

Concatenatio as a Structural Element in the Christian Drápur

Martin Chase, S.J.
Pontifical Institute of Mediæval Studies
Toronto

The earliest use of concatenatio as a rhetorical term is in Bede's De Arte Metrica:

At uero in exametro carmine concatenatio uersuum plurimorum solet esse gratissima, quod in Aratore et Sedulio frequenter inuenies, modo duobus, modo tribus, modo quattuor, aut quinque uersibus, nonnumquam sex uel septem uel etiam pluribus ad inuicem conexis... [In hexameters the concatenatio of many verses is extremely pleasing. You find it frequently in Arator and Sedulius: the linking together of two, three, four, or five verses; sometimes even more than six or seven.]

Remigius of Auxerre adds an explanatory gloss:

CONCATENATIO id est copulatio. Catena dicitur eo quod capiat et teneat, inde concatenatio dicitur concinnatio uel copulatio eo quod multos copulat uersus. [Concatenatio is a joining. A catena ("fetter") is a thing that grasps and holds, and thus concinnatio ("putting-together") or copulatio ("coupling") is called concatenatio ("chaining-together"), because it joins many verses together.]¹

In Bede's definition concatenatio refers to any linking of verses, but it eventually came to denote more narrowly the linking of groups of verses (usually strophes or stanzas), and this is the sense in which I use the term. Concatenatio was employed by European and Insular poets throughout the Middle Ages, and it appears in both Latin and vernacular works. The link between the last line of one stanza with the first line of the following takes a variety of forms: it can be grammatical, with both lines

belonging to the same sentence, or by the repetition of a word, rhyme, or alliteration. Within a poem the stanza-linking may be regular, with all the stanzas joined (even the last and the first), or haphazard. Likewise the catch-words (or rhymes, or alliterating syllables) may either be randomly distributed or be assigned a fixed position within the line, e.g. the last word in a line and the first word in the succeeding line.

The earliest surviving examples of concatenatio are in Irish and Hiberno-Latin poems of the eighth century. It appears again in Carolingian and Ottonian Latin poetry, and it had a great vogue in twelfth-century Welsh, Provençal, and German vernacular lyrics. There are numerous instances of concatenatio in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin verse, and it is probably best known to students of English from the late ME and Scottish poems of the alliterative revival. Minnesang was clearly influenced by troubador lyrics, but other relationships between stanza-linking traditions are difficult to determine. The one characteristic which all these poems share is alliteration, and it may be that concatenatio is a natural development of alliterative verse and that it arose independently in a diversity of settings.

Apart from a few Latin hymns of Irish origin, stanza-linking was reserved for secular poetry, and given its widespread popularity it is surprising that it was ignored by the contemporary grammatical treatises and poetic manuals. In most poems the technique is not used as strictly and consistently as rhyme and other metrical devices, but the frequency of linked stanzas is high enough to indicate that concatenatio was consciously employed and is not merely the result of chance repetition.

The phenomenon is more difficult to assess in skaldic poetry, because the abundance of alliteration makes accidental links inevitable.² Nevertheless I believe that forms of concatenatio were used by poets as early as Einarr Skálaglamm, and it is clear that it became a standard technique among the Christian skálds of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In the classical dróttkvætt vísa the individual verses or vísu-orð are linked in pairs (vísu-fjórðungar) by the requisite alliteration. This rule is invariable and cannot be regarded as a special linking effect. What I call concatenatio occurs when there is an alliterative link between vísu-fjórðungar, i.e. between verses 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, or 8-1. This means that an anticipatory word in an even-numbered vísu-orð alliterates with the stuðlar or alliterating syllables in the following line of verse. The linking syllable may fall on the first, second, or third stress in the even-numbered vísu-orð:

4 goðs þrenning mér kenna

5 gofugt ljós boðar geisli³

4 alls græðari fæðask

5 Greitt má gumnum létta⁴

4 raundýrliga launaðr

5 ef lofða gramr lifði.⁵

When the anticipatory alliteration is on the first stress, or höfuðstafr, the linked pair of vísu-fjórðungar share the same alliteration scheme, and when this occurs sporadically in a drápa it is not always easy to determine whether it represents concatenatio or simply a desire to repeat an alliterative pattern.

Concatenatio can occur at three points within a drápa or flokkur. When the link is between the second and third or sixth and seventh vísu-orð of a vísa it reinforces the bond between the vísu-fjórðungar which make up the helmingr. When the fourth and fifth verses are joined (thus linking the helmingar) the unity of the eight-line vísa is emphasized. And finally, the linking of the last and first lines of two successive vísur is most nearly analogous to the stanza-linking concatenatio we find in other poetic traditions. Unfortunately the fragmentary nature of the surviving early drápur makes it impossible to evaluate the linking of vísur, and so it is difficult to know whether the stanza-linking in the long Christian poems represents an earlier tradition or a new development.

Table 1 is an assessment of concatenatio in the poetry of pre-twelfth-century skálds whose surviving works include at least eight intact dróttkvætt vísur. It lists the percentages of vísu-fjórðungar which are joined by anticipated alliteration, with links between helmingar and those within the helmingr recorded separately. The earliest skálds (Bragi, Þjóðólfr, Egill) and the plainer poets of the eleventh century did not distinguish between inter- and intra-helmingr junctures, but the works of most of their contemporaries show a distinct bias toward one form or the other. The most striking example is the poetry of Hásteinn, in which there is not a single alliterative link between helmingar, yet the intra-helmingr frequency is an abnormally high 56%. In Vellekla and in the poetry attributed to Gunnlaugr we see the opposite: there are proportionally twice as many links between helmingar as within the helmingr. The poetry of Arnórr and his son shows little variation in the use of concatenatio, but other skálds used a different pattern in each poem. Sigvatr's Nesjavísur contain no linking of helmingar, while the Austfararvísur show a 29% frequency; likewise Óttarr linked 33% of the helmingar in his Knútsdrápa but only 6% in his hastily-composed Höfuðlausn.

The long Christian drápur of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as Bishop Bjarni's Jómsvíkingadrápa survive more or less intact, and afford better opportunities for the analysis of alliterative linking. In these poems, with the exception of Heilags anda vísur, the arrangement of vísur within the drápa represents very nearly the poet's intention, and so we can examine links between vísur in addition to those between helmingar and couplets. Table 2 shows that Plácítúsdrápa and Jómsvíkingadrápa have a higher frequency of alliterative concatenatio than the stylistically-related group composed of Geisli, Leiðarvísan, Harmsól, and Líknarbraut, but in the Geisli-group its use is more systematic. The Plácítúsdrápa skáld favored intra-helmingr links, using links between helmingar more moderately and avoiding links between vísur. Bishop Bjarni, on

the other hand, was lavish in his use of alliterative links, but seemingly without regard to how or where.

The series of religious poems from Geisli to Lifknarbraut shows a predilection for the linking of vísur, and Geisli stands out with the highest frequency, as well as the lowest frequency of intra-helmingr links. Einarr Skúlason not only used alliterative concatenatio as a structural device, he avoided its use within helmingar in order to emphasize its linking properties. Table 3 shows this more clearly: it demonstrates how the various poems use concatenatio by contrasting the percentages of the alliterative links in each drápa used in linking positions (between vísur and helmingar) with those in non-linking positions (within helmingar).

With the exception of Geisli and Jómsvíkingadrápa, the drápur have an equal frequency of linking and non-linking concatenatio. The 63% to 37% ratio in Geisli is a significant departure from the norm. The deviation is too prominent to be attributed to chance, it is a special technique in the hands of a skillful poet. The Jómsvíkingadrápa ratio of 57% non-linking to 43% linking alliteration is evidence of a different aesthetic. The figures show that Bishop Bjarni had little interest in anticipated alliteration as a structural principle, rather, he regarded extra alliteration as a beautifying effect. He favored the sustaining of an alliterating consonant or cluster in successive vísu-fjórðungar, with the result that the two couplets within a helmingr often have the same alliteration scheme. This pattern occasionally spills over the boundaries between helmingar or vísur, but it is in the interest of repeating the alliteration rather than of forming structural bonds.

Table 4 records the various positions the anticipatory alliterating word holds in the even-numbered line of poetry, in both non-linking and linking situations. The Plácítúsdrápa skáld favored the second stress of the line for the linking word in intra-helmingr concatenatio and the final stress for links between helmingar and vísur. This is the pattern concatenatio

normally has in the other vernacular traditions, and it is surprising that he was the only skáld to use it: in all of the other drápur the linking word falls on the final arsis least frequently of the three possible positions. The drápur vary the preferred position of the anticipated syllable, but in each of these poems (with the exception of Jómsvíkingadrápa) one position is favored for intra-helmingr links and another for connections between helmingar and vísur. In Geisli, Leiðarvísan, and Harmsól the first position is used for major junctures. Geisli especially emphasizes the association of the first stress with the linking of helmingar and vísur by reserving the position for this function, using it only infrequently for concatenatio within the helmingr. Líknarbraut follows quite another pattern. Its ratios for the position of intra-helmingr link words are the most extreme on the table, with the first stress used at a 61% frequency and the second stress at only 11%. This makes for a sharp contrast with links between helmingar and vísur, where the middle position is favored at a 45% frequency. As we might expect, Jómsvíkingadrápa is unrelated to the patterns found in the other drápur. Bishop Bjarni shows a strong preference for the first stress in both situations, and this is but further evidence that his aim was to repeat alliterative patterns for aesthetic reasons rather than to use concatenatio as a linking device.

My final experiment was to look for syntactic and sense links between couplets, helmingar, and vísur in the drápur and determine whether there is a relationship between them and the alliterative links. I found that alliterative concatenatio is least in evidence where syntactic links are strongest. Plácítúsdrápa, in which the vísu-fjórðungr all but disappears as the basic sense unit (the narrative crosses the bounds of helmingar and even vísur), has the lowest instance of linking concatenatio. In the poems where formal syntactic boundaries are more distinct the concatenatio is more frequent, although it occurs without regard to meaning: links between unrelated helmingar and vísur are as frequent as between those with a

thematic continuity.

I suggest that alliterative concatenatio was a basic technique which emerged early in the skaldic tradition, most likely as a natural development in the use of alliteration. The skálds recognized it as a part of the structural framework of the drápa, a way of joining the independent helmingar and vísur as lead joins the medallions in a stained-glass window. The frequency of its use in a drápa probably depended on both the taste and the skill of the poet. I suspect that had they survived intact, the great poems of the tenth century would have yielded at least as high an instance of concatenatio as the later Christian poems and that we can see a shadowy reflection of the early drápa style in Geisli, Leiðarvísan, and Harmsól.

TABLE 1

Percentages of dróttkvætt vísur in which visu-fjórðungar (couplets) are linked by alliterative concatenatio:

	within the <u>helmingr</u>	between <u>helmingar</u>
Bragi, <u>Ragnarsdrápa</u>	38%	33%
Þjóðolfr ór Hvini, <u>Haustlǫng</u>	28%	30%
Þórbjörn hörnklofi, <u>Glymdrápa</u>	25%	14%
Egill Skallagrímsson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	21%	21%
Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir, <u>Lausavísur</u>	15%	33%
Glúmr Geirason, <u>Gráfeldardrápa</u>	15%	43%
Kormákr Ögmundarson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	27%	30%
Hölmgöngu-Bersi Véleifsson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	19%	31%
Hásteinn Hrómundarson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	56%	0
Gísli Súrsson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	34%	21%
Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson, <u>Máhlífingavísur</u>	24%	12%
Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	25%	20%
Einarr Helgason skálaglamm, <u>Vellekla</u>	25%	50%
Tindr Hallkelsson, (Drape om Hakon jarl)	20%	0
Eilífr Goðrúnarson, <u>Þórsdrápa</u>	23%	32%
Hallfróðr Óttarsson, <u>vandræðaskáld, Óláfsdrápa</u>	25%	17%
	<u>Lausavísur</u>	11%
.		
Hávarðr halti Isfirðingr, <u>Lausavísur</u>	26%	15%
Gunnlaugr ormstunga Illugason, <u>Lausavísur</u>	25%	50%
Eyjólfur dáðaskáld, <u>Bandadrápa</u>	19%	25%
Haldórr Ókristni, <u>Eiríksflokkur</u>	19%	0
Þórðr Kolbeinsson, <u>Eiríksdrápa</u>	4%	25%
	<u>Lausavísur</u>	10%
Óláfr Haraldsson, <u>Lausavísur</u>	16%	22%
Sigvatr Þórðarson, <u>Víkingarvísur</u>	38%	14%
	<u>Nesjavísur</u>	0
	<u>Austrfararvísur</u>	29%

TABLE 1, cont'd.

(Sigvatr)	<u>Vestrfararvísur</u>	27%	14%
	(Flokkur om Erlingr Skjalgsson)	40%	10%
	<u>Bergsögglisvísur</u>	43%	24%
	<u>Erfidrápa Óláfs helga</u>	18%	25%
	Lausavísur	27%	27%
Þórmóðr Bersason Kolbrúnarskáld,	<u>Þórgeirsdrápa</u>	13%	20%
	Lausavísur	27%	13%
Óttarr svartí, <u>Höfuðlausn</u>		20%	6%
	<u>Knútsdrápa</u>	15%	33%
Þjörn Arngeirsson Hítðalakappi, Lausavísur		31%	24%
Arnórr Þórðarson, <u>Magnúsdrápa</u>		26%	27%
	<u>Þórfinnsdrápa</u>	27%	25%
	(Erfidrápa om kong Harald)	17%	33%
Haraldr Sigurðarson harðráði, Lausavísur		14%	33%
Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, <u>Magnúsflokkur</u>		11%	14%
	<u>Sexstefja</u>	17%	15%
	Lausavísur	18%	17%
Þjarni Hallbjarnarson, <u>Kalfsflokkur</u>		25%	13%
Þórleikr fagri (En flokk om Sven Ulfssön)		27%	30%
Steinn Herdísarson, <u>Óláfsdrápa</u>		28%	13%

TABLE 2

	<u>% of intra- helmingr links</u>	<u>% of linked helmingar</u>	<u>% of linked vísur</u>
<u>Plácítúsdrápa</u>	60%	33%	23%
<u>Geisli</u>	21%	31%	41%
<u>Leiðarvísan</u>	33%	31%	39%
<u>Harmsól</u>	30%	28%	33%
<u>Líknarbraut</u>	27%	25%	31%
<u>Heilags anda vísur</u>	34%	47%	
<u>Jómsvíkingadrápa</u>	51%	33%	43%

TABLE 3

distribution of alliterative links within the drápur:

	<u>within helmingar</u>	<u>between helmingar or vísur</u>
<u>Plácítúsdrápa</u>	50%	50%
<u>Geisli</u>	37%	63%
<u>Leiðarvísan</u>	49%	51%
<u>Harmsól</u>	50%	50%
<u>Líknarbraut</u>	49%	51%
<u>Jómsvíkingadrápa</u>	57%	43%

TABLE 4

position of linking word in the line:

	links within <u>helmingar</u>			between <u>helmingar</u> or <u>visur</u>			combined average		
	1st stress	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
<u>Plácutúsdrápa</u>	22%	41%	38%	28%	31%	41%	25%	36%	39%
<u>Gefslí</u>	23%	40%	37%	39%	35%	25%	33%	37%	30%
<u>Leifarvísan</u>	30%	33%	37%	39%	32%	29%	34%	33%	33%
<u>Harnsóli</u>	33%	31%	36%	49%	31%	21%	41%	31%	28%
<u>Líknarbraut</u>	61%	11%	29%	31%	45%	21%	46%	28%	26%
<u>Heilags anda vísur</u>	18%	46%	36%	31%	45%	21%	21%	47%	32%
<u>Jómsvíkingadrápa</u>	67%	21%	12%	56%	19%	25%	87%	20%	17%

NOTES

¹Bede, De Arte Metrica, I.xi ("Quae Sit Optima Carminis Forma"), ed. C.B. Kendall (commentaries and glosses of Remigius ed. M.H. King), Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 123A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975).

²In this paper I am concerned only with alliterative concatenatio. Rhyme-linking and word repetition are rare in skaldic poetry.

³Einarr Skúlason, Geisli, v. 1; ed. Finnur Jónsson, Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning (Copenhagen, 1908-1915), 1B:427.

⁴Geisli, v. 21 (Skjaldedigtning 1B:433).

⁵Geisli, v. 70 (Skjaldedigtning 1B:445).

APPENDIX

Examples of Alliterative Concatenatio in Irish and Latin Poetry

anonymous eighth-century lyric:

M'airiuclán hi Túaim Inubir;
 ní lántechdais bes sestu--
 cona retglannaib a réir,
 cona greín, cona escu.

Gobban du-rigni in sin
 (co n-ecestar duib a stoir);
 mu chridecan, Dia du nim,
 is hé tugatoir rod-toig.

Tech inna fera flechod,
 maigen 'na áigder rindi;
 soilsidir bíd hi lugburt,
 os e cen udnucht n-imbí.

[Early Irish Lyrics: Eighth to Twelfth Century, ed. Gerard
 Murphy. Oxford: Clarendon, 1956, p. 112.]

from a seventh-century hymn to St Colum Cille:

...Coluim Chille céin do-bó
 bíd mo dúchann, dáil co feirt;
 fri cách ngúasacht géra dó,
 dath a molto méit mo neirt:

Ní gairm fri fás fil form gein,
 gígsea dom Día dúais mo bláith;
 bérthum sech ríg trebas tein,
 tar sin is for fil mo ráith.

Rígdae bráthair, búadach ríg,
 rathmar fiadu feib ron ain;
 eblaíd goiste ndemno dím
 dóbart a baird bes dom-air.

[A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry A.D. 600 to 1200, ed.
 David Green and Frank O'Connor. London: Macmillan,
 1967, pp. 19-21.]

anonymous eighth-century poem, "De Pippini Regis Victoria Avarica":

Omnes gentes qui fecisti, tu Christe, dei soboles,
 terras, fontes, rivos, montes et formasti hominex,
 Avarisque convertisti ultimis temporibus.

Multa mala iam fecerunt ab antio tempore,
 fana dei destruxerunt atque monasteria,
vasa aurea sacrata, argentea, fictilia.

Vestem sanctam polluerunt de ara sacratissima,
lintheamina levitae et sanctaemorialium
muliebribus tradata suadente demone.

Misit deus Petrum sanctum, principem apostolum,
in auxilium Pippini magni regis filium,
ut viam eius comitaret et Francorum aciem.

Rex accintus dei virtute Pippin, rex catholicus,
 castra figit super flumen albidum Danubium,
 (h)ostibus accingens totum undique presidia.

Unguimeri satis pavens, Avarorum genere,
 regi dicens satis forte: 'Tu Cacanem perditite!
 atque Catunae mulieri, naledictae goniugi:

'Regna vestra consumata, ultra non regnabitis,
regna vestra diu longe cristianis tradita,
a Pippino demollita, principe catholico.

Adpropinquat rex Pippinus forti cum exercitu,
 fines tuos occupare, depopulare populum,
 montes, silvas atque colles ponere presidia.

Tolle cito, porta tecum copiosa munera;
 sceptrum regis adorare, ut paulum possis vivere,
aurum, gemmas illi offer, ne te tradat funeri'.

Audiens Cacanem rex, undique perterritus,
proctinus ascendens mulam cum Tarcan primatibus,
regem venit adcrare et plagare munere.

Regi dicens: 'Salve princeps, esto noster dominus,
regnum meum tibi trado cum festucis et foliis,
silvas, montes atque colles cum omnibus nascentiis.

Tolle tecum proles nostras, parent tibi obsequia,
 de primatibus nec parcas, terga verte acie,
 colla nostra, proles nostras ditioni tradimus'.

Nos fideles cristiani deo agamus gratiam,
qui regnum regis confirmavit super regnum Uniae,
et victoriam donavit de paganis gentibus.

Vivat, vivat rex Pippinus in timore domini,
avus regnet et senescat et procreet filios,
qui palatia conservent in vita et post obitum.

Qui conclusit regnum crande, amplum, potentissimum,
quae regna terrae non fecerunt usque ad diem actenus,
neque cesar et pagani, sed divina gratia.

Gloria aeterna patri, gloria sit filio.

[Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini. ed. Ernest
 Duemmler. vol. 1, Berlin, 1881, pp. 116-117.]

Oengus mac Típraite (d. 741), Hymn to St Martin of Tours:

Martine, te deprecor
pro me rogare patrem,
Christum ac spiritum sanctum,
habentem Mariam matrem.

Martinus, mirus more,
ore laudavit Deum,
Puro corde cantavit
atque amavit eum.

Electus Dei vivi;
signa sibi salutis
Donavit Deus pacis
magnae atque virtutis.

Verbum Dei locutus,
secutus in mandatis,
Virtutibus impletus
mortuis suscitatis.

Sanans homines lepra
cura duplici mira:
Magnitudine mala,
aegritudine dira.

Deum, Dominum nostrum,
passum pro nobis mire
Voluntarie propter nos,
deprecare, Martine.

[Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi. vol. 51 ed. Clemens Blume, S.J.
 Leipzig: Reisland, 1908, p. 328.]

