

## The Codex Optimus Attitude: Methodological Bias in Editions of the *Poetic Edda*

**ABSTRACT:** *Il presente contributo affronta due temi principali: la mancanza di imparzialità metodologica nelle edizioni critiche dell'Edda Poetica, e l'origine e classificazione di varianti testuali. Tali temi sono sviluppati attraverso la discussione di una selezione di varianti nelle più rispettate edizioni critiche. Con "mancanza di imparzialità", fenomeno qui definito come "atteggiamento da codex optimus", ci si riferisce a scelte editoriali che prediligono lezioni del Codex Regius senza emendazioni. Una scarsa propensione alle emendazioni e al confronto con la lectio faciliior in altri testimoni comporta che i criteri editoriali non sono in linea con i principi basilari della critica testuale. Tale preferenza è tuttavia irregolare, giacché alcune lezioni notoriamente corrotte in R vengono emendate o scartate. Ciò dimostra che non c'è sempre una scelta ponderata delle varianti, e che tale scelta è dettata da una preferenza per R, invece di seguire un metodo. Nel presente contributo, le varianti selezionate vengono discusse per chiarire la loro possibile origine, ovvero durante la trasmissione orale o scritta.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Poetic Edda* (PE) is a collection of mythological and heroic poems preserved mainly in the manuscript GKS 2365 4to, also known as the *Codex Regius* (henceforth **R**) of the *Poetic Edda* and the fragmentary AM 748 I a 4to (henceforth **A**). **R** and **A** have a common antigraph for the mythological section<sup>1</sup>. Other manuscripts that preserve eddic material are AM 544 4to, also known as *Hauksbók* (1290-1360), which contains a version of *Völuspá*, and the manuscripts of the *Prose Edda*: GKS 2367 4to (ca. 1300), AM 242 fol. (ca. 1350), AM 748 I b 4to (ca. 1300-1325), AM 1 e β fol. (ca. 1400). **R** is one of the most important manuscripts of the medieval Germanic poetic tradition, since it contains the most extensive collection of eddic poems that has been preserved. It has therefore been the object of multiple studies, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the stemmatological relationship between **R** and **A**, see LINDBLAD (1954, 275).

the main reference manuscript in both critical editions and translations of the *PE*<sup>2</sup>. This article argues that the prestige of **R** has led to methodological bias in some of the most important scholarly editions, where the reading of **R** has sometimes been preferred without thorough evaluation of other witnesses. By so doing, important principles of textual criticism, such as *lectio difficilior potior* (the principle according to which the most difficult reading should be preferred) and *emendatio metri causa* (emendation on metrical grounds) have been disregarded in favour of cases of *lectio facilior* (the easier reading, also known as trivialization: the change of an unusual word into a known, but more banal one) and unmetrical verses found in **R**. Such an approach, which can be termed the “codex optimus attitude”<sup>3</sup>, is nevertheless applied inconsistently in editions. For example, no critical edition has the **R** version of the beginning of *Völuspá*, *Hljóðs bið ek allar kindir*<sup>4</sup>. This couplet works semantically, but it has considerable metrical issues (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2020, 42)<sup>5</sup>. Here, editors agree to adopt the reading of *Hauksbók*, *Hljóðs bið ek allar helgar kindir*, which works both semantically and metrically.

The first aim of this contribution is to discuss a selection of variants in **R** and **A** and how they are approached in the most respected commentaries and critical editions<sup>6</sup>: *De Gamle Eddadigte* (Finnur Jónsson 1932); *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 5th edition (Neckel – Kuhn 1983); *Sæmundar Edda hins Fróða* (Sophus Bugge 1867); *Die Lieder der Edda* (Gering – Sijmons 1901); *Eddadigte: Gudedigte* (Jón Helgason 1965); *Kommentar zu der Liedern der Edda* (von See et al. 1997-2019); *Die Lieder der Edda* (Sijmons 1906). I will also discuss the different ways in which editors choose variants by going through different types of readings. The possible bias and shortcomings in editions will be evaluated in the following aspects: choice of variants, openness to emendations, and transparency in their method.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive overview of the previous scholarship on **R**, as well as a discussion of its paleographic and orthographic features and a codicological description is available as part of the *Editiones Arnarnagæanæ Electronice*: <https://eae.ku.dk/q?p=eae/vols/text/1>

<sup>3</sup> «The proponents of this method [that of the codex optimus, also known as best-text edition] maintain that the editor should use one manuscript as the base for the entire text of the work, changing its readings only when they are “impossible”, that is, clear scribal errors, and not when they are simply “improbable”» (ROELLI 2020, 496).

<sup>4</sup> There are non-critical editions which have the **R** version of this couplet, such as the one by GÍSLI SIGURÐSSON (1998, 3).

<sup>5</sup> The omission of *helgar* in **R** is likely an eyeskip, since the final syllable is the same as *allar*. Nonetheless, it is highly peculiar that the scribe would make such a noticeable error on the first line of the first page of his work.

<sup>6</sup> I have excluded translations and editions without a critical apparatus from this overview.

The second aim of this contribution is to fill a gap in Old Norse scholarship on the transmission of the *PE* and how variants occurred, by addressing both oral and scribal variants with the same methodological rigour. Textual criticism has developed a detailed taxonomy to analyze and describe scribal errors and variants<sup>7</sup>, but in ON poetry, the oral stages of composition and transmission need to be taken into account as well. With the exception of *Völuspá*<sup>8</sup>, for which mixed stemmas encompassing both the oral and the written transmission have been proposed<sup>9</sup>, the approach to the transmission of eddic poems has either focused on the scribal and material aspect, simply labeling variants which could not be explained as scribal, as oral, or on a fully oral-performative aspect, according to which the poems did not have a real author but took shape with every performance.

To address these two aims, the examples from the *PE* that I will discuss will be grouped into the following categories:

1 - Oral trivialization. A principle that I propose is useful to analyze oral variants according to the textcritical principle of *lectio difficilior potior*. The concept of oral trivialization is based on the assumption that eddic poems are authorial works, and the first time that a poem was recited, the poet had one and only one version in mind. During the oral transmission, some rare or sophisticated words may have been replaced with easier ones, often keeping the initial phonemes, but trivializing the semantic aspect. This is the oral trivialization on phonetic/acoustic grounds.

2 - Scribal trivialization. The textcritical principle according to which scribes intervene on a text by replacing words they do not recognize with trivial ones, often because such words were written when the language was at an earlier stage. The reconstruction of this phenomenon allows us to understand the written transmission of the corpus. Since ON poems were written down centuries after their composition, scribal trivializations are generally younger than oral trivializations.

3 - *Lectio faciliior* and formularity. Formularity is an important aspect of ON poetry as oral poetry, since it is an archaic stylistic feature to help memorization. The formulaic structure of recurrent verses can help us understand whether a scribe trivialized the formulaic, therefore archaic, word order into a more familiar one.

4 - *Emendatio ope ingenii* and orthography. *Emendatio ope ingenii* is the emendation based on conjecture. I will discuss cases where this type of emendation has been proposed by editors

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. ROELLI (2020).

<sup>8</sup> The names of the eddic poems will be presented with the following abbreviations: *Vsp* (*Völuspá*), *Hym* (*Hymiskviða*), *Alv* (*Alvíssmál*), *Hbl* (*Hárbarðsljóð*), *Ls* (*Lokasenna*), *Hv* (*Hávamál*), *Gm* (*Grímnismál*), *Skm* (*Skírnismál*) *Dkv* (*Þrymskviða*), *Fm* (*Fáfnismál*).

<sup>9</sup> HÁUKUR ÞORGEIRSSON (2020, 34) proposes a stemma to visualize the transition from the oral \***R** version of *Vsp* to the version preserved in **R**.

to restore a lack of alliteration, or words that have been allegedly completely replaced by an eyeskip, as well as cases where the reading of **R** has been included as it is, even though the unnormalized orthography results in a meaningless word.

This categorization allows for a two-fold discussion: on the one hand, which variant editors choose, and on the other, whether it is more likely that such variant originated during written or oral transmission. The likelihood of whether a variant arose during oral or written transmission will be established by taking into account paleographic, semantic and metrical criteria: if one of the two variants makes a verse unmetrical, or if it is plausible that the scribe made a mistake (grapheme confusion, eyeskip, or deliberate trivialization), then it is likely a written variant. If the metre is respected and the semantics are similar and the variant cannot be explained through visual similarity, the variant likely occurred during oral transmission.

## 2. VARIANTS AND EMENDATIONS IN EDDIC POETRY

One of the main aspects that show the philological method of editors is how they approach textual variants: which manuscript they choose, and to what extent they intervene in the text with emendations, in case of corruption. In a recent contribution, Mikael Males (2025) discusses the reluctance of editors towards emendations<sup>10</sup>, as well as a lack of transparency in the process of the choice of variants in large commentaries of the *PE*, particularly the *Kommentar zu der Liedern der Edda*. In his conclusions, Males highlights the importance of evaluating and choosing variants case by case, instead of relying entirely and arbitrarily on one witness, since the distribution of valid variants is not consistent between **R** and **A**. I will build on his observations and conclusions and provide further concrete examples of the choice of variants in the aforementioned critical editions.

A good example of lack of transparency in editorial intervention is *De Gamle Eddadigte* (Finnur Jónsson, 1932). Finnur Jónsson was one of the most prolific and respected Old Norse scholars, and he was also a zealous but often silent emender: his emendations often completely substitute the actual manuscript readings, as he does not always include the readings in the apparatus. It is therefore impossible to know where he intervenes on the text, unless it is compared to the manuscripts or other editions. For instance, he justifiably emends the unmetrical *fram* in *Hym* 7.2 to *framan* in the text, but there is no explanation in the notes, and the readings from **R** and **A** are not included (1932, 92). He also makes strong statements on the authenticity of verses without elaborating on such claims. On the last line of *Alvissmál* 35.7,

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<sup>10</sup> The scholarly skepticism towards emendations has also been addressed by Haukur Þorgeirsson, who discussed compelling cases in *Vpluspá* (2020) and *Hymiskviða* (2023).

*nú skínn sól í sali*, he writes in the footnotes: «L. 7, der ikke siger andet end l. 6, er uten tvivl senere tilføjet» ('line 7, which says nothing different than line 6, is without doubt added later')<sup>11</sup>. Regardless of the validity of his claims, such lack of transparency in the editorial process results in gatekeeping knowledge on the transmission of eddic poems. Even though Finnur Jónsson is a respected scholar, greater transparency would be desirable in order to facilitate the most important step of the scientific method, namely reproducibility.

### 2.1 Oral Trivialization

The reading *fram(an)* in *Hym* 7.2 in **R** is a clear example of trivialization that most likely occurred during the oral phase of transmission of the poem. The oral *lectio difficilior*, *frálīga* in **A**, has not received much scholarly attention. Below the first half of st. 7 in **R** and **A**.

*Hym* 7.1-4 (**R**)<sup>12</sup>

*Fóru driúgum  
dag þann fram  
Ásgarði frá  
unz til Egils kvómu.*

They travelled forth that day, from  
Ásgarðr, until they came to Egill.

*Hym* 7.1-4 (**A**)

*Fóru driúgan  
dag frálīga  
Ásgarði frá  
unz til Ægis kómu.*

They travelled far the day swiftly,  
from Ásgarðr, until they came to  
Ægir.

Metrically, Suzuki (2014, 843) scans 7.2 as A-, considering *þann* unstressed, since the **R** version of this line lacks one unstressed position to fulfill the metrical requirements of a *fornyrðislag* line. If we choose the **R** reading, this line requires emendation, and *fram* should be emended to *framan*, as proposed by Sijmons and Gering (1901, 260). In that case we would have an acceptable A2k type, instead of a catalectic line, unusual for an otherwise very regular poem with a isosyllabic tendency (Del Zotto 1979, 64; Males 2025, 160). Neckel and Kuhn (1983, 89) choose to have the **R** reading without emendation in the main text, but mention in the footnotes the emendation proposed by Sijmons. The *Kommentar* (vol. 2, 291) also has the **R** reading without emendation, and the only comment made about *dag frálīga* in **A** is

<sup>11</sup> Finnur's hypothesis on the younger age of *Alv* 35.7 has been elaborated in the light of oral transmission of the poem and antiquarian rework of *Vsp* 4, *sól skein sunnan á salar steina* (CONTI 2025, 59).

<sup>12</sup> Both readings are based on NECKEL – KUHN (1983).

that this reading has the same crossed alliteration between *f* and *d* as in **R**. It is important to bear in mind that the adverb *fráliga* is much rarer than either *fram*<sup>13</sup> or *framan*, and it fulfills the metrical requirements for the verse without any need for emendations. The case for trivialization is thus strong. Sijmons (1906, 113) suggests that the *frá-* in 7.3 could have triggered an eyeskip in both **R** and **A**, which resulted in *fram(an)* and *fráliga*, and that the original reading might have been something like *dag þann allan*. It seems somewhat unlikely that an eyeskip should occur at the same place and result in two so different readings, however, and furthermore it seems improbable that the **A** scribe would come up with such a rare and sophisticated adverb like *fráliga* by mistake. The presence of the two *fra-* elements in consecutive lines could simply be a stylistic choice by the poet. Moreover, *dag þan allan* is a common construction, also found in prose, and therefore even more trivial than *dag þann framan*.

The unemended **R** reading is preferred in many critical editions (Bugge 1867, 106; Jón Helgason 1965, 41; Neckel – Kuhn 1983, 89). Finnur Jónsson (1932, 92) and Sijmons (1906, 113) have *dag þann framan*. An exception is Neckel (1914, 86), with the whole **A** version *fóro driúgan dag fráliga*, and the form *framliga*, 'excellently', suggested in the apparatus. The proposed emendation *framliga*, an adverb as rare as *fráliga*, is an important contribution which allows us to reconstruct the steps of oral and written transmission of this verse of *Hym*.

Now that we have established that **A** has the *lectio difficilior*, we can reconstruct the process that led from *frá(m)liga* to *fram*, taking into account both the oral and the written transmission of *Hym*. It is easy to imagine how, during the process of oral transmission, an unusual word like *framliga* might have been replaced by *framan*, a more common word beginning with the same element *fram-*. This would be an acoustically triggered oral trivialization. Then, in order to make the line work metrically, *þann* was introduced, resulting in a A2k or A1- line. The presence of *þann* in **R**, filling the first unstressed position in the verse, is therefore an indicator that the *\*framan* variant occurred during oral transmission, not as a result of scribal intervention. If this were scribal trivialization, we might have ended up with an even more hypometrical line like *\*dag fram(an)*. But if *þann* was in the shared antigraph and omitted in **A**, the line *\*dag þann frámliga* would have been too long<sup>14</sup>. The change from *framan* to *fram* in **R** is easily explained by an omission of the nasal bar *in lieu* of *-an*, a relatively recurrent

<sup>13</sup> The *Old Norse Prose Dictionary* (ONP) lists four occurrences in the poetic corpus of the adverb *fráliga*: *Heiðr* 20, *Merlínussþá* 62.3, 32.7, *Skauf* 23.5, and three prose occurrences: *Máruss saga* 660 and *Fljótsdóla saga* 42 and 82. The adverb *fram* has 935 entries in ONP, and *framan* 137.

<sup>14</sup> A hypothetical *\*dag þann fráliga* could be classified as D\*, a D type with an extra dip after the first lift. Such verses are relatively rare, but they do exist (cf. *Gap var ginnunga*, *Vsp* 3.7). Suzuki counts 47 instances of D\* in *fornyrðislag* (2014, 15). But again, D\* is an exceptional five-positions verse, and *\*dag þann fráliga* would still not fit in the highly regulated metrical structure of *Hym*, just as the catalectic *dag þann fram* in **R**.

error by the **R** scribe (Finnur Jónsson 1930). This also tells us something about the abbreviation strategies in the antigraph, which is that the nasal abbreviation included the preceding vowel. Following this, there has likely been another eyeskip with the following *-ra-* superscript in line 7.3, *Ásgarði frá*, since *fram* in **R** is abbreviated with the same superscript (cf. Figure 1 and 2). This eyeskip may have also been the cause of the omission of *m* in **A**, and the change from *framlíga* to *frálíga*. If this hypothesis is correct, it would imply that the transmission history of *Hym* is more complex than the scholars have assumed. But this topic needs to be elaborated in a separate study.



Figure 1: *dag þann fram a[sgarði] frá*. GKS 2365 4to (**R**), 14r6.

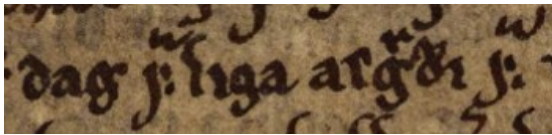


Figure 2: *dag þ: líga a[sgarði] frá*. AM 748 I a 4to (**A**), 6r5.

Another instance of oral trivialization can be found in *Alvíssmál*. This poem is not in **A**, but it is in **R**, and stanzas 20 and 30 are quoted in the *Skáldskaparmál* section of the *Prose Edda*. The variant *óljós/ósorg* in *Alv* 30 is likely oral because the words are metrically equivalent, although semantically different, and it is unlikely that this variation occurred due to confusion of graphemes. This is *Alv* 30 in **R** and *SnE* (my emphasis):

*Alv* 30 (**R**)

*Nótt heitir með mǫnnum,  
En njól með goðom  
Kalla grímo ginregin,  
Óliós iotnar,  
Álfar svefngaman,  
Kalla dvergar draumniorun.*

(Neckel – Kuhn 1983, 128)

*Alv* 30 (*SnE*)

(380) *Nótt heitir með mǫnnum  
en njóla í Helju,  
kolluð er gríma] með goðum,  
ósorg kalla jǫtnar,  
álfar svefngaman,  
dvergar draum-Njǫrun.*

(Faulkes 1990, 379)

Night [it] is called among men,  
 But darkness among gods,  
 call [it] mask, the great-gods,  
**without light** [call it] giants,  
 elves, sleep-enjoyment,  
 dwarves call [it] dream-goddess.  
 (Frog 2011, 55)

Night [it] is called among men  
 But darkness in Hel,  
 [it] is called mask among gods,  
**without care** call [it] giants,  
 elves, sleep-enjoyment,  
 dwarves [call it] dream-goddess.  
 (Frog 2011, 55)

Since the stanza provides *heiti* for ‘night’, it is more straightforward to imagine the night as *óljós* (‘absence of light’), rather than *ósorg* (‘absence of pain’). Although, for the same reason, one could argue that *óljós* is the *lectio facillior*. In fact, while the night as ‘absence of light’ would be rather obvious across cultures, *ósorg* makes sense in a more specific way in the context of ON mythology: night can be ‘absence of pain’ for the giants due to the power of sunlight to turn them into stone<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, elsewhere in the *PE* the noun *sorg* occurs in proximity of words semantically pertinent to the night, such as *Rígsþula* 44.3 *sefa ok svefja, sorgir lægja*, and *Hávamál* 114.6 *ferr þú sorgafullr at sofa*. In *Lexicon Poeticum*, Finnur Jónsson defines *ósorg* as «sorg-løshed, jætternes navn på natten, men urigtig v. l. for *óljós*, *Alv* 30» (‘lack of sorrow, giants’ name for night, but wrong variant for *óljós*, *Alv* 30’) (1931, 449). *Óljós* is therefore his choice in his edition (1932, 136), as well as in Bugge (1867, 133), Neckel – Kuhn (1983, 128), Jón Helgason (1965, 67) and Sijmons (1906, 157). *Óljós* is the reading of **R** and **AM** 748 I b 4to (ca. 1300-25), while *ósorg* is in **AM** 1 e β fol (ca. 1400), **GKS** 2367 4to (ca. 1300) and *Codex Trajectinus* (ca. 1595). Since *óljós* and *ósorg* are metrically equivalent, and it is unlikely that one occurred as copying mistake of the other, *óljós* is likely an oral variant that resulted from a semantic simplification of *ósorg* in the oral transmission of *Alv*. We see here that editors have not taken the principle of *lectio difficilior potior* into account.

## 2.2 Scribal Trivialization

One of the best examples of scribal lexical trivialization, that is intervention on single words, in **A** is *Hym* 12, *stendr sól fyrir*, whereas **R** has *súl*, a *hapax legomenon* in ON, meaning ‘pillar’ (Males 2024, 156). Here, the **A** scribe intervenes in the text by exchanging an unusual word with a banal word that makes no sense in the context. A scribe may also intervene on the word order, and trivialize poetic syntax, which is bound to metre, into a more familiar prosaic one.

<sup>15</sup> The motif of a giant turned into stone by the sunlight is also in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 30. The narrative context is surprisingly like the one of *Alvíssmál*: a supernatural creature, dwarf or giant, is interrogated as an excuse to wait for the sun to rise and turn them into stone, and even though *Alvíss* does not explicitly turn into stone, he is caught by the daylight.

An example of scribal syntactic trivialization is *Hym* 3.7, þann ek öllum öf yðr of heita (**R**), þanz er öllum yðr öf heiti (**A**). **A** has a much more natural word order, since in the majority of instances an expletive preverbal particle is preceded by a noun, not a pronoun (cf. Kellogg 1988, 344). However, the **R** reading should be preferred on metrical grounds. *Öf* is too short to be the first lift, and the length cannot be compensated for the following position because it starts with a vowel, but it is acceptable at the end of the verse. Therefore, in this case **A** has the *lectio facilior*.

The *Egils-Ægis* variant in *Hym* 7 is most likely scribal, which means that the **A** reading *Ægis* is either a trivialization or an orthographic error, since it does not really fit in the narrative context, nor the metre. Finnur Jónsson (1932, 92) identifies Egill with a giant, even though this is an unusual name for a giant<sup>16</sup>. Otherwise, Egill has been identified with the farmer, father of Þjálfi and Rǫskva, whom Þórr and Loki visit in *Gylfaginning* 44 (Del Zotto 1979, 41; von See 1997, 291; Sijmons –Gering 1901, 260)<sup>17</sup>. This is an interesting example, because one variant or the other would heavily change the narrative frame. Þórr had just left Ægir for his quest for the cauldron, and it makes little sense that after much travelling they come back to where they departed from (von See 1997, 291). Even more importantly, from a metrical perspective, it cannot possibly be *Ægir*: *Egils* can resolve into one stressed position (*unz til Egils kvómu* is a C2 type), but *Ægis* is too heavy to resolve, since *æ* counts as a long vowel. *Unz til Ægis kómu* has one too many unstressed positions, which does not reconcile with the otherwise high metrical regularity of *Hym*. This aspect has been overlooked by Bugge in his apparatus, since the fact that he remained neutral on the choice implies that he considered both variants equally valid: «om egils eller ægis er det rette, vover jeg ikke at afgjøre» ('if Egils or Ægis is correct, I do not dare to decide') (1867, 106). Jón Helgason (1965, 41) does rightly point out that the different vocalism in **A** and **R** should be taken into account in the interpretation of this variant. The grapheme *æ* in **A** is regularly equivalent to the etymological *e* and *ǣ* in **R**<sup>18</sup>. There is therefore the possibility that the **A** scribe was copying *Egils* while adapting it to his graphophonological inventory, \**Ægils*, and omitted the *l* by mistake. The other possibility is that he adapted the orthography and trivialized *Egill* into *Ægir*, a name that he had already encountered throughout *Hym* and in *Grm* 45. Considering that there are other instances of lexical and syntactic trivializations in **A** (Males 2024), as well as several copying errors (Finnur Jónsson 1896, V), I find the trivialization and orthographic adaptation the

<sup>16</sup> The name *Egill* is not present in either of the two *Jötna heiti þulur* (GUREVICH 2017, 707).

<sup>17</sup> The narrative context around this episode is different in *Gylf* and *Hym*. In *Gylf* 44, Þórr is on his way to Útgardaloki.

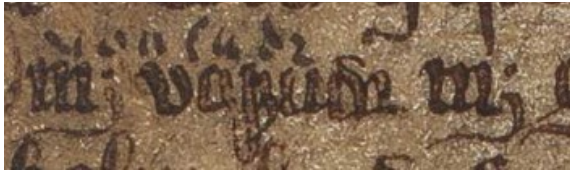
<sup>18</sup> A tricky exception in *Grímnismál* 45, where **R** and **A** have the same inconsistent orthography with both *æ* and *ǣ*: *ǣgis bekkir á, / ægis drekku at* (**R** 10v,17; **A** 5v,4). The other cases where **A** has *e* instead of *æ*, like *veorr* **R** (14r,15) vs *veorr* **A** (6r,13), are likely to go back to the antigraph (LINDBLAD 1954, 289).

most plausible explanation of the origin of the unmetrical *Ægils* variant, and I am therefore inclined to take *Egils* as the original form.

*Alv* 20 has two interesting variants: *hviðuð/blummuðr*, which is most likely scribal, because *blummuðr* is unmetrical<sup>19</sup>, and *váfuðr/vönsuðr*. *Hviðuð* is in **R** and AM 1 e β fol, *blummuðr* in GKS 2367 4to, AM 748 I b 4to and Codex Trajectinus. The *blummuðr* variant likely occurred in written transmission, not as a copying mistake, but under the influence of *Snorra Edda*: both *blummuðr* and *vönsuðr* are in the *Veðra heiti*, which are in *Skáldskaparmál*, and they might have been added by a copist who read them in the *pula Veðra*. *Váfuðr* is a *heiti* for Óðinn in the *pula Óðins nofn*<sup>20</sup>. Here the connection with the wind is less obvious, making it the *lectio difficilior*. Interestingly, *váfuðr* is in **R** and AM 1 e β fol, and on the latter an inter-linear <vonfudr> has been added by a younger hand (cf. figure 3). This addition suggests two things: that *váfuðr* was unfamiliar to a later reader, meaning that it is likely more archaic; it supports the hypothesis of AM 1 e β fol being copied from an older antigraph than the other manuscripts of the *Prose Edda* (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2017). All the editions have the **R** readings, *váfuðr* and *hviðuð*, the first being the *lectio difficilior*, and the second being the only metrically acceptable variant. Once again, the *Kommentar* has a long and detailed explanation on the meaning of *váfuðr* and *hviðuð*, with no explanation on the choice of variant (vol. 3, 345). In the case of *Alv* 20, the codex optimus attitude is therefore not in the choice of variants per se, since **R** actually has the best readings, but only in the lack of transparency in the process of the choice of variants.

<sup>19</sup> The last element of a *Vollzeile* must be bimoraic, and *blummuðr* is too long.

<sup>20</sup> *Váfuðr* is also found in a fragment by Bragi in the genitive form, in the kenning *váfaðar Gugnís* ('of the swinger of Gugnir/ of the spear of Óðinn'). The form *váfaðar* is present in other kennings in the skaldic corpus, as a *heiti* for Óðinn: Einarr Skúlason, *Óxarflokkur* 5: *ógnprúðr Váfaðar þingbröngvir* ('the battle-proud compeller of the assembly of Váfuðr'), a kenning for "warrior". Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, *Lausavísur* 1a: *veig Váfaðar* ('strong drink of Váfuðr'), a kenning for "poetry". Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Lausavísur* 124: *orr Váfaðar* ('the wound of Váfuðr'), a kenning for "poetry". Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, *Hákonarmál* 5: *Svá beit þá sverð ór hendi síklings váðir Váfaðar* ('then the sword from the hand of the sovereign bit the garments of Váfuðr'), a kenning for "armor". Even though there are countless instances of kennings with Óðinn as base word, those are the instances in the skaldic corpus with *Váfaðar*, as *heiti* for Óðinn, as a determinant. Bragi's fragment is the only instance where *váfaðar* is used as a noun, but it is still part of a kenning for Óðinn. Apart from *Alv*, there is another instance of *Váfuðr* in nominative form in **R**: *Grm* 54, 1113. Here, as well as in most of the other skaldic evidence, it is used as one of the many *heiti* for Óðinn, but it is not part of a *kenning*. Both in *Alv* and *Grm*, *váfuðr* is in proximity with the recurring *með goðum*. In *Alv* we find the only case where the term is presented as a synonym for "wind", but the fact that it is proposed as the term used "with the gods" may imply a degree of semantic depth that connects it to Óðinn/*Váfuðr*.



**Figure 3: *Váfuðr* with interlinear *vonfuðr*. AM 1 e β fol, 7r.**

### 2.3 *Lectio Facilior and Formularity*

The relationship between formularity and orality is an important aspect of eddic studies. One of the most frequent formulaic collocations in the *PE* is *æsir-álfar*. It occurs fifteen times in the *PE*: *Vsp* 48.1-2; *Hv* 143.1-2, 159.4-5, 160.4-5; *Gm* 4.3; *Skm* 7.4-5, 17.1-2, 18.1-2, *Ls* 2.4-5, 13.4-5, 30.4-5; *Þkv* 7.1-2, 5-6; *Fm* 13.4-5; *Sd* 18.4-5 (cf. Kellogg 1988: 11). This collocation has been described as a merism, a rhetorical figure referring to the totality of a single higher concept (Frog 2011: 30), and a syndetic construction or binomial, a pair of words that carry the same grammatical function, in this case two nouns, linked by a conjunction within a single line of verse (Ruggerini 2001, 210)<sup>21</sup>. Ruggerini distinguishes between the reversible and irreversible binomial, that is, a binomial that can have the order of members inverted or not (2001, 211). The eddic evidence for the *æsir-álfar* binomial points strongly towards a rigid word order; both when the two items are separated by a conjunction in the same line, like *ásuð ok álfuð nær* (*Gm* 4) and when they are split in two different lines, like *hvat er með ásuð? hvat er með álfuð?* (*Vsp* 48, *Þkv* 7), where *æsir* is the first element of the binomial. Therefore, the binomial *æsir ok álfar* has a formulaic character and an ancient and stable semantic basis, based on conceptual opposition.

An exception is *Skírnismál*, which presents the only two instances in which the binomial is inverted: *Hvat er þat álfa, né ása sona, né víssa vana?* (17.1-3) ‘What is that of the elves, or of the Æsir sons, or the wise Vanir?’, *Emkat ek álfa, né ása sona, né víssa vana* (18.1-3) ‘I am not of the elves, nor of the sons of the Æsir, nor of the wise Vanir’. Ruggerini (2001: 222) proposes that this unusual formulation is most likely an innovation, being the only case with the elements reversed, and in the negative form. Frog (2011: 30) also mentions the inversion of elements in *Skm* 17 and 18, but he does not discuss it in detail, as a different word order does not affect the semantics of the binomial. But semantics is not the main focus here, since binomials act like one semantic unit. Rather, the oral-formulaic aspect of this binomial, and all the other evidence in the eddic corpus, highlight that there is something unusual with the order. Therefore, it can be useful to widen the perspective from the *æsir-álfar* binomial to the

<sup>21</sup> These definitions are not mutually exclusive, as the first one describes the rhetorical and semantic aspect, and the second is more focused on the grammatical aspect.

whole *belmingr*, and compare the versions of **R** and **A**.

**R** reads *Hvat er þat álfa, né ása sona, né vísa vana?* (17.1-3), *Emkat ek álfa né ása sona né víssa vana* (18.1-3). **A** reads *Hvat er þat ása eða álfa sona né víssa vana?* (17.1-3)<sup>22</sup>, ‘What is that of the *æsir* or the elves or the wise Vanir?’. In these two stanzas, the syndetic construction is repeated in the tripartite variation *æsir-álfar-vanir* as a question-and-answer exchange (Frog 2011, 58). The editors are unanimous in choosing the **R** version for the order of the binomial, but **A** for *víssa*. They do not elaborate on their choice, nor on the formulaic nature of *æsir – álfar*, but they mention the **A** reading in the footnotes. In this case, the criterion for the preference for **R** is likely the continuity of the conjunctions *né – né*, against *eða – né* in **A**. Even more importantly, the sequence *álfa sona* in **A** is not attested anywhere in the eddic corpus, whereas *ása sonum* is attested in *Vm* 38, *Grm* 42, *Ls* 3, 27, 53, 56, 64, and *ása synir* in *Alv* 16. Therefore, the first conclusion is that **A** has the *lectio faciliior*. However, it is not immediately intuitive why **A** should not be preferred here, since it has the archaic word order. This is a good reason to believe that the **R** version was chosen by the editors not because of its unique use of word pairs, but because of the repeated conjunction.

#### 2.4 Emendatio Ope Ingenii and Orthography

One example of *emendatio ope ingenii*, or *divinatio*, that is emendation based on conjecture, is Sijmons’ suggestion to emend *Hym* 7 from *dag þann framan* to *dag þann allan*. The improbability of this emendation is given by *frálíga* in **A** being a good example of *lectio difficilior*. Bugge was also particularly keen on this kind of emendation. He proposes an emendation of *Skírnismál* 10.3-4 *úrig fjöll yfir, þyrja (R) þursa (A) þjóð yfir*. He chooses *þursa* in the text and in the apparatus he proposes to change the second full line into *þursa þjóðar til* for logical reasons: *Skírnir* is not going to travel *over* the people of the giants but *to* the people of the giants (1867, 92). The reading *þursa* is also used by Finnur Jónsson (1932, 75), who believes that line 4 is a later addition, and by Sijmons (1906, 91) and in the *Kommentar* (1997, 85). *Þyrja* is used by Neckel – Kuhn (1983, 71) and Jón Helgason (1965, 25). The *þyrja* variant may be a scribal corruption of *þursa*, or it may be the *lectio difficilior*, since it is a rare verb meaning ‘to sweep’ or ‘rush’. Bugge’s emendation has been criticized in the *Kommentar* (1997, 85), as they argue that there is no reason to emend the line. I believe that Bugge’s emendation has been overlooked mainly because *Skm* 10.3-4 is *galdralag*, a subtype of *ljóðabáttr* used to convey magic. Since the main feature of *galdralag* described by Sievers (1893, 79-82) is the repetition of the *Vollzeile* with small lexical variation in a *ljóðabáttr* stanza, the *yfir-yfir* repetition would make the verses “more *galdralag*”. However, the alleged magical effect can

<sup>22</sup> Stanza 18 is missing in **A**, plausibly due to an eyeskip, since the last line is almost identical to that of stanza 17 *ór salkynni at sjá*.

be achieved either with the modified repetition or with the rhythm variation given by the unexpected extra line (Conti 2025). Therefore, I argue that Bugge's emendation based on sense is valid and does not make the verses "any less *galdragalag*".

Another important editorial intervention by Bugge is in *Hárbarðsljóð* 44, *Nam ek at mǫnnum þeim enum aldrœnum er búá í heimis skógum*<sup>23</sup>. As it is, this stanza lacks alliteration, which is unusual even for *Hbl*, which has a highly irregular structure. Therefore, Bugge emends *mǫnnum* to *ýtum* in the apparatus<sup>24</sup>, to make it alliterate with *ek* and *aldrœnum*, and changes *skógum* to *haugum* in the text, to have internal alliteration in the *Vollzeile*<sup>25</sup>. Once again, while Bugge justifies his choices, Finnur Jónsson simply intervenes in the text (1932, 88) with the same *haugum* emendation, although he keeps *mǫnnum*. Neckel and Kuhn (1983, 85) do not make any emendations, but they mention Bugge's in the apparatus. Because of the lack of alliteration in the unemended version, they adopt a typographical strategy not to subdivide *Hbl* 44 into verses, but present it as one "block". The dwelling in a forest or in a burial mound would change the narrative settings, and, since it affects the alliteration, the alleged corruption from *haugum* to *skógum* in *Hbl* 44 and 45 must have happened in the shared antigraph of **R** and **A**.

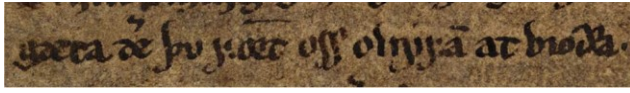
The lack of attention for emendations is also reflected in the orthography. An example is *Hbl* 41: *Þess viltu nú geta, ef þú fórt oss ólubann (R) óliufan (A) at bjóða*. *Ólubann* in **R** is problematic in many ways. Firstly, the manuscript is damaged and the word is hard to read. Secondly, as it is, *ólubann* is a form with no meaning. It has been noted that, on a few occasions, the **R** scribe writes *b* instead of *f*; this orthography is a dialectal feature also found in a limited number of Icelandic manuscripts, and is also found elsewhere in **R**: in *halb* and *hverb* in *Hávamál* (Lindblad 1954, 243)<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, this form should be normalized as *\*ólufann*, which is much more similar to the **A** reading *óliufan*. The **A** scribe is much more orthographically consistent than the **R** scribe, with relatively few exceptions, which are likely to go back to the antigraph (Lindblad 1954, 289). In **A**, the dotted *y* usually stands for *y*, and *u* or *v* for *u*. It is unclear whether *óliufan* has the dot above or if the sign is just a parchment imperfection (cf. Figure 4).

<sup>23</sup> *Mǫnnum* is omitted in **A**.

<sup>24</sup> *Mǫnnum* is marked with a *crux desperationis*.

<sup>25</sup> He also emends the *skógum* in the following line with *haugum*, for the same reason.

<sup>26</sup> The remanence of this and other dialectal features in *Vm*, *Skm* and *Sd* are a likely sign that the early stages of the writing process of eddic poems happened in northwestern Iceland (LINDBLAD 1954, 290).



**Figure 4:** *gæta ær þv fort off oliyfan at biōða. AM 748 I a 4to (A), 1r25.*

The dialectal orthography is not emended in *Háv* 52, *hálb* (*hálf*) *er gld hvar*, and *hverb* (*hverf*) *er haustgríma* in *Háv* 74 in Neckel – Kuhn (1983). Finnur Jónsson emends it according to the normalized orthography (1932, 33). The fact that Neckel and Kuhn keep all the instances of dialectal orthography, without normalizing it, but intervene systematically on the texts with their standard orthography, shows their preference for **R** as it is, even when it is not justified.

## 6. CONCLUSION

A generic preference for the readings of **R** and a lack of openness to emendations in editions is a methodological bias based on the prestige of **R** as a material witness, which disregards basic principles of textual criticism. Therefore, the independent textcritical value of **A** must not be bypassed, since individual variants call for careful evaluation. A series of editorial shortcomings in variant choice and method transparency have been discussed through the points of oral and scribal trivialization, formularity and *emendatio ope ingenii*. Among the examples discussed, *Hym* 7 provides strong evidence of how irregular the distribution of valid readings is, since there is one trivialization in **R**, *fram(an)*, and one in **A**, *Ægis*. Cases like this highlight the importance of avoiding the codex optimus attitude, and demonstrate the importance of evaluating variants carefully on a case by case basis and explaining clearly the method behind such evaluations. Regarding the origin of variants, I have sought to demonstrate that the textcritical principle of *lectio difficilior potior* can be applied to oral variants. The aspect of oral trivialization, outlined here, calls for further study, but it is a step forward to a better understanding of the transmission of eddic poetry.

The critical editions and commentaries of the *PE* which gave importance to emendations and justified their choice of variants, like Bugge's and Sijmons', are more than one hundred years old. Since then, noticeable progress has been made in historical linguistics applied to Old Norse poetry (e.g. Haukur Þorgeirsson 2012), and the digital edition of **R** has been published as part of the *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ Electronice*. These resources would provide an excellent starting point for a new, perhaps necessary, critical edition and commentary of the *PE*. A new edition that takes the opportunity to apply strong textcritical criteria, choose variants based on plausibility, provide all the variants, make emendations when needed and to

elaborate on the editorial choices, is something that all scholars and students of Old Norse would benefit from.

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