

The Finnic Tetrameter – A Creolization of Poetic Form?

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Abstract: This article presents a new theory on the origins of the common Finnic tetrameter as a poetic form (also called the Kalevala-meter, *regilaul* meter, etc.). It argues that this verse form emerged as a creolization of the North Germanic alliterative verse form during a period of intensive language contacts, and that the Finnic ethnopoetic ecology made it isosyllabic. Previous theories have focused on the trochaic, tetrametric structure and viewed other features of poetic form as secondary or incidental. This is the first theory to offer a metrically driven explanation for the distinctive features of the poetic form: the systematic placement of lexically stressed short syllables in metrically unstressed positions and systematic yet unmetrical use of verse-internal alliteration. The emergence of the poetic form may be viewed simply in terms of hybridization, but its formation as a central mode for epic and ritual poetry demands consideration of social factors. Creolization is considered a social process of hybridization at the level of sign systems that is characterized by a salient asymmetrical relation of power, authority or other value in the cultural sign systems being reconfigured from the perspective of the society or groups involved. An argument is presented that North Germanic contacts also produced systematic verse-internal alliteration in Finnic languages. Discussion then turns to the distinction between the origin and spread of the poetic form. The poetic form's uniformity across Finnic language areas in spite of its 'foreign' metrical features along with the range of genres with which it was used are considered indicators of the poetic form's spread with language, forming an argument that the tetrameter emerged within an environment that also produced Late Proto-Finnic, and then spread with Late Proto-Finnic language and culture through areas where other Finnic language forms were spoken.

Keywords: diachronic analysis; language contacts; Kalevala-meter; Germanic alliterative verse; creolization

This paper introduces a new theory concerning the history of the common Finnic tetrameter (Kalevala-meter, *regilaul* meter). Unlike earlier discussions of the meter, my aim is to offer a metrically-driven account of the most

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distinctive features of the poetic form: i.e. the conventions for the placement of lexically stressed syllables of different length and the conventional use of alliteration although this is not metricalized. When considering the history of the poetic form, I also take into account the fact that the poetic form was a social phenomenon. The poetic form did not emerge and change in a vacuum: it emerged in relation to people using it, and their choices about using it as opposed to something else were motivated rather than random. Consequently, it becomes necessary to account for the range of uses of the poetry in relation to its emergence and spread.

In overview, I argue that the poetic form emerged during the Late Finnic language period of ca. A.D. 200–800, which is later narrowed to ca. A.D. 200–550 through considerations of historical language spread, and gradually builds into an argument that the poetic form emerged in a multilingual environment most likely closely tied to the emergence of Late Proto-Finnic from Middle Proto-Finnic. The period ca. A.D. 200–550 corresponds to the period when contacts with Scandinavian language were most intense. Rather than only borrowing words, I propose that Proto-Finnic speakers were also influenced in ways that they used words. I argue that the emergence of the Finnic tetrameter can be accounted for as a metrical hybrid during this period of intensive Finnic contacts with Proto-Scandinavian. This account differs from previous discussions by offering metrically motivated explanations for the Finnic tetrameter's unusual and distinctive features concerning the placement of long and short syllables and unmetricalized alliteration. When the emergence of this poetic form is placed within the broader context of alliteration in the North, it appears probable that alliteration also entered Proto-Finnic through Proto-Scandinavian influence during the same period. Scandinavian influences at this time thus seem to have fundamentally impacted Finnic ethno-poetics. If this is correct, the Finnic tetrameter may not simply be a hybrid, but a creolization of the Proto-Scandinavian alliterative tetrameter. In this case, the Proto-Scandinavian meter would have been assimilated into Proto-Finnic, where the vernacular ethno-poetic system subordinated it to syllabic (as opposed to accentual) rhythms, resulting in a unique new poetic form. In addition to conventions governing syllable placement and alliteration, creolization would also account for the poetic form's tetrametric rhythm.

The discussion of metrical form is followed by a discussion relating the tetrameter to Proto-Finnic language spread and developments in Finnic traditions. Evidence is provided to argue that, in order to account for the tetrameter in North Finnic and its distinct evolution from other Finnic traditions, the spread of the poetic form occurred at least several centuries before the breakup of Proto-Finnic into separate languages (in roughly A.D. 800,

following Kallio, P. 2014). Consideration is given to the question of whether the Finnic tetrameter spread through speech communities of Late Proto-Finnic or with Late Proto-Finnic as a language or dialect through Middle Proto-Finnic with broader changes in culture. The question of broader changes is addressed by bringing into focus the variety of areas of culture with which the poetic system connects. This is done by giving attention to the range of genres with which the poetic form was likely associated and their implications concerning practices and social identities. These discussions concerning the spread of the poetic form are complementary to the main argument of the origin of the poetic form through Scandinavian contacts, which can be accepted without taking a position on processes through which it spread and developed.

1. Cultural Creolization?

The concept of creolization may seem extremely marked to some readers. The term *creolization* emerged with culturally and historically specific connections to the context of colonialism, and has received particular attention in connection with language. The perspectives on, and understanding of, social and cultural phenomena in those contexts have been abstracted and developed for more general consideration of restructuring processes related to competition and selection operating at the level of constituent elements rather than language wholes (Mufwene 2007). Creolization as a concept has also been considerably extended as a framework for addressing traditions and culture more generally (Chaudenson 2001; cf. also Bronner 2005). The term *creole* of course emerged as embedded in language and culture ideologies: it was viewed as something inferior to a pure and ideal form of language, culture, ethnicity or race, and evaluated from a stance of the group of which the pure, ideal form is considered iconic.¹ The concept of creolization has been lifted from those contexts and objectified in order to discuss a type of broad phenomenon. Notably, attention to the process has brought the products into focus as unique and distinctive rather than as derivative, which allows, for example, creativity to come into focus (Harring 2004).

Use of the concept creolization varies. The approach used here is built on a semiotic view of culture as “localized in concrete, [socially] accessible signs, the most important of which are actually occurring instances of discourse”

¹ On iconicity in language ideologies, see Irvine, Gal 2001.

(Urban 1991: 1).² Hybridization and cultural mixing customarily describe products and outcomes independent of social contexts, significance or even perception, and these terms can be applied to unique examples or variations on any scope. Similarly, assimilation, vernacularization or indigenization refer only to conforming elements of one culture to the receiving culture, which might be as simple as adjusting the phonology of a borrowed word and reshaping its semantics to accord with its use in the context of another language. Creolization is distinguished from these complementary concepts in three important ways. First, creolization refers to a phenomenon of systems of signs and sign behaviour, such as a language, register, genre, category of practice (e.g. foodways), or even culture at the broadest semiotic level, as opposed to something within the sign system like a word or symbol, or something produced by it like a particular text or performance. Second, the product of creolization is something new and distinct as a social phenomenon with at least some degree of social durability, whether it is eclipsed after a single generation or advances and spreads to become dominant. Third, the process of creolization is characterized by an asymmetrical relation of power and authority associated with the cultural sign systems being reconfigured, a relation which has connotations for semiotic ideologies. The conditions of the asymmetrical relation are considered historically specific to a particular cultural environment rather than necessarily entailing a form of colonialism *per se*.³ The asymmetry is also not assumed to be necessarily martial, political or economic, only socially salient in the process of creolization.

Creolization is thus a form of hybridization connected with a type of social or societal relation between groups associated with the two or more semiotic systems being hybridized and resulting in a new and distinct system. The argument below is built on first arguing that the emergence of the Finnic tetrameter can be accounted for as a hybrid of poetic forms, which I consider the most compelling such explanation because it offers metrically motivated explanations for its distinctive features. If this model is accurate, however,

² I replace Urban's "publicly" with "socially" since not all forms of culture are public and thus not necessarily publicly available.

³ This approach to creolization also does not seek to differentiate a top-down imposition of language, culture, religion or practices by a dominant 'other' from a bottom-up assimilation of valorized practices and forms of expression by those on the other side of the asymmetrical relation. Processes of creolization are here considered to occur among people of the relevant society with their motivations in relation to the conditions of cultural contacts and relations; such an approach opens onto the problem that the processes involved can be multiple and diverse.

it creates significant questions about how this development relates to cultural contacts, and to consideration of whether the relation between cultures and their interaction was more or less symmetrical or markedly asymmetrical. Tracing cultural heritage of language or tradition has customarily built tree-like models that trace each branching of diversification back to a single parent. These models render invisible possible external forms that may have contributed to diversification, and they thus reflect implicit and deep-rooted ideologies that lead language, culture or traditions to be modelled in relation to pure and ideal historical forms that are challenged by models of mixing like creolization (see also Mufwene 2007). Identifying the emergence of something like the Finnic tetrameter with cultural creolization contests this mode of thinking and demands consideration that different features of the phenomenon may each have an independent lineage. This would, of course, also be the case with other forms of hybridization. The argument below therefore explores what may be inferred as most probable behind the outcomes of the processes of hybridization, also considering social implications.

2. The Common Finnic Tetrameter

The common Finnic tetrameter refers to a poetic form that was organized according to a hierarchy of features that varied significantly by region in the time when the poetry was recorded. Key features are (see also e.g. Sadeniemi 1951; Kuusi et al. 1977; Leino 1986; Sarv 2008):

2.1. Syllabic Rhythm (More or Less)

Each metrical position was isosyllabic (filled with only one syllable). This can be placed in contrast to accentual meters, like the Old Germanic alliterative form which counted stresses and allowed a variable number of syllables between them (e.g. Árnason 1991; Russom 1998). Although syllable-based rhythms are not uncommon, it is only one of a number of possible organizational principles for verse.⁴ It can be contrasted with meters based on moraic rhythms, such as Homeric verse, in which certain positions can be completed by either a long syllable (= 2 morae) or two short syllables (= 1 mora each) (e.g. Foley 1990: 68–84). The syllabic rhythm allowed some flexibility in the opening foot, with additional flexibility in other feet varying by region; in western and

⁴ On different principles for metrical organization, see also Hanson, Kiparsky 1996.

south-eastern regions of Estonia, the poetic form advanced in the direction of accentual verse (on which, see Sarv 2008; 2011; 2014–2015; see also Kallio, K. et al. 2016–2017: 144–145). These ranges of flexibility nevertheless appear primarily associated with the historical loss of syllables in different Finnic dialects and languages as well as contacts with poetry in other languages.

2.2. Trochaic Tetrameter Lacking a Caesura

The base syllabic rhythm exhibits four stressed positions alternating with unstressed positions forming four trochaic feet of two syllables each. Flexibility is in the first foot where two or occasionally even three syllables may appear in one position. Word breaks are not permitted within the last foot, so lines should never end in a monosyllable, although this can be found very occasionally even in the most conservative region of the meter. The trochaic rhythm lacks a regular caesura (i.e. a mandatory word-break within the line).⁵

2.3. Placement of Long and Short Stressed Syllables

A particularly distinctive feature of the meter is that, outside of the flexible first foot, the placement of stressed syllables is regulated by a dual constraint. Finnic languages place stress on the first syllable. In the meter, long stressed syllables should appear in metrically stressed positions (with the exception of the word on = ‘is’) and short stressed syllables should appear in metrically unstressed positions. The placement of unstressed syllables is not regulated. Mari Sarv (2008: 39) describes this with the equation &XXABABA(C)&, in which & indicates a mandatory word break, X indicates metrical positions which are flexible, A and B indicate positions where a stressed syllable must be long or short, respectively, and C cannot receive a stressed syllable. The constraint differentiates stressed from unstressed syllables and then prescribes the complementary placement of the stressed syllables according to length. Basically, it entails certain constraints for long stressed syllables and different constraints for short stressed syllables. The complexity of this feature of

⁵ Matti Sadeniemi (1951) proposed that the meter has a caesura, but this seems to be projection on analogy to Germanic alliterative poetry. There is usually a word break somewhere in the middle of the line, but this is a natural outcome of right justification or ‘winnowing’ (§2.5 below); there are also lines of a two-syllable word followed by a six-syllable word. Moreover, there is nothing that would mark a caesura in a line in sung performance.

the meter has been considered generally exceptional (Fabb 2009: 163). This constraint produces a regular contrastive alignment of lexically stressed short syllables with metrically unstressed positions, which I refer to as *contrastive stress*. Contrastive stress is striking because it seems counter-intuitive to the degree that it has been proposed that we would never have discovered the meter without evidence of its performance (Ross, Lehiste 2001: 116). This convention is quite strong, but does not hold for 100% of lines even in regions where the metrical form is most strict and regular (Sadeniemi 1951: 43–45).

2.4. Alliteration

Another distinctive feature of the poetic form is a convention that two lexically stressed syllables in a line should begin with the same sound, but the positions of those syllables are not interfaced with the metrical template. In other words, it is an alliterative metrical form but alliteration is not part of the meter; instead, alliteration floats on top of the meter in a line without a direct relation to metrical constraints.⁶ Alliteration is significantly more flexible than the placement of long and short syllables. It ideally includes both the onset consonant and following vowel (strong alliteration); if the following vowel is not the same, there is a phonological hierarchy of which vowels are preferred (Krikmann 2015). Onset alliteration is not required in every line, and its absence can be accommodated by alternative strategies for integrating a verse into the acoustic texture of performance, such as alliteration on metrically stressed rather than lexically stressed syllables or phonic patterning across adjacent verses (Frog, Stepanova 2011: 201). Daniel Abondolo (2013) has remarked that the fact that alliteration is not formally metrical suggests that it is a secondary feature that has complemented the metrical form.

2.5. Right Justification or ‘Winnowing’

Longer words are generally positioned at the end of a line rather than at its onset. In itself, this is a manifestation of a common phenomenon in oral poetry of right justification (Foley 1990: 96–106, 178–196), which manifests as a formal convention for organizing words in a line. In the present context, interest

⁶ In discussions at conferences, Mari Sarv has repeatedly advocated for this distinction.

in this convention is that right justification is subordinate to the placement of long and short syllables.⁷

2.6. Parallelism

Semantic and syntactic parallelism are an integrated feature of the poetic form, although parallelism is not formally required of every verse (see further Steinitz 1934; Saarinen 2017). Parallelism will remain outside of the concerns of the present article, but it may be noted that right justification extends to the organization of parallel verses (Kuusi 1952).

3. Main Approaches to the Origins of the Finnic Tetrameter

3.1. A Proto-Uralic Inheritance?

Theories of the history of the Finnic tetrameter not infrequently address potential relationships with poeties in other Uralic (or Finno-Ugric) languages. Eugene Helimski argues that the Finnic tetrameter is associated with the meter of Northern Samoyedic shamanic singing and ritual. The poetry is typically composed in an isosyllabic trochaic tetrameter with a mandatory caesura in the middle of the line. This presents an eight-syllable trochaic line that is equivalent to the Finnic tetrameter, but which differs in that it: *a*) lacks the constraints on syllable placement; *b*) lacks the complement of alliteration; and *c*) exhibits a caesura (Helimski 1998: 44–45; 2003: 201; see also Helimsky, Kosterkina 2004: 220–221). A historical relationship between the meters would most reasonably trace back to a common Proto-Uralic language phase, which would mean it had been in continuous use in each language family for more than four thousand years.

Methodologically, Helimski's theory begins from a transparent formal similarity of meters. It then accounts for these similarities and their long-term continuity through two factors:

⁷ For example, the word *mehiläinen* as a four-syllable word should appear at the end of a line owing to the number of syllables. However, it only appears at the beginning of a line, because its initial syllable is short, which would contrast with the constraint on the placement of stressed syllables.

1. These language groups remained closer to the syllabic structure of Proto-Uralic while reductions through syncope and apocope in other Uralic language motivated change in the inherited meter (Helimski 1998: 45).
2. Northern Samoyedic eight-syllable and six-syllable meters had complementary distribution in use so that the eight-syllable meter was used for sacred forms of discourse whereas the six-syllable meter was for profane discourse; sacred status was a crucial factor in the *longue durée* of the meter (Helimski 1998: 44–45; 2003: 201).

Helimski does not situate this model more directly in relation to the degree of difference between Samoyedic and other Uralic languages, nor does he contextualize comparison among meter and poetics of other Uralic languages. The great differences in performance practices of the different languages also lack consideration, although continuity in metrical form would require adaptation to different modes and practices of performance across millennia. When language contacts can historically impact meters (e.g. Sarv 2011), the fact that octosyllabic verse is also not uncommon across languages in central and northern Eurasia (Leisiö 2001) warrants consideration.

Metrically, comparison is a system of four features: *a*) an isosyllabic meter *b*) of eight positions that is *c*) rhythmically organized as a tetrameter *d*) with a trochaic rhythm. It is quite possible that individual poetic features could have continuity from Proto-Uralic, as seems to be the case with parallelism (cf. Lotz 1954; Tkačenko 1979; Jakobson 1981 [1966]; Fox 2014). Ingrid Rüütel (1998), for example, has proposed that the isosyllabic structuring of verses in performance is an archaic feature of the Finnic singing tradition that is shared across several Uralic languages. Isosyllabic structure could indeed have a continuity in poetics going back to Proto-Uralic, but that would only account for one of four features in Helimski's model. More recently, Niina Aasmäe, Pärtel Lippus, Karl Pajusalu, Nele Salveste, Tatjana Zirnask and Tiit-Rein Viitso observe that "(rhythmic)" trochaic prosody appears typical of Uralic languages (2013: 31), which has implications of historical continuity. If metrical form were purely an abstract linguistic phenomenon, isosyllabism could have augmented and systematized language prosody yielding a trochaic metrical form (cf. Korhonen 1994: 84–86 and the discussion below). However, oral poetry is a performance-centered practice, so linguistic stresses and performance rhythms might also be aligned through extrametrical features like expletives, as in some Samoyedic poetries (see Niemi, J. 2015–2016; 2020), vocables or other devices (cf. also Kallio, K. 2013; 2020). A trochaic metrical structure in an isosyllabic rhythm is possible for Proto-Uralic, but cannot be assumed

solely on the basis of reconstructed linguistic prosody. The question of verse length as octosyllabic, tetrametric or both is still more difficult to assess. The four-millennium continuity of all four of Helimski's features as a system yielding an isosyllabic trochaic tetrameter based on the presence of such meters in ritual poetry of two language branches looks suspiciously ideal without a far broader and more sophisticated comparative analysis.

One appeal of Helimski's theory is that it could account for the fact that the Finnic tetrameter was used for a remarkable number of genres, ranging from epic and incantations to lyric verse, bawdy songs, proverbs and riddles. From the perspective of semiotic ideologies, if the poetic form had earlier held a prestige status connected with an authoritative mode of social or religious discourse, then it would be unsurprising for that poetic form to be drawn on in secular contexts and to have its fields of use extended. The social and religious significance of ritual and/or epic would construct an ideology of the variety of language characteristic of them, linking language form to assumptions, evaluations and connotations concerning the type of speech, constituting a language ideology (e.g. Keane 1997; see also Irvine 1989; Irvine, Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2001). The poetic mode of expression as a medium of discourse⁸ would be subject to valorization linked to the type(s) of speech of which it was iconic. This can be approached in relation to media ideologies (Gershon 2010a; 2010b), which could be carried by the poetic form if applied in use with already established or new speech varieties, and the media ideology would then reciprocally evolve according to how the poetic form would be used across speech varieties in society. Put simply, the poetic form associated with religious and ritual uses would develop a media ideology valorizing it relative to other media, and that status would account for extensions of its use across genres as a valued or elevated mode of expression. The opposite, however, seems improbable: a popular poetic form exclusive to secular contexts of entertainment is unlikely to have use extended to sacred and ritual contexts at the expense of poetic forms with established authority and valorized status. Helimski's proposition remains quite hypothetical, but Samoyedic languages exhibit a noteworthy uniformity in vocabulary related to shamanism (Janhunen 1986: 106–109). This is an indicator of historical conservatism in this area of culture at least from Proto-Samoyedic, which seems to be more of an exception than a norm in Northern Eurasia (see Janhunen 1986). It is at least possible that Samoyedic languages could be conservative in poetics as well.

⁸ I consider medium as that which mediates communication at a general level whereas mode “involves a structuring of a medium's use in ways that produce predictable, socially distinguishable formal differences in expression” from other modes (Frog 2017a: 586).

When considering the history of the meter, Helimski's comparison only accounts, maximally, for the (more or less) syllabic basis and rhythm of a trochaic tetrameter. It does not account for the distinctive features of the Finnic meter concerning the placement of long and short stressed syllables or unintegrated alliteration.

3.2. A Common Finnic and Mordvinic Meter?

The Finnic tetrameter has been compared to Mordvinic meters, although the relationship has been more often mentioned than explored. Heikki Paasonen entered this topic into discussion as early as 1897 when he proposed a relationship between the Finnic meter and a Mordvinic octosyllabic meter with caesura and occasional alliteration. This comparison became less compelling when metrical analysis revealed that Mordvin oral poetry has lines of 7–17 syllables, among which octosyllabic verse is not the most common (Paasonen 1911). (For discussion, see Korhonen 1994: 75–77.) Recently, Paul Kiparsky proposed that the Mordvinic meters are the result of reorganizing the metrical system based on an inherited equivalent of the Finnic tetrameter. Historical changes in the phonology of Mordvinic languages affected word length, stress patterns and quantitative oppositions. Kiparsky theorizes that these changes disrupted alliteration and positioning of long and short stressed syllables as well as the regularity in the number of syllables in a line. These disruptions compelled a restructuring of the metrical system that maintained an isosyllabic base: “The higher-order metrical organization is determined by the interaction of two partially conflicting constraints, SALIENCY, marked by catalexis, and (metrical) PARALLELISM” (Kiparsky 2014: 37). Kiparsky's model presupposes that the key features of alliteration and placement of stressed syllables were already established in the meter inherited into Mordvinic languages.

Comparisons between Finnic and Mordvinic meters are based on the classic family tree model of Uralic languages as a progressive splitting off of languages, beginning from Samoyedic (if this is included at all), followed by Ob-Ugric (Khanty, Mansi, Hungarian), Permic (Komi, Udmurt), Volgic (Mari, Mordvin), and finally the splitting of Finnic and Sámi language families. In this model, a historical relationship between Finnic and Mordvinic meters would derive at least from the hypothetical Proto-Finno-Volgic language stage. However, this model of the family tree has been developed mainly on the basis of lexicon rather than shared phonological innovations. It now seems unlikely that Finnic and Sámi had a shared language phase of so-called Proto-Finno-Sámic or that Mordvin and Mari had a shared language phase of so-called

Proto-Volgic, let alone an earlier common Proto-Finno-Volgic phase (see Saarikivi 2007; Luobbal (Aikio) 2012a; Häkkinen 2012; Frog 2017c). Although Finnic and Mordvinic as well as Sámic languages belong to networks of West Uralic languages, their respective histories of phonological developments do not resolve into a clear stemma of genetic descent; they are potentially or probably independent branches from Proto-Uralic (see Saarikivi 2011: 106–110; also Frog 2017c: 38). If Finnic and Mordvinic derive from an earlier branch of Proto-Uralic, they separated from one another so early that such a branch cannot be distinguished.

From this perspective, there is no basis for the assumption of a common language phase shared by Finnic and Mordvinic languages after the breakup of Proto-Uralic, which has been the basis for comparison between the meters of these languages. Nevertheless, connections between Finnic, Mordvinic and Sámi languages suggest long-term interactions in common networks (Kuusi 1963; Saarikivi 2011: 106–110). Although comparisons cannot trace back to a common language phase intermediate from Proto-Uralic, it may provide relevant indicators concerning earlier historical periods in the respective languages related to participation in shared networks. Trochaic prosody has been considered common for Uralic languages (Aasmäe et al. 2013: 31) whereas Russian folk meters are not generally syllabic (Bailey 1992), making it seem improbable that the syllabic system of Mordvinic meters derives from Russian language contacts. It seems more likely to reflect an inherited structuring principle of verse that was established at least as early as the Viking Age, when Slavic language spread along trade routes through Uralic language areas of today's Russia.⁹ Although ambiguous in itself, comparison supports the probability that the syllabic base of the Finnic tetrameter could have archaic roots, even if those roots are not presumed to go back as far as Proto-Uralic.

3.3. A Baltic Loan?

In his study of Latvian poetry, A. R. Niemi (1918) observed an octosyllabic verse form in *daina* poetry that produced trochaic lines. He compared this to the Finnic tetrameter as its potential origin. Finnic languages exhibit a rich layer of Baltic loanwords indicative of intensive contacts and influences (Larsson 2001), which are paralleled by impacts on mythology and traditions (Harvilahti 1990). Comparison with *daina* poetry connected the Finnic

⁹ On the lack of evidence for a historically related verse form in Sámic languages, see Frog 2017c: 62.

tetrameter with this wide-ranging influence. However, the interpretation of the historical relationship between Latvian and Finnic meters was superficial and problematic. Niemi's comparisons between Finnic and Baltic language traditions generally suffered from lack of contextualization in relation to other traditions (Hautala 1954: 340–341). His theory of the origin of the Finnic tetrameter reflects his broader ideas of historical relations and directions of influence between Finnic and Baltic language groups, connected to evidence of linguistic loans (see also Wilson 1976: 96–98).

Petri Kallio (2020) has recently shown that the Baltic loans seem to be of substrate character. In other words, the influences on language and culture probably result from Proto-Finnic language spreading through regions where what Kallio calls North Baltic was spoken, resulting in a language shift. Basically, when Proto-Finnic arrived, a Proto-Baltic language was spoken by people who lived in the region, and the Proto-Baltic speakers gradually began speaking Proto-Finnic. Linguistic evidence indicates that the significant contacts with Baltic languages were completed in the language phase known as Middle Proto-Finnic, before the beginning of the present era (Kallio, P. 2020). Continuity of a metrical form through a language shift is theoretically possible, although discussion in the following section makes an emergence of the poetic form in Middle Proto-Finnic seem improbable.

A central problem with the Baltic origin theory is that the meter for comparison is only found in Latvian; similar meters in the more historically conservative Lithuanian language are lacking. The rhythms of the *daina* meter also appear linked to the development of initial stress in Latvian. Proto-Baltic did not have word-initial stress, and a trochaic rhythm for a primary poetic form is improbable; Proto-Baltic is more likely to have had a primary poetic form for epic and ritual poetries closer to an Indo-European model. Latvian initial stress is identified with Finnic influence, which may be of substrate character – i.e. from Baltic language spreading through areas where Finnic was spoken – during the Iron Age or potentially as late as the early Middle Ages (Balode, Holvoet 2001: 9; Koptjevskaja-Tamm Wälchli 2001: 638–639). Interpreting similarities between the Finnic tetrameter and Latvian *daina* meters in connection with the stratum of Baltic influences on Proto-Finnic more than two millennia ago thus seems anachronistic. The Latvian meter may be more reasonably attributed to Finnic influences rather than vice versa (Korhonen 1994: 82–84, 86).

Comparison with Latvian verse is centrally at the level of octosyllabic lines that can have a trochaic rhythm or have an asymmetrical structure (e.g. 3+5 syllables). Although verses (and stanzas) may exhibit alliteration, this is irregular, and the organization of stressed syllables according to length is absent.

3.4. A Language-Driven Development in Late Proto-Finnic?

Mikko Korhonen (1994 [1986]) argues that developments in the transition from what is known as Middle Proto-Finnic to Late Proto-Finnic “created sufficient conditions for the spontaneous emergence of a new metric system” – i.e. the Finnic tetrameter (1994: 85). Middle Proto-Finnic had a strong contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables in words, which is reflected in the levelling of vowels in unstressed syllables. A relevant change in the transition to Late Proto-Finnic is a weakening of this contrast and emergence of secondary stress on the third syllable of longer words. This change in prosody gives words of four syllables a trochaic rhythm in normal speech. Korhonen takes a language-driven approach to meter. Consequently, he considers Middle Proto-Finnic to have most likely had an accentual meter based on metrical stress followed by a variable number of unstressed syllables as a formalization of rhythms in conversational speech. The change in stress in Late Proto-Finnic then, in its turn, produced a meter that formalized the new rhythms of conversational speech, producing a syllabic, trochaic rhythm. Korhonen further proposes that the change in stress prominence was essential in enabling contrastive stress to become a metrical condition for short, lexically stressed syllables. In overview, Korhonen sees the development of Late Proto-Finnic first yielding a shift to syllabic rhythms, then developing a standard line length, and finally developing the contrastive stress of short stressed syllables in metrically unstressed positions. He considers this last development of contrastive stress as a strategy for using words with one, three or five syllables in the trochaic tetrameter (Korhonen 1994: esp. 84–86).

Methodologically, Korhonen’s approach views meter as unilaterally determined by spoken language prosody and phonology. He thus observes that Finnic and Mordvinic meters are both syllabic, but rejects a common proto-metrical system with a syllabic rhythm because he considers an accentual rhythm more probable at earlier stages of the proto-languages, probably back to Proto-Uralic (1994: 77–82). He does not consider that oral poetry will be performed in a way that distinguishes it from normal speech (e.g. Tsur 1992), reflexively drawing attention to itself as verbal art (e.g. Bauman 1984), nor does he consider that the mode of performance can thus become a primary determinant on rhythm and enunciation. Sung performance of this Finnic poetry generally subordinates lexical stress to metrical stress and vowel length to the performance rhythm, as well as smoothing over transitions between words (Collinder 1946: 38; Sadeniemi 1951: 95; Leino 1994: 67–68). Pentti Leino (1994: 69), for example, proposes that sung performance was a key to enabling contrastive stress in the meter, thus attributing this development to a

different factor than Korhonen. Of course, the metrical structure of oral poetry will not maintain distinctions that are not present in the language and perceivable by language users, but meters evolve in a symbiotic relationship with language rather than in a unilateral relationship to it (Foley 1996). If syllables are distinguished in a language, there is nothing to inhibit an isosyllabic meter or a trochaic rhythm. This is not to say that Helimski is right and Korhonen is wrong, only that Korhonen's approach is no less problematic than Helimski's.

Korhonen's approach produces a justification for contrastive stress that only accounts for why lexical stress would not be uniformly identified with metrical stress rather than why contrastive stress would be systematically metricalized. The general view seems to be that the poetry first developed a trochaic rhythm and later metricalized contrastive stress. Paavo Ravila (1935) proposed that contrastive stress developed specifically in relation to sung performance in order to avoid confusing long and short vowels (e.g. *tuuli* = 'wind' vs. *tuli* = 'fire'). However, Pentti Leino (1994: 61–62) points out that this only concerns vowel length and, in context, this concern would be relevant to very few words to motivate such a rule. The dominant explanation has been that the trochaic rhythm initially aligned all metrical stresses with lexical stresses, but this created a difficulty that the meter limited the use of words to those with even numbers of syllables. Korhonen (1994: 86) sees this as one practical solution that could also have been accomplished by either allowing more syllables in unstressed positions or allowing single syllables to stretch across metrical positions. Leino (1994: 69) sees the metrical development as a gradual formalization of pragmatic variations produced by occasional uses of words with odd numbers of syllables. These explanations are unsatisfying.

The proposal that contrastive stress developed in order to enable use of the full range of vocabulary has four weaknesses. First, this model does not account for why a trochaic rhythm would become established at all if the limits it placed on vocabulary made it difficult to use; it is simply taken for granted. Second, the initial restrictiveness of the poetic form seems inconsistent with the range of genres for which the tetrameter was later used. If the form was hard to use, it seems improbable that it would have spread across a wide range of genres; if it only spread after innovation, it is unclear why it would displace alternative poetic forms. Third, it is unclear why the solution to the problem of limitations to vocabulary use would be resolved by an increase in metrical complexity. Finally, it is unclear why that solution would be the metricalization of an otherwise counter-intuitive contrast between lexical and metrical stress made systematic according to syllable length or weight. Basically, Korhonen's theory reduces to a narrative that the meter was a spontaneous product of natural language which was, however, unsuited to people's needs, and so they

added constraints to the meter that seem counter-intuitive to natural language in order to be able to use more vocabulary.

In Korhonen's approach to the history of the trochaic tetrameter and possible solutions to the problem he sees of how to use words with an odd number of syllables (1994: 86), he overlooks that verbal art evolves its diction – the register of verbal art – in relation to metrical constraints (Foley 1996). The use of words with an odd number of syllables could have potentially been accommodated in a number of ways. For example, they could have been accompanied by expletive particles – i.e. words or sounds that have a metrical but not a semantic value in the verse (as the word *on* = 'is' can be used in Finno-Karelian poetry); they could also be extended with affixes such as diminutive suffixes, frequentative affixes for verbs, and so on (Frog 2017b: 438).¹⁰ They could have used parallel forms that might derive historically from different dialects or periods maintained as metrical alternatives (e.g. *haukka* and *havukka* = 'hawk'), stretch long vowels across two positions and so forth (cf. Foley 1996: 27–37; Coleman 1999: 36–45; Lauerma 2004; Sarv 2014–2015; also Helinski 1998: 44). The hypothesis that the metricalization of contrastive stress was a secondary development owing to limitations on vocabulary fails to consider that the vocabulary would have first evolved symbiotically with the meter in order to suitably express what was customarily required through the poetic form (see also Frog 2015: 82–89).

From the perspective of interactions between language and meter, Korhonen's argument yields a compelling point concerning changes in language prosody and the emergence of the Finnic tetrameter. The levelling of contrasts between stressed and unstressed syllables in spoken language does seem to provide conditions for the metricalization of contrastive stress. In other words, the relative weakening of the prominence of lexically stressed syllables allowed the meter to organize their placement according to a relationship between syllabic quantity and metrical stress. Lexical stress determined which syllables were metrically relevant but they could more naturally be destressed in the performance rhythm without this being perceived as a deformation of pronunciation. In Middle Proto-Finnic, the more substantial difference

¹⁰ Amid the extensive literature on kalevalaic poetry, I recall (I hope not falsely) a reference to an otherwise unfamiliar work, probably from the second half of the 20th century, that treats uses of such devices in the meter. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find it when rereading any of the articles where I thought I encountered the reference and have not otherwise identified the relevant work. These devices and their use in the syllabically structured of Kalevala-meter can be compared to corresponding devices in the more flexible poetic form of Karelian laments (on which, see Stepanova, E. 2014: ch. 4; 2015).

in prominence between lexically stressed and unstressed syllables makes the emergence of the meter less likely. The more pronounced this contrast, the more likely destressing a stressed syllable and stressing the following syllable would be perceived as deformation unless people had already been naturalized to contrastive stress through the performance tradition. Thus, the metrical convention of contrastive stress might survive through the momentum of the singing culture in a linguistic environment where stressed syllables increased in relative prominence, but, the greater the contrast, the less likely contrastive stress is to emerge as a metricalized feature.

4. A Theory of Hybridization

The transition from Middle to Late Proto-Finnic potentially created conditions in which the Finnic tetrameter could emerge. There is no reason to believe that these changes spontaneously produced an isosyllabic meter with a trochaic rhythm *per se*: syllabic rhythms may have already been part of the inherited performance culture (e.g. Rūütel 1998), as indeed could have been trochaic rhythms, as proposed by Helmiski. However, the change in language prosody may have been an essential condition for the metricalization of contrastive stress. Petri Kallio (p.c.) notes that changes also involved syncope that produced a long stressed monosyllable in high-frequency words such as *pää* = ‘head, end’ and *maa* = ‘land’ (Kallio, P. 2007). This may have been relevant by increasing the vocabulary available for metrically stressed positions if these excluded short lexically stressed syllables, while the trochaic rhythm would require such monosyllables in nominative, genitive or accusative cases to be followed by a lexically stressed syllable in a metrically unstressed position.¹¹ However, these conditions do not themselves account for the emergence of the metrical form, and most particularly do not account for the distinctive features of metricalized contrastive stress and unmetricalized alliteration.

Loanword evidence allows the transition to Late Proto-Finnic to be dated as beginning around A.D. 200 according to the absolute chronology of Germanic

¹¹ As noted above, Ravila’s (1935) theory that metricalized contrastive stress was driven by the need to distinguish between long and short vowels in stressed syllables does not hold up under scrutiny (Leino 1994: 61–62). However, Riho Grünthal (p.c.) observes that Luobbal Sámmol Sámmol Ántes’ (2012b) recent work on Finnic long vowels indicates that the vowel system did not develop a full set of quantity contrasts until Late Proto-Finnic, which may reflect and entail sensitivities to quantity relevant to the metricalization of stressed syllable quantities.

languages.¹² Late Proto-Finnic is characterized by intensive contacts with Proto-Scandinavian languages, which seem to occur especially in the period of Proto-Scandinavian language dated to roughly A.D. 200–550 as is observable especially through the remarkable number of loanwords (see *LägLoS* and the overview in Kallio, P. 2015). By around A.D. 800, the number of word stems in Late Proto-Finnic borrowed from Germanic was probably greater than the number inherited from a Pre-Finnic language phase, and perhaps several times the number borrowed from Baltic languages (Ahola et al. 2014: 258). Petri Kallio (2015: 26) has treated this as a superstrate comparable to that of French in English – i.e. a layer of influence from a language and culture that was valorized, presumably owing to social power or prestige of speakers identified with it (cf. also Mufwene 2007: 75–79). The scope and magnitude of influences from Proto-Scandinavian language make it reasonable to consider that influences may have extended from vocabulary and syntax to things that people do with language, such as practices of verbal art.

Germanic languages exhibit a common metrical and poetic system that was used across a wide range of genres (e.g. Sievers 1893; Árnason 1991; Russom 1998). Features of this poetic system relevant here are:

1. *An accentual tetrameter*. Verses were organized in half-lines or hemistichs. Each half-line customarily had two metrically stressed positions and two unstressed positions; unstressed positions could have one or more syllables each, and one or more syllables could be in anacrusis (i.e. be extrametrical) at the beginning of each hemistich.¹³ Because the rhythm is based on accents rather than syllables, a half-line was composed of two or more words, although some are built from compounds.
2. *Placement of metrical stress*. Metrical stress was coordinated with phrasal stress, so metrical stress was on words with greater weight in a phrase within a hemistich, especially nouns and adjectives, and which words

¹² Germanic languages can be dated on an absolute chronology back to roughly the beginning of the present era on the basis of runic inscriptions. The ability to identify sound changes in Germanic languages on an absolute chronology makes it possible to date periods of changes in Finnic languages on the basis of loanword evidence.

¹³ The verse form is most commonly known through Edvard Sievers' (1893) typology, in which verses are regularly identified with four stressed positions divided into two hemistichs comprised of two stressed positions and two unstressed positions or one unstressed and one with secondary stress. Sievers' typology gets treated quite often as a theoretical model of Germanic verse, but, as Kristján Árnason (2016: 74–76, 79) has recently stressed, Sievers himself saw it as only a descriptive tool with much variation that falls outside of it. There is also a variation known as a hypermetric line, with an additional stressed position in one hemistich, which is not relevant here.

carried stress and alliteration was connected with relative weight within the phrasal unit.

3. *Syllabic quantity rules*. Syllabic quantities were distinguished in the meter. These are customarily referred to as ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ syllables but equated to long and short syllables in the period of most intense contact and were directly comparable to quantities in Proto-Finnic. Metrically stressed positions could only be filled by a heavy stressed syllable or its equivalent (2 morae). A light stressed syllable (1 mora) could only fill a metrically stressed position with what is called ‘resolution’: it had to be accompanied by a second light syllable and the two together would act as a single heavy syllable (1+1=2 morae).
4. *Metricalized alliteration*. One or both stressed syllables in stressed positions in the first hemistich would carry alliteration with the stressed syllable in the first stressed position in the second hemistich.

If we posit the hypothesis that the Proto-Finnic poetic system had a prominent isosyllabic meter or generally relied on syllable-based rhythms, then metrical hybridization with the Germanic poetic system would account for the Finnic tetrameter including its distinctive features.

4.1. Difference in Rhythm

The main hurdle of this account is the difference in rhythm. It requires the premise of an isosyllabic meter or isosyllabism as a metrical principle more generally in the Proto-Finnic poetic ecology, a premise that finds support in comparative evidence in combination with later evidence of the Kalevala-meter. However, this premise must more narrowly specify that isosyllabism held such a position that the Germanic poetic form was restructured by it in such a way that verse length developed a periodic syllabic metrical form. This premise is required to account for the Germanic accentual verse form with four strong positions across two half-lines becoming a Finnic syllabic tetrameter. *If Helimski’s theory is accepted that Finnic and Samoyedic preserve a Proto-Uralic trochaic tetrameter associated with ritual and epic, then the difference in rhythm could be explained as the product of mapping the Germanic accentual poetic form on the inherited trochaic tetrameter that held comparable status and functions in Finnic society. However, Helimski’s theory is here considered only a possibility, so the alternative and more basic possibility of a metrical ecology that only imposed isosyllabism is considered here.*

For the difference in rhythm, certain differences between the languages are relevant. Finnic had systematic word-initial stress while Germanic had stem-initial stress, so prefixes were unstressed, and Germanic used a variety of prepositions where Finnic would use case endings. Whereas Germanic could easily have unstressed syllables before the first stressed position in a verse, Finnic word-initial stress would regularly align the first metrical stress at the onset of a verse. This difference would break from the floating stress patterns of Germanic meter and may have supported movement to a syllabic rather than accentual rhythm. If the poetic ecology drove the Germanic form into a periodic syllabic structure, maintaining four stressed positions with the first at the onset of a verse would presumably incline these to be regulated within the syllabic structure. If the rhythm of the Germanic form with its four stressed positions were aligned with the prosodic structure of Late Proto-Finnic rather than inclining to some other structure, this would yield a trochaic rhythm (which may have already been a familiar structure of the poetic ecology). At this point, the model is no less speculative than the proposals of Helimski or Korhonen. Korhonen's model lacks motivation for a tetrameter rather than a pentameter or longer trochaic verse form, whereas this stage of comparison gives the same system of four features that Helimski proposed as having continuity from Proto-Uralic: *a*) an isosyllabic meter *b*) of eight positions that is *c*) rhythmically organized as a tetrameter *d*) with a trochaic rhythm. The model presented here would account for this set of features, but, it does not exclude the possibility that hybridization may have occurred with an inherited syllabic or trochaic form, such as that proposed by Helimski. However, the description here would at least account for how a syllabic structure was aligned with the Germanic form to produce a trochaic tetrameter.

4.2. Contrastive Stress

The metrical conventions for the placement of long and short stressed syllables are both the most distinctive feature of the poetic form and also the most regular organizing principle of verses after the constraint on line length to eight positions (violation of which would disrupt sung rhythms whereas violation of stressed syllable quantity would only disrupt metrical texture). The conventions governing stressed syllable placement thus appear crucial to understanding the poetic form. Korhonen's theory proposes a metrical proto-form in which the formalization of language prosody identifies metrically strong positions with primary and secondary stresses while excluding these from metrically weak positions; the consequence that only words of even

numbers of syllables can be used is then proposed to motivate the metricalization of contrastive stress as an innovation allowing use of words with an odd number of syllables (cf. also Leino 1994). If the model of hybridization is accepted, rather than a secondary development, metricalized contrastive stress emerges as a direct outcome of restructuring the Germanic poetic form into a trochaic tetrameter.

An octosyllabic structure combined with Late Proto-Finnic word length would normally allow only two to four words per line, closer to what would be in a Germanic hemistich. Consequently, there were only exceptionally more lexically stressed syllables in a line than metrical feet. The proportion of metrically strong positions to lexically stressed syllables would neutralize the Germanic meter's requirement of a heavy syllable in every metrically strong position because of the potential for disproportion between strong positions and stressed syllables. Organization based on phrasal stress rather than lexical stress would also be neutralized: syllabic weight or quantity would become relevant for all stressed syllables, irrespective of word class and word order. The Germanic meter's constraints based on phrasal stress and quantity regularly resulted in lexically stressed syllables in metrically weak positions. If the Germanic quantity rules are applied in an isosyllabic verse, all long, stressed syllables would need to be placed on metrically stressed positions by default.¹⁴ At the same time, resolution is incompatible with isosyllabism and short stressed syllables would become excluded from metrically stressed positions, giving metricalized contrastive stress.

The flexibility of the first foot is not directly accounted for by the Germanic tradition. However, flexibility at the onset can also be compared to anacrusis in Germanic verse, allowing extra syllables at the onset of hemistichs (greater for the first than the second), and it aligns with the widely-found tendency for increasing regularity toward the end of a verse, which also manifests right justification in the Finnic tetrameter, suggesting its presence in the ecology. Functionally, the flexibility of the first foot plays a key role in enabling variation in word order so that conditions of syllabic quantity can be met elsewhere. The relaxing of this constraint in the first foot can thus be seen as an organic outcome of developing the utility of the poetic form by allowing flexibility while limiting it to the onset of the verse. The exceptional complexity (Fabb

¹⁴ The exception to this is the verb *olla* = 'to be' – *on* = 'is' – which stands outside of this constraint. However, it might be noted that within Germanic phrasal stress, verbs were generally weak except in certain phrasal word order. Although *on* is formally a long syllable, the fact that it can operate as a short syllable in the meter, perhaps coincidentally, is consistent with the Germanic poetic system.

2009: 163) of the dual metrical constraint associated with long and short stressed syllables is then explained as emerging from a poetic system with central principles governing syllables that could be used in metrically strong positions, only allowing for short stressed syllables under conditions that could not be met in a syllabic rhythm.

4.3. Unmetricalized Alliteration

Notably, discussions of the origins of the Finnic tetrameter tend not to give consideration to alliteration, which is either ignored or taken for granted as a ‘natural’ outcome of initial stress. Alliteration may be found in a wide range of poetries, but Nigel Fabb (2015: ch. 5) observes that it is nevertheless relatively infrequent as an integrated feature of poetic form. Proto-Uralic had word-initial stress, which was maintained in several of its descendent languages. Uses of alliteration are found in Uralic languages both with and without initial stress (Leino 1970: 13), but it does not appear as a primary or systematic verse-organizing principle in poetic composition (cf. Latvian *dainas* above). Finnic and Germanic languages both employ alliteration as a central, systematic feature in their poetry traditions, forming an isogloss along with Celtic poetries. Moreover, alliteration in these traditions is formally similar as line-internal, in contrast to so-called ‘vertical alliteration’ that links the beginnings of verses in series, prominent in Mongolian poetry (Kara 2011) and some Turkic poetry traditions (Radloff 1866: 86–91; Reichl 1992: 176 and cf. 199–200, 272–274). In both Finnic and Germanic, systematic use of alliteration reflects an innovation in the poetic systems from their respective Uralic and Indo-European heritages (see also Roper 2009; Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Wälchli 2001: 638–640). The position of alliteration as a basic and yet unmetricalized feature of lines in the Finnic tetrameter cannot not be taken for granted as a ‘natural’ outcome of initial stress. The apparent isogloss of verse-internal alliteration as a central poetic feature in the North suggests a role of historical contacts.

As Daniel Abondolo (2013) observes, the fact that alliteration is not metricalized in the Finnic tetrameter makes it appear secondary, even if alliteration remains valorized and a conventional feature of a verse line. This is more striking when compared, for example, to poetries in Iceland, where the valorization of alliteration leads it to be integrated into assimilated meters where alliteration was otherwise lacking (Árnason 2011). Alliteration in the Germanic meter has a metrical function of linking paired hemistichs. The Finnic tetrameter lacks a caesura and thus a verse has no hemistichs to link. If alliteration were assimilated through Germanic influence on poetries, it could

not fill an identical role in this meter. Of the normally two to four words within the Proto-Finnic octosyllabic verse structure, two should alliterate. The only metrical position in which a stressed syllable predictably falls is the first syllable of a line. Although the first syllable in a verse may be either long or short, word order in the remaining feet is governed by the constraint on the placement of stressed syllables within very flexible syntax.¹⁵ Metricalizing alliteration in that position would place a constraint on the foot offering flexibility in the placement of stressed syllables, creating a competition between constraints as fixed and free in the opposite feet, with all but the second of eight verse positions governed by one or the other. Utility of the poetic form would seem to require one of these principles to be primary, and maintaining both would likely severely limit its range of uses. Such a competition also seems unlikely to develop from the Germanic verse form, where alliteration was coordinated with strong metrical positions governed by the quantity rules. Hypothetically, alliteration could have been metricalized for one or more other positions in a Finnic line, but this would have almost certainly been at the expense of constraints on the placement of long and short stressed syllables. Alliteration appears secondary to quantity rules in the hierarchy of metrical conventions. It may have been pragmatically unmetricalized owing to the limitations of an octosyllabic rhythm in which the quantity rules were maintained as primary.

4.4. Alliteration as a Poetic Organizing Principle in Proto-Finnic

When alliteration in the Finnic tetrameter is viewed exclusively in comparison with Germanic verse, influence may appear relatively straightforward. However, viewing the Finnic tetrameter as an outcome of hybridization does not exclude the possibility that alliteration may have already been a prominently-established part of the poetic ecology. Alliteration was used across a remarkably wide range of genres in Finnic languages, but for historical comparative purposes it is necessary to look to whole poetic systems that can arguably be traced to a common Proto-Finnic heritage. Alliteration was also a primary organizing principle for the poetry of Finnic laments, which were performed with a distinct poetic system that does not appear to have been historically based on syllabic rhythms or periodically repeating metrical

¹⁵ For a recent study of verse-internal syntax in the northern Karelian dialect of this poetry, see Saarinen 2018: ch. 4; the number of words in a verse is so few that inter-linear syntax is particularly significant, but these topics are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

structures (Frog, Stepanova 2011; Stepanova, E. 2012; 2014).¹⁶ As a genre of practice, Finnic lament likely has an unbroken (if continuously evolving) continuity from Proto-Uralic (Stepanova, E. 2012; 2014; see also Stepanova, E. 2011). Alliteration's use as a primary organizing principle for this type of verbal art seems to be specific to Finnic languages. As with the Finnic tetrameter and Germanic verse, alliteration is internal to poetic units of lament utterance rather than linking them in series.

Finnic alliteration has been suggested to have deep roots that may extend back to an Uralic heritage (e.g. Leino 1970: 13–14; Sarv 1999: 132). Alliteration can be found across several of these languages, which is unsurprising for languages that have historically had initial stress. In other Uralic languages, alliteration is found in sayings, idioms, proverbs and also used in poetry, both as alliteration proper and as a by-product of *figura etymologica* or lexical repetitions, but other Uralic poetries do not seem to support alliteration as a *systematic* verse-organizing principle. In other Uralic languages, verse-internal alliteration can be compared, for example, to its use in Turkic oral poetries (Radloff 1866: 87–88), and it is found less prominently even in Indo-European languages without word-initial stress (Watkins 1995: 23; cf. Lord 1960: 42 etc.).

¹⁶ Finnic laments were a women's tradition of sung ritual poetry that survived to documentation only in Orthodox areas (i.e. it generally disappeared from Estonia and Finland). Formal structuring principles of Finnic laments vary considerably on a continuum of regional traditions. At the southern end of this continuum in Setomaa (southeast Estonia and adjacent Russia), laments were formally quite similar to and convergent with local forms of the Finnic tetrameter, which had shifted toward and accentual form and become a women's singing tradition. In Ingria and progressing through regions to the north toward the White Sea, the verbal units become variable in scope composed in relation to correspondingly variably musical structures, and the scope of individual units also increase from a more verse-like structure to poetic 'strings' that may be up to ca. 40 words in length organized according to a single pattern of alliteration. (See Frog, Stepanova 2011: 204–209 and works there cited.) Finnic laments are here considered to have been historically a flexible form of poetic speech sung in relation to correspondingly flexible musical structures (e.g. Niemi 2002; Silvonen 2020). It is considered to have been closer to forms of lament in regions of Karelia where the language had undergone fewer changes through syncope and apocope, and where the Finnic tetrameter remained closer to what is reconstructed for Proto-Finnic. A problem for historical analysis is that lament was only documented in North Finnic languages, in Votic, a so-called Central Finnic language in dynamic interaction with North Finnic groups, and in Seto, representing so-called Inland Finnic, the most distantly related language branch from North Finnic (Kallio, P. 2014). As a consequence, the reconstruction allows a strong comparative perspective on North Finnic lament, a perspective on lament in the culturally dynamic region of Ingria, where Votic and local North Finnic lament may have received considerable contact-based influence, and then an extensive gap to Seto lament. The continuum of variation in Finnic lament tradition appears to parallel the continuum of variation in kalevalaic poetry (which gives a fuller picture).

Fabb observes that “alliteration is widespread as an unsystematic characteristic of lines in many poetries” but “predictable and systematic alliteration is rare” (2015: 124). Such rarity is in spite of the number and variety of the world’s languages with initial stress. This global perspective makes systematic alliteration in Proto-Uralic still less probable. Alliteration in Finnic poetry seems to diverge from that in other Uralic languages as a systematic (if not metricalized) organizing principle for metrical verses and equivalent poetic units rather than simply being a ‘non-random’ and ‘statistically significant’ (Sebeok, Zeps 1959: 370, 384) complementary feature added to the poetic form. Most likely, alliteration was a familiar and potentially even a common device in Proto-Uralic that only became systematic in Finnic as a subsequent development. Because this development is not exclusive to the tetrameter but also prominent in the poetic system of lament, it suggests a broader valorization of alliteration in Finnic poetics, which raises the question of whether alliteration was a primary and systematically employed poetic principle prior to Germanic language influence or Germanic language influence carried more significant and extensive impacts on Finnic poetics.

The question of the background of alliteration in Finnic poetics can be considered in relation to the history of language contacts. With its spread to the Baltic Sea region, Finnic became established on the frontier of a continuum of Uralic languages and dialects that spread across Northern Eurasia. Whereas Sámi languages exhibit significant evidence of so-called Palaeo-European languages that were superseded to extinction by Indo-European and Uralic languages (Luobbal [Aikio] 2012a), Finnic languages lack evidence of significant loans from any such languages (Kallio, P. 2020).¹⁷ This suggests that the rise of alliteration can be most reasonably attributed to internal innovation or contact with an otherwise known language family. Impacts from other Uralic languages are more difficult to assess, but there is not evidence of

¹⁷ This is the common current view. However, there is a substantial amount of vocabulary shared by Finnic and Sámi which gets left outside of this discussion because it was earlier considered to derive from a common language phase, although it could also reflect contacts with a third language. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that such hypothetical language contact would have introduced alliteration as a central feature in Proto-Finnic ethno-poetics when alliteration is not prominent in other languages east of the Baltic Sea. Similarly, words considered Germanic loans into Proto-Finnic but which lack cognates in other Indo-European languages also require reassessment, although the number of such words is probably not so significant as to suggest potential impacts on the poetic system. More generally, it seems rather unlikely that a single language would have significant presence on both sides of the Baltic Sea presumably in the Bronze Age leading it to impact both Finnic and Germanic ethno-poetics independently.

significant impacts from such languages, nor that other Uralic languages had comparable uses of alliteration that could have been carried into Finnic. This is not surprising when the branch of Proto-Finnic that survived was on the frontier of contacts with Baltic languages along the south, Germanic to the west, and mobile cultures to the north (cf. Frog, Saarikivi 2015–2016), where etymological evidence suggests the flow of linguistic influence to have been predominantly unidirectional from Finnic to Sámi languages (Aikio 2009; Luobbal [Aikio] 2012a). The Finnic lexicon reveals a generally-recognized series of major strata of influences from different Indo-European languages. An early group of vocabulary from an Indo-Iranian language or languages (which may have been mediated through networks) is shared by several other western Uralic languages (Koivulehto 2001) and is unlikely to have impacted Finnic poetics. The Baltic substrate observed above could have impacted poetics, but alliteration does not appear as a primary structuring principle of Baltic poetries, giving no reason to believe the Baltic substrate has any connection to Finnic alliteration. Significant contacts with Slavic language begin around the beginning of the Viking Age, corresponding to the time when Proto-Finnic dialects were diversifying into different languages (Kallio, P. 2014; Frog, Saarikivi 2015–2016); alliteration is not a primary principle for Slavic versification, and contact seems too late for the rise of Finnic alliteration. Germanic is the only language family with which Finnic had extensive contacts and also exhibits alliteration as a significant poetic feature. The quantity of Germanic loanword vocabulary in Late Proto-Finnic also appears substantially greater than from any other stratum of linguistic influence, increasing the possibility that influence may have extended to poetics.

As a systematic verse-organizing principle, alliteration is improbable for Proto-Uralic and unlikely to have entered Proto-Finnic through contact with any language other than Germanic (noting that the review above also eliminates likelihood of a third language impacting the poetics of both Finnic and Germanic). Although independent emergence of this principle might be hypothetically possible, contextualizing Finnic and Germanic alliteration with their intense history of contacts among alliteration in poetries of the world more generally makes multigenesis appear so improbable that it does not warrant serious consideration. Intensive contacts with Finnic began between Late Proto-Finnic and North Germanic / Early Proto-Scandinavian, after Proto-Germanic had already diversified (Schalin 2018). The alliterative, accentual verse form is common across the Germanic languages; its emergence

is obscure, but most likely comes from a common language phase,¹⁸ quite probably connected with the shift to stem-initial stress already in Early Proto-Germanic / Pre-Germanic.¹⁹ Moreover, Germanic and Celtic alliteration exhibit a number of striking parallels (Travis 1942: 99) that make a historical relation unambiguous, and this relation must antedate Germanic and Finnic contacts.²⁰ Systematic alliteration in Germanic thus seems to antedate significant contacts with Proto-Finnic, and thus can be assumed to have entered Finnic through language contacts. This scenario would be consistent with the tremendous flow of vocabulary into Late Proto-Finnic, and with the flow of culture across the Baltic Sea more generally, whereas alternative scenarios are difficult to reconcile with language history.²¹

Although alliteration may have been an established device in Middle Proto-Finnic and perhaps earlier, its advance to a systematic verse-structuring principle appears to have emerged through Germanic language contact. This development can be reasonably correlated with linguistic influences in Late Proto-Finnic, when impacts connected with the Finnic tetrameter are also

¹⁸ Although identification of the Germanic alliterative verse form as a Proto-Germanic heritage is a reconstruction, etymological evidence shows the prominence of alliteration already prior to sound changes that distinguish North Germanic: for example, the god Óðinn's male kin with names starting with /v/ must have been established in an earlier language phase when his name would have participated in the same alliteration (< Proto-Germanic **Wōdinaz*/**Wōdanaz*).

¹⁹ This development could potentially reflect a Palaeo-European substrate resulting from language shifts, producing Pre-Germanic language in the spread of Indo-European (see e.g. discussions in Rifkin 2007; Kroonen 2012; but see also the critical discussion in Mees 2003), although connecting systematic alliteration to such substrate influence would be pure speculation.

²⁰ The problem with a model of Germanic influence on Celtic after Finnic contacts is one of chronology. Other issues aside, the alliterative form would first need to spread from North to West Germanic to reach the British Isles with population mobility in the fifth century or later, but alliteration in Old Irish seems to have been established prior to phonological changes that occurred some centuries earlier (Stifter 2016: 66).

²¹ Proposing the reverse direction of influence from Finnic to Germanic or the emergence of alliteration as a verse-structuring principle in both languages through contacts faces three major issues. First, it appears incompatible with a historical relation between Germanic and Celtic alliteration. Second, the restructuring of metrical principles for the most common and elevated form of Germanic discourse is not comparable to etymologies of single words or individual images or narrative motifs: such an impact on a whole poetic system contrasts sharply with the lack of general evidence of Finnic impacts on Germanic. Third, the emergence of the alliterative verse form in North Germanic requires an explanation for the social process of the new poetic form's spread to other Germanic languages after Proto-Germanic's diversification.

most probable. This yields three possibilities: *a*) alliteration first entered the ethnopoetics system with the emergence of the Finnic tetrameter and gradually extended use; *b*) alliteration first became established in the ethnopoetic system, which supported its use in the development of the tetrameter; or *c*) the emergence of the tetrameter was one part of a broader transformation of the Finnic ethnopoetic system. There is no way to determine which of these three is the case. I consider it least probable that alliteration entered Finnic ethnopoetics through the tetrameter (*a*) and then became adapted to other poetic forms. This would not seem to account well for alliteration in lament, which seems to have been maintained as a distinct poetic system not based on periodic metered verse units.²² Rather than alliteration entering ‘first’ (*b*), it seems most likely that these developments reflect broader changes in society and practices across a period of perhaps a few generations, during which the radical developments in ethnopoetics were negotiated and became established in more or less stable forms (*c*).

4.5. A Perspective on the Emergence of the Finnic Tetrameter

These considerations lead me to theorize that the Finnic tetrameter, as currently understood, emerged through a process of metrical hybridization, as a Scandinavian metrical model was assimilated into the vernacular poetic system. Scandinavian conventions of requiring long syllables in stressed positions were directly assimilated while the vernacular isosyllabic structure prevented the resolution of two short syllables in a single stressed position, with the outcome that short stressed syllables were excluded from metrically stressed positions. The prosodic changes in the transition to Late Proto-Finnic reduced the contrast between lexically stressed and unstressed syllables allowing the meter to assimilate the Scandinavian conventions while also retaining a syllabic rhythm with the placement of short stressed syllables in metrically unstressed positions. Alliteration was quite probably already familiar as a device, yet its *systematic* use was assimilated as a valorized feature for forming verses or corresponding units of poetic utterance, making it a feature that also structured

²² On laments’ poetic form, see Frog, Stepanova 2011; Stepanova, E. 2014; on differences in mythology between these systems in North Finnic traditions, see Stepanova, E. 2012; 2014; note that differences in mythology and symbolism across these systems in North Finnic traditions is at least partly connected to changes in religion at a later period that appear not to have impacted traditions in Estonia and Setomaa (Ahola et al. 2017: 926–927).

word choice.²³ However, the primary feature with metrical priority was the placement of long and short stressed syllables, to which alliteration remained secondary and thus could not be interfaced with the meter.

Alliteration was not only valorized for the Finnic tetrameter but also seems to have become an organizing feature of the independent poetic system of laments, and a valorized ethnopoetic feature more generally. Taken together, these traditions suggest a process within which Finnic ethnopoetics underwent profound and wide-ranging impacts. The assimilation of alliteration as an aesthetic priority at the level of acoustic texture in the tetrameter becomes somewhat ambiguous within the context of its more pervasive impacts on ethnopoetics. However, the isolated assimilation of syllabic quantity rules from a poetic system in one language and transplanting them into a meter used in another would seem rather peculiar. It is possible that the quantity rules were assimilated more widely and the Finnic tetrameter is the only poetic form in which it survived, but it seems most probable that the tetrameter results from the adaptation of a full metrical form rather than individual principles being taken up from another language. In addition to contrastive stress and alliteration, Scandinavian influence could potentially also be responsible for the Finnic form being a tetrameter.

This theory of metrical hybridization is compatible with the model of Helimski, which attributes the octosyllabic rhythm of the meter and its trochaic rhythm to a Proto-Uralic heritage. It rejects Korhonen's theory that Middle Proto-Finnic would have maintained a poetic system with an accentual

²³ This also shaped the poetic register (see also Roper 2012; cf. Frog 2015: 82–89; Frog with Tarkka 2017: 217–221). In a discussion at the 2018 NordMetric conference in Stockholm, Paul Kiparsky questioned why the poetic form would be assimilated without also assimilating kennings as basic rhetorical device of the poetic idiom. The question of kennings is too involved to elaborate here. However, it may be briefly noted that kennings are not common to all Old Germanic alliterative verse traditions (Gardner 1969: 111), which makes their prominence in the period of contact uncertain. More significantly, the role of kennings and their potential for variation in Old Germanic poetry is connected to metricalized alliteration, so a kenning in one hemistich could vary lexical components in relation to the needed alliteration. The Finnic tetrameter had fewer words per verse and lacked a caesura: rather than variation motivated by the need to link metrical units with alliteration, Finnic verses tended to crystallize into whole-line formulae. In Old English and Old Norse, kennings are frequently used in so-called apposition, a type of semantic parallelism in which a kenning fills a hemistich, accomplishing alliteration, while it repeats a semantic unit of a noun in the preceding hemistich or verse (Hopkins 2020; also Frog with Tarkka 2017: 207). Apposition as such is not relevant in the Finnic tetrameter, although it might be compared to how semantic parallelism commonly elides semantic elements from the preceding verse (Saarinen 2017) and how parallel verses exhibit a greater tendency to have alliteration than main verses (Sarv 1999).

rhythm that was displaced during language change. However, it is compatible with Korhonen's views on the significance of prosodic changes in the language from Middle to Late Proto-Finnic. Korhonen's argument can be placed in dialogue with Helimski's theory to question long-term continuity of a trochaic rhythm while also accounting for it in the Late Proto-Finnic verse form. Unlike Korhonen's model, Helimski's theory would account for the length of the line, and, if the octosyllabic form was emblematic of ritual discourse, it would confer social significance on the poetic form that would account for its later use and spread across genres. The current theory offers metrically motivated accounts of the emergence of metricalized contrastive stress and unmetricalized but systematized verse-internal alliteration. The Scandinavian model could also account for the tetrametric rhythm while contemporary language structure discussed by Korhonen would account for its trochaic structure. The spread of the poetic form would be attributed to the valorization of the Scandinavian poetic form, and possibly also its range of uses in the source language, which in later evidence are comparable to those of the Finnic tetrameter. The antecedent poetic form, whether or not Helimski is correct, would have been completely obscured in this process.

5. Creolization of the North Germanic Poetic Form?

The Finnic tetrameter appears to have emerged in a context of broad impacts on both the lexicon and ethnopoetics. In spite of the apparent magnitude and scope of the impacts of North Germanic on Late Proto-Finnic, there seems to be no significant impact of Late Proto-Finnic on North Germanic. This situation suggests a marked asymmetry in the languages and cultures of the speakers of the different languages, which has implications for semiotic ideologies. Language ideologies can be inferred to be behind the general paucity of loanwords from Uralic languages in Scandinavian, of loanwords from Celtic in Old English or Old Icelandic, and from Sámi in Finnic. The resistance to loanwords suggests that these languages became iconic of their emblematic speakers as 'other' (Irvine, Gal 2000), with the implication that the evaluative stance taken to those others is such that their identities are not desirable and difference should be maintained. In contrast, the tremendous amount of loanword vocabulary borrowed into Late Proto-Finnic from North Germanic suggests a valorized position of the speakers or culture of which the language is iconic. This stance extends to poetics.

If it is correct that systematic alliteration was adopted in this context, the valorization of Germanic culture and practices resulted in fundamental impacts on the ethnopoetic system. Rather than a symmetrical interaction between languages and cultures with the spread of, for example, a new, trendy genre of practice like the cross-cultural spread of ballads or ring dancing in the Middle Ages, the Finnic tetrameter appears as part of a broader process that produced a new poetic form used across a variety of genres. The North Germanic alliterative verse form seems to have carried with it the syllabic quantity rules that were apparently not part of earlier Finnic versification, while the Proto-Finnic metrical ecology gave priority to isosyllabic rhythm, producing metricalized contrastive stress. The restructuring of ethnopoetics suggests that associations with Germanic culture and practices conferred a positive social evaluation on such adaptations among Proto-Finnic speakers that never seems to be matched by Germanic speakers. The poetic form is a hybrid, but it seems to emerge in an environment where there is a marked asymmetry between the languages and cultures from which elements are being selected and combined, which makes it relevant to view as a creolization. I would carry this proposition a step further and advance that the Finnic tetrameter is unlikely to have emerged without the asymmetrical cultural relations that led to creolization. If the Finnic tetrameter is accepted as having historically been the primary mode of epic and associated ritual discourse, it means a poetic form adapted from another language replaced inherited modes of genres tied to social and religious identities. This type of change depends on exceptional conditions of social asymmetry.

The model of creolization suggests a situation of intense language and cultural contact in dual-language environments. The adaptation of Proto-Scandinavian syllabic quantity rules into a Proto-Finnic syllabic rhythm requires an environment *a*) where speakers of Proto-Finnic had native-like sensitivity to the rhythms of Scandinavian verbal art, and *b*) where speakers' native-like sensitivity to Proto-Finnic ethnopoetics required that verses conform to syllabic rhythms. Even within such an environment, it would not be sufficient for the 'translation' of the poetic form from one language to another to occur at the level of isolated individuals. The requisites of the environment would have to operate at a social level: for Scandinavian quantity rules to become established in a Proto-Finnic metrical system, Proto-Finnic speakers would have to develop sensitivity to those rules at a social level. Moreover, people would need to have a motivation to creolize a Proto-Scandinavian medium of verbal art and also to maintain it. The poetic form and types of performance associated with it would need value and relevance in the Proto-Finnic language environment. The emergence of the poetic form would also

likely be gradually negotiated into a more stable social practice rather than emerging spontaneously as a stable poetic system. Even if its emergence were on the platform of Helmiski's hypothetical trochaic tetrameter, the introduction of conventions governing the placement of stressed syllables would require a fairly comprehensive restructuring of formulaic diction (cf. Frog 2015: 82–89). The introduction of alliteration as a compositional priority would correspondingly motivate the development of a rich equivalence vocabulary that would make it possible to say 'the same thing' while meeting different patterns of alliteration, augmented by semantic parallelism, repeating 'the same thing' with different alliterations in a series of verses (Roper 2012; see also Sarv 1999; Frog with Tarkka 2017: 217–221). These developments most likely took shape as a social process within a speech community or network of speech communities of relatively limited size and scope that subsequently spread through the dialect continuum.

6. Reverse-Engineering Spread

The preceding sections have focused on the earliest periods for which the Finnic tetrameter is probable, arguing that the distinctive features of conventions of contrastive stress and unmetricalized alliteration most likely developed as a creolization of a North Germanic poetic form connected to evidence of intensive language contacts in the Late Proto-Finnic era. Late Proto-Finnic sets a *terminus post quem* for this process at roughly A.D. 200, while the poetic form seems unlikely to post-date the era of intensive contacts, which would make a *terminus ante quem* of roughly A.D. 550. However, if we accept that the process of creolization could not be a spontaneous and uniform development for a broad language area, then we face the question of how it spread from a more limited network of speech communities to be found almost as widely as Late Proto-Finnic's surviving descendant languages. Perspective on this can be gained by applying a descendant historical reconstruction methodology, working backward from the evidence from the more recent into the more distant past (Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015: 67).

6.1. The Tetrameter among Surviving Finnic Languages

The Finnic tetrameter is clearly part of an integrated poetic system found across all Finnic languages, with two exceptions. In the eastern-most Finnic language, Vepsian, only a few riddles and proverbs are found in the meter, and these may be attributable to relatively recent exchange (Krohn 1918: 133; Kuusi 1994: 47). On the south-western frontier in Livonian, the common Finnic tetrameter is lacking, although, for example, Matti Kuusi observes that about one in five proverbs that he surveyed seemed to be in a looser trochaic tetrameter; these Livonian proverbs are not paralleled by proverbs in the Finnic tetrameter elsewhere and vice versa (Kuusi 1994: 47, 54). In addition to metrical evidence, the shared poetic system is supported by common features of formulaic the idiom and its rhetorical structures (Harvilahti 2015: 311–315), as well as phraseology and rhetoric that appears to have been interfaced with the long-term transmission of whole narrative poems (e.g. Kuusi 1963: 158). More generally, the poetic diction exhibits distributions of linguistic archaisms that would be inconsistent with recent, rapid spread (e.g. Frog 2010; Sarv 2011). In areas of southwest Finland, Ingria, western and southeast Estonia, phonological changes in language alongside contacts with poetics in other languages had tremendous impacts on the poetic form with the result that formal structure of verses was considerably affected (Lauerma 2004; Sarv 2008; 2011; Kallio, K. et al. 2016–2017). Overall, the features of the tradition suggest that the poetic system was shared in all of the languages where it was found already when they were dialects of a common Proto-Finnic language. Vepsian is a North Finnic language, belonging to one of the most recent branches of the language: if the Finno-Karelian forms of the poetic system and that of Votic and North Estonian derive from a common language phase, it must have been lost from Vepsian. The identification of the tetrameter as a common Proto-Finnic heritage has led to the inference that it was earlier also once an established part of Livonian oral culture, although the absence of the tetrameter from Vepsian and Livonian have also opened the question of whether the poetic form spread through Finnic languages after they had diversified.

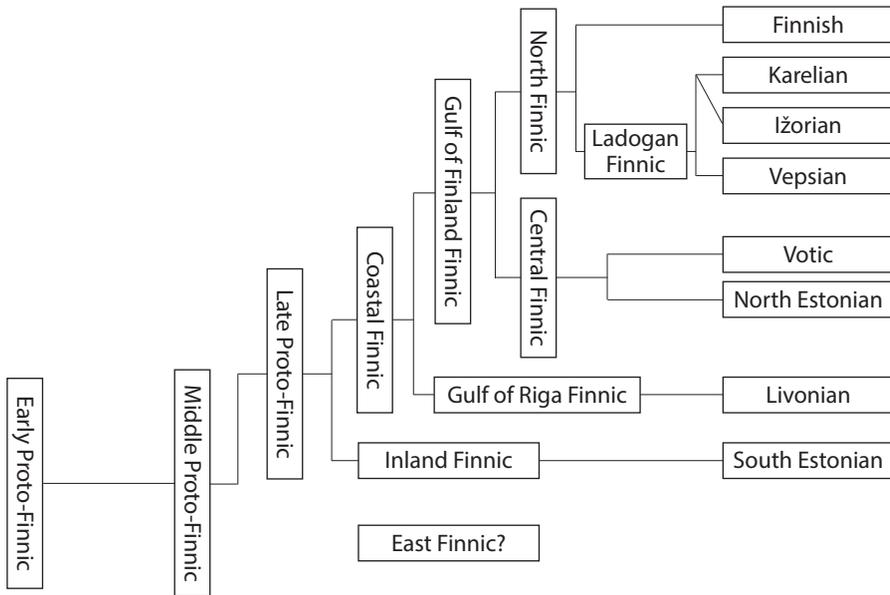


Figure 1. A family tree of Finnic languages (source: Kallio, P. 2014: 163); although Early, Middle and Late Proto-Finnic language phases can be distinguished on the basis of internal linguistic evidence, other language branches in the diversification of earlier language phases went extinct before they could be documented, some of which may have disappeared in language shifts to Late Proto-Finnic.

6.2. An Early Stage of Diversification Observable through North Finnic Traditions

Most diversification of the Finnic tetrameter that can be placed on a chronology is from the Middle Ages or later (e.g. Sarv 2011: 16–17). This places it after Proto-Finnic had broken up and thus after the poetic form is assumed to have been established in all languages where it was preserved, so it is not relevant to dating the tetrameter's origin and spread. Ingrid Rüütel's (e.g. 1998) valuable research on musical structures in singing culture identifies relationships with potentially deeper historical roots, but this work does not present positive evidence for the early poetic form and its diversification. Musical structures and poetic form are complementary, interacting through text-setting. The history of particular musical structures in Proto-Finnic could antedate their use with the poetic form, for example if the poetic form spread through Proto-Finnic dialects. If one accepts Helimski's theory, the poetic form could have spread

principally by adapting an inherited trochaic tetrameter, adding contrastive stress and verse-internal alliteration. Such a scenario would make the new poetic form compatible with existing musical and performance structures, with the possibility that the new form might be locally shaped by their impacts on the earlier tetrameter. In addition, singing styles and social practices are not tied to language, so they can spread through performance traditions for use with the local poetic dialect and also across languages, thus researchers focusing on music will see a major boundary in the singing of the Finnic tetrameter further north than text-oriented researchers, for whom continuity at the level of poems and verbal sections of poems in North Finnic (excluding Vepsian) poetry becomes more prominent. Of course, vocabulary and phraseology may move across languages and whole songs may be translated (cf. Vargyas 1983 I: 137), but it is in poetry where arguments for continuity and diversification of the poetic system become methodologically grounded, and thus makes the earliest distinguishable diversification of the poetry tradition of particular interest.

When considering the history of the poetic tradition, innovations that distinguish North Finnic from Finnic languages south of the Gulf of Finland present another relevant *terminus ante quem* for the Finnic tetrameter. Continuities are particularly apparent in North Finnic epic and incantations, which can be observed at a textual level of verses, even if the relevant traditions did not survive to documentation in much of Finland. In Finland and Karelia, Finnic languages had, in the early Viking Age, generally been spoken in the south, concentrated in south-western regions of Finland Proper, Häme and Satakunta on the one hand, and around inland waterways on the northwest shores of Lake Ladoga and on the Karelian Isthmus on the other hand. The Proto-Finnic dialects of these areas evolved later Finnish and Karelian, which spread north through mostly Sámi-speaking territories across the centuries. The spread of these languages was directly connected to the spread of ways of life and social organization into which Sámi speakers and any other language groups were assimilated. This spread of language and culture carried the Finnic tetrameter, its genres and poems, as well as Finnic lament, religion and practices by which Sámi cultures seem to have been completely eclipsed (see e.g. Frog 2013; Ahola, Frog 2014; Kallio, P. 2014; Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015). Variation in the metrical form in western Finland can be assumed to have developed since that time, as can the breakdown and disappearance of relevant traditions in Southwest Finland.

The North Finnic traditions seem to have undergone developments through Scandinavian contacts during the Iron Age that produced significant differences in the poetry traditions (for discussion, see further Frog

2013). Although it is possible to observe incantations shared across the Gulf of Finland, the North Finnic traditions exhibit whole genres of fairly long, highly variable, versified ritual incantation poetry in the tetrameter associated with the type of ritual specialist called a *tietäjä* = ‘knower, one who knows’; although some types of incantations like some cattle charms are found across Finnic languages, the incantations characteristic of this type of ritual specialist lack parallels in Estonian tradition (e.g. Krohn 1901; 1924; see also Roper 2008).²⁴ More generally, the tetrameter seems not to have been as significant in the incantation tradition south of the Gulf of Finland (Rüütel 1998; cf. Kõiva 2011). Although scant non-Christian vernacular mythology was preserved in Estonian and Seto traditions in contrast to remote regions of Karelia, the differences in incantation traditions cannot be simply accounted for by loss when incantation traditions seem to have been quite vital and extensively documented.²⁵ Even the features and formulae related to the banishment of illnesses and harm on either side of the Gulf of Finland do not necessarily trace back to a common Proto-Finnic heritage (Brummer 1908).

These incantations are an integrated part of a broader range of innovations that seem to have had pervasive impacts on the poetry tradition. The incantations were the verbal art of the ritual technology used by the *tietäjä* as a primary medium for interacting with and manipulating forces and entities in the unseen world. Unlike many incantation traditions in Europe, this ritual poetry did not affect the world mechanically: it was dependent on the innate power of the specialist. Ideally, a *tietäjä* would perform rituals in a state of ‘raised’ power, which can be described physiologically as a motoric trance state. Both in rituals for raising his power and in the ensuing healing or other ritual, the verbal art of incantations had a function of directing the *tietäjä*’s perceptions and experience to the unseen, mythic world, which it verbally both described and manipulated (see Siikala 2002; Frog 2013; cf. Frog 2017a). These incantations were integrated with the mythological epic traditions, relying on shared image systems and epics and parts of epics could also be performed as incantations. The mythological poetry and incantations provided a primary medium through which the *tietäjä* internalized and structured his knowledge of the unseen world, and ritual performances relying on this technology were imaginally conceived as actualizing a real-time drama

²⁴ Prominent in this respect are so-called ‘origin incantations’, which include an origin story of the source of illness or harm, an incantation strategy that sets this tradition apart from other incantation traditions of Europe and Asia.

²⁵ Already in 1901, when the collection of such folklore was still in full swing, Kaarle Krohn mentions “over 50,000 variants” of Estonian charms.

of interactions with agents and forces in the unseen world (e.g. Haavio 1967; Siikala 2002; Frog 2013). As I have discussed elsewhere, the innovations associated with this ritual technology were not only linked to the emergence of the *tietäjä* as a type of ritual specialist as such. The technology (like any medical technology) was also interfaced with images of the body, which were incompatible with conceptions of a separable soul fundamental to forms of classic shamanism or Sámi shamanism.²⁶ The emergence of the *tietäjä* also involved a radical restructuring of the mythology with significant influence from Scandinavian models in relation to the ideology, technology and role of the *tietäjä*, symbolically organized to contrast the *tietäjä* with forms of classic or Sámi shamanism as ‘other’. This contrastive opposition seems to have been maintained through the spread of the *tietäjä* institution and associated mythology through Sámi-speaking regions. Traditions of Sámi shamanism completely disappeared from these regions, suggesting that the spread with Finnic language and culture of the *tietäjä* institution, its mythology and ideology, was equivalent to a conversion process for groups previously associated with shamanism.

This mythology and the incantation tradition are interfaced with more fundamental symbolism that pervades lyric, wedding songs and other genres. This symbolism seems to have undergone changes that distinguish the North Finnic traditions of poetry from those south of the Gulf of Finland. In the North Finnic poetry, the eagle or raptor becomes symbolic of a threatening other and especially of a suitor or groom as a predator in relation to maidens as waterfowl or domestic fowl (Ahola et al. 2017: 905–919). The raptor symbolism, and such predator symbolism more generally, sets these traditions apart from the symbolism of Karelian laments (Ahola et al. 2017: 924–927; cf. Stepanova, A. 2012).²⁷ This contrast is more striking because the same women who would lament were also singers of wedding songs incorporating the raptor symbolism. It is doubly noteworthy when these poetry traditions were maintained alongside one another in the same communities apparently for centuries. This symbolism also seems to be lacking from Estonian and

²⁶ Following Anna-Leena Siikala, ‘classic shamanism’ refers to the system of features characteristic of shamanic traditions across Central and Northern Eurasia. As I have recently discussed, treating attested forms of Sámi shamanism as forms of classic shamanism is problematic. This is not only owing to formal differences that have often been explained away as historical developments, but also because Proto-Sámi spread rapidly through other language areas resulting in language shifts of local populations, and thus later Sámi shamanism may reflect indigenous traditions of cultures that simply began speaking Proto-Sámi language (Frog 2017c).

²⁷ I would like to thank Eila Stepanova for her assistance and consultation on this topic.

Seto poetry in the Finnic tetrameter, which appears instead to exhibit similar symbolic patterns to Karelian laments (Peegel 2004).²⁸ The raptor symbolism in poetry of the North Finnic tetrameter thus seems to be an innovation, and its interface with both the mythology and ritual poetry suggest it belongs to the same package of innovations as the emergence of the *tietäjä* institution (Ahola et al. 2017: 927–930; cf. Frog 2013). The fact that innovations in symbolism appear uniformly across North Finnic regions, and also in genres not characteristic of the *tietäjä*, increases the likelihood that they spread with the poetic system itself, and thus with the North Proto-Finnic dialect, much as can be observed with the spread of Finnish and Karelian through Sámi language areas.

The spread of the North Proto-Finnic dialect appears to be linked to immigration from Southwest Finland during the second half of the eighth century to points of access to inland waterways on the western side of Lake Ladoga and the Karelian Isthmus, anticipating the opening of the Eastern Route (Uino 1997). The mixing of these groups with local populations gradually gave rise to distinctively Karelian culture, and Ižorian seems to have separated off from this evolving language not long thereafter (Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015: 89–90). With the opening of the Eastern Route, the North Proto-Finnic dialect seems to have been a prominent contact language (Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015: 88–98; cf. also Ahola et al. 2014: 257–259; Bjørnflaten 2006). Although the absence of the Finnic meter from Vepsian has been interpreted as a loss owing to impacts from other cultures, it is also possible that Vepsian is the result of populations along the Eastern Route undergoing a shift to the Proto-Finnic dialect used in contact relations. Vepsian exhibits a lexical substrate of vocabulary from a language of a branch of Proto-Finnic separate from surviving Finnic languages, and has been described as an ‘East Finnic’ language (Itkonen 1983: 216–217; Kallio, P. 2014: 157–158, 163). The ethnonym identified with Vepsians also seems to refer to non-Finnic language groups farther east in the earliest sources and, whether or not those other language groups underwent a language shift, was subsequently identified with speakers of a Finnic dialect (Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015: 91; see also Grünthal 1997: 108–109). If Vepsian emerged primarily from the use of a North Proto-Finnic dialect as a contact language and populations undergoing language shifts, it may have spread primarily as a medium of communication without the full range of verbal art or

²⁸ I would like to thank Jonathan Roper for discussing this topic with me and assisting me with the use of Juhan Peegel’s dictionary, of which I had not been aware.

the package of religious technology and mythology of the *tietäjä*.²⁹ In summary, the North Finnic traditions suggest that the poetic form was established in areas of Finland by the first half of the eighth century. Moreover, traditions using the poetic system in Finland had already undergone significant evolution before their spread east at that time.³⁰ The absence of Vepsian traditions of the poetic form could be a result of the North Proto-Finnic dialect spreading as a contact language for trade along the Eastern Route rather than as a spread of a full range of cultural practices from which the poetic tradition subsequently disappeared.

Internal evidence of linguistic diversity points to the emergence of Late Proto-Finnic as south of the Gulf of Finland (Frog, Saarikivi 2014–2015: 105). It is not clear when Proto-Finnic arrived in Southwest Finland, which cannot be clearly distinguished in the archaeological record. Following the so-called climate catastrophe of A.D. 536–537, the flow of culture from Estonia to Finland was reversed, following which the fixed-settlement culture of Southwest Finland became actively engaged in long-distance trade and evolved a distinct culture (see Tvauri 2014). Proto-Finnic language almost certainly became established in Finland before that reverse in the flow of culture and associated role in long-distance trade. In fact, that role in long-distance trade likely established conditions for the North Proto-Finnic dialect to be a significant language at the opening of the Eastern Route. It is unclear precisely when

²⁹ On questions surrounding the Vepsian sky god, see Frog 2017d: 107–110. This is not inconsistent with Vepsian exhibiting a lament tradition, which may have continuity from, for example, an East Finnic or other Uralic language (cf. Rahkonen 2013) through a language shift. Indeed, if Vepsian spread in connection with eastern trade, it most probably occurred predominantly through movement of men rather than full households. As a women's tradition of verbal art and ritual practice, Vepsian lament would not be carried and regulated by the men; it would emerge and evolve in relation to the linguistic-cultural background of the women in society. If those women were predominantly or entirely of non-Vepsian background in a local community, the tradition would presumably reflect that background, becoming translated through Vepsian language within one or a few generations. Alliteration is not a systematic feature of Vepsian laments: it is found almost exclusively in formulaic circumlocutions, which can correspond to circumlocutions in other Finnic lament traditions (Frog, Stepanova 2011: 208), but this may only reflect a background of Vepsian lament in an otherwise extinct branch from Late Proto-Finnic, or even perhaps from Middle Proto-Finnic, eclipsed in a language shift.

³⁰ Although it is of course possible that the *tietäjä* institution evolved e.g. in Karelia at the beginning of the Viking Age, the cultures of Southwest Finland and Karelia seem to become increasingly distinct from the immigration onward rather than exhibiting a reciprocal flow of culture back to Southwest Finland, which rapidly became peripheral to the Eastern Route. However, there is no doubt that traditions in Karelia also evolved in those and subsequent centuries.

the institution of the *tietäjä* emerged, but it may be connected with the North Germanic loan into North Finnic of *runo* = ‘performer of poetry; poem’. This word seems to have been borrowed into the northern dialect of Proto-Finnic during the ca. A.D. 200–550 period without spreading to other Proto-Finnic dialects (Willson 2019), which could be another relevant indicator that the dialect was already geographically separated across the Gulf of Finland. When the *tietäjä* institution emerged, the Finnic tetrameter must have already been a primary medium for authoritative poetic discourse in order to be adopted as the mode of verbal art for the assimilated ritual technology. The Finnic tetrameter was most likely established north of the Gulf of Finland before the reverse of the flow of culture after A.D. 536–537. If the loan of *runo* is connected to the *tietäjä* institution, it would suggest that the poetic system and genres of the Finnic tetrameter had already diversified across the Gulf of Finland in connection with religious change in ca. A.D. 200–550.

6.3. Invisible Synchronic Variation

When reconstructing the poetic form, there is a tendency to treat it as uniform during the Proto-Finnic language period. However, distinctive developments in North Finnic discussed above can be traced back to the Proto-Finnic dialect and most likely go back to the sixth century or earlier. On the one hand, these developments spread with language to form a distinct branch of the tradition from Finland to Karelia and Ingria. By the time of collection, this branch had spread across a geographical area greater than those of all other branches of the tradition together. The developments in this branch are readily observable at the level of genres and symbolism. Nevertheless, synchronic variation is no less to be expected south of the Gulf of Finland. Mari Sarv (2008; 2014–2015) has shown that the poetic form evolves symbiotically with dialects of language (cf. Foley 1996: 14 etc.). North Finnic is only one branch of the Finnic languages, whereas Central Finnic, Gulf of Riga Finnic and Inland Finnic branches (see Figure 1) are all south of the Gulf of Finland. Rather than changes in the poetic system north of the Gulf of Finland being anomalous in themselves, they are more likely symptomatic of how the poetic tradition evolved in different networks of speech communities. What is exceptional about the development in North Finnic is that it can be distinguished in later evidence, owing both to the expansive geographical spread of North Finnic traditions and also to geographical factors that led local forms to interact more with one another on either side of the Gulf of Finland rather than across it. It is reasonable to assume that the poetic form was already evolving variation in

relation to different dialects during the Late Proto-Finnic period. Even if the ongoing interaction of adjacent communities with different dialects blurred the differences between them into more of a continuum, variations would have developed in contact networks linking singing communities. There is no reason to presume that the singing tradition and poetic form were homogeneous across all of Estonia by e.g. A.D. 500 any more than corresponding traditions in Finland would be with those in other Proto-Finnic language areas (see also Rūütel 1998).

The question of variation already in ca. A.D. 500 leads to another question that may have still more significant implications. Middle Proto-Finnic and subsequently Late Proto-Finnic tend to be assumed to have been spoken across fairly extensive geographical areas – let us say of at least the size of Estonia and probable larger. The reconstruction of language chronology basically erases synchronic variation for each common stage that is reconstructed. However, Middle Proto-Finnic had been spoken for centuries and there were without doubt many dialects of it. Late Proto-Finnic tends to be imagined as a more or less fluid set of changes in phonology that happened more or less uniformly for everyone who spoke Middle Proto-Finnic. The etymologies of words borrowed from Germanic speakers can then be compared with whether they happened before or after a certain set of changes. The situation with a poetic form is slightly more complex because it is not simply a question of a single word, the pronunciation of a particular sound, or what case ending one uses with a particular verb. The poetic form is an organizational system for oral poetry, which is dependent on performance practices. Even within a language area such as Late Proto-Finnic became, the spread of a poetic form would not be a potentially subtle process but rather connected with things that people are actively doing as agents in a community. Particularly if the poetic form were to be socially valorized as a form of authoritative discourse, it would have to spread from community to community of speakers.

6.4. Uniformity of the Tetrameter's Features across Language Areas

Generally speaking, meters do not seem to readily spread from one language and culture to another easily without sufficiently shared frameworks of poetics already established in the receiving language. When a meter of oral poetry does spread from one language to another, it does not do so abstractly: it does so as an integrated part of practices connected with one or more genres and associated situations of use. The Finnic tetrameter is used with a striking range of poetic genres, and this is the case across language areas. Rather than spreading

across Finnic languages and cultures as a mode of performance associated with individual practices, the tetrameter appears to have spread with a broader ‘package’ of culture. Extensive packages of culture, which include numerous genres, ideology and extend through a wide range of areas of social life, can be carried through language areas and even move across linguistic-cultural groups, as is apparent in the spread of world religions or modern Western culture. In the case of the Finnic tetrameter, the spread of the poetic form through a continuum of diversified dialects and languages seems unlikely.

The uniformity of the Finnic tetrameter’s features across Finnic areas is a potential relevant indicator that it is linked to a common linguistic heritage rather than having spread through a continuum of dialects and languages. If it is accepted that the Finnic tetrameter’s distinctive features of metricalized contrastive stress and unmetricalized alliteration emerged under Scandinavian influence, these can be assumed to have been foreign features to the poetic systems of dialects and languages where they were not already established. Constraints on stressed syllable placement depend on native-like sensitivity to the *metrical* differentiation of long and short syllables. Their spread would require acceptance of metricalized contrast between lexical and metrical stress in each consecutive ethno poetic environment to which they would be foreign as they moved from one dialect or language to the next, at least some of which are likely to have less direct familiarity with Scandinavian poetics. Considering that the conventions of stressed-syllable placement according to quantity are both complex and would be ‘foreign’, a spread through different ethno poetic environments could easily lead them to be simplified or eliminated (cf. Trudgill 1989 on interactions between linguistic dialects).

Alliteration would be only somewhat less vulnerable in this respect. Alliteration was presumably a generally perceivable quality of text, and its spread though Finnic languages as a systematic verse-structuring principle is thus much more possible. That it would spread with the Finnic tetrameter as a constitutive and yet unmetricalized feature of the poetic form is, however, more precarious. If alliteration were a saliently perceivable poetic principle while metricalized contrastive stress was not, or perceived as peculiar and puzzling rather than aesthetically pleasing, the hierarchy of poetic principles could have been restructured. However, we do not see regions of the poetic tradition where alliteration is reduced to an occasional ornamental feature or, conversely, where it is metricalized at the expense of syllabic quantity rules. Instead, as discussed above, forms of the Finnic tetrameter in all areas where it is found appear to derive from a common form organized on the same principles, its absence from Vepsian can be reasonably attributed to loss or language spread without a full package of culture, while the case of Livonian will be returned to below.

The variations in the Finnic traditions can be contrasted with the parallel forms in Latvian *dainas*: if the Latvian meter is an assimilation of the Finnic tetrameter, it has lost the syllabic quantity conventions and alliteration has been reduced to occasional ornamentation. In attested Finnic languages, the spread of the poetic system seems to have occurred without significantly impacting the peculiar and distinctive features of the poetic form. These observations further support that the Finnic groups have maintained the poetic form from an earlier common language phase. In this case, it would already have been pervasive when Proto-Finnic was diversifying into different dialects and certainly no later than its breakup into increasingly distinct languages sometime around the beginning of the Viking Age or ca. A.D. 800 (on which, see Kallio, P. 2014).

6.5. Early Presence of Late Proto-Finnic North of the Gulf of Finland

It is unclear whether Proto-Finnic became established in Southwest Finland prior to the transition from Middle to Late Proto-Finnic. There are three possibilities: *a*) Proto-Finnic only spread to Finland after ca. A.D. 200; *b*) the Proto-Finnic speech communities of Southwest Finland were still sufficiently networked across the Gulf of Finland that they underwent the same changes more or less uniformly; or *c*) Middle Proto-Finnic spread across the Gulf of Finland and later Late Proto-Finnic spread through areas where Middle Proto-Finnic was spoken, producing language shifts (cf. the spread of Vepsian above). I have elsewhere argued that certain loanwords are likely to have been borrowed into Proto-Sámi from Late Proto-Finnic before Proto-Sámi, which also emerged sometime around A.D. 200, spread from an area in southern Finland and Karelia north and across both the Kola and Scandinavian Peninsulas (Frog 2017c: 51–52). Although the loans cannot be dated with precision nor is the location of the loans certain, Proto-Sami seems never to have spread south even onto the Karelian Isthmus (Luobbal [Aikio] 2012: 64), so these loans suggest Late Proto-Finnic's presence north of the Gulf of Finland closer to ca. A.D. 200.

If the Finnic tetrameter is considered only to have emerged in Late Proto-Finnic, it seems more likely that the poetic form spread with Late Proto-Finnic across the Gulf of Finland rather than that a new poetic form and practices spread once the language had already been established there. The emergence of Late Proto-Finnic seems to have been south of the Gulf of Finland in roughly A.D. 200. Late Proto-Finnic contacts with Proto-Sámi must have been north of the Gulf of Finland at a time that before Proto-Sámi significantly spread,

and thus fairly close to when Late Proto-Finnic emerged (Frog 2017c: 52). This suggests either a quite rapid geographical spread of Late Proto-Finnic or a connection of Late Proto-Finnic with contact networks. If the loanword evidence reflects spread of culture, it would suggest that the Finnic tetrameter emerged at roughly the same time as Late Proto-Finnic, and possibly in connection with it (otherwise the tetrameter would be secondary and have to spread through multiple and dispersed speech communities). If the loanword evidence is related to contact networks, it presents the possibility that Late Proto-Finnic emerged from Middle Proto-Finnic in connection with such networks. The possibility of language spread and connection to networks are not mutually exclusive. The Late Proto-Finnic loans into Proto-Sámi include words related to death and burial³¹ and words related to conceptions of the body and illness,³² which suggest impacts on practices and understandings of the world (Frog 2017c: 51–52), increasing the probability that the contacts with Late Proto-Finnic were connected with culture rather than being only a pragmatic language of intergroup communication.

6.6. Social Significance and Range of Genres

If the theory of creolization is roughly accurate, the history of the Finnic tetrameter would not only involve its emergence as a ‘new’ poetic form but also its spread as a valorized mode of expression across speech communities on a respectable geographical scale. A process of spread would, of course, not be of the poetic form only but rather a spread of practices through which it would be valorized as a mode of expression. Valorization implies that the practices would be socially significant in some way, such as through public ritual performance, perhaps significant for emblems of social identities (e.g. epic), mediating models for understanding the world (e.g. mythology), or valorized through associations with elites of society (e.g. charged with ‘Germanicness’). Whatever the case, spread as a valorized medium of expression and communication was likely associated with changes in practices in society, and likely with social, political and/or religious changes that affected identities.

³¹ Proto-Sámi **hāvtē* = ‘grave, hole’ ~ Finnish *hauta* = ‘grave, hollow, hole’; Proto-Sámi **kālmē* = ‘grave’ ~ Finnish *kalma* = ‘place of the dead, force of death’.

³² Proto-Sámi **heajke* = ‘breath; spirit’ ~ Finnish *henki* = ‘breath; spirit’; **vājmō* = ‘marrow; heart’ ~ Finnish *vaimo*, which developed into a word for ‘wife’; **tāvtē* ‘illness, malady’ ~ Finnish *tauti* = ‘illness, malady’.

Particularly noteworthy is also the range of genres with which the poetic form is associated in later traditions. This is not a genre-specific poetic form like the meter of Russian *bylina* epic and thus not comparable to the cross-linguistic spread of something like the medieval ballad (cf. Vargyas 1983). If the Finnic tetrameter had started off as a genre-specific form, it could, in theory, have extended its use across a wide range of genres, especially if the primary genre made the poetic form valuable and desirable to use, as discussed in relation to Helimski's theory above. In this case, extension across genres would presumably have happened quite early to account for it on both sides of the Gulf of Finland. Conversely, the range of genres associated with the poetic form is directly paralleled by the range of uses of Old Germanic meters. If the Finnic tetrameter is a creolization of a North Germanic meter, this range of use may reflect its initial application across a range of genres paralleling the Scandinavian tradition. If the Finnic tetrameter's diversity of genres is connected to that of the North Germanic poetic form, it would reflect the connection of creolization with a corresponding range of practices. Such a breadth of practices further reduces the probability that the poetic form spread through language or dialect areas without more comprehensive transformations of culture. In this case, etymological evidence that Late Proto-Finnic speakers were having cultural impacts on Proto-Sámi speakers already close to A.D. 200 suggests that the Finnic tetrameter was already carried north of the Gulf of Finland at that time.

If the Finnic tetrameter spread not with a particular practice or narrow set of practices but rather as a poetic medium linked to multiple areas of culture, the changes accompanying its spread were presumably no less pervasive. This observation returns us to the probable emergence of alliteration as a valorized feature in ethnopoetics during the same period. If the creolization of the meter was one part of more a comprehensive transformation of Finnic ethnopoetics, this whole process may have developed largely within a single dialect area or in connection with, for example, networks of groups, perhaps elites, involved in trade that spanned the Baltic Sea. Rather than being a process separate from the transition from Middle to Late Proto-Finnic, these developments may have been in a Middle Proto-Finnic dialect that became Late Proto-Finnic. In this case, the whole dialect (or language) would then have gradually spread through groups of speakers of Middle Proto-Finnic, presumably with changes in culture of which the poetic system was a part.³³ Such would be comparable to the spread

³³ Such a spread of Late Proto-Finnic could offer a frame for considering so-called East Finnic features in languages around the lakes on the eastern side of Estonia (cf. Itkonen 1983: 217).

of North Finnic since the Viking Age through areas where Sámi language forms were predominantly spoken. In this case, Livonian would have emerged as a dialect through the shift to Late Proto-Finnic. Rather than the absence of the tetrameter being necessarily attributable to loss, the poetic form may never have assimilated, not unlike what has been argued for the spread of Vepsian above.

Within this scenario, the Finnic tetrameter would have emerged as part of the process of the emergence of Late Proto-Finnic and associated transformations of the ethnopoetic system around A.D. 200. The range of practices associated with the Finnic tetrameter suggest a broad range of transformative impacts on culture. This situation increases the likelihood that the poetic system of Finnic lament underwent a transformation of poetics as part of a process of cultural transformation. It may be noted that mythology is built into these poetic systems and their associated ritual practices (Stepanova, E. 2012; 2014), so restructuring the poetics through systematic alliteration was likely accompanied by restructuring of symbols and conceptions as well. Viewed in this light, the remarkable number of Germanic words borrowed into Late Proto-Finnic during the language phase from ca. A.D. 200–550 seem unlikely to have been evenly distributed across centuries and dialects. Instead, their concentration may stem from the same process of creolization that produced the Finnic tetrameter and the vocabulary established at that time then spread with the dialect or language now labelled Late Proto-Finnic (which does not exclude subsequent loans in the same phase like *runo* above). This model separates the emergence of the poetic form from its spread, but in this case the spread of the poetic form would be part of the spread of broader changes in language and culture. Considering the Finnic tetrameter as a creolization of a poetic form in this context then leads to the question of whether Late Proto-Finnic as a language form may be viewed as emerging through a process of creolization, producing a new language form that was advanced to dominance in relation to forms of Finnic from which it evolved and which it gradually superseded as it spread.

7. A Possible Biography

Developments in the transition from Middle to Late Proto-Finnic seem to have established conditions for the emergence of the metrical form. At that time, the tradition ecology presumably maintained isosyllabic systems of versification. The Middle Proto-Finnic verse form of comparable status remains hypothetical, and there is no way to tell whether it may have been the octosyllabic

tetrameter proposed by Helimski. However, the syllabic rhythm of the Finnic tetrameter is difficult to account for without assuming that it had a syllabic structure (*pace* Korhonen), which seems probable on the basis of comparative evidence. Syllabic and even trochaic rhythms could be a feature of an Uralic heritage, but this remains difficult to assess.

Late Proto-Finnic is characterized as the most intensive period of Scandinavian language contacts. The scope and magnitude of influence makes it reasonable to consider that these contacts may also have had significant influences on linguistic behaviour. The creolization of the Proto-Scandinavian alliterative tetrameter would account for the tetrametric organization of lines in the Finnic tetrameter, the quantitative rules governing stressed syllables producing metricalized contrastive stress, and also unmetricalized alliteration attached to the metrical template. The social status and diverse roles of the meter make it unlikely to have spread through Late Proto-Finnic in connection with individual practices of verbal art. Its spread was far more probably connected with broader changes in culture. The range of genres associated with the poetic form and indications that it emerged in conjunction with more extensive and pervasive changes in Finnic ethnopoetics present the more likely possibility that these innovations were linked to the emergence of Late Proto-Finnic, which itself spread in connection with culture through other Proto-Finnic language areas.

According to this theory, the Finnic tetrameter would have emerged in a multilingual environment where people had native-like sensitivity to both Finnic and North Germanic poetics. The creolization of the Germanic poetic form appears directly connected to a restructuring of the ethnopoetic system that introduces systematic verse-internal alliteration. The Finnic tetrameter's range of genres seems to cover areas of religion (ritual poetry and mythology) and ethnic identity (epic) as well as more mundane secular genres (proverbs, riddles), suggesting strikingly extensive impacts that reciprocally reframe the remarkable body of Germanic loanwords, supporting Petri Kallio's (2015: 26) description of them as a superstrate. Rather than the majority of these loans accumulating across centuries, it seems more probable that perhaps the majority of them are connected with the multilingual environment and cultural impacts connected with the emergence of the Finnic tetrameter. The poetic form thus most probably emerged somewhere in Estonia. If it is accurate that Sámi loanword evidence indicates the presence of Late Proto-Finnic north of the Gulf of Finland not long after A.D. 200, the process that produced it must have been followed by quite rapid spread. This spread carried Late Proto-Finnic through other language areas with a full package of culture, which opens the question of whether lack of evidence for the tetrameter in Livonian

is attributable to loss, or an area where the tetrameter was not assimilated in earlier language spread. The spread of Late Proto-Finnic through dialects or languages of Middle Proto-Finnic (and perhaps other languages) necessarily displaced established forms of verbal art, in which case, speakers of some communities and perhaps whole regions may have been resistant to assimilating the oral poetry traditions.

However the Sámi loanword evidence is interpreted, Late Proto-Finnic seems to have been established in Southwest Finland by the climate event of A.D. 536–537. Once it reached Finland, the poetic form subsequently became the verbal medium for new ritual technologies in the emergence of the *tietäjä* institution. The loanword *runo* is a potential indicator that this transformation had occurred already before ca. A.D. 550, but the subsequent spread of language offers evidence of an unambiguously distinct form of the tradition by ca. A.D. 750 at the latest. It is not clear whether the poetic form spread along the Eastern Route in the process from which Vepsian language emerged. Although the developments in the North dialect of Proto-Finnic may be distinctive, they highlight that the tradition likely also developed elsewhere and evolved multiple dialects in Estonia, where language variation was greater, but where such variations may have been levelled in a continuum of dialects through ongoing networks of immediate interaction.

Once established in Late Proto-Finnic areas of Finland, Karelia, and Estonia, the poetic form evolved in a symbiotic relationship with changes in dialect and also in relation to contacts with singing traditions in other dialects and languages. At the age of about 16 centuries, poetry in the Finnic tetrameter began to be actively documented, by about 17, its situation had become more serious, and now, at about 18, it has largely matured into heritage, and we look back on its life with reflection.³⁴

³⁴ This publication presents research of the Academy of Finland project Mythology, Verbal Art and Authority in Social Impact of Folklore Studies at the University of Helsinki. Versions of this argument have been presented at the Regilaulukonverents of the Estonian Literary Museum, *Regilaulu seitse nahka: vaateid regilaulule mitmest küljest* (30.11.–1.12.2016, Tartu, Estonia), and also at the NordMetrik conference *Metrics and Versification in Poetry and Song* (13.–15.9.2018), where it benefitted from lively discussions. An Estonian version of this article is in preparation for publication in proceedings from the 2016 Regilaulukonverents, and this article has benefitted from discussions with that collection's editor Taive Särg, and the anonymous review that she organized for that venue.

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