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Chapter 2. Present approach, previous research

2.1 The present approach

2.1.1 Subjects of comparison; problems of comparability

Skaldic poetry was being produced, if we rely on Finnur Jónsson's arbitrary delimitation,[1] for a period of six hundred years, a period during which major changes, metrically significant, were occurring within the language, masked though these tend to be by conservatism of syntax and orthography. Parallel with these linguistic developments, changes of expectation occur at the level of metrical realization, such that Hans Kuhn has made a strong case for the dating of skaldic stanzas purely on the basis of the types of syntactic construction by means of which the apparently constant metrical form of the *dróttkvætt* was realized.[2]

In Ireland, stanzaic-syllabic form was a prime medium for verse composition for a longer period still, from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries, 800 years at the inside. Thus however tenacious a caste of bardistry we assume to have guarded the purity of the tradition,[3] linguistic developments will have had their effect. It is therefore a dangerous generalization to refer to a "skaldic system" and a "mediaeval Irish system" as if these systems were homogeneous and directly comparable.

Accepting this, it would appear preferable to take a cross-section of one system at a specific point of development and compare this with a similar cross-section from the other system. This raises the question of how to isolate comparable cross-sections for analysis. Drawing the section from the same chronological period, dated absolutely, means comparing two different stages of development.

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1 Finnur Jonsson 1912-1914 includes poetry which he dates within the years 800-1400.

2 Kuhn 1983 pp. 272-330, summarized on pp. 272-3. The method has one obvious drawback, and that is that the linguistic dating process he uses relies on the assumption that we possess a corpus of verse texts, independently datable in absolute chronology, preserved so exactly that they can be used to trace stylistic variation. For the period of oral tradition at least, and the first skaldic poems are ascribed to poets allegedly operating some two centuries before the advent of writing, this is a perilous assumption, as Kuhn himself points out:

"Es bleiben auch deshalb große Lücken und sehr viel Unsicherheit. Ich komme um sie nicht herum" (p. 273).

3 cf. W. Meid 1991 p. 13-5.

The only stage of development at which true comparability would seem assured would appear to be the very beginning; but how is this beginning to be defined? Does a new form exist from the moment a few avant-gardistes begin to experiment with it, or only when it has found broad acceptance, and if the latter, how broad does this acceptance have to be?

I have attempted to overcome these problems by assuming that a form is fully established by the time it becomes the subject of instruction. The basis of comparison is thus provided by the metrical system revealed in the earliest prescriptive texts in either language.

This ideal can only be realized partially. In Irish there is a continuous tradition of metrical instruction, and MV 1 is the first example. In Iceland, poems in the *clavis metrica* form were composed throughout the Middle Ages, but there is only one metrical tract as such. I am using this text, Snorri's *Háttatal*, as the basis of the following examination, backed up by *Háttalykill* and the comments on metrics in the Third Grammatical Treatise; in Irish I am using the first of the *Mittelirische Verslehren*, backed up by Cellach's *Dagaisti*.

2.1.2 Apparent contrasts

A number of superficial resemblances on the level of metrical realization were outlined in the Introduction. The two poems examined in Chapter 1 suggest that the following reservations should be made:

i) Stanzaic form: in *Dagaisti*, stanzas, where syntactically determinable, appear in quatrain form, the individual lines being defined by end-rhyme and cadence. In *Háttalykill*, stanzas are mostly eight-lined and definable by cadence only.

ii) Syllabicity:[4] variation of length (defined by syllable count) between individual lines within the same stanza occurs more frequently and within wider limits in *Dagaisti* than in *Háttalykill*.[5]

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4 The following metrical features are compared in detail in the second part of the book; for syllabicity see Ch. 8.

5 Thus in *Dagaisti* two metres out of twelve display differences of four syllables or more: *lethdechnad* (8-4-8-4) and *sétrad ngarit* (8-3-8-3). The extent of variation to be expected is displayed clearly in the metrical table appended to the survey of MV 1 in Ó hAodha 1991 pp. 243-4, in which variations of up to four syllables (syllable counts of 7-3-7-3 and 4-8-4-8 being typical examples) are not uncommon. The metre *deibide baisse fri tóin* 'deibide slap on the arse', with its syllabic count of 3-7-7-1 is an extreme example. *Háttatal* contains only one metre with a variation of more than two syllables between lines, this being st. 76 *hnugghent*, with the pattern 7-4-7-4. (Möbius 1879 p. 69, but cf. Faulkes 1991 p. xxii, 68-9 for the apparent irregularity of the metre, which is not attested elsewhere in this form; see note in Faulkes op. cit. pp. 84-5).

iii) Alliteration:[6] *Dagaisti* accepts alliteration only between adjacent accents and at the end of the line; *Háttalykill* accepts alliteration separated by an intervening accent.

iv) Rhyme:[7] end-rhyme is the rule in *Dagaisti*, the exception in *Háttalykill.* In *Dagaisti* the rhyme system allows variation of consonant within phonetically related groups, in *Háttalykill* it demands identity of consonant but allows vowel-variation.

2.1.3 The question of medium

The verse-forms we are examining were intended for recitation, and therefore for reception by ear. As soon as they are incorporated in written tracts, however, they are subject to visual analysis in terms of graphematic form. In these tracts, there is therefore a certain tension between metre as aurally perceived form and metre as visible regularity.

No syllabic-stanzaic verse is plausibly ascribed[8] to any Irish poet known to have been operating before the Conversion and concomitant introduction of the Latin alphabet. In Icelandic, on the other hand, verses used as substantiation in historical sagas[9] are ascribed to poets generally assumed to be working in the second half of the ninth century, over a century before there can be any question of the use of the Latin alphabet in Scandinavia. This suggests that Icelandic stanzaic verse grew up in a non-literate[10] society, whereas the comparable Irish form developed in a culture to which writing was available and familiar.

If this is so, the relationship of the written tract to the verse-forms analysed is different in each culture. In Irish, writing-based prescriptive analysis is appropriate, since the verse-form developed under the influence of a written culture. In Icelandic this is not the case.

In the Irish prescriptive tracts, metricists are analysing form on principles that composers can at least be said to have been aware of. In Icelandic, on the other hand, their system contains elements of analysis which for the earliest composers of the form would have been irrelevant, if not meaningless.

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6 cf. below, Ch. 7.

7 cf. below, Ch. 6.

8 By plausible ascription I refer to the citing of recognized poets as authorities. Obviously the ascription of poetry in late Middle-Irish stanzaic form to mythological saga-characters purporting to have lived around the time of Christ can be discounted.

9 Thus in Snorri's account of the reign of Harald the Fine-Haired (ca. 860-930, cf. Aðalbjarnarson 1941 p. lxxiii) in *Heimskringla*, (ÍF 26, = Aðalbjarnarson 1941 pp. 94-149) some 12 stanzas are quoted from one poet alone, Þorbjörn hornklofi, all drawn from poems purporting to be contemporary panegyric.

10 i.e. ignorant of the Latin alphabet and concomitant traditions of written analysis.

However hard to assess, this fundamental distinction in relationship must be borne in mind at all stages of the comparison. Hitherto, whatever conclusions have been drawn as to the relationship of the two poetic systems, the question of medium has been neglected.

2.1.3.1 Alphabets prior to Latin

In both countries, the Latin alphabet was the second form of writing known to have been employed. The earliest Irish script was the epigraphic *ogham*,[11] devised specifically for cutting on wood or stone,[12] with a graphematic system based on Latin phonetic values.[13] It can be tentatively dated to the fourth century.[14] The Latin alphabet was introduced in the following century, while Ogham continued in more or less sporadic epigraphic use at least until the Viking Age.[15] Old Norse, like Old Irish, knew two systems of writing, the first being epigraphic. The runic alphabet existed well before the period of the earliest scaldic poetry.[16] Runes have been known to act as the agent of preservation of skaldic texts,[17] our earliest datable preserved skaldic stanza being that inscribed on the Karlevi stone in Öland, Sweden.[18] In Western Christendom of the Middle Ages, Latin script, the parchment codex and written traditions of metrical and grammatical analysis are to all intents and purposes inseparable. By the time Irish syllabic-stanzaic poetry evolved Irish learning had been thoroughly permeated by Latinate tradition; at the back of the poet's mind was the possibility of recording his work in writing. It was therefore shaped by the dictates of the written analysis. If we assume on the other hand that the Norse poetic system evolved before the availability of the Latin

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11 The reader is referred to McManus' authoritative study of the Ogham alphabet (1991) for a full treatment of questions briefly touched on here.

12 McManus 1991 p. 7.

13 ibid. pp. 28-9, 33-4.

14 ibid. p. 41.

15 The most striking example being the runic-ogham parallel text of the 11th-century Killaloe Cross, cf. McManus 1991 p. 130. For the parallel existence of Latin and Ogham epigraphical traditions see ibid. pp. 128-9.

16 The earliest inscriptions to be found on Scandinavian territory, spear heads from SW Sweden, are dated archaeologically to the middle of the second century A.D. (Düwel 1983 p. 20). A first-century *fibula* found at Meldorf would, if the characters engraved on it can be conclusively established as runes, be the earliest example of the script extant (ibid. 125, 144).

17 Bjarni Einarson (1989) pp.320-321 may be taken as a fair representative of scholarly opinion in this matter when he says, after pointing out a few cases where runic transmission is attested in fact (Karlevi-stone, Bergen runestaves) or recorded in sagas (*Egils saga,* ÍF 2 p. 256, *Grettis saga,* ÍF 8 p. 203) "En hvað sem því líður eru ekki líkur til að slíkt hafi verið algengt" 'Nonetheless it is unlikely that this sort of thing was the rule' (p. 321).

18 Düwel 1983 pp. 74-5.

script we assume that the only means of preservation imaginable, apart from memory, was that of the epigraphic runic alphabet.

Nothing in *Háttalykill* leads us to suggest that it is conceived as a written form. Above all the circumstances of its composition, if we are to believe *Orkneyinga saga,* suggest that it was oral in both composition and performance.[19] There is little to suggest that it has been significantly influenced by the import of Latinity. Snorri's *Háttatal,* dating from the following century is more clearly influenced by Latin learning; it was also probably intended from the outset as a manuscript poem.[20] Nonetheless, I hope to demonstrate that the influence of Latinity has not completely eradicated the traces of an original oral-based analysis. Finally, the Third Grammatical Treatise, based as it is on the teachings of Priscian and Donatus, is firmly within the Latinate tradition; but even here, traces of a pre-Latin view of the poetic art survive.

The comparative study undertaken in the remainder of this book thus rests on the following basic assumption: A metrical system cannot evolve without underlying concepts of regularity. These in their turn depend on the available methods of analysis. To compare two metrical systems without taking into account the means by which regularities are perceptible in the two given systems is questionable.

Irish syllabic poetry was evolved as a written concept, in a milieu which was under the influence of Latin learning. It was thus designed from the outset to be susceptible to analysis by writing-based methods. Icelandic skaldic poetry evolved before the onset of Latinity, though later adapting under the Latin influence. Since it had undergone at least a century of consolidation before coming under this influence, it was far less amenable than its Irish counterpart. Prescriptive texts on Icelandic metrics, despite themselves arising as a response to Latinate influence, still convey a sense of form in which the relics of an oral system are to be found, though analysed according to the criteria of the newly-imported learning.

There can thus be no question of comparing syllabic-stanzaic metres in the two languages without taking into account the relationship of each to writing, and more specifically, to the Latin alphabet.

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19 This is corroborated by the form of Snorri Sturluson's *Háttatal,* despite the fact that it was presumably conceived from the first as a manuscript form. Not only is there no mention of written form in the commentary, but also the explicitly panegyric nature of the poem forbids the use of purely visual differences in form; the value of the poem as panegyric also lies in its demonstrable mastery of form, and would therefore be vitiated if this mastery were not instantly *audible* to the unlettered, but poetically discriminating warriors of the addressees' immediate court circle.

20 Faulkes 1991 p. ix. Whether the manuscript once delivered was intended to be read aloud, i.e. aurally received, or for private perusal need not concern us; the significant fact was that the poem's recipient, unlike that of *Háttalykill,* would have the opportunity of perusing a written text should he so wish.

2.2 Previous research[21]

Detailed comparative research which focusses specifically on the relationship between Irish and Icelandic poetry of the Middle Ages is rare. Study of Icelandic-Irish relations in general has been determined by the state of research in the individual languages and literatures, and in the availability of such essential research tools as grammars, dictionaries and critical editions of texts. In this respect Icelandic scholarship was quicker to develop than Irish.

Serious comparative research can be said to have started as a reaction to a series of lengthy articles published by Heinrich Zimmer under the collective title of "keltische Beiträge" between 1888 and 1891. This set of comparative studies did not appear *ex nihilo,* however. The comparative approach is already inherent in the *Grammatica Celtica* of Zeuss,[22] his studies of Celtic having been motivated by a desire to show that the Bavarians were *not* Celts by comparing and contrasting Bavarian forms with Celtic equivalents.[23] It was the appearance of this *Grammatica Celtica* in its second edition, revised by Hermann Ebel and published in 1871, that provoked Carl Hildebrand, in 1874, to state that:

> Ich halte die grundlage der skaldischen verskunst für keltisch. Was wir von altkeltischer poesie kennen (Zeuss-Ebel 934 fgg.) zeigt dieselben eigenheiten, und wie eng der verkehr zwischen den anwohnern des nordwestl. meeres war, bezeigen eine grosse anzal (sic) wörter die, deutlich keltischen ursprungs, in den nordischen sprachschatz vorzüglich der skaldenpoesie übergangen sind.[24]

An important result of Hildebrand's first exploratory suggestion that skaldic metre had Celtic roots was the article by A. Edzardi in 1878,[25] in which he analyses the two metrical systems, in particular that of the skalds, in considerable detail, and points to the similarities of *rinnard* and *dróttkvætt;* like Hildebrand, he bases his conclusions on examples given by Zeuss. In a tentatively formulated article showing considerable awareness of the pitfalls awaiting comparative scholarship

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21 This short survey refers only to the specific problem of Irish influence on skaldic form. Useful bibliographies and surveys of research on the wider issues of metrical and cultural comparison can be found in the following:
On general metrics: Christian Küpert 1989, Introductory survey, pp. 1-6, Bibliography, pp. 285-305.
On general metrics, but with specific reference to problems in Icelandic: Kristján Árnason 1991, survey, pp. 3-44, bibliography, p. 173-82.
On skaldic poetry: Roberta Frank, in Clover/Lindow 1985, abbreviations, pp. 12-8, survey, pp. 157-84, bibliography, pp. 185-96.
On Irish-Norse contacts in general: Gísli Sigurðsson 1988, survey, pp. 9-119, bibliography, pp. 120-55.
A bibliography and survey of research on Irish syllabic/stanzaic poetry is yet to be compiled.

22 First edition 1853.

23 Tristram 1991 pp. 11-2.

24 Hildebrand 1874 p. 78 n. 1.

25 Hildebrand is mentioned specifically on p. 587 n. 1.

in this field[26] he suggests, not only that skaldic forms were the result of Celtic influence, but that this also conditioned the sporadic occurrence of partial rhymes in poems within the *Lieder-Edda* corpus. No doubt as a result of his contacts with Windisch,[27] Edzardi had considerable awareness of the problems of Irish metrics, and thus avoided misunderstandings such as those perpetuated by Heusler and Lie.

For both Norwegians and Icelanders at this time, philology was closely tied up with the movement towards political independence. This is the background to the debate between Finnur Jónsson and Sophus Bugge.[28] For Finnur Jónsson, the poetry ascribed to the first skald to whom surviving texts are attributed, Bragi Boddason, is so highly developed in form that it must have been the product of long development. By dating Bragi to the beginning of the ninth century, and assuming that he was preceded by at least one generation of skalds producing early forms of *dróttkvætt*, he hopes to exclude all possibility of Insular influence, Irish or British.[29] For Jónsson, skaldic poetry was of pure West-Norse descent. It had been cultivated in their West-Norwegian homeland by those independent warriors whose strength of spirit had forbidden them to accept subjection to a central monarchy, and had moved westwards to preserve their independence in Iceland.

Bugge, on the other hand, maintains on linguistic grounds that Bragi's verse should be dated to the mid tenth century. In particular, he argues that syncopated forms used by Bragi are contemporary with forms found in the two rune-rows titled *ogam lochlandach* and *gallogam* in the *Book of Ballymote* and in the British museum MS Add. 4783 (Clarendon Codex, fol. 15), which are later than unsyncopated forms found in earlier rune-rows datable to the end of the ninth century.[30] The weakness of this argument will be apparent; it makes no allowances for modernisation or scribal regularisation in the texts of Bragi's verse, nor does it take account of the fact that one runic tradition may be more conservative or deliberately archaic than another.

Whereas Bugge's remarks on the dating of Bragi's verse may be said to belong to the tradition of debate on Norse-Irish cultural borrowings, in which establishment of date and direction of transmission is all-important, his remarks on *Ynglingatal*[31] lead us into another strand of argument, that of comparative form. *Ynglingatal* is a genealogical poem of thirty stanzas[32] ascribed by Snorri Sturluson[33] to the late ninth-century Norwegian skald Þjóðólfr hvínverski and composed in the skaldic metre *kviðuháttr*, in which lines of four and three syllables alternate.

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26 op. cit. pp. 581-2, 588.

27 cf. op. cit. p. 581 n. 3.

28 The controversy between S. Bugge and F. Jónsson, is conveniently, if one-sidedly, summarized in Jónsson's general survey of research on Norse-Celtic relations in 1895 pp. 271-82.

29 Finnur Jónsson 1895 pp. 287-334.

30 S. Bugge 1894 pp. 14-25.

31 S. Bugge 1894 pp. 108-52.

32 Jónsson 1912-5 A I, pp.7-15, B I, pp. 7-13.

33 *Ynglinga saga* ch. 50, ÍF 26 1 p. 83.

Bugge not only examines this poem in the context of the other notable *kvíðuháttr* poems, Egil's *Sonatorrek*[34] and *Arinbjarnarkviða,*[35] but also with the Irish tradition of genealogical poetry. He accounts for the metre by assuming that it was a borrowing from Irish heptasyllabic forms with trisyllabic cadences, which the Norse metricists regularized (presumably because of acoustic reception, though Bugge does not discuss the point) into lines of four and three connected by alliteration of the *stuðlar* and *hǫfuðstafr* pattern basic to the Germanic *Langzeile.*[36] Bugge's comments in this direction are interesting from the point of view of the present study because they implicitly recognize, though this is nowhere explicitly stated, that metrical form, linguistic realisation and social function are equally relevant and inextricably connected.[37]

Bugge's comparative work is a reaction to developments in the field of Celtic Studies, his assessment of social function relying on O'Curry, in particular *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish,* the early work of Kuno Meyer providing assistance with one aspect of realisation in particular, the kenning,[38] and Whitley Stokes' comments on metre[39] having possibly influenced him on the aspect of metrical form.

Stokes' theory brings us back to Edzardi's contention that *dróttkvætt* was a direct borrowing from the Irish metre *rinnard.*[40] At this stage comments on metrics were still liable to be based more or less on empirical observation combined with subjective judgement, as the mediaeval Irish metrical tracts were not yet available in a form accessible to scholarship in general. (Snorri's and related tracts had been available in reliable Icelandic-Latin parallel text since 1846.) This deficiency was remedied in 1891 with the publication of Thurneysen's *Mittelirische Verslehren,* a work not yet superseded.[41]

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34 Edited with translation and commentary in Turville-Petre 1976 pp. 27-41.

35 Text in ÍF 2 pp. 258-67.

36 1894 pp. 151-2.

37 Thus for example he not only suggests that metrical form was influenced by Irish, but that formalized panegyric was a social custom built up as an imitation of the existing Irish system (1894 pp. 56-7).

38 K. Meyer 1892 p. 220-1. "We have here, in fact, an instructive example in that delight in obscure modes of diction, which Irish poetry so often shows in its use of kennings, extinct forms of language, antiquated native, and lastly even foreign words." Of course Meyer was not attempting to suggest that *kenningar* were used in Irish to the extent of scale or systematisation that was prevalent in Norse. His Irish readers would have been aware, as Bugge evidently was not, that of fifteen examples given, all but four were taken from one source, the *Bríatharogam,* lists of obfuscations of ogham letter-names. (Cf. McManus 1991 pp. 42-3.)

39 W. Stokes 1885a p. 273.

40 Edzardi 1878 pp. 583-4.

41 A first step towards re-evaluating Thurneysen's work is represented by Ó hAodha 1991, which gives preliminary results of research leading ultimately to a re-edition of this tract.

Bugge's arguments on *Ynglingatal* may be summed up as follows:
On the level of social function:

> The practice of panegyric is an Irish phenomenon taken into Norse by cultural borrowing. (This comment had already been made in respect of Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa.*)

On the level of linguistic realisation:

> The specifically genealogical material of *Ynglingatal* recalls the genealogical information contained in the poetry of the filid.

On the level of metrical form:

> The metre of *Ynglingatal* is *kviðuháttr,* alternating three and four syllables. This gives a total of seven syllables per pair of lines, the same number of syllables as the most frequent Irish metres. It is thus a reasonable assumption that *Ynglingatal* is based on versions of these metres having a regular caesura dividing the seven syllables into units of three and four.

On these grounds Bugge suggests that *Ynglingatal* is a poem made for an audience in Viking Northumbria or Dublin.

Though Thurneysen's publication of the *Mittelirische Verslehren* proved a landmark in studies of Irish metrics, its form does not make it readily accessible to non-Irish-reading metricists or students of other literatures. This deficiency, if it can be called such, was remedied by K. Meyer in 1909 by the publication of *A Primer of Irish Metrics.* This work was crucial in bringing Irish metrics to the attention of Nordic philologers, and in inviting comparison; it is symptomatic that Andreas Heusler possessed a copy[42] and incorporated at least one example from it into his *Altgermanische Dichtung.*[43] However, Meyer, in rendering Irish theoretical metrics of the mediaeval period more accessible to scholarship in general, also laid it open to the threat of being interpreted by those without the specialist knowledge required to appreciate the problem in its full complexity, and having parallels drawn on superficial grounds when deeper knowledge might cry caution. This can be exemplified by Heusler's use of the stanza mentioned above, Meyer's example of *rannaigecht recomarcach bec*, which he describes as follows:

> Ein g e n a u e s Vorbild zeigt die irische Dichtung freilich nicht, aber eines, das in der Gesamtwirkung dem nordischen Hofton ungleich näher steht als irgend einer der älteren germanischen Formen. Es ist das beliebteste Mass der Iren; der dreihebige Siebensilbler mit Silbenreim nebst Stabreim, und zwar der Art mit trochäischem Schluss (wie der Hofton).[44]

This passage contains two completely false assumptions, proceeding apparently from Heusler's lack of acquaintance with any form of Irish metrics other than that

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42 Now in the possession of the Universitätsbibliothek Basel. The copy contains Heusler's *ex libris* plate, but shows no signs of having been annotated in any way by Heusler himself.

43 See below, p. 46.

44 Heusler 1957 p. 29.

contained in Meyer's *Primer*, which he had failed to read with due attention.[45] There is no justification whatsoever for assuming that *rannaigecht recomarcach bec*, or any form of *rannaigecht* for that matter, was the most beloved metre of the Irish.[46] The only comment of Meyer's which could possibly give rise to such an assumption is his introduction to the section on those metres which he describes as "Stanzas of rhyming couplets, in which both the verse and the verse-ends are homosyllabic". Here, he notes that "the most common metres *of this group*[47]are those called *rannaigecht*". The second false assumption, which Heusler makes in defiance of Meyer's remarks on p. 5 of the *Primer*,[48] is that the form can be analysed as three-stressed heptasyllables. The danger of this assumption can be seen in the lines he quotes:[49]

> a Emain idnach óibinn asa fidrad adfédim[50]

where the second line can only be read as stressed by assuming that the combination *asa* (the preposition *as* 'out' prefixed to the possessive 3rd Singular feminine *a)* takes full stress, which is as artificial a stress-placing in Irish as Heusler would have known it to be in Old Norse.

He continues by analysing the form thus:

> Das Verspaar hat vier vokalische, zwei *f*-Stäbe; Binnenreim bilden *idnach, fidrad*, der Schluss *fédim* bildet Endreim mit dem Schluss der folgenden Langzeile. Stab und Silbenreim haben also ganz andre (sic) Stellung als beim Hofton.[51]

Had Heusler included the whole of the stanza as given by Meyer, the selective nature of the above information would have been apparent; even as it stands above, Heusler's analysis is extremely suspect.

Thus as far as end-rhyme is concerned, Heusler declines to quote the second line-pair, which Meyer gives as follows:

> Is mór ndine dit' gúalainn rogab ríge for Érinn

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45 The lack of notes in Heusler's hand in his private copy may well be indicative; that he was not averse to marking books may be observed in the glossary to his copy of Möbius' *Háttatal*.

46 A catalogue in process of compilation by my Freiburg Colleague Gisbert Hemprich points to an overwhelming dominance of *deibide*.

47 My emphasis.

48 Heusler is convinced that all isosyllabic verse must have an underlying rhythmical structure, and is therefore not prepared to accept Meyer's assertion that the ruling principle in Irish is isosyllabicity; cf. Heusler 1925 p. 84.

49 A Emain idnach óibinn asa fidrad adfédim
Is mór ndíne dit' gúalainn rogab ríge for Érinn.
O warlike and pleasant Emain, whose history I relate, many are the tribes who from your slopes took the kingship of Ireland. (Translation G. Mac Eoin, personal communication.)

50 Heusler 1957 p. 29.

51 ibid. p. 30 n. 5.

Had he done so, the question would have been raised as to why *oíbinn* and *ad-fédim* in the above stanza do not rhyme, when *ad-fédim* is permitted to rhyme with *Érinn*. What is here involved is not *"Silbenreim"* (syllable rhyme), but more specifically rhyme involving identity of vowels and similarity of consonants from tonic syllable to the word-ending. The same principle is at work in the pair that he chooses as examples of *"Binnenreim"* (line-internal rhyme): *idnach fidrad*. Just what he envisages as constituting the rhyming elements here is unclear, which leads to the suspicion that he was unaware of any problem and considered the pair to be an example of tonic-syllable rhyme after the manner of Icelandic *aðalhending*, here the element */id/* in each case. In fact the situation is more complex: in phonetic transcription we have

	/fiðrað/
opposed to	/iðnaχ/, with identity of /ið a /,
strict relationship (liquid group)	/ n /
with	/ r /,
loose relationship (fricative)	/ ð /
(voiced-voiceless opposition) with	/ χ /.

In all but the strictest periods of Irish metrics this would have been regarded as a disyllabic full internal rhyme. Comparison with the third and fourth lines reveals the same pattern in *ndine* and *ríge*, with disyllabic vowel identity and consonant equivalence. Finally, his treatment of alliteration ("four vocalic and two consonantal alliterations") suffers from the same problem as his assumption of "Dreihebigkeit" in requiring *asa* to be stressed.

Such matters of detail may seem unimportant within the large scale of Heusler's examination and the relatively short treatment given the question of Irish borrowings within it. Nonetheless, it illustrates the dangers involved in accepting second-hand authority on a metrical system with which one is not personally familiar.

Heusler's position, involving among other points the view that Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* represents an entirely new departure in Germanic versification, most plausibly explained by the use made by one gifted individual of inspiration from abroad, was re-examined by Hallvard Lie in 1952. As an example of regular Irish syllabic poetry Lie uses the self-same stanza quoted by Heusler from Meyer with no reappraisal whatsoever; all Heusler's misconceptions are reproduced.[52] Ironically, he

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52 Ser man nærmere på det irske versparet som Heusler anfører som eksempel på det metriske skjema som den norske skalden skal ha lånt ok laget *dróttkvætt* av, vil man knapt oppdage et eneste særegent trekk som det skulle ha vært nødvendig å reise over havet for a låne.

a Emain idnach oibinn
asa fidrad adfedim (sic)

Verset er 3-taktet, likesom *dróttkvætt*, men har 7, ikke 6 stavelser. Der forekommer i n n r i m *(idnach: fidrad)* ok s t a v r i m (4 vokaliske og 2 konsonantiske staver), men plaseringen af rimene er helt forskjellig fra *dróttkvætts*. Dessuten er der e n d e r i m, da *fedim* rimer med sluttordet i følgende langlinje. (Lie 1957-82

uses Heusler's mistaken assumption that the lines are both three-stressed as an argument against Heusler; since for Lie the three-stressed lines in *dróttkvætt* are not a significant innovation, but merely a regularisation of practises found elsewhere in Germanic poetry, Heusler's argument for borrowing is invalidated.[53]

Lie's unwillingness to discuss issues of Irish metrics in their full complexity or at least to make it known that he is aware of this complexity suggests that he has relied for his information on Heusler, giving Heusler's source Meyer a cursory glance at best, and Meyer's source Thurneysen[54] no attention whatsoever.[55] Thus a chain of misconceptions has been handed down, with the reprinting of Lie's article in a memorial volume of 1982, for nearly three-quarters of a century.

The indirect influence of Meyer's work, with its ambivalent effects, continued with the publication by Gerard Murphy in 1961 of *Early Irish Metrics,* a work purporting to be an updating and replacement of Meyer's *Primer* following the same basic principles, thus also ultimately deriving from the work of Rudolf Thurneysen, and destined to form an important source for studies by Sveinsson, Turville-Petre,[56] Mackenzie and Kristján Árnason. Finally one should add that in the few words Hans Kuhn devotes to the problem in his *magnum opus* of 1983 he acknowledges that he is doing little more than adopting the same position as taken by Heusler over fifty years beforehand, thus perpetuating the influence of Meyer's *Primer.* Meyer's first-hand influence can thus be said to have extended from 1909 to 1982 at least, and as perpetuated by his successor Murphy to represent standard doctrine on Irish metrics to date.

Meyer's *Primer* and its successor, Murphy's *Early Irish Metrics*, incorporate disadvantages forced by necessity on short synoptic treatments generally. In particular, they can do little more than hint at developments within the broad categories of poetry schematized. Meyer, for example, outlines in a mere 22 pages (5-26) a system for what he himself describes as "the mass of Irish poetry from the eighth

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p. 119.) The text following the verse quotation is Heusler's translated (without specific acknowledgement) into Norwegian.

53 Lie 1957 rep. 1982 pp. 120-1.

54 Heusler himself made use of Thurneysen's edition of the metrical tracts (Heusler 1925 p. 313) in tracing certain Icelandic forms to possible Irish ancestors; here, as in his use of Meyer, he appears to have misunderstood the principles involved. It is surprising in view of his acquaintance with Thurneysen's work that he sees no need, in rebutting Meyer's remarks about stress-accent, to make any reply at all to the far more detailed treatment of the matter in Thurneysen 1885 pp. 329-31, 336-47.

55 A brief look at Thurneysen 1885 p. 347, for example, would have convinced him of the dangers of his views on Irish alliteration "I *dróttkvætt* er stavrimets funksjon - i overensstemmelse med gammel germansk tradisjon - v e r s b i n d e n d e, i det irske versmalet o r d b i n d e n d e" (p. 119) ('In *dróttkvætt* the function of alliteration, as in old Germanic tradition, is to connect verses; in the Irish metre it is to connect words.' - my translation.) Irish alliteration has a range of functions but, as Thurneysen shows, it can be used to connect lines just as could Germanic alliteration. The point is discussed in detail in Ch. 7 below.

56 Turville-Petre's work on the subject is illustrative of the manner in which Murphy came to replace Meyer. Turville-Petre 1954 cites Meyer; in G. Mac Eoin's translation of this work 1971/2 the reference to Meyer remains, but is supplemented by mention of Murphy, while in his handbook of 1976 all references are to Murphy.

to the seventeenth centuries".[57] In doing so he is forced to generalize; chronological details are restricted to vague indications such as "the older poetry",[58] or "at a later period".[59] It is thus impossible for comparative scholars using these works to ensure chronological aptitude of the examples selected without tracing them to their sources, which Meyer frequently does not indicate.[60]

Discussions of a national literature's origins are rarely carried out on a purely scholarly plane, and that of the origins of scaldic poetry is no exception. Finnur Jónsson, in seeking to free the *genre* from all taint of Celtic contamination, was acting within the spirit of his age, in which Iceland was gradually asserting its right to independence. It is thus a sign of suprising objectivity to find Heusler, a Swiss member of the Prussian Academy, advocating Irish influence at a stage of history in which Germanic scholarship in general was seeking to emphasize the native roots of its own literature, and in which the desire to do so had not yet been made disreputable by excesses such as perpetrated in the subsequent decade. At the same time his contemporary Erik Noreen was seeking the roots of the stylistic features typical of scaldic diction in native traditions of magic and incantation, which he considers to have motivated a style rich in *tmesis*, marked by obfuscating language that evolved into the *heiti* and *kenningar* of subsequent scaldic poetry.[61]

The theme of the kenning in particular was to be taken up by Wolfgang Krause, who considered it a common feature of both Celtic and Germanic poetic language, originating from a period in "late Antiquity"[62] during which Germanic and Celtic tribes were living in close contiguity, a time in which he also envisages the parallel development of runic and ogham alphabets. Like these alphabets, such stylistic figures, according to Krause, owe their origin to the prerequisites of religious ritual: magic, taboo and deliberate obfuscation. In arguing along these lines, Krause is thoroughly in accordance with the spirit of his age in regarding Iceland as the last outpost of an otherwise abandoned Germanic heritage,[63] and the skalds not as innovators, but as the guardians of that heritage.

The post-war decade seems to see a revival of Irish claims to a share in the skaldic achievement,[64] with significant publications by Hallvard Lie, Einar Ól.

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57 Meyer 1909 p. 5.

58 op. cit. p. 7.

59 op. cit. p. 10.

60 Murphy is in this respect a distinct improvement, giving references to texts even if they are used as standard examples in *Mittelirische Verslehren.*

61 Noreen 1926 pp. 143-4. For a comparative study of *tmesis* see Amory 1979.

62 Krause 1939 p. 19.

63 'Denn die Kenning ist nicht eine Sondereigentümlichkeit der altnordischen Dichtung, sondern eine *gemeingermanische* Stilform.' (p. 14.)

64 A study of the motives behind this shift in interest would require a separate article; it would illustrate the complexity of motivation that can lie behind trends in scholarship in general. Thus *Skírnir* published seven major articles on Irish matters between 1948 and 1954. One is led to ask whether this results from the editor's (Sveinsson's) own personal interests (cf. Sveinsson 1948), from an identification by Icelanders, following Independence in 1944, with the newly formed Irish republic, or from a

Sveinsson and Gabriel Turville-Petre, as well as the re-edition of Heusler's *Altgermanische Dichtung*. Whereas Heusler was convinced, though his treatment of the fact is short and subsidiary, that the decisive influence in the formation of the skaldic system came from Ireland, Hallvard Lie, although holding to the principle of the single inspired innovator influenced by foreign developments, looks for this inspiration not solely to Ireland but also to the mainland of Europe, and in particular to the culture of the Carolingian Empire. He regards the fact as significant that the earliest skaldic poetry belongs to a class he refers to as *billeddiktning*, 'pictorial poetry'. By this he is not, of course, referring to the *carmina figurata*, a class of poem requiring the resources of a sophisticated manuscript culture,[65] but to what he refers to as "diktning sem prøver å gjenfortelle og tolke billedkunstverker av mer eller mindre episk innhold".[66] This, according to Lie, is a direct result of the poet's having come into contact with Carolingian learning, and modelled on patterns drawn from classical antiquity, probably re-narrations of Homer and Virgil. This conclusion is symptomatic of a reaction against previous "Germanicising" tendencies which is to make itself felt more fully in the 1970s and 80s, resulting not only in advocacy of the Irish claim, but also in recognition of the fact that Icelandic learning of the earliest Christian period, and thus of the age responsible for the preservation of the skaldic tradition, was more open to the influence of the mediaeval Latin tradition than had been previously recognised.[67]

Turville-Petre's concern, on the other hand, in studies commencing with his article of 1954, and finally summed up in his handbook *Skaldic Poetry* (1976) is to establish those elements of skaldic poetry which could possibly have owed their origin to specifically Irish influence; his analysis is primarily on the level of metrical form, though he also draws attention to similarities in the social function and status of the poet in the two cultures. He is aware that metrical features shared by the two, such as end-rhyme, internal rhyme and alliteration, differ in details of application. Cultural background is not his concern; he does not, for example, point out that the majority of preserved Irish verse in syllabic metres that can be ascribed to the Viking Age is religious in content, or that Irish poets of the period were writing poems in this metre of a length unheard of in skaldic poetry.[68]

A sequel to Turville-Petre's investigations is formed by B. Gordon Mackenzie's article of 1981.[69] This examines some of Turville-Petre's reservations, his

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general anti-germanic reaction to excesses of the previous decade. Presumably all three factors combined to produce a climate receptive to Irish-Icelandic studies.

65 See Tranter 1991 pp. 248-50.

66 "Poetry which attempts to relate or interpret pictorial art of more or less epic nature", Lie 1952 rep. 1982 p. 131, my translation.

67 Skaldic poetry itself would appear to be less amenable to this manner of treatment than other genres of Old Icelandic literature, though the circumstances of its preservation are undeniably Christian. A summary of the problem is to be found in the introduction to Clunies Ross 1987 pp. 9-21.

68 *Félire Oengusso* contains a quatrain for each day of the year, the two longer poems of Blathmac mac Con Brettan were in all likelihood of 150 quatrains each, according to the pattern of the Psalter, which is followed by *Saltair na Rann*, containing as it does 150 *dúan* 'cantos' in the main section and twelve supplementary sections.

69 In Dronke 1981 pp. 337-56.

so-called "sharp differences" between Irish and skaldic metrics[70] and seeks to prove that his modesty is unjustified.

Symptomatic of the revival of interest in Norse-Irish connections in the 1950s is the fact that the International Celtic Congress held in Dublin in 1959 had the theme: "The Impact of the Scandinavians on the Celtic Regions." This interest was given a further impetus by the discovery of significant Viking urban remains at the Wood Quay site in Dublin, in connection with which it was decided to hold the seventh Viking Congress in Dublin in 1973. It was at this latter congress that Einar Ól. Sveinsson read the paper: "An Old Irish verse-form wandering in the North".

Einar Ól. Sveinsson's interest in Irish matters appears to have begun as a necessary concomitant of his editorial work on *Njáls saga*, leading to the publication of the *Íslenzk Fornrit* edition, in which he was obliged to consider the Irish sources for the episode in the saga dealing with the Battle of Clontarf. The wide range of his interest is attested by the collection *Löng er för* (1976), of which the final section is devoted to a comparison of Irish accentual metres as analysed by Carney 1971 with the catalectic metres *(alhneppt* and *hálfhneppt)* of the skaldic canon. Whereas previous scholars tended to draw attention to similarities between skaldic poetry and the syllabic metres of Ireland, and thus to concentrate on features such as rhyme, alliteration, and inevitably strictness of syllable count, Sveinsson is led to compare accentual features, in particular that of cadence. His arguments are vulnerable, as he himself admits. Ingenuously, he draws attention to the significant differences between the rules of both rhyme and alliteration in the two cultures, differences that lie outside the scope of his main argument. A more serious objection can be raised on the grounds of syntax: Carney contends that the Irish forms are based on two-accent phrases with a marked *caesura* (and the syntax does nothing to disprove this contention). However, a *caesura* in this position in the Norse examples given by Sveinsson breaks the syntax as often as not. Since it is specifically in the cadence that Sveinsson finds his similarities, the position of *caesura* is of vital importance. The examples juxtaposed by Sveinsson (p. 215) and read at the original delivery of the English version of the paper in Dublin require stretching of the rules of either Irish or Icelandic word-stress if even the accentual pattern of the cadence is to appear identical, so that the most that can be said of the two is that the one metre is reminiscent of the other. One wonders if that really justifies his conclusion

> Ég fæ ekki betur séð en hnepptir hættir, sem ekki verða skýrðir með norrænum kveðskap, eigi sér *ótvíræðar* fyrirmyndir í írskri ljóðagerð.[71]

or whether we might not be better abiding by his general conclusion about the borrowing of scaldic poetry *in toto* from Irish:

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70 Turville-Petre 1976 pp. xxvii-xxviii.

71 'It seems clear to me that the shortened metres, which cannot be explained in terms of Norse metrics, have an unambiguous parallel in Irish song metre', op. cit. p. 212, my translation.

um það efni sé dómur enn ekki fallinn.[72]

The latest development in this field to date is provided by the studies of Kristján Árnason. His most significant contribution is to introduce concrete arguments from the realms of historical phonology, examining in particular the complex interrelationship between syllable count, syllable weight, accent and quantity. The foundation of Árnason's work was laid by his historical study of quantity and related features in Icelandic (1980). Here he points to the complexity of interrelationship between the metrical features of syllabicity, accentuality and quantity, while not dealing specifically with the question of Irish contacts.[73] In a preliminary paper on this question (Árnason 1981) he re-examines the hypothesis first assumed by Edzardi and Stokes that *dróttkvætt* was a direct borrowing from *rinnard*, noting the need to analyse a) the differences in the prosodic systems of the two languages, and b) the feasibility of remodelling in the borrowing process "to ease the conceivable tension between the prosodic structure of the borrowing language and the rhythmical form of the original metre".[74] To a) Árnason points to the presence of initial dynamic accent and to a dichotomy between heavy and light syllables in both languages, to b) he suggests that if such a borrowing were to have taken place, it would necessarily have involved regularization of quantity.[75] He leaves the question open as to whether borrowing, which he considers possible, actually did take place. In a subsequent publication (1987) Árnason approaches the specific question of rhyme in *dróttkvætt* and Irish syllabic poetry. He points out that the basic concept is similar; rhyme of equivalence categories *(jafngildisflokkar),* but the realisation of this concept is different in each case.[76]

Perhaps the most important single finding to be presented by Árnason is the following:

> [...] the basic form of a *dróttkvætt* line was a combination of three trochees, where the heavy beats had to be carried by heavy stressed syllables [...] but that the variant structures listed above were allowed, as defined by a relatively restrictive set of metrical rules, so that a certain amount of tension in rhythm was allowed in other places than the cadence.[77]

Here he challenges the generally-held assumption that *dróttkvætt* is an isosyllabic metre,[78] suggesting by implication that it is syllabotonic in intention, though variously tonosyllabic, isoaccentual or even quantitative in realisation. His latest publication (1991) examines the principles laid out in the 1981 article, leading to a certain modification of position as regards Irish influence, which he now considers

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72 'a final decision has yet to be reached about that matter' (ibid.).

73 For a survey of research in this field see Liberman 1982 pp. 43-9, and his exhaustive bibliography, op. cit. pp. 323-50.

74 Árnason 1981 p. 109.

75 Árnason 1981 pp. 109-10.

76 Árnason 1987 pp. 6-7.

77 Árnason 1981 p. 106.

78 That this is still accepted doctrine is suggested by the definition given in a standard Icelandic reference work, Bjarni Einarsson 1989 p. 316.

to have been one of a number of possible factors influencing the development of what he refers to as the "Icelandic metrical set", in which eddic and skaldic metres are to be seen as two related but distinct elements.[79]

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79 Árnason 1991 pp. 82-4.