Rhyme in *dróttkvætt*, from Old Germanic Inheritance to Contemporary Poetic Ecology I: Overview and Argument

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Abstract: This paper is the first in a three-part series or tryptic that argues for the Old Germanic origins of rhyme in the Old Norse *dróttkvætt* meter. This meter requires rhymes on the stressed syllables of two words within a six-position line, irrespective of the syllables that follow. This first instalment introduces both the Old Germanic poetic form and the *dróttkvætt* meter. It outlines the background of the discussion and presents the basic argument. The second instalment presents a portrait of rhyme in Old Germanic meters outside of Old Norse, providing foundations for viewing rhyme as an inherited part of the Old Germanic poetic system. That portrait highlights the use of rhymes including the stressed vowel within a short line and the tendency to use such rhymes in the b-line, corresponding to the rhymes in even lines of *dróttkvætt*. The third instalment turns to *dróttkvætt* within its poetic ecology, beginning with a portrayal of rhyme in Old Norse eddic poetries, followed by *dróttkvætt* in relation to its contemporary poetic ecology and unravelling its impacts on that ecology, gradually working backward to a perspective on the ecology in which it emerged.

Keywords: rhyme, alliterative poetry, oral meter, Germanic, eddic, skaldic

Rhyme has received relatively little attention in Germanic alliterative verse outside of metricalized rhyme in the Old Norse *dróttkvætt* meter and other verse forms of so-called 'skaldic' or 'court' poetry. What attention Old Germanic rhyme has received remains little known. Rhyme generally remains invisible in the shadow of metrical alliteration, and its appearance in Old Germanic alliterative verse is often viewed as anomalous, secondary or 'late'. As a consequence, its background remains poorly understood. However, interest in such rhyme seems to be on the rise: in recent decades, it has been approached more or less independently by a few scholars from different perspectives.

The present article presents the opening scene of a tryptic, with an orientation, background, and overview of an argument that will unfold in the following instalments. The second scene will offer a portrayal of rhyme in

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Old Germanic alliterative verse outside of Old Norse. Rhyme is there shown to belong to the repertoires of phonic devices employed by poets, and to be an added feature that could both support the metrical form and be used by some poets in the place of additional alliteration. The second scene then becomes the backdrop for the third, portraying rhyme in Old Norse eddic poetry and in the *dróttkvætt* meter. On that background, rhyme in *dróttkvætt* emerges clearly as a formalization of rhyme as a feature of Old Germanic alliterative verse. It is also revealed to have impacted the Old Norse poetic ecology of which *dróttkvætt* was a part. Although no solution is offered to the origin of *dróttkvætt*'s rhythm, which diverges markedly from the Old Germanic alliterative meter, the meter's relationship to other developments in the poetic ecology are considered, arguing that they were parallel in a milieu of metrical innovation rather than consequent, although the metricalization of rhyme in the *dróttkvætt* meter may have been a secondary innovation, systematizing an added phonic feature. This first portrait, however, briefly presents the Old Germanic poetic form and *dróttkvætt*, the overarching argument of the tryptic, its background, and the history of scholarship on which it builds.

An Orientation to the Old Germanic Alliterative Verse Form

Old Germanic languages exhibit a poetic form that is normally seen as part of the common linguistic heritage. The main evidence for the meter comes from Old English, Old Norse, Old Saxon, and Old High German. The richest corpora are preserved in Old English and Old Norse, with the largest corpus of poetry preserved in Old Norse, of which the majority is, however, in *dróttkvætt* and other skaldic meters, while Old English preserves the larger corpus in the Common Germanic poetic form. The corpus of Old Saxon is much more limited, constituted mainly of the Christian epic *Heliand* 'Saviour', while the Old High German sources are short or fragmentary, including charm texts in which the poetic form worked a bit differently than in epic,[1] while epic or narrative texts are not written out with the meter as salient and regular throughout.[2] Old English, Old Saxon, and Old Norse corpora therefore provide

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[1]   See e.g. Stanley 1984; in Old English, see also Roper 2011; on parallelism and lexical repetition in charms, see Tolley 2021: 331–342.

[2]   It tends to be taken for granted that Old Germanic poetries have been written out in ways that make meter salient, even if individual lines may be considered problematic and subject to editorial interventions. However, the process of dictation is extremely interruptive and can easily

the main data for modelling the Old Germanic poetic form, and the Old High German data is considered in relation to this.

The meter is organized as pairings of an a-line and a b-line linked across a caesura by metrically required alliteration, as in the following example from the Old Saxon *Heliand*, in which *helag* 'holy' alliterates with *handon* 'hands' (indicating the caesura between the a-line and the b-line with a large space):

(1)
helag uuord godas   endi mid iro handon scriban (*Heliand* 7)
the holy word of God   and with their hands wrote[3]

A-lines and b-lines have the same basic formal structure as constituted of two strong and two weak positions, but allowing for words to be in anacrusis (i.e. extrametrical at the beginning of a line) and the rhythm was not periodic (i.e. the distribution of strong and weak positions within a line was not regular and repeating). Strong and weak positions were organized in different ways, although certain rhythms are more common than others, a few are excluded, and preferred rhythms varied between a-lines and b-lines.[4] Lexical stress in Germanic languages falls on the first syllable of the word stem. Under most conditions, a strong position requires a long lexically-stressed syllable or a short syllable accompanied by a second syllable that together complete the position – a phenomenon called *resolution*. The accentual rhythm was based on phrasal stress, affecting which words could be used in strong positions according to a combination of word class, syntax, and the relative 'weight' of words in the line. Consequently, rather than syllables being discussed as short or long, they are distinguished as *heavy* and *light* within the meter. The number of syllables in metrically weak positions was variable. Alliteration was carried on strong positions, ideally connecting either or both strong positions in an a-line with the first but not the second in a b-line. Extra-metrical syllables could be included at the beginning of both a-lines and b-lines. The following markup is used for the metrical structure of lines:

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lead to a breakdown of metrical form, as well as other types of confusion. On the documentation of oral traditions through dictation, see Ready 2019; for a discussion of cases in Old Norse, see Frog 2021b.

[3]   Translations of Old Saxon are from Dewey 2011 unless otherwise noted.

[4]   See e.g. Cable 1974: ch. 7; Russom 1998; on the trajectories of evolution in each language, see Suzuki 2014.

S   = Metrically strong position
w   = Metrically weak position
s   = Position with secondary stress
| = Inferred foot boundary commonly identified in metrical analysis

This markup is used for metrical positions, not syllables, since the latter are not relevant to look at in detail in this discussion.[5] In the following long line from *Beowulf* (l. 422), the first word (*niceras*) undergoes resolution and there is double alliteration in the a-line:

(2)
 S   w | S w   S   s w| S
niceras nihtes   nearoþearfe dreah
from monsters by night   I severe distress suffered

When presenting lines within a paragraph's text:

/ = Caesura between an a-line and a b-line

The established convention is to count lines of all Old Germanic poetries other than Old Norse according to long lines, within which a-lines and b-lines are specified by the respective letter, like *Beowulf* 422a versus 422b.

The basic line could also be expanded with an additional strong and weak position in what is called a *hypermetric line*. Hypermetric lines are generally absent from Old Norse poetry,[6] and the very limited corpus in Old High German contains many metrical irregularities that makes it problematic to

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[5]   The allowance of multiple syllables in a weak position could be metrically relevant in some poetries. In *Beowulf*, for example, a non-repetition of rhythm constraint required that the a-line and b-line be different, and paired SwSw lines would be set apart by having differing numbers of syllables in weak positions or syllables in anacrusis (Golston 2009). I have not observed such a principle in Old Norse.

[6]   The eddic meter called *fornyrðislag*, which is the Old Norse form of the basic Old Germanic alliterative meter, excludes hypermetric lines entirely. The meter called *ljóðaháttr*, discussed in the third instalment in this series, presents lines that correspond to the hypermetric structure found in other Old Germanic poetries, but Seiichi Suzuki finds these to be rare to the point of being anomalous (2014a). The relatively rare eddic meter *málaháttr* is an innovation with a five-position structure, which complicates the evaluation of lines as 'hypermetric' as the meter is regularly composed in lines with more than four positions (see also Russom 2009).

treat examples as independent evidence in metrical analysis.[7] However, the Old English and Old Saxon evidence indicates that double alliteration was required in hypermetric a-lines[8] and this aligns with the Old High German texts.[9]

Background of this Discussion

Rhyme in Old Germanic poetry outside of Old Norse skaldic meters has remained largely unnoticed in large part because it has easily been invisible to most researchers working with the poetry. In modern European cultures, rhyme is commonly conceived in terms of sameness in the endings of words, especially at the ends of lines linking them in pairs, stanzas, or more complex arrangements. On that backdrop, rhymes involving the ends of words within an a-line or a b-line in a formulaic pair like that in example (3) are easily passed over as idiom-like and incidental. Rhymes involving only the stressed syllable, like in example (4), may easily pass unnoticed, or the repeated sounds may only be recognized as part of the more general phonic texture of lines rather than as a distinct device in itself. Rhymes with contrasting vowels, like in example (5), would probably not be considered rhymes at all; they might be recognized as consonance, but consonance is a much broader concept that can refer to any pattern of repeating consonants within a line, including those carrying alliteration or in unstressed syllables (cf. also consonance in example (4): *broðor oðerne*), rather than the ends of syllables in metrically strong positions as a counterpart to alliteration on such syllables' onsets.

(3)
blowan ond growan (*Riddle 34* 9b, Old English)
bloom and grow

(4)
broðor oðerne (*Beowulf* 2440a, Old English)
a brother the other

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[7]   On irregularities in use of alliteration in Old High German, see Stanley 1984.

[8]   In Old English, see Bredehoft 2005a; in Old Saxon, see Suzuki 2004: 295.

[9]   On Old High German hypermetric lines, see Simms 2003: 112–115.

(5)

healdan scolde (*Beowulf* 230a)
should guard

The types of rhymes in (4) and (5) are referred to in Old Norse as *hendingar* (singular *hending*), a term that is also used in research, along with the term 'internal rhyme',[10] although 'internal rhyme' may be used to refer to any rhymes within a word, rather than being required to include the stressed syllable. The distinction between these rhymes incorporating the vowel and contrasting vowels is metricalized in the *dróttkvætt* meter, with a terminological distinction of the former, like rhymes in (4), called *aðalhendingar*, and the latter, like in (5), as *skothendingar*. Some scholars use 'off-rhyme' for *skothendingar*, although others use 'off-rhyme' also for assonance on stressed vowels or diphthongs without the following consonants or for rhymes that are otherwise non-ideal in some way. Were it not for Snorri Sturluson's discussion of such rhymes within the *Háttatal* 'List of Verse Forms' section of his thirteenth-century *ars poetica* called *Edda* (Snorri Sturluson 1987; 1999; see also Kristján Árnason 2016), these types of rhyme would have likely been slower to come into research focus.

Interest in rhyme in Old Germanic poetries generally seems to be concentrated in the nineteenth century. It was discussed already by Jacob Grimm (1840: lxiii–lxiv), not surprisingly beginning from attention to end-rhymed lines, and it was even a focus in a doctoral dissertation (Hoffmann 1885). Friedrich Kluge's pioneering comparative study of rhyme in Old English and Old Norse appeared nearer the end of the century (1884), partly as a response to A. Edzardi's (1878) argument for the Celtic origin of skaldic rhyme. Old Norse *hending* rhymes are Kluge's opening frame of reference and distinguished among the formal categories of rhymes and rhyme structures he surveyed (1884: 423). In *Beowulf*, Kluge identified 45 short lines with rhymes including the vowel and 100 from which it was excluded (1884: 429–431). The value of Kluge's study is in his observation of not only similarities but also contrasts between the Old English and Old Norse usage of rhyme.

Attention to rhyme may have been derailed by Eduard Sievers' study of Old Germanic meter (1893), which became a foundation of modern scholarship. Sievers discussed rhyme especially in Old Norse skaldic verse and in Old English (1893: 107–111, 146–149), but he generally dismissed it as rare and as not having penetrated into the Germanic system outside of Old Norse court

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[10]   Kristján Árnason (1991) coined the shortened form 'inrhyme' to refer to skaldic *hendingar* in English.

poetry (1893: 49). End rhyme, and especially its use in linking lines, continued to receive comment.[11] However, this attention was linked to end rhyme's identification as a late and foreign feature (e.g. Fulk 1992: 259). It became more likely to be mentioned in connection with certain texts or passages. Questions of end rhyme as a phenomenon shifted into a riddle of whether scattered occurrences of end rhyme are accidental or ornamental, while outside of skaldic meters the uses of stressed-syllable and word-stem rhyme either within or between lines seems to have become largely invisible (e.g. Harris 1985: 106; Fulk et al. 2008: clxi n.5; Bredehoft 2005b: 207–208).[12]

New perspectives on rhyme in Old Germanic poetries have been developing in recent decades. These developments have centered on Old English owing to a combination of factors, several of which are historical, linked to both the size and nature of the preserved corpora and how discussion has evolved over time. Old English and Old Norse both offered sizable corpora that were linked historically to national languages, leading the poetries to be identified as the earliest heritage literatures of the respective countries. The substantial corpora and status as heritage literature made these centers of international academic activity. In Old Norse, researchers' attention to poetic complexity was channelled into the study of the more 'literary' poetry of court poets owing to a division of the researchers' own construction that identified eddic poetry as compositions of the 'folk'. The prominence of 'kennings'[13] at the surface level of court poetry led kennings rather than other poetic and rhetorical devices to be the central points of reference for discussing 'skaldic' influences on 'eddic' poems. Although Old English poetry could be viewed as having the collective character of a Germanic tradition, it was also identified with individual poets, especially through the case of Cynewulf and the textual embedding of his 'signature' in runes. Research on Old English thus sought individual agency and creativity in poems composed in the inherited Germanic meter. The difference

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[11]   This seems to have been more common, at least in Old Norse research, among scholars who were already active when Sievers published (e.g. Sijmons & Gering 1906: ccxviii–ccxix, ccxlv–ccxlvii).

[12]   For example, Kari Ellen Gade states: "In *fornyrðislag,* internal rhymes do not appear to have been used consciously as a poetic device" (1995: 237).

[13]   Kennings get defined in various ways (see e.g. Meissner 1920; Marold 1983; Fidjestøl 1997; Clunies Ross et al. 2012; Sverdlov 2015). I would describe a kenning as a combination of two nouns forming a compound or related through the genitive case that together refer to a third nominal category, like 'storm of swords' or 'sword-storm' referring to 'battle'. In skaldic poetry, kennings may be 'complex', with one of the nouns replaced by another kenning, and one of those nouns replaced by a kenning, and so on.

in attention led to the relatively early elucidation of whole repertoires of relatively subtle poetic and rhetorical devices in Old English poetry (e.g. Bartlett 1935) that have been scarcely noticed or explored in eddic poetry. Whether or not Sievers was significant in the displacement of rhyme from discussions of these poetries, the types of stem-syllable rhymes characteristic of *dróttkvætt* dropped out of discussions of other Old Germanic poetries.

Bringing rhyme into focus currently seems attributable to several individual scholars. Inna Matyushina wrote a two-volume doctoral dissertation on rhyme in Old Norse, Old English, Old High German, and Old Saxon alliterative verse (1986) in the environment of Soviet metrical studies. Her work attends to syllable and word-stem rhymes within a methodology oriented to quantitative statistical analysis. Some of her work on rhyme in Old Norse appeared in English in an obscure journal a few years later (1994), where it went largely unnoticed. Her focus there is on *dróttkvætt*, summarizing her findings about eddic poetry almost as an appendix. Independent of Matyushina, Thomas A. Bredehoft then brought rhyme into focus in Old English with attention to its potential metrical functions, addressed briefly in his monograph on Old English meter (2005a: 57–59, 61–62) and in a comparative study with rhyme in Old Saxon (2005b). Following up on an observation of Calvin Kendall (1991: 115; cf. Sievers 1893: 39), Bredehoft seems to have started by thinking in terms of end rhyme and adjusted this image to stressed-syllable and word-stem rhyme on empirical grounds with almost no reference to its position in Old Norse. Matyushina's work on Old English rhyme only appeared in English later. She began from the view that stressed-syllable rhymes were saliently perceivable in Old Norse poetry and presumably also in Old English when they appeared in metrically strong positions (2011). She later explored the use and development of rhyme in Old English in long-term perspective (2018). Whereas Bredehoft focused on line-internal rhymes that included the vowel,[14] Matyushina included also rhymes excluding the vowel as well as repetitions of full syllables, parts of compounds, full words, and *figura etymologica*, both within and across lines. She finds that "in nearly a third of the extant lines of Old English poetry, alliteration is enriched by additional sound devices, whose structure and function appear to be crucial for the development of Old English metre" (2018: 266). Both scholars considered it methodologically essential to only count rhymes occurring on syllables in metrically strong positions, as

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[14]   Bredehoft also discusses examples of rhymes not including the vowel, described as 'off-rhyme' (e.g. 2005a: 64).

the only positions in which rhyme could be reasonably considered a phonic poetic device.

In Old Norse scholarship working with eddic poetries, Terry Gunnell (2013) brought extra-metrical sound pattering into focus from a performance perspective. He was not concerned with rhyme *per se*, but rather with the phonic texture of the poetry as it would be received by audiences, reflecting on its associated aesthetic dimensions. My own interest in rhyme was sparked independently more than a decade ago in work on the eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, where rhyme and other poetic devices have a long history of discussion as potential indicators of late composition (e.g. de Vries 1928). Although I later abandoned this stylistic study for a different line of argumentation,[15] I had begun to explore especially forms of end rhyme with or without stressed syllables and also phonic parallelism in eddic poetry (i.e. the repetition of a sound sequence between lines) (see Frog 2022a: 79–89). In parallel with this work on Old Norse eddic poetry, I was exploring, in Finno-Karelian kalevalaic poetry, strategies for compensating the lack of alliteration in individual lines through inter-linear alliteration and phonic parallelism (Frog & Stepanova 2011).[16] Questions about end rhyme in kalevalaic poetry began coming into focus in research discussion more recently (e.g. Kallio 2017). In response to the theme of a conference,[17] I undertook a comparative study of rhyme in kalevalaic and Old Germanic poetries. Research connected to that study led me to Bredehoft's observation that Old English rhyme could be used in the place of a required additional alliteration in Old English (2005a: 61–62). Across this period, my work on the use of alternative poetic devices in these poetries and observations of the same type of phenomenon in other poetic systems (e.g. Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir 2016) gradually precipitated into a general approach to what I describe as 'metrical compensation', when one poetic principle is exchanged for another to compensate for its absence (Frog 2021a: 282–286). Bredehoft's comparative study of rhyme within a short

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[15]   This interest was in the context of evaluating the narrative of the poem in the context of Circum-Baltic traditions of the Theft of the Thunder Instrument (tale-type ATU 1148b; see Frog 2011). In 2011, in addition to the stylistic analysis being ultimately inconclusive for dating, I realized that internal features of the poem's content compromised any serious probability of this poem being produced in an ideological framework that regarded the god Þórr (the poem's protagonist) and thunder as a destroyer of giants and trolls (Frog 2011; 2014).

[16]   I had read Bredehoft's comments on rhyme in *Early English Metre* (2005a: 61–62) before this time, but they had not stuck with me and I am not aware of ever having consciously made the connection to them.

[17]   "Rhyme and Rhyming in Verbal Art and Song" held in May 2019 in Helsinki.

line in Old English and Old Saxon included an argument that this device had a long history in Old Germanic poetries, that, even if it was not metricalized as regular, could have a use with a metrical function within a line (2005b). For me, this argument struck a chord with *dróttkvætt*, leading to the present discussion. Today, all of these developments seem independent rather than united, although they may seem to coalesce into a trend when looking back from a perspective of future scholarship.

The Old Germanic Verse Form's Development in Old Norse

The poetic form evolved in each language more or less independently on different trajectories (see also Suzuki 2014b). The particular developments are not a concern for most poetries, but the developments in Old Norse require comment as a context for the emergence of the *dróttkvætt* meter. Many words were shortened through syncope, loss of verb prefixes, and so on. This impacted the basic form of the Common Germanic meter called *fornyrðislag* 'old story meter', so that it often has fewer syllables than lines in other Old Germanic poetries and inclines toward syllabic rhythms. Resolution became generally limited to the first strong position in an a-line[18] and it became less common to include additional syllables either in anacrusis or in weak positions,[19] although poets could still capitalize on metrical flexibility (e.g. Turville-Petre 1978: xii–xiv). Other changes were much broader in scope. Although their significance to metrics may not be immediately apparent, they become a relevant point of reference for later discussion.

Most Old Germanic poetries appear to have been used in a highly variable composition-in-performance tradition comparable to that of South Slavic epic and the Homeric epics as modelled in the 'Classic' form of so-called Oral-Formulaic Theory laid out by Albert Lord (1960). Old Norse belongs with Finnic and North Russian poetries to an isogloss of short epic forms (cf. Honko 1998: 36), although a long epic form would be expected in all three traditions on the basis of linguistic heritage. Old Norse poetry in the Common Germanic meter became performed with a terse style of tight groups of long lines commonly referred to as stanzas or strophes (see e.g. Kristján Árnason 2006). These line groups were reproduced much more regularly and

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[18]   I am thankful to Haukur Þorgeirsson for pointing this out to me.

[19]   Suzuki (2014b) observes that when anacrusis is considered only in terms of independent words rather than prefixes, anacrusis in *fornyrðislag* is more common than in *Beowulf*.

also quoted, for example in prose.[20] These units can appear very regular in dialogic poems, which supported early scholarship's assumptions of 'memorized' and invariant text, as was imagined for ballads. However, passages are often of irregular length in third person narration and they varied in social circulation.[21] Already during the nineteenth century, the impression that eddic poetry was composed in stanzas led it to be numbered by these units (although the units are not entirely consistent between editions), and then by short lines (and *Vollzeilen*) within them. The shorter length and structuring into more concentrated units impacted the density of formulaic language that was used across different poems and parts of poems,[22] which is relevant to the later discussion of rhymed short-line formulae.

The organization of poems in groups of long lines is linked to a change in syntax. The Old Germanic form allowed a syntactic break between multi-line independent clauses to be placed between an a-line and a b-line. For example:

(6)
Tho nam he thiu bok an hand   endi an is hugi thahte
suido gerno te gode.   Iohannes namon
uuislico giuuret   endi oc aftar mid is uuordu gisprac
suido spahlico.   habda im eft is spraca giuuald,
giuuitteas endi uuisun.   that uuiti uuas tho agangan,
[…] (*Heliand* 235–239)

Then he [Zechariah] took the book in hand   and very gladly
turned his heart to God.   The name 'John'
he wisely wrote   and afterwards also with words spoke
very wisely.   He had again his power of speech,
of wisdom and of usage.   That punishment, that harsh affliction,
[…] (Adapted from Dewey 2011, arranging phrases to match the original arrangement of lines)

Staggering the ends of independent clauses and of long lines created an effect of anticipating a b-line following the clause. The meter would thus drive the continuation of (usually) narration by requiring a new clause to begin in order to complete the long line.

In Old Norse, the syntactic break between multi-line independent clauses was no longer permitted between an a-line and a b-line. This change in the poetic syntax points to an increased coherence of the long line as a couplet, as well as requiring that all larger units of narration, dialogue, or information begin and end at long line boundaries. The passage or stanza in example (7) is from the poem *Vǫluspá*, documented independently in two versions from the oral tradition; one version follows the line order as seen here, while the other inverts the order of the long line couplets.

(7)
Þórr einn þar vá,   þrunginn móði;
hann sialdan sitr,   er hann slíct um fregn.
Á genguz eiðar,   orð oc sœri,
mál ǫll meginlig,   er á meðal fóro. (*Vǫluspá* 26)

Thor alone there struck,   swollen with rage;
he seldom sits by,   when he hears about such [things].
Broken were oaths,   words and promises,
all powerful speech,   which between them [gods and a giant] had passed.[23]

Alongside *fornyrðislag*, the meter called *ljóðaháttr* 'poetic form of songs' was established. A meter called *málaháttr* 'poetic form of speeches' is also found used in one eddic poem, which may be considered a variation of *fornyrðislag* in which short lines regularly have an additional weak position – i.e. two strong and three weak positions (Suzuki 2014a: Part II; see also Kristján Árnason 1991: 51–52; Russom 2009). In *ljóðaháttr*, long lines alternate with a distinct line type called in German a *Vollzeile* 'full line'. A *Vollzeile* has two to three strong positions, no caesura, and a preferred cadence as a strong position formed by a light disyllable or heavy monosyllable (phrasal stress and the syntax used in this meter allows this to be a preposition used postposition-ally). *Ljóðaháttr* long lines are also more flexible than those in *fornyrðislag*, allowing both more syllables in weak positions and more easily allowing less than four syllables in a short line; they also allow the same cadence and syntax

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23   Translations from Old Norse are my own.

in a b-line as in a *Vollzeile*. Syntactically, a long line and following *Vollzeile* form a unit; *Vollzeilen* may then be used in a parallel series, but a strong syntactic break, beginning a new independent clause, is required in the following long line.[24] In addition to these formal differences from *fornyrðislag*, *ljóðaháttr* is characteristically used for direct speech (Quinn 1992), so poems in this meter are monologic, dialogic, gnomic wisdom, or charms, while third-person narration or explanation is introduced in prose.[25] Although poems in this meter are on mythological and heroic subjects, they seem to belong to a different genre than poems in *fornyrðislag*, potentially a form of drama (Phillpotts 1922; Gunnell 1995). Dialogic *ljóðaháttr* poems in particular incline to a regular stanzaic structure, in which a long line and *Vollzeile* form a half-stanza.

An Orientation to *dróttkvætt*

Dróttkvætt 'court verse', is set apart from the Old Germanic form in several respects. In research, eddic meters – *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr* with their variations – are contrasted with so-called skaldic meters, which are characteristic of court poetry (see e.g. Clunies Ross 2005; Leslie 2017). Court poetry was poetry of praise and commemoration, again correlating differences in metrical form with difference of genre. Skaldic poets also used eddic meters, although their use for court poetry would almost invariably interpret them as having a syllabic rhythm (Turville-Petre 1978: xv; see also Faulkes 1999: 86). Skaldic poetry is very often ascribed to named poets and linked to historical situations of their composition or what they refer to or celebrate. As with *ljóðaháttr*, poetic form appears to correlate with genre, of which *dróttkvætt*, especially used with extreme complexity of syntax and dense use of circumlocutions, was emblematic.

Skaldic meters have a hybrid quality. They variously appear as isosyllabic meters transposed onto the principles of the Germanic accentual meter, or as the Germanic accentual meter interpreted through isosyllabism. The role of phrasal stress is de-emphasized, which can be viewed as a consequence of

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[24]   In detail, see Suzuki 2014a; on the complementarity and contrast of metrical line types in *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr*, see Russom 2009.

[25]   The so-called *galdralag* 'the meter of charms' is a variation of *ljóðaháttr*, in which parallelism of *Vollzeilen* with lexical repetition is emblematic.

the meter's near-isosyllabism (Kristján Árnason 1991: ch.4).[26] These developments are compounded by the poetic system's development of a noun-heavy circumlocution system of kennings[27] and extreme flexibility of syntax.[28] It also has potential anacrusis-like flexibility in the number of syllables before the first strong position, and the mostly syllabic rhythm makes resolution appear as in a mora-counting meter.[29] Skaldic composition is also characterized by a regular stanzaic structure, whereby paired short lines linked by alliteration form couplets, paired couplets form a half-stanza called a *helming*, across which syntax may be spread (comparable to a *helming* in *ljóðaháttr*), and two *helmings* form a stanza (cf. the eight short lines forming two pairs of long lines in example (7)). Nevertheless, poets often simply composed four-line half-stanzas, or at least such units were common for quotation in the prose narratives of saga literature, Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, and in grammatical treatises.

In *dróttkvætt*, rather than two strong and two weak positions in a short line, lines are normally seen as having three strong and three weak positions. Relative to the basic four-position short lines of the Old Germanic verse form, *dróttkvætt* lines have an additional strong and weak position, making them commensurate with hypermetric lines.[30] Each line has six positions, of which the first four may vary the arrangement of strong and weak positions, as in other Germanic poetry, and resolution is possible in these strong positions. The fifth position in the line is always the final strong position, where resolution is never permitted and of which the following position is enclitic, giving a regular trochaic cadence.[31] The apparent variability of strong and weak positions in the first four positions in the line has led to interpretations of the *dróttkvætt* line as an expansion of the basic Old Germanic line with a regular two-position cadence (e.g. Sievers 1893: 99; Gade 1995: 231–238; Russom 1998: 24–25, 30–31, 85–86, 109n.59). Like eddic poetry, *dróttkvætt* is conventionally numbered by stanzas and lines within a stanza, leading them to be

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[26]   Within the context of Old Germanic poetries, this may be viewed as a breakdown of the accentual rhythm (Smirnitskaya 1994 [forthcoming]; Matyushina 1994), but it may be better viewed as an adaptation, through which principles of the accentual rhythm based on phrasal stress continued to shape what types of words and under what conditions these should be used in metrically strong positions.

[27]   On kennings, see note 13 above.

[28]   On syntax in *dróttkvætt*, see Gade 1995; see also Kuhn 1983.

[29]   E.g. Frank (1978: 34–35) compares *dróttkvætt* to reconstructed Indo-European meters.

[30]   On the comparison with hypermetric lines, see Simms 2003.

[31]   See further Myrvoll 2016.

discussed in terms of odd lines and even lines rather than a-lines and b-lines. Like hypermetric a-lines, *dróttkvætt* odd lines / a-lines require alliteration on two of the three strong positions, which connects them to the first strong position in an even line / b-line that in ideal *dróttkvætt* is the first position. The type of rhyme regularly involves a word's lexically stressed syllable (although an unstressed syllable may sometimes be allowed) irrespective of any subsequent syllables. In ideal *dróttkvætt*, even lines include the vowel in the rhyme, like *hríð* : *síðan* 'storm : then', while the vowel is excluded from the rhyme in odd lines, as in *malmr* : *hilmir* 'metal : prince'.[32] Snorri Sturluson's (1999) thirteenth-century presentation brought the six-position line into focus as the primary unit of composition. Snorri's presentation coupled with line-internal rhyme have together led researchers to view the six-position line as the primary unit of composition.[33] Nevertheless, alliteration is the invariant metrical feature and these lines were always composed in couplets or long lines.

The poetic form can be illustrated by a so-called *lausavísa* 'loose stanza' of Oddi *inn litli* Glúmsson that was reportedly composed *in situ* in response to a challenge to compose a stanza on the image in a tapestry. Alliteration is underlined and rhyme in italic, followed by the same text in prose word order with kennings set off in curled brackets, followed by the translation. The first word in the second *helming* (*firum*) is subject to resolution in holding the strong position; the expression in lines 3–4 *bandalfr beiði-Rindi / Baldrs* literally 'bond-elf to the begging-Rindr <giantess> of Baldr <god>' also illustrates the complexity of the diction, in which the kenning 'begging-Rindr of Baldr' refers to the goddess Frigg, who begged for Death to release her son Baldr, and may simply be a kenning for 'woman', while the 'bond-elf to a woman' would mean 'man', or it could specifically refer to Hermóðr who formed an agreement ('bond') to act as Frigg's intermediary and attempt to retrieve Baldr, if the purported tapestry portrayed a mythological scene:[34]

$\underline{\text{Stend}}r_4$ ok$_{10}$ $\underline{\text{h}}yggr_{11}$ at$_{12}$ $\underline{\text{h}}\varrho ggva_{13}$
$\underline{\text{h}}er\eth ilútr_5$ með$_{14}$ sv*erð*i$_{15}$

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[32] For an accessible introduction to this poetic form and its features see Clunies Ross et al. 2012; in more detail, see Kristján Árnason 1991; see also Kuhn 1983; Matyushina 1994; Smirnitskaya 1994 [forthcoming]; Gade 1995; and so on.

[33] See also the analysis in Fabb 2009, which tests whether the six-position line or twelve-position line with a caesura should be considered primary.

[34] That the expression refers to a man is generally accepted, but *how* it means 'man' is reached in other ways as well (e.g. Jesch 2009).

b*and*alfr$_3$ b̲eiði-Ri*ndi*$_2$
B̲*ald*rs$_1$ við$_6$ dyrr$_7$ á$_8$ tj*ald*i$_9$

Fi*r*um$_4$ mun$_2$ h̲ann$_1$ með$_5$ hjǫ*r*vi$_6$
h̲*ætt*r$_3$; nús$_7$ mál$_{18}$ at$_9$ *sætt*isk$_{12}$
h̲lœðendr$_{10}$ h̲leypiskí*ð*a$_{11}$
h̲l*unn*s$_{11}$ áðr$_{13}$ geigr$_{14}$ sé$_{15}$ *unn*inn$_{16}$

{{Baldrs beiði-Rindi} band}alfr stendr herðilútr við dyrr á tjaldi ok hyggr at hǫggva með sverði.
Hann mun hættr firum með hjǫrvi; nús mál, at {hlœðendr {hleypiskíða hlunns}} sættisk, áðr geigr sé unninn.
The bond-elf to the begging-Rindr of Baldr stands bent-shouldered by the door on the tapestry and intends to strike with his sword.
He will be dangerous to men with his sword; now it is time for the loaders of the leaping skis of the roller [SHIPS > SEAFARERS] to be reconciled, before an injury is inflicted.
(Text and normalized word order quoted from Jesch 2009 and translation adapted from the same)

Dróttkvætt poetry is mainly documented in the thirteenth century, yet the metrical complexity of Old Norse *dróttkvætt* poetry made it very stable in oral transmission. The identification of the poetry with named poets allows poems to be situated on a chronology. The basic chronology is consistent with an arc of evolution of the poetic form, and that model is supported by the linguistic and philological studies of the texts. The dating and ascription of individual passages, poems, and stanzas may be disputed, yet the broad chronology of the corpus as a whole is generally accepted. In the medieval tradition, *dróttkvætt*'s origin is identified with Bragi Boddason, a historical person who also became a legendary 'first poet'. Bragi was active in the nineth century. He is identified as performing for kings in the first half of the century – and also bears the epithet *inn gamli* 'the old' – but the recent evaluation is that he was reliably active beginning from AD 850 (Clunies Ross 2017). However, the poetry of Bragi and the other earliest identified poets reveals that the near-isosyllabic line structure with its alliteration was already fully-developed in their compositions, and that the traditional idiom was also already established as a social form at that time, while the usage of rhymes remained more flexible.[35] The

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[35]   On the meter, see e.g. Matyushina 1994; Gade 1995; on formulaic phraseology, see also Marold 1983; Frog 2016.

syllabic base of the poetic form had much less flexibility than the basic Old Germanic meter, and this was combined with an increase of features through the incorporation of rhyme. Nevertheless, the tendency to approach the poetry through an ideal abstraction of the meter obscures the fact that metricality is on a spectrum of degree from more and less ideal to non-ideal and unmetrical.[36] That metrical well-formedness operates on a spectrum of degree is organic to oral poetries, which are produced or reproduced and received in a flow of oral discourse, where formal features may have varying degrees of salience on a hierarchy of priority (Frog 2021a: 253). Many deviations may pass unnoticed, or they may be compensated for by alternatives; deviations may even be intentional flourishes (see also Kristján Árnason 1991: 26–28).[37] In the case of *dróttkvætt*, the six-position rhythmic structure and organization into couplets linked through alliteration on three positions was primary. Deviation from the rhythmic structure in particular would presumably be salient in oral performance, and the salience of alliteration appears linked to its salient perceivability as a primary poetic organizing principle in the broader poetic ecology. Among the earliest poets, rhyme in even lines / b-lines was regular but not fully systematic, allowing for flexibility, while the absence of rhyme in an odd line / a-line was commonplace, and some poets may have perceived such rhymes as an added rather than metricalized feature (Matyushina 1994).

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[36]   Snorri Sturluson's (1987; 1999) representation of poetic forms simultaneously highlights and obscures this aspect of the poetry. On the one hand, Snorri illustrates the limits of what is metrically acceptable, for instance in the number of syllables in a line, but he also takes variations found in couplets of other poets and makes them systematic for a whole stanza, framing them as distinct verse forms (see also Faulkes 1999; Kristján Árnason 2017).

[37]   E.g. research on Russian folk poetry of recent decades normally approaches this problem in statistical terms, allowing a poem to be identified as 'in a certain meter' although 20% of lines diverge from it, with some scholars considering even a deviation of 25% of lines not excessive for such an identification (Bailey 1993; 1995: 483; Skulacheva 2012: 53). This is not to suggest that skaldic court poetry allowed a similar degree of flex, except perhaps in the usage of rhyme, which seems not to have been metricalized in the same way as the six-position rhythm and alliteration. The greater metrical regularity of Old Norse court poetry relative to the Russian folk poetry referred to appears linked to the reflexive attention to the composition of stanzas and similar units as discreet units of tradition that were quoted and discussed rather than simply parts in poems circulating centrally as wholes and performed from beginning to end without a developed metadiscourse on formal composition.

The Problem of Origins

The origins of *dróttkvætt* remain unknown. Stem-syllable or internal rhyme is commonly contrasted with end rhyme, which enters into skaldic composition later on. The contrast is both between *dróttkvætt* rhyme's lack of incorporation of word-final syllables, which formally distinguishes the type of rhyme, and also for its use as line-internal rather than linking lines into couplets or series, which formally distinguishes the rhyme's metrical use. The earliest *dróttkvætt* compositions seem to be too early for impacts from the spread of end rhyme through vernacular poetry traditions of Europe during the Middle Ages (cf. Fabb & Sykäri 2022). Also, the early rhymes in Latin were concerned with the assonance of the final syllables or series of syllables rather than consonance, which has priority in Old Norse, highlighted by systematic rhymes that contrast the vowels of the respective syllables (Simms 2003: 149–161).[38] Old Irish isosyllabic verse, with its distinct sound patterning, was proposed to have provided the model for *dróttkvætt* already in the nineteenth century (Edzardi 1878). The proposition of a relationship builds from observations of features shared between insular Celtic and skaldic poetries that have also seemed limited to these (Tranter 1997). Links to Ireland can be found for a few of the earliest skaldic poets (Kuhn 1983: 274–275, 288), which makes some sort of contact-based influence possible. However, hexasyllabic metrical structures are not very common for Irish verse forms and, although Irish meters may have a regular cadence, *dróttkvætt*'s trochaic cadence with a heavy disyllable seems to set it apart (Gade 1995: 7–11; Tranter 1997: ch.8). The parallels in the use of phonic patterns can be striking when they are lined up between Old Norse, Irish, and Welsh (Travis 1943; Tranter 1997: ch.6). Nevertheless, consonants were rhymed in Old Irish within classes rather than requiring the phonemes to be the same (Simms 2003: 153–154), and Kristján Árnason (2007) shows that the same principles govern consonants and consonant combinations in both skaldic rhyme and Old Germanic alliteration. The principles of rhyme therefore appear rooted in vernacular poetics and there is no compelling 'foreign' meter of which *dróttkvætt* would be a direct adaptation, but that does not in itself exclude the possibility of influence (Stifter 2016: 88–89).

   The question is complicated by the structural similarity between hypermetric and *dróttkvætt* lines as constituted of three strong and three weak positions

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[38]   The influence of Latin Church poetry has also been proposed to have impacted the regular trochaic cadence of *dróttkvætt* lines (Kuhn 1983: 331), but the eddic meter *ljóðaháttr* also shows a preferred cadence, which points to a sensitivity to the end of the line not observed for other Old Germanic poetries.

linked by alliteration with double alliteration in the a-line (see also Simms 2003). Rather than the six-position line structure being borrowed, it, along with its systematic alliteration, may be a Germanic component of the meter. Similarly, rhyme on only a stressed syllable irrespective of any following syllables or on a two-syllable word stem[39] is characteristic for Old English and Old Saxon alliterative poetry, where it most commonly links words within an a-line or a b-line (Bredehoft 2005b; Matyushina 2011). The formal type of rhyme and also its line-internal usage may also therefore have a background in the Germanic tradition, as argued in later instalments of this series. Alongside *dróttkvætt*, *ljóðaháttr* reflects potentially if not probably more or less contemporary metrical innovations with connections to different genres, as perhaps does *málaháttr*. This possibility is highlighted by the contrastive distribution of Old Germanic line types across *fornyrðislag*, *ljóðaháttr*, and *málaháttr*, which indicates a level of distinction between them not only at the level of the mode or genre of performance (cf. Gunnell 1995), but also at the level of the metrics of a-lines and b-lines (Russom 2009; Suzuki 2014b). The innovations in *málaháttr* move in a parallel direction to *dróttkvætt* in terms of expanded lines. Those in *ljóðaháttr* seem to go in the opposite direction in terms of allowing more syllables in weak positions or anacrusis, while the preferred cadence of *Vollzeilen* points to metrically foregrounding the cadence in the poetic ecology, rather than this being unique to *dróttkvætt*. Thus, *dróttkvætt* was not the only meter to emerge in the poetic ecology and its only feature that is not readily accounted for within the Germanic tradition is its near-isosyllabicity.

Dróttkvætt is often considered to have developed somehow from the common Germanic meter, although the models for this vary.[40] Stem-syllable rhyme has been a vexing feature in tracing the meter's origin because rhyme has been seen as 'foreign' to Old Germanic poetry and a 'late' feature. Consequently, scholars have hunted for a 'foreign' meter that could have been borrowed with an isosyllabic hexameter and associated rhyme.[41] When the type of rhyme can be considered an adaptation from the inherited poetic system, the syllabic base

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[39] Rhyme on two-syllable word stems tends to converge with end rhyme, since it is found mainly in syndetic formulae – i.e. formulae of an 'X and/or/nor Y' type.

[40] Examples include Sievers 1893; Kuhn 1983; Kristján Árnason 1991; Smirnitskaya 1994 [forthcoming]; Gade 1995; Russom 1998. Doug Simms (2003: 217) links the formal comparison between *dróttkvætt* and hypermetric lines to usage of hypermetric lines for 'elevated speech', which is potentially analogous to *dróttkvætt* as a mode of elevated speech as court poetry.

[41] Kristján Árnason has recently argued against this position and for the rhyme in *dróttkvætt* being instead a development extended from the principles of alliteration, although as a development linked to the *dróttkvætt* meter rather than as part of the Old Germanic tradition (2007).

of *dróttkvætt*'s rhythm might be viewed as a spontaneous product of language change. However, a spontaneous emergence of the meter is improbable owing to a combination of factors:

(*a*) It appears as a single new poetic form alongside the Germanic accentual meter, rather than participating in a general shift toward isosyllabism;[42]

(*b*) Formal divergence from the basic Germanic meter is complex as a combination of both its hexametric and isosyllabic structure, producing a marked contrast with eddic meters, even if poets could also use and adapt eddic meters;

(*c*) As oral poetry, the structural divergences must reflect marked changes in performance rhythms;

(*d*) Divergence in metrical form correlates with extreme complexity of both the circumlocution system and poetic syntax;

(*e*) These divergences are matched in a social evaluation as an honorific mode of discourse linked to courts; and

(*f*) The social valorization is linked to poets characterized by mobility between courts and kingdoms.

Social valorization as court poetry of a formally exceptional meter used by actively mobile poets[43] make the simplest explanation that poets encountered an isosyllabic poetry in contexts that led them to valorize it as an elevated mode of expression and to adopt it, or at least to adapt its isosyllabic rhythm as an emblematic feature. Like most elements of the meter, kennings as a feature of diction are a device of the inherited poetic tradition used to meet

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[42]   This does not exclude other metrical experimentation, yet skaldic verse is overwhelmingly in *dróttkvætt*-type meters, while skaldic use of *fornyrðislag* and its variations is a distant second.

[43]   Knowledge of the operation of these courts is fragmentary and known centrally through the narrative worlds of medieval sagas and especially sagas composed in Iceland, in which poets and poetry receive varying degrees of attention. Genres of skaldic praise and commemoration poetry operated as commodities in an exchange economy. 'Courts' were social centers in which kings or other nobility both hosted and maintained communities, including poets, whose compositions would customarily be well compensated. The principles of exchange in the courts were not inherently different from exchanges in the hall-centered communities elsewhere in society or from poems as commodities exchanged for support from gods (e.g. a poet could expect something in return for composing a poem to honour the god Þórr). The central differences seem to have been in the construction of poetry as cultural capital within courts as political centers (and presumably greater economic reward), the reciprocal instrumentalization of skaldic poems as propaganda (i.e. as compositions to be remembered, repeated, and explicated and discussed elsewhere), and the extension of poets' relation to a patron as a diplomat-like agent representing a political leader's interests to another court or community (e.g. in Iceland).

metrical needs as well as for honorification.[44] Their adaptation and development, along with the increased complexity in syntax and in conjunction with the poetry's usage as an honorific register,[45] may be viewed as a consequence of the demands of the meter.[46] The riddle of *dróttkvætt*'s origins thus reduces to the background of its near-isosyllabic rhythm.

If this scenario is roughly correct, then isosyllabism of some poetry tradition may have simply 'sounded cool' and been creolized into hypermetric couplets rather than a meter used in another language being directly assimilated. Irish influence without a direct correspondence of meters is thus very possible (see also Stifter 2016: 88–89). Alternately, poetries in Romance languages also become possible, as do Finnic, Baltic, and potentially other poetries east of the Baltic Sea. Impacts from east of the Baltic Sea have remained outside of the history of the meter because the respective languages had no marked impact on Old Norse in Scandinavia. However, the opening of the Eastern Route was characterized by major multicultural and multilingual economic centers like Staraya Ladoga (founded by ca. AD 750: Kuz'min 2008). Although impacts on vocabulary may not have spread to Scandinavia from these societies, new poetic forms could potentially do so if they were received in Scandinavia as vernacular (i.e. in Old Norse) rather than 'foreign', and if they also received a valorized status through association with an affluent court culture.[47]

Our knowledge of court cultures in Scandinavian and along the Eastern Route is limited. Nevertheless, the sagas point to the political and economic

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[44]   Kennings are also a feature of Old English alliterative poetry, although they are not as frequent and never 'complex' in the sense of allowing one element of a kenning to be itself a kenning (e.g. Marquardt 1938), although the kenning is not found as a significant poetic-rhetorical device in Old Saxon or Old High German (Gardner 1969).

[45]   On honorific registers, see e.g. Agha 1998; Irvine 1998.

[46]   Poetry characterized by systematic line-internal alliteration develops equivalence vocabularies to enable saying 'the same thing' with different alliterations (Roper 2012). *Dróttkvætt* restricted the Old Germanic accentual meter's syllabic flexibility and added needs of rhyme to it. The metrical demands of *dróttkvætt* thus required equivalence vocabulary not only for different alliterations, but also for both different rhymes and syllabic rhythms and combinations of all three of these. The development of the kenning system and how it can be used in the poetry's syntax accommodated these compositional needs.

[47]   The window is limited for the probable development and export of an adaptation of the Germanic accentual poetry to isosyllabic rhythms in the multicultural society of a trading center like Staraya Ladoga or Velikij Novgorod. These societies were linked to the huge flow of silver into Scandinavia from the end of the eighth century, but the silver trade collapsed along with many Scandinavian-founded centers toward the end of the tenth century, after which Slavic language became dominant (see Frog & Saarikivi 2015 and works there cited).

centers linked to Scandinavia and its diaspora as operating in forms of peer-polity interaction, which suggests that poets and their poetry could have been similarly engaged across these regions. Snorri Sturluson, for example, received weapons and a rich suit of armour for one poem, a ship for another, and so on. These gifts may be exceptional in their value, entangled as they are with political moves (Wanner 2008: 69–72), yet they also point to the high value of poems as exchange commodities, while the entanglement of political engagements with commodity exchanges for poetry cannot be assumed to be unique to Icelanders visiting the courts of Norway. An amusing example of a poet visiting a court in England and being richly rewarded by a king for a gibberish poem gets mentioned as an anecdote of the difficulty in understanding complex *dróttkvætt* compositions (*Sneglu-Halla þáttr*). However, the anecdote may simultaneously reflect the social and political dimensions of poetry in the extended peer-polity networks of the North, where forms of poetry that may not be locally valorized in themselves may be presented and richly rewarded as valorized commodities suited to the elites. The *dróttkvætt* meter seems not to have been the emblematic poetic form of court poetry in all of these societies, while the establishment of centers along the Eastern Route in Finnic and other Uralic language areas makes isosyllabic court poetry in some multilingual areas probable, even if not in the Old Norse language. Whatever the background of the *dróttkvætt* meter, the identification of Bragi Boddason as the 'first poet' links an oral poetry tradition that had already taken shape with a prominent early poet who reportedly performed for kings in several courts around Scandinavia – courts that were doubtless also visited by others from both east and west.[48]

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[48] This tryptic precipitated as a response to a conversation with Haukur Þorgeirsson over a very long lunch at a Chinese buffet. I would like to thank Geoffrey Russom and Kristján Árnason for their valuable comments and criticisms on an earlier version of the three articles.

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