A Note on a Fiery Pharao

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In the Gododdin the word *pharaon* is attested once, viz. in line 1432[1], in the difficult Gwarchan Maeldderw. The text reads (p. 29[6-7]): [1431]*Disgleiryawr ac archawr tal achon* [1432]*ar rud dhreic fud pharaon*, translated by Isaac as: "the dazzling one, and the one who required due payment for his lineage; in the presence of the spoils of the Pharao's red dragon."[2] On his translation of the second of these two lines Isaac remarks: "I am interpreting the syntax as a poetic transformation of what would normally be expressed in the word order (also modernizing the orthography) *ar fudd draig rudd Ffaraon*."[3] We are of the opinion that, although the syntax of the Gododdin and the connected Gorchanau is sometimes succinct, in these texts the syntax, at least on the level of word-groups, functions, on the whole, rather as to be expected.[4] Further, there seems to be no poetic reason for the interchange of *ruđ* and *fuđ* in this line. Supposing that *disgleiryawr*, "splendid, bright," in line 1431[5] describes the fallen hero praised in this song, it seems

1 We quote the text according to the edition of Daniel Huws (ed.), *Llyfr Aneurin: a facsimile,* South Glamorgan County Council & The National Library of Wales, 1989.

2 Graham R. Isaac, "Gwarchan Maeldderw," *CMCS* xliv, 2002, pp. 73-96, p. 84; the abbreviations used in this article are the usual ones.

3 Isaac, ibid., p. 88; cf. also his remark p. 90, sub 27: "The line is a fine example (out of many) of the syntactic minimalism of the poet"; note that this translation is accepted by Marged Haycock, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, Aberystwyth 2007, p. 222.

4 For the whole of "Gwarchan Maeldderw," cf. also M. Meelen's translation of this text in "Kelten" 2010.

5 The rest of this line is not really important for the following discussion, but may be translated as: "the brilliant one, seeking tribute ..," taking *tal* rather as "payment, tribute" than as "end, top, front" (both meanings are attested in the Gododdin); *achon* has been explained as an otherwise unattested plural of *ach* "relationship, lineage, race, stock," (cf. Isaac, ibid., p. 84) which is, of course, possible, but by no means certain. Prof. Schrijver, taking up this possibility, in a personal communication notes as a possible translation: "the brilliant [hero] and the one who exacts payment [i.e. tribute] of [i.e.] for the descendants [of the deceased]. However, *achon* may be any adjective describing the tribute exacted by Maeldderw; we are, however, unable to propose a solution.

probable that the words in the next line give some extra information on this point. *Ruđ dhreic* may very well mean "red dragon," while for these texts *ar* meaning "before, in the presence of," is frequent. *Fud* is a word with its first consonant lenited; several possibilities come to mind, but *mud*, "dumb, silent," does not fit the context and does not rhyme with *ruđ*. *Budd*, "profit, gain, booty, usefulness," seems therefore the best solution. The meaning of the whole line may be: "[the brilliant one ..] in the presence of the Red Dragon, the profitable one of the Pharao." In this construction *fuđ pharaon* may be an epithet of the *ruđ dhreic*, meaning a hierarchy of an overlord called "pharao," with petty kings dependant of him, styled "dragon." More probable, however, it seems to us, to suppose that *dhreic* and *pharaon* are indicating the same person, while the hero is called one who is profitable for his overlord, in which case *fuđ pharaon* is an apposition to *ruđ dhreic* and therefore lenited.

We suppose that the use of the terms *draig* and *ffaraon*[6] may very well have been influenced by Gildas' use of both.[7] Gildas uses "pharaoh" to indicate a British king in the paragraph containing the well-known expression *superbo tyranno Vortigerno*. Gildas quotes from the Old Testament "*stulti principes", ut dictum est, "Taneos dantes Pharaoni consilium insipiens"*,[8] based on a text from Isaiah (xix[11]), in the form in which it is represented in the Vulgate: *Stulti principes Taneos,*[9] *sapientes consiliarii Pharaonis dederunt consilium insipiens.* This sentence has been translated as "Foolish princes of Taneos,[10] as is said, giving unwise counsel to Pharaoh.*"*

6 For the form, cf. Ifor Williams, *Cyfranc Llud a Llevelys*, Bangor, 1922[2], p. 28.

7 Although it is, of course, also possible that the use of these terms was already general and wide-spread.

8 Gildas, *De Excidio Britonum*, 23, 2, we quote the text according the edition of Th. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora Saec. iv. v. vi vii*, vol. iii, Berlin, 1898, p. 38.

9 The form Taneos in the Vulgate is, of course, to be explained as the Greek genetive, the Septuagint giving Τάνεως in this verse; as "Tsoan" is the Hebrew name of the North-Egyptian town Tanis (Coptic: Čane) the Greek form of the name must have been taken directly from Egyptian.

10 Translations of the Gildas' text tend to represent "Taneos" by Zoan (cf. the preceding note), cf. e.g. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas, The Ruin of Britain and other Works*, London and Chichester, 1978, p. 26. At least one translator even gives, we suppose by mistake, "Zion," cf. N. J. Higham, *The English conquest, Gildas and Britain in the fifth century*, Manchester, 1994, p. 38. It seems incorrect to translate not Gildas' text

And further Gildas speaks of *libet quid quantumque his supradictis lascivientibus insanisque satellitum **Faraonis**, quibus eius periturus mari provocatur exercitus strenue rubro, eorumque similibus quinque equis minarum prophetica inclamitent strictim edicere oracula*,[11] which may be translated as "Rather, I wish succinctly to relate what threatenings, and how great, the oracles of the prophets exclaim against the above-named lascivious and mad five horses of the retinue of Pharaoh, by whom his army is actively incited to its ruin in the Red sea, and those like unto them." Seeing that Gildas starts the use of "pharaoh" for a British king or chieftain with a quotation from the Bible, it seems not improbable that the use of "ffaraon" in later Welsh texts takes its departure from Gildas.[12] It is

but the Hebrew Vorlage, which he most probably did not know. Earlier translations give, more correctly, "Taneos", as e.g. *The epistle of Gildas, the most ancient British author, ..., faithfully translated out of the originall Latine*, London, 1638, p. 50: "by the foolish Princes (as it is said) of *Taneos* giving undiscreete Counsell to their king *Pharaoh*." Better still would be, we suppose, ".. the princes of Tanis ...," although perhaps one might suppose that Gildas did not recognize the genetive Taneos. Note that the edition of Stevenson (*Gildas De Excidio Britanniae ad fidem Codicum Manuscriptorum recensuit Josephus Stevenson*, London, 1838, p. 30, gives the name as *Thafneos*, a form found in several translations, cf. e.g. John Allan Giles, *Six old English chronicles, of which two are now first translated from the monkish Latin originals*, London, 1891, p. 310: *Foolish are the princes, as it is said, of Thafneos, giving counsel to unwise Pharaoh*. Note also the interesting text, reported by Stevenson as a marginal remark from the Cambridge MS of this text: *Stulti sunt principes Tafneos, dantes, id est, suadentibus [sic] Pharaoni, ut plecteretur (?) populus Israel et ut persequeretur eos iterum, ita Germaniae cum Gurtingerno insipienti*.

11 Gildas, o.c., 37, 2.

12 Note also that in later literature the use of Ffaraon/Pharao is mainly restricted to the king of Egypt, cf. e.g. the website www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk, which gives, in a searchable form, the prose texts dating from 1350-1425: *pharao vrenhin trwy vor rud* (Peniarth 5 / Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch, 4v[42]); *pharao vrenhin yr eifft* (Llanstephan 27 / Llyfr Coch Talgarth, 10r[13]; Peniarth 15, 73[14]; Peniarth 190, 34[18]); *pharao ac y lu yr eifft* (Llanstephan 27 / Llyfr Coch Talgarth, 95v[8]; cf. also Llanstephan 27 / Llyfr Coch Talgarth, 49v[23]); cf., however, on this point also Haycock, o.c., ibid (see note 3), who points to a poem by Hywel Foel praising Owain ap Gruffudd, which ends with the following three lines: difefyl ner fyryfder faraon / dinam hael o hil eryron / dinac dreic dinas kertoryon, cf. R. M. Andrews e.a., *Gwaith Bleddyn Fardd a Beirdd Eraill ail Hanner y Drydedd Ganrif ar Ddeg*, Caerdyd 1996, p. 186, ll. 24-26 (= Llawysgrif Hendregadredd f. 23v at the end), where the Pharao in question may be the traditional Ffaraon Dandde or the king of Egypt, according to the note by the editors on p. 190, and to Canu Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr, who uses Faraon to indicate the Norman king (Faraon Freinc (cf. N. A. Jones & A. P. Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr*, Caerdydd 1995, p. 122, l. 222 (= Llawysgrif Hendregadredd f. 41r almost at the end), and the remark on p. 148,

interesting that in the same texts Gildas also uses the term *draco*[13] for one of the British kings: *Quid tu enim, insularis draco, multorum tyrannorum depulsor tam regno quam etiam vita ...,*[14] "What of you, dragon of the island, you who have removed many of these tyrants from their country and even their life ?".[15]

Several editors of this text note the possible relation with the dragons of Dinas Emrys as mentioned in Nennius *Historia Brittonum* and retold in *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*.[16] Perhaps the supposed relationship is strengthened by the fact that in the line from *Gwarchan Maeldderw* both "pharaoh" and "dragon" are mentioned, as is the case in *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, although the semantic content of the term "dragon" is normally understood differently, not as "king, chieftain," but as a symbol for a whole nation.

More or less the same story is also to be found with Nennius,[17] in the *Historia Brittonum*,[18] with the small difference compared to the *Lludd a Llefelys*-version that in this text the colour of the dragons is mentioned: *duo vermes in eo* (i.e. *in medio tentorii*) *sunt, unus albus, et unus rufus*, "There (i.e. in the tent) two serpents, one white and the other red." And further: *duo vermes duo dracones sunt; vermis rufus draco tuus est ... at ille albus draco illius gentis, quae occupavit gentes et regiones plurimas in Brittannia*, "the two serpents are two dragons; the red serpent is your dragon, but the white serpent is the dragon of the people who occupy several provinces and districts of Britain." Perhaps the wording is this

where other examples are mentioned).

13 For the use of *draco* by Gildas, cf. P. Sims-Williams, "Gildas and Vernacular Poetry," in: M. Lapidge & D. Dumville, *Gildas: New Approaches*, Woodbridge, 1984, pp. 169-192, esp. pp. 184, 186-187, 190-192, who tentatively supposes that Gildas' use of *draco* may have been influenced by the positive use of this loan word from Latin in British speaking environment.

14 Gildas, o.c., 33, 1, when describing the iniquities of Maelgwn of Gwynedd.

15 Translation from Winterbottom, o.c., p. 32.

16 Cf. e.g. Ifor Williams, *Canu Aneirin*, Caerdydd, 1938, p. 379; Isaac, o.c., pp. 88-89.

17 This is not the place to enter into discussions about the authorship of this text, and the relations of the different vesions. We quote the text according to the edition of Th. Momssen, *Chronica Minora Saec. iv. v. vi vii*, vol. iii, Berlin, 1898, pp. 122-222.

18 Nennius, *Historia Brittonum* ii, §42, pp. 183-186, as part of the endeavours of Vortigern to build a citadel in Snowdonia, Gwynedd.

quotation is interesting: *vermis rufus draco tuus est*, which may indicate, in this instance, a specialized meaning of *draco*, one could imagine a translation "the red serpent indicates your leadership."

In case there is a relation between the story told in *Lludd a Llefelys* and the Gododdin text, we are left with the question why the pharaoh is called *tandde*, "fiery,"[19] and whether this epithet is somehow to be explained as a result of this relationship, as it is not what one most would expect in the context.[20] It is, of course, possible that the author thinks of Vortigern as the one who formerly gave his name to the place afterwards called Dinas Emreis, and that he used *ffaraon* under influence of Gildas. The text, however, gives *Sef ffuruf y gelwit y lle hwnnw gwedy hynny. dinas emreis. a chyn no hynny dinas ffaraon dande*,[21] "Thus this place was called Dinas Emreis (the town of Ambrosius) after this, while before it was called Dinas Ffaraon Dande (the town of the fiery Pharaoh)." The use of *tandde*, as noted, is strange, but perhaps we may explain it from the Latin used by Gildas. One might suppose that either *taneos* or *dantes* triggered the use of the Welsh epithet, however, as the words *stulti principes* are easily combined with *dantes*, it seems that *taneos*, which must have been difficult to comprehend in the context of Gildas remarks, is the better candidate of the two.

The question whether in this case the Gododdin should have pride of place before Gildas, or the other way round, is an

19 Note that R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Welsh Triads*, Cardiff, 1978[2], pp. 24, 226, does not translate *Dandde*, but seems to take it as part of the name, which is, of course, in accord with the genealogy *Llŷr Lledyeith ap Ffaraon ap Dd. (= Dandde)* ..., cf. ibid. p. 427. Note also that J. Morris Jones, *A Welsh Grammar*, Oxford, 1913, p. 256, explains *tandde* as a combination *tan* and an adjectival ending *-đe*, which, according to him, is borrowed from Irish during the 12th century and he also supposes this ending not to occur in prose texts; however, *tandde* is attested in Canu Heledd, Cynddylan (cf. I. Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen*, Caerdydd 1935, p. 33: *Llys Benngwern neut tande,* "the court of Pengwern is a blazing fire"), which texts have been dated by several authors in the 9th century (cf. e.g. J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, Cambridge 1990, p. ??); note further that GPC, s.v. *tandde* does not mention *Pharaon dandde.*

20 Cf. e.g. B. F. Roberts, *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, Dublin, 1975, p. xxvi: I know no reason why this Pharaoh should be termed "fiery" (*tandde*). The explanation may lie in an apocryphal legend, unless it is assumed that the adjective refers to the stronghold as the prison of dragons.

21 Red Book of Hergest, col. 709; B. F. Roberts, o.c., p. 5, ll. 134-136.

interesting one, when we compare Isaac's remarks[22] on Awdl li from the Gododdin.

22 Isaac, Graham R.: *Canu Aneirin* Awdl LI revisited: Gildas and the *Gododdin*, *ZCP* liv, 2005, pp. 144-153.