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Cúán ua Lothcháin and the transmission of the
Dindsenchas

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The *Dindsenchas* 'lore of places' was described by Whitley Stokes in 1894 as 'one of the most curious relics of mediaeval literature' (1894:274), and three years later by Alfred Nutt as 'a considerable mass of undated fragmentary tradition' (Meyer 1897:168). In the meantime, some scholarly effort has been made to rationalize this profuse corpus of onomastic, legendary and traditional historical material in its aggregate form and to discover a chronological and cultural context in which to view its compilation.¹ Anyone who has had occasion to look at the *Dindsenchas* corpus or indeed at individual constituent texts, will probably appreciate the challenges facing those who attempt such rationalization, and indeed it may be said that the scholarly attention that the *Dindsenchas* has received, though qualitatively estimable, is quantitatively disproportionate to the task. Up until the 1980s, there was general agreement as to the development of the *Dindsenchas*, due primarily to the work of Rudolf Thurneysen (1921:36-46) and Edward Gwynn (1928; 1932; 1935:3-114). It may be helpful at this point to outline briefly this understanding of the form and development of the *Dindsenchas*.

The *Dindsenchas* is generally broken up into three recensions or collections.² Following Thurneysen, and, later, Ó Concheanainn, I will call them here A, B and C. (Gwynn employed a different formulation, and

¹ In the present article, '*dindsenchas*' refers particularly to the corpora of poems and prose texts, as outlined below, that deal specifically with places and place-names (now often known as the 'metrical *Dindsenchas*' and the 'prose *Dindsenchas*' respectively, and sometimes referred to as *Dindsenchas Érenn* or, more often, *Senchas Dind nÉrenn* in the sources themselves, e.g. Rawlinson B 506 f. 11ra1, Book of Uí Maine f. 84r1, RIA MSS B iii 1 f. 1r1, 24 P 13 p. 16 l. 1). I am not concerned here with the wider tradition of *dindsenchas*, the 'literary exploitation of Irish place-names', in Brian Ó Cuív's phrase (1989/90:90), which is manifested incidentally throughout the literature (see, for example, Baumgarten 1987, 1990; Arbuthnot 1999). I distinguish these corpora of texts from individual *dindsenchas* pieces through the use of upper-case *D* ('the *Dindsenchas*').

² Charles Bowen (1975/76:120) and Tomás Ó Concheanainn (1981/82:91) prefer to consider *Dindsenchas A* in terms of a 'collection'.

viewed the *Dindsenchas* in terms of two recensions.³ Recension A comprises a collection of poems, which is today only found as this collection in the Book of Leinster (LL), although versions of most of the poems are also found in Recension C. Somewhat confusingly, this collection of poems is interrupted twice in the manuscript – in its present arrangement – by *dindsenchas* pieces in prose. Recension B is often known as the ‘prose *Dindsenchas*’, as it consists (mainly) of short prose texts. This recension is conventionally divided into two sub-groups, one of which, designated ‘Ba’ by Thurneysen, comprises the pieces of prose *Dindsenchas* that are found in LL (including those pieces just mentioned that interrupt Recension A). The other version of the ‘prose *Dindsenchas*’ is that designated ‘Bb’ by Thurneysen and ‘Bd.-Ed.’ by Gwynn, which is now found in the manuscripts Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 506 and Edinburgh, NLS, Advocates 72.1.16 (Gaelic XVI). The texts of these manuscripts were edited by Stokes as the ‘Bodleian Dinnshenchas’ (1892) and ‘Edinburgh Dinnshenchas’ (1893) respectively. Although this recension is commonly referred to as the ‘prose *Dindsenchas*’, the individual items typically include a single quatrain after the prose piece. Thurneysen (1921:40-2) and Gwynn (1935:22) considered this recension to have been created by making prose abstracts of the corresponding poems in Recension A.⁴

Recension C is written in prose and verse. It has often been considered the ‘full form’ of the *Dindsenchas*. It was regarded by Gwynn (1935:29) and Thurneysen (1921:43-4) and others following them as the consolidated, most developed version, in which the poems of A and the prose pieces of B were integrated by a ‘Reviser’ into prose-and-verse items on individual places.⁵ This is the recension that is found in most manuscripts, about twenty in all, including copies, the best-known of which are the Book of Ballymote, the Book of Lecan and the Rennes Irish manuscript. A notable difference between this recension and the others is the geographical plan that underlies it – it would appear to follow a circuit of Ireland route, beginning in Meath, and following, to a considerable extent, a clockwise sequence through each kingdom (Westropp 1899:22; Meyer 1912; Thurneysen 1921:44-5; Gwynn 1935:29-31; Bowen 1975/76:124).

This conception of the form and development of the *Dindsenchas* in its various recensions held the field until the publication of an important study in 1981/82 by Tomás Ó Concheanainn, in which he presented a contrary interpretation of the evidence, arguing that Recension C, or an earlier version of it, was in fact the primary recension, and that A and B were separately excerpted from it. He furthermore held (1981/82:97) that LL was

³ See Gwynn 1935:3-33.

⁴ Bowen (1975/76:121) also remarked that Recension B is ‘certainly based’ on Recension A.

⁵ Gwynn thought that the ‘Reviser’ cannot have worked directly from LL and that ‘there existed a collection prior to L, from which L and the revised text of the Second Recension are independently derived’ (1935:21-2, 67-9).

the original Recension A text and that the scribe of LL himself was responsible for it.⁶

Although Ó Concheanainn spoke in terms of a single scribe of LL, William O’Sullivan’s 1966 study of the scripts and structure of LL identified four main hands in the manuscript, all of which were involved to some extent with *dindsenchas* material. It may be more useful, therefore, to speak in terms of a single ‘architect’ (or ‘tailor’ as O’Sullivan (1966:9-10, 22) described him), rather than ‘scribe’, for the LL *Dindsenchas*. Indeed, O’Sullivan’s palaeographical and codicological study led him to make some interesting observations on the *Dindsenchas* in LL. He drew attention to evidence of scribe T (whom he considered to have been the ‘tailor’ of the manuscript) composing the *Dindsenchas* ‘from fragments written by [scribes] A, F and U’, and offered the interesting insight that apart from the evidence of two leaves by another scribe, ‘T is the only scribe who seems to understand the later exclusive concept of place-name poetry as a category in itself’ (1966:9, 22).⁷ So Tomás Ó Concheanainn’s conception of one mind, if not one hand, behind LL is not negated by O’Sullivan’s palaeographical analysis, but O’Sullivan’s study of the layout and construction of the manuscript, it seems to me, does not always square easily with the idea that the LL *Dindsenchas* was excerpted from Recension C, or even from a precursor of it.⁸ The process that O’Sullivan envisaged (1966:22-4) is more indicative of a conglomeration of a variety of sources than of a straightforward excerption from an already established recension like Recension C. Indeed, O’Sullivan makes the further suggestion (1966:23-4) that *dindsenchas* material in LL forms not one or two, but four separate collections, and that the treatment of *dindsenchas* material in the manuscript is ‘a main gateway’ to tracing the development to the (as O’Sullivan calls it) ‘full-blown’ version of the *Dindsenchas* as found now in Recension C.⁹ It is important to bear in mind that the current arrangement of those parts of LL containing

⁶ In 1907, Alfred Nutt (1907:227) provisionally rejected ‘the hypothesis that the existing prose collection is based upon or represents a verse one of equal extent, of which the *Book of Leinster* poems are the surviving fragments’.

⁷ See now Duncan (2012), who argues that nine principal scribes were involved in the compilation of LL, and that O’Sullivan’s ‘T’ should be split into four different hands (2012:30-3).

⁸ Ó Concheanainn sometimes invokes, either explicitly or implicitly, a lost or earlier text of C as source for the other two recensions; see, for example, 1981/82:92, 99, 106, 117.

⁹ The four collections that O’Sullivan posited are (i) a metrical version in the hand of scribe U, (ii) a prose version which is mostly in the hand of scribe A, (iii) a metrical version in A’s hand, and (iv) scribe T’s additions to the latter as well as a further two folios in his hand.

O’Sullivan (1966:23-4) calls the series of poems in Rawlinson B 502 (ff 47vb-50vb) dealing with the traditional history of Leinster ‘*Dindsenchas Lagen*’, but in fact the series is headed ‘*Laidsenchas Lagen*’ in the manuscript and contains only one poem that could properly be categorised as *dindsenchas* (viz. the poem beginning *Óchtur Criathar cid dia tā*, f. 47vb38). O’Sullivan may have been misled by Meyer’s title in his introduction to the facsimile (see Bhreathnach 2000:299 and n. 2).

dindsenchas material does not reflect the original sequence of folios. This has some implications for certain of Ó Concheanainn's arguments. For example, when the prose *dindsenchas* of 'Adarca' in LL is adduced as an example of 'the disregard for the tradition of *Dinnsenchas Érenn* ... shown by the redactor who incorporated these borrowed items [from C] into Ba', by virtue of the fact that it is 'just a section of the threefold prose-unit of recension C' (1981/82:130), it should be noted that the LL prose *dindsenchas* of 'Adarca' is found at the end of LL p. 160b, which, as O'Sullivan's reconstruction of the original sequence of folios shows, comes before a loss of folios. It may well be, therefore, that the rest of the manuscript text has been lost, and that we cannot be certain that what survives constitutes the entirety of the original Ba text.

O'Sullivan's study would seem to support Ó Concheanainn's argument that there was no archetype for Recension A, that is, the integral collection of texts we know as Recension A, as opposed to the various sources of it. This in itself does not indicate derivation from Recension C, however. The proposal of such a derivation throws up some interesting questions that should be addressed, it seems to me, before the proposal may be accepted. For example, if A was derived from C, why did the compiler(s) of A abandon the geographical plan that can be found in C, at least in its present form? Although Gwynn (1935:29) refers to 'clear traces of an attempt at geographical sequence' in A, any such sequence appears desultory in comparison to that which is perceptible in C. The itinerary rationale of C, although not strictly adhered to throughout, would seem to be such an important attribute of that recension that to appeal to an earlier version of C that lacked it is surely to posit a different recension altogether. Another difference between A and C that may problematize a derivation of A from C – or, at least, begs consideration – is the fact that a much greater number of poetic ascriptions is found in A than is found in C. Were the ascriptions unique to A all supplied by the A compiler(s)? It is difficult to see why they might have been excised from C subsequent to an excerption by A.

Another, perhaps more important, disparity between A and C which the theory proposed by Ó Concheanainn does not seem to adequately account for is the fact that A contains seventeen poems that are not now found in C (Bowen 1975/76:130-1).¹⁰ If these poems were excerpted from a version of Recension C, then that version must have been quite different from the one that survives, at least with regard to the amount of material it contained. Alternatively, one must argue that these pieces were either taken from some other source altogether or were freshly composed for the purpose. Such qualifications to the proposal of the derivation of A from C must severely mitigate

¹⁰ Bowen's inventory also lists prose pieces from B not now contained in C. Gwynn (1935:29) suggested that poems were omitted from the Second Recension (= C) by the 'Reviser' when they did not conform to his definition of *dindsenchas*.

the proposal itself; at most, it may be argued that C was *the most significant* source of A. Ó Concheanainn deals briefly (1981/82:94-5) with the items on two places, Dún Másc and Cend Finichair, in both verse and prose, that are found in A and B (LL only) respectively, but not in C. In both cases, he argues that because the prose, which is separate from the verse in the manuscript, ends with a reference to the poems (i.e. gives the first line or couplet of the poems), therefore the compiler of A found 'Dún Másc' and 'Cend Finichair' as 'a composite piece of prose and verse in a text of Recension C and excerpted the prose and the verse separately' (1981/82:95). This line of argument is based on another (1981/82:92-4) dealing with the item on Ráth Cnámrossa, which is represented in all three recensions. Ó Concheanainn points to the fact that, in the case of 'Ráth Cnámrossa', the verse of A (and C) and the prose of C are both made up of three corresponding sections, each giving an alternative explanation of the name, with the second and third sections introduced by the phrases *aliter* and *uel ita* in the prose. The text of Recension B (LL only) correlates to the second of these sections only, but ends with a reference to the first line of the poem. Ó Concheanainn concludes from this that 'this section of the prose in the Book of Leinster is clearly an extract from the text of C' (1981/82:93). Although I am not sure that this conclusion necessarily must follow from the facts as we have them, the case for the derivation of the B text of 'Ráth Cnámrossa' from Recension C is at least strengthened by the almost verbatim correspondence between the B text and the second section of the prose of the C text. In the case of 'Dún Másc' and 'Cend Finichair', however, there are no C texts extant, and so no such correspondences may be confirmed. The conclusion that Ó Concheanainn draws for 'Ráth Cnámrossa', namely, that the LL text was taken directly from a C text, would seem to be applied to 'Dún Másc' and 'Cend Finichair' solely on the basis that they, like 'Ráth Cnámrossa', include a line or couplet from the beginning of the corresponding poems (which are now found only in LL). But without any evidence that these items were ever in C, it seems to me to be difficult to argue that they were directly extracted from it. Moreover, there are other pieces that are exclusive to LL (see Bowen 1975/76:130-1), but do not consist of a prose piece ending with the opening line or couplet of a corresponding poem. How should their absence from C be explained if both A and B were taken directly from C, or even from an earlier text of C?

There are other examples of where the text of LL (A) is more copious than that of C, as in the poem on 'Carman', the longest in the *Dindsenchas*.¹¹ This poem is particularly apposite here, as it provides an interesting comparison on a number of levels to one of Cúán's poems that will be mentioned below. It deals with the *dindsenchas* of Carman, the burial place of the kings

¹¹ Note, however, that not all C manuscripts agree in their texts; TCD E.4.1 (1436), for example, alone of the C manuscripts, shares ll 97-156 (Gwynn 1913:10-14) with A.

of the Laigin (identified by Diarmuid Ó Murchadha (2002) as Silliothill, Co. Kildare), and provides a history and vibrant description of the Óenach Carman. One of the important aspects of this poem is that it would appear to furnish some internal historical dating evidence that was used by Gwynn in dating the compilation of the LL *Dindsenchas* as a whole. The poem refers to the *óenach dédenach* ‘last assembly’ (l. 140), which Gwynn suggested referred to the *óenach* of Donnchad mac Gilla Phátraic of the Osraige in 1033. Because the next recorded *óenach* was that convened by Conchobar Ua Conchobair of Uí Fhailge in 1079, Gwynn proposed that the poem cannot have been composed later than 1079 and may in fact have been composed for that occasion. Gwynn considered this date of 1079 as ‘the latest date assignable on purely internal evidence to any part of the verse-Dindsenchas in L, and it would indicate that this collection as a whole, and the prose which was presumably written when the collection was first formed, cannot be dated earlier than the close of the eleventh century’ (1935:94).

The first eighty lines of the poem deal with the *dindsenchas* of ancient Carman, how it got its name, and the occasion of the first *óenach*. This section ends with a *dúnad*, and the next begins with a clear shift of theme and temporal setting. It purports to bring the history of the *óenach* up to the author’s own day, giving the number of *óenaig* that had been convened and a breakdown of the different population groups to which the kings who convened them belonged. It then enumerates the seven games of the *óenach*, after which another *dúnad* is found (l. 192). The poem goes on to list tributary groups of the Laigin and the seating arrangements at the *óenach* of their heads in relation to the king of Leinster, and to give a description of the *óenach* itself, which brings us more or less to the end of the poem.

As Tomás Ó Concheanainn noted (1981/82:98-9), the poem in its longest form would appear to be composite, and, as he would maintain, to be the work of more than one poet. He would divide the poem into two sections, consisting of lines 1-80 and lines 81-324 respectively, on the basis of the thematic and structural divisions in the poem, as well as on contrasting patterns of internal rhyme between the two sections. He would consider the date of composition that Gwynn suggested, 1079, to be ‘probably correct for the second section’ on internal evidence (1981/82:99). Similarly, of the ascription in LL to the poet Fulartach, Ó Concheanainn says: ‘if we assume that the ascription has some basis in fact, we can accept it only for the second section of the poem ... Lines 1-80 are to be ascribed to an earlier author’ (1981/82:99).¹² As already mentioned, the poem is longer in A than in C;

¹² Although Gwynn (1913:471) states that ‘Carman’ is ascribed to Fulartach in LL, I am unable to make out an ascription from the manuscript image on ISOS. The page is badly stained, but the line preceding the poem seems legible enough. The editors of the diplomatic edition state in their foreword that the poem is attributed to Fulartach (with a reference to Gwynn’s edition) (LL vol. iv p. xi), but record no ascription in their edition of the text itself.

some parts of the second section are unique to A, but some are also found in C. C ends at l. 296,¹³ and does not contain ll 157-92 or 221-84. Most C manuscripts do not contain ll 97-156, but TCD E.4.1 (1436) is an exception to this.¹⁴ Although A’s text is longer, there are two couplets and a quatrain that are found in C but not in A (Gwynn 1913:18 (ll 211-20), 476). Both Gwynn (1913:469) and Ó Concheanainn (1981/82:99) considered that the second section was abridged by ‘the scribes who handed down recension C’. This would imply that an original C text contained the material now only found in A; clearly, the C text as it now stands cannot have been A’s only exemplar.

The TCD manuscript E.4.1 (1436) would seem to be a critical link in the chain of transmission of the poem – as well as sharing some material with A that is not found in the other C manuscripts,¹⁵ E.4.1 also agrees with LL against the rest of C in certain readings of the text common to all manuscripts.¹⁶ However, contamination by LL can probably be ruled out, since E.4.1 does not contain all the extra material of the A text, and furthermore agrees with the other C manuscripts against LL in certain other readings.¹⁷ It would seem, therefore, that Gwynn raised an interesting possibility in identifying E.4.1 as occupying an ‘intermediate position’ in the transmission of the poem (1913:469; cf. 1935:8-9).

R.I. Best (1956) later recognised the two folios of E.4.1 that contain *dindsenchas* material as belonging originally to Laud 610, in which manuscript only two other *dindsenchas* items now survive, on Slige Dala and Dún Másc, both in prose (Dillon 1960:75). It is extremely regrettable that more *dindsenchas* material from Laud 610 does not survive; since what does survive seems to stand apart from the other versions, a fuller collection could be hoped to yield some significant evidence for the relationship between the recensions. For example, the Laud copy of the item on Slige Dala is very similar to Ba (LL), while the prose of the C version differs significantly from these.¹⁸ The prose *dindsenchas* of Dún Másc is now found only in LL (which also exclusively contains the verse *dindsenchas* of Dún Másc in its entirety) and Laud 610. The Laud version is somewhat different and more extensive than the LL version, and instead of the first couplet of the corre-

Gwynn may have based his statement on O’Curry’s rather faulty transcription (1873:531). The only other manuscript to carry an ascription is TCD E.4.1 (1436), which ascribes the poem to ‘Flann’.

¹³ Note, however, that ll 313-6 of Gwynn’s edition are found in C, but are placed after l. 288 in that recension.

¹⁴ See n. 11 above; this manuscript is also unique in that it is the only C manuscript to carry an ascription (see n. 12 above). In the first section, the quatrain at ll 53-6 is found only in LL and E.4.1, and E.4.1 also agrees with LL in not containing the quatrain at ll 21-4.

¹⁵ See previous note.

¹⁶ See, for example, the *variae lectiones* for ll 4, 19, 21-4, 37, 45, 53-6, 84, 85, 90.

¹⁷ See, for example, the *variae lectiones* for ll 193, 195, 203, 204, 207, 211-20, 313-6, 314, 316.

¹⁸ Note also that Laud has some text not found in LL, and contains a superior reading *secht maic Orfait* (Laud 610 f. 86va12, 26) for *.uii. orfaid* in LL (LL 22476, 22482).

sponding verse *dindsenchas* as is found at the end of the prose in LL, it includes the fourth and fifth quatrains of the poem (f. 86vb12-18). MS E.4.1 seems to straddle both recensions in its text of other items also. In his discussion of ‘Sliab Bladma’, Tomás Ó Concheanainn (1981/82:112-3) suggests that the form *meic Úachalla* in the prose and verse of LL is found only in that manuscript, whereas manuscripts of Recension C show *meic Úachail*. However, *meic Úachalla* is in fact also found in E.4.1 (p. 85a6), which may prejudice his argument that the correction in the LL prose ‘must have been made on the authority of the text of the poem in the Book of Leinster itself ... since that is the only text of the poem which shows the form *meic Úachalla*’ (1981/82:112). The phrase *Bregmáel in ngobaind mbáin* in LL was, according to Ó Concheanainn (1981/82:112-3), corrected from *ro marb buachaill Bregmael* [leg. *Bregmaíl?*] *báin*, an original reading which he states is now found only in the Bb version. However, it is in fact also found in E.4.1 (p. 85a4) as well as the other manuscripts listed by Gwynn (1906:56) as S₂ and H, namely RIA B ii 2 (f. 8rb20-1) and TCD H.3.3 (1322) (p. 17a27) respectively.¹⁹ While Ó Concheanainn was quite right (1981/82:113) to point out the error of the editors of the Book of Leinster when they stated that *ro marb buachaill Bregmaíl báin* was the reading of ‘R [= the Rennes Irish manuscript], etc’ (LL 701 n. 6-6), it may be useful to clarify here that it is in fact more widely attested than suggested.²⁰ Unfortunately, space does not permit further comparison of the texts of E.4.1 and Laud 610 with the other texts here, but an investigation of their place in the broader *dindsenchas* tradition would seem worthwhile.

The *dindsenchas* poetry of Cúán ua Lothcháin

A number of poets are named as authors of *dindsenchas* poetry; those whose floruits are vouched by other sources may be dated to between the last quarter of the ninth century and the middle of the eleventh (Gwynn 1935:93). One of these poets is Cúán ua Lothcháin, whose death is recorded in the annals in the year 1024.²¹ Seven *dindsenchas* poems are accompanied by an

¹⁹ The quatrain containing the line is found as a single quatrain accompanying a short prose piece in B ii 2, and as the penultimate quatrain of the copy of the poem in TCD H.3.3 (1322), where the line reads *romarb buacoill Bregmaíl mháir*.

²⁰ As Ó Concheanainn noted (1981/82:114), it is also found in the Book of Uí Maine (f. 110va1-2). There, however, it occurs, somewhat corruptly, as a lone quatrain, without accompanying prose. Note that another version of ‘Sliab Bladma’, in prose with a single quatrain, is found at f. 89r of the same manuscript; while the prose reflects that of C, the single quatrain is quite different from all other versions, apart from its first line.

²¹ Cúán’s obit is found in the Annals of Ulster, Annals of Inisfallen, Annals of Tigernach, *Chronicum Scotorum*, Annals of Loch Cé, Annals of Boyle, Annals of Clonmacnoise and Annals of the Four Masters.

ascription to Cúán in one or more manuscripts.²² As well as making this substantial contribution to the corpus, Tomás Ó Concheanainn argues for a much more extensive role for Cúán in his conception of the development of the *Dindsenchas*. In another important article, Ó Concheanainn (1982) made a case for Cúán’s authorship of various anonymous *dindsenchas* poems and furthermore suggested that Cúán may in fact have been ‘the author who compiled the primary recension of Dinnshenchas C’ (1982:98).

Although space does not allow for a detailed exploration of his arguments here, it may be worth drawing attention to a possible conflict between his two proposals: the first, that Recension C, or an earlier version of it, was the source for A and B, and the second, that Cúán was instrumental in compiling the primary draft of that Recension C, or of its earlier version. Ó Concheanainn’s 1982 study, in which he made the suggestion of Cúán’s compilership of the *Dindsenchas*, focusses primarily on the final quatrains of a number of mostly anonymous poems. These quatrains have in common a religious tone, and are mostly found in the versions of these poems in Recension C. In those poems also found in Recension A, the religious quatrains are usually, though not always, absent from the A texts.²³ Ó Concheanainn sought to discover evidence of authorship in these quatrains on the basis of their style and content. He argued that they were not the work of ‘some later versifier adding devotional items to certain poems’ because they ‘coalesce so well with the poems, both metrically and stylistically, that the poems in question and their additional quatrains clearly represent the work of a single author’ (1982:94). This author, he proposed, was Cúán.

I think that one obvious question that arises here is, why are so many of the extra quatrains not found in A, if A was excerpted from an earlier version of C? It seems unlikely that the A compiler would have removed them. Otherwise, we must assume that they were not in his exemplar in the first place. In that case, however, we are left with the uneasy proposition that the original draft of the *Dindsenchas* did not contain the fullest texts of poems that were composed by the very man who compiled that collection. Both Gwynn’s (1935:74) and Ó Concheanainn’s (1982:94) use of the term ‘addition’ or ‘additional’ to describe these quatrains in the context of a ‘work of a single author’ (as Ó Concheanainn argues) may be taken to suggest that a period of time had elapsed between the composition of the final quatrains and that of the rest of the poems they were appended to.

²² These are ‘Temair III’ (Recension C only), ‘Temair V’ (B only), and ‘Boand I’, ‘Sinann I’, ‘Carn Furbaide’, ‘Druim Criaich’ and ‘Taltiu’ (all in A and C). The ascription of ‘Boand I’ is not completely legible in LL, the only manuscript to carry an ascription, but was taken to be to Cúán by Gwynn (1913:480) and evidently by Carney (1983:180).

²³ Out of twenty poems mentioned by Ó Concheanainn, ten lack the final quatrain in LL. In three others, the pious quatrain is found in LL (in one of these, it is not the final, but the penultimate, quatrain). In the case of the remaining seven, the poem is not found in LL at all. The final quatrain is similarly lacking in either one or two other (C) manuscripts in the case of three of the twenty poems.

According to this line of reasoning, this period of time should be long enough to allow for the circulation of two versions of Recension C (the earlier of which is now represented by the shorter poems in A), but short enough to be accommodated within the poet's lifetime. A somewhat perplexing corollary of this interpretation is that the poems held to have been composed by the compiler of the earlier recension are given a longer form in the later one. This seems to me an uneconomical proposition; surely, if A was excerpted from an earlier version of C, then these extra quatrains are most likely the work of a later reviser of C, and not of the original compiler. If that original compiler was indeed Cúán ua Lothcháin, he could therefore hardly have been the author of these quatrains.

Ó Concheanainn's examination of poems containing the final devotional quatrains was not confined to those ascribed to Cúán in the manuscript(s) but also included eighteen anonymous poems.²⁴ Moreover, certain of Cúán's *dindsenchas* poems were not included in his study, presumably because they do not display the stylistic attributes that he was concerned with. In what follows, I will take the example of two of these poems here, which I think are relevant for our discussion.

'Druim Criaich' (*Druim Criaich, cete cet cuan*)

This is a poem of 212 lines (53 quatrains) in Gwynn's edition (1924:42-57). At line 136 (34 quatrains), there is a *dúmad*, and the remaining nineteen quatrains are found only in LL, that is, Recension A. A very definite thematic break is also perceptible at this point as the poem moves from an account of events in the far distant past, namely the story of the treachery of the three sons of Eochaid Feidlech against their father, to events seemingly in much more recent history, that is, in the late tenth century, involving Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill (Máel Sechnaill II), the Clann Cholmáin high-king of Tara, who has often been associated with Cúán. The poem, and especially the second section, contains a wealth of extremely interesting historical references, but looking at this second section from a more literary point of view, we can say that it was clearly written with the first section in mind: an explicit comparison is made between the treachery of Eochaid Feidlech's sons against their father as described in that first section and the actions of opponents of Máel Sechnaill against him in the second. The two sections are adroitly integrated further at the end of the second section, where Máel Sechnaill's pedigree is traced back to Eochaid Feidlech.

So far, Tomás Ó Concheanainn's idea of the relationship of the different *dindsenchas* recensions, that is, that the prose-and-verse C recension was the

earlier one, would seem to work well here, as the second section in A seems clearly to be a later addition: the events of the second section are not reflected in the prose of C, or indeed extant in the verse of any C text, but seem to provide an historical anchor in the late tenth century. This might indicate that a putatively primary C or proto-C recension pre-dated these late tenth-century events. The distinction of the two parts of the poem is based on thematic and textual evidence: the incidence of metrical ornament in each section does not seem to provide any grounds to differentiate the sections on that basis, and the linguistic evidence from both sections is similarly homogeneous. The only ascription accompanying the poem in manuscript is found in LL (A); the version of the poem in that manuscript also contains an authorial signature in the final quatrain, which is not present in C. There would seem, then, to be at least three possibilities with regard to the authorship of 'Druim Criaich'. The first is that Cúán wrote both sections of the poem. In that case, we would probably have to allow a certain period of time between the composition of the two parts, enough for a separate manuscript tradition to have developed (represented by C on the one hand and A on the other). The second is that Cúán wrote the first section, and another poet wrote the second. In this case, the second section was grafted onto a poem known, or thought, to have been written by Cúán, with the signature quatrain in A serving as an acknowledgement of this. A third possibility is that a now-anonymous poet wrote the first section, and Cúán updated it by adding the second and identifying himself in it. The subject matter of the second part of the poem, that is, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, may suggest a link with Cúán, although we should be mindful of circularity here.²⁵ As stated, there would not seem to be any compelling metrical or linguistic reasons to assign the two sections to two different authors, but the manuscript evidence would seem to point in that direction. According to Thurneysen's and Gwynn's theories (A > C), we would have to assume that the redactor of C (the 'Reviser') excised the second section of the poem, and made some rearrangements of quatrains, for his recension. It would seem that the evidence in this case fits better with Ó Concheanainn's position that C did not come from A. But what about Ó Concheanainn's other premise that A represents an excerpt of C? Clearly, the evidence here cannot establish that for certain, but if we accept Ó Concheanainn's arguments that (i) A was derived from C, and (ii) that Cúán was instrumental in the compilation of C, then his authorship of 'Druim Criaich', or at least of the second section which incorporates his apparent signature, would seem to be in serious doubt. Conversely, if we accept his authorship of 'Druim Criaich' in its entirety, then we must question his putative role in the compilation of Recension C.

²⁴ These are 'Loch Dergderc', 'Áth Luain', 'Cleitech', 'Crechmael', 'Es Ruaid I', 'Lia Nothain', 'Sliab Betha', 'Druim Cliab', 'Cerna', 'Loch nÉrne', 'Ard Macha', 'Dubthir', 'Nemthenn', 'Mag Luirg', 'Mag Muirisce', 'Loch Néil', 'Benn Foibne' and 'Mag nAí'.

²⁵ A further possibility, that Cúán had nothing to do with the composition of the poem whatsoever, and the ascription to him is entirely false, must remain.

‘Taltiu’ (*A chóemu críche Cuind chain*)

Tomás Ó Concheanainn’s studies (1981/82; 1982) were based on his doctoral dissertation which was largely concerned with Recension B, and as such, much of his focus is on the relationship of B to the rest of the *Dindsenchas*. As mentioned above, Thurneysen and Gwynn argued that B was put together by making prose abstracts of the poems of A. Ó Concheanainn, however, strongly disagreed, and argued that in fact C (or an earlier version thereof) was the primary version, and that both A and B were derived from it.

One of the poems he adduced for his argument that B was derived from C is another poem ascribed to Cúán, namely ‘Taltiu’ (*A chóemu críche Cuind chain*) (Gwynn 1924:146-63). Like ‘Druim Criaich’, ‘Taltiu’ can be divided into two sections, and like ‘Druim Criaich’, these sections are readily distinguishable from a thematic point of view – the first (ll 1-188) deals with the ancient history of the place, and the second (ll 189-236) with more recent events and with describing the assembly that was held in Taltiu. LL contains the only manuscript ascription to Cúán, but, as in the case of ‘Druim Criaich’, the poem contains an authorial signature, to ‘ua Lothcháin’ (Gwynn 1924:162 l. 233; LL 27997). Gwynn (1924:413) plausibly suggested a date of composition of 1007 on the grounds of internal evidence: that it was composed for the occasion, recorded in the annals, of the convening of the Óenach Tailten by Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill in that year.²⁶

As mentioned above, the individual articles in Recension B, although mostly prose, typically include a single quatrain also, and Ó Concheanainn drew attention to the fact that the first line of the single quatrain cited in the Recension B text of ‘Taltiu’ is identical to the ninth line of the verse text (1981/82:120). He concluded: ‘in view of the date of the poem we may take it as certain that the first line of the single quatrain [i.e. in B] represents an echo of the identical ninth line of the poem’ (1981/82:120). He clearly took the 1007 date suggested for ‘Taltiu’ to precede the compilation of Recension B, which would seem likely enough.²⁷ Ó Concheanainn’s argument, then, is that there was a direct borrowing, and that it went from Recension C to Recension B. It may be argued, however, that with regard to ‘Taltiu’, the nature of the evidence does not make for a very strong case. The line referred to by Ó Concheanainn reads *Taltiu ingen Magmóir maill* ‘Taltiu daughter of gentle Magmór’. This line is mostly made up of Taltiu’s name, which is hardly susceptible of much variation. The only ‘free’ syllable in the

²⁶ Gwynn in fact proposed the date 1006, but this should be understood as 1007 according to the revised dating of the annals (Walsh 1941). The ‘restoration’ of Óenach Tailten by Máel Sechnaill is recorded in the Annals of Ulster, *Chronicum Scotorum* and Annals of the Four Masters (s.a. 1006).

²⁷ Gwynn (1935:91-114) proposed a date in the first quarter of the twelfth century for Recension Ba, and the second quarter for Bb; Máirín O Daly (1965:62), however, suggested a date of 950-1000 for the prose *Dindsenchas*.

line is the last one, the adjective *maill*, which of course provides alliteration with Taltiu’s patronymic and would be a relatively easy word to find a rhyme for, especially with the possibility of vocalic variation (-ai/-oi-) in the genitive. It is perhaps not inconceivable that two different poets might choose this particular monosyllable to qualify Taltiu’s patronymic and thus end the line.

But there is a more important point to be made here that is not given much attention in Ó Concheanainn’s article, concerning the division of the poem into two sections, a division which is, as we also saw in the case of ‘Druim Criaich’, borne out in the manuscript tradition. The second, ‘contemporary’ section is found only in LL (i.e. Recension A) and in one manuscript of Recension C, namely, the sixteenth-century manuscript TCD H.3.3 (1322). Interestingly, there are other examples of shared material between this manuscript and LL, both in other *dindsenchas* poems, such as ‘Slíab Bladma’, as well as in the first section of ‘Taltiu’ itself, including quatrains peculiar to these two manuscripts. The internal historical evidence which allowed Gwynn to postulate a date of composition of 1007 for ‘Taltiu’ is found in the second section of the poem only. Therefore, in the first instance at least, we should consider this date to apply to the second section, and not necessarily to the first. Moreover, apart from one manuscript out of the eight containing it,²⁸ Recension C (as it now exists, and excluding the single manuscript H.3.3) does not contain this dating information. This dating may not, therefore, apply to that quatrain from the poem that Ó Concheanainn used as evidence for B’s dependence on C. Of course, that quatrain is likely to predate the datable second section, a point which would surely have been to the advantage of Ó Concheanainn’s argument here, and it is surprising that he did not make a clear distinction between the compositional strata in the poem, as he is incisive in assessing the implications such stratification may have in the case of other poems. In any case, in terms of the relationship between A and C, again, Ó Concheanainn’s position that C did not come from A would seem to be borne out by the evidence here.

But what about his other contention that A was excerpted from C? One might argue that the extra material in A could have been added to this excerpt, but in this case we have the witness of another C manuscript, H.3.3. As already mentioned, as well as sharing the second section with LL, H.3.3 agrees with LL in containing quatrains in the first section that are not found in the other C manuscripts.²⁹ However, in certain individual readings in the first section, H.3.3 will often agree with the C manuscripts against LL.³⁰ At

²⁸ Gwynn (1924:147) lists seven; he appears to have overlooked RIA 24 P 13 (olim Reeves 832, Gwynn’s ‘V’).

²⁹ For example, quatrains 7 (ll 25-8), 14 (ll 49-56), 22 (ll 85-8), 40 (ll 157-60).

³⁰ See, for example, ll 22, 48, 71, 77, 89, 93, 114, 121, 129, 130, 134, 143, 153.

first glance, this might look as if the redactor of the H.3.3 text was using two sources, a C manuscript and an A manuscript, which could well have been LL itself.³¹ However, there are some readings which complicate this. Firstly, there is one quatrain from the second section (ll 197-200) which is only found in LL. Of course, its omission in H.3.3 may be readily explained by its simply being overlooked by the scribe. But H.3.3 contains a quatrain (ll 221-4) that is not found in LL, which is more difficult to account for. This quatrain includes an infixed pronoun which does not look particularly late: *conan tardad* ‘that he should bring us’.³² Some other variants also indicate that H.3.3 drew on a source that was not LL, such as the final line in the following quatrain (Gwynn 1924:160-1 ll 193-6):

Conostánic 'na chath chass ray	Until there came in his serried ar-
mac meic ind ríḡ mothar-mass	the king's comely-bearded grand-
ocus mac domeil mid mesc	son, and the son, who drinks the
ingine ind ríḡ dodrairmesc.	heady mead, of the daughter of the
	king who thwarted the Fair.

For his edition, Gwynn chose the reading of H.3.3 in the final line; LL (LL 27964) reads *mac* [recte *maic?*] *ind ríḡ dodrairmesc*. The reading of H.3.3 is superior from a metrical point of view, as the LL reading is a syllable short. Furthermore, the H.3.3 reading would also seem to be preferable from an historical point of view. The subject of the quatrain is Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill. Máel Sechnaill's father Domnall was a son of Donnchad Donn mac Flainn Sinna († 944), who was the king referred to in the second line, and his mother was Dúnlaith, daughter of Muirchertach mac Néill of Cenél nÉogain († 943). This Muirchertach (named in the Annals of Ulster as *mac Néill maic Áedo*) is recorded in the annals as having disturbed the *óenach* of Donnchad Donn in the year 927. The one who ‘thwarted the fair’ was therefore on Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill's mother's, and not his father's, side. This was the *óenach* that became known as the *dubóenach Donnchada* ‘black *óenach* of Donnchad’, and is also mentioned in the first section of ‘Taltiu’ (Gwynn 1924:158-9 ll 173-6):

Cóic cét óenach ...	Five hundred fairs ...
ó óenuch Pátric Macha	from the Fair of Patrick of Macha
co dub-óenach nDondchada.	to the Black Fair of Donnchad.

We may note that it is mentioned here in the context of being the last *óenach* – this is important from the point of view of the relative dates of composition of the two sections.

³¹ Ó Concheanainn (1981/82:92, 97, 131 n. 56) doubted the existence of a text of A prior to LL.

³² Gwynn (1924:162 l. 223) reads *co nantartad*.

One more variant reading might be worth mentioning. At line 228 of the poem, LL (LL 27992) reads *Crist dia chomge dia chommorad*, where H.3.3 reads *Crist die coimge die comedadh*.³³ The line is hypermetrical in both manuscripts; as the other lines in the quatrain all begin with the word *Crist*, this word was obviously repeated incorrectly in the last line. If this was not done independently in both manuscripts, then it would seem to point to a flaw in some common exemplar. The readings, however, would seem to indicate that the immediate exemplar used by H.3.3 was not LL.³⁴ This suggests to me that another copy of the poem was once available. There is a gap of 125-150 years between Cúán's floruit and the compilation of LL around the mid-twelfth century. So if Cúán *did* write those sections of the poems that contain his signature, there presumably was a text of those poems that predated LL. But even if we, with Tomás Ó Concheanainn, take LL as the only (ever) witness to Recension A, there is another point that should be made here in relation to these poems. It is these second sections – now almost exclusively found in A – that involve the associations with Cúán, whether these associations be direct, through authorial signatures, or inferred, through internal historical references or subject matter related to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill. I suggest, then, that it is untenable to accept both Cúán's authorship of these poems in their entirety and his compilation of the primary draft of Recension C; these two positions would seem to me to be mutually exclusive.

Arguing from particular to the general may be a hazardous exercise when dealing with such a voluminous corpus of material – especially material that was probably particularly prone to accretion – and with such a relative profusion of manuscript witnesses. But what I have hoped to show is that there are still important insights to the wider *dindsenchas* manuscript tradition to be discovered by examining the textual tradition of individual poems, without losing sight of the historical and other contexts in which they were composed.³⁵

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³³ Gwynn (1924:163), using the LL text, translated ‘to protect and prosper him’.

³⁴ In LL, the *-mor-* of *chommorad* is written *mo* followed by a 2-shaped *r*; it is perhaps possible that this was misread as *m* followed by an ampersand, but the manuscript seems quite legible, even today.

³⁵ I would like to thank Professors Liam Breatnach and Tomás Ó Concheanainn for reading a draft of this article, offering many helpful comments and suggesting many improvements. Any remaining errors are my own responsibility.

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Celebrating Sixty Years of Celtic Studies at Uppsala University

Proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium
of Societas Celtologica Nordica

Edited by
Ailbhe Ó Corráin and Gordon Ó Riain



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ABSTRACT

Ó Corráin Ailbhe, and Gordon Ó Riain, eds., 2013. *Celebrating Sixty Years of Celtic Studies at Uppsala University: Proceedings of the Eleventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Celtica Upsaliensia, Vol. 9.

This volume is a celebration of Celtic Languages and Literatures at the University of Uppsala, an academic tradition which has continued from 1950 to the present day. In order to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of this tradition, *Societas Celtologica Nordica* held its eleventh symposium in Uppsala on 14-16 May 2010. The present volume comprises the proceedings of that conference and nine former lecturers in Celtic Studies at Uppsala have contributed. The articles deal with aspects of Irish literature, language, history and folklore. Literary papers deal with early Irish voyage literature, Irish place-name lore, textual transmission, satirical verse of the eighteenth century and the emergence of a modern Irish-language print culture. Language papers deal with matters such as words for the fox in Indo-European and Celtic, the language of the first translation of the New Testament into Irish, linguistic features of the late Ulster Cycle and diversity in language learning. Irish history is catered for in papers that look at the origins and birthplace of St Patrick and Gaelic Dublin in the early eighteenth century, while another paper deals with field-work carried out in Ireland and Scotland by the Norwegian folklorist Ole Mørk Sandvik.

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Dedicated to the memory of
Birgit Bramsbäck (†1995) and Karl Inge Sandred (†2008)