A SPECIMEN

Elstob — *A Variable Font for Medievalists, by Thornbec Stæfwyrhta*

ABCD
ABCDE
ABCDEFG
ABCDEFGHI
ABCDEFGHIJK
ABCDEFGHIJKLMN

Display (18pt) 26, 24

Quouſque tandem abutere, Catilina, pati

Quouſque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia noſtra?

Medium Diſplay (18pt) 20

Quouſque tandem *abutere, Catilina, þ*

Regular 12

Beatꝰ uir q̇ nō abiit in ꝯsilio īpioꝛ & in uia peccatoꝛ nō stetit, & in cathedra pestilentiae nō sedit, sed in lege dñi uoluntas ei *Beatꝰ uir q̇ nō abiit in ꝯsilio īpioꝛ & in uia peccatoꝛ nō stetit, & in cathedra pestilentiae nō sedit, sed in lege dñi uoluntas eiꝰ & in*

BlockQuote (10pt) 10

Her Cynewulf benam Sigebryht his rices ꝉ Westseaxna wiotan for unryhtum dędum buton Hamtunscire, ꝉ he hæfde þa oþ he ofslog þone aldor *Her Cynewulf benam Sigebryht his rices ꝉ Westseaxna wiotan for unryhtum dędum buton Hamtunscire, ꝉ he hæfde þa oþ he ofslog þone aldormon þe*

Insular Footnote (8pt) 8

Heƿ Cẏnepulꝼ benam Siᵹebꝛẏht hıꞃ ꞃıceꞃ ꝉ Peꞅꞇꞃeaxna ꝓıoꞇan ꞃoꞃ unꞃẏhꞇum ꝺęꝺum buꞇon Hamꞇunꞃcıꞃe, ꝉ he hæꞃꝺe þa oþ he oꞃꞅloᵹ þone alꝺoꞃmon þe hım lenᵹeꞅꞇ ꝓunoꝺe *Heƿ Cẏnepulꝼ benam Siᵹebꝛẏht hıꞃ ꞃıceꞃ ꝉ Peꞅꞇꞃeaxna ꝓıoꞇan ꞃoꞃ unꞃẏhꞇum ꝺęꝺum buꞇon Hamꞇunꞃcıꞃe, ꝉ he hæꞃꝺe þa oþ he oꞃꞅloᵹ þone alꝺoꞃmon þe hım lenᵹeꞅꞇ ꝓunoꝺe ꝉ hıene þ*

Medium FinePrint (6pt) 6

Ða se Wisdom þa þis leoð asungen hæfde, þa ongan he eft spellian ꝉ þus cwæð: "For ðæm nis nan tweo þ þes andwearda wela myrð ꝉ let þa men þe bioð atehte to þam soðum gesældum; ꝉ he nænne ne mæg gebringan þær he *Ða se Wisdom þa þis leoð asungen hæfde, þa ongan he eft spellian ꝉ þus cwæð: "For ðæm nis nan tweo þ þes andwearda wela myrð ꝉ let þa men þe bioð atehte to þam soðum gesældum; ꝉ he nænne ne mæg gebringan þær he him gehet, þ is æt þam hebsta*

Semibold Subhead 14

Gylfi konungr réð þar lǫndum er nú heitir Svíþjóð. Frá honum er þat sagt at hann gaf einni far *Gylfi konungr réð þar lǫndum er nú heitir Svíþjóð. Frá honum er þat sagt at hann gaf einni far*

Runic Regular 12

ᚹᛁᚻᛋ ᚹᛁᚱᚢᛁᛚ ᚠᚪᚢᛈ ᚿᛁ ᚹᛖᚱᚷᛗᛁᛒᛗᚱᛁᚷ ᚹᚠᚱᛊ ᚷᚠᛋᚱᛁᚻ ᚷᚱᚿᚱᛊ ᚦᚠᚱ ᚻᛗ ᚿᛁ ᚷᚱᛗᚢᛏ ᚷᛁᛋᚹᛖᛗ ᚻᚱᚿᚠᛋ ᛒᚠᛋ *ᚹᛁᚻᛋ ᚹᛁᚱᚢᛁᛚ ᚠᚪᚢᛈ ᚿᛁ ᚹᛖᚱᚷᛗᛁᛒᛗᚱᛁᚷ ᚹᚠᚱᛊ ᚷᚠᛋᚱᛁᚻ ᚷᚱᚿᚱᛊ ᚦᚠᚱ ᚻᛗ ᚿᛁ ᚷᚱᛗᚢᛏ ᚷᛁᛋᚹᛖᛗ ᚻᚱᚿᚠᛋ ᛒᚠᛋ*

Runic Bold Blockquote (10pt) 10

ᚱᛖᚿᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᚠᚿᛁ ᚱᛗᚢᚢᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᛏᚹᛖᚷᛗᚷᛁᛒᚱᚿᚱᚠᚱᚠᚹ ᛋᚢᚢᚿᚠᚻᛁᚹ ᛈᚹᚿᛁᚹ ᛁᚻ ᚱᚿᚹᚠᛋᚿᛏᚱᛁ : ᚻᚠᛁᚻ ᚿᛁ *ᚱᛖᚿᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᚠᚿᛁ ᚱᛗᚢᚢᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᛏᚹᛖᚷᛗᛁ ᚷᛁᛒᚱᚿᚱ ᚠᚹᛊᚿᚠᛁ ᚻᛁᚹ ᛈᚹᚿᛁᚹ ᛁᚻ ᚱᚿᚹᚠᛋᚿᛏᚱᛁ : ᚻᚠᛁᚻ ᚿᛁ*

Runic Light 8

ᚱᛖᚿᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᚠᚿᛁ ᚱᛗᚢᚢᚹᚠᚢᛋ ᛏᚹᛖᚷᛗᛁ ᚷᛁᛒᚱᚿᚱ ᚠᚹᛊᚿᚠᛁ ᚿᛁᚻ ᛈᚹᚿᛁᚹ ᛁᚻ ᚱᚿᚹᚠᛋᚿᛏᚱᛁ :

Light 12

Eue þi moder leop efter hire ehnen, from þe ehe to þe eappel, from þe eappel i Parais dun to þer eorðe, from þe eorðe to *Eue þi moder leop efter hire ehnen, from þe ehe to þe eappel, from þe eappel i Parais dun to þer eorðe, from þe eorðe to helle. Þer*

ExtraLight 10

Þer ha lei i prisun fowr þusent ȝer ant mare, heo ant hire were ba, ant demde al hire ofsprung to leapen al efter hire to deað wiðuten ende.Biginnunge *Þer ha lei i prisun fowr þusent ȝer ant mare, heo ant hire were ba, ant demde al hire ofsprung to leapen al efter hire to deað wiðuten ende. Biginnunge ant rote*

IPA Medium 10

ə lɑŋ tajm ə'go, wɛn aj wəz dʒʌst ˈstɑːɹtɪŋ awt, aj hæd ðə gʊd ˈfɔɹtʃən tə mit ðə gɹet ˈwɪlə ˈkæðəɹ. wɪð ɑl ði ɑ'dæsəti əv juθ, aj æskt hɚ wʌt əd'vajs ʃi wʊd gɪv ðə ˈwʊdˌbɛ ˈɹajtɚ, ɪ 'pɛ ænd ʃi ɹə'plajd: maj əd'vajs tə ðə ˈwʊd *ə lɑŋ tajm ə'go, wɛn aj wəz dʒʌst ˈstɑːɹtɪŋ awt, aj hæd ðə gʊd ˈfɔɹtʃən tə mit ðə gɹet ˈwɪlə ˈkæðəɹ. wɪð ɑl ði ɑ'dæsəti əv juθ, aj æskt hɚ wʌt əd'vajs ʃi wʊd gɪv ðə ˈwʊdˌbɛ ˈɹajtɚ, ɪ ənd ʃi ɹə'plajd: maj əd'vajs tə ðə ˈwʊd*

What is a variable font?

A *variable font* is one that can do the work of a very large number of conventional fonts by varying the characters' shapes in ways designed by the font's creator. These variations are controlled by one or more *axes*, the most common of which is *weight*. Most traditional font families have two weights—regular and bold—but in a variable font the weight can be varied continuously from lightest to heaviest.

Elstob has three axes in both the roman and italic faces: *weight*, *optical size*, and *grade*.

The *weight* axis runs from 200 (ExtraLight) to 800 (**ExtraBold**), with 400 (Regular) as the default.

The *optical size* axis varies several aspects of the characters' shapes (especially x-height and contrast) for the best look at particular sizes. The scale for this axis (6–18) corresponds to point sizes (though you *can* use any optical size at any point size). Where instances (axis presets which work like static fonts) are named with point sizes, these are recommended for use at those sizes.

Grade is like weight, but with one crucial difference: it varies the weight of characters without changing their width. This is useful in web pages, for it allows you to dynamically change the weight of text (for example, on mouseover) without forcing the text to reflow.

OpenType features

OpenType is a font format that enables many advanced typographical features. For example, the ligatures in words like "office" and "afflict" are enabled by OpenType features, and so are discretionary ligatures like those in "sect" and "store," TRUE SMALL CAPS (not the scaled capitals produced by some applications) and old-style figures (1234 as opposed to 1234).

Elstob has these common Open-Type features and many more: English þ and ð, ınꞃulan leττeꞃ-ꞃhapeꞃ, automated uſe of long s with correct Engliſh and French rules (alſo a number of ligatures for potentially awkward combinations in words like aſſiſt and flaſh), automated r rotunda with contextual rules (producing, e.g., "oꝛder" and "bꝛother" but not "earn" or "first"), and automated transliteration of roman characters into runes (your choice of English futhorc, Elder futhark, or Younger futhark—long branch or short twig).

Contextual alternates are used to prevent collisions in words like sīð (compare the ð in suð) and for aesthetic purposes: compare, for example, the Q in Quest with the one in LGBTQ, and the p in *prevent* with the one in *help*.

In the italic face, Elstob has several swash capitals (e.g. $\mathcal{A}$, $\mathcal{F}$, $\mathcal{P}$) as well as swash *z* and *k*.

Medieval features

If all you needed were the letters commonly used in medieval texts, many general-purpose fonts would do the trick. For example, Times New Roman has a perfectly good þ and ð for Old English, and a ȝ for Middle English. But while the shapes of þ and ð in Times are correct for modern Icelandic, þ and ð are preferable for Old and Middle English.

The Unicode standard provides a number of medieval characters. Elstob contains a generous selection of the ones most generally useful to medievalists, and these have been handled with more than the usual care.

Consider, for example, the common Latin abbreviation for *-us*. Unicode provides two characters for this abbreviation: one that takes up space in a line of text, like a letter, and another that works like a diacritic, being attached to another character. Most diacritics are centered on the letters they modify (e.g. ü), but in manuscripts the *-us* abbreviation, when above a letter, is usually offset to the right. Elstob follows this common manuscript usage, e.g. *salt̉*, *mun̉*. Where a location above the base character would look awkward, the abbreviation is still raised, but placed to the right, e.g. A̍, l̉. Diacritics can be stacked in Elstob, and then they are usually

[continued]

centered on top of one another. But in Elstob (as in most manuscripts), another diacritic instead pushes the *-us* sign to the right (e.g. q̓).

The spacing *-us* sign can look awkward in certain combinations, e.g. following A and f (Aꝰ, fꝰ). These and many other combinations are kerned (their spacing adjusted) in Elstob so that they always look good: Aꝰ, fꝰ.

A sampling of other medieval characters in Elstob: �lꝫ, læg, aſtri, ꝯſolatio, pfcm̄, ꝑfcm̄, q̈, ꝗ̊. All of these, of course, work just as well in italic as in roman.

About this typeface

It is named for Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756), a celebrated early scholar of Old English language and literature, closely connected with the Oxford "Saxonists" of that time. The font is based, however, not on Elstob's own publications, but on a typeface then employed by the Oxford University Press.

This was one of a number of typefaces commissioned by Bishop John Fell (1625–86) for use by the press and cut by the Dutch designer Peter de Walpergen (1646–1703). The model for Elstob is de Walpergen's Double Pica. However, Elstob is not a reproduction or a revival of this typeface, which it differs from in many respects—especially its vastly expanded repertory of characters.