Old Saxon *unmet*, Genesis B 313b *ungemet*, and unmetrical scribal forms in germanic alliterative verse

Nelson Goering

To cite this article: Nelson Goering (2020): Old Saxon *unmet*, Genesis B 313b *ungemet*, and unmetrical scribal forms in germanic alliterative verse, Studia Neophilologica, DOI: [10.1080/00393274.2020.1851296](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2020.1851296)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2020.1851296>

Published online: 04 Dec 2020.

Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

View related articles [↗](#)

View Crossmark data [↗](#)

ARTICLE

Old Saxon *unmet*, Genesis B 313b *ungemet*, and unmetrical scribal forms in germanic alliterative verse

Nelson Goering

Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

ABSTRACT

The adverb *ungemete*, *unigmetes* in Beowulf and elsewhere in Old English verse creates significant metrical problems. I revive and expand the proposal of Fulk (1992) to read this as **unmet*. This restoration receives support from metrics and from the comparison with Old Saxon *unmet* of the same meaning, and the alteration to *ungemet(e)*, etc., in the manuscripts is easily explained by Old English scribal practices.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 July 2020

Accepted 9 November 2020

KEYWORDS

Beowulf; Old English; Old Saxon; Emendation; Alliterative verse

1 The problem

The words *unigmetes* and *ungemete* ‘exceedingly, immeasurably’ present a well-known metrical problem at their four occurrences in *Beowulf*¹

(1)

- (a) *gamela Scylding. Ġeat unigmetes wēl*
‘old Scylding. The Geat exceedingly greatly ...’ (*Beo* 1792)
- (b) *wæfre ond wælfūs, wyrd ungemete nēah*
‘agitated and eager for battle, fate exceedingly close’ (*Beo* 2420)
- (c) *þeoden mǣrne, þegn ungemete til*
‘famous king, thane exceedingly good’ (*Beo* 2721)
- (d) *dōgorġerīmes, dēað ungemete nēah*
‘of his count of days, death exceedingly close’ (*Beo* 2728)

The essential problem is that the underlined words result in unmetrical patterns. The *un-* is most likely stressed (see below), leaving either *-igmetes* or *-gemete* to sit in what would most typically be a monosyllabic, fully unstressed dip of a type D4 (Db) verse.² For a more routine verse of this type, compare:

CONTACT Nelson Goering nelson.goering@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk Somerville College, Oxford, UK

¹Cited from Fulk, Bjork & Niles (2009).

²I use Sievers’ usual labels (and light revisions of it, including ‘Da’ for types D1-3, and ‘Db’ for type D4), though this is a matter of convenience in labelling, and does not represent a strong commitment to any specific theoretical underpinning of Old English metre. All the relevant metrical observations hold just as well under the word-foot theory of metre (Russom 1987).

- (2) bona swiðe nēah
 ‘the slayer exceedingly close’ (*Beo* 1744b)

Beyond *Beowulf*, forms of this adverb appear some 30 times in the corpus of poetry,³ nearly always as the first word in an off-verse followed by a heavy trochee:

- (3) is heora ealdordōm ungemete swiðe
 ‘their lordship is exceedingly great’ (*PPs* 138.15)

This and the many similar verses, mostly from the *Metrical Psalms*, clearly show that the *un-* indeed bears the main stress, since the alliteration is always vocalic. These verses would seem to scan as type A, which is more tolerant of expanded dips between the first two lifts. Nonetheless, one would normally assume some degree of secondary stress on *-me-*, which would result in an unmetrical pattern.

2 Previous explanations

The four examples from *Beowulf* have attracted attention throughout the entire history of modern Old English metrical studies. Sievers (1885: 260) scans these as type D4 (Db), assuming that all the syllables after *un-* are unstressed: SSwwws.⁴ In Sievers (1893: 130), he proposes extending the form of 1792, beginning with *unig-*, to all the instances in *Beowulf*, in order to allow resolution, resulting in the dip only containing two syllables in each case. This solution is unacceptable for two major reasons: resolution of *unig-* after a stressed monosyllable would violate Kaluza’s law, and *unigmet-* is a late variation of *ungemet-* in the history of Old English (Fulk, Bjork & Niles 2009: cxli), and is more likely to be a scribal replacement for the latter rather than the reverse. The linguistic basis for assuming such a run of unstressed syllables without giving prominence to *-me-* is not something Sievers attempts to justify, and this remains a dubious proposal. Momma (1990) and Suzuki (1996: 21–22) would also take this as a variety of type D.

An alternative view, proposed by Pope (1966: 330–331), holds that in *Beowulf* the *un-* is, in fact, unstressed, and *-mete* forms a resolved half-lift. This is also the conclusion arrived at by Russom (1987: 120–121), and it is accepted ‘with some hesitation’ by Kendall (1981: 48), who is followed in turn by Hutcheson (1995: 265). Under this scansion, the metrical pattern of the four verses in question would then be Swwš^wS,⁵ an ‘E2’ type otherwise not attested in *Beowulf* at all. Furthermore, in all but one of its non-*Beowulfian* occurrences, *un-* is clearly stressed and alliterating (the exception is *Met* 11.59, which has the same rhythm and same problems as the examples from *Beowulf*).

³Statements about attestation in Old English poetry are based on Bessinger (1978), checked against the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. Citations are from Krapp & Dobbie (1953), unless specified otherwise, and short titles follow Mitchell, Ball & Cameron (1975). With *ungemet* (4x): *GenB* 313 (discussed below), *PPs* 56.5, 61.2, *Met* 11.59. With *ungemet* (17x, in addition to the 3x in *Beowulf*): *PPs* 72.5, 98.1, 108.2, 108.3, 108.27, 115.1, 115.2, 118.50, 118.58, 118.70, 118.150, 118.161, 138.15, 141.6, 141.7, 142.3, 143.17. With *ungemetum* (5x): *PPs* 118.67, 118.107, 142.1, *MRune* 29, *JDay II* 194. With *ungemetun* (1x): *MRune* 8. With *unigmet* (2x; cf. the 1 instance of *unigmetes* in *Beowulf*): *Met* 7.33, 10.9.

⁴S stands for a stressed syllable, s for a secondarily stressed syllable, and w for a weak or unstressed syllable. See Stockwell (1996) and Goering (2020: 141, fn. 5) for details of metrical notations for Old English.

⁵The š^w marks a short syllable (indicated by the breve) followed by an unstressed syllable which has resolved with it, so that this is equivalent to SwwsS.

Rather than choosing which element to stress, *un-* or *-me-*, Bliss (1962: 77–78) argues that the entire adverb is unstressed, so that the scansion of the *Beowulf* verses would be SwwwwS. This is linguistically unlikely (see in particular Russom 1987: 120–121) and would still result in an unparalleled metrical pattern (Pascual 2013: 55–56).

A more recent proposal comes from Yakovlev (2008: 59, fn. 26),⁶ who very tentatively suggests a double application of Cable (1991: 13–16) prefix exemption to construe both *un-* and *ge-* as extrametrical, resulting in scansions like *wyrd (un)ǵemete nēah*, where the brackets signal material ignored by the prefix licence.⁷ Even if one in general accepts Cable's argument that prefixes may be disregarded in scansion, this would be a highly unusual instantiation of the licence, applying to two separate prefixes to entirely eliminate the second position of a verse. The application of the prefix licence under any circumstances to *un-* is furthermore doubtful, for much the same reasons as Pope's decision to take *un-* as unstressed.

All of these attempts to stress or destress various parts of the adverb involve linguistic difficulties, and even so none result in acceptable metrical patterns. Since the initial problem is essentially metrical, none of these can be considered an adequate solution, and all of these approaches may be safely set aside.

3 A solution

One further suggestion is proposed in a footnote by Fulk (1992: 70, fn. 14):

[N]early all the thirty-seven instances [of *unǵemet-* in verse]⁸ require *unmet-*, instead, and none would be rendered unmetrical by the substitution. *Unmet-* as a simplex (cf. O[ld] Sax[on] *unmet*, O[ld] H[igh] G[erman] *unmez*, *ungamez*) is attested twice in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and even once in verse, at *Instructions for Christians* 136b, if these are not simply variant spellings of *unmæt*.

That is, Fulk argues that Old English poets generally intended disyllabic *unmet* here, and that the longer *unǵemete* (and similar) of the manuscripts is an artefact of scribal norms that does not reflect the content of the poems in question.

This proposal has, as far as I can see, been taken up by no metricists or editors since, not even Fulk, Bjork & Niles (2009), which Fulk helped edit. The form **unmet* could not have been printed as such, according to the editorial philosophy of that edition, where metrically motivated readings are signalled primarily through underdotting – in this case, these words could have been given as *unǵemetė*, *unǵimetės*. But no such marking is employed in these instances, and even in the commentary the reading **unmet* is not explicitly included in the range of possibilities (Fulk, Bjork & Niles 2009: 216–217, s.v. 1792^b. *unǵimete*s; a citation leads to Fulk's footnote, quoted above, but the possible reading **unmet* is not directly suggested). It is, nonetheless, a solution with much to recommend it: it is linguistically plausible, results in excellent metre, and fits into a well-

⁶I thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing Yakovlev's discussion to my attention.

⁷Yakovlev gives the scansion as SppSrs, with *S* standing for a stressed syllable, *s* for a secondary stress, *p* for an extrametrical prefix, and *r* for a resolved syllable. This must be a mistake, since this would result in the scansion of, effectively, SSs, with only three metrical positions – a type whose existence is ruled out by Yakovlev's framework. He presumably intended SppSxs instead, with suspension of resolution. However, since suspension is not expected after a fully unstressed syllable, this difficulty with resolution is a further reason for doubting this suggestion.

⁸This tally includes adjectives as well as adverbs.

founded view of the scribal habits of late Old English copyists. The following sections examine each of these points in turn.

4 Old Saxon *unmet*

Old Saxon represents the most closely related poetic tradition to Old English, with its two major poetic works – *Heliand* and the shorter surviving fragments of *Genesis* – very similar in lexis and style to their Insular counterparts. In this corpus, *unmet* occurs three times⁹

(4)

- (a) *ōður mag man olbundeon, thōh hē sī unmet grōt*
'more easily can one [push] a camel, though it be exceedingly large ...' (*Hel* 3299)
- (b) *ar^abið-uuerco, huilon unmet hēt*
'[we suffered many] difficult labours, while [the sun shone] exceedingly hot' (*Hel* 3437)
- (c) *fulliad mid iro fer^ahu; ferid unmet¹⁰ grōt*
'come to an end with their life; [hateful hunger] comes, exceedingly great' (*Hel* 4329)

The word is also found twice in the *Hildebrandslied*, a poetic text of unclear dialect affiliation (some structural elements appear to be Saxonisms, but other features are at odds with this; the surface form is extremely mixed), but certainly an important representative of early West Germanic poetic tradition¹¹

(5)

- (a) *her was Ōtachre ummet tirri*
'he was exceedingly angry with Odoacer' (*Hild* 25)
- (b) *du bist dir altēr Hūn, ummet spāhēr*
'you old Hun, you are exceedingly cunning' (*Hild* 39)

In (5a), the MS has *ummettirri*, which may be read in various ways. Braune (1994), following Grein (1858: 26), simply puts a word division between the two *t*'s, reading the exact equivalent of Old Saxon *unmet*, though the word *tirri* is unusual and must be either conjecturally explained or emended. Others, going back to Lachmann (1835: 142–143), have preferred to place the word boundary after the *t*'s, *ummett irri*, or, following Lühr (1982), understand *ummett<i> irri*, with one of the two sequential *i*'s being elided (scansion would suggest this elision is metrical, not just scribal). This would replace the awkward hapax *tirri* with the well-attested adjective *irri* 'angry' (cognate with Old

⁹Cited, with some adaptation, from Behaghel & Taeger (1996), with reference to Sievers (1878) and Tiefenbach (2010).

¹⁰Thus in MS C; M has *unm&*, using the ampersand as a shorthand for the letter sequence *et* at the end of a line: <https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/0002/bsb00026305/images/index.html?id=00026305&groesser=&fp=193.174.98.30&no=&seite=126>.

¹¹Cited from Braune (1994: 84–85), with the addition of vowel length marks. (5a) is line 24 in Lühr (1982: 2–4), while (5b) is line 35. Fulk, Bjork & Niles (2009: 339–341) also edit the poem, in which (5b) is line 37.

English *yrre*), at little palaeographic cost – but it would make for an unusual case of double alliteration in the off-verse. The correct reading is not easy to determine. But even if the reading *ummett*<*i*>, less like its Old Saxon counterparts, is accepted, the important point for the immediate purpose is the lack of any *gi*- prefix. In both instances, the words show a trivial assimilation of *nm* to *mm*.

The prose corpus of Old Saxon is rather meagre, but it does include one instance of *ungimet*, with the *gi*- element (*Merseburger Glosses* 71, 5). This would seem to parallel the situation I propose for Old English: **unmet* in the poetic register, and longer, prefixed forms *ungimet*, *unġemete*(-) more typical of prose.¹²

5 Scansion

If we introduce **unmet* into Old English poetry, parallel to Old Saxon, the verses in (1) would read as:

(6)

- (a) *gamela Scylding. Ġeat unmet wēl*
'old Scylding. The Geat exceedingly greatly ...' (*Beo* 1792)
- (b) *wǣfre ond wǣlfūs, wyrd unmet nēah*
'agitated and eager for battle, fate exceedingly close' (*Beo* 2420)
- (c) *þēoden mǣrne, þegn unmet til*
'famous king, thane exceedingly good' (*Beo* 2721)
- (d) *dōgorġerīmes, dēað unmet nēah*
'of his count of days, death exceedingly close' (*Beo* 2728)

Met 11.59 would also scan comparably. Taking the *un*- as stressed (as it must be elsewhere), the second element of this grammaticalized adverb is open to significant demotion to be treated as an unstressed element, being both word final and immediately subordinated to the preceding primary stress (avoidance of stress clash). These verses would all scan identically to (2), and indeed to (4c), probably showing the D4 (Db) rhythm SSws, though scansion as type E (SswS) is also possible – if such a distinction is even to be maintained in off-verses (Cable 1974: 75–79, Suzuki 1996: 113–121). Either way, such verses are a well-established part of the Old English metrical repertoire (see further Suzuki 2004: 276 and Hofmann 1991: 194, 269 for the comparable scansion of 4c).

Other verses are also metrically improved. (3) would be read as a simple type A verse, the most basic rhythm in Old English poetry:

¹²A full treatment of the Old High German material is beyond the scope of this discussion. It is worth noting, however, that we do find both the plain adverb *unmez*, as well as extended adverbial forms such as *ungimezzon*. In the early *Abrogans*, we find both an adverbial *unmez* and adjectival *ungamezzi* alongside one another. There was likely a good deal of analogical influence between adverbial and adjectival forms in West Germanic generally, and it does not seem implausible to suppose the *ga-/gi-/ge*- forms on the whole to be typologically younger. The suffixed adverbial forms – such as extended *unġemete* and possible *ummett*<*i*> – are very likely younger elaborations, showing various productive ways of more explicitly marking the form as an adverb than the bare *unmet* did.

- (7) is heora ealdordōm *unmet* swīðe
 ‘their lordship is exceedingly great’ (PPs 138.15)

And similarly for most of the remaining instances of this adverb in the corpus.¹³

There are two verses with surface forms *ungemete* in which the substitution of **unmet* would result in poorer metre¹⁴

(8)

- (a) þæt of *ungemete* ælces ðinges
 ‘that from the immoderation of every thing’ (Met 25.38)
 (b) æpelinges sīð. Hio mid *ungemete*
 lissum lufode ...
 ‘the journey of the noble one. She loved [him] with immoderation, tenderly’ (Met 26.62–63)

In neither of these is *ungemete* an adverb (and these verses are accordingly not listed in the catalogue in note 2 above). Rather, *ungemete* is in each case an abstract noun in the dative singular (cf. Old High German *unmez* ‘excess’, modern German *Unmaß*). It is possible that these verses should also have the *-ge-* removed to avoid violating the constraint against compounds of the shape Swš^w (Terasawa 1994), but the nominal case ending must be retained. With **unmete*, these verses would each scan as unremarkable examples of type C.

6 Scribal replacements of **unmet*

Even if we assume the form **unmet* is linguistically correct in Old English poems, questions remain about how and why *ungemete*¹⁵ came to be written in the surviving manuscripts. The simplest assumption is that the text as originally composed contained the form **unmet*, which stood as such in the earliest manuscripts, and that this was altered by scribes in the course of transmission.¹⁶ The motivation would simply be that they

¹³Most examples are in the off-verse; one, at PPs 118.61, is in the on-verse (with scribal *geneahhie* to be read as a variant of *geneahhe*).

¹⁴Strictly speaking, with **unmet* (8a) could scan as a variety of A3, but it would be an unusual example of the type.

¹⁵And similar. From here on out, unless specified otherwise, I will use *ungemete* as a stand-in for all expanded variants, including *unigmetes*, *ungemetum*, etc.

¹⁶A more complex possibility is that these texts always showed forms comparable to *ungemete* in their written traditions. More complex, because it requires an early and enduring mismatch between the scribal forms and poetic pronunciation, so that over the course of several centuries scribes consistently wrote tetrasyllabic *ungemete* (or *ungimetæ*, etc.) alongside a pronunciation as disyllabic *unmet*. It also supposes that longer forms such as *ungemete* had both come into existence and become the standard in writing already in the early Old English period. In both respects, linguistic and scribal, this would appear to rest largely on projecting the situation of later West Saxon onto much earlier Anglian of the seventh or earlier eighth centuries for *Beowulf*, and I cannot see any supporting evidence to justify this. The *Metrical Psalms* are generally regarded as a later composition, but even so it is simpler to assume that the poet wrote the form that fits better with the metre, and to attribute the late textual form to the late scribe who was not interested in the finer metrical details of syllable counts (the manuscript dates to the middle of the eleventh century). Only the *Metres of Boethius* were likely composed in West Saxon (perhaps even by King Alfred, though the attribution remains controversial), in a context where we can be reasonably sure that *ungemete* was the ordinary form in prose (and presumably speech). Perhaps here there would be more scope for a mismatch from the beginning between poetic and written form in the three occurrences of *ungemet*, *unigmet* that occur in this poem – though it is worth noting that

(correctly) equated **unmet* in their exemplar with the common form *ungemete* of later written Old English.

The Old Saxon material may show a similar process of scribal updating. As is well known, *Genesis B* (i.e. lines 235–851 of *Genesis* in MS Junius 11) is translated from Old Saxon into Old English, and fragments of the original *Genesis*, including a short overlapping passage found in both languages, have been discovered. To judge by the usage in *Heliand*, we would expect any instances of our adverb occurring in the Old Saxon *Genesis* to be **unmet*. While this adverb does not occur in the surviving Old Saxon passages, a relevant form is found in the Old English translation:¹⁷

- (9) þær hæbbað heo on æfyn ungemet lange
 ‘There they have in the evening, exceedingly long ...’ (*GenB* 313)

This word is at best metrically uncomfortable (as already discussed), and both metre and the Old Saxon evidence converge to suggest that the original of 313b was **unmet lango*, both in linguistic form (as suggested by the metre) and in actual orthographic form (as suggested by the evidence of *Heliand*). If so, then a scribe has, at some unknown point along in the course of transmission and translation, converted this **unmet* either directly to Old English *ungemet* (if this happened during or after translation) or via Old Saxon **ungimet*, which was then further altered to *ungemet*. If the former is what took place, the occurrence of *ungemet* rather than *ungemete* may be due to the scribe employing a slightly more conservative, less expanded form: *ungemet* is a less common form, but may be found alongside *ungemete* in both Early and Late West Saxon, and is the preferred form in some texts, such as *Bald’s Leechbook II*. If the latter, then a (Saxon) scribe has already ‘modernized’ the poetic **unmet* to the more prosaic **ungimet* before translation, which was only further altered in West Saxon to the point of accommodating the *ge-* prefix to the usual later Old English form.

This sort of ‘modernization’, particularly on the Old English side, is in keeping with the typical behaviour of scribes copying texts not already written in their quasi-standard orthographic system.¹⁸ Neidorf (2017: 103), in his systematic review of this issue, summarises the usual approach:

When the scribes correctly identified the word before them, they altered the superficial characteristics of the antecedent reading in order to commit the word’s standard Late West Saxon form to parchment. When the scribes erred in their identification, they would transmit a word of similar appearance that was intelligible and genuine, but manifestly erroneous in the present context.

the sequence *-ig-* is unlikely to be original, and is presumably either altered from *-ge-* in *ungemet*, or introduced during an expansion of **unmet*. Either way, a minimum of scribal alteration seems to be inescapable, and the motivation for rigorously back-projecting the habits of later scribes onto earlier manuscripts still strikes me as rather weak. However this may be, these speculations concern the written forms this adverb might have taken in poetic manuscripts in different periods and contexts, while I am primarily concerned with establishing the likely poetic and linguistic values used by poets in composition.

¹⁷Cited from Doane (1991), with slight adaptation.

¹⁸It is worth noting that while we call ‘Old Saxon’ a different language, it is hardly clear that a scribe copying *Genesis B* would have felt this to be exceptionally more distant or difficult than an early manuscript in early Anglian Old English. The process of ‘modernizing’ an ‘Old English’ poem such as *Cædmon’s Hymn* or the *Leiden Riddle/Riddle 35* into Late West Saxon can hardly have fundamentally different from the process of ‘translating’ *Genesis B* from ‘Old Saxon’.

The first option – successful identification of early Old English **unmet* with Late West Saxon *ungemete* – is, I propose, what took place with **unmet*, at least in *Beowulf*, and possibly at all the occurrences listed in note 2.

Such a scenario assumes that **unmet* existed, at least in the poetic language, earlier in Old English. This is supported chiefly by the Continental cognates discussed above, since a bare form **unmet* is not found as such in the Old English corpus, prose or poetry. None of the forms cited by Fulk are adverbial, nor are they formally plain **unmet*. However, they, along with four instances of forms of *unmetlic* (adjectival in the prose *Life of St. Guthlac* and *Orosius*; adverbial in the *Letter of Alexander* and the *Liber Scintillarum*), do attest to the presence in Old English of a base *unmet-*, not extended with *-ġe-*. It is worth noting that no relevant forms are found in the very earliest texts at all, and the absence of a bare **unmet* does not speak strongly against the reconstruction of such a form based on metrical evidence, aided by the analogue of Continental West Germanic.

What is required for this hypothesis is that, as perhaps also happened in Old Saxon, the prefixed variants were productive, and became the norm in later Old English (and strongly so in West Saxon). In a fairly routine type of further characterisation, the form would also be extended by more overt adverbial suffixes: most frequently *-e* but also *-es*, *-um/-un*, and *-lic*¹⁹ (this did not take place in recorded Old Saxon, and is less thoroughgoing in Old English). The prefix itself became entrenched enough to be worn down to simple *-i-* (a general form in Middle English; cf. the extremely frequent *unimete* in Lazamon's *Brut*), early enough for Scribe A of the *Beowulf* manuscript to write *unigmetes* (*ig* is usually graphic for *ī* in late Old English). The more conservative Scribe B writes the more etymological *ungemete*, either because that was the variant in their speech (this scribe is widely held to be older than A, on the basis of their handwriting style), or because they held more strictly to 'standard' spelling conventions and so wrote what had been a *ge-* prefix as such.

When coming across the to-them archaic form **unmet*, these scribes did what they usually did: converted the lexeme into a familiar modern form, copying an original line such as **uyrd unmet neh* (or similar) to *pyrd ungemete neah*. In the process, the metre was disturbed, but this was not disturbing to the typical late scribe, who had other priorities.

7 Conclusion

Fulk's suggestion to restore *unigmetes* and *ungemete* in *Beowulf* to **unmet* solves a minor but persistent metrical issue in the poem. With instances of this sort, where a single lexeme repeatedly seems to behave metrically oddly, there should be a strong suspicion that a linguistic story of some sort lies behind the attested forms. In this case, the assumption that poetic Old English retained a disyllabic adverb **unmet* 'exceedingly', is linguistically plausible, and well supported by cognates in Old Saxon (including in the closely related poetic tradition of the *Heliand*) and Old High German. The assumptions that this form was recharacterized to *ungemete* (and similar), and that scribes, especially Late West Saxon scribes, would have used such a now-ordinary form in place of older **unmet* without regard for metre, are both also plausible, in keeping with expected developments in the language and in scribal culture.

¹⁹Also used as an adjectival formative.

This reading has not generally been taken up by editors or metricists. That the reading **unmet* has not been printed directly in any major edition is not surprising, since Old English editorial practice tends to be conservative, but there are tools such as under-dotting which have been employed to mark the secondary nature of comparable young linguistic forms. More significantly, this possibility is generally not considered in the various metrical and textual discussions of these verses (including commentaries in editions) that have appeared since Fulk (1992).

The lack of integration of Old Saxon material into Old English studies may be a contributing factor to the poor reception of this restoration. Although *Heliand* and *Genesis* should, by any reasonable metric, form a central part in the study of Old English verse, Old Saxon is generally treated as something distinct, at best an optional supplement rather than as a sizeable corpus shedding essential light on the language and poetics of the Ingvaenic dialects of northwestern Europe. This has, perhaps, led the ready example of *unmet* from that corpus to be too readily left out of consideration as a solution for the problematic *ungemete*, etc.

Whatever the reasons for the lack of attention given to **unmet*, I do not think that there is any good reason to defend the manuscript readings for this adverb. Restoring to **unmet* is metrically far preferable, linguistically plausible, and easily explained in terms of scribal behaviour.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank R. D. Fulk and Rafael Pascual for reading over a draft of this paper, and the anonymous reviewer for many helpful and insightful comments. I am also grateful to the British Academy for their support of the research project *Old Norse Influence on Middle English Prosody*, of which this was an outgrowth.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the British Academy [Norse Influence on Early Middle English Prosody].

ORCID

Nelson Goering <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2565-3369>

References

- Behaghel, Otto & Burkhard Taeger (eds.). 1996. *Heliand und Genesis*. 10th edn. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Bessinger, J. B. (ed.). 1978. *A concordance to The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bliss, Alan J. 1962. *The metre of Beowulf*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Braune, Wilhelm. 1994. *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*. Ernst Ebbinghaus (ed.). 17th edn. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

- Cable, Thomas M. 1974. *The meter and melody of Beowulf*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Cable, Thomas M. 1991. *The English alliterative tradition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Doane, A. N. (ed.). 1991. *The Saxon Genesis*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fulk, R. D. 1992. *A history of Old English meter*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fulk, R. D., Robert E. Bjork & John D. Niles (eds.). 2009. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 4th edn. Corrected reprint. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Goering, Nelson. 2020. Eduard Sievers' *Altgermanisch Metrik* 125 years on. In Paula Rodríguez-Puente, Rodrigo Pérez-Lorido & Carlos Prado-Alonso (eds.), *Of ye Olde Englisch langage and textes: New perspectives on Old and Middle English language and literature*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Grein, C. W. M. (ed.). 1858. *Das Hildebrandslied nach der Handschrift von Neuem herausgegeben, kritisch bearbeitet und erklärt*. Göttingen: Georg H. Wigand.
- Hofmann, Dietrich. 1991. *Die Versstrukturen der altsächsischen Stabreimgedichte Heliand und Genesis. II: Verslisten*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Hutcheson, B. R. 1995. *Old English poetic metre*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Kendall, Calvin B. 1981. The prefix *un-* and the metrical grammar of *Beowulf*. *Anglo-Saxon England* 10. 39–52.
- Krapp, George Philip & Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie (eds.). 1953. *The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: A collective edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lachmann, Karl. 1835. Über das Hildebrandslied. In *Historisch-philologische Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Aus dem Jahre 1833*, 123–162. Berlin: Druckerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Lühr, Rosemarie. 1982. *Studien zur Sprache des Hildebrandliedes*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Mitchell, Bruce, Christopher Ball & Angus Cameron. 1975. Short titles of Old English texts. *Anglo-Saxon England* 4. 207–21.
- Momma, Haruko. 1990. Old English *ungemete(s)*: An immeasurably long word? *Medieval English Studies Newsletter* 23. 10–11.
- Neidorf, Leonard. 2017. *The transmission of Beowulf*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Pascual, Rafael J. 2013. Three-position verses and the metrical practice of the *Beowulf* poet. *SELIM* 20. 49–79.
- Pope, John C. 1966. *The rhythm of Beowulf: An interpretation of the normal and hypermetric verse-forms in Old English poetry*. 2nd edn. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Russom, Geoffrey. 1987. *Old English meter and linguistic theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sievers, Eduard (ed.). 1878. *Heliand*. Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses.
- Sievers, Eduard. 1885. Zur rhythmik des germanischen alliterationverses. I. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 10. 209–314.
- Sievers, Eduard. 1893. *Altgermanische Metrik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- Stockwell, Robert P. 1996. Some recent theories of Old English metrics. In Christopher McCully & J. J. Anderson (eds.), *Early English metrics*, 73–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suzuki, Seiichi. 1996. *The metrical organization of Beowulf: Prototype and isomorphism* (Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 95). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Suzuki, Seiichi. 2004. *The metre of Old Saxon poetry: The remaking of alliterative tradition*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Terasawa, Jun. 1994. *Nominal compounds in Old English: A metrical approach* (Anglistica 27). Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger.
- Tiefenbach, Heinrich (ed.). 2010. *Altsächsisches Handwörterbuch/A concise Old Saxon dictionary*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Yakovlev, Nicolay. 2008. The development of alliterative metre from Old to Middle English. University of Oxford DPhil diss. <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:02e46bb4-0abb-479d-9c50-64be689e013e>.