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SUMMARY

In the light of the importance of metrics for the establishment of skaldic texts, and hence for their use for literary or historical purposes, the sources of knowledge of skaldic poetry are discussed. It is shown that there is a tendency to circularity in metrical analysis of edited texts, since almost all editors have consciously or unconsciously used metrical criteria in producing their texts, to which reference is then made in order to establish the principles of metrics. Further, medieval commentators regularly assume knowledge of basic metrical principles, and so give little direct information about them.

A basic assumption of skaldic metrics, that each line in dróttkvætt has three accents ("lifts", "stresses"), is discussed. After a brief survey of the literature, an explicit statement of this assumption, and the implications involved in it, are examined. The relationship between accent, alliteration and rhyme is discussed.

It is concluded that the assumption is wholly unjustified, and suggestions for a more realistic approach to the subject are made.

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The publication of Professor E.O.G. Turville-Petre's new anthology of skaldic poetry (E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Scaldic Poetry, Oxford 1976) gives a new impetus to skaldic studies in the English-speaking world; the present paper can be seen, inter alia, as an early product of this impetus. Skaldic metrics (for the purposes of this paper narrowly defined as the metrics of dróttkvæðr háttir and metres derived from it) is a difficult and sometimes obscure subject, but Turville-Petre has given one of the most humane and most clearly reasoned basic accounts of it available (op. cit. pp. xviii-xx and xxviii-xl).

The importance of scansion, of course, is very great; quite apart from its intrinsic interest, it can sometimes be used, for instance, in dating a verse. Irregularity in the use of skothending, for instance, is usually considered a characteristic of earlier dróttkvætt (Turville-Petre, op. cit. p. xxix; von See, Skothending. Bemerkungen zur Frühgeschichte des skaldischen Binnenreims, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache (Tübingen), 90 (1968), pp. 217-22, and references given there). Further, linguistic attempts to date rhymes depend, of course, upon a precise knowledge of the rules governing rhyme, which are more complex than might appear at first. Further, skaldic scansion is a basic tool of textual criticism: that is, it can be used as a tool with which the original text of a verse can be established, or at least the corruption of its text demonstrated. Only after this stage can the content of the verse be analysed. Scansion is therefore of central importance to the historian, who may wish to use the verse as a source-document in itself, or to use it to determine how reliable a saga may be; it is also central for the literary scholar, who is concerned with the intrinsic value of the verse as poetry, and with the light which it may throw upon its poet. In short, the historian and literary scholar must look to the editor, and the editor to the metrist, to establish the text of skaldic poetry before it can be used. Great expectations, rarely fulfilled.

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Thus the rule that each dróttkvætt line must have three metrically functional accents, in this formulation, has three (groups of) further implications. Firstly, in the statement that it is the strongest accents which are metrically functional, it is implied that actual accentual strength, as opposed to relative strength, is metrically irrelevant, as also is any supernumerary accent. Secondly, it is implied that the rules of 'natural' Old Norse speech and of Old Norse recitation can be invoked to determine which syllables are accented most strongly. Thirdly, it is implied that alliteration can determine or modify accentuation; in this context it is also relevant to consider the metrical function of rhyme.

I propose to discuss these three groups of implications before returning to the three-accent rule, which to a large extent depends upon them. As representative texts I use Bragi's Ragnarsdrápa (Rdr.), the corpus of poetry attributed to Þórarinn inn svarti Þórólfsson from Mávahlíð, the Máhlíðingavísur (Máhl.), and the Erfidrápa Óláfs helga of Sighvatr Þórðarson (Erf.), although reference will also be made to other texts. Examples have been selected from Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning B I, and Kock, Skaldediktningen I, but have always been checked, and frequently re-edited, by reference to Finnur Jónsson, Skjaldedigtning A I.

Firstly, if it is assumed that the (three) strongest accents in a line are the only functional accents, and, as corollary, that actual accentual strength is irrelevant and that supernumerary accents are irrelevant, then major inconsistencies of practice are involved. For instance, in lines such as Rdr. 1² hve hreingróit steini (hrein- carries höfuðstafr), 3² Jörmunrekr at vakna, 3⁷ þá er hrafnbláir hefndu; Máhl. 2⁷ þá var dæmisalr dóma, 4⁵ hve hjaldrviðir heldu, 7⁶ baugs fyrri óðal- draugi; Erf. 4⁴ ríklunduðum undan, 13³ loghreytöndum líta, 16³ fjólkunnigra Finna, and very many other such examples, the three-accent rule obliges the metrist to take the second element of a compound as one of the three functional accents. But in lines such as Rdr. 2² gjöld baugnafaðs vildi, 5⁵ saums andvanar standa, 5⁸ Hergauts vinu barðir;

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Máhl. 1² morðfárs vega þorði, 6⁸ unnr benlækir runnu, 7⁴ þings spáneyjar syngva; Erf. 1⁴ eirsamr konungr þeira, 5² margdýrr konungr varga, 8⁸ blóðrøst Svíar óðu, and very many other such examples, the three-accent rule obliges the metrist to disregard the second element of a compound. How then is it possible to scan lines such as Rdr. 3⁶ Randvís hofuðniðja or Erf. 9⁴ aflfátt meðalkafla or Egill Aðalsteinsdrápa 1⁸ hrannbrjótr konungmanni? If in examples such as these, the second element which carries rhyme is thereby to be more strongly accented, and the problem so resolved, how then is it possible to scan lines such as Erf. 7⁸ framlundaðr Ögmundar or 17⁸ gunnranns konungmanni? See also the discussion of rhyme and accentuation below.

Similar problems arise outside compounds: in a line such as Erf. 3⁸ dýrs horn Vísund sporna or 5⁶ þjóf hvern konungr ernan, 7⁴ gørt víg saman hjörtu, 22⁶ hönd kristit lið standa, 27⁸ vers ylgjar staf fylgðum, the three-accent rule obliges the metrist to disregard a primary accent, while in eg. Erf. 3⁵ annan lét á unnir it obliges him to accent a pronominal adjective, a finite auxiliary verb in its normal syntactic position, and a noun. This last example is in the same half-strophe, and sentence, as the example quoted above, dýrs horn Vísund sporna. Such inconsistencies of scansion produce insoluble problems in cases such as Haustleng 15⁷ seðr gekk Svölnis ekkja or Kormákr lv. 37³ allt gjalfr eyja þjalfa, where no accent can be metrically disregarded.

Insoluble problems of scansion, as well as major inconsistencies of practice, arise, therefore, when actual accentual strength and supernumerary accents are disregarded in the application of the three-accent rule.

Secondly, I am in agreement with the implication that the rhythmic patterns of dróttkvætt are in some accord with natural speech in Old Norse. This, however, is an act of faith rather than a provable conclusion; I believe that (even) skaldic poetry remains human speech, and, as such, must harmonise with the rhythm- and intonation-patterns of the language in which it is composed. Much profitable work remains to be done in

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demonstrating how such a harmony, which I believe to be basic to the æsthetic impact of the poetry, operates in, for instance, the relationship between metrics and syntax. The more such observable correlations can be shown to exist, the more probable the axiom becomes, but in a dead literary tradition and a past language it is not provable. It is also possible that worthwhile research into Old Norse poetic recitation may be profitable.

The third group of implications, that alliteration (and/or rhyme) can determine or modify accentuation, can be proved or disproved by reference to the texts. If alliteration can determine accent, then words which cannot otherwise be accented may carry alliteration, and thereby be accented. Conjunctions such as at or ef, prepositions such as til, frá, við, með, relative particles such as er/es or sem, may be used as examples. The conjunctions ok and enn/en have accented bye-forms with different meanings; adverbial use of conjunctions or prepositions will also involve adverbial accentuation. I disregard pronouns, since their accentuation seems to vary. I present a survey of instances in earlier (9th-10th century) poetry, where potentially unaccented words carry alliteration. I have noted in the material attributed to the 9th century the following instances: Haustlǫng 8⁵ þá varð Þórs of rúni: þá adverbial. Glymdrápa 8⁵ áðr fyr eljunfróðum (v.r. -prúðum): a debatable example. Snorri (Heimskringla, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavík 1941, I, p. 121; Haralds saga ins hárfagra, cap. xxii) interprets it adverbially, and says that "er hann (þ.e. Haraldr) kom vestr í Mön, þá hefðu þeir áðr spurt, hvern hernað hann hafði gert þar í landi, þá flýði allt folk inn á Skotland..."; however, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, note ad loc., interprets it as a conjunction. Torf-Einarr 3⁶ þar fló ár at sárum: þar (emended from þær) adverbial.

The material attributed to the 10th century is as follows: Egill lv. 31¹ fyrir þykki mér fúra: fyrir adverbial. Egill lv. 36¹ drekkum ór þó at Ekkils: ór adverbial. Göppormr 5⁵ þann er áðr frá Írum: áðr adverbial. Kormákr lv. 2³ oss hlægir þat eigi. Kormákr lv. 10⁵ þó váru vér þeiri.

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Kormákr lv. 20³ koma mun ór við eyra: ór (emended from ór) adverbial.
 Kormákr lv. 22¹ at em ek Yggjar gøtva: at adverbial. Kormákr lv. 25¹
at hefi ek yðr at færa: at probably adverbial; if preposition, then
 displaced; Finnur Jónsson, followed by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, emends to
átt. Hólmgöngu-Bersi 8⁷ nú læt ek þar þrjóti: þar adverbial. Hrómundr
 halti 2⁴ áðr né gørr of ráðinn: áðr adverbial. Hrómundr halti 2⁷ oss var
áðr of markaðr: áðr adverbial. Tjörvi 1 vér höfum þar sem Þóri: þar (v.r.
 þat) adverbial. Tjörvi 4 áðr á vegg of fáða: áðr adverbial. Gísli 18¹
eigi verðr enn orða. Gísli 29³ ár þótt ek eigi væra. Víga-Styrr 5 uggi
ek eigi seggja. Víga-Glúmr 11⁵ er óvægin eigi. Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson
 1⁵ þar gengu vér þrøngvir: þar adverbial. Björn Breiðvíkingakappi 3¹
þá mun þøll in mjóva: þá adverbial. Eysteinn Valdason 2³ æstisk áðr
at flausti: áðr adverbial. Eilífr, Þórsdrápa 13¹ þars í þróttar hersa:
þars (þar er) emended from þeirs; compound conjunction but unemended
 pronoun makes good sense. Hallfreðr Erfidrápa 5⁵ fellu þar með þølli:
þar adverbial; v.r. þeir makes good sense. Hallfreðr Erf. 17⁵ áðr en Ormi
næði: áðr en compound conjunction, en unaccented. Hallfreðr lv. 16⁶
áðr en orfa stríðir: áðr en compound conjunction, en unaccented. Hallfreðr
 lv. 17⁴ án ok Strútr inn gráni: án displaced preposition, following its
 noun; carries höfuðstafr. Hallfreðr lv. 27⁷ áðr var ek ungu fljóði: áðr
 adverbial. Anonymous I B 5, about the Hjaltasynir 5 þá er á Þorskafjarðar:
þá er (þás) compound conjunction; irregularity elsewhere in this verse
 (l. 1).

Thus it can be seen that, leaving aside words such as eigi which bear etymological accent, and þó, which can be regularly accented both in other Germanic languages and in modern Icelandic, there is only one fairly safe instance, the last cited above, of an unaccented conjunction or preposition taking alliteration in earlier skaldic poetry. This brief survey, then, establishes conclusively that at least in the earlier poetry such words were unaccented and therefore could not carry alliteration. Alternatively put, this survey shows that alliteration could not fall on an otherwise unaccented word, and so cause it to carry accent.

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The question remains whether alliteration can produce a primary accent upon a syllable which would otherwise carry only a secondary accent. Associated with this problem is another major matter of principle: that of the degrees of accent that can be metrically significant. In this matter noun- and adjective-compounds are again relevant. I assume that, as in other Germanic languages, the second element of such a compound carries less accent than the first. This is shown by the phonological development of long-standing compounds such as proper names in -leifr, eg. Óláfr/Ólafr, or in -leikr, eg. Þorlákr. Monophthongisation of PrGer ai to ā only takes place before PrN x and r, and "in stark nebentoniger silbe" (A. Noreen, Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik, 5th ed., Tübingen 1970, § 54, 3(a) & (b)), and otherwise neither in fully accented nor unaccented syllables; Noreen quotes only one more or less safe instance of this sound-change occurring elsewhere than in an element of a compound word where the main accent lies elsewhere. It is therefore safe to assume that the second element of a noun- or adjective-compound bore a 'strong secondary accent'.

If the initial sound of the second element of a noun- or adjective-compound can freely alliterate, then one of two conclusions can be drawn: either that alliteration can fall upon a 'strong secondary accent' and does not require a primary accent, or, alternatively, that alliteration can cause a syllable which would otherwise have had only 'strong secondary accent' to bear primary accent. If the initial sounds of the second elements of such compounds do not freely alliterate, then, subject only to a possible caveat discussed below, neither conclusion is tenable.

In practice, alliteration of the second element of a noun- or adjective-compound is very rare indeed: in poetry assigned to the 9th century I have noted only these examples: Rdr. 13³ svá at af rennirauknum, Haustlong 20¹ áðr ór hneighlíðum. In poetry assigned to the 10th century I have noted these examples: Kormákr lv. 7⁷ dýr verðr fægi-Freyja, Kormákr lv. 38¹ era mér sem Tinteini, Kormákr lv. 49⁷ því skal mér en Tinteini, Kormákr lv. 56⁷ betr ann ek sigli-Ságu, Hólmgöngu-Bersi 14³

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mart verðr gegni-Gautum. It is remarkable that all these examples show alliteration between the two elements of the compound; further, that all the 10th century examples involve proper names, and that all these examples are recorded in Kormáks saga. Otherwise the second elements of compounds alliterate only when separated from the first element by tmesis, eg. Haustlǫng 10³⁻⁴.

It is clear, therefore, that the second elements of compounds do not freely carry alliteration. Therefore neither of the possible conclusions presented above can be drawn; alliteration does not normally fall upon a syllable which merely carries 'strong secondary accent', nor does alliteration fall on a syllable which would otherwise merely carry a 'strong secondary accent' and thereby cause it to carry a primary accent.

A possible counter-argument to this would be that, in order to carry alliteration, a syllable may not only need to bear a certain degree of accent but may need to be preceded by a pause. This seems improbable, firstly because of the instances of alliteration within compounds cited above, which in the case of those involving proper nouns can be adequately explained in terms of stronger accentuation than is usual in compounds. Secondly, it is also improbable since alliteration can occur freely in a-lines after a proclitic particle, eg. a preposition, demonstrative or 'expletive' of: eg. Rdr. 2¹ ins gjalla, 2³ inn mæri, 3¹ við illan, 3³ með dreyrfár, 3⁵ í ranni, 4¹ of set (preposition), Haustlǫng 13⁵ of fátt ('expletive').

Therefore it may certainly be concluded that alliteration can neither determine nor modify accentuation in early dróttkvætt.

The problem remains whether rhyme could determine or modify accentuation. The same tests can be applied to this problem as to that of alliteration. I present a survey of instances in earlier (9th-10th century) poetry, where potentially unaccented words or syllables carry aðalhending; skothending, at least in lausavísur, is too irregular throughout most of this period to give safe information. In material attributed to the 9th century I have noted the following instance:

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Haraldr inn hárfagri 2⁴ hví eruð ér æfar margir (skothendingar in all lines). In material attributed to the 10th century I have noted the following instances: Egill lv. 7⁴ gangr var harðr at víkingum (complete failure of aðalhending in ll. 2 and 8). Egill lv. 22⁶ þrettán lagar mána. Kormákr lv. 2⁸ eldask hjá þreskeldi. Hólmgöngu-Bersi 4² beiðendr við styr kendir. Tjörvi 4 áðr á vegg of fáða (áðr adverbial). Tindr Hákonardrápa 10⁴ virðendr Búa kendu. Hallfreðr lv. 17⁴ án ok Strútr inn gráni (án displaced preposition; carries höfuðstafr).

Possible examples where potentially unaccented words or syllables carry skothending are much more frequent but, apart from material attributed to the end of the 10th century, very much less reliable. I present a selection of the more probable instances which I have noted from the material attributed to the 9th and earlier 10th centuries: Haustlǫng 5³ þekkiligr með þegnum (Kock emends to þægiligr). Glymdrápa 8⁵ áðr fyr eljunfróðum (v.r.-prúðum) (áðr possibly adverbial; see above). Torf-Einarr 5⁷ Haralds hefi ek skarð í skildi (no other skothending in this verse. Glúmr Geirason Gráfeldardrápa 5⁷ gðlingi fekksk ungum. Glúmr Geirason Gráfeldardrápa 11⁷ sjá getr þar til sælu (the version of this verse preserved in the Third Grammatical Treatise has a different line: sér of slíkt til þeira). Kormákr lv. 53¹ rjóðandi lét randa. Þorkell klyppr Þórðarson 7 áðr í bragnings blóði (áðr probably conjunction; other skothendingar in verse regular). Þorvaldr Hjaltason 1¹ farið til Fýrisvallar (all other skothendingar in these two verses regular apart from 2⁵). Vellekla 13⁷ því bregðr ǫld við aðra. Vellekla 37¹ hvar viti ǫld und einum (v.r. gðrum) (but cp. a number of failures of skothending, eg. 37³ þat skyli herr of hugsa, emended by Kock to of heyra).

In the material ascribed to the later 10th century I have noted the following instances: Gamli gnævaðarskáld 2¹ gðlingr drap sér ungum. Þorbjörn díarskáld 2³ áðr draptu Lút ok Leiða (áðr probably adverbial). Hallfreðr Erfidrápa 17⁵ áðr en Ormi næði (áðr en compound conjunction, en unaccented; áðr alliterates). Hallfreðr Erfidrápa 18⁷ áðr óx um gram góðan (áðr adverbial). Hallfreðr Erfidrápa 20⁵ alls sannliga segja

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(Kock emends to senna). Hallfreðr Erfidrápa 29⁵ áðr en glíkr at góðu (áðr en compound conjunction, en unaccented). Hallfreðr lv. 8³ þess er ól við lof lýða. Hallfreðr lv. 10¹ sá er (ie. sás?) með Sygna ræsi. Hallfreðr lv. 20³ rennumk ást til Ilmar (v.r. Unnar). Hallfreðr lv. 21⁵ nú sel ek af þótt ýfisk (af adverbial). Hallfreðr lv. 27⁷ áðr var ek ungu fljóði (áðr adverbial and alliterates). Anonymous fragments C 2³ þá ek eigi loð lægis. It should be noted that skothendingar are considerably less well maintained in Hallfreðr's lausavísur than in his drápur, eg. lv. 15¹, 20¹, 20⁷.

The material presented above shows that there is no evidence for aðalhending on unaccented syllables in the earlier poetry, and that there is no safe evidence for skothending on unaccented syllables in the same period. It is not possible to determine from the material of this period whether skothending might be able to fall on a less strongly accented syllable than aðalhending; I shall assume, as seems likeliest, that both require the same degree of accentuation. The material therefore shows that rhyme cannot fall on an otherwise unaccented syllable and thereby cause it to carry accent. Thus it can certainly be concluded that rhyme cannot determine accentuation in early dróttkvætt.

Nonetheless, there is a major distinction to be drawn between the skaldic use of alliteration and that of rhyme. The second elements of noun- and adjective-compounds can rhyme freely, and examples are very numerous. Instances from the three texts used above, where the second element of a compound constitutes the penultimate syllable of a line, are Máhl. 3⁸ nágrundar Vermundi, 7⁶ baugs fyri óðaldraugi, 14¹ hétu hirðinjótar; Erf. 7⁸ framlundaðr Ögmundar, 9⁴ aflfátt meðalkafla, 14⁵ auk at ísarnleiki, 16² gramr sjalfr meginrammir, 17⁸ gunnráns konungmanni, 20⁴ þann styrk búandmanna. Instances where the second element stands elsewhere in the line are Rdr. 3² Jörmunrekr at vakna, 5² golfhqlkvis sá fylkis, 6⁵ ok bláserkjar birkis etc.; Máhl. 1⁶ valnaðrs í styr þaðra, 2² hræflóð bragar Móða, 2⁴ sliðrbeittr staðar leita etc.; Erf. 1⁶ sóknstriðs firum ríða, 2¹ Upplönd fekk (til) enda, 2³ kristnihald þat er heldu (NB).

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alliteration on second element) etc. Instances in b-lines, and hence with aðalhending, seem to be more common, because compounds seem to be more common in b-lines. Most of the instances cited above show long second elements carrying rhyme, but there are sufficient instances in which short second elements also carry rhyme to demonstrate the possibility, eg. Haustlǫng 1⁷, Sighvatr Austrfararvísur 21⁷. Rhymes on long syllables will inevitably be usual, since all rhyming syllables elsewhere in the line must rhyme with the penultimate syllable, which is always long.

It must therefore be concluded that, unlike alliteration, rhyme can regularly fall on a syllable bearing 'strong secondary accent', and it is therefore necessary to distinguish between the degrees of accent required for alliteration, and those required for rhyme. Further, just as there seems to be the exceptional possibility of alliteration on the second element of a compound (probably when that compound bears unusual emphasis in that it is or contains a proper noun), so there appears to be the exceptional possibility of rhyme falling on a syllable bearing 'weak secondary accent'. Such syllables are the long word-formative elements such as -ing-, -ung-, -and- etc., which seem also to be able to bear metrical accent in ljóðaháttr. The safe instances from the earlier poetry, cited above, were Hólmǫngu-Bersi 4² beiðendr við styr kendir, Tindr Hákonardrápa 10⁴ virðendr Búa kendu, both with aðalhending; possible examples with skothending were Egill lv. 7⁴ gangr var harðr at víkingum, Glúmr Geirason Gráfeldardrápa 5⁷ ǫðlingi fekksk ungum, Gamli 2¹ ǫðlingi drap sér ungum.

It is therefore a safe conclusion that alliteration can only freely fall on syllables bearing primary accent, but that it can occasionally and exceptionally fall on syllables bearing 'strong secondary accent'; such exceptions seem to be governed by fairly severe constraints. Rhyme, in contrast, can freely fall on syllables bearing both primary and 'strong secondary accent'; it can also occasionally and exceptionally fall on syllables bearing 'weak secondary accent'. There is no safe evidence in poetry attributed to the 9th and 10th centuries that either alliteration

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or rhyme could ever fall on syllables which would otherwise be wholly unaccented.

Of the three groups of implications which are involved in Einar Ólafur's formulation of the three-accent rule, then, the first and third have been shown to be untenable. Firstly, the implication that actual accentual strength is metrically irrelevant involves gross inconsistencies of practice, while the implication that supernumerary accents are metrically irrelevant not only involves such inconsistencies, but raises insoluble problems of scansion. The second set of implications is axiomatic, and not subject to proof or disproof. The third set of implications, that alliteration and *pari passu* rhyme can modify accentuation, by causing syllables to carry metrically significant accent which could not otherwise do so, is shown to be false, since syllables which cannot otherwise carry accent cannot carry alliteration or rhyme.

The three-accent rule is dependent for its validity upon the first group of implications discussed above. If absolute rather than relative accentual strength is metrically significant, then a line with fewer than three primary accents does not conform to the three-accent rule, eg. Máhl. 6⁵ pá er við hjalm á holmi (I have noted only three examples in 9th and 10th century poetry where pá alliterates: adverbially Haustlǫng 8⁵, Björn Brk. 3¹; as conjunction, 10th c. anon. I B 5⁵: see above, pp. 9-10; it is here a conjunction). Again, if a supernumerary accent cannot be dismissed, then a line with more than three accents does not conform to the three-accent rule, eg. Erf. 3⁸ dýrs horn Vísund sporna (which has four primary accents falling on long syllables, and one 'weak secondary accent'). A large proportion of lines fall into these two categories. I present a selection of safe instances which certainly show more than three accents in a line; these examples are taken from the first ten verses of the Máhliðingavísur. 1² morðfárs vega þorði, 1³ hlaut ǫrn af ná neyta, 1⁶ valnaðrs í styr þaðra, 2² hræflóð bragar Móða, 2⁴ sliðrbeittr staðar leita, 2⁶ vígtjalds nær skaldi, 3⁷ Hugins létum nið njóta, 3⁸ nágrundar Vermundi, 4² þegi herr meðan segja, 4⁸ hnigreyr lögum

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dreyra, 6² varð or drifin sára, 6⁸ unnr benlækir runnu, 7⁴ þings
spámeyjar syngva, 9⁸ Hlín goðvefjar mína, 10⁸ Alfgeirr af hvot meiri.

Safe instances of lines which certainly show fewer than three full accents in the first ten verses of the Máhlíðingavísur are, for instance, 2⁷ þá var dæmisalr dóma, 4⁵ hve hjaldrviðir heldu, 6⁵ þá er við hjalm á holmi, 7⁵ þá er bjúgrøðull bógar, 7⁶ baugs fyri óðaldraugi, 8² remmiskóðs við Móða, 9⁵ er lútviðir létu. There are many other arguable instances of lines with both more and fewer than three accents in these ten verses. To pronounce such lines with three full accents conflicts with a natural pronunciation of them, and so conflicts with the axiomatic assumption that dróttkvætt scansion should conform to natural speech-patterns.

The three-accent rule must for these reasons be rejected.

When the three-accent rule is rejected, it becomes necessary to examine the number of accents actually present in individual lines (ie. to scan individual lines). It also becomes necessary to distinguish all the metrically relevant degrees of accentual strength. This is itself a matter that requires much further work, for not all the criteria which determine accentual force are entirely clear. For instance, the precise rules for syllable-length 'by position', and their function, remain unclear, despite the discussion by Hans Kuhn, Vers- und Satzbau der Skalden, ZfdA 74 (1937), pp. 58-63. The exact operation of 'resolution' in dróttkvætt remains obscure; this latter problem is also bound up with that of the number of syllables in a line. There also remain many problems of interest in the relationship between metrics and syntax, despite the pioneering work of Hans Kuhn, Zum Wortstellung und Betonung im Altgermanischen, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 57 (1933), pp. 1-109.

In short, we still lack an adequate theoretical foundation for the scansion of skaldic poetry.

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