VERBA SCÁTHAIGE

The single-handed defence of Ulster by Cú Chulainn while the Ulstermen lie sick calls for a tactic of delaying action, the chief form of which is the fight or duel at the ford. This also provides the best vantage point for the narrator of saga interested in depicting heroic encounter. The problem is to find adversaries worthy of Cú Chulainn’s steel, how to level others up to him. The ingenious solution was to pose a school of military training at which the flower of the Irish warrior youth learned their trade as companions-in-arms. From the conflict of friendship and loyalty with cupidity and treachery dramatic tension would flow; for the pupils of Scáthach were foster-brothers. In Recension I of Táin Bó Cuailnge Fer Baeth is beguiled by Medb and Aíill with praise and promises, and on hearing of this Cú Chulainn thinks that he himself will fall at the hands of one who is his equal in age, speed and weight. But Fer Baeth is killed when he comes to renounce his friendship and before the duel can take place. The late Fer Diadh episode utilizes the same motif and the Macgnímartha/Maccendar one tries to accommodate it. Here Cú Chulainn is said to have learned warfare from Scáthach in his sixth year and the Yellow Book of Lecan adds that he courted Emer in this year also; which appears a trifle precocious even for Cú Chulainn. The reconciling of biographical detail from different sources is obviously giving trouble here.

The uncanny phantom background of Scáthach is used to good purpose when she is made foretell what is in store for the hero during the Táin. The resulting Verba Scáthaige offer a cryptic view of the Táin down to the battle between the two bulls. It represents the first telling of the saga available to us and the near certainty that the text was included in the early eighth-century Cín Dromma Snechta would indicate that by this time the saga was known in a complete form.

The text is extant in two versions: Version A, an original version found in four manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512, of the 14th-15th centuries, f. 118 b 2 (R); British Library Egerton 1782, written c.1517, f. 19 b 1 (E1);1 Egerton 88, written 1564, f. 11 a 2 (E2); Royal Irish Academy 23 N 10, compiled 1575, p. 68 (N).2 The four copies are independent of one another. Version B, an expanded version included in the saga Tochmarc Éimear; the following five copies are extant: Lebor na hUidre 125 b – 126 a (before 1106); Royal Ir. Acad. D iv 2 (15th century?), f. 77 v; British Library Harleian 5280 (16th century), f. 34 a 1–2; Book of Fermoy (15th century) p. 212; 23 N 10, pp. 26, 125.

1 Copy in Trinity College, Dublin, ms 1287 (H.1.13), p. 360 (18th century).

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In seeking to trace the contents of the lost *Cín Dromma Snechta*, a manuscript which was probably written down in the early eighth century, Thurneysen pointed to certain similarities between the manuscripts Egerton 88 and 23 N 10 in respect of texts dealing chiefly with heroic material. Eg. 88 was copied by Donall O'Davoren in 1564 from a selection (as he says) of the best of the texts in the *Cín Dromma Snechta* made by Gilla Commáin O Congalain (ob. 1135). Thurneysen notes that for three items in Egerton 88, of which two are found in 23 N 10, direct evidence of provenance in *Cín Dromma Snechta* is available. Eight other items common to these two manuscripts belong to the linguistically oldest stratum of Irish literature; they are associated with other texts of great antiquity in several manuscripts and it would appear entirely likely that these ten texts, of which *Verba Scáthaisge* is one, derive from the *Cín Dromma Snechta*.

Generally speaking, the ancient text has been transmitted with considerable fidelity in the four manuscripts of Version A, the difference between them being chiefly a matter of spellings or of sporadic additions and omissions. The best manuscripts appear to be Egerton 1782 and Rawlinson B 512, in that order; for instance, where E² has *baigthi Medb*, R reads *ba grithi medba* (v. 28). Ms 23 N 10 omits *dia forcuin and* of the other three manuscripts at the end of the prose and adds *ollgabadh* in v. 29; with Egerton 88 it adds *cen colinn* in v. 20 in agreement with the B group: E¹ *fori coin cul- cen colinn*, N *fori coin cul- cen colainn*, LU 10385³ *ar Coin Culaind|* *cen colind* appear to show a gradual modernisation of text. *Cen colainn* literally ‘without a body’, apparently means ‘dead’; cf. *i colainn* ‘alive’. A reference to the mutilation of the dead Cú Chulainn would be in keeping with the account in *Brislech Mór Maige Mártheimn* where the dead hero’s head and arm are brought to Tara and buried there (LL 14057–64)⁴. Common to E¹ and N is the reading *silis* for *sifis* in v. 15. LU has *sifis* which is glossed by *selfs*, and another of the B manuscripts, D iv 2, reads *selfs*. *Silis* ‘drips, causes to flow’ is originally a strong verb with reduplicated future. But the most substantial evidence of modernisation occurs at vv. 14–15 where E¹ and LU read as follows: E¹ *Ba hoin frí * *sírech tach* *sir dochr- sir deim in* *sir duba*; LU *Ba hoin ar slóg* [v.l. *arlog*, D iv 2] *sírech tach|sir dochair* *sirdeimin*. *sirguba* (*sirguba*, D iv 2). LU may be translated ‘You will be alone before the host, afflicted by constant misfortune and in constant unfailing lamentation’.

In LU, the outstanding exponent of Version B, the poem is expanded to eighty-one verses, with six added at the beginning, twenty-nine at the end and the rest interspersed. But the original thirty-two verses are included in the proper order with the usual slight alterations of form, the only further substantial differences being in vv. 17 and 22–3; where

for v. 17 cuan dia lios loscannab, LU has gätar lunni loscudi; for v. 22
dal de dalab dendarbe, LU has ana dolath telbarbæ; and for v. 23 dedirn
brodir bréisfhír, LU has dideirn bróideáig brufstír (discussed in the notes
infra).

The other copies of Version B have what is essentially the same text
as LU, in part well preserved, in part a mixture of idiosyncratic spelling
(Harl. 5280) and modernised or corrupt forms.

The facts concerning the state of the manuscripts adduced above sug-
uggest that in spite of the associations established for mss E1 and N,
they sometimes offer less reliable and more modernised readings, as indeed
might be expected of sixteenth-century manuscripts. On the other hand,
although the LU version is the later one, we sometimes get the more reli-
able readings in this early twelfth-century manuscript.

The transmission of Version B is bound up with that of Tochmarc
Eimir. According to Thurneysen’s analysis,5 this saga was probably
composed and written down in the eighth century. The first part of it
was re-fashioned in the early eleventh century and is now found in this
form (Version I) in LU 121–2. The middle part of Version I is now lost,
but the end of it from § 55,6 is contained in Rawl. B 512, f. 117 a. The
second part of the saga was re-fashioned and expanded in the early part
of the twelfth century (Version II) but is no longer extant; it is implied in
the frequent references in Version III to alternative sources of the story.
Version III was compiled shortly after Version II in an effort to reconcile
it with the divergent presentation of Version I. Complete copies of it are
found in D iv 2, 23 N 10, and Harl. 5280.7

As a motive for the composition of Version II Thurneysen suggests
the urge of a story-teller to provide worthy foemen for Cú Chulainn
in the Táin. Originally, and in Version I, the hero was alone with Scáthach,
which left him unparalleled in arms. So in Tochmarc Eimir § 67, which
is based upon Version II, Cú Chulainn arrives at Scáthach’s school for
young warriors to find not only Fer Báeth and Fer Diad there, but also
Lugaid and Luan, sons of the redoubtable Lóch, a Lárine not mentioned
in the Táin, and an otherwise unknown Drüst, according to the list in
§ 80.

The expansion of Verba Scáthaige can be traced to some extent in
the manuscripts. In Version I Scáthach is said to communicate her
Verba to the wounded Cú Chulainn, 7 asmbert si friss indni aridmwhui
iar tichtain hErend co n-eipert si indni Scéathach: Aríonna olígabád 7 rl.
atá isind likar ‘and she told him what was in store for him after coming
to Ireland, saying Aríonna olígabád etc., which is in the book’.8 Here

5 Die irische Helden- und Königsage (Halle 1921) 377–95.
6 This is according to K. Meyer’s numbering in his edition of Tochmarc Eimir in
ZCP 3 (1901) 229–63, p. 245.
7 For details, see Thurneysen, Heldensage, 378.
she quotes v. 2 of the original version, which happens to be more to the point than v. 1. The poem then follows immediately upon Tochmarc Emire in Rawl. B 512, f. 118 b, to provide one of the four copies of Version A.

Our poem is included in the corresponding place in Version III\(^5\) but in the expanded form beginning fecun, a scialh braidíne, which is not found in Version I. The compiler uses the same late opening in § 71, where he points out that in certain other recensions (slechta) the poem is brought in at this particular point after Cú Chulainn had slept with Scáthach upon the strand. The inference here is that the compiler of Version III merely uses a version (II) of the poem ready to his hand and is not himself responsible for any of the modifications evident to us in a comparison with Version I.

According to Thurneysen, the expanded Verba Scálhaige belongs to a Version II redacted in the early twelfth century (Heldensage 379–82). That the poem can have been an ad hoc redaction of such late date is extremely unlikely. The expanded poem may more plausibly be related to a live oral tradition which, particularly in the earlier centuries, stimulated the extended treatment of a theme which continued to excite poet and patron. In Tochmarc Emire there is frequent reference to 'other versions, other traditions', as for instance in §§ 67 and 71. One of these must have been a floating oral version of the poem independent of the recorded one. The problem is highlighted by one particular anomaly of transmission: in all four copies of Version A the poem terminates with A’t-chu firfíth Finnbennach / Ai fri Donn Cúailnge ardúrách (cf. edition infra). We point out below that the last verse has at least one stress too many. It also lacks the regular alliterative link with the preceding verse and the similar link between final and preceding word. Since, however, the four primary witnesses record it so, it belonged more than likely to their ultimate source, Cin Dromma Snaedh. If we accept this as an ultimate answer, we may seek to improve the line by reading *Ai fri Donn Cúailnge and take ardúrách as an addition at an early state to obtain dúnad of a kind with v. 1. But the 'addition' does nothing to supply the structural alliteration between final and preceding word.

When we turn to Version B we note that all five copies omit Ai from the last line, thereby restoring at least the three-stress norm as well as linking alliteration. Hence it seems much more likely that the place-name Ai is an intruder on the pattern of the place-name Cúailnge than that it belonged to the original poem, to disturb its structure unnecessarily. The original poem was of course oral, not written. If this reasoning proves persuasive, it can show that, even in a manuscript as old as the Cin Dromma Snaedh, written text may not be perfect and that the oral tradition can retain its importance for establishing it.

The poem is composed in verses with trisyllabic (dactylic) cadence, the exceptions being vv. 8, 20, and 29. The metre tends to adjust this in v. 8 *faetbaramus* and v. 29 *othartige* by weakening the second syllable further. To v. 20 we shall return. As a rule there are three stresses to the verse, but one of them can be weakened or suppressed, as in vv. 1, 2, 4–5. The last verse (32) has at least four stresses. The verse cadence, then, appears to be a more compelling criterion than the accentuation or stressing. One other criterion also appears vital, namely alliteration between cadence word and the preceding word. It is absent in vv. 28 and 32 only, and these appear exceptional: *seu 'and'* is the preceding word in v. 28, and v. 32 is in any case irregular. In v. 18 the final *idamasb* appears to alliterate with the stressed vowel of *dibéd*. Hence the alliteration is on the whole rigidly observed, and for good reason. It is *fir-usimm*, the ‘true stitching’ which builds a verse by adding an alliterating cadence to a (two-stress) nucleus. As nearly all the verses are clearly heptasyllabic (vv. 2–5, 9–11, 13–19, 21–6, 28, 30–31), the remainder need to be examined, not least for the clues which their structure may provide for their interpretation. Five of these verses are one syllable short, which can be supplied when hiatus forms are applied as follows: v. 1 (-beː: MSS -be), v. 6 (biːd), v. 7 (crúːc: three MSS crúoch, one MS crūos), v. 12 (triːːn: MS tren, tren), v. 27 (biːl). In v. 12 the precedence of *triːːn* over *tren* on metrical grounds is justified also on the semantic: *trén* ‘strong, etc.’ could contribute little to the sense of the verse, as against *triːːn* ‘third (of an army); army’. The only other defective line which calls for comment is v. 20. MSS E¹, N, and the LU group add *cen colinn*. This we do not believe to be original, since it can hardly be reconciled with what follows in v. 21. *Cú Chualainn* *cen colinn* appears to be a word-play in which the preposition *cen* may well attract a certain contrastive stress. It is unlikely that the phrase *cēn colinn* could pass muster as a trisyllabic cadence. A pentasyllabic verse commonly ending in a stressed monosyllable may alternate with or conclude a series of heptasyllabic verses, or it may conclude an unrhymed four-line stanza with such verses. If we were to emend v. 20 to *fortsuc Choin Chualainn* we should at least have a pentasyllabic line with regular lenition of *Choin*. On the other hand, verses irregular in cadence and in syllable count are common in the ‘rhetorics’: cf. the oft-quoted lines from *Fled Bricrend*, *Bráo mara* / *bara bledmaillé* / *blog derghened* / *lond mainnch mathrúamdae* . . . (LU 8681–4), or from *Serlige Con Cualinn* § 40 Fēg, a Loīg, dar thēːs: / *oc coistecht frīt* / *filet mná*

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The Fleid Bricrend passage (LU 8681-97) shows that short verses are not confined to the position at the beginning of 'rhetorics'. This applies also to the syllabic metres (nuachruila) where varieties with short verses are known as gairit, e.g. rannaigecht gairit: Ferg feine / do muintir Echach Eile / etc., or selnad ngairit as Ingen leich as luchru i Laignib / nach len locht / etc.

Linking alliteration is the rule in the poem, but there are exceptions and licences. The link is unstressed in vv. 13-4 and in the parallel vv. 4-5 (with -f: f). Here, however, it could be dispensed with and may not be significant. The link is maintained regularly in vv. 8-16; it fails in vv. 16-17 and resumes in vv. 18-21. Dál in v. 22 may link with preceding unstressed -dí. Verses 24-5 are linked by the parallelism of frí-clauses.

Can breaks in alliterative linking indicate structural segmentation? By marking the breaks we get Segment I, vv. 1-3; Segment II, vv. 4-7; Segment III, vv. 8-16; and Segment IV, vv. 17-32.

Verse 4 could indeed be the beginning of a new narrative phase. If v. 8 is another such beginning then we can more easily follow the change from second to third person in v. 8. Is v. 17 the middle of a period or the beginning of one? On balance the alliterative break appears to offer the best clue to context here.

As the metre of the poem is an early favourite in the Laws and elsewhere, so the language is clearly very old; witness the verbal forms with infixed pronoun in tmesis, cotul-cúufftar, fortat-bítsatar (vv. 4-5), with suffixed pronoun in báigthy (v. 28); also the reduplicated futures bítsatar (v. 5) bíd (v. 6); bjet (v. 27), tithis (v. 8), cíchis (v. 13), sífs (v. 15), cích (v. 27). Further, pre-tonic to- for later do- in loairechlain (Eg. 88, prose); the form fú (v. 10: R, E^2) of the possessive pronoun 'thry'-; as for later -u- as in chacrit (v. 4), Chaisaint (v. 20).

Other old features are independent datives such as feálú (v. 9), foináib (v. 16), idámaib (v. 18), the use of the name Sélanta (v. 7), the strange word belend (vv. 25-6), and the phrase dál de dálaib dédarbe reminiscent of Conaille Medi Michur (v. 22). Compare also, difédal (v. 18), m-scóich do in the prose and last but not least, the form sceu (v. 28) which may be an old dative.

All the facts we have adduced up to this make it clear that the poem is archaic. We may expect it to have been composed orally in the seventh or perhaps even in the sixth century. An edition of the poem should no doubt reflect this archaism by utilising the early forms offered by one or more of the manuscripts. (Even in the prose, Eg. 88 spells Toairechlain where the other manuscripts have pre-tonic do-) Accordingly, we favour spellings such as Sétanta, brágit which do not show a glide to -i after neutral consonance, since MSS R and E^2 do offer support for this (v. 11). The poem shows a sensitiveness to initial mutations in v. 4 chacrit (after cotul-) and v. 13 mbélatu (after neuter noun). Accordingly we

take account of the less perspicuous manuscript lenition after *fort* in v. 20 (*mss* R, E²).

Our policy is to draw the text as far as possible from the four primary witnesses, the manuscripts of Version I. Where these appear to fail or falter, recourse is had particularly to LU, collated where necessary with the other manuscripts of Version II. Manuscript forms are retained, we do not emend, and we limit our modifications to the removal of some late scribal forms. The shape of the resulting text was often found to correspond rather closely to LU (compare, for example, LU 10356–8 with vv. 1–3). In regard to the endings of verbs simple and compound in final position, manuscript usage is rather inconsistent. We have thought it best to reflect this usage rather than systematise it.

As the poem is an *imbas forossndi* ‘a vision which illumines’, present and future may tend to merge; as it is a vision addressed to a companion, second person and third person may tend to merge.

*Verba Scáthai*ge: five manuscripts


belend dicté clesamnach. cíchit biet banchuire. baigthe medb sceu aíle all aruthosa òthurligi. hucht fri hechta hirgairce. alchu fir féith finbhennach hai. fri donn cuaingne ardburach.

III. Eg. 88, f. 11 a 2 (E¹): INdsip- uerba scathaige fri con iar-og scar- frie is na rannais thair ó ro saith do lan foghlaim in mil- la scath-. Toairecheán do iar- scath- ani aridmiadh coneipt fris tria iumbus forosn- diaforcuirt IMbe hírr aongaile. ara tosa oll gab-. uath-friheid nimlibir i. t. b. c. Cotut caráith cellfethán foradbradhaid bib- sathar. bieth do calg cul béimn cruch frisruit sedantai (no- do coin c-) líthís fíoch fæbûramhna fethal feula fer (no fed) cles- fer do breig braifith- braighit do tuath líthshíth-. tren cíthach cóicídhis. cíchis do buár mbeulataí, ba hoin fri sluagh sìrech-thach sáir dochar- sáir déimin sáir dúbh síls dá fúil ñám taimen féarnaibh îlb idlócharaib cuan dìos' loscanuab. lin do fedhad il damaib ílur fúil- s'fìthir. fort coin cul- cen colinn ceis tealaigh nen chrídhé dal de dalaib de dairbe. de dirn bord marc braifith- bruathach fri toins treichdaich frissin mbéid mbándernach.

bend dìchd clesamn- cíchid bìed banchuir båigthi medb sceo aill- arathosa òthurlighe huchí fri hechta hirgairce. adchú fir féith finbhendach hai fri donn cuail- aurtburch.

IV. 23 N 10, p. 68 (N): INciúint uerba scath- fri concl- oc scar- doib isna rannuab tair. ro saith do choineul- lanfloictí in míilti la scathággh do aurchecháin scath- do iar- indni aradmiad caoineipt fris tria imbass forosna IMbe eir hengaile aratossa ollgabud huatha fríheit nímbear i. t. aínb do cuailig. Cotat curaith ciallfaithir foral braigait bibsáit bìed do chailíec culbeimnech cruach fri srot sétanta i. proirium nodó choinceil-. Lítithís fíoth feibharaíomus fethal feula fedhchleasaih feara dobreig mbráitaí fer braight dithuaidh tìthshíth tren cíthach cóicígís cíchis do bhí chuairt bhop ñeil mar luisí ilub ñdllochtaib cuan diáilíos loisndainb lin dofedal idamalb ílar fúili ferith- for coineul- cen coileann Ceisfe alag nenchríde al de dalbá déidarbe didirn borddirce braifithir bruathach fri toins treitchaidh frissin mbelend mbándernach belen di chet clesamnach cíchet bìed banchuir báití medb sceo aill-ai aratossa ollgabadh òthurligh. ucht fri hechtga irgairgí alchu firféith finbhennach aí fri donn cuaintí aurtburch. 7ca

V. LU 125 b, from Tochmarch Emere:

line 10350

úathud fri eit nimlebair.
óic Cruachna rascéarsa.
Cotut curaid cellfetar.
fortut bráigtibibsatár.
bìed do choilíg culbemend
fris fìthir Setinti
sennait rout raodtressa.
inìbh riscloifíet cínamreda.
clárad im bìaib bendercúidh.
líthís fíoch fæbûramhna.
fethail feola fedecessaib.
ferba do Breagh bratfatair.
brághi do thuath lithsitir.
trean cithoch cóitigis.
cichis do buar mbeallu.
Ba hoin ar slóg sirreachtach
sírochhair sírdmin, sirguba.
sísís do fuil flandtedmand.
fernaib ilib liddlochtaib
armaib séeo mnáib dergercaib.
cródergfa arm armeth mellglaí.
faich folha firfáitir.
arath croich crosfaítír.
recur serech sárlaír.
gáéir lar lúnni los cuí.
Lin difead ildamaib.
ilar fúle firfáitir
ar Coin Cuaind cencolind.
céísín álach n-enraith.
ana doláth thotharbae.
dideirn bródeirg brufáitir.
Brón ar cáth dor bháthfraisilg
da taib Maigí Maithimni.
da mhía clúchí tregaígi.
brúthtaígh fúri toind tréchtlii.
frisín mbeálaí bmandernach.
bealaig úthaígh ochtcleasaíg.
belend di chet clesamna
cíchit biet banchuri.
bagthi Medb séco Ailella.
Arutossa othairlige.
ucht fúri echt-ga irgairce.
alchuir firfáid Findbennach
fri Donch Cúalnge ardburach.
Cuin doréga. cuin dórifhea.
ros do gáilí gnáthgherí.
benfaí bémend irlebra.
meic Roích nádrindig ardurgna.
naisceta n-ollach n-óenellach.
lochta do thom doiscúra cetha.
Erig do loch lúrcheada.
cuchtaí éagail lúcorcaic
selaid tanaig trubud
cúir n-Ulad ógírí.
do mnáib Ulad oenteomaírn.
do scáth cndach cómromach.
do gáil túgaígh tairberlach tréntúirg.
do chroig déit dathbuthí
da ndondálaíb.
rasia th’aíinm Albanchu.
ciach do gáilí gemenáig.
Aifí Úathach iachtfaíth.
alaind seththach sóriaíla.
etrocht soibrocht suanaígh.
teóra bliadás ar tréntrichait.
bát neart ar do lochnamh.
tricha bliadns bagimse
gus do gáilí gnáthgherí.
o sín immach ní fullimse.
do saegul ní indisímsa.
ete bóudaíb banchuri.
gearid gé etéigene
díth álaib fo chén. fo cén a scit. b.
line 10430
RECONSTRUCTED TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Incipiunt verba Scáthaige fri Coin C(h)ulainn oc scarad doib isnaib rannaib thair ò rò-scäch do Choin Chulainn lánfoglaíimm in milli la Scáthaich. To-airchechain Scáthach dò iarum aní arid-mbiad, con-épert fris tri imbas for-osndi dia foiirciunn:

'(Here) begin the words of Scáthach to Cú Chulainn as they were separating in the eastern parts when Cú Chulainn had completed the full course of military training with Scáthach. Then Scáthach foretold to him what was in store for him and told him of his end through Vision which illumines:

1 A mbe[ğ] eir ëengaile,
arut-ossa ollgábud,
uathad fri h-êt n-imlebair.¹
Cotuñ- chaunúth -cëllfelar,
5 fortat- brágit -bitsatar,
bied do chaile cùibúimen
cruàñh fri sruth Sétanti.²
Tithis fidach fáeburamnnus
fethul feulae, ferchlessaib.
10 Ferba do breig brailfiter,
brágit do- thuaith -thíthsítr;³
triúchithach coicdigis,
cíchis do buar mbéllteu.
Ba h-oin fri slóg sìrdochrai.
15 Síís de fuil flanntnenmen
fernaib lil iliddochtaitb.

When thou art a peerless champion,
great extremity awaits thee,
alone against the vast herd.
Warriors will be set aside against thee,
5 necks will be broken by thee,
thy sword will strike strokes to the rear
against Sétante’s gory stream.
Hard-bladed, he will cut/conjure the trees
by the sign of slaughters, by manly feats.
10 Cows will be carried off from thy hill,
captives will be forfeited by thy people;
harried by the troop for a fortnight,
thy cattle will walk the passes.
Thou wilt be alone in great hardship against the host.
15 Scarlet gushes of blood will strike
upon many variously-cloven shields.

¹The four MSS add the gloss i. ëin hò cùainge, abbreviated. LU also.
²The four MSS add nomen pròprium do Choin Chulainn, abbreviated. LU also.
³None of the five MSS has the expected ending -er.
Cuan dia lilis loscannaib
lin di-fedat ildamaib.
Ilar fuile fíríitìí
20 fort Choin Chaulainn.\textsuperscript{5}
Cèfe àlad n-aínchridi
dàl de dàlaib dedarbe.
Dedic bròdiric brísfither,
bruthaich frì toind treglaigthí,
frisìn mbelend mbandernach,
belend di chèit clessannach.
Cichit, bièt banchuriu
Bàighi Medb sceu Ailella.
Árút-ossa otharlige
30 ucht frì h-échta airgaice.
Al-chu ìfrì-thì Frimbennach
(At) frì Donn Cuailnge ardbrùrach.

A band of parasites that thou wilt adhere to
will bring away many people and oxen.
Many wounds will be inflicted
20 upon thee, Cú Chulainn.
You will suffer a wound of revenge (in)
one of the encounters at the final breach.
From your red-pronged weapon there will be defeat,
(men) pierced against the furious wave,
against the whale equipped for exploits,
a whale performing feats with blows.
Women will wail and beat (hands) in their troop,
Medb and Aìll boast of it.
A sick-bed awaits thee
30 in face of slaughters of great ferocity.
I see the very glossy Finnbennach
(of Àe) in great rage against Donn Cuailnge.

\textsuperscript{4}None of the five MSS has the expected ending -er.
\textsuperscript{5}MSS E\textdegree; N and LU add cen còban.
NOTES

1. *A mbeː*. *A*" when", a conjunctive use of the neuter article + *beː*, 2 sg. subj., of the substantive verb. This form is preferred here to *be*, fut. 2 sg. of the copula, on account of the syllable count: see p. 195 above. For examples of the substantive verb in this usage, cf. Amra Colum Cille §§ 24-7, 74-5, 78-81, etc. (W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 20 (1890) *passim*).

2. *Arʊ-ɔsɔːː*: The *Dictionary of the Irish language* [*DIL*] takes up this verse under *arʊ-taːɪŋ*, *arʊ-taː* and *arʊ-ɔsɔːː*. *Arʊ-taːɪŋ* 'build up, refreshes' can hardly apply semantically. *Arʊ-taː* 'is in store for' is quite plausible, particularly since it resumes *arʊd-mbیd* of the preceding prose. Against it is the fact that all manuscripts have -ɔː in the third syllable. *Arʊ-ɔsɔː* 'awaits' fits very well and the fidelity of the Rec. I manuscripts to a form of *arʊ-ɔsɔː* enhances one's estimate of them.

3. The gloss *i. taɪn boː c.[sic R, E*²]* helps to establish the reference of *éit* 'herd'.

4-5. The verb *cotʊt-ʊʃɪllʃɛtər* is fut. 3 pl. of the verb *con-cɪlləlθar/ con-ceɪl* 'spares, protects, withholds etc.' *DIL* (s.v. *con-ceɪl*) translates the LU version *cotʊt ʊʃɪlɹ ʃɛtɪr* 'warriors will spare (surround?!) thee'. But there appears to be no precise context for these suggestions to fit into. H. Wagner renders LU 4 and 5 (*fortʊt bɹɪət ʃɪbəstʌr*) as follows: 'Kämpen werden von dir besεɪt(?) werden, Naclen werden von dir erbrochen werden' (*Indogermanisch und Keltisch* (ed. K. H. Schmidt, Weisbaden 1977) 220). With the rendering of v. 5 we are in agreement; the proposition in v. 4 that Cú Chulainn will defend champions is unsupported and enigmatic. A rendering of any single verse of *Verba Scathaige* should make sense in the context of the poem and harmonise with the facts of the *Táin*. Our own translation of v. 4 rests upon the assured meaning 'to spare, set aside' for *con-cɪlləlθar*, prominent also in Modern Irish *cόiglim*, *cόiglίm*. The hand-picking and cozening of champions to go forward against Cú Chulainn is an indispensable part of the plot. Verse 5 would appear to develop the matter in an understandable way. More than this cannot be expected, because a visionary poem need not be logically developed; and in any case the *logic* of a sixth- to seventh-century heroic poem must be very remote from us.


7. *Cruːɛːː*: Cf. *E*¹, *E*², N *cuːroːc* (LU *cuːroːc*, N¹, Harl. 5280 *cuːraːc* . . . ); R *cuːroː* may stand for *crɛː*, gen. of *cruː* 'gore', which would also give a good reading. *Setants*: *E*¹ has -ar; The introduction of the hero's other name signals the change from second to third person in *takaː* of v. 8. Cf.
At comsa mac Findcheimfrim (R. Thurneysen, Sélá Muoce Mêc Dathó (Dublin 1935, 1969) 14.11), with fusion of 2/3 person.

8. Títhis: fut. 3 sg. of tongaid: also of tennid 'cuts'. Fidach: MSS fithog, fíthoch (LU fidoch): Cú Chulainn's first effort to hold Medb's army at bay was with an inscribed circular wattle which diverted the invaders and made them clear a path through the wood (C. O'Rahilly, Táin Rec. I, lines 226-6, 256-71); his second was with a forked branch (ibid., gabáid lines 351, 247; crand 370) upon the points of which he impaled four enemy heads. Then, at Mag Mucceda, Cú Chulainn cut down and inscribed an oak-tree (ibid., lines 327-81) upon which the enemy shattered thirty chariots. The wooden obstacles were invested with magical prohibitions and in this sense the verb tongaid 'swears, adjures' is appropriate here in v. 8. Note also in the Táin 'rhetorics' (LU 546): Fer-tong glas, boch tú, sr veintar s gwichtu: 'He conjures the stream, woods move, slaughter will be done at his coming' which corresponds with the drift of vv. 8-9 here. In this vein also, Cú Chulainn calls upon the river Cronn to rise against the enemy (LU 561-6).

9. Fethal is a sacred object upon which an oath might be sworn. Feulae is gen. pl. of feol 'flesh'; the connotation of slaughter is present in many of its compounds such as feol-chombac, feolfhogal. These associations are implied in the etymologies fuil (*uoli, feol (*uol- *uali. Furchleassab: E1 reads fer no fedcles- which implies knowledge of another version; N and LU also have fudchleassab; if this is for fid- and refers to acrobatic tricks with a spearshaft it could also be acceptable. In his Gundestrup Cauldron, Garrett S. Olmsted renders vv. 8-9: títhis fithog foib ar amnus // fethal feula fudchleassab 'Keenly pointed, flesh adorned // timber will attest to wood-feats' (Collection Latomus 162 (Brussels 1979) 229-38). Here foibar amnus is taken as an epithet of timber rather than of the champion: but the notion of 'sharpness' resides in foibar here and amnas does not seem to be used like gér of material sharpness. Other difficulties are that 'ornament of flesh' seems hardly plausible for fethal feula and that a personal subject is certainly preferable for tongaid.

10. The place-name Brega assumed by the editors of LU can hardly be right here. The possessive adj. do could hardly apply, as Cú Chulainn has no particular responsibility for this area, whether it be defined (with Cath Muighe Léana (ed. Eugene O'Curry, Dublin 1865) 80) as lying south of the Boyne to the river Rige on the border with Kildare, or (with Annals of Ulster I (ed. W. M. Hennessey, Dublin 1887) 442) as north of it to Belach Dún (Castlereagh, north-west of Kells) and Cassain (Annagassan, s.e. of Castleblanch in Louth. Cf. E. Hogan, Onomasticon Gédelicium (Dublin 1910) s.v.). On the other hand, when Medb penetrated northwards into Cuib and the pursuing Cú Chulainn came upon Buide and Aillí's men with the bull and heifers: Can tucsaid a folad? 'Whence have you brought the cattle?' asks Cú Chulainn. On tsleib scuit 'from yonder mountain' is the answer (Táin Rec. I, lines 1456-6). Hill and ford feature prominently in the narrative: Cach ãth ãth dingnai oc ãr fú, is ãth ãth Dinsear Medba a araum 'Every ford and every hill by which [Medb] spent the night is named Áth Medba and Dinsear Medba' (Táin Rec. I, lines 1535-6). Similarly, the next reference to the bull and other cattle includes mention of the hill of Forgemen (Táin Rec. I, line 1540). An obvious measure in
war-time, besides, would be to drive cattle into the hills to avoid capture by the enemy. All this provides the background for our interpretation 'Cows will be carried off from the hill'. Breh 'hill' is also explained as 'plain', a development which O'Mulconry's gloss (i.e. *mag inna bráit síthe ardae*), Wh. Stokes, ed., *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* I (Halle 1900) 233–324, p. 241 § 154) at least renders plausible. A reference to *Mag Muirtheimne* in our poem would be attractive. But the meaning 'plain' appears doubtful and, in view of the relevance of 'hill', dispensable. While LU reads *breg*, the Rec. I manuscripts have *breg* preceded by *tu* (R, E²), *do* (E¹, N). N alone has the pl. *fearb*, the other three manuscripts have *verb* with sg. *verb* to match. The LU reading *Ferba do breg brafstar* 'the cows of thy hills will be carried off' here is acceptable. *Do bresg*, however, is acceptable for being quite specific, for the goal of the Fóraic was the mountain range of Cúailnge in the Carlingford peninsula. Medb's army divided up at Findshair Chúislinge to seek the bull (*Táin* Rec. I, line 131), and the bull with fifteen heifers was seized at Sliabh Gullion (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1491). This area, to the north and east of Delga, was under Cú Chulainn's protection. *braifster*: note the palatalised stem *braith* in the Rec. I forms as against LU *bratfatar*. The stem *braith* in R and E², if distinct, is relatively late and its meaning 'betray, disclose, point out' less apt.

11. We assume tmesis with *do-tomg* in the sense 'forfeits' and *thaith* of E² and N. The N reading (with *di*) suggests the earlier *di-tomg*.

12. *triáanchathach*: *Trían* we take to refer to the third of Medb's army which she led north, as described below; cf. *Luid Medb co triun in tsíthig lè hu Cúib* 'Medb went with a third of her army to Cúib' (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1488). *Trián* can also mean more generally a 'band, company' so that there is no difficulty in applying the word here. For the meaning of *cathach*, cf. *cath* 'trial, hardship, battle' and its collocation with *cath* as in *cath cath orm cehr* (K. Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic', *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* IV (Halle 1912) 25 § 258). Verse 12 appears to refer to the same episode as in v. 10 (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1487, *Faghaidh in Tairb* 'The Finding of the Bull'; cf. *Heldensage*, 161–2 § 40). Medb with one third of her army marches along the Slige Mhuascha to Cúib for the bull and then north to ravage Dún Sobairche. Cú Chulainn follows to Cúib and seven martial exploits of his are enumerated (*Táin* Rec. I, lines 1523–6). Further action follows in his home country, *Mag Muirtheimne*, to the defence of which he returns. When Medb had spent a fortnight ravaging the north she returned with fifty two women captives from Dún Sobairche to join up with Ailill and the men in charge of the bull (*Táin* Rec. I, lines 1537–8). This background appears to emerge in the following verses.

13. *Cích*: fut. 3 sg. of *cingid*.

14. *sindlochna*: Hardly *sír* 'continuous' + *do* neg. prefix + the gen. sg. of *cath* 'troop, (line of) battle': *dochro* 'a difficult, unbeatable troop'. The alternative here is to emend with *dlegre* 'dejection, etc.' or with *dochroe* 'hardship, etc.' construing 'alone in great hardship etc. against the host'. An entirely satisfactory solution is hard to obtain. LU has an easier reading with *sírleachtach, sírlechair* 'in sorrow and constant misery'.

15. Here we construe impersonally: *flanntenmen* as object acc. pl. of the impersonal verb *sis* (: *seannid*), literally 'it will strike', in a participial construction with *do = di* 'of (blood)'. The alternative reading *Sisus do
Your blood will strike etc. does not make sufficient sense. N reads de.
17. We take *leiscannaib* as dat. of apposition to *cuan*; cf. ... *hulí líaehaib oscus clèerchib 'all, laymen and clerics' (*GOI*, 160 § 261.2). *lis*: fut. 2 sg. conj. of *le나n*.
18. *di-juat*: the present tense with fut. meaning is found in all stages of Irish. *idamaib* is a prepositionless dat. of accompaniment.
19. The stem *fi* is Mid. Ir. for *fer*.
20. This form of the verse is found in R and E² and it appears to be the older. It reflects a tension between second and third persons as in v. 8. It is a mixture of two constructions. Vocative *A Chú Chulaína* is fused with a construction in third person, *for Coin Cúlaínn*. An analogical case is the fusion of voc. and nom. in hypocoristic forms like *Mo Lua chrùbdeach* with lenited adj. (*GOI*, 144 § 232.2). N has the simpler reading *for Coin Cúlaínn*.
21. *Álas n-ainchride* (men- *fise*): The word is no doubt *ainchride* 'wrong, enmity; revenge'. This appears to be a passing allusion to Cú Chulaína's death, a deed inspired by the motive of revenge, as described in *Bríshch Mór Muirtheimne*, LL 121b. Verses 22-6 appear to resume the *Táin* story of his defence of Mag Muirtheimne and its environs against Ailill and Medb; cf. vv. 28-9.
22. This verse recalls the conclusion of *Conaith Medb Míchuru*: *Hulaithe iar sírfubu sarnaraib ág de dalú dethurba* 'The Ulaid having long mourned, after conflict of nobles arising from disputes at the final breach' (*SCP* 8 (1912) 307). Only E¹ reads *dal*, the other manuscripts open the verse with *al*. *Dal* may be argued to alliterate with preceding unstressed *-de*. If for *al* we read *ail* 'misfortune' this would also give good sense. The actual manuscript reading is preferred to an emendation. *Dethurba* we analyse *deab* 'final' (from *dead* 'end') + *aibre*, *aurba* 'breach'.
23. The manuscripts have *brisfith*: R, E¹, E²; *brisfithr* N. LU has *dideirn* (i. *dot grán*). *brídréirg bruús* The following alternative reading of vv. 23-8 has been considered and rejected: *The valiant one (dideirn) with the red-pronged (spear) will be defeated, pierced (tregtaighe) against the furious wave. To the whale equipped for exploits, a whale performing feats with blows, a troop of women will cry out and they will fight*. An apparent advantage of this reading is that the theme of Cú Chulaína's defeat mentioned in v. 23 is developed in v. 24 (though not in vv. 25-6). A drawback is the obscurity of *bruusach fí toimd* 'against the furious wave', since in *Fled Bricrenn* § 52 the hero himself is referred to in a 'rhetoric' by the figure *tönd mairneach mathriamad* 'destructive wave, splendid as a bear' (G. Henderson, *Fled Bricrenn* (Ir. Texts Soc. II, London 1869) 64.12). Hence *tönd* is an epithet of Cú Chulaína. The remainder of this reading visualizes a feat-performing champion to whom the women appeal for help, which does not blend with his defeat in v. 23. A variation of this reading is to make *bruusach* of v. 24 refer to Cú Chulaína's enemies: 'the furious ones pierced against (by?) the wave, against the whale', etc. This is obscure and unsatisfactory; *bruusach* is best referred to Cú Chulaína. The LU version of v. 23 with *bruús* looks like a refurbishing of the verse to bring out a meaning such as we propose. The opening word, *dideirn* the Interpolator explains by *dot grán*, as if it stood for *dít surn* 'with your iron weapon'.

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This yields good sense for the LU verse *dideirm bróder ing bruftair* ‘they will be crushed by your red-pronged weapon’; it is followed by *Brón ar each dot bráithresig / di(a) tag Maigi Murthemn* ‘everyone will grieve for your terrible defeat against the Plain of Muirthemne’. There is a lack of continuity in the treatment here.

24. In YBL Táin Cú Roi considers it unbecoming a champion to attack the wounded and weakened Cú Chulainn (*i.e.* *ind tregtaighi ceth chaighi*). John Strachan and J. G. O’Keefe, Táin Bó Cuáinde from the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin 1912) 102 line 291). In v. 24 of our poem manuscript forms such as *tregt* (a)side R, N, E; *tregdaicha* E’ may represent a fusion of these closely associated terms. Tregtaighi is a participial formation from *tregtaid* ‘pierces’ which in turn is a later simplex of *tris-gata*. The regular participle of *tregtaid* is *tregt*; this would have been pre-syncopé *tregtāe* (cf. *trecsamh* ‘pierce’, Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus II (1963; Dublin 1976) 42.21). Hence *tregtāe* may have been the original form here. *teait*: If this is being used in a concrete sense the reference would be to Loch Lúmaíraith of the Plain of Muirthemne rather than to the sea (LL 14046: *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemn*).


26. Cf. LL 10258 in *cur ceth chaigbi chaigbi ceth chaigh* Cú Chulaind ‘the smiting, feat-performing, triumphant, red-sworded Cú Chulainn’. *Cétach*, from *cét* ‘blow’ has the same force as *di chéit* in v. 26. G. S. Olmsted reads vv. 25-6: *frissin mbelend mander/nach/belan d/bel/ict ceth clesannach* ‘Against the bare-handed warrior/can go a warrior performing feats’ (Gundestrup, 220-***; Études Celtiques 15 (1976-7) 537). *Band/ernach* from *bàn/-’bare’ + *der/nach* (*der/nach* looks somewhat forced and also out of context. *Dichet* ‘can go’ seems out of place in a vision; on the formal side, whereas *di chéit* provides the required alliteration with *clesannach*, *dichet* does not. The alliteration of unstressed elements to link successive verses is a different matter.

27. *cicht*: fut. 3 pl. of cúd ‘weeps, cries etc.’ *bí diff* fut. 3 pl. of *benain* ‘strikes’ (cf. *GOI*,406 § 654). E’ has *bied*. LU *cicht* *biet banchuir* ‘troops of women will weep and beat (their hands)’ offers an acceptable version of this verse. Three of the Rec. I manuscripts have *banchuiri*; the remaining one, R, reads *banchuiru*, which we adopt. *Banchuiru* can refer either to *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemne* (LL 119b), cf. *It bróinig banchuir* with reference to groups of women lamenting Cú Chulainn’s impending death, a recurrent motif here. It may refer to women captured, such as the fifty taken by Medb at Dunsevick (LU 76b). We are unable to find in these verses any necessary reference to the *Aided Breath* episode of *Táin* Rec. I (LU 63b; cf. Olmsted, Gundestrup, 197-6; Études Celtiques 15 (1976-7) 538-41).

28. *báithighi*: *báich* + *i- ‘boasts of it’, *sou* (R, E) may be an old dat. form; it is followed by the genitive.

30. *ccht* of N and LU does not seem to make good sense here.

to provide the basis for the interpretation of K. Meyer (*Revue Celtique* 11 (1890) 457) and G. S. Olmsted *Gundestrup*, 230, 'I see (that) Finnennach (of Ai) will fight against the loud-bellowing Donn C.' The main objection to it is that the function of *Atchiu* is to introduce a spectacle, not a declaration of intent. *DIL* F 102–3: 4 and 5 *feth* appear to be the same word. The meanings given are 'smoothness, finish, polish ?' (4) and 'sleekness, a healthy or flourishing appearance, and in wider sense, looks, appearance (of health or the reverse)' (5). Under (4) an example of *feth* as an adj. in the meaning 'smooth, finished ?' is offered; under (5) the gloss *feth* × *slemain* (from Wh. Stokes, ed., 'O'Davoren's Glossary', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie II* (Halle 1904) 271 § 1604). Transitional examples of *feth* (i.e. as noun or as adj.) are: *ba feth in gres de denach* ... *ba feth in tins as de denach* (*DIL* 103.5–7). There appears, then, to be an adequate basis for the reading *fufeth* 'very smooth, sleek, polished etc.', which we adopt in the text.

32. This final verse lacks linking and structural alliteration; it has at least one stress too many and is run on from the previous verse in an exceptional manner. We suggest on p. 194 that the opening word *Ai* did not originally belong to it.

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