

Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 2

Records of the discussions at the conference room on 28-09-2016

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Elizabeth Boyle, Siobhán Barrett, Deborah Hayden, Chantal Kobel, Gearóid Úa Conchubhair, Daniel Watson, Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Fangzhe Qiu, Elliott Lash, Romanas Bulatovas and Lars Nooij (scribe)

Practicalities

Given the size of the fanclub, we shall endeavor to meet in larger rooms, such as the present one. On 23/11, 30/11 and 7/12 we shall meet in the conference room in the Iontas building; on 14/12 the meeting will take place in the seminar room of the same building. All other meetings during this semester will be hosted at the ChronHib beár.

Proceedings #1

The proceedings were generally well-received, although some members were unable to access it. The host website, *academia.edu*, does not allow one to view or download documents without logging in and some members do not have *academia*-accounts. As such, the proceedings will from now on not only be posted on *academia*, but will also be sent out by email to the members.

Neil McLeod made some useful remarks on the first issue of the proceedings, commenting that Micheal Duignan's role in translating Thurneysen's *Handbuch* into the GOI should not be overlooked. His words are quoted:

The way I heard the story is as follows. It was decided that a translation into English would be a good thing, and a meeting was held in Dublin to discuss the project. When it came to discussing who should be sent to Bonn to work with Thurneysen, Best said 'Young Duignan should go.' Binchy was a little surprised not to have been nominated, but everyone just fell into line with Best. So Duignan went to Bonn and worked closely with Thurneysen. But when Thurneysen died, Binchy and Bergin became more critical of the way Duignan (and Thurneysen!) had proposed to proceed, and Duignan was removed.

McLeod goes on to note that it is his understanding that Duignan was greatly upset at being removed from the project.

Finally McLeod suggests mentioning a few other grammatical works on the OIr. language. Although the overview in the previous proceedings was not meant to be exhaustive, it is a fair suggestion. The works were: Pokorny's *A Historical Reader of Old Irish* (1923), Lewis and Pedersen's abbreviated and updated translation of Pedersen's *Vergleichende Grammatik* into English as *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar* (1937) and Tigges' *An Old Irish Primer* (2006).

In light of this it was further suggested at the meeting to mention that M'Swiney translated Windisch's grammar as *Compendium of Irish Grammar* (1883), a few years after Moore had finished his translation.

During the previous meeting it was decided that it would be good to read contemporary reviews of Thurneysen's grammar. It has proven difficult to find any, but Elliott did discover an article of notes on the *Handbuch* by Kuno Meyer in 1917 in *Miscellanea Hibernica*.

GOI: Introduction - The Celtic Languages (continued)

We continue in the middle of the page: “Gaelic or Goidelic”. This should be seen as referring to the language branch, rather than to the spoken language itself (OIr. > Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic).

‘Goídil (sg. Goídel) was the ancient name of the people who spoke this language, which itself was called Goídelg.’ There are many issues with this phrase, as well as with the sub-section it introduces. Firstly, the term ‘ancient’ is vague and essentially meaningless in an Irish context. Interestingly, this word is absent from the *Handbuch*. Moreover, the name *Goídel* cannot be original for it is in fact a British term, derived from the Welsh *gwyddel*, ‘wild person’. The exact phonological shape of the Irish word dictates that it must have been borrowed from Old Welsh during the 8th century.

This fits well with its first attested occurrences in Old Irish, which are as a personal name in the Annals in the 2nd half of the 8th century and as both a personal name and a name for the language in the ‘canonical’ part (as defined by Ahlqvist) of the *Auraicept na nÉces*. This part of the *Auraicept* was dated by Ahlqvist to the mid-8th century. In the (presumably, based on similarities to contemporary glossing activities on the continent) mid-9th century commentaries on the *Auraicept* the term is often used to mark the contrast between Irish- and Latin-speakers.

A possible early self-designation for the Irish language is *bélrae na Féne* ‘the language of the Féni’, or even just *bélrae* ‘language’. Of course, even *Féni* can be considered to refer only to a segment of the population. As such, one may wonder whether the Irish had any early self-designation for the language (community) as a whole. Nonetheless, a certain linguistic awareness must have been present from at least the 5th century onwards, when Christianity was introduced and Latin acquired a position of significance alongside Irish within Ireland itself.

Other early names for the Irish are equally problematic. Latin *Scotti*, *Scottica* appear to lack a direct OIr. counterpart. OIr. *scoth*, ‘flower’ seems unlikely. OIr. *scoth*, ‘edge’ might be more fitting, if credence is given to a little-known classical text in which the Irish are said to place blades on the tongues of their children (see Andreas Hofeneder, *Die Religion der Kelten in den antiken literarischen Zeugnissen*, vol. 3, Vienna 2011, 238). Given its predominance in Latin sources, it might be an earlier self-designation, which was replaced by *Goídel*, or perhaps a name for part of the population. St. Patrick’s use of *Hiberniacum*, corresponding to Irish *Éirennach*, which is presumably derived from *Ériu*, rather than being related to the *Érainn* tribe, is a rare term in OIr. (e.g. occurring as a personal name in the Annals of Ulster).

As to the mentions of modern names for the Irish language, there are some differences between the GOI and the *Handbuch*, but both offer a limited, apparently haphazard sample. A revised grammar should give a more thorough overview.

Continuing to “the territorial subdivisions of Gaelic are”, it is noted that the phrase “the language of the earliest sources is called Old Irish” is misleading. Thurneysen himself makes note of the *ogam* inscriptions as offering the earliest attestations of the Irish language and they should therefore be noted as such. Moreover, the temporal divisions of Irish, which are also mentioned under this heading, are nowadays more subtly divided. The following divisions are proposed:

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|-----------------|---|
| Early Goidelic | pre-4 th century AD |
| Primitive Irish | 4 th -6 th centuries AD |
| Archaic Irish | 7 th century AD |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Old Irish | 8 th -9 th centuries AD |
| Middle Irish | 10 th -12 th centuries AD |
| Classical Modern Irish | 13 th -1650 AD |
| Early Modern Irish | 13 th -1650 AD |
| Dialectal Modern Irish | 1650-present |

Some notes must be made. The border between Archaic Irish and Old Irish is particularly indistinct. There are indeed scholars who would open the Old Irish period at about 650 AD and call its earlier sources ‘Early Old Irish’. Stifter prefers to leave the entire 7th century to Archaic Irish and reserve the distinction ‘Early Old Irish’ for 8th century OIr. in contrast to that of the 9th century. The end of the Old Irish period is equally indistinct, with some scholars letting it continue up to about 950 AD. In the scheme proposed for the revised grammar, it may be seen that a relatively compact period for Old Irish proper is preferred. When dealing with matters which concern both Old and Middle Irish the term ‘Early Irish’ is adopted.

A final note concerns the Early Modern period of the language. Classical Modern Irish refers to the (written) standard language of bardic poetry, whereas Early Modern Irish refers to the language of, for example, the medicinal texts, which more closely resembles the spoken language on its way from Middle to Dialectal Modern Irish.

“Scottish Gaelic in the Highlands of Scotland and the adjacent western islands”: Scottish Gaelic was more widespread in the earlier period and this should be mentioned. “[I]t was introduced by Irish settlers from about the beginning of the sixth century A.D.”: ‘settlers’ is an odd word. Moreover, the introduction of Irish into Scotland probably began a few centuries earlier (3rd or 4th century AD?). Some historians would even claim that it was original to the Highland region, but this is considered highly unlikely due to the lack of early dialectal divergence. Languages generally diverge at least somewhat when its speakers become geographically separated, but as all variants of Goidelic go back to OIr. itself, rather than to an earlier Goidelic proto-language, evidence for any early dialectal divergence is lacking. This speaks strongly against a very early presence of Irish speakers in Scotland.

The mention of the word “Erse” to designate Scottish Gaelic (or indeed all of the Goidelic languages in the *Handbuch*) is unwarranted: the term is both outdated and appears derogative. As to Manx, it must now be added that it went extinct and has since been revived.

We skip page 2, which deals solely with the British languages. As mentioned earlier on in the first proceedings, this section does require revision. This is also true for the section on page 3 on the Continental Celtic languages, which is completely outdated. As to Pictish (top of page 3), the consensus is now that it is probably (para-)British.

GOI: Introduction - Sources (§4)

We now turn to page 4 where the sources of Old Irish are discussed. This is a very important section as the choice of sources is programmatic and has an understandably significant impact on the rest of the grammar; and it is considered that some texts (such as the Blathmac poems) must now be added to the chief sources used by Thurneysen.

“For the grammarian the most important sources of Old Irish are those preserved in more or less contemporary manuscripts.” This is, of course, true. Thurneysen here seems to follow Zeuss’ position.

“They consist for the most part of glosses in Latin MSS.” We should qualify this statement. Thurneysen’s ‘for the most part’ left open the possibility for making use of early texts found in later manuscripts (for which see his §8), but we should be explicit about being open to the cautious use of such later sources. Nonetheless, the contemporary sources do deserve prominence: our understanding of OIr. grammar is fundamentally based on them. All texts found in later sources are compared to the glosses in order to establish their credibility as sources of OIr.

Continuing: “.i.e. marginal and interlinear explanations in Irish interspersed with Latin.” ‘Annotations’ would be a better term than ‘explanations’ here. It also stands to reason to make explicit mention of the fact that the contemporary manuscripts also include some poems and other scraps of OIr. alongside the glosses.

Thurneysen’s explanation of the survival of continental MSS. in contrast to the lack of early MSS. surviving in Ireland itself is simply incorrect. His claim that the continental manuscripts were shelved and survived through a subsequent lack of use – whereas “constant use wore out the earlier manuscripts” in Ireland – is spurious. The disuse of useful Latin manuscripts simply because they contained illegible Irish glosses is very uncertain. Differences in climate and (monastic) infrastructure may well be more reasonable explanations. We might wish to consider referencing Donnchadh Ó Corrain’s *What happened to Ireland’s medieval manuscripts?* (Peritia 22-23: pp. 191-223). At any rate, this paragraph will have to be rewritten to include more realistic scenarios.

“The most complete collection of these contemporary sources is contained in...Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus.” It still deserves mention, but it should be noted that its editors made numerable editorial mistakes. Earlier collections (such as Zimmer) need not be referenced anymore. The modern lexicon by Kavanagh (*A lexicon of the Old Irish glosses in the Würzburg manuscript of the epistles of St. Paul* 2001), Griffith’s online database of the Milan glosses and Bauer’s online database of the Priscian glosses do need to be mentioned here. Additionally Dagmar Bronner’s *Verzeichnis altirischer Quellen* (2013), which is the most recent catalogue of Old Irish manuscripts should be referenced. Finally, a line should be added, stating that many texts can now also be found in more recent editions of their own.

Since the publication of the GOI, a number of contemporary OIr. glosses have been discovered and this must be mentioned. A good overview of OIr. texts found in later manuscripts (post-10th century) is also lacking. Ongoing research, such as that within the ChronHib project, may help to alleviate this problem and should be referenced.

GOI: Introduction - Sources - Würzburg (§5)

Thurneysen goes on to discuss specific sources (and groups of sources) in separate paragraphs. The first of these is Würzburg. We do not wish to open such paragraphs with the rather uninviting “Wb.” as Thurneysen did, but rather with a more natural-sounding line opener. We should also add the shelf-number of the MS and the internet source (vb.uni-wuerzburg.de/ub/mpthf12/ueber.html) here. Thurneysen’s decision to label the scribes of Würzburg Wb., Wb. I. and Wb. II. is rather confusing and should be altered to reflect more common practices. The first two scribes are traditionally referred to as *prima manus* and *main hand*; Stifter (*The Prehistory of the Preverb to-*) introduced the term *tertia manus* for what Thurneysen calls Wb. II.

The dating of the Würzburg glosses was left relatively uncertain in the *Handbuch*, but the wording in the GOI (“They may be assigned to about the middle of the eighth century.) is less cautious. The

grounds for dating them as such are left unmentioned. This cannot stand in a modern grammar and these grounds must be stated explicitly. The relation between the date of the manuscript itself and the glosses (for Thurneysen states that the glosses were “copied from another manuscript”) must also be explored in greater detail.

Turning to page 5, the mentions of earlier editions of these glosses need not be listed, for they have all been superseded. We do wish to include brief bibliographies on immediately pressing matters after paragraphs such as these in the revised grammar to aid the function of the grammar as a reference work. The Thesaurus, Kavanagh and the internet source should be added here.

GOI: Introduction - Sources - Milan (§6)

“The Milan Glosses on a Latin commentary on the Psalms.” This has now been established to be not just *a* Latin commentary, but rather very specifically *the* commentary by Theodorus of Mopsuestia. This commentary has recently been published in the Brepols Church Fathers Series (in Latin).

“These form the largest collection of glosses.” This is true. “They were, however, not written with the same care as Wb.” This is also true. However, the statement “slips of the pen being frequent” is less clear a statement as it implies undue carelessness. In the *Handbuch* these are called “Flüchtigkeitsfehler” and from a German-Dutch perspective it is felt that the translation ‘copying errors’ would better convey the sense of the original (as well as fit the historical scenario which would explain the inconsistencies in the glosses).