

Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 7

Records of the discussions at the conference room on 30-11-2016

In attendance: David Stifter (chair)¹, Deborah Hayden, Gearóid Úa Conchubhair, Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Chantal Kobel, Siobhán Barrett, Anne Harrington, Bernhard Bauer, Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu, Romanas Bulatovas, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Practicalities

David has kindly supplied us with a great many cookies.²

Matters arising

Caoimhín Ó Donnáile (University of the Highlands and Islands, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig) commented on the second proceedings, stating that Manx did not go extinct in the strict sense. Although the last native speaker died in 1974, there has always been a small community of competent speakers into the present.

Duncan Sneddon (Edinburgh University) remarked that there are a few OIr. words – apart from personal and placenames – in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*. One is the word *tigernis* (with Latin case ending), which appears without comment or translation. The other, also without glossing, is the short phrase *hi nin glas*.

J. Sebastian Pagani – the head of Classics at a private secondary school in Phoenix, Arizona – sent David a long email, praising David's book *Sengoídelc* as well as 'these historic proceedings'. Interestingly, they offer some classes on OIr. to their pupils at this school. We may get back to this when we discuss the available resources for learning Old Irish.

Brian Ó Catháin of Maynooth, who has a strong interest in German scholarship in Celtic Studies, offered some insights on the vexed issue of Thurneysen's personal influence on the rewriting and translation of the *Handbuch* into English. Brian believes that Thurneysen's contribution was very great and that Bergin and Best altered little. He cites a review of *GOI* by Anne Heiermeier,³ who participated in Thurneysen's OIr. group in Bonn, as a potential source for inside information on the translation project.

It is noted that the preface to Thurneysen's *Old Irish Reader* also offers some of Thurneysen's thoughts on the translation-work on the *GOI*.

David proceeds to read from a book by Pisani and Pokorny (*Allgemeine und vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft, Indogermanistik: Keltologie* (Bern 1953)), the second half of which (written by Pokorny) deals with Celtic Studies and includes many comments on the *GOI*. Pokorny adamantly disagreed with

¹ Minutes before the meeting, Susan Schreibman (the head of *An Foras Feasa*, which hosts both ChronHib and these meetings) entered the room, demanding compensation from David *if* he did not supply her with a required document before the end of the day. David offered her his head; she refused his offer. Later on she gave us the liberty of helping ourselves to tea and coffee for future meetings.

² David was very specific as to the distribution of these cookies: he wants them to be placed on small plates so that people may take cookies without the need to grab them from the box right in front of him, as this might otherwise prove distracting. Moreover, he stressed that he wanted a plate of his own. And he got one.

³ Heiermeier also worked with Pokorny, who made advances towards her, which she rebuffed. Ever after Pokorny angrily reacted to anything she published, which might help explain her obscurity as a scholar. David: "If I ever make advances on you, be careful. I might write nasty things about you."

Heiermeier (see note 3 for a possible cause). According to him, Thurneysen had an interleaved copy of the *Handbuch*, which included his notes. Duignan used this copy as the basis for his translation and Thurneysen reviewed Duignan's work. After Thurneysen's death Bergin and Best made their own translation of Thurneysen's copy of the *Handbuch*, independent of Duignan's work. Pokorny further comments that there are some deficiencies to the *GOI*. He rather curiously complains that it misses a connection to the real-life, living language, being a study of the written language alone. Moreover, he states that the phonetic section is weak and the section on syntax is too limited. Additionally, not enough attention is paid to the way Irish deviates from the other Indo-European languages. In full, Pokorny is decidedly critical, but generally vague as to what exactly is wrong with it.

Elliott now mentions an article by Martin McNamara ('Psalter text and Psalter study in the early Irish Church (A.D. 600-1200)', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 71 C (1973), 201-98) in which two 10th-century manuscripts are mentioned which include some Irish glosses. The manuscripts are: *The Double Psalter of St Ouen* and a *Fragment of Sister Codex of St Ouen Psalter*. Both take the form of a double psalter, containing both the Roman and Gallican psalter. These psalters, like the manuscript of the Milan glosses, contain parts of the commentary by Theodorus of Mopsuestia. It is unclear what the exact contents of the Irish glosses are, but they are certainly of interest. There are very few manuscripts from the 10th century and, like the *Liber Hymnorum*, they should be taken into account.

Elliott also mentions a 10th-century Bamberg cryptogram, which is in Latin, but includes a letter with 9th-century Irish names (John Carey mentions it in *Ireland and the Grail*, 2007, 124-7).

Additional archaic sources

Continuing on last week's discussion some additional archaic sources are mentioned. The Lambeth commentary is suggested: it includes deponent verbs which are later only attested as active verbs and it is generally archaic. Bieler and Carney dated it to the 720's, but as it is found as flyleaves in a 12th-century manuscript, the date is uncertain; it could be earlier still (although not before the 650's, most likely, as Isidorus' *Etymologiae* is mentioned). There is nothing to suggest that it is not an original text.

A further potential source is the Monastery of Tallaght compilation, which was compiled during the 9th century and may well include older material.

Inscriptions (§11)

"...sepulchral inscriptions"; although a literary theme, we would now be more cautious. How many of them actually occur with burials? Perhaps it would be better to refer to their use as boundary markers? We should check the archaeology and McManus's *A guide to Ogam* (Maynooth 1991).

"There are about 300 altogether..."; there are now about 400 known ogam inscriptions. "...most of which have been found in the southern half of Ireland..."; a map would be the neatest way to illustrate the distribution.

"...in Britain, chiefly in Wales and the adjacent districts, where colonists from Southern Ireland had settled in the third century A.D."; the 3rd century is too early for settlers from Ireland, but we need to check whether the 4th century (the 'troubles'), or the 5th century (the abandonment of Britain) would be more accurate.

As to their dating, we should check and give references to the most recent publications on the subject: McManus, Ziegler, MacAllister and the *Ogham in 3D*-project.⁴

The *ogam* inscriptions, although strictly speaking mostly belonging to the pre-Old Irish period, are still relevant for the grammar, both for historical purposes and for the fact that there are also *ogam* inscriptions from the OIr. period, as well as use of *ogam* in manuscripts from the period.

The *ogam* alphabet (§12)

“The **Ogam alphabet** was still understood throughout the Middle Ages...”; this line is misleading as *ogam* was never forgotten and an antiquarian knowledge of the alphabet remained throughout the period, up to the present.

Modern hypotheses about the origins of the *ogam* alphabet should be discussed briefly in a new grammar. Moreover, as this paragraph in *GOI* is unnecessarily imprecise, it needs to be rewritten entirely.

The linguistic usefulness of the *ogam* inscriptions (§13)

“The linguistic material furnished by these inscriptions is very scanty...”; this is true. “...the very nature of the Ogam script conduces to misspellings...”; this is correct.

This paragraph is also rather weak overall; all of this is better covered in McManus. Curiously, the paragraph has been entirely rearranged in comparison to its German original. The original is somewhat better. The statement in the *Handbuch* on the (lack of) value of these inscriptions for the purposes of writing a grammar of OIr. is missing in the *GOI*. Such a statement should be added in a new grammar.

Elliott favours adding some actual examples, mentioning in particular the *ogam* gloss *latheirt* in the St Gall Priscian.⁵

Sources for *ogam* (§14)

This paragraph lists the collections of the *ogam* inscriptions. Curiously, they did not include Macalister chief opus, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum*, which had been finished by the time the *GOI* was published, but was still work in progress when the *Handbuch* was written. It seems they had forgotten to do so, as a comment to this effect is found in the translators’ notes towards the end of the book.

The works mentioned above should be added to any such list (McManus, Ziegler, *Ogham in 3D*). Macalister should still be mentioned. Wendy Davies’ *Celtic Inscribed Stones Project* (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/>; last update 2000!) and Patrick Sims-Williams’ *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain* (2002) should also be included.

Irish-language, Latin-script inscriptions (§15)

This paragraph is very vague and unhelpful as it stands. It also needs to be rewritten entirely. Has a full collection of Irish-language, Latin-script inscriptions appeared since the *Thesaurus* was published? These inscriptions should be taken into account when they can be dated to the OIr. period.

⁴ Mention is briefly made of the *Celtic Inscribed Stones*-project, which – with regard to the *ogam* stones – has been superseded by the *Ogham in 3D*-project. David: “I actually applied for a post in it in the late 90s, but they did not take me.” Bernhard: “That is why you don’t like them.” [DS: This is libelous, I do not not like them!]

⁵ *Latheirt*: “drunk”.

Contentwise these inscriptions are very limited, generally consisting only of <oroit do [name]> “(say) a prayer for X”. There are not very many of them either. They take up only three pages in the *Thesaurus*. This is unlike the situation in Wales; perhaps we should make note of this difference?

Mention is made of the book by Elisabeth Okasha and Katherine Forsyth (*Early Christian Inscriptions of Munster* (Cork 2001)), which includes many more inscriptions than the *Thesaurus* does. However, we do not know to which extent these are certain to go back to the OIr. period; and they also include Latin-language inscriptions.

Dialects (§16)

“Linguistic differences in the Old Irish sources are almost all differences of period, and are the result of morphological development.” This sentence is full of a-priori assumptions and not uncontroversial. “Contemporary divergences, such as would point to dialectal peculiarities are very rare...”; this is too strongly worded. There is a lack of evidence and caution is warranted. “The paucity of the sources does not suffice to explain this comparative uniformity; in the literary language a levelling and intermixing of dialects must have taken place.” This is given as a dogma, with no arguments. “This process was undoubtedly assisted from the earliest times by the wandering poets, singers, and scholars, who would naturally wish to be understood everywhere.” This is full-on speculation. “Further, in the monastic communities of the sixth and following centuries, from which our sources are ultimately derived, the teachers were drawn from various parts of the country.” Again, this is largely speculative.

This entire paragraph, as quoted above, needs to be completely reformulated, starting from a position of ignorance. There appears to be a northern slant to the chief sources of OIr. (as mentioned in previous meetings). It would therefore be very interesting to know where the Würzburg glosses were written as they are linguistically quite distinct from the other glosses and this may also hint at regional variation. Peadar Ó Muirheartaigh wrote a PhD thesis recently about *Gaelic dialects present and past: a study of modern and medieval dialect relationships in the Gaelic languages*. We expect great things from him in the future.

Finally, it is briefly mentioned that the linguistic features of the dialects of today need not be informative of the dialects of the past.

Next week

Next week we will deal with the resources for learning Old Irish.