Chapter 3. The development of the stanzaic-syllabic form in Iceland and Ireland

3.1 Syllabic systems and their forerunners in Ireland and Iceland

In each of the *clavis* poems examined in the first chapter, one stanzaic form stands apart from the remainder. In Cellach's *Dagaisti* it is the penultimate stanza:

> anamain irdairc
> uasal in slonnod
> nisdenand duine
> uile acht ollom.

and in *Háttalykill* the very first:

> Skyldr at skemmta
> þykkik skǫtnum vera
> þeims vilja nýt mǫl nema,
> forn frœði lætk
> framm of borin,
> ef ér vilið heyrt hafa.

In the Irish instance there is a regular pattern of accentuation not found in the remaining stanzas, while in the Icelandic example there is neither rhyme nor regular cadence and the stanza pattern contains six lines rather than the usual eight.

These stanzas hint that the stanzaic-syllabic form was not the only acknowledged medium for metrical composition at the time the two *clavis* poems were composed. This hint is confirmed by sources suggesting that the stanzaic-syllabic system was imposed, in both Icelandic and Irish, on fully viable preceding systems in which alliteration and accent were relevant features, rhyme and strict syllable count were not.

This preceding system belongs to the oral stage of either culture; there are no manuscripts preceding the beginnings of the stanzaic systems. In assuming that such a system existed, we are relying on evidence of content, in particular where panegyrics relate to datable characters, and cannot entirely rule out the existence of later forgeries.

Linguistic dating is a further indication, again subject to the risk of later archaisms.[1] We can, however, say that the general trend of evidence supports the interpretation that accentual-alliterative[2] poetry was being composed before the advent of stanzaic-syllabic metres. For a period, in both languages, two forms ran concurrently;[3] this was finally followed by a period in which stanzaic-syllabic composition had the ascendency.

3.1.1   Irish pre-syllabic metres

The following example, from the legal tract *Bretha Nemed*, is typical of the Irish pre-syllabic system, stichic, and variously described as "accentual"[4] and "alliterative".[5] The common denominator between varying forms of such verse is the use of chains of alliteration linked to the initial tonic accent.

> Raidh uile a Amairgen,
> abair fir filed,
> feig Bretha Nemed
> nad ceil a ndliged
> duit ma for caomrustar.
> Cia roich teisctiu teiscleimim tuath?
> O taman co fochluc;
> ferr fis a tri ngrad
> glanmiadh macfuirmeid;
> fordo-midhir dris.[6]

Breatnach divides into lines on the basis of syntax and provides the following translation:

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[1]   In view of the central rôle played by linguistic dating in ascribing poems preserved in manuscript to pre-oral stages of Irish or Icelandic civilisation, one should bear in mind the warnings given by Raymond Page (1990 pp. 370-1) on the fallibility of this method of dating.

[2]   The part played by alliteration and accentuation in archaic Irish metrics is disputed, and this is reflected in terminological variations. I adopt the compromise designation "accentual-alliterative" following Donncha Ó hAodha 1991 p. 224 & n.

[3]   cf. L. Breatnach in *Celtica* 7.

[4]   J. Carney, most recently in 1989 pp. 40-1; in more detailed form, 1971 pp. 23-8.

[5]   cf. Kalyguine 1991 p. 189, 1992 (draft) pp. 81-91.

[6]   L. Breatnach 1988 pp. 20-8, here p. 21; of the technical terms he does not translate *Bretha nemed* could be rendered 'Judgements of the privileged (i.e. *filid)'* tuath, 'tribe', while the remaining are designations of poetic grades.

'Tell all, o Amairgen, declare the truth of poets, examine *Bretha Nemed* which does not conceal their entitlements, if enquiries be made to you. How far does initial gleaning extend in a *túath*? From *taman* to *fochloc*; better than the knowledge of their three grades is the bright dignity of a *macfhuirmid*; I pronounce on them (and) the *dris*.' (ibid. p. 23)

Each line forms a syntactic unit. These units are linked by alliteration;[7] the first stressed syllable of the line connects backwards to the last stress of the preceding line, the last stress of the line conversely looking forwards to the first stress of the next line.[8] In contrast to the Germanic alliterative systems, only adjacent accented syllables may alliterate, any intervening non-alliterating accent being said to break the chain.

An alternative analysis is that provided by Carney:

A "phrase" is a metrical unit containing two stresses [...] A trisyllabic word is metrically ambivalent, and may have a single stress [...] or two stresses [...] In the latter case the initial [...] will alliterate twice, first with the initial of the last word in the preceding phrase, and then with the initial of the first word in the succeeding phrase, thus giving a sequence of three alliterations, instead of the usual two. This almost always happens with trisyllabic line-endings [...]

Most basic is that *in strict verse* every phrase is connected to the following by alliteration,[9] or, more rarely, by some other device [...]

All this ensures that a poem is a piece of mnemonic perfection, and that linking, alliterative or otherwise, proceeds from the first to the very last phrase. The purpose of such verse was, of course, to secure the correct transmission of information in a society that relied mainly on orality.[10]

It will be noticed that Carney describes the two-accent phrase without reference to syntax. Among his examples of poems in the strict form described above Carney gives the following:

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[7]   For the benefit of readers who are not specialists in Celtic metrics it should be pointed out that Irish alliteration ignores forms produced by initial mutation, of which Irish has two varieties, lenition, in which voiced or voiceless stops are replaced by equivalent fricatives, and eclipsis, in which voiceless stops are replaced by voiced stops, voiced stops are replaced by nasals. The system as it affects alliteration is treated in further detail in Ch. 7; in reading the example above it should merely be borne in mind that lenited or eclipsed forms (such as *ndliged, ngrad* in the example) alliterate as if no mutation had taken place (giving in this case *dliged, grad,* alliterating correctly with *duit, glan*).

[8]   The chain is usually completed by the device of *dúnadh* "closure", in which the end of the last line repeats salient words of the first; as Breatnach's example is incomplete, there is no *dúnadh* here.

[9]   Travis (1942 p. 102) thus misses the point when he refers to "the principle of a correspondence between sense and sound [...] utilized to create a continuous chain of alliterative links". If we accept Carney's view, the reverse is true. It is precisely the fact that alliteration and syntax are kept out of phase that constitutes the basic principle. It ensures that a break in syntax never coincides with a break of alliteration, just as in good brickwork the joint in one row may never coincide with a joint in the row above.

[10] Carney 1989 p. 41.

Dind Rig,
ród tomm
tenbath,
tricha fariach
fó brón
bebsat[11]

which he translates as follows:

'At the Fortress of Kings, red ridge of death by fire, thirty sub-kings died in anguish.'

It will be noted that the only amendment needed to bring the example from *Bretha Nemed* given above into line with Carney's system is to divide the sixth line as given by Breatnach into two phrases, which can be done without violence to the alliteration.

However, it will at the same time be noted that the assumption that although the syntactic units given by Breatnach can indeed be interpreted as two-accent phrases, a certain amount of interpretative licence is required to do so, and that certain of the words bearing alliteration would appear to be unstressed in such an interpretation. It is thus unsurprising that a case has been made for an analysis of the system placing much less reliance on the accent than that suggested by Carney,[12] regarding phonemic organization as the overriding metrical prerequisite.[13] Scholars supporting either of these views generally agree that, whatever the exact basis of the earliest Irish metrics, syllable-counting was not an integral feature.

The opposing position is that adopted by Calvert Watkins 1963, that all Irish verse, including that of the most archaic period, is based on an Indo-European iso-syllabic system. Though greeted initially with enthusiam,[14] the argument has several weaknesses, as exposed in particular by Campanile and Wagner:[15] Calvert Watkins' analysis is based on only a very small sample of texts, and ignores the problem of *roscada*.[16]

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[11]   Carney 1989 p. 44. I have treated each of Carney's "phrases" as a separate line to facilitate comparison with the *Bretha Nemed* example. Lack of space prevents me from giving any account of Carney's treatment of the text here other than a warning that his text is highly emended (cf. the equally highly emended edition in Campanile 1988). For a diplomatic edition see O Brien 1962; the poem is also to be found in editions by Stokes (1901), Kuno Meyer (1914), Greene (1955) and Wagner (1976).

[12]   Kalygin 1993 ch. 2, pp. 81-91, gives an excellent discussion of the subject and further literature.

[13]   The foundation for analyses of this nature appears to have been laid by the studies of Roman Jakobson; of especial interest for the present investigation are the articles "Linguistics and Poetics" (Rudy 1981 pp. 18-47, esp. pp. 43-4) and "Subliminal verbal patterning in poetry" (ibid. pp. 136-47, esp. 137-40).

[14]   cf. Turville-Petre 1976 p. xxviii, Ruth & Winfried Lehmann 1975 p. 140.

[15]   Campanile 1979 pp. 181-4, Wagner 1977 esp. p. 2.

[16]   For a discussion of the status of these passages of rhythmical prose in obscure style and on the borders of metricality see the articles by Corthals and Tranter in Tranter/Tristram 1989 pp. 201-20 and 221-40 respectively, also Corthals 1989 pp. 41-60. A useful summary of the various types of *roscad* is given in Breatnach 1991

Even if Watkins' premise of evolution from isosyllabic metrics is regarded as tenable, it must be conceded that all sense of isosyllabicity had been lost by the time the earliest metrical texts were composed in the form we now have them.[17] Adherence to syllabic regularity in the stanzaic metres must therefore also be regarded as an innovation. It appears to replace regularity of accent (assuming we accept this as a feature of the earlier poetry); the position of accent is regulated only in the final cadence of each line, and then, according to the writers of the metrical tracts at least, only as an essential concomitant of the syllabic regulation of this cadence.

Ceallach's thirteenth stanza thus spans the two systems. From the old system, following Carney's accentual analysis, it retains the pattern of two-accent phrases:

> *an*amain *ird*airc
> *ua*sal a *slon*nud.
> nis *den* and *duin*e etc.,

but alliteration occurs within the phrase instead of at the linkage, while the use of internal and end-rhyme, and the isosyllabic structure of the whole are features of the newer system.

In the remainder of Ceallach's examples the two-accent phrase structure is not present; they belong to the *nuacrotha*, 'new forms', mentioned in the First Metrical Tract.[18]

3.1.2   Non-syllabic verse forms in Icelandic

The earliest known Icelandic metrical texts are all developments of the Common Germanic alliterative long-line traditionally assumed to be based on the features of stress-accent and alliteration.[19]

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pp. 199-204. If one follows P.L. Henry's analysis of them as consisting of two - or three - accent phrases extended by alliterating ornament (Henry 1978 p. 129, but cf. L. Breatnach 1991 pp. 200-1) one perceives them as existing in a close relationship to two-accent alliterative forms in Carney's terms as analysed in the example above.

[17]   cf. Campanile's comments on *Amra Choluimb Chille*, 1979 pp. 194-7.

[18]   MV 1 p. 23 'it núacrutha na haisti seo; ar it núalitríde arrangatar iat' 'These are new forms, for it is those of the new letters who made them.'

[19]   Controversy in the metrical analysis of long-line based metres has centred on the rôle of isochrony within the system. The fundamental analysis laid down by Sievers, still the basis of important works on the subject such as Kuhn 1983 and Árnason 1992, makes no attempt to produce isochronous lines; the opposite position is that of Heusler, restated by Pope, in which lines are subjected to a musical notation. This chapter does not take account of the reawakening of discussion on Old English metrics, symptomatized by the work of Russom (1987), Kendall (1991), Cable (1991) and Fulk (1992). Cable in particular is adamant in rejecting the traditional "strong-stress" theory of Old English long-line versification in favour of a syllabic theory; his approach is thus the diametrical opposite of Árnason.

However, Icelandic pre-syllabic poetry shows a considerably stricter regulation of form than that seen in the Old English examples. Although still technically stichic, since long lines are not linked by any metrical feature, we frequently observe syntactic organization in units of eight half-lines,[20] and although there is no strict isosyllabicity, the variations in line length are kept within strict limits. The pre-syllabic forms are generally divided into the following groups:

a) The basic long-line form, essentially stichic, is to be found in the metre *fornyrðislag* 'old narrative metre'. The number of syllables per half-line in this form varies between three and five, though Snorri, in the following example, allows himself less latitude:

> Ort er of ræsi
> þann er rýðr granar
> vargs og ylgjar
> ok vápn litar;
> þat mun æ lifa
> nema ǫld farisk,
> bragninga lof
> eða bili heimar.[21]

Uncharacteristically, Snorri incorporates this metre into his panegyric; elsewhere in Icelandic literature, it is the standard metre for narrative.

The variant form *málaháttr*, on the other hand, is characterized by a six-syllable line, though pentasyllables are common and tetrasyllables occur.

> Munða ek mildingi,
> þá er Mœra hilmi
> fluttak fjǫgur kvæði,
> fimtán stórgjafar.
> Hvar viti áðr orta
> með œðra hætti
> mærð of menglǫtuð
> maðr und himins skautum?[22]

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[20]   I reserve the term *stanzaic* for forms which are metrically indivisible, regardless of syntax, and use *pseudostanzaic* for metrically divisible forms which are regularly organized on the basis of syntax.

[21]   'That has been composed in praise of the prince who reddens the lips of wolf and she-wolf and stains weapons which will live for ever unless men die out and the worlds collapse.' *Háttatal* st. 96, text as in Faulkes 1991 p. 38. The syllable count of the last line would according to Snorri's own principles be reduced to five by the slurring of *eða*, cf. Faulkes ed. cit. p. 8.

[22]   'From the generous one I received fifteen great gifts when I presented four poems before the prince of Mœre. Where before would any man under the face of heaven know of praise composed for a ring-breaker with nobler measures.' *Háttatal* st. 95, Faulkes 1991 p. 37.

This metre, like *fornyrðislag*, is generally to be found as a vehicle for narrative.

b) The metre *ljóðaháttr* shows a further step towards genuinely stanzaic organiza-
tion. It can be seen as a six-line unit, in which lines 1,2,4 and 5 correspond to
those in *fornyrðislag*, while lines 3 and 6 each contain three stresses, two of them
alliterating, and can vary between four and eight syllables in length.

> Gløggva grein hefi ek gert til bragar,
> svá er tírœtt hundrað talit;
> hróðrs ørverðr skala maðr heitinn vera
> ef sá fær alla háttu ort.[23]

The principle of variation within specific limits rather than strict control of sylla-
bles, present in the traditionally narrative or gnomic long-line based metres, is
taken one stage further by the metre *kviðuháttr,* used in *Ynglingatal,* in which
lines of three and four syllables tend to alternate:

> Kveðkat ek dul
> nema Dyggva hrør
> glitnis Gná
> at gamni hefr,
> því at Jódís
> ulfs ok Narfa
> konungmann
> kjósa skyldi
> ok allvald
> Yngva þjóðar
> Loka mær
> at leikum hefr.[24]

Ynglingatal, a genealogical poem ascribed to Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni, is in subject mat-
ter closer to the panegyric body of skaldic poetry than that of the religious or
mythological narrative texts of the *Edda.* Nonetheless, there is still no occurrence
of internal rhyme, nor any regulation of cadence, while the twelve lines above
form a syntactically defined 4 + 8 line stanza.

In conclusion, one can say that in both languages it appears that a system of
versification involving accent and alliteration was gradually displaced by one in
which stricter regulation of syllable count, rhyme and cadence were required. In

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[23] 'I have made clear distinctions in poetry, a tenfold hundred in number; no-one shall
     be called unskilled in poetry if he can compose all these forms.' *Háttatal* st. 100,
     Faulkes 1991 p. 39.

[24] Text from Turville-Petre 1976 p. 7, where this translation is supplied:

     'I tell no secret, that the horse-goddess (Death) has the corpse of Dyggvi for her
     delight; for the sister of the wolf and of Narfi has taken the king to herself. The
     daughter of Loki has the all-powerful one of the race of Yngvi for her pleasure.'

Irish,[25] the model is one of substitution, with one set of restrictions removed or downgraded, and another set up in their place. In Icelandic, on the other hand, there is no sign that an earlier set of restrictions has been downgraded or removed. The restrictions of the long-line based metres are all retained, while a further set is superimposed, giving a system of considerably increased complexity.

3.2   Models of metrical transition and their applicability

Four basic models have been applied to account for metrical transition in either of the two cultures:

1) Metrical congeniality
2) Cultural borrowing
3) Personal inspiration
4) Reversion.

In the present analysis prominence will also be given to a fifth aspect, arguably inherent in both 1) (metrical congeniality) and 2) (cultural borrowing), but significant enough to deserve separate treatment:

5) Medium.

3.2.1   Congeniality

3.2.1.1   Irish

According to this model, as formulated by Wolfgang Meid,[26] "every language develops a congenial metrical system". The theory, as represented by Roman Jakobson and the Prague School,[27] regards changes in the metrical system of a given language as resulting from linguistic constraints arising as the language develops, which render it increasingly difficult, and finally impossible, to com-

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[25]   The neat transition apparently demonstrated in 3.1 above is of course unlikely to have been reflected in fact; it does, however, indicate the possibility of a spectrum of change, in that the stanzaic system need not have replaced stichic versification wholesale in all areas of metrical composition.

[26]   W. Meid 1991 pp. 13-5.

[27]   cf. Küper 1988 pp. 16-8.

pose within an existing metrical system, so that a new one evolves.[28] To apply this model to Irish and Icelandic we must be able therefore to specify those factors which made syllable-counting metres more easily practicable than those preceding them.

In both languages there was a strong tonic accent in the relevant period, falling on the initial syllable of the word-nucleus.[29]

In Irish, the prototonic accent preceded the loss of final syllables in the Primitive Irish period,[30] and caused syncope during the period of the first written records[31] (the period of Archaic Old Irish).[32] Its persistent effect during the course of the Old Irish period led to reduction of unstressed vowels,[33] affecting perceptions of rhyme in the stanzaic-syllabic verse: later verse rhymes indiscriminately between unstressed vowels, whereas in the earlier period only identical unstressed vowels are permitted in rhyming pairs.[34]

There was no linguistic development which forced Irish poets to replace a system of versification in which the accent was a relevant feature by another system in which it was irrelevant or at best marginal, and there was no development that gave increasing prominence to word-endings, thereby favouring rhyme, or that levelled out syllable quality or quantity, thereby favouring isosyllabic metre. We therefore cannot apply the congeniality model to explain the change in this case.

3.2.1.2   Icelandic

There are linguistic developments within the language that facilitated this increase; there are none that compelled it.

The pre-existing Icelandic system, as described above, involved strictregulation of accent and alliteration, and variation of syllable count within reasonably strict limits. There is no reason to assume that this syllabic strictness was a matter of specific metrical regulation; it is far rather a product of the syncope which acted on the language during the period of Primitive Old Norse, which had the effect of severely reducing the number of unstressed syllables, as seen in the following example from the Tune stone:[35]

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28   For my reservations about the universal applicability of this model see Tranter 1991 pp. 245-7.
29   cf. H. Wagner 1962-4 pp. 265-72.
30   In this section I follow the chronology of sound-changes in Primitive and Archaic Old Irish given in K.H. Jackson 1953 pp. 141-3. Cf. Thurneysen 1946 pp. 58-61.
31   Thurneysen 1946 pp. 67-9, esp. p. 68 paragraph 109.
32   For a delineation of the boundaries between the various stages of Irish and a discussion of the sources by means of which this delimitation can be made see Schmidt 1991 pp. 71, 74-9.
33   Thurneysen 1946 pp. 27, 58-9, 60.
34   Murphy 1961/73 p. 31.
35   Dated ca. 400 (Düwel 1968/83 p. 32).

ek wiwaʀ after woduride witanda halaiban
worahto runoʀ (20 syllables)

which Kristjánsson reconstructs in 13th century Icelandic as follows:[36]

Ek Vír eptir Óðríði vitandhleifa[37]
orta rúnar (15 syllables)

'I V. in memory of O. the giver of bread wrought runes.'

Both the Primitive Old Norse verse of the Tune stone and the Old Icelandic reconstruction function adequately as three Germanic half-lines, despite the 25% loss of syllables in the transition to Icelandic. The syllabic latitude[38] of the long-line metre, coupled with the continuing prototonic accent lending audibility to alliteration, suggest that in Icelandic, as in Irish, there was no compelling linguistic motivation for change.

However, there were features in the language that made the development of a more strictly regulated form of verse more practicable than had previously been the case than in Primitive Old Norse or in other Germanic languages.

In particular, the syncope referred to above facilitated both stricter control of syllable count (the apparently co-incidental development of definite limits on syllabic variation in the non-isosyllabic metres mentioned in that section being an indication of this facilitation) and the introduction of internal tonic syllable rhyme.[39]

The loss of unstressed syllables through syncope throws variation in syllable quantity into a sharper relief. Quantity seems to have played no regulatory rôle in the stichic system, and to have become significant in the syllabic-stanzaic system.

Despite this, the congeniality model is inadequate as an explanation for the adoption of syllabic-stanzaic form, either in Icelandic or in Irish. It is noteworthy that the transition is more thoroughgoing in Irish, where linguistic reasons seem fewest, than in Icelandic, where there are at least certain features which would encourage metrical innovation, assuming that other stimuli for change were working in the same direction.

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[36]   Jónas Kristjánsson 1988 p. 28.

[37]   Kristjánsson does not divide this compound, which bears two lexical stresses.

[38]   The short lines of *málaháttr* contrast with the long, rambling structure of Middle English alliterative verse such as Langland's or the not dissimilar lines of Aelfric's metrical homilies, and yet in all these forms the basic structure of the Germanic long line is unmistakable.

[39]   This latter point is dealt with in more detail in Ch. 6.

3.2.2   Cultural borrowing

According to this model, the metrical system in question adopts features belonging to the system of another culture at the expense of congeniality.

To have caused metrical transition, a contact culture would need to have affected Ireland prior to ca. A.D. 600, and Western Scandinavia prior to ca. 800.[40]

3.2.2.1   Ireland

Ireland had contacts with Gaelic, Welsh, Pictish and Germanic-speaking cultures in the British Isles, and with Romance, Germanic and Brittonic-speaking cultures on the European mainland.

Of these, the only cultures likely to have been using metres resembling the stanzaic-syllabic forms under discussion were Welsh and Romance.

Our earliest extant Welsh poetry exists in MSS of the late 12th to 13th century,[41] in the form of panegyric concerning historical figures and events of the late 6th/early 7th centuries. End-rhyme, alliteration and internal rhyme are features of this verse, which is in some cases isosyllabic, in others variable in syllabic count. Stanza form as such is not yet present, though the *awdlau* ('odes, rhapsodies') into which *Y Gododdin* is divided may be regarded as incipient stanzaic structure. The part played by accent in the system is still much in debate.[42]

Romance culture in this context refers to the areas forming the former Roman (Western) Empire and is thus inseparable from the culture of Western Christendom. Romance verse in this sense thus sees the gradual breakdown of the quantitative system of Classical Latin and its replacement by a stanzaic system involving syllable-count and end-rhyme.

Those scholars who favour the cultural borrowing theory as an explanation of the transition in Irish derive the new metres from the Romance systems, these having been imported in the wake of the Conversion and further developed in Hiberno-Latin poetry.[43]

Under Romance systems we may subsume the following:

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[40]   At this stage the West Norse ancestors of the settlers of Iceland were still living on the Scandinavian mainland; the first settlement on Iceland, that of Ingólfr Arnarson, is recorded in *Íslendingabók* as having taken place in 874 (Benediktsson 1968, ÍF 1, i, pp. cxxxv-viii).

[41]   *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* 'Black Book of Carmarthen' late 12th or early 13th century, *Llyfr Aneirin* 'Book of Aneirin' ca. 1250, *Llyfr Taliesin* 'Book of Taliesin' ca. 1275 (cf. D.S. Evans 1970 p. xxi, Ifor Williams 1968 p. xiv).

[42]   cf. M. Haycock, "Probleme der frühmittelalterlichen kymrischen Metrik" in Tristram 1991 pp. 155-71, esp. pp. 156-9.

[43]   The most influential article supporting this position remains Thurneysen 1885.

Quantitative-stichic,[44] classical versification as practised as an academic disci-
   pline[45] on the Continent, notably in Gallia, and learned by Irish missionaries
   and students there.
Quantitative-stanzaic,[46] stanzas being defined syntactically, presumably rein-
   forced musically, but not by any recurring metrical pattern.
Rithmus,[47] i.e. isosyllabic verse without regard to accent or quantity.

Either of the latter two classes could have provided the impulse towards change to
isosyllabic metre with regular cadence; Ambrosian hymns, though quantitative,
would appear merely isosyllabic in performance, especially when sung.[48]

   A theory of borrowing would thus assume a basic framework of Latin metrics,
received through the medium of sung performance, and influenced by a latent tra-
dition of *anagrammatic*[49] metrics, which manifests itself in the full exploitation of
the language's potential for rhymes of various types and for alliteration.

3.2.2.2   Iceland

Scandinavia had few recorded contacts in the period leading up to 800. If we
extend the period to 850 the picture is completely different. By this time the
Viking voyager had reached all the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic, the
Channel, the Atlantic coasts of Europe, and the North-West Mediterranean. The
trade-route eastwards was being opened up via Kiev and Novgorod, the Volga
and the Dniepr to the Black Sea and Byzantium.

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[44]   e.g. the Hilarian *Ymnum dicat:*
       Ymnum dicat turba fratrum, ymnum cantus personet
       Christo regi concinnantes laudes demus debitas. (Raby 1959 p. 5)

[45]   Quantitative verse only had a regular audible ictus when the poet, as in the case of
       Ymnum dicat above, took pains to let stress accent and long quantity coincide
       wherever possible.

[46]   As in Ambrosian hymnody.

[47]   As in Augustinus' *Psalmus contra partem Donati.*

[48]   For a discussion of this phenomenon and its effects see Klopsch 1991 pp. 101-6.

[49]   I use the term *anagrammatic* with some caution here to refer to the conscious appli-
       cation of the principle described as *subliminal patterning* in Jakobson 1979 p. 139,
       involving recurrence of individual isolated phonemes. Obviously, in anagrammatical
       metre in the stricter sense, (cf. ibid. p. 14) such isolated phonemes should be suscep-
       tible of reassembly to form key lexemes, as suggested for certain Irish poems in
       Kalyguine 1993 p. 88. For application of the anagrammatic principle in my looser
       definition to Welsh, Irish, Icelandic, see Travis 1943, esp. pp. 138-9. His examples
       for Icelandic, apparently taken from T.G. Jones 1934, and showing cynghanedd-like
       structures in Icelandic lines, are to be treated with caution, the apparent regularity
       deriving in each case from the syntactic parallelism of the construction involved.

The earliest preserved skaldic text, the *dróttkvætt* stanza on the Karlevi stone, dated at around 1000,[50] appears in Sweden; known skalds are on the other hand exclusively Norwegian in the period prior to the settlement of Iceland in 870, shortly after which the Icelanders come to have a near-monopoly on the art as far as preserved texts are concerned. These facts are not mutually exclusive, of course, and it is conceivable that in the case of Karlevi a West-Norse poet may have been employed to compose a panegyric (to a Danish chieftain, as the text makes clear) from which a single stanza was taken to serve as the monument's inscription, just as it is conceivable that an East-Norse poet learned his trade from a Westerner. Similarly the arguments suggested by Kuhn in favour of an East-Norse origin of skaldic forms,[51] and Schier's reconstructions of the lost literary tradition of Sweden,[52] remain hypothetical until we have skaldic texts at our disposal which can be established with reasonable certainty to be East-Norse and at least as early as the texts ascribed to West-Norse skalds.[53]

Within the areas most accessible to West-Norse contacts, the only two cultures with an established tradition of stanzaic-syllabic metrics in the vernacular language were Wales and Ireland. Of these two, the Irish system is the closer to that adopted by the skalds,[54] and contacts with Ireland[55] were closer and more prolonged than those with Wales.[56]

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[50]   Düwel 1983 pp. 74-5.

[51]   Kuhn 1983 pp. 264, 344, in which he remarks that of the names of skalds recorded as having worked before Bragi, only one is incontrovertibly Norse in origin, while king Ragnarr loðbrók, to whom Snorri ascribes one of the forms in *Háttatal*, was Danish.

[52]   Handout for lecture of 6. Dec. 1990 to the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für skandinavische Studien, Zürich, entitled "Die Anfänge der Literatur in Island und Schweden". Schier's contention was that the high proportion of vernacular literature preserved in the West Norse area, in particular Iceland, was an accident of transmission, the result of differing monastic traditions in the two countries. Icelandic monasticism was Benedictine, with a concomitant interest in *auctores* and encouragement of historical learning. The first Swedish foundations were Cistercian, with a more austere approach to learning, succeeded by Dominicans, whose attention focussed on *artes* rather than *auctores,* leading to an emphasis on texts dealing with pastoral care and mysticism rather than on history. In this intellectual climate the preservation of vernacular literature was far less likely to be encouraged than in Benedictine Iceland.

[53]   Prof. Hans-Peter Naumann is at present engaged on research into metrical runic inscriptions from Sweden which should throw further light on this question. Publication is envisaged in the series *Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie* (oral communication).

[54]   In Welsh, stanzaic poetry proper, as opposed to rhapsodic form, can be said to begin with the development of the *englyn* form during the course of the ninth century. Cf. Ifor Williams 1935 pp. lxxxiv-lxxxviii, J.M. Jones 1925 pp. 310-27.

[55]   The contacts of the first Icelandic settlers with Irish anchorites are unlikely to have made more than a minimal contribution to West Norse culture. Cf. Sigurðsson 1988 p. 25.

[56]   Though there is evidence of transient settlement around the coastline, there is nothing to compare with the establishment of the Viking Kingdom of Dublin, or the ports of Wexford, Waterford and Limerick. Cf. Ó Corráin 1972 pp. 89-96.

None of the cultures with which the West Norse had extensive contact in the Early Viking Age seem unduly likely to have been considered prestige cultures of such a nature that their vernacular metrical systems had to be copied come what may, and the two Celtic cultures mentioned are unlikely to have been any exception.[57] The influence of such a culture is thus more likely to be that of a stimulus towards the development of new forms rather than the wholesale replacement of one system by another.

The remaining path for possible cultural borrowing involves contact by West Norse with the liturgy of the Church, and a corresponding exposure to stanzaic-syllabic metre through hymnody.

3.2.3   Personal inspiration

Discussion of this theory in Old Norse centres on the figure of Bragi Boddason, the first named Norse skald, and the rôle he played in the development of skaldic form. Until it can be proved that this Bragi was a historical figure and that the stanzas attributed to him are genuine this must remain speculative.[58]

3.2.4   Reversion

As the name suggests, reversion implies a return of a culture to a previously abandoned system of metrical composition. Typically, this might occur after a period in which a less congenial system has been superimposed. Once the forces causing the retention of the superimposed system cease to exist, the original system is once more free to flourish, and re-emerges as a newly developed system adapted to contemporary demands, linguistic and social. Conceivable grounds for this reversion are the removal of a political or aesthetic elite class for whose benefit the superimposed poetry had been composed, or the emergence of a culture into political independence after a period of subservience.

Two models for reversion have been suggested for Irish metrics, those of Calvert Watkins (1963) and James Carney (1971).

Calvert Watkins sees the syllabic-stanzaic metres as a reapplication of an Indo-European isosyllabic principle. The alliterative-accentual forms are held by Watkins to be a decayed version of two original metres, both isosyllabic, an original long line and an original short line. These had in the meantime been affected by syncope and proclisis, and were subject to catalexis, so that their appearance is that of syllabic near-irregularity.

Syncope is a phenomenon closely connected with the workings of the expiratorial initial accent which favours the development of alliterative verse, yet Watkins

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57   But cf. Laxness 1952 rep. 1988 ch. 24 p. 211.
58   cf. Turville-Petre 1976 pp. xxiv-xxvi.

makes no attempt to establish the rôle played by accent in this verse; the reversion is in his terms merely one in which corruptions are removed and the isosyllabic system restored to its pristine condition.

For Carney, isosyllabicity, far from being a pristine state to which the practitioners of the Early Middle Irish period were able to restore their corrupted system, was "an upper-class aberration [...] it lasted a millennium". He postulates a continuous substratum of accentual metrics running through the whole of the period in which stanzaic-syllabic forms were preferred by the elite, the patrons of the poets whose works have been preserved, from the inception of the form up to the "Flight of the Earls" after the Battle of Kinsale in 1607. This substratum survived as oral tradition, to re-emerge in a modified form as the *amhrán* of the modern period.

Of the two versions of the theory, Carney's has the advantage of being able to specify a distinct cause for the reversion; removal of patronage. He does not, however, explain how in the interim the (in his terms) uncongenial metre comes to enjoy the patronage of the elite and attain its position of dominance in the first instance. To explain this stage of the transition we must refer to the "cultural borrowing" model.

Watkins' model, on the other hand, presents us with an apparently unmotivated reversion to long-departed Indo-European standards. It raises the question as to why, when an originally syllabic metre had decayed so far as to have become unrecognizable, the attempt to restore it to regularity was made on a basis uncongenial to the language; why should poets attempt to produce Indo-European metrics (of which they can have had neither theoretical nor practical knowledge), in a language that no longer possessed the structural prerequisites for doing so?

3.2.5   Change of medium

The manner in which a metrical composition is composed, preserved, performed and received exerts a similar influence on its form as does the phonetic system in which composition takes place. A change in medium involves a change in the demands placed on those producing and receiving metrical texts, and can thus exert forces capable of destabilizing an established metrical system and accelerating the introduction of new features congenial to the new medium. Depending on the medium, it can also act conservatively, by preserving fixed texts according to an obsolete phonetic system, or facilitate borrowing, by permitting easy import of texts from other cultures.

A change of medium also brings with it a change of ideology. When the change is the result of import, more is imported than a mere system of communication; not only the medium is changed, also the ideas that will be communicated.

In both the cultures under examination, a predominantly oral culture with an epigraphic script imported the medium of ink on parchment as a concomitant to accepting the ideologies of Western Christendom. This Christianity regarded itself in various respects as the religion of the word; its basis lay in a series of books, so

that *biblia* "books" came to refer exclusively to the Holy Scriptures; Icelandic and Irish are here no exception. Acceptance of Christianity thus meant acceptance of the parchment codex and the development of techniques for producing it; it also meant adoption of techniques for analysing what was written within its bindings. Once these techniques have been adopted, they are applied not only to the holy scriptures, but to all written literature; and to the practitioners of the written word, all literature is written literature.

The paradigm for such adoption in our period is the tract *Málskrúðsfræði* by Óláfr Hvítaskáld. This tract forms part of the so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise*, a vernacular grammar closely following Donatus and Priscianus, written at the beginning of the fourteenth century. By adopting Donatus' procedure, one with its roots in pre-christian classical antiquity, Óláfr is automatically opting for an analysis of language based on written units. The analysis of figures of speech given in the ensuing *Málskrúðsfræði*, using examples from the skalds to replace those from classical poets in the original, thus clearly binds the vernacular poetic tradition into a grammatical system based on the letter and the letter-derived syllable.

3.2.6   Summary

It is unrealistic to expect any metrical transition to have taken place as the exclusive result of only one of the above-mentioned models' having exerted its influence on the system; apart from ii) and iv), which are mutually exclusive, a combination of any or all of the above-mentioned factors can be expected in varying proportions.

3.3   Metrical transition and the advent of written grammar

3.3.1   Grammar and Metrics in Ireland - chronological relations

Latin grammar was imported to Ireland well before stanzaic-syllabic verse appears in the vernacular,[59] and was probably already being used to analyse the vernacular by the end of the seventh century.[60] Latin grammar is the basis of the

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[59]   For a précis account of the development of grammar in mediaeval Ireland and select bibliography see A. Ahlqvist 1987.

[60]   cf. Ahlqvist 1982 pp. 48-50, Herren 1992 p. 68.

Auraicept na nÉces[61] dated "not later than the eighth century", while its traditional ascription to Cenn Faelad Sapiens would give a *terminus post quem non* of A.D. 680.[62] It is likely that grammars designed specifically for use in Ireland were in use from the immediate post-Conversion period, i.e. from ca. A.D. 500.[63]

The earliest extant grammars generally held to be of Irish provenance are the *Ars Malsachani, Anonymus ad Cuimnanum,* and the *Ars Ambrosiana,* all dated to approximately 700 A.D.[64] A degree of controversy exists as to whether these texts represent the genuine work of Hiberno-Latin grammarians; cf. in particular Law 1982, who would wish to ascribe all grammars hitherto accepted as Hiberno-Latin (cf. Löfstedt 1965 pp. 20-5, Holtz 1981 pp. 264-314) to Continental or Anglo-Saxon sources. This can be seen as part of a general reassessment of the sometimes extravagant claims made for the part played by Ireland in transmitting and developing the learning of early Western Christianity (cf. Delz 1991).

For the purposes of the present examination it can be assumed that a tradition of grammatical analysis sufficient to produce a Latin-Irish contrastive tract was fully developed by 800 at the latest and that Ireland was in a position to produce original grammatical texts based on the standard works of antiquity by A.D. 700.[65]

The poem *Amra Choluim chille* 'Praise of Colmcille' is traditionally assumed to have been written shortly after the saint's death in 597. Colmcille was a hymnodist

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61   The original text gathered a large volume of accretions in the course of transmission, the earliest extant manuscript containing it being the late 14th century Book of Ballymote. The full text is to be found in Calder 1917, whilst Ahlqvist 1982 is an attempt to isolate and analyse a core text which can be equated with reasonable proximity with the original 7th-8th century Primer.

62   Ahlqvist 1982 p. 18 and literature given there.

63   Despite wishing to play down Irish learnedness, Vivian Law (1982 pp. 9-10) points clearly to the basic problem facing the emergent Irish Christian community: "how was one to go about teaching a language with which there was no contact except through books?", and her answer, "It was their works, the grammars of late Antiquity, which provided the Christian teachers of the British Isles with the foundation for their instruction" is as valid for Ireland as it is for mainland Britain.

64   Law rejects such an early dating for *Malsachanus*, cf. "Malsachanus reconsidered, a fresh look at a Hiberno-Latin grammarian", in CMCS 1, 1981 pp. 83-93. For the dating of *Ars Ambrosiana* cf. the study of the Irish glosses in the MS (Codex Ambrosianus L 22) by Thurneysen in ZCP 1933 p. 208, for its insular provenance the comparison with *Auraicept na nÉces* by B. Bischoff in *Sacris Erudiri* 6, p. 205, and a summary of the evidence with references in Löfstedt 1965 pp. 20-1. Law, accepting the dating, argues Mediterranean provenance and an Irish copyist; 1982 pp. 95-7. Law will concede for *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum* "an Irish setting, even if the author was a pupil of the Irish, in Northumbria perhaps, rather than an Irishman himself" (Law 1982 p. 87).

65   I am following here the argument of Holtz 1982 pp. 271-2, concerning the relative chronology of Irish grammatical tracts. Particular note should be taken of the part played by *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum* in this argumentation, since, even adopting the reservations uttered by Law (op. cit.) as to the provenance of the grammars Holtz cites, it appears probable that this work was symptomatic of grammatical instruction in a sufficiently Irish environment as to represent by and large the state of learning in Ireland itself at the turn of the seventh century.

himself and used syllabic-stanzaic metre in Latin.[66] The panegyric does not use these verse-forms, however, being composed, as far as we can tell, in a variant of the accentual-alliterative metre. It is an obscure text that has been subject to continual glossing; we must treat any attempt to use it as evidence with the caution that texts of this nature generally demand. It does suggest, however, that at the stage that the *Amra* was composed, stanzaic-syllabic metre was not an accepted form of vernacular panegyric, not even to praise a saint to whom such metres were familiar in Latin.[67]

The bulk of the evidence suggests that the seventh century in Ireland saw, as two parts of a single development, the application of late Latin grammar to the vernacular and the adoption of late Latin forms into the indigenous metrical system. We can regard both processes of assimilation as having been complete by the time of compilation of the canonical portion of the *Auraicept na nÉces* and the composition of the series of hymns to the Virgin known as *Poems of Blathmac;* this means, at the most cautious estimates, by the end of the eighth century.

It will be clear from the above that the early syllabic-stanzaic poetry developed in an environment of monastic learning. Whichever view we take as to its origins, its development has from the earliest stages been conditioned by the availability of visual display in the form of the parchment manuscript, and of Latin models of metrical analysis.

Latin versification for the Irish meant hymnody, and conversely, pre-existing hymnody will have been the prime model for Irish metrical composition in Latin. This raises the question as to what metrical features of this hymnody were recognized as such by the Irish and which of these features could have been incorporated into the vernacular syllabic-stanzaic verse.

Above all, we need to examine the rôle of the stress accent, bearing in mind the fact that Irish vernacular syllabic-stanzaic verse ignores the accent except at the cadence.[68]

On the other hand, since the Carolingian era at least, we are familiar with Latin hymnody in which the accent plays an important part, verse being constructed on the tonosyllabic foot-substitution principle, in which the stress-accent substitutes the long quantity. This principle is inherent in Bede's famous remarks about rhythmical compositions:

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[66]   cf. the *abecedarium Altus Prosator,* written in rhyming octosyllables with accentual regularity only in the trisyllabic cadence. (For the importance of this hymn and those like it in the development of insular metrics see now Orchard 1994, esp. pp. 29-60.) Unlike Augustinus, Colmcille uses rhymes in couplets and a stanzaic form, the stanzas being twelve octosyllables in length. The stanzas, in conformity with the *abecedarium* form, are determined by the appropriate letter of the alphabet as the initial of the first line.

[67]   The existence of a considerable collection of these in the Bangor Antiphoner of ca. 680 A.D. suggests that the form was well established by the time of the saint's death.

[68]   The following section should now if possible be read in the light of Orchard's work on the Anglo-Latin octosyllable, Orchard 1994 pp. 19-72.

Videtur autem rithmus metris esse consimilis, quae est [69]*verborum modulata conpo-sitio, non metrica ratione, sed* **numero syllabarum**[70] *ad iudicium aurium examinata, ut sunt carmina vulgarum poetarum. Et quidem rithmus per se sine metro non potest, metrum vero sine rithmo esse non potest. Quod liquidius ita definitur: metrum id est ratio cum modulatione, rithmus modulatio sine ratione.*[71] **Plerumtamen casu quo-dam invenies etiam rationem in rithmo, non artifici moderatione servata, sed dono et ipsa modulatione ducente** quem vulgares poetae necesse est rustice, docti faciant docte. Quomodo instar iambici metri pulcherrime factus est hymnus ille praeclarus:

Rex aeterne Domine,
rerum creator omnium,
qui eras ante saecula
semper cum Patre Filius;

et alii Ambrosiani non pauci. Item ad formam metri trochaici canunt hymnum de die iudicii per alphabetum:

Apparebit repentina
dies magna domini,
fur obscura velut nocte[72]
inprovisos occupans.

Here Bede seems to apply the term *rithmus* to tonosyllabic metres; in W.H. Jones' words:

His short chapter on rhythm was the first recognition of isosyllabic stress rhythm as a literary form, though Aethelwald's letter and verses to Aldhelm had previously identi-fied its existence.

His formulation "ad formam metri trochaici" to describe *Apparebit repentina* cer-tainly suggests that *rithmus* to Bede meant the emulation of quantitative feet in the placing of stressed and unstressed syllables, as the example bears out.[73] This

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[69]   The following section in italics is to be found almost word for word (with only very slight modifications due to the dialogue form and occasional alterations of word order) in a tract ascribed to Marius Victorinus, the *Ars Palaemonis de metrica institutione*, Keil Gramm. Lat. VI pp. 290-1, and cf. pp. xviii-xix of the *praefatio* to that volume.

[70]   Palaemon has "numerosa scansione" here.

[71]   The following sentence is cited by Norberg (1958 p. 133) as evidence that Bede was aware of poems in which the accentual and the quantitative principles were com-bined.

[72]   This line illustrates the phenomenon commented on by Norberg (1958 p. 139) that the third line of the Ambrosian stanza tends to show irregularity of cadence (/x/x instead of x/xx), and absence of rhyme or assonance. Norberg suggests that this results from the stanzas' having been sung to a melodic sequence aaba.

[73]   cf. Bulst 1976 p. 25. W. Meyer (1905-36 2 p. 7) draws attention to the fact that Bede's first example, *rex aeterne*, contains a large proportion of lines in which the tonosyllabic analysis does not hold, concluding that the only regularity is in the cadences. Elsewhere (vol. 3 p. 139) he concludes that 'Erst Beda gibt den rhyth-mischen Gedichten diesen Namen. In diesem [scil. *de rithmo*] excerpiert er die besprochene Stelle des sogenannten Palaemon, wo er "numerosa scansione" zu "numero syllabarum" ändert'. D. Norberg (1958 p. 87 n. 2) concludes that 'Bède

raises the following question: if tonosyllabic metres were familiar to Bede and Aldhelm, there is every likelihood of their being equally familiar in Ireland.[74] Why were they not used?

However, tonosyllabicity is not implicit in the definition Bede inherits from the pseudo-Victorine tract, in which the nub of the definition lies in the contrast between the *ratio cum modulatione* 'proportion with variation' of metre and the *modulatio sine ratione* 'variation without proportion' of rhythm. This points to a definition in which quantitative metre observes the degrees of proportion by which the duration of short and long syllables form the ratio 1:2, whereas rhythm observes no such proportion, a definition equally applicable to isosyllabic metres without regulation of the stress-accent.[75]

Augustine's *Psalmus contra partem Donati*, quoted by Murphy as containing a forerunner of Irish rhyme, provides a model of *rithmus* in this sense,[76] a form which the Father adopted, as he states in his *Retractions*, so that the metrical freedom allowed by the form should render it unnecessary for him to choose abstruse vocabulary *metri causa* and thus to render his message incomprehensible to the

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semble avoir été le premier à identifier le rhythme d'un vers avec l'accentuation ordinaire des mots'. Klopsch (1973 p. 23) on the other hand, considers this identification to be already inherent in the definition of the *Ars Palaemonis*.

[74]   It is worth considering W.H. Jones' comment here: "As stated in the Preface for this volume, Bede inherited and transmitted a rich grammatical tradition which early Irish and English scholars shared. It remains to be codified [...]

Though in such a field of constant copying and reiteration it is almost impossible to determine literary indebtedness, I risk the following catalogue of grammarians or grammars known to Bede:

Authors whose works were cetainly known to Bede: Agroecius, ps.Asper, Audax, Caper, Charisius, *de Differentiis* (of the Naples MS), Diomedes, Donatus, Hieronymus, Isidor, Julian of Toledo, Malleus Theodorus, Pompeius, Sergius, Servius, Marius Victorinus Afer, Virgilius Maro grammaticus [...]

Probably known: Cassiodorus, Cledonius, Eutyches, Priscian, the Probus derivatives.

[...] Several of these authors would travel to him in the same codex, a common path seeming to be Visigothic France and Spain to Ireland to England to Insular missions on the Continent" (op. cit. p. 2).

[75]   cf. Crusius 1928 p. 131, Bulst 1944 p. 18, Bulst 1976 p. 27.

[76]   "Der psalmus abecedarius contra partem Donati Augustins ist in trochäischen Oktonaren verfasst, die stets in zwei gleich lange Hälften geteilt sind. Die vorletzte Silbe jeder Vershälfte trägt nahezu immer den Wortton (mit synizese z.B. *hódje*); sie ist also in mehr als zweisilbigen Wörtern notwendigerweise lang. Die vorausgehenden Silben sind in der Betonung frei und nur durch die gleiche Silbenzahl geregelt." Crusius 1928 p. 131. The verse is analysed as being purely isosyllabic in the Benedictine edition (Congar & Finaert 1963 pp. 140-141), where it is suggested that Augustine should be placed "à l'origine du mouvement qui a donné la poésie rhythmique du vers roman, basée sur l'accent des mots" (eo. loc.) W. Meyer (1905-36, vol. 2 pp. 18-23), gives an analysis of the frequent deviations from strict octosyllabic form, even after considering elision and vowel-slurring, concluding that the poem was only freely isosyllabic. Raby (1927 rep. 1953 p. 21) considers the form, on the basis of the position of the end-rhyme, to be that of a sixteen-syllabled long line with regular caesura after the 8th, the hemistiches having regular cadence. Klopsch (1973 p. 6) considers it to be isosyllabic, and like Meyer, suggests that the form is melodically influenced, deriving from Semitic psalmody.

common man.[77] The result is a poem in isosyllabic form with rhapsodic rhyme and regulated cadences.

This earliest form of *rithmus* had no regulation of stress-position outside the cadence,[78] it formed the foundation for the later metres in which this regulation was extended to include the whole line of verse.[79] As the principle of isosyllabicity was still adhered to, the result was the tonosyllabic verse as quoted by Bede.[80]

The question still remains as to why it was the earlier, less-regulated form of isosyllabic line that appears to have set the standard for vernacular Irish stanzaic metre.

The answer is partly chronological, partly ideological. The chronological aspect explains why the cadenced form of line was adopted, the ideological, why it was maintained.

If we assume that tonosyllabic foot-substituting versification was a relative novelty in the age of Bede, this points to an inception not long before 700 A.D. By this time there had been composition of isosyllabic hymnody with regulation only in the cadence in Ireland for over a century; the form was sufficiently well-established to supply a model for the vernacular.

Assuming a monastic background for the transfer of the isosyllabic metres from Latin to the vernacular, there are also ideological reasons why the tonosyllabic forms should not be adopted.[81] These can be seen inherent in Augustine's metrical tract, *De musica libri sex*.[82]

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[77]   ideo autem non aliquo carminis genere id fieri uolui, ne me necessitas metrica ad aliqua uerba, quae uulgo minus sunt usitata, compelleret (*Retractions*. 1, 20, as quoted in Congar & Finaert 1963 p. 136). Cf. also Raby 1953 pp. 20-2, W. Meyer 1905-36 vol. 2 p. 18.

[78]   For a historical summary of the phenomenon see Pulgram 1991, esp. p. 79. Pulgram is a proponent of the accentual viewpoint; among his antagonists are W. Meyer (1936 p. 308), F. Raby (1924 p. 14); for a summary of proponents of either view see also D. Norberg 1958 pp. 87-92.

[79]   For an examination of this process see Meyer 1936 pp. 255-66.

[80]   Norberg (1958 pp. 119-121) quoting the poem in honour of Milan *alta urbs et spatiosa*, which he dates at ca. 739, suggests that the tonosyllabic form first flourished in Italy, and was disseminated thence "par les poètes de l'époque carolingienne qui avaient reçu leur formation en Italie" (p. 120).

[81]   See now Tranter 1996.

[82]   Despite the title, this treatise as it stands is an exhaustive metrical tract.

A hint of the ideological significance of metre can be found in the phrase, common to both Bede and Marius Victorinus: *numero syllabarum ad iudicium aurium examinata, ut sunt carmina vulgarum poetarum,* reminiscent of Victorinus' *iudicium vero in auribus et auditu est.*[83]

The idea of "songs of vulgar/vernacular poets" suggests a hierarchal view of metrics. Quantity is no longer perceptible to the ear;[84] mere numbers[85] of syllables can be heard and counted, without the need for academic analysis.[86]

For Augustine, mere acoustic reception ranks low in the hierarchy of perceptions:

> Sed ego puto cum ille a nobis propositus versus canitur, *Deus creator omnium;* nos eum et occursoribus illis numeris audire, et recordabilibus recognoscere, et progressoribus pronuntiare, et his judicialibus[87] delectari [...][88]

Mere numbers of syllables,[89] *numeri occursores,* can be perceived *in sensu audientis,*[90] whereas for the appreciation of quantitative verse abstraction is called for,

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83   Keil VI p. 50 1.9. Similarly, the section *de rhythmo* in Victorinus' *Ars Grammatica* is concerned with rhythm as *duration,* within the context of the quantitative system. Thus although commencing with universals:

differt autem rhythmus a metro, quod metrum in verbis, rhythmus in modulatione ac motu corporis sit (Keil VI p. 41)

he proceeds to equate rhythm with the duration of metrical feet:

Rhythmorum autem tres esse differentias volunt in dactylo iambo et paeone [...] nam dactylus aequa temporum divisione taxatur, ut et anapaestus: uterque enim pes quattuor temporum est. (ibid. p. 41)

84   cf. *De Musica* II ii 2, ed. cit. p. 98.

85   Augustine himself does not use the word *rithmus* in this context; metrical relations of time are expressed by the same word *numerus* as used by Bede and Victorinus. For Augustine, as Victorinus (whose conversion is related by Augustine [*Confessiones* viii, 2, cf. Raby 1926 p. 16]), the term *rhythmus* refers to forms in which regularity of feet exists without repetition of the same form of *versus,* as in rhythmical prose:

Age, in conjunctis pedibus sive libera perpetuitate porrigatur ista conjunctio, sicut in rhythmis; sive ab aliquo certo fine revocetur, sicut in metris [...] (VI x 27, ed. cit. p. 420)

and is therefore equivalent to the definition given in Victorinus:

quod metrum certo numero syllaborum vel pedum finitum sit, rhythmus autem numquam numero circumscribaretur (Keil VI p. 42).

For a summary of the definitions of *metrum* and *rhythmus* in the grammars of late antiquity see W. Meyer 1905-36 vol. 3 pp. 131-7, 141-5.

86   For the perceptibility of isosyllabic verse within the liturgical context cf. Bulst 1944 pp. 19-20.

87   This category is later divided into *numeri sensuales* and *numeri iudiciales;* cf. n. 132 below.

88   ed. cit. p. 410.

89   "A la fin de l'Antiquité et au début du Moyen Age, on considérait que la poésie rhythmique était inférieure à la poésie quantitative [...]" (Norberg 1958 p. 92, quoting examples from Augustine's comment in *Retractiones* onwards, pp. 92-3).

90   VI ii 2, ed. cit. p. 360.

involving judicial rhythm, which depends on the power of reason[91] and ranks highest in the hierarchy.

Augustine was writing within the context of Late Latin, in which a relative levelling off of the stress-accent had occurred.[92] His reasoning is applicable, *mutatis mutandis,* to vernacular versification in Ireland. Here, in a stress-timed language, isosyllabicity does not produce any noticeable regularity, certainly not the line-length regularity perceptible in syllable-timed languages.[93] Like quantitative verse for Augustine, it is only to be fully appreciated after academic analysis and thus takes the place in the hierarchy allotted by Augustine to quantitative metre. Tonosyllabic regularity, on the other hand, is directly perceptible to the ear, and thus of lesser value.[94]

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[91]   The scale of six categories is reached after continual modifications, the hierarchy in its final form then consisting of the following:

1) Rhythm pertaining to the body; *numeri corporeales*

2-6) Rhythms pertaining to the soul:

2) *numeri occursores;* rhythms heard directly by the ear

3) *numeri progressores;* rhythms in the mind of the performer underlying and governing performance

4) *numeri recordabiles;* recollections of rhythm in the memory, not realized as a performance

5) *numeri sensuales;* the innate sense of rhythm which causes one to enjoy correct and dislike incorrect rhythm

6) *numeri iudiciales;* the rational power of judgement by means of which rhythms can be analysed objectively without regard to their effect on the senses.

(cf. Jackson Knight 1950 p. 104.)

[92]   The effect of this levelling off can be seen in the fact that French versification from the oldest texts onwards has never adopted the tonosyllabic principle.

[93]   Norberg (1958 p. 95) demonstrates this aptly in his comparison of a quantitative (sapphic) stanza of Theodulph bishop of Orléans (from his panegyric to Louis the Pious, 814) with an anonymous rhythmical imitator. This imitator uses the principle of the stress-accent to follow, not the quantitative feet of the original, but its stress-accent pattern. A point not mentioned by Norberg is that the original copied:

En adest Caesar pius et benignus
Orbe qui toto rutilat coruscus
Atque prae cunctis bonitate pollet
munere Christi

in fact has patterns of regularity on two differing planes: quantitative

ᴗ ᴗ – – – ᴗ ᴗ – – – ᴗ

and accentual

/xx/x/x(x)x/x

the latter pattern being copied. Presumably Theodulph, like the author of *Félire* on a different level, wanted the best of both worlds; quantity, showing his academic peers his mastery of the form, and accent, enabling dissemination of the work by the unlettered masses and thus presumably adding to its effectiveness as panegyric.

[94]   cf. Tranter 1996.

3.3.2 Grammar and Metrics in Iceland

Iceland resembles Ireland in the rapidity with which the principles of Latin grammar were applied to the vernacular.[95] The vernacular tract generally known as the *First Grammatical Treatise* and dated to the middle of the twelfth century[96] concerns itself specifically with the problems of reducing the sounds of Icelandic to the symbols of the Latin alphabet. Whereas its Irish counterpart the *Auraicept na nÉces* makes use of Ogham symbols to explain the phonology of the vernacular,[97] the *First Treatise* makes no use of any versions of the runic alphabet.

As in Ireland, so in Iceland the need evidently arose for the adaptation of standard works of the Latin grammarians into a form suitable for instruction in the vernacular. The *First Treatise* predates any surviving adaptation of this nature, however, the first such being the so-called *Third Grammatical Treatise*, ascribed to Óláfr Hvítaskáld, and thus to be dated before his death in 1259.[98]

The chronological relationship between the advent of Christianity and the first vernacular grammars is comparable in the two cultures; 200-250 years separate Patrick's mission and the *Auraicept;* this corresponds with 250 years between the conversion of Iceland and the Third Treatise, and a hundred years less before the compilation of the First Treatise. Where the two cultures differ most strikingly is in the chronological relationship between the advent of vernacular grammars and the development of stanzaic-syllabic metrical systems. Whereas in Ireland there was a parallel development and assimilation of grammar and metrics, in Iceland, metrical change preceded the introduction of Latin grammar.

Iceland was the first of the Scandinavian countries to develop an indigenous written vernacular literature; it thus seems appropriate to relate the chronology of grammar and metrical change to developments in Iceland, the more so, inasmuch as all named skalds from the middle of the tenth century are of Icelandic provenance.[99] There is no evidence to suggest that any of the named skalds of the ninth and tenth centuries, whether of Norwegian or Icelandic descent, were proficient in the Latin alphabet, and we can safely assume that the world of classical and late Latin learning was effectively barred to them. Whatever influence Latin metrics may have had on the subsequent development of skaldic poetry, the foundations were laid in the pre-Latin era.[100]

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[95]   cf. Ahlqvist 1982 pp. 19-20.

[96]   Kristjánsson 1988 p. 129.

[97]   cf. McManus 1991 p. 32.

[98]   Kristjánsson 1988 p. 130.

[99]   This evidence is open to varying interpretations, especially since the find of a considerable number of runic inscriptions on wood at Bergen has proved that skaldic poetry was being written in that alphabet as late as the fourteenth century in Norway, and the spread of the find suggests a continuing tradition (cf. Düwel 1968/83 pp. 82-6, Liestøl 1963).

[100]   In the context of Western Christendom at that period, this effectively means that if we accept external influence, we must assume that it took one of two forms; aural reception of liturgical metrical texts, probably sung, and aural reception of vernacular metrical texts, whether narrative or part of sacral or secular ritual. This raises the

3.3.3   The nature of the sources: a caveat

A considerable quantity of syllabic-stanzaic poetry in Icelandic is ascribed to poets from the pre-Latin era. For example: *lausavísur* 21 & 22 in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* are addressed to a king Aðalsteinn, i.e. to Æðelstan, king of England[101] from A.D. 925-939.[102]

Caution is indicated, however, because of the nature of transmission: These verses are incorporated in a prose saga dating to the first quarter of the thirteenth century.[103] The complete saga is preserved in two parchment codices of the fourteenth century and a paper copy from the 17th, as well in various fragments dating from ca. 1250 onwards.[104]

A similar problem surrounds a supposedly historical verse in the first of the *Mittelirische Verslehren*: Stanza 32[105] is an extract from a panegyric to a king Amhlaibh of Dublin, who must be one of the tenth-century Norse rulers of the town, either Sigtryggsson (Cuarán) or Goðfriðsson, or possibly the ninth-century Óláfr hvíti, king of Dublin and York.[106] The stanza is incorporated in a tract generally held to have been written around A.D. 1000, but surviving in manuscripts of which the earliest is the Book of Ballymote, dated to ca. 1400.[107]

We cannot safely regard either of these examples as pure and uncontaminated products of the tenth century. Either may indeed be a reflex of a tenth-century panegyric composed to the historical figure mentioned. It is possible that these reflexes contain substantially the same wording as that tenth-century panegyric; but we cannot assume so unconditionally. It is equally possible in either case that the wording represents what a subsequent author or compiler considered an appropriate wording for a tenth-century panegyric, possibly being a complete reworking. This reworking might have followed the dictates of a tenth-century metrical system, as far as this was understood at the time; it might equally well have been undertaken to bring a given stanza into line with the dictates of a metrical system operating at the time of compilation.

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question of what competence the Western Scandinavian populations might have had either of Latin or the vernacular, and where they might have been exposed to metrical texts of any of the above categories. It should, however, be pointed out that metrical characteristics could be perceived without understanding of the semantic context of the text. This would be particularly the case of ritual texts, which might be frequently repeated in a context in which the Scandinavian auditor would not be disturbed by lack of understanding as he might in the case of narrative.

[101]   This title is justified at least from his victory at *Brunanburh* in 937 until his death two years later.

[102]   The chronology of *Egils saga* deviates from that of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and other English sources by about ten years; cf. ÍF 2, pp. XLVII-LII.

[103]   ÍF 2, p. LVIII.

[104]   ibid. pp. XCV-XCVII.

[105]   Ó hAodha 1991 p. 235 st. 24.

[106]   Ó hAodha 1991 p. 235 n. 93.

[107]   Thurneysen 1912 pp. 78-82, for this particular stanza p. 81. For a brief description of BB with dating see O' Neill 1984 p. 38.