

PREFACE

Now that old-fashioned photographic images and new-fashioned digitized images can display pages of the Nowell Codex, what is the point in producing a new edition of the Old English translation of *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*?

The answer lies in the data structure of this edition. It represents not only the letters (and other marks) of the manuscript text, but the locations and sizes of the spacings left between sequences of letters, as well. If only words were separated by spacing, that could be represented in the manner of conventional printed editions. But that is not the case. If spacings were more or less equal, that too could be represented in the manner of printed editions. That is not the case either. Instead, there are clear correlations between spacings—where they occur, and their relative sizes—with phonological patterns, morphological patterns, syntactic patterns. That being the case, it will be useful to have the spacing features given explicit representations in an edition, along with the letters and other markings, so that these two complementary aspects of the manuscript evidence can be studied together.

This edition therefore embodies a data structure a bit more complex than has been customary, while remaining fully transparent. It records the letters and marks of the manuscript; adds vowel-length marking; eschews modern punctuation, capitalization, and the like. Then, because the manuscript's spacings occur some at word boundaries, some at other points, it encodes the linguistic features of the places of their occurrences. This structuring enables analysis directly of the correlation among graphotactic, phonotactic, morphotactic, and syntactic aspects of the text.

To make it most accessible and most useful, the text of *Alexander's Letter* is prepared in print format and in electronic format—one for reading and annotation, one for computer-based analysis. Both are available at the same website.

Or to ask once again what is the point of this edition, another answer is that the original text was written out by the same person who copied the first three-fifths of *Beowulf*. Any linguistic insights we can glean from the text of *Alexander's Letter*, particularly if they concern linguistic prosody, should be welcome for the study of West Saxon Old English and the text of the best poem preserved in that language.