

Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 5

Records of the discussions at the conference room on 26-10-2016

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Deborah Hayden, Gearóid Ua Conchubhair, Anne Harrington, Bernhard Bauer, Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu, Romanas Bulatovas, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Practicalities

Many have sent in apologies (Siobhán Barrett, Elizabeth Boyle, Chantal Kobel, Lára Ní Mhaoláin), explaining their absence.¹ There will be no meeting next week, nor (most likely) the week after that. As such the next meeting will likely take place the 16th of November.

Previous proceedings

Peadar Ó Muirheartaigh sent David an email, commending the reading group initiative. He also comments on the discussion on the claim that the Turin glosses were written by the scribe of Milan (GOI §6). He says that the glosses are definitely not in the same hand. It is only the Latin commentary in Turin that is in the same hand as that in the Milan manuscript. Cahill (Peritia 13, 1999) has noted that Bergin and Best added this claim to the grammar themselves. It reflects Best's claims in his edition of the Turin glosses. As such the claim does not appear to have ever been advanced by Thurneysen himself.

Elliott notes that the Turin glosses are now largely illegible due to a fire in c. 1910, which left the writing smudged. As such the Thesaurus edition remains the only edition based on the manuscript as it was before it was damaged. Nevertheless, both McNamara (Celtica 6, 1963) and Cahill offered a number of better readings. These sources should be mentioned.

Elliott remarks that it was agreed during the previous meeting to only list the most important sources in a grammar of this kind. He wonders how 'importance' will be decided. David answers that the decision was made mainly because it would otherwise become a very long list and that there is no need to recapitulate lists which can easily be found elsewhere, outside of a grammar. The guiding principle should be that texts used in the grammar itself should be mentioned in the chapter on sources.

Elliott stresses that the Minor Glosses are significant sources and that it would be a poor practice to continue singling out the Turin glosses, as they only contain a rather middling amount (c. 115) of OIr. glosses relative to the other manuscripts that make up said corpus.

Elliott has looked into some reviews of the *Handbuch* and other grammars. In ZCP 7 (1910) there is a short review of the *Handbuch* on page 527. Also included in this journal are reviews of Vendryes' *Grammaire* by Bergin and of Strachan's Welsh Grammar. This might make for an interesting read.

Elliott also discovered a discussion between Pokorny and Thurneysen (in ZCP?) on aspects of OIr. grammar, spanning the decade 1910–20.² These might also make for interesting reading, as they may offer insights into the way Thurneysen's views developed after the publication of the *Handbuch*.

¹ David: "Let's start, maybe. We have taken loads of apologies." It should be noted that both of the Austrians are present, despite it being their national holiday (*Nationalfeiertag*).

² Elliott sent an email concerning this and some of the previous to David early in October. David claims to have never received such an email, but Elliott is adamant on the matter: "You replied, saying 'thank you'." David: "Oh. I would not delete that." The mystery remains unsolved.

The Nature of Old Irish

David offers some reflections, which spark a long argument, on the exact nature of the Old Irish which a new grammar should aim to describe. Back when the GOI was written all sources from the OIr. period were taken together and both earlier and later forms were presented on an equal footing. Given that we now have a better understanding of the chronology of the sources, it might be desirable to shift the focus and fundamentally build the grammar on the basis of 8th century sources. Earlier sources would then be preferred over 9th century material, which would only be used where appropriate (e.g. where earlier sources are lacking). Any use of later material would then be explicitly marked as such.

In actual practice, we would of course have to discuss lines of developments and diachronic discrepancies in any new grammar of OIr., but a narrower focus on 8th-century sources would facilitate a more effective description of the earliest, comprehensively attested form of the language. It is suggested that the differences between 8th- and 9th-century forms are significant enough that the inclusion of both would create a rather fuzzy picture of the language. It is thus suggested that uniformity trumps diversity. In contrast it is felt that the differences between 7th- and 8th- century Irish are relatively minor and that sources from both centuries could be used to inform the new grammar.

An example of the benefits of changing the focus of the grammar is that it would allow to avoid having to treat the hypercorrect form *dáu* (3sg. m. of the conjugated preposition *do*) in the 9th-century poem *Messe ocus Pangur Bán* on an equal footing with *dó*. Another pertinent example is the treatment of the nom. pl. of u-stem nouns.

Nonetheless the grammar should not avoid variance as such and if the focus is settled on the earlier period all forms found to reliably derive from that time should be included. Mention is made of the possibility of adding a separate section on 9th-century Irish. Similarly it is, not for the first time, briefly discussed whether there should be a section on historical phonology and whether or not *ogam*-sources should be included. The matter hinges on the fact that, however useful such a section might be, the subject is vast and it would be difficult to treat it adequately in the space allowed for it in a largely synchronic description of OIr.

The proposed shift of focus has implications for the definition of OIr. A few weeks ago, at the second meeting of the fanclub, OIr. was defined as the Irish language during the 8th- and 9th-centuries. The Irish of the 7th-century was called Archaic Irish. During the present meeting a contrast is made by some of the participants between ‘OIr. proper’ or ‘actual OIr.’ (referring chiefly to the OIr. of the 8th-century, but also referring to the Archaic Irish of the 7th-century) and 9th-century Irish. It remains unclear what 9th-century Irish should then be considered to be, as all of the participants appear to agree that the language of these sources is still, essentially, OIr.

The preceding also has significant implications for the – yet to be discussed – inclusion of sources of OIr. first attested in later manuscripts, as these may then include a significant number of texts with 7th-century origin, whilst potentially excluding texts dated to the 9th-century.

At this stage a strong case is made for the inclusion, whatever might otherwise be decided, of the early 8th-century Lambeth commentary to the sources, as it offers us a long text, rather than brief glosses, affording us a different view of the language.

Finally, continuing the discussion from the last meeting, brief note is made on why Thurneysen did not mention the Stowe Missal: this is thought to be due to the fact that Thurneysen and Strachan considered the manuscript to belong to the 10th-century.

Later Manuscripts (§9)

The phrase “Besides the old texts from later MSS. included in the Thesaurus, two large manuscript collectanea are frequently cited” is somewhat unfortunately worded, as these other old texts from later manuscripts (presumably the texts from the *Liber Hymnorum*) have not been mentioned in the GOI so far. The sentence is absent as such from the *Handbuch*, which instead offers the equally unsatisfying mention that these two manuscripts include (amongst other texts) the texts of the Irish heroic sagas. Thurneysen must have been unduly influenced by his work on *Die irische Helden- und Königsage* at the time.

“**LU. Leabhar na h-Uidhri, or Lebor na h-Uidre**”; the Modern Irish name is not often used and should be left out. The information given on the scribe has been superseded and the recent publication on the manuscript should be added, if it is to be mentioned in a new grammar. ISOS (Irish Script on Screen) should also be referenced. The facsimile edition need not be mentioned anymore.³

The other manuscript mentioned in the GOI is the Book of Leinster (LL), the Irish name for which (*Leabhar Laighneach, Lebor Laignech*) is not quite as consistent as that of LU. Should we use the Old-and-Middle Irish spelling here as well, to be consistent, even though it is not often used? Fangzhe points out that the Irish name of the manuscript is actually *Lebar na Núachongbála*.

In general, it is decided that when one is citing a form from an early text first attested in a later manuscript the text itself, rather than the manuscript in which it is found, is significant. As such, the text, and not the manuscript, should be cited in such cases.

The discussion now turns to why these two manuscripts were singled out. It soon becomes apparent that all participants consider this to be a flawed practice (e.g. why not mention Rawlinson B502 as well, if LU and LL are discussed?), but there is a difference of opinion as to what should replace it.

One position sets out that we should simply adhere to the previously stated principle that citation within the grammar itself determines whether or not a source is discussed in this chapter. If these manuscripts are of particular significance as sources for our grammar of OIr. they should be listed, if not then they should be left out. Moreover, for the purpose of citing word forms we should generally turn to modern editions of texts. Since significance should be attached primarily to the texts, rather than to the (late) manuscripts in which they are contained, there appears to be no need to mention the latter at all.

The other position proposes to include a list of about one page of the main manuscript witnesses of Early Irish literature here, independent of whether or not these are cited in the grammar itself. The purpose of this list would be to introduce the reader to the field itself. Moreover, this is felt to help avoid too strong a divorce between the study of the language on the one hand and the manuscripts witnesses on the other. An oft-repeated argument is that the addition of a short list to the book cannot really hurt.

³ Fangzhe states that the facsimile editions, being beautiful, belong to “the age of elegance”. David misheard this and thought Fangzhe was mentioning an “age of arrogance”.

The discussion centres around the intended goals and audience of a new grammar. It was earlier agreed that the grammar should be a non-introductory reference grammar. This can be interpreted as meaning that such a list is superfluous. However, this is countered by the argument that newcomers to the field (whether students, or specialists from other fields) will still read and use the grammar irrespective of whether it was aimed at them or not, and that every little may help them along. Surely it is desirable to help newcomers gain entry to the field? This in turn is countered by the notion that there is a certain circularity to such an argument and that this line of thought might see the grammar endlessly expanded to cater to the needs of potential readers. Moreover, should this not rather be an introduction to the specific subject of OIr. grammar, rather than to the field in general? The matter is left unsettled.

In the course of this discussion some thought was also given to the long-term stability of hyperlinks. Should hyperlinks be used in the text, or just general references to the websites on which the information may be found? Modern search technology will allow to locate websites even if their URLs changed.

An important point is made towards the end in that it should be explicitly stated and explained that within the field of Celtic Studies early texts may often be found, more or less reliably transmitted, in manuscripts that may postdate them by (many) centuries.

Archaic Sources (§10)

It is felt by some that the placement of the archaic sources after treating the later manuscripts is odd. They should have been placed chronologically before the later material. However, not all believe that a chronological ordering would have been warranted, as these archaic sources are not the sources on which the grammar is primarily based and placing them first would have given them undue prominence.

Whether or not this distinction will be maintained depends largely on the precise focus of the grammar (see the earlier discussion on the nature of OIr.).

The phonological developments between Archaic Irish and OIr. will certainly need to be discussed if such sources are to be included among the chief sources of the grammar. This supports the case for a separate chapter on historical phonology to be included.