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## Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 32

Records of the discussions in the Conference Room on 19-02-2018

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Bernhard Bauer, Fangzhe Qiu, Daniel Watson, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Siobhán Barrett, Romanas Bulatovas, Elliott Lash, Theodorus Fransen

### Practicalities

We did not get too much done last week, but hope to speed up a bit today (relatively speaking).

Last week's proceedings have been written up by the scribe, but have not been sent on to David yet, whilst the latter works on a new template for these proceedings, which will include a reference to ChronHib's ERC grant number.

### The Milan poems

Over the weekend Anders Ahlqvist sent David a draft of an article he is writing on the two very faint, hard to read poems on the very first folium of the manuscript of the Milan glosses. These poems were not treated by Aaron Griffith in his database of the glosses and earlier editions have large lacunae and do not make much sense of the text. Ahlqvist has managed to massively improve the readings and looks set to present a solid, philological edition of the poems.

Each of the two poems consists of seven or eight stanza's (rhyming quatrains). Ahlqvist believes the two to form part of a larger poem. The poems are written in a script that differs somewhat from that of the glosses and it has been claimed on this basis that they are slightly younger; however, it also seems possible to us that the differences reflect a difference in care and available space relative to the glosses, rather than a change of hand.

Ahlqvist believes that we are dealing with two riddle poems. The first is about Christ, who is not mentioned by name. Rather, the poem alludes to all kinds of aspects of his person. The second poem is about a magical house, which is a metaphor for the Church. Some of the sentiments and concepts expressed in these poems remind David of Blathmac and we may well look at them in the seminar after we have finished reading Blathmac sometime next year.

### Glides before unstressed, final vowels: *ai*, *ae* (§98)

"In the earliest sources final *e* and *i* after neutral consonants are normally written without an intermediate vowel. On the other hand *-ai* and *-ae* are found occasionally in Wb. and more consistently in the later Glosses."

David has made a quick check of the words found under A and B in Würzburg and those under C and D in Milan. He notes that the absence of the glide is véry consistent indeed in Würzburg. Admittedly, he went through it rather quickly, but he found no examples of the glide at all under these circumstances. Fangzhe adds that this is also the case in the Schaffhausen manuscript of the *Vita Columbae*.

In the Milan glosses the majority of the words have an *a*-glide, although it is nonetheless also frequently absent. There is no immediately apparent rationale for the distribution and it is very tentatively suggested that it may be a lexical matter, typical of specific words, rather than according to a more general pattern. Equally tentative is David's suggestion that the lack of an *a*-glide might be slightly more frequent with *i* rather than with *e*.

We do not expect it to reflect a phonetically real vowel, because it is not found in the earliest period. It may have arisen as a grapheme, perhaps under the influence of word-internal spellings, e.g.:

-the /θ°e/	> -thae
-thi /θ°i/	> -thai
-thaib /θ°əβ°/	

At any rate, there is clearly a major difference between Würzburg and Milan (and Sankt Gallen) in this respect. It looks like it is chronological, although there may well also be a local dimension to it, with different orthographical practices prevailing in different localities.

Perhaps this is also reflected in the many cases of 'wrong palatalisation' in the Blathmac manuscript, where later scribes may have misinterpreted Blathmac's spellings without a glide-vowel as indicating a palatal consonant; e.g. (although this is not an actual example, but rather a made-up illustration, since we could not recall an attested example on the spot) Blathmac might have written *dalte* for *daltae*, and a later scribe wrote this as *dailte*, which cannot possibly have been correct.

We do not particularly like Thurneysen's use of the words 'occasionally' and 'more consistent'; these words are rather vague and do not appear to give an accurate view of the reality. We would need the actual statistics to be more concrete.

#### **-ae > -a and -eo, -ea > -e (§99)**

"The further development of this -ae to -a and of -eo -ea to -e is sometimes found in Mil., more frequently in Sg. and the later Glosses." This must have some usefulness as a dating criterion. These spellings do indeed turn up in Milan, but we would rather say sporadically. The wording 'more frequently' (Handbuch: *nicht selten*) is again vague. Strachan is cited for having collected the examples of these developments and it should therefore be possible to derive the necessary statistics from that article.

"Apparently the second sound first became silent where an enclitic was attached to the word, thereby bringing the double sound into medial position." Thurneysen here gets closer than anywhere else to stating that he believed these glides to involve two sounds, but he is extremely unclear as to the exact nature of this 'double sound'. He neither calls it hiatus, nor a diphthong.

"There are instances of this even in Wb., e.g. **in tain díagma-ni** 3<sup>a</sup>15 'when we go' for **díagm(a)e-ni**." One could, however, say that this is actually something different entirely. The addition of the nota augens may have made the final vowel of the verb word-internal, thus turning it into *schwa*. If this is correct, then we must suppose that in most cases the scribes restored the underlying vowel from the non-augmented forms, i.e. they typically spelled such augmented forms hypercorrectly and the instances mentioned by Thurneysen are slips, where one sees the actual form shining through. An alternative explanation is that these instances are just spelling mistakes and therefore not linguistically meaningful.

It would seem that before the wholesale change of vowels to *schwa* in absolute final position, which is typical from Middle Irish onwards, final -e which followed a non-palatal consonant turned into -a during the ninth-century already. It remained as -e after palatal consonants. This may perhaps be compared

with the wholesale change of final *-o* into *-a* in absolute final position, which we discussed previously. It is not quite the same though, given that for final *-e* there did remain an opposition between retained *-e* and *-a*, whereas *-o* was lost entirely.

In the two (rather late) manuscripts containing the text *Comrac Líadaine ocus Cuirithir*, one typically finds *-æ* spellings for all kinds of final vowels; e.g. the rhyming pair *cenæ* (OIr. *cenae*) and *degæ* (OIr. *dego*). The fact that they also rhyme may indicate that this loss of distinction already goes back to the underlying 9<sup>th</sup>-century original, which would support this proposed merger of certain final vowels. Clearly, this was a real and relevant development during the Old Irish period.

Where Thurneysen says that “*-eo -ea* turned into *-e*”, it must now be understood that *-eo* had already become *-ea* at that stage. As such, we are dealing with 1) *-o# > -a#*, 2) *C°e,a > C°a* and *C°e,a > C°e*.

We are therefore observing a reduction from a five-way vowel distinction in absolute final position to a three-way opposition through a four-way intermediary, i.e.:

1)      i                      u  
          e                      o  
              a

2)      i                      u  
          e                      a

3)      i                      u  
              æ

There is some disagreement as to whether the phonetic range of *u* (and possibly *i*) increased during the later stages. Examples where *-o* is written for *-u* after the loss of *-o* in this position (and the concomitant loss of a distinction between rounded vowels in absolute auslaut) can be seen, as was discussed in an earlier meeting, as indicating that to an Irish ear, word-final *u* may have sounded rather a lot like *o* at this stage; e.g. Stowe Missal *firto* for *firtu*. But it may also reflect a certain graphical liberty taken by the scribes, without any phonetic reality.

David adds that, for plain morphological reasons, there must have been a difference in the original distribution between *e* and *a* after a non-palatal vowel versus that of *e* and *a* after a palatal vowel. After non-palatal vowels, both *e* and *a* occurred quite frequently. However, after palatal vowels, *e* was much more common than *a* before the sounds merged. It would be interesting to see whether the merger occurred sooner, or more consistently after palatal vowels than after non-palatal vowels.

At any rate, the reduction of the five-way vowel system in absolute final position to the Middle Irish situation where there was only one, neutral vowel (*schwa*) was a complicated process which took place over an extended period of time during the late Old Irish period.

Examples of original *-ai* and *-ae* falling together as *C°e* and *C°æ* likely reflect a later stage, when all distinctions had been lost.

### Changes in hiatus (§100)

We would rather regard the matters raised by Thurneysen as reflecting different ways of spelling hiatus, rather than attaching too much phonetic reality to the readings, but it seems difficult to decide the issue. At any rate, *nue* is a problematic word. The spelling *naue* is certainly archaising and rather artificial.

On a slightly different note, it is suggested that an argument against all kinds of new vowels arising as distinct phonemes is that we do not see it happen in metrics (i.e. there are no issues with rhyme). This is a solid argument.

“-e after *i* becomes -a by differentiation; e.g. **lie** ‘stone’, Wb., **lia** Sg. 67<sup>b</sup>12 (cp. medially in **liaig** from **lieig** §105).” We would call this dissimilation, rather than differentiation, although we do not necessarily believe that Thurneysen is correct. This could rather be part of the neutralisation of final vowels in general.

Taking the word *nia*, *nie* < \**nepōts*, we would have expected \*\**niū* as the attested form (we do find *niö*, which may reflect this?), but the attested forms are messy and it is hard to draw firm conclusions from them. For *lië* ‘stone’, the form *lië* is indeed expected < \**līēg* < \**liuank*-.

The word-internal developments in *liaig*/*lieig* are a different matter entirely, given that it is not in absolute final position. In the gen. sg. we find *liäc*, although \*\**liēc* might be expected < \**līuēgos*. Perhaps the nominative influenced this form?

To explain these matters one would need to study all examples of final, unstressed vowels after *i* in hiatus (e.g. *liä*, *liaig*, *siür*, *fii*, hiatus-verbs, forms of *aue* and *nue*) and see what actually happens; this essentially requires a new study. In a new handbook the problem should mainly be mentioned and described as clearly as possible at this stage.

In the German §96, Thurneysen links the attested forms with -o for -u after *e* as also related to these matters.

### Pretonic vowels (§101)

“The quality of unstressed short vowels in the interior of words is altogether dependent on that of the flanking consonants.” This sounds very reasonable for post-tonic, unstressed short vowels, but it turns out that Thurneysen is talking about pre-tonic syllables in this paragraph. We would strongly distinguish pre-tonic developments from those that happen after the stress. For Thurneysen all unstressed vowels in the interior of words seem to be similar (e.g. in his example *ro·pridchissem* only the stressed first *i* is exceptional, but to us there is a world<sup>1</sup> of difference between the pretonic *o* and the post-tonic second *i* and *e*).

As to the matter of rounded vowels in pretonic preverbs, cf. David’s article *The history of the Old Irish preverb* \*to-. David adds that in the Milan poems edited by Ahlqvist, he noticed that *u* is used exclusively in this context. Where Thurneysen mentions “Wb. II.”, we would say *tertia manus*. Thurneysen is correct, this scribe usually has *u* indeed.

“Subsequent levelling obliterated this distinction...” Basically, we are dealing with a real sound change: *o* > *u* in pretonic syllables.

“Conversely, *o* sometimes appears for unstressed *u* when the preceding syllable contains *o*...” This is a completely different context and should not be compared to pretonic developments at all. It is nonetheless interesting; it looks like some kind of vowel harmony.

“The treatment of long vowels in unstressed syllables is substantially the same as in stressed.” This is essentially correct.

The *Handbuch* has a wonderful wording at the start of this paragraph (§97): “Die kurzen schwachbetonten Vokale im Wortinnern stehen völlig unter dem Banne der sie umgebenden Konsonanten und

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<sup>1</sup> David: “These are different worlds.” Fangzhe: “What?” David: “Worlds.” Lars: “Like night and day.” Fangzhe: “Ah, worlds! Why ‘worlds’?” David: “I’m speaking metaphorically. *In altero mundo*, different universes, different laws of nature!”

sind durch deren Färbung bestimmt.” The words *stehen völlig unter dem Banne* ‘are fully under the spell’ put one in a rather magical mindset.<sup>2</sup>

At any rate, the patterns behind these pretonic developments need to be explained more clearly in a new grammar. It should also incorporate Elliott’s work on *etir/itir* (i.e. the behaviour of pretonic *e/i*), which he will shortly publish in an article in *Ériu*. The behaviour of *e/i* appears to be similar to that of *o/u*, although there are fewer possible examples of it.

In the following paragraph Thurneysen will discuss the behaviour of posttonic unstressed vowels in closed syllables (i.e. *schwa*). For him, this requires far more subtle rules than we need, as he operates with a 3-way system of consonant-quality and we do not. But we will deal with that next week.

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Pages read in this session: c. 2

Paragraphs discussed: §§ 98–101

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<sup>2</sup> The scribe was put in mind of the Lord of the Rings, which is called ‘In de ban van de ring’ in its Dutch translation.