

RICHARD PERKINS: 'Rowing chants, the first "Kings' Sagas"?' (summary)

The fact that skaldic strophes lie at the fountain-head of the tradition of sagas with which the Conference deals, the Kings' Sagas, is taken as an opportunity to put forward a new theory on the origins of dróttkvæðr hátttr. Dróttkvæðr hátttr can be said to have developed during the period c. A.D. 500-875. On the Premises that: (a) labour processes often given rise to new forms of rhythmical composition; (b) rowing-chants are a common type of work-chant; (c) rowing was a particularly common activity in Scandinavia at the time dróttkvæðr hátttr developed and rowing-chants are especially likely to have existed, the following Hypothesis is put forward:

that dróttkvæðr hátttr had its origins in rowing-chants.

The following evidence consistent with the Hypothesis is produced:

(A) There is a verse in dróttkvæðr hátttr, one attributed to Björn hítðalakkapi (Bjarnar saga hítðoelakappa, ch. 5; Hristi handar fasta, etc.) which bears a number of signs of having been used as a rowing-chant. (B) Verses composed in dróttkvæðr hátttr often have themes found in acknowledged work-chants and rowing-chants. For example, skaldic verse sometimes mention the 'strabadser, som skjalden må udstå på søen' (Jón Helgason): the element of complaint is certainly also found in the shanties and other maritime working-songs. And in connection with the main topic of the Conference, special attention is given to the fact that rowing- and paddling-chants from various parts of the world often mention employer, captain or chief-tain in laudatory terms or represent him as a generous man. (C) The idiosyncratic features of dróttkvæðr hátttr could be explained in terms of the Hypothesis. For example, the final trochee of each line could be interpreted as a labour cry marking the moment of exertion in rowing. And the already existing theory on the origin of skaldic kennings in (sea) taboo language would accord well with the Hypothesis. (D) Miscellaneous evidence.

The Hypothesis is considered alongside already existing Alternative Hypotheses: (i) that dróttkvæðr hátttr developed under the influence of Irish metres; (ii) that it developed under the influence of the visual arts of the Viking Age. It is maintained that the Hypothesis is equally, if not more acceptable than the Alternative Hypotheses.

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In an Introduction to the revised Everyman's Library edition of Laing's translation of Heimskringla, Peter Foote traces the development of the Kings' Saga tradition from its beginnings through to Snorri's great work. He starts with a treatment of 'Snorri's authorities', three of which he gives as Intelligent people and ancient poems, Ari Thorgilsson and Eric Oddsson. As Snorri's second authority, Foote gives Scaldic verse and it is, of course, a well-known fact that not only Snorri but also other compilers of Kings' Sagas drew frequently on scaldic poetry as sources for their works. Indeed, it may be said that praise poetry in dróttkvætt, together with such poems as Ynglingatal and Háleygjatal, lies, as it were, at the fountain-head of the tradition of sagas with which this Conference deals as a main theme. Dróttkvætt stanzas celebrating, for example, a king's victory in a given battle, often composed not long after that battle took place, are frequent and important elements in the Kings' Sagas. It is this fact, coupled with certain others, which I intend to take as a pretext for discussing a problem which might otherwise seem largely eccentric to the study of the Kings' Sagas, the question of the origin of the metre dróttkvæðr hátttr. Not, of course, that this matter is in itself unimportant: Erik Noreen, for example, refers to it as 'det i viss mån centrala problemet i den fornvästnordiska diktningsens historia'. In what follows, a new solution to this problem is set out: my hypothesis is that dróttkvæðr hátttr had its origins in rowing-chants. I shall first set out my theory and the supporting evidence, in schematic form to save space and lend overall perspective. I shall then stress various aspects of the evidence supporting my hypothesis which are of special interest to the conception of skaldic strophes as 'Kings' sagas' in embryo. I shall thirdly go on to discuss the evidence supporting my theory in more general terms. Finally, I shall mention what might, at first sight, be seen as a major objection to my hypothesis and, at the same time, I shall briefly assess my solution in relationship to solutions which have been put forward by other scholars. I must point out at this stage that I put forward my

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hypothesis with some diffidence and will be grateful for comment, be it constructive or destructive, in any discussion which might arise out of this paper.

(I)

(1) The Phenomena

Dróttkvæðr hátttr distinguishes itself from Eddic and Old Germanic verse-forms by virtue of the following features (for exemplification, see (6) (i)):

- (a) the number of syllables in a line is fixed within narrow limits (most usually 6);
- (b) each line ends in a trochee (long stressed syllable followed by short unstressed one);
- (c) odd lines have half-rhyme (skoðendingar), even lines full-rhyme (aðalendingar),

Further:

- (d) poetry in dróttkvæðr hátttr is distinguished by the extensive use of so-called 'riddle-kennings' (Swedish gátkenningar) in its diction.

(2) Chronology

Terminus post quem: dróttkvæðr hátttr must have developed after the sound-change syncope took place, i.e. not earlier than about A.D. 500.

Terminus ante quem: dróttkvæðr hátttr must have developed before or during the life-times of such poets as Bragi inn gamli, Þjóðólfr ór Hvini and Þorbjörn hornklofi, i.e. not later than about A.D. 875.

THEREFORE: dróttkvæðr hátttr must have developed in the period A.D. 500-875 (called the Relevant Period)

(3) The Problem

To account for the origin of the Phenomena.

(4) The Premises

- (a) Labour processes often, through work-chants, give rise to new

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forms of rhythmical composition.

(b) Rowing-chants are a (common) type of work-chant.

(c) Rowing was a particularly important and common activity in Scandinavia during the Relevant Period.

(d) Rowing-chants are likely to have existed in Scandinavia during the Relevant Period.

(5) The Hypothesis

On the basis of the Premisses, this Hypothesis is proposed:

That dróttkvæðr háttr had its origin in rowing-chants.

(6) The Consistent Evidence

It is, of course, impossible to test the Hypothesis. We may, however, adduce evidence which is relevantly consistent with it. This may be arranged under four heads:

(i) It is possible to point to a verse in dróttkvæðr háttr which bears a number of signs of being used as a rowing chant. This is found in Bjarnar saga hítðalækappa, ch. 5, where it is attributed (by no means necessarily correctly) to Björn:

Hristi handar fasta
hefr drengr gamans fengit;
hrynja hart á dýnu
hløð Eykyndils vøðva,
meðan vel stinna vinnum,
veldr nokkvat því, kløkkva,
skíð verðk skriðar beiða
skorðu, qr á borði.

Translation: 'The young man has provided the lady with sexual pleasure; Eykyndill's bottom beats hard on the down cushion; meanwhile, we cause the stout oar to sigh at the ship's side; there is a reason for that; I must move the ship forward.'

There are features in the verse which would seem to suggest that it is a rowing-chant: (a) its text suggests it was declaimed during the process of rowing. And, by comparison with other rowing-chants, both

Norse and non-Norse: (b) the use of the first person plural (vinnum) is a common feature in the texts of labour-chants of all types; (c) so is the erotic element; (d) there is a jibe at the landlubber; we may compare the shanties; (e) the verse is (partly) preoccupied with the oar, just as other work-songs are sometimes preoccupied with the instrument of labour. (One might compare 'The paddle song of the Aotea canoe' (Polynesian)); (f) the formula qr at borði is found in what, by other criteria, seems to be a rowing-chant in Flóamanna saga (cf. Medieval Scandinavia, 1969, 92-101); (g) there is an element of complaint in the verse; the same feature can be found in work-songs from other places; finally, in Björn's verse, we find: (h) juxtaposed descriptions of two rhythmical activities; and (i) the descriptions are linked by the conjunction meðan. Both these two last mentioned features are found, for example, in the verse in Flóamanna saga; and with (i) compare the shanty text: 'While we jolly sailor boys were up unto the top,/ And the land-lubbers lying down below, below, below,...! (ii) In addition to be able to point to a single verse which bears a number of signs of being a rowing-chant (see (6) (i)), there is, in the corpus of verse in dróttkvæðr háttr (called here vísur; ed. Finnur Jónsson in Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning, 1912-15; abbreviated Skj), a number of themes which find parallels in work-songs (often rowing-songs) from cultures outside the Old Norse world:

- (a) Many vísur are about ships and sea-voyages.
- (b) Several verses in dróttkvætt are specifically about rowing.
- (c) A number of vísur are about storms and the sea. (The shanties often mention storms.)
- (d) Vísur frequently contain topical material; this is also a feature of work-chants (including rowing-chants).
- (e) It is well known that skaldic poetry is laudatory. Work-songs (including rowing-songs) often mention employer or captain or prince in favourable terms. Thus the jorrams of the Highlanders were often composed in honour of their chieftains.
- (f) It is also well known that skaldic verses often represent the lauded prince as a generous man, thus hinting at reward. Rowing-

chants from other parts of the world also contain hints or requests for reward at the journey's end.

- (g) The shanties have a predilection for high-sounding place-names; the same feature can be found in certain verses in dróttkvætt (cf. Jan de Vries, Altnordische Literaturgeschichte, i, 1964, 292).
- (h) Skaldic verses sometimes mention the 'strabadser, som skjalden må udstå på søen' (Jón Helgason in Nordisk kultur, 8 b); the theme of the seaman's hard lot is a common one in shanties, sea-songs and rowing-chants. Cf. 'the element of complaint' mentioned in (i)(h) above.
- (i) Björn's verse (see above) is not the only skaldic verse to mock the landlubber or
- (j) to have an erotic theme. There are several other vísur where the poet contrasts his own lot with that of the stay-at-home, who, as often as not, is in the embrace of wife or concubine (cf. e.g. Skj, B, i, 115, 277, 330, 512).
- (iii) The Phenomena could be explained in terms of the Hypothesis in the following manner:
- (b) The trochee at the end of each line could be explained as (remnants of) a labour cry marking the moment of exertion in rowing (cf. George Thomson, Studies in ancient Greek society, 1954, 447-8). Such constants are common in labour-songs of many types (cf. e.g. Rex Harris, Jazz, 1956, 28). Note in this connection, for example, the Thonga (African) work-song recorded by Junod and quoted by Thomson (447):

Ba hi shani-sa, ehé!

Ba ku hi hlupha, ehé!

Ba nwa makhofi, ehé!

Ba nga hi nyiki, ehé!

In this way, the most idiosyncratic feature of dróttkvæðr háttr could be accounted for.

- (a) The limitation of the number of syllables in each line would strictly regularize the incidence of the labour cry.

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(c) Antiphonal rowing- and paddling-chants are known from a large number of places throughout the world: the oarsmen or paddlers on one side of the vessel may sing one verse, those on the other side the next; or two fuglemen may sing alternate verses responding to one another; or one person sings a solo part while others chime in with a chorus. The marking of alternate lines of a dróttkvætt verse by skot-hendingar and aðalhendingar could be explained in terms of antiphonal rowing-chants, and there is already some evidence for the existence of antiphonal rowing-chants in early Iceland: thus what seems to have been a verse related to a rowing-song in Sturlunga saga (ed. Kr. Kálund, 1906-11, i, 285-6) is sung by two men, each chanting alternate lines; and another verse in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (ch. 8; Skj, B, ii, 482), which is about rowing, has the refrain Ingjaldr í skinnfeldi in alternate lines.

(d) There has, for some time, existed a theory which sees the origin of kennings in tabu-language. This was first put forward in its most direct form by Axel Olrik (Nordisk tidskrift, 1897), was supported, perhaps too enthusiastically, by Alberta Portengen (De Oudgermaansche dichtertaal in haar ethnologisch verband, 1915) and was developed with special reference to 'riddle-kennings' by Erik Noreen (Studier i fornvästnordisk diktning, 1921) and by Svale Solheim (Kvalen i folketru og diktning, 1942). Now Hallvard Lie ('Natur' og 'unatur' i skaldekunsten, 1957, 55 f.) finds much to be said for the tabu-theory but sees as the main objection to it the great gap between what he calls 'folkelig praktisk ervervsmagi' and 'en overklassepreget høytartistisk diktekunst', as he characterizes poetry in dróttkvæðr háttr. If verses in dróttkvætt originally had a practical use at sea, then it would be particularly understandable that they should be in a tabu-language, tabu-languages being particularly commonly used by seafaring peoples or at sea. In this connection, we should note that Olrik bases his whole hypothesis on the tabu-language of Shetlandese (and Norwegian) fishermen and Portengen draws attention to a seamen's tabu-language used in the islands to the north of the Celebes (present-day Indonesia) which influenced the poetic diction of the relevant area.

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(iv) In a number of minor respects, there are factors which are consistent with the Hypothesis, for example:

- (a) In 13th and 14th century Icelandic sources, there is evidence for the presence of skalds on ships. If, e.g., we are to believe Heimskringla, Haraldr harðráði composed his gamanvísur on a ship either crossing the Black Sea or being rowed up the Dnepr. In Flateyjarbók (1860-68, i, 405), we are told how a skald (Þórarinn) recites a vísa to men who are rowing. And the dróttkvætt verse on the Karlevi stone on Öland (late tenth century or a little later) seems to have been composed by a member of the ship's company of a Danish vessel temporarily landed on the island.
- (b) A number of kennings for 'men' are suggestive of ships and the sea although used in non-maritime contexts. Note also the name of the sea-god Njörðr used in kennings for 'men'.
- (c) Verses 16 and 17 of Haraldskvæði (Skj, B, i, 24-5) stress the duties of the drótt as rowers:

<p>16 Mjök eru reifðir rógbirtingar, þeir í Haralds túni húnum verpa; féi eru þeir gœddir ok fögnum mæm, malmi húnlenzkum ok mani austrœnu.</p>	<p>17 Þá eru þeir reifir, es vitu rómu væni, örvir upp at hlaupa ok árar at sveigja, hómlur at slíta en hái at brjóta; ríkula hykk þá vörru þeysa at vísa ráði.</p>
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(Indeed, verse 17 has certain reminiscences of rowing-chants; cf. Stubb's chant to his crew in Herman Melville, Moby Dick, ch. 47: '...Why don't you snap your oars, you rascals?... pull and break something!') An explanation for the name of the metre, dróttkvæðr hátt, would thus be provided. (There are, of course, other explanations.)

(7) The Alternative Hypotheses

The major Alternative Hypotheses to the Hypothesis are:

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- (a) The 'Irish' hypothesis (connected with, e.g., Guðbrandur Vigfússon, Sophus Bugge and, more recently, G. Turville-Petre and Jan de Vries): that dróttkvæðr háttir developed under the influence of certain Old Irish metres.

OBJECTIONS: There are chronological and cultural objections to this theory. Further, the likenesses between skaldic and Irish metres are considered by many not great enough to posit a connection. Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzkir bókmenntir í fornöld, 1962, 129: 'En hitt er verra, að hvorki innlend né írsk fyrirbrigði skýra í rauninni allar nýjungar dróttkvæðs háttar.'

- (b) Hallvard Lie's hypothesis (cf. Maal og Minne, 1952, 1-92): that dróttkvæðr háttir developed under the influence of the visual art of the Viking Age and more particularly in imitation of anaturalistic pictures on shields.

OBJECTIONS: Lie's theory is, in my opinion, too vague to carry any great weight - the body of consistent evidence which can be adduced in support of it is limited and not very relevant. (Our knowledge of the art of shield-painting in the Viking Age is practically non-existent.) Cf. Stefán Einarsson, A history of Icelandic literature, 1957, 7: 'a tempting but probably fallacious theory'.

(8) Conclusions

The Hypothesis considered in relationship to the Alternative Hypothesis may be evaluated as at least as, and arguably more probable than they. Perhaps the greatest OBJECTION to it is that the complicated word-order associated with dróttkvæðr háttir might be considered untypical of labour-chants. On the other hand, Ove Moberg (Acta philologica Scandinavica, 1943, 200) has suggested that in the oldest skaldic poetry (that of Bragi) the word-order is considerably simpler than in the poetry of, for example, Sigvatr. The present Hypothesis has the advantage of combining an explanation of the metrical features of dróttkvæðr háttir with an already existing explanation (to which a number of scholars incline) of the origin of 'riddle-kennings'.

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(II)

Sections (ii) (d), (e) and (f) of the Consistent Evidence (6) will now be amplified to stress certain features of the content of dróttkvætt-stanzas.

(6)(ii)(d) The topicality of skaldic verse

In his characterization of skaldic poetry, Erik Noreen (Den norsk-islandska poesien, 1926, 16) points out that, in contrast to the poetry of the Edda, the poetry of the skalds is 'till sitt innehåll a k t u e l l, anknuten till samtidens historia på ett eller annat sätt'. Stefán Einarsson (A history of Icelandic literature, 1957, 46) writes: 'The actuality of the king's eulogies derives from the circumstance that they must have been based on the king's recent feats.' And Jón Helgason (Nordisk kultur, 8 b, 1953, 138) remarks that: 'I flere tilfælde digter en skjald om en overstået kamp.' If we may, for example, believe the author (or authors?) of a vísa in Skj, B, i, 396 (Brenndr vas upp með endum, etc.), it was composed within twenty-four hours or so of an attack on Heiðabøer (which seems to have been sea-borne). And as is well known, single occasional verses about both momentous and trivial events are an important part of the preserved corpus of skaldic poetry. Now this element of improvisation and the preoccupation with recent events is, perhaps not surprisingly, also a feature of the chants of river-men and seamen the world over. I give examples from two continents. Ruth Finnegan (Oral literature in Africa, 1970, 235 f.) notes that the Mabale paddle-songs (Congo) are sometimes about local events. And of the work-songs of the Thonga, Henri A. Junod (The life of a South African tribe, ii, 1927, 208-9) has the following interesting passage: 'But the richest collection is that of sailors' songs. I heard one of the, ... on the Nkomati, repeated a hundred times in a monotonous fashion by a boy who was pushing the boat along the shore with his pole, from Morakwen to Lour-enço Marques: "I siloyi, I ndandale," he said - (these words have no more meaning than tra-la-la) "They are starving at Ntimane, siloyi..." He was journeying from the Ntimane country, near Khosen, and having heard that the crops had failed, went muttering this great news all down the river!' Note also the quotation from Sibree (1880) in what follows. Turning from Africa to Australasia, we note the following by Charles Wilkes (Narrative of the

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United States exploring expedition, etc., 1844, iii, 20-21) in a report on an American naval visit to Tongatabu (Tonga Islands) in the middle of the last century: 'The canoe of these chiefs was seen advancing slowly over the calm sea by the efforts of its scullers, and was filled with men all singing the following air [music given by Wilkes but omitted here]. To this they sing any words, but generally such as are applicable to the mission of business or pleasure they may be on...' Finally James Cowan (The Maoris of New Zealand, 1910, 316), describing a war-canoe expedition by Queenite Maoris against rebel Hauhaus in 1864, records this combined war-song and paddle-song, chanted by the kai-tukis (fuglemen on Maori canoes), just before the force entered the Ohau river on its way up to Lake Rotoiti (North Island) (which it will be convenient to quote in extenso):

Ah, when evening came
 And slumber closed my eyes
 The spirit of my love
 Did visit me.
 My side twitched as I dreamed,
 'Twas a sign my love was near.
 Ah, let me soon return!
 Paddle away!
 Yonder see our leaders
 Winiata and Haimona,
 Who gazed upon the cliffs of Tuhua.
 I'm weary sitting at my paddle;
 But soon I'll leap into battle
 As if I had been bitten.
 Now our eyeballs madly stare!
 Steersman, straight for the Ohau River mouth-
 Paddle away!
 All together, all together!
 Quickly plunge your paddle blades.
 How bravely fly the feathers
 That deck our war canoe!
 Paddle away, And away!

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Can we doubt that as the Queenite force returned home victorious, the kai-tukis sang of their recent success?

(6)(ii)(e) Dróttkvætt-stanzas as praise poems

In the Maori paddling-song just cited, we see that the chieftain leaders of the expedition are referred to. In this connection, we may consider the circumstance that 'hovedmassen av s[kaldediktning] er...lovkvad, diktet for og om fyrster' (Kulturhistoriskt lexikon). It is a well known fact that panegyric themes are an important element in skaldic poetry. It is also well known that work-songs frequently concern the employer or boss of the chanters, whether in laudatory terms or otherwise. In the bitter and grim work-songs of American prison labour, convicts often sang of hard task-masters. German threshing songs frequently referred to the threshers' boss, the farmer (Joseph Schopp, Das deutsche Arbeitslied, 1935, 290). And moving from dry land to the waters, we find similar themes. Rowers and paddlers frequently refer to or praise either important passengers or bosses, masters or chieftains in their time chants. For example, Madingoes paddling a missionary up the Gambia river to his mission station in 1833, sang an extempore paddle-song wishing success to the minister in his new work (William Moister, Memorials of missionary labours in western Africa and the West Indies, 1850, 124). Similarly, Maori kai-tukis used to make extempore remarks on the Europeans in the boat (cf. Elsdon Best, The Maori canoe, 1925, 168). The impromptu song of another kai-tuki as his vessel transported a Maori lady of high rank was this (J.C. Andersen, Maori life in Aotearoa, 1907, 373):

"Pull on; thrust deeply.-

How leaps my fluttering heart, as gleam of brightness flashes from thy eyes, O Puhi-huia!

Pull on!"

And again:

"Though far thy fame from Maunga-whau was spread and heard in distant lands, thy heart consents to dwell at Tipi-tai."

And turning to more permanent masters and leaders, three examples may be briefly cited. George W. Cable (in The century magazine, April, 1886) gives this vignette of life in the Louisiana of ante-bellum days where travelling

was mainly by water: 'Every plantation had its river or bayou front, and every planter his boat and skilled crew of black oarsmen. The throb of their song measured the sweep of the oars, and as their bare or turbaned heads and shining bodies bowed forward and straightened back in ceaseless alternation, their strong voices chanted the praise of the silent, broad-hatted master, who sat in the stern.' Second, Finnegan (loc. cit.) notes how the paddle-songs of the Mabale sometimes concerned the local chief. And finally, and nearer home, Laura Alexandrine Smith (The music of the waters, 1888, 82) stresses the fact that the jorams of the Highlanders 'were usually composed in honour of their chief'.

(6)(ii)(f) Dróttkvætt-verses contain hints for reward

Many skaldic poems are, then, praise-poems in honour of a prince or king. It is a well known fact that a quality frequently praised in the eulogistic verses of the skalds is generosity. There are, for instance, a number of skaldic kennings for princes which refer to this virtue - bauga deilir, armlinns eyðir, hringa hreytir, auðar skiptir are but a few examples. And with good reason, references to a prince's generosity have been interpreted as hints for reward. In this context, it is relevant that paddlers and rowers (as well as other groups of workers; cf. e.g., Schopp, op. cit., 64 ff.) in other parts of the world sing chants which contain hints for reward from the master or employer (sometimes praising his generosity at the same time). I give three examples, from Indonesia, from Madagascar and from Louisiana:

(1) 'Interessant war auf dem Heimweg der Gesang unserer Ruderer. Sie suchten sich während der mehrstündigen Fahrt dadurch anzufeuern und bei uns die Gebelaune zu erwecken. Irgend einer hob z. B. an: "Der Herr hat viel Arrak und wird uns davon geben", worauf der Chor die Zeile wiederholte. Da aber der Herr keinen Arrak gab, hiess es weiter: "Der Herr hat viel Tabak, er wird uns davon geben", und so ging es fort und fort mit dem Herzählen aller Herrlichkeiten, ein Gebrauch, der im ganzen Archipel bis zu den Arrow-Inseln wahrgenommen werden kann! (Jacobsen, Reise in die Inselwelt des Banda-Meer, 1896, 96, 98).

(2) 'Few things are more pleasant than a canoe voyage on some of the large rivers of Madagascar, always providing ^(that) you have a good canoe and a

sufficient staff of paddlers. The men often beguile the time by singing their musical and often amusing canoe chants, in which one of them keeps up a recitative, usually an improvised strain, often bringing in circumstances recently happening, and very frequently introducing delicate flattery of the European employing them, how generous and rich he is, &c., and inquiring if there is not beef, and rice, and other food at the next stopping place. To this all the rest chime in with a chorus at regular intervals, a favourite one being Hé! misy vâ? ("Oh, is there any?")' (James Sibree, The great African island Chapters on Madagascar, 1880, 178).

(3) This is the final verse of a Creole slave rowing-song sung to a Louisiana planter on the last stage of his journey (see Cable, loc. cit.):

See! see! the town! Hurrah! hurrah!

Master returns in pleasant mood.

He's going to treat his boys all 'round,

Hurrah! hurrah for master good!

Given that the Hypothesis is correct and that skaldic strophes were used as rowing-chants, a more imaginative interpretation may be permitted of the evidence on which emphasis has just been placed. Verses in dróttkvætt might be seen, for example, as the rowing-chants of Viking bands raiding on foreign coasts. A typical Viking attack has been seen as a 'quick-in quick-out' affair (Gwyn Jones) and the importance of rowing to the success of Viking raids, not least of all to facilitate speedy retreat to the open sea, has been stressed by, for example, Bertil Almgren (in Tor, 1962). With a raid completed and booty and captives aboard, with the drótt rowing vigorously away from the hostile coast, this was the time for the skalds (who might be seen in the functional role of fuglemen; see below) to begin their time-giving chants. These were naturally in the first instance topical: 'We burnt Heiðaboer'; 'We gave the raven carrion'; 'Men fled from the warriors.' Then, with one eye on recently acquired spoils, the skalds may enter on praise of their leader or prince and his conduct in battle: 'Bravely you strode forward, oh prince!' 'The warrior reddened his sword in the midst of the throng'; 'Fiercely you fought, oh king!' And finally, in more unconcealed hope of reward, the skalds stressed their leaders'

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generosity in kennings of the type 'giver of treasure', 'waster of gold', distributor of rings'. The chieftain listened. And as verses 16 and 17 of Haraldskvæði might suggest, when they returned home the dróttinn rewarded the drótt for their exertions on the rowing-bench and in battle. And, in the hall, the skalds' verses would have been remembered, varied and developed. And subsequently some of them would have been handed down in tradition to the writers of the first Kings' Sagas.

(III)

I turn to a broader discussion of the Consistent Evidence. First, I should stress that no great weight is to be attached to any of the factors listed under (6)(iv) in isolation. Taken together, however, they are of greater importance and various other points could be added to them. What inference, for example, are we to draw from these two statements in Anne Holtsmark's article on the goddess Rán in Kulturhistoriskt lexikon: 'Myten om R[án] hører til blant sjøfarere...'; and 'Den gjør inntrykk av å være en skaldisk myte!?' And in connection with (6)(iv)(a), we might ask ourselves whether skalds (whose presence we often hear of on ships) did not have some more useful function than merely to compose poetry. Could they be seen in a role similar to that of the shanty-men? (6)(i) and (6)(iii) I regard as most important. In connection with (6)(i), it would, of course, have been desirable to have undertaken practical tests to ascertain whether a dróttkvætt-stanza could be used as a rowing-chant. This might be possible in future. (Note here, incidently, Alan Binns's statement in his Introduction to Holger Arbman's The Vikings (1961, 14), recently confirmed for me by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, that the rowing-stroke required on Viking ships is 'the short quick one needed for rowing at sea as distinct from racing on rivers'.) On the other hand, accepting that the verse ascribed to Björn is a rowing-chant (and I find it difficult to believe that it is not), then such experiments would seem less important. And in this connection, it is particularly interesting that we have an account of a skald reciting a vísa to men who are actually rowing (see page 8 above). Of the points listed under (6)(iii), (c) is probably to be regarded as the least convincing. It should, however, be remembered that in what is taken to be the oldest poetry

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in dróttkvætt, aðalhendingar and skothendingar are irregularly employed and may not have been an original feature of the metre. (On the other hand, I have toyed with the idea that, if dróttkvætt-verses were used as rowing-chants, then the skothendingar and aðalhendingar might have had some functional purpose, e.g. to distinguish one side of oars from the other.) (6)(iii)(a) and (b) are of much greater importance: my suggestion is that the trochee at the end of each line could be explained as an expanded labour cry. I am undecided at the present stage of my investigations whether to suggest that the penultimate long syllable represents the moment of exertion and that the final syllable is one of relaxation or that the final syllable is one of exertion. Lastly, with reference to (6)(iii)(d), a verse attributed to Eyvindr skáldaspillir (Skj, B, i, 65) should be noted:

Lótum langra nóta
 lqgsóta verfótum
 at spábernum sporna
 sporðfjögðruðum norðan,
 vita, ef akrmurur jökla,
 ql-Gerðr, falar verði,
 ítr, þærs upp of róta
 unnsvín, vinum mínum!

Translation: 'Let us row our ship (let our sea-steed tread with oars) from the north to the herring (sporðfjaðraðar spábernur langra nóta), to find out whether the herring (akrmurur jökla), which the ship (or whale) routs up, can be caught by my men, splendid woman!' This verse, I would suggest, (a) bears signs of being a rowing-chant used by fishermen; and (b) contains kennings for the hunted object, herring, which may still have something of their original function as tabu-words (cf. Svale Solheim, Kvalen i folk- etru og dikting, 1942, 12 f.). (Hunters and fishermen frequently refer to their prey by tabu-terms.) The verse attributed to Eyvindr might, then, act as some sort of link connecting (6)(iii)(d) with the evidence for dróttkvætt verses as time-giving chants for rowers.

(IV)

The Alternative Hypotheses may now be briefly discussed. First, the 'Irish' hypothesis. As noted, there are chronological difficulties in connection with this. The first Viking attack on Ireland is normally dated to 795 and yet Bragi is traditionally thought to have been active as a poet between 800 and 850 (cf. *Skj*, B, i, 1); my terminus ante quem on page 3 is conservatively late. Assuming, then, with Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld, 1962, 129), that 'ótrulegt virðist, að [Bragi] hafi ekki verið kveðandi undir dróttkvæðum hætti um miðja [9.] öldina', then the space of half a century or so for Irish influence to have its effect seems somewhat brief. To overcome this difficulty, it is, of course, possible to date contacts between Gaelic- and Norse-speaking peoples earlier than 795 (cf. Jan de Vries in *Ogam*, 1957, 13-26) or to put Bragi's life-time later in the ninth century than is normally done. But in addition to the chronological problem, there are various fundamental differences between Irish and skaldic poetry which have been stressed by, for example, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (loc. cit.), Stefán Binarsson (A history of Icelandic literature, 1957, 6) and Hallvard Lie (in Maal og Minne, 1952, 1-15). Although, then, the 'Irish' hypothesis has not been falsified, it is considered by many as improbable. To turn to Lie's theory. I have not the space here to say all I should like to about this. I must, however, stress that I am not convinced by it and his argument seems to me to contain a number of flaws. For example, it appears to be a premiss of Lie's theory that Ragnarsdrápa, a 'shield-poem', was the first poetry to be composed in dróttkvætt. This is, to say the least, disputable. Again, as I note on page 9, one of the forms of visual art which Lie posits as a model for dróttkvætt-style is only imperfectly known to us; as he himself admits, 'skjoldmalerienes formspråk kjenner vi ikke direkte' (Maal og Minne, 1952, 29). Indeed, I may not even be right in counting Lie's theory as an alternative hypothesis to my own: he sets out to account for the origin of 'dróttkvættstil', which phenomenon is not necessarily identical with my Phenomena. On page 9, I state what I see as the greatest objection to my own theory: that the complicated word-order associated with dróttkvæðr háttr may be considered untypical

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of labour-chants. There are, however, various ways of overcoming this problem. On page 9, I note that Ove Moberg has argued that the word-order in the oldest skaldic poetry is simpler than that in, for example, the poetry of Sigvatr. Going further back, it might have been yet simpler. Indeed, the first verses in dróttkvætt might have had a word-order similar to that of prose and that it was only when the skaldic art became more professionalized that a more complicated word-order developed. Notice, however, that the verse attributed to Björn hítðlakappi which I suggest is a rowing-chant (see page 4) has a relatively intricate word-order. Finally, I should like to stress certain advantages of my theory. First, as I have noted (page 9), it links up with an already existing theory on the origin of kennings. Second, it is based on a recognized theory on the origin of poetry (favoured, incidentally, especially by Marxist theorists; cf. e.g. George Thomson, loc. cit.; Ernst Fischer, Um listbörfina, 1973, ch. 2). Third, in certain ways, it could be regarded as simpler - and simplicity is, in general, an important factor affecting the acceptability of a hypothesis (cf. Carl G. Hempel, Philosophy of natural science, 1966, 4C-5) - than the 'Irish' theory, which presupposes foreign influence and bilingualism, and Lie's theory, which assumes the influence of non-literary art-forms.

As I stressed at the beginning of this paper, I put forward my hypothesis tentatively. It may be easy to falsify and I should be grateful at this stage of my investigations for destructive criticism. This could save me time in attempting to develop or support my thesis further. On the other hand, no hypothesis on a matter like the origin of skaldic poetry is ever likely to be 'proven'. The different theories must be judged alongside one another on a probabilistic basis. And until my hypothesis can be convincingly falsified, I hope it will be given attention alongside existing theories which set out to account for the origin of dróttkvaðr hátttr.

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