

MÍACH'S HEALING OF NÚADU IN *CATH MAIGE TUIRED*

NÚADU, high king of the mythical Irish *Túatha Dé Danann*,¹ is famous for having had his right *lám* 'hand or arm' severed at the First Battle of Mag Tuired (Moytura) by the functionally named *Sreng* 'Act of Tearing',² a warrior of the opposing Fir Bolg army, and replaced with a silver prosthesis by the divine healer Dían Cécht with the help of the brazier Crédne. This metal limb had the marvellous property of moving just as well as a real one. Hence the king — probably a euhemerized god — became known as Núadu Airgetlám, 'Núadu of the Silver Hand/Arm'.³ That, however, was not the end of the story, although scholars have paid less attention to the tale's continuation in which Núadu is healed by Míach, Dían Cécht's son, after Dían Cécht had applied the prosthesis.⁴ The episode reads as follows in Elizabeth Gray's edition and translation of *Cath Maige Tuired (CMT)* 'The Second Battle of Moytura', the text which forms the centrepiece of the 'mythological cycle' of medieval Irish tales:⁵

Boí *dano* Núadae oga uo thras, 7 dobreth láim n-argait foair⁶ liao
Díen Cécht go lúth cecha lámha indte. Nír'uo maith *dano* liaa
mac-sium sen .i. le Míach. Atréacht-sim don láim 7 atbert, ault
fri halt dí 7 féith fri féith; 7 ícuís fri téorai nómaidhe. In cétna
nómaid immus-curid comair a táeib, 7 rotonigestar. An dómaid
tánisde immas-cuirid aro brundib. An tres nómaid dobidced
gelsgothai di bocsibnibh dubhoib ó rodubtis a ten.

¹I thank the editors of *Celtica* and the external reviewer of this article for their corrections and valuable comments.

²This form is most probably to be taken as the verbal noun of *srengaid* 'pulls, drags, draws, tears'; see E. G. Quin and others, *Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin 1913-75) (*DIL*) s.v. *sreng*.

³Or originally, it may be, 'of the shining/brilliant arm'; see Stefan Zimmer, 'The making of myth: Old Irish *Airgatlám*, Welsh *Llaw ereint*, Caledonian *Ἀργεντοκόσος*', in Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard (ed.), *Ogma: essays in Celtic studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002) 295-7.

⁴The main works that discuss Núadu are John Rhys, *Lectures on the origin and growth of religion as illustrated by Celtic heathendom*, second edition (London 1892); Alexandre Haggerty Krappe, 'Nuada á la main d'argent', *Revue celtique* 49 (1932) 91-5; T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin 1946, repr. 1984), General Index s.v. Nuadu; Françoise Le Roux, 'Le dieu-roi Nodons/Nuada', *Celticum* 6 (1963) 425-54; John Carey, 'Nodons in Britain and Ireland', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 40 (1984) 1-22; Heinrich Wagner, 'Zur Etymologie von keltisch Nodons, Ir. Nuadu, kymr. Nudd/Lludd', *ZCP* 41 (1986) 180-8; Elizabeth A. Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired. The second battle of Mag Tuired* (Irish Texts Society LII, Dublin and London 1982, repr. 1998) 130-1; and Claude Sterckx, 'Nútons, Lútons et dieux celtes', *ZCP* 46 (1994) 39-79.

⁵Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 32 § 33.

⁶See fn. 35 on p. 164.

‘Now Núadu was being treated, and Dían Cécht put a silver hand on him which had the movement of any other hand. But his son Míach did not like that. He went to the hand and said “joint to joint of it, and sinew to sinew”; and he healed it⁷ in nine days and nights.⁸ The first three days he carried it against his side, and it became covered with skin. The second three days he carried it against his chest. The third three days he would cast white wisps of black bulrushes after they had been blackened in a fire’.⁹

Dían Cécht then wounded Míach three times by throwing a sword at his head, but on each occasion Míach healed himself. A fourth throw, however, cut out Míach’s brain, an injury so severe that even he could not cure. Dían Cécht buried Míach and from his grave there sprouted three hundred and sixty-five herbs. Airmed, a character later identified as Dían Cécht’s daughter, gathered the herbs, but her father deliberately muddled them up, so that afterwards only those taught by the Holy Spirit knew their healing properties. Finally, Dían Cécht declared, ‘Though Míach no longer lives, Airmed shall remain’ (*Mane pé Míoch, méraidh Airmeth*).¹⁰ Whitley Stokes, following a discussion by John Rhŷs, remarked ‘So Hermes restores the tendons which Typho had cut out of Zeus’ hands and feet’, this being an episode from Greek mythology found in the *Library* of pseudo-Apollodorus (I.vi.3).¹¹ Jaan Puhvel, applying Georges Dumézil’s notion of divine ‘functions’ derived from Proto-Indo-European societal mythology, saw in this episode and related Celtic traditions ‘both the tensions and the syncretises of “warrior-medicine” and third-function healing’,¹² the ‘warrior-medicine’ (second function) being used by Dían Cécht and the ‘third-function healing’ by Míach.¹³ Elizabeth Gray, however, contends that ‘In the context of the entire myth, the primary significance of the conflict between Dían Cécht and his son is not the rivalry between divine representatives of different modes of healing. The main point is rather to identify Dían Cécht as the supreme god of healing and to define the possible limits of medical skill, especially in regard to battle injuries ... As a myth about medical practice, Dían Cécht’s conflict with Míach defines the limitations of medical expertise and establishes Dían Cécht’s supremacy

⁷[Better: ‘it healed’ (Edd.).]

⁸For a recent discussion of the term *nómad* ‘nine days’ (a derivative of the numeral *noí* ‘nine’), see Liam Breatnach, ‘Varia III. The meaning of *nómad*’, *Ériu* 62 (2012) 197-205.

⁹Or ‘... when they had turned black in a fire’; see note at Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 85.

¹⁰Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 32 § 35.

¹¹Whitley Stokes, ‘The second battle of Moytura’, *Revue celtique* 12 (1891) 52-130, 306-8, at p. 67 fn. 2, referring to Rhŷs, *Lectures* 121, 620. Actually, the Greek text records that both Hermes and Aegipan fetched and restored Zeus’s sinews, and that the adversary who had removed them was Typhon (not Typho); see J. G. Frazer (trans.), *Apollodorus: the library*, i (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 1921, repr. 2001) 48-51.

¹²Jaan Puhvel, ‘Mythological reflections of Indo-European medicine’, in George Cardona, Henry M. Hoeningwald and Alfred Senn (ed.), *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans: papers presented at the Third Indo-European Conference at the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia 1970) 369-82, at p. 379.

¹³For Dumézil’s thoughts on this episode, see his *Flamen-brahman* (Paris 1935) 78-80.

as a physician.¹⁴ Significantly, neither scholar questions the original integrity of the episode — unlike an earlier commentator, R. A. S. Macalister, who remarked ‘That Miach, son of Dian Cecht, substituted an arm of flesh for the arm of silver, and that his father slew him in jealousy (as Apollo slew Aesculapius), are later embellishments of the tale.’¹⁵ However, the arguments to be made against the story’s original unity seem quite weighty.

Although surviving texts of the first, second and third redactions of *Lebor gabála Érenn* (LG) ‘The book of invasions of Ireland’ state that Núadu was healed first by Dían Cécht and then by Míach, of the two manuscripts containing the first redaction, the Book of Leinster and the Book of Fermoy, only the latter mentions Míach’s medical procedure.¹⁶ In the Book of Leinster, and in the *Míniugud* recension, the healing simply constitutes Dían Cécht’s application of a silver arm with the help of Créidne. The Book of Leinster version reads:

Lám argait, co lánlúth cacha láma in cach meór 7 in cach alt dorat fair. Dían Cecht in liaig, 7 Créidne cerd i congnam fris.

‘He [Núadu] had an arm of silver with the full activity of any arm in each finger and in each joint, which Dian Cécht the leech put upon him, Créidne the wright giving him help’.¹⁷

The Book of Fermoy version alone continues with the following passage, which apparently describes Míach’s replacement of Núadu’s silver arm with an organic one:

Dorat imorro Míach mac Dían Cecht alt fri halt 7 feith fri feith dia laim fair, 7 icaid fri teora nomaidhi; 7 bertusa laim n-airgit n-a (d)iri.

¹⁴Elizabeth A. Gray, ‘Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (24-120)’, *Éigse* 19 (1982) 1-35, at pp. 11-12.

¹⁵R. A. S. Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Lebor gabála Érenn. The book of the taking of Ireland* (Irish Texts Society XLI, Dublin and London 1941, repr. 1987), iv, 100. Here Macalister apparently fails to appreciate that, as we shall see, it was Núadu’s own arm that Míach reattached. Also, it was Asclepius’s grandfather, Zeus, not Apollo, who slew him for being too skilled a healer; see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek myth: a guide to literary and artistic sources*, i (Baltimore and London 1996) 91-2. The same parallel is drawn, with correct identification of the healer’s slayer, by M. L. West, *Indo-European poetry and myth* (Oxford 2007) 148.

¹⁶On the various redactions of this work and their manuscripts, see R. A. S. Macalister (ed. and trans.), *Lebor gabála Érenn* (Irish Texts Society XXXIV, Dublin and London, 1938, repr. 1984), i, xi-xxv; R. Mark Scowcroft, ‘Leabhar gabhála — part I: the growth of the text’, *Ériu* 38 (1987) 79-140; idem, ‘Leabhar gabhála — part II: the growth of the tradition’, *Ériu* 39 (1988) 1-66; John Carey, *A new introduction to Lebor gabála Érenn. The book of the taking of Ireland* (Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Publications 1, Dublin and London 1993); John Carey (ed.), *Lebor gabála Érenn: textual history and pseudohistory* (Irish Texts Society Subsidiary Publications 20, Dublin and London 2009).

¹⁷Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 114-15; R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin and M. A. O’Brien (ed.), *The book of Leinster, formerly Lebar na Níachongbála*, i (Dublin 1954) 34.1075-7.

‘But Míach son of Dian Cécht fixed joint to joint and vein to vein of his own hand, and it heals in thrice nine days; and on that account he gave his silver hand as his guerdon’.¹⁸

Secondly, none of the redactions of *LG* mentions Dían Cécht’s killing of his son, an episode also absent from another important, though late, account of Míach’s healing of Núadu, in *Oidhe chloinne Tuireann (OCT)* ‘The fate of the children of Tuireann’.¹⁹ Indeed, although the seventeenth-century so-called ‘Ó Cléirigh recension’ of *LG* mentions Dían Cécht’s envy of his son in this matter (see quotation below), the only text to mention Míach’s death at the hands of his father is *CMT* itself.²⁰ And even that text stumbles heavily over this event, since it later — without explanation — reintroduces Míach, having him chant spells, alongside his father, brother and sister, to heal wounded warriors.²¹ We may suspect that this is not just an oversight of the author, but an indication that Míach’s earlier death was intrusive to the original narrative.

It is significant, thirdly, that the *Ánnala ríoghachta Éireann* ‘Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters’ (*AFM*) attribute Núadu’s healing to Dían Cécht alone, the only *lám* that is fitted being the silver prosthesis:

Aois domhain, tri míle tri ced a deich. An sechtmadh bliadhain do Bres ós Erinn innsin, go ro fhagoibh an righe do Nuadhat iar níoc a laimhe la Diancecht, 7 Creidne cerd ag congnamh lais. Uair do ratsad laimh naírgitt fair.

Aois domhain, tri míle tri ced a haoín décc. An ced bhliadhain do righe Nuadhat airgetlaimh tar eis a laimhe do thaitheamh re píosa airgaitt aithleigthedh.

‘The Age of the World, 3310. This was the seventh year of Breas over Ireland, when he resigned the kingdom to Nuadhat [i.e. Núadu], after the cure of his hand by Diancecht, assisted by Creidne, the artificer, for they put a silver hand upon him.

¹⁸Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 114-15 [translation emended, Edd.]. For the similar passages in the second and third redactions, see Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 148-9 and 176-7.

¹⁹Eugene O’Curry, ‘The fate of the children of Tuireann’, *The Atlantis: or register of literature and science of the Catholic University of Ireland* 4 (1863) 157-240; J. P. Craig (ed.), *Clann Tuireann, being a modern version of the Fate of the children of Tuireann* (Dublin 1902); Richard O’Duffy, *Oidhe chloinne Tuireann. The Fate of the children of Tuireann* (Dublin 1901); Seán Ua Ceallaigh (ed.), *Trí Truagha na Scéaluidheachta: Oidhe chlainne Tuireann, Oidhe chlainne Lir. Oidhe chlainne Uisnigh* (Baile Átha Cliath 1927). See also Caoimhín Breatnach, ‘Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann agus Cath Maíge Tuired: dhá shampla de mhíotas eiseamláireach’, *Éigse* 32 (2000) 35-46.

²⁰‘The colloquy between Fintan and the hawk of Achill’ records that Míach and Oirmed perished because of the hand (?) in the east, but does not describe the circumstances and does not mention Dían Cécht (ed. Kuno Meyer in O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer and J. G. O’Keefe (ed.), *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* (Halle a. S. 1907), i, 24-39, at p. 31 § 46). For a discussion and partial English translation of this poem, see Eleanor Hull, ‘The hawk of Achill or the legend of the oldest animals’, *Folklore* 43 (1932) 376-409.

²¹Gray, *Cath Maíge Tuired*, 54-5 § 123.

The Age of the World, 3311. The first year of the reign of Nuadhat Airgeatlamh, after his hand had been welded with a piece of refined silver'.²²

Similarly, the *Cóir anmann* 'Fitness of names' mentions only a single healing with the silver prosthesis, though it names none of the physicians:

Dochuiridar leagha Thúaithe Dé Danann lámh airgit co lánlúth cacha laimhe for Núadhait. Is aire sin tráth aderthi Núadha Airgétlámh friss iarsin.

'The physicians of the Tuatha Dé Danann put on Nuadu a silver arm with as much movement as every [real] arm. For that reason, then, afterwards he used to be called Nuadu Airgétlámh'.²³

Versions of the story that omit Míach account better, in my view, for the frequency of Núadu's epithet 'Silver Arm', an appellation which implies a more lasting and significant importance for the prosthesis than is allowed by its seemingly swift removal in *CMT*. The awkwardness sensed in this regard is scarcely lessened by the passing statement, in the Ó Cléirigh recension of *LG*, that Míach started healing Núadu only 'after a while' (*iar ttrioll*), since this text is vague about how long the king actually had his silver appendage, and, like all other records, says nothing about what he did with it while it was attached. As a result, the final sentence, following a description of Míach's attachment of what is evidently a different arm, smacks of the *non sequitur*:

... 7 ro fhagaibhset a ri, .i. Nuadha in eallach an chatha, ier mbéim a láimhe dhe ona ghualainn amach. Do rad íeromh Diancécht an liaigh 7 Creidhne an cerd láimh n-airgit fair, co luth i ngach méor 7 i ngach n-alt dhi. Gattaidh tra iar ttrioll Míach mac Díancécht an laimh n-airgitt de, 7 dobert alt fri halt, 7 féith fri feith, 7 ícidh fri teóra nómhadha; 7 ba foirmtech Diancécht a athair fris. As aire émh atberti Núadha Airgettlamh frisiomh indsin.

'... and they lost their king, that is Nuadha, in the joining of the battle, after his arm was hewn from his shoulder. Afterwards Diancécht, the leech, and Creidhne the wright, set on him a silver arm, with vitality in every finger and every joint of it. But Míach, son of Diancécht, lops the silver arm from him after a while, and put joint to joint, and sinew to sinew, and it heals in thrice nine days; and Diancécht his father was envious of him. For this cause he used to be called Nuadha "Silverarm"'.²⁴

²²John O'Donovan (ed.), *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann. Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the four masters* i (Dublin 1848), 16-17.

²³Sharon Arbuthnot (ed.), *Cóir anmann: A late Middle Irish treatise on personal names. Part 2* (Irish Texts Society LX, London and Dublin 2006) 45 § 158; Whitley Stokes, 'Cóir anmann (fitness of names)', in Stokes and Windisch (ed.), *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch, Dritte Serie, 2. Heft* (Leipzig 1897) 284-444, at pp. 356-7.

²⁴R. A. Stewart Macalister and John MacNeill (ed.), *Leabhar gabhála. The book of conquests of Ireland. The recension of Micheál Ó Cléirigh*. Part 1 (Dublin 1916) 148-9 [translation emended

Although the matter cannot be resolved conclusively, it is suspicious that Níadu is effectively healed twice and ends up with an arm that is apparently *not* silver. If he were indeed healed twice, it would seem more natural, given his frequent epithet ‘Silver Arm’, for the prosthesis to have superseded the organic limb and become his ‘natural’ attribute. This awkwardness, together with (i) the lack of uniformity among the redactions of *LG* about Míach’s healing of Níadu and Dían Cécht’s jealousy, (ii) the lack of corroboration for *CMT*’s account of Dían Cécht’s killing of Míach, (iii) Míach’s anachronistic reappearance in *CMT*, and (iv) Míach’s absence from, and the appearance of only a silver prosthesis in *AFM* and *Cóir anmann*, suggests that at least two conflicting stories about Níadu’s treatment have been fused, along with a tradition about Dían Cécht’s murderous envy of his son. In view of Níadu’s abiding epithet it seems likely, as Macalister thought, that Dían Cécht’s healing of Níadu with a silver prosthesis was original to the story, and that Míach’s contribution was an accretion. Whatever the truth of this matter, the following discussion focuses on more tractable questions about Míach’s healing of Níadu in *CMT*.

A fundamental question about this episode is which part of Níadu’s anatomy was replaced, since Irish *lám(h)* is ambiguous: it can mean ‘hand’, ‘hand and forearm’ or ‘whole arm’.²⁵ Translators of *CMT* differ on this point. Gray opts for ‘hand’ in her edition of the text, as in an earlier reference to Níadu’s *lám* in the same work,²⁶ but refers to ‘arm’ in her notes²⁷ and consistently in her separate commentary published slightly earlier.²⁸ Many years before, Stokes also opted for ‘hand’ in the first English translation of the text.²⁹ Christian-J. Guyonvarc’h’s French translation, however, has ‘bras’.³⁰ In support of ‘hand’ might be adduced the probably cognate medieval Welsh figure of *Lludd Llaw Ereint*, a character whose epithet means ‘(of the) Silver Hand’.³¹ To my knowledge, however, no surviving medieval Irish source unambiguously identifies Níadu’s loss as that of just a hand, although this was something that the early Irish lexicon had the resources to do.³²

Edd.] On this recension (now shown to be the work of Cú Coigcríche Ó Cléirigh) see Pádraig A. Breatnach, ‘On the Ó Cléirigh recension of *Leabhar Gabhála*’, *Éigse* 37 (2010) 1-57.

²⁵See *DIL* s.v. *lám*; Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla. An Irish-English dictionary* (Dublin 1904) s.v. *lámh*; Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Baile Átha Cliath 1977) s.v. *lámh*.

²⁶Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 25, 130.

²⁷Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 85 (‘restoration of Níadu’s own arm’) 130.

²⁸Gray, ‘Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (1-24)’, *Éigse* 18 (1981) 183-209, at pp. 195, 197, 200; Gray, ‘Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (24-120)’ 1, 11; Gray, ‘Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (84-93, 120-67)’, *Éigse* 19 (1982) 230-62, at p. 255.

²⁹Stokes, ‘Second battle of Moytura’, 59, 67.

³⁰Christian-J. Guyonvarc’h, *Textes mythologiques irlandais I*, i (Rennes 1980) 49.

³¹On the name and character of *Lludd Llaw Ereint*, see Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (ed.), *Culhwch and Olwen: an edition and study of the oldest Arthurian tale* (Cardiff 1992) 145, and Peter C. Bartrum, *A Welsh classical dictionary: people in history and legend up to about A.D. 1000* ([Aberystwyth] 1993) 418.

³²Words for ‘hand’ and not ‘arm’ in *DIL* include *amm*, *crob* and *crúb*.

On the contrary, all the unambiguous Irish evidence indicates that the king lost an arm with hand still attached. We have already seen references in different recensions of *LG* to the prosthesis's movement 'in each finger and each joint', which presumably indicates fingers and arm-joints together, and to the severing of the king's arm at the shoulder, while *CMT*'s description of Núadu raising his *lám* to his chest clearly indicates the recovery of arm-movement. Furthermore, the loss of an arm is explicit in three other passages. In *Cath Muige Tuired Cunga* 'The battle of Mag Tuired of Cong' we read:

Dobert Sreang bem cloidimh don airdrigh .i. do Nuadhaid gur theasg bile an sgeth 7 an laimh ndes ac a ghualaind, gu ndrochair an lamh gu triun an sgeth le for talmain.

'Sreng dealt a blow with his sword at Nuada, and, cutting away the rim of his shield, severed his right arm *at the shoulder*; and the king's arm with a third of his shield fell to the ground'.³³

A further passage from *LG* runs:

... 7 ro facbait a ri³⁴ sind lathair sin, 7 ro benadh a lam de o'n gualaind sis. Ocus ro batar legtha secht mbliadna oca leghus comad and dobretha lam n-arguit fair,³⁵ amail asbert:

Sreng mac Sengaind co slegaib,
a cath Chunga cruaidh cneadaigh,
dorat beim do Nuadha nar,
co tesc da dhes a des-lam.

'... and they left their king on that field, with his arm cut off *from the shoulder down*. Leeches were seven years working his cure, and an arm of silver was put upon him, as one saith:

Sreng son of Sengand with spears,
in the hard battle of Cunga of wounding,
gave a blow to noble Nuadhu,
and lopped from his right side his right arm'.³⁶

Similarly, the forty-third stanza of 'The Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill' describes Núadu's severed *lám* as clothed 'up to the breastplate' (*don lúirig*).³⁷

In addition to these textual sources, two early stone busts from Armagh and Lurgan show a male figure, who has been identified as Núadu, holding his false arm at the shoulder (though his left, not his right as stated in *Cath Muige*

³³John Fraser, 'The first battle of Moytura', *Ériu* 8 (1915-16) 1-63, at pp. 46-7 (emphasis mine).

³⁴[Better to adopt the reading *rofácbad a ri* 'their king was left' of MSS D and E (Edd.).]

³⁵[Read *dobreth lám argait fair* (Edd.).]

³⁶Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 20-3, 62-3; cf. 10-11, 34-5 (emphasis mine). Note again the single, not double, healing.

³⁷Meyer, 'Colloquy', 30 § 43.

Tuired Cunga and *LG*).³⁸ Finally, it could be relevant that a bronze model of a forearm with attached hand — possibly a votive offering — was among the artefacts discovered at a fourth-century Romano-Celtic temple at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire,³⁹ identified in an inscription from the site as the *templum [No]dentis* ‘temple of Nodons’.⁴⁰ The name *Nodons* (*Nodon(t)s/Nuden(t)s*) is generally accepted as a cognate of Irish *Núadu*.⁴¹ On this basis, it clearly seems best to translate *lám* in the description of *Núadu*’s healing in *CMT* as ‘arm’.

Next is the question of whose arm — as I shall translate *lám* henceforth in this context — *Míach* ‘went to’ and healed in *CMT*. Stokes stated in a passage he inserted without comment in his translation that *Míach* ‘went to the hand (which had been struck off *Dían-cecht*)’⁴² — an explanation which might account for *Dían Cécht*’s murderous reaction, but which lacks corroboration: no other text refers to such a mutilation and *Dían Cécht* is never said to be one-armed. Therefore, although this explanation cannot be disproved, it seems likely to be Stokes’s own answer to the question. Furthermore, it is an explanation that other medieval evidence, to be examined shortly, renders unlikely.

Since no replacement arm other than the silver prosthesis has been mentioned in *CMT*, it might initially appear that *Míach*’s response to *Dían Cécht*’s achievement was simply to go to the attached silver prosthesis and cause skin to cover it. But there are obvious problems with this idea, too. The cited words of the incantation spoken by *Míach*, ‘joint to joint . . . sinew to sinew’, seem more indicative of the setting of a severed or broken limb than of the growth of skin.⁴³ Furthermore, such an act of completion would arguably

³⁸Ellen Ettlinger, ‘Contributions towards an interpretation of several stone images in the British Isles’, *Ogam* 13 (1961) 286-304, at pp. 286-9; *Dáithi Ó hÓgáin, Myth, legend & romance: an encyclopaedia of the Irish folk tradition* (London 1990) 326. The right side is also identified in *Arbuthnot, Cóir anmann* (part 2), 45 § 158 (= Stokes, ‘Cóir anmann’, 356-7): *A lamh dheas doben Sreng mac Senghainn de a comracc a cath Muighi Tuired Cunga* ‘Sreng son of Sengann cut off his right arm in combat in the battle of Mag Tuired Cunga’.

³⁹R. E. M. Wheeler and T. V. Wheeler, *Report on the excavation of the prehistoric, Roman, and post-Roman site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire* (Oxford 1932) 89 and pl. 26 (no. 121); see also Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, revised edition (London 1992) 233 fig. 1, with tentative comparison with *Núadu*’s silver arm on p. 258.

⁴⁰Wheeler and Wheeler, *Report*, 100.

⁴¹See especially J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘The name “Nodens”’, in Wheeler and Wheeler, *Report*, 132-7; Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern 1959) 768 (*neu-d-*); Christian-J. Guyonvarc’h, ‘Notes d’étymologie et de lexicographie Gauloises et Celtiques (XVII) 60. Le théonyme *NODONS/NUADA*’, *Ogam* 15 (1963) 229-37; Carey, ‘Nodons’, 1-3; Wagner, ‘Zur Etymologie’; Garrett S. Olmsted, *The gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans* (Innsbruck 1994) 393.

⁴²Stokes, ‘Second battle of Moytura’, 67.

⁴³The cited words are perhaps an excerpt from a common type of magical incantation, the earliest surviving European instance being the Old High German *Second Merseburg charm*: Wilhelm Braune and Ernst A. Ebbinghaus (ed.), *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 16th edition (Tübingen 1979) 89 (xxx.1.b). The full charm, variants of which sometimes include the words ‘skin to skin’, is usually employed for sprains and occasionally for broken bones. There is a large bibliography on this type of charm: see e.g. Braune and Ebbinghaus, *Lesebuch*, 173-4; Rolf Ködderitzsch, ‘Der Zweite Merseburger Zauberspruch und seine Parallelen’, *ZCP* 33 (1974)

not be so provocative as to prompt Dían Cécht's murderous attack on Míach. It seems clear, therefore, that Míach removed Dían Cécht's silver prosthesis and put another arm in its place. This inference is confirmed by *OCT* (as we shall see), by the passages from the Book of Fermoy and Ó Cléirigh recensions of *LG* quoted earlier, and by another passage from *LG*, though its editor and translator has Míach replace a silver 'arm' with a 'hand', despite the same noun, *lám*, describing both:

Dorat Miach mac Dian Cecht alt fri halt 7 feith fri feith dia laim
fein fair, 7 icaidh fria teora nomaidhi, 7 bertais in laim n-arcait ina
dire.

'Míach son of Dían Cécht set joint to joint and vein to vein of his
own hand upon him, and it heals in thrice nine days, and he took
the silver arm as a guerdon'.⁴⁴

Núadu's severed arm came into the possession of his followers. *Cath Muige Tuired Cunga* records that the Dagda, fifty soldiers and their physicians placed it on a 'fold of stones' on the battlefield in the king's stead,⁴⁵ while a variant account has the arm removed from the battlefield along with the injured king.⁴⁶ From one or both of these passages, we might infer that Núadu's severed limb was available for reattachment. The previously mentioned 'Colloquy' is hard to interpret in this respect. It records that the hawk stole the huge arm from the battlefield and kept it in its nest for seven years, that Núadu's swineherd found it and took it to Carn Láma ('Cairn of the Hand/Arm'),⁴⁷ and, rather obscurely, that Míach and Oirmedh perished because of it in the east.⁴⁸ But the hawk's loss of the limb after seven years apparently finds parallel in the physicians' healing of Núadu after seven years according to *LG*, with the important difference that in that text the cure is the silver prosthesis.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Míach and Oirmedh reappear as the healers Miach and Oirmiach in *OCT*, a text which strongly suggests that they reattached Núadu's original arm.

45-57; Jonathan Roper, *English verbal charms* (Helsinki 2005), Charm-Type Index under 'Bone to bone', esp. 96-9; Wolfgang Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, corrected second edition (Wiesbaden 2011); and, for an instance ending 'skin to skin', Monika Kroječ, 'Slovenian charms between South Slavic and Central European tradition', in Jonathan Roper (ed.), *Charms, charmers and charming: international research on verbal magic* (Basingstoke 2009), 145-62, at p. 148.

⁴⁴Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 148-9 (contrast the consistent translation as 'hand' at pp. 114-5); cf. Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 130: 'The arm, replaced by one of silver, gives rise to his epithet "Silverhand"' (emphasis mine). Note that the incantation is missing from *LG*, though key words from it are incorporated into the action performed. Cf. Macalister, *Lebor gabála*, iv, 296: 'The formula *alt fri halt 7 feith fri feith* has the appearance of being a fragment of some old healing spell'; also Stokes, 'Second battle', 67 fn. 1.

⁴⁵Fraser, 'First battle', 46-7.

⁴⁶Brian Ó Cuív, 'Fragments of a modern Irish version of the first battle of Magh Tuireadh', *Celtica* 1 (1950) 111-7, at pp. 112, 116; see also Guyonvarc'h, *Textes*, 45.

⁴⁷Compare the 'fold of stones' on the battlefield in *Cath Muige Tuired Cunga*.

⁴⁸Meyer, 'Colloquy', 30-1 (§§ 45-6).

⁴⁹Similarly in *AFM*, i, 16-17 (quoted earlier), according to which Bres took the sovereignty of Ireland from Núadu in the year 3304, before resigning it, in the seventh year of his reign (3310), once Núadu had received his silver prosthesis.

The opening episode of *OCT*,⁵⁰ a tale that survives only in late redactions, records that Miach and Oirmiach removed the king's silver arm — it contained a beetle that was tormenting him — and sought an organic replacement. However, they could find no limb of the right length and width among the Túatha Dé Danann, except for that of a swineherd called Modhan.⁵¹ The people then asked the pair whether it would suit them to use *cnámharlach a láimhe féin*⁵² 'the bones of his own arm'.⁵³ And the healers replied: *Is í dob' féarr linn* 'It is that we would prefer'. The arm was then fetched and brought to them at the royal court of Tara. The bone-setting was subsequently performed by Oirmiach, and the cure completed with the aid of herbs fetched by Miach. Here the question of 'whose own arm?' is easily answered, as the comparative *féarr* ('better') and the expedition to fetch the limb show that we have a choice simply between two persons: Modhan and the king. Since Modhan is not mentioned again, and since a lowly swineherd is unlikely to have been thought a suitable donor for a high king, it seems clear that it was Núadu's own severed arm that was fetched and reattached.⁵⁴

Whether we can read back from this detail in *OCT* to earlier tradition is uncertain, as this text's author might simply have given his personal solution to an old puzzle. However, I think we can in this instance, and that it confirms what was already the most likely interpretation in *CMT* and *LG*. Again, the insight has additional significance, for, in referring to *cnámharlach*, 'bones' of the arm, *OCT* underlines the significance of the otherwise unattested verbal form *rotonigestar*⁵⁵ 'it became covered with skin' in *CMT*.

A final important question concerns the passage's concluding line: *An tres nómaid dobidced gelsgothai di bocsbibh dubhoib ó rodubtis a ten*. Scholars have failed to explain this line satisfactorily. Stokes, whose edition of the Irish reads *An tres nomad dobidced gel sg::ai di boc-sibnih dubhoib o ro dubtis a ten*, resorted to ellipsis in his translation: 'The third seventy-two hours he would cast... of black bulrushes when they were blackened in fire.'⁵⁶ So did Guyonvarc'h at the same point with 'A la troisième série de neuf jours il produisait des ... ? ... blancs de joncs noirs quand on les noircissait au feu',⁵⁷ remarking on 'l'obscurité de la dernière phrase'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Gray remarked:

⁵⁰O'Duffy, *Oidhe*, 1-3, 67-70; O'Curry, 'Fate', 158-61.

⁵¹Compare the unnamed swineherd of Núadu who took the king's severed arm to Carn Láma in Meyer, 'Colloquy', 31 § 46.

⁵²O'Duffy, *Oidhe*, 3; O'Curry, 'Fate', 160.

⁵³O'Duffy's 'bones of his arm' is a small but crucial mistranslation in that it fails to account for *féin* 'own'; cf. Macalister, *Lebor Gabála*, iv, 148 § 329 *dia laim fein*. O'Curry, 'Fate', 161, rightly has 'Would the bones of his own arm [i.e. of the arm of this very man] serve you?'; note also the correct rendering in *DIL* s.v. *cnámharlach*.

⁵⁴A point overlooked in the summary in O'Duffy, *Oidhe*, xv, which simply says 'They procure and set another arm for the king'.

⁵⁵*DIL tonnaigid*, a queried entry which cites only this instance in *CMT* and relates it to the noun *tonn*, whose meanings include 'skin'.

⁵⁶Stokes, 'Second battle', 66-9.

⁵⁷Guyonvarc'h, *Textes*, 49.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* 92.

'The third element of Míach's medical practice, casting wisps or tufts of blackened rush, remains obscure'.⁵⁹ Gustav Lehmacher translated *gelsgothai di bocsbibh* as 'mit den weißen Schößlingen von Binsen' without comment.⁶⁰

Several points need clarifying here. First is the grammatical subject of this sentence, and of the preceding two. Gray's reference to 'Míach's medical practice' might be thought to indicate that Míach is still the subject, as earlier ('But his son Míach did not like that. He [Míach] went to the hand . . .'). This, at least, is how Dumézil interpreted the passage: 'Miach place successivement la main d'argent sur diverses parties de son propre corps'.⁶¹ Why Míach should do this, especially *after* reciting his charm, is unclear. I very much doubt that he did, since it seems far more likely that Núadu is the grammatical subject and that this passage describes the gradual recovery of his arm, after it has been reattached by Míach's incantation.

Second is the interpretation of the verb *dobided*, which in context seems unlikely to mean 'would throw, cast' as Stokes and Gray have it, for why would anyone repeatedly throw parts of charred rushes? Guyonvarc'h was, I think, closer to the correct sense with 'il produisait', but all three scholars have overlooked the likelihood that, given the following preposition *di*, we have an instance of *DIL*'s *do-bidci* (c) with *de* (*di*), which means 'strikes from, cuts off, removes'. The sentence's meaning becomes clear in light of a traditional use of the common plant *Typha latifolia*.⁶² This plant, a native of the British Isles, grows up to a height of 2.5 metres,⁶³ and is distinguished by its large, dark, cigar-like seed-heads. In English it is called (greater) reed-mace, cat('s)-tail and (false) bulrush. In Irish and Scots Gaelic its names include *bodán* (*bodan*) *dubh*, from *bod* 'tail' and *dubh* 'dark'.⁶⁴ The passage from *CMT* also describes the rushes as dark: *di bocsbibh dubhoib*.⁶⁵ That the plant in question is *Typha latifolia* is indicated by the passage's remaining details.

The compound *gelsgothai* 'white wisps' is unique. Gray explains it in her notes as a combination of *gel* 'fair, white, bright, shining' and *scoth*,⁶⁶ a noun whose meanings listed in *DIL* include 'flower, blossom', 'pick, choice', 'hero, noble one, scion', 'lock [of head-hair], tress, tuft',⁶⁷ the supporting

⁵⁹Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 85.

⁶⁰Gustav Lehmacher, 'Die zweite Schlacht von Mag Tured und die keltische Götterlehre', *Anthropos* 26 (1931) 435-59, at p. 443.

⁶¹Dumézil, *Flamen-brahman*, 79 ('Miach places the silver hand successively on various parts of his own body').

⁶²I thank Emma Hampton for sharing with me her first-hand knowledge of the appearance, uses and preparation of this plant.

⁶³A. R. Clapham, T. G. Tutin and D. M. Moore, *Flora of the British Isles*, corrected third edition (Cambridge 1989) 585-6.

⁶⁴Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir*, s.v. *bodán*; Edward Dwelly, *Faclair Gaidhlig agus Beurla le dealbhan* (Glasgow 1901-11), s.v. *bodan*; John Cameron, *The Gaelic names of plants (Scottish, Irish, and Manx)* (Edinburgh and London 1883) 82.

⁶⁵Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 32.139. See *DIL* s.v. *boicshimin*; Dinneen, *Foclóir*, s.v. *boic-shiithbhín*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir*, s.v. *bogshifín*.

⁶⁶Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 85.

⁶⁷*DIL* s.v. *scoth* 1.

quotations for this last group of senses including one that mentions rushes.⁶⁸ Alternatively, the manuscript reading *gelsġi* might stand for *gelsġúabai* (or *gelsġúapai*), which would be another unique compound, this time formed from the adjective *gel* and the noun *sciúap* (a borrowing of Latin *scopa* ‘twigs, shoots, broom, besom’) whose meanings include ‘brush, broom’ and ‘sheaf/bundle of flax’ and which was sometimes used with reference to human hair and horse-tails.⁶⁹ Either compound might initially be thought to refer to the white, dandelion-like seed-tufts of *Typha latifolia*’s dark, tail-like fruits; it might appear, then, that Núadu raised his arm to pick these. However, this would fail to account for the mention of prior charring.

It so happens that *Typha latifolia* produces other structures that fit the description ‘white hairs/wisps’ or ‘white (hair-like) bundles’. For the rhizomes of this plant contain long, thin and very white fibres, which are a good source of starch. Once unearthed, the procedure is to ‘break them into lengths of 30-40 cm and throw them on the embers of a fire until they are charred black’⁷⁰ (*rodubtis a ten* ‘they had been blackened in a fire’); one then removes them from the fire and breaks their outer surface to expose the fibres, which remain white.

Admittedly, the interpretation of *scoth* or *sciúap* as ‘root-fibre’ is uncertain. Neither *DIL* nor Dinneen gives this meaning for either word, but their silence is unsurprising given the peculiar botanical specificity I propose. Nor is this extension of meaning far-fetched, since words that describe human or animal hairs might easily serve to describe similar, but rarely named, filaments found elsewhere. Most importantly, no other interpretation, I think, can account for all the details described in the text. It seems likely, then, that Núadu was extracting the root-fibres of *Typha latifolia* and that we should translate:

The third nine⁷¹ days he would remove ‘white hairs/bundles’ [i.e. root-fibres] from ‘dark bulrushes’ [i.e. *Typha latifolia*] after they had been blackened in a fire.

Núadu’s accomplishment of this task was evidently indicative of a complete cure, and the act of extracting these root-fibres by hand does indeed require some dexterity and strength. Given that this sentence describes, on one level, an aspect of early Irish food preparation,⁷² it seems likely that Núadu not only extracted the fibres but also ate at least some of them. Another possible benefit of touching and consuming the starchy fibres of *Typha latifolia* may be termed ‘magical’. Since starch is a substance that has been valued since antiquity for

⁶⁸*DIL* s.v. *scoth* 1(b): *gach scoith fhada úrluachra* ‘each long wisp of fresh rushes’.

⁶⁹*DIL* s.v. *sciúap*. Cf. Welsh *ysgub* ‘sheaf, bundle’ (also a borrowing of Lat. *scopa*) and *ysgubell*, a noun whose meanings include ‘bush (of hair)’.

⁷⁰Ray Mears, *Essential bushcraft* (London 2003) 190.

⁷¹See fn. 8 on p. 159 above.

⁷²One which seems not to be mentioned elsewhere in early Irish records. Generally on the gathering of wild plants and roots in medieval Ireland, see Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish farming: a study based mainly on the law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries AD* (Dublin 1997, corr. repr. 2000) 304-15.

its ability to stiffen and whiten fabrics,⁷³ its handling and consumption might also have been considered efficacious for strengthening and knitting bones, flesh and skin, and for whitening skin. Two other examples of early Irish magico-medicine also provide clues to the healing power of rushes.

A charm from a group of medical texts copied in 1496 reads:

Toirmesc ar fhuil 7 ar fhail 7 ar sceth. Mad ar fuil a cur a mboigsibind 7 a cengail imon raigh, 7 a mboigsibinn mad sceith 7 a hiadad mon bragaid, isin edan arin fail fo .7. Curtur in gac ni dib ind opaid so .i. Asdud bota bota bolgnaid / asduth crucrinnail spirnit.

'Prevention of bleeding and hiccough and vomiting. If it be for bleeding set it in a bulrush and tie it around the forearm, and in a bulrush if it be vomiting and fasten it around the neck, in the forehead for hiccough, seven times. In each of these set this charm: Asdud, etc.'⁷⁴

The words of this charm mostly resist interpretation — they are perhaps deliberately mystificatory — but, as its editors observe, *asdud* (also *asduth*) is probably for *astúd*, which *DIL* defines as the 'act of holding back, detaining, keeping (in a place)'. In light of Míach's medical practice, the recitation of a charm of holding together with the application of bulrush to an arm forms a notable parallel. Also striking is an episode from the Irish Life of Saint Berach, a sixth-century holy man whose story survives in a Middle Irish version copied by Míchél Ó Cléirigh in 1629.⁷⁵ A monk whom the saint had sent on an errand was waylaid by robbers and decapitated. Berach hurried to the scene, rendered the robbers powerless to attack him, and commanded them as follows:

'Coraighidh an cenn frisin meidhe'; 7 doronsat amlaidh. Ocus ro gabh Berach simhin luachra asin port-linn luachra ro bóí a ccomh-foccus; 7 doroinne ernaigthe ind, 7 ro coraigh im bragaitt in mairbh, 7 atracht focéttoir; conidh desin atad sibhne Beraich go brath.

"Fit the head to the trunk"; and they did so. And Berach took a rush from a rushy pool on the bank hard by, and made a prayer over it, and fitted it round the throat of the corpse, and he arose forthwith; and hence (these rushes) are (called) "Berach's rushes" till doom'.⁷⁶

⁷³See Deborah Schwartz and Roy L. Whistler, 'History and future of starch', in James BeMiller and Roy Whistler (ed.), *Starch: chemistry and technology*, third edition (Amsterdam 2009) 1-10, at p. 2.

⁷⁴James Carney and Maura Carney, 'A collection of Irish charms', *Saga och Sed* (1960) 144-52, at p. 152.

⁷⁵Charles Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada náem nÉrenn: lives of Irish saints* (Oxford 1922), i, xvi.

⁷⁶Plummer, *Bethada náem nÉrenn*, i, 42 (Irish text), ii, 41 (translation). A variant account of this episode in a later Latin life of this saint mentions neither decapitation nor rushes, the dead monk

It seems that rushes, used together with a verbal charm or the Christian substitute of a prayer, were believed magically efficacious for holding and rejoining severed body parts. Given the evidence of these remedies, Míach's association with healing herbs in *CMT*, and his collection of (unspecified) plants to heal the king's arm — presumably by application to the body — in *OCT*, there may well have been a 'magical' aspect to the involvement of *Typha latifolia* in Núadu's rehabilitation.

Finally, I suggest that the material result of Núadu's recuperative food-production may tie in with the wider theme of *CMT* at this point, namely the requirement for a legitimate sovereign to provide generously for his people.⁷⁷ It is conceivable that Míach's treatment restored not only Núadu's arm but also his essential productivity.⁷⁸ This, I suggest, was in preparation for his reinstatement as ruler in place of Bres, the Fomorian who replaced him following his mutilation but whom the people in turn rejected because of his extreme lack of hospitality, and whose life they spared only in exchange for advice about which days to plough, sow and reap crops.⁷⁹ It is, I think, no coincidence that Núadu's very next appearance in *CMT* sees him hold a 'great feast' (*mórfleg*) as the reinstated king of Tara.⁸⁰

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being resurrected solely with prayer; see Charles Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford 1910), i, 85.

⁷⁷Cf. Gray, 'Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (1-24)', 191, observing that 'a king must be hospitable' and that 'considered as myth, "The Second Battle of Mag Tuired" is in large part a narrative treatise on kingship'.

⁷⁸This would be broadly in keeping with the interpretation of the name *Núadu* as 'acquirer, catcher' or 'dispenser of wealth', from an Indo-European root **neud-* meaning 'gain possession of'. For etymological discussion, see Tolkien 'The name "Nodens"', in Wheeler and Wheeler, *Report*, 132-7; Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* 768 (*neu-d-*); Guyonvarc'h, 'Notes d'étymologie et de lexicographie Gauloises et Celtiques (XVII) 60. Le théonyme *NODONS/NUADA*', *Ogam* 15 (1963) 229-37; Carey, 'Nodons', 1-3; Wagner, 'Zur Etymologie'; Olmsted, *The gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans* 393; William Sayers, "'Mani maidi an nem ...': ringing changes on a cosmic motif', *Ériu* 37 (1986) 99-117, at p. 117.

⁷⁹Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 66-9 (§§ 149-61). For discussion of this episode, see William Sayers, 'Bargaining for the life of Bres in *Cath Maige Tuired*', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 34 (1987) 26-40.

⁸⁰Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 38-9. Cf. Gray, 'Cath Maige Tuired: myth and structure (24-120)', 1: 'Núadu — his own arm miraculously restored — at once manifests the hospitality that Bres lacked by summoning the Túatha Dé Danaan to a feast at Tara'. Núadu also supplies food and drink in a later account of the conflict described in *CMT*: see Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Cath Muighe Tuireadh: the second battle of Magh Tuireadh* (Dublin 1945) 19, 21-2, 24. We may additionally compare two early Britons with cognate names: (i) Nudus son of Liberalis 'Generous', commemorated in an early sixth-century Latin inscription on a stone at Yarrow Kirk, Selkirkshire; (ii) *Nudd Hael* 'Nudd the Generous', whose generosity was proverbial in medieval Welsh tradition, and who was identified in the Welsh *Triads* as one of the *Tri hael Enys Prydein* 'Three generous men of the Island of Britain' and as *Nudd Llwhael* 'Nudd of the Generous Hand'; see Rachel Bromwich (ed. and trans.), *Trioedd ynys Prydein: the triads of the island of Britain*, third edition (Cardiff 2006) 5-7, 199, 464-6.