Preserving Blunders in Eddic Poems
Formula Variation in Numbered Inventories of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*

Frog

1. Introduction

Eddic[1] poetry exhibits what I have described as an *inclination to non-variation* in its use of phraseology (Frog 2011: 58–72; 2021). In other words, at least narrative poetry seems to have been characterized by ideals of performing formulae and passages 'the same' each time where repetition is salient. When the inclination to non-variation is recognized, formulaic phraseology that seems to vary when 'saying the same thing' raises a flag against the backdrop of the corpus. Non-variation appears as a general ideal, which leads variations that may initially seem incidental to stand out as sites of interest. If such variations are attributable to the person who wrote or dictated the text, they may offer illustrations of the dynamism of the tradition and the operation of creative agency within it.[2] Conversely, a variation may reflect non-ideal phrasing or otherwise reflect processes through which the written text was produced.

[1] I would like to thank Gísli Sigurðsson for his extremely valuable and detailed comments and criticisms, which have greatly improved this study.

[2] Formula variation in *Grípisspá* points to a valorization of variation in phraseology (e.g. Mellor 1999 [2008]: 122). For present purposes, it is irrelevant whether the poem was composed in writing: it reflects knowledge of the poetic form and language and attitudes toward them. The point here is simply that individuals may engage with a tradition in ways that deviate considerably from social conventions (e.g. Harvilahti 1992b: 95–96).

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This is an exploratory study that examines formula variation in connection with the numbered inventory of questions posed by Óðinn to Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþrúðnismál* and the numbered inventory of locations in *Grímnismál*. Several numbered inventories are preserved in the corpus, so variation in these two poems can be considered in relation to other commensurate lists. Whereas a single variation in isolation remains ambiguous, both poems exhibit multiple co-occurring features that appear non-ideal. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, one variation produces a long line that lacks alliteration, and a second seems to forego the repetition of lines opening a question and either the question and answer are only half their usual length or only one rather than two turns of dialogue is presented. In *Grímnismál*, different formulae are used for numbering locations, and this co-occurs with a mix-matching of numbering, identifying the fourth named location as the 'third', along with several additional variations concentrated in the first three stanza-like passages of the list. In each case, variations are assessed in terms of whether they more likely originate from the copying process or from the initial documentation of the respective poem or section of a poem, and what this may suggest about processes in the background.

Like so much in eddic poetry research, the assessments are inevitably interpretations, and thus are considered probabilities of varying degrees of likelihood. Some of these are interdependent, some are reciprocally reinforcing or mutually exclusive, and most are unavoidably contingent on interpretations of some feature of the text being non-ideal. The exploratory nature of this investigation advances into areas where the source materials have not previously been interrogated with the questions considered here. Consequently, more deliberation on alternative explanations and false tracks is required in the main text or in notes than in a study concerned with a more familiar issue where frameworks are established for how to interpret types of evidence or it is possible to lean on findings of earlier studies. After both cases have been examined, discussion turns to the question of why the documented poems would retain lines and passages where something seems to have gone wrong when it was first formulated – i.e. why 'blunders' were not corrected – and what this suggests about how people conceived the written poems, with implications for their use as sources in research.

2. Sources and methodology

2.1 An inclination to non-variation

Oral eddic poems are here approached as socially recognizable 'things' made of language and their reproduction is considered characterized by ideals of non-variation.[3] Oral-Formulaic Theory (OFT) has become a dominant model for approaching how oral poetry varies. 'Classic' OFT – i.e. OFT as formalized by Albert Lord in 1960 – presents a composition-in-performance model for long epic traditions, whereby stories are retold freely in the traditional idiom in each performance. Although this model has been considered for eddic poetry, the corpus does not present evidence to suggest that eddic poems were verbally composed anew in each performance. Eddic poems differ from epic traditions even in other Germanic languages by being much shorter in length, composed in relatively tight sequences of long lines[4] commonly described as 'strophes', and lacking evidence of a formulaic infrastructure suggestive of a composition-in-performance tradition.[5] Passages of poems are quoted, for example in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, in ways that imply they were socially recognizable and recognizable as identified with a particular poem as opposed to others, not unlike skaldic poetry. This is consistent with the shorter form of individual poems and their composition in units forming series of verses. In such traditions, groups of verses that are regularly reproduced tend to 'crystallize' in individuals' memories and circulate as verbal units of composition, and whole poems and their parts become rememberable as constituted of these units. This does not mean that the units are invariable, only that they are not being composed on a formula-by-formula and line-by-line basis. Stability in oral transmission

[3] On oral poems as 'things' made of language, see Frog 2019; concerning eddic poems, see Frog 2021.

[4] Other Old Germanic poetries allow a clause continued from the preceding long line to conclude in the first short line and then an independent clause to begin following the caesura to continue onto the next long line. Eddic syntax generally does not allow an independent clause to begin within a long line unless one or both clauses are only a short line in length.

[5] See also Lönnroth 1971; Mellor 1999; Haymes 2003; Thorvaldsen 2006. Gísli Sigurðsson (1998: xx) proposes that poems were composed anew in each performance and then shifted toward a more memorized tradition through impacts of literacy and the Church, but the analogous case of Old English poetry (e.g. Amodio 2004) does not support this view and the formal changes in the poetic system seem to have come centuries earlier.

is, however, not simply an outcome of poetic form: it is rooted in social convention.[6]

Dominant ideals of non-variation in eddic poetry can be observed in both the social stability of phraseology in independent, oral-derived[7] variants of the same passage of text and also in formula repetition within a particular text.[8] Narrowing focus to within a version of a text points to how individuals reproduced those texts. When focus is on formula variation, comparison across versions of poems will present differences between the ways two or more individuals performed them, clouding tendencies of individuals with what can be described as 'dialects' of performance. For example, the preserved poem *Alvíssmál* is particularly interesting with regard to formula variation because the dwarf's thirteen answers to Þórr's questions are consistently comprised of six formulae, each with an open slot completed by a word or phrase specific to the question, and which formula is used is driven by alliteration with the slot-fillers in a-lines and *Vollzeilen* (Acker 1983: ch.3; 1998: ch.3; Thorvaldsen 2006: 116–117; Frog 2011). Within the poem, even superficial variations in the phraseology of repeated formulae generally seem to be avoided, and those that occur are at the particular formula's first use (Frog 2011: 58–72). Two passages of the poem are quoted in *Snorra Edda*: the twelve uses of formulae exhibit seven variations (Frog 2021:§6). Ideals of non-variation are obvious within the poem *Alvíssmál*[9] owing to the number of formula repetitions, whereas if only comparisons between corresponding passages

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[6] Thus, most regions of kalevalaic epic exhibit a high degree of verbal regularity (Frog 2016); in a southern region where epic shifted into a women's singing tradition and converged with other narrative genres in the same meter, it become far more flexibly handled (Harvilahti 1992a), whereas lyric poetry in the same meter remained extremely dynamic even where epic remained more conservative (Timonen 2004). North Russian *bylina*-epics are formally comparable in length and content to eddic narrative poetry and kalevalaic epic but appear quite flexible in performance, characterized by passages that remained verbally regular while their organization and the connecting tissue between them varied (Gil'ferding 1894: 24). Consequently, *bylina*-epics open to analysis through Classic OFT (e.g. Arant 1990) in a way that it is not readily applicable to eddic poems.

[7] On the concept of 'oral-derived' text, see Foley 1990.

[8] I initially argued this with focus on *Alvíssmál* (Frog 2011); for a more recent study, see Frog 2021.

[9] All references to passages within preserved poems are thus made using abbreviations: *Alv = Alvíssmál*, *Bdr = Baldrs draumar*, *Fm = Fáfnismál*, *Gðr I = Guðrúnarkviða I*, *Gm = Grímnismál*, *Háv = Hávamál*, *HH I = Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, *HH II = Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, *Hym = Hymiskviða*, *Sd = Sigrdrífumál*, *Skm = Skírnismál*, *Vm = Vafþrúðnismál*, *Vsp = Vǫluspá*, *Þkv = Þrymskviða*; passages are numbered following the Neckel & Kuhn edition (1963), with line numbers following a period when relevant, so *Vm*

in *Snorra Edda* are in focus, the use of formulae appears more flexible. Not all performers necessarily engaged with the tradition according to ideals of non-variation (cf. Harvilahti 1992b: 95–96), and *Alvíssmál* may get closer to ideals of non-variation than some other poems, yet the corpus generally appears characterized by non-variation in repetition as an ideal.

The theory of the inclination to non-variation has been developed especially through the analysis of poems on mythological subjects, with which *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* are grouped. The same principles also seem attributable to poems on heroic subjects, although these generally have less text-internal repetition to assess.[10] The degree of verbal correspondence between independently documented texts of the same poems is a fact of the corpus that generally gets taken for granted in eddic scholarship. Nineteenth-century researchers started off imagining the poems through modern, literary poetry and envisioning the oral transmission of poems through their medieval manuscript transmission. These combined frames of reference provided the initial lens for interpreting the degree of sameness between the Codex Regius' and Hauksbók's *Vǫluspá*s or between *Snorra Edda*'s numerous eddic quotations and independent poems. The variations were often so minimal that they were easily interpreted through that lens – a difference of a word or two within a phrase; the presence, absence or arrangement of verses or groups of verses. The high degree of phraseological sameness even yielded inter-

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40.1–2 indicates the first long line / pair of short lines of the fortieth passage of *Vafþrúðnismál* according to the Neckel & Kuhn edition.

[10] See e.g. repetitions between *HH II* 40 and 41, *Fm* 8 and 20, *Fm* 12 and 14, *Sd* below, and *Gðr I* 5 and 11; see also Lönnroth 1971. Dividing the corpus into mythological and heroic poetry follows the arrangement of the Codex Regius manuscript, which is somewhat arbitrary in that the 'mythological' and 'heroic' poems seem to reflect earlier collections brought together by a copyist (Vésteinn Ólason 2019: 235–242 and works there cited). It may be worth noting that *Grímnismál*, for instance, concerned with a king and his son rather than with events of cosmological scope, would probably not be considered as a mythological poem if it were found preserved as an episode in a longer saga; alternately, the story of Loki's slaying of Otr would likely be considered mythological if it were only preserved as a separate poem independent of the story of Sigurðr. The number and diversity of heroic poems in the Codex Regius manuscript point to a vibrant oral tradition in the background, but the background of the individual poems is unclear. Any generalization about differences in how poems varied should begin with genre categories, which is more likely than subject matter to indicate use in connection to practices. From this perspective, the monologic and dialogic poems in *ljóðaháttr* appear different from the third-person narrative poems in *fornyrðislag* in terms of practice and also idiom (Gunnell 1995: ch. 3–5), and thus more likely to be linked to differences in variation than the grouping of poems in the Codex Regius.

pretations that every eddic text ultimately traces back to a single manuscript exemplar, and scholars created narratives to account for differences between sources (e.g. Dronke 1997). Viewed against different forms of oral poetry, however, the high degree of sameness points to a tradition that, verbally, was extremely conservative.[11] It suggests that those learning the poetry aspired to perform it 'the same' as other performers, and the conception of sameness was understood as directly connected to phraseological regularity, so that rephrasing verses and reformulating sequences of verses seems generally to be avoided.[12]

Evidence of independently-attested poems and poetic passages from the mythological corpus generally foreground verbal stability, but the inclination to non-variation did not necessarily apply uniformly to whole texts, although the crystallization of phraseology into verbally regular passages tends to center on units that are semantically or functionally significant.[13] *Snorra Edda* may increase impressions of non-variation by predominantly quoting passages where verbal crystallization is expected to be highest, as may the two versions of *Vǫluspá* as a poem made up almost entirely of such units. Conversely, verses and passages that receive less semantic weight may be less crystallized or more open to variation in transmission,[14] like the general comments to Loki opening knowledge about Frigg in *Snorra Edda*'s quotation from *Lokasenna* (Frog 2021:§6). Similarly, where repetition is salient within a poem, phraseology appears more regular, as in introductions to inventories of mythic knowledge discussed below (cf. also e.g. *Skm* 17–18, *Skm* 39, 41, *Þkv* 26, 28), whereas

[11] In a comparison of passages from Uzbeck and Karakalpak epics, for example, Karl Reichl (1985: 631) observes that "[v]ariants are often phonetically/graphemically so close that they look like reading or aural mistakes."

[12] Parallel passages where verbal correspondences are recognizable but phraseology is markedly different are also found. In poems on mythological subjects, these include, for instance, the descriptions of Þórr's eating in *Hym* 15 and *Þkv* 24 and the passages on the revenge cycle surrounding Baldr in the monologue of *Vsp* 31–34 and the dialogue of *Bdr* 7–11. In the present context, it is relevant to observe that the parallels with marked differences in phraseology are found in *different* poems rather than being characterized as 'the same' text. Such passages are also found in the heroic poems, noting that a redactor's editing of passages considered 'the same' between *HH I* and *HH II* (see Harris 1983 [2008]: 191–202) seems simultaneously to distinguish the poems as 'different'.

[13] Anna-Leena Siikala (1990: 80–86) initially developed the concept of crystallization based on observations of verbal regularity around semantically central units in legends by individual tellers, only later extending the concept to the transmission of oral poetry.

[14] This view is complementary to Lars Lönnroth's (1971: 16) observation that phraseology in *Hjálmar's Death Song* appears more stable where it is specific to the passage of the poem and more variable where it relies on prefabricated formulaic phraseology.

minor variations may not have been noticeable in common formulae used only occasionally within a poem (Frog 2021:§5). The present study focuses on passages where the inclination to non-variation is predicted as a social ideal for a repeating formula or series of lines.

2.2 Questions of poetic form and the documentation process

Considerations of orality behind eddic poems has increased considerably since the turn in OFT research from emphasis on form to foreground meanings,[15] yet such orality continues to be taken for granted (see also Harris 1983 [2008]: 189). Questions of the relationship between the manuscript texts and oral performance have predominantly focused on variation, whether in the oral tradition behind written texts (e.g. Thorvaldsen 2008) or in the interpretation of the written texts as variations from the oral tradition (e.g. Gísli Sigurðsson 1998). The push to return to the manuscript texts rather than relying on edited editions (e.g. Quinn 2016) has nevertheless remained inclined to interpret textual details through the lens of modern literature, reading all details as reflecting meaningful intention. The transition of poems from oral discourse into writing has generally remained invisible. The written poems have consequently tended to be conflated with accurate transcripts of oral performances (if subsequently mediated through scribal transmission), without consideration of how the documentation process may have impacted the text in either presentation or transcription. Although the particular processes remain unknown, the documentation process requires consideration as a factor when considering text variation.

As Gísli Sigurðsson (1998: xx) has stressed, the speed of transcribing an eddic poem would undoubtedly be far slower than the rate of an oral performance and the resulting text should not be confused with an ethnographic transcript of an oral performance. The documentation of poems can be assumed either to have involved a slow, interruptive and potentially frustrating process of dictation or a slow, reflective transcription from personal knowledge and memory. Dictation inevitably impacts on the

[15] On this turn, see e.g. Foley & Ramey 2012; Frog & Lamb 2021; the use of OFT with an interest in meanings in variation shows up in eddic poetry research at the International Saga Conference in 1988 (Gísli Sigurðsson 1990; Quinn 1990) and began gaining momentum across the 1990s, reinforced by the rising interest in performance (e.g. Gunnell 1995) and publication of Paul Acker's (1998) important study as well as Gísli Sigurðsson's (1998) introduction to his edition of the poems.

realization of oral poetry, as has been observed and discussed for countless traditions already since the nineteenth century.[16] The impacts of this process vary by tradition and by the individuals involved, and include both "those skillfully and those ineptly done" (Lord 1960: 149). Dictation may regularize the metrical form by reducing or eliminating the flexibility of a normal performance, or the poetic form may break down entirely, for example because expletive particles relevant to meter but not meaning are omitted, or because the presenter tells what verses would say in paraphrase or simply summarizes content. Transcription from personal knowledge lacks the interactive dimension, and allows the writer to work at his or her own pace with time for deliberation and reflection, potentially resulting in text aligned with the writer's ideals.

Dictation has tended to be imagined as the most probable way for oral poetry to enter writing.[17] This idea is centrally built on modern collection activity, on the backdrop of an ideology that spread with the Enlightenment and Romanticism and that conferred value on traditions that were historically, religiously and/or culturally 'other'. This ideology prompted outsiders with a literate cultural background to interview oral poets or organize poetry's documentation. Throughout most of the twentieth century, orality and literacy were viewed as opposed and exclusive categories. This made it seem natural that oral poetry must be presented by someone who is illiterate and documented by someone who is literate. The polarized view marginalized poetry written by literate people based on personal knowledge of an oral tradition by not considering it authentically 'oral'. However, orality and literacy can be extremely fluid, as seen in traditions ranging from European ballads to improvizational rap battles (see also Foley 2010). In the Middle Ages, texts were commonly written for oral delivery, creating a milieu characterized by aurality (Coleman 1996). Written texts were also open to potentially considerable variation rather than only being slavishly reproduced,[18] and the Old English poet Cynewulf appears as someone fluent in the oral poetic idiom while his runic signatures indicate he was

[16] For a survey of many such accounts with extensive quotations, see Ready 2015: 13–24.

[17] This impression has been augmented by discussion centering around questions about Homeric poetry, so that comparative emphasis has been on long and variable epic forms (e.g. Lord 1960; Ready 2015).

[18] The interactions of orality and literacy have been extensively explored in Old English poetry: e.g. O'Keeffe 1990; Doane 1994; Amodio 2004; on 'scribal performance' generally, see Ready 2019; in Old Norse poetry, see e.g. Harris 1983 [2008]; on Old Norse text variation by copyists, see also Jansson 1944; Sävborg 2012.

writing them himself. It seems eddic poems began being written down within about a century of the development of vernacular writing. The Old Norse corpus is predominantly prose, but that prose is filled with quotations of different types of poetry stemming from the oral tradition. If quotations of poems in sagas are considered written out from personal knowledge, there is no reason to assume *a priori* that whole eddic poems were transcribed from dictation.

Transcribing the eddic poems indicates that they were valuable and interesting to the people who wrote them, and that they were valued *as poems* rather than only for informational content. Poems on mythological subjects in particular would have to be sufficiently valorized among people who were literate to invest in the time, trouble and expense to document them in spite of their 'pagan' subject matter. The social gap between peasant oral performers and modern literate collectors would be anachronistic for medieval Iceland, as would the ideology of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. There is no reason to believe that a community of medieval Christians would valorize such 'pagan' poems without viewing them as their own traditions to start with, and no reason think that the literate person documenting poems was a social outsider with little or no advanced knowledge of the tradition.[19] Writing the poems down suggests a continuity of the oral traditions in the communities doing the writing. Although the exact purpose of the written poems is unknown, writing them out indicates that they were intended to be used, as does collecting and copying them. The texts were produced by and for literate audiences, although their use most likely had a social dimension, connected with public rather than private reading (see also Coleman 1996). The oral delivery of written poems can be assumed to have followed the conventions of the oral performance tradition, so the writing of eddic poems should be viewed as an extension of the oral tradition rather than divorced from it (Mundal 2010: 166–167), even if the oral tradition may have been transformed or gradually displaced as a historical process (see also Gísli Sigurðsson 1998: xx). How different poems were documented may have

[19] Romanticism's elevation of non-Christian mythology tends to be seen in terms of heritage and its expression of a 'spirit' of a people, but it is worth noting that this built on ideas of the Enlightenment that saw mythology as inspired and thus as achieving aesthetic ideals and to be valued on those terms while rejecting and condemning beliefs and practices of paganism. Works like *Snorra Edda* and *Heimskringla* seem instead to suggest an environment where traditions linked specifically to vernacular non-Christian mythology were present and valued in society, leading them to be reframed as acceptable in a Christian context rather than rejected.

varied considerably, but, if poems were documented through dictation, the transcriber was likely familiar with the tradition if not competent to perform in it, and had quite probably heard the particular poem before.[20] Rather than today's ideals of transcription, the transcriber's knowledge of the tradition may have affected and even filtered what was written, so that writing the poem may have been a process of co-production (Ready 2015).

Documented eddic poems generally make the metrical form salient. They sometimes have prose insertions and there are scattered lines that are non-ideal, but they do not float in and out of poetic form.[21] The consistent salience of the metrical form makes it possible that the documentation process often or usually resulted in texts closer to certain formal ideals than might be normal in other situations. If eddic poetry was documented through dictation, the situation can be assumed to have been staged – i.e. pre-organized – arranging for one person to present and another person with the materials, place, and perhaps light to transcribe. The situation would almost certainly be different from a customary performance context. If the person dictating was not the organizer of the situation, he may have felt self-conscious or awkward, particularly when the process itself was first being attempted. The shift in mode to dictation or performance of short series of verses in bursts, followed by pauses as they are written down, breaks up the flow of presentation and can cause difficulties for even the most skilled and confident performer.[22] The setting may thus have resulted in less-than-ideal presentations, especially when first getting started, while the presenter's attention may have been more on the unusual situation than on the poetry (e.g. Lord 1960: 126). The different mode of presentation, or regular breaks after short sets of verses, could be particularly disruptive for a presenter who conceived of the text not as simply words and phrases but as performed speech. Comparative evidence suggests that the presenter would gradually become more accustomed to the process and situation, with the consequence that difficulties may be more concentrated at the beginning than at the end of a presentation.

Albert Lord's discussion and examples are widely known as a point of reference when considering dictation (e.g. 1960: 114–115 and ch. 6). He

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[20] Medieval dictation of a poem for transcription is unlikely to be organized without it first having been heard.

[21] The poem *Hárbarðsljóð* might be considered an outlier here, which could reflect differences in its documentation context.

[22] See e.g. the survey of accounts from different traditions, concentrated on oral epic, in Ready 2015: 13–24.

states that that "a dictated text, even when done under the best of circumstances and by the best of scribes, is never entirely, from the point of view of the line structure, the same as a sung text" (Lord 1960: 127). Although the claim is valid, some of the issues that Lord describes are linked to the type of tradition and are not so prominent in, for example, kalevalaic epic, which was documented extensively through dictation during the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The South Slavic singers described by Lord traditionally performed with musical accompaniment in a tradition of composition-in-performance, piecing together most passages formula by formula and line by line in a flow of continuous speech. For this type of tradition, removing the features that organize and facilitate that flow can be extremely disruptive (e.g. Lord 1960: 126–127). Eddic poetry diverged from other Germanic poetry not only in poetic form but also in performance practices. The poetry seems not to have been performed with musical accompaniment, nor is it described as 'sung' (Harris 1985: 116–117). Eddic poems on mythological and heroic subjects also do not appear to have been composed *in situ*. Poems were not memorized in the modern sense of actively learning an absolute and invariable exemplar to be ideally reproduced without variation of a single morpheme. Nevertheless, they seem to have been internalized as regularly reproduced verbal texts. This makes for a very different situation for dictation, with the presenter trying to remember lines and passages, whether remembered as whole or as largely prefabricated but completed *in situ*.

The presentation of verses interacts with memory, whether or not with conscious, reflective self-assessment of the ongoing presentation. The role of memory is greater where poems are remembered as texts, rather than composed freely *in situ*, and less-than-ideal verses may be recognized and improved in repetitions. This type of process is reflected in *Alvíssmál*, where formulae only vary on their first use, and a more ideal form on their second use remains consistent thereafter. This does not mean that poems were invariable, but remembering formulae or whole lines and systems of lines plays a significant role in such poetry, and difficulty calling up the customary phrase for a particular passage can cause a presenter to stumble no less than any of us might when, mid-sentence, we find we cannot recall a key word or phrase. *Composing* is here considered an act of formulating potentially unique expressions, whether at the level of a single line or a whole poem, either in the course of presentation or in a situation allowing for deliberation. *Remembering* concerns both words and prefabricated units and frameworks and potentially whole stretches

of text. Composing and remembering are here seen as complementary and interacting in an oral performance: even the most crystallized oral poetry may involve a degree of composition, while even the most variable oral poetry involves a degree of remembering prefabricated units and schemata of the idiom. The performance of oral poetry is commonly characterized by a continuous and regular flow of delivery that will normally prioritize ideal fluency, without pauses, false starts, etc. Not being able to remember a phrase or passage will thus normally lead to composition or simply moving forward, sometimes at the expense of semantic content (or even sense). The pressures of temporal delivery are removed in deliberative transcription from personal knowledge and also potentially from dictation, which might even open into discussion and corrections in the course of presentation. The transcriber might also edit the text in the process of transcription without consultation, or stop to question a verse, perhaps digressing into conversation.[23] The possible factors in the situation are innumerable, but the perspectives outlined here offer a frame of reference for considering the cases below.

2.3 Methodology

An ideal of non-variation is taken as a dominant ideology in text reproduction, and formula usage that diverges from this ideal is assessed against that backdrop. All else being equal, variation in repeating formulae could reflect a performer's idiosyncratic handling of the poetic system (cf. Harvilahti 1992b: 95–96), impacts of a scribe on the transmission of a text (Frog forthcoming:§7), or problems of memory (as in *Alvíssmál* above) or other interference in the context of the initial transcription of a poem. Focus here is on repetitions within a single version of a text. Multiple uses of a formula or verse sequence within a poem create a context in which variation can be viewed, but a variation among only two or three uses remains ambiguous. The cases taken up below thus examine formulae in lists of a greater number of items in series, providing a larger number for comparison. The repeated use in relatively rapid and periodic succession is also assumed to make non-variation more salient in the documentation of the poem and its manuscript transmission.

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[23] Cf. *Gm* 25.2, where it looks like *Herjafǫðrs* 'of Óðinn' has been added to the end of a b-line as a clarification, and then the word order changes in the line's repetition in *Gm* 26.2 to syntactically integrate *Herjafǫðrs* (cf. Bugge 1867: 80–81).

Interpreting the background of individual variations uses so-called 'close reading', looking with great care and an analytical eye at a text and its features in context, down to minutia of detail. More pragmatically, the case studies below are each of a numbered inventory of knowledge or questions about mythic knowledge, so other examples of similar inventories are first reviewed to establish a frame of reference within the corpus. Variations in each case are correlated with potential relevant indicators of competence, confidence, and fluency in the passage of the text or poem, and also corresponding potential indicators of confusion, tension, or disruption, with the hope of identifying interpretable patterns.

2.4 Sources

The primary materials of this study are the texts of eddic poems as they appear in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to) and AM 748 I a manuscripts, working centrally from the edition of Sophus Bugge (1867) alongside the diplomatic editions of Ludv. F. A. Wimmer and Finnur Jónsson (1891) and Vésteinn Ólason and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2001) of the Codex Regius and of Finnur Jónsson (1896) of AM 748 I a; I have also made use of images of both manuscripts available at handrit.is as well as relevant later manuscripts of which digital images are available. Comparisons with *Snorra Edda* are made with reference to Anthony Faulkes' edition of *Gylfaginning* and the Prologue (Snorri Sturluson 2005), with consideration of Finnur Jónsson's edition (Snorri Sturluson 1931).

3. Ordinal formulae

I use the term *ordinal formula* to refer to a formula that has an open slot,[24] which is regularly completed by ordinal numbers to form a series. Ordinal formulae are used in several eddic poems, where the longer series are particularly linked to inventories of units of mythic knowledge. Such numbered lists are exclusively found in poems in the *ljóðaháttr* meter. Outside of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*, these are inventories of things

[24] The concept of formulae with slots and slot fillers was introduced into discussions of formulaic language in oral poetry by Paul Acker (1983; 1998).

that can be performed with supernatural effect, found in *Hávamál*, *Sigrdrífumál* and *Grógaldr*.

3.1 *Hávamál* 146–163

The ordinal formula in *Hávamál* is used in a list of eighteen items. The list opens with *Ljóð ek þau kann* 'Songs I know those' (*Háv* 146.1) with *hjálp heitir eitt* 'help one is called' beginning the second half of the stanza; this is followed by the ordinal formula *Þat kann ek {it} #* 'That I know {the}/a # ' (curly brackets indicate an element of a formula that can be omitted; '*#*' indicates a slot in the formula completed by an ordinal number). This section of *Hávamál* is preceded by the advice to Lodd-Fáfnir, in which there are twenty-one repetitions of the opening verse sequence introducing units of advice; the latter repeating sequence is a long line followed by two *Vollzeilen*, reduced in abbreviation to the first two words by the fifth use (*Háv* 112–137; see also Frog forthcoming:§3). In contrast, the ordinal formula in the following section is written out with no more than normal abbreviation (the abbreviation "k̃." is here only left unexpanded to "k*ann*" so that it is saliently distinguishable from "kaɴ", expanded to "ka*nn*"; I indicate line breaks systematically through all examples):

(1)	Lioþ ec þa/ ka*nn*			/ er ka*nn*at þioðans kóna	(*Háv* 146.1–2)
	hialp heit*ir*		eit*t*	/ e*nn* þ*at* þ*er* hialpa mv*n*	(*Háv* 146.4–5)
	Þ*at* ka*nn*	ec	ii.	/ er þvrfo yta syn*ir*	(*Háv* 147.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec.	iii.	/ ef m*er* v*er*þr þa/rf micil	(*Háv* 148.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec et	iiii.	/ ef m*er* fyrðar b*er*a	(*Háv* 149.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec it	v.	/ ef ec se af fári scoti*nn*	(*Háv* 150.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec et	vi.	/ ef mic sęrir þegn	(*Háv* 151.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec it	.vii.	/ ef ec se havan loga	(*Háv* 152.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	viii.	/ er a/llo*m* er	(*Háv* 153.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	ix.	/ ef mic na/þ*r* v*m* stendr	(*Háv* 154.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	x.	/ ef ec se tvnriþor	(*Háv* 155.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	xi.	/ ef ec sc*a*l t*il* orrosto	(*Háv* 156.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ	xii.	/ ef ec se atre vp*p*i	(*Háv* 157.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ	xiii.	/ ef ec sc*a*l þelgn vngan	(*Háv* 158.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	xiiii.	/ ef ec sc*a*l fyrða lilþi	(*Háv* 159.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	xv.	/ e*r* gól þioð reyr*ir*	(*Háv* 160.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	xvi.	/ ef ec vil ins svi*nn*a mans	(*Háv* 161.1–2)
	Þ*at* ka*nn*	ec iþ.	xvii.	/ at mic mv*n* seint fi*rr*az	(*Háv* 162.1–2)
	Þ*at* k̃.	ec iþ.	xviii.	/ e*r* ec æva ke*nn*ig	(*Háv* 163.1–2)

The first unit or strophe is formally different from those that follow and does not use the ordinal formula. After this, the ordinal formula regularly

completes an a-line followed each time by a different b-line that opens the specific unit of knowledge. The b-line either begins *ef* 'if' followed by a first-person singular pronoun or *er* 'which' in all but the seventeenth item. The number in the ordinal formula regularly carries alliteration (although undesirably in the seventh with the verb); alliteration can be assumed to drive the phraseology of the b-line. The line structure of each unit being introduced is not regular. Although it is most common for long lines and *Vollzeilen* to alternate, both are also found used in series; counting each a-line, b-line and *Vollzeile* separately, the number of verses in each unit varies from three to nine; counting each long line singly, the number of verses varies from two to seven.

The formula *Þat kann ek {it} #* varies only in the absence of *it* from the second and third uses; *it* is never to be found in combination with *annarr* 'second', which seems to be a convention of language that drives at least a minimum variation in the formula's phraseology.[25] Use of *it* beginning with the fourth rather than the third item could be an incidental variation but it is equally possible that the absence was a less-than-ideal realization or an accident of carrying non-variation from the second to the third use rather than shifting immediately to use with *it*. An omission by the scribe is also possible, although the formula is not subject to extensive abbreviation, so it would have to be attributed to accident. As a variation, the omission of *it* is superficial. Alternation in the orthography of *it* between "et", "it", and "iþ" is lexically incidental from the perspective of oral variation, but the inclination to non-variation may, in this case, also be reflected in the orthography: the form "iþ" becomes regular beginning from the eighth use.

3.2 *Sigrdrífumál* 22–37

The ordinal formula *Þat ræð ek þér {it} #* 'That I advise you {the}/a #' is used in *Sigrdrífumál* eleven times, beginning from the first item. Although the regular alternation of long lines and *Vollzeilen* predominates, *Vollzeilen* are also used in series in *Sd* 25 and *Sd* 35. Outside of these passages, editors treat the text as composed in regular stanzas, yet the number of verses between uses of the ordinal formula vary, with supplementary comments or elaborations given for the third (*Sd* 25), fourth (*Sd* 27), sixth (*Sd* 30), ninth (*Sd* 34) and tenth (*Sd* 36) items in the inventory. Only the

[25] The variation in the abbreviation of *kann*, changing back from "k̃." to "kaɴ" with the seventeenth item occurs with the first use after beginning to write on the verso of the leaf.

first six uses are preserved in the Codex Regius, at which point is the lacuna of the missing quire:

(2) Codex Regius (GKS 2365)

Þat ręþ	ec	þ*er*	iþ	fyrsta	/ at þv viþ frǫndr þina	(*Sd* 22.1–2)
Þ*at* r.	e.	þ*er*.		a.	/ at þv eiþ ne svęr*ir*	(*Sd* 23.1–2)
Þ*at* r.	e.	þ.		iii	/ at þv þi*n*gi a	(*Sd* 24.1–2)
Þ*at* r.	ec.	þ*er*	it.	iiii.	/ ef byr forldǫþa	(*Sd* 26.1–2)
Þ*at* r.	ec.	þ*er*	it	v.	/ þottv fag*r*a*r* ser	(*Sd* 28.1–2)
Þ*at* r.	ec.	þ.	it	vi.	/ þo*t* m*eþ* seggio*m* fari	(*Sd* 29.1–2)

The remainder of the stanzas are preserved only in later paper manuscripts, where they conclude the poem.[26] The oldest manuscripts with the remaining stanzas are from the seventeenth century. Bugge identified the oldest as AM 738 4to, copied in 1680, and AM 166 b 8vo, which he dated to the second half of the seventeenth century (1867: 234), although the relevant leaves were lost from the latter within a few decades of his edition (Ussing et al. 1894: 429). Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2011a; 2011b) argues that the neglected manuscript Lbs 1199 4to, not used by Bugge or later editors of the poem, exhibits features that suggest it may be the closest to the Codex Regius text:

(3) Lbs 1199

Þad	ræd	eg	þier	hid	İ.	/ ad. þu vid frændur þyna	(*Sd* 22.1–2)
Þad.	r.	e.	þ.		İİ	/ ad þu Eid nie Suorier	(*Sd* 23.1–2)
þad	r.	e*g*	þ.		III.	/ ad þu þingi a	(*Sd* 24.1–2)
Þ.	r.	e.	þ.	iþ	İV·	/ ef byr f*or*dæd	(*Sd* 26.1–2)
þ.	r	e.	þ		V.	/ þottu fagrar sier	(*Sd* 28.1–2)
þ .	r.	e.	þ.		Vİ.	/ þott med seggiu*m* f*ar*:	(*Sd* 29.1–2)
Þ.	R.	e*g*	þ.		VII.	/ Eff þu sakar deiler	(*Sd* 31.1–2)
þ .	r.		þ.		Vİİİ.	/ ad þu skallt v*id* Illu sia	(*Sd* 32.1–2)
Þ.	r.		þ.		İX.	/ ad þu Naam Bi*arg*el	(*Sd* 33.1–2)
Þ.	r.		þ.		X	/ ad þu truer alldre	(*Sd* 35.1–2)
Þ.	r.		þ.		XI.	/ ad þu v*id* illu sęr	(*Sd* 37.1–2)

As in *Hávamál*, alliteration is carried by the number in every use with a different b-line that opens the specific unit of information; b-lines never-

[26] In *Vǫlsunga saga*, extended quotation of *Sigrdrífumál* stops with the preceding section of the poem (i.e. *Sd* 21), although the stanzas of the rest of the poem appear to have been transformed into a series of prose statements of advice (Bugge 1867: 232–234; cf. Finch 1965: 39–40). Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2011a: 121) finds that all but one manuscript of the poem datable to the seventeenth century concludes with the same text. In later manuscripts, text from *Vǫlsunga saga* became linked to the poem by manuscript redactors. For example, ÍB 299 4to, rather than copying the opening verses of the incomplete stanza in the Codex Regius, picks up in the prose advice of *Vǫlsunga saga* following *Sd* 28; the same passage is included in Lbs 1689 4to, which contains *Sigrdrífumál* through *Sd* 37.

theless predominantly begin the same (*at þú* 'that you', of which *ef þú* 'if you' may be a variation). Abbreviation generally matches the Codex Regius through the fourth use, including the absence of *it* from the third, although Roman numerals are used already beginning from the first. After the fourth use, *it* is omitted without abbreviation, as is *ek* 'I' after the seventh; the reduction of the number of words reflected in an abbreviated text sequence was common (as was variation in which words were represented in abbreviation).

AM 738 4to expands the abbreviations – also adding *it* to the third use – until the fourth item, which is the first on a new page (16r). The switch to Roman numerals seems to have caused some confusion, reflected in "i4" rather than "iv". The abbreviations generally remain uniform, although *it* disappears from the last three uses of the formula:[27]

(4) AM 738 4to

Þad	ræd	eg	þier	hÿd	fyrsta	/ ad þü vid frændur þÿna	(*Sd* 22.1–2)
Þad	ræd	eg	þier		an*n*ad	/ ad þu eid ne sverier	(*Sd* 23.1–2)
þad	ræd	eg	þier	ed	þridia	/ ad þu ey ä þingi	(*Sd* 24.1–2)
Þ	R	e	þ	iþ	i4	/ ef byr fordæda	(*Sd* 26.1–2)
þ	R	e	þ	iþ	v:	/ þöttu fagrar siäer	(*Sd* 28.1–2)
Þ	R	e	þ	iþ	vi	/ þött med seggi*u*m fare	(*Sd* 29.1–2)
þ	r	i	þ	iþ	vij	/ ef þu sakardeil*ir*	(*Sd* 31.1–2)
þ	r	i	þ	i:	viij	/ ad þu skallt vid illu sia	(*Sd* 32.1–2)
þ:	r:	e	þ		ix	/ ad þu Naaum*m* biarlger	(*Sd* 33.1–2)
þ	r	e	þ		x	/ ad þu truer alldzeij	(*Sd* 35.1–2)
þ	r	e	þ		xi	/ ad þu vid illu siaer	(*Sd* 37.1–2)

In the eleventh use, the Roman numeral appears "xii", although the "ii" is probably a sloppy double stroke to mark a thick "i" as "ii" is written "ij" elsewhere in this text.

3.3 *Grógaldr* 6–14

The ordinal formula *Þann gel ek þér {it} #* 'This incant I to you {the}/a #' is used for all nine items presented in *Grógaldr*'s numbered list. Like the lists in *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, the b-line formula is different with each use. Each unit in the list is uniformly structured as two pairs of

[27] In AM 738 4to, the seventh and eighth uses of the formula seem to abbreviate it carelessly, so that the "e" becomes hardly recognizable, as does the "r" in the eighth. Something seems to have impacted the copying process on the ninth use: the abbreviations become clear, yet *it* disappears.

alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen* with the exception of *Gg* 10, which has an additional *Vollzeile*. AM 738 4to's text is presented in (5):

(5) AM 738 4to

Þan*n* gel ek þer		fyrstan*n*	/ þan*n* kueþa fiǫlnytan*n*	(*Gg* 6.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer		an*n*an*n*	/ er þu arna skalt	(*Gg* 7.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer		þryðia	/ ef þer þióðir	(*Gg* 8.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer	in*n*	fiorþa	/ ef þik filanþr stanþa	(*Gg* 9.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer		fimta	/ ef þer fiotur verþa	(*Gg* 10.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer	in*n*	Sietta	/ ef þu a sio kemur	(*Gg* 11.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer	in*n*	siøunþa	/ ef þik sekia kemur	(*Gg* 12.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer	in*n*	atta	/ ef þik uti nem*ur*	(*Gg* 13.1–2)
Þan*n* gel ek þer		Nijunþa	/ ef þu vyþ þan*n* naddgøfgna	(*Gg* 14.1–2)

Bugge's edition presents *inn* regularly for all uses of the formula except the second, and all b-lines after the first as beginning *ef* 'if' followed by a second-person singular pronoun. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014: 189) identify the oldest manuscript as Stockh. papp. 8vo nr. 15 (not used by Bugge); their edition also presents *inn* with the third question (2014: 438).

3.4 Overview of ordinal formulae in *Hávamál*, *Sigrdrífumál*, and *Grógaldr*

Ordinal formulae reviewed in this section remain formally very uniform. *Hávamál* exhibits a different formula with the first item in the series whereas *Sigrdrífumál* and *Grógaldr* both use the ordinal formula also for the first item. The only formal variation is the presence or absence of the article *it*/*inn*, a variation that seems to be required for *annarr* 'second', which may impact its variability in repetition generally; absences of the article later in the series nevertheless appear likely attributable to manuscript abbreviation simply rendering it invisible. The formula is combined with a different b-line in each use and alliteration is consistently carried by the number. All three lists exhibit preferred ways of beginning the b-lines.

4. Alternating b-lines in *Vafþrúðnismál*

In *Vafþrúðnismál*, the ordinal formula *Segðu þat {it}* # 'Say you this {the} #' is used to open a series of twelve questions. Unlike ordinal formulae above, the b-line does not begin the unique unit of knowledge, nor is

the b-line different for each use of the formula. Sets of questions in *Vafþrúðnismál* are linked through the repetition of an opening long line and *Vollzeile*, producing what can be described as *macro-parallelism* (Urban 1986: 26–29) through which paired questions and answers become perceivable as parts of parallel groups.

4.1 Indications of ideals of non-variation

The repeating verse sequences opening questions are subject to extended abbreviation with suspension. The abbreviation strategy may conceal some variation, but it simultaneously indicates a perceived sameness of the verse sequence. In the first such sequence, Vafþrúðnir's questions to Óðinn open with the common formula *Segðu {mér} {þat} X* 'Say you {to me} {this} X', in which one or both optional words may appear. In the first use, the pronoun *mér* 'to me' is used, switching immediately to *þat* 'this' in repetitions ("?" represents a *punctus elevatus*, used to indicate omitted words):

(6) Segþv mer gagn raþr / allz þv agólfi | vill // þins v*m* freista fr*a*ma (*Vm* 11.1–3)
Segdv þat gagnraþr? (*Vm* 13.1–3)
S egðv þ. g? (*Vm* 15.1–3)
Segþv þ. g. / a? | (*Vm* 17.1–3)

Say to me / this Gagnráðr / as you on the floor want // yours (*um*) to try your fame?

The number of repetitions is relatively few, but the regularity of the last three uses continues into the ordinal formula *Segðu þat {it} #* in the following series of questions. The *Segðu {mér} {þat} X* is a widely attested formula, used in the repeating series of questions in *Alvíssmál* and *Fjölsvinnsmál* and also more widely (see Kellogg 1988: *s.v.* 'segja'). Use with *Segðu mér X* or *Segðu mér þat X* are the most common forms whereas *Segðu þat X* seems rare outside of *Vafþrúðnismál*; examples of variation within a poem are normally expansions after the first use and never otherwise alternation between short forms with only *mér* or *þat* (Frog 2021:§5). *Segðu mér þat X* appears held as generally ideal in the corpus. *Mér* in the first use in (6) is most likely a less-ideal realization on the formula's first use, following which the presenter finds a preferred form on the first repetition and sticks with it.

Non-variation also characterizes the opening verse sequence of the questions following the numbered inventory:[28]

[28] Bugge (1867: 72) adds "vm" before "reynda regin" based on the expletive particle *of*

(7)	Fjolþ	ec	for	/ fiolþ	ec	freistaþac	// f. ec relynda regin	(*Vm* 44.1–3)
	Fiolþ	ec.	f.	/ f.	e.	f?		(*Vm* 46.1–3)
	Fiolþ	ec	f.	/ f.				(*Vm* 48.1–3)
	Fiolþ	ec	f.	/ f?				(*Vm* 50.1–3)
	Fiolþ	ec.	f?					(*Vm* 52.1–3)
	F iolþ	ec	for	/ f?				(*Vm* 54.1–3)

Much I travelled / much I tried // much I tested the gods

These examples suggest that the presenter of the poem subscribed to ideals of non-variation. The opening variation in the first series of questions suggests that he did not always come up with an ideal form of a verse on the first use of a formula.

4.2 The ordinal formula within the recurrent verse sequence

The sequence of questions forming a numbered inventory is separated from the preceding text, beginning on a new line with a large capital. The rubric "capitulum" 'chapter' has been added in red ink in a space at the end of the line. Within the poem, this division marks the transition from the first parts of the poem, including the giant's questions, to Óðinn's questions, which dominate the rest of the poem until its conclusion.[29]

For the first ten questions, the ordinal formula is integrated into an opening address of the giant that is a long line and *Vollzeile* in length, and the question is formulated in a following long line and *Vollzeile*. The answer then follows in two pairs of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*. The structure of both questions and answers is generally regular, although there are two answers that are only a single long line and *Vollzeile* (*Vm* 27, 31) and one that includes an additional long line (*Vm* 38).[30] With the eleventh and twelfth cycles of the inventory, variations appear in the macro-parallel structure. The eleventh question is formulated as a single

found in AM 748 I a; it is possible that the same could be a variation concealed by abbreviation here.

[29] This rubric is also found following *Rm* 25 and following the concuding verses of *Guðrúnarkviða* II (and cf. also Bugge 1867: ii–iii, 396), making it seem unlikely to antedate bringing together the mythological and heroic collections into a single manuscript.

[30] The additional long line stands out because it is an independent clause juxtaposed between a long line and *Vollzeile* that form a coherent clause, leading it to be interpreted as an interpolation (e.g. Gering 1927: 173). The line is also formally unusual. Its short lines are end-rhymed, which in *ljóðaháttr* (outside of lists of names) is otherwise only found in combination with parallelism (in short lines or *Vollzeilen* in *Skm* 28.3–4; in *Vollzeilen* in *Háv* 134.11–12), and the rhyme is on heavy disyllables, which is unusual for a b-line's cadence (found in *Vafþrúðnismál* in *Vm* 2.5, 3.5 and 33.2).

long line and *Vollzeile* (*Vm* 40) as is the answer (*Vm* 41) or these together form a question without an answer. The twelfth question is formed through variation of the repeating opening lines and the answer repeats the following long line while both have an extra *Vollzeile* or long line (*Vm* 42, 43). The ordinal formula *Segðu þat {it} #* is regular, with *it* appearing in all instances except with *annarr*, and all questions open with a variation of the long line and *Vollzeile* except for the eleventh:[31]

(8)	S egðv	þ*at*	iþ	eína	/ ef	þi*t*	o̧þi	dvg*ir*	// *oc*	þv	vafþrvðn*ir*	vit*ir*.	(*Vm* 20.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.		ii.	/ e.	þ.	ȩ.	d.	// *oc*	þ.	v? |		(*Vm* 22.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	iþ	iii.	/ allz	þic	svi*nnan*	|qv*e*þa	// *oc*	þ.	v.	v.	(*Vm* 24.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	iþ	iiii. |	/ a.	þ.	f?						(*Vm* 26.1–3)
	S egðv	þ*at*.	iþ	v.	/ a.	þ.	f?						(*Vm* 28.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	it.	vi.	/ a. |	þ.	s.	q.					(*Vm* 30.1–3)
	S egðv	þ*at*.	iþ	vii.	/ a.	þ.	s.	q.					(*Vm* 32.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	iþ	viii.	/ a.	þ.	f?						(*Vm* 34.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	iþ	ix.	/ a |	þ.	s.	q.	// e?				(*Vm* 36.1–3)
	S egðv	þ*at*.	iþ.	x.	/ a.	þu	tiva	rá́c	// áll	vafðrvðn*ir*	vit*ir*		(*Vm* 38.1–3)
	Segðv	þ*at*.	et.	xi.	/ hvar	ytar	tvno*m*	i	// há/*gg*vaz	hv*er*ian	dag.		(*Vm* 40.1–3)
	Seg|þv	þ*at*.	iþ	xii.	/ hvi	þu	tiva	rá́c	// á́ll	vafðrvðn*ir*	vit*ir*		(*Vm* 42.1–3)

4.3 The b-line formula and lack of alliteration in the eighth question

The ordinal formula's use in a repeating line sequence appears to be an outcome of adapting it to the question and answer dialogue. As in other ordinal lists, the b-line varies in relation to the number in the question, although the number does not always exhibit alliteration. Three formulae with variations are used in the b-line. These formulae, including variation in the formula *allz þik svinnan/fróðan kveða* 'as you are said to be clever/wise', relate to alliteration with the numbers, as shown in Table 1.

Any two ordinal numbers that carry the same alliteration have a different b-line formula, one of which can also be used with the remaining two numbers by alliterating with the verb *segja* to produce a metrically well-formed line. The relationship of b-lines to alliteration suggests a system of alternatives driven by alliteration comparable to that found in

[31] This is matched in AM 748 I a, where the formula becomes abbreviated to the first letter of each word and Roman numerals are also used for the numbers, while *þat* rather than *it* disappears from the fifth and then the seventh through the last questions (or possibly *þú*; i.e. rather than "þ. þ." appears "þ.", written "þv." in *Vm* 42).

Tab. 1. B-line formulae and ordinal number alliteration (deviations from expectation underlined)

Alliteration	formula	relevant for ordinal numbers	used for
vocalic alliteration	*ef þitt æði dugir*	*annarr*, *átti*, *ellifti*	*einn*, *annarr*
alliteration on /f/	*allz þik fróðan kveða*	*fyrstr*, *fjórði*, *fimti*	*fjórði*, *fimti*, *átti*
alliteration on /s/	*allz þik svinnan kveða*	*sétti*, *sjaundi*	*sétti*, *sjaundi*
alliteration on /t/	*allz/hví þú tíva rǫk*	*tíundi*, *tólfti*	*tíundi*, *tólfti*
other alliteration	*allz þik svinnan kveða*	*þriði*, *níundi*	*þriði*, *níundi*
verse series unused	—	—	*ellifti*

Alvíssmál. When the system is recognized, non-ideal variations come into sharper focus. First:

a. The b-line of the eighth question does not produce metrical alliteration

The system anticipates use of the b-line for vocalic alliteration, while the formula *allz þik svinnan/fróðan kveða* 'as you are said to be clever/wise' would produce a metrical alliteration if used with *svinnr* rather than *fróðr*. The variation is unlikely to be the result of scribal error since it is in a series of the formula's *svinnr* variations. A copyist's skip of the eye would require jumping across about eight lines of text (based on the Codex Regius). A misreading of a long s (ſ) as a Carolingian miniscule f is unlikely when the manuscript seems only to have used Insular f (ꝼ);[32] moreover, variations of the formula are abbreviated in different ways in the Codex Regius as "f?" and "s. q.", pointing to a salient distinction between the formula variations in the exemplar.[33] The variation in the eighth question also points away from deliberative transcription from personal knowledge, which would allow the presenter (i.e. writer) to look back at earlier choices, noting that either of the other b-line formulae used up to that point would produce a metrical alliteration. The b-line of the eighth question therefore appears likely to reflect an oral formulation that was transcribed by a second individual. The variation might be accidentally introduced if the a-line and b-line were dictated separately, but dictation

[32] Carolingian minuscule f is used in only three instances in the Codex Regius, all in corrections (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2019: 365).

[33] AM 748 I a transcribes the first use with the abbreviation "f.", which would match the Codex Regius, followed by regularized abbreviations of "f. k." alongside "s. k." for the following uses (see also Frog forthcoming).

in such short units could easily lead into confusion by interrupting syntax and rhythm, which would likely leave additional traces through the poem. Intuitively, it seems far more likely that dictation would have proceed by utterances that were syntactically or metrically complete.

4.4 The lack of the introductory sequence in the eleventh question

Predictable phraseology is disrupted a second time when vocalic alliteration comes around again:

b. The eleventh question does not continue with a b-line in Table 1
c. It is the only of the poem's 22 questions that does not open with a repeating verse series
d. It is either half the length of the poem's 21 other questions or has no answer
e. If the second long line and *Vollzeile* is an answer, this is half the length of 19 of the poem's 21 other answers (i.e. all except *Vm* 27 and 31)
f. The second long line and *Vollzeile* is an answer, the answer does not clearly identify the location 'where' of the question

Transition immediately to the question in the b-line breaks the macro-parallelism that is otherwise regular through the dialogue and thus appears non-ideal.

Questions in the poem regularly begin with an a-line while the post-positional use of *í* in the final position indicates that *Vm* 40.2 is a b-line, so the phrasing would not result from a copyist accidentally skipping a stretch of text. Moreover, the suspension of abbreviations would lead even the ordinal formula alone to be read as representing the full opening series of verses, as seen in (6) and (7) above. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century copyists interpreted the a-line this way, expanding the verse group, leaving the following b-line and *Vollzeile* without an a-line.[34] Beginning the question in the b-line requires some degree of conscious composition that diverges from all patterns in the poem. The variation cannot be reasonably attributed to a copyist and can with confidence be identified

[34] For example, reproducing the b-line from the eighth question in AM 738 4to, 55v, ÍB 68 4to, 61r, reproducing the b-line from the tenth question in Lbs 1689 4to, 20r–20v, or following the a-line with "etc" in ÍB 299 4to, 14v. For additional discussion of variations, see Bugge 1867: 71.

with the poem's initial documentation. The variation is extremely unlikely for a deliberative process of writing. Other ordinal inventories present the main unit of information immediately in the b-line with alliteration on the number. Although the variation diverges from other questions in *Vafþrúðnismál*, it follows broader conventions of ordinal formula use. It can be understood as a non-ideal expression that was an organic outcome in oral delivery, which would point to a dictation situation. In this case, the variation likely followed an interruption while the preceding verses were transcribed (during which there may also have been distractions).

Either the answer is omitted entirely or the question is unusual in its short duration. Units of mythic knowledge in eddic ordinal inventories may be longer than a pair of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen* or be elaborated by an additional verse group but they are almost never shorter.[35] Dialogic poetry in *ljóðaháttr* in particular is generally characterized by giving a turn of speech not less than a pair of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*, so *Vm* 27, 31 and 41 look short on the backdrop of the corpus as well as of the poem.[36] *Snorra Edda* reproduces the question and a full-length answer for *Vm* 31 (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 10). Although reconstructing verses through *Snorra Edda*'s prose is highly problematic, *Gylfaginning* 19 is devoted to presenting the names and information contained in the lines of *Vm* 27 followed only by a second, commensurate set of names and information (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 21), long suspected to reflect knowledge of additional verses from this passage.[37] As an answer to the eleventh question, a single long line and *Vollzeile* looks non-ideal, particularly when it follows on an anomalously-phrased question.

Together, the question and answer correspond to a passage in *Snorra Edda* commonly considered as the answer to the eleventh question:

(9) Segðu þat it ellipta / hvar ýtar túnum í // hǫggvast hverjan dag (*Vm* 40.1–3)
allir einherjar / Óðins túnum í // hǫggvast hverjan dag (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 34)
val þeir kjósa / ok ríða vígi frá // sitja meirr um sáttir saman (*Vm* 41.4–6)
val þeir kjósa / ok ríða vígi frá // sitja meirr um sáttir saman (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 34)

[35] Only in *Háv* 147 and *Vm* 27 and 31, and possibly in *Gm* 5, if counted as two units.
[36] *Vafþrúðnismál*'s passages are quite regular, otherwise only having an extra line in *Vm* 38, 42 and 43, and in the giant's statement that closes the poem, where it appears to be intended for rhetorical effect (*Vm* 55.7–9).
[37] Bugge (1867: 69) even proposed a reconstruction of the lines; cf. Wimmer 1896: 110, also reproduced in Neckel & Kuhn 1963: 49.

‘Say you that the eleventh / where men in the courts // fight every day’
‘all the einherjar / of Óðinn in the courts // fight every day’

‘the slain they choose / and ride from battle // sit then (*um*) reconciled together’
‘the slain they choose / and ride from battle // sit then (*um*) reconciled together’

The exemplar of AM 748 I a followed the a-line *Segðu þat it ellipta* immediately with the lines as found in *Snorra Edda*, apparently treating the a-line as a suspension for the whole question. Accepting that beginning the question in the b-line is an oral-derived variation leads the AM 748 I a variant to be seen as a copyist’s revision (the reverse being improbable, since the question would otherwise begin in the a-line). Whereas modern editions present the Codex Regius’ question with AM 748 I a’s answer, not reproducing the question is an indicator that a copyist saw the question *hvar ýtar túnum í* as an adaptation of *Óðins túnum í*. This would suggest that the variation in the Codex Regius had exchanged the name Óðinn, which specifies a location, with a question word along with a poetic word for ‘men’ that can carry vocalic alliteration for the nominal subject of the a-line. With *Segðu þat it ellipta*, this most likely situation-specific adaptation seems to have made the opening long line and *Vollzeile* a question. Initially, I viewed *Vm* 40.1–3 and 41.4–6 as question and answer. Rethinking it from the perspective of oral poetry, if AM 748 I a accurately reflects that *Vm* 40.2–4 are an adaptation of *Vm* 41.1–3, then I consider it more likely that the presenter elided the conventional beginning of the question with the conventional answer and simply pushed through. I suspect that the elision was simply considered a non-ideal realization – a type of variation – and that the presenter’s main concern was that his verses were well-formed and well-ordered, not who spoke which line. Presumably, anyone who knew the poem would recognize what had happened, and recognize both question and answer that were fused together; in that circumstance, asking which lines were spoken by which speaker is not interesting if it is not enacted as a dialogue.[38]

Something has clearly gone awry at the eleventh question, most likely occurring in oral delivery. If this is more or less correct, viewing the eleventh question as simply elided to the answer and the presenter then just pushing onward might seem to suggest dictation in the whole unit

[38] Marginal speaker notations and manuscript punctuation of this passage will not be discussed here.

of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*. However, it could equally be suggested that a short burst of a single long line and *Vollzeile* would make it easier to accidentally elide the ordinal formula directly into the question. This would mean oral delivery in syntactic units, which is also how the Codex Regius but not AM 748 I a is punctuated. The presenter's main concern could still have been to keep the lines well-formed and well-ordered, but, as two utterances separated by perhaps a minute, the transcriber or anyone listening may have interpreted the two parts as question and answer.

The rhythm of dictation has implications for the shortness of *Vm* 27 and 31 (i.e. answers to the fourth and sixth questions). If the units of dictation were a single long line and *Vollzeile* each, these answers would be potential sites where the presenter may have accidentally jumped ahead to the next question. Alternately, if dictation was by the whole turn of each speaker of the poem, then the shortness of *Vm* 27 and 31 would be salient in dictation, making it more likely that these were originally transcribed as complete answers, in which case it seems more probable a copyist accidentally skipped the second half of both in a common exemplar of both the Codex Regius and AM 748 I a. Assessing whether *Vafþrúðnismál* was more likely dictated in syntactic units or turns of dialogue depends on (*a*) whether it is considered more probable that the second half of two answers (not questions) was skipped in oral delivery or accidentally elided by a copyist, and also on (*b*) which seems more probable for the elision of the eleventh question. In either case, the eleventh question, with or without an answer, points to a situation in which even a passage that was clearly non-ideal was written down, presumably more or less as presented.

4.5 Variation in the twelfth question and answer

In this context, the final exchange of the ordinal inventory exhibits variations that require comment:

g. The b-line of the twelfth item varies that of the tenth by changing it into a question
h. The answer in *Vm* 43.1–2 repeats *Vm* 42.4–5 in the question, both followed by a varying *Vollzeile* and an additional line

The variation between the b-lines of the tenth and twelfth questions is of only one word: *allz* 'as' is exchanged for the interrogative *hví* 'how, why'. The twelfth question differs from those preceding it by turning

the repeated statement of Vafþrúðnir's great knowledge into a question about how he knows it rather than as introducing an inquiry about some piece of that knowledge; the second part of the question then repeats the general demand. Vafþrúðnir's reply then differs from answers to previous questions by repeating the second long line of the question, varying the following *Vollzeile*, and, as in the question, following this with an additional line,[39] before proceeding to the answer proper.[40] Although the variations in the twelfth question and answer set these apart from those that preceded them, they appear linked to the change in emphasis of the question and the conclusion of the section of the dialogue. Rather than non-ideal, they seem more likely to be rhetorical and, on the backdrop of conventions of non-variation, exchanging *allz* for *hví* was probably quite marked. Introducing an interrogative at the beginning of the b-line in the twelfth question seems likely to have been part of the tradition or at the very least an established strategy of the particular presenter of the poem, creating the possibility that anticipating this may also have been a factor influencing the eleventh question's jump to an interrogative in the b-line.

4.6 A cardinal number in the ordinal formula and vocalic alliteration

The eighth and eleventh questions both appear as non-ideal formulations that seem to have been produced *in situ*. Both anticipate use of the b-line suited for vocalic alliteration. Use of such a b-line in the first two questions and then 'forgetting' it in the course of performance seems unlikely and contravenes the more general pattern. It thus raises the question of whether the formula *ef þitt æði dugir* 'if your knowledge suffices' was considered non-ideal by the presenter so that it was not used again.

The first use of this b-line may be linked to a non-ideal variation:

i. The ordinal formula's first use has the cardinal *einn* rather than the ordinal *fyrstr*[41]

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[39] The additional line in the question is a *Vollzeile*; that in the answer may be a long line or *Vollzeile* depending on how one scans it (scanned as a long line until Neckel).

[40] A similar type of repetition between question and answer systematically structures the first group of four questions, with variations especially in a-lines while the *Vollzeilen* are regular (*Vm* 11–18). In the final series of six questions, the complete *Vollzeile* is once repeated between question and answer (*Vm* 50–51) and the concluding phrase twice (*Vm* 46–47, 54–55). Repetition of the long line is specific to *Vm* 42–43.

[41] The leaf preserved with *Vafþrúðnismál* in AM 748 I a begins with the b-line formula *ef*

Ordinal formulae are not otherwise used with cardinal numbers, although only *Sigrdrífumál* and *Grógaldr* use such formulae with the first item in a series (*Sd* 22.1, *Gg* 6.1). If *fyrstr* had been used in *Vafþrúðnismál*, the b-line *allz þik fróðan kveða* would presumably have accompanied it for alliteration. The data is too thin to determine whether *fyrstr* or *einn* was established in the presenter's dialect of the tradition, though it is possible that *einn* was non-ideal.

Use of *einn* drives vocalic alliteration for use of *ef þitt æði dugir*, which is metrically well-formed, and this is repeated, predictably, with *annarr*. Thereafter follow five uses of the *allz þik svinnan/fróðan kveða* formula before requiring vocalic alliteration for *átti*. Following two uses of *allz þik svinnan kveða* carrying alliteration with *sétti* and *sjaundi*, the b-line formula is varied for *átti* to *allz þik fróðan kveða*. A third use of the preceding b-line would have achieved metrical alliteration, but this option may have been less noticeable if alliteration with the number was in focus. This otherwise peculiar choice points to an attempt to find a different b-line formula. The b-line formula shifts to *allz þú tíva rǫk* with the tenth question, and the eleventh diverges completely from the a repeating verse sequence when vocalic alliteration is needed again. Rather than these non-ideal solutions being accidental moments of confusion (which can, of course, occur), they seem more likely to reflect the same problem of difficulty coming up with the appropriate b-line for vocalic alliteration. The *ef þitt æði dugir* deviates from all subsequent b-line formulae, which begin *allz þú/þik*, and preferred openings of the b-line seem characteristic of other ordinal formulae above. In the eighth question, insofar as 'forgetting' the b-line *ef þitt æði dugir*, already used twice, is unlikely, varying the formula from the preceding question probably reflects a preference for another line beginning *allz þú/þik*.

The repeated b-line opening *allz þú/þik* builds up to the variation of *alls* for *hví* in the last question. After five repetitions of *allz þik*, the divergence of *ef þitt æði dugir* from the pattern would be salient, as it would not have been in the first questions. This hypothesis remains conjectural, but clear difficulties later in the inventory correlate with vocalic alliteration, with the implication that *ef þitt æði dugir* was not, at that point, considered suitable. If this is correct, it looks like the presenter did not recall the conventional formula and formulated a solution for vocalic alliteration *in situ* already with *einn*. *Æði þér dugi* 'may your knowledge suffice for you' is used

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þitt æði dugir, from which use of *einn* can be assumed.

early in the poem (*Vm* 4.4) and may have been adapted here to generate the b-line. Such an adaptation would point to competence and flexibility in the presenter's handling of the poetic idiom, although the solution was abandoned after the repeating b-line opening *alls þú/þik* was initiated.

4.7 A perspective on variation in *Vafþrúðnismál*

Variation is an organic part of all oral poetry. In that respect, the variations considered here can be considered normal. The interest in these non-ideal solutions are as indications of problems that in turn may offer insights into the initial documentation of the poem. For whatever reason, the presenter seems to have had difficulty where a b-line for vocalic alliteration is predicted. Other features of the poem suggest the presenter's competence in the poetic idiom. We might interpret what happened in the eleventh question as a mistake, yet the elision of the ordinal formula with the b-line to form a question both indicates the ability to find a solution and seems connected with internalized knowledge of the poetry. *Vm* 5 may also be mentioned here as "the only purely narrative *ljóðaháttr* strophe in existence" (Gunnell 1995: 277), presenting third person narration in verse where all other *ljóðaháttr* poems would have prose (see also Gunnell 1995: 185–203). *Ljóðaháttr* is characteristically used for direct speech (Quinn 1992) and Terry Gunnell (1995: ch.3) has argued convincingly that poems in *ljóðaháttr* appear to have been used in a monologic and dialogic performance genre. The written text of *Vafþrúðnismál* is neither accompanied by nor includes any prose. If Gunnell is correct, the anomaly of *Vm* 5 could be explained as the presenter of the poem remaining in the poetic idiom for the third person exposition where presenters of other *ljóðaháttr* poems would shift into prose. Rather than belonging to the oral tradition of *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Vm* 5 would then be a by-product of the documentation process that would reflect the individual's fluency in the idiom.

'What happened' in the background of documenting the text is unclear, but the variations appear to derive from oral delivery, documented by a second person. What is most striking about the presenter's difficulties with b-lines for vocalic alliteration is that the solutions seem to decline rather than improve. They start off with a metrically well-formed b-line in the first two questions, followed rather surprisingly by varying a second formula so that it does *not* alliterate in the eighth question, and then the repeating opening verse sequence collapses entirely in the eleventh. Rather than deeply meditated solutions, the non-ideal verses and passages look

like spontaneous choices in the flow of ongoing performance. Estimating that the pause might be something like a minute for transcribing a half strophe or two minutes for a full strophe, it looks like this presenter, at least, may not have been deeply concerned about 'what comes next' during the interims of presentation as the transcriber was catching up. He may simply have been sitting there, waiting, perhaps attentive, watching his counterpart work, perhaps others present, observing, offered scattered moments of distraction, or perhaps he was simply... bored.

The progression of b-lines solutions for vocalic alliteration does not reflect especial concern. Instead, it could be symptomatic of growing disinterest or even annoyance with the documentation process itself. Such a possibility might seem novel and moderately amusing yet incidental, but it warrants consideration because it could also impact on the presentation of the poem. Scholarship tends to take the eddic poems for granted; textual issues come into focus where these are somehow disruptive or seem anomalous, but the impacts of the performance situation may also be at other levels. For example, the exchange of the twelfth question and answer points to a rhetorical climax, following which some sort of change is expected, such as Vafþrúðnir asking another series of questions. Instead, Óðinn simply continues his interrogation. If the presenter was growing impatient, annoyed or had simply lost interest, he may also have hastened the presentation to its conclusion. Such a possibility is impossible to determine with only one preserved variant of the poem, but it is important to consider that a performance might also be non-ideal at other levels than only lines or question and answer, and that the presenter of a poem might enthusiastically try to find ways to elaborate a poem and display his ability, or equally decide to keep it short or wrap up abruptly.

5. Difficulties starting and alternative ordinal formulae in *Grímnismál*

The numbered list of otherworld locations in *Grímnismál* presents a complex case. The ordinal inventory exhibits a formal regularity in which each unit is composed in a pair of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*, although the structure of passages is not uniform throughout the poem. The internal organization of the first three passages varies from those that follow. Like the ordinal inventory in *Hávamál* above (1), the opening

long line and *Vollzeile* present a general introduction to the list followed by the first item in the second long line. The second passage then presents a different location in each half. All other ordinal inventories begin numbering from the first item, although *Hávamál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* use a cardinal number, without and with the ordinal formula, respectively. None of the first three locations in *Grímnismál* are numbered. An ordinal formula first appears at the beginning of the third passage, where the fourth location is numbered the 'third' (*Gm* 6).[42] The numbering of locations proceeds regularly thereafter, yet the formula changes for the next three locations and then changes again for the following four. Units in the inventory become formally regular from the fifth/'fourth' location (*Gm* 7), but, following the sixth/'fifth' (*Gm* 8), the list contains two additional stanza-like units (*Gm* 9–10). The structure of all the ordinal formulae is the same, with two open slots: the second receives the ordinal number while the first is filled by the common noun *bœr* 'settlement' and by a place name in all uses thereafter. The name or noun in the first slot always carries alliteration rather than the number. Items are here presented in four groups by their ordinal formulae or lack thereof:

(9)	i.	Land e*r* heilact				/ er ec li*gg*ia se	(*Gm* 4.1–2)
		e*nn* iþrvðheimi				/ sc*a*l þó*rr* ve*r*a	(*Gm* 4.4–5)
		Ýdalir	heita			/ þar e*r* vllr hef*ir*	(*Gm* 5.1–2)
		alfhei*m* ǀ freýr̨				/ gáfo i arðaga	(*Gm* 5.4–5)
	ii.	Bǫr	er sa	i*nn*	þriði ǀ	/ er blið regin	(*Gm* 6.1–2)
		valascialf	heit*ir*			/ e*r* vęlti sé*r*	(*Gm* 6.4–5)
	iii.	Sæcq*v*a beccr	heit*ir*	e*nn*	iiii.	/ e*nn* þar svalar knego	(*Gm* 7.1–2)
		Glaðs heimr	heit*ir*	e*nn*	v.	/ þars en gvll biarta	(*Gm* 8.1–2)
		Þrym hei*m*r	heit*ir*	e*nn*	vi.	/ e*r* þiazi ǀ bío	(*Gm* 11.1–2)
	iv.	Breiða [blik]	ero	ín	sivndo	/ e*nn* þar baldr hefir	(*Gm* 12.1–2)
		H im*in*biorg	ero	en	atto	/ e*nn* þar hei*m*dall	(*Gm* 13.1–2)
		Folcvangr	e*r*	i*nn* ǀ	nivndi	/ e*nn* þar freyia rę̨þr	(*Gm* 14.1–2)
		Glitni*r*	e*r*	i*nn*	x.	/ h*ann* e*r* gv*ll*i ǀ stvddr	(*Gm* 15.1–2)
		Nóa tvn	ero	en	xi.	/ en*n* þar niorþ*r* ǀ hef*ir*	(*Gm* 16.1–2)

In *Gm* 5.1 and *Gm* 6.4–5, *Ýdalir heita* and *Válaskjálf heitir* exhibit an *X heit-ir/-a* formula, a formula type of which a multitude of examples is found in the corpus (see Kellogg 1988: *s.v.* 'heita'), including in (1) above

[42] The incongruity between the number of locations and the numbering in the list is found in both manuscripts of the poem and has long been recognized. See e.g. Gering 1927: 189.

and elsewhere in *Grímnismál*.[43] The *X heit-ir/-a inn #* formula is related to this but considered as a distinct type.

The examples of ordinal formulae in *Grímnismál* are:

(10) i.	—	—						(*Gm* 4.1, 4.4, 5.1)
ii.	*X*	*er sá*	*inn*	#	'X is that	the #'	# = 3rd	(*Gm* 6.1)
iii.	*X*	*heit-ir/-a*	*inn*	#	'X is called	the #'	# = 4th–6th	(*Gm* 7.1, 8.1, 11.1)
iv.	*X*	*er(u)*	*in(n)*	#	'X is/are	the #'	# = 7th–11th	(*Gm* 12.1, 13.1, 14.1, 15.1, 16.1)

In contrast to *X heit-ir/-a* formulae, *X er(u) Y*, where X is a noun in the nominative case, underlying ordinal formulae ii and iv, is only found in *Grímnismál* once outside of the ordinal inventory (*Gm* 33.1: *Hirtir ero oc fiórir* 'Harts there are also four').[44] When the construction is not common, formula ii looks like a variation of formula iv on its first use or both as variations of a *X er/-u {sá} inn #* formula.

Even before considering the text in any detail, a number of features stand out as potentially irregular:

a. Three locations are named in the inventory before numbering begins (*Gm* 4–5)
b. The second and third locations are each presented in half the verses of other units, apparently forming a single unit together (*Gm* 5)
c. Numbering begins by labelling the fourth location as the 'third' (*Gm* 6)
d. The first ordinal formula is not completed with a place name (*Gm* 6)
e. The structure of units only becomes regular from the fifth/'fourth' item (before *Gm* 7)
f. The first ordinal formula varies lexically from its subsequent uses (*Gm* 6)
g. A second, equivalent ordinal formula is then used for a series of three items (*Gm* 7–11)
h. The first ordinal formula is resumed for the last five items (*Gm* 12–16)

The presenter could of course handle the poetic system more freely than most performers (cf. Harvilahti 1992: 95–96), but then the irregularities would be expected to occur more or less uniformly through the inventory.

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[43] *X heit-ir/-a* in *Gm* 22.1, 38.1; *X heitir enn* in an unnumbered inventory in *Gm* 28.1; *X heitir* ANIMAL in *Gm* 25.1, 26.1, 32.1, 39.1.

[44] A similar construction is found with the noun in a dative (*Gm* 9.4), others are found with an adjective in the first position and also *þá er X*.

Irregularities a–f are concentrated in *Gm* 4–6 and labelling the fourth location as the 'third' looks fairly clearly non-ideal, while the only irregularities in *Gm* 7–16 are, oddly enough, g–h – the alternation of the ordinal formula – and the insertion of *Gm* 9–10, which appears irregular under scrutiny. Put simply, it looks like the presenter got off to a rough start but generally aimed at non-variation.

5.1 Fourth = 'third'?

Within *Grímnismál*'s ordinal inventory, each unit appears to be conventionally presented through a pair of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*. This view is supported by comparison with other ordinal inventories, predicted by macro-parallelism as structuring the inventory, and consistent with evidence that non-ideal irregularities are concentrated in *Gm* 4–6, after which items in the inventory are formally regular. The presentation of two locations in *Gm* 5 points to a difficulty that resulted in one formal unit of conventional length. The mix-matching in the numbering of the fourth location as the 'third' in *Gm* 6 can be directly connected with this, as counting by formal units rather than named locations, then also pointing to *Gm* 5 as non-ideal. In *Grímnismál*'s ordinal formula, the place name systematically carries alliteration with the b-line. In principle, the long line for any location could be used with any numeral. Thus, *Álfheimr* could have been the third conventional place in the inventory and the collapse of two locations into *Gm* 5 resulted in numbering being off by one for the remainder of the list. Alternately, the numbering may have held priority, in which case the mnemonic significance of the numbering may have been to include all of the items in the list (i.e. counting up to eleven; cf. *Sigrdrífumál*) while their order could have varied considerably in the oral tradition.[45] In either case, if two locations that would customarily be

[45] Gísli Sigurðsson (e.g. 2014) has revealed likely connections of some Old Norse mythology to observable phenomena visible in the sky. *Snorra Edda* identifies locations mentioned in *Grímnismál* as in the sky (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 23–24), creating the possibility that the ordinal inventory was linked to visible phenomena like constellations. Even then, there is nothing to suggest that the numerical order of the locations is linked, for instance, to an Old Norse zodiac. The locations are not presented as having spatial relations to one another in any source, although *Prymheimr* is identified with *Jǫtunheimar* (Snorri Sturluson 1998: 2; and not in the sky in Snorri Sturluson 2005: 23–24), making a position between the dwellings of Óðinn and Baldr seem doubtful. When other ordinal inventories seem simply to organize mythic knowledge numerically, *Grímnismál* may do the same.

presented separately have been collapsed into a single passage, this has implications for the documentation context.

Like the difficulties with the eleventh question in *Vafþrúðnismál* above, collapsing two formal units into one makes a background in oral delivery probable. Accepting that each location would be presented in a commensurate formal unit, the truncated presentation of *Ýdalir* points to difficulty in remembering the remainder of the passage, leading the presenter to push forward and complete it with a second location *in situ*. The priority of *Gm* 5 as a formal unit then seems to have limited *Álfheimr*'s presentation to a single long line and *Vollzeile*. Deliberative writing would have allowed an ordinal number to be added to the *X heit-ir/-a* formula used with *Ýdalir*, for instance above the line, and seems generally less probable for the mixed numbering; it also would have allowed time to formulate complete units. Either deliberative writing or oral delivery in bursts of a single long line and *Vollzeile* would presumably allow the passage on *Ýdalir* to remain half its conventional length without also limiting the passage on *Álfheimr*. The formal structure of units as constituted of an alternating pair of long lines and *Vollzeilen* is regular for the entire passage and apparently conforms the presentation of two locations to this structure, suggesting that it was salient for the presenter. The most probable scenario is that the passage results from dictation in bursts of formal units, and the presentation of formal units was given priority over both interruption and, it is implied, the presentation of a full passage on *Álfheimr*.

At a glance, the long line with *Álfheimr* does not appear compatible for use with an ordinal formula because of Freyr's name in the a-line. In the inventory, gods' names otherwise only appear in the same long line with the place name when these alliterate, so Freyr's name would presumably not appear with *Álfheimr* and an ordinal formula. Gods' names otherwise appear in the second a-line in four out of the eleven other passages, always in the nominative case (*Óðinn ok Saga* in *Gm* 7.4, *Hroptr* in *Gm* 8.4, *Skaði* in *Gm* 11.4, *Forseti* in *Gm* 15.4). Freyr's name fills the place in the a-line where an ordinal formula could otherwise appear. Without his name, the lines would not specify to whom *Álfheimr* was given by the gods, which, if the lines are otherwise conventional, would presumably become clear in the second half of the passage. Completing the a-line with Freyr's name rather than an *X heit-ir/-a* or *X er/-u Y* formula may be semantically driven so that 'to whom' is specified. The possibility that Freyr was customarily named in the following a-line might then be related

to the Codex Regius' scribe writing "freýr" in the nominative case and then adding a dot under the "r" as a correction mark that the letter should be ignored. If it is correct that the long line would customarily be used with an ordinal formula, the variation with Freyr's name would be an *in situ* solution for conforming information in a full group of verses to the formal unit of *Gm* 5 – a solution that points to the presenter's competence in collapsing information from a longer passage into a single long line and *Vollzeile*.

5.2 Elaboration between *Gm* 8 and *Gm* 11?

Following the sixth/'fifth' location, *Glaðsheimr*, where *Valhǫll* is said to be (*Gm* 8), two passages present supplementary information about *Valhǫll* (*Gm* 9–10). Elaboration of items in an ordinal inventory through extension was observed in *Hávamál* and by following a unit with one additional stanza-like unit in *Sigrdrífumál*. *Gm* 9–10 forms a longer elaboration, which may be incidental, yet each passage begins with the same long line and *Vollzeile*, so the number of lines adding information corresponds to what would be one unit in *Sigrdrífumál*. The initial repetition creates macro-parallelism that links *Gm* 9 and 10 to one another while setting them apart from what precedes and follows them. The macro-parallelism gives the impression that they belong to a different list or poetic passage. An elaboration of an ordinal inventory would seem more likely to present the lines of information together as a single unit without a repeated introduction that does not add information and interrupts the macro-parallelism of the list.

In a tradition of poetry relying heavily on remembering passages, a performer may follow the tradition's networks of associations and jump from reciting one poem to what is customarily another. A similar case is found in the pair of questions and answers in *Fáfnismál* 12–15, where the questions are set apart from the rest of the dialogue by a repeating opening that looks like a variation of that in *Vafþrúðnismál* (*Segðu mér {þat} Fáfnir / allz þik fróðan kveða // ok vel mart vita* 'Say to me {that} Fáfnir / as you are said to be wise // and indeed much know'). The questions are also distinguished by asking for general information about *nornir* and then about a location of *ragna rǫk*, which is characteristic of questions in *Vafþrúðnismál* but beyond the scope of the rest of *Fáfnismál*'s dialogue.[46] *Gm* 9–10 elaborate about *Valhǫll*, mentioned in *Gm* 8, whereas

[46] Earlier scholars interpreted these questions as an interpolation while more recent scholars

Fáfnismál's question about *nornir* follows a mention of *nornir* in *Fm* 11. Whether accidental, intentional or socially established, these look like transpositions of passages customary for one type of use into another.

If *Grímnismál*'s documentation is considered to result from dictation, the concentration of non-ideal features at the beginning of the text tip the probability toward *Gm* 9–10 not being a conventional part of the ordinal inventory. The digression might be linked to anticipating later descriptions in the poem and it is unclear whether the passages were conventional to *Grímnismál* or a different poem, but their appearance between *Gm* 8 and 11, interrupting one sequence of macro-parallelism with another, seems more likely than not to have been non-ideal.

5.3 Comparison with quotations in *Snorra Edda*

Turning to the use of ordinal formulae, five of the items in *Grímnismál*'s inventory are quoted in *Snorra Edda* (Snorri Sturluson 2005: 23–24, 26):

(11)		Codex Regius				*Snorra Edda*		
	iii.	Þrym hei*m*r	heit*ir*	e*nn*	vi.	*Þrymheimr*	*heitir*	(*Gm* 11.1–2)
	iv.	Breiða [blik]	ero	ín	sivndo	*Breiðablik*	*heita*	(*Gm* 12.1–2)
		Him*in*biorg	ero	en	atto	*Himinbjǫrg*	*heita*	(*Gm* 13.1–2)
		Folcvangr	e*r*	i*nn*	nivndi	*Fólkvangr*	*heitir*	(*Gm* 14.1–2)
		Glitn*ir*	e*r*	i*nn*	x.	*Glitnir*	*heitir salr*	(*Gm* 15.1–2)

The items in *Grímnismál* use both formula types iii and iv whereas the quotations in *Snorra Edda* appear to conform to a principle of non-variation, exclusively using the *X heit-ir/-a* formula, with a variation *X heitir salr* with Glitnir. *Snorra Edda*'s quotations may be conscious variations of an *X heit-ir/-a {inn #}* ordinal formula, since the ordinal number would be out of context when the passages are quoted individually. The possibility that the inventory may have been known without ordinal numbering cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, non-variation of the formula in *Snorra Edda* is more noteworthy because the quotations are presented with a variety of information between them, including passages from another poem (see Snorri Sturluson 2005: 23–26). The quotations highlight that the variation in the preserved poem *Grímnismál* is probably exceptional.

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interpret them as sensical and meaningful in the poem (*KLE* V: 429), whereas I would say the two views are focusing on different concerns.

Tab. 2. Possible alliterations between ordinal numbers and place names in the inventory

Alliteration	ordinal number	used for
vocalic alliteration	*(einn)*, *annarr*, *átti*, *ellifti*	*Álfheimr*, *Ýdalir*
alliteration on /f/	*fyrstr*, *fjórði*, *fimti*	*Folkvangr*
alliteration on /n/	*níundi*	*Nóatún*
alliteration on /s/	*sétti*, *sjaundi*	*Søkkvabekkr*
alliteration on /t/	*tíundi*, [*tólfti*]	—
alliteration on /þ/	*þriði*	*Þrúðheimr*, *Þrymheimr*
no alliteration possible	—	*Breiðablik*, *Glaðsheimr, Glitnir*, *Himinbjǫrg*, *Válaskjálf*

5.4 An avoidance of alliteration?

When alliteration with the ordinal number shapes or determines the b-line in all other ordinal inventories, it becomes noticeable that the number never alliterates with a place name in *Grímnismál*. As seen in Table 2, the list could have been organized with alliteration also carried by the number in six of twelve potential uses of the formula.

If an ordinal formula were used in *Gm* 5, either *Ýdalir* or *Álfheimr* would alliterate with *annarr* and be the only instance of alliteration with a number in the sequence. If the presenter felt that, ideally, alliteration with the number should be systematically avoided and had named the wrong location, this might have led him to consciously omit *annarr* from an *X heit-ir/-a inn #* formula or to exchange an *X er/-u inn #* formula for a simple *X heit-ir/-a* formula. It is also possible that *annarr* was unintentionally omitted, in which case it is also accidental that other numbers in the list do not carry alliteration. However, when alliteration seems to drive choices between formulae and phrases elsewhere, potentially even affecting which cardinal direction is named in some lines (Lönnroth 2002: 17), it seems improbable that the first use of the ordinal formula would be with alliteration without doing so again thereafter.

The lack of numbering for the first three locations presents a third possibility that the presenter was having difficulty and only realized that the locations should be counted at some point between naming *Ýdalir* and the beginning of *Gm* 6, thus using a simple *X heit-ir/-a* in *Gm* 5. Forgetting to number the first locations seems the most likely explanation when *Gm* 6 appears both to misnumber the location and also to deviate in structure

by naming the location in the second rather than the first long line. If it is not accidental that numbers never carry alliteration in this ordinal inventory, it would suggest that alliteration would also be avoided with *annarr*, making *Ýdalir* non-ideal as the second location. In this case, the order of locations in the inventory would deviate from how the presenter would customarily organize them in a performance.

5.5 Alternating ordinal formulae

Particularly exceptional in the passage is that the ordinal formula used in *Gm* 6 is exchanged for an alternative that is used without variation for the following three locations and then a form of the initial formula is resumed without variation for the rest of the list. Changing from a less ideal to a more ideal phrase is found in examples through the corpus, but this variation appears anomalous because it alternates between formulae rather than simply varying phraseology and because it is not completely random but rather appears regular for stretches of text. The initial switch from *X er/-u {sá} inn #* in *Gm* 6.1 to *X heit-ir/-a inn #* in *Gm* 7.1 might be considered linked to the use of a simple *X heit-ir/-a* in *Gm* 6.4. However, the initial use of *X er/-u {sá} inn #* is between two simple *X heit-ir/-a* formulae in *Gm* 5.1 and 6.4. This makes it much less likely that the formula in *Gm* 6.4 affected the choice of formula in *Gm* 7.1 and does not account for the change back only in *Gm* 12.1, 16 lines later (counting by long lines). If the change back had coincided with the end of the digression in *Gm* 9–10, it might look like the presenter corrected himself to a more ideal formula following a disruption. The peculiarity is greater when the first alternation coincides with units attaining a more ideal structure that is maintained through the rest of the section, and then changing again in the stretch of passages that otherwise does not exhibit non-ideal features.

A feature of orthography could perhaps present a clue to something happening in the background of documenting the text. The *X er/-u {sá} inn #* formula appears with the ordinal number being written out (*Gm* 6), switches to Roman numerals with the change to the *X heit-ir/-a inn #* formula (*Gm* 7, 8, 11), and then resumes writing out numerals when changing back to the *X er/-u {sá} inn #* (*Gm* 12, 13, 14), until using Roman numerals for the last two items in the list (*Gm* 15, 16). Writing out ordinal numbers in a series, especially the first and second, and then switching to Roman numerals is common and the Codex Regius generally makes this switch near the beginning of an ordinal inventory; if there were only one

change at the end of the list, it would not be surprising. Changing from Roman numerals to writing out numbers is exceptional, and doubly so when they seem to alternate here. Co-variation between how numbers are written and alternative ordinal formulae makes this still more striking. The copy of *Grímnismál* in AM 748 I a exhibits some slight differences in the transcription and text, but these appear most likely to have been introduced by a copyist.[47] The Codex Regius is unambiguously the more reliable manuscript and remained close enough to its exemplars for the writing habits in earlier texts to be distinguishable (see also Vésteinn Ólason 2019: 235–242 and works there cited). *If* co-variation between use of Roman numerals and the ordinal formula is not accidental, *then* it points to some sort of a change between *Gm* 6 and *Gm* 7 and then a second change between *Gm* 11 and *Gm* 12. Insofar as it seems unlikely for a copyist to exchange one ordinal formula for another across only a short section of text, this variation in orthography would be rooted in the original documentation of the poem.

This is a big 'if' that is conditional on both the co-variation being non-random, and continuity in the different ways of writing out the numbers through earlier copying of the poem. That such continuity in copying is possible finds some support in *Alvíssmál*, in the writing of the dwarf's thirteen answers, each naming six ways something is called by different types of being. In the course of the dialogue, abbreviations develop for formulaic use of *jǫtnar* and *álfar*. *Alv* 24 shifts from these abbreviations to writing out the words in full, an indicator that 'something changed' in a process of writing or copying the poem. The 13 answers contain 78 terms or expressions for calling different things. Only two of these are found in multiple answers, both in repetitions of a line, and one repetition of each is in *Alv* 24 (*Alv* 24.3 = 26.3, *Alv* 24.5 = 32.5). Since non-repetition is otherwise the norm, repetition appears non-ideal, and the co-occurrence of both repetitions in connection with one passage makes it more likely that the problem was concentrated there rather than occurring independently in *Alv* 26 and 32. This view is supported by co-occurrence in *Alv* 24 of

[47] AM 748 I a is filled with regularizing spellings, minor variations and transparent copying errors (Finnur Jónsson 1896: iii–vii) whereas the Codex Regius seems generally to follow its exemplar more closely. In AM 748 I a, the numbers are all written out until the last three formulae (rather than only the last two), and, in the second use of the *X heit-ir/-a inn #* formula, *er* 'is' is written in the place of *heitir* so that it looks like a type iv ordinal formula. The shift to Roman numerals late in the sequence in both manuscripts hints at a late shift also in a common exemplar.

abbreviations being reset, pointing to an interruption or disruption at that point in the poem. The wording in *Alv* 24 is most likely attributable to the initial documentation of the poem, so whatever happened affected the person writing out the poem or both the oral presenter and transcriber (Frog 2011: 53). Observing this correlation between non-ideal lines and changes in abbreviation is dependent on accurately copying abbreviation or its lack from the exemplar. The case of *Alvíssmál* makes this possible for *Grímnismál* as well. That the scribe of the Codex Regius reproduced the numbers as found in the exemplar is increased by the contrast with other ordinal inventories where Roman numerals dominate.

Variation in orthography can only be attributed to a person writing out or copying the text, not to an oral presenter. Change in how numbers are written looks like a change in writing habits or practice followed by a change back. A single transcriber might transition from writing out numbers to use of Roman numerals, but switching back and forth is unlikely, and still less likely to co-vary with the change in formula. It is possible that a shorthand strategy might be reset following a break or interruption, as in *Alvíssmál*, but then the switch back to Roman numerals would likely occur at least as rapidly as earlier in transcription. Instead, it initially occurs immediately following the first number and later only after writing out three numbers (i.e. *Gm* 12–14). Alternately, the change to and from shorthand could reflect a change in the person writing out the poem. That a medieval text may be copied by multiple hands is a commonplace, although it would not be expected for such a short stretch of text. However, if *Grímnismál* was written down from dictation, the situation would be different from working with a written text, because stopping by either the presenter or transcriber would interrupt the other. If the person presenting the poem was an authority or should otherwise not be interrupted any more than necessary for the transcription, a change in the transcriber for a shorter period is possible. In sagas in Hauksbók (Jansson 1944) and in the Codex Upsaliensis' *Snorra Edda* (Sävborg 2012), different copyists have been shown to take considerably different attitudes to the exactitude with which they reproduce or rephrase and manipulate their exemplar. If the changes between writing numbers reflect different transcribers, the alternation in the ordinal formula from *Gm* 6.1 to *Gm* 7.1, and back again from *Gm* 11.1 to *Gm* 12.1 would correlate with a change between two people transcribing the poem, the second of whom wrote out the ordinal formula differently. In this case, one of the transcribers either consciously edited the ordinal formula to that of a preferred dialect, wrote it out as seemed

natural without considering it to be 'different', or, if the dictation was in bursts of short passages, was more concerned with remembering and transcribing semantically-significant phrases and recalled the opening phrase of the passage through his own dialect. If the co-variation between writing numbers and the ordinal formula is not accidental – a big 'if' – it points to a relationship between the transcription and the alternation between ordinal formulae. This relationship seems most easily explained by a change between two people transcribing the text, in which case the alternation between formulae would point to an aspect of co-production in the written text (e.g. Ready 2015: 27) that would probably otherwise remain invisible.

If there was a second transcriber, the regularity of structural units makes it look like these were the units of dictation, in which case any such transition is most likely between those units. The second writer would then have been responsible for only *Gm* 7–11, which is just twenty long lines and *Vollzeilen*, thirty short lines and *Vollzeilen*, or 107 words in Bugge's edition. Basically, it looks like someone stepped in and took over the work of the first scribe for maybe ten minutes, or a bit longer, although the amount of time depends on the copying process. Odd as this might at first seem, it looks like the second transcriber stepped in while the first ran off to take a pee. The passage is embedded not just within the poem but linked to only a few strophes within the ordinal inventory. If it does indeed reflect a change in the transcriber, it suggests a situation in which it was undesirable to interrupt the process of writing, even if only for a relatively short break. The shift in orthography would thus imply a situation where one person dictated and another transcribed while others were present and able to trade roles with the transcriber – and the person dictating should not be interrupted. This interpretation remains an extremely conjectural possibility (how could it not?), but it accounts for the exceptional alternation between ordinal formulae in the Codex Regius' text.

5.6 A perspective on variation in *Grímnismál*

A concentration of features at the beginning of *Grímnismál*'s numbered inventory point to the performer having difficulty at the beginning of the list so that it was not realized in an ideal way. Some scholars may be sceptical that naming two locations in *Gm* 5 is non-ideal, but there is a concentration of features in this part of the text that stand out against other ordinal inventories and against the corpus more broadly, and these features have cumulative implications. The regular structure of items after *Gm* 6

suggests that the concentration of such features at the beginning was non-ideal, since they would otherwise be more evenly distributed through the inventory (cf. *Grípisspá*). I began this investigation with the expectation that the obvious irregularities like mis-numbering at the beginning of the inventory were directly related to the exceptional alternation between ordinal formulae. The lack of numbering at the beginning of the list does indeed appear connected with the presenter, but the alternation between formulae begins as the units of the inventory become regular, and they instead seem to correlate with a corresponding variation in how numbers are written. The features of the text suggest a process of dictation, with the presenter probably reciting by formal units of a pair of alternating long lines and *Vollzeilen*. The alternation between ordinal formulae is very exceptional and difficult to account for, leading to the hypothesis that there was a change in the person transcribing dictation from *Gm* 7 to 11, after which the first transcriber resumed. It remains possible that the alternation of formulae reflects an aberrant type of variation on the part of the performer. The two-scribe hypothesis is only preferable on the condition that co-variation of the writing of numbers and alternation of ordinal formulae is not random.

6. Implications for the documentation of eddic poems

The eddic corpus is so firmly established as a frame of reference in the scholarship that the poems in their preserved forms get taken for granted. The discussions of the numbered inventories in both *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* point to documentation situations in which the poems were presented orally by one person while another wrote them down. In both inventories, potential indicators point to presentation in short bursts of lines. In *Grímnismál*, *Gm* 5 suggests presentation in regular pairs of alternating long lines and *Vollzeile*. It is more difficult to assess *Vafþrúðnismál*. Indicators that the Codex Regius' exemplar was extremely close to the first transcription of at least *Alvíssmál* and *Grímnismál*, even in details of abbreviation, may increase the probability that the omission of the second half of *Vm* 27 and 31 have occurred in dictation. The omission only of the second half of more than one answer in short succession within the ordinal inventory might also tip the scales in that direction, although these are answers to the fourth and sixth questions, before problems begin with numbers that would carry alliteration. Whatever the case, if the dictation of *ljóðaháttr* poetry was commonly in regular formal units, it might make

the verse groups in the written poems look more regular than they might have been in other contexts. The irregularities in both examples further suggest that, when the presenter had difficulty remembering something or mixed something up, he simply pushed through the passage, producing solutions *in situ*, as would be likely for a customary oral performance. The irregularities in these examples suggest that the presenters did not pause to deliberate between lines or correct what was said. The curious case of alternating formulae in *Grímnismál* presents the possibility that a transcriber might write down equivalents of what was said, perhaps like writing out what someone says in their dialect in one's own. The co-production entailed in transcription from dictation nevertheless allowed non-ideal verses and passages to enter into writing, which is itself interesting.

With all of these examples, and also with the numerous instances of minor variations on a formula's first use elsewhere, the key question that easily goes unasked is: *Why are they there for us to see them?* In other words: *Why were non-ideal dictated lines and passages not revised?* The text resulting from dictation seems to have gone unedited: no one seems to have gone through it and adjusted details where these might be amiss. The texts do not give the impression of having first been written out on a wax tablet to then be read by, or read out to, the presenter and 'corrected'. Both the two-scribe hypothesis for formula alternation in *Grímnismál* and the associated example from *Alvíssmál* would point to transcription directly onto vellum. There are clear cases of so-called scribal performance, in which a copyist uses knowledge of the poetry and poetic system in order to revise an oral-derived poetic text, as in the case of the Helgi poems discussed by Joseph Harris (1983 [2008]: 191–202) or the revision of the eleventh question in AM 748 I a's *Vafþrúðnismál*. Nevertheless, the ordinal inventories reviewed above seem to suggest that the norm was simply to write out the poems more or less as they were spoken – blunders, unique solutions and all – and then subsequent copyists reproduced them that way. Focus here has been on sites in the texts where non-ideal variations are apparent owing to the number of examples in a repeating series with which they can be compared. When the lines and whole passages are for the most part technically well formed, it raises a question of how many other sites there may be in the corpus where passages are non-ideal, but there is no frame of comparison to identify it. This raises methodological issues for text analysis of poems, if the verses, phraseology or even organization of a poem may be non-ideal. However,

just because poetry is oral does not make every variation equally good, and it is reasonable to infer that at least some of the variations discussed above were transparently considered as 'not how it should be' if not simply 'wrong' or 'bad' even by the presenter. Scholarship today tends to view a written text as 'the' poem, and yet, if *Vafþrúðnismál*'s elision of question and answer or *Grímnismál*'s elision of two locations into a single passage was 'not how it should be', it raises the question of what people imagined the thing being written down to be.

Transcribing a dictated text as the poem without indication of an interest or need to edit or revise even passages where something has obviously gone wrong suggests an understanding of what the eddic poems are as things made of language. Although the articulation of a line or passage might be better or worse, whatever was dictated appears to have been conceived as capturing 'the poem' in writing. This might be compared to early nineteenth-century collectors of oral kalevalaic poetry, who simply wrote down whatever was dictated or sung in one go and were satisfied that they had gotten that person's variant. They sought to collect as many variants *from different people* as they could manage, because they tended to imagine individuals' variants as imperfect while enabling reconstruction of an ideal text through comparison.[48] The writing of at least these eddic poems seems to reflect a similar idea of the poem being captured in one go, but without the corresponding way of looking at variations as things to be polished out and corrected in order to present a poem in its most ideal form. The lack of any editing or correction suggests an idea of 'the poem' as whatever is orally presented from beginning to end. The performance principle of simply pushing through, formulating solutions *in situ* rather than stopping to find a more ideal solution, seems to have extended to the written text. The result is '*Grímnismál*', or '*Vafþrúðnismál*', or whatever else has been performed – i.e. the variant is 'the poem' (cf. Lord 1960: 21, 28; see also Foley 2002: 11–21). An oral performance is commonly assessed and discussed by those who hear it, and is also connected to the authority and skill of the performer. The lack of editing and revision even of problematic lines and passages suggests that there was not, at least when these poems were written, an idea that the delivered text should or even could be improved.

[48] Only toward the end of the nineteenth century is a collection technique developed of getting performers to both sing and dictate the same poem, leading to a composite that is more complete and ideal (Saarinen 1994: 180).

This leads to the question of how the manuscript text itself was understood, materially objectified and separated from the person. Where oral and written traditions are interwoven, performance will often be in focus as an activity, without concern for whether it is based on personal knowledge and competence or recited from a script. In his work with Rotenese ritual poets (who were also mostly literate), James J. Fox (p.c.) found it common that the poets, listening to recordings made of their performances, would refer to and discuss these as though it were a third person. Rather than the ideal or even necessarily particularly good representations of particular oral poems, several if not many of the texts in the eddic corpus may be quite close to whatever was produced in a single, clumsy dictation situation. Instead of being polished, it is necessary to consider that these text scripts may, at least initially, have each been seen as 'a' performance of the particular poem – not 'my', 'your', 'his' or 'her' performance, but as 'a' performance, which might equally be discussed and criticized. Returning to the production and copying of the poems in order to be used, if the written texts were 'performances' with lines and passages that are less than ideal, it raises the question of whether the written poem was imagined as something that people should recite verbatim, or if it was more of a guide.

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Summary

The rise of interest in the orality of eddic poetry has tended to view the preserved corpus *as* oral poems without considering their transition into writing and its potential implications. The present article is an exploratory study of variation in the ordinal inventories of questions and knowledge in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Variation in formula usage might reflect individual creativity and a dynamic handling of the poetic system. The two cases in focus, however, show a correlation between the variations and indicators that the expressions or their organization were not ideal. In both cases, indicators in the poem's text suggest that it is a product of oral presentation transcribed by a second individual. A detailed examination of formulae in *Vafþrúðnismál* point to difficulties where a b-line for vocalic alliteration is expected, for which the solutions seem to get worse rather than better, leading to the possibility that the presenter was bored or disinterested. Several features point to difficulties at the beginning of *Grímnismál*'s inventory, while exceptional variation in formula use leads to a possibility that some variation may be linked to the transcriber rather than the presenter. That blunders of presentation have been preserved in both poems rather than revised, either during the initial documentation or in later copying, reflecting ideas of what these texts are in relation to the tradition.

Keywords: eddic poetry, performance, variation, documentation

Frog
University of Helsinki
Folklore Studies / Department of Cultures
ORCID iD 0000-0001-5967-6281