

THE STRESS SYSTEM OF THE HIBERNO-LATIN
HENDECASYLLABLE

THIS article, written in honour of Professor Brian Ó Cuív, is the third in a series of studies that deal with the problem of stress in insular rhythmical verse, and most particularly in Hiberno-Latin rhythmical verse.¹ The essential problem posed in this programme of research is whether it is possible to isolate what is characteristically ‘insular’ – and more especially Irish-insular – from the surviving material of early rhythmical verse.² These studies are based on the solid and universally accepted method of analyzing rhythmical verse developed by Dag Norberg in a series of books.³ The kernel of the Norbergian method can be summarized in the phrase *imitation de la structure*. This means that the *structure* of a line of quantitative verse was taken over into rhythmical (non-quantitative) verse. *Structure* embraces four elements: (1) the number of a syllables in a line; (2) the type of line-ending, i.e. proparoxytone (‘rising’) or paroxytone (‘falling’); (3) word-foot divisions; (4) stress pattern.⁴ With respect to the last, Norberg established conclusively that it was not the ictus-pattern of the ancient model that was imitated, but rather its word-accent pattern. Norberg summarizes his method succinctly with the following words:

Nous avons formulé le résultat de nos recherches de la manière suivante: on lisait les anciens vers quantitatifs en respectant les accents ordinaires comme s'ils avaient de la prose et en prenant garde aux coupes et à la répartition des mots dans les vers, puis on imitait l'image rythmique ainsi obtenue sans se soucier de la quantité.⁵

Norberg was quite conscious of the tendency of insular (and particularly Irish) writers to imitate the quantitative *structure* differently from

¹See now my ‘The stress systems in Insular Latin octosyllabic verse’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 15 (1988) 63–84; ‘Hibernolatinische und irische Verskunst mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den Siebensilber’, *Scriptoria* (Tübingen), forthcoming.

²I first formulated this problem in my ‘Hiberno-Latin philology: the state of the question’ in M. W. Herren (ed.), *Insular Latin studies: papers on Latin texts and manuscripts of the British Isles 550–1066* (Toronto 1981) 1–22, p. 16.

³*La poésie latine rythmique du haut moyen âge* (Stockholm 1954); *L'introduction à la l'étude de la versification latine médiévale* (Uppsala 1958); *Les vers latins iambiques et trochaïques au moyen âge et leurs répliques rythmiques* (Stockholm 1988). This last work was not available to me when I wrote my article on the insular octosyllables (see note 1).

⁴Norberg's concept of *structure* is expressed in his notation system, which I follow in this paper. The hendecasyllabic line discussed here is expressed in the notation 4p 7pp, i.e. four syllables ending in a proparoxytone word or word-group, followed by a ‘caesura’ (a metrical pause that might more accurately be designated by the term *diaeresis*), then seven syllables ending in a proparoxytone word or word-group.

⁵Norberg, *Introduction*, 186. For details of the method see *ibid.*, 94–119.

continental writers. He devoted some discussion to insular peculiarities in the imitation of iambic dimeter in the *Introduction*,⁶ while in his latest work he allotted a separate chapter to this topic.⁷ In general, Norberg regarded the insular compositions as examples of *imitation partielle*; in some instances, e.g. the octosyllabic poem 'Altus prosator', he thought that only the number of syllables was imitated.⁸

In analyzing insular practice in composing eight- and seven-syllable rhythmical verse, I have come to somewhat different conclusions from those of Norberg without diverging in any serious way from the method he established. In the case of octosyllabic verses such as one finds in the 'Altus prosator', I argued that the poet retained the basic *structure* provided by the metrical model, but favoured one of the three possible word-stress patterns that occurs but rarely in the metrical model and is also rare in the continental imitations thereof. As for the seven-syllable line, I think that it is highly doubtful that Irish poets employed a Latin model or models. I base this assertion on two factors: (1) problems surrounding the transmission of a suitable metrical model to Ireland; (2) the irregularities that occur in extant Hiberno-Latin heptasyllabic poetry. It seems likelier that this verse form was heavily influenced by early examples of a native Irish seven-syllable line. (Repetition of the arguments for these conclusions would require a great deal of space, so I must content myself with referring the reader to the publications cited above.) What emerges is that each type of verse must be studied on its own, as I hypothesized earlier.⁹

In the present paper I should like to consider a third type of verse, namely the rhythmical hendecasyllable, designated by Norberg as 4p 7pp.¹⁰ This unusual verse-type differs markedly from other rhythmical hendecasyllabic verse types, which show a 'caesura' after the *fifth* syllable in imitation of either the quantitative sapphic or alcaic verse,¹¹ or else is divided after six syllables.¹² The 4p 7pp appears to be a Hiberno-Latin innovation, with several examples datable to the seventh century.¹³ There are two continental examples of this

⁶ibid., 125–6.

⁷'Les débuts dans la tradition insulaire' in *Les vers latins iambiques*, 42–7.

⁸In his discussion of the poem 'Altus prosator', ibid., 44.

⁹*CMCS* 15 (1988) 84.

¹⁰*Introduction*, 118. For the notation, see above, note 4.

¹¹See Norberg, *Introduction*, 95, 101, 104.

¹²ibid., 98.

¹³These are: (1) the *Lorica of Laidcenn*, ed. M. W. Herren, *Hisperica Famina*: II. Related poems (Toronto 1987) 76–93; (2) the so-called 'Oratio Gildae', ed. B. Bischoff, *Ancedota novissima* (Stuttgart 1984) 154–61; (3) the 'Kanon Evangeliorum', ed. M. Esposito, 'Hiberno-Latin manuscripts in the libraries of Switzerland', *RIA Proc.* 30 C (1912) 1–14, esp. 3–5; (4) a rhythmical paraphrase of the *Carmen Paschale* of Caelius Sedulius, ed. W. Meyer, *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. Kl. IV* (1917) 594–6. For a discussion of the relationship between these poems, see Herren, *Hisperica Famina* II, 56–61.

verse-type, but they are almost certainly later than the Hiberno-Latin examples.¹⁴

Norberg, perhaps influenced by Wilhelm Meyer, regarded the model as an abbreviated form of a rhythmical septenarius (8p 7pp).¹⁵ In other words, the usual eight syllables of 'falling rhythm' occurring before the 'caesura' in the septenarius are reduced to four in the hendecasyllable. Despite my initial reluctance to accept this proposed model,¹⁶ I now see it as the most plausible *Vorbild* for our hendecasyllable. Certainly no other Latin model comes easily to mind, nor does there appear to be a question here of vernacular influence. The transmission of the hypothesized Latin metrical model to Ireland is demonstrable.¹⁷

But the matter does not end here. In discussing the 'Oratio Gildae' Norberg notes the irregular line (verse 4):

Qui natus est ex virgine Maria

and states:

L'imitation de structure est seulement partielle dans le vers 4 . . .
et dans quelques cas où la cadence finale est paroxytone.¹⁸

In my earlier explanation of the stress system of the *Lorica of Laidcenn*, I believe that I was all too eager to overlook irregularities.¹⁹ Moreover, I tended to assume that the poet either was ignorant of some word accents or simply was indifferent to certain dissonances with the ictus-pattern. However, ignorance of word accent cannot be invoked to explain the rhythm of an entire stanza such as we find at lines 19-22:

Tum deinde cet(e)ros agonithetas
patriarchas quattuor quater prophetas
apostolos nauis Christi proretas
et martyres omnes peto anthletas²⁰

Two-syllable rhyme joins the line-endings of each verse in the stanza. It is difficult to believe that Laidcenn would ask his reader to distort the accent of all four paroxytone words at the end of each line in order to 'regularize' the rhythm. It also seems unlikely that he was ignorant

¹⁴Listed by Norberg, *Introduction*, 118 n. 1. These are *Andecavis abbas esse dicitur*, K. Scheckter (ed.), *Poetae latini aevi Carolini [PLAC]* IV fasc. iii (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Berlin 1896, repr. 1964) 591; *Phoebo claro / nondum orto iubare*, L. Traube (ed.), *id.* III (Berlin 1896, repr. 1964) 703. The last-named contains some words in a Romance language.

¹⁵*ibid.*; W. Meyer, 'Die Verskunst der Iren in rythmischen lateinischen Gedichten', *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur mittellateinischen Rythmik* 3 (Berlin 1936) 306-7.

¹⁶*Hisperica Famina* II, 57.

¹⁷Norberg, *Introduction*, 112-13.

¹⁸*ibid.*, 118 n. 1.

¹⁹See the selective list of lines with regular rhythm given by me in *Hisperica Famina* II, 57. The present study is intended as a modification of the discussion of the theory of stress patterns given in that work.

²⁰*Hisperica Famina* II, 78.

of the correct stress in such familiar Christian Latin words as *prophetas* and *a(n)thletas*. In brief, it seems most natural to treat the entire stanza as a case of rhyming paroxytone cadences.

If one were provisionally to treat the post-caesura seven-syllable hemistichs as free-standing units (rather than simply as completions to the 'abbreviated' septenarius), one would note that all the lines show identical rhythm (word-stress patterns):

cét(e)ros àgonithétas
 quáttúor quáter prophétas
 náuis Chrísti prorétas
 ómnes péto anthlétas.

It is most instructive to compare the stress patterns of this 'stanza' with those of a typical stanza from one of the earliest Hiberno-Latin heptasyllabic poems, 'Versiculi Familiae Benchuir', where, instead of the rhyme scheme *aaaa* we find *acbd*. I cite stanza 2:

Návis númquam turbáta
 Quámvis flúctibus tónsa
 Núptiis quóque paráta
 Régis Dómino spónsa.²¹

Quite similar to this example (but with a different rhyme scheme again: *abab*) are the verses of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus (written probably in Ireland, c.650):

Méa, méa Matróna,
 túum ampléctor sóma
 nóbis ánima úna
 héret átque arctúra.²²

These examples help to explain the intrusion of paroxytone heptasyllabic elements in the *Lorica of Laidcenn*. A close parallel to the paroxytone lines in the *Lorica* occurs in the poem 'Oratio Gildae' discussed by Norberg, (lines 9–10):

Né me cáptent hóstes átque latrónes
 Néque fúres néque mún-di predónes.²³

Thus despite the preponderance of proparoxytone rhyming cadences in both Hiberno-Latin hendecasyllabic poems, we occasionally find paroxytone rhyming cadences in the heptasyllabic portions. These heptasyllabic portions exhibit a stress pattern *s s s s s s* and the variant

²¹C. Blume (ed.), *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi* LI (Leipzig 1908) 356.

²²L. Caruso and G. Polara (ed.), *Virgilio Marone grammatico, epitomi ed epistole* (Naples 1979) 26.

²³Bischoff, *Anecdota novissima*, 154–61.

s s s s s s that is identical to the stress pattern in many lines of free-standing Hiberno-Latin heptasyllable. This fact seems to show that writers of the Hiberno-Latin hendecasyllable did not think consistently in terms of 4p 7pp, but rather in terms of 4p + 7pp *or* 7p, thereby revealing the influence of the 'unstable' Hiberno-Latin heptasyllable on the hendecasyllable. This latter is characterized by rhyming cadences alternating between pp and p. Rhyming proparoxytone heptasyllables could be mixed with rhyming paroxytone heptasyllables in the same stanza, as in the refrain of the *Versiculi Familiae Benchuir* with the rhyme scheme *acbd*:

Bénchuir bóna regula,
Récta átque divína,
Strícta, sáncta, sédula,
Súmma, iústa ac míra.²⁴

At this stage it might be worth while to compare our two surviving examples of continental hendecasyllable (4p 7pp). The first stanza of *Andecavis abbas* supplies the model for the remainder of the poem; the rhythm is regular throughout and there are no deviations. Leaving aside the refrain *Eia eia eia laudes* etc., the stanza reads as follows:

Andecavis abbas esse dicitur
Ille nomen primi tenet hominum;
Hunc fatentur vinum vellet bibere
Super omnes Andechavis homines.²⁵

Not only are all line-endings regularly proparoxytone (according to Norberg's model), the rhythm throughout the line is also regular, i.e. stressed and unstressed syllables alternate regularly and each line begins with 'falling rhythm' and ends with 'rising rhythm':

ś s ś s ś s ś s ś s ś
Ándecávis ábas ésse dicitùr.

Elision does not occur, and there is only one example of diaeresis: 4,2 *suāviter*. The same holds for the poem *Phoebi claro*. Again leaving aside the refrain (here written in a romance dialect), all the lines are perfectly regular. I cite the first stanza:

Phoébi cláro nóndum órto iúbarè
Fért Auróra lúmen térris ténue
Spículátor pígris clámat 'súrgitè'.²⁶

In stark contrast to these continental examples, the Hiberno-Latin examples display irregularities of various sorts. I have attempted to

²⁴Blume, *Analecta Hymnica* LI, 356.

²⁵*PLAC* IV, 591.

²⁶*PLAC* III, 703 n.

show elsewhere that word separation at the 'caesura', diaeresis, synizesis, syncope and elision as well as end-rhyme and internal assonance are characteristic of the Hiberno-Latin examples.²⁷ Here I shall restrict comment to matters affecting stress. In addition to the occurrence of paroxytone ('non-pattern') lines in what should be a proparoxytone system, one notes variations within each system as well.²⁸ Thus for the paroxytone lines we note an example of *imitation des ictus* in line 4 of 'Oratio Gildae', with a resulting hemistich of rhythmical iambic dimeter (catalectic):

Qui nátus èst ex víginè María.²⁹

Similarly, there are variants in the proparoxytone lines. Compare *Lorica of Laidcenn*, line 30:

úndiquè me defénde poténtià

and line 50:

cóllo clémens adésto tutámini

But it would be wrong to reach the conclusion, on the basis of such variations, that all is permitted, with the further conclusion that the only principle of order is syllable count. Something altogether different is at work here as in the heptasyllable, namely that regular stress is subordinate to the principle of repeated rhythm in lines joined by rhyme. This can apply to a group of four lines (a whole stanza), as we showed in the discussion of lines 19–23, or to groups of two lines within a stanza. Observe the arrangement in *Lorica*, lines 51–4:

51 Déinde ésto lúricà tutíssimà
 52 érga mémbra érga méa uíscerà
 53 ut retrúdas a mé inuisíbílès
 54 súdum cláuos quos fíngunt odíbílès

Lines 51–2 agree not only in the rhythm of proparoxytone cadence, but show identical rhythm throughout; thus:

ś s ś s ś s ś s ś s

²⁷*Hisperica Famina* II, 57–62.

²⁸In my analysis of insular octosyllables (*CMCS* 15 (1988) 63–84), I classified the variant *structures* obtainable from a metrical model into 'basic pattern' (showing complete agreement of word-accent with the ictus-pattern of the model), 'variant 1' (where there is a single clash of accent and ictus at a non-crucial place in the line), and 'variant 2' (where a second clash occurs, this time at the end of the first foot, where it is particularly jarring). These categories might apply as well to seven-syllable insular verse or to verses containing a heptasyllabic element, if it could be shown that the insular verses were based on a Latin metrical model. However, as this cannot be proven (indeed, I hold that the model must be rejected), I have not employed the terminology in the present paper.

²⁹Indeed, the line, taken as a whole, yields a rhythmical iambic trimeter (catalectic); note the 'rising' rhythm in the first hemistich.

In the next couplet it is important to observe that the rhythm shifts markedly from the preceding couplet. This is achieved by placing the stress on the second syllable from the beginning of the heptasyllabic hemistich – an ‘indentation’, if you will. The rhythm obtained is:

ś ś ś ś ś ś ś ś ś ś

The selfsame shift of rhythm occurs between the two couplets in the following stanza (lines 63–6):

Tége cámbas súrras fêmorálià
 cúm genúclis póplites et génuà
 tége tálos cum tíbís et cálcibùs
 crúra pédes plantárum cum bássibùs.

Thus, in contrast to the continental examples, which show constant rhythm throughout, the Hiberno-Latin hendecasyllabic poems are characterized by rhythmic variety, which, as I have tried to show, is based on the grouping of final stress patterns (cadences) and sometimes complete stress patterns (lines) according to rhyme-scheme. However, it must be admitted that problems remain. An instructive example occurs in lines 21–4 of ‘Kanon Euangeliorum’:

21 Ecce sexto pari sonant clamore
 22 Natus Adam cum clamoso leone,
 23 Computata traditis pro munere
 24 Sacerdotum oppidis in honore.³⁰

From the standpoint of correct Latin word-stress, lines 21, 22 and 24 are paroxytone, while line 23 is proparoxytone. The explanation admits of three hypotheses: (1) the poet was indifferent to word-stress and was content with a fixed syllable count; (2) he was ignorant of the correct stress of the four end words and thus took them all for proparoxytone;³¹ (3) the poet meant to give *clamore*, *leone*, and *honore* their correct paroxytone values and was content to admit the irregularity of the proparoxytone *munere* in line 23. Of these three explanations, I should tend to favour number 3, if only because it is the most ‘rational’. The hypothesis preserves correct word accent in all lines and allows for two-syllable ‘Irish end-rhyme’ (or two-syllable end-assonance) in lines 21, 22 and 24, resulting in the scheme *abd*. It may be significant that line 23, the third line in the stanza, is ‘odd man out’. The reverse schema, pp pp p pp, occurs four times in the *De Mundi transitu*, an Hiberno-Latin heptasyllabic poem of 21 stanzas.³²

³⁰Esposito, *RIA Proc.* 30 C (1912) 4.

³¹This is not so implausible in the cases of *clámōre* and *hónōre*; the incorrect stress may be accounted for by a false analogy to *árbōre*, with short *o*. However, it is quite difficult to explain *léōne*.

³²See the important study by M. J. McGann, ‘The distribution of cadences in the *De Mundi transitu* of St. Columban’, *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 31/2–3 (1961) 147–9, p. 148.

I end on some methodological points. (1) To grasp the principle of the rhythmical organization of individual lines in these and other Hiberno-Latin poems, it is important to remain firmly Norbergian! Lines should always be read according to established word accent, not according to some fixed idea of verse-ictus; unstressed monosyllables and enclitics should be left unstressed, except, of course, where a secondary verse-stress is possible. Irregularities and infelicities in certain lines of these poems may remain, but these can only be ascertained after the intended cadences and their attendant rhyme-structure have been established with some degree of probability. (2) Further progress in our understanding of the distribution of cadences in Hiberno-Latin poetry will depend upon a comprehensive study of Hiberno-Latin together with native Irish theory of rhyme that embraces not only the permissible types of rhyme, but also their *schemata* in the stanzaic structure.

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