

Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 3

Records of the discussions at the conference room on 05-10-2016

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

Practicalities

Due to the preceding departmental meeting, today's meeting is shorter than usual. Moreover, next week there will be no meeting due to David's absence. The fourth meeting of the fanclub will therefore be on the 19 October.

Elizabeth argues strongly that jokes made during the reading sessions should be recorded in the minutes. The point is conceded. However, as Elizabeth was absent during this meeting, few jokes were made.

Handbuch preface

In his preface to the *Handbuch*, Thurneysen wrote that he had originally planned to write his grammar of OIr. together with his friend Strachan. Strachan would have treated Old and Middle Irish alongside one another, whereas Thurneysen would have focused on a description of Old Irish itself, going beyond it only to point out the inherent links tying OIr. to the other Indo-European languages. Unfortunately, Strachan's untimely death sadly precluded this possibility.

In effect, Thurneysen retained his original focus in writing the *Handbuch* and later the GOI. This focus on OIr., rather than treating it alongside Middle Irish, is considered to have been beneficial to the work for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was at his time a dearth of securely dated Middle Irish sources, making it difficult to decide on the basis for a Middle Irish grammar. Secondly, when one knows OIr. well, it is easy to grasp the Middle Irish developments. As such, a 'pure' description of OIr. grammar provides exactly the solid basis needed for understanding Middle Irish.

A counter to this is that there was already variation of language within the OIr. glosses, implying that a 'pure' OIr. grammar may never have been more than an artificial concept. Thurneysen may well have considered this possibility, but – like most later scholars – have decided that it is usually possible to determine which forms were earlier – and therefore to be preferred – and which forms were later.

Would the addition of the Blathmac poems to the sources of OIr. complicate matters further? For the most part it would not. Blathmac generally supports our present understanding of OIr., although there are indeed some problematic, i.e. younger-looking forms.

Thurneysen continues to state that, in spite of his decision to limit himself to OIr. materials, whenever the contemporary glosses left gaps in our understanding of the language, he resorted to early texts found in later manuscript sources to complete the grammar. In this, however, he was very careful, preferring to note too often rather than too little whenever an example was drawn from a later source. Some deviations into Middle Irish developments can, moreover, also be found in the grammar, especially in the small-script notes.

Thurneysen quite consciously decided to offer only a very limited description of the links between OIr. and the other Indo-European languages. The *Handbuch* was not intended as an introduction to such studies, but it offered enough to afford those with a solid background in Proto-Indo-European help in accessing OIr.

Moreover, Thurneysen comments on the then recent publication of Vendryes' *Grammaire* and Pedersen's *Vergleichende Grammatik*. Regarding the first he mentions that its description of syntax is more extensive. To the second he redirects any reader interested in comparative linguistics.

Vendryes' introduction

When Vendryes wrote his work most scholars still made use of Ebel's version of Zeuss' grammar and Windisch. Both were by then outdated and did not reflect the developments made during the previous decades. This made it difficult for outsiders to gain a full grasp of the language and the field as many important insights were found scattered across a diversity of papers, rather than being gathered in a single reference work. We seem to find ourselves at a similar stage once again.

Interestingly, Vendryes dedicated his grammar to Thurneysen.

The scope of the grammar was similar to that of the *Handbuch*, as Vendryes restricted himself to pre-10th century material in defining Old Irish. He defends his approach of writing a synchronic description of the language rather than writing a comparative grammar on the grounds that a language needs to be understood in its own right and that OIr. shows many peculiarities of its own, which deserve a fuller treatment than can be offered when the focus is on a comparison with other languages.

GOI: Introduction - Sources - Milan (§6) (continued)

The *Handbuch* description of the Milan glosses is much shorter than that offered in the GOI and differs quite considerably. In the *Handbuch*, Thurneysen speculated that the Latin commentary on the Psalms which was glossed might well have been written by Columbanus. This is wrong (see Proceedings: 2) and was left out in the GOI.

"The manuscript came to Milan from Bobbio, but seems to have been written in Ireland." The reason it is thought to have originated in Ireland, rather than on the continent is chiefly that the OIr. glosses contained therein fit class-room use. Therefore, the manuscript must have been used in a context where the Psalms were taught to pupils through the Irish language. We should mention this.

Brief mention is made of the fact that there is an Old Irish treatise on the Psalms found only in later sources. Perhaps a comparison between that and the Milan glosses would be interesting, especially as concerns the use of terminology.

"The Latin text and the glosses... are the work of a single scribe who signs himself Diarmait. It is possible that this Diarmait was the grandson of Áed Rón described as *anchorita* (= *anachoreta*) *et religionis doctor totius Hiberniae* who died in 825." David checked the *Annals of Ulster* to see whether there might be other Diarmaites who could fit the bill. There are quite a few:

1. In 814 Diarmait fosterson of Daigre was appointed as abbot of Iona. He is also mentioned in 829 and 831, when he respectively went on a trip to and returned from Scotland.
2. In 823 Diarmait son of Donnchad, the abbot of Ros Ech, died.
3. In 825 the aforementioned, learned Diarmait grandson of Áed Rón died.

4. In 835 a change of abbots in Armagh is recorded: Forannán replaced Diarmait grandson of Tigernán. In 836 this Diarmait went to Connacht “with Patrick’s law and his insignia”. In either 839 or 848 Diarmait regains the abbacy of Armagh, forcing Forannán out. The first entry is in Irish, whereas the second entry is in Latin; the latter seems more likely to be original. In 851 a royal conference was held at Armagh, which Diarmait attended. In 852 both Forannán and Diarmait, “the most learned of all the teachers of Europe”, died.

Any of these Diarmaits could be the learned Diarmait who wrote the Milan glosses and they should therefore all be mentioned.

“The Maíl-Gaimrid cited as an authority in glosses 56^b33 and 68^c15 is almost certainly to be identified with the *scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Benn[h]air* (Bangor, Co. Down), who died in 839.” This may well be correct, there is no other Máel Gaimrid in the *Annals of Ulster* in the period in question.

Where might the manuscript have been written? Bangor, related to this Maíl-Gaimrid, seems a strong possibility, although Thomas Clancy rather considers it to have been written in Iona (a word found in the glosses which later only occurs in Scottish-Gaelic at the very least favours a North-Eastern link).

The discussion now turns to Bangor itself, which appears to have been a very major centre of learning during the 7th and 8th centuries. Both the St. Gall glosses on Priscian and the famous, but lost, *Cín Dromma Snechtai* compilation are thought to have originated there (the latter suggestion by David). The 9th century, from which the Milan glosses are thought to derive, would represent a distinctly late phase for Bangor.

The Hisperic tradition of Latin writing, the name of which is derived from the (in)famous *Hisperica Famina*, “Western Utterances”, might also be derived from 7th century Bangor. Hisperic writing is well-known for its use of highly artificial words, demonstrating an active, creative engagement with Latin grammar, which requires an origin in a highly educated environment. Whether the Hisperic tradition is a didactic exercise, explaining the use of forms and metre (cf. Andy Orchard), or an attempt by clever scholars to show off their competence in Latin, it is undoubtedly a sign of great learning.

A note is made on whether the *belrae na filed* reflects the Hisperic tradition in the vernacular. Strictly speaking, this is not the case. *Belrae na filed* is much later (11th-12th century) and as such is unlikely to be directly derived from the Latin practice, although it appears to reflect a similar mindset.

The influence of Bangor is difficult to assess due to the lack of a dedicated study, by comparison with other centres of learning. Its relative obscurity seems related to its later demise; first it was razed by Vikings and then it was superseded by Armagh. Deborah makes mention of a manuscript containing recipes for medicine. In this manuscript recipes are rarely ascribed to any particular origin, but one is very specifically ascribed to Bangor, which may also reflect its importance as an early centre. Additionally, in *Auraicept na nÉces* – which in its present form is strongly associated with Munster – when figures of authority are cited at one point, one is from Munster, as expected and another is from the North-East (Bangor?).

The reason for Bangor’s prominence is unclear. Perhaps different regions had different scholarly interests and expertise? Leinster, which is closer to Britain and the continent, has yielded significant early genealogies. Munster produced, or at least influenced, many law tracts (although *Senchas Már* itself was originally from the North).

The likelihood of a North-Eastern origin for the Milan glosses, possibly in Bangor, is highly significant. It would seem that nearly all major sources for OIr. derive from the North-East. The St. Gall glosses and *Cín Dromma Snechta* appear to derive from Bangor, the *Annals of Ulster* have a clearly north-eastern origin, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is from around Co. Louth, and the Blathmac poems are equally from the North-East. The origin of the Würzburg glosses is as yet unknown.

Given this regional slant of the sources – with both the Milan and St. Gall glosses possibly deriving from the very same centre – one may wonder whether the differences between the language of Milan and St. Gall on the one hand and the Würzburg glosses on the other are due to distance in time, or space. The orthodox position is that the Würzburg glosses are simply earlier, but the Milan glosses are often strikingly archaic in their own right. The matter deserves further reflection.

“In addition to the glosses, the manuscript contains at the beginning two Irish poems, now partly indecipherable, written in another hand.” These poems were not investigated by Griffith in his database. McCone cited a form of the female word for “three” from them. Moreover, they appear to have a rather unusual word-order. Yet it would seem that they have not been investigated in-depth since the GOI was published.

“...the language of ML, which is appreciably later than that of Wb.”, reflecting *Handbuch*: “Die sprache ist jünger als Wb”, is too forceful. As mentioned above, although some forms look late (there is some neutralization of final vowels – although this might also be scribal) the Milan glosses are generally quite conservative in comparison to, for example, the Blathmac poems, which may be dated to c. 750 AD. Also, the division between the forms of the article *inna* and *na* is much stricter in Milan than it is in Würzburg, whatever the implications of that may be. The upshot of this is that the dating of the Milan glosses appears much less certain than has been thought. The Milan and St. Gall glosses need to be closely compared and also contrasted to more securely dated texts.

As to the editions of the Milan glosses, the Ascoli edition (1878) is difficult to come by and access at this stage. The *Thesaurus* added emendations to Ascoli’s clean transcription and as these include editorial mistakes, its version is perhaps worse than Ascoli’s. Griffith’s database deserves full mention, as well as Griffith’s and Stifter’s article, *New and Corrected ms. Readings in the Milan Glosses* (2014), which improves many of the readings in Ascoli and the *Thesaurus*. Unfortunately, the MS has not been digitized. The collotype facsimile by the Royal Irish Academy (1936) has been scanned for the Milan Glosses project, but although RIA was in favour of putting it online, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan which contains the MS refused to allow this. David, however, offers to provide the scans to anyone who wants them.