spacing (always minimal) answers better to prosodic analysis than to morphotactic patterns: the morphemes involved are too various to be accounted for in morphotactics formulas. Begin with the abbreviations 7 for *ond* and þ for *þæt*; they occur in place of the spelled form with very few exceptions. Conjunction **ond**, nearly always written as an abbreviation, is usually not set apart from following letters; of course, it is not a letter and is thus immediately separable for that reason. (It may be listed in the alphabet, in a twelfth century text, for example; nonetheless, it represents a morpheme (most often a word) rather than a discrete sound. In that alphabet, it appears in the Anglice littere following the A to Z sequence.) It is, though, usually preceded by conspicuous linear space. That would be consistent with its being initial and unstressed in a phonological phrase. Spelled **ond** mainly occurs following a midline point, and begins a new sentence, e.g., 114r.7, 8 or four times on 131r.

The abbreviation for **þæt** is similar. (It is also listed in the follow-up to the same alphabet as the **ond** abbreviation.) At 118r.19 **þæt** is spelled out at line-end, and still leaves room enough for **wē**, but the space is left empty; normally **wē** **ūs** are written as a close pair. Even so, þ **wē** **ūs** could easily have fitted within the right margin ruling. On 120r.1, 3 **þæt** is written full twice in three lines.

Relative particle **þe** is similar, except that it is a spelling, hence usually set apart from the next sequence by minimal spacing. The spacing preceding it is little or none when it follows a pronominal, as in **Se þe**, but considerably more when it initiates a clause relative to a NP containing a noun head and a determinative form, as in 123v.10 <sup>0</sup> tō <sup>1</sup> þæm <sup>3</sup> mere <sup>4</sup> þe <sup>1</sup> wē <sup>1</sup> bī <sup>1</sup> ge-<sup>1</sup>-wīcod <sup>3</sup> hæfdon ./.

Prepositions are similar to relative particles in several ways.

(4) Two Examples of Phrasal Spacing Patterns. Varied measure of spacing can be studied within clausal constructions. For example, should we expect the grouping pattern

þā wolde wē | ūs ge-restan .  
þā mynton wē | ūs ge-restan .  
—or

þā wolde | wē ūs | ge-restan .  
þā mynton | wē ūs | ge-restan . ?

(Apart from the spacings, note the morphological clue that this text is based on speech in late West Saxon: plural past tense **wolde** vs. **mynton**.) The graphotactics are consistent in both passages in representing the second pattern.

124v.10–11 <sup>9</sup> ðā <sup>0</sup> wæs <sup>4</sup> sēo <sup>3</sup> þridde <sup>4</sup> tīd <sup>3</sup> þære <sup>4</sup> nihte <sup>5</sup>  
þā <sup>0</sup> wolde <sup>9</sup> wē <sup>1</sup> ūs <sup>3</sup> ge-<sup>0</sup>-restan . <sup>5</sup> þā <sup>2</sup> cwōman <sup>3</sup> þær <sup>2</sup> nædran <sup>3</sup> eft <sup>9</sup>

125r.16–17 <sup>5</sup> þā <sup>1</sup> hit <sup>2</sup> wæs <sup>1</sup> sēo <sup>1</sup> fīfte <sup>3</sup> tīd <sup>3</sup> þære <sup>4</sup> nihte . <sup>9</sup>  
þā <sup>0</sup> mynton <sup>3</sup> wē <sup>1</sup> ūs <sup>?</sup> ge-<sup>0</sup>-restan . <sup>5</sup> ac <sup>1</sup> þā <sup>2</sup> cwōman <sup>9</sup> þær <sup>3</sup> hwīte <sup>5</sup> léon <sup>3</sup>

A final example of measure-patterns that need study is the construction **on be-cwōm**. This is in the line of historical development of phrasal verbs in English, which had conspicuous development in the fourteenth century, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have virtually flooded the language. But they had to begin somewhere. Listed below are the instances of **be-cwōm-** (and *be-cuman*) culled from *Alexander's Letter*. Most of them occur with prepositional phrases. Those instances which have **on** immediately preceding the verb form (*not* a preposition) are shown in boldface type. Two are especially informative. At fol. 124r and fol. 125r, at the end of a line of writing there is room for **on** and **be**. However, both times the line division is after **on**, apparently intended to avoid canceling the graphotactic patterns of the phrasal construction. Following are the occurrences of **be-cwōm-**.

111r .<sup>5</sup> Ond <sup>2</sup> swā <sup>?</sup> mid <sup>2</sup> mī/ne <sup>2</sup> werode <sup>3</sup> on-<sup>1</sup>-sunde <sup>3</sup> in <sup>1</sup> patriacen <sup>3</sup> þ <sup>2</sup> lond / wē <sup>0</sup> be-<sup>3</sup>-cwōman <sup>3</sup> mid <sup>2</sup> golde <sup>4</sup>

111v .<sup>6</sup> ðā <sup>2</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōman <sup>3</sup> wē <sup>3</sup> on <sup>1</sup> þā <sup>3</sup> lond-<sup>3</sup>-ge-<sup>2</sup>-mæro / me<sup>2</sup>do <sup>3</sup> 7 <sup>0</sup> persa .<sup>6</sup>

111v þ <sup>1</sup> wē <sup>2</sup> tō <sup>2</sup> þæm <sup>1</sup> londe / 7 <sup>0</sup> tō <sup>1</sup> þære <sup>5</sup> stōwe <sup>5</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōman .<sup>4</sup>

114r .<sup>6</sup> ðā <sup>1</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwō/man <sup>3</sup> wē <sup>0</sup> syðþan <sup>3</sup> tō <sup>1</sup> þæm <sup>3</sup> wudum <sup>4</sup> in<sup>1</sup>die <sup>3</sup>

.<sup>5</sup> Ond <sup>2</sup> wē <sup>4</sup> þā <sup>1</sup> eft <sup>3</sup> in <sup>0</sup> fasia<sup>1</sup>cen <sup>2</sup> þæt / [115v] lond <sup>4</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōman <sup>3</sup>

116r þ <sup>0</sup> ūs<sup>1</sup>ic <sup>2</sup> þær <sup>2</sup> **on** <sup>1</sup> **be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōme** .<sup>6</sup>

116v 7 <sup>0</sup> þā <sup>2</sup> fȳr <sup>3</sup> þe <sup>1</sup> ūs <sup>2</sup> þær <sup>2</sup> in <sup>0</sup> þæm / wīcum <sup>3</sup> **on** <sup>1</sup> **be-<sup>2</sup>-cwōman** <sup>2</sup>

117v / frīneð <sup>4</sup> hwæt <sup>1</sup> gōdes <sup>3</sup> oþðe <sup>3</sup> yfles <sup>3</sup> him <sup>1</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cu/man <sup>3</sup> sceal .<sup>5</sup>

118r .<sup>5</sup> Ðā <sup>0</sup> be-<sup>2</sup>-cwōm <sup>2</sup> ic <sup>3</sup> on / caspīam <sup>3</sup> þ <sup>1</sup> lond <sup>3</sup>

118v <sup>3</sup> þȳ <sup>0</sup> læs / wē <sup>1</sup> on <sup>0</sup> ðā <sup>3</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōmon .<sup>4</sup>

119r <sup>3</sup> þ <sup>0</sup> mē <sup>2</sup> þā <sup>2</sup> earfeðu / be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōman ;<sup>4</sup>

121v .<sup>5</sup> \*þ <sup>0</sup> ūsic <sup>2</sup> ðonne <sup>3</sup> sem<sup>1</sup>ninga / hwelce <sup>3</sup> earfe<sup>2</sup>ðo <sup>4</sup> **on** <sup>1</sup> **be-<sup>2</sup>-cwōme** .<sup>5</sup>

122r .<sup>4</sup> ðā <sup>3</sup> be-<sup>2</sup>-cwōm / sum <sup>?</sup> on-<sup>0</sup>-gris-<sup>2</sup>-līc <sup>?</sup> wīse <sup>4</sup> on <sup>2</sup> hīe .<sup>3</sup>

123r 7 <sup>0</sup> þ <sup>0</sup> wē <sup>1</sup> ge-<sup>3</sup>-nōg <sup>0</sup> raðe <sup>3</sup> tō <sup>0</sup> þæm <sup>1</sup> be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōman /

124r <sup>4</sup> gif <sup>2</sup> ūs <sup>1</sup> on <sup>0</sup> niht <sup>3</sup> un-<sup>0</sup>-cūðes <sup>3</sup> hwæt <sup>3</sup> **on** / **be-<sup>2</sup>-cwōme** <sup>5</sup>

125r <sup>3</sup> þāra <sup>1</sup> þinga <sup>3</sup> þe <sup>2</sup> ūs <sup>1</sup> **on** / **be-<sup>1</sup>-cwōmon** <sup>3</sup> swā <sup>3</sup> monigra <sup>3</sup> ge-<sup>0</sup>-swenc<sup>1</sup>nissa <sup>3</sup> 7 <sup>1</sup> ear/feðo .<sup>5</sup>

125v <sup>2</sup> 7 <sup>0</sup> ge-<sup>1</sup>-swenc<sup>2</sup>nissum <sup>2</sup> þe <sup>2</sup> ūs <sup>1</sup> **on** <sup>1</sup> **be-<sup>3</sup>-cwōm=** /

128v be-<sup>?</sup>-cuman <sup>3</sup> in <sup>0</sup> mace<sup>1</sup>doniam <sup>4</sup> tō <sup>1</sup> olimphi/ade <sup>5</sup> mīnre <sup>4</sup> me<sup>1</sup>der <sup>3</sup> 7 <sup>0</sup> mīnum <sup>2</sup> ge-<sup>1</sup>-swus/trum .<sup>5</sup>

128v þ <sup>0</sup> ic <sup>2</sup> eft <sup>2</sup> cwic <sup>3</sup> ne / mōste <sup>3</sup> in <sup>0</sup> mīn<sup>1</sup>ne <sup>3</sup> ēpel <sup>4</sup> be-<sup>0</sup>-cuman .<sup>4</sup>