

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 Cúailnge* Fer Báeth is beguiled by Medb and Ailill 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 Báeth is killed when he comes to renounce his friendship and before the duel can take place. The late Fer Diad episode utilizes the same motif and the Macgnímartha/Maccorda 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 (E²);¹ Egerton 88, written 1564, f. 11 a 2 (E¹); 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 Emire*; 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).

²N was published without translation by R. Thurneysen, 'Verba Scáthaige nach 23.N.10', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 9 (1913) 487–8. A transcript of R, collated with E¹ and E², was published (without translation) by K. Meyer in *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts V* (Halle and Dublin 1913) 28–30.

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 Congaláin (*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 Scáthaige* 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 gríthi medba* (v. 28). MS 23 N 10 omits *dia foirciund* 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 *fort coin cul- cen colinn*, N *for coin cul- cen colainn*, LU 10385³ *ar Coin Culaind cencolind* 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 *Brisleach Mór Maige Murthemni* 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 *sifis* for *sifs* in v. 15. LU has *sifs* which is glossed by *selfa*, and another of the B manuscripts, D iv 2, reads *selfa*. *Silid* '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 fri sluagh sirechtach sir dochr- sir deimin sir duba*; LU *Ba hoín ar slóg* (v.l. *arlog*, D iv 2) *sírrechtach/sírdochair sírdemin. sírguba (sírduba, D iv 2)*. LU may be translated 'You will be alone before the host, afflicted by constant misfortune and in constant unflinching 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

³R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin 1929) 314.

⁴R. I. Best and M. A. O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster* II (Dublin 1956) 450.

for v. 17 *cuan dia lilis loscannaib*, LU has *gáetar lunni loscudi*; for v. 22 *dal de dalaib dedarbe*, LU has *ana doláth tetharbae*; and for v. 23 *dedirn brodirc brisfithir*, LU has *dideirn bródeing brufitir* (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 suggest 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 reliable readings in this early twelfth-century manuscript.

The transmission of Version B is bound up with that of *Tochmarc Emire*. 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 Emire* § 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 Drúst, 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 aridmbui iar tichtain hErend co n-epert si indni Scathach: Aritossa ollgabad 7 rl. atá isind libar* 'and she told him what was in store for him after coming to Ireland, saying *Aritossa ollgabad* etc., which is in the book'.⁸ Here

⁵*Die irische Helden- und Königsage* (Halle 1921) 377-95.

⁶This is according to K. Meyer's numbering in his edition of *Tochmarc Emire* in *ZCP* 3 (1901) 229-63, p. 245.

⁷For details, see Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 378.

⁸From Rawl. B 512, ff. 117 a 1 - 118 a 2, edited by K. Meyer, 'The oldest version of *Tochmarc Emire*', *Revue Celtique* 11 (1890) 433-57, p. 452 lines 142-4.

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 III⁹ but in the expanded form beginning *foceun, a sciath bvaídne*, 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 (*slechtsa*) 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 Scáthaige* 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 *At-chiu firfēth Finnbennach / Ái fri Donn Cuailnge ardbúrach* (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, *Cín Dromma Snechta*. If we accept this as an ultimate answer, we may seek to improve the line by reading **Ái fri Donn Cuailnge* and take *ardbúrach* 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 *Ái* 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 *Ái* is an intruder on the pattern of the place-name *Cuailnge* 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 *Cín Dromma Snechta*, written text may not be perfect and that the oral tradition can retain its importance for establishing it.

⁹Edited from Harl. 5280 by K. Meyer, ‘Tochmarc Emire la Coinculaind’, *ZCP* 3 (1901) 229–63, pp. 255–8 § 79.

STRUCTURE, LANGUAGE, AND EDITION

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 *faeburamnus* and v. 29 *otharlige* by weakening the second syllable further.¹⁰ 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: *sceu* ‘and’ is the preceding word in v. 28, and v. 32 is in any case irregular. In v. 18 the final *ildamaib* appears to alliterate with the stressed vowel of *di-fedat*. Hence the alliteration is on the whole rigidly observed, and for good reason. It is *fír-uaimm*, 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 (*-beē*: MSS *-be*), v. 6 (*biēd*), v. 7 (*cruäch*: three MSS *cruoch*, one MS *cruo*), v. 12 (*triän*: MS *trean*, *tren*), v. 27 (*biēt*). In v. 12 the precedence of *trian* 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 *trian* ‘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 Chulainn 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 *cèn 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.¹¹ If we were to emend v. 20 to *fort-su Choin Chaulainn* 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 bledmaill / blog dergthened / tond mairnech mathrúamdae . . .* (LU 8681–4), or from *Serlige Con Culainn* § 40 *Fég, a Loíg, dar th’éis: / oc coistecht frit / filet mná*

¹⁰Cf. W. Stokes, *Saltair na Rann* (Oxford 1883) 71 line 4864: *tabernacuil* (in *deibide* rhyme), which counts as 3 syllables.

¹¹Cf. C. Watkins, ‘Indo-European metrics and archaic Irish verse’, *Celtica* 6 (1963) 194–249, p. 230; and M. O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama* (Ir. Texts Soc. L, [London] 1975) 84 § 16 and p. 143 n. 685.

córi ciallmathi. . .¹² The *Fled 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 (*núachrutha*) where varieties with short verses are known as *gairit*, e.g. *rannaigecht gairit: Ferg féine / do muintir Echach Éile / etc.*, or *sétnad ngairit* as *Ingen laích as luchru i Laighnib / 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. *Dāl* in v. 22 may link with preceding unstressed *-di*. Verses 24–5 are linked by the parallelism of *fri*-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, *cotut·cēillfetar, fortat·bībsatar* (vv. 4–5), with suffixed pronoun in *bāighthi* (v. 28); also the reduplicated futures *bībsatar* (v. 5) *biēd* (v. 6); *biēt* (v. 27), *tithis* (v. 8), *cichis* (v. 13), *sifis* (v. 15), *cichit* (v. 27). Further, pre-tonic *to-* for later *do-* in *toaircechain* (Eg. 88, prose); the form *tu* (v. 10: R, E²) of the possessive pronoun ‘thy’; *-au-* for later *-u-* as in *chaurith* (v. 4), *Chaulainn* (v. 20).

Other old features are independent datives such as *fethul* (v. 9), *fernaib* (v. 16), *ildamaib* (v. 18), the use of the name *Sétanta* (v. 7), the strange word *belend* (vv. 25–6), and the phrase *dāl de dālaib dedarbe* reminiscent of *Conailla Medb Míchuru* (v. 22). Compare also, *di-fedat* (v. 18), *ro-scāich 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 *Toaircechain* where the other manuscripts have pre-tonic *do-*!) Accordingly, we favour spellings such as *Sétanti*, *brágit* which do not show a glide to *-i* after neutral consonance, since MSS R and E² do offer support for this (v. 11). The poem shows a sensitiveness to initial mutations in v. 4 *chaurith* (after *cotut-*) and v. 13 *mbēlatu* (after neuter noun). Accordingly we

¹²M. Dillon, *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin 1953, repr. 1975) 24.

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 for-ossndi* ‘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 Scáthaige: FIVE MANUSCRIPTS

I. Rawl. B 512, f. 118 b 2 (R): Incipiunt verba scathaige fri coinchul-oc *scarad* doib isnarandaib thair oroscaich do choincul- lán foglaimb in milti lascathaich Do airchechain scathach do iarum an ni aridmbiad *conepert fris tria imbas forossndi dia foirciund*. Imbe err hængaile arutossa ollgabad huathad fri héit nimlibir .i. tain bo .c. Cotut chaurith ceillfetar *fortat* bragait bibsatar. bied do chalcc culbeimmen. cruo fri sruth setantæ *nomen proprium* do choincul-. tithis fithog fæburamnuss. fethul feulai ferchlessaib. ferb tu breig braithfighth-. bragitt du tuath tithsitir. trean cithoch coicdigis cichis do buar mbealtau. ba hoin fri slog sir dochre. sifis do fuil fland tenman fernaib ilib idlochaib cuan dia lilis loscannaib lin difedat ildamaib ilar fule firfitir *fort* choinchaulaind ceisfe alag nen chride al de dalaib dedarbe de dirn bro dirc brisfith- bruthaich fri toind trechtide frisinbelend mbandernach belend dichet chlessamnach cichit biet banchuriu ba grithi medba sceu ailella aruthossa otharligi hucht fri hechta hirgairge. atchiu fir feith finn *bennach* hoéi fria dond cuailnge ard baurach. Finit.

II. Eg. 1782, f. 19 b 1 (E²): Incipiunt uerba scathaige fri coinchuluinn oc *scarad* doib iss narannuib thair oroscaith do choinchuluinn lánfoglumm in milti lascathaig. Doaircechain scath- dó iarum anní aritmbíad. *connepert* friss triaimbas forossndi diafoirciunn . . . IMbe err haengaili arutossao ollgabad. huathad fri heit nimlibir .i. táin bó .c. cotut chaurith ceillfetar fortatbráguit bibsatar. bied dochalg cúl-béimmen. cruoch frisruth sétantæ. *nomen proprium* dochoinchul-. tithis fithóg fáebur amnus fethul feulai ferchlessaib. ferb tu breig braithfighth-. bragit duthuaith tithsitir. treancithoch coicdigis. cichis do buar mbeltu. bahóin fri slóg sirdochrui. sifis do fuil flann tenman fernaib ilib idlochaib. cúan dialilis loscannaib. lín dofedad ildámaib. ilar fuili firfitir. *fort* choinchaulainn ceisfe alag nen chride. al de dalaib dedarbe. dedirn bro dirc brisfith-. bruthaich fri toind trechtide frisinmbelend mbandernach.

belend dichet clessamnach. cichit biet banchuire. baigthi medb sceu ailella aruthosa othurligi. hucht fri hechta hircairce. atchiu fir feith finnbennach haí. fri donn cualngne ardbúrach.

III. Eg. 88, f. 11 a 2 (E¹): INdsip- uerba scathaige fri con iar-og scar- frie is na rannaib thair ó ro scaith do lan foghlaim in mil- la scath-. Toaircechain do iar- scath- ani aridmbiadh conePERT fris tria iumbus forosn- diaforciunt IMbe herr aongaile. ara tosa oll gab-. uath- friheid nimlibir .i. t.b.c. Cotut caraith ceillfethar fórdadbraghaid bibsathar. bieth do calg cul bemenn cruoch frisruth sedantai (no- do coin c-) tithis fithoch faoburamhnas fethal feula fer (no fed) cles- ferb do breig braitfith-. braight do tuath tithsith-. tren cithach coicdighis. cichis do buar mbeulatai. ba hoin fri sluagh sirechtach sir dochr- sir deimin sir duba silfis do fuil flann tenmen fernaibh ilib ildlochaib cuan dia lilis loscannuib. lin do fedhad il damaib ilur fuil- fir fithir. fort coin cul- cen colinn ceis fealaigh nen chridhe dal de dalaib de dairbe. de dirn bro dircc brisfith-. bruthaich fri toinn trechdaichi frisin mbelend mbandernach. belend diked clesamn- ciched bied banchuire baigthi medb sceo ailt-. arathosa otharlige hucht fri hechta hircairce. adchiu firfeith finnbendach hai fri dont cuail- aurtburach.

IV. 23 N 10, p. 68 (N): INcipiunt uerba scath- fri concl- oc scar- doib isna rannuib tair. ro scaith do choincl- lanfoglaim in milti la scaithaigh do aurchechain scath- do iar- indni aradmbiad coneipirt fris tria imbass forossna IMbe eir hengaile aratossa ollgabud huatha friheit nimleair .i. tain bo cuailg- Cotat curaith ciallfaithir fortat braigait bibsatur bied do chailcc culbeimnech cruoch fri srut setanta .i. proprium no- do choincl-. Tithis fithog foibharamnus fethal feula fedchlessaib fearba dobreig mbraitfiter braight dithuaith tithsithir tren cithach coictigis cichis do buar mbelata bahoín frislog sirdochræ silfis de fhuil fland ted- man fernaib ilib idlochaib cuan dialilis loscandaib lin dofedat ildamaib ilar fuili firfith- for coincl- cen colainn Ceisfe alag nenchríde al de dalaib dedairbe didirn brodircc brisfithir bruthaich fri toinn trechtaide frissin mbelend mbandernech belenn di chet clesamnach cichet biet banchuire baiti medb sceo aill-ai aratosa ollgabud otharlighi. ucht fri hechtga irgairgi atchiu firfeith finnbennach æi fri donn cuailngi artburach. 7ca

V. LU 125 b, from *Tochmarc Emere*:

line 10350

Fo chen a scíth búagnigi
buadaig bágaig urbágaig
úarcraidi taiscea.
corraib fortacht fort.
nibá fortacht can rečni.
nibá rečni can decni.
Imbé eirr óengaille.
Arutósa ollgabud.

úathud fri eit n-imleair.
óic Cruachna rascerasu.
Cotut curaid cellfetar.
fortut brágit bibsatar.
bied do cholg culbémend
cruoch fri sruth Setinti
sennait rout ruadtressa.
rinnib riscloifet cnámreda.
clárad im búuib bendcrudi.
tithis fidoch fáeburamnas.

fethail feola fedclessaib.
 ferba do Breg bratfatar.
 brágti do thúath tithsitir.
 trean cithoch cóictigis.
 cichis do búar mbealtu.
 Ba hoín ar slóg sírrechtach
 sírdochair sirdemin. sírguba.
 sífis do fuil flandtedmand.
 fernaib ilib ildlochaib
 armaib scéo mnáib dergdercaib.
 cródergfa arm armeth mellgléo.
 fiaich fotha firfitir.
 arath croich crosfaitir.
 recur serech sárlatir.
 gáetar lunny loscudi.
 Lin difedat ildamaib.
 ilar fule firfitir
 ar Coin *Culaind* cencolind.
 césfé álag n-encaide.
 ana doláth tetharbae.
 dideirn bródeirg brufitir.
 Brón ar cách dot bráthbreislig.
 día taib Maigi *Murthemni*.
 día mbia cluchi tregaigi.
 bruthaig fri toind tréchtidi.
 frisin mbelend mbandernach.
 belaig úathaig ochtclesaig.
 belend di chet clesamna
 cichit biet banchuri.
 bagthi Medb scéo Ailella.
 Árutossa otharlige.
 ucht fri echtga irgairce.

atchíu firfid Find*ben*nach
 fri Dond Cúalnge ardburach.
 Cuin dorega. cuin doriidfea.
 ros do gaili gnáthgéri.
benfait bémend iarlebra
meic Roich rúadrindig arduigna.
 naiscseta n-ollach n-óenellach.
 lochta do tham doscura cetha.
 Erig do loch lúrechda.
 cuchtach écsi ilcomraic
 selaig tanaig trubud
 cu tír nUlad ógérig.
 do mnáib Ulad oentomaim.
 do sciáth cnedach comromach
 do gai túagach tairbertach trénturig.
 do cholg dé*t* dathbuthir
 a ndondálaib.
 rasia th'ainm Albanchu.
 ciach do gair gemadaig.
 Aífi Úathach iachtfaitit.
 alaind sethnach sóermilfa.
 etrocht soebrocht suanaigfe.
 teora bliadna ar tréntrichait.
 bat neirt ar do lochnamtib.
 tricha bliadna bagimse
 gus do gaili gnáthgéri.
 o sin immach ní fullimsea.
 do saegul ní indisimsea.
 eter búadaib banchuri.
 ge garid gé é*t*gene
 dit álaib fo chen. fo cen a scit .b.
 line 10430

RECONSTRUCTED TEXT AND TRANSLATION

Incipiunt verba Scáthaige fri Coin C(h)ulainn oc scarad doib isnaib rannaib thair ō rō-scāich do Choin Chulainn lānfoglaimm in mīl̄ti la Scáthaich. To-airchechain Scáthach dō iarum anī arid-mbiad, con-epert fris tri imbas for-ossndi dia foirciunn:

‘(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[ē] eirr ōengaile,
arut-ossa ollgābud,
uathad fri h-éit n-imlehair.¹
Cotut- chaurith ·cēillfetar,
5 fortat- brāgit ·bibsatar,
biēd do chalcc cúlbéimmen
cruāch fri sruth Sétanti.²
Tithis fidach fáeburamnus
fethul feulae, ferchlessaib.
10 Ferba do breig braitfiter,
brāgit do- thuaith ·tithsitir;³
triāncithach coicdigis,
cichis do buar mbēlatu.
Ba h-oín fri slóg sīrdochrai.
15 Sifis de fuil flanntenmen
fernaib ilib ildlochtaib.

- 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. *tain bo cuailnge*, abbreviated. LU also.

²The four MSS add *nomen proprium do Choin Chulainn*, abbreviated. LU also.

³None of the five MSS has the expected ending -er.

- Cuan dia lilis loscannaib
 lín di-fedat ildamaib.
 Ilar fuile firfitir⁴
 20 fort Choin Chaulainn.⁵
 Cēsfe ālad n-ainchridi
 dāl de dālaib dedarbe.
 Dedirn brōdirc brisfithir,
 bruthaich fri toind tregtaigthi,
 25 frisin mbelend mbandernach,
 belend di chēt clessamnach.
 Cichit, biēt banchuriu.
 Bāigthi Medb sceu Ailella.
 Arut-ossa otharlige
 30 ucht fri h-ēchta airgairce.
 At-chīu firfēth Findbennach
 (Aī) fri Donn Cuailnge ardbūrach.

- 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,
 25 against the whale equipped for exploits,
 a whale performing feats with blows.
 Women will wail and beat (hands) in their troop,
 Medb and Ailill boast of it.
 A sick-bed awaits thee
 30 in face of slaughters of great ferocity.
 I see the very glossy Finnennach
 (of Áe) in great rage against Donn Cuailnge.

⁴None of the five MSS has the expected ending -er.

⁵MSS E¹, N and LU add *cen colinn*.

NOTES

1. *A mbeë*: A^n 'when', a conjunctive use of the neuter article + *bee*, 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 Coluim Cille §§ 24-7, 74-5, 78-81, etc. (W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) *passim*).
2. *Arut-ossa*: The *Dictionary of the Irish language* [*DIL*] takes up this verse under *ar-utaing*, *ar-tá* and *ar-ossa*. *Ar-utaing* 'build up, refreshes' can hardly apply semantically. *Ar-tá* 'is in store for' is quite plausible, particularly since it resumes *arid-mbiad* of the preceding prose. Against it is the fact that all manuscripts have -*o-* in the third syllable. *Ar-ossa* 'awaits' fits very well and the fidelity of the Rec. I manuscripts to a form of *ar-ossa* enhances one's estimate of them.
3. The gloss .i. *tain bo .c.* [sic R, E²] helps to establish the reference of *éit* 'herd'.
- 4-5. The verb *cotut cēillfetar* is fut. 3 pl. of the verb *con-ciallathar/ con-ceil* 'spares, protects, withholds etc.' *DIL* (s.v. *con-ceil*) translates the LU version *cotut curaid cellfetar* '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 (*fortut brágit bibsatar*) as follows: 'Kämpen werden von dir beschützt (?) werden, Nacken werden von dir gerbrochen werden' (*Indogermanisch und Keltisch* (ed. K. H. Schmidt, Weisbaden 1977) 229). 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 Scáthaige* 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-ciallathar*, prominent also in Mod. Ir. *coiglim*, *caiglim*. 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 *rosc* must be very remote from us.
6. *Biëd*: fut. 3 sg. of *benaid*. Cf. *GOI*, 406 § 654. *Cúlbéimmen*: sic E², R, (LU). In view of *brágit* in v. 5 we consider the anatomical meaning 'back, back of head, neck, etc.' improbable for *cúl-* here. The meaning we assign allows for development of theme; it agrees with the description of Cú Chulainn's battle frenzy in the context of enemy penetration of Ulster: *Ní aithgnéad cóemu ná cairdiu. Cumma no slaided ríam 7 íarma. Is de sin doratsat Fir Ól nÉcmacht in ríastartha do anmair do Choin Chulaind* 'He would recognize neither comrades nor friends. He would attack alike before him and behind him. Hence the men of Connacht named Cú Chulainn the Distorted One'. (C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge, recension I* (Dublin 1976) 51 lines 1655-7, trans., p. 171).
7. *Cruäch*: Cf. E¹, E², N *cruoch* (LU *cruoch*, N¹, Harl. 5280 *cruach* . . .); R *cruo* may stand for *cró*, gen. of *crú* 'gore', which would also give a good reading. *Setanti*: E¹ has -*ai*; The introduction of the hero's other name signals the change from second to third person in *tithis* of v. 8. Cf.

- At comsa mac Findchoíme frim* (R. Thurneysen, *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (Dublin 1935, 1969) 14.11), with fusion of 2/3 person.
8. *Tithis*: fut. 3 sg. of *tongaid*: also of *tennid* 'cuts'. *Fidach*: MSS *fithog*, *fithoch* (LU *fidoch*): Cú Chulainn's first effort to hold Medb's army at bay was with an inscribed circular withe which diverted the invaders and made them clear a path through the wood (C. O'Rahilly, *Táin* Rec. I, lines 225–6, 259–71); his second was with a forked branch (*ibid.*, *gabail* lines 331, 347; *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 827–31) 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 5486): *For-toing glaiss, boccit cuillte, ár silestar i rríchtu* '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 5512–20).
 9. *Fethal* is a sacred object upon which an oath might be sworn. *Feulae* is gen. pl. of *feoil* 'flesh'; the connotation of slaughter is present in many of its compounds such as *feoil-chombach*, *feoilfhogail*. These associations are implied in the etymologies *fuil* (*uoli, *feoil* (*ue-uoli. *Ferchlessaib*: E¹ reads *fer* no *fed cles-* which implies knowledge of another version; N and LU also have *fedchlessaib*; 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: *tithis fithog foibaramnus / fethal feula fedchlessaib* 'Keenly pointed, flesh adorned / timber will attest to wood-feats' (Collection Latomus 162 (Brussels 1979) 229–38). Here *foibaramnus* is taken as an epithet of timber rather than of the champion: but the notion of 'sharpness' resides in *foibar* here and *arnas* does not seem to be used like *gér* of material sharpness. Other difficulties are that 'adornment 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 Mhuighe Léana* (ed. Eugene O'Curry, Dublin 1855) 80) as lying south of the Boyne to the river Ríge on the border with Kildare, or (with *Annals of Ulster* I (ed. W. M. Hennessy, Dublin 1887) 442) as north of it to Belach Dúin (Castlekieran, north-west of Kells) and Cassán (Annagassan, s.e. of Castlebellingham in Louth. Cf. E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin 1910) s.v.). On the other hand, when Medb penetrated northwards into Cuib and the pursuing Cú Chulainn came upon Buide and Ailill's men with the bull and heifers: *Can tucsaid a folad?* 'Whence have you brought the cattle?' asks Cú Chulainn. *Ón tsléib ucut* 'from yonder mountain' is the answer (*Táin* Rec. I, lines 1495–6). Hill and ford feature prominently in the narrative: *Cach áth 7 cach dingnai ocár fíu, is Áth 7 Dindgna Medba a ainm* 'Every ford and every hill by which [Medb] spent the night is named Áth Medba and Dindgna 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 thy hill'. *Brí* 'hill' is also explained as 'plain', a development which O'Mulconry's gloss (.i. *mag inna biat slēbe ardae*, Wh. Stokes, ed., *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* I (Halle 1900) 232-324, 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 *breig* preceded by *tu* (R, E²), *do* (E¹, N). N alone has the pl. *ferba*, the other three manuscripts have *ferb* with sg. verb to match. The LU reading *Ferba do breg bratfatar* 'the cows of thy hills will be carried off' is quite acceptable. *Do breig*, however, is capable of being quite specific, for the goal of the Foray was the mountain range of Cúailnge in the Carlingford peninsula. Medb's army divided up at Findabair Chúailnge to seek the bull (*Táin* Rec. I, line 131), and the bull with fifteen heifers was seized at Slieve Gullion (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1491). This area, to the north and east of Delga, was under Cú Chulainn's protection. *braitfiter*: note the palatalised stem *brait-* (*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-toing* in the sense 'forfeits' and *thuait* of E² and N. The N reading (with *di*) suggests the earlier **di-tong-*.
12. *triānchithach*: *Triān* we take to refer to the third of Medb's army which she led north, as described below; cf. *Luid Medb co tríun in tslóig lé hi Cuib* 'Medb went with a third of her army to Cuib' (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1488). *Triān* can also mean more generally a 'band, company' so that there is no difficulty in applying the word here. For the meaning of *cithach*, cf. *cith* 'trial, hardship, battle' and its collocation with *cath* as in *cith cath 7 orn orgain* (K. Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic', *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* IV (Halle 1912) 25 § 295). Verse 12 appears to refer to the same episode as in v. 10 (*Táin* Rec. I, line 1487, *Fagbáil in Tairb* 'The Finding of the Bull'; cf. *Heldensage*, 161-2 § 40). Medb with one third of her army marches along the Slige Midluachra to Cuib for the bull and then north to ravage Dún Sobairche. Cú Chulainn follows to Cuib 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 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. *Cichis*: fut. 3 sg. of *cingid*.
14. *sirdochrai*: Hardly *sír-* 'continuous' + *do-* neg. prefix + the gen. sg. of *cró* 'troop, (line of) battle': *dochró* 'a difficult, unbeatable troop'? The alternative here is to emend with *dograe* 'dejection, etc.' or with *docræ* 'hardship, etc.' construing 'alone in great hardship etc. against the host'. An entirely satisfying solution is hard to obtain. LU has an easier reading with *sírrechtach*, *sirdochair* 'in sorrow and constant misery'.
15. Here we construe impersonally: *flanntenmen* as object acc. pl. of the impersonal verb *sifs* (: *seinnid*), literally 'it will strike', in a partitive construction with *do* = *di* 'of (blood)'. The alternative reading *Sifs do*

- fuil* . . . 'your blood will strike etc.' does not make sufficient sense. N reads *de*.
17. We take *loscannaib* as dat. of apposition to *cuan*; cf. . . . *huli láechaib ocus cléirchib* 'all, laymen and clerics' (*GOI*, 160 § 251.2). *lilis*: fut. 2 sg. conj. of *lenaid*.
 18. *di-fedat*: the present tense with fut. meaning is found in all stages of Irish. *ildamaib* is a prepositionless dat. of accompaniment.
 19. The stem *fir-* 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 Chulainn* is fused with a construction in third person, for *Coin Culainn*. An analogical case is the fusion of voc. and nom. in hypocoristic forms like *Mo Lua chráibdech* with lenited adj. (*GOI*, 143 § 232.3). N has the simpler reading for *Coin Culainn* . . .
 21. *Álad n-ainchridi* (*nen-* MSS): The word is no doubt *ainchride* 'wrong, enmity; revenge'. This appears to be a passing allusion to Cú Chulainn's death, a deed inspired by the motive of revenge, as described in *Brisleach Mór Muirtheimne*, LL 121b. Verses 23–6 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 *Conailla Medb Míchuru*: *Hulaith iar sirgubu / iarnaraib ág de dalib detharbe* 'The Ulaid having long mourned, after conflict of nobles arising from disputes at the final breach' (*ZCP* 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. *Dedarbe* we analyse *ded-* 'final' (from *dead* 'end') + *airbe*, *aurba* 'breach'.
 23. The manuscripts have *brisfith-* R, E¹, E²; *brisfithir* N. LU has *dideirn* (i. *dot gráin*) *bródeirg brufitir*. The following alternative reading of vv. 23–8 has been considered and rejected: 'The valiant one (*dedirn*) with the red-pronged (spear) will be defeated, pierced (*tregtaigthe*) 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 Chulainn's defeat mentioned in v. 23 is developed in v. 24 (though not in vv. 25–6). A drawback is the obscurity of *bruthaich fri toind* 'against the furious wave', since in *Fled Bricrenn* § 52 the hero himself is referred to in a 'rhetoric' by the figure *tond mairneach mathrúamdae* 'destructive wave, splendid as a bear' (G. Henderson, *Fled Bricrend* (Ir. Texts Soc. II, London 1899) 64.12). Hence *tond* is an epithet of Cú Chulainn. 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 *bruthaich* of v. 24 refer to Cú Chulainn's enemies: 'the furious ones pierced against (by?) the wave, against the whale', etc. This is obscure and unsatisfactory; *bruthach* is best referred to Cú Chulainn. The LU version of v. 23 with *brufitir* 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 gráin*, as if it stood for *dit iurn* 'with your iron weapon'.

This yields good sense for the LU verse *dideirn bródeirg brufitir* 'they will be crushed by your red-pronged weapon'; it is followed by *Brón ar cách dot bráthbreislig / dí(a) taib Maigi Murthemni* '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 (. . . *ind fir tregdaighthi crēchtaighthi*, John Strachan and J. G. O'Keeffe, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Yellow Book of Lecan* (Dublin 1912) 102 line 291). In v. 24 of our poem manuscript forms such as *trecht(a)ide* R, N, E², *trechdaichi* E¹ may represent a fusion of these closely associated terms. *Tregtaighthe* is a participial formation from *tregtaid* 'pierces' which in turn is a later simplex of *tris-gata*. The regular participle of *tregtaid* is *tregtae*; this would have been pre-syncope *tregatae* (cf. *trecatim* 'I pierce', *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* II (1903; Dublin 1975) 42.21). Hence *tregatae* may have been the original form here. *toind*: If this is being used in a concrete sense the reference would be to Loch Lámraith of the Plain of Muirthemne rather than to the sea (LL 14040: *Brislech Mór Maige Murthemni*).
25. *belend*: I take this to be from Lat. *balena* 'whale'; cf. *Fled Bricrenn* § 52 from the 'rhetoric' on Cú Chulainn (LU 8682) *bara bledmaill* 'fury of the sea monster'. *bandernach* is analysed *band* 'exploit', *-ernach* 'iron implement'. For the formation cf. *GOI*, 220 § 346.
26. Cf. LL 10285 *in cur cētach clessamnach cathbuadach claidebderg Cú Chulaind* 'the smiting, feat-performing, triumphant, red-sworded Cú Chulainn'. *Cētach*, from *cēt* 'blow' has the same force as *di chēt* in v. 26. G. S. Olmsted reads vv. 25-6: *frissin mbelend mbandernnach/belend dichet clessamnach* 'Against the bare-handed warrior/can go a warrior performing feats' (*Gundestrup*, 229-***; *Études Celtiques* 15 (1976-7) 537). **Bāndernnach* from *bān* 'bare' + *dernnach* (**dernanach* looks somewhat forced and also out of context. *Dichet* 'can go' seems out of place in a vision; on the formal side, whereas *di chēt* provides the required alliteration with *clessamnach*, *dichet* does not. The alliteration of unstressed elements to link successive verses is a different matter.
27. *cichit*: fut. 3 pl. of *cüid* 'weeps, cries etc.' *biēt*: fut. 3 pl. of *benaid* 'strikes' (cf. *GOI*, 406 § 654). E¹ has *bied*. LU *cichit biet banchuri* 'troops of women will weep and beat (their hands)' offers an acceptable version of this verse. Three of the Rec. I manuscripts have *banchuire*; the remaining one, R, reads *banchuriu*, which we adopt. *Banchuire* can refer either to *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* (LL 119b), cf. *It brónaig banchuiri*, 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 Dunseverick (LU 70b). We are unable to find in these verses any necessary reference to the *Aided Fraích* episode of *Táin* Rec. I (LU 63b; cf. Olmsted, *Gundestrup*, 197-9; *Études Celtiques* 15 (1976-7) 538-41).
28. *bāigthi*: *bāigid* + *i* 'boasts of it'. *sceú* (R, E²) may be an old dat. form; it is followed by the genitive.
30. *ēchtga* of N and LU does not seem to make good sense here.
31. *fīrfēth*: MSS: Rec. I *fīr feith* (R, E²), *fīrfeith* (E¹, N); Rec. II *fīrfid* (LU, D iv 2, N¹, Fermoy), *fīrfe* (Harl.). The Rec. II reading *fīrfid* would seem

to provide the basis for the interpretation of K. Meyer (*Revue Celtique* 11 (1890) 457) and G. S. Olmsted *Gundestrup*, 230, 'I see (that) Finnbennach (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 *féth* 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 *féth* as an adj. in the meaning 'smooth, finished ?' is offered; under (5) the gloss *feth* .i. *slemain* (from Wh. Stokes, ed., 'O'Davoren's Glossary', *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* II (Halle 1904) 371 § 1004). Transitional examples of *feth* (i.e. as noun or as adj.?) are: *ba feth in gres dédenach . . . ba feth in tsnas dédenach* (*DIL* 103.5-7). There appears, then, to be an adequate basis for the reading *fírféth* '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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