

PREFACE

The original version of this text of *Beowulf* was a first of its kind in two respects—a pioneering data structure for an electronic literary text, and the only edition to represent in detail the graphotactics of a medieval text. Prepared in 1968–69 and published in 1975 as *Beowulf: An Edition with Manuscript Spacing Notation*, it was technologically premature and typographically offputting, given the primitive computing equipment of a quarter-century ago.

This revised version retains the original data structure as well as the encoding of the graphotactics of the *Beowulf* manuscript. Twenty-five years of technological advances have made the use of this text no longer restricted to those with access to an institutional computer, requiring a moderate budget for machine time and an immoderate allotment of personal time spent having to work one's way in batch-mode electronic data processing. Analyses that would take weeks to develop a generation ago can now be achieved in a few hours on almost any personal computer.

The text is an alphanumeric analog of a handwritten verbal text, not a set of images. We have had images since the photographic facsimiles beginning with the Early English Text Society edition by Julius Zupitza (1882). The new electronic *Beowulf* prepared by Kevin Kiernan and Andrew Prescott, unimagined and unimaginable twenty-five years ago, provides superb images by displaying electronically stored scansions of the manuscript leaves. All these versions, as well as the conventional editions—Friederich Klaeber's still being unsurpassed—serve separate purposes. The present edition remains unique in purpose and format, enabling analysis of the spacing features of the manuscript text, which are crucial, I believe, to study of the phonotactics, the prosody, and the meter of *Beowulf*.

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