

PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND:  
NATURE, HIERARCHY AND INSPIRATION

2 Volumes

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Nature as the Correspondence between Representation and Reality.....	18
Chapter 2 Nature as Inspired Knowledge.....	73
Chapter 3 The Christian Era as the Apogee of Naturalness.....	174
Volume 2	
Chapter 4 The Christian Era as the Fading Away of Naturalness.....	223
Chapter 5 The Limits of Nature: <i>Metempsychosis</i> and <i>Metamorphosis</i> .....	301
Chapter 6 The Gods of the Sagas as the Mediators of Nature.....	372
Conclusion.....	409
Bibliography.....	421

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Dedication

In commemoration of James Watson of Jedburgh (1835-1898)

Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine.

Et lux perpetua luceat ei.

## Abstract

Where we find medieval distinctions between philosophy and theology, the term ‘philosophy’ describes the mode and degree the soul’s participation in the gracious revelation of God’s wisdom apart from – though ideally in cooperation with – the further means of grace which are manifest through the Church alone. This thesis explores what philosophy, thus defined, means in an early Irish context, and does this through an exploration of the way that nature is conceptualised in contrast to the realities and capacities taken to be manifest in the Church. Chapter 1 discusses the influence of Isidore’s parallel conceptions of natural law and natural language on the way that secular political hierarchies were conceived in early Irish literature. Chapter 2 shows that, in early Irish literature, natural law does not generally mean the vestigial capacity for ethics that remains to the soul after the Fall, as it does for the Latin Doctors, but the mode of inspiration by the Holy Spirit that is appropriate to the secular hierarchies. Chapters 3 and 4 concern contrasting positions on the degree to which this natural law can be politically realised in the Christian Era. Chapter 3 outlines the influence of Eusebian triumphalism, which sees the Christian Era as the time in which the natural law may be most perfectly known. Chapter 4 discusses the influence of Augustine’s theory of the Six Ages of the World, which sees the Christian Era as less capable of embodying the natural law than former ages. Chapter 5 discusses the meaning of *metamorphosis* and *metempsychosis* in an early Irish context, in view of their apparent incompatibility with Christian ideas concerning human nature. Chapter 6 shows that the gods of the early Irish sagas do not compromise the philosophical theology of nature discussed in the preceeding, but rather, are integral to it.

## Abbreviations

<i>AG</i>	<i>Aimirgein Glúngel tuir tend</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>Audacht Morainn</i>
<i>BND</i>	<i>Bretha Nemed Déidenach</i>
<i>BNT</i>	<i>Bretha Nemed Toísech</i>
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>CG</i>	<i>Críth Gablach</i>
<i>CIH</i>	Binchy, Daniel A., ed., <i>Corpus iuris Hibernici: ad fidem codicum manuseriptorum</i> , 7 vols. (Dublin 1978).
<i>CMT</i>	<i>Cath Maige Tuired</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DCD</i>	The <i>De civitate Dei</i> of Augustine
<i>De XII</i>	<i>De duodecim abusiuis saeculi</i>
<i>DGCM</i>	The <i>De Genesi contra Manicheos</i> of Augustine
<i>DML</i>	The poetic passage in The Prologue to <i>SM</i> [=Kim McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to <i>Senchas Már</i> ’, <i>Peritia</i> 5 (1986), 1-35, ed. at 29-30 and tr. at 6-8.
<i>DTR</i>	The <i>De temporum ratione</i> of Bede
<i>Etym.</i>	The <i>Etymologiae</i> of Isidore of Seville
<i>GOI</i>	Thurneysen, Rudolf, <i>A Grammar of Old Irish</i> , tr. D.A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin (Dublin 1946, repr. 2010).
<i>HE</i>	The <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> of Eusebius/Rufinus
<i>LGÉ</i>	<i>Lebor Gabála Éirenn</i>
<i>LL</i>	The Book of Leinster: Dublin, Trinity College Library, 1339 (H 2. 18)

<i>LO</i>	<i>In Lebor Ollaman</i>
<i>LU</i>	Lebor na hUidre: Dublin RIA 23 E 25 (Cat. No.1229)
<i>MV</i>	<i>Mittelirische Verslehren</i>
<i>OGSM</i>	Old Irish Glosses on <i>Senchas Már</i>
<i>PG</i>	Migne, Jacques Paul, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca</i> , 161 vols. (Paris 1857-88).
<i>PL</i>	Migne, Jacques Paul, ed., <i>Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris 1844-64).
<i>PSM</i>	The prose of The Prologue to <i>SM</i> [=John Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to <i>Senchas Már</i> ’, <i>Ériu</i> 45 (1994): 1–30].
<i>SFF</i>	<i>Scéla Néill Fhrossaig</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Senchas Már</i>
<i>STMC</i>	<i>Scél Tuáin meic Chairill</i>
<i>TBDD</i>	<i>Togail Bruidne Dá Derga</i>
<i>UA</i>	<i>Udhacht Athairne</i>
<i>UB</i>	<i>Uraicecht Becc</i>
<i>UR</i>	<i>Uraicecht na Ríar</i>
<i>WGPE</i>	<i>Würzburg Glosses on the Pauline Epistles</i>
<i>MGP</i>	<i>Milan Glosses on the Psalter</i>
<i>ZCP</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie</i>

## INTRODUCTION

### Christianity and its Antecedents

The relationship of Christianity to the forms of religion that had preceded it has always been a rather complicated matter. Because the Church has understood Christ to be, as the prophet sang, ‘the desire of all the nations’<sup>1</sup> (that is, not only of Israel), it has distinguished itself from Judaism and paganism alike, not as something unrelated to them, but as that which has at last begun to enact their consummation and perfection. As such, a constant engagement in the reinterpretation of (and thus, in coming to know itself through) its predecessors, is integral to its very idea. This is, of course, most obvious relative to Judaism. Yet even within the Christian Scriptures themselves, an understanding of Christianity as, among other things, a reinterpretation of Hellenistic paganism is already in the foreground.<sup>2</sup> St. John turns to the Stoic concept of the *Logos*<sup>3</sup> to describe what Christ is,<sup>4</sup> and quotes Christ as using language consonant with the mystery cults<sup>5</sup> to describe himself to his disciples when they inform him that Greeks have come to visit him.<sup>6</sup> In a vision on the way to Damascus, Christ, in warning Saul that it is hard for him to ‘kick against the pricks’,<sup>7</sup> uses the same words by which the

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<sup>1</sup> Haggai 2:8: ‘desideratus cunctis gentibus’. See also the Great Advent Antiphons, namely the antiphon for December twenty-second; Benedictines of Solesmes, ed., *Liber Usualis* (Tournai and New York 1961), 342: ‘O Rex Gentium, et desideratus earum . . .’. This may be given a *terminus ante quem* of the ninth-century at the latest, due to Cynewulf’s use of the Great Advent Antiphons in his poem, *Christ*; for this, and further arguments for contemporaneity with St. Gregory the Great, see J. Allen Cabaniss, ‘A Note on the Date of the Great Advent Antiphons’, *Speculum* 22.3 (Jul. 1947), 440-2.

<sup>2</sup> For comparable Jewish approaches to pagan philosophy contemporary to the New Testament, see, for example, E.H. Colson, ed. and tr., *Philo: On Abraham; On Joseph; On Moses*, Loeb Classical Library 289 (Cambridge, MA 1939). Another significant precedent for such an approach in the Hebrew Scriptures is found in Isaiah 45:1, where Cyrus, the Persian emperor, is portrayed as YHWH’s anointed one: ‘אָמַר-בַּהּ אֲנִי, שְׁמַיִהוּ לְכוּרָהּ / οὕτως λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῷ χριστῷ μου Κύρω’ (=Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus).

<sup>3</sup> For various passages illustrating Stoic theology, see A.A. Long and David N. Sedley, eds. and tr., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge 1987), tr. I, 268-72, 323-332 and ed. II, 265-9, 321-32.

<sup>4</sup> John 1: ‘In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum . . .’ (=In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . .).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA 1985), 288-290, esp.290. See also, the related idea that truth is only available to the initiated; e.g. Matt.13:10-23; John 14:21-22.

<sup>6</sup> John 12:24-5: ‘nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram, mortuum fuerit, / ipsum solum manet: si autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert’ (=Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit’).

<sup>7</sup> Acts 9:5: ‘σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν’ (=It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks), and the same text again at 26:14. Compare to *Bacchae*, line 795; E.R. Dodds, ed., *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford 1944): ‘πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι θνητὸς ὢν θεῶν’ (kick against the goad, mortality striving against deity).



Dionysius of Euripides' *Bacchae* warns Pentheus against his own impiety, thus suggesting that Christ is, in some manner, the true Dionysius.<sup>8</sup> Later, Saul, now St. Paul, would turn to pagan philosophical and cultic terminology in order to make the Gospel comprehensible to the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup> Many further examples could be found besides.

Of course, the notion that Christ is the ultimate object of pre-Christian piety can tend just as easily towards a polemic emphasis of such rupture as exists between Christianity and its predecessors as towards a conciliating emphasis on its continuity with them. On the one hand, a youthful St. Augustine is led by 'The Platonists' to a true understanding of the Christian faith,<sup>10</sup> and Lactantius finds, in the *Hermetic Corpus* and the Sibylline Oracles, what he believes to be ancient prophecies which correctly distinguish between the first and second persons of the Trinity.<sup>11</sup> Yet neither of them is infrequent in their denunciations of pagan religion. On the other, we also find the straightforward rejection of pagan learning as the antithesis of Christianity, a position which received its most famous articulations from Tertullian and St. Jerome respectively.<sup>12</sup> Yet Tertullian's

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<sup>8</sup> Dodds makes this comparison in his note on line 795; Dodds, *Euripides: Bacchae*, 164. See also, Otto Bauernfeind, *Die Apostelgeschichte. Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Leipzig 1939), 163; Denis R. MacDonald, 'Classical Greek Poetry and the Acts of the Apostles: Imitations of Euripides *Bacchae*', in Stanley E. Porter and Christian Pitts, eds., *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 9 (Leiden 2012), 463-96. Cf. Alfred Vögeli, 'Lukas und Euripides', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 9 (1953), 415-38.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Acts 17:22-31, esp. 27-8; for *Quellenforschung* and discussion of the complex interactions with Greek philosophy which occur in this passage, and references to the relevant sources, see Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles – A Commentary* (Philadelphia 1971), 515-31, noting his caution that St. Paul's interpretation of the relevant pagan sources has to some degree been anticipated by earlier Hellenistic Jewish authors; Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia 1973), 137-49; Daniel Marguerat, *Les Actes des Apôtres: 13-28* (Geneva 2015), 147-67. St. Paul's discussion of natural law in Romans 2 is another passage of similar significance.

<sup>10</sup> *Confessions* VII.ix.13-xxi.27; J.J. O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions, Volume 1: Introduction and Text* (Oxford 1992), 80-7; Henry Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford 2008), 121-32. On this aspect of Augustine, see *inter alia* Wayne Hankey, 'Recurrere in te unum: Neoplatonic Form and Content in Augustine's *Confessions*', in Phillip Cary, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth, eds. *Augustine and Philosophy, Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth 2010), 127-144.

<sup>11</sup> *Institutiones Divinae* IV.vii.3-9, IV.ix.3, IV.xiii.2ff., IV.xxvii.19; S. Brandt and G.L. Laubmann, eds., *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactanti: opera omnia*, 2 vols, CSEL 19, 27 (Prague, Vienna, Leipzig 1890-93) I, 1-672, at 292-5, 300-1, 316ff., 388; Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, tr., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, Translated Texts for Historians 40 (Liverpool 2003), 232-3, 237, 244, 275.

<sup>12</sup> *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII.1ff., esp. 9; R.-F. Refoulé, ed., *Tertullien. Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques*, Sources chrétiennes 46 (Paris 1957), 96-7. *Epistulae* XXII.29.7; Isidore Hilberg, ed., *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi: Epistulae*, 3 vols, CSEL 54-6 (Leipzig and Vienna 1910-18) I, 189. For a similar statement relative to an Insular context, see also Alcuin's, *Epistolae CXXIV*; Ernst Dümmler, ed.,

rejection of pagan learning, in practice, takes the form of an argument for a Stoic materialist doctrine of the soul, as opposed to a Platonic understanding of it as being incorporeal,<sup>13</sup> and Jerome's does not hinder him from turning to Plato's *Phaedrus* in order to understand the vision of Ezekiel.<sup>14</sup> In short, neither the affirmation, nor the negation of pagan wisdom seems, in fact, to occur very often without some accompanying gesture toward the other.

### **Early Medieval Ireland: An Unusual Case**

One way in which early medieval Ireland stands out in the history of Christian theology is the degree to which the continuity (rather than the rupture) of the Church with pagan pre-Christian beliefs and institutions is often assumed and affirmed. Especially notable here are two ideas: 1) that there were no martyrdoms in the time of the conversion,<sup>15</sup> and 2) that certain righteous poets and rulers of the Irish past received inspired knowledge by the Holy Spirit of a sort which not only pointed towards the coming of the faith to Ireland, but remained a necessary augmentation of ecclesiastical knowledge in the Christian era.<sup>16</sup> However, we are faced with the problem that our complete lack of pre-Christian Irish sources makes it impossible to decisively confirm or deny these or any other claims about the beliefs of Irish pre-Christians. It is at least possible that certain ideas attributed to the pre-Christian Irish past could have a very strong degree of continuity with the past to which they are attributed. The Christian interpretation of the Psalms is an important point of reference here. That is to say, the Church's

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*Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II (Berlin 1895), 183.21-26 [=Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae 4]: 'Quid Hinielodus cum Christo? . . .?'

<sup>13</sup> Dennis K. House, 'The Relation of Tertullian's Christology to Pagan Philosophy', *Dionysius* 12 (1988), 29-36.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Kries, 'Origen, Plato and Conscience [*Synderesis*] in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary', *Traditio* 57 (2002), 67-83.

<sup>15</sup> Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville, eds., *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge 1982), 21-46, at 37. Note, for example, the lack of Irish martyrs (in the most usual sense of the word) in the *Martyrology of Oengus*; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, Henry Bradshaw Society 29 (London 1905). In the twelfth-century, Gerald of Wales would see this apparent absence as a sign of the deficiencies of the Irish Church; *Topographia Hibernica* §32 [O'Meara §107]; J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock and G.F. Warner, eds., *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, 8 vols, (London 1867) V, 178-9; John J. O'Meara, tr., *Gerald of Wales: The History and Topography of Ireland* (Harmondsworth 1982, repr. 1988), 115-6.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2.

christological reinterpretation of the Hebrew psalms,<sup>17</sup> as radical a reinterpretation of them as it is, did not require any change in the words of the psalms themselves. In which case, it cannot be assumed *a priori* that the expression of a pre-Christian idea must be altered in order to become comprehensible to a Christian interpretation of it, even if its newfound comprehensibility is very different from that which it is understood to have had previously.

Even so, if an idea is going to be altered, it seems that much more likely to occur at the hands of an intellectual context which sees itself as having recourse to superior means of interpretation which is, as such, capable of separating the ‘true’ from the ‘false’ elements of that idea to a degree not possible previously. Moreover, the degree to which a given early Irish understanding of the pre-Christian past is a result of accidental changes in the mediation of information also cannot be assumed. Existing texts allow us to determine, for example, that the way the concept of a ‘hypostasis’ (υπόστασις) is used in the Creed and the Cappadocian Fathers is very different from how it was previously used by Plotinus,<sup>18</sup> or to evaluate Christian claims that Plato’s *Timaeus* takes the universe to have a temporal beginning, in opposition to the ‘pagan’ claim that it is

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<sup>17</sup> For an excellent introduction to this topic, and early patristic interpretation of the psalms in general, see Hans Boersma, ‘The Church Fathers’ Spiritual Interpretation of the Psalms’, in Jason Van Vliet, ed., *Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honor of Cornelis Van Dam* (Eugene, OR 2011), 41–55, esp. 46-51. On the Early Irish reception of this aspect of patristic psalm-exegesis, see Martin McNamara, ‘Christology and the Interpretation of the Psalms in the Early Irish Church’, in Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey, eds., *Studies in Patristic Christology* (Dublin 1998), 196-233 [repr. in Martin McNamara, *Psalms in the Early Irish Church* (Sheffield 2000), 378-416].

<sup>18</sup> *Ennead* III.8 is a good introduction to the three hypostases of Plotinus; A.H. Armstrong, ed. and tr., *Plotinus: Enneads*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA 1966-88) III, 357-402. His three hypostases describe unequal modes of existence, knowledge, and unity where the lesser hypostases are able to be what they are in distinction from the superior only through participation in the superior: the least being Soul (ψυχή/psuchē), the next greatest, Intellect (νοῦς/nous), and beyond them all, that by which all lesser things exist and are, ‘the Good’ (τὸ ἀγαθόν/to agathon), or ‘the One’ (τὸ ἓν/to hen). For the prehistory of this doctrine, see Edward Booth, ‘St. Augustine’s *notitia sui* Related to Aristotle and the Early Neoplatonists’, *Augustiniana* 27 (1977), 70-132 and 364-401; 28 (1978), 183-221; 29 (1979), 97-124, at 27 (1977), 370-1. However, insofar as the persons of the Christian Trinity are defined as one essence (μία οὐσία) in three hypostases (τρῆς ὑποστάσεις) the term is used to denote utterly unitary coequal individual substances, rather than remaining a means for distinguishing lesser modes of existence, knowledge and unity from greater. For the argument that this Cappadocian formulation is ultimately inherited from Origen, and references to scholarship on the Cappadocians relative to Trinitarian doctrine, see Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, ‘Origen, Greek Philosophy and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of *Hypostasis*’, *The Harvard Theological Review* 105.3 (July 2012), 302-350.

eternal.<sup>19</sup> However, since sources are quite scarce until the mid-seventh century, by which time the Church was already well established, and the texts we have are the products of ecclesiastically educated authors,<sup>20</sup> we are not able to make a similar test of the beliefs that medieval Irish Christians attribute to their pre-Christian forbearers.<sup>21</sup>

In such a situation one might perhaps look at the ways in which medieval Irish engagement with Christian authorities produces different results than elsewhere in Latin Christendom and in this way attempt to glimpse a negative image of the influence of pre-Christian Irish sources. But here too we must be careful. It is true enough that in any engagement with a text, or an idea, one will inevitably be influenced by one's historical circumstances. However, unless one is to entirely rule out the possibility that a reader may sometimes enjoy an insight into a text, or else be provoked by a text to forms of creativity, that cannot be fully accounted for by historical causes and effects, we must concede that some of these departures may reflect an unusual encounter with a text in the moment, rather (or at least more) than an inherited traditional opinion.<sup>22</sup> If we understood the medieval Irish authors involved to be purely passive mediators of earlier traditions we could perhaps be reasonably confident that any differences from the usual tendencies of Latin Christendom would show us a reliable outline of the contemporary

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<sup>19</sup> e.g. *DCD* XI.21; Bernhard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, CCSL 47-8 (Turnhout 1955) II, 339-40; Henry Bettenson, tr., *St Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (London and New York 1972), 451-2. Overviews of this issue include Harry A. Wolfson, 'Patristic Arguments against the Eternity of the World,' *The Harvard Theological Review* 59.4 (Oct. 1966), 351-367; Andrew Smith, 'The Pagan Neoplatonists' Response to Christianity', *The Maynooth Review / Revieú Mhá Nuad* 14 (Dec. 1989), 25-41, at 32ff; Maren R. Niehoff, 'Did the *Timaeus* Create a Textual Community?', *Greek, Roman & Byzantine Studies* 4 (2007), 161-91.

<sup>20</sup> This will be discussed at various points in what follows. However, some of the seminal studies here are Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Legend as Critic', in Tom Dunne, ed., *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, Historical Studies 16 (Cork 1987), 23-37; Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, Maynooth Monographs 3 (Maynooth 2000), 110-37; Liam Breatnach, Aidan Breen and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 382-438.

<sup>21</sup> Concerning which, the mournful note that Carey hits in his comment on this seems eminently appropriate; John Carey, *The Mythological Cycle of Medieval Irish Literature* (Cork 2018), ii: 'the real 'Celtic mythology' . . . however many traces and reflections it may have left in the literatures of the Celtic peoples and their neighbours, is lost to us forever'.

<sup>22</sup> A rather breathtaking example (from a different, if related context) of the extent to which this is possible is the immense productivity of Eriugena's encounter with Ps. Dionysius; Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden 1978). In short, political approaches to literary criticism are useful and indeed necessary, but not sufficient to their object on their own. For a useful introduction to the need for and limitations of political interpretations of texts, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 169-189.

survivals of the intellectual culture that preceded the Church. It is, however, hard to know what such an assumption of their passivity would be based on.

As it is, the sheer volume of strange departures one may find in early Irish literature, in tandem with the prevalence of strong affirmations regarding the integrity of pre-Christian wisdom, would seem to indicate that pre-Christian Irish ideas (and various subsequent permutations thereof) played some fairly considerable role in how Irish Christendom interpreted its theological authorities. It is evident, at any rate, that many authors of early Irish literature believed that they did. However, any attempt to drive a wedge between Christian interpretation of pre-Christian belief in Ireland, and that which it interprets, seems doomed to failure. For as influential as preexisting ideas seem to have been on the development of Christian theology in Ireland, it is as ideas in which the ecclesiastically trained authors of the existing literature somehow recognized the doctrines of the Church that such ideas would be theologically comprehensible, and thus, have the power to influence it.<sup>23</sup> That is, the power of certain pre-Christian ideas to transform Christianity in Ireland, rather than be rejected and forgotten, would seem to lie in their potential to be transformed into Christian theology. In which case, not only Christian theology, but the relevant pre-Christian ideas, would not be what they were before the encounter. Both are in their own, albeit, mutually entwined ways, so to speak, a ‘new creature’.<sup>24</sup> Of course, this is always the case in such encounters between Christianity and its various predecessors, but in medieval Ireland we only have information regarding what the ecclesiastical side of this dialectical partnership looked like prior to their synthesis, a synthesis, moreover, which is in most of the extant instances already a synthesis of Christian theology with prior Christian understandings of paganism, rather than with pagan thought *per se*.

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<sup>23</sup> This was not taken into account by Johnston in, Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge 2013), 134: ‘The attempt to find a theological foundation for the composition and transmission of native saga by churchmen is ultimately flawed, the answer surely lies in the actual historical and social environments which these churchmen inhabited . . . It seems clear that the Church was so deeply embedded within Irish society that social solidarity trumped theological purity’.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 5:17.

The question of the role that pre-Christian wisdom has in relation to Christian revelation is fundamentally a question about the role that knowledge which is thought, in principle, to be available to all people in general has in relation to the knowledge which is known only by God's revelation to and through the Church. Or, in other words, it is a question about the role that philosophy has in relation to revealed theology; nature, in relation to grace. Therefore, the best way to begin to work out the role that pre-Christian wisdom has in the eyes of early Irish authors will be to investigate what is seen as natural, and how what is natural is thought to be known and brought about in its own particular way. Only insofar as we do so will we begin to be able to understand the distinction it is perceived as having from the gracious realities and means of knowing which are represented by the Church. And this task is more delicate than it may perhaps seem, since we will find that nature is not here conceived of as a self-contained reality which is wholly extrinsic to Grace, but as something which is taken to be intrinsically and essentially involved in it even before the advent of the Church. This is also true of the better-known forms of this distinction which occur in ancient and medieval theology. But part of the significance of the work before us is that the neo-scholastic attempt to envisage some kind of 'pure nature' which, as such, exists in simple distinction from supernatural realities, is frequently even less relevant to early Irish speculations in this area than it is to the interpretation of pre-modern theology generally.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Limits of the Project**

Because the philosophical significance of pre-scholastic<sup>26</sup> Irish contributions to the development of theology - apart from Eriugena and his rough contemporaries at the

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<sup>25</sup> On the inapplicability of a neoscholastic concept of 'pure nature' to ancient and medieval Christian theology generally, de Lubac's *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* is seminal; Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques* (Paris 1991, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). See also, *idem*, 'Mystère du surnaturel', *Recherches de science religieuse* 36.1 (1949), 80-121 [= 'The Mystery of the Supernatural', in *idem*, *Theology in History*, tr., Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco 1996), 281-316]. *idem*, *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (Paris 1965) [= *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, tr., Lancelot Sheppard (London and New York 1969)]. *idem*, *Le Mystère du surnaturel* (Paris 1965) [= *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, tr., Rosemary Sheed (1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)]. For a recent overview, see Randall S. Rosenberg, *The Givenness of Desire: Human Subjectivity and the Natural Desire to see God* (Toronto 2017), 13-38.

<sup>26</sup> Vernacular engagements with scholasticism have also been neglected, but see Elizabeth Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: The Evidence of *Scela na Esergi*', *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009), 216-230.

Carolingian court - has been almost completely neglected,<sup>27</sup> the following argument will necessarily have the relatively modest nature of a *prolegomena* to further study. Moreover, even in this preliminary way it will by no means provide an overview of all the different ways that extra-ecclesiastical wisdom is perceived in relationship to that of the Church in medieval Ireland. Rather, this study is specifically concerned with following the strand of interpretation in the literature which involves the strongest affirmation of the natural and the pre-Christian, especially in the form they were thought to take in Ireland itself. This is partly because it is relative to such affirmations that the intellectual history of medieval Ireland most strikingly displays the strangeness of which it was not infrequently capable. The contribution that early Irish literature makes to the larger discussions in which it participated will be most obvious where its engagement with Christian authorities produces results that are, by comparison, unusual and unexpected. However, this is also because the sources that are the most affirmative of what is possible according to nature tend to have the most to say about it.

As for its temporal limitations, the texts covered by this study are as early as the seventh century, when early Irish literature (both Irish and Hiberno-Latin) begins to emerge in earnest, and as late as 1200 or so, by which time Middle Irish begins to pass into Early Modern.<sup>28</sup> In this it goes up to but does not, for the most part, include *Acallam na Senórach*,<sup>29</sup> for the simple reason that this text contains enough relevant material to warrant a separate detailed consideration. Additionally, this overview does not attempt

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<sup>27</sup> Marenbon goes so far as to argue that philosophy basically does not exist in early medieval Ireland; John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London and New York 2008), 48; *idem*, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge 1981), 2-3. For a notable exception, see John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun: Religious Speculation in Early Ireland* (Aberystwyth 2011).

<sup>28</sup> This has often been described as a point at which attempts to bring the Irish Church into harmony with the ideals of the continental reform meant that Irish *senchas* was no longer integral to the ecclesiastical curriculum; Proinsias Mac Cana, 'The Rise of the Later Schools of *Filideacht*', *Ériu* 25 (1974), 126-46. However, more recent research on late medieval Ireland seems to suggest that there was no such sudden change at this point; Katharine Simms, 'An Eaglais agus Filí na Scol', in Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, ed., *An Dán Díreach Léachtaí, Cholm Cille* 24 (Maynooth 1994), 21-36.

<sup>29</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., 'Acallamh na Senórach', in Ernst Windisch and Whitley Stokes, eds. and tr., *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 4 vols. (Leipzig 1900) IV.1, 1-438, ed. at 1-224 and tr. at 225-271; Standish Hayes O'Grady, ed. and tr., *Agallamh na Senórach: leabar Méig Charthaig*, f. 159, col. I', in Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica (I-XXXI): A Collection of Tales in Irish*, 2 vols. (London 1892), ed. I, 94-233 and tr. II, 101-265; Ann Dooley and Harry Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland: 'Acallamh na Senórach'* (Oxford 1999).

to deal with the influence of eleventh- and twelfth-century Neoplatonism on texts towards the end of this time-frame.<sup>30</sup> The promise of such work depends upon first understanding the relationship of these texts to earlier Irish developments in the manner attempted here. Only against this background will the difference made by such an engagement become visible and distinct.

### **The Character of the Sources**

Much of the difficulty, but also the interest of this subject lies in the character of the relevant sources. Early Irish scholarship is notable for the tendency to list apparently contrasting solutions to problems in conjunction with each other without indicating which, if any, of the options are wrong. Nor is this limited to one area of scholarship. One is just as likely find this approach in the explanation of the etymology of a word,<sup>31</sup> as in the question of what various patristic authorities have said on a given subject.<sup>32</sup> The eighth-century *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*<sup>33</sup> is perhaps the most outstanding example of the latter, and, as such, occupies a notable position in intellectual history.<sup>34</sup> The ranging of apparently contrasting authorities for the sake of their ultimate conciliation is generally supposed to emerge with Ivo of Chartres, Peter Abelard and the rise of the scholastic method in eleventh- and twelfth-century France,<sup>35</sup> not eighth-century Ireland.

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<sup>30</sup> On aspects of the influence of eleventh- and twelfth-century Neoplatonism in Ireland, see Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland'; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Pagans and Holy Men: Literary Manifestations of Twelfth-Century Reform', in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, eds., *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal* (Dublin 2006), 143–161; Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'An Irishman at Chartres in the Twelfth Century: The Evidence of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F.III.15.', *Ériu* 48 (1997), 1–35; *idem*, 'A Middle-Irish Note on Boethius' *De institutione arithmetica*', *Éigse* 35 (2005), 1–8; *idem*, 'Irish Glosses in a Twelfth-Century Copy of Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae*', *Ériu* 55 (2005), 1–17.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 18–30.

<sup>32</sup> As Chapter 2 will demonstrate throughout.

<sup>33</sup> Hermann Wasserschleben, ed., *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (Leipzig 1885, repr. 1966); a new study, edition and translation of the *Hibernensis* by Roy Flechner, based on his PhD research is forthcoming in 2019.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 324–30.

<sup>35</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford 2004), 21–5 incl. notes for a clarifying overview and references to primary sources; for a more detailed discussion, see Joseph de Ghellinck, *Le mouvement théologique du XIIe siècle: études, recherches et documents* (Paris 1914), 277ff, esp. 277 and 281. Note that de Ghellinck names the *Hibernensis* here as a significant stage in the developments of canon law that reach a decisive moment in Yves of Chartres, citing it as an example of a logical ordering of canon law in contrast to a more conservative chronological ordering. However, he neglects to make any mention of its



Even so, there remains a very great difference between what is going on in the France of Yves of Chartres and the Ireland of Cú Chuimne of Iona and Ruben of Dairinis. The greater part of the theological speculation which one finds in early Irish literature appears in the form of narratives about the ancient past rather than arguments which proceed by transparent steps. Philosophical investigation tends to use the *dramatis personae* of historiography as its medium,<sup>36</sup> rather than the categories of Aristotelian logic. In this respect, medieval Irish engagement with the philosophical doctrines present in the Church Fathers is strikingly reminiscent of the way in which the doctrines of Pre-Socratic philosophy were explored by ancient Greek playwrights.<sup>37</sup> Yet it remains that some have wanted to interpret this absence of the formal practice of dialectic as evidence for the absence of any capacity for abstract thought whatever, let alone anything that could be called philosophical investigation.<sup>38</sup> We shall find that this is most definitely not the case. Given the fame of Ireland in the time of Bede as a desirable place to study Biblical exegesis,<sup>39</sup> the number of notable Carolingian scholars who came from Ireland,<sup>40</sup> and, quite simply, the extent of character of the non-narrative

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aforementioned use of a ‘*sic-et-non*’ approach to patristic authorities relative to theological questions, the very thing in which it most significantly anticipates Yves.

<sup>36</sup> Carney’s comment on this subject is not exactly wrong, but remains quite vulnerable to misinterpretation; James Carney, ‘Language and Literature to 1156’, in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford 2005), 451-510, at 456: ‘Irish poets tend to avoid philosophical abstractions. When they have some comment to make on life, they prefer to dramatize their themes and to state their universals in terms of a particular person, time and place.’ This appears to be right in the sense that Irish poets tend to avoid what we might see as formal philosophical argumentation. When they have some comment to make regarding a philosophical concept, they prefer to dramatize it, stating their universals in terms of particular person, time and place.

<sup>37</sup> William Allan, ‘Tragedy and the Early Greek Philosophical Tradition’, in Justina Gregory, ed., *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 2005), 71-82; Jennell Meggan Arp, *Pre-Socratic Thought in Sophoclean Tragedy*, unpublished PhD diss. (University of Pennsylvania 2006); Jacqueline Assaël, *Euripide, philosophe et poète tragique* (Louvain 2001).

<sup>38</sup> A position that receives its fullest expression in Charles Donahue, ‘Beowulf and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration from a Celtic Stance’, *Traditio* 21 (1965), 55-116, at 65-6. Other notable examples include D.A. Binchy, ‘Review: The Church in Early Irish Society by Kathleen Hughes’, *Studia Hibernica* 7 (1967), 217-9, at 218; Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘The Sinless Otherworld of *Immram Brain*’, *Ériu* 27 (1976), 95–115, at 100; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, ‘The Concept of the Hero in Irish Mythology’, in Matthieu Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois, The Cauldron of Knowledge: A Companion to Early Irish Saga* (Indiana 2014), 51-64, at 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* III.7, 13, 27; J.E. King, ed. and tr., *Bede: Historical Works*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA 1930), ed. I, 354-60, 386-90, esp. 484-90 and tr. I, 355-61, 387-91, esp. 484-91.

<sup>40</sup> Roy Flechner, and Sven Meeder, ed., *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion* (London 2016) generally, but esp. Immo Warntjes, ‘Computus as Scientific Thought in Ireland and the Early Medieval West’, 158-78, with references to further scholarship at 256-8, and Sven Meeder, ‘Irish Scholars and Carolingian Learning’ at 179-194, with references to further scholarship at 258; *idem*,

literature that remains,<sup>41</sup> the fact that such a claim could ever have been made stretches credulity.

However, what this tendency does mean is that our understanding of the various conciliations of Christian authorities that are embodied in these narratives will, for the most part, be much less exact than it would be if they were also given a formal expression that was separate from their literary embodiment. The best we will often be able to do in such a case is to work out the most likely story.<sup>42</sup> But then, a great part of the fascination of this task lies in the hope of understanding what philosophy means in a situation where the preferred method of the poet-scholars who are identified as philosophers<sup>43</sup> is to write narratives in which a given synthesis of apparently contrasting authorities only ever emerges ‘fully-armed’,<sup>44</sup> as something which is always already achieved and embodied in the form of an authoritative retelling of past events. Another way to put this is that early Irish literature offers us an opportunity to see what results

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*The Irish Scholarly Presence at St. Gall: Networks of Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages* (London and New York 2018).

<sup>41</sup> For an unsurpassed overview, Richard Sharpe, ‘Books from Ireland: Fifth through Ninth Centuries’, *Peritia* 21 (2010), 1-55.

<sup>42</sup> With deliberate reference to Plato’s *Timaeus* 29d; John Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera*, 5 vols. (Oxford 1900-1907) IV; Donald J. Zeyl, tr., ‘Timaeus’, in John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge 1997), 1224-1291, at 1236.

<sup>43</sup> In this respect, *Auraicept na n-Éces* is especially notable: 1. the word for poet said to be derived from the word for philosopher: *Auraicept na n-Éces* [Short Recension], lines 698-671; George Calder, ed. and tr., *Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholars’ Primer, Being the Texts of the Ogham Tract from the Book of Ballymote and the Yellow Book of Lecan, and the Text of the ‘Trefhocul’ from the Book of Leinster* (Edinburgh 1917), ed.50 and tr.51: ‘filidh ·i· fialsaighi no fialshuighi: no fi ani ærais, 7 li ani molais: no fili onni is *philosophos* ·i· fellsamh ar dlíged in filed guru fellsumh (=filidh, poet, that is, generous seeking, or generous sitting: or *fi*, that which satirises, and *li* that which praises: or *fili* from the word *philosophus*, philosopher, owing to the duty of the poet to be a philosopher); 2. the study of Irish is philosophy, albeit, not the philosophy that St. Paul warned against: *Auraicept na n-Éces* [Short Recension], lines 57-62; Calder, *The Scholar’s Primer*, ed.6 and tr.7; and 3. philosophical practice is equated in a poetic citation to the practice of glossing, poetry and prose: *Auraicept na n-Éces* [Short Recension], lines 53-6; Calder, *The Scholar’s Primer*, ed.6 and tr.7; this poetic citation is all but identical to the last two lines of the early Irish poem *Gelehrsamkeit schützt nicht vor der Hölle*; Kuno Meyer, ed., ‘Mitteilungen aus Irischen handschriften’, *ZCP* 12, 358-97 at 385, as cited and translated in Próinséas Ní Chatháin, ‘Some Themes in Early Irish Lyric Poetry’, *Irish University Review* 22.1 [Serving the Word: Essays and Poems in Honour of Maurice Harmon] (Spring - Summer 1992), 3-12, at 8: ‘Fogluim feallsamnacht is fás / léigend Gaideilg ocus glúas / litirdacht léir ocus rím / is becc a mbríg istig thúas’ (=Learning and philosophy are in vain / Latin, Irish and gloss / zeal for literature and prosody / little their virtue in the house above).

<sup>44</sup> *Homeric Hymn* 28; Martin L. West, ed. and tr., *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (Cambridge, MA and London 2003), 211.

when Isidore's refashioning of philosophy on fundamentally grammatical, rather than fundamentally dialectical, principles is embraced wholeheartedly.

### **Methodology**

The procedure then will be to place the doctrines embodied in the relevant literature in the context of the relevant statements by Christian authorities known to have been generally available at the time. Sometimes this will be aided by quotations or misquotations of one patristic author or another. However, this is generally a simple question of which statements are the most plausible basis for such a doctrine, or some aspect of it, and which are most notably at variance with it. In some instances, the correlation will be close enough to amount to proof in itself that a specific statement, or group of statements, by the patristic author in question were known first-hand. In others, especially in relation to issues are often addressed in similar ways by multiple authorities, less precision has been possible. There are, in fact, many issues raised here that would benefit from a more detailed analysis at some later point. But having here traced some of the fundamental features of the superstructure to which many of these issues belong, it is hoped that such analysis may at least now proceed on surer footing that had been possible previously.

In general, the picture that emerges will confirm earlier identifications of a pre-Augustinian synthesis of patristic authorities, but not in the sense that St. Augustine fails to be an important authority. For many of the issues addressed here, he will in fact show himself to be the most relevant authority. It is a pre-Augustinian synthesis in the sense that while he is among the great authorities which participate in it, he does not seem to stand above them as their measure<sup>45</sup> in the way that he so often did elsewhere before the influence Ps. Dionysius began to rival his own.<sup>46</sup> Towards the end of the time-frame

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 2 in particular, esp. pages 79-111.

<sup>46</sup> For Ps. Dionysius as introducing a means of systematizing Augustinian Platonism that is true to the character of Augustine's own thought, see Robert D. Crouse, 'Augustinian Platonism in Early Medieval Theology', in Joanne McWilliams, ed., *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* (Waterloo, ON 1992), 109-20. On the logic of Augustinian thought as fundamentally different from that of Ps. Dionysius, and subordinate to it in Eriugena and Thomas Aquinas, see Wayne J. Hankey, 'Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation', in Ysabel de Andia, ed., *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident* (Paris 1997), 428-38.

covered by this study, this ‘pre-Augustinian’ character will not be so pronounced. However, insofar as many of the more unusual features of early Irish theology persist, it will be found to be in large part due to the abiding influence of this earlier synthesis of authorities, and to the affirmation of perceived continuities with Ireland’s pre-Christian past which that earlier synthesis made possible and perhaps even required.

### **A Crux in the Scholarship**

From another frame of reference, this study is an attempt to address a problem fundamental to the study of early Irish literature, but certainly not confined to it. I am speaking of a tendency to regard the concept of rationality, and the concept of an inspiration by which things beyond reason may be known, as natural and inherently irreconcilable enemies between which, as such, there has always been (and must always be) a state of war. Yet as persuasive as such an analysis may be philosophically it is not one which is shared by the greater part of extant ancient and medieval thought. Nor indeed has it been universally accepted in modernity. Even so, that has not prevented the doctrine of their irreconcilability from being superimposed on forms of thinking to which the idea of such a division is utterly strange.

In the study of early medieval Ireland this imposition has, as one might well expect, taken two mutually antagonistic forms. On the one hand, some scholars have emphasized the role of the Church in the production of the extant literature.<sup>47</sup> This seems quite justified in principle. However, in practice this has often involved the assumption the writers involved could not have sincerely believed in their accounts of the miraculous, especially when these accounts involved things that are not easy to place in a medieval Christian cosmology.<sup>48</sup> The result of this assumption has been a preference for interpreting such content as having neither more nor less meaning than an

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<sup>47</sup> See note 20 above.

<sup>48</sup> One of the most powerful expressions of this perspective is R.M. Scowcroft, ‘Abstract Narrative in Ireland’, *Ériu* 46 (1995), 121-58, esp. 156-7. This has subsequently been elaborated on to great effect in Elizabeth Boyle, ‘Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts in Medieval Irish Literature’, in Deborah Hayden and Paul Russell, eds., *Grammatica, Gramadach and Gramadeg: Vernacular Grammar and Grammarians in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Amsterdam 2016), 11-34, esp.24, and the section of Mark Williams’s monumental new monograph which he has described as ‘speculative’; Mark Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals* (Princeton and Oxford 2018), 160-82.

expression of power-relations.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, some scholars have emphasized that the elements of such accounts that do not intuitively seem to fit into a Christian cosmology are, nevertheless, often presented to the reader as if they are real.<sup>50</sup> This also seems quite justified, but is in turn often accompanied by one of two assumptions: 1) that any attempts to interpret them in Christian theological terminology may, in Carey's words, 'have "saved appearances", but . . . do not look as if they carried imaginative conviction for either author or audience',<sup>51</sup> or 2) that these attempts are indeed imaginatively satisfying, but were never intended to be rationally so.<sup>52</sup>

Insofar as they are accompanied by these assumptions, both approaches insist that the author presents us with an unintelligible world. Neither version of the author means what they say. One belongs to an essentially practical political world and merely acts as if they believe in certain strange things beyond it as a way of furthering those political purposes. The other belongs to a world whose meaning is fundamentally determined by inspired or imaginative modes of knowledge beyond reason, and merely pretends to rationalize it (presumably for the sake of escaping charges of heresy), or else cares so little about reason that self-contradiction is of no account so long as the aesthetics are

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<sup>49</sup> For characterisations of early Irish literature as whole in this way, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', in David Ellis Evans *et al.*, eds., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Celtic Studies* (Oxford 1986), 141-58, at 141-3; *idem*, 'The Church and Secular Society', in *L'irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 57 (Spoleto 2010), 261-321, at 281-4, 306, 317, 320-1; *idem*, 'Legend as Critic', *passim*; *idem*, 'Irish Vernacular Law and the Old Testament', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission. Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart 1987), 284-307, *passim*. For some of the limitations of interpreting early Irish saga-literature as 'political-scripture' and references, see Ralph O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship & Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga* (Oxford 2013), 277ff.

<sup>50</sup> Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 37 (Summer, 1999), 33-54; Gregory Toner, 'Authority, Verse and the Transmission of *Senchas*', *Ériu* 55 (2005), 59-84. Ralph O'Connor's general discussion of sagas and romances as medieval genres also applies here; Ralph O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories and Romances* (Stroud, Gloucestershire and Charleston, SC 2002), 19ff.

<sup>51</sup> John Carey, *The Mythological Cycle of Medieval Irish Literature* (Cork 2018), 16. For a similar comment, see John Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland in the Later Middle Ages', in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm, eds., *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past* (Cardiff 2015), 51-68, at 61: 'And so the causistry which had sought to distinguish the Túatha Dé Donann from the people of the *síde* dissolves like the insubstantial construct it had always been'.

<sup>52</sup> Proinsias MacCana, 'The Sinless Otherworld of *Immram Brain*', *Ériu* 27 (1976), 95-115, at 100: 'that other, and happier land which loomed so large in the Irish consciousness was a continuation of man's primitive condition before he tasted of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus was the pagan world brought poetically, if not rationally, within the framework of Christian orthodoxy'.

what they should be. In short, either approach imagines a psychology for the author as a way of minimizing the importance of the aspects of their presentation to which are ideologically unpalatable. However, this is a dubious hermeneutic approach at best. Many different psychologies are possible for the writer of any given text. And even in a case where that psychology is to some extent known, it does not follow that everything in a text will be made explicable by that psychology.<sup>53</sup>

In every instance, the work before us is both as simple and as difficult as trying to understand the coherence of *all* the details of an extant or recoverable text to the fullest extent that this is possible. To this end, a certain scholarly naïveté must be maintained which holds at bay the imaginative sophistry that necessarily follows upon the question, ‘But what do they *really* mean by that?’, by means of a formula that is at least verifiable in principle: something along the lines of ‘Whatever the unknowable motives of the speaker may be, what are they actually saying that they are saying?’. Such a process must, of course, involve being sensitive to such cues as show that a text is meant to be taken as satire (in the modern sense), or pure allegory, for example.<sup>54</sup> But when these identifications are correct they will not demand that we suppress parts of the presentation to make it work. Similarly, this should not be done under the illusion that there is never a political or other ulterior purpose at work in the texts that we will be considering. Quite the contrary. It is always useful to determine who stands to benefit from a given ideology. However, it is another thing entirely to claim this benefit is its

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<sup>53</sup> In this I do not want to go so far as proclaiming the ‘death of the author’, with Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault; Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, *Aspen* 5-6 (1967); Michel Foucault, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?’, *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie* 63 (1969), 3, 73-104, with English translation in Josué V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies* (Cornell 1979), 141-60. The metaphor of the relationship of a parent and child seems to be a useful one here. Where knowable, the character of a text’s author will tend to reveal something about the text in much the same way as meeting someone’s parent tends to reveal something about them, given that text, like child, to some degree owes the character of its being to the character of its source, having come into being from what their source is. However, this does not mean that either kind of progeny is fully or even mostly explicable by means of the knowable characteristics of the progenitor(s), or that the progeny will not be and do things that are utterly unforeseen by their progenitor(s). Conversely, this means that one cannot know the progenitor adequately simply by studying the knowable characteristics of its progeny. Knowledge of the progenitor may ‘make sense’ relative to one’s previous knowledge of its progeny, but the relevance of that previous knowledge is only reliably identifiable when both are known on their own terms. Even when dealing with causes that are simpler and more intelligible than parents and authors, short of consubstantial union, to see the son is not to see the father; John 14:9: ‘qui videt me, videt et Patrem’.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 303-9.

truest meaning for all (or indeed any) of those who subscribe to it. Every ideology has those who make use of it for cynical purposes, as well as those who hold to it as true believers. And even those whose relationship to a given ideology is almost entirely instrumental may still be convinced by it in part. The task then remains to understand what makes the interpretation of the world that is embodied in a given text or texts intelligible as such. This is especially so where a given ideology is relatively stable for a long period of time, as it is in the case at hand. For in such a case, it has in some sense ‘worked’ for many kinds of individuals of many different motivations and degrees of intellectual sophistication as an account of the nature of reality.

In any attempt to discover the unity in apparent differences there will be the danger of discovering unities that were not there to begin with. But the alternative of assuming the incoherence of the remaining evidence does not seem to be a real solution. Real contradictions will inevitably emerge from time to time, especially given that so much of the extant evidence is the result of layers upon layers of revision by many authors, editors and scribes. Sometimes we will encounter the expectation that we take an intervenor’s reinterpretations of earlier material seriously, even though their reinterpretations seem to involve them in irresolvable difficulties relative to the claims of an earlier form of the text.<sup>55</sup> However, this is a very different matter from assuming that they do not mean some part of what they say. Moreover, the fact remains that a great deal of what has appeared self-contradictory relative to the ecclesiastical establishment that produced these texts no longer appears to be so when adequately situated in its patristic context. The result may not be something that we recognise as agreeing with reason or inspiration as we understand them. However, that is beside the point. The object is not to determine how such thinking does or does not match up to our ideals, but how it makes sense to itself relative to the principles by which it understands itself to operate. If we can get some glimpse of this we will have accomplished something indeed, and, perhaps, will have shone some new light on the way we reflect on our own thinking in the process. There is nothing for it then but to

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 6, pages 396-401.

wade in, the law of non-contradiction in one hand, and the philosophical doctrines of the Church Fathers in the other, and to see what happens.



## CHAPTER ONE – NATURE AS THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND REALITY

### Introduction

The trouble with the concept of ‘nature’ and the ‘natural’ is that its meaning generally seems so clear as to be self-evident, at the same time as there is broad, even violent, disagreement about what that meaning actually is.<sup>1</sup> The result is that it all too easily becomes a sort of ideological place-holder which, as such, is able to assume whatever value may be desirable in a given situation, but yet does so in such a decisive way as to appear that it has undeniably always been so (to all forward-thinking people), from time immemorial. Now to say that a concern with the concept of the ‘natural’ is central to secular medieval Irish literature is not to say that this is untrue of other literatures in other places and times: quite the contrary. However, where this concept has appeared in that literature, it has, in the manner outlined above, been exceptionally vulnerable to misinterpretation, when it has served modern purposes to do so. Although St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, is known to have carefully studied pagan theological texts, and to have written secular works based on them,<sup>2</sup> the Angelic Doctor is much less likely to be taken as a closet-pagan<sup>3</sup> when he speaks of things like ‘natural law’ than an anonymous early Irish author, for whom there is no comparable evidence. Thus, in the attempt to understand how these terms are used in early Irish literature, the greatest obstacle will be to clearly distinguish these uses from our own intuitive understanding of them. To do this we must turn to the intellectual context in which these early Irish formulations took shape. There is no denying that medieval Ireland is the source of theological ideas that are often striking and strange, especially when one considers them in the larger context of Latin Christendom. But it is precisely in studying these ideas as manifestations of

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<sup>1</sup> For a contemporary example, see Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, ‘Human-nature: Justice vs. Power’, in *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate on Human Nature* (New York and London 2006), 1-67. [repr. of Fons Elders, ed., *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* (London 1974), 135-97].

<sup>2</sup> e.g. *Super Librum de causis expositio*; Henri-Dominique Saffrey, ed., *Sancti Thomae de Aquino super Librum de causis expositio* (Fribourg 1954); Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor, tr., *St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Book of Causes* (Washington, D.C. 1996).

<sup>3</sup> On Aquinas’ engagement with pagan Neoplatonism, see Wayne Hankey, *God in Himself, Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the ‘Summa Theologiae’*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford 1987, repr. 2000).

Latin Christendom that the character of that strangeness, or, in other words, the character of their contribution to the debates they have inherited, comes into view.

There has been a concept of a natural law, that is, of a law that conforms, and thus, conforms those who practice it, to the greater order of reality, from at least as early as the Pre-Socratics and the Greek Tragedians,<sup>4</sup> though such a thing may be said to be clearly implied in many earlier literatures.<sup>5</sup> It is, however, the combined influence of Platonic, Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy that would prove the most important for Christian development of this idea. For Hellenistic pagans and Christians alike, the possibility of natural law, as such, rested on the correspondence between the structure of human rationality and the divine ordering of nature as a whole, that is, on its status as a true microcosm of the cosmos, not just as an object of thought, but in the very character of its thinking. This correspondence between inner and outer, reason and world, meant, not only that the soul had the means in itself by which it might come to know the providential order of reality (i.e. [meta]physics), but also the means by which it might live in accordance with that greater order (i.e. ethics), and thus live according to a natural and not merely a conventional law.<sup>6</sup> Because the knowledge of a law that conforms to the order of nature depends on knowledge of that order, and because knowledge of that order depends on the analogy, perhaps even the identity, that is

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<sup>4</sup> Erich Brown, 'The Emergence of Natural Law and the Cosmopolis', in Stephen Salkever, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought* (Cambridge 2009), 331-64; A.A. Long, 'Law and Nature in Greek thought', in Michael Gagarin and David Cohen, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law* (Cambridge 2005), 412-30; Lloyd L. Weinreb, *Natural Law and Justice* (Cambridge and London 1987), 15-26; William A. Banner, 'Origen and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 51-82, at 59-60, 63 and 73. For specifically Stoic developments, see Marcia L. Colish, *Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Leiden 1985) I, 31-50.

<sup>5</sup> Such as we find in Homer, on which, see William Allan, 'Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 126 (2006), 1-35; Rick M. Newton, 'Odysseus and Melanthius', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 38.1 (1997), 5-18; Charles Segal, 'Divine Justice in the Odyssey: Poseidon, Cyclops, and Helios', *The American Journal of Philology* 113.4 (Winter, 1992), 489-518; Rainer Friedrich, 'The Hybris of Odysseus', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 111 (1991), 16-28; *idem*, 'Thrinakia and Zeus' Ways to Men in the *Odyssey*', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 28 (1987), 375-400; Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971, rev. 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Throughout these developments, law which is thus, 'natural' or 'according to nature' (κατὰ φύσιν / *kata phusin*) is often defined in contrast to that which is 'according to custom' (κατὰ / *kata nomon*), whose shape may reflect no more than the whims and habits of those who frame it. The first recorded contrast of these terms in a single phrase seems to be in Plato's, *Gorgias* 483e3; E.R. Dodds, ed., *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford 1959, repr. 2001), 263, note on lines 482 c 4-483 c 6.

thought to exist between it and the structure of human rationality,<sup>7</sup> everything begins with one's ability to accurately reflect on the true content of one's own rationality.<sup>8</sup> For it is, of course, only insofar as it becomes possible to truly distinguish what belongs to the soul's innately rational character, from what does not, that its analogy to reality as a whole will be of any use to the one seeking to discover a law that is natural, and not merely pleasing to one's particular configuration of likes and dislikes at a given moment. The accurate thinking of one's own thought invariably hangs, in turn, on the practice of specific intellectual disciplines, in addition to whatever moral training is also deemed necessary to keep the mind from being led astray from itself by its affections. As one might expect, the various philosophical schools of late antiquity tended to differ on which rational disciplines should receive the most emphasis, and on the order in which they should be undertaken, in the attempt to actualise this human capacity for self-thinking thought as perfectly as possible in oneself.

One particularly influential approach, based on the conciliation of Plato's *Parmenides* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, involved hypothesizing the kind of cause that is implied by physical reality, then hypothesizing what kind of cause is necessarily implied by that cause, and continuing this dialectical process until arriving at an absolutely unhypothetical First Cause which would allow the confirmation of all the hypothetical steps that lead to it.<sup>9</sup> The steps of this dialectical process, taken together, are understood

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<sup>7</sup> This idea may be as old as Pythagoras. See, for example, its attribution to the 'Pythagoreans' in Sextus Empiricus', *Pros logikos*, I.92; R.G. Bury, ed. and tr., *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*, Sextus Empiricus 2 (Cambridge, 1936), 48-49. It is, at any rate, in Heraclitus; Brown, 'The Emergence', 342. This would become an increasingly ubiquitous feature of natural law theory as the concept came to be more explicit over time, and may be taken to be present in some form wherever it is argued that the content of natural law becomes intelligible through self-knowledge, or, in other words, the exercise of philosophical reasoning.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this study, see Isidore's equation of natural law with rational law; *Etymologiae* (*Etym.*, hereafter) V.iii.4; W. M. Lindsay, ed., *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX* (Oxford 1911); Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, tr., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge 2008), 117: 'Porro si ratione lex constat, lex erit omne iam quod ratione constiterit, dumtaxat quod religioni congruat, quod disciplinae conveniat, quod saluti proficiat' (=Furthermore, if law is based on reason, law will be everything that is consistent with reason, insofar as it agrees with religion, accords with orderly conduct, and is conducive to well-being [lightly edited]). The need expressed here for reason, and the law derivable from it, to be in agreement with things that seem not to fall directly under its jurisdiction should be read in light of his idea that God is, in some manner, beyond such rational representation and apprehension. See pages 47-8.

<sup>9</sup> The seminal text on this Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* is still E.R. Dodds, 'The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic 'One'', *The Classical Quarterly* 22.3/4 (Jul.-Oct.

to amount to an accurate rational description of the hierarchical ordering of the levels of reality. The author identified with Dionysius the Areopagite, in Latin translation, would have been the first significant mediator to the West of this quintessentially Neoplatonic approach prior to the twelfth-century rediscovery of Aristotle. Thus, except as a useful point of comparison, its relevance to early Irish literature prior to Eriugena is limited at best.

Another such discipline, strongly associated with Stoicism, but with roots in Plato's *Cratylus*<sup>10</sup> and in Heraclitus<sup>11</sup> and Homer<sup>12</sup> before him, focuses on a distinction between natural and conventional words. The basic idea is that, in natural words, sounds directly correspond to things.<sup>13</sup> In this case, insofar as something is truly named, the sounds

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1928), 129-142; see also Jean Trouillard, 'Le Parménide de Platon et son interprétation néoplatonicienne', *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 23 (1973) 83-100; H.D. Saffrey, 'La Théologie platonicienne de Proclus, fruit de l'exégèse du Parménide', *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 116 (1984), 1-12; Carlos Steel, 'Le Parménide est-il le fondement de la Théologie Platonicienne', in Alain-Philippe Segonds and Carlos Steel, eds., *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* (Leuven and Paris 2000), 373-397. On the conciliation of Plato and Aristotle as necessary to this interpretation, see Edward Booth, 'St. Augustine's *notitia sui*'. Cf. Lloyd P. Gerson, 'The "Neoplatonic" Interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*', *International Journal for the Platonic Tradition* 10.1 (2016), 65-94, who misses that the argument for the centrality of the *Parmenides* does not lie in its mere provision of the order of reality found by Neoplatonic commentators in Plato, so much as its strictly dialectical derivation of that order, i.e. its derivation by means of the rational soul's most characteristic activity. For more recent work on the history of the interpretation of the *Parmenides*, see John Douglas Turner and Kevin Corrigan, eds., *Plato's 'Parmenides' and its Heritage*, 2 vols. (Atlanta 2010).

<sup>10</sup> On the etymological theory of Plato's *Cratylus*, and convincing arguments that it is a genuine theory of Plato's, rather than a learned joke, see David Sedley, *Plato's 'Cratylus'* (Cambridge 2003); see also Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's 'Cratylus'* (New York and London 2001); Rolf Baumgarten, 'Creative Medieval Etymology and Irish Hagiography (Lasair, Columba, Senán)', *Ériu* 54 (2004), 49-78, at 60-2.

<sup>11</sup> The main evidence for this, besides the portrayal of Cratylus as Heraclitus' student by Plato, is Heraclitus' own etymology of 'bios' (bow), by which he seems to indicate, at once, the double nature of the bow, and the intimate connexion between life and death: Frag. LXXIX; Charles H. Kahn, ed. and tr., *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge and New York 1979, repr. 2001), 64-5: 'βίος τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος' (=The bow [βίος] is called life [βίος], but its work its death [lightly edited]).

<sup>12</sup> On Homer's etymological practice, and that of Heraclitus' younger contemporary, Pindar, see Evanthia Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, *Ancient Poetic Etymology: The Pelopids: Fathers and Sons*, Palingenesia. Schriftenreihe für klassische Altertumswissenschaft 89 (2007), 32-108. Here Homer's distinction between divine and human language in the *Iliad* I.402-4, II.813-4 and XIV.291 is especially significant; David B. Munro and Thomas W. Allen, ed., *Homeri opera*, vols. 1-2 (Oxford 1902, repr. 1920) I, 14-5, 46 and II, 41. On this, see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, *Ancient Poetic Etymology*, 89-96.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of ancient and medieval conceptions of 'natural language', and further sources, see Helen Peraki-Kyriakidou, 'Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing', *The Classical Quarterly* 52.2 (2002), 478-493; Mark Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia 1988), 15ff.; Christos Nifadopoulos, ed., *Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology*, Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology 25-27: September 2000

involved in that name imply an actual connection with other things that have the same sounds in their respective names. It remains that there are merely arbitrary names whose sounds are only related by chance to the reality they describe.<sup>14</sup> However, through attentiveness to the sounds of true words, one is then thought to be able derive a scientific account of reality through an etymologizing process in which the object revealed in a word is understood with more precision through a consideration of the word that describes it in relation to other natural words that employ similar sounds.<sup>15</sup>

This etymologizing, grammatical, approach was broadly influential throughout medieval Europe.<sup>16</sup> Beginning, as Genesis does, with God's creation of the orders of reality through a process of naming, and Adam's subsequent naming of the new-created

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(Münster 2003); Robert Maltby, 'The Limits of Etymologising', *Aevum Antiquum* 6 (1993), 257-75; Jefferey Bardzell, *Speculative Grammar and Stoic Language Theory in Medieval Allegorical Narrative: From Prudentius to Alan of Lille* (New York and London 2009), 3-5, 12-31, 79-80; James, J. O'Hara, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (University of Michigan 1996, rev. 2017), 7-56; Dirk M. Schvenkeld, 'Language', Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfield and Malcolm Schofield, eds., *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge 1999, repr. 2002), 177-215, at 179-182; Peter T. Struck, *The Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton and Oxford 2004), 136-9; Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Leiden 1985), 56-60; Karl Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, Abhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig, philologisch-historische Klasse 49.3 (Berlin 1957); Michael Frede, *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis 1987), 325-37, 357.

<sup>14</sup> This, as we shall see, is how Isidore understands the problem. However, Stoic proponents of natural language, for instance, generally seem to have conceived of gradations of purity or corruption relative to a given word's original natural state, rather than a stark juxtaposition between 'natural' and 'conventional'. For such a view, etymological method is applicable for every word whatever, providing that a person possesses sufficient dialectical power and virtue. See Catherine Atherton, *The Stoics on Ambiguity* (Cambridge 1993, repr. 1995), 67-9, 95-7.

<sup>15</sup> Interest in multiplying etymologies of a single word as a way of deepening one's knowledge of the being it describes is by no means universal among practitioners of ancient etymology. Where multiple etymologies exist it seems most often to be seen, among Stoics, as a valid means of limiting the spread of ambiguities of meaning that may arise, rather than an inherently desirable extension of knowledge. On this, see Atherton, *Ambiguity*, 105-7. In principle, the potential etymologies of a word would appear to be the same number as the knowable relationships that the being it describes has relative to other beings; Struck, *The Birth of the Symbol*, 138-9; Glenn W. Most, 'Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis', in Wolfgang Haase, ed., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.36.3 (Berlin 1989), 2014-65, at 2028. However, the high-water mark for the desirability of multiple etymologies among those with a strong theory of natural language seems to arrive with the medieval practitioners of the art, especially, it seems, with those associated with Irish learning. On the latter, see Chapter 1, note 18 below.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent overview of the ancient and medieval development of the kind of etymologising described here, but with careful reference to other early approaches to etymology that, to varying degrees, were, or came to be, distinct from it, see Davide Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths: Etymology and the Allegorical Mindset* (Washington, D.C. 2007), 34-115.

animals,<sup>17</sup> it is easy to see the appeal that a philosophical discipline, based on the significance of human onomastic capacity, might have for medieval theologians. Even so, it seems to have been taken up with particular enthusiasm in Ireland.<sup>18</sup> The most important mediator of these ideas to Ireland is Isidore of Seville,<sup>19</sup> a seventh-century bishop and encyclopaedist whose work, the *Etymologiae* (among others), was influential here from the mid-seventh century onwards.<sup>20</sup> It is difficult to say how much medieval Irish interest in, and practise of, this kind of etymology may be due to Isidore's influence, or how much the introduction of Isidore merely added fuel to a fire that was already alight.<sup>21</sup> There were, of course, much earlier intermediaries of these

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 1 and 2:19-23.

<sup>18</sup> For examples of the tendency toward multiple etymologies for a single term in Isidore (among other late antique Latin authors) and the further development of this tendency in scholarship, see Paul Russell, 'In aliis libris: Adaptation, Reworking and Transmission in the Commentaries to *Amra Choluim Chille*', in Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden, eds., *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 2014), 63-94; *idem*, *Glossaries and Learned Discourse in Medieval Ireland*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures 6 (Cambridge 2008); *idem*, 'The Sounds of a Silence: The Growth of *Cormac's Glossary*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 15 (1988), 1-30, at 18, 20, 23 and 29.

<sup>19</sup> For the specific character of Isidore's approach to etymology, see Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths*, 96-115; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, 133-72..

<sup>20</sup> Luned Mair Davies, 'Isidorian Texts and the Hibernensis', *Peritia* 11 (1997), 207-49; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, 'Ireland and Spain in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 1-10; Michael Herren, 'On the Earliest Irish Acquaintance with Isidore of Seville', in Edward James, ed., *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford 1980), 243-50 [repr. in *Latin Letters in Early Christian Ireland* (Ashgate 1996) III]; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, 'Visigothic Spain and Early Christian Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 62 C (1962), 167-94. For specific early instances of the *Etymologiae*'s influence, see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 82 C (1982), 405-430, at 423; Paul Russell, 'In aliis libris', 90 note 72; James P. Carley and Ann Dooley, 'An Early Irish Fragment of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*', in Lesley Abrams and James P. Carley, eds., *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey: Essays in Honour of the Ninetieth Birthday of C. A. Raleigh Radford* (Woodbridge 1991), 135-61; Calder, *The Scholar's Primer*, xxxi-l; *contra* Marina Smyth's argument from silence, that the lack of evidence for Isidore's influence on certain cosmological texts throws doubt on the positive signs of his influence elsewhere in the seventh and early eighth century. Among other things, this would seem to depend on the supposition that, where Isidore was known, he would always be followed at the expense of other available authorities; Marina Smyth, 'Isidorean texts in Medieval Ireland', in Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood, eds., *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages: Transforming and Transmitting Knowledge* (Leiden 2016), 111-31; *idem*, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh Century Ireland* (Woodbridge 1996), 33; *idem*, 'Isidore of Seville and Early Irish Cosmography', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 14 (Winter 1987), 69-102.

<sup>21</sup> Donatus, Priscian and Servius, among others, also deserve consideration as potential mediators of late antique etymological practice prior to Isidore's *Etymologiae*; Robert Maltby, 'Priscian's Etymologies: Sources, Function and Theoretical Basis', in M. Baratin, B. Colombat and L. Holtz, eds., *Priscien: Transmission et reformation de la grammaire de l'antiquité aux modernes* (Turnhout 2009), 239-46; Robert Maltby, 'The Role of Etymology in Servius and Donatus', in Christos Nifadopoulos, ed., *Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology*, 103-118.

etymological practices, notably the Bible<sup>22</sup> and its patristic commentators.<sup>23</sup> The presence of pre-existing etymological interests would, perhaps, help to account for the higher level of prestige Isidore seems to have enjoyed in Ireland than elsewhere in Latin Christendom.<sup>24</sup> But it is in Isidore that they would have first encountered the practice of etymologising as the basis of a philosophical system.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction made above between natural and conventional words will recall the earlier distinction between natural and conventional law. Still, one cannot assume that a work which evokes one of these distinctions will necessarily evoke the other.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, even if an author takes both language and law to have natural and

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<sup>22</sup> Notable examples include Exod. 2:10; 1 Sam. 4:21; Isaiah 8:3-4; Hosea 1:3-9.

<sup>23</sup> The most detailed (albeit, somewhat ambivalent), patristic treatment of Stoic linguistic theory and etymological practice is likely St. Augustine's, *De dialectica*; Jan Pinborg, ed. and B. Darrel Jackson, tr., *Augustine: De dialectica* (Dordrecht 1975). He would later develop the position that the auditory form of spoken language is arbitrary relative to the mental referent signified by it; Mary Sirridge, 'Augustine's Two Theories of Language', *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 11 (2000), 35-57; Isabelle Koch, 'Le verbum in corde chez Augustin', in Joël Biard, ed., *Le langage mental du Moyen Âge à l'Âge classique* (Leuven 2009), 1-28; Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Birth of Occidental Semiotics', in R.W. Bailey, L. Matjeka and P. Steiner, eds., *The Sign: Semiotics Around the World* (Ann Harbour 1978), 1-42, at 20-39.

<sup>24</sup> The classic example is *Do Faillsigid Tána Bó Cúailnge*, the story of how the *Táin* was miraculously recovered after the last copy had been traded for Isidore's *Etymologiae*; Kevin Murray, ed. and tr., 'The Finding of the *Táin*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 41 (Summer, 2001), 17-23. For further discussion, see James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin 1955), 165-88; Tomás Ó Máille, 'The Authorship of the *Culmen*', *Ériu* 9 (1921-1923), 71-76. For the apparent Old Irish basis of the version of the text found in The Book of Leinster (LL, hereafter) and the Middle Irish composition of the D.iv.2 version, see John Carey, 'Varia II: The Address to Fergus's Stone', *Ériu* 51 (2000), 183-7, at 183 note 5.

<sup>25</sup> Note, 'the basis', and not actually a complete system. As we see in the *Etymologiae*, the rest of the arts emerge as an unfolding of what is present as potency in grammar, but grammar on its own is not yet the full unfolding of the system of thought for which it is the necessary basis. There is, perhaps, a sense that rhetoric and dialectic in his view could be understood simply as elaborations of grammar, but this would run the risk of muddying his reasons for giving grammar a distinct section (albeit the first section) in his *Etymologiae*. See Del Bello's qualifications of Amsler's statements on this subject; Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths*, 97-101; Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, 134-5, 171.

<sup>26</sup> There are those in antiquity who would believe in a distinction between natural and conventional law, but not think that there is any such thing as natural language on the level of physically spoken or written word: Proclus, for example, as opposed to Iamblichus. For Iamblichus, it was of the utmost importance that 'barbarian names' (βάρβαρα ὀνόματα/*babara onomata*) of religious ritual not be translated into Greek, in order for them to remain effectual; Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, VII.5; Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell, ed. and tr., *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries* (Atlanta 2003), 298-303. However, for Proclus, it is the intellectual 'form' (εἶδος/*eidos*) of a word that has a natural relationship to its object, not its 'matter' (ὕλη/*hulē*), that is, not in the embodiment of that form in a particular vocalisation. In which case, the actual sound of the utterance is not important, so much as the rational character of what is manifest in the utterance, whether in religious ritual or otherwise; R.M. Van Den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translation, Commentary*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 90 (Leiden 2001), 101ff. Augustine would arrive at a position similar to that of Proclus; see note 23 above.

conventional forms, it does not follow that this author will necessarily present them in a way that preserves the perceived analogy between them. However, Isidore does precisely this in the *Etymologiae*. In Book I, he distinguishes between words that are invented ‘according to nature’ (*secundum naturam*) and those which are contrived ‘according to whim’ (*secundum placitum*).<sup>27</sup> In Book V, he distinguishes between ‘natural law’ (*lex naturae*) and merely customary ‘human law’ (*lex humanae*).<sup>28</sup> The form of ‘human law’, like that of language which is shaped ‘according to whim’, has no definable relationship to reality at all, in that it is determined only by what seems pleasing.<sup>29</sup> Yet, in contrast to them, a kind of language and a kind of law have existed, and exist, which are characterised precisely by their correspondence to nature. In the case of natural language, the directness of its conformity to nature, its naturalness, lies, as we would now expect, in the correspondence between its sequence of sounds and the thing described. According to Isidore, it is only this that makes the etymological practice, which is the basis and organising principle of his *Etymologiae*, possible.<sup>30</sup> But what then must this mean for how the naturalness of natural law is conceived? Since there is such an immediate relationship between the nature of a given thing and its manifestation to human sense-perception, on the level of language, one would then expect that the same immediate relationship between representation and reality will exist between the role proper to humanity in the larger cosmological order, described in the natural law, and the physical instantiation of that role in the state. And what we find is certainly along these lines. For, unlike Ps. Augustine (Ambrosiaster) and those following him - for whom a king must be honoured as the image of God (*imago Dei*), in

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<sup>27</sup> *Etym.* I.xxix.2; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 55: ‘Non autem omnia nomina a veteribus secundum naturam inposita sunt, sed quaedam et secundum placitum, sicut et nos servis et possessionibus interdum secundum quod placet nostrae voluntati nomina damus’ (=However, not all words were established by the ancients from nature; some were established by whim, just as we sometimes give names to slaves and possessions according to what tickles our fancy).

<sup>28</sup> *Etym.* V.ii.1; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117: ‘Omnes autem leges aut divinae sunt, aut humanae. Divinae natura, humanae moribus constant’ (=All laws are either divine or human. Divine laws are based on nature, human law on customs).

<sup>29</sup> *Etym.* V.ii.1; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117: ‘humanae (leges) . . . discrepant, quoniam aliae aliis gentibus placent’ (=human laws may disagree because, different laws please different peoples).

<sup>30</sup> *Etym.* I.xxix.3; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 55: ‘omnium nominum etymologiae non reperiuntur, quia quaedam non secundum qualitatem, qua genita sunt, sed iuxta arbitrium humanae voluntatis vocabula acceperunt’ (=etymologies are not to be found for all words, because some things received names, not according to their innate qualities, but by the caprice of human will).



the same way as a bishop is honoured as the image of Christ (*imago Christi*), whether they act like a sovereign or no<sup>31</sup>- Isidore contends that a king who does not act like a king is not a king at all.<sup>32</sup> Thus the noun ‘king’ (*rex*), in Isidore’s view, is derived from the actions of ‘ruling’ (*regendum*) and ‘acting correctly’ (*recte agendum*)<sup>33</sup> rather than the actions from a pre-existing identity existing independently of them. It is only insofar

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<sup>31</sup> Ps. Augustine (Ambrosiaster), *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi testamenti CXXXVII*, quest. 35; edited in Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium, *Ambrosiaster: Quaestiones Veteris et Novi testamenti: Quaestiones numero CXXXVII* (Turnhout 2010 – online edition) 63.10, which may be viewed at the website ‘The Library of Latin Texts: Series A’ (online at: <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/Toc.aspx>), last accessed at 25.07.2017: ‘Dei enim imaginem habet rex, sicut et episcopus Christi. Quamdiu igitur in eadem tradicionem est, honorandus est, si non propter se, tamen propter ordinem’. The idea that the image of Christ is, in some way, uniquely possessed by the bishop, attributed to St. Augustine in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* [CCH, hereafter], seems likely to come from this Ps. Augustinian source; CCH I.15; Wasserschlöben, ed., *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 9; Roy Flechner, ed. and tr., *The Hibernensis: A Study, Edition and Translation with Notes* (Cambridge 2011), 17 and 541, which may be viewed at the website *Converting the Isles: An International Network for the Study of Conversion to Christianity in the Insular World* (online at: [http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/conversion/logos/Flechner\\_Hibernensis.pdf](http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/conversion/logos/Flechner_Hibernensis.pdf)), accessed at 15.07.2017: ‘Augustinus ait: Christus imaginem Dei habet, sicut episcopus imaginem Christi’ (=Augustine said: Christ bears the image of God, just as a bishop bears the image of Christ). On Ambrosiaster’s kingship ideology, see Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe, *Ambrosiaster’s Political Theology* (Oxford 2007), 127-45. For the bishop as having the same ‘grade’ (*grád*) as the ‘Son of God the Father’ (*Maic Dé Athar*), see also *Bretha Nemed Toisech* [BNT, hereafter] §9; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The First Third of *Bretha Nemed Toisech*’, *Ériu* 40 (1989), 1-40, at 13-14. A line from *quest. 79.3* of the same work (CTLO, eds., *Quaestiones*, 135.5) is quoted without attribution in the marginalia of *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*; J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, eds., ‘*Hymnus S. Hilarii in laudem Christi*’, in J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, 2 vols., Henry Bradshaw Society 13-14 (London 1898) I, 35-42, at 42, with preface at II, 18. This appears to have been first noted by Alexander Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature: Texts and Studies 7.4 (Cambridge 1905), 164. Cummin quoted from this work as early as 632; see Maura Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Cummin’s Letter ‘De Controversia Paschali’ and the ‘De ratione computandi’* (Toronto 1988), 60, note on line 36, as referenced by Pádraig P. Ó Néill, ‘The Latin Colophon to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the Book of Leinster: A Critical View of Old Irish Literature’, *Celtica* 23 (1999) 269-75, at 272 note 23.

<sup>32</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XI.iii.4; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 200: ‘Reges a regendo vocati. Sicut enim sacerdos a sacrificando, ita et rex a regendo. Non autem regit, qui non corrigit. Recte igitur faciendo regis nomen tenetur, peccando amittitur. Vnde et apud veteres tale erat proverbium: “Rex eris, si recte facias: si non facias, non eris”’ (=Kings are so called from governing, and as priests are named from sacrificing, so kings from governing. But he does not govern who does not correct; therefore the name of king is held by one behaving rightly, and lost by one doing wrong. Hence among the ancients such was the proverb: “You will be king if you behave rightly; if you do not, you will not.”[lightly edited]). On Isidore’s kingship ideology and its medieval Irish influence, see O’Connor, *The Destruction*, 274.

<sup>33</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I.xxix.3; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 55: ‘Sunt autem etymologiae nominum aut ex causa datae, ut ‘reges’ a regendo et recte agendo’ (=Etymologies of words are furnished, either from their rational as kings from “ruling” and “acting correctly” [lightly edited]).

as the king corrects (*corrigit*) the people,<sup>34</sup> which is to say, brings them into conformity to the natural law,<sup>35</sup> that they are a king.

### Linguistic Elaborations on Isidore

However, the early Irish reception of Isidore's ideas of natural language and law is certainly not a case of slavish imitation. On both sides of the equation, linguistic and legal, these basic principles are developed in new directions.<sup>36</sup> Isidore's understanding of ancient etymological practice leads him, for the most part, to a conservatism that gives pre-eminence to Hebrew,<sup>37</sup> the language which he believes is the ancient source of the others, and thus, presumably, least corrupted.<sup>38</sup> There is, however, a qualification of this view. In spite of the priority he gives to Hebrew as the font of all other languages, together with the arts that would become manifest in them, it remains that he understands Greek to be 'more illustrious than the other nation's languages' since 'it is more sonorous than Latin, or than any other language'.<sup>39</sup> This affirmation of Greek is not so strong as to maintain the priority of the Septuagint to St. Jerome's Latin

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<sup>34</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XI.iii.4; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 200.

<sup>35</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, V.xx-xxi; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 119. Note here that it is not simply the universal characteristics of nature as a whole, or of human nature that need consideration, but the state of the particular natures ruled at a particular time.

<sup>36</sup> For an example of a Hiberno-Latin etymology that 'is more Isidorean than Isidore himself', see Rolf Baumgarten, 'A Hiberno-Isidorean Etymology', *Peritia* 2 (1983), 225-8.

<sup>37</sup> It is important, however, that the primacy Isidore grants Hebrew not be confused with Bede's subsequent, or Jerome's prior, preference for what they called the 'hebraica veritas' (Hebrew Truth) - i.e. the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament - on which Jerome based his Vulgate, over the authority of the Greek Septuagint. See, for example, Bede's *Epistola ad Pelguinam* §16; Charles W. Jones, ed., *Bedae opera pars I: Opera didiscalia*, 3 vols., CCSL 123A-C (1975-80), 615-626, at 625; Faith Wallis, tr., 'Letter to Pelgwin', in her *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool 1999), 405-15, at 414. The authority that Hebrew has for Isidore does not cause him to see the Greek *Septuagint* as anything other than a direct result of revelation. He still prefers St. Jerome's *Vulgate*, but because Jerome is a Christian, not, it seems, because his Hebrew manuscripts were thought to be more reliable; *Etymologiae* VI.iv.1-5; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 139. Nor does it move him to abandon the chronology of the Septuagint relative to what Jerome saw (and Bede would see) as the demands of the 'Hebrew truth'; compare the chronology of *Etymologiae* V.xxxix.1-42; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 130-3, with the Vulgate-based chronology in Bede's *De temporum ratione* §66; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didiscalia*, 241-544, at 463-535; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 157-237, with commentary at 353-66, esp. 357.

<sup>38</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I.iii.4, xxxix.2 and xlii.1, V.i.1 and IX.i.1-4; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, V.xx-xxi; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., 39, 65, 67, 117 and 191.

<sup>39</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, V.xx-xxi; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., 191: 'Graeca autem lingua inter ceteras gentium clarior habetur. Est enim et Latinis et omnibus linguis sonantior'. Compare the *Auraicept*'s contention that 'every obscure sound' is found in Irish; see note 38 below. It seems possible, that this affirmation of the younger language of Greek could be the kernel from which, under the influence of the sources mentioned below, the *Auraicept*'s speculations on Irish grew.

translation of the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament in anything but chronology. But neither should his preference for the Vulgate be taken to indicate a commitment to the ‘Hebrew truth’ (*hebraicas veritas*) as the necessary basis for Scriptural authority, such we find in Jerome and Bede after him. For Isidore, the importance of the Vulgate does not lie in the belief that the Hebrew manuscripts are inherently superior to the Greek of the Septuagint, but in that the Vulgate is the work of a Christian, as opposed to the prophetically inspired (although admittedly pre-Christian) Septuagint. Nevertheless, despite this single, albeit, highly significant *proviso*, there is little to disrupt a picture of the priority of Hebrew.

Yet this is certainly not where the matter is left in early Irish literature. In *Auraicept na n-Éces*, most notably, what Isidore briefly says about Greek, is instead applied to the Irish language in a much-elaborated form. In place of Isidore’s warm but relatively ambiguous statement that Greek is ‘more sonorous’ than other languages, the *Auraicept* makes the more technical claim that the Irish language is ‘more comprehensive’ (*foirleithiu*) than every other, on account of its containing ‘every obscure sound’ (*gach son forrdorcha*).<sup>40</sup> In this it seems to be led by the same theory of language (in which sounds correspond to realities)<sup>41</sup> to an intellectual optimism - dimly visible in this

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<sup>40</sup> *Auraicept na n-Éces*, lines 11-12; Calder, ed. and tr., *The Scholar’s Primer*, ed.2 and tr.3. This is also, ‘*Ar a cuibdi, ar a edruma, ar a mine*’ (=on account of its aptness, on account of its lightness, on account of its smoothness [lightly edited]); *Auraicept na n-Éces*, line 32; Calder, ed. and tr., *The Scholars’ Primer*, ed.4 and tr.5. It is not immediately evident if the claim made later in Calder’s text, that Hebrew is the language spoken before Babel, and will, perhaps, be spoken in heaven hereafter, represents the introduction a rival tradition, in complete or partial conflict with the *Auraicept*’s general idealization of Irish, or if it is seen as agreeing with it in some way, perhaps expanding upon a distinction between natural and spiritual, secular and ecclesiastical ideals of language, such as occurs in texts like Prologue to *Senchas Már* and the *Senchas Már* itself (*SM*, hereafter); *Auraicept na n-Éces*, lines 188-192; Calder, *The Scholars’ Primer*, 14-17. Compare to The Prologue to *SM* §5-11; John Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*’, *Ériu* 45 (1994), 1-32, ed. at 12-3 and tr. at 18-9. Compare also *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8), §30-37, esp.35; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai: An Old Irish Law Tract on the Church and Society* (Dublin 2017), ed. at 32-4, 150-6 and tr. at 33-5, 151-7. Note that the prose of The Prologue to *SM* has been edited and translated separately from the poetic passage that is found in the middle of it. For the prose, see Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’ (*PSM*, hereafter). For the poetry, see Kim McCone, ‘Dubthach Maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to *Senchas Már*’, *Peritia* 5 (1986), 1-35, ed. at 29–35 and tr. at 6–8 (*DML*, hereafter).

<sup>41</sup> See also *Auraicept na n-Éces* §1.13-4; Anders Ahlqvist, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Linguist: An Edition of the Canonical Part of the ‘Auraicept na n-Éces’*, *Commentationes humanarum litterarum* 73 (Helsinki 1982), 48: ‘Is and iarum ro-ríaglad a mbérla-sa: a mba ferr iarum do cach bérlu 7 a mba leithiu 7 a mba cáimiu, is ed do-reped isin nGoídilc; 7 cach son dona-airnecht cárechtair isna aipgitrib ailib olchena, ar-íchta cárechtairi leo-som isin bethe-luis-nin ind oguim . . .’ (=It is there then that this language was given

isolated statement of Isidore, but more reminiscent of the portrayal of the Latin language by Cicero, in his *Tusculanae Disputationes*,<sup>42</sup> and, more significantly for an early Irish readership, by Priscian, in his *Institutiones*<sup>43</sup> - that languages can, with scholarly effort, be brought into yet greater conformity with nature, in a way which would presumably make them more etymologically transparent than those which pre-existed them. It would be hard to determine the extent to which such a belief about the Irish language may have informed the abundant application of the etymological method to Irish vocabulary, outlined above. However, the very fact that so much of it exists, including

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its rules: what was best then of every language and what was widest and finest was cut out into Irish / and every sound for which a sign had not been found in the other alphabets besides, signs were invented in the B-L-N of the ogham. . .).

<sup>42</sup> Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I.i.1-iii.6, I.viii.15-6, I.ix.19, II.ii.5-7, II.xi.26, III.iv.7-v.11, III.xiv.29-xv.33.; J.E. King, ed. and tr., *Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge 1927, rev. 1945, repr. 2014), 2-9, 18-21, 22-5, 150-3, 172-4, 232-7, 260-7.

<sup>43</sup> Priscian, *Institutiones*, II.i.1-ii.4; the most current edition is on the website *Corpus grammaticorum Latinorum* (online at: <http://kaali.linguist.jussieu.fr/CGL/text.jsp>), accessed at 25.07.2017; Mortimer J. Donovan, tr., 'Priscian and the Obscurity of the Ancients', *Speculum* 36.1 (Jan., 1961), 75-80, at 75-6: 'cum omnis eloquentiae doctrinam et omne studiorum genus |sapientiae luce praeifulgens a Graecorum fontibus deriuatum Latinos proprio / sermone inuenio celebrasse et in omnibus illorum uestigia liberalibus |consecutos artibus uideo, nec solum ea, quae emendate ab illis sunt prolata, sed / etiam quosdam errores eorum amore doctorum deceptos imitari, in quibus / maxime uetustissima grammatica ars arguitur peccasse, cuius auctores, / quanto sunt iuniores, tanto perspicaciores, et ingeniis floruisse et / diligentia ualuisse omnium iudicio confirmantur eruditissimorum (quid enim / Herodiani artibus certius, quid Apollonii scrupulosis quaestionibus / enucleatius possit inueniri?) cum igitur eos omnia fere uitia, quaecumque / antiquorum Graecorum commentariis sunt relicta artis grammaticae, |expurgasse comperio certisque rationis legibus emendasse, nostrorum autem |neminem post illos imitatore eorum exitisse, quippe in neglegentiam / cadentibus studiis literarum propter inopiam scriptorum, quamuis audacter, / sed non impudenter, ut puto, conatus sum pro uiribus rem arduam / quidem, sed officio professionis non indebitam, supra nominatorum praecepta / uirorum, quae congrua sunt uisa, in Latinum transferre sermonem (=When I find that the Latins proclaimed in their own language the teachings of all eloquence and every kind of study derived from the sources of the Greeks and resplendent with the light of wisdom; and when I see that they followed the steps of the Greeks in all the liberal arts and imitated not only those studies which were handed down by the Greeks without error, but also certain misconceptions, having been biased by a love of Greek scholars, among whom especially the most ancient art of grammar is proved to have gone astray, an art whose authors, the more recent they are, are so much the clearer, and in the judgement of all the most learned, are acknowledged to have flourished by their natural ability and to have succeeded because of their diligence - for what could be more definitive than the arts of Herodian or clearer than the precise questions of Apollonius? - when, therefore, I find that these men purged almost all errors, whatever ones were left in the commentaries of the ancient Greeks on the art of grammar, and made emendations according to the fixed laws of reason, yet [when I find that] none of us has since emerged as their imitator, to counter a neglect of literary studies, which are declining for want of writers, I have attempted, however boldly, yet modestly, I think, and according to my strength, a difficult task surely, yet one befitting the office of my calling, to translate into Latin idiom precepts of the abovenamed men which seemed fitting).

literary forms dedicated to Irish etymologies, such as the Old Irish glossaries<sup>44</sup> and the Middle Irish *Dindsenchas*,<sup>45</sup> shows that there was an abiding belief that newer languages could achieve a level of conformity to nature sufficient to make this practice useful. Moreover, the tendency of Irish scholars to multiply etymologies of a given Irish word far beyond the one or two provided for most Hebrew, Latin and Greek words in their late antique sources,<sup>46</sup> would indeed seem to support the notion that Irish was thought to be the result of scholarly improvements that made it more fecund with etymologies than any language previous, in this way making the hidden depths of the objects, thus described, more intelligible than ever before. In this vein, it seems probable that the strong identity between word and reality upon which ancient etymological theory is built, in Isidore and elsewhere, relative to which the Irish language seems to be thought exemplary, may also be at work in the ability that is often attributed to *filid* (and to certain other *nemed* classes at times), to shape reality with the spoken word.<sup>47</sup> However, such possibilities will have to be dealt with at a later point.

### **Political Elaborations on Isidore: Kingship**

It is of no surprise, then, that in medieval Ireland, where an Isidorean view of language was so influential, its implications for how the realities described in natural law are physically embodied in the political order are broadly attested as well. In some instances, we find fairly straightforward versions of the doctrine. When the *Würzburg Glosses* (*WGPE*) comment on St. Paul's command, in Romans 13, that Christians be obedient to such political powers as they had over them, the glossator contends that St.

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<sup>44</sup> Notably, *Sanas Cormaic*; Paul Russell, Sharon Arbuthnot and Pádraic Moran, eds., *Sanas Cormaic* (Cambridge 2006-), this may be viewed at the website, 'Early Irish Glossaries Database' (online at: <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/texts.php>), last accessed at 20.07.2017.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Gwynn, ed. and tr., *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, 5 vols. Todd Lecture Series 8-12 (Dublin 1903-35; repr. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies 1991); Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Bodleian Dinnshenchas', *Folk-Lore* 3 (1892), 467-516; *idem*, 'The Edinburgh Dinnshenchas', *Folk-Lore* 4 (1893), 471-497; *idem*, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas', *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894), 272-336, 418-484; *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), 31-83, 135-167, 269-312, 468. For discussion and examples of Isidorean etymologies in *dindsenchas* and saga-literature, see Rolf Baumgarten, 'Placenames, Etymology, and the Structure of *Fianaigeacht*', *Béaloideas* 54/55 (1986-87), 1-24; *idem*, 'Etymological Aetiology in Irish Tradition', *Ériu* 41 (1990), 115-122.

<sup>46</sup> See note 18 above.

<sup>47</sup> See pages 41-2 below.

Paul does not count a ‘wicked power’ (*cumactte nangid*) as a ‘power’ (*cumactte*),<sup>48</sup> and that it follows, then, that one should not serve a ‘power’ which fails to ‘correct the evil and magnify the good’.<sup>49</sup> In *Crith Gablach* (*CG*) we find what appears to be an Irish translation and synthesis of Isidore’s various derivations of ‘king’ (*rex*) from the actions of ‘ruling’ (*regare*) and ‘correcting’ (*corrigerere*), mentioned above: “‘King’(*ri*): why is he named this? Because he rules (*riges*) with the power of correction (*chun[d]rig*) over his kingdom’.<sup>50</sup> Thus, it is only being consistent when, like Isidore, it also claims that the king is not a ‘rightful ruler’ (*flaith téchtae*) if he neglects his obligations as a ruler.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the idea that a king,<sup>52</sup> by acting unjustly, will lose his kingship, or else his honour-price (*díre*) as king, is frequently attested.<sup>53</sup>

Yet the Isidorean contention that an unjust king is, in some manner, not a king, is often extended, far beyond the simple question of right rule, to include such things as his exercise of the privileges of his rank. In the first place, it seems that even a king who makes just judgements is not a king if he does not have the means of enforcing his

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<sup>48</sup> *WGPE* 6a, gloss 1; Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses Scholia Prose and Verse*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge 1901-3, repr. Dublin 1975) I, 499-712, at 533.

<sup>49</sup> *WGPE*, 6a, gloss 9; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 534: ‘*indí [con]sechat hulcu etmórate mathi*’.

<sup>50</sup> *CG* §30, lines 444-5; Daniel A. Binchy, *Crith Gablach* (Dublin 1979), 18: ‘*Rí, cid ara n-eperr? Arindí riges cumachtu(i) / chun[d]rig for thúath(i). . .*’. The translation above is my modification of that in Eoin MacNeill, ‘Ancient Irish Law: The Law of Status or Franchise’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 36 C (1921-24), 265-316, at 300.

<sup>51</sup> In this case, the duty of providing beer each Sunday; see *CG* §41, lines 543-4; Binchy, ed., *Crith Gablach*, 21; MacNeill, tr., ‘Ancient Irish Law’, 304.

<sup>52</sup> My following description of early Irish kingship ideology is a modest expansion on that of Fergus Kelly’s foundational work in *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series 3 (Dublin 1988, repr. 2016), 18-21.

<sup>53</sup> (Losing kingship): see Triad 186; Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *The Triads of Ireland*, Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin 1906), 24. (Losing honour-price): see The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) §11; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text ‘Senchas Már’ and the Question of its Date*, E.G. Quiggin Memorial Lectures 13 (Cambridge, 2011) 6-7; *Heptad* (*SM* 2) §13 [=CIH 15.4]. Aside from law-texts, this principle is also found in many early Irish saga-texts. On this, see, for example, *Aided Chonchobair A*; Chantal Kobel, ed. and tr., *A Critical Edition of ‘Aided Chonchobair’ (The Violent Death of Conchobar); with Translation, Textual Notes and Bibliography*, unpublished PhD thesis (Trinity College, Dublin 2015), ed.219-221 and tr.221-3. *Echtra Fergusa maic Léti* §4-7; D.A. Binchy, ed. and tr., ‘The Saga of Fergus Mac Léti’, *Ériu* 16 (1952), 33-48, at ed.37-8 and tr.41-3. *Cath Maige Mucrama* §3, 63-71; Máirín Ó Daly, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Mucrama: The Battle of Mag Mucrama*, Irish Texts Society 50 (Dublin 1975), ed.38, 58-60 and tr.39, 59-61. *Cath Maige Tuired* §39; Elizabeth A. Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, Irish Texts Society 52 (Kildare 1982), ed.34 and tr.35.

judgements, and his privileges besides.<sup>54</sup> But as far as his privileges are concerned, a king who has the means of enforcing them, but neglects to do so, also loses his honour-price. His honour-price can additionally be lost if he acts shamefully or endures shaming.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it is often suggested that even minor physical disfigurement can raise the question as to whether a king is indeed still a king.<sup>56</sup> Most of the time this is evidently because it is seen, like natural disaster, or failure in war, as an unmistakable sign of prior false-judgement.<sup>57</sup> In this, one might say that law, as it is generally conceived in a medieval Irish context, is one step more ‘natural’ than Isidorean natural law. For it is not only ‘natural’ in the sense of seeking to align its assignment of political franchise as closely as possible to the nature of the person in question - in this case, recognizing a ruler as such only insofar as he himself, in the living present, is actually found to be one - but is also ‘natural’ in the sense of its assumption that the natural order, when departed from by the political order, will make this departure abundantly obvious,<sup>58</sup> through earthquakes, famine, lightning and the like.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Recholl Breth* (SM 13) [CIH 219.17-18]; for further references, see Liam Breatnach, ‘The King in the Old Irish Law Text *Senchas Már*’, in Folke Josephson, ed., *Celtic Language, Law and Letters: Proceedings of the Tenth Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, Meijerbergs Arkiv för Svensk Ordforskning 38 (Göteborg, 2010), 107-28, at 113-114.

<sup>55</sup> According to *CG*, he is said to lose his honour-price if he does manual labour or shows cowardice in battle; *CG* §40, lines 530-41; Binchy, ed., *Crith Gablach*, 21. According to the *Senchas Már* text, *Sechtæ* (SM 9) [CIH 15.3], we find that a king loses his honour-price if he goes hunting without his retinue, allows himself to be satirised, or breaks an oath.

<sup>56</sup> The *locus classicus* for this idea is *Bechbretha* (SM 21) §31-2 [=CIH 449.25-7]; Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly, eds. and tr., *Bechbretha: An Old Irish Law-Tract on Bee-Keeping* (Dublin 1983, repr. with additional appendix, 2008), 69. See also, Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., ‘The Expulsion of the Dessi’, *Y Cymmrodor* 14 (1901), 101–35, at 107, 131. For an overview of the relevant primary sources regarding the blemishes of rulers, see Bart Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin 2000), 82-7.

<sup>57</sup> See primary sources in note 59, below. This idea, together with its Eusebian background, is discussed at much greater length Chapter 3, pages 176-207.

<sup>58</sup> However, in apparent contrast, see the *Milan Glosses* fol.56b, glosses 15ff.; Stokes and Strachan, eds. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 184: ‘.i. archuingid innsainmechimbai ind ingoir asberatsom nadudignet innadegnimu huare is hifochaidib bithir hisuidib ⁊ dungenat immurgu innadualchi airis soinnige adchotar trisaidib’ (=it causes error to many why the righteous are in troubles and afflictions, and the impious, however, in abundance and prosperity).

<sup>59</sup> This most important examples of this expectation are the seventh-century Irish law tracts, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* [*De XII*, hereafter] and *Audacht Morainn* [*AM*, hereafter]; Siegmund Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi* (Leipzig 1909); Priscilla Throop, tr., *Vincent of Beauvais: The Moral Instruction of a Prince, with Pseudo-Cyprian: The Twelve Abuses of the World* (Charlotte 2011), 115-133; Recension B of *Audacht Morainn*; Fergus Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin 1976). However, it is nowhere portrayed more dramatically than *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* [*TBDD*, hereafter]; Eleanor Knott, ed., *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 8 (Dublin 1936); Jeffrey Gantz, tr., ‘The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel’, in Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*

The idea that the natural order will reveal the state of the political order is more significant than it might, at first, seem. For in marrying the Eusebian idea that the justice of a ruler, or its lack, is sensibly manifest in the corresponding physical order, or disorder, of his kingdom and his body,<sup>60</sup> to the Isidorean idea that a king who rules unjustly is not a king, a significant tension in Isidore's system is thus resolved. Although the acts by which a king rules and corrects his kingdom will likely be physical, there is nothing in Isidore to suggest that there is any particular physical feature of royal behaviour that has an immediate relation to its relative justice or injustice, or thus, to the kingliness of the king. A king is revealed to be a king by just acts. But the relative justice of these acts would seem to be the meaning of the acts within the overall system of natural law, not something directly revealed in the character of their sensible qualities.<sup>61</sup> Yet in natural words, as he understands them, it is precisely the sensible character of the sounds that directly relate to the realities they describe. Thus, while Isidorean words and kings share a sense of being as they appear, the senses in which they 'appear' are different. However, if, as we find throughout early Irish literature, the status of the justice, by which a king is a king, is visibly manifest in his body and in the land itself, then the minor, if significant, asymmetry between Isidore's linguistic and political theory is resolved, since royal justice now, like the subjects of natural words, has a direct sensible representation.<sup>62</sup> This does not necessarily mean that

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(London and New York), 60-106. But see O'Connor, *The Destruction*, for updated translations of numerous sections of the 'Y' recension on which Knott's edition was based. This is an expectation which implicitly (and in the *Audacht Morainn* explicitly) assumes that just king can only be so insofar as he has thorough insight into the cosmological order, so as to properly evaluate the place of a given person or being in it; *AM* §4-11, 22-4, 29-52, esp. 32; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.4, 8-14, esp.10 and tr.5, 8-15, esp. 11).

<sup>60</sup> The relevant sections are found mostly in Books VIII and IX of Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, through which it was known to the medieval Latin West; see Eduard Schwarz, E. and Theodor Mommsen, eds., *Eusebius' Werke 2: 'Die Kirchengeschichte [und] die lateinische Übersetzung des Rufinus'*, 3 vols., Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 9.1-3 (Leipzig 1903-9) II, 739-853. There is currently no complete translation of Rufinus' Latin text. However, Books X and XI are translated in Philip R. Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History' of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11* (New York and Oxford 1997).

<sup>61</sup> By which I mean the qualities that make a physical thing apprehendable by the senses. The same problem would appear to apply to the king's maintenance of his privileges as well.

<sup>62</sup> In this, things such as the observation of privileges seems to be a sort of intermediate category, which is less abstract than 'justice', but still not the same thing as sense-impressions corresponding to the thing, since, like 'justice' in its purer sense, what counts as a correct observation of privileges only appears within the framework of beliefs about the behaviour suitable for a king and does not belong to the sensory qualities of the keeping of privileges itself.



the authors of such early Irish sagas and law-texts as worked with these ideas set out to mend a perceived problem in Isidore's *Etymologiae*. It is simply the case that the image of kingship that emerges from a comparative reading of these texts tends to chime better with the theory of language they inherited from him, than does his own presentation of kingship.

As far as these matters are concerned, there are a few instances of kingly disfigurement in later texts that remain a bit of a puzzle. The reason being, that they seem to provide examples of this occurring even when the 'justice of the ruler' (*fír flathemon*) is beyond reproach.<sup>63</sup> Yet it would be inaccurate to see this as a loosening of the relationship between representation and reality, so much as a reversal of the normal order of causation between them. Instead of the king's body suffering disfigurement because he has ceased to be a king through his injustice, he ceases to have the nature of a king because his physical appearance, perhaps through no fault of his own, no longer functions as a direct representation of one. When the Middle Irish introduction to *Bretha Éitgid* presents Cormac Mac Airt as someone who continues to be revered as a just legal authority, even after he has lost the kingship of Tara on account of being blinded,<sup>64</sup> we seem, indeed, to be very close to the spirit of the Byzantine theology of the *eikōn*<sup>65</sup> (i.e. the devotional image) in which an *eikōn*, through no deficiency in the

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the unjust, but effectual satire of Caíer, the king of Connacht, by Néide, his adopted son, in *Sanas Cormaic*; Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic*, Y 698; Paul Russell, tr., 'Poets, Power and Possessions: Some Stories from *Sanas Cormaic*', in Joseph F. Eska, ed., *Law, Literature and Society*, CSANA Yearbook 7 (Dublin 2008), 9–45, at 34–5.

<sup>64</sup> *Bretha Éitgid* [CIH 250.1–251.3], as cited in Robin Chapman Stacey, *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland* (Philadelphia 2007), 88 note 204. See Neil McLeod, tr., *Bloodshed and Compensation in Ancient Ireland* (Perth 1999), for translations of extracts from *Bretha Éitgid*. This story is also found in *The Expulsion of the Déisi*; Meyer, ed. and tr., 'The Expulsion of the Dessi', ed.130 and tr.131; *idem*, ed., 'Tucait Indarba na nDéssi', in Osborn J. Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, J.G. O'Keefe, eds., *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, 5 vols. (Halle and Dublin 1907) I, 15–24, at 17; R. I. Best and Osborn J. Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin 1929), 137–141, at 138; Vernam Hull, ed., and tr., 'The Later Version of *The Expulsion of the Déssi*', *ZCP* 27 (1958–9) 14–63, ed.28 and tr.48. For an overview of the relationships between the different versions of *The Expulsion of the Déisi*, see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Expulsion of the Déisi', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 110 (2005), 13–20 [repr. in Matthieu Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois: The Cauldron of Knowledge: A Companion to Early Irish Saga* (Notre Dame 2014), 283–292].

<sup>65</sup> One of the central primary sources on doctrine of the *eikōn* (εἰκών) is St. John Damascene's *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*; Bonifatius Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften Des Johannes Von Damaskos: Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres* (Berlin 1975); Andrew Louth, tr., *Three Treatises on Divine Images: St. John of Damascus*, Popular Patristics Series 24 (Yonkers 2003). But no

original form of the *eikōn* itself, or the materials of which it is made, is no longer identified with, or given the honour due to its prototype, if it is defaced or wears out in such a way that the prototype of which it is an image can no longer be recognized in it.<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to tell if such instances in medieval Irish literature are in contrast with the idea that the justice by which the king is king directly reveals itself in his physical appearance, or if these represent exceptions to the rule, in which powers greater than the power of the ‘justice of the ruler’ to bring about the material prosperity of the king’s body and kingdom<sup>67</sup> interfere with its normal operation. But whatever the case, it would seem that the early Irish authors in question require that the political embodiment of the natural order corresponds to its exemplar to a much higher degree than that required by Isidore, yet in a way that continues to be eminently intelligible from an Isidorean frame of reference, and indeed, more intelligible in relation to the etymological approach to grammar inherited from him, than is his own understanding of kingship.

### **Political Elaborations on Isidore: Poets**

The principle that there is a correspondence between public representation and political reality is elaborated yet further beyond Isidore’s formulation through its extension to the other *nemed*-classes. According to the Introduction to the *Senchas Már* (*SM* 1), just as a king loses his honour-price through ‘false-judgement’ (*gúbrethach*), so does a poet if he is ‘fraudulent’ (*díupartach*), or a bishop if he is ‘morally-erring’ (*tuisledach*). No-one, in fact, who neglects the obligations that define their station is entitled to their honour-price.<sup>68</sup> But despite the foregrounding of this idea in *Senchas Már*’s (*SM*) introductory text, we must turn, for the most part, to the law-texts associated with the *Bretha Nemed*

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less important are the anti-iconoclastic works of St. Theodore Studious; *PG* 99, col. 327-504; Thomas Cattoi, tr., *Theodore the Studite: Complete Writings on Iconoclasm*, Ancient Christian Writers 69 (Mahwah 2015). The most comprehensive treatment of the history of the doctrine of the *eikōn* is Gary Wayne Alfred Thorne, *The Ascending Prayer to Christ: Theodore Stoudite's Defence of the Christ-ikwv against Ninth Century Iconoclasm*, unpublished PhD thesis (Durham University 2003), which may be viewed at the website Durham E-Theses Online (online at: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/>), last accessed 20.07.2017.

<sup>66</sup> See Thorne, *The Ascending Prayer*, 281 for discussion and sources.

<sup>67</sup> Such as, perhaps, the power of a poet to satirize, or a cleric, to curse.

<sup>68</sup> The Introduction to the *SM* (*SM* 1) §11; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text ‘SM’*, 6-7: ‘Ataat cethéora sabaid túaithe noda desruithetar i mbeaib: rí gúbrethach, epscop tuisledach, fili díupartach, aire esindric. Nád óget a mámu ní dlegar doib díre’ (=There are four eminences of a kingdom who debase themselves through petty things: a falsely-judging king, a stumbling bishop, a fraudulent poet, an unworthy noble. Those who do not fulfill their obligations are not entitled to honour-price).

tradition to find a detailed account of what this might mean in the case of poets and clergy. In *Bretha Nemed Toísech (BNT)*<sup>69</sup> and *Uraicecht na Ríar (UR)*<sup>70</sup> we find that a poet's grade depends upon a combination of their capacity for poetry, their learning, and their moral purity, in the same way as we saw the status of a ruler as ruler depends upon his capacity for enforcing just judgements and his correct observance of behaviour appropriate to his status. However, the sensible manifestation of what is sometimes more generally called the 'justice' or 'truth of poets' (*fir filed/fíor filidh*),<sup>71</sup> is not, as it is in the case of the 'justice of the ruler' (*fir flethemon*), in the general soundness of his body, but in the lack of blisters on his face,<sup>72</sup> nor, more significantly, in the fecundity of the land, but in the formal purity of his compositions. Regardless of how talented or accomplished a poet is, he does not receive the corresponding honour-price, or

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<sup>69</sup> For the first third of *BNT*, see Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third'. Six sections [*CIH* 2213.34-2215.14, 2215.15-35, 2219.4-14, 2219.16-31, 2220.17-25, 2220.26-9] of the second third are edited and translated in Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law* (Dublin 1987), 20-42, and one [*CIH* 2218.34-9] in Neil McLeod, 'Assault and Attempted Murder in Brehon Law Glosses and Commentaries', *The Irish Jurist* 31 (1998), 351-91, at 357. Another lengthy extract from the last third [*CIH* 2226.3-24] is edited and translated in the handout for Liam Breatnach's lecture, 'The Law of the Church in *Bretha Nemed Toísech*' (Dublin 2014). This may be viewed at the website, 'Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: Events: *One-Day Law Conference in Honour of Fergus Kelly*' (online at: <https://www.dias.ie/2014/10/22/one-day-law-conference-in-honour-of-fergus-kelly/>) accessed at 20.07.2017. Four additional extracts from the third section [i.e. *CIH* 2221.12 and 25-6, 2221.17-21, 2222.36-8, and the greater part of 2224.4-26] have been translated in Stacey, tr., *Dark Speech*, 212, 202, 74 and 206, respectively, with further paraphrases and short translations of other parts of the third section found at 137, 161, 198, 205-6, 210 and 213 among other places. See Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the 'Corpus iuris Hibernici'* (Dublin 2005) 188-91, for an overview of the text, its eighth-century composition and further sources.

<sup>70</sup> Edited and translated in Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 63ff.

<sup>71</sup> *BN[T]* I, line 2 [= *CIH* 2213.34] and *BN[D]* XI, line 8 [*CIH* 1125.5-6]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 21-3 and 48; see also *Digest D36* [*CIH* 2012.22]: 'Raid uile aimirgein abair fir filed', as cited in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 24 in the note on *BN[T]* I, lines 1-2.

<sup>72</sup> Most often blisters appear in early Irish literature as the result being the recipient of a poet's satire, but the idea that they can also be a sign of the falseness a poet's judgement is also well-attested. Dubthach, in The Prologue to *SM*, offers his blisterless cheeks as a sign of the truth of his judgement; *DML*, line xi; McCone, ed. and tr., 'Dubthach Maccu Lugair', ed.29 and tr.7. See also Russell *et al*, ed., *Sanas Cormaic* Y, 584; McCone, tr., *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 173: where it defines a 'blister' (*ferb*) as a 'bolg docuirethar in duine for a gruadaibh iar n-áir no iar ngúbreith' (=a bubble that comes on a person's face after satire or after false judgment). Another example is found in *Din Techtugud* (*SM* 11) and the associated glossing tradition [*CIH* 207.22-209.28, 908.26-909.13, 1241.16-7, 1859.25-1861.5, 2018.16-2019.15, 2019.28-36], where the judge, Sencha, received blisters as the result of making a false judgement, which then subsided when Bríg corrected his judgement; for summary, commentary and references, see Fangzhe Qiu's invaluable study, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, unpublished PhD thesis (National University of Ireland, Cork 2014), 42-3. Where this is understood to be the case, a false judgement would seem to be a kind of satire on oneself. This is conclusion is, at any rate shared, by the gloss on *Din Techtugud* in *CIH* 1241.16-7, where the effect of the true judgement by Bríg mentioned above is characterised as an example of praise nullifying the effects satire; Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 42.

privileges, until he produces the appropriate number of compositions in the metre pertaining to that grade,<sup>73</sup> and receives a favourable judgement on them (together with his other qualifications) from a poet of the highest order.<sup>74</sup> However, if we may take *BNT* to apply to *UR* (which is likely if, as it has been claimed, the *UR* is a sort of primer for *BNT*),<sup>75</sup> it does not seem that these compositions are merely one qualification among others, but evidence of them all. For we find in *BNT* that moral impurity compromises the intellectual judgement necessary for purity of learning,<sup>76</sup> and that purity of learning removes defilements of composition. Likewise, one who does not compose (*ellaing*) does not learn, one who does not compose a *nath*-poem does not compose, and one who

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<sup>73</sup> In the first place, there is the number of general ‘compositions’ (*drécht*a), or else ‘tales’ (*scéla*) pertaining to each grade. Whereas the *Uraicecht Becc* [*UB*, hereafter] calls them ‘scéla’, *UR* calls them ‘dréchta’, although *UR*’s glosses consistently understand these ‘dréchta’ to be ‘scéla’. The relevant sections of *UR* are §2, 6 and 12-20; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 102-105 and 109-113. Charts summarizing the evidence in *UB* and ‘*UB VI*’ [= *CIH* 2126.1-2127.5] are found in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 177 and 182, with further information at 3-6 and 18. Then there is the matter of the poetic metres which are proper to each grade. Charts summarizing the evidence in the ‘commentary’ on *UB*, as well as *UB VI* and *IX* are found in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 177 and 182-3, with further information at 3-6 and 18-19.

<sup>74</sup> i.e. an *ollam*: *UR* §6; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.104 and tr.105: ‘Ceist, cía cruth do-berar grád for filid? Ní hansae, taisbéna d dréchta do ollamain—7 biit na secht ngráda fis occa—7 gaibthi in rí inna lángrad, inid-focladar int ollam asa dréchtaib 7 asa enncai 7 asa idnai, .i. idnae fóglaimeid, 7 idnae béoil, 7 idnae lámae 7 lánamnais, 7 idnae inracuis ar gait 7 brait 7 indligiud, 7 idnae chuirp arna roib acht óen sétig lais, ar at-balar coibligiu chíabair acht óenairchinn i n-aidchib téchtaib’ (=How is a grade conferred on a poet? Not difficult; he shows his compositions to an *ollam*—and he has the seven grades of knowledge—and the king received him in his full grade in which the *ollam* declares him to be on the basis of his compositions, and his guiltlessness, and his purity, that is purity of learning, and purity of mouth and purity of hand and martial union, and purity consisting of being innocent of theft and plunder and illegality, and purity of body, that he have only one wife, for one perishes through dark [illicit] cohabitation aside from one chaste [woman] on lawful nights).

<sup>75</sup> Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 79-80.

<sup>76</sup> *BNT* [*CIH* 2224.12-23]: ‘12. Ar corbuid arg anidan anmesa mblastad misimbeir searb somblas; 13. faonan coir cosmúil consaid fuil for anuirt namarca conad frissin file 14. fuirmidh foserndud andlignedh(?) airbera cin fogluim foglenad cin eallach; 15. Nad ealluing ni direnar, ar ni hurfaoimh duilem deoluid 16. Diciallathar coir a crotuibh, conbongar aonted, tathmider coir coigidail; 17. Corus filed fobenar, benar inuid amarcae, amarcach gach fili cin fogluim, 18. Fosernar sirfocul, ansid gach necnuidti, eccnuidti cach nainmech, ainmech 19. cach file nad fri fogluim fuirme, forruirmider cach iarna miad, miad caich 20. Iarna grad, grad caich iarna 1 frichnum, frichnam caich for idna; ni direnar i 21. Ngraduib na fogluim nad fogluimter uad, na frithgnuid(?) na frithgnaiter 22. uad, ar us iarna saothar 7 iarna idna 1 iarna frichnam dorenar cach grad 23. ni direnar nac deaidh; nib toisech nach dall, ni togairm nach loscc, ni 24. foirmairgh(?) nach nanbobracht’. No translation currently exists, but see Stacey’s paraphrases and glosses of these lines in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 206 with notes at 213-4: ‘Impure persons (*anidan*) are depicted as inherently ignorant and unsound in judgement; their intellectual and moral flaws defile what is true and just like blood upon a fresh white cloth or bitter tastes among the sweet. Advancing in learning is not merely an intellectual achievement, it is a moral triumph, one with dramatic consequences for the proper order of society’. See also *UR* §3 including gloss 14; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.102 and tr.103, where it is said that it is ‘through his ‘purity’ (*tria idnai*), among other credentials, that a poet ‘illuminates nobility’ (*for úaisli -osnai*). See also the second quotation in note 77 immediately below.

does not compose a *nath*-poem is not a *nemed*-class poet.<sup>77</sup> There seems to be nothing to suggest that the other qualifications of a poet would not also be independently verified. However, the poetry appropriate to a given grade of the poetic profession appears to be deemed impossible without all the capacities and qualifications by which they are the grade of poet that they are.

The way in which the ‘justice of poets’ (*fír filed*) is sensibly manifest in their compositions, together with the qualifications necessary for its attainment (i.e. the things that make a poet a poet), is most evident in juridical contexts. On one hand, the dense alliterative prose of *rosc(ad)*, used by the poets in judgements, does not amount to ‘truth’ or ‘justice’ (*fír*) by itself.<sup>78</sup> On the other, even learned judgements that are not given in the form of *roscada* are thought to be empty.<sup>79</sup> A poet must be ‘competent in the wisdom of nature’ (*maith a ngaos aicnid*) and base his judgements upon the ‘maxims’ (*fásaige*) through which that wisdom is known, for them to amount to an ‘apportioning of truth’ (*randa fír*),<sup>80</sup> yet it remains that *rosc(ad)* makes up one of the

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<sup>77</sup> *BN[T]* I, line 62-4 [=CIH 2215.5-7]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 22-4: ‘ni neme nad elluing, / ni elluing nad elluing nath, do-fairce nath nemtius’ (=he is no *nemed* who does not compose, he who does not compose a *nath* does not compose, a *nath* brings about privilege). *BNT* [CIH 2224.4-26]; lines 4, 7-8 and 24-6 here are from Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 207 [lightly modified]; lines 9-11, from Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 123 note 7: ‘4. Ni fogluim nad ellaing, nid ellaing nad ellaincc nath . . . 7 . . . cach foghlum fogluim co hellach, ar us 8. nemed cach fili iar nealluch arabeir for idnai . . . 9. . . Ar atait .iiii. ora 10. arabeir gach fili fuirmech a dire dorirthar: idna lanamnuis, idhna laime, 11. idna beoil, idhna foghluma foglana cach nuad nanglan . . . 24. . . anobracht gac fili cin ellach, dall cach 25. grad can idna., anidan cach fili arabeir can fogluim no cin fotha, fotha filed 26. fogluim, fogluim filed firellach for idna . . .’ (=4. He who does not compose does not learn, he who does not compose a *nath*-poem does not compose . . . 7 . . . Learning coupled with [the] joining together [of the elements of poetry] is every [true] learning, for 8. each poet who proceeds on the basis of purity in accordance with *ellach* (composition) is a *nemed* . . . 9 . . . for there are four 10. which every composing poet whose honour-price will be paid practices: purity of marital union, purity of hand, 11. purity of mouth, purity of learning which cleanses the impurity of all types of poetry . . . 24 . . . Every poet without *ellach* is [like] a person wasting away from disease, 25. every grade without purity is blind, every poet who pleads without learning or without foundation is impure, learning [constitutes] the foundation of poets, 26. true composing [and] true purity [constitute] the learning of poets . . .).

<sup>78</sup> *UR* §18.64-5; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.112 and tr.113: ‘Ní rannat roscadae / ranna fír / for-regat tamain teisceimnig / trebnu airechtae’ (=Roscads [alone] do not make the apportioning of truth; gleaning *tamans* oppress the chiefs of a court [lightly edited]). This quotes *BNT* [CIH 2222.15], see note 80 below: ‘Ni randa roscad, randad fír . . .’.

<sup>79</sup> *BNT* [CIH 2222.9], as cited in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 306 note 232.

<sup>80</sup> *BNT* [CIH 2221.13-8]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 132 notes 64-6: ‘ni lor eolus isna haoib roscaduib manib maith a ngaos aicnid; is de adber an fili: id lia cesta canoine, it lia dorcha duil. Ni randa roscad, randad fír forragad taman teisceimnec trebnairecht, ni airgither anbretha i riguib roceduil roclaid aicnded ilclandach ae in athceduil Ni rosca na mbuaidh brethaib berdur . . .’ (=Knowledge of the aforementioned *roscada* is not sufficient, unless he be competent in the wisdom of nature; concerning this

three ‘rocks’ (*ailig*) on which judgements are based, along with ‘maxims’ (*fásaige*) and ‘testimony’ (*tesdemuin*).<sup>81</sup> The ‘truth’ as such, would seem to be in the confluence of the learning through which natural law is known, and the correct manipulation of the sounds of utterances through the observation of strict formal requirements, relative to a situation made known through testimony.<sup>82</sup> In this we see some of the significance regarding why one of the requirements of a high-level poet is that he be able to compose ‘extemporaneously’ (*díchetal di chennaib*).<sup>83</sup> For a poet that has only memorised *roscada* at his disposal, no matter how perfect they may be formally, will not be able to reveal the ‘wisdom of nature’ (*gaos aicnid*) in a way that speaks to the instance at hand, even if he does have the necessary knowledge of ‘maxims’ (*fásaige*).<sup>84</sup>

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the poet says: problems are more numerous than the cannon law, obscurities are more numerous than what is laid down in the law. *Roscads* [alone] do not make the apportioning of truth; gleaning *tamans* oppress the chiefs of a court. Splendid judgements are not bound in the bindings of chanting. Prolific nature can undermine the suit consisting of repetition. It is neither *roscad* nor chanting which apportion the truth to all. Better is prolific nature out of which judgements are triumphantly delivered . . .). The *CIH* edition of the above text is reprinted with Breatnach’s translation and discussed in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 210-11.

<sup>81</sup> See *BNT* [*CIH* 2221.15-16] and *UB* [*CIH* 1592.3ff.]; Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 74 and 210, for the founding of legal judgement ‘co nailcibh roscud 7 fasach 7 tesdemuin’ (=on the “rocks” of *roscad*[a] and maxim[s] and testimony). Elsewhere in *UB* [*CIH* 643.12=636.1] we find that while poetic judgements are based *roscada*, and those of clergy are based on Scripture, those of rulers are based on both; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 168. See also *PSM* §9.3 for *roscada* and *fásaige* (maxims) as the basis of legal judgement; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.19. For further discussion, examples of judgements given in *roscada* and references see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 74, including notes 131, 210, 232.

<sup>82</sup> See Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 161-2 and Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 133 for further discussion and sources relative to the juridical effectualness of the compositions of qualified poets, as opposed to the hapless efforts of poets of lesser skill.

<sup>83</sup> *BN[T]* IV, lines 1-5 [*CIH* 2219.16-18]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.36-7: ‘A Moraind a maine a mochta, abuir frium co miter nert cach naosad nemedh, ar is a nemtesaib do-eclamar cach direch dana dligid. Imus for-osnam, dicedul do cenduib, cedul n-anomuin cethirriach cato cach suad’ (=O wealthy might Morand, tell me how the power of every lawfully established *nemed* is estimated, for it is on the basis of privileges that every upright lawful skilled person is chosen [?]. ‘Great knowledge that illuminates’, extempore chanting, the singing of *anamain* of four varieties are what confer dignity on a sage . . .). The most important study of the *Bretha Nemed*’s stated requirement that a *nemed*-poet be capable of ‘*díchetal di chennaib*’ (lit. chanting from [the] heads), and the history of the ways in which that requirement was subsequently understood, is John Carey, ‘The Three Things Required of a Poet’, *Ériu* 48 (1997), 41-58. See also *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* [*CIH* 1114.2]; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Three Things Required’, 45: ‘. . . na comhad nath, na anair, na anamhain, nad coir canad co chennaibh’ (=a poet is denied status ‘who cannot compose a *nath*, or an *anair*, or an *anamain*, who cannot chant properly *do chennaib*). *UB* [*CIH* 1603.35-7; cf. 648.37-649.1, 2319.27-30]; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Three Things Required’, 42: ‘Tredi dlegar dun ollamain filed .i. tenm laeghdha 7 imus forosnadh dicedal do cennaib, amail adberat bretha nemeth: a tri nemtigter nemthusa fileth, tenm laeda 7 imus forosnad [7] dicedul du cennaib’ (=Three things are required of a master *fili*: *teinm laedo* and *imbas forosnai* and *díchtal do chennaib*, as *Bretha Nemed* states: ‘Three things qualify the entitlements of a *fili*: *teinm laedo* and *imbas forosnai* and *díchtal do chennaib*’).

<sup>84</sup> See notes 80-3 above.

Therefore, even though Isidorean etymological practice is not evoked here,<sup>85</sup> the respective relationships that a successful poetic composition has to its subject matter, and to the poet that its success reveals to be a poet, are not simply parallel to Isidore's understanding of natural language, but have the very same structure. As we have seen, a natural word, in Isidore, is one in which the character of the sounds has a direct relationship to the reality revealed in them. Likewise, we have now seen that a good poetic composition is one in which a masterful manipulation of sounds, in accordance with strict formal requirements, is correctly matched to a masterful application of the knowledge that has nature as its basis. In the case of the formal requirements of *rocs(ad)* this is not, of course, as in Isidore, a matter of individual words.<sup>86</sup> However, the principle remains that the truth is only adequately manifest through the appropriate sounds.

In this, it is an addition to Isidore rather than a contrast. For a *nemed*-poet, natural words, of the sort that medieval Irish etymological practice depends upon, would seem not to be enough. They must also be organised in what we may call a 'natural grammar', so as to represent their objects with a directness that would not be possible (be its syntax ever so natural) on the level of simple prose. Thus, when *Bretha Nemed* texts include so much of the *roscada* attributed to ancient figures of the pre-Christian past,<sup>87</sup> it is evident that this should not necessarily be taken as locating authority in an older form of language, so much as locating authority in pre-Christian figures who were thought to have such purity of morals and learning as to be capable of transporting bare facts into truths of an impossibly high register, truths that revealed the knowledge of nature to a degree otherwise inaccessible, however lengthy or exact one's study of it might be.<sup>88</sup> Although, in regard to the greater truth revealed through the application of *rosc(ad)*'s formal requirements, it is not so just as a matter of extent, but of kind. For in the movement from unadorned speech to *roscada* we do not only have a movement

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<sup>85</sup> Note, however, the Isidorean etymologies dispersed throughout the relevant texts; see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 3-19 for references to quite a number of examples.

<sup>86</sup> Bearing in mind the frequency of etymologies in these law-texts; see reference in note 85 above.

<sup>87</sup> Such as Morainn, Neire, Athairne, Amairgen, Concobhar and Cormac. For discussion and references see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 199, with notes at 304.

<sup>88</sup> On the theme of the righteousness that is possible according to nature being more possible in the pre-Christian past, see Chapter 4.

from less to more profound truth, as it were, but a movement from a merely correct description of the legal precedents arising from nature, to the actual determination and enactment of justice in the living world, thus, collapsing Isidore's natural linguistics and natural politics, in the case of the juridical utterances of poets, into a single unified activity.<sup>89</sup> Yet unlike the manifestation of the 'justice of the ruler' in his body and his kingdom, which would be plain enough to all to see, the ability to understand such proofs of justice as these would evidently be confined to poets whose advanced training would allow them interpret the aesthetic evidence correctly.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, it remains that there is enough of a gap, in a manner of speaking, between poet and poem, between the composition and its subject that something is still accomplished in the poem. When a poem is composed about someone justly, whether a panegyric or a satire, it evidently does not simply manifest their current state back to them, given the rewards due for a good-praise poem, and the fear of satire.<sup>91</sup> Rather, it consistently acts as the means by which the physical rewards or punishments suitable to their current ethical state are manifest to them. The examples of this are manifold.<sup>92</sup> One might say then that justly composed poetry is indeed a direct representation of the person it describes, but one that describes the person's present state in such a way as

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<sup>89</sup> Apart from the general character of the *Bretha Nemed* tracts as a whole, the prime example would seem to be Dubthach's judgement, delivered in *rosc(ad)*, in The Prologue to *SM; DML*, lines i-xx; McCone, ed. and tr., 'Dubthach Maccu Logair', ed.29-30 and tr.6-8.

<sup>90</sup> For concerns regarding about the impenetrability of poetic judgements to non-poets, see *PSM* §9-10; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12-13 and tr.19.

<sup>91</sup> For overview and references, see Roisin McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin 2008); Liam Breatnach, 'Satire, Praise and the Early Irish Poet', *Ériu* 56 (2006), 63-84, noting his corrections of Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Praise Poetry in Ireland Before the Normans', *Ériu* 54 (2004), 11-40. See also Liam Breatnach, 'Araile felmac féig don Mumain: Unruly Pupils and the Limitations of Satire', *Ériu* 59 (2009), 111-137; *idem*, 'On Satire and the Poet's Circuit', in Cathal G. Ó hÁinle and Donald E. Meek, eds., *Unity in Diversity: Studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Language, Literature and History* (Dublin 2004), 25-36; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 106-18; Kim McCone, 'A Tale of Two Ditties: Poet and Satirist in *Cath Maige Tuired*', in Donnachadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone, eds., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, Maynooth Mongraphs 2 (Maynooth 1989), 122-43; Kelly, *A Guide*, 43-7, 49-51, 137-9.

<sup>92</sup> For overview and references, see McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire*, 4-5; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 85, 107-111, 115. A notable and often cited example the physical effects of satire is *Cath Maige Tuired (CMT)* §39; Elizabeth Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired, The Second Battle of Mag Tuired* (Dublin 1982), ed.34 and tr.35: 'Ní fil a maín trá Bresi,' ol sé. Ba fir ón dano. Ní boí acht meth foair-sim ónd úair-sin. Conad sí sin cétnae hóer dorónadh a n-Érinn' (= 'Bres's prosperity no longer exists,' he said, and that was true. There was only blight on him from that hour; and that is the first satire that was made in Ireland); on this aspect of *CMT*, see McCone, 'A Tale of Two Ditties', 122-6.



both includes its still-concealed consequences and sets them in motion. In this case, both praise and satire would always be in a middle-ground between description and some form of prophecy.<sup>93</sup>

There is a real difficulty, however, in the instances where it seems to be effective even when unjustly given, such as we find in *Sanas Cormaic*, for example.<sup>94</sup> Such instances seem to represent an overturning of the structure of the natural order, in which we have seen, there is a direct connection between appearance and reality, public self-representation and the person as they are in themselves. That being the case, the glossator of *Bretha Crólige*<sup>95</sup> and the commentator on The Introduction to *SM*,<sup>96</sup> in their suggestion that unjust satire could cause a poet to lose their honour-price entirely seems to be in close accord with what we have seen in *BNT*. For such a composition, through its unnatural forcing together of a powerfully natural linguistic representation of moral fault and its consequences with an object that is contrary to it, with the result that a partially unreal object<sup>97</sup> comes into being, would seem to supply the clearest possible evidence that the purity of morals and learning on which their capacities as a poet depended had been severely debased.

But nowhere is this subtle gap between representation and reality more strange than in the case of a poet who does not come from the appropriate background. For a poet

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<sup>93</sup> Although, this combination of description and foretelling of future events could, perhaps, be said to demonstrate how prophecy, pure and simple, is conceived of as working.

<sup>94</sup> See note 63 above.

<sup>95</sup> *Bretha Crólige* §32, gloss 6; Daniel A. Binchy, ed. and tr., '*Bretha Crólige*', *Ériu* 12 (1938), 1-77, ed. at 26 and tr. at 27: 'æir iar setaibh dligid darinne ⁊ noca netirdibiginn a eneclainn im duine ær iar setaib do denumh' (=it is a satire along lawful lines she has made, and to make a satire along lawful lines does not wipe out a person's honour price).

<sup>96</sup> For the 'fili díupartach' (fraudulent poet) in The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) §11 on which this commentator expands, see note 68. For relevant Middle Irish commentary, see *CIH* 2091.8-11; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., *Early Irish Satire*, 6-7: 'IN filí dano connaig forcraidh a duaisi no agras in mét na dligheinn no doni air nindligthech, is a letheneclann dibhas ime gach ernaile dibh fri cach naon chena coruice in tres fecht, ⁊ a laneneclann uero on / tres fecht amach' (=The poet, moreover, who demands and excessive reward, or who sues for the amount he is not entitled to, or who composes and unlawful satire, it is his half honour-price which each one of those categories diminishes concerning him with respect to each one, moreover, until the third time, and [it is] his full honour-price, truly, from the third time onwards).

<sup>97</sup> Partially unreal in the sense that the person would have preexisted the satire, but by means of the satire would have suffered transformation by forces not arising from any existing natural cause.

without the appropriate father and grandfather, his compositions, as with all other poets, are direct sensible evidence of his true poetic grade to a qualified interpreter. However, his actual person lags behind. Despite the fact that his compositions are in no way unsuitable for his grade, being resplendent with all the qualifications he actually has, he only receives half the honour-price due his grade until he achieves double the qualifications, or does double the amount of study.<sup>98</sup> Thus, it would seem that while poetry has the capacity to undermine the natural order itself, if misused, there are still certain ways in which the poet is very much at the mercy of nature, so far as the question of birth is concerned. Insofar as the poet has a capacity for poetry, together with purity of morals and learning, his nature as poet can ascend with the progress of his poetry and the grade of poetic identity that comes with it, but his own nature will not always be able to keep up with his grade, and the highest grade will remain beyond him. Unlike the king, the poet himself can himself be somewhat lesser (or more) than his public role, a role which, it remains, is directly revealed in its sensible manifestations insofar as it is truly possessed.

### **Political Elaborations on Isidore: Clergy**

The Church is a much different matter. As in the case of Isidore's king, the actions of clergy reveal the nature of the identity that performs them. Turning again to *BNT* we find that any member of the Church hierarchy maintains the privilege that corresponds to their given status only to the degree that they fulfil their proper functions. Insofar as they neglect these functions, receive or use wealth in a culpable way, or otherwise debase themselves through moral impurity, their honour-price is diminished from what would have been appropriate to their rank.<sup>99</sup> This can also apply to a local church as whole. For if the faults of its members are sufficient, a church can lose its characteristic immunity to culpability. 'Just' (*fír*) members of the lay-classes are then able to legally over-swear it, with the result that it no longer receives the offerings (*audbarta*), or full

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<sup>98</sup> e.g. *UR* §7-12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed. at 106-8 and tr.107-9. For general discussion and references to further primary sources, see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 94-8. Note that this works the opposite way as well. A person who does not produce poetry but is descended from productive poets receives something of their status as far as the third generation.

<sup>99</sup> *BNT* §12-14 and 20; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', ed.12-6, and tr.13-17. *Córus Bescnai*, version A, gloss 6 on §40; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bescnai: An Old Irish Tract on the Church and Society*, Early Irish Law Series 7 (Dublin 2017), ed.160 and tr.161; Kelley, *A Guide*, 42.

honour-price (*ógdíre*) that would otherwise be due to it.<sup>100</sup> However, with the exception of hermits and unordained thaumaturgists, whose political standing seems to depend entirely on their ability to enact miracles,<sup>101</sup> there seems to be no direct physical proof that the purity of the clergy has been maintained and that their duties have been observed, in the way that we have seen in the ruler's body and kingdom, relative to the ruler, and in clarity of face and poetic composition, relative to the poet. Exposure to literacy, and to the 'white language' (i.e. Latin) in particular, seems to be a factor in where a clergyman finds himself in the grades of the Church.<sup>102</sup> Yet there seems also to be no suggestion that a particular level of eloquence must be attained, or that such eloquence, if attained and used properly, will be an indication of their qualifications as a whole. On a physical level, there are, indeed, any number of instances where the superior qualifications of the Church, or its representatives, are displayed through saintly miracles which are suitably threatening or benign relative to the circumstances.<sup>103</sup> But such disruptive displays generally serve only to initially establish

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<sup>100</sup> *BNT* §6-7; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', ed.10-12 and tr.11-13. *Heptads*, a.k.a. *Sechtae* (*SM* 9) [*CIH* 1.1ff. and 4.2ff.]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', 31 note on §6. That a church forfeits the tithes and offerings, etc. owed to it if it fails to fulfil its duties, is implied by *Córus Bescnai* (*SM* 8) §38 [= *CIH* 529.4-5]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bescnai*, 34-5, as argued in Breatnach *et al.*, 'The Laws of the Irish', 408. *Córus Bescnai* version A, glosses 18-19 on §38 and gloss 6 on §39; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bescnai*, ed.158 and tr.159. *Córus Bescnai* version C §38; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bescnai*, ed.272 and tr.273; *Berrad Airechta* §6 and 8 [= *CIH* 591.25-7 and 30-1]. See also Robin Chapman Stacey, tr., 'Berrad Airechta: An Old Irish Tract on Suretyship', in T.M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd Owen and Dafydd Walter, eds., *Lawyers and Laymen: Studies in the History of Law Presented to Dafydd Jenkins on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Cardiff 1986), 210-33, at 211.

<sup>101</sup> *Bretha Crólige* §12; Binchy, ed. and tr., 'Bretha Crólige', 12-13.

<sup>102</sup> *BNT* §1; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', ed.20 and tr.21: 'Tabair búaid / Dé do epscup / - scoth nádbi drochduini drécht - / ro cethorcho blíadnae / bélráí báin bí; / biru is tresca eclais / cach neimthiuso nár' (=Give divine excellence to the bishop - a statement which is not the portion of an evil person - who has had forty years of the 'fair language'). This language (Latin) seems to have a higher status than the vernacular; *Míadslechteae* [*CIH* 586.27-9]; reprinted and translated in the handout for the presentation, Liam Breatnach, 'The Church in the Law of Early Medieval Ireland' (Dublin 2014) §22, which may be viewed at the website *Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: Recorded Lectures and Conferences* (online at: <https://www.dias.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/STATLecture2014handout.pdf>): 'conid inand imus-freccrat grádha ecna 7 eclasa fri grádha file 7 féne, acht is ecna máthair cacha dána díb conid asa bais uile hebhait' (=so that the grades of Latin learning and of canonical orders correspond to each other in the same way as the grades of poets and free laymen, save that Latin learning is the mother of each of the learned professions, so that they all drink from out of her palm). Exactly how the grades of Latin scholars fit into the pattern described in this study, providing that there is, in fact, sufficient information available to do so, will require further study.

<sup>103</sup> The most paradigmatic example, relative to the Irish legal tradition, is, of course, the confrontation of Muirchú's St. Patrick with Lóegaire; see Muirchú, *Vita sancti Patricii* I.16 (15)-21(22); Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', in Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 10 (Dublin 1979), 61-121, at 88.8-99.4. On the influence of this text on the subsequent Irish

the Church's prerogatives, or to reinforce them against any subsequent recalcitrance, and then, tend to reveal something about the Church only negatively, by supernaturally amplifying, nullifying or destroying the natural sensible manifestations of the justice or injustice of their secular counterparts.<sup>104</sup> There seems to be no way that the character of a standard clergyman leaks out, as it were, so that it becomes visible through representative sensory phenomena. But this being so, why does this seem to be true only of the hierarchies of the Church?

This may seem especially odd, when we consider the priority of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the others in many of the relevant texts. The sevenfold hierarchy of the Church is the prototype from which the poetic orders (*UR*),<sup>105</sup> or, perhaps, even all the secular *nemed*-classes (*CG*),<sup>106</sup> are taken to have variously derived their own sevenfold distinctions of grade. In The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1), it even goes so far as to say that the grades of the secular orders were neither ordered nor graded before the

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legal tradition, see Liam Breatnach, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 36-52, at 51.

<sup>104</sup> The quintessential example of Patrick's miracles as belonging to something superior to the general order of nature is his reanimation of the dead; see Muirchú, *Vita sancti Patricii* II.1-2; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', 115.1-22. For Isidore and the *Würzburg Glosses* on the unnaturalness, or superiority to nature, of Christian faith and its miraculous results, see notes 113 and 118. This understanding of Christian miracle contrasts in terminology, but not necessarily in idea with that of Augustinus Hibernicus in *De mirabilibus* iii.9; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 39-74, at 51. In these instances, 'nature', as defined thus far, could just as well as not be understood as what Ps. Augustinus says follows from the *rationes* involved in the functioning of things 'from day to day' (*quotidiana*), 'supernatural', as what comes about through the higher *rationes* which are manifest in the 'unaccustomed government of things' (*inuisitata gubernatio*) found in the miraculous. The important thing here is that there is, in Augustinus Hibernicus' words, no 'day to day' manifestation of the justice or injustice of ecclesiasts in the way that we have seen is the case for rulers and poets.

<sup>105</sup> Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 81-9.

<sup>106</sup> *CG* §2; Binchy, ed., *Críth Gablach*, 1.6-9; Breatnach, tr., *Uraicecht*, 86): 'Cid asa fordailtea grád túa[i]the? A [a]urlunn grád n-ecalsa; ar na[ch] grád bís i n-eclais is coir cia beith a [a]urlann i túaith, dég fortaig nó dithig nó fiadnaisi nó brithemnachta[e] ó chách dialailiu' (=On what basis have the lay grades been divided? On the basis of correspondence with the Church grades, for any grade that is in the Church, it is right that its corresponding one should be in the *túath*, for the sake of proof by oath, or evidence or judgement from one to the other). It seems likely that *BNT* §15's description (Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', 15-16), of the seven grades of the Church as the 'mórfeiser fora costaiter uili' (=seven people on whom all are based), as it transitions into a description of the grades of the rulers, should be read in light of this idea. In this vein, see also Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Law of the Church' §7: 'Adamrae áe ecalsa arda-labrathar cach riucht, / cach grád, cach coindelg, cach cátu, cach delb; / for secht ndánaib in Spiruto Noíb, for secht ngrádaib, / for secht n-análaib ebaltair áe ecalsa' (=Most wonderful is the lawsuit of the church, which speaks for all conditions of persons, every grade, every comparable grade, every (church) dignity, every like dignity; on the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, on the seven grades, on seven breathings, the lawsuit of the church will be prosecuted [lightly edited]).

promulgation of *Senchas Már*,<sup>107</sup> a law text which describes the law of Scripture (*recht litre*) as one of its fundamental bases,<sup>108</sup> and which *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8), together with The Prologue to *SM*, which forms a part of its Old Irish Glosses (*OGSM*),<sup>109</sup> present as being framed only at St. Patrick's behest and through his blessing.<sup>110</sup> The sevenfold hierarchy of the Church, in turn, appears to derive its own order from the sevenfold gifts<sup>111</sup> of the Holy Spirit which have been revealed to and through it.<sup>112</sup> If then, the

<sup>107</sup> Introduction to *SM* §10; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text 'SM'*, 4-5: 'Ar ro buí in bith i cutrummu conid tánic Senchas Már' (= For the world had been in [a state of] equality until *Senchas Már* came to it. The glosses of *Bretha Cróilige* makes direct reference to this; see *Bretha Cróilige* §5 with glosses 1 and 6-9, esp.9; Binchy, ed. and tr., '*Bretha Cróilige*', ed.8 and tr.9: 'Ar is a fenechus rosuidiged dire lethard do gradaib tuaithe i mmessaib crolige' (=For it was in *fenechus* that unequal *díre* has been established for the lay grades in the assessments of blood-lyings) and its gloss: 'ar robi in bith i cutrumus co a tainic sencus mor' (=For the world was in equality until the *Senchas Már*').

<sup>108</sup> Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) §1; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text 'SM'*, 4-5. *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) §30-7; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, 32-5. This theme is elaborated upon by The Prologue to *SM* §7-9; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.18-19.

<sup>109</sup> For the dating of the Old Irish Glosses to *SM* (*OGSM*, hereafter) and further discussion, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 338-46, esp. 344. On The Prologue to *SM* in relation to the *OGSM* as a whole, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 24, 40, 71, 160, 338 and esp. 345.

<sup>110</sup> *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) §30-7; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, 32-5. This theme is elaborated on by *PSM* §4-9; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11-12 and tr.18-19.

<sup>111</sup> Interpreting Roger E. Reynolds, "'At Sixes and Sevens" – and Eights and Nines: The Sacred Mathematics of Sacred Orders in the Early Middle Ages', *Speculum* 54 (1979), 669-84, at 671-3, in light of Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 85-6. In addition to the early Irish and Insular sources mentioned in Reynolds (i.e. Ps. Isidore's *Liber de numeris*; Ps. Bede's *Collecantea*; *Collectio sangermanensis*; *CCH XLII.22*), see *CCH VIII.1*; Hermann Wasserschleben, ed., *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 26: 'De gradibus in quibus Christus adfuit: Ostiarius fuit, quando aperuit ostia inferni, exorcista, quando ejecit septem demonia de Maria Magdalena, lector, quando aperuit librum Esaiæ, subdiaconus, quando fecit vinum de aqua Cana Galileæ, diaconus, quando lavit pedes discipulorum, sacerdos, quando accepti panem ac fregit et benedixit, episcopus fuit, quando elevavit manus suas ad coelum et benedixit apostolis'. *BNT* §3; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', 8-9: 'secht ndánae in Spiruto Noib, secht ngráda ecalso cona fodlaib 7 cona n-ordaib córaib do buith indí' (=the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven grades of the Church with their divisions and proper functions being in it). *BNT* §9; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The First Third', 12-13: 'Trén cách co heclais i ndá secht sluindter; sluindter secht ndánae in Spiruto Noib, nóebthus sluindiud secht ngrád n-ecalso' (= Everyone is strong until compared with the church, in which two sevens are declared; let the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost be declared, the declaration of the seven grades of the church sanctifies it). *Biblical Glosses in Book of Armagh* fol.171a, gloss 3; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 494-8, at 496: 'condid dithetacht in spírto secht .n. delbich sin isin tsollummun sechtmanach forsi(nn) aeclis .uiii. grádich profetauit Iesus híc dicens accipietis' (=so that it is of the coming of the septiform Spirit in the weekly solemnity on the seven-graded Church that Jesus here has prophesied).

<sup>112</sup> These are both, in turn, associated, at least in one place, with the seven spheres of the planets. See 'Litanies of Confession' in Charles Plummer, ed. and tr., *Irish Litanies: Text and Translation*, Henry Bradshaw Society 62 (London 1925, repr. Woodbridge, Suffolk 1992), 2-19, ed. at 10 and tr. at 11: 'Ar do shecht ndánaib, Ar do secht ngradaib, Ar do sech nímhib' (=By Thy seven gifts; By Thy seven orders; By Thy seven heavens). For the possible significance of such an association, see St. Iranaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, l.ix, the original Latin of which has been lost, now existing only in an Armenian recension; Karapet Ter-Mékérttschian, Samuel Graham Wilson and Max, Prince of Saxony, ed. and tr., '*Eis epideixin tou apostolikou kerygmatos: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*', in Joseph Barthoulot, ed., *Patrologiae Orientalis* 12 (Paris 1919), 653-732; more recently translated in Joseph P.

grades of the secular orders are conceived of as dependent on those of the Church (as the orders of the Church, on the gifts of the Holy Spirit) for the distinctions by which each grade is what it is, one might well expect that the Church would be the superlative example of the kind of correspondence between inner and outer, between reality and sensible representation, that we have seen at work in the secular grades. However, we have that this is emphatically not the case.

Only tentative answers will be possible at this point. However, there is a further detail in Isidore's *Etymologiae* that is significant relative to our question. Unlike created natures which, Isidore says, may 'be classified by the properties through which the Creator has defined it',<sup>113</sup> God's nature is ineffable (*ineffabilis*).<sup>114</sup> This does not mean that nothing at all can be said of it, but that 'human speech can say nothing worthy' of it.<sup>115</sup> It remains possible that a name which is proper to God, such as The Tetragrammaton (יהוה),<sup>116</sup> may be divinely revealed. But the fitness of such a name lies

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Smith, tr., *Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, The Works of the Fathers in Translation 16 (Westminster and London 1952), 53. There, the seven stages of the liturgy, the seven charisms by which the Holy Spirit was manifest in Christ, and the seven spheres of the planets are all found to be the same heptad. From the perspective of the early Irish 'Seven-Heavens' texts, such a view would appear to make one's progress through the grades of a given hierarchy, in some manner, analogous to the ascent recounted in these texts, of the soul, through the planetary spheres, to the Trinity itself. On early Irish 'Seven-Heavens' texts, see John Carey, Nic Cárthaigh and Cairíona Ó Dochartaigh, eds., *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, 2 vols (Aberystwyth 2014) I, 153-306. Such an analogy certainly seems to be invited by the description of Christ later in the same litany as 'aird-espoic na secht nime' (=Archbishop of the seven heavens) in the 'Litany of Confession'; Plummer, ed. and tr., *Irish Litanies*, ed.2 and tr.3. On the close association of these two litanies in the manuscript tradition, see Tomás O'Sullivan, 'Texts and Transmissions of the *Scúap Chrábaid*: An Old-Irish Litany in its Manuscript Context', *Studia Celtica Fennica* 7 (2010), 26–47, at 41-2.

<sup>113</sup> *Etym.* II.xxiv.12; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 80: 'his usibus deputatur, in quibus a creatore definitum est, nisi forte cum voluntate Dei aliquod miraculum provenire monstratur' (=each thing is classified by those properties according to which the Creator has defined it, unless perhaps, by the will of God, some miracle were to occur).

<sup>114</sup> *Etym.* II.xxiv.13; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 80.

<sup>115</sup> *Etym.* VII.i.18; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 154: 'de Deo nihil digne humanus sermo dicit' (=But human poverty of diction has taken up this term, and likewise for the remaining terms, insofar as what is ineffable can be spoken of in any way – for human speech says nothing suitable about God – so the other terms are also deficient). See also *Sententiae* I.ii.4 and xv.6; *PL* 83 col. 537-738, at 542, 569-70.

<sup>116</sup> *Etym.* VII.i.16; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 153: 'Tetragrammaton, hoc est quattuor litterarum, quod proprie apud Hebraeos in Deo ponitur, iod, he, iod, he, id est, duabus ia, quae duplicata ineffabile illud et gloriosum Dei nomen efficiunt' (=the Tetragrammaton, that is, the "four letters" that in Hebrew are properly applied to God – *iod, he, iod, he* – that is, "Ia" twice, which when doubled, forms the ineffable and glorious name of God). Note that he is somewhat mistaken here about the letters that make up the Tetragrammaton. It is 'iod, he, vav, he' (יהוה),

in the fact that it also is ineffable, in that it too ‘cannot be bounded by human sense and intellect’.<sup>117</sup> If, then, God cannot be directly represented by intelligible sounds in the way that created natures can, it seems that this would mean something similar for the grades of the Church, defined as they are by the mediation of what is understood to be ineffable. Were the symmetry we have found between Isidore’s linguistic and political theory to hold, such a principle would require that there not be an intelligible relationship between the sensible qualities of clergy and their identity as clergy, for the same reasons that such a relationship is necessary in the case of rulers and poets. The former are, in some manner, unrepresentable on the sensible level, because their role is that of a political mediation of what is not representable ‘to human sense and intellect’.<sup>118</sup> The latter are exactly what they appear to be on the sensible level, because their role is to mediate justice insofar as it is derivable from the eminently representable order of created nature. Again, this does not necessarily mean that we have a thoroughly self-conscious development of Isidore here. But, however we may understand it, it remains noteworthy that early Irish developments in linguistics and politics, in which Isidore’s influence was undoubtedly felt, not only remained consistent with his principles in elaborating on them, but maintained an astonishing degree of theoretical consistency between these developments, despite important differences of detail and emphasis from text to text.

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not ‘iod, he, iod, he’ (יהיה). This ‘ineffable’ speech should not be equated with the angelic speech occurring in *In Tenga Bithnua*; John Carey, ed. and tr., *In Tenga Bithnua: The Ever-New Tongue*, Apocrypha Hiberniae II: Apocalyptica 1, Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum 16 (Turnhout 2009), *passim*. The reason being that its examples of angelic speech are held to be translatable.

<sup>117</sup> *Etym.* VII.i.16; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*. 153: ‘Dicitur autem ineffabilis, non quia dici non potest, sed quia finiri sensu et intellectu humano nullatenus potest; et ideo, quia de eo nihil digne dici potest, ineffabilis est’ (=The Tetragrammaton is called ‘ineffable’, not because it cannot be spoken, but because in no way can it be bound by human sense or intellect; therefore, because nothing worthy can be said of it, it is ineffable).

<sup>118</sup> For the contents and results of faith as disruptive to nature and the natural, see *WGPE*, 2c, gloss 25; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 508: ‘.i. nipo lobur ahires cepu friaicned quod dictum est’ (=i.e. his faith was not weak, though quod dictum est was contrary to nature); *idem*, 19d, gloss 8 on page 625: ‘.i. maic ni dosom adobtione non natura’ (=i.e. we [are] sons of His adoption *non natura*). See note 113 above for Isidore on divine miracles as disruptive of the natural attributes which allow natural naming after the manner defined in this study.

## Middle Irish Sources – Foundational Concerns

Of course, most of the sources we have considered to this point are Old Irish. Middle Irish linguistic and political thought is not, however, neatly separable from its Old Irish precedents. In the first place, there are the manuscripts in which we find the Old Irish law-tracts, grammars and sagas to consider. None of them is earlier than the beginning of the twelfth century,<sup>119</sup> and many considerably later.<sup>120</sup> The greatest part of the evidence for the *Bretha Nemed* legal tradition, for example, which has been so important for the preceding, is found in early-modern manuscripts.<sup>121</sup> The Old Irish texts that survived did so only because they were significant to Middle and Early Modern Irish scribes. Relative, at least, to the predominantly legal evidence we have been considering, the character of this significance is amply illustrated, given that the greater part of the Middle Irish legal writing still extant is in the form of gloss and commentary on the Old Irish law-tracts, or else as reworkings of them.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, in the case of the *SM* and *Cáin Fúithirbe*, there is evidence of a cumulative glossing tradition, in which Old Irish glossing passed into Middle Irish without interruption.<sup>123</sup> This is not relevant for law-tracts such as *CG*, *Míadsleхта[e]*<sup>124</sup> and the two principle *Bretha Nemed*

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<sup>119</sup> The earliest (c.1100) being, *Lebor na hUidre* (LU, hereafter); Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ‘Introduction’, in Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ed., *Lebor na hUidre*, Codices Hibernenses Eximii 1 (Dublin 2015), xi-xxi.

<sup>120</sup> The eighth-century poetry of Blathmac, for example, is known only in a single seventeenth-century manuscript (National Library of Ireland: MS G 50); James Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac, Son of Cú Brettan: Together with the Irish Gospel of Thomas and a Poem on the Virgin Mary*, Irish Texts Society 47 (London 1964). The most recent work on Blathmac is Siobhán Barrett, *Study of the Lexicon of the Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan*, unpublished PhD thesis (Maynooth University 2018). See also, Pádraig Ó Riain, ed., *The Poems of Blathmac Son of Cú Brettan: Reassessments* (Dublin 2015).

<sup>121</sup> The only complete copy of *BNT* [=CIH 2211.1-2232.37] ‘was written in 1571 by Matha Ó Luínín of the Ard, Co. Fermanagh’; see Kelly, *A Guide*, 260 and Standish Hayes O’Grady, Robin Flower and Myles Dillon, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London 1926-53) I, 141-6, as cited in Breatnach, ‘The First Third’, 3. One of the major sources for *Bretha Nemed Déidenach* [*BND*, hereafter] is *O’Davoren’s Glossary*; Breatnach, *A Companion*, 186-8. This glossary appears as part of Egerton 88, a manuscript ‘written between 1564 and 1569 by Domnall O’Davoren and various pupils’; Kelly, *A Guide*, 231. The only continuous text of *BND* is found in TCD H.2.15B, a seventeenth-century copy made by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh; Breatnach, *A Companion*, 185; Kelly, *A Guide*, 262. However, in this last case, the argument made here on this page does not apply. Dubhaltach seems to have been interested in *BND* as an antiquarian, not as a lawyer. For further discussion of Dubhaltach, see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Celebrated Antiquary, Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (c. 1600-1671): His Lineage, Life and Learning*, Maynooth Monographs 6 (Maynooth 1996).

<sup>122</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 322. Moreover, Breatnach also notes that such glosses and commentary tended to be read ‘in conjunction with the the main text’ in question, not as a replacement for it; see Liam Breatnach, ‘The Glossing of the Early Irish Law Tracts’, in Hayden and Russell, eds., *Grammatica*, 112-132, at 124-127.

<sup>123</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 338-49, at 345, 348-51, 356-7.

<sup>124</sup> For a list of Old Irish law-texts that have little to no glossing, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 94.



texts,<sup>125</sup> which appear with little to no glossing in such continuous copies of them as survive.<sup>126</sup> However, this is not yet to say anything of places where they are quoted or extracted. Most significantly for our purposes, the material on the poetic hierarchies that we have been dealing with in *BND*, and especially *BNT*, are quoted or otherwise taken up by many subsequent texts.<sup>127</sup> Among these are the late Old (or early Middle) Irish<sup>128</sup> legal tract, *Uraicecht Becc (UB)*<sup>129</sup> (together with its subsequent commentary tradition and the texts derived from that commentary tradition),<sup>130</sup> the Old and Middle Irish ‘Stories from the Law-tracts’,<sup>131</sup> the Middle Irish Metrical Tracts (*MV*)<sup>132</sup> and the early modern Digests.<sup>133</sup>

This is not the place to attempt to characterize the relationship of Middle Irish legal thinking to its Old Irish exemplars in any general way. Certainly, the emergence of so

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<sup>125</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 185, 189.

<sup>126</sup> For a list of Old Irish law-texts that have little to no glossing, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 94. However, this does not therefore demonstrate that these texts never had their own glossing traditions. The existence of glossed extracts from some of the texts in this list, including *CG*, *BND* and *BNT*, may represent the remnants of a glossing which was once much more comprehensive; *idem*, *The Companion*, 94-5, 185, 189.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Breatnach, ‘The First Third’, 1: ‘*Bretha Nemed Toísech* is one of the most widely cited Old Irish law tracts’.

<sup>128</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 316: ‘There is, however, nothing here which would compel one to date it to the later eighth century, and the language would be in keeping with a date in the ninth century, or even perhaps as late as the early tenth century’.

<sup>129</sup> The only published translation of *UB* remains that of MacNeill; see MacNeill, tr., ‘Ancient Irish Law’, 272-81. However, Fangzhe Qiu has an edition and translation in preparation which is based on the Book of Ballymote version [*CIH* 1590ff.], but which also includes readings from the Yellow Book of Lecan.

<sup>130</sup> An account of the relevant sections of these is given in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 3-18, with editions at 153-75.

<sup>131</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 349-50. For texts and translations of some of the ‘Stories from the Law-Tracts’, see Myles Dillon, ed. and tr., ‘Stories from the Law-Tracts’, *Ériu* 11 (1932), 42-65. For a comprehensive discussion, as well as editions and translations of ‘Stories from the Law-Tracts’ not found in Dillon, see Fangzhe Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*. For a helpful overview, Fangzhe Qiu, ‘Narratives in Early Irish Law: A Typological Study’, in Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O’Neill, eds., *Medieval Irish Law: Text and Context*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 12 (Sydney 2013), 111-41.

<sup>132</sup> Rudolph Thurnysen, ed., ‘Mittelirische Verslehren’, in Windisch and Stokes, eds., *Irische Texte* III, 1-182. Thurnysen’s *MV* IV, found on page 106 of his edition, is edited, translated and discussed in Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘*Sluindfét dúib dagaisti in dána*: A Middle Irish Text on Metres’, in Caoimhín Breatnach and Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, eds., *Aon don Éigse: Essays Marking Osborn Bergin’s Centenary Lecture on Bardic Poetry* (Dublin 2015), 51-90. It is, however, *MV* I and II that are of primary concern here. For general discussion of *MV* I, often in relation to *MV* II, see Donncha Ó hAodha, ‘The First Middle Irish Metrical Tract’, in Hildegard L.C. Tristram, ed., *Metrik und Medienwechsel / Metrics and Media* (Tübingen 1991), 207-244.

<sup>133</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 322-37. The glosses in the Digests are ‘usually very close to those in copies of the complete text’; *idem*, ‘The Glossing’, 127-31.

much of it as gloss and commentary on the Old Irish law-tracts suggests continuity more than rupture. Given the theory of language we have found to be implicated in Old Irish descriptions of political hierarchy from the beginning, we may, at any rate, feel free to ignore the old assumption that the abundance of etymologies in Middle Irish legal gloss and commentary which agree more with Isidorean than with modern linguistic practice can be taken as positive evidence that the Old Irish words in question were no longer understood.<sup>134</sup> This is further underscored by the fact that Isidorean etymology is, as we have seen, also explicitly practiced in the Old Irish period, where it is turned to as a way of opening up the meaning of a word beyond its lexical definition, not as a substitute for ignorance of the definition in question.<sup>135</sup> It becomes significantly harder to argue that a given scholar's etymological practice demonstrates their ignorance of the meanings of Old Irish words when their analysis of the words in question is itself in Old Irish.<sup>136</sup> If Middle Irish etymologies reveal anything about the relationship between reader and text in this later period, they reveal that these law-texts were deemed sufficiently authoritative to be worthy of close and labourious scrutiny. But then, as Old Irish developed into Middle Irish, the comprehension of Old Irish would certainly have become more difficult.<sup>137</sup> Nor is continuity the same as identity. The same text may come to be interpreted in many different ways depending on what one understands to be appropriate interpretive method. This will be even more the case when the political situation of the reader is significantly altered from that which was described by the Old Irish law-texts. One may by no means simply assume that any given idea will function

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<sup>134</sup> The most witty (and thus the most referenced) example of this assumption is that of Osborn Bergin, as reported by Binchy; Daniel A. Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts: Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 29 (1943), 195-227, at 212: 'My friend and teacher Professor Osborn Bergin once gave a neat parody in English to illustrate the technique of these unscrupulous glossators. He pictured them confronted with the Shakespearian phrase "darraign your battle". Taking their cue from the familiar word "battle", they would have "separated" the first word somewhat as follows: "*darraign*, that is, *do ruin*, from its destructiveness; or *die ere you run*, that is, they must not retreat; or *dare in*, because they are brave; or *tear around*, from their activity; or *dear rain*, from the showers of blood"'.

<sup>135</sup> For more on this, together with many additional Old Irish examples, see Liam Breatnach, 'The Glossing', 121-4, esp. 122: 'Far from being dismissed as pointless, the skill displayed in these etymologies is rather to be admired as evidence of mastery of the Isidorean methodology . . . Moreover, these etymological glosses take account of specific technical uses of words'.

<sup>136</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 352-3.

<sup>137</sup> This increasing difficulty is evident in the emergence of a new element in glossing during the Middle Irish period: glosses which do no more than render the Old Irish text in the later form of Irish belonging to the context of the glossator; see Breatnach, 'The Glossing', 119.

the same way in Middle Irish commentary as it appears to, from our frame of reference, in the original Old Irish which it explicates. However, as we shall now see, the narrower judgement may be made, that the creativity of Middle Irish commentators is not directed towards a reappraisal of the fundamental principles at issue here, so much as it is towards the development of the conclusions that were perceived to necessarily follow from them.

### **Middle Irish Sources: Kingship**

The justice of a given ruler continues to be, as we have come to expect, directly apparent in the soundness of his kingdom and body. This is no less true of Middle Irish accounts of Cormac Mac Airt,<sup>138</sup> for example, than it is of those previous.<sup>139</sup> *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga (TBDD)*, in the form in which it comes to us, is a particularly fine demonstration of the relevance of these Old Irish ideas to a Middle Irish context.<sup>140</sup> A

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<sup>138</sup> *Scél na Fír Flatha* §1; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, in Windisch and Stokes, eds., *Irische Texte* III.i, ed.185-202, at 185 and tr.203-229, at 203: ‘Ba lan in bith do gach maith ria lind in rig sin. Bai mes 7 clas 7 murthoradh. Bái sidh 7 saime 7 súbha. Ni bai guin na diberg fa ré sin, acht cach na n-inadh duthaigh foghen’ (=At the time of that king the earth was full of every good thing. There were mast and fatness and seaproduce. There were ease and peace and happiness. There was neither murder nor robbery at that season, but everyone (abode) in his proper place).

<sup>139</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* I.20-31; Maxim Fomin, ed. and tr., ‘*Tecosca Cormaic*’, in Maxim Fomin, *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India*, *Empirie und Theorie der Sprachwissenschaft* 2 (Heidelberg 2013), ed.150-160, at 148-150 and tr.149-161, at 149-51: ‘Torud inna flaith, / Déicsiu cach thúraig, / Almsana ili, / Mess for crannaib, / Iasc i n-indberaib, / Talam toirthech, / Bárca do thochor, / Allmaire sét, / Murchuirthe dílsi, / Étach sirecda, / Drong claideb mbéimnech ar choimét a thúaithe, / Forrána tar crícha’ (=Fruits during his reign / Looking after every one in misery / Copious alms / Mast upon trees / Fish in river-mouths / Earth fruitful / Ships arriving / Foreign goods of value / Lawfully claimed what was placed by the sea / Silken clothing / Host of the clashing sword for preserving his kingdom / Raids beyond borders); see also, Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *The Instructions of King Cormaic Mac Airt*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin 1909), ed.2-4 and tr.3-5.

<sup>140</sup> *TBDD*, lines 182-191; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 6, but following O’Connor’s amendments and translations; O’Connor, ed. and tr., *The Destruction*, 78: ‘Ro bátar trá deólatchaire móra ina flaith .i. .uii. mbárca cach mís mithemon da gabáil oc Inbiur Colbtha cachá blíadna, 7 mes co ngluine cach fogmair 7 imbas for Búais 7 Boind i medón in mís mithemon cachá blíadna 7 imbet caínchomraic co nár rubi neach in n-aile in nÉrinn fria flaith, 7 ba blindithir la cach n-aen guth aroile in nÉrinn fria flaith 7 betis téta mennchrot. Ní lúaiscead gaeth caircech mbó ó medón earraich co meadón fogmair. Nír bo thoirneach ainbtineach a flaith’ (=Indeed, there were great bounties in his reign, namely, seven ships every June landing at Inber Colptha, and acorns knee-deep every autumn, and *imbas* in the Bush and Boyne rivers in the middle of every June, and such abundance of goodwill that in his reign no man slew another in Ireland, and in his reign everyone in Ireland found each other’s voice as sweet as harpstrings. Wind ruffled no cow’s tail from mid-spring to mid-autumn. His reign was neither thundery nor stormy). See also *TBDD*, lines 597-610; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 18; O’Connor, ed. and tr., *The Destruction*, 127: ‘Is maith a flaith’, ol Fer Rogain, ‘Ní taudchad nél tar gréin ó gabais flaith ó medón fogmair, 7 ní taudchaid banna drúchtae di feor co medón laí, 7 ní fasnán gaemgaeth caircech cethrae co nónae, 7 ní forúich mac tibhri ina flaith tar ag fireand cachá indise ón chind mblíadnae co araill. . . In ina flaith is combind la cach fer guth arailli 7 betis

further case in point is the bilingual Middle Irish and Hiberno-Latin homily, *Sermo ad reges* ('A Sermon to Kings'), which quotes the relevant passages of *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi* ('The Twelve Abuses of the World' [*De XII*])<sup>141</sup> at length, and sympathetically expands upon them, this in the context of its own account of *iustitia reges/ fír flathemon* ('the justice of the ruler').<sup>142</sup> But it would be wrong to characterize the extant evidence as indicative of no more than a mimetic reflection of Old Irish authorities.

There is, for instance, considerable elaboration on the role that symbolic action plays in the maintenance of the ruler's justice in the Middle Irish literature. There are a number of Old Irish sagas which depict *nemed*-class persons, as subject to certain 'prohibitions' (*geisi*), which, when broken, result in their imminent death.<sup>143</sup> But it is only in two late

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téta mendchrot ar febus na cána 7 in tísda 7 in chaínchomraic fil sethnu na Héirind. Is ina flaith ataat na trí bairr for Éirind .i. barr dés 7 barr scoth 7 barr measa' (= 'Good is his reign,' said Fer Rogain. 'Since he took the kingship, not a cloud has veiled the sun from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn, not a drop of dew has fallen from the grass before midday, no winter wind ruffles a cow's tail before noon, and in his reign no wolf harms more than one bull-calf in every byre from the end of one year to the end of the next. . . . It is in his reign that everyone finds each other's voice as sweet as harpstrings, because of the excellence of the law, peace, and goodwill which exist throughout Ireland. It is in his reign that Ireland enjoys the three crops: a crop of corn, a crop of flowers, and a crop of acorns).

<sup>141</sup> Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abuisvis saeculi*.

<sup>142</sup> On this, see Brent Miles, 'The *Sermo ad reges* from the *Leabhar Breac* and Hiberno-Latin Tradition', in Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden, eds., *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 2014), 141-158, at 146-9.

<sup>143</sup> e.g. (Cú Chullain dies following breaking his *geis* of not eating dog-meat): *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni* §11; Bettina Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn: A Critical Edition of the Earliest Version of 'Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni' with Introduction, Translation, Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary* (Maynooth 2009), ed.18-9 and tr.39. (The high-king, Conaire Mór brings about his death and the destruction of his kingdom by breaking his *gessi*): but this is provisional, depending on how one interprets a difficult passage in the existing fragments of Cin Dromma Snechta version of *Togail Brudne Uí Derga*, or what one takes to have been present in the Old Irish texts on which the tenth- or eleventh-century *TBDD* was based; on the former, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Geis, Prophecy, Omen, Oath', *Celtica* 23 (1999), 38-59 at 44; on *TBDD* as a Middle Irish text based on lost Old Irish material, see O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 18ff. (Other descriptions of a *geis* or *geisi*, but without evidence of the consequence of breaking them): 1) *Mesca Ulad*, §20, lines 234-5; J.C. Watson, ed., *Mesca Ulad* (Dublin 1941), 11; John T. Koch and John Carey et al, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales*, Celtic Studies Publications 1 (Aberystwyth 2003, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.), 106-27, at 110; 2) *Fled Bricrenn* §16; George Henderson, ed. and tr., *Fled Bricrenn: The Feast of Bricriu*, Irish Texts Society 2 (London 1899), ed.16 and tr.17; R.I. Best and O. Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre: The Book of Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929), 246-77, at 250, line 8215; Koch and Carey et al, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 76-105, at 83; 3) *Echtrae Nera* §13, lines 123-34; Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., 'The Adventures of Nera', *Revue Celtique* 10 (1889), 212-28, ed. at 222, tr. at 223; Koch and Carey et al, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 127-132, at 130.

Old Irish wisdom texts, *Tecosca Cormaic*<sup>144</sup> and *Audacht Morainn A*,<sup>145</sup> that the presence and maintenance of such *geisi* are unambiguously presented as integral to a ruler's overall maintenance of the justice by which he is ruler.<sup>146</sup> We should be cautious about concluding too much based on the late emergence of this idea, given that we are not in a position to determine how representative the extant evidence is relative to what has been lost. Nevertheless, it seems significant that even if the association of the maintenance of *geisi* with the maintenance of the ruler's justice may be based on much earlier beliefs, it is only after these two late Old Irish wisdom texts that sagas emerge which clearly assume this association,<sup>147</sup> the most important being the aforementioned tenth- or eleventh-century saga, *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*.<sup>148</sup>

Interpreted through this expectation, the kings of the early Irish sagas die when breaking their *geisi*, either because in doing so they have directly compromised their justice as

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<sup>144</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* §6.6; Fomin, ed. and tr., '*Tecosca Cormaic*', ed.158 and tr.159: 'rop sogeis' (=Let him be having good *geisi*). See Kelley, *A Guide*, 20 'which seems to mean that he must not break his *geisi*'.

<sup>145</sup> *AM A* §52; Rudolph Thurneysen, ed. and tr., 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', *ZCP* 11 (1916-17), 56-107, at 87: 'bid sogesse'; also Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, 70: 'bid sogessi', as otherwise noted in Maxim Fomin, ed. and tr., 'Recension A of *Audacht Morainn*', in Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, ed.118-26, at 126 and tr.119-27, at 127. This line of Fergus' edition is also cited and translated in Thomas Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*, Prophecy, Omen and Oath', 42 note 29: 'sogessi' (=of good *geiss*). For the ninth-century date of *AM A*, see Thurneysen, 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', 77-8: 'Immerhin möchte ich, alles zusammen-genommen, die Entsehungzeit nicht zu weit von 800 abrücken'.

<sup>146</sup> Following Kelly's interpretation of *sogeis* in *Tecosca Cormaic* ('which seems to mean that he must not break his *geisi*'), as opposed to Thurneysen's definition of *sogessi/sogheis* in *Audacht Morainn A*: 'leicht zu erbitten'; Kelley, *A Guide*, 20; Thurneysen, 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', 106. In this Kelley is close to Meyer's translation, 'having good *gessi*', which Fomin, in turn, follows exactly in his recent edition of *Tecosca Cormaic*; §6.3 of Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *The Instructions of Cormaic*, ed.12 and tr.13; §6.6 in Fomin, ed. and tr., '*Tecosca Cormaic*', ed.158 and tr.159. Yet, when Fomin translates the term as it appears in *AM A*, he is closer to Kelly than Meyer: 'sogessi' (=observing his *gessi*); Fomin, ed. and tr., 'Recension A of *Audacht Morainn*', ed.126 and tr.127. However this term is translated, its meaning must allow for the fact that it seems to be listed both as an example of the exercise of *fír flathemon*, in *Tecosca Cormaic*, and as one of its results, in *Audacht Morainn A*. For linguistic arguments against Thurneysen's translation, but with reference to Greene's historical research, see Eric P. Hamp, 'Varia III', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 158-62, at 61-2; David Greene, 'Tabu in Early Irish Narrative', in P.M. Tilling, ed., *Proceedings of the Third International Symposium organized by the Centre for the Study of Vernacular Literature in the Middle Ages - Medieval Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense 1979), 9-19.

<sup>147</sup> For complementary but largely parallel conclusions regarding the historical development of the concept of *geisi* generally, and references, see Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*, Prophecy, Omen and Oath'.

<sup>148</sup> Another notable example is the late Middle-Irish saga *Bruiden Da Choca*; Gregory Toner, ed. and tr., *Bruiden Da Choca*, Irish Texts Society 61 (London 2007). For relevant citations from further examples, see Charles-Edwards, '*Geis*, Prophecy, Omen and Oath', *passim*.

ruler,<sup>149</sup> or because their failure to remain just drives them on to doom themselves through the violation of their *geisi*, the discernment by which they were able to maintain their contractual obligations having been fatally undermined by this failure.<sup>150</sup> But if this theme in Middle Irish saga is made intelligible by late Old Irish wisdom-texts, it is not until the Middle Irish period that we have the first witnesses of such an idea in properly legal commentary.<sup>151</sup> And while they seem to be based on earlier sources, it is likewise not until the Middle Irish period that we find systematic compilations of which *geisi* are thought to belong to the kingly office of which kingdoms.<sup>152</sup> This is a significant development, as is the emergence of the idea that maintenance of these *geisi* is fundamentally the maintenance of the king's contract with the gods who are in some sense the basis of his capacity to maintain his justice.<sup>153</sup> However, relative to the basic idea that there is an exact correspondence between the state of the ruler's justice and the state of the ruler's kingdom and body,<sup>154</sup> it remains neither more nor less significant than any other instance which shows this principle at work.

### Middle Irish Sources – Poets

Nor has the idea that blisters will reveal a poet's false judgement faded away. The principle Middle Irish witnesses of this doctrine tend to emerge in the context of commentary on the narrative elements of *Auraicept na n-Eces* (*In Lebor Ollaman* [*LO*]),<sup>155</sup> of the *SM*, together with its Old Irish glosses<sup>156</sup> (*Aimirgein Glúngel tuir tend*

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<sup>149</sup> This raises a question which must be left unanswered for now, being outside the scope of this text: 'When a warrior (i.e. not a king) is portrayed as dying due to breaking a *geis*, is this similarly seen as the result of (or resulting in) a failure to maintain *fír fer* ('the truth/justice of men)?'.

<sup>150</sup> Debate on this subject mostly takes the form of debate on the reasons for the fall of Conaire Mór in *TBDD*; e.g. Connor, *The Destruction*, 72-81; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Gat and díberg in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', in Anders Alqvist *et al.*, eds., *Celtica Helsingiensia: Proceedings from a Symposium on Celtic Studies*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 107 (Helsinki 1996), 203-12 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 412-21].

<sup>151</sup> See the Middle-Irish prologue to *Bretha Éitgid* [*CIH* 250.13-4], as noted in Kelly, *A Guide*, 20. This passage has been discussed above in note 61.

<sup>152</sup> Myles Dillon, ed. and tr., *Lebor na Cert: The Book of Rights*, Irish Texts Society 66 (Dublin 1962); *idem*, ed. and tr., 'The Taboos of the Kings of Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 52 C (1951-2), 1-6, 8-25, 27-36.

<sup>153</sup> Best exemplified in *TGDD*; O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 75-81; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *síd*', *Éigse* 17.2 (1978), 137-55, at 142-44 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coir Sois*, 19-34, at 24-7]; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 136-7.

<sup>154</sup> See pages 30-5 above, and Chapter 3, pages 176-207.

<sup>155</sup> Roisin McLaughlin, ed. and tr., 'A Second Source for the Text on Judges and Poets in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to *Senchas Már*', *Celtica* 27 (2013), 18-37, ed. at 19 and tr. at 20: 'Ni bertis na

[AG]),<sup>157</sup> or in some combination thereof, such as we have in the text, given the name ‘A9’ by Roisin McLaughlin.<sup>158</sup> However, it makes a notable appearance in the non-canonical introduction to *Amra Choluim Chille* as well.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, in *UB*’s commentary tradition and in the texts deriving from it, together with the relevant Metrical Tracts (*MV*), that is, in all the Middle Irish texts concerned with outlining the poetic grades, the proper execution of the form of poetic composition which is appropriate to one’s rank continues to be the primary evidence that one is indeed a poet of that particular rank.<sup>160</sup> Of special interest here are the eleventh-century *MV II*<sup>161</sup> and a

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*hugdair-seo tra gubretha ⁊ ba deithbir, daigh at-raigdis bolga fora ngru[a]dhaib in tan do-berdis gubretha.* (=These authors never gave false judgements, and that was fitting, since blisters used to arise on their cheeks whenever they gave false judgements).

<sup>156</sup> Whilst bringing in elements of the *Bretha Nemed*.

<sup>157</sup> AG §17; Peter J. Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel tuir tend: A Middle-Irish Poem on the Authors and Laws of Ireland*’, *Peritia* 8 (1994), 120-50, ed. at 127 and tr. at 135: ‘Mac Áige dá mbered bréic / ástais bolga arin mbláithgéc, / dá ráided fir rib arís / bolga sin no sergatis’ (=When the son of Áige used to utter a lie blisters used to develop on the branch, when he used to say what was true to you again those blisters used to waste away). The a-stem feminine noun, *géc*, ‘a branch, a bough’, can also be used as a figurative way refer either to a person as a whole, or a person’s limbs. Further discussion of the meanings of this word and examples, may be viewed at the website for eDIL: (online at: <http://www.dil.ie/25489>), last accessed 11.08.2018.

<sup>158</sup> A9 §3; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., ‘A Second Source’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘Do-cuiridar cetamus bolga for deas-gruaidh Sin meic Aighi in tan do-bered claenbreith ⁊ dus-legdais athurrach iar fírbreith ⁊rl-’ (=Blisters were produced immediately on Sen mac Áigi’s fair cheek whenever he used to give a false judgement and they used to leave it again after a true judgement etc).

<sup>159</sup> The preface is part of the Middle Irish commentary on the *Amra*; [TCD 1441 (E 4.2)] version] J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, eds. and tr., ‘*Praefatio in Amra Coluim Cille*’, in Bernard and Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, ed. I, 162-3, at 162.11-2 and tr. II, 53-4, at 53: ‘ocus no-asaitis for ind filid fein na cnuicc oculus no-eiplid fo chét-óir diammad cen chinaid no-árad’ (=but upon the poet himself grew the ulcers, and he used to die immediately, if it was without fault he satirised’. This is quoted subsequently in the tract ‘On the Oppresiveness of Poetry’; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*’, *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899), 30-55, 132-83, 248-89, 400-437, ed. at 421-2 and tr. at 422: ‘Oculus no fásaidís ar in filid féin na cnuic, ⁊ no eiplid fochétóir, dia mbad cin cinaidh no aéradh’ (=And the ulcer would grow on the poet himself, and he would straightway perish, if he satirized the guiltless); discussed in Howard Meroney, ‘Studies in Early Irish Satire I-II’, *Journal of Celtic Studies* 1 (1950), 199-226, at 222.

<sup>160</sup> The evidence of this provided by *MV I* and *MV II* is found dispersed throughout Donncha Ó hAodha, ‘The First Middle-Irish Metrical Tract’, in Hildegard L.C. Tristram, ed., *Metrik und Medienwechsel / Metrics and Media* (Tübingen 1991), 207-244. However, Breatnach seems to provide a more convincing picture of the significance of *MV III* and *IV* in relation to them, with helpful extracts and translations to illustrate his point; Breatnach, ‘*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti*’, 62-72. That is to say, *MV III* and *IV* reflect different concerns than *MV I* and *MV II* (Breatnach), not a situation that has decisively moved on from them (Ó hAodha).

<sup>161</sup> *MV II* §110; Thurnysen, ed., ‘Mittelirische Verslehren’, in Windisch and Stokes, eds., *Irische Texte III.i*, 1–182, at 57-8: ‘Ceithri srotha déc inso síis .i. . . ⁊ idna láme ⁊ idna lanamnais ⁊ idna bel ⁊ idna foglama’. On the eleventh century composition of *MV II*, see Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics* (Dublin 1961), v.

text, designated by Liam Breatnach as *UB II*,<sup>162</sup> which is based on the version of *UB* that has glosses and commentary (such as one finds in *The Yellow Book of Lecan*, *The Book of Ballymote* and H3.18) and incorporates material from *MV II*. The reason being that both texts explicitly reproduce the doctrine and even the wording of *BNT*<sup>163</sup> and *UR* §6<sup>164</sup> regarding the necessity of the poet's purity (*idnae*) to his ability to function as a poet.<sup>165</sup>

To some scholars, the picture does in fact look somewhat different on the issue of *rosc(ad)*, which, as we have seen, is described in *BND* as the medium through which legal judgement must be expressed if it is to have any chance of being enactment of true justice. It is not mentioned at all in the amalgamated list of bardic and filic poetic metres in *MV III*, or in *MV IV*, something which has suggested to Donncha Ó hAodha that they represent a fading away of interest in *rocs(ad)*, such as we still find in *MV II*, in favour of the rhyming syllabic metres of the bards.<sup>166</sup> However, this seems just as likely to be due to the differing purposes of *MV III* and *IV* as any other reason.<sup>167</sup> Whatever the reasons for this absence may be, the late Middle Irish poem, *AG*, together with *A9*, still maintain that *rosc(ad)* is necessary to the execution of just legal judgements, demonstrating the currency of the idea in at least some quarters at that time. Although the scope of this affirmation of *rosc(ad)*'s legal significance differs in each case, in that *AG* follows an interpretation of *The Prologue to SM* which limits the post-*SM* legal use of *rosc(ad)* to the judgements which concern the poetic profession itself,<sup>168</sup> even as it makes the practice of 'true law' dependent on the study of pre-*SM rosc-*

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<sup>162</sup> *CIH* 541.19-558.25, at 550.21-2; for general discussion of this text, see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 7-13.

<sup>163</sup> *CIH* 2224.9ff, see page 37 note 77 above for text and translation.

<sup>164</sup> *UR* §6; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.104 and tr.105.

<sup>165</sup> The references to non-*UR* primary sources cited in the previous five footnotes are found in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 123.

<sup>166</sup> Ó hAodha, 'The First Middle-Irish Metrical Tract', 210 and 212.

<sup>167</sup> See note 213 above.

<sup>168</sup> *AG* §49-50; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glúngel*', ed.131 and tr.137: '49. "Geibed cách a dréichta de / –is ed téichta in túslaicthe. / Ná berat foscad filid / acht a roscad rodligid". Ó sin 'le ní ruscat breith / filid a llabrad ar leith, / acht a cuit and amar cách / in tan ná fégtha in firfáth' (=49. Let everyone take his shares of it –that is the legal rightness of the resolution. Let poets not give protection save in accordance with *roscad* of great lawfulness' / 50. Since then poets have not delivered a judgement using their distinctive speech, but their share was therein like everyone else's when the true reason used not to be perceived).



judgements,<sup>169</sup> whereas *A9* appears to take the *Bretha Nemed* on its own terms in maintaining that *rosc(ad)* is one of the ‘three rocks’ (*tri hailchi*) on which the enactment of any judgement is based.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, the principle that just poetic judgement occurs only when pronounced in a manner that has adequate formal qualities is present elsewhere relative to other forms of judgement. It is claimed in at least one Middle Irish tract, that a formally imperfect *tréfocal* is void, and can result in fines, or even the postponement of the poet’s case.<sup>171</sup> One must grant that a single text does not yet demonstrate broad consensus, even in the absence of contrary evidence. Nevertheless, as exceptional as the explicit statement of this restriction may be, it certainly seems concomitant to the requirement that a poet must use the ‘noblest metre’ he knows when making a *tréfocal*,<sup>172</sup> as well as the more commonly stated position that the legal practice of satire is restricted to *fili* to the exclusion of bards.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *AG* §42; Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.131 and tr.137, naming the third of the ‘*tríar nár*’ (=three noble professions), mentioned previously in §41: ‘Breithem re breithemnas mbil / a fesaib a fásaigib / rigit roscada filed, / má do-fégthar firdliged’ (=A judge for fine judgement, on the basis of sciences and precedents which the *roscads* of poets bind, if true law is observed). On poetic form as proof of the purity that makes ancient Irish poets necessary legal authorities, see *AG* §28; Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.131 and tr.136: ‘Finntar fégtar na filid, / daíne deiligthe in dligid; / do-fégthar cumma cumtaig / don Gaidile at glanugdair’ (=Let the poet be known and considered, people who distinguish the Law; it is seen from the shape of what they fashion that they are pure authors of Irish).

<sup>170</sup> *A9* §3; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., ‘A Second Source’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘*Sencha mac Ailella nicon beredh breith gen na tri hailchi astada caca breithe, .i. roscad ⁊ fasach ⁊ teistemain*’ (=Senchae mac Ailella never gave a judgement without the three lasting foundations of every judgement, i.e. legal verse (*roscada*) and precedent and evidence); Compare to note 134 above. However, *AG*’s departure from this doctrine does not seem to be in ignorance of the *Bretha Nemed*, given that it lists the ‘persons of the *Bretha Nemed*’ at *AG* §54 (Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.133 and tr.137) and the derivation of the *tréfocal* from it at *AG* §58 (Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.133 and tr.137). This does not, of course, prove thorough familiarity with every aspect of the *Bretha Nemed* texts. Yet it certainly suggests that *AG*’s reading of The Prologue to *SM* - in which Conchobar’s earlier prohibition of the use of *rosc* in legal judgements is emphasised at the expense of the account of Dubthach’s subsequent use of *rosc* in the final judgement of The Prologue - demonstrates a principled preference, on the specific issue of *rosc*’s legal significance, for a reading of the *Bretha Nemed* which decisively subordinates it to *SM*; [Conchobar’s judgement] *PSM* §10-11, at Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19; [Dubthach’s judgement] *DML*, lines i-xx; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29-30 and tr.6-8. For more on The Prologue to *SM*, see Chapter 2, pages 136-46.

<sup>171</sup> *The Prose Tréfocal*, *passim*; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The *Tréfocal* Tract: An Early Middle Irish Text on Poetics’, in Gordon Ó Riain, ed., *Dá dTrian Feasa Fiafraighidh: Essays on the Irish Grammatical and Metrical Tradition* (Dublin 2017), 1-66, ed. at 59-60 and tr. at 60-63. Also discussed in Howard Meroney, ‘Studies in Early Irish Satire III’, *Journal of Celtic Studies* 2 (1953-8), 59–130, at 122-130, esp. 125-6; referenced relative to the general connection between the composition of poetry and its effectiveness in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 116, together with note 115.

<sup>172</sup> *CIH* 552.9f; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘Addenda and Corrigenda to *The Caldron of Poesy*’ (*Ériu* xxxii 45-93), *Ériu* 35 (1984), 189-91, at 189: ‘. . . ⁊ is arin aisti as uaisli bís ag cach filed doní a trefocal do tabach na net negni .i. na nailbin’ (= . . . and it is in the nobles metre which any grade of poet has that he makes his trefocal to levy the penalty for the forcibly removed cattle, i.e. the herds’. For further

Of course, there are less ambiguously new developments as well. There is the expansion of bardic hierarchy beyond anything attested previously in *MV I*,<sup>174</sup> the first signs of the emergence of ‘Bérta na Filed’ (‘The Speech of the Poets’) as a discrete subject of study in *MV II*,<sup>175</sup> and, in general, the tendency in the Middle Irish period, noted by Ó Cuív, towards greater metrical complexity over time.<sup>176</sup> But in each case, the old doctrine, that a poet is only truly a poet insofar as the metres of his compositions reveal him to be so, seems to make this search for more perfect forms of composition (and more perfect ways of regulating them) all the more intelligible, rather than in any way becoming a casualty of the process.<sup>177</sup> The optimistic understanding of natural language which we have found to be inseparable from the way that the hierarchies of rulers, poets and clergy are conceived, would clearly require an ongoing attempt to improve what still appeared to remain unclear or undeveloped in past authorities, especially poetic authorities, fundamentally concerned as they are with language itself.

### **Irregular Manifestations of Poetic Judgement**

Yet this scholastic tendency we have observed in the Middle Irish sources towards further systematisation and synthesis does not escape creating a certain amount of ideological complexity. There are more than a few instances where further elaboration of the idea that the ethical character of a judgement will be directly manifest, as such, to

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discussion on the metrical perfection required of a *tréfolcal*, summaries of and references to relevant sources, as well as the importance of *BND* for Middle Irish ideas on the subject, see Breatnach, ‘The *Tréfolcal* Tract’, 2-9.

<sup>173</sup> Breatnach, ‘On Satire and the Poet’s Circuit’, 26: ‘That a *fili* could use the weapon of satire on behalf of others outside the boundaries of their *túath* is well attested in Middle Irish sources’. For some of these Middle Irish sources which portray the *filid* as the unique wielders of satire on behalf other members of their *túath*, see excerpts and translations in Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘Addenda and Corrigenda’, 189-91.

<sup>174</sup> Ó hAodha, ‘Metrical Tract’, 213ff.

<sup>175</sup> See *MV II* §25; Thurnysen, *Mittelirische Verslehren*, 38. For an overview and examples of *Bérta na Filed*, see Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘*Araile felmac féig don Mumain*’, 113ff.: ‘The term *Bérta na Filed* itself is at least as old as *MV II*, where it appears (§25) on the curriculum for the sixth year of study of a poet, and there are some definitely early examples of poems written in it . . . While there appears to have always been an element of vocabulary which was characteristic of poetry, what marks off *Bérta na Filed* is the near exclusive use of arcane vocabulary’.

<sup>176</sup> Brian Ó Cuív, ‘Some Developments in Irish Metrics’, *Éigse* 12 (1967-8), 273–90, but see Breatnach’s caution, on the evidence of *MV IV*, that this generalisation does not apply to all metres; Breatnach, ‘*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti*’, 72.

<sup>177</sup> Further emphasized by the fact that the organization of *MV I* and *MV II* seem to derive directly from *BND*. On this see, Breatnach, ‘*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti*’, 64, esp. note 53 and pages 67-9; also Ó hAodha, ‘Metrical Tract’, 217-9.

the senses, leads to the apparent conflation of the distinct ways in which the Old Irish sources took this to be manifest from hierarchy to hierarchy, or else, to an exploration of situations in which the interaction between these hierarchies involves a very high degree of mutual interrelation. For instance, where, in our Old Irish sources, the presence or absence of blisters on the cheeks was offered as the only bodily sign of the relative trustworthiness of a poetic judgement, in *OL*, *AG* and *A9*, it is only one sign among others. In *AG* and *A9*, blistering, or its lack, is, in fact, only cited as a sign of the judgements of Sencha mac Áigi,<sup>178</sup> saying that the soundness of the judgements of the other great poets and judges were revealed in a different way in each case.<sup>179</sup> However, what makes matters particularly complicated is that all of these texts are united in informing us that the truth (or else falseness) of Fachtna's judgements was revealed in the state of the mast-crop, and in the relationship of cows with their calves,<sup>180</sup> signs we would have expected to emerge only relative to the judgements of rulers.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> See note 157 above.

<sup>179</sup> *AG* §15; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glungel*', ed.127 and tr.135: 'Ro deilig Día dígrais dron / do cach fir d'f-b-sin sainmod / co mbered breith taitnim tric / rachta aicnid amnasglicc . . .' (=Unassailable, steadfast God has determined for each of those men a distinct way to give brilliant swift judgement by means of clever and ingenious natural law . . .). *A9* §3; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., 'A Second Source', ed.34 and tr.35: 'Cidh riasiu tra tísad Patraic, ro badur adhamrai di foillsightib in tan na derntais breithemuin a fir n-aignidh . . .' (=Before Patrick came, moreover, there were wondrous revelations when judges did not implement the natural truth . . .).

<sup>180</sup> *AG* §21-2; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glungel*', 128 and 135-6: 'Acus a mac Fachtna find, / dá mbered bréic—bad derb lim— / tuited mes cach muine mín / uile uile in n-aidche-sin. / Mad i n-aimsir blechta báin / no hindised í i-irdáil / no séntais baí láega lis / riu táeba ní tobraitis' (=And his son, fair Fachtna—I would be sure—that when he used to utter a lie the mast of every small thicket used to fall all and entirely that night. If it were in the time of white milking that he used to relate it [a lie] in an assembly, cows used to reject calves of enclosure; with them they used not to concern themselves); *A9* §3; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., 'A Second Source', ed.34 and tr.35: 'Fachtna a mac-sidhi, in tan no beredh breith gua, mad i nd-aimsir mesa do-tuitedh mes an tire a mbith a n-aenoidhci. Mad fir i nus beredh, fa hogh in mes forsín fidh. Is de fa hainm do-sum Fachtna Tulbrethach. Madh i n-aimsir blatha no sendais na ba a laigh' (=His son Fachtnae, when he used to give a false judgement, if it was during the time of mast, the mast of the land in which he was used to fall in a single night. If what he judged was true, the mast remained whole on the trees. That is why his name was Fachtnae Tulbrethach. If it was in the springtime, the cows used to reject their calves).

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, the following excerpt from *Recholl Breth* (*SM* 13), quoted and translated in Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The King in *SM*', 113-4; 'Atáat secht fiadnaise for-gellat goí cach rí: senad do sonda asa n-airlisi cen fir cen dlíged, détin aire inge mad tar cert, maidm Catha fair, múnae ina fláithius, díisce mlechta milliud mesa, séol n-etha. It é secht mbéochaindeala in só for-osnat goí cach rí' (=There are seven witnesses which attest the falsehood of every king: turning a synod out of their precinct without right or due cause, being the object of satire unless it be justified, his being defeated in battle, *famine during his reign, dryness of milch cows, destruction of mast, scarcity of corn*. These are the seven living candles which reveal the falsehood of every king [italics are mine]).

The synthesis of kingly and poetic juridical roles is certainly not without Old Irish antecedent. *UB*'s claim that a ruler's judgement is based both on the *roscada*, which are the basis of poetic judgements, and the Scriptures, which are the basis of ecclesiastical judgements, bears mention.<sup>182</sup> One might also consider *Tecosca Cormaic*'s requirement that a king be trained as a poet,<sup>183</sup> and *BNT*'s quotations of Conchobar and Cormac making judgements in *rosc(ad)*.<sup>184</sup> Yet while these may help us to understand the basis for an expansion of the signs of kingly justice in the direction of those belonging to poetic justice, such as we find in a figure like Cormac Mac Airt, neither offers any help in understanding this expansion of the signs of poetic justice in the direction of those belonging to kingly justice.

It is at least feasible this could be accounted for the fact that *AG* seems to use the term 'judge' (*brithem*) fairly interchangeably with 'poet' (*filid*) to describe Fachtna and the others. In which case, perhaps of the two it is 'judge' that should receive the emphasis. There is an extract from an unknown Old Irish text in Digest B which lists 'scarcity of corn and milk and mast' among the results of the falsehood committed by a kingdom

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<sup>182</sup> In *UB* we find that while poetic judgements are based *roscada*, and those of clergy are based on Scripture, those of rulers are based on both; *UB* [*CIH* 643.12=636.1]; Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 168: 'Nach breith egalsa dochuisin, is for fir 7 dlige 7 screpra consuiter. Breth filedh im[murgu]: forosgadhaibh consuiter. Breath flatha im[murgu] consuiter foraibh uili: foroscadaibh, et fasaigib, testemnaibh firaib' (=Any judgement of the church that exists, it is established on the basis of truth and entitlement and Scripture. [The] judgement of a poet, moreover, is established on the basis of *roscada*. The judgement of a ruler, moreover, is established on them all: on *roscada*, and precedents and true testimonies': we find that while poetic judgements are based *roscada*, and those of clergy are based on Scripture, those of rulers are based on both.

<sup>183</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* §3, lines 40-4; Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin 1909), ed.10 and tr.11: 'Foglaimm cach dána, / Eolas cech bérlai, / Druine mrechtrad, / Tacra co fásaigib, / Brithemnas co roscadaib' (=Learning every art, / Knowledge of every language, / Skill in variegated work, / Pleading with established maxims, / Passing judgement with *roscada* [lightly edited]).

<sup>184</sup> (Conchobar) *CIH* 2217.24-35. For discussion of these passages, see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 155, 170, 198-99. (Cormac) *CIH* 2213.6-15; 2217.8-23. For discussion of these passages, see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 73. *Rosc* judgements are also attributed to Conchobar and Cormac in *BND*; *CIH* 1126.27-32 and 1116.29-34 respectively; discussion in Stacy, *Dark Speech*, 199. Cormac is further depicted as succeeding in a judgement due to its superior rhetorical qualities (although in this case it does not qualify as *rosc*) in *Cath Maige Macrama* §63; Ó Daly, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Mucrama*, ed.58 and tr.59; discussion in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 81-2. Certain 'Stories from the Law Tracts' are relevant to *BNT*'s respective accounts Conchobar's (story III) and Cormac's (story II) poetic judgements; Dillon, ed. and tr., 'Stories from the Law-Tracts', ed.44-5 and tr.52-53. For the appearance of the 'Stories from the Law Tracts' as commentary on extracts of *BNT* and *BND*, and stories II and III as part of the content of those stories which appears to back to Old Irish originals, see Breatnach, *Companion*, 349-50. Further discussion of this topic is found in Chapter 2, pages 157-73.

(*túath*) in submitting a case to an unworthy judge.<sup>185</sup> Given that, in the time of the Old Irish law-tracts, the majority of judges (insofar as they were distinct from poets)<sup>186</sup> seem to have been directly appointed by the king of the *túath* in which they worked,<sup>187</sup> these results should perhaps be interpreted as demonstrating that kings were held to be ultimately responsible for the legal decisions which were made by their appointed judges. There is at least one passage in *SM* which would strongly support such an interpretation.<sup>188</sup> According to such a view, it would not, at any rate, be overly surprising if signs associated with the ‘justice of the ruler’ resulted from the legal decisions of a judge.

Relative to *SM*, this not only makes sense, but provides an alternative way of understanding the way that the justice or injustice of the judgements of the secular hierarchies are immediately revealed by physical manifestations. We have already briefly alluded to the contention raised by a certain reading of The Prologue to *SM*, which is part of *SM*’s Old Irish Glossing,<sup>189</sup> that the speech of the poets, with its metrical and aesthetic rigour, was, in the time of Conchobar, forever replaced as the universal juridical language by a form of language with royal associations that was

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<sup>185</sup> Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The King in *SM*’, 115: ‘Atáat secht mbrithemain nád fuigliter la Féinín. sechis gán thúaithe cenéoil a fuigell, is séol n-etha 7 mlechtá 7 mesa, is óen n-aicsean fodera galra 7 aincesa brithem forsa finntar gáu. birthem nád laimethar gell fri himmchosnum a brithe, bríthem cen fothae n-éoluis, brithem beras breith for lethtarae cen immaidbe do dib leithib’ (=There are seven judges to whom cases are not submitted in Irish law, and moreover to submit cases to them is falsehood on the part of people and kindred, it results in the scarcity of corn and milk and mast, it is one of the causes which bring about illnesses and tribulations: a judge who is discovered to have uttered falsehood, a judge who does not dare to give a pledge in respect of a dispute as to his judgement, a judge without foundation of knowledge, a judge who gives judgement on the basis of a plea by one side without arguing by both sides’.

<sup>186</sup> This is not always the case.

<sup>187</sup> Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 54, incl. notes; Liam Breatnach, ‘Lawyers in Early Ireland’, in D. Hogan and W.N. Osborough, eds., *Brehons, Serjeants and Attorneys: Studies in the History of the Irish Legal Profession* (Dublin 1990), 1-13, at 7-10.

<sup>188</sup> This conclusion is consonant with the expectations defined by the following passage of *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid* (*SM* 14) [*CIH* 231.15-31]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The King in *SM*’, 114: ‘Cis n-é téora haimsera inid apail a torad ar cach flaith combe dithli ith 7 mlichu 7 mes? Taithmech n-andburt, sóerad fuidre. fúaslucud dechmad, fúaslucud do mogaib. . . Atáat tri firther noda icat: forcomét do brithemnaib arná rucát gúbreith, almsana ó chách di cach thorud, nem foigell guae nó gúfiadnaisi i túaith’ (=What are the three occasions when his fruits perish from ever lord so that corn and milk and mast are destroyed? Undoing bequests [to the church], ennobling the semi-free, annulling tithes, releasing slaves . . . There are three countermeasures which remedy them: judges to take heed lest they give false judgement, alms from every produce [to be given] by all, no attesting of falsehood or false witness among the people’..

<sup>189</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 143-7, 169-72.

characterised by a contrasting rigour of transparency and plain-spokenness.<sup>190</sup> This would, as The Prologue suggests, make judgements more intelligible, but would offer no way for the relative truth of a judgement to be revealed in the sounds of its utterance. Or there would be no way unless the legal decisions of judges were alternatively conceived of as an extension of the judgements of rulers, as suggested above, so that their truth or falsity would be revealed in the same way as the state of the ruler's justice was generally. After all, we must remember that we had to turn to the *Bretha Nemed* tradition to find an account of the 'truth of the poets', or of sensible manifestations by which it was taken to be apparent to the senses. Thus Middle Irish texts like *AG* and *A9* are perhaps not then reflecting wholly new ideas so much as attempting to determine what *SM* means for the *Bretha Nemed* tradition on an issue in which they evidently take *SM* to be more authoritative. However, if so, the insistence of the non-canonical Prologue to *Amra Choluim Chille* that the presence or absence of blisters are a sign for or against poetic judgements in the Christian era,<sup>191</sup> along with the Middle Irish evidence, discussed above, for the continuing conviction that the metrical form of a poetic judgement as indispensable to its truth,<sup>192</sup> should serve as a caution to us that the *Bretha Nemed* is not always seen as the junior partner of *SM* on these matters.

That said, this does not necessarily need to apply to judges in distinction from the hierarchy of poets with which they are so closely associated, at least, not by the Middle

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<sup>190</sup> *PSM* §10-11; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19: 'Ba dorcha didiu in labra ro labrasatar ind filid isin fuigiull-sin 7 nírba réill donaib flathaib in brethemnus ro-n-ucsat. "Is lasna firu-so a n-oenur a mbrethemnus 7 a n-éolus," oldat na flaithi. "Is dongaba dō dorime leo. Ní tuicem-ni cétamus a rráidite." "Is menand," ol Conchobar, "biaid cuit do chách and-som óndú; acht a n-as dúthaig doib-sium de, ní-s-ricfe. Gébaid chách a drécta de." 11 Doallad didiu breithemnus ar filedaib acht a ndúthaig de 7 ro gab chách de feraib Érenn a drécht den brithemnus' (=Dark was the speech which the poets spoke in that case, and the judgement which they gave was not clear to the princes. 'Their judgement and their understanding belong to these men along,' said the princes. . . . 'Moreover, we do not understand what they say.' 'It is plain', said Conchobar: 'henceforth everyone will have a share [in judging]; except for that which pretains properly to them therein, it will not fall to their lot. Each will take their own portions of it.' 11. So poets were deprived of their power to judge, save for what pertained properly to them; and each of the men of Ireland took his own portion of judgement'). For further discussion on this, and the necessity of the Church to the eventual universality of this plain-spoken legal language, see Chapter 2, pages 169-72.

<sup>191</sup> See note 212 above.

<sup>192</sup> See pages 36-42 above.

Irish period in which *AG* and *A9* were written.<sup>193</sup> As Liam Breatnach has shown, the *ollam* had, by then, moved from being an official of the *túath* to being a direct appointee of the king, with an honour-price equal to that of the king which had appointed him.<sup>194</sup> Thus, a conflation of the effects of Fachtna's false judgement with those of kingly false judgement - such as we have observed in these Middle Irish sources - could reflect a sense that the king has become much more implicated in the judgements of his appointed *ollam* just as much as it may reflect a sense of longer standing, that he is implicated more specifically in those of an appointed judge. Such an interpretation would, in any event, be better positioned to account for the typically poetic manifestations of Sencha's<sup>195</sup> false judgements at the same time as the royal manifestations of Fachtna's.<sup>196</sup> But then, there are other possibilities to consider as well.

Since these figures of Amairgen, Aithairne, Morainn and the rest are presented in *OL*, *AG* and *A9* as authorities for the whole of Ireland, it also seems worth considering whether the phenomena in question may be the late result of a related idea, appearing in *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad*,<sup>197</sup> among other places,<sup>198</sup> that there is a supreme *ollam* over all the poets of Ireland. It certainly seems possible that the judgements made by a poet in such a role might be thought to require sensible proofs that go beyond that of the normal poetic hierarchy in order to provide adequate distinction between them. The

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<sup>193</sup> On the linguistic and historical grounds for dating *AG* to between 1050 and 1150; Smith, 'Aimirgein Glúngel', 124. On the linguistic grounds for assigning a generally Middle Irish dating to *A9*; McLaughlin, 'A Second Source', 21-9.

<sup>194</sup> Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 92-3; with reference to the Middle Irish text *Menman Uraird Maic Coisse*, see also Carey, 'The Three Things Required', *Ériu* 48 (1997), 52.

<sup>195</sup> See note 157 above.

<sup>196</sup> In earlier legal texts, Fachtna is associated with a judgement on cattle, but the truth or falseness of his judgements are not said to be manifest through the behaviour of cattle; Fangzhe Qiu, 'Wandering Cows and Obscure Words: A Rimeless Poem from Legal Manuscripts and Beyond', *Studia Celtica Fennica* 9 (2013), 91-112, esp. 101. However, Qiu further notes that the story of this judgement often occurs in the context of the explanation that '*ferb*' can mean both 'cow' and 'blister'; Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 66, 70, 102, 133, 149. It seems possible then that at the idea that cattle manifested the character of Fachtna's judgement come into the tradition through this ambiguity. In which case, it is still a '*ferb*' that reveals false judgement, just a different sort of '*ferb*'. However, this still leaves the problem of the mast-crop also manifesting the character of his judgements unsolved.

<sup>197</sup> *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* §1; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy of the Two Sages', *Revue Celtique* 26 (1905), 4-64, ed. at 8 and tr. at 9: 'Adna mac Uthid̄ir de thuathaib Ólnecmacht, ollam hÉrenn i n-écsi 7 fílidecht' (=Adnae, son of Uthider, of the peoples of Connaught, was the ollave of Ireland in science and poetry [lightly edited]).

<sup>198</sup> Such as the Annals, which speak of Cellach Úa Rúanada (ob. 1079), as the 'ardollam Érenn'; referenced in Ó hAodha, 'Metrical Tract', 209 and Breatnach, '*Sluindfet dúib dagaisti*', 52.

idea that the judgements of each of these figures are thought to be attended by physical evidence that is singular to them alone does, at any rate, appear to be related to the idea that they are on a level of their own, much as saints (each with their distinctive miracles) are, in relation to the ecclesiastical hierarchies.<sup>199</sup> Of all the explanations thus far, this seems the best able to account for the diversity in the physical manifestations of justice and injustice in the judgements of these poetic authorities.

However, there is at least one of these texts to which this solution cannot apply. *A9* clearly states that all these ‘wondrous revelations’ which occurred when ‘judges did not implement the natural truth’ belong to the time ‘before Patrick’.<sup>200</sup> Thus, unlike *OL* and *AG*, it seems to limit such things entirely to the pre-Christian past, thus lessening (if not removing entirely) any significance they could have for understanding how the judgements of contemporary poets were thought to operate. In this the prior comparison to the saints holds, but now in the sense that they manifest, in all their diversity, the kind of miracles God worked in Ireland before (and only before) they were superceded by the miracles of the saints proper. Thus despite the fact that *A9* maintains the *Bretha Nemed*’s doctrine that true judgement is necessarily manifest in poetic *rosc(ad)* it departs from the *Bretha Nemed* in failing to affirm any other sensible sign by which it may be recognised this side of Patrick.

Unfortunately the argument at hand does not allow us the leisure to resolve these problems in any decisive way. For our purposes the importance of these difficulties lies in their further confirmation of our provisional conclusion. Middle Irish literature generally assumes the truth of the old concept that the character of a given judgement (and of the one who makes it) is transparently manifest to the senses. And when it does not do so, this is not because it was never the case, but because of the current dominance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy’s less tangible mode of judgement. However, in its exploration of all the various potential results of this concept, it sometimes leads to conclusions which would seem difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate, were one only

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<sup>199</sup> Recalling that the rank-and-file of the clergy seem to provide no such signs of their status; see pages 43-8 above.

<sup>200</sup> See note 179 above.



to read their Old Irish sources as we have them. Finding the likely basis for a later idea in an earlier text is fair enough. But it is, after all, a rather different matter to discover something like a later idea in an earlier text in the light of that later idea, than it is to discover it as a result of reading the earlier text only by its own lights. However, an apparent lack of obviousness to one sitting on their own with a text, without the benefit of its subsequent interpretive tradition, does not necessarily invalidate the later idea as an interpretation of the earlier text. One must allow that profound interpretations of a text may emerge over the process of its interpretation that would not have been self-evident to its authors. But, before we may consider the matter sufficiently settled for the time being, we must turn to some other salient examples.

### **Clerical Curse and Poetic Satire**

We have not said anything yet about the ecclesiastical hierarchy in this last section. That is because there is little to say. As we discussed earlier, the sainthood of the saints seems invariably to be manifest in hagiographical literature through miracles which disrupt or else perfect the natural order embodied in the secular hierarchies. On the side of its perfection, sometimes this means that the saint out-rules the ruler, such as we find, for instance, in the supernatural signs of fecundity and abundance that characteristically spring up around St. Brigid.<sup>201</sup> However, such miracles also sometimes occur in a way which seems reminiscent of the proofs of poetic fitness. A saintly curse, as Tomás Ó Cathasaigh has noted, is not always easily distinguished from poetic satire.<sup>202</sup> Or at least, saints in early Irish literature are sometimes depicted as giving their curses and blessings, and other acts of prayer, in poetic form.<sup>203</sup> Yet there continues, to

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<sup>201</sup> *Bethu Brigte, passim*; Donncha Ó hAodha, ed. and tr., *Bethu Brigte* (Dublin 1978). *Vita I S Brigitae, passim*; Karina Hochegger, ed. and tr., *Untersuchungen zu den ältesten 'Vitae sanctae Brigitae'*, unpublished MPhil diss. (Vienna 2009), 100-201. Cogitosus' *Vita II S Brigitae, passim*; Hochegger, ed. and tr., *Untersuchungen*, 18-59; Seán Connolly and J.-M. Picard, tr., 'Cogitosus's *Life of Saint Brigit: Content and Value*', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), 5-27. On the interrelationships of these lives, see Richard Sharpe, 'Vitae S Brigitae: The Oldest Texts', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 81-106.

<sup>202</sup> Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Curse and Satire', *Éigse* 21 (1986), 10-15 [=Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 95-101].

<sup>203</sup> Ó Cathasaigh produces only one example of a saintly curse which is similar to a poetic satire in more than being given in poetic form. That such an example exists is certainly noteworthy. However, it is not, on its own, a sufficient basis for a general theory about their relationship in early Irish literature as a whole. On the contrary, given its apparent singularity relative to the evidence discussed here, its significance seems to be that of an interesting exception, rather than that of a characteristic example of a

my knowledge, to be no evidence of any such manifestation of a rank-and-file clergyman's suitability relative to his role.<sup>204</sup>

Where a poetic satire, and the more indirect poetic compositions which are its necessary prelude, must, as we have seen, meet strict metrical and thematic<sup>205</sup> requirements specific to the person and crime being satirised, the clergy seem not to need any poetic skill whatever in order to curse effectively, having recourse to the one-size-fits-all solution of maledictory psalm-chanting when simple prose will not do.<sup>206</sup> Due process must of course be observed in either case, just as it must in the legal process of distraint, in order to be successful.<sup>207</sup> But since a cleric must only follow an officially prescribed form, there is nothing in the form of the curse itself which, as it does in the case of a poet, reveals anything about the character of the cleric or the judgement which is involved in their act of cursing. The same logic obtains for hymnody. Where a poet must himself compose a poem, a poem which is, moreover, suitable to the moment, if he is to be rewarded for it, one need only read the words of a prayer like St. Patrick's *Lorica*,<sup>208</sup> St. Colum Cille's *Altus Prostatōr*<sup>209</sup> or the *Beati*<sup>210</sup> off the page in order to

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dominant pattern. In which case it undermines rather than supports Elliott's breathtakingly absolute claim that curses and satires are formally indistinguishable irrespective of time or culture; Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton 1960), 291-2; cf. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Curse and Satire', 95; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 117.

<sup>204</sup> For a late Middle Irish example of how the signs of justice that apply to one hierarchy do not apply to another, see *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill* §10.12-13; Dan M. Wiley, ed. and tr., *An Edition of 'Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill' from the Book of Ui Maine*, unpublished PhD thesis (Harvard 2000), 89-164, ed. at 121 and tr. at 149. Here St. Ruadán's eye is burst as result of the king Diarmait's curse. Contrary to what we might expect were this to happen to a king, there is no indication given that this might throw his status into question. On the contrary, it is Diarmait's reign which is approaching its immanent end. For the late Middle Irish dating of *Aided Diarmata meic Cerbaill*; Wiley, *Aided Diarmata*, 102-4.

<sup>205</sup> On the corresponding need for the expression of a praise poem to be appropriate to the role and status of the person praised, see Breatnach, 'Satire, Praise and the Early Irish Poet', 68-71.

<sup>206</sup> Dan M. Wiley, 'The Maledictory Psalms', *Peritia* 15 (2001), 261-79, esp. 265-8.

<sup>207</sup> Wiley, 'The Maledictory Psalms', 268-71.

<sup>208</sup> This is stated most straightforwardly by its Middle Irish preface; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 354 'Patraicc dorone in nimmunsa . . . Ocus is luirech hirse inso fri himdegail cuirp 7 anma ar demnaib 7 dúinib 7 dualchib. Cech duine nosgéba cech dia co ninnithem léir i nDia, ní thairisfet demna fria gnúis, bid dftin dó ar cech neim 7 format, bid co[e]mna dó fri dianbas, bid lúrech dia annain iarna étsecht' (=Patrick made this hymn . . . And this is a corslet of faith for the protection of body and soul against devils and men and vices. When anyone shall repeat it every day with diligent intentness on God, devils shall not dare to face him, it shall be a protection to him against every poison and envy, it shall be a defense against sudden death, it shall be a corslet to his soul after his death). However, the preface simply summarises what is everywhere assumed in the body of the *lorica* itself; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 354-8.

receive the reward that answers to them. Not even an appropriate disposition generally seems to be required.<sup>211</sup> This is all plain enough. However, ecclesiastical matters threaten to become somewhat more complicated relative to certain Middle Irish portrayals of the secular orders.

### ***Fír Flathemon and Sanctity***

In *Scél Néill Frossaig*, we find an account of a just judgement which was made by the late eighth-century king of Tara, after which the saga is named.<sup>212</sup> As we would expect of a just ruler, we are informed that ‘Ireland was prosperous during his reign. There was [the produce of the wood and of the earth], corn and milk in his time, and he had

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<sup>209</sup> The preface to the *Altus Prostatōr* in *Leabhar Breac* promises that that one who recites it ‘non erit in inferno post diem iudicii etiamsi multa mala egerit’ (=will not be in hell after Judgement Day even if he has done many evils); J.H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, eds. and tr., ‘Preface to the Hymn *Altus Prostatōr*’, in Bernard and Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, ed. I, 62-5, at 64-5 and tr. II, 23-26, at 25, as cited in Charles D. Wright, ‘Next-to-Last Things: The Interim State of Soul in Early Irish Literature’, in Carey *et al.*, eds., *The End and Beyond I*, 309-96, at 392; Brian Grogan, *Eschatological Doctrines of the Early Irish Church*, unpublished PhD diss. (Fordham University 1973), 201-2. For an anecdote concerning the *Altus Prostatōr* where its recitation is depicted as having similar effects, see Eugene O’Curry, ed., *Lectures on the Manuscript Material of Ancient Irish History* (Dublin 1861, repr. 1995), 529-31; John Carey, tr., ‘*Altus Prostatōr*’, in John Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 29-50, at 49-50.

<sup>210</sup> e.g. *Días Macclérech* §11-12; John Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Two Clerical Students and the Next Life’, in Carey *et al.*, eds., *The End and Beyond I*, 139-143, ed. at 142 and tr. at 143: “‘7 biair bliadain at bethaid & in biaid do gabail gach laithi ar m’annum-si,” ar si, “risin mbliadain-sin. Ar is i arada 7 slabra 7 muince is treisi do tabairt anma duine a iffium in biait.” 12. Ocus celebraidh cach ainim dib da cele 7 teit an ainim docum a colla 7 atracht a crech eisti ac techt innti 7 gurro tathbeoghad co dechad docum nime a cinn bliadna & in biaid tra as i urnaigte is dech fil ann hi’ (=‘And recite the *Beati* every day for my soul,’ it said, ‘throughout that year. For the *Beati* is the ladder and chain and collar which is most powerful for bringing a person’s soul from hell.’ 12. And each of them bade the other farewell. And the soul went to its body; and its shriek arose from it at going into it so that it was brough back to life, and went to heaven at the end of the year. And so the *Beati* is the best prayer that there is). For further examples of the recitation of the *Beati* as a means of saving the souls of the departed from punishment, see Carey, ‘The Two Students’, 139, note 4.

<sup>211</sup> Note that of all the examples above, only the preface to Patrick’s *lorica* makes the results provisional on the disposition of the one reciting, in this case on it being ‘co ninnithem léir i nDia’ (=with diligent intentness on God); see note 208 above.

<sup>212</sup> There are two Middle Irish copies of this work, both from a lost common source. For the LL’s version of this story (LL 35670-711), see R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O’Brien and Anne O’Sullivan, eds., *The Book of Leinster, Formerly ‘Leabar na Núachongbála’*, 6 vols. (Dublin 1954–1983) V, 1202-3; David Green, tr., ‘The “Act of Truth” in a Middle-Irish Story’, *Saga och Sed* (Uppsala 1976), 30-37, at 31-2. Wiley quotes a number of passages of this text and translation but with different editorial conventions than Best *et al* and some revisions of Greene’s translation; Dan M. Wiley, ed. and tr., ‘Niall Frossach’s True Judgement’, *Ériu* 55 (2005), 19-36, at 20-22, 25, 27-8. Where *Scél Néill Frossaig* is cited below, I have followed Wiley’s editorial conventions and his revisions of Greene. The *Liber Flavus Fergusoirum* version has not been published. On the sources and background of this text, see Wiley, ‘Niall Frossach’, at 19-20.

everyone settled on his own land'.<sup>213</sup> The particular interest of this passage for the concerns at hand arises when he correctly makes the judgement in question. That he would have to capacity to judge truly is only to be expected of one who is truly a ruler. However, this judgement effects more than the ongoing prosperity and peace of the land. Just prior to uttering his judgement Niall beomes flushed (*imdergad*), so that a vapour (*dé*) goes up from him. This vapour frees a hapless cleric who was being bourn useen through the air by devils overhead, scattering them, so that he falls to the earth.<sup>214</sup> Freeing clerics from devils, by vapour or otherwise, is not typically a result of even the best royal judgements. As a spiritual matter, it would seem to fall decisively within the sphere of the Church's activity, a conclusion which is driven home by its close similarity to a story about Colum Cille.<sup>215</sup>

In the preface to Colum Cille's *Amra*, we learn that 'pride of spirit' (*miad menman*) comes upon him when praised by the poets whose rights he has been defending, so that demons begin to fill the air above him. When one Baíthíne perceives this and rebukes him, Colum Cille immediately bows his head and performs penance. Upon raising his head once more a vapour (*ceo*) flies up from him which scatters the demons which had been gathering over him, thus freeing a cleric who had been held captive to by them for over year, who then, as in the story about Niall, falls safely to the earth below.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>213</sup> LL 35670-3; Best *et al*, eds., *The Book of Leinster* V, 1202; Greene, tr., 'The Act of Truth', 32; Wiley, ed. and tr., 'Niall Frossach', 22: 'Ba maith Hériu fria remis. Boí mess 7 class 7 íth 7 blicht fria lind 7 boí cach óen fora dúthaig oca'.

<sup>214</sup> LL 35700-6; Best *et al*, eds., *The Book of Leinster* V, 1203; Greene, tr., 'The Act of Truth', 32; Wiley, ed. and tr., 'Niall Frossach', 27: 'In tan iarum rucai-siu in mbreith firen forglide í mbuarach forsín nmaí [sic] dodechaid dott áil, is and don-rala-ni uasut-su. In dé iarum tánic dit-su ar th'imdergad foloí-side i n-ardda coro-scaíl na demna for cach leth. 7 níro- fêtsat m'fastud-sa occo issind aer co tudchad-sa for lár amal atchi-siu 7 corom-šáerad tri fírinni do flátha-su. 7 iss í ind fírbreth rucai-siu, or sé, forin lenam' (=But when you gave that fine righteous judgment woman who came to plead with you, we happened that time. The vapour, then, which rose from red flew up and scattered the demons in all directions, unable to hold me in the air, so that I fell down, freed] through the truth of your rulership-gave on the child).

<sup>215</sup> On this, see Wiley, 'Niall Frossach', 28ff.

<sup>216</sup> Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluimb Chille*', 38: 'ocus í n-oenfhecht dogntis in ceol sin [i.e. aibse]. Co tanic miad menman don chleríuch, co mba lan in t-acer do demnaib huasa chind. Co ro failsiged do Baeithin sin, ocus co ro chairig sede in clerech, 7 co tuc testemain fair a Bassil dia forcetal, co tuc in clerech choimm. 7 co nderna athirge, 7 co tuargaib iarsin 7 co roemid ceo mór dia chind, 7 co ro scailset ciaich sin; ut dicitur: Mór a ferta in chlerig caid. / í nDruim Cheta 'sind rigraith, / dethach a chind iar crabud. / dorat demna immgabud. // Dorochair in sacart de. / co rabé 'na fiadnaisse / iarna bith fri bliadain Iáin. / etir demnu 'na [n]drochdáiil'; Wiley, 'Niall Frossach', 29: 'And [the *filid*] were making that music simultaneously so that pride of spirit came upon the cleric until the air above him was full of

Given how much Middle Irish literature has been lost, it seems impossible, as suggestive as the parallels between these two stories may be, to say whether or not we are dealing with an intentional comparison between Niall and Colum Cille here, or a more widely occurring motif. Yet it seems clear though, however we understand the relationship between these texts, that Niall's saintly qualities are being emphasized. There is no difficulty in this as such. Sainthood is not exclusive to the ecclesiastical hierarchies and Niall is depicted as a pious Christian king in the other extant accounts of him. The problem lies in that his saintliness seems to be part and parcel with his capacity as a true ruler to judge justly. The cleric does not attribute his newfound freedom to something in addition to Niall's exercise of *fír flathemon*, but to his *fír flathemon* itself.<sup>217</sup>

A similar problem is found in the *Irish Ordeals*, where the pre-Patrician judge, Morainn, is said to have received a collar (*sín*) from St. Paul,<sup>218</sup> among other such collars of more local and less ecclesiastical provenance, which aids him in discerning truth from falsehood. In both cases, saintly miracle seems to be at least the partial basis of their ability to preserve their justice as ruler and judge respectively. It could initially be tempting to see these passages as evidence that Old Irish distinctions between the secular and clerical orders are beginning to break down at this point, but such an interpretation does not bear up under scrutiny.

These passages, as singular as they are in many respects, are but further explorations of a theme that is already familiar to us from the Old Irish law-texts. Directly, in *CG* and

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demons. That was revealed to Baithine and he censured the cleric and he quoted to him a text by Basil to instruct him. After that, the cleric bowed his head and performed penance. He then raised his head and a great mist erupted from his head, so that because of that mist the demons scattered off. As it is said [by the poet]: The miracles of the holy cleric / In the royal *ráth* at Druim Cett were great. / After [his] mortification, [the] steam from his head / Caused the demons great danger. // As a result of that, the priest fell down / Into his presence, / After having been a full year / Among the demons in their evil assembly'.<sup>217</sup> Literally, he tells Niall: 'corom-sáerad trí fírinni do flatha-su' (=I was freed through the truth of your rulership'); for references, see note 214 above.

<sup>218</sup> *Scél na Fír Flatha* §16; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.190-1 and tr.208-9: 'Bai didiu Sin aili Moraind and .i. Luidh Morann morbrethach co Pol abstal, ⁊ dobert eibistil uadh, ⁊ bidh 'ma bráigid. . . Antan dono doberedh Morann breth nogebeth epistil ima bragaid ⁊ ní abrad gaí iarum' (=Then there was another Sín Morainn "Collar of Morann". Morann of the Great Judgements went to Paul the Apostle, and brought from him an epistle and wore it round his neck. . . Now when Morann used to deliver judgement he would put the epistle round his neck, and then he would never utter falsehood).

The Introduction to *SM* (*SM I*) and by inference, in *UR* (among other poetic status-texts), we have seen that the seven-fold ordering of the secular hierarchies are conceived of as dependant, in some fashion, on the hierarchies of the Church. In the same way, these Middle Irish accounts conceive of the capacity for true judgement, on which both the ordering and activity of the secular hierarchies depend, as, in some fashion, dependent in turn on the revealed knowledge of the Church. Although this is not yet to say anything about the degree and character of this perceived dependence in any of the instances cited above. But whatever difficulties may arise from such a conception, they are evidently not new to the Middle Irish period. In which case, these later texts do not appear to represent a confusion of the earlier categories so much as a further exploration of what it means for the secular orders, to be what they are in distinction from the ecclesiastical order, in the context of their simultaneous dependence on it.

### **Conclusions**

In sum, we may conclude that the basic structure of the Old Irish unification and elaboration of Isidore's theories of natural language and law, which we outlined in the first section of this chapter, would have been present in Ireland, to some degree or another, into the twelfth-century and perhaps further. Firstly, it would have been present in the form of the Old Irish texts themselves, which continued to be copied, glossed, commented upon and otherwise used as authorities throughout the Middle Irish period and beyond. Secondly, it would have been present in the form of the Middle Irish glosses, commentary and other works which took up various aspects of this unified theory of natural language and law and expanded upon them (and Isidore), as their Old Irish sources had on Isidore (and on each other) before. It has been consistently evident that we may not describe the Middle Irish sources in question as typically conservative or creative in any unqualified way. They are conservative insofar as they seem to operate under the assumption that their Old Irish sources give an authoritative account of the principles of legal and linguistic reality, the correct understanding and application of which abides as their primary goal. However, the work of understanding and applying these sources can be, as we have seen, profoundly creative.

As they explored the limits of various aspects of this theory, its explanatory potential for contemporary problems, its apparent paradoxes and points of tension, it is evident that many of the results - although based to a great degree upon the elucidation, correction and clarification of preexisting texts - seem quite unlikely to have been foreseen by its Old Irish theorists. Nor is this particularly unexpected. For the theory of natural language which has been implicitly and explicitly involved in theory of natural politics throughout, is one in which older forms of knowledge, while always remaining authoritative, may always be improved upon. Irish is the most exact language because it is the newest and mostly completely the result of scholarly endeavour. Yet the three languages of Scripture always remain the necessary foundation and reference point of its improvements. Where Heraclitus once said, ‘the way up and the way down are one and the same’,<sup>219</sup> our early Irish scholars might add that likewise ‘the way forward is the way back’.

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<sup>219</sup> Frag. CIII; Charles H. Kahn, ed. and tr., *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge and New York 1979, repr. 2001), ed.74 and tr.75: ‘ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡστὴ’. The translation above is slightly different from Kahn’s. The most literal sense would be ‘the way up, down: one and the same’.

## CHAPTER TWO – NATURE AS INSPIRED KNOWLEDGE

### **Introduction**

Thus far, we have seen that the secular hierarchies described in early Irish literature are broadly characterised by their Isidorean idea of the natural, that is, by a strict agreement of appearance and reality. Moreover, we have also seen that this agreement is possible in different ways and to different degrees from hierarchy to hierarchy. Insofar as a ruler was truly a ruler, this was taken to be revealed in soundness of body and kingdom. Insofar as a poet was truly a poet, this was taken to be revealed by their unblemished face and the metrical perfection of their compositions. But this is not true of the ecclesiastical hierarchies as well. Because some realities are ineffable and others are not, such law and such politics as are variously based on them seem inevitably to reflect the contrast of their respective objects. Thus, the sensible manifestations of the ecclesiastical polity and its clerical members generally provide no evidence about the degree to which they may be regarded as truly being so, but conclusive evidence about members of the secular polities of rulers and poets. However, we have not yet determined very much about where the knowledge comes from that makes it possible for the arrangement and exercise of the secular hierarchies to accord with the natural order in their various ways of doing so.

In the process of outlining this structure, it has become possible to conclude that, in this political naturalness, they are conceived as working in a way that mirrors Isidore's theory of natural language, in which the essences of things, together with their interrelations, are manifest through sounds which exactly and immediately correspond to them. According to this theory, the exact correlation between sound and thing in natural language means that an analysis of the sounds of natural words will result in the essence manifest in those sounds coming to be progressively more intelligible to the analyst. Yet despite the optimism we have observed in early Irish literature regarding what may come to be known through such an etymological analysis of the Irish language, especially in its poetic uses, this does not in itself appear to have been thought



a sufficient epistemological basis for the due ordering of the hierarchies of rulers and poets.

Where the literature speaks of such matters, we have found that the order of secular hierarchies is taken to depend on the Church's sevenfold hierarchical order, which in turn depends on the sevenfold structure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This idea seems to have transcended party lines, with important witnesses of it occurring in *Críth Gablach*, The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) and *Bretha Nemed Toísech*.<sup>1</sup> But if this is so, how is it that the same texts are able to conceive of the secular hierarchies as pre-existing the arrival of the Church in Ireland? There seems to be only one possible explanation. Insofar as the internal structure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is conceived of as the ultimate source of the order of the secular hierarchies, the degree to which they are thought to pre-exist the establishment of the Church will be the degree to which the Holy Spirit must somehow be manifest through them without the mediation of the Church's institutions.

But this cannot happen in just any old way. The revelation of the Holy Spirit through the secular hierarchies must be lesser than the revelation of the Holy Spirit through the ecclesiastical hierarchies for it to be conceivable that the secular orders are in some way dependant on the Church's revelation once it becomes available. But it must also possess a unique content which that of the Church does not. Only then can it account for why the secular hierarchies are needed at all in the Christian era. Of course, any attempt to demonstrate the Church's need for something, or to define a way in which the Holy Spirit reveals itself, cannot escape being a theological argument, whatever else it may be. Therefore, our search will be best served by beginning at the beginning, with a consideration of the theological antecedents of medieval Irish ideas regarding such a 'non-ecclesiastical', or else 'natural' form of revelation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 45-7.

## The Nature of Natural Law – Patristic Background

For early Christians, and many pagan Platonists,<sup>2</sup> the task of living in accord with the divine ordering of reality requires much more than the determined application of our present capacities. In their eyes, the human soul, by virtue of being in this present world, no longer enjoys an unimpaired correspondence between its thinking and the structure of reality since, to use the language of Christian theology, its current state of rationality is a mere vestige of the ‘image of God’ (*imago Dei*) in which God is said to have made humanity in Genesis 1, an image now fundamentally distorted through humanity’s fall from Paradise. Such scientific and ethical knowledge as the human soul is understood to perceive in its present state of deficient rationality is thought only to be a glimpse of the greater order and life to which the soul most truly belongs.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the soul must undergo a restoration by means of a nature or natures superior to its own if it is to recover its own properly rational nature.<sup>4</sup>

Insofar as they speak on this issue there seems, up to this last point, to be near unanimity among the Latin Fathers and such Latin translations of the Greek Fathers as would conceivably have been accessible to the early Irish authors in question. However, there

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<sup>2</sup> The most dramatic example being Iamblichus. Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (Pennsylvania 1995) is a good introduction to the relevant issues, but for further nuances, see Nathan McAllister, *Systematic Theology: Iamblichus’ Reception of Plotinian Psychology*, unpublished MPhil thesis (Dalhousie University 2004), esp. 41-5.

<sup>3</sup> The manifold examples include the following. Eusebius’/Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.ii.19; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* I, 23. St. Anthony the Great, *Epistolae*, *passim*; [Latin recension] *PL* 40, col. 978-1000; Samuel Rubenson, tr., *The Letters of Saint Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis 1995), 196-231. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, esp. XVI-XVIII; *PG* 44, col.123-257, esp. 177-196; William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, tr., ‘Select Writings and Letters of Gregory of Nyssa’, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 28 vols. in 2 series (Oxford and New York 1886-89) Series 2 V, 387-427, esp. 404-9. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIV.xvi.22-3; *PL* 42 col. 1053-5; Stephen McKenna, tr., *Augustine: On the Trinity, Books 8-15* (Cambridge 2002), 160-3. See also Augustine’s realisation that he is in such a state; Augustine, *Confessiones*, VII.x.16; James J. O’Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols. (Oxford 1992) I, 82; Henry Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford 1992, repr. 1998), 123-4: ‘et inveni longe me esse a te “in regione dissimilitudinis”, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelso: “cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. Nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me”’ (=And I found myself far from you “in the region of dissimilarity” [quoting Plato, *Statesman* 273d], / and heard as it were your voice from on high: “I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me).

<sup>4</sup> On the fundamental interrelation of how the Jewish, Christian and Pagan Platonic philosophers understood the problem of the soul’s current state as not equal to its own true nature and the polyvalence of the term ‘nature’ itself, see Wayne Hankey, ‘Natural Theology in the Patristic Period’, in Russell Re Manning, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford 2012), 38-56.

is a fairly basic divergence among them regarding the degree to which the soul's capacity for moral knowledge has been impaired by its fall. In this matter, the four Latin Doctors:<sup>5</sup> Sts. Augustine,<sup>6</sup> Ambrose,<sup>7</sup> Gregory<sup>8</sup> and Jerome,<sup>9</sup> seem to stick closely to the formulations of Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>10</sup> For them,

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<sup>5</sup>A useful overview of much of the relevant material in the Latin Doctors may be also found at Andrew M. Greenwell's blog, *Lex Christianorum*, in the entries for March 2010:

<http://lexchristianorum.blogspot.com/2010/03/>

<sup>6</sup> *De diversis quaestionibus* LIII.2; *PL* 40, col.35-7; David L. Mosher, tr., *Augustine: Eighty-Three Different Questions*, *The Fathers of the Church* 70 (Washington, D.C. 1982), 91-4. *De sermone Domini in monte*, IX.32; *PL* 34, col. 1283-4; Denis J. Kavanagh, tr., *St. Augustine: Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons* (Washington, D.C. 1951), 139-42. *De Trinitate* XIV.xv.21; *PL* 42, col. 1051-2; McKenna, tr., *Augustine: On the Trinity*, 158-160. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* CXVIII.xxv.4; *PL* 37, col. 1574; Maria Boulding, tr., *Exposition of the Psalms 99-120* (New York City Press 2003), 462-3. *Epistola* CLVII, esp.xv; Al Goldbacher, ed., *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis Episcopi: Epistulae*, CSEL 34.i-iii (Prague, Vienna and Leipzig 1884-94) III, 449-88, esp. 462-4; Roland Teske, tr., *Letters*, 4 vols., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* II.1-4 (New York 2001-5) III, 16-39, esp. 25-6.

<sup>7</sup> Notably, Ambrose, *Epistola* 73; *PL* 16, col. 1251-4; Members of the 'Oxford Movement', tr., *The Letters of S. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan* (Oxford 1881), 433-6. Ambrose, *De officiis* III.15-28; Ivor J. Davidson, ed. and tr., *Ambrose: De officiis*, 2 vols. (Oxford 2012), ed.362-70 and tr.363-71. Of the Latin Doctors, Ambrose's understanding of natural law is the most ambiguous relative to our present concerns.

<sup>8</sup> Note *Moralia in Job*, IV.xxxii.63-5, where St. Gregory talks about the patriarchs, he sounds as though he includes faith, and what it makes possible, in the structure of natural law itself. However, at XXVII.xxv.47-8, he describes natural law otherwise, as something which reveals the moral character of each person's actions, whether they desire this knowledge or not. Compare VII.vii-ix.7-9, X.vi.6-10; Marci Adriaen, ed., *Gregorius Magnus: Moralia in Iob*, 3 vols., CCSL 143 and 143A-B (Turnhout 1979-1985) I, 207-9, III, 1366-8, also I, 338-41, 537-44; Charles Marriott, tr., *Morals on the Book of Job by S. Gregory the Great*, 3 vols., *Library of the Fathers* 18, 21, 31 (Oxford 1844-50) I, 229-32, III, 234-6, also I, 369-71 and 579-85.

<sup>9</sup> Notably *Epistola* 121; Isidore Hilberg, ed., *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi: Epistulae*, 3 vols., CSEL 54-6 (Vienna and Leipzig 1910-18) III, 1-55. *Comm. in Matt.* I.iii.15-16, II.xi.21-2, III.29-31, VI.xxv.26-29; Émile Bonnard, ed. and tr., *Saint Jérôme. Commentaire sur S. Matthieu*, 2 vols., *Sources chrétiennes* 242, 259 (Paris 1977), ed. I, 94, 228, II, 126-8, 224-8 and tr. I, 95, 229, II, 127-9, 225-9; Thomas P. Scheck, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on Matthew*, *The Fathers of the Church* 117 (Washington, D.C. 2008), ed. I, 94, 228, III, 126-8, 224-8 and tr. I, 95, 229, III, 127-9, 225-9. *Comm. ad Gal.* II.16, III.2, V.17-21; *PL* 26, col. 343-4 348-50, 411-18; Andrew Cain, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on the Galatians*, *The Fathers of the Church* 121 (Washington, D.C. 2010), 112-4, 120-2, 224-35. *In Eccl.* II.3, line 42; Paulus de Lagarde, G. Morin and M Adriaen eds., *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos. Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum. Commentarioli in psalmos. Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, CCSL 72 (Turnhout 2010 – online edition), this may be viewed at the website, 'The Library of Latin Texts: Series A' (online at: <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/Toc.aspx>), accessed at 17.08.2018; Richard J. Goodrich and David J.D. Miller, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 66 (New York and Mahwah 2012). *Comm. in Ezek.* I.7; *PL* 25, col. 21-4; Thomas P. Scheck, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ezekiel*, *Ancient Christian Writers* (Mahwah 2016). On St. Jerome's reception of Origen's natural law doctrine in *Epistola* 121, see Hammond, C.P., 'Philocalia IX, Jerome, Epistle 121, and Origen's Exposition of Romans VII', *The Journal of Theological Studies* XXXII (1981), 50-81, esp. 59-67. For Jerome's transmission of Origen's doctrine of *synderesis* in his *Comm. in Ezek.*, see Douglas Kries, 'Origen, Plato, and Conscience [Synderesis] in Jerome's *Ezekiel* Commentary', *Traditio* 57 (2002), 67-83.

<sup>10</sup> *Commentaria in epistolam b. Pauli Romanos* [*Comm. in Rom.*, hereafter], esp. III.ii.10, vii.5-8, IV.iii.1-2, v.7; *PG* 14, col. 839-1290; Thomas P. Scheck, tr., *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., *The Fathers of the Church* 103-4 (Washington, D.C. 2001-2), esp. I, 191-3, 210-3, 252-3, 262.

natural law most often describes the residual capacity for ethical knowledge and action which remains to the soul in its present fallen state. However, for Eusebius,<sup>11</sup> Lactantius<sup>12</sup> and especially St. John Cassian,<sup>13</sup> the natural law seems to be equated with the capacity for ethical knowledge and action which the soul had prior to its fall,<sup>14</sup> rather than what it still possesses in its current state. As such, natural law is not, according to them, what remains to the soul of its ethical life apart from what may be restored through the perception of faith. Rather, it is the ethical content of the soul's dependence on God through faith, to the degree that this dependence has not been lost through The Fall and further abuses of the soul's powers of deliberation.

Thus far it may appear that what we have here is no more than a tendency to apply the same term to two different aspects of the same situation. Ultimately, however, this is not the case. According to the former view, the natural law is an indelible feature of the soul's rational capacity,<sup>15</sup> which, as such, is accessible to all people at all times as a clear testimony against sin, allowing no one any excuse, but not providing the soul, of itself, with the means of attaining the saving righteousness (*iustus*) which it pre-figures to some degree, but which is truly known and enacted by faith alone. Yet by means of this law, the soul is capable of inferring enough about the incorporeal realities it no longer apprehends that it is possible to recognize a true revelation of such realities when it appears.<sup>16</sup> This is all-important, since it is only through an apprehension of the Image

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<sup>11</sup> Notably, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.ii.6, 10 and 18-23; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte I*, 13-27.

<sup>12</sup> *Divinae Institutiones*, I.v.1-vii.13, VI.viii.1-ix.24, VI.xvii.1-xviii.2; Brandt and Laubmann, eds., *Lactantius Firmianus: opera omnia I*, 13-28, 507-14, 541-7. He speaks of nature as being able to lead someone to a conception of God, and the need for a natural, universal law, but sees any knowledge of the actual content of what that law requires as being wholly dependent on what is revealed through faith.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, John Cassian, *Conlationes*, I.xix; III.xii-xxii, X.x; XIII.i-xviii; *PL* 49 col. 477-1328, at 508-510, 575-84, 831-6, 897-946; Boniface Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, (New York and Mahwah 1997), 57-9, 131-9, 378-83, 467-91.

<sup>14</sup> On the presence of a similar doctrine in St. Anthony's *Epistolae*, and his following of St. Clement of Alexandria in this regard, see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 73-4. But note here his comment that the explicit naming of this knowledge that belonged to the soul at its first creation as the 'natural law' does not occur in the Latin version of his letters.

<sup>15</sup> Origen leaves open the possibility that some few may succeed in obliterating the natural law in themselves through extreme hardness of heart; Origen, *Comm in Rom.*, II.viii.7; *PG* 14, col.891-2; Scheck, tr., *Origen: Commentary on Romans I*, 130-1. Ambrose follows him in this, see references in note 7.

<sup>16</sup> Origen, *Comm. in Rom.*, I.xvi.5-6, III.i.7; *PG* 14, col. 863-4, 924-5; Scheck, tr., *Origen: Commentary on Romans I*, 90-91, 181. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, III.v.13.49-50; William Green, ed., *De libero*

of God in the primary sense (i.e. Christ), by the perception of faith, that the image of God in it may begin to be restored from the rump of it that remains in the form of the natural law.<sup>17</sup> According to this way of understanding the problem, it is still better to be obedient to no more than natural law, than to be disobedient to it. Although Augustine, who speaks most explicitly on this issue, does not seem to conceive of this as resulting in any more than physical blessings, which, as such, are enjoyed only in this life.<sup>18</sup>

However, according to the latter view, the natural law - understood here in the sense of the divine law which was implanted in us at our first creation - has no such nigh-invulnerable remainder. Thus, the natural law, while present in all,<sup>19</sup> is not known by all, not in its wholeness. Rather it has become so corrupted by humanity's initial fall,<sup>20</sup> and by subsequent occasions for sin, that, prior to Moses, only a few (namely, the Patriarchs, and those like them) were able to sufficiently preserve or cultivate the dependency on divine illumination through which it is maintained, so as to retain any accurate notion of morality whatever. According to Cassian, it is only the fear of punishment inspired by the Mosaic law which prevented all knowledge of natural law from being lost utterly prior to the advent of the Incarnation.<sup>21</sup>

A good point of comparison<sup>22</sup> here is the account of the putative virtues of pagan philosophers in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*<sup>23</sup> and Cassian's *Conlationes*.<sup>24</sup> Augustine

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*arbitrio*, CCSL 29 (Turnhout 1970); Peter King, tr., *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice and Other Writings* (Cambridge 2010), 82-3. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, VIII.10; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 226-7; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 311-3.

<sup>17</sup> Origen, *Comm. in Rom.*, I.xix.8, II.v.4, vii.6; IV.v.11, vii.6; V.viii.12; PG 14, col. 868-9, 880-1, 888-9, 976-8, 985-6, 1011-2; Scheck, tr., *Origen, Commentary on Romans*, 100-101, 114-5, 125-6, 261-4, 275-6, 359.

<sup>18</sup> *De civitate Dei*, V.15-16; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 149; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 203-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Conlationes*, VIII.xxiii; PL 49 col. 761-4; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 308-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Conlationes*, V.xxiv.2; PL 49 col.640; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 283.

<sup>21</sup> *Conlationes*, VIII.xxiv.3; PL 49, col. 764-7; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 310.

<sup>22</sup> The contrast between Augustine and Cassian here seems to bear comparison to the contrast between Plotinian and Iamblican understandings of the soul's current relationship to the realities from which it has fallen. On this contrast as nuanced rather than a confrontation of absolute opposites, see McAllister, *Systematic Theology*.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *De civitate Dei*, VIII.x-xii; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 226-8; Bettenson, *The City of God*, 311-5.

<sup>24</sup> *Conlationes*, XIII.iv; PL 49, col. 903-4; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 469-70.

sees the virtues of pagan philosophers as virtual rather than actual because they are attained for their own sake,<sup>25</sup> or for the sake of a plurality of gods,<sup>26</sup> and not for the sake of the God<sup>27</sup> who is the true end of all desire.<sup>28</sup> Yet, while such virtues have the character of sin, since the pursuit of them as an end in themselves, or for other false ends, involves the subordination of higher to lower goods,<sup>29</sup> they are correct relative to their immediate practical context.<sup>30</sup> Cassian, however, sees the virtues of pagan philosophers as no more than illusion.<sup>31</sup> For him it is only as the soul, in a spirit of contrition, allows itself to be self-consciously led and instructed by the Spirit of God that any sort of virtue whatever becomes possible.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Nature of Natural Law – Early Irish Literature**

Given the general dominance which the Latin Doctors' concept of 'natural law' has in subsequent speculation on the subject, it is easy to assume that this must be what is meant when this term appears in early Irish Literature. The grounds for such an assumption might seem to be further strengthened by the historiographical use to which it is often put in medieval Ireland. As Carey has pointed out, natural law is consistently associated in early Irish literature with the patriarchal figures who precede the advent of

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<sup>25</sup> *De civitate Dei* IX.iv, XIX.iv; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 251-3, II, 664-9; Bettenson, *The City of God*, 345, 852-7.

<sup>26</sup> *De civitate Dei* VIII.xii, X.i-iii, XIX.xi; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 229, 271-6, II, 674-5; Bettenson, *The City of God*, 269-70, 371-5, 881-4.

<sup>27</sup> *De civitate Dei* XIX.xx-xxi; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 687-9; Bettenson, *The City of God*, 881-3.

<sup>28</sup> *De civitate Dei* XV.xxii, XIX.x-xi; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 487-8, 674-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 636-7, 864-6.

<sup>29</sup> See also *Contra Julianum* IV.iii.21-22; Ernst Kalinka and Michaela Zelzer, eds., *Santi Aureli Augustini opera: Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*, CSEL 85 (Vienna 1974); Matthew A. Schumacher, tr., *Saint Augustine: Against Julian*, *The Fathers of the Church* 35 (New York 1957), 186-8. *De spiritu et littera* XXVII.48; Karl Franz Urba and Joseph Zycha, eds., *Sancti Aureli Augustini: De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de Baptismo paruulorum ad Marcellinum libri tres, De spiritu et littera liber unus, De natura et gratia liber unus, De natura et Origine Animae libri quattuor, Contra duas Epistulas Pelagianorum libri quattuor*, CSEL 60 (Leipzig and Vienna 1913), 155-229, at 202; John Burnaby, tr., 'The Spirit and the Letter', in John Burnaby, *Augustine: Later Works* (Philadelphia 1955), 195-250, at 231-2.

<sup>30</sup> *De civitate Dei*, XIX.25. See also V.12-15; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 696; Bettenson, *The City of God*, 891, also 196-205.

<sup>31</sup> *Conlationes*, XIII.v.2ff.; *PL* 49 col.904ff.; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 469.

<sup>32</sup> *Conlationes*, XIII.v.4-vi.3; *PL* 49 col.905-8; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 470-1.

formal law in the narrative of *Genesis*.<sup>33</sup> In this arrangement, the age of natural law occurs at the beginning of a three-, or sometimes four-part, historical development. The unwritten ‘law of nature’ which predominated during the time of the pre-Mosaic patriarchs is distinguished from, and supplemented by, the written ‘law of the letter’ or ‘Scripture’ (*recht[a] litre*),<sup>34</sup> revealed to and through Moses. This ‘law of the letter’ is sometimes grouped with or closely followed by the ‘law of the prophets’ (*recht[a] fáide/fatha*). However, in all cases,<sup>35</sup> the law ‘of the New Testament’ (*nua-fiadnaise*),<sup>36</sup> or else, ‘of the Gospel’ (*soscelai*),<sup>37</sup> manifest in the person of Christ, is the pinnacle of the development.

<sup>33</sup> For discussion and sources, see John Carey, ‘The Two Laws in Dubthach’s Judgment’, *CMCS* 19 (Summer 1990), 1-18, at 9; McCone, ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, 10-12; Ó Corráin, ed. and tr., ‘Irish Vernacular Law’, 284-307.

<sup>34</sup> Other significant references include The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) §1; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text ‘SM’*, ed.4 and tr.5: ‘Senchas fer nÉrenn, cid conid-roíter? Comchuimne dá sen, tindnacul clúaise di araíli, díchetal filed, tórmach ó recht litre, nertad fri recht n-aicnid. Ar it é trénaílg in sin frisa n-astaiter bretha in betho’ (=The tradition of the men of Ireland, what has preserved it? Joint recollection of two elders, transmission from one ear to another, chanting of poets, augmentation from the law of Scripture, reliance on the law of nature. For those are the firm foundations on which the judgements of the world are fixed). *PSM* §7; Carey, ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18: ‘Is ann ro herbad do Dubthach taisbéad breithemnusa 7 uile filidechta Érenn 7 nach rechta ro fallnasat la firu Érenn i recht aicnid 7 i recht fáide, i mbrethaib indse Érenn 7 i filedaib doaircechnatar donicfad bétra mbán mbiait .i. recht litre’ (=Then it was entrusted to Dubthach to exhibit judgement, and all the poetry of Ireland, and ever law which had held sway among the men of Ireland, in the law of nature and the law of the prophets, in the judgements of the island of Ireland and among the poets who had prophesied that the white language of the *Beati* would come, i.e. the law of Scripture). But see also Dubthach’s judgement itself, where he refers to it simply as the ‘fiadnaisi náesa núí’, i.e. the (=testimony of [the] new law); *DML*, line viii; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.7. Würzburg Glosses on Timothy 1, 29a gloss 16; Stokes and Strachan, ed. an tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 687: ‘.i. maniatat indarecht peccad foir uetus et nouum † natrirecte .i. naturae rl. . .’ (i.e. unless the two laws—Vetus et Nouum—fasten a sin upon him, or the three laws, to wit, *naturae*, etc. . .).

<sup>35</sup> That is, in all cases in which the New Testament is seen as inaugurating a law. The eighth-century *Commentarius Wirziburgensis In Matthaem*, for example, only lists the law of nature, the law of Scripture (or the written law), and the law of the prophets. It is possible that the legal significance of the New Testament is included under the rubric of ‘law of Scripture’, together with the Mosaic law. This is, after all, more or less what *SM* and The Prologue to *SM* do. However, its middle-placement in the list makes the matter highly ambiguous; Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium, ed., *Commentarius Wirziburgensis In Matthaem necnon et glossae / Opera theologica peregrinorum aetatis patristicae* (Turnhout 2011 – online edition), 81, lines 17-8, this may be viewed at the website, ‘Archive of Celtic Literature’ (online at: <http://clt.brepolis.net/acll/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=159041>), accessed at 18.08.2018: ‘legem naturae tantum’ transgressi sunt, hae uero tres LEGES i. e. naturae et litterae <et> prophetiae’.

<sup>36</sup> This is also sometimes referred to as the *bérlae báin* (=the white language). See note 34 above for use of this term in The Prologue to *SM*. See Chapter One, note 102, for its use in *BNT* and *Míadslechteae*.

<sup>37</sup> See the Old Irish Glosses on *Cáin Fúithirbe* (*CIH* 773.7-21); Ó Corráin, ed. and tr., ‘Irish Vernacular Law’, 291: ‘. . . i. bith menma na mbretheman inad (?) atginnti nad imraomathar fot ro mbar hi reibh ecreitmhe condo urrort ainfis bait[se]; slain ma derellsat asind recht aicnid do-rat Dia doibh .i. is fai asbert-som anisim ara mbe menmai cach bretheman da tabarr eolus hi recht litre 7 soscelai 7 fis fenecais 7 gac[h] negnai arna drellat as . . . Fearb nDe .i. briathar De ni fuircle nech i recht De . . . Berta Dia dhuin

Like the doctrine of natural law exemplified by Augustine *et al*, this scheme takes natural law to be in some way different and distinguishable from the forms of revelation represented by the Mosaic law, and the law of Grace which succeeded it. Similarly, it would by all appearances, seem to be inherently in contrast with the doctrine of natural law exemplified by Cassian *et al*, which takes there to be no other natural law than that which is attained through faith by the righteous of all ages. Therefore, one might well expect that this scheme, where it appears in early Irish literature, would be a reasonably certain sign that a more Augustinian doctrine of natural law is implicit. There is only one problem with such an interpretation. None of the medieval Irish texts which directly consider the basis of pre-Christian (or otherwise extra-ecclesiastical) moral knowledge, even those which make use of this historiographical arrangement, seem to support interpreting natural law in its typically Augustinian sense. The assertion that every human soul has an insufficient, but in some manner, reliable, store of innate ethical knowledge seems not to be attested, or if so, certainly not to be the norm. On the contrary, a Cassian-like sense, that the natural law is exclusively revealed by the Holy Spirit through faith, appears to prevail.

Counterintuitive as this may seem at first glance, it is not without precedent. Of the theological authorities which both make explicit use of a comparable scheme<sup>38</sup> and are

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.i. do-bert Dia do Mhaisi 7 do apsdolaibh . . . Iar fenechus .i. iarsin ained do-rat Dia duin' (=Let the judges take care that they are not pagans who did not transgress for as long as they were in periods before the faith until ignorance of perfect baptism impaired them is they deviated from the natural law which God gave them. This is why he said that: that every judge to whom knowledge of the law of the letter and of the gospel and the learning of *fénechas* and of every wisdom is given should take heed that they do not deviate from it . . . The word of God i.e. the word of God; nobody avers in the law of God . . . Which God gave us i.e. which God gave to Moses and the Apostles. In accordance with Irish law (*fénechas*) i.e in accordance with the nature God has given us).

<sup>38</sup> e.g. Augustine's *Enchiridion* CXVIII; *PL* 40, col. 287-8, esp.287; Albert Cook Outler, tr., *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*, The Library of Christian Classics 7 (Louisville 1955, repr. 2006), 410-1: 'Nam fuit primitus ante Legem; secundo sub Lege, quae data est per Moysen; deinde sub gratia, quae revelata est per primum Mediatoris adventum. Quae quidem gratia nec antea defuit, quibus eam oportuit impertiri, quamvis prop temporis dispensatione velata et occulta' (=The first period was before the law; the second under the law, which was given through Moses; the next, under grace which was revealed through the first Advent of the Mediator. This grace was not previously absent from those to whom it was to be imparted, although, in conformity to the temporal dispensations, it was veiled and hidden. For none of the righteous men of antiquity could find salvation apart from faith in Christ). See also his *De Trinitate* IV.iv.7; *PL* 42 col. 982-3; Edmund Hill, tr., *Saint Augustine: The Trinity* (Hyde Park, New York 2010, 2nd ed.), 157.



likely to have been available to the Irish authors in question,<sup>39</sup> at least Rufinus-Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* appears to present natural law in a way that clearly contrasts with that of Augustine and the rest, and is similarly harmony with Cassian, though not necessarily with the same results as we shall find in our early Irish sources.<sup>40</sup> There is also an interesting passage in Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* where, in the context of a description of this three-age scheme, he says that God 'deigned to illumine the First Age of the world by natural law through the patriarchs'.<sup>41</sup> Natural law in this case cannot be that which is common to all people because it is only through the patriarchs that his illumination is manifest. And yet neither is it simply what is known to the saints of any time, because its exclusivity to the patriarchs means that it remains distinguishable from the illuminations which are proper to the holy people of other ages.<sup>42</sup> To try and determine the nuances of what Rufinus or Bede understood to be going on here is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.<sup>43</sup> However, as we turn to consider the early Irish evidence, it will be useful to keep in mind that at least some of

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<sup>39</sup> Isidore seems to be firmly on the Augustinian side of things in this matter; *Etym.* V.iv.1; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117: 'Ius naturale [est] commune omnium nationum, et quod ubique instinctu naturae, non constitutione aliqua habetur' (=natural law is common to all nations, and, because it exists everywhere by the instinct of nature, it is not kept by any regulation). For his use of the three-age scheme in question, see *Etym.* VI.xvii.18; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 144: 'Primum enim tempus est ante legem, secundum sub lege, tertium sub gratia; ubi iam manifestatum est sacramentum prius occultum in prophetico aenigmate: ideo et propter haec tria saeculi tempora resurrectio Domini triduana est' (=For the first age is before the Mosaic law, the second under the law, and the third under grace; where the sacrament is now manifest, earlier it was hidden in prophetic enigma. It is also because of these three ages of the world the resurrection of the Lord is on the third day).

<sup>40</sup> I am uncertain whether St. Anthony's letters would have been available in Latin translation. However, they certainly bear mentioning as a similar example. See reference in note 14 above.

<sup>41</sup> *De temporum ratione* LXIV; Charles W. Jones, ed., *Beda opera pars I: Opera didascalica*, 3 vols., CCSL 123A-C (Turnhout 1975-1980), 241-544, at 456; Faith Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool 1999), 152: 'Prima namque saeculi tempora lege naturali per patres, media lege literali per prophetas, extrema charismate spiritali per seipsum ueniens illustrare dignatus est'.

<sup>42</sup> Part of the interest here is that Bede also speaks of a 'natural law' which is much the same as the Augustinian doctrine we have been describing; *In Genesim*, 4:20a-22b and 6:4a; *PL* 91, col. 74, 83-4; Calvin B. Kendall, tr., *Bede: On Genesis*, Translated Texts for Historians 48 (Liverpool 2008), 156, 170.

<sup>43</sup> There is a clear need for systematic work on the different things meant by 'natural law' in patristic literature. Two possible ways of making sense of such a situation seem obvious: 1) 'natural law' is the first stage in a succession of forms of knowledge revealed by faith, each more complete than the last, 2) 'natural law' has more or less the same content as the knowledge made available by faith in any age, but more limited in the extent of its effects. In this case, the natural law would be least and first in that its effects are only felt as far as the limits of one's extended family (e.g. the family of Abraham); the Mosaic law would be intermediate as having effects that are felt as far as the limits of a state (e.g. Israel); the Gospel would be superlative in its lack of any limitation on the extent of its effects. However, neither of these possibilities will turn out to be sufficient to the case at hand.

their Christian authorities speak of a natural law that only ever emerges as the product of the Holy Spirit's illumination by faith, at the same time as they find this three- or four-fold scheme of history a useful means of distinguishing in some way between it and the forms of revelation represented by the Mosaic law and the Christian gospel.

### The Milan Glosses

The *Milan Glosses* (*MGP*) contain some of the most candid speculation on the basis of natural law. In the glosses on *Psalm* 17, we are told that the ordering of the elements of creation manifests God (*dia . . . nundfoilsigedar*)<sup>44</sup> no less than a teacher (*praeceptóir*) does by speaking.<sup>45</sup> This is, in fact, the reason for which they were created,<sup>46</sup> 'that God might be known and learned through them'.<sup>47</sup> Nor is this a difficult lesson for anyone to understand.<sup>48</sup> For people of every nation and language are able to understand it<sup>49</sup> without any 'art of education or study'.<sup>50</sup> Further on, in the glosses on *Psalm* 22, it is claimed that without the knowledge of God it is not possible to distinguish between 'what is good or evil to do'<sup>51</sup> since things that seem like 'truth' (*fír*) to humans are not necessarily truth from God's absolute perspective. This being the case, every deliberation that is attempted without reference to him is said to be empty.<sup>52</sup> But

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<sup>44</sup> 'dia', in the previous clause, is the implied direct object here.

<sup>45</sup> *MGP* 42b, gloss 18; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 115: 'i. ní lugu asnindet lathar innandule dodia 7 nundfoisigedar indáas bid praeceptóir asidindissed 7 nodprithched ho belaiþ' (= i.e. not less does the disposition of the elements set forth concerning God and manifest Him than though it were a teacher who set it forth and preached it with his lips).

<sup>46</sup> See also, *MGP* 145c, gloss 4; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 481: 'i. amal is trí accomol nildule Xterissedar indomon sic imfolangar oínmolad do dia trichocetal inna nule n.dule' (= i.e. as it is through the conjunction of many elements that the world consists, so praise is effected to God through the concert of all the elements).

<sup>47</sup> *MGP* 42b, gloss 13; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 115: 'i. atorbae aratorsata .i. doathgniu 7 etarcnu dáe treu'.

<sup>48</sup> *MGP* 42c, gloss 13; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 117: 'i. nidoirb lannech atabairt' (= it is not difficult for anyone to construe it).

<sup>49</sup> *MGP* 42c, glosses 12 and 14; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 117.

<sup>50</sup> *MGP* 42c, gloss 2; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 116: 'i. censairse . foglaimme 7 frithgnama doneuch'.

<sup>51</sup> *MGP* 51b, gloss 7; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 159: 'i. nad fes cid as maith no as olc denum manídarti écnae dae' (= i.e. that it is not known what is good or evil to do, unless the knowledge of God were given).

<sup>52</sup> *MGP* 51b, 27; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 160: 'i. nach comairle dong(ní) duine sech dia noserassaigedar dia' (= i.e. every counsel that a man makes apart for God, God makes it void'.

whoever will trust (*nodn-eirbea*) in God will be given knowledge (*intellectum*) by him,<sup>53</sup> so that he may know how to avoid the evil and choose the good.<sup>54</sup> This knowledge is not simply derived from the conceptual knowledge of God's existence and providence mentioned in the glosses on *Psalm 17*, which would seem to act as the necessary precursor to trusting him,<sup>55</sup> but an 'answer (*aithesc*)' regarding 'what is to be done, or what is to be avoided'.<sup>56</sup> Thus, when a gloss on *Psalm 21* states that the heavens (*nime / caeli*) teach 'morality' (*bestatu*: glossing *mores*; which, in turn, glosses *iustitiam*),<sup>57</sup> it seems most likely that we should understand it in a sense that reads the glosses on *Psalm 17* in the light of those on *Psalm 22*. Namely, the heavens teach justice, precisely insofar as they teach about God, who himself teaches the 'truth' (*fír*) of a given situation to those who, upon knowing of him, trust him. These glosses are complimented, in turn, by the glosses on *Psalm 1* where we find that 'faith (*ires*) is opened up to the

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<sup>53</sup> This idea is also discussed at length in the *Würzburg Glosses*. See *WGPE*, 14c, glosses 22-31; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus I*, 594: '22. .i. araní immeraiher iarcolinn isgnáth gáo et fír nand ní íar colinn didiu moimradudsa sed secundum deum et non est medaium in illo . . . 29. .i. bainse dún epert gue airintí labrathar indiunni .i. iesus cristus is fírion side . . . 31. .i. níroibe iniesu christo est et non .i. fír et gáu acht is est nammá robói and .i. fír .i. biddixnugud fírinne' (=22. i.e. for that which is cogitated according to the flesh, false and true are usual therein. Not then, according to the flesh is my cogitation, *sed secundum deum et non est medacium in illo* . . . 29. i.e. it were hard for us to utter falsehood, fore He that speaketh in us, even Jesus Christus, He is Just . . . 31. i.e. in *Iesu Christo* there were not *Est* and *Non*, that is, the True and the False, but it is *Est* only that was in Him, that is the True, even eternal existence of truth).

<sup>54</sup> See Isaiah 7:15.

<sup>55</sup> It is directly stated elsewhere that real knowledge of any sort is impossible for the person who fails to have conceptual knowledge of God's providence; *MGP* 55d, gloss 25; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus I*, 182: '.i. nifil chosmailius fír doneuch asber nadmbed dligned remdeicsen dáe dudoinib sech remideci dia dunaib ammandib amlabrib' (=i.e. there is no semblance of truth to anyone who says that there is no law of providence of God for men, for God provides for the animals).

<sup>56</sup> *MGP* 51b, gloss 8; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus I*, 159: '8. .i. dobeir dia aithesc cid as denti no cid as ingabthi do retaib ata chosmaili fri fír. la doini 7 bes ní bat fira ladia' (=8. i.e. God gives an answer what is to be done, or what is to be avoided, of things that are like truth in the eyes of men, and perchance they are not true in the eyes of God). See also *MGP* 51b, glosses 7 and 10; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus I*, 159: '7. .i. nad fes cid as maith no as olc denum manídtarti écnae dáe. . . 10. .i. intan asmber duaid intellectum tibi dabo sechis ardi son dombera dia doneuch nodneirbea ind 7 genas triit confestar cid as imbabthi do dénum diulc 7 cid as deinti do dimaith . aithesc tra lesom insin apersin dáe' (=7. i.e. that it is not known what is good or evil to do, unless the knowledge of God were given, . . . 10. i.e. when David says, *intellectum tibi dabo*, that is a sign that God will give to everyone that shall trust in Him, and work through Him, that he may know what evil he must avoid doing, and what good he must do).

<sup>57</sup> See the respective glosses on the two consecutive clauses 'ADNUNTIABUNT CAELI IUSTITIAM' and 'STUDIO IN MORES' (*MGP* 45b, glosses 15-6), in Aaron Griffith and David Stifter, ed. and tr., 'New and Corrected ms. Readings in the Milan Glosses', *Études celtiques* 40 (2014), 53-84, at 64: '.i. inna nime | fadesin | í. it <índ> | inna nime ata forcit|laidi' (=the heavens themselves, that is, it is the heavens that are teachers); '.i. bestatu forchanat.' (=i.e. morality which they teach).

understanding (*engnae*)<sup>58</sup> through ‘well-doing’ (*degním*) and ‘good works’ (*caingnímai*), in which ‘faith’ seems to be occupying that position held by ‘trust’ in the gloss on *Psalms* 22. Thus, the moral action that is taught by God, and the moral action by which one has the faith that allows one to be taught by him, are mutually reinforcing, each giving rise to the further possibility of the other as they progress. As a theory regarding how ‘truth’ or ‘justice’ of any sort is possible, this will be particularly valuable for any consideration of the ‘truth of the ruler’ or ‘of the poet’, discussed above. While it cannot be assumed that any author who speaks of such things necessarily has this theory in mind, it remains that it provides a contemporary theoretical basis regarding how such a ‘truth’ may be obtained and maintained, to which there seem to be no definable alternatives elsewhere in such relevant literature as has yet been edited.

### **Muirchú’s *Vita sancti Patricii***

Yet, while the *Milan Glosses* are exceptional for the extent of their speculation on how a moral law comes to be known through the study of nature, they are certainly not lacking in ideological parallels. Notably, the much earlier story of Monesan, in Muirchú’s *Vita sancti Patricii*, seems to present the same perspective in a much simpler form.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *MGP* 14c, glosses 15, 16 and 19; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 12: ‘15. .i. arosailther hires tri degním, 16. hochotarsnu .i. innarbanar hires dano trí drochgnimu . . . 19. .i. aisndís istrichaingnímu rosegar 7 arosailther indhires foirbthe do engnu’ (=15. i.e. faith is opened through well-doing, 16. i.e. on the contrary, i.e. faith is, moreover, driven out through evil deeds . . . 19. i.e. the setting forth that it is through good works that perfect faith is attained and is opened up to the understanding).

<sup>59</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvi; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, 62-123, ed. at 88 and tr. at 89: ‘[2] Quodam igitur tempore cum tota Britannia incredulitatis algore rigesceret cuiusdam regis egregia filia, cui nomen erat Monesan, Spiritu Sancto repleta, cum quidam eius expeterent amplexus coniugalis non adqueuit cum aquarum multis irrigata esset undis ad id quod nolebat et deterius erat compelli potuit. [3] Nam illa cum inter uerbera et aquarum irrigations solita esset interrogabat matrem et nutricem utrum conpertum habere<n>t rotæ factorem qua totus illuminatur mundus, et cum responsum acciperet [per quod conpertum haberet] solis factorem esse eum cui caelum sedes est, cum acta esset frequenter ut coniugali uinculo copularetur, luculentissimo Spiritus Sancti illustrata <consilio> ‘Nequaquam’, inquit, ‘hoc faciam’. [4] Querebat namque per naturam totius creaturae factorem in hoc patriarchae Abraham secuta exemplum’ (= [2] At a time, then, when all Britain was still frozen in the cold of unbelief, the illustrious daughter of some king—her name was Monesan—was full of the Holy Spirit. Assisted by Him, although many desired to marry her, she accepted no proposal. Not even when floods of water were frequently poured over her could she be forced to do what she did not want and what was less valuable. [3] When, in between beatings and soakings with water, she was insistently urged (to do so) she kept asking her mother and her nurse whether they knew the maker of the wheel by which the world is illumined, and when she received the answer that the maker of the sun was he whose throne was in

Monesan is said there to be ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (*Spiritu Sancto replete*)<sup>60</sup> prior to contact with Christianity. This is, in some way, the result of her practice of searching for the creator of the world ‘through nature’ (*per naturam*),<sup>61</sup> a practice which seems to be undertaken under her own power, as it were. However, the apparent result of her inquiry into nature, is not only that she has become convinced of the existence of God, but that she has come to be in sufficiently direct contact with him that she is described as ‘enlightened with the luminous counsel of the Holy Spirit’.<sup>62</sup> It is this ‘counsel’ which seems to reveal to her at once, the ideal of celibacy and the means of resisting the various attempts made to convince her, through argument or torture, to give up this ideal. Thus, the whole doctrinal structure we found in the *Milan Glosses* is present. Contemplation of nature leads to a knowledge of the divine cause of nature which translates into a further participation in the wisdom of that cause that, in turn, makes an authoritative deliberation on moral difficulties possible. Moreover, the availability of this ‘counsel’ seems to be inseparable from her ongoing obedience to it, in which case, we have the same interdependence of right action and faith the *Milan Glosses* led us to expect.

### **A Rational Discipline**

What we seem to have here, to refer back to the earlier discussion of rational disciplines, is a greatly simplified version of the dialectical method found in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Plato’s *Parmenides*, by their Neoplatonic commentators.<sup>63</sup> Or, rather more accurately, these texts seem to be the inheritors of an approach, common to Platonising Stoics, certain Middle-Platonists and many early Christian theologians,<sup>64</sup> which was

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heaven, she, frequently urged to enter into the bond of marriage, said, enlightened by the luminous counsel of the Holy Spirit: ‘I shall never do that.’ [4] For through nature she searched the maker of all that is created, following in this the example of Abraham the patriarch).

<sup>60</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvii.2; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, ed.88 and tr.89.

<sup>61</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvii.4; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, ed.88 and tr.89.

<sup>62</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvii.4; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, ed.88 and tr.89: ‘luculentissimo Spiritus Sancti illustrata <consilio>’.

<sup>63</sup> See discussion and references in Chapter 1, pages 20-1.

<sup>64</sup> The central texts for this ‘common’ Platonic tradition (i.e. that which is not exclusive to the developments following on the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides*) are Plato’s *Symposium* 210a-212c and *Phaedrus* 245a-257b; [*Symposium*] Kenneth Dover, ed., *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge 1980), 60-3; Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, tr., ‘Symposium’, in Cooper and Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works*, 457-505, at 492-4; [*Phaedrus*]; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* II; Alexander

later decisively elaborated, through a Neoplatonic engagement with some of Plato's earliest commentators, with results which were largely unknown to the Latin West prior to Eriugena's translation of Ps. Dionysius.<sup>65</sup> The intricacies of this history will, unfortunately, have to be dealt with at another time.

The importance of the comparison, for our purposes, is that both methods arrive at a concept of the divine cause of creation, and its continued ordering, through a process of study which begins with a study of nature, insofar as it is evident to the senses. In either case, it is, most often, the ability to conceptualize the divine cause of nature, that prepares the student of nature to begin to be directly taught or inspired by the divine cause represented by that concept.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, one's progress in this venture is universally assumed to depend in some way upon a corresponding progress in moral purity, hence the rareness of those who have made much progress before the appropriate forms of institutional life have come into being.<sup>67</sup>

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Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, tr., 'Phaedrus', in Cooper and Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works*, 506-56, at 523-33.

<sup>65</sup> However, it was only possible to actually identify these results as Parmenidean in character following William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides* in the thirteenth-century; Raymond Klibansky, 'Plato's *Parmenides* in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1.2 (1943), 281-30, at 284-6.

<sup>66</sup> Such a journey to theological vision by means of the study of physics is most famously exemplified in Christian theology by Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Augustine's *Confessions*. For the *Consolation*, see Wilhelm Weinberger, ed., *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae consolationis libri quinque*, CSEL 67 (Vienna 1935); Victor E. Watts, tr., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* (London and New York 1969). For the *Confessions*, see O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions I*; Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. For this aspect of both works, and the general importance of Philo of Alexandria to this theme in the Fathers, see Hankey, 'Natural Theology', *passim*. However, the earliest evidence of which I am aware for knowledge of Boethius' *Consolation* in Ireland is from the twelfth-century; Ó Néill, 'Irish glosses', 1-17. Augustine's portrayal of his unlearned mother, Monica, as enjoying a theological vision as a result of the contemplation of the natural order might seem especially relevant here; *Confessiones* IX.x.24-5; O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions I*, 113-4; Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, 171-2. But I am similarly not aware of any evidence for early knowledge of the *Confessions* in Ireland. Moreover, we must remember that, contrary to our early Irish sources, he sees some sort of quasi-ethical life being possible even without such an illumination by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he seems to see Monica's theological vision as the crown of her life of simple piety rather than its beginning (as it was for him as a philosopher), given its occurrence just prior to her death. The Latin version of Flavius Josephus' *Antiquitates Iudaicae* seems to mediate this Philonic theme in a way that is, at once, closer in character to what we have found in these early Irish texts, and more likely to have been known to their authors; see note 79 below.

<sup>67</sup> That is, in both cases, one's ethical state directly affects the degree of what one is able to see by faith. However, the first emergence of ethics follows upon the epistemological recognition of God in our early Irish sources, an emergence which then in turn makes more comprehensive theological recognitions possible, and so on and so forth. Yet for those that see some form of ethics as being innate in the soul, the

The great difference between these respective approaches lies in the number and definiteness of the steps towards that goal, together with the extent of the results understood to follow from it. Where the Neoplatonic system moves from the sensible, through every level of reality subsequently implied by the last (which is to say, through very many such levels), to the first cause, the approach manifest in the *Milan Glosses* and the *Vita* implies a much less multi-layered sense of reality, in that it moves directly from a contemplation of the corporeal order to a contemplation of its incorporeal cause. Thus, where a dialectically verifiable account of all the levels of reality results from the Neoplatonic process, in addition to the theological insights made possible by divine inspiration,<sup>68</sup> the confirmed results of the process here, seem, understandably, to be restricted to an inspiration which grants its recipient empirically verifiable<sup>69</sup> moral discernment, such as is necessary for a successful negotiation of the sphere of individual action.

This is not to say that the *Milan Glosses* and the *Vita* are necessarily at odds with such other texts as may see a like process as resulting in considerably more knowledge (we shall see, in fact, that it does not) but simply that no more is definitely claimed here, and that this seems to be in keeping with the lack of theoretical steps which they describe. Whatever the significance that further cosmological knowledge may have for these matters, the basic distinction between Creator and created seems to be seen as sufficient for a person to begin to be taught by the Holy Spirit concerning moral knowledge. It remains that a certain amount of cosmological knowledge is implicit in this received moral knowledge since it seems to rely on a correct evaluation of an absolute hierarchal

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exercise of this innate capacity seems to be the necessary preliminary, not only to the recognition of God, but to the philosophical study of nature in the first place. See, for example, Origen, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, preface; Luc Brésard and Henri Crouzel, eds., and tr., *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, 2 vols., Sources chrétiennes 375-6 (Paris 1991-2) I, ed.39-45 and tr.40-46. His interpretation of the books of Solomon definitely have philosophical knowledge preceding direct mystical knowledge of God, but in this case, moral knowledge seems to precede philosophical knowledge, rather than resulting from direct knowledge of God.

<sup>68</sup> For Proclus as exemplary of this aspect of Neoplatonism, see Daniel Watson, 'Images of Unlikeness: Proclus on Homeric σύμβολον and the Perfection of the Rational Soul', *Dionysius* 31 (2013), 57-78, esp.64ff.

<sup>69</sup> Empirically verifiable in the sense that, as described in Chapter One, the justice or lack thereof in a moral act is manifest physically, in the body of the actor and the property over which they have responsibility, or, in the case of a poet, in metrical defects.

relationship of goods, insofar as it applies to the dilemma in question, so that Monesan's refusal to marry, is, for example, a refusal of what is objectively 'less valuable' (*deterius*).<sup>70</sup> However, the emphasis of both these texts, as in Cassian, is decisively on the divine, rather than the human side of the equation when considering how knowledge of any sort of moral truth is possible. The significance that such scientific knowledge as may be obtained by merely human capacities has in relation to the divine gift of ethical knowledge seems to be of the decisive but limited sort that a pilot-light has in relation to a gas-cooker.

### **The Image of Abraham**

The narrow bounds in which merely human rationality operates, in the shared perspective of these texts, becomes all the more evident when we consider Muirchú's *Vita* in the light of its sources. The most striking feature here is the comparison of Monesan's revelation of God to that of Abraham. It is normal enough that Abraham should be evoked. In addition to his association with natural law, noted above, he tends to be the classic example in Christian tradition, from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans onwards,<sup>71</sup> of the degree to which direct revelation of God is possible without the help of divinely instituted liturgical hierarchies. What is not at all common, is the suggestion that Abraham's self-conscious study of nature was the necessary precursor to this revelation. Augustine and Origen, for example, present philosophical study as preliminary to mystical knowledge of God,<sup>72</sup> especially in a Christian context, but nowhere as indispensable to it.<sup>73</sup> Thus, it is to be expected that the philosophical study of nature would not generally be numbered among Abraham's activities in the greater part of patristic literature. It would not make much sense to emphasize what is not essential to faith, when writing about faith's primary typological representative. Even so, the idea that Abraham's revelation of God came about as a culmination of his

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<sup>70</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvii.2; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', ed.88 and tr.89.

I.27. Compare to the idea in the seventh-century Old Irish wisdom-text, *AM*, that the justice of the ruler depends on his correct estimation of the relative worth of the beings he governs. See Chapter Three, pages 201-2, 205-7.

<sup>71</sup> See also John 8:56.

<sup>72</sup> See notes 66-7 above.

<sup>73</sup> See the discussion of philosophy as the 'handmaiden' of theology below on page 140, incl. note 240; see also discussion of Augustine's portrayal of his mother in note 66 above.



philosophical study of nature is developed at length by Philo of Alexandria,<sup>74</sup> is relatively well-attested elsewhere in Hellenic Judaism<sup>75</sup> and even occurs in Eusebius' *Preperatio Evangelicae* XI.vi.<sup>76</sup>

However, the only sources of this idea which seem as if they could have been available to Muirchú<sup>77</sup> are The Book of Jubilees,<sup>78</sup> or more likely, Flavius Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae*,<sup>79</sup> both in Latin translation. Of course, were the idea to come from another

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<sup>74</sup> e.g. *De Abrahamo* XV-XVII; F.H. Colson, ed. and tr., *Philo: Volume VI* (Cambridge, Mass. 1984), 4-137, ed. at 38-44 and tr. at 39-45.

<sup>75</sup> e.g. Artapanus, Pseudo-Eupolemus and Alexander Polyhistor etc., as referenced and discussed in Annette Yoshiko Reed, 'Abraham as Chaldean Scientist and Father of the Jews: Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154-168, and the Greco-Roman Discourse about Astronomy/Astrology', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35.2 (2004), 119-158, at 123-127, 132-3 and 142-5.

<sup>76</sup> PG 21, col.859-62; E.H. Gifford, tr., *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae praeparationis libri XV* (Oxford 1903), 342: 'Τί δ' εἶ σοι τὸν Ἀβρὰμ παραφέρομι; Μετεωρολόγος τις οὗτος, καὶ τῆς τῶν ἄστρον θεωρίας, τῶν τε κατ' οὐρανὸν μαθημάτων εἰδήμων τὸ πρὶν, ὅτε τῆς Χαλδαϊκῆς μετεποιεῖτο σοφίας, γεγωνῶς, Ἀβρὰμ ἐχαλεῖτο· τοῦτο δ' Ἑλλήνων φωνῇ πατέρα μετέωρον σημαίνει. Ἄλλ' ὁ Θεός γε αὐτὸν, τῶν τῆδε ἐπὶ τὰ ἐπιγανῆ καὶ τῶν ὁρωμένων ἐπέκεινα προάγων, εὐθυβόλῳ κέχρηται μετωνυμίᾳ, Οὐκέτι, φήσας, κληθήσεται τὸ ὄνομά σου Ἀβρὰμ, ἀλλὰ Ἀβραὰμ ἔσται τὸ ὄνομά σου, ὅτι πατέρα πολλῶν ἐθνῶν τέθεικά σε.' (=But what if I should quote Abraham to you? He was a kind of meteorologist, and formerly, while he was acquiring the wisdom of the Chaldees, he had become learned in the contemplation of the stars and in the knowledge of the heavens, and was called Abram; and this in the Greek language means 'high father.' But God leading him on from things of this world to things invisible and lying beyond the things that are seen, employs an appropriate change of name, saying, 'Thy name shall no more be called Abram, but Abraham shall be thy name; for a father of many nations have I made thee'). This work also preserves some of the evidence for Hellenistic Jewish contributions to this subject; Reed, 'Abraham as Chaldean Scientist', 123 note 10.

<sup>77</sup> Of the two, it seems more likely that Josephus' *Antiquitates* is the decisive source of this doctrine. On the *Antiquitates* as available in Ireland from the eighth-century with supporting references, see Leslie D. Myrick, 'On the Stelographic Transmission of Prediluvian *Scéla*, An Apocryphal Reference in the *Irish Lebor Gabála*', *ZCP* 47.1 (2009), 18-31, at 19, incl. note 3. However, Muirchú's *Vita* would seem to suggest that it, or some other mediator of the idea that Abraham came to faith in God through the study of nature, was available considerably earlier than this.

<sup>78</sup> The Book of Jubilees, 12:16ff. James C. VanderKam, ed. and tr., *The Book of Jubilees*, 2 vols., *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 510-1, *Scriptores Aethiopici* 87-8 (Louvain 1989), ed. I, 73ff. and tr. II, 71ff. A Latin version existed, but currently only fragments remain; VanderKam, ed. and tr., *The Book of Jubilees* (discussion) I, xv and II, xvii-xviii, (fragments) I, 270ff. However, I know of no sign of its influence in early Irish literature that would require direct knowledge of it, in preference to the mediation of its doctrines by Josephus; for the example of its indirect influence on *LGÉ* through Josephus, see Myrick, 'On the Stelographic Transmission', 22 note 13. The Ps. Clementine *Recognitions* I.27-71, in Rufinus' Latin translation, should also probably be borne in mind as a possible sources of this doctrine. For its portrayal of the study of the stars generally and Abraham's in particular as leading to a recognition of God in this work, see Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, *Patristic Studies* 6 (New York 2007), 321-7; Nicole Kelley, *Knowledge and Religious Authority in the Pseudo-Clementines: Situating the Recognitions in Fourth Century Syria* (Tübingen 2006), 95-7. However, I am not currently aware if there is any evidence for early Irish knowledge of this text.

<sup>79</sup> *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Liber 1: VII.i.154-8; Pollard, R.M. et al, eds., *Flavius Josephus (Latin trans.): Antiquities* (2013- online edition) this may be viewed on the website, 'The Latin Josephus' (online at: sites.google.com/site/latinjosephus): 'Prudens existens, et nimis intelligens in omnibus rebus, [6v] et

source, that the knowledge of God's existence and thus, the moral knowledge given by God,<sup>80</sup> are necessarily the result of an inquiry into nature, it is not inconceivable that Muirchú may have simply read between the lines, as it were, even though the entirety of this constellation of associations seems to be without explicit precedent in the patristic sources. Such an idea would certainly imply something about Abraham, as the quintessential example of how pre-Christian revelation is achieved, were it not already derived from an earlier account about him. In any event, the difference between Muirchú's *Vita* and these likely sources of its understanding of Abraham is instructive. For quite unlike the respective accounts of Abraham in The Book of Jubilees or Josephus' *Antiquitates*, the *Vita*, like the Milan Glosses, seems to presuppose no specific amount of education, or intellectual prowess, in order to arrive at an accurate conception of God through the study of nature. Muirchú apparently felt no need to establish Monesan's inborn or acquired intellectual accomplishments when describing her search

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sapines in his quae audierat, et de quibus libet aliquit cogitaret. Propterea et uirtute sapru[d]entia maior aliis fuit, et opinionem, quam de deo tunc cuncti habebant, innouare et inmutare praeualuit. Primus itaque presumpsit pronuciare deum creatorem unum esse cunctorum. Reliqua uero ad felicitatem tendentia per praeceptum praebentis singula quaeque dari, et non propria uirtute subsistere consessus est. Haec uero conici<.>ebat per terrae passionem et maris, et ea quae contingent circa solem et lunam et ex omnibus quae circa caelum semper eueniunt . . . Meminit autem patris nostri abraham berosus, non quidem nominans eum sed ita dicens, post diluuium decima generatione, apud chaldeos fuit quidam uirustus et magnus in caelestibus rebus expertus (=He was a person of great sagacity, both for understanding all things and persuading his hearers, and not mistaken in his opinions; for which reason he began to have higher notions of virtue than others had, and he determined to renew and to change the opinion all men happened then to have concerning God; for he was the first that ventured to publish this notion, That there was but one God, the Creator of the universe; and that, as to other [gods], if they contributed any thing to the happiness of men, that each of them afforded it only according to his appointment, and not by their own power. This his opinion was derived from the irregular phenomena that were visible both at land and sea, as well as those that happen to the sun, and moon, and all the heavenly bodies . . . Berosus mentions our father Abram without naming him, when he says thus: 'In the tenth generation after the Flood, there was among the Chaldeans a man righteous and great, and skillful in the celestial science'.

<sup>80</sup> Note that Josephus seems as if he may also be a significant source of the idea that reliable ethical knowledge is only ever derived from adequate knowledge of God; *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Preface: VII.i.154-8; Pollard, R.M. *et al*, eds, *Flavius Josephus (Latin trans.): Antiquities* (2013 - online edition), this may be viewed on the website, 'The Latin Josephus' (online at: [sites.google.com/site/latinjosephus](http://sites.google.com/site/latinjosephus)) 'Sciendu itaque quomodo legislator ille omnium rerum, necessarium iudicauit: ut quisquis suam uita bene gubernaturus, & legem esset aliis positurus, dei primitus deberet considerare naturam, operaque eius mente contemplaretur et eius exemplum imitaretur et quantum uirtus esset hunc sequi temptaret' (=The reader is therefore to know, that Moses deemed it exceeding necessary, that he who would conduct his own life well, and give laws to others, in the first place should consider the Divine nature; and, upon the contemplation of God's operations, should thereby imitate the best of all patterns, so far as it is possible for human nature to do, and to endeavor to follow after it). My thanks to Michael Clarke for drawing this passage to my attention.

for God ‘through nature’ (*per naturam*).<sup>81</sup> Yet The Book of Jubilees insists on Abraham’s wisdom even in childhood, and (contrary to most patristic accounts) his literary studies, whereas Josephus claims that he is a man who was ‘a person of great sagacity, both for understanding all things and persuading his hearers, and not mistaken in his opinions’, with special reference to his astronomical knowledge.<sup>82</sup> As the most likely sources for Muirchú’s comparison of Monesan to Abraham, it seems necessary to account for why he leaves out, rather than insisting upon, such details, in any attempt to interpret Muirchú’s understanding of natural knowledge and its role. To this end, a comparison with The Prologue to the *Senchas Már* will help clarify matters.

### **A Case in Point: The Prologue to *Senchas Már***

In stark contrast to the *Milan Glosses*, and Muirchú’s *Vita*, the eighth-century Prologue to *Senchas Már*<sup>83</sup> associates natural knowledge precisely with those who are most learned. There we are told that the Holy Spirit ‘spoke and prophesied’ (*ro labrastar 7 doaircechain*) through the mouths of ‘righteous poets and judges’ (*brethemon 7 filed fíreón fír*), from the first settling of Ireland ‘until [the] coming of the faith’ (*co cretem anall*), in the same way as he did through ‘the chief prophets and patriarchs’ (*inna prímfáide 7 inna n-uaslaithe*) of the Old Testament. The results of this ‘speaking’ and ‘prophesying’ are broadly characterised as the ‘law of nature’ (*recht aicnid*), in two places, but in one instance, are divided into two distinct elements: i.e. the ‘law of nature’ and the ‘law of the prophets’ (*recht fáide*).<sup>84</sup> Here we are not told anything about the process by which these ‘righteous poets and judges’ have come to be the mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit. However, there seems to be no ideological tension between this, and the idea we saw above, that an authoritative knowledge of the law of nature, cannot be achieved by a merely human study of nature, but relies on what is subsequently taught by God, once our study of nature has made us aware of him and his providence. If anything, in this case, the terminology used here further highlights the apparent contrast

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<sup>81</sup> It bears noting, however, given the Irish context, that she is said to be a noble, something which seems likely to be a qualification of sorts given what we know about the legal culture of the time.

<sup>82</sup> See note 79 above.

<sup>83</sup> For the eighth-century dating of The Prologue to *SM* as part of *OGSM*, see Chapter 1, page 46 note 109.

<sup>84</sup> *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18.

that we noted before, between what would come to be understood as the patristic mainstream and early Irish understandings of how natural law is discovered.

Where the *Milan Glosses* and Muirchú's *Vita* seem to make direct revelation the indispensable supplement to one's study of nature, if moral knowledge is to result, The Prologue actually uses the term 'natural law' (*recht aicnid*) to describe the moral knowledge taught to them, or, in this case, 'spoken through' them, by the Holy Spirit. Since the explicit use of this terminology, especially in the historiographical manner it is employed here, is more characteristic of Augustine *et al* than the authorities which depict the moral life as utterly dependent on faith, the perspective of The Prologue evidently exists in a self-conscious state of dynamic tension between these contrasting emphases. Like Augustine it is precisely a 'natural law' that has a particular association with pre-Christian history, prior to the written law,<sup>85</sup> and maintains a distinction from any other kind of law thereafter. However, the Holy Spirit seems to reveal the contents of this 'natural law' in its entirety, rather than merely augmenting natural virtues with spiritual ones, and thus reorienting them towards their true purpose. In respect to the latter, The Prologue to the *Senchas Már* is clearly much closer to Cassian than Augustine, and, in fact, to represent a fairly radical form of Cassian's natural law doctrine. As in Cassian, natural law is not conceived as preliminary to, or even distinguishable from, true righteousness, since it is precisely 'the righteous' who receive knowledge of it; the natural law and saving faith appear together.<sup>86</sup> But where Cassian states that knowledge of natural law is attained only by means of the 'guidance and illumination of God',<sup>87</sup> *The Prologue* uses much stronger, or at least, more specific language, claiming that it is something known and related through a form of prophetic inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in yet further contrast with the Latin Doctors, it seems not to be accessible to all people, at least to such a degree as makes it possible to instantiate it in the universality of a legal form, since those through whom the Holy

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<sup>85</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>86</sup> A standard gloss of *aicned* (nature) is 'i. na fer firéan' (i.e. the justice [or truth] of [the] righteous man; see, for example, *CIH* 377.12 and 396.2 in *Cethairšlicht Athgabálae* (*SM* 2)). My thanks to Liam Breatnach for these references.

<sup>87</sup> *Conlationes*, III.xiv; *PL* 49, col. 574; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 133: 'magisterio et illuminatio Dei'.

Spirit speaks the natural law are not only ‘righteous’ but ‘righteous poets and judges’. Evidently there is a relationship between some sort of learning (presumably scientific since not ethical), and one’s capacity to be a fitting receptacle of such revelation.

In this case, it is clear that more may be learned from the Holy Spirit by the righteous pre-Christian poet or judge of The Prologue, than could have been conjectured, based only on the *Milan Glosses* and Muirchú’s *Vita*. The ‘natural’ lessons taught by the Holy Spirit here are not just sufficient for guidance in personal morality, but make up one of the fundamental bases of legal ordering of the entire state. As we have seen in the previous section on Isidore, this law, especially insofar as it defines the roles of the secular orders (i.e. those of rulers and poets), is based on an ideal that a political order, if it is to be just, must match and manifest the actual order of creation exactly. Thus, the knowledge taught (or, at the very least, authoritatively confirmed) by the Holy Spirit would seem to necessarily include an exhaustive knowledge of the whole cosmological order,<sup>88</sup> the natures that make up that order, and the linguistic means of accurately representing these things, for a just legal system to be possible. Though, to return to the perspective of the Introduction to the *SM* (*SM* 1), the available knowledge of the natural order of things, prior to the arrival of the Church, as substantial and significant as it is thought to have been, still suffers from sufficient lack of clarity that an adequate ordering, even of the secular hierarchies (of rulers and poets), is not thought to be possible until the arrival of Patrick and the ‘law of Scripture’.<sup>89</sup> Thus, from at least the point of view of this one central text, natural knowledge - despite the fact it is implied here as well that this is known through direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit - only fully comes fully into to its own in relation to ‘more-than-natural’ knowledge that the Church receives from the same source.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> One finds this expectation stated explicitly in *AM*; see Chapter 3, pages 201-2.

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 1, page 46.

<sup>90</sup> Later in this chapter we will see that this is also true of The Prologue to *SM* itself; see pages 140-6.

It remains that Muirchú's *Vita* - in which we find the partial basis of The Prologue's more detailed account<sup>91</sup> - and the *Milan Glosses*, differ from The Prologue, either in not emphasizing the education of proto-Christians who are understood to be taught by God in this way, or in denying the need for such education entirely. However, this seems to be due to the differing purposes of these texts, rather than conflicting ideas about the necessity of divine instruction to the very possibility of moral knowledge. Both the *Milan Glosses* and the *Vita* are concerned with how the contemplation of nature can result in the revelatory knowledge of God that is necessary for an individual to begin to live a holy life, The Prologue, with the circumstances under which that knowledge can be known sufficiently to become the authoritative basis for the shared legal system of the states (*túatha*) that make up Ireland. In which case, almost no intellectual training is needed to make 'first contact', as it were, but a great deal of such training is needed (presumably also something which becomes possible as a result of the Holy Spirit's revelation of natural law) in order to be receptive of such a comprehensive knowledge of the Spirit's instruction of the soul as is necessary for the promulgation and maintenance of law.

This interpretation, at any rate, fits very nicely with such descriptions of the poetic order as occur in the Old Irish texts whose contents, The Prologue claims, were incorporated into the *Senchas Már*'s grand synthesis,<sup>92</sup> namely, those found in the tracts of the *Bretha Nemed* legal tradition<sup>93</sup> and in *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* ('The Dialogue of the Two Sages').<sup>94</sup> For, in either case, the degree of a poet's learning and purity is directly linked

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<sup>91</sup> On Muirchú's *Vita* and Tírechán's *Collectanea* and *SM* (with its significant Patrician elements) as products of the same seventh-century Armagh context, and the various overlaps and contrasts between their portrayals of Patrick, see Breatnach, *The Early Law Text 'SM'*, 34-8.

<sup>92</sup> *PSM* §11; Carey, ed. and tr.: 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19: 'roba la fileda a n-oenur brethemnus cosin Immacallaim in Dá Thuaruth i nEmain Mache' (= judgement was in the hands of the poets alone until the 'Colloquy of the Two Sages' in Emain Macha); *SM* §11.6-7: 'Isin aimsir-sin domídetar maithi fer nÉrenn tomus n-aí 7 innsce do chách iarna miad, amail ro gabsat isnaib Brethaib Nemed 71' (= At that time the nobles of Ireland adjudged the measure of lawsuit and speech to each man according to his rank, as they are reckoned in the *Bretha Nemed* etc.). Other texts are mentioned. However, these are the two with the most to say about poetry and poets.

<sup>93</sup> For discussion and quotations of some of the relevant sections of *BNT* (esp. *CIH* 2219.16-31, 2224.4-6), see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 36-7; Stacy, *Dark Speech*, 82-9, 206-7.

<sup>94</sup> Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', *passim*. The prophetic capacity of the lesser poet seems to be limited to the sphere of the typical functioning of natural causes and includes very little theological knowledge. The greater poet is able to look back to the beginning of time and to the destruction of the

to the degree of what he knows, or is able to know, through divine inspiration.<sup>95</sup> This being so, the degree to which these qualifications are, as we have seen, manifested in the metrical form of a poet's compositions provides a way of confirming, not simply the degree to which their judgements are true enactments of justice, but the degree to which the Holy Spirit itself may be said to be speaking through them relative to the situation at hand. The specific degrees of poetic inspiration will be discussed in detail at a later point.<sup>96</sup> However, for the moment, what is most important is simply that the *Milan Glosses* and the *Vita* are in harmony with the view we have found in The Prologue and the authorities it cites. All pre-Christian moral knowledge is understood to be divinely revealed to the soul in a way that is linked to the exercise of its scientific capacity, contrary to what would become the dominant tradition of natural law in the Latin West, where a certain fixed degree of moral knowledge is thought to belong inherently to the soul as a part of its own rational nature. It certainly seems unlikely that Cassian would have foreseen any such development of his doctrine of natural law. However, the results appear natural enough relative to The Prologue's evident attempt to conciliate an understanding of natural law in the tradition of Cassian with the more definite distinctions between kinds of law that are characteristic of the Latin Doctors. Once a natural law that is revealed through inspiration becomes distinct from other laws, a parallel distinction between multiple forms of inspiration becomes necessary to account for the bases of multiple laws.

### **Some Immediate Results**

Thus, these findings appear to add further confirmation to previous claims about the extra-Augustinian character of early Irish thinking about natural law, but not for the reasons suggested by scholarship to this point. Scholarship in this area has tended to focus on medieval Irish literature's abundance of proto-Christian figures. Various scholars have suggested that this characteristic likely reflects a pre-Augustinian vision of Christian orthodoxy, with Tomás O'Sullivan making a case for Cassian's influence as

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world and contains a great deal of theological knowledge. For further discussion and sources, see pages 118ff.

<sup>95</sup> See also the eighth-century Old Irish text, *The Caldron of Poesy*, ed. and tr., by Liam Breatnach in *Ériu* 32 (1981), 45-93.

<sup>96</sup> Pages 118-33, 139-43, 157-73.

the decisive factor.<sup>97</sup> However, while it is fashionable to assume that St. Augustine is somewhat of a ‘Gloomy Gus’ on these subjects,<sup>98</sup> he seems to provide the clearest picture of how the salvation of pagans might come about prior to an encounter with the sacraments of the Church. In the first place, he takes the story of Job as biblical proof that there are indeed those who belonged to the ‘Spiritual Jerusalem’ without any institutional exposure to the Gospel,<sup>99</sup> and that this has been made possible from the beginning of the world through the mediation of angels, by means of ‘signs and symbols appropriate to the times’.<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere he goes so far as to claim that the necessary revelation of the Incarnation is made manifest to all who are humble enough to acknowledge their need of divine assistance, but suggests that many of the ancient philosophers, while knowing, by grace, of the reality of the Incarnation, rejected it, and their need for the grace by which it was revealed, through arrogance and pride.<sup>101</sup> That said, he is not without concrete extra-Biblical examples of pagan proto-Christians who are said to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. He presents the Sibylline Oracles, for example, as an important instance of just such a thing.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while Cassian’s analysis of the will may seem more conducive to optimism about the salvation of pre-Christian pagans,<sup>103</sup> it remains that Augustine’s more explicit account of the issue appears to provide some of the best conceptual tools for one seeking to understand how such a

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<sup>97</sup> Tomás O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif of the ‘Naturally Good’ Pagan in Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae*’, in Jonathan M. Wooding, Rodney Aist, Thomas Owen Clancy and Thomas O’Loughlin, eds., *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker* (Dublin 2010), 253-273; Gilbert Márkus, ‘Pelagianism and the “Common Celtic Church”’, *Innes Review* 56.2 (2005), 165-213, at 211-2; Donahue, ‘*Beowulf* and Christian Tradition’, 55-116.

<sup>98</sup> This is not entirely without basis. See, for example, Augustine, *Epistolae*, CLXIV.iv; Goldbacher, ed., *Epistulae* III, 530-4; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine III, 64. However, such statements need to be interpreted in the context of the evidence following.

<sup>99</sup> *De civitate Dei*, XVIII.47; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 645-6; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 828-30.

<sup>100</sup> *De civitate Dei* VII.32; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 213; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 293.

<sup>101</sup> For discussion and references to relevant passages in Augustine’s works, see John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton and Oxford 2015), 30-3.

<sup>102</sup> *De civitate Dei* XVIII.23; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 613-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 788-91.

<sup>103</sup> See O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif’, 264-73 and Márkus, ‘Pelagianism’, 210-11 for helpful evocations of Cassian relative to this theme.



phenomenon could occur. If this aspect of early Irish literature reflects a pre-Augustinian orthodoxy, there is certainly no need to assume that it does so.<sup>104</sup>

However, on the entirely different (if related) matter of the means by which pagan pre-Christians are thought to be capable of accurate moral knowledge, we have found that there is no accounting for the position which is common to the texts discussed above apart from the likes of Cassian and Josephus, Lactantius and Eusebius. In The Prologue, for instance, none of the ‘righteous judges and poets of the men of Ireland’ through whom the Holy Spirit is taken to have uttered the law of nature, even those who live to meet Patrick, are explicitly baptized, in the way that we see so often when there is a meeting of pre-Christian and Christian virtue in early Irish literature.<sup>105</sup> It remains that the conciliation it describes of the law of nature with the Church’s Law of Scripture could be taken as a kind of metaphorical ‘baptism’.<sup>106</sup> However, the ‘righteousness’ of those who promulgated the law of nature in pre-Patrician times seems not to depend on the occurrence of what is, for them, a future conciliation.

If we had not distinguished the way The Prologue defines the law of nature from the way it is generally described by the Latin Doctors, it might be tempting to suppose that we find here the influence, if not the actual doctrines, of the Pelagians. However, it is clear now that such an assumption has no real basis.<sup>107</sup> Given that the law of nature, in the sense in which The Prologue uses it, is known only in the context of one’s dependency on the ongoing revelation of the Holy Spirit’s teaching, the way in which their righteousness is conceived is clearly not commensurable with a Pelagian outlook. It is likely due to a failure to disambiguate the way that law of nature is understood to be knowable in most early Irish texts, from the way it is understood by Augustine, Gregory

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<sup>104</sup> Here Helen Conrad-O’Briain must certainly be right; Helen Conrad-O’Briain, ‘Grace and Election in Adomnán’s *Vita S. Columbae*’, *Hermathena* 172 (Summer 2002), 25-38. Unfortunately, she does not distinguish sufficiently between St. Augustine and Lactantius on these matters.

<sup>105</sup> O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif’, 263; Márkus, ‘Pelagianism’, 182-3; Conrad-O’Briain, ‘Grace and Election’, 28-31, 37. Further examples are found in Chapter 2, 109-111; Chapter 4, 269-72; Chapter 5, page 338-43, incl. note 125.

<sup>106</sup> For the conciliation of pre-Christian and Christian tradition in medieval Ireland as a kind of ‘baptism’, see Carey, *A Single Ray*, 1-38; see further discussion of this metaphor in Chapter 3, page 186.

<sup>107</sup> For convincing arguments against medieval Irish exposure to Pelagian texts actually resulting in Pelagianism, see O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif’, 253-73; Márkus, ‘Pelagianism’, 211-2.

and the rest, that has led more than a few to imagine a Pelagian tendency in early Irish literature generally.<sup>108</sup> One can only agree with O’Sullivan that the emphasis on sacramental reception, in most early Irish accounts of ‘naturally good’ pagans encountering the saints of Ireland, points away from Pelagius and towards Cassian.<sup>109</sup> However, it is only insofar as their concept of the natural is, like Cassian’s, found to be of something that only ever appears, as such, in the context of the soul’s self-conscious reception of God’s gracious intervention,<sup>110</sup> that his argument can be finally convincing.

### **Symptoms of the Contrasting Doctrines**

This, however, is not the only way in which medieval Irish portrayals of pre-Christian pagans contrast with those found in the Latin Doctors. Whereas, in early Irish literature, there seem to be no examples of those who have knowledge of the law of nature<sup>111</sup> subsequently rejecting such higher knowledge as the Holy Spirit may reveal to them through the ecclesiastical hierarchies, the whole of Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* is, in many respects, a cautionary tale about the *hubris* of such. This seems to follow directly from the respective differences in their conceptions of natural law outlined above. If the natural law is something that is known only through direct revelation by the Holy Spirit, it would be difficult to conceive that the one who knew it would be resistant to another revelation by that same Spirit, when the possibility of that revelation was made available to them by the Church.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, it would be much more likely to conceive of someone who knows the natural law rejecting the revelation mediated by the Church where the natural law is thought to be knowable by no more than the exercise of one’s own innate capacities.

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<sup>108</sup> See, for a recent example, Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century*, Studies in Celtic History 20 (Woodbridge and Rochester 2002), 278-83.

<sup>109</sup> O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif’, 262-3.

<sup>110</sup> Márkus and O’Sullivan both come very close to the argument here; Márkus, ‘Pelagianism’, 180-1; O’Sullivan, ‘The Anti-Pelagian Motif’, 271-2.

<sup>111</sup> Including those who search for God through nature or who are ‘naturally good’.

<sup>112</sup> The closest example I can think of is the man of ‘natural good’ who plans to attack Patrick before being confronted with his face; *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xi.4-6; Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, ed.78 and tr.79. This is, however, because he is mistaken about him, not because he objects to his actual doctrine.

Therefore, the druids of Patrician hagiography, rather than Irish proto-Christians of natural goodness or knowledge, appear to be the true point of comparison to the arrogant philosophers described in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. These druids cannot be attributed knowledge of natural law in the manner we have found to predominate in medieval Ireland, because their lack of faith in God would be a sign, and, in fact, the cause, of its absence. Whereas, for Augustine, the philosophers' lack of faith does not hinder their knowledge of natural law at all, so much as make it impossible for their observance of it to be truly virtuous. There is, moreover, a further contrast between these druids and philosophers, regarding the way that their respective forms of knowledge are understood. The knowledge of the druids is manifested, for the most part, as an unnatural power to distort the true reality of things,<sup>113</sup> the knowledge of St. Augustine's philosophers, as a correct knowledge of natural things (and the ethics which pertain to them), made deficient through a failure to understand the way that natural things are ordered to their divine source and end. Yet, regarding the matter of faith they are in strict agreement. Irrespective of how the concept of natural law is employed in each instance, a lack of prior faith is consistently associated with the subsequent rejection of the Gospel.<sup>114</sup>

The same principle obtains in the opposite direction. Pre-Christians who are said to know the natural law in these early Irish texts, do not reject the revelation embodied in the Church for the same reason as pre-Christians who are known for faith are not generally said to do so in patristic sources. It seems, then, that the relevant early Irish texts, while developing the idea of natural law in non-Augustinian ways, are clearly not so ideologically eccentric as a comparison to Augustine (in which this difference is not taken into account) might superficially suggest. No individual instance of a 'naturally good' pagan responding favourably to the preaching of the Gospel can be taken as

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<sup>113</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xx, esp.3; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', ed.94 and tr.95: 'Et post paululum ait magus: "faciamus signa super hunc campum maximum [in hoc campo maximo]", respondensque Patricius ait: "Quae?", et dixit magus: "inducamus niuem super terram", et ait Patricius: "Nolo contraria uoluntati Dei inducere", et dixit magus: "ego inducam uidentibus cunctis"' (=And after a short while the druid said: 'Let us work miracles in this vast plain,' and Patrick replied, saying: 'What sort of miracles?', and the druid said: 'Let us bring snow over the land,' and Patrick said: 'I do not want to bring about anything against God's will,' and the druid said: 'I shall bring it about in the sight of all').

<sup>114</sup> This paragraph as a whole refers back to pages 75-9.

definitive proof of one perspective on natural law or the other. Yet the consistency of such favourable responses in early Irish literature certainly points to a predominance, beyond the instances in which it is specifically attested, of a view of natural law which sees it as something which is known only by divine revelation.

### **The Image of Moses**

This, however, is not the only symptom which has relevance for identifying the character of the doctrine of natural law that is operative in such places as it may not be clearly stated in theological terminology. The role of Moses, where he is given one, is also significant.<sup>115</sup> There are many places in the Fathers, where a pagan author, who is thought not to have attained faith, and thus, not to be capable of knowing the things that are only apprehended by that means of perception, is taken to have learned something of such knowledge from someone who has, although without necessarily acquiring faith itself in the process. Most often, this is hypothesised to come about by coming into direct or indirect contact with the law of Moses, which is to say, the law taken to have been revealed to Moses by faith.<sup>116</sup> At first glance, this is somewhat perplexing. Why would this additional knowledge, where present, not more often be conceived as coming about by the attainment of faith on the part of the pagan author? Moreover, if not through their own faith, why connect the expansion of non-Hebraic, pre-Christian knowledge to Moses when its quintessential representatives, the patriarchs of Genesis, are definitively free of such influence, as pre-Mosaic figures? Surely it would be more straight-forward, when attempting to work out the possibilities for non-Hebraic, pre-Christian knowledge, to do so in a way that more closely mirrors the perceived experience of the patriarchs who are seen as the quintessential exemplars of this kind of

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<sup>115</sup> For a general discussion of the image of Moses in early Irish literature, see John Hennig, 'The Literary Tradition of Moses in Ireland', *Traditio* 7 (1949-1951), 233-261.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel Ridings, *The Attic Moses: The Dependency Theme in Some Early Christian Writers* (Göteborg 1995); Paul Ciholas, 'The Attic Moses: Some Patristic Reactions to Platonic Philosophy', *The Classical World* 72.4 (Dec., 1978 - Jan., 1979), 217-225, at 221-5; Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretation of the History of Culture* (Tübingen 1989); Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, 'Origen, Patristic Philosophy and Christian Platonism: Rethinking the Christianisation of Hellenism', *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009), 217-263; Arthur P. Urbano, *The Philosophical Life: Biography and the Crafting of Intellectual Identity in Late Antiquity* (Washington, D.C. 2013), 80-124; G.R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford 2001), 176-202.

knowledge? There are, however, reasons enough, when we consider the material they are dealing with.

When the Fathers discuss pagan learning, they are most often dealing with textual evidence that achieved the form in which they have received it independently of the Church.<sup>117</sup> The existing Irish accounts of pre-Christian Ireland are only the most recent results of several hundred years of prior Christian scholarly interpretation of the events they understand themselves to be describing. Some of the Fathers, and many medieval theologians, argued for a very strong degree of agreement between certain ancient pagan philosophers and the Christian faith.<sup>118</sup> However, one would expect that the chances of finding (or thinking that one has found) real contrast would be much higher in cases where the form of the text under consideration was not itself a product of the Church's interpretation of the pre-Christian past. In instances where true conflict with Christianity was thought to exist, a person looking to affirm the remaining commonalities would be able to do so much more straightforwardly through a theory of an imperfect transmission of someone else's true revelation, than one in which the given author's own revelation was itself somehow partly deceptive and partly true. The latter would tend to make a proto-heretic, rather than a proto-Christian out of the ancient author in question. Conversely, the medieval Irish sources, in which the events are, necessarily, as ecclesiastical productions, described in a way that is already adequately conciliated to the Christian faith in the eyes of their authors, would not appear to require

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<sup>117</sup> A notable exception would seem to be the correspondence which Seneca was thought to have had with St. Paul; Claude W. Barlow, ed., *Epistolae Senecae ad Paulum et Pauli ad Senecam <quae vocantur>*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 10 (Horn 1938). This edition is reprinted with accompanying essays in Alfons Fürst, Therese Fuhrer, Folker Siegert, Peter Walter, eds., *Der apokryphe Briefwechsel zwischen Seneca und Paulus* (Tübingen 2006). See also, Richard I. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis 2010), 110-116. For a recent reconsideration of the character of this corpus, its dating and its relation to the epistles of St. Paul, see Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, 'A Pseudepigraphon Inside a Pseudepigraphon? The Seneca-Paul Correspondence and the Letters Added Afterwards', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 23.4 (2014), 259-289.

<sup>118</sup> A high-water mark for this is likely Peter Abelard, who argued that the great philosophers of pre-Christian times arrived at a correct understanding of the Trinity by rational means, and had a correct doctrine of the Incarnation revealed to them, having prepared themselves for such revelation by their life of philosophical virtues; Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 73-94; *idem*, 'Abelard's Concept of Natural Law', in Albert Zimmermann, ed., *Mensch und Natur im Mittelalter*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 21.2 (Berlin 1992), 609-21, at 619-21.

such explanations to the same degree, that is, not until they came into the hands of someone with a contrasting understanding of Christian theology and history.<sup>119</sup>

Another reason for the patristic invocation of Moses in these situations is due to the strong parallels observed between pagan works and those of Moses. The similarities noted between the creation-account in Plato's *Timaeus* and that in Genesis were, for example, a particularly fruitful source of this kind of speculation.<sup>120</sup> Here one must also bear in mind that, because none of the writings attributed to pre-Mosaic figures seem to have been able to maintain an authoritative association with them in the long term, at least for Chalcedonian Christians (i.e. the Latin and Greek Churches),<sup>121</sup> any attempt to discover similar parallels between pagan writers and the doctrines of the patriarchs would be left with little basis besides speculation unless, perhaps, relevant inspired material were to emerge subsequently.

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<sup>119</sup> For examples of the latter, see Chapter Six, pages 395-400.

<sup>120</sup> See the sources in note 19 of the Introduction. For relevant passages in Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, see John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 23 (Tübingen 2004), 38, incl. note 220; Ciholas, 'Plato: The Attic Moses', 224, incl. note 31; Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (Leiden and Boston, 2006), 111, incl. note 15. Part of the reason for the ongoing productivity of this identification past the patristic era in the Latin West is that the passage of the *Timaeus* translated (17a-53c) and commented upon (31c-53c) by Calcidius was more or less the only part of the Platonic corpus that was directly known following the loss of Cicero's version of the *Protagoras* and Apuleius' version of the *Phaedo* in the sixth century, apart from quotations in the likes of Cicero, Seneca, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Augustine, Boethius, Rufinus' translations of Origen and others; Kilbansky, 'The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition', 22-5. For references to scholarship on the influence of Calcidius' *Timaeus*, see Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame 2008) II, 421 note 2. For the text, see John Magee, ed. and tr., *On Plato's Timaeus: Calcidius* (Cambridge, Mass. 2016).

<sup>121</sup> For example, The Book of Enoch has been preserved in its entirety only by the Ethiopian Coptic Church, which is singular in regarding it as canonical Scripture. For The Book of Enoch's transmission, see M.A Knibb, ed. and tr., *The Ethiopian Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1978) II, 1-47. For the history and influence of texts attributed to Enoch up to and including Origen, see James C. Vanderkam, 'Enoch, Enochic Motifs and Enoch in Early Christian Literature', in James C. Vanderkam and William Adler, eds., *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Assen and Minneapolis 1996), 33-61. For introductions to and translations of works attributed to other pre-Mosaic figures, see James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City 1983-5) I, 473-87 [Treatise of Shem], 681-706 [Apocalypse of Abraham], 707-720 [Apocalypse of Adam], 775-828 [Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs], 829-868 [Testament of Job], 869-912 [Testaments of the Three Patriarchs], 989-995. [Testament of Adam]. For the history of The Book of Jubilees' transmission, see VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* I, v, viii-xvi.

But even more significant is the fact that the pagan material under consideration by the patristic authors are examples of arts, sciences or literary genres thought to have been invented by Moses or his inspired successors and thus to have been unknown to other peoples prior to their subsequent dissemination. Origen, for example, understood the Greek sages to have borrowed their knowledge of the three branches of philosophical study (i.e. the study of ethics, physics and contemplation respectively) from Solomon, ‘who had learnt them by the Spirit of God at an age and time long before their own’.<sup>122</sup> Likewise, Isidore identifies David as the inventor of the hymn (*hymnus*),<sup>123</sup> Jeremiah as the inventor of the threnody (*threnos*) or lament (*lamentum*),<sup>124</sup> and Moses as the inventor of historical writing (*historia*).<sup>125</sup> Some went so far as to claim that Moses invented the art of writing itself.<sup>126</sup> Although most seem not to have wanted to claim quite so much as that for him. However, the idea that Moses is, at the very least, the fountainhead of all true philosophy and law was fairly widespread.<sup>127</sup> The upshot of this is that the degree to which arts, sciences and literary genres were thought to become

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<sup>122</sup> *In Canticum Canticorum*, Prologue; Brésard and Cruzel, eds., and tr., *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, I, ed.130 and tr.131; Lawson, tr., *Origen: The Song of Songs*, 40-1: ‘Haec ergo, ut mihi videtur, spaientes quique Graecorum sumpta a Solomone, utpote qui aetate et tempore longe ante Ipsos prior ea per Dei spiritum didicisset, tamquam propria inventa protulerunt . . .’ (=It seems to me, then, that all the sages of the Greeks borrowed these ideas from Solomon, who had learnt them by the Spirit of God at an age and time long before their own; and that they then put them forward as their own inventions . . .).

<sup>123</sup> *Etym.* I.xxxix.17; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, *The Etymologies*, 65.

<sup>124</sup> *Etym.* I.xxxix.19; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, *The Etymologies*, 66.

<sup>125</sup> *Etym.* I.xlii.1; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, *The Etymologies*, 67.

<sup>126</sup> i.e. The Hellenistic Jewish writer, Eupolemus, claimed that Moses (contrary to others who claimed this of Enoch or Abraham instead) invented writing. Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria both quote this opinion. For discussion, translations and references, see F. Fallon, tr., ‘Eupolemus’, in Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II, 861-72, at 865.

<sup>127</sup> See references in note 116 above. Important examples for an early Irish context include Eusebius/Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.ii.19; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte*, 23; Isidore, *Etym.* V.i.1 and ii.1; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117: ‘Moyses gentis Hebraicae primus omnium divinas leges sacris litteris explicavit. Phoroneus rex Graecis primus leges iudiciaque constituit . . . Omnes autem leges aut divinae sunt, aut humanae. Divinae natura, humanae moribus constant’ (=Moses of the Hebrew people was the first of all to explain the divine laws, in the Sacred Scriptures. King Phoroneus was the first to establish law and legal processes among the Greeks . . . All laws are either divine or human. Divine laws are based on nature, human law on customs). Note that Moses does not seem to be the first lawgiver in an absolute sense. Jerome’s *Chronicon* has King Phoroneus significantly predate Moses; Jerome, *Chronicon*, year 1806e; John Knight Fotheringham, ed., *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones* (London 1923), 35; Roger Pearse et al, tr., *The Chronicle of St. Jerome* (2005 – online edition) this may be viewed at the website, *The Tertullian Project* (online at: [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome\\_chronicle\\_00\\_eintro.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_chronicle_00_eintro.htm)): ‘Foroneus Inachi filius et Niobae primus leges iudiciaque constituit’ (=Phoroneus, son of Inachus and Niobe, was the first to establish laws and courts). Rather, Moses is the first to promulgate ‘divine’ or ‘natural law’, according to the definition we were working with in Chapter 1.

possible only with the emergence of the Mosaic law was the degree to which any pagan pre-Christian who excelled in these things seemed to display the influence of that same Mosaic law, and, indeed, dependence upon it.

The other side of this issue is that the degree to which intellectual discoveries were thought to have emerged in a time before the Mosaic law, would have been the degree to which such things would have been thought to be available, at least in principle, to a pre-Christian who did not have the benefit of any knowledge of it. This means that early Irish texts which ascribe the emergence of intellectual discoveries to no more than the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit enjoyed by certain righteous pre-Christians presuppose a version of sacred history which associates comparable discoveries with righteous pre-Mosaic figures like Seth, Enoch and Abraham, even where these figures are not mentioned.<sup>128</sup> For the same reasons, they also presuppose some degree of tension with any claim that such discoveries were indeed pre-Mosaic, but revealed by devils to pre-deluvian humanity, or that the accursed son of Noah, Ham, was responsible for their preservation, that is, except where Ham's preservation of this knowledge may have been alternatively perceived as saving the discoveries of earlier righteous people, or else, as

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<sup>128</sup> Of the authorities likely to have been available in Early Ireland, Josephus, as we have seen, seems to be among the most optimistic regarding which forms of knowledge were possible before Moses. In addition to the abilities he claims Abraham had as natural philosopher, he says that the intellectual discoveries of pre-deluvian times were engraved in pillars of brick by the virtuous descendants of Seth, so that they would survive the coming destruction which had been prophesied; *Antiquitates Judaicae*, Liber 1: II.ii.60-iii.71, esp. iii.70-1; Pollard, R.M. *et al*, eds., *Flavius Josephus (Latin trans.): Antiquities* (2013-online edition) this may be viewed on the website, 'The Latin Josephus' (online at: [sites.google.com/site/latinjosephus](https://sites.google.com/site/latinjosephus)): 'Disciplinam uero rerum caelestium et ornatum eorum primitus inuenerunt et ne dilaberemur ab hominibus quae ab eis inuenta uidebantur, aut antequam uenirent ad cognitionem deperirent cum praedixisset Adam exterminationem serum omnium unamginis uirtute, alteram uero aquarum uel ac multitudine fore uenturam duas facientes columnas, aliam quidem ex lateribus aliam uero ex lapidibus aliam ambabus quae [3v] inuenerant conscripserunt, ut et si constructa lateribus exterminaretur ab imbris, lapidea permanens praeberet in omnibus scripta congoscere' (=They also were the inventors of that peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned with the heavenly bodies, and their order. And that their inventions might not be lost before they were sufficiently known, upon Adam's prediction that the world was to be destroyed at one time by the force of fire, and at another time by the violence and quantity of water, they made two pillars, the one of brick, the other of stone: they inscribed their discoveries on them both, that in case the pillar of brick should be destroyed by the flood, the pillar of stone might remain, and exhibit those discoveries to mankind; and also inform them that there was another pillar of brick erected by them). The Book of Enoch and The Book of Jubilees are also worth keeping in mind here. They claim that the angels instructed Enoch in all kinds of arts; Myrick, 'The Stelographic Transmission, 24. The Book of Enoch §72-81; Michael A. Knibb, ed. and tr., *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, ed. I, 215-70 and tr. II, 167-187. The Book of Jubilees IV.17-22; Vanderkam, ed. and tr., *The Book of Jubilees*, ed. I, 24-6 and tr. II, 25-8.



something which is subsequently purified, corrected and repurposed by righteous pre-Mosaic persons after him.<sup>129</sup>

In brief, where early Irish texts claim that there were righteous poets and judges in pre-Christian Ireland who were so without the aid of even the indirect influence of the law of Moses, and not only this, that a complete and true system of laws was revealed by the Holy Spirit to them, such as we have found in The Prologue to *SM*, among other places, we would seem to be dealing with an unusually strong affirmation of the kind of revelation that was thought to be possible either before the emergence of the Mosaic law, or without knowledge of it. Insofar as this particular issue is at play, we are no longer dealing with something like Cassian's understanding of natural law in simple contrast with the Latin Doctors. We have already seen that the *Milan Glosses* and Muirchú's *Vita*, in placing the Holy Spirit's revelation of this natural law at the culmination of some form of study of the natural order, are in line with with certain apocryphal works and Josephus' *Antiquitates* rather than the relevant sections of the available patristic material. But this is that much more so in instances where this revelation is seen to presuppose or result in arts and sciences which are generally seen as possible only in the wake of the Mosaic law, that is, insofar as they are good, and not the perverse results of the diabolical knowledge which was variously thought to have been revealed to Cain, Ham or their physical and intellectual heirs. There are signs, however, that from the late Old Irish period onward there were at least some parties who thought this to be rather too strong an affirmation of what is possible according to the natural law, taken on its own.<sup>130</sup> The earliest extant example is the ninth-century glossary, *Sanas Cormaic*, where Caí, the same Caí whom the canonical part of *Auraicept na n-Éces*<sup>131</sup> associates with the scholarly creation of the Irish language (and, apparently, its *ogham* script), is said to have learned about the Mosaic law from the Hebrews and

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<sup>129</sup> The idea that Ham preserved the knowledge of pre-diluvian arts of dubious origin on stones which survived the flood occurs in a number of places in early Irish literature. For discussion, sources, and the importance of Cassian as the immediate source of this idea, see Myrick, 'The Stelographic Transmission'.

<sup>130</sup> Scholarship has sometimes mistakenly confounded the Natural and Mosaic Laws; McCone, 'Dubthach maccu Lugair', 12-15; Ó Corráin, 'Irish Vernacular Law', 288-9. To date, the clearest account of their distinction is Carey, 'The Two Laws', 10-13.

<sup>131</sup> *Auraicept na n-Éces* I.1-14; Ahlqvist, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Linguist*, 47-8.

brought this knowledge with him to Ireland.<sup>132</sup> This is the reason, it claims, that there are so many parallels between the judgements of pre-Christian Irish law and the law of Moses.

We should be careful, though, not to assume that the theory of Mosaic influence will, in every instance, simply displace (when present) the theory at hand, namely, that the knowledge of natural law is the result of the divine inspiration that, in turn, results from the study of the natural order, an inspired knowledge which, in addition to being a sufficient basis of personal morality, is also a basis for progressively more learned forms of the study of the natural order which, as they progress, will eventually culminate in an inspired knowledge of natural law that is profound enough to enable the promulgation of a complete system of human laws that are accurately based on the natural law. It may indeed indicate that true laws are only thought to be possible only insofar as the Mosaic law is known, in preference for the theory at issue here. When this takes place, it could just as easily be in favour of an Augustinian understanding of natural law as something along the lines of Cassian's stoicising distrust of technological and political developments, or some combination thereof. But then it may also indicate some intermediate form of cooperation between what the Holy Spirit is thought to reveal

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<sup>132</sup> *Sanas Cormaic*; Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic* Y, 698; Ó Corráin, tr., 'Irish Vernacular Law', 289-90: Cainbretaig, dalta Feniusa, iss e in deiscibul sin rosiacht Maccu Israheil fri fogloim n-ebra, 7 is he ba brithem la longus mac Miled, 7 is aire asberar Cai Cainbrethach de, fobith it bretha recta nobeired, 7 is aire it imda issin berla. nac tan didiu biter cen rig isnaib tuathaib is brathcai fogni etorra .i. fria urradus. dia mbe immorro ri is rechtge son amail is maith lais' (=Cainbrethach, the pupil of Fénius, he is the disciple who went to the Sons of Israel to learn Hebrew, and he was the judge with the felt of the Sons of Míl. Cai Cainbrethach is that he gave judgements of the [Mosaic] law and that is why they are abundant in Irish law [lightly modified]). Another notable example is found in *LGÉ*; *CIH* 1653-4; Ó Corráin, tr., 'Irish Vernacular Law', 288-9. The twelfth-century text, *Scél na Fír Flatha* §24; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.193 and tr.211: 'IS e in Cai sin dorad in Tuaith De, 7 rofoglaim recht Maisi, 7 is e doberread bretha lasin scoil iarna comhthínol uili do chach leth . . . 7 romarastair Cai co tormail .ix. ndine a n-Erinn iar firindi a breathumun (*sic*), ar at e bretha nobered .i. bretha rechta Maísi, 7 is aire sin isat airimda bretha rechta isin feneocus. Ba siad bretha rechta didiu rofognom do Cormac' (=it was that Cai who brought this ordeal from the land of Israel when he came to the Tuath Déa, and he had learned the law of Moses, and it was he that delivered judgements in the school after it had been gathered from every side . . . And Cai remained in Erin until he had outlived nine generation, in consequence of the righteousness of his judgements, for the judgements which he used to deliver were judgements of the Law of Moses, and therefore the judgements of the Law are very abundant in the Fénechas. They were judgements of the Law of (Moses), then, that served for Cormac). Similar claims about the character of secular law are made elsewhere (i.e. *UB* II [*CIH* 552.3-6]); Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Three Things Required', 54-5, incl. note 57. Such an idea also appears in a later version of the Prologue to *SM* [*CIH* 340.21-22]; Carey, 'The Two Laws', 10; McCone, 'Dubthach maccu Lugair', 12.

about the truth of things to a righteous person without the aid of Scriptural revelation, and that which is thought to be revealed only through Scriptural revelation.<sup>133</sup> In such a case, one could not presuppose which would be the senior and which the junior partner in this relationship. The Mosaic law might be seen as no more than that of an authoritative confirmation the veracity of a pre-existing law, and the arts which led to its revelation being possible, just as easily as it could be seen as the rule on which the earlier revelation depended absolutely in order to take any kind of definite and systematic shape whatever. Moreover, there are matters of emphasis to consider.

If, for instance, someone learned how to fix a completely inoperable radio from an instruction manual, it would be quite uncontroversial to say that their knowledge about radios came from an instruction manual to the exclusion of other things. Such knowledge as a direct experience of the radio's signal might convey would be significant to that which has found in the manual only as a confirmation of the truth of its contents at the end of the process it described. Yet, if what was learned from that manual was how to clarify one's already existing reception of a radio program, a program which, moreover, consisted of a more detailed version of the material on which the manual was based, both written word and direct experience would be present and interrelated from the very beginning. In this later case, the source of one's knowledge of radios that one might emphasize in a given instance would depend entirely on the purposes of the moment.

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<sup>133</sup> They are unlikely to have been known in Ireland at the time, but this is what I take to be the position of Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria among others: there was an inspiration with real content that preceded an encounter with the law of Moses which was, nevertheless, decisive; Salvatore R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford 1971), 9-59; Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 65-72 and 138-49. See also Philo's *De vita Moisi*, where Moses is not the source of the Egyptian arts of mathematics, geometry, metrics, music (defined here as the study of metre, rhythm and harmony), a kind of 'philosophy conveyed in symbols' (τὴν διὰ συμβόλων φιλοσοφίαν), astrology, and law nor of the material contained regular Greek school course, nor of Chaldean astrology and law. He is instructed in all of these during his time in Egypt. Rather, he is portrayed as being the one who is able to authoritatively unite the contents of all these arts into a true and coherent whole; *De vita Mosis* I.v.21-4; Colson, ed. and tr., 'Moses I and II', ed.286-8, tr.287-9.

### **A Complex Case: *Suidigud Tellaig Temra***

This conclusion is made all the more inescapable by the existence of works in which the various possible bases of natural knowledge are all present and explicitly conceived as mutually reinforcing. Of these, the Middle-Irish text, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*,<sup>134</sup> is particularly good example. Fintan mac Bochra is presented there as the basis of subsequent historical knowledge in Ireland.<sup>135</sup> His historical knowledge is, in a way, his own, as a man who has seen and experienced many things due to his extremely long life. But even in this, the primacy of faith is evident, in that the length of his life is apparently due to Christ's intervention.<sup>136</sup> Yet, the authority of his judgement on these historical matters lies explicitly in his knowledge of every just judgement from times past, along with knowledge of the judges who made them. As we would now expect, this begins with its divine source, God's own judgement of the devil, and proceeds from there to include biblical judges, such as Moses, on the one hand and Irish judges, such as Caí (who, significantly, is mentioned immediately after Moses), on the other.<sup>137</sup> The authority by which Fintan's knowledge of judgement is confirmed and completed is Trefuilngid, who is 'an angel of God', or else 'God himself'.<sup>138</sup> His own knowledge of judgement thus begins and ends with that of God although it is clearly augmented by both direct and indirect mediations of Mosaic juridical knowledge in the middle.

Yet this latter addition to his knowledge of the history of Ireland by Trefuilngid (presumably of the things to which he had not been an eyewitness) is not simply a matter of Fintan happening to be alive at the time. It is on the basis of the extent and soundness of his previous knowledge that he is chosen, as one of twenty-eight *seanchaidi*, to receive this further knowledge, and out of these twenty-eight, to declare it

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<sup>134</sup> R.I. Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', *Ériu* 4 (1910), 121-172.

<sup>135</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §13 and 31; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor Tara', ed.138, 152 and tr.139, 153.

<sup>136</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §9; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', ed.130 and tr.131: 'Mad misi romanacht / mac Dé dín úas druíng / corscib dím in díliu / húas Tul Tuindi truím' (=As for me I was saved / by the Son of God, a protection over the throng, / the Deluge parted from me / above massive Tul Tuinde).

<sup>137</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §11-12; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', ed.134-8 and tr.135-9.

<sup>138</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §31; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', ed.152 and tr.153: 'ar ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin' (=for he was an angel of God, or he was God himself).

to the assembly of Conaing Bec-ecla.<sup>139</sup> In this, the correlation we have seen in earlier texts, between the extent of one's education, and the extent of one's capacity for directly apprehending further divinely revealed knowledge, is evidently present here as well. Although, here, the process does not seem to begin with an inspired knowledge that results from his study of nature so much as with hearing the news of the initial judgement God made at the beginning of history. The source of this knowledge is similarly beyond that which belongs to humanity in itself, but Fintan's encounter with Trefuilngid is the first we see of him receiving knowledge from a divine source directly, even if the length of his life seems to be dependent on ongoing divine intervention. It is, moreover, left ambiguous as to how much of his knowledge of past judgements comes from the initial report he heard regarding God's judgement of the devil, how much comes from the law of Moses and its mediators, and how much again is received subsequently from the divine knowledge of Trefuilngid, all of which are received prior to the appearance of the Church in Ireland. They are all, it seems, very much, interrelated.

The best we can say is that this text is not concerned with delineating the interrelations between these various revelatory bases of knowledge so much as it is in arguing that the testimony and the judgements of Fintan enjoyed every possible form of authority they could have short of the advent of the Church. Aside from the fact that this text does not allow for very clear distinctions between where one mode of revelation stops, and the others begin, its relatively late date makes it an unlikely basis for any new conclusions regarding the earlier texts we have been considering. Yet it provides an important caution that we should not be quick to insist that positions which may be mutually exclusive in other texts are so in another which does not present them as such. Albeit, this should not become a pretext for introducing such complexity as we have found in *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* to a text whose presentation is more straightforward, or whose distinctions between forms of revelation are clearer for being part of its fundamental concern. This brings us to the end of our analysis of the signs and symptoms which

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<sup>139</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §21-22; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor Tara', ed.144-6 and tr.145-7

demonstrate the presence or absence of the doctrine of natural law we have been considering, and of their limitations as signs and symbols. Now it falls to us to explore another aspect of its character.

### **Natural Law as Theological Vision**

To say how the law of nature is known is still not to say much about the intelligible content that is thought to be specific to it. We have found that it emerges as a divine revelation of ethical knowledge, and, it would seem, of the various arts and sciences by which a yet more profound revelation of that ethical knowledge is possible. But we have still to determine what, if anything, distinguishes this content from that which presumably arises from the revelation proper to the Church. First, however, there is the divine element of that revelation to consider. As a divine revelation it would seem likely to reveal something about the divinity that does the revealing, in addition to its yet to be delineated ethical and scientific content. However, it also remains to be seen what the conceptual content of this theological knowledge - both its extent and its kind - might be.

As direct as this experience and knowledge of the Holy Spirit is, in the texts we have considered, it is evidently still not an all-sufficient theological knowledge. Whatever Muirchú may mean by saying that Monesan is ‘full of the Holy Spirit’, she is not so in such a way as to make her any less in need of the sacraments of the Church than any other ‘naturally good’ person in medieval Irish hagiography.<sup>140</sup> She is, so to speak, ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ in a natural, rather than an ecclesiastical mode. Similarly, The Prologue to *SM* does not limit the natural law, that the Holy Spirit is said to speak

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<sup>140</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.xxvii, 7-9; Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘Muirchú’, ed.100 and tr.101: ‘Tunc ille repletus Spiritu Sancto eleuauit uocem suam et dixit ad eam: “si in Deum credis?” Et ait: “Credo.” Tunc sacro Spiritus et aquae lauacro eam lauit.(8) Nec mora, post ea solo prostrata spiritum in manus angelorum tradidit. Ubi moritur ibi et adunatur. (9) Tunc Patricius prophetauit quod post annos uiginti corpus illius ad propinquam cellulam de illo loco tolleretur cum honore. Quod postea ita factum est. Cuius transmarinae reliquiae ibi adorantur usque hodie.’ (=He then, full of the Holy Spirit, raised his voice and said to her: ‘Do you believe in God?’ And she said: ‘I do believe.’ Then he bathed her in the bath of the Holy Spirit and the water. (8) Immediately afterwards she fell to the ground and gave up her spirit into the hands of the angels. She was buried on the spot where she died. (9) Then Patrick prophesied that after twenty years her body would be conveyed to a near-by chapel with great ceremony. This was done afterwards, and the relics of the maiden from across the sea are there an object of worship to the present day. See secondary sources in note 97 above, for further references and discussion.

through the mouths of ‘the righteous poets and judges’ of Ireland’s pre-Christian past, to its legal contents and the hierarchical cosmology implicit in those contents, but sees this utterance, this natural law, as having a further prophetic element that, in a way reminiscent of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, foretells future events of salvation history.<sup>141</sup> However, in this case, the additional knowledge afforded by this prophetic element, despite its direct revelation by the Holy Spirit, does not appear to contain anything at all about the Church, or the knowledge associated with it, besides the bare anticipation of its eventual appearance. The Holy Spirit, in these situations, is evidently thought to reveal something past ethical knowledge about just deliberation and the forms of learning which allow it to come more profoundly into view, but in a way that is appropriate to such knowledge, and, in some way, limited by its field of vision.

The significance of this additional revelation, not included in the political instantiation of the natural law, as such, but emerging both as its possibility and perfection, is not spelled out in the medieval Irish texts in question, but is clear enough when we return once more to the patristic authorities. As we saw earlier, the Latin Doctors did not believe that mere obedience to the natural law - in the reduced sense of it being the fallen soul’s compromised but inherent knowledge of ethics - could result in anything more than, perhaps, physical blessings, and those, only in this present life.<sup>142</sup> For the soul to begin to regain its true nature, something further is needed, in the form of a revelation (beyond what is already innate in the fallen soul’s vestigial capacities) of Christ, which is to say, the more-than-natural means by which the soul may to begin to live again according to a law beyond that of its currently fallen nature. It is only a soul

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<sup>141</sup> *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18: ‘Is ann ro herbad do Dubthach taisbénad breithemnusa 7 uile filidechta Érenn 7 nach rechta ro fallnasat la firu Érenn i recht aicnid 7 i recht fáide, i mbrethaib indse Érenn 7 i filedaib doaircehnatar donicfad bélra mbán mbiait .i. recht litre. Ar in Spirit Naem ro labrastar 7 doaircechain tria ginu na fer fíréon ceta-rabatar i n-inis Érenn amail donaircechain tria ginu inna prímfáide 7 inna n-uasalaithe i recht petarlaice; ar rosiacht recht aicnid máir nád roacht recht litre’ (=Then it was entrusted to Dubthach to exhibit judgement, and all the poetry of Ireland, and every law which had held sway among the men of Ireland, in the law of nature and the law of the prophets, in the judgements of the island of Ireland and among the poets who had prophesied that the white language of the *Beati* would come, i.e. the law of scripture. For the Holy Spirit spoke and prophesied through the mouths of the righteous men who were first in the island of Ireland, as He prophesied through the mouths of the chief prophets and patriarchs in the law of the Old Testament).

<sup>142</sup> See page 78 above.

that has begun to live according to the more-than-natural realities that have thus been revealed by faith that has begun to be ‘righteous’ (*iustus*).

Of course, this is not a dilemma for the medieval Irish sources we have been considering. Since they do not conceive of a correct knowledge of nature as being possible apart from what is revealed by faith, this revelation and the resulting righteousness, seems to be internal to their conception of natural law (where it is conceptualised), rather than something needed in addition to it. Yet, as we found in the previous section, the significance of what it is that is revealed by faith, relative to the question of salvation, is not altered by this. These further revelations, these prophecies in the mode of nature, would be what allows medieval Irish authors to see certain pre-Christian people in Ireland, not only as ‘right’ (*fír*), insofar as ethics and politics are concerned, but ‘righteous’ (*fíreóin / fíriánaichthe*) in the same way as the biblical patriarchs were thought, according to St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans,<sup>143</sup> to have been made ‘righteous’ by faith. When we find Irish pre-Christians described as ‘righteous’ in these contexts, this should be taken as a claim that they know and assent to enough about what is beyond nature, in the narrow sense of the word, that they are understood to have the faith necessary for salvation.

By implication, this conclusion applies to *fír* as well. For in the texts which have been discussed above, that which is known uniquely by the faith that crowns one’s intellectual endeavours, however modest these endeavours may be, the same faith as

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<sup>143</sup> In addition to what we have already observed above see, *WGPE*, 2a-d, 19a-20a, esp. 2a18, 2b6, 2b17, 2c13, 2d7, 19b12, 19b15, 19c20; Stokes and Strachan, eds. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 503-9, 621-627, esp. 504: ‘2a18. .i. huaire nád riarfact furuar buid cenengne etcenfírinni . . . 2b6. .i. istrichretim iesu Christi isírian cách . . . 2b17. .i. isnesa dogeintib .i. quia ante legem sancti deo placuerunt ut ábail, séth, enóc, nóe . . . 2c13. .i. istriahiris rambái cachmaith . . . 2d7. .i. anadruirmed doabracham .i. fírinne trihúris . . . 19b12. .i. amal as híress ronóib abracham nitatgníma rechto issí dano robnóibsi . . . 19b15. .i. indí ata híressig ataella indbendacht doratad for abracham . . . 19c20. .i. ma nudubfeil inellug coirp crist adibcland abrache amal sodin et itsib atachomarpí abracham’ (=2a18. i.e. since he has not sought Him it has produced a state of being without understanding and without righteousness . . . 2b6. i.e. it is through belief in Jesus Christ that every one is righteous . . . 2b17. i.e. He is nearer to Gentiles, i.e. quia, etc. ut Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah . . . 2c13. i.e. it is through his faith that he has had every good . . . 2d7. i.e. what has been counted unto Abraham, even righteousness through faith. . . 19b12. i.e. as it is faith that has sanctified Abraham and not deeds of the Law, it also has sanctified you . . . 19b15. i.e. they that are faithful, the blessing which has been bestowed on Abraham passes to them . . . 19c20. i.e. if ye are in the union of Christ’s Body, ye are Abraham’s children in this wise, and it is ye that are Abraham’s heirs).



grants them the salvation that belongs to righteousness, is what allows them to be ‘right’ in a reliable way.<sup>144</sup> Nor is this idea confined to the texts we have been considering. The idea that the righteousness that is imparted by faith is the prerequisite for ‘rightness’ generally is, in fact, most explicitly articulated in the *Würzburg Glosses*. In a gloss on St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians it is said that both what is ‘false’ (*gáu*) what is ‘true’ (*fír*) are common in such thinking as is done according to the flesh. However, St. Paul here is not capable of speaking falsely because he who is ‘true’ (*fír*) and righteous (*fíríon*), namely Christ, speaks through him.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, here, epistemological rightness is, significantly, not simply implied by moral rightness, but directly equated with it, in that the glossator sees speaking about God’s ‘*fír*’ here as the same thing as speaking of his absolute existence. It remains, there is no telling if this theory is necessarily implied in any given discussion of the ‘truth’ of a king or a poet. But, as in earlier instances, it is, to my knowledge, the only definable theory of the principles by which such a ‘truth’ operates which may be found in the literature that is currently available.

### Contrasting Views of Natural Theology?

The extent of the theological content that can, or must, be known according to this revelation of natural law is something on which there is, at least superficially, a wide degree of variance in early Irish literature. It is consistently argued by the Fathers that

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<sup>144</sup> See also, *MGP*, 55d25; Stokes and Strachan, eds. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 182: ‘.i. nífil chosmailius fír doneuch asber nadmbed dlíged remdeicsen dá dudoib sech remideci dia dunaib anmandib amlabrib.’ (=i.e. there is no semblance of truth for anyone who says that there is no law of the providence of God for men, for God provides for the dumb animals).

<sup>145</sup> *WGPE*, 14c22-37, glossing 2 Corinthians 1:20-21; Stokes and Strachan, eds. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 594-5: ‘22. .i. araní immeraither iarcolinn isgnáth gáo et fír nand ní íar colinn didiu moimradudsa sed secundum deum et non est mendacium in illo . . . 24. fochenéle lugi [i]ssiu rodbo chosmi[liu]s .i. amal nafil india [an]isiu .i. is fír fír et gáu [acht] tantum fil [an]d isamlid is fír fil indiunni 25. .i. fír tantum ished file indiunni . . . 28. .i. as est .i. fír 29. .i. bainse dún epert gue airintí labrathar indiunni .i. iesus cristus is fíríon side . . . 31. .i. níroibe iniesu christo est et non .i. fír et gáu acht is est nammá robói and .i. fír .i. biddixnugud fírinne . / . . 37. .i. ishe dia . . . .i. icosmuilius fris ignímaib et béssaib’ (= 22. i.e. for that which is cogitated according to the flesh, false and true are usual therein. Not, then according to the flesh is my cogitation but according to God and there is no falseness in him . . . 24. as a kind of oath herein it [is used], or a similitude, to wit, as this is not in God, even True and False, but it is True *tantum* that there is in Him, so it is True that there is in us 25. i.e. True *tantum*, it is this which is in us . . . 28. i.e. who is Est, i.e. True 29. i.e. it were hard for us to utter falsehood, for He that speaketh in us, even Jesus Chrstus, He is Just . . . 31. i.e. in Iesu Christo there were not Est and Non, that is, the True and the False, but it is Est only that was in Him, that is the True, even eternal existence of truth . / . . 37. i.e. it is God [who has sealed us] i.e. in likeness to Him in deeds and morals).

the faith by which righteousness is possible for a pre-Christian is specifically faith in Christ, since the possibility of righteousness for anybody, at any time, is understood to have been brought about only through the atemporal results of his temporal incarnation, passion and resurrection. However, how explicit this knowledge of Christ must be for faith to have an adequate basis is often left somewhat ambiguous. In the early Irish material, *Udhacht Athairne (UA)* in *Bretha Nemed Déidenach (BND)* and The Prologue to *SM* represent the apparent extremities of the debate. *UA* attributes the poet Athairne a knowledge of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation that is so detailed as to satisfy even the complex formulations and expectations of the *Athanasian Creed*.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, consistent with the pattern we have observed this far, this theological knowledge seems to be what gives him authority to instruct his students on the form of life that will be appropriate to them prior the Incarnation of Christ. For it is only with reference to the possibility that the Incarnation he foretells may take a long while to occur that the question emerges as to how they should live in the meantime.<sup>147</sup>

In which case, *UA* presents a view in which such theological knowledge as makes it possible to formulate parallel definitions to those of the *Athanasian Creed* is not simply possible for one living according to natural law, but is apparently the necessary ground for knowledge of the natural law to emerge as law, or at least the emergence of such a law in a form that may be said to describe what is ‘righteous’ (*fírén*).<sup>148</sup> Thus it seems to

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<sup>146</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1115.3ff]; Breatnach *et al.*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, ed.420 and tr.421: ‘Udhucht Aithirne annso do thairchedal gheine Criosd, ut dixit Athairne: Gignither Iosa Criosd, Athair aonmac – as aoinfer, as dias, as triar, as toghairm thredhata, as folaigh n-aoanaonta forosnaidh na n-uile gan aicsin, ro baoi gan tosach, biaidh gan foirchenn; comaosa an Mac 7 an tAthair 7 an Sbiorad Naomh, áonchumhachta 7 aoinmhiadhamhlata - tiugfa Tigherna fer Neimhe sgeo talmhan, Slainicidh an Domhain .i. Isu Chriosd a ainm’ (=The following is the statement of Athairne prophesying the birth of Christ as Athairne said: Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, will be born – the unseen illuminator of all is one person, is two, is three, whose appellation is a Trinity, whose substance is a single unity, has been without beginning, will be without end; the Son and the Father and the Holy Ghost are coeval, a single power, and a single dignity – there will come the Lord of the men of Heaven and Earth, the Redeemer of the World whose name is Jesus Christ). On its relationship of this passage to the *Athanasian Creed*, see Breatnach *et al.*, ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 242ff.

<sup>147</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1115.9-10]; Breatnach *et al.*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, ed.420-21 and tr.422: ‘Os sinne, ol a félmac fria hAthairne, có bíam, bheas ní thairsiom an tair/cedol sin do chomhalladh?’ (=As for us, said his pupils to Athairne, how shall we be, perhaps we may not experience the fulfilment of that prophecy?).

<sup>148</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1115.19-20]; Breatnach *et al.*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, ed.421 and tr.422: ‘Ant í bes ógh, bes iodhan, bes fírén, bes fírbhrethach i cceird éigsi saorfaid natha, naoithfid molta . . .’ (=He who is pure, who is sincere, who is righteous, who is true judging in the craft of poetry will ennoble

be, on the one hand, very demanding regarding what constitutes a saving knowledge of the Gospel, but on the other, optimistic about the extent of what can be known by such inspiration as a person who lives before Christ is able to receive. In both respects *UA* anticipates the views that Peter Abelard would later have on the subject<sup>149</sup> and, like him, provides for few means of distinguishing between the doctrinal content of the revelation that is available to the Church and that which was available to righteous pre-Christians.

Conversely, The Prologue to *SM*, as we have seen, attributes nothing more specific than knowledge that the ‘white language of the *Beati* would come’ to the righteous poets and judges of which it speaks.<sup>150</sup> Thus, on the face of it, it is considerably more generous in its outlook than *UA*, apparently requiring very little knowledge, beyond what the Holy Spirit is said to reveal about ethical action, for a person to achieve the righteousness that belongs to faith. However, in this apparent generosity, it seems that such theological insight as is possible, for one who knows no more than the natural law, contains next to nothing of the theological knowledge one might associate with the Church. The Prologue to *SM*’s more implicit sense of the revelation necessary for salvation would, if all is as it appears, be just as valid an interpretation of someone like Augustine as the extremely explicit doctrinal knowledge attributed to Athairne.<sup>151</sup> Yet, similar to it, one might have to go to twelfth- or thirteenth-century France to find another *milieu* in which such an understanding would be in any way the norm.<sup>152</sup> In all this, it is, however, a perspective which seems to draw a stark contrast between natural and ecclesiastical forms of knowledge in a way which *UA*, perhaps, does not.

Yet the contrast between these two texts is not as strong as it may seem at first. While *UA* emphasises continuity over development when it comes to doctrine, it plainly

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[praise-]poems, will make known praises . . .). Compare this to the idea discussed above, that the existence of the secular hierarchies before the coming of the Church depends upon some sort of knowledge of the distinctions that apply to the divine nature, namely, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; see pages 73-4.

<sup>149</sup> See note 118 above.

<sup>150</sup> See note 141 above.

<sup>151</sup> See note 146 above.

<sup>152</sup> William of Champeaux, Peter Damian and Hugh of St. Victor, for example; see Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers*, 65-6, 87, 168-70.

distinguishes between such law as is deemed possible before Christ, and such law as is deemed possible afterwards, in that it is, as we noted, framed precisely in the form of instructions regarding how poets should conduct themselves prior to the Incarnation, should it not occur for some time. As such, it is still operating within the clear distinctions between modes of revelation, and the respective stages of salvation history associated with them, that we have seen elsewhere in early Irish literature. However, at least in the case of *UA*, the significance of the Church's mode of knowledge would seem to lie in the unforeseeable legal and ethical ramifications understood to arise from the Incarnation itself, and presumably the Church's capacity to make the Incarnation manifest in its sacraments, rather than the revelation of the Incarnation as a doctrine. The correct knowledge of what the Incarnation is, that the *Athanasian Creed* claims is necessary for salvation,<sup>153</sup> is thought to be known by righteous proto-Christians like Athairne, but not what is revealed through its actual manifestation.

This distinction between theological and legal development plays a decisive role in our understanding of The Prologue to *SM* as well. Relative to the law of the Church, the righteous poets and judges of pre-Christian Ireland are said to know nothing except the coming of the 'white language' through which it would be articulated.<sup>154</sup> However, this is not yet to say anything about the doctrinal content of such prophecy as these righteous poets and judges were thought to enjoy. It seems unlikely, at any rate, that their prophetic activity could at once be thought to be comparable to that of the 'patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament' and exhausted by the simple foretelling of the

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<sup>153</sup> *Quicumque Vult*, lines 1-4; C.H. Turner, ed., 'A Critical Text of the *Quicumque Vult*', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1910-11), 401-11, at 407; tr., *Book of Common Prayer - 1959: Canada* (Cambridge 1959), 695-8, at 695: '1. Quicumque vult salvus esse, ante omnia opus est ut teneat catholicam fidem: 2. Quam nisi quisque integram inviolatamque servaverit, absque dubio in aeternam peribit. 3. Fides autem catholica haec est: ut unum Deum in Trinitate, et Trinitatem in unitate veneremur. 4. Neque confundentes personas, neque substantiam separantes . . .' (=1. Whosoever would be saved / needeth before all things to hold fast to the Catholic Faith. 2. Which Faith except everyone keep whole and undefiled, / without doubt he shall perish eternally. 3. Now the Catholic Faith is this, / that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance . . .). For further discussion of its textual history and early commentaries, see A.E. Burn, *The Athanasian Creed and its Early Commentaries* (Cambridge 1896).

<sup>154</sup> For other texts which mention the white language and further discussion, see Chapter 1, page 44, esp. note 102.

advent of the ‘white language’.<sup>155</sup> In this context, then, it is the comparison to the prophetic activity of the ‘patriarchs and prophets’ that is decisive with regard to the ‘righteousness’ of those involved, rather than the specific knowledge that the ‘white language’ would come. This being the case, it is hard to determine the extent of what was thought to be doctrinally knowable by these ‘righteous poets and judges’ and the degree of doctrinal knowledge is thought to be sufficient for righteousness, since there is no indication of the limits of what was thought to be known by the patriarchs and prophets to which they are compared, or the lower epistemological limit of the faith by which they are understood to be righteous. As far as legal knowledge is concerned, the knowledge of the pre-Christian righteous in The Prologue to *SM* (as in *UA*) certainly includes knowledge that a superior law will be revealed. But past this, The Prologue to *SM* is silent, or it would be, but for its passing reference to *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad*.

### **The Evidence of *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad***

The dialogue after which the *Immacallam* is named is between Néde, a youthful poet of the second-highest grade<sup>156</sup> who contends with the present *ollam* of Ireland, Ferchertne, for his office.<sup>157</sup> Both begin by alternately demonstrating their knowledge of the poetic art by means of veiled references to features of the natural order and its political instantiations, and also by direct references to them that are veiled references to their poetic art. The turning point comes when each asks the other whose son they are. Néde answers with reference only to his immediate origins as a poet,<sup>158</sup> but Ferchertne, looking further back, to his origination as a man from the first man, Adam, who he knows was, in some manner, ‘baptised’ (*ro basted*) after his death.<sup>159</sup> Thus, Ferchertne, not only has a knowledge stretching back to the beginning of creation, but one which

<sup>155</sup> These references here are all to the quotation in note 141 above.

<sup>156</sup> *Immacallam* §6; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.10-12 and tr.11-13: ‘IS amlaid dano documlai in mac, 7 craeb airgdide uaso, uair issed no bíd uasna hanrothaib. Craeb óir immorro uasna / ollamnaib. Craeb umai uasna filedaib archena’ (=Thus went the youth with a silvern branch above him; for this is what used to be above the *anruths*, a branch / of gold above the ollaves: a branch of copper over the rest of the poets). The secondary position of the *ánruth* after the *ollam* is quite consistent in early Irish portrayals of the poetic hierarchies; for comparisons of various early Irish orderings of the poetic hierarchy, see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 81, 181-184.

<sup>157</sup> This begins at *Immacallam* §10; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.14 and tr.15.

<sup>158</sup> *Immacallam* §10, line 128-39; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.30. and tr.31.

<sup>159</sup> *Immacallam* §10, line 141-7, esp. 143; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.32 and tr.33.

includes a certain amount of doctrinal insight into the sacraments of the Church, and seemingly, that by which they are understood to have efficacy. But their subsequent answers to the question of what tidings they may have show the gap between them to a much greater extent.<sup>160</sup> Néde foretells abundance of crops, peace, virtue, and perfection of art in the immediate future.<sup>161</sup> Ferchertne, however, looks far beyond this to the ruin of the world preceding the apocalypse and describes the destruction of all the natural goods previously described by Néde, in great detail, in addition to the destruction of the coming Church in all its orders.<sup>162</sup> It is at this point that Néde acknowledges Ferchertne's superiority.<sup>163</sup>

In all this, the *Immacallam* amounts to the most protracted medieval Irish exploration, as remains to us, of contrasting degrees of proficiency in the divine inspiration by which the law of nature is known, and extra-ecclesiastical prophecy possible. Of particular interest is that the extent of Néde's inspired knowledge seems to correspond to the limits we have seen more commonly ascribed to natural knowledge in the Patristic sources, that is, it is confined to created realities and such justice as pertains to them, without necessarily referring these things appropriately to the divine source and justice which they imply. In keeping with this we observe that while Néde cannot produce such theological knowledge as Ferchertne does, his knowledge of the natural order is sufficient to recognize the truth of such knowledge when it appears. He is also able to recognize that there is a God, but it is not clear if he is capable of affirming anything

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<sup>160</sup> The Middle Irish glossator in LL complicates matters by reading Néde's statement, 'fechait oblaind' (fruit trees flourish?), as a veiled reference to the unleavened bread 'ablanna' of the Eucharistic feast; *Immacallam* §10, line 154, gloss 1; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.34 and tr.35: 'i. ablanna 7 corp Crist (=consecrated Hosts and Christ's Body). This seems contrary to the dichotomy which is developed in the main text in which it is Ferchertne, not Néde, who has knowledge of such things. But perhaps it is this is something thought to be implicit in Néde's knowledge which is only knowable from such a perspective as Ferchertne enjoys. The glossator of Rawlinson B 502 has this simply as a reference to '[a]bla ubla' (=appletrees [and] apples), whereas the glossator of the Yellow Book of Lecan preserves both possibilities.

<sup>161</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 149-73; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.32-4 and tr.33-5.

<sup>162</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 175-266; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36-48 and tr.37-49. A new edition and translation of this part of the *Immacallam* and its glosses is found in Carey, ed. and tr., 'The End of the World in *The Colloquy of the Two Sages*', in Carey *et al.*, eds., *The End and Beyond* II, 629-45.

<sup>163</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 268-73; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.50 and tr.51.

beyond this simple acknowledgement of his existence at this point, or if he was capable of even this recognition before his exposure to Ferchertne's superior learning.<sup>164</sup>

Thus far, we would seem to have a view which contrasts with what we have seen in the texts we have been considering, were it not that his knowledge still seems to have been revealed to him from a source which is beyond his own nature. In the first place, he is not simply able to be 'right' in these matters, in a way that is distinguished from the 'righteousness' which is necessary for 'rightness' in the other texts that we have looked at. His knowledge is also associated, at least by him, with the quality of 'righteousness' which has always signified thus far, the righteousness that is made possible by faith and in which lies the Christian hope of salvation.<sup>165</sup> It might be supposed that we should not trust his own account of himself in this way, but despite Néde's deficiencies, this statement never seems to be put into question either by author's description or the authoritative perspective of Ferchertne.<sup>166</sup> Of course, it would be wrong to expect that every text will use terminology in the same way. Although, viewed from the perspective of The Prologue which sees some version of this account as something which is included in its own perspective, it would be hard to know how else to interpret them.

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<sup>164</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 268-72; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.50 and tr.51: '268. Ni *anse*. fetar mo Dia dülech. 269. *fetar* mo rus fãithi, / 270. *fetar* mo choll creth, 271. *fetar* mo Dia trën, 272. *fetar* rofili faith Fercheirdne' (=268. Easy [to say]. I know my God creative. 269. Know my wisest of prophets. 270. I know my hazel of poetry. 271. I know my mighty God. 272. I know that Ferchertne is a great poet and prophet).

<sup>165</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 19-27; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.16-18 and tr.17-19: '[Dixit Ferchertne] 19. *Ceist*, a gillai forcitail, can dodechadsu? [Respondit Néde] 20. Ni *ansa*. a sail súad, 21. a ommur gáise. / . . . 27. I forcantar firinne' (= Said Ferchertne: 19. A question, O instructing lad, whence hast thou come? Néde Answered: 20. Not hard [to say]: from the heel of a sage, 21. From a confluence of wisdom. / . . . 27. in which righteousness is taught . . .). The Yellow Book of Lecan has 'fior' (truth/justice) rather than 'firinne' (righteousness).

<sup>166</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 274-81; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.50-2 and tr.51-3: '274. Fosaigthe, a bic mōir, meic Adnai . . . Ferchertne dixit: Fosaigthe tra, a fili moir .i. i n-eolas, a maic Adnai . . . 275. robat moхта indōcbaithe, 276. Robat clothach cumtachta la duini ocua Dia . [7 paragraphs omitted] . . . 277. rob comrar dāna, 278. rob doe rig, / 279. ropo áil olloman, 280. Roba orddan nEmna. 281. ropo airddiu cāch' (= [Dixit Ferchertne] 274. Stay, O little [in age], great [in knowledge], son of Adnae! [Dixit Ferchertne] 275. Said Ferchertne: Stay then, thou poet great, to wit, in science, O son of Adnae! mayst thou be magnified [and] glorified! 276. mayst thou be famous [and] adorned in the opinion of man and God! 277. mayst thou be a casket of poetry! 278. mayst thou be a king's arm! 279. mayst thou be a rock of ollaves! 280. Mayst thou be the glory of Emain! 281. mayst thou be higher than every one!).

Thus, whether or not this ‘righteousness’ was already associated with Néde, in the version of the *Immacallam* referred to by The Prologue, such subsequent medieval scholars as interpreted the *Immacallam* in light of The Prologue would have necessarily concluded that he possessed, despite his very modest theological knowledge, some measure of the righteousness that comes from the direct knowledge of God which faith makes possible. Nor is this as strange as it may seem. It is important to bear in mind here that the Milan Glosses appear to have required no more than the basic distinction between Creator and creation, for at least the beginnings of righteousness to be possible.<sup>167</sup> Yet, if so, we are dealing with a very implicit form of revelation indeed, whose principle mediators seem to be such things as the ‘gods of Poetry’ (*Dea nDána*) and the ‘hazels of wisdom’ (*acailib crímond*).<sup>168</sup> Although, it would not be the first time, either in Scripture or Christian tradition, in which God was understood to reveal himself and his instruction through spiritual intermediaries with the assistance of some kind of sacramental food.<sup>169</sup> We will have occasion to deal with this question of strange mediaries at a later point.<sup>170</sup>

Whatever we make of them, it is clear that any contradiction we may observe between these kinds of mediaries and Christianity is not seen as one by the author. Fechtne’s knowledge, as we have found, is not limited to the created order, but includes insight into ecclesiastical, eschatological, and other transcendent realities. As someone who appears to have a relatively comprehensive and explicit knowledge of the objects which faith perceives, he fits quite neatly into the Prologue’s category of ‘righteous poet’ through whom the Holy Spirit speaks. Yet, if he is sharply distinguished from Néde, regarding the extent of his knowledge, he is in no way distinguished from him regarding the mediaries of this revelation to him. For, like Néde, his ‘fury of inspiration’ (*borand immas*) and ‘structure of mind’ (*aicde menmann*),<sup>171</sup> among other such things, appear to derive from the Boyne river, which, the glossator of the Book of Leinster (LL) informs

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<sup>167</sup> See pages 83-5 above.

<sup>168</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 24 139, 270; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18, 30, 50 and tr.19, 31, 51.

<sup>169</sup> e.g. Isaiah 6:6-7; Ezek. 2:9-3:2; Rev. 10:8-10.

<sup>170</sup> This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

<sup>171</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 81-2; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.24 and tr.25.



us, is the river that produces the ‘hazels of wisdom’ referred to by Néde.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, his reference to the Boyne is made by means of its association with a certain otherworldly being, namely, Bóane, the wife of Nechtan (or else Núada) after whom the river is here thought to be eponymously named.<sup>173</sup>

The reason for the difference between them lies not in the ultimate or proximate sources of their inspiration and learning, but in their respective ranks. The *Immacallam*, as we have seen, portrays Néde as an *ánruth* (the second-highest rank of poet) and Ferchertne as an *ollam* (the highest poetic rank). This would seem to suggest that the kind of prophetic knowledge that looks beyond the created order is something which belongs exclusively to the rank of *ollam* and that the form of prophecy which is confined to the standard operation of the created order, to the rank (or ranks) below it.<sup>174</sup> Remembering that the quality of ‘righteousness’ seems to pertain to them both, the message here is not ‘only *ollams* go to heaven’, so far as pre-Christians are concerned. Lower-ranked poets are dependent on the *ollam*, not for the inchoate knowledge of God they already have, but for the extension of their clear insight into the created order to the realities that are beyond it, with all the things that this extension makes possible.

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<sup>172</sup> This is at any rate how the glossator of Rawlinson B 502 seems to interpret the text. See *Immacallam* §10, line 33, gloss 6; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18 and tr.19: ‘atib-seom sruth immais na ecsa esse’ (=he quaffed thereout the stream of inspiration of knowledge). See also the LL glossator’s similar comment, where Néde mentions the hazels directly; *Immacallam* §10, line 24, gloss 1; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18 and tr.19: ‘a nóí collaib na Segsa’ (=from the nine hazels of Segais [i.e. the source of the Boyne]). Compare to *The Caldron of Poesy*, where a similar doctrine is found; *The Caldron of Poesy* §10-11; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.66 and tr.67: ‘10. Atáat dano dí fódail for fáilti ó n-impoíther i Coire Sofís, .i. fáilte déodaie 7 fáilte dóendaie. 11. Ind fáilte dóendaie, atáat cethéoir fodlai for suidi . . . fáilte fri tascor n-imbais do-fuaircet nóí cuill cainmeso for Segais i sídaib, conda-thochrathar méit motchnaí iar ndruimniu Bóinde frithroisc luaithiu euch aige i mmdeón mís mithime dia secht mbliadnae beos’ (=10. There are, then, two divisions of joy through which it is converted into the Caldron of Knowledge, i.e. divine joy and human joy. 11. As for human joy, it has four divisions . . . (iv) joy at the arrival of imbais which the nine hazels of fine mast at Segais in the *síd*’s amass and which is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne, as extensive as a wether fleece, swifter than racehorse, in the middle of June every seventh year regularly).

<sup>173</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 31-5; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18 and tr.19: ‘31. Os tussu, a mmo sruth, can dollod? . . . 34. iar síd mnā Nechtáin, 35. iar ríg mnā Nuadat’ (=31. And thou, O my senior, whence hast thou come? . . . 34. along the elfmound of Nechtán’s wife, 35. along the forearm of Núada’s wife). See further discussion in Chapter 6, pages 373-82, with related discussion concerning accounts of ‘elfmound’ in question at 387-9.

<sup>174</sup> For other early Irish texts which see ‘inspiration’ (*imbais*) as a necessary qualification for any poet (*fili*), see Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Three Things Required’, *passim*.

Yet the preliminary form of righteousness which is possible for a poet of Néde's standing seems to have a certain vulnerability due to its relative ignorance of what is beyond the created order. It is presumably his lack of such knowledge that leads him to think that he can be an *ollam*, a position which is distinguished from him by its stable possession of that which he knows only tentatively. But in claiming the position of *ollam*, he is found, for all his knowledge of the created order, to have made a false judgement, dissembling to be what he is not,<sup>175</sup> the same perversion of the order of reality that Ferchertne prophesies will generally characterize the end of time, albeit, in forms far more numerous and exaggerated.<sup>176</sup> However, it seems that Néde, having shown himself penitent for his false judgement, is able to be restored to himself by an *ollam*,<sup>177</sup> which is to say, by one who has the comprehensive understanding of reality that is enjoyed by an *ollam*.

In this, the *Immacallam* presents a much more clear-cut relationship between what we may call the 'merely-natural' and 'more-than-natural' forms of prophecy thought to be available to righteous pre-Christian poets than *UA* does, that is, if such a distinction is even implied in *UA*. Since *UA* begins with Athairne and his interlocutors already in a teacher-student relationship, it is much more difficult to determine what their capacities would have been prior to Athairne's impartation to them of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It is possible that, like Néde, they are thought to have such righteousness as a more implicit form of faith allows, so that Athairne's subsequent comments on how they should live only expand and make explicit what was already present in a relatively inchoate form. However, this seems unlikely when we consider the details of the *UA* further.

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<sup>175</sup> This is most clearly evident in the false beard that he makes for himself out of grass to make him seem old enough; *Immacallam* §8; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.12 and tr.13. Cf. Cú Chulainn's similar adoption of a beard made of grass to make himself seem the age of a fighting-man. This, however, has no such negative connotations; *Táin Bó Cúailnge I*, lines 1449-1455; Cecile O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* (Dublin 1976), ed.45 and tr.165.

<sup>176</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 175ff., esp. 187, 190-91, 222-3, 254-62; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36ff. and tr.37ff.

<sup>177</sup> *Immacallam* §10, lines 274ff.; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.50ff. and tr.51ff.

The fact that they are already students implies that they are not beginning from zero. Yet, there is no concrete indication that his students previously had anything approaching a reliable knowledge of the distinction between the ‘truth’ he tells them to follow, and the ‘falsehood’ he tells them to reject. Moreover, the possibility of the ‘righteous’ behaviour he enjoins upon them only emerges in the context of the adoration of the ‘King who created the World’, who Athairne has only just made known to them through his prophecy. In its evident insistence that the faith upon which righteousness relies involves an explicit knowledge of the Trinity and the Incarnation, among other things, the *UA*, as might well be expected, remains close to the spirit of the *Athanasian Creed* which it draws upon. This neither confirms or denies the *Immacallam*’s presentation, insofar as the revelation of such things belongs, there, to the *ollam*, in exclusion of the lower ranks of poets. However, it does suggest that, such poets as may not be able to glimpse these realities for themselves, would be wholly dependant on those who did, for any degree of the righteousness in which is the possibility, both of the soul’s salvation, and of correct discernment of what is true, from what is false.<sup>178</sup> In this latter case, it is indeed in contrast with the *Immacallam*, where a lesser poet, who knows no more about God than his existence (and perhaps not even this in any distinct way), is said to have attained, through his inspiration, sufficient righteousness to distinguish true from false with a fairly high degree of accuracy, and to have done so prior to any contact with a poet whose doctrinal knowledge of God was more complete.

This raises the important, but, for the moment, unanswerable question: ‘does the *Immacallam*’s insistence on the precarious independence of a form of righteousness, which apparently knows little more about God than his existence, and prophecies about no more than the contents of created nature, an early attempt to conciliate the kind of view we find in *UA* with a more standard patristic understanding of natural knowledge?’ It is, at the very least, striking that Ferchertne is comparable to Athairne in his knowledge of spiritual things, whereas Néde’s knowledge, despite its prophetic element, is limited to the same sphere of knowledge that is more generally ascribed to natural

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<sup>178</sup> In this it is, perhaps, comparable to the dependence of a priest on a bishop for both the authority and the mediation of the Holy Spirit, through ordination, necessary to be in any way capable of performing that role.

philosophy in the Fathers. If so, it is a synthesis which has features that seem unlikely to have been anticipated by either perspective on its own. Among these, the identification of a kind of prophecy, which, despite its source in God, is limited to the created order in its scope, is, without a doubt, the most dramatic and unprecedented.

### **The Evidence of *The Caldron of Poesy***

Here, another Old Irish text, *The Caldron of Poesy*,<sup>179</sup> will be a useful point of comparison. In its exploration of the sources of poetry in the soul, *The Caldron* finds a tripartite hierarchical structure, consisting, in ascending order, of the Cauldrons of *Goriath*,<sup>180</sup> *Érma* (Motion) and *Sofís* (Knowledge), respectively. The *Coire Goriath* is the source of knowledge of the most preliminary poetic knowledge: morphology, grammatical gender and the like.<sup>181</sup> It begins to provide this learning from early youth onward.<sup>182</sup> But this cauldron does not provide the same amount of knowledge to all, since God does not provide to everyone equally in this regard.<sup>183</sup> In some people, this cauldron is empty of knowledge, being upside down; in others, partly full, containing partial knowledge; in yet others, it is upright, and thus, full of knowledge.<sup>184</sup> Beyond this is the *Coire Érmae* (Cauldron of Motion). This cauldron does not contain anything of itself, but under the influence of certain kinds of sorrow or joy, it can be moved into an upright position,<sup>185</sup> and so become a receptacle for the knowledge from which all the arts, including poetry, is derived.<sup>186</sup> Insofar as the *Coire Érmae*, is converted into this

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<sup>179</sup> Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 45-93. Liam Breatnach suggests that its composition must have occurred in the first half of the eighth century, on linguistic grounds. It cannot at any rate, have been composed later than the second half of the ninth century, when *The Triads of Ireland*, in which it is quoted, were written; Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 56.

<sup>180</sup> The etymology of 'Goriath' is unclear; Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 74.

<sup>181</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §1.10-12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.62 and tr.63.

<sup>182</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §5; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.64 and tr.65.

<sup>183</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §1.7-9; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.62 and tr.63.

<sup>184</sup> There is an apparent conflict between the claim that the Caldron of Goriath is generated upright in a person, and the claim that because God does not provide knowledge to everyone equally, it is upright in some, half-upright in others, and inverted in yet others. Breatnach's solution appears to be right. That is, when it says that this cauldron is 'generated upright from the first', this is in the ideal case of someone who could possibly attain the highest levels of knowledge; Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 50.

<sup>185</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §6 and 8ff.; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.64ff. and tr.65ff.

<sup>186</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §2, 7 and 13.86; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.62-64, 70 and tr.63-65, 71.

upright position it comes to be called the *Coire Sofís* (Cauldron of Knowledge).<sup>187</sup> However, this conversion is brought about in different degrees, in different people. While everyone has the potentiality for poetic knowledge, the *Coire Érmae* remains inverted in every second person,<sup>188</sup> so that, whatever they may possess of the preliminary knowledge contained in the *Coire Goiriath*, they remain fundamentally ignorant and foolish.<sup>189</sup> Among the bardic classes, the *Coire Érmae* (of Motion) is partially full, since it moves no higher than its side, except for the highest status of bard, the *ánroth*, in whom it is upright.<sup>190</sup> This seems to imply that it will also be fully upright, and thus fully the *Coire Sofís* (Knowledge) among all the higher grades of poets (ie. the *filid*) as well.

That said, it seems that a person's capacity for the conversion of the *Coire Érmae* depends in part on the degree of knowledge which has been permitted by the inborn disposition of the *Coire Goiriath* in them. One who acquires the high-level of knowledge made possible by an upright *Coire Goiriath*, begins with the *Coire Érmae* on its side, whereas those with less, begin with the *Coire Érmae* pointing downward. It is only those in whom the *Coire Goiriath* is fixed upright, and the *Coire Érmae*, thus, begins on its side, that the *Coire Érmae* will be capable of assuming the upright position.<sup>191</sup>

However, if more than a distinction between sub- and super-*ánroth* poets is to be made, there must be further means of subdividing this capacity of the *Coire Érmae* to receive knowledge from God<sup>192</sup> than are allowed by the fundamental contrast of its sideways

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<sup>187</sup> Accepting Breatnach's interpretation; Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 50-1.

<sup>188</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §3.22-4 and 8.34-5; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', 64-66.

<sup>189</sup> This is not stated directly but is the implication of the statement that the *Coire Sofís* is that which 'echtraid fri borbu' (=separates one from fools); *The Caldron of Poesy* §16.114; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.72 and tr.73.

<sup>190</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §8; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', 66.

<sup>191</sup> This is following Breatnach's interpretation of §1 and 5-8; Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 50.

<sup>192</sup> 'God' (*Día*) is only mentioned directly, in regard to the *Coire Goiriath*, as the ultimate source of knowledge and the means of receiving it in the soul; *The Caldron of Poesy* §1; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.62 and tr.63. However, there seem to be no other candidates for who or what might be filling the *Coire Sofís* or for that by which this filling of knowledge, at least at its greater extent, may be understood as an 'inspiration' (*imbas*), and, at its greatest, 'tórumae ind raith déodai' (=the

and upright positions. This need is fulfilled by the lists of the sorrows and joys that are capable of converting the *Coire Éрмаe*. As Professor Breatnach has noted, the listing of the joys that can convert the *Coire Éрмаe* upward seem to be hierarchically ordered, so that they mirror the stages of poetic development.<sup>193</sup> It begins with the most basic joy, such as arises from sexual longing, proceeds through that which comes from freedom from care, and from there to that which arises from studying poetry well. The culmination is the joy of *imbas*, the inspiration which is said to come from the, now familiar, nine hazels from the *síd* that appear on the Boyne in the middle of June every seventh year.<sup>194</sup>

Breatnach must surely be correct when he sees these as describing the stages of a poetic career. However, since neither sexual longing, nor the joy that arises from moments of respite and ease, or else the study of poetry, are likely to be left behind at any point in that career, it seems that these must, in addition to a temporal succession, also represent a hierarchical arrangement of the joys that are always at work (insofar as they have been attained) in the successful practice of inspired poetry, leading from the most foundational and involuntary to the most sublime and intentional. The list of sorrows, leading from longing, to grief, to jealousy, to exile for the sake of God, appear to follow a similar pattern of ascending intentionality. Presumably the further one moves up these lists, and the more effectively one subjects the initial items to the latter, the more perfectly one will realize the capacity of one's sideways, or else upright, *Coire Éрмаe* to receive poetic knowledge that lies in the *Coire Sofís*, the source of all the arts. In short, moral education, that is, the education and ordering of desire, must be added to the rote knowledge of the *Coire Goiriath* if the capacity of that knowledge (such as one has it), to be further converted to the *Coire Sofís*, is to be realised. Given the association of *imbas* with the poetic (as opposed to the bardic) classes in both *BND* and *The Introduction to SM (SM 1)*,<sup>195</sup> it seems likely that the reception of *imbas*, at least, is a

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coming of divine grace); *The Caldron of Poesy*, §10-12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.66-8 and tr.67-9.

<sup>193</sup> Breatnach, 'The Caldron of Poesy', 50.

<sup>194</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §11; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.66 and tr.67.

<sup>195</sup> For sources and discussion, see Carey, 'The Three Things Required', 43ff. See also discussion and references on pages 95-6 above.

part of this moral education that is only possible when the *Coire Éarmae* is already in the fully upright position.

The way that the lists of the sorrows and joys which convert the *Coire Éarmae* provide a means of describing progress and rank within the basic distinctions of its sideways, and upright orientations, is further emphasised by the subsequent introduction of a yet greater joy, the divine joy (*fáilte déodae*), the ‘coming of grace to the cauldron of *Éarmae*’.<sup>196</sup> This shows definitively that not all uprightness of the *Coire Éarmae/Sofís* is equal. For those who know this joy as well, seemingly, in addition to all the others, are alone in possessing divine prophecy, in addition to the secular prophecy involved in *imbais*.<sup>197</sup> In the words of *The Caldron*, such poets are:

‘both secular and divine prophets and commentators both on matters of grace and of (secular) learning, and they then utter godly utterances and perform miracles, and their words are maxims and judgements, and they are an example for all speech’.<sup>198</sup>

Now we have the whole system before us in a sense. Yet it remains unclear what it is exactly that these ‘cauldrons’ represent. Corthals’ idea that this account should be read in the context of earlier Latin accounts of the tripartite structure of the soul appears to be the right general approach. However, he seems to have been mistaken in its application. He associates these cauldrons with the appetitive, irascible and rational parts of the soul,

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<sup>196</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.67 and tr.69: ‘tórumae ind raith déodai dochum in Choiri Éрмаi’.

<sup>197</sup> My interpretation of this passage differs somewhat from Breatnach’s. He saw ‘fáilte déodai’ (=divine joy) as creating two kinds of poets: one sacred and one secular; Breatnach, ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, 51. However, secular prophecy seems already to exist at the level of ‘fáilte fri trascor n-imbais’ (=joy at the reception of *imbais*), something presented in distinction from ‘divine joy’, and indeed, one level down from it. How then does ‘divine joy’ turn poets into secular prophets if secular prophecy exists without it? However, if ‘divine joy’ is taken to produce one person of both capacities, then it is adding sacred knowledge to the secular inspiration which is necessary to all lower classes of poets and to the highest class of bard. This has the further advantage of fitting better with Breatnach’s theory that the forms of joy and sorrow in some fashion represent the stages of a poetic career.

<sup>198</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.67 and tr.69: ‘fáidi déodai 7 dóendai 7 tráchtairi raith 7 frithgnamo imale, conid íarum labrait inna labarthu raith 7 do-gniat inna firtu, condat fásaige 7 bretha a mbriathar, condat desimrecht do each cobrai’.

as outlined in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>199</sup> This theory has in its favour that the distinctions in question are transmitted by various patristic sources.<sup>200</sup> The difficulty with it is that it is hard to know what it would mean for the appetitive faculty to be conceived of as the receptacle of the elements of grammar,<sup>201</sup> or for the irascible faculty to become the rational part of the soul insofar as it is converted upwards, or again for it to do so in a way that was determined in part by this appetitive knowledge, and in part by varieties of joy and sorrow. If we are to identify this as a patristic mediation of an earlier tripartite structure, it seems much closer to a distinction, which is also made from Plato onwards, between the imagination (through which the soul is capable of presenting any information whatever to itself for reflection), reason (through which the soul is able to reflect on the information it presents to itself) and intellect (through which the information which the soul presents to itself comes to include principles that make the accurate judgements of different kinds of information possible).<sup>202</sup>

If so, the reason then that *Coire Éрмаe* does not have its own intelligible content is that it represents the rational power by which the soul reflects on its intelligible content, rather than the means by which it receives and contains that content. However, this seems to be a separation only in abstraction, rather than in actuality, because *Coire Éрмаe* (the soul's rational part) *is* the *Coire Goiriath* and *is* the *Coire Sofís* insofar as it has the intelligible content proper to them. In the texts we have been looking at so far, the capacity for just judgement over things that go beyond individual morality have consistently emerged relative to the upper reaches of learning. Thus, the best way of understanding the distinction between the rudimentary knowledge contained by *Coire Goiriath* and the advanced knowledge contained of *Coire Sofís* seems to be as a

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<sup>199</sup> Cf. Johan Corthals, 'Decoding the *Caldron of Poesy*', *Peritia* 24-5 (2013-14), 74–89, esp.83.

<sup>200</sup> There seems to be no basis for Corthals contention that such a 'tripartite view on the nature of man and his soul went out of fashion and acceptance in the context of western Christian orthodoxy by the end of antiquity'; Corthals, 'Decoding the Caldron of Poesy', 83. For a summary of evidence to the contrary in Jerome's *In Hiezechielem*, see Douglas Kries, 'Origen, Plato and Conscience (*Synderesis*) in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary', *Traditio* 57 (2002), 67-83.

<sup>201</sup> *The Cauldron of Poesy* §1.10-12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Cauldron of Poesy', ed.62 and tr.63.

<sup>202</sup> Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* is much later than *The Caldron*. However, the section of the *Summa* which is concerned with the soul's intellectual powers provides a useful way of looking at many of the relevant patristic passages in relation to each other; *Summa Theologiae* I, Q.79, esp. art.9-10; Thomas Gilby, ed., '*Summa theologiae*': *Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, 61 vols. (Cambridge 1964-81) XI.



distinction between the knowledge that consists of the mechanical application of rules learned by rote learning, on the one hand, and the grasp of the governing principles by which such rules operate on the other. It is one thing to memorise information so that one is capable of reproducing it exactly, quite another to be capable of a correct deliberation regarding the degree to which something does or does not conform to the principles of an art. What is going on here is not necessarily so technically specific as the distinction between imagination, reason and intellect. There are other more general forms of the distinction in the literature, such as the distinction between reason, its opinions and its judgements, or between reason and its two guises as ‘lower reason’ (*ratio inferior*) and ‘higher intellect’ (*ratio superior*).<sup>203</sup> Determining which form of the distinction is operative here is beyond the scope of this argument. However, in its general outline, it seems to be the best way of accounting for the differences between the cauldrons, together with their interrelations, at the same time as it does so in a way that is in keeping with the patterns we have been tracing thus far.

Whatever we make of this, it is of particular interest that, in *The Caldron*’s account of how the soul receives the knowledge of an art, it seems to be making use of a distinction which is exactly parallel to one noted in the *Würzburg Glosses*: is the *spiritus* that St. Paul speaks of as being in man, ‘the superior part of the mind by [means of] which we think, or the Holy Spirit i.e. insofar as it has been imparted to us’?<sup>204</sup> Except where the glossator merely implies that both propositions are in some way true, *The Caldron*’s presentation offers a rather elegant solution regarding how it is so. In the terminology of the glosses, *The Caldron*’s answer would seem to be, the *spiritus* is the *anima/mens* to the extent that the *anima/mens* has been inspired by the *Spiritus Sanctus*. That is, the superior part of the mind by which the mind thinks is the superior part by virtue of the mind’s reception of the Holy Spirit, to the extent that it has been imparted. All the arts are in the soul, and are the soul, insofar as that which is the source of all the arts has come to be within itself. The degree of its capacity for this reception is, in turn, the

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<sup>203</sup> See references to Augustine and John Damascene in *Summa Theologiae* I, Q.79, art.9; Gilby, ed. and tr., ‘*Summa theologiae*’ XI.

<sup>204</sup> *WGPE*, 25c, gloss 26; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 662: ‘i. rann airegede innaame quo intellegamus l. spiritus sanctus i.e. amal doneconnacht duún’. The translation above is lightly edited.

degree to which its rational capacity has been converted towards it by the fundamentals of education, and by forms of joy and sorrow arising from the natural operation of the body, from circumstance, and from the further pursuit of the disciplines belonging to learning and asceticism.

It is also striking, relative to the *Immacallam*, that secular knowledge, that is, knowledge that is circumscribed by the limits of the created order, arises from the same source as the knowledge of the gracious realities that are beyond that order. The difference between the poet who knows the inspiration of *imbais* and one who knows something in addition, is not that one receives inspiration and one does not. Both are inspired and receive it from the same source. Both are capable of prophecy, for there are both secular and divine forms of prophecy. Yet one receives it to a greater degree, because the receptacle by which he receives this knowledge is the better prepared to receive it. This maps onto the relationship between Néde and Ferchertne in the *Immacallam* very nicely.

If we were to interpret the *Immacallam* through *The Caldron*, Néde is a poet whose *Coire Éarmae* has been converted into the *Coire Sofís* by all the necessary sources of sorrow and joy, short of the sorrow that comes from exile for the sake of God, and the divine joy that is the ‘coming of grace to the *Coire Éarmae*’. Thus, the limits of his knowledge, both prophetic and otherwise, are only the limits of created nature itself. Ferchertne, however, seems to have been visited by ‘divine joy’, so that his knowledge extends to all things pertaining to the gracious and natural orders alike. Yet, in saying this, it is evident that *The Caldron* has a somewhat different idea of who Néde is than we observe in the *Immacallam*, in that it quotes Néde as making an authoritative statement about the *Coire Éarmae*, including its capacities that pertain to grace,<sup>205</sup> things which seem to be beyond his understanding in the *Immacallam*’s portrayal of him. Whether this quotation should be taken to mean that *The Caldron* is drawing on a

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<sup>205</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §13; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.68ff. and tr.69ff.: ‘De sin a n-as-ber Néde Adnai: / Ar-caun Coire nÉrmai / intlechtsaib raith / rethaib sofís / srethaib imbais . . .’ (=Concerning that, what Néde mac Adnai said: / I acclaim the Caldron of Éarmae / with understandings of grace / and accumulations of knowledge / with strewings of *imbais* . . .).

conflicting version of the events of the *Immacallam*, in which definite knowledge of what is beyond created nature is seen as being possible for a poet, like Néde, who is not yet an *ollam*, or if this statement is supplementary to the *Immacallam*, having been understood to be made by Néde at a later point in his career than the *Immacallam* records, is, unfortunately, not a matter we may determine at present.

There remains, however, what seems to be an undeniable contrast with the *Immacallam*, in *The Caldron*, in the direction of *UA*. For grace, as we have seen, is normally associated with the righteousness by which salvation becomes possible. Earlier, when we saw that Néde was associated with both ‘righteousness’ and ‘right’, this appeared to be proof that he was, in some implicit way, the recipient of such grace. Yet ‘grace’ (*rath*), in *The Caldron*, is firmly associated with the inspiration that pertains to what is beyond the human sphere, beyond the natural order’s frame of reference. In which case, *The Caldron* is like the *Immacallam*, in making it possible to distinguish between grades of inspiration. However, it is like *UA*, in its association of grace only with such inspiration as involves a precise knowledge of Christian doctrine, or presumably, with those who, while not inspired themselves (at least to this degree), have learned of the gracious contents of such inspiration. It is, moreover, further like *UA*, in that the possibility both of laws and their theoretical basis seems only to emerge in the person of the poet who has a comprehensive knowledge of both natural and gracious realities, since it is only the person visited by ‘divine joy’ who is credited with ‘maxims and judgements’ (*fásaige 7 bretha*).<sup>206</sup>

It remains that, in every one of these cases, we find the same structure as we began with in the *Milan Glosses*. Knowledge of ethics, or of the arts and sciences, does not belong to merely human thinking, but is subsequently taught or otherwise provided by God. However, whether true righteousness is at the beginning of that process, or if it relies entirely on familiarity (whether directly known or subsequently mediated) with theological doctrines gleaned from the pinnacle of such a process, seems to be a matter of contention from text to text. Sometimes, we find a sense that everyone, no matter

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<sup>206</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.68 and tr.69.

how unlearned, is capable of learning about the highest realities first-hand. On the other, we find an emphasis on the role of intellectual and moral disciplines in making the soul capable of such knowledge. Sometimes, this latter emphasis seems to be only for the sake of determining how the righteousness that the unlearned are capable of may become substantial enough to serve as a basis for secular law, politics and the justice that pertains to them. But in *UA* and *The Caldron*, it seems that the very possibility of salvation for anybody lies in the fact that there are some who practice these disciplines, in that the necessary epistemological content of ‘grace’ (*rath*) as such, appears to be accessible through them alone.

Exactly what all this means for our understanding of The Prologue to *SM* is difficult to tell. Its direct reference to the *Immacallam*, as opposed to the more general reference to *BND*, where *UA* is found, along with its lack of many specifics about the content of the prophecy which makes the ‘righteous judges and poets’ comparable to the prophets, suggest that it, like the *Immacallam*, links degrees of righteousness, and the grace on which righteousness depends, to the degrees of poetic learning, rather than locating saving grace only at the culmination of such learning, a learning which, nevertheless, is still received from God even at the lowest stages. However, nothing The Prologue says makes it possible to determine this absolutely. Where it is rather more illuminating is the question of how all that was deemed knowable, from the most ancient times, by righteous poets and judges relates to the knowledge which was exclusive to the Church alone.

### **Why Does Natural Knowledge Still Matter?**

The problem that faces us now is this: what exactly is the point of these earlier forms of revelation for a medieval Christian who believes that the fullness of what was only *glimpsed* before in symbols and types has now been revealed? If you can watch the film why would you bother watching the previews? The fact that the medieval Irish ecclesiastical establishment put so much time into the literature that it understood to derive or survive from pre-Christian Ireland shows that the law of nature and the learning affiliated with its particular mode of prophetic insight were highly valued.

However, the character of its worth is seldom explicitly articulated. When, for example, we read in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* that

‘The lawsuit of the church is like a sea obliterating small streams, the lawsuit of the church is a most wonderful lawsuit . . . it is certain that civil law (*féinechus*) is vain in comparison with the words of God . . .’<sup>207</sup>

there is not exactly an overwhelming sense of what pre-Christian Irish law (*féinechus*) has to contribute. There are a fair number of texts that take the law of nature to be a basis for law along with Scripture itself.<sup>208</sup> Moreover, the honour-prices assigned to members of the poetic or scholarly profession (*filid*), associated as it is with this kind of knowledge, seem to indicate that this knowledge is regarded with a high level of prestige and importance.<sup>209</sup> However, this does not yet reveal what is thought to be gained from it that could not be better learned by going to Mass and reading the Scriptures in light of the commentaries of the Fathers. Most of the relevant evidence is rather implicit. For example, in the Old Irish commentary on the Mass in the *Stowe Missal*, we find that a stage of the Mass is associated with the law of nature.<sup>210</sup> The late

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<sup>207</sup> *BNT* [*CIH* 2226.3ff.]; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Law of the Church’ §1: ‘Is muir tar glasa áe ecalsa, adamrae áe áe ecalsa, nís frithaí frecair. Is déoraid fri cách, is aurraid cách frie, Ad-rig, ní áragar, do-immairg, ní timmairg, fo-gelltar, ní fuiglea im chert centair scéo altair’.

<sup>208</sup> See, for example, *UB* [*CIH* 634-5, 1592]; Breatnach *et al*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 386. *Bretha im gatta* [*CIH* 478.8-10 and 15-16, 1977.4-9]; Breatnach *et al*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 413. *UA* [*CIH* 1115.3-22]; E.J. Gwynn, ed., ‘An Old-Irish Tract on the Privileges and Responsibilities of Poets’, *Ériu* 13 (1940-42), 18.24-19.10; Breatnach *et al*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 420-422. The Introduction to *SM* §1; Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text ‘SM’*, 5. *Cethairslicht Athgabálae (SM 2)* [*CIH* 1714.17]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text ‘SM’*, 15-16. *The Reference Bible/Das Bibelwerk: Pauca problemsmata de enigmatibus ex tomis cononicis: Praefatio et libri de Pentateucho Moysi*, LIII.ii-iii; Martin McNamara, ed. and tr., ‘Plan and Source Analysis of *Das Bibelwerk*, Old Testament’, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Ireland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission/ Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart 1987), 84-112, at 89.

<sup>209</sup> Liam Breatnach, ‘Law and Literature in Early Mediaeval Ireland’, in *L’Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell’alto medioevo*, Spoleto, 16-21 aprile 2009, *Atti delle Settimane LVII* (Spoleto 2010), 215-38, at 232.

<sup>210</sup> *The Tract on the Mass in the Stowe Missal* §5; Stokes and Strachan, eds. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* II, 252: ‘Acanar dind offriund forsen iter introit 7 orthana 7 tormach corrigi liacht napstal 7 ψalm ndigrad isfigor recto aicnith insin inroaithnuiged crist tria huili baullo 7 gnímo. Liacht apstal immurgu 7 salm digrad 7 hosuidiu codinochtad is foraimet rechta litre inrofiugrad crist acht nadfess cadacht cidrofiugrad and.’ (=What is chanted of the Mass thereafter, both introit and prayers and addition, as far as the Lesson of the Apostles [the Epistle] and the Gradual, that is a figure of the law of nature, wherein Christ has been renewed, through all His members and deeds. The Epistle, however, and the

ninth- or early tenth-century, *Litany of Jesus I*,<sup>211</sup> evokes those who ‘had intelligence in the law of nature’ on the behalf of the suppliant, along with, but also in clear distinction from, the other Biblical figures associated with forms of revelation which emerged subsequently.<sup>212</sup> Such evidence shows that at least *some* early Irish authors thought that such revelation as was possible under the law of nature had an ongoing purpose that is not swallowed up by the forms of revelation that succeeded it.

Even so, direct claims that natural revelation knows things that are not known through the Church’s revelation seem fairly sparse. In a Hiberno-Latin gloss on the *Irish Penitentials* that has been dated to the middle or first half of the seventh-century, the contribution of Jethro, Moses’ pagan father-in-law, to the law of Moses is presented as evidence that knowledge arising from no more than a ‘good nature’ (*natura bona*), can supplement the laws that God revealed to Moses, and presumably those arising from the authors of Sacred Scripture who came after him.<sup>213</sup> Later in the seventh century, *Córus*

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Gradual, and from this to the uncovering [of the chalice], it is a commemoration of the law of the Letter wherein Christ has been figured, only that what has been figured therein was not yet known).

<sup>211</sup> For discussion of the ‘Litany of Confession’, see Chapter 1, pages 46-7 note 112. O’Sullivan argues that the *Litany of Confession* immediately preceded the *Litany of Jesus I* in their transmission by the Red Book of Munster; O’Sullivan, ‘Texts and Transmissions’, 41-2. On the difficulties involved in any attempt to recover what an eighth-century text of the *Litany of Jesus I* (as a component part of *Scúap Chrábaid*) may have looked like; O’Sullivan, ‘Texts and Transmission’, 44.

<sup>212</sup> Plummer, ed. and tr., *Irish Litanies*, 30-9, ed. at 32 and tr. at 33: ‘*Ateoch frit huile thuicsenchu rechta aicnid im Aibel, im Sheth, im Heli, im Enoch, im Nói, im Abraham, im Isaác, im Iacob; Ateoch frit huili thuicsenchu rechta litre im Moysi, im Iesu, im Chalep, im Aron, im Elizar, im Ionass. Ateoch frit huli thuicsinchu rechta fatha, im Eliam, im Eliseum, im Daid, & im Sholmain; Ateoch frit huile thuicsenchu rechta nua-fiadnaise im do noeb-abstalu uadessin, & im na huile noebu, co deired in domuin*’ (=I entreat you by all those wise in the law of nature, such as Abel, Seth, Eli, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I entreat you by all those wise in the law of scripture, such as Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Aaron, Eleazar, and Jonah; I entreat you by all those wise in the law of the prophets, such as Elijah, Elisha, David and Solomon; I entreat you by all those wise in the law of the New Testament, such as your own holy apostles, and all the saints until the end of the world).

<sup>213</sup> *Canones Hibernenses* §7; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., ‘*Canones Hibernensis I-VI*’, in Ludwig Bieler, with appendix by D.A. Binchy, *The Irish Penitentials*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 5 (Dublin 1963, repr. 1975, 2012), 160-75, at ed.168 and tr.169: ‘Ubi sunt in lege praecepta quae Deus non praecipit? Iethro socer Moysi elegere .lxx. principes qui iudicarent populum cum Moysi, et hoc iudicium est, quia si inuenerimus iudicia gentium bona, que natura bona illis docet, et Deo non displicet, seruabimus’ (=What are the precepts in the law which God did not command? Jethro the kinsman of Moses told Moses to choose seventy leading men who would judge the people with Moses; and this is a judgement, that if we find judgements of the nations good, which their good nature teaches them, and it is not displeasing to God, we shall keep them [slightly edited, following Breatnach *et al.*, tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 392]). There are a number of relevant Patristic interpretations of Jethro (e.g. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, I; Gregory the Great, *Regulae Pastoralis*, II.7; Jerome, *Comm. in Matt.* I.7.18; cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra in Exodum*, I.8). However, Origen’s treatment of the subject in *Homily XI on Exodus* seems

*Béscnai*, a component tract of *Senchas Már* (*SM* 8), explicitly states that ‘There is much in the law of nature which they [i.e. the pre-Christian prophets] covered, and which the law of Scripture did not cover’,<sup>214</sup> a phrase which, as we shall see, is quoted in turn by The Prologue to *SM*.<sup>215</sup> These both clearly distinguish the importance of early Irish law from the common patristic view that the laws of one’s state which do not conflict with Scripture should be obeyed, not necessarily because they have any intrinsic worth in themselves, but for the sake of charity.<sup>216</sup> However, these are still only a single fragment of Biblical exegesis in a gloss and a brief statement made by a single tract in a very large, if extremely important, law text. Far more significant is the author of The Prologue’s decision that this idea was so central to *Senchas Már*’s synthesis of Irish law, that a disentangling of what this meant relative to the question of the death-penalty was the best way to summarise and preface the contents of this massive, and massively influential, work.

### A Summary of The Prologue

In The Prologue to *Senchas Már*, the high-king, Loegaire, following St. Patrick’s defeat of his *magi* (*druíd*)<sup>217</sup> in a contest of miracles,<sup>218</sup> assembles the best of the men of Ireland to discuss their laws. Before Patrick arrives, those assembled express their fear that moral and political chaos will result if the ‘law of forgiveness’ (*cáin dílguda*), preached by Patrick, is adopted. They resolve to pay a man, Núadu, to kill a member of Patrick’s household, intending to accept Patrick’s ‘law of forgiveness’ if he forgives the

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most relevant here; *Homiliae in Exodum* XI.6; *PG* 12, col. 379-81; Ronald E. Heine, tr., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington, D.C. 1982), 362-4.

<sup>214</sup> *Córus Béscnai* §36; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Béscnai*, ed.34 and tr.35; ‘Atá már i recht aicnid ro-siachatar nád roacht recht litre’. The translation above is edited slightly. See also the accompanying gloss; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Béscnai*, ed.154 and tr.155: ‘.i. atā mōr do rēir dīrīataid in aicnidh, ⁊ ro-sīacht do rēir dīrīataid in aicnidh ⁊ noco rīacht do rēir dīrīataidh na litre, ūair lia ceasta canōine nā canōin, ⁊ lia aicned inā udaras’ (=i.e. there is a great deal under the authority of the ‘rectitude’ of nature, and it fell to the authority of the ‘rectitude’ of nature and it did not fall to the authority of the ‘rectitude’ of Scripture, for the problems of canon law are more abundant than the canon law, and [the law of] nature is more abundant than written works [translation lightly modified]).

<sup>215</sup> For the quotation itself, see Chapter 3, note 76.

<sup>216</sup> e.g. *De civitate Dei*, XIX.14-15; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 680-3; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 872-5. *Comm. in Rom.*, IX.xxv-xix; *PG* 14, col. 1226ff.; Scheck, tr., *Origen: Commentary on Romans* II, 220ff.

<sup>217</sup> On ‘magus’ as the Latin translation of ‘druí’ (i.e. druid) in medieval Irish literature, see Chapter 5, pages 309-14.

<sup>218</sup> *PSM* §1; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.11 and tr.17.

crime, and to reject it if he does not.<sup>219</sup> Patrick's reaction is to look up to heaven, after which earthquakes ensue, causing the men of Ireland to plead the forgiveness preached by Patrick. But he refuses to make a judgement on the matter himself, rather entrusting it to the 'royal-poet' (*rigfíled*) of Ireland, Dubthach.<sup>220</sup>

Patrick lays hands on Dubthach, so that he may judge the matter by means of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>221</sup> However, there is another sense in which Dubthach was already thus inspired. He was chosen for this task as a representative of the 'righteous poets and judges of the men of Ireland',<sup>222</sup> through whom the Holy Spirit revealed the 'law of nature' (*recht aicnid*),<sup>223</sup> in a manner comparable to the patriarchs and prophets of Scripture.<sup>224</sup> The 'law of nature', made known through these righteous poets and judges, is contrasted with the 'law of Scripture' (*recht litre*), which has now been made known to Ireland through Patrick.<sup>225</sup> Neither Dubthach nor Patrick are able to conciliate the apparent conflict between the respective laws of nature and Scripture on their own, since each is limited to one side of the dilemma or the other. However, when, at Patrick's hands, Dubthach also receives the Holy Spirit as it is manifest according to the law of Scripture,<sup>226</sup> he comes to occupy a position that is beyond the difference between natural and scriptural, secular and ecclesiastical forms of revelation. His transcendence of their mutual distinction allows him to judge the entirety of pre-Christian Irish learning in relation to that of the Church, thus distinguishing what truly belongs to the law of nature from what does not, so that the law of nature, thus defined, may be incorporated into a single law together with the, now reinterpreted, law of Scripture.

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<sup>219</sup> *PSM* §2; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.17.

<sup>220</sup> *PSM* §4.6; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18.

<sup>221</sup> *PSM* §4; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18.

<sup>222</sup> *PSM* §7.13; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.18.: 'breithemon ⁊ fíled fíréon fír nÉrenn'.

<sup>223</sup> *PSM* §7.6; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18. This also referred to as 'law of the prophets' (*recht fáide*). Where presented as distinct, it seems to be seen to represent contributions to the law of nature in the post-Mosaic period, just as ecclesiastical law is presented as later contribution to the Mosaic law of Scripture. Since both forms of the law of Scripture only appear in Ireland with St. Patrick in this account, these finer distinctions between kinds of natural and scriptural law do not seem to be as meaningful relative to Irish historiography as they are to scriptural.

<sup>224</sup> *PSM* §7.9-10; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18: 'amail doaircechain tria ginu inna prímfáide ⁊ inna n-uasalaithe i recht petarlaice' (=as he prophesied through the mouths of the chief prophets and patriarchs in the law of the Old Testament).

<sup>225</sup> *PSM* §7.11 and 15; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18.

<sup>226</sup> *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.18.



This is further defined as a determination of what parts of the earlier tradition ‘did not go against God’s word in the law of Scripture, or in the New Testament, or against the consciences of the faithful’.<sup>227</sup> Regarding this, it is said: the ‘whole law of nature was sufficient, save (in what concerns) the faith, and its proper dues, and the knitting together of Church and State’,<sup>228</sup> but also that it ‘reached many things that the law of Scripture did not reach’.<sup>229</sup> This does not mean, however, that there is no common content between the two laws. The apparent conflict between the law of nature and the law of Scripture is only resolvable because of the presence of judgements in the Bible, understood to have been made before the revelation of Mosaic law, and thus, according to the law of nature.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, it is only relative to the law of nature that it becomes possible to determine the meaning of the law of Scripture’s characteristic requirement of forgiveness. The law of Scripture’s imperative to forgive does not, as it turns out, mean suspending the physical punishments that the law of nature demands.<sup>231</sup> But again, in the other direction, it is only relative to the law of Scripture that the law of nature comes to self-consciously reflect on itself as an analogy of divine justice. The ‘men of Ireland’ knew that moral and social chaos would result from failing to punish murderers. They do not seem to have known that the seriousness of murder lay in harming a being made in the image of God,<sup>232</sup> or that a failure to punish murder would mean that earthly judgement had ceased to imitate God’s judgement of the rebel angels.<sup>233</sup>

The immediate result of this conciliation is that Níadu’s soul is saved, in accordance with the forgiveness demanded by the law of Scripture, but his body is killed, in accordance with the law of nature.<sup>234</sup> The greater result is a synthetic law, in which the

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<sup>227</sup> *PSM* §7.14-5; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.11 and tr.18: ‘nád tudchaid fri bréthir nDé i recht litre 7 núfiadnaise 7 fri suibse na crésion’.

<sup>228</sup> *PSM* §7.17-18; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.11 and tr.18: ‘dír recht aicnid uile inge cretem 7 a cóir 7 a comuaim n-eclaise fri tuaith’. The translation above is lightly modified.

<sup>229</sup> *PSM* §7.17-18; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.11 and tr.18: ‘ar rosiacht recht aicnid már nád roacht recht litre’.

<sup>230</sup> *DML*, lines vii, x, xiv; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.7.

<sup>231</sup> *DML*, lines xv-xix; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.8.

<sup>232</sup> *DML*, line xv; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.8.

<sup>233</sup> *DML*, line iv; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.7.

<sup>234</sup> *DML*, lines xv-xix; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.8. On the patristic context of Dubthach’s judgement, see Damien Bracken, ‘The Fall and the Law in Early Ireland’, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and*

law of nature and the law of Scripture are made into a comprehensive whole. This is *Senchas Már*, of which it is said that ‘no human judge of the Gaels can undo anything which he may find’ in it.<sup>235</sup>

### **Interpreting The Prologue to *SM***

But what does this story actually mean? How do we characterise what is present in the revelation of this ‘law of nature’ that is not simply an inchoate version of what is found in the law of Scripture which then causes it to abide as a necessary basis for Irish law? Its statement that ‘the whole law of nature was fitting, save (in what concerns) the faith, and its proper dues, and the knitting together of Church and kingdom’ seems significant.<sup>236</sup> Although by itself it would not necessarily indicate that the law of nature contributed anything to what is known by the law of Scripture. But in tandem with the other statement that it reaches ‘many things which the law of Scripture did not reach’, this would seem to indicate that the law of nature provides a complete account of everything *except* for the explicit contents of the law of Scripture, and the character of the Church’s relationship to the State.<sup>237</sup> Or in the words of Augustine, The law of nature reveals that which pertains to the ‘familiar and customary course of nature’, in contrast to the law of Scripture, which seems to primarily reveal the character of God’s miraculous interventions in the common course of nature.<sup>238</sup> It is, then, in its capacity as the law through which the created order is known, that the law of nature has a content which is not found in the ecclesiastical law, which, in contrast, is most concerned with describing the manifold effects of the Incarnation of God on that order.

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*Transmission / Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Texte und Überlieferung* (Dublin 2002), 147-69, at 147-56; *idem*, ‘Immortality and Capital Punishment: Patristic Concepts in Irish Law’, *Peritia* 9 (1995), 167-186.

<sup>235</sup> *PSM* §§8.6-7; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.7: ‘Iss ed nád cumaic nach breithem doennae do Gaedelaib do thaithbiuch, nach ní fogaba’.

<sup>236</sup> *SM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.11 and tr.18: ‘Roba díreacht aicnid uile inge cretem 7 a cóir 7 a comuaim n-eclaise fri tuaith’. The translation above is Carey’s, with minor changes.

<sup>237</sup> In this respect it is reminiscent of Origen’s distinction between ‘human righteousness’ (*iustitia humana*) and ‘God’s righteousness’ (*iustitia Dei*) in *Comm. in Rom.*, III.vii.6. However, in this case ‘human righteousness’ would seem to be at least potentially capable of doctrinal truths of Christianity. Only the sacraments and rites of the Church, together with knowledge about specific events in heaven (i.e. God’s judgement of Satan in *DML*, line iv) seem to be unambiguously outside the jurisdiction of the law of nature here.

<sup>238</sup> See Augustine’s *Contra Faustum* 26.3; *PL* 42, col.481; Richard Stothert, tr., ‘Reply to Faustus the Manichaean’, in Schaff and Wace, eds., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 IV, 281-664, at 321-2: ‘cognitum . . . cursum solitumque naturae’.

## The 'Handmaiden' of the Law of Scripture

Yet this mutual clarification should not lead us to conclude that The Prologue portrays the law of nature and the law of Scripture as in any way equal. Here, as in Biblical exegesis from Philo onwards (and before in Aristotle), natural knowledge, or 'philosophy',<sup>239</sup> as it were, is *ancilla theologiae*, the 'handmaiden of theology', even if it occupies some of the prophetic territory normally reserved for 'theology' in the usual form of this distinction.<sup>240</sup> Be that as it may, 'philosophy', as such, is ascribed not quite an autonomy but an importance and an independence such as it would rarely have among Christian authorities prior to the High Middle Ages.<sup>241</sup> It remains that the soul's natural knowledge here does not seem to be capable of verifying its own contents in the way claimed by those who have the more dialectical understanding of reason's natural powers that follows from Plato's *Parmenides* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.<sup>242</sup> In spite of the fact that false judgement is assumed here, as in so many other places in medieval Irish literature, to reveal itself corporeally, in the form of blemishes upon the face of the one that makes it,<sup>243</sup> that which is truly known by the law of nature requires that which is known by the law of Scripture to distinguish between the totality of its true contents and such unworthy *senchas* as may have become mixed with it, whereas the contents

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<sup>239</sup> *DML*, lines xv-xix; McCone, ed. and tr., 'Dubthach maccu Lugair', ed.29 and tr.8.

<sup>240</sup> For a detailed history of this idea and sources from Philo of Alexandria up to the twelfth century, see Bernard Baudoux, 'Philosophia ancilla theologiae', *Antonianum* 12 (1937), 293-326. A useful summary of the same material is found in Malcolm de Mowbray, 'Philosophy as the Handmaid of Theology: Biblical Exegesis in the Service of Scholarship', *Traditio* 59 (2004), 1-37. Albert Heinrichs, 'Philosophy the Handmaiden of Theology', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968), 437-50 is also helpful, but the view of philosophical history through which it interprets its evidence very much less so. For the prehistory of this idea and its significance for Sts. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, see Robert D. Crouse, 'St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle: *Philosophia ancilla theologiae*', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso nel suo settimo centenario*, i (Naples 1975), 181-185.

<sup>241</sup> In most of the primary sources covered by the scholarship in note 240, secular studies are portrayed as a handmaiden of theology only in the sense of preparing the immature soul for the study of Scripture, rather than providing a knowledge of its own, as here. The clearest Christian precursor to the position here would seem to be Origen's sense that such philosophy as is possible according to nature brings about a spiritual interpretation of scripture to a degree that would not be possible otherwise; *Homiliae in Exodum* XI.6; *PG* 12, col. 379-81; Ronald E. Heine, tr., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington, D.C. 1982), 362-4.

<sup>242</sup> For a quintessential example, see Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria*, VI.1074.17-1076.1; Carlos Steel, ed., *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem commentaria*, 3 vols. (Oxford 2007-9) III, 45-7; Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, tr., *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's 'Parmenides'* (Princeton 1987), 427-8. On this aspect of Proclus, see Jean Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris 1982), 196-202; *idem*, *L'Un et L'Âme selon Proclus* (Paris 1972), 88-89; Watson, 'Images of Unlikeness', 71, as well as sources and discussion in Chapter 1, pages 20-21, incl. note 9.

<sup>243</sup> *DML*, line xi; McCone, ed. and tr., 'Dubthach maccu Lugair', ed.29 and tr.7. See discussion in Chapter 1, page 36, incl. note 72.

that belong to the canon of Scripture do not need to be further determined through engagement with the Irish instantiations of the law of nature. The whole of the law of nature as uttered by the Holy Spirit through the mouths of ‘righteous judges and poets’ is found to be true, but it is only through inspiration by that greater revelation which is accessible through the Church alone that what actually belongs to the law of nature can be identified.<sup>244</sup> Thus, in a fascinating twist, the very thing for which the natural learning of the proto-Christian poets and judges is utterly dependant on the knowledge of the Church is the definition and confirmation of a field of knowledge that belongs properly to it alone, a field of knowledge, moreover, which allows the Church, in turn, to come to understand its own knowledge in a way would be impossible for it on its own.

In this distinction of the interdependent fields of knowledge belonging to the law of nature and the law of Scripture, we seem to have an anticipation of the Iamblichean distinction between natural and supernatural that would later be mediated to the Latin West by Erigena and subsequently become widespread in the twelfth century,<sup>245</sup> and also of the dependant distinction between philosophical theology and revealed theology that would become a mainstay of scholastic philosophy.<sup>246</sup> In the gap between Boethius

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<sup>244</sup> *SM* §7, esp. lines 14-17; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18-9: ‘Ní didiu nád tudchaid fri bréithir nDé i recht litre ⁊ núfiadnaise ⁊ fri cuibse na créision, conairged i n-ord brethemnachta la Pátraic ⁊ ecailsi ⁊ flaithi Éirenn do neoch’ (=whatever did not go against God’s word in the law of scripture, / and in the New Testament, or against the consciences of the faithful, was fixed in the system of judgement by Patrick and the churches and the princes of Ireland severally).

<sup>245</sup> The term *hyperphus* (ὑπερφύης) was first used in the sense of ‘supernatural’ by the pagan Neoplatonist, Iamblichus. See *De Mysteriis* I.10.34.8; III.1.100.6, III.16.137.6, III.31.179.1; V.8.209.3, V.18.223.13; VII.2.251.7; X.3.288.5; Clarke *et al.*, eds. and tr., *Iamblichus: On the Mysteries*, 42-3, 118-9, 158-9, 198-9, 238-9, 256-7, 292-3. This distinction was taken up by Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite. See, for example, his *De divinis nominibus*, I.4-5; II.9-10; VI.2; XI.5; *PG* 3, col. 591-4, 647-8, 855-8, 953-4; Colm Luibheid, tr., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York and Mawah 1987), 51, 54, 65-6, 104, 124, 264. Eriugena was given the task of translating the works of Ps. Dionysius by Charles the Bald. Subsequently Eriugena made the distinction he found there available to the Latin West, in his *Periphyseon* through the Latin term, *supernaturalis*, which he used extensively; *Periphyseon, passim*; Idouard Jeaneau, ed., *Iohannus Scottus Eriugena: Periphyseon*, 5 vols., CCCM 161-5, (Turnhout 1996-2003); I.P. Sheldon-Williams tr. and John O’Meara, rev., *Eriugena: Periphyseon [Division of Nature]*, Cahiers d’études médiévales: Cahier special 3 (Montréal and Washington 1987). However, more influential in this regard would be his actual translations, since Ps. Dionysius, now comprehensible to Latin readers, would become a mainstay of scholastic theology. However, it seems that this distinction did not become widely used until the twelfth century. On this, see Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2008), 6-13 (although his comments on Peter Lombard are somewhat suspect); Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: etudes historiques* (Paris 1946), 323-428, at 369-73.

<sup>246</sup> For this distinction in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas and its Aristotelean roots, see Crouse, ‘St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle’, 181-185.

and Peter Damien which is found in many scholarly histories of the relationship between philosophy and theology<sup>247</sup> there are evidently some important Irish vernacular contributions. However, it will be quite clear by now that it is not an uncomplicated anticipation. The distinction in *The Prologue* is fundamentally between the two kinds of inspiration. Both are prophetic illuminations of human rational capacity by the Holy Spirit but are so according to differing modes: one natural and the other ecclesiastical. This is clearly quite different from the scholastic distinction between philosophical theology, in the sense of the theology which is possible according to our own rational powers, and revealed theology, as the theology which becomes possible for human thought only by means of the objects of divine revelation. No simple one-to-one comparison will be possible. Yet it is perhaps a more interesting prospect for all that. Even so, this does not yet mark the limit *The Prologue's* contribution to the development of these distinctions.

### **Beyond the Difference**

While complete authority in interpreting the law of nature once belonged only to righteous poets and judges, *The Prologue* goes on to inform us that the greater part of this authority was eventually delegated to others. Whereas initially 'judgement was in the hands of the poets alone',<sup>248</sup> they were subsequently deprived of 'the power to judge, save for what pertained properly to them'<sup>249</sup> so that every vocation came to judge what applied to itself. King Conchobar is said to have done this because, during the *Immacallam* in Emain Macha, the darkness of their speech was such that the princes could not understand it.<sup>250</sup> Thus, the natural knowledge of the poets then seems to be subject, not only to the authority of the Church, upon its arrival, but also to the authority of the king who, despite his inability to understand the poets, evidently has sufficient

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<sup>247</sup> See, for example, de Mowbray, 'Philosophy as Handmaid', 11.

<sup>248</sup> *SM* §10.1-2; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19: 'Ón uair ro-n-uc Amorgein Glúngel cétbreith i nÉre, roba la fileda a n-oenur brethemnus' (=From the time when Amairgen Glúngel gave the first judgement in Ireland, judgement was in the hands of the poets alone).

<sup>249</sup> *SM* §10.8-10; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19: "'Is menand,'" ol Chonchobar, "biaid cuit do chách and-som óndú; acht a n-as dúthaig doib-sium de, ní-s-ricfe. Gébaid chách a drécta de.'" (= 'It is plain', said Conchobar: 'henceforth everyone will have a share [in judging]; except for what pertains properly to them [the poets] therein, it will not fall to their lot. Each will take their own portions of it.').

<sup>250</sup> *SM* §10-11; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19.

natural knowledge of his own to appropriately divide the judgement of the contents of natural law among its representative vocations, or faculties.

This is an important bit of information. For if it is appropriate to divide the judgements, which knowledge the law of nature makes possible, by vocation, it shows that these judgements are not moral judgements in any narrow sense of the word. Rather, morality here seems to include whatever deliberations must be made regarding the proper practice and regulation of a given art or trade. In which case, the specific character of the scientific knowledge which a soul receives from the knowledge of the natural law appears to be bound up, to a degree which we would not have been able to guess up to this point, with the specific character of the revealed moral knowledge on which we now see it depends for its capacity to deliberate effectively regarding any application of its scientific knowledge. That is to say, one's scientific knowledge is not only related to the *degree* of the moral knowledge revealed to the soul, but to its *kind*. As we have seen, King Loegaire attempts to make a similar division of judgement, in Patrick's time, to that which Conchobar made before him, but with rather less success. The events of The Prologue begin with him setting up a test that will determine the future of ecclesiastical law, relative to the law that have existed that that time.<sup>251</sup> His lack of success seems to lie, not in his use of royal authority to regulate the law of nature. This has been shown by Conchobar to be a legitimate use of kingly power. Rather, it is in his attempt to treat the sacred knowledge of the Church's law as just another faculty of natural law, which, if so, would be legitimately under his authority, leaving him free to determine the jurisdiction of its own particular species of judgement, and the extent of its influence, in the same way as Conchobar did relative to the divisions of natural learning.<sup>252</sup>

This leads to the most fascinating feature of The Prologue's presentation. The law of Scripture has authority over both the poetic source of and kingly rule over the law of

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<sup>251</sup> *SM* §3; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.17-8.

<sup>252</sup> *SM* §10-11; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19.

nature. Things go badly for anyone who resists Patrick.<sup>253</sup> Yet despite his evident possession of the fullness of the Church's supremely authoritative knowledge, he does not seem, of himself, to be capable of reconciling the superficially conflicting findings of the two laws, but relies on the poet, Dubthach, for this. The figure of the poet in The Prologue seems to be least in the hierarchy of poet, king and bishop. Yet it is uniquely a poet, associated as his vocation is with dark unintelligible speech,<sup>254</sup> that, when inspired by an episcopal blessing, is able to make an intelligible whole of all the various forms of learning springing from the law of nature, in tandem with, and at least partially by means of, resolving the apparent conflict between law of nature and the law of Scripture. In this work Patrick almost appears as Dubthach's sub-contractor. Judgement is entrusted to Dubthach regarding what belongs to the law of nature, which is to say, what does not conflict with the law of Scripture,<sup>255</sup> and only then is this law of nature is then 'fixed' (*conairged*) by Patrick, together with other ecclesiastics and princes, in the law of Scripture.<sup>256</sup> This editorial aspect of the work is much more of a team-effort on the part of nine different authorities including Dubthach and Patrick.<sup>257</sup> However, the whole is called 'Patrick's Law'<sup>258</sup> presumably because the whole matter depended on the blessing he gave Dubthach.

This is of immense significance. The result of this, the *Senchas Már*, is not presented here merely as the clarification of the law of nature by the law of Scripture. The process of clarification has not, as we have seen, only flowed in one direction. Rather, the characteristic ideal of the law of Scripture, that of forgiveness, has come to be more perfectly understood through its conciliation with the law of nature in a way that helps resolve the apparent tension between it and the natural law elements of the Christian Scriptures themselves. A different understanding of the contents of ecclesiastical revelation would put it in a false conflict with natural revelation, and *vice versa*. Thus, insofar as Dubthach is under the influence of Patrick's blessing, in addition to the

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<sup>253</sup> *SM* §3; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.11 and tr.17-8.

<sup>254</sup> *SM* §10; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.13 and tr.19.

<sup>255</sup> Which involves the determination of what does and does not go 'against the consciences of the faithful'; *SM* §7.15; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19: 'fri cuibse na crésion'.

<sup>256</sup> *SM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.18-9.

<sup>257</sup> *SM* §8; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19.

<sup>258</sup> *SM* §9; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19.

natural inspiration he enjoys as the ‘royal-poet’, his perspective, as one which authoritatively interprets each law in terms of the other, would seem to be beyond the difference between them, prior to the distinction between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural. This, in turn, suggests that *Senchas Már* has an authority that goes beyond even the authority of Scripture itself, since the Church’s interpretation of the Scriptures makes up only one side of the unity of natural and ecclesiastical forms of revelation by which it is perceived. It is no wonder that the author of The Prologue claims that no human judge can undo anything in it.<sup>259</sup> While such a gesture towards a knowledge so divine as to be beyond the distinction between natural and ecclesiastical modes of knowledge is not entirely without precedent,<sup>260</sup> and to some extent seems to anticipate certain features of the thought of Eriugena<sup>261</sup> and Meister Eckhart,<sup>262</sup> it remains a remarkable development in the history of Christian theology and even of ideas as a whole. For one thing, explicit gestures towards a unity which precedes the difference between natural and supernatural, between the kind of theology that becomes available through philosophical study, and the kind of theology that only becomes available through the additional means of divinely instated liturgical hierarchy, seem to be confined, for the most part, to the heirs of Proclus. Yet there is no reason to suppose that any of the texts by which Proclus was mediated to the Latin West would have been

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<sup>259</sup> *SM* §8; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.19.

<sup>260</sup> Of these, Eusebius’ portrayal of Constantine is most notable. See Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IX-X; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 736-904. See also his *Oratio de laudibus Constantini*; I.A. Heikel, ed., *Eusebius’s Werke I: Oratio de laudibus Constantini*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 7 (Leipzig 1902), 195-259; H.A. Drake, tr., *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius’ Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley 1976). However, this is not an uncomplicated example of direct influence. The Constantine of Rufinus’ version of the *Historia*, through which Eusebian kingship ideology would have been known to medieval Ireland, does not transcend the distinction between secular and ecclesiastical spheres in the same way.

<sup>261</sup> See, for example, Eriugena’s famous statement in his commentary on Martianus Capella: ‘nemo intrat in caelum nisi per philosophiam’ (=no one enters into heaven except by philosophy); *Annotationes in Martianus Capellam*, 57.15; C. E. Lutz, ed., *Iohannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum* (Cambridge, MA 1939, repr. New York 1970), 64. For him the work of religion may broadly be said to amount to a recovery of the arts, such as they exist in the soul’s very essence, and especially the art of dialectic by which they are ordered in relation to each other; *idem*, *Periphyseon*, II.557B-559B, IV.748A-749A, IV.767C-770A, V.868C-869C; Jeaneau, ed., *Periphyseon* II, 42-5, IV, 11-13, IV, 38-43, V, 13-15; Sheldon-Williams, tr., *Eriugena: Periphyseon*, 159-61, 388-89, 412-6, 532-3.

<sup>262</sup> See, for example, *Sermon Three* (Pf 3, Q 104) and *Sermon Nine* (Pf 9, Q 86, QT 28, Evans II, 2) of Walshe’s translation of Meister Eckhart’s *German Sermons*; Maurice Walshe, ed. and tr., *The Complete Mystical Writings of Meister Eckhart* (New York 2009), 46-54, 83-90. There he takes Martha to represent a kind of active life that is superior to the life of contemplation, such as it is represented by Mary in Luke 10:38-42.



available to our Old Irish glossator. Nor is this the only question we are left with relative to The Prologue's sources. There is clearly much more work to be done on understanding the theology of this invaluable narrative.

### **Following The Prologue to *SM***

The Prologue represents the high-water mark in the history of the doctrine of natural law in medieval Ireland. It remains that many other texts, among them *The Caldron*, the *Immacallam* and *BND*, attribute knowledge of the highest doctrines of Christianity to the highest ranks among the poets. This is, in fact, one thing that appears to set the theological content of natural forms of inspiration apart from the forms of inspiration which belong exclusively to the Church. While there are any number of instances in which an *ollam* is attributed direct apprehension of Christian doctrine, this is nowhere, to my knowledge, attributed to the members of the clerical hierarchy that are not also poets, or else, recognised saints.<sup>263</sup> It is one thing, it seems, to have the power and knowledge necessary to perform the sacramental acts of the Church, but quite another to mystically apprehend, rather than simply inherit, its doctrinal truths.<sup>264</sup> However, no other texts which have yet been edited suggest that poetic knowledge of the natural law is something which can be made capable of synthesizing every form of learning - those derived from an ecclesiastical form of inspiration, just as those derived from its own natural mode of inspiration - into a unified whole. The Prologue was demonstrably influential relative to later speculation on these matters. Yet this idea seems to have either been unnoticed or thought too daring by those which follow or agree with it in other respects.

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<sup>263</sup> The great example of someone who is all of these is Colum Cille. The *Altus Prostatore* is, of course, the most famous example of his poetry; see Carey, ed and tr., '*Altus Prostatore*'. For a Middle Irish account of Colum Cille defending the poets from expulsion from Ireland, see the Preface to *Amra Choluim Chille*; [TCD 1141 (E 4.2) version] Bernard and Atkinson, eds. and tr., '*Praefatio in Amra Coluim Cille*', ed. I, 162-3 and tr. II, 53-4; [LU version] R.I. Best and O. Bergin, ed., *Lebor na hUidre: The Book of Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929), 11-15. For discussion, see John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh and London 1974), 157-70.

<sup>264</sup> See the discussion of *UA* above on pages 115-8.

In addition to later versions of The Prologue itself,<sup>265</sup> the Middle Irish Texts, *AG*, *A9* and *Scél na Fír Flatha, Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri, ocus Ceart Claidib Cormaic (SFF)*,<sup>266</sup> all reproduce parts of its account. *AG* and *SFF* include the story of the royal judgement which was provoked by the *Immacallam*, through which every professional hierarchy, while formerly having been subject to the judgements of poets, came to be granted juridical authority over itself.<sup>267</sup> Although this is not without some important differences in *SFF*, which presents Cormac mac Airt as the subsequent renewer of Conchobar's initial promulgations of this judgement,<sup>268</sup> a version of the story which seems to be unattested in earlier extant sources. In addition, *AG* and *A9* recount abbreviated versions of the Prologue's description of how the *SM* itself was founded.<sup>269</sup> In doing so, they preserve The Prologue's most basic doctrine, namely, that the natural law - primarily known by righteous poets and judges, but to some degree known by all just people irrespective of vocation - as an integral and necessary part of Christian law, augments and completes, rather than merely foreshadows, the law of Scripture, revealed by the Church.

The relationship between natural and ecclesiastical forms of law remains significantly more ambiguous in *SFF*, which, despite drawing from material which appears to originate from The Prologue to *SM*, makes no mention of *SM* or of ecclesiastical law whatever. Rather than speaking of 'righteous poets and judges', it is said there that 'royal lords' (*rihfálaithe*) of the pre-Christian past, such as Conn and Cormac, followed the 'natural truth' and the 'law' associated with it. As we have come to expect, its

<sup>265</sup> For discussion of these later versions, see Carey, 'An Edition', 1-11. However, note Breatnach's corrections of this discussion relative to his work on *OGSM*; Breatnach, *A Companion*, 24, 40, 71, 160, 338 and esp. 345.

<sup>266</sup> i.e. 'The Story of the Ordeals, Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise, and The Decision as to Cormac's Sword'. There are several different recensions of *SFF*, of which the first can likely be dated to c.1200. For this, further discussion of the recensions of this story, and references, see Boyle, 'Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts', 20-21.

<sup>267</sup> *AG* §45-54; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glúngel*', ed.131-2 and tr.137. *SFF* §5-6; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.186-7 and tr.204-5.

<sup>268</sup> *SFF* §7; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.186-7 and tr.205; 'Romeasc cach ar dan a cele arís, co tanic in mordail sin im Cormac. Rodeiligsid didiu arís aes cach dana fria aroili isin mordail-sin, 7 rohordaigheadh cach dib fora dhan dileas' (=Howbeit each man again encroached on the other's profession, until that great meeting was held by Cormac. So in that great meeting they again separated the men of each art from the others; and every one of them was ordained to his own art).

<sup>269</sup> *AG* §33, 37-44; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glúngel*', ed.130-1 and tr.136-7; *A9* §2, 5; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., 'A Second Source', ed.32-34 and tr.33-35.

author understands this law to be divinely revealed. When, as in Cormac's adventure in the 'Land of Promise', an apparition appeared to them to assist them in the following of this 'natural truth', we are assured that this was a divine, angelic visitation. Cormac's restoration of Conchobar's earlier legislation, in which he had broken up the poet's juridical monopoly over the arts, is given as the result of just such an angelic ministration.<sup>270</sup> The legal results of Cormac's legal embodiment of this ministration will, moreover, remain forever.<sup>271</sup> Even so, the relation that the laws which are derived from the 'natural truth' are understood to have to the laws derived from the Christian Scriptures is not evident. Given that at least this one manifestation of the 'natural truth' is taken to have an abiding relevance, it presumably has something to contribute to the Church proper which is not already found in the Mosaic law on which it claims much of pre-Christian Irish law was based.<sup>272</sup> However, if so, this conclusion is left almost entirely implicit, something in which it contrasts strikingly with the relevant sections of *AG* and *A9*.

There is at least one sense in which *AG* and *A9* may be said to go further than The Prologue in what they claim about natural law. They, like *AU* and the *Immacallam*, are far more specific about the knowledge that certain poets and judges of Ireland's pre-Christian past had concerning theological matters. In addition to the general sense that knowledge of the natural law comes from God, they both claim that Connla, by 'the grace of the Holy Spirit', was able to identify God, the Son, as the creator of the world, an identification which has the added significance of presupposing a correct

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<sup>270</sup> *SFF* §80; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.202 and tr.220-21: 'Acht adberaid na hecnaidi cach uair notaisbenta taibsi ingnad dona righflathaibh anall ⁊ amal adfaid in Scal to Chund, ⁊ amal tarfas Tír Thairngiri do Cormac -, comidh timthirecht diada ticedh fan samla sin, ⁊ conach timthirecht deamnach. Aingil immorro dos-ficed da chobair, ar is firindi aignidh dia lentais, air is timna Rechta rofoghnamh doibh. Timthirecht diada immorro rosær fir Erenn a n-Uisneach ar in Tromdhaim cena lecon doibh' (=The wise declare that whenever any strange apparition was revealed of old to the royal lords, - as the ghost ap/peared to Conn, and as the Land of Promise was shewn to Cormac, - it was a divine ministration that used to come in that wise, and not a demoniacal ministration. Angels, moreover, would come and help them, for they followed Natural Truth, and they served the commandment of the Law. It was a divine ministration, moreover, that freed the men of Erin at Uisnech from the Great Bardic Company, without leaving it to them).

<sup>271</sup> *SFF* §4; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.186 and tr.204: 'uair is iad na smachta ⁊ na rechta doronadh 'sin dial sin merus a n-Erinn co brath' (=For the rules and law which were made in that meeting will abide in Erin for ever).

<sup>272</sup> *SFF* §24; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.192-3 and tr.211.

understanding of the divine relations of the persons making up the Christian Trinity.<sup>273</sup> Such a claim is scarcely less strong than those we have observed in *BND* concerning Athairne. Although, in contrast to the Athairne of *BND*, they seem to present Connla as an exceptional, rather than a paradigmatic, case.<sup>274</sup> To this, *AG* adds further that Morann ‘believed in God’.<sup>275</sup> *A9*, like *SFF* (and *Sanas Cormaic* before them),<sup>276</sup> also claims that Caí was fully instructed in the Mosaic law before coming to Ireland.<sup>277</sup> In this respect, *AG* might be said to be closest of the three to the original form of The Prologue, where the revelation of natural law in pre-Christian Ireland seems to operate independently of any Mosaic influence.<sup>278</sup> However, neither *AG* nor *A9* echo any of the direct statements made both by The Prologue and the *SM* itself about what it is that the law of nature contributes to the law of Scripture that makes it a necessary part of *SM*. They certainly assume *that* it is necessary, but do not show *why* it is.

It is safe to assume that their authors take themselves to be following the combined understanding of The Prologue and *SM* in these things at least insofar as they both say

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<sup>273</sup> *AG* §4-8; Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.125-6 and tr.135: ‘4.Is é in Connla cétna cóir co nnirt Spirit Naím nertmóir ro-lá conflícht ros conaig risna druídib díthoraid . / . 6. At-bert Connla co céill nglicc . // 7. . “is ferr dúind táeb risin fer do-rigne im cach náem núanem. 8. Cid ima ngebthe in bur leith gníma meic Dé?” (=4. It is that same just Connla who with the strength of the might Holy Spirit contended with the druids and overcame them . / . 6. Connla with great shrewdness said . / 7. . it is better to trust in Him who has made around every saint bright heaven 8. Why should you assume unto you the deeds of the son of God?). *A9* §1; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., ‘A Second Source’, ed.32 and tr.33: ‘Do-roisced-eisidhe do feraib Erenn a ngais, as he co rath in Spiruta Naeim. Is se do[no] do-nidh conblicht cogaidh frisna druidhib as-bert-saidhi batar he do-densat nem 7 talam 7 muir 7 grian 7 esc 7rl- . . . “Is ferr duinne”, ol se, “taeb do tabairt fria fer do-ronsat h[aec] omnia .i. Dia nime 7 talman” 7rl-. “Sain samla didiu 7 ilmaine Meic De” (=He used to surpass the men of Ireland in wisdom and he possessed the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is he, moreover, who used to engage in the warlike conflict against the druids, who used to say that it was they who created heaven and earth and sea and sun and moon etc. . . It is better for us’, he said, ‘to trust in the One who has made all of this, i.e. God of heaven and earth’, etc. ‘Special, then, are the likeness and the many gifts of the Son of God’).

<sup>274</sup> See pages 115-8 above.

<sup>275</sup> *AG* §26; Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.129 and tr.136: ‘Cid Morand, do chreit do Día, / ba breathem rán, ba rígnía’ (=Even Morand, he believed in God, he was a very splendid judge, he was a kingly champion).

<sup>276</sup> See page 107, esp. note 132.

<sup>277</sup> *A9* §1; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., ‘A Second Source’, ed.32 and tr.33: ‘Is e in Cai-sin for-fogluim recht Maisi re taidecht anair 7 it breatha reachta no bereadh. Is de ba Cai Cainbrethach’ (=It is that Caí who learned the law of Moses before coming from the east and it is judgement of the law [of Moses] that he used to give. This is why he was called Caí Cainbrethach).

<sup>278</sup> For a later version of The Prologue in which Mosaic influence is assumed, see references towards the end of note 132 above.

that ‘the law of nature reached many things which the law of scripture did not reach’.<sup>279</sup> It also seems more than likely that the ethical and scientific content which is specific to it would similarly pertain to the typical functioning of the created order, rather than God’s miraculous interventions in it. But we must be cautious even in regard to this likelihood, given that these texts are the only clues we have regarding what they take that combined understanding to be. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to argue that the doctrine of natural law’s supplementarity is not intrinsic to the story of natural law’s conciliation and synthesis with the law of Scripture in *SM*, even in the truncated form in which it is reported by *AG* and *A9*, and it remains the most plausible interpretation of *SFF*.<sup>280</sup> There can be no need for something to be part of a synthesis if it is not perceived as contributing something to that synthesis in the process. Yet we find in them no comparable trace of more exalted features of The Prologue’s presentation of the natural inspiration enjoyed by righteous poets and judges. There is no sign that this inspiration, insofar as its own vision has come to be quickened by the inspiration which is proper to the Church, is something which can adequately unite the arts, or beyond them, the totality of the secular and ecclesiastical spheres of learning.

In *SFF*, we have found that it is decisively the king of Ireland, rather than the chief-poet of Ireland (as blessed to do so by his bishop), who is able to preside in judgement over the arts. Given that the law which is instituted by Cormac’s royal authority is taken to endure for all time, a similarly enduring role for the kind of royal authority which promulgated it would seem to be assumed. However, the status of the legal authority of the king in relation to that of the Church, now that it has survived long enough to exist in the context of the Church’s authority, is not explored at all. In *AG* and *A9*, where all pre-Christian Irish law is incorporated into (and thus superseded by) *SM*,<sup>281</sup> the parts of The Prologue which emphasise the royal-poet’s central role in *SM*’s formulation are not to be found. The impression this leaves is that St. Patrick and his episcopal heirs, in addition to having juridical authority over the forms of learning arising from the law of

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<sup>279</sup> *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18.

<sup>280</sup> The other possibility being that pre-Christian law is seen as an incomplete form of the law derived from the Christian Scriptures, which, as such, agrees with (but does not add anything to) it.

<sup>281</sup> *AG* §37-40; Smith, ed. and tr., ‘*Aimirgein Glúngel*’, ed.130 and tr.136-7; *A9* §2; McLaughlin, ed. and tr., ‘A Second Source’, ed.32-4 and tr.33-5.

Scripture, are also now the primary judges of the arts arising from the law of nature, thus succeeding the kings in this capacity, as the kings had the poets before them:<sup>282</sup> a significant departure from the dialectical relationship which Patrick has with the law of nature's poetic representative in The Prologue (Dubthach), in which that representative, while inferior to him, is made by him to be superior to either of them when taken on their own. In short, The Prologue's qualification of the way in which the natural theology of the poets operates as the 'handmaiden' of the theological knowledge which is particular to the Church and its Scriptures, is no longer present. The 'priority' (*airechas*) which is given 'to man of the White Language' (*d'fír Bérlai Báin*), in the words of *AG*, is now without any counterpoint.

### ***Uraicecht Becc: A Contrasting Account***

Or at least it has no counterpoint among the inheritors of The Prologue's account of Dubthach and Patrick. *UB*'s understanding that the judgements of a king are based on both the *roscada* of the poets and the Scriptures of the Church<sup>283</sup> seems to place the king in a similar role to that which Dubthach comes to assume in The Prologue through receiving Patrick's episcopal and saintly blessing. If it is only the king who derives his judgements from the respective bases of both ecclesiastical and secular judgement, it would appear that it is the king who determines how these bodies and modes of knowledge will be related and conciliated to each other. From such a perspective, The Prologue is unlikely to have been a very satisfactory account. While kings are involved there in the making of *SM*, any sense of the juridical supremacy of kings, which The Prologue's outline of Conchobar's earlier judgement may have encouraged, is dismissed in Patrick's confrontation with Loegaire, where Loegaire is chastised precisely because

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<sup>282</sup> This is left implicit in *A9*, but see *AG* §44; Smith, ed. and tr., '*Aimirgein Glúngel*', ed.131 and tr.137: 'Ó tháinic Pátraic—mod mas— / tuscat don fír airechas, / d'fír in Bérlai Báin—ferr de— / do chind cháid na canóine' (=Since Patrick came—splendid work—they have given priority to the man of the White Language—the better for it—to the pure one of Canon Law).

<sup>283</sup> *UB* [*CIH* 643.12 = 636.1]; Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 168: 'Nach breith egalsa dochuisin, is for fír 7 dlíged 7 screpra consuiter. Breth filedh im[murgu]: forosgadhaibh consuiter. Breath flatha im[murgu] consuiter foraih uili: foroscadaibh, et fasaigib, testemnaibh firaib' (=Any judgement of the church that exists, it is established on the basis of truth and entitlement and Scripture. [The] judgement of a poet, moreover, is established on the basis of *roscada*. The judgement of a ruler, moreover, is established on them all: on *roscada*, and precedents and true testimonies).

he has made the mistake of assuming this juridical supremacy relative to the Church.<sup>284</sup> However, the figure of Cormac seems to be more accommodating to *UB* in this regard. The pre-eminence which the king has over the clerical and poetic hierarchies in *UB* seems to be in harmony with, if it is not indeed actually operative in the roughly contemporary *Tecosca Cormaic*, where we find Cormac insisting that a king must, among other things, be characterised by the ‘learning of every art’ (*foglaímm cach dána*), ‘knowledge of every specialist language’ (*eolos cach bérlai*) and ‘judgement with’, or ‘by means of *roscada*’ (*brithemnas co roscadaib*).<sup>285</sup>

These statements do not, of course, prove anything about the relation of royal to ecclesiastical authority. However, a text which is set in the pre-Christian past will not have many means of demonstrating anything about that relationship. On the one hand, there is nothing in the idea that a just king must be the master of every kind of natural learning which demands the extension of that mastery to the forms of learning which belong to the Church; on the other, there is nothing in it which is at odds with such an extension. In which case, it seems impossible to be certain if these statements belong more fundamentally to a view where a just king’s mastery of knowledge, in the Christian era, is thought to pertain strictly to the sphere of the natural, or if they belong to a view which understands it to include the ecclesiastical sphere as well.

At any rate, if either sense of the doctrine came to be associated with Cormac in this way by the by the Late Old Irish period, as it seems The Prologue’s doctrine had with Conchobar, it certainly would help make sense of why in *SFF*’s account of the kingly apportioning of judgement to each art over itself, Conchobar’s initial promulgation of this legislation is overshadowed by Cormac’s revival of it.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, there is the role

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<sup>284</sup> *PSM* §1-4, 10-11; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.10, 12 and tr.17-19. See discussion above on pages 142-4.

<sup>285</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* §3, lines 40-4; Fomin, ed. and tr., ‘*Tecosca Cormaic*’, ed.154 and tr.155: ‘Foglaímm cach dána, / Eólas cech bérlai, / Druine m(b)rechtrad, / Tacra co fásaigib, / Brithemnas co roscadaib’ (=Learning of every art, / Knowledge of every specialist language, / Craftsmanship of variegated works, / Law-suit based on legal precedents, / Judgement with *roscada* [lightly edited]). Compare to the connection between Lug’s mastery of all the arts and his perceived fitness for kingship in *CMT* §39; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.40-42. and tr.41-3.

<sup>286</sup> See pages 147-9 above.

of this kingly legislation in legal history to consider. Where the culmination that the natural law receives in the context of *SM*, according to The Prologue, involves kings only in a subsidiary capacity, *SFF* presents Cormac's revival of Conchobar's royal legislation as natural law's prime and unsurpassable manifestation.<sup>287</sup> Whether or not *SFF* is in fact influenced by the doctrine of the king's absolute pre-eminence in *UB*, it remains that it uses only parts of The Prologue which are congenial to this doctrine and then transforms them in such a way as to remove any dissonance with it as may remain, though without any definitive statement that would prove that it actually intends to take matters as far as this.

Of the texts discussed thus far, it is only *Scél Néill Frossaig* that, through its attribution of ecclesiastical effects to Niall's enactment of his *fír flathemon*,<sup>288</sup> shows us an unambiguous parallel to, or dramatization of, *UB*'s doctrine of kingship. Whatever the degree of *UB*'s influence, it is certainly interesting that the closest parallel to The Prologue's boldest doctrine is found in a text which does not make reference to it, a text, moreover, which makes kingly, rather than poetic, authority supreme over every form of knowledge and law.

### **Natural Knowledge: Kings and Other Non-Poets**

As important as this is, there is another side to The Prologue's subsequent influence which is no less significant, although it too concerns The Prologue's account of the royal judgement that each vocation should henceforth govern itself. Aside from what this story adds to the discussion of whether the unification of the various forms of natural and ecclesiastical learning is most a poetic, clerical or royal capacity and responsibility, it says a great deal about the vocations which have, as such, been judged capable of judging themselves. The author of *The Caldron* is clear that the divine inspiration by which the Cauldron of Motion is filled is the origin of all the arts, not just

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<sup>287</sup> See notes 270-1 above.

<sup>288</sup> LL 35670-711; Best *et al.*, eds., *The Book of Leinster* V, 1202-3, David Greene, tr., 'The "Act of Truth"', 31-2; Wiley, ed. and tr., 'Niall Frossach', 20-22, 25, 27-8. See discussion in Chapter 1, pages 68-70.



those belonging to the poetic vocation.<sup>289</sup> This would indicate that all the arts partake of this inspiration in their own way. However, the distinctions he makes between kinds of natural inspiration are all of degree rather than kind, thus leaving us in the dark about the way in which these various partakings arise, whether parallel to poetic inspiration and, as such, fundamentally distinct from it, or else, in some way derivative from and dependent on it. It is only upon turning to The Prologue that we finally encountered a self-conscious account of the members of various vocations receiving distinct forms of natural inspiration appropriate, not only to their degree, but to their specific vocation. At every step we have found that the truth of moral and political judgements is uncontroversially thought to depend on a revelation of the law of nature by means of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if it is indeed a just judgement that a given vocational hierarchy may judge the relative ‘truth’ or ‘justice’ of its own members in the exercise of their vocation, it means then that such divine revelation as is necessary for that to be possible must be available to each vocation in distinction from the learning and discipline of any other vocation, rather than through their degree of participation in the discipline and learning of the poetic vocation.

In this way, the gap between the most basic teaching of the Holy Spirit, such as we see reported in the *Milan Glosses* and Muirchú’s *Vita*, and the most lofty teaching, which enables the promulgation and maintenance of law (although perhaps in an incomprehensible way)<sup>290</sup> is closed. If we interpret the material we have considered in the *Bretha Nemed* through this, as The Prologue itself requires of its readers,<sup>291</sup> this would mean that Holy Spirit inspires everyone with the knowledge of natural law insofar as, but also, *in the particular way that*, their vocational training and the form of

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<sup>289</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy* §4; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.64 and tr.65: ‘Caite didiu bunad ind archetail ⁊ gachsois olchenae? Ní ansae; gainitir tri coiri i cach duiniu .i. Coire Goiriath ⁊ Coire Éрмаi ⁊ Coire Sois’ (=What does the source of poetic art and every other knowledge consist of? Not difficult three cauldrons are generated in every person, i.e. the Caldron of Goiriath and the Caldron of Éрмаe and the Caldron of Knowledge).

<sup>290</sup> Bearing in mind that the poetic judgements involved in the *Immacallam* were said to be incomprehensible to the rulers present; *PSM* §10; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19.

<sup>291</sup> *PSM* §11; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19: ‘Isín aimsir-sin domídetar maithi fer nÉrenn tomus n-aí ⁊ innsce do chách iarna miad, amail ro gabsat isnaib Brethaib Nemed ⁊rl’ (=At that time the nobles of Ireland adjudged the measure of lawsuit and speech to each man according to his rank, as they are reckoned in the *Bretha Nemed*, etc.).

moral purity pertaining to it has prepared them to receive it. Conversely, it would mean that everyone, at least potentially, has access to such inspiration to the degree *and in the particular way that* their vocation requires knowledge of natural law in order for the duties that belong to it to be fulfilled. Moreover, it would also signify that at least some members of that vocation will enjoy the inspiration that is specific to their vocation to an extent that allows them to justly judge whether those duties have indeed been fulfilled.

To the degree that the other professional hierarchies mirror the structure of the poetic hierarchy in this regard, this will also mean that it is the *nemed*-class members of a given profession who have access to the inspired knowledge of natural law which pertains to their profession. Whereas its sub-*nemed* members, like bardic-class poets, will presumably practice that profession only insofar as they have availed themselves, through rote-learning, of the profession-specific knowledge, exemplars, regulations and judgements promulgated by the *nemed* classes. But bearing in mind that the *Caldron of Poesy* depicts even the lowest levels of knowledge as coming from a kind of inspiration by the Holy Spirit, and not just inspired knowledge (*imbas*) as such, we should be alive to the possibility that certain sub-inspiration forms of inspiration, as it were, may be at work in the sub-*nemed* classes' ability to learn and reproduce this rote learning.<sup>292</sup> Certainly such inspired knowledge of natural law as is necessary for fulfilling the life of personal virtue prescribed by the Church to every Christian would presumably be available to even the sub-*nemed* classes. For where this has been spoken of there we have found a consistent de-emphasis of the significance of learning or any other intellectual qualification.

The importance of The Prologue's account of Conchobar's royal judgement is most readily apparent in the fact that it does not, as we have seen, only appear where poetic inspiration is presented as the paradigmatic example of the revelation of natural law, but even in a text such as *SFF*, where the angelic visitations enjoyed by 'royal-lords' serve this function instead. The idea that there was a subsequent need for a restoration of this

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<sup>292</sup> That is to say, the Holy Spirit fills the Caldron of Goiriath as well as the Caldron of Knowledge; *The Caldron of Poesy* §1; Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The Caldron of Poesy', ed.62 and tr.63. See discussion above, at pages 125ff.

paradigmatic example of such legislation, after it had fallen into disuse, is certainly an addition. However, the fundamental structure of the story, together with the ideological import it has for how the other secular hierarchies are conceived remains the same. Of course, between *AG*, *SFF* and The Prologue in its various recensions, these are just three texts, all told. Yet, like many of the other developments considered in this chapter, the doctrine which is mediated through their transmission of this story has a high degree of explanatory power, and is without easily distinguishable rivals. However, in this case, it becomes possible to identify another, more implicit theory regarding the division of juridical authority among non-poets, using The Prologue as a point of reference.

### ***Tecosca Cormaic*: A Contrasting Account**

In the ninth-century wisdom-text, *Tecosca Cormaic*, we have seen that the king is required to be proficient in *roscada*.<sup>293</sup> Where such a requirement obtains, this could be taken to indicate a certain incredulity about the legitimacy of the division of judgement that we find in The Prologue. Where the Conchobar of The Prologue confines the use of *roscada* to judgements which apply to the poetic-art,<sup>294</sup> it seems here that the capacities of the king must to be shored up with those of a poet if he is to maintain his justice as ruler. If this is true of kings, relative to their own vocation, there is no reason, in principle, why this might not be true of other non-poets as well. However, in *Tecosca Cormaic*, the king is not required to be proficient in *roscada* only, but in every art.<sup>295</sup> Thus, this requirement is not speaking about one or two more areas of knowledge that a just king should have in addition to the knowledge that is proper to him as king.

It indicates rather that the capacities which are severally possessed by the poet, and every other vocation among the ‘men of art’ (*áes dána*) in distinction from each other are understood to exist as a unity in person of the just king. In which case, if the just king has poetic knowledge simply because he has every kind of knowledge, this would

<sup>293</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* §3, lines 40-4; Fomin, ed. and tr., ‘*Tecosca Cormaic*’, ed.154 and tr.155.

<sup>294</sup> *PSM* §10; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19.

<sup>295</sup> *Tecosca Cormaic* §3, lines 40-4; Fomin, ed. and tr., ‘*Tecosca Cormaic*’, ed.154 and tr.155: ‘Foghlaimm cach dána, / Eólas cech bérlai, / Druine m(b)rechtrad, / Tacra co fásaigib, / Brithemnas co roscadaib’ (=Learning of every art, / Knowledge of every specialist language, / Craftsmanship of variegated works, / Law-suit based on legal precedents, / judgement with *roscada* [lightly edited]).

not necessarily mean that poetic knowledge was indispensable to any other kind of non-poet's capacity to judge their own profession. However, in relation to the narrative in The Prologue which we have been considering, there would be more than a little interpretive dissonance involved in even this interpretation, given that the very reason for breaking up the poetic monopoly on judgement, in The Prologue, was that no one was able to understand the excessively obscure speech of the poets beside the poets. The question of how it is that any non-poet, whether royal or no, could be capable of making authoritative judgements in *roscada*, or even (as in *Tecosca Cormaic*) could be required to do so, cannot be settled by a narrative whose motivating principle is the assumption that non-poets do not use *roscada*, and cannot understand it.

### **Significance for the *Bretha Nemed***

The *Bretha Nemed* is comparable to *Tecosca Cormaic* on this issue, given its tendency to depict rulers as *roscad*-speaking authorities in their own right,<sup>296</sup> something which has the consequence of presenting obvious problems for The Prologue's attempt to assimilate it to its interpretation of *SM*. That said, whether this similarity amounts to a view which parallels that of *Tecosca Cormaic* in practice remains to be seen. Unfortunately, there is not, to my knowledge, any straightforward explanation in *BNT* or *BND* regarding how or why *rosc(ad)* appears in royal judgements to which we might then usefully compare the more definite positions of *Tescoca Cormaic* and The Prologue. We might perhaps conclude that, like The Prologue, they may be taking each vocation to possess its sufficient share of the inspired knowledge of natural law,

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<sup>296</sup> Both Cormac and Conchobar make judgements in *roscad* in *BNT*; (Conchobar) *CIH* 1116.29-34, 2217.24-35; (Cormac) *CIH* 2217.8-25. For discussion of these passages, see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 73, 155, 170, 198-99; Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 77, 91-2; Breatnach, *A Companion*, 363. Certain 'Stories from the Law Tracts' are relevant to *BNT*'s respective accounts of Conchobar's (story III; *CIH* 2113.16-25 [concerns *CIH* 2217.8-25]) and Cormac's (story II; *CIH* 2113.6-15 [concerns *CIH* 2217.8-25]) poetic judgements; Dillon, ed. and tr., 'Stories from the Law-Tracts', ed.44-5 and tr.52-53. *Rosc* judgements are also attributed to Conchobar and Cormac in *BND*; *CIH* 1116.29-34 and 1126.27-32, respectively; discussion in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 199. Conchobar's judgement here is also referenced in the 'Stories from the Law Tracts' (story XIII; *CIH* 2117.23-35); Dillon, ed. and tr., 'Stories from the Law-Tracts', ed.51 and tr.62-3. Cormac is further depicted as succeeding in a judgement due to its superior rhetorical qualities (although, in this case, it does not qualify as *rosc*) in *Cath Maige Macrama* §63; Ó Daly, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Mucrama*, ed.58 and tr.59; discussion in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 81-2. For the appearance of the 'Stories from the Law Tracts' as commentary on extracts of *BNT* and *BND*, stories II and III as part of the content of those stories which appears to go back to Old Irish originals, and story XIII as decisively Middle Irish, see Breatnach, *Companion*, 349-50.

quintessentially associated with the poets, by virtue of no other means than the disciplines and education which are proper to it alone, only that, for the *Bretha Nemed* texts, this share of inspiration is manifested in the form of a spontaneous capacity for the appropriate use of poetic *roscada*, rather than a reason that it need not be used. The difficulty with such an interpretation is that, as we saw in the first chapter, the correct use of *roscada* - given that it is a demanding form of composition, especially the extemporaneous use of it which is required in juridical contexts - seems not merely to be a demonstration of one's insight into the law of nature, but of the specifically poetic learning and accomplishment to which a poet owes their capacity to be a recipient of such inspired knowledge.<sup>297</sup> In other words, it appears to be (and certainly is in the eyes of The Prologue) a demonstration of one's identity as a poet, in distinction from other vocations. The claim that different vocational disciplines may similarly prepare a person for a degree of inspired natural knowledge proportional to their degree of training and purity is not controversial relative to the other texts we have been considering. However, the further claim that inspired natural knowledge will manifest itself through the masterful practice of an entirely different vocation's discipline seems to be in danger of self-contradiction, and thus to be especially unlikely, short of their being a direct statement to that effect.

The most straightforward explanation is that it is through some form of fairly rigorous poetic education that the *Bretha Nemed* texts conceive of someone who more fundamentally belongs to another vocation as being able to stand among the poets as an authoritative judge on matters pertaining to the law of nature. According to such a view, persons of non-poetic professions could be legal authorities insofar as they also became accomplished poets. Alternatively, it is also possible that *Tecosca Cormaic's* later insistence on a true king's grasp of all the arts, including the poetic arts, is simply an accurate interpretation of the earlier *Bretha Nemed* texts with which it is associated. After all, the decisively extra-poetic *roscad*-speaking authorities referenced in *BNT* and *BND* are all kings.<sup>298</sup> Although, if this *aporia* may be accounted for entirely by

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<sup>297</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 35-43; Chapter 2, pages 92-6, 118-33.

<sup>298</sup> i.e. Conchboar and Cormac; see note 296 above.

attributing to these texts an implicit understanding of the kingly role which could be said to mirror *Tecosca Cormaic*, and to anticipate the position of *UB* in certain respects, there is at least a possible complication in the form of a story found in the Middle Irish commentary tradition on *BNT*, where a craftsman named Mac Enncae evidently receives something rather more than human knowledge regarding the plan of a new shield design for Cú Chulainn.<sup>299</sup> Thus far we have only seen the gods of the sagas reveal hidden knowledge to high-level poets, in the *Immacallam*<sup>300</sup> and to ‘royal-kings’, in *SFF*.<sup>301</sup> The emergence of such a story as commentary on *BNT* may indicate the presence of some as of yet unconsidered affirmation of forms of juridical authority which belong to craftsmen without reference to the authority of poets or rulers, a possibility we must keep in mind as we go along. But then it may of course reflect later developments more than anything in *BNT* itself. We are faced then with ambiguities that run in multiple directions. Yet even with these ambiguities in play, it is already evident that the *Bretha Nemed* will serve as a useful counterpoint to The Prologue in the interpretation of later texts.

### **The Case of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirtheimne***

Speaking of which, the best way to begin to work through the possible significance of the use of *rosc(ad)* by rulers (as well as poets) in the *Bretha Nemed*, will be to see what light it might shine on Cú Chulainn’s remarkable use of it in his late Old Irish death-tale, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirtheimne (BMMM)*.<sup>302</sup> The reason for this is that *BMMM* appears at first glance to go even farther than what the *Bretha Nemed* says explicitly on this subject, and if so, stands to establish the frontier of what may be possible for our understanding of the implicit doctrines of the *Bretha Nemed*. The central issue is that Cú Chulainn of this text seems not to be a poet, and is only a king in the metaphorical

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<sup>299</sup> This is story V [*CIH* 2114.5-24, commenting on 2219.37-8] of Myles Dillon’s ‘Stories from the Law Tracts’; R.I. Best, ed., ‘Cuchulainn's Shield’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), 72; Dillon, tr., ‘Stories from the Law Tracts’, tr.54-5; John Carey, tr., ‘The Hand of the Angel: Observations on the Holy Book in Early Ireland and Northumbria’, *Temenos Academy Review* 2 (Spring 1999), 76-96, at 80-81; *idem*, tr., ‘The Waters of Vision and the Gods of Skill’, *Alexandria* 1 (1991), 163-86. On its ‘high incidence of Middle Irish features’ as showing that its text is unlikely to go back to an Old Irish original, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 350. For further discussion, see Chapter Six, page 374.

<sup>300</sup> See pages 118-25 above.

<sup>301</sup> See pages 147-8 above.

<sup>302</sup> For the dating of this text and further discussion, see Chapter 4, pages 239-40.

sense implied by the character of the curse on the spear that kills him.<sup>303</sup> He aspires, not to the ‘justice of the ruler’ nor to the ‘justice of poets’, but does seem concerned with something he calls the ‘justice of men’ (*fír fer*).<sup>304</sup> As such, when he begins to prophesy in *roscada* about the Apocalypse,<sup>305</sup> this would not be easily accounted for by The Prologue’s doctrine on its own, since, according to The Prologue, this kind of speech is confined to the hierarchy of poets. Insofar as he is a non-poet prophesying in *roscada* could appear to have much more in common with *BNT* and *BND*. However, we must bear in mind that unlike the non-poetic speakers of *roscada* in *BNT* and *BND*, he is not a king either. It is tempting to say that we must then turn to The Prologue for some sort of explanation of how it is that a pre-Christian who is neither poet nor king, *nemed*-class though he may be, is capable of prophesying about Christ, or indeed, of anything at all.

Interpreted through The Prologue, it would seem that he is able to do this because the highest ranks of any profession partake of their appropriate degree of the inspired knowledge of natural law which paradigmatically belongs to righteous poets, or else - following *Tecosca Cormaic*, *UB* and *SFF* - to righteous rulers. If so, we may conclude that since he is prophesying of Christ, the author of this death-tale thinks that inspired knowledge of theological doctrines, something which has thus far been associated only with the most accomplished poets, is nevertheless possible for certain superlative persons who are neither kings, nor judges, nor poets. In which case, the prophecies of *BMMM* could be identified as occupying a median position between *BNT* and *BND* on one hand, and The Prologue on the other, where an optimistic extension of the logic The

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<sup>303</sup> *BMMM* §20; Bettina Kimpston, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn: A Critical Edition of the Earliest Version of Brislech Mór Maige Muirtheimni with Introduction, Translation, Notes, Bibliography and Commentary*, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 6 (Maynooth 2009), ed.23 and tr.42: ‘Íar sin dano rogab Lugaic in tres gai indlithi ra boí oc maccaib Calatín Cid bias din gai-seo, a maccu Calatín Tuitfid rí dé ar meic Calatín . . .’ (=After that Lugaic grasped one the three prepared spears of the sons of Calatín. ‘What will come of this spear, sons of Calatín?’ ‘A king will fall by it,’ . . .). Although note that, according to *Mesca Ulad*, he was king over a third of Ulster for a year’s time; *Mesca Ulad* §3-4; Watson, ed., *Mesca Ulad*, 2; Koch and Carey et al, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 106-127, at 106-7. My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle for this reference.

<sup>304</sup> Among the other disasters he prophesies as resulting from the future appearance of the Antichrist, he says that this ‘justice of men’ will be violated; *BMMM* §10, line 159; Kimpston, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.16 and tr.38. Lugaic later asks for ‘fír fer’ from Conall Cernach, who has overtaken him in order to avenge Cú Chulainn’s death; *BMMM* §29, lines 467, 474; Kimpston, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.26-7 and tr.45.

<sup>305</sup> *BMMM* §10, 31; Kimpston, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.16-18, 28-9 and tr.38, 46-7.

Prologue explains how someone who is not trained as a poet might nevertheless prophecy like a poet of the highest rank, and the *Bretha Nemed*, how a non-poet is using *roscada*.

However, we can ultimately accept these conclusions only insofar as we forget the Old Irish account of Cú Chulainn's birth, *Compert Con Culainn*, where we are informed that, as a child, Cú Chulainn had the benefit of instruction from a number of *Bretha Nemed* legal authorities, namely the poets, Sencha mac Ailela and Amairgen.<sup>306</sup> There is, of course, no guarantee that the author of *BMMM* had this in his mind. Cú Chulainn's boyhood is not even alluded to in *BMMM*. Yet given the roughly contemporary circulation of a story which speaks of his thorough instruction in poetry, it seems much more straightforward to account for Cú Chulainn's prophetic *roscada* by this means, rather than by the somewhat strained theory of a *Bretha Nemed*ising interpretation of The Prologue offered above. The fact that he prophesies like a high-level poet, likely means that he, as an exceptional figure in many other respects as well, is thought to have reached a comparable level of poetic achievement in his education.

This is not to say that certain syntheses of these two rival visions cannot or do not occur. Quite the contrary. *SFF*, *AG* and *A9* are all good examples of texts that borrow elements from both sides of the aisle, as it were. However, where we see those who are neither poets nor rulers making juridical decisions or prophecies in *roscada*, this would, barring definite evidence to the contrary, seem to decisively imply the influence of the *Bretha Nemed*, and with it the idea that their capacity to do so must arise from a significant degree of supplementary poetic training of the sort one would not usually expect outside of great figures<sup>307</sup> such as Cú Chulainn and Finn.<sup>308</sup> The other side of

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<sup>306</sup> Another *Bretha Nemed* figure, the judge, Morann, makes the judgement concerning who will train Cú Chulainn, and in what subjects; *Compert Con Culainn* §7.14ff.; A.G. van Hamel, ed., *Compert Con Culainn* (Dublin 1933), 7-8; Louis Duvau, tr., 'La légende de la conception de Cúchulainn', *Revue Celtique* 9 (1888), 1-13, at 8-9.

<sup>307</sup> This would, for example, appear to include the Emer of *BMMM*; *BMMM* §33-5; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.30-4 and tr.47-9. Although, while she is shown to be capable of the extensive use *roscad*, there is no evidence that whatever poetic insight and training this demonstrates extends as far as the prophetic knowledge of theological doctrine.

<sup>308</sup> For references to, and descriptions of, the various accounts of how Finn attains and uses poetic *imbas*, see Kevin Murray, *The Early Finn Cycle* (Dublin 2017), 77-83.



this, is that it would seem to put an end to any vague expectations which the story of Mac Enncae may have raised, that the *Bretha Nemed* itself implicitly understood such inspiration as a high-level practitioner of any art or craft may enjoy to be spontaneously manifest in the form of a capacity for understanding and using *roscada*. Where rulers make judgements or prophecies in *roscada*, however, things remain much more ambiguous at present. This will similarly appear to imply some kind of poetic training and the *Bretha Nemed* side of things in general. But whether, as we have said, this poetic ability belongs to the ruler as the one who, by definition, is the preeminent possessor of all the arts, or as one who has simply acquired poetic ability as something which is ‘in addition’ to what he is as a king, resists any definite determination that is based only on his *roscada*, or any additional evidence of a poetic education.

### **Non-poetic Justice in the *Bretha Nemed***

Here it is helpful to reconsider the basis of the ‘justice of the ruler’. The Prologue provides a way of accounting for just judgements that have no reference to poetic language or form. Therefore, neither a king’s capacity for justice, nor any other non-poet’s, depends on poetic knowledge, or indeed anything that does not explicitly concern their own vocation. However, we have seen that just judgement and poetic ability appear to go hand-in-hand in the *Bretha Nemed*. In *BNT* it states that any judgement on matters of natural law must be founded ‘on the rocks of *roscad* and maxim and testimony’.<sup>309</sup> This being so, an ability to at least understand the same *rosc(ad)* which The Prologue explicitly claims are not understood by rulers<sup>310</sup> will be absolutely necessary for any judge of whatever kind. Moreover, given that the royal legal authorities quoted in the *Bretha Nemed* there are evidently capable of declaiming their judgements in *roscada*, together with the other forms of heightened rhetoric in which their maxims are often couched,<sup>311</sup> it would seem that this necessity extends to a

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<sup>309</sup> *BNT* [CIH 2221.15-16] and *UB* [CIH 1592.3ff.]; Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 74 and 210: ‘co nailcibh roscud 7 fasach 7 tesdemuin’ (=on the “rocks” of *roscad[a]* and maxim[s] and testimony). See discussion in Chapter 1, pages 37-9, with the context of this quotation found in note 81.

<sup>310</sup> *PSM* §10; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition, ed.13 and tr.19: ‘7 nírba réill donaib flathaib in brethemnus ro-n-uscat. 'Is lasna firu-so a n-oenur a mbrethemnus 7 a n-éolus,' oldat na flathi. 'Is dongaba dō dorime leo’ (=and the judgement they gave was not clear to the princes. ‘Their judgement and their understanding belong to them alone’, said the princes . . . ‘Moreover, we do not understand what they say’).

<sup>311</sup> See note 296 above.

capacity to use these forms juridically, and not just to understanding their meaning, at least for rulers of the highest ranks. But then, if the ‘justice of the ruler’ is, by definition, intrinsic to the character of kingship, how would it be conceivable, from the perspective of the *Bretha Nemed*, that the poetic understanding and ability which is necessary to its enactment would be extrinsic to kingship, as something that may perhaps be grafted onto it, but is in no way integral to it? In such a case, it would be no more than a weaker, or at best, an equal version of the same thing. Moreover, the contrasting ways in which we saw these forms of justice manifest themselves in the first chapter, would be without any theoretical basis. Although if poetic knowledge is in some manner intrinsic to kingship, but in a different way than it is to the poetic role, then there is indeed still a means of accounting for the distinctions discussed in the first chapter. It would seem impossible to make a meaningful distinction between the ‘justice of the ruler’ and the ‘justice of poets’ if the ‘justice of the ruler’ was really no more than the degree to which the ruler had acquired the ‘justice of poets’.

The conception of kingship that we found in *Tecosca Cormaic* seems to escape this dilemma. If the king is defined as one who, in some fashion, possesses all the arts, then he would be distinct from every other vocation in transcending and unifying the characteristics which made them distinct from each other. Determining whether this also applies to the *Bretha Nemed* will then require that we consider the other arts as well. The difficulty with these other arts is that *BNT* includes a number of statements about them which seem oddly close to The Prologue. There we find that each art is to be ‘judged under the authority of its own expert’, the reason being that ‘everyone is ignorant in the craft of another’.<sup>312</sup> In this case, the *nemed*-class members of a given

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<sup>312</sup> *BNT* [CIH 2221.17-21]; Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 201-2: ‘Mo nere nuallngnaidh, diamba brithemh, berur gach ndan do reir a suadh fadeisin, ar us cinmota saí cach dana rosuided [?] bretha 7 brithemuin la [Féniu], ar us ain eolus cach dana condad sain a mbretha 7 a mbrithemuin, ar nib era for ae ancesa, ainb cach a ceird aroile, arfoilge fodluim fircerda . . . oscar cach a ceird ar.ii.’ (=My Neire accustomed to proclaiming, if you would be a judge, let every art be judged under the authority of its own expert, for judgements and judges have been established together with the expert of every art, since the knowledge of every art is separate, so that their judgements and their judges be separate, for you ought not to pass judgement on cases where you are ignorant. Ignorant is everyone in the craft of another; learning underlies true craftsmen; an outsider is everyone in the craft of another).

profession seem to have jurisdiction over it.<sup>313</sup> This also fits nicely with the story from the Middle Irish commentary on *BNT* (*CIH* 2219.37-8) mentioned above, of the craftsman who receives a new idea for a shield design from one of the gods.<sup>314</sup> In either instance, it seems to be understood that those who are at the highest levels of their respective professions, in a manner which is comparable to the poetic hierarchy, enjoy such inspired knowledge of natural law as is necessary to perform and regulate their own profession justly. But then, if this is so, we must consider how this relates to the seemingly contradictory statement that legal judgements require a certain degree of poetic capacity, being based on a combination of ‘*roscad*, maxims and testimony’.

### **Vocational and Transvocational Judgement**

Unless we are to take this to be simple contradiction, we must here be dealing with two different kinds of judgement: one which involves the self-regulation of a given vocation, another which deals with cases that transcend the limitations of discrete disciplines, where specifically poetic ability and knowledge is not at all necessary to the former, but indispensable to the latter. If the notion is to hold, that there is a direct correlation between one’s authority to judge something and one’s understanding of it, it would signify that the ability to maintain the authority which the ruler of a kingdom has over all its constituent vocations is thought to be directly correlative to his actual understanding of those vocations. This understanding would presumably be of the principles by which these vocations functioned rather than of all the possible practical applications of those principles, or there would be no field of knowledge left which is proper to the vocational expert. Moreover, if this trans-vocational judgement is not to amount to the complete displacement or destruction of vocational judgement it will mean that the former acts mostly as a confirmation or negation the judgements of the latter, or as a way of relating the principles of one vocation to another. Anything further would again leave no sphere of judgement left for the vocational expert. *Audacht*

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<sup>313</sup> See also the end the following passage of *BNT* [*CIH* 2213.34-2215.4], present as *BN[T]* I, lines 77-8 in Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.20-3, at 23 and tr.23-4, at 24: ‘cach nimidh a riar, cach dan a dligeid’ (=to every *nemed* [belongs] his right to decide, to every craft its privileges), or Stacey, tr., *Dark Speech*, 201 (=to every *nemed* [belongs] his authority, to every art its entitlement).

<sup>314</sup> See pages 158-9 above; Chapter Six, page 374.

*Morainn*, which tends to be associated with the *Bretha Nemed*,<sup>315</sup> is a useful example here. There Feredach, a ruler, is portrayed as being the ultimate judge of every craft and art in his kingdom.<sup>316</sup> Yet there is no indication that he is to be involved with or trained in the minutiae of their operations. Moreover, in the exercise of his kingly judgement he is guided by the expert advice of the judge, Neire, one of the legal authorities quoted by *BNT*.<sup>317</sup> He may be, in some sense, the final authority, but is not the only kind of authority.

This seems like solid support for the notion that *Tecosca Cormaic*'s understanding of the just ruler as the possessor of all natural knowledge applies to the *Bretha Nemed* as well. Although we might now say that he is the primary possessor of this knowledge, given that this knowledge of the principles of each vocation, if not necessarily sufficient to manufacture the products of a given art or craft, is, at any rate, sufficient to justify his right to (at least potentially) overrule the judgements of professional experts concerning their respective arts or crafts, much as the expert art-critic might be justified in overruling the judgement of the artist concerning a work that only the artist could produce.

### **Non-Royal Forms of Transvocational Judgement**

However, a problem remains. Poets and judges are also portrayed as having the authority to make judgements that are in no way confined to the evaluation of products and practice of their own vocation.<sup>318</sup> One might go so far as to say that where there is

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<sup>315</sup> Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 183: 'a strong case can and has been made for *AM*'s association with the *Bretha Nemed* school. *AM* displays the same style and the two "certain" *Bretha Nemed* tracts, makes use of expressions, syntactical structures, and legal personalities found in those tracts, and has a demonstrable interest in the *nemed* classes, which it also conceptualizes and including unfree persons'.

<sup>316</sup> Speaking here specifically of Recension of B. See *Audacht Morainn* §32-52; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.10-14 and tr.11-15. This point is also made in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 185.

<sup>317</sup> The whole of *AM* is framed as a message which Morann is entrusting Neire to give to Feredach; *AM* §2-3; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.2-4 and tr.3-5.

<sup>318</sup> Including Athairne, Amairgen, Neire, Morann, Nin, Senchán Torpéist etc. For a brief overview, references, and the general tendency of *Bretha Nemed* tracts to attribute the promulgation of law to legendary poets and jurists, see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 199-201, incl. notes 152-4, 166-7. The editions and translations of judgements by various such poetic authorities in *BNT* and *BND*, found in Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 20-75, are primarily concerned with the regulation of the poetic profession, but by no means limited to it. An exhaustive list of narrative descriptions of legal judgements, organised according to the order in which they appear in *CIH*, together with references to extant editions and translations, is

*rosc(ad)* in particular, and poetic ability in general, there seems to be a corresponding capacity to make trans-vocational judgements, a rather dramatic contrast to The Prologue where its uses, before Patrick, are seen as limited to a single vocation. But if this is so, it means that the poets and judges are also, in some sense, the preeminent possessors of the various fields of natural knowledge that fall within their jurisdictions, together with their royal counterparts. Of course, since there are degrees of authority in the hierarchies of *nemed*-class poets and judges, as there are among the rulers, it follows that there will be corresponding degrees and extents of preeminent knowledge to match them. However, the most troublesome issue here is rather what this means for the relation of a ruler and a poet or jurist of equal status, such as, for example, the king and *ollam* of a *túath*. According to the theory at hand, the king and the *ollam* of a kingdom, in their own distinct ways, would both preeminently possess all the fields of natural knowledge practiced in that kingdom. However, the way these two total perspectives on the *túath* are conceived as interacting with or including each other is not at all clear.

It is possible that the universal knowledge and authority of one is subordinate to the superior universality of the other. Alternatively, they may operate in a kind of mutually dependent symbiosis, or else independently, but cooperatively, in equal partnership. Then again, their relationship may be conceived as varying from case to case.<sup>319</sup> Any definite determination is unfortunately beyond both the scope of this study. At any rate, as two different kinds of apprehension and judgement of the same totality of natural truth, both seem to represent some form of fail-safe mechanism relative to the

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found in Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 38-105, with those from the *Bretha Nemed* being found at 75-80, 90-8, 103-4. However, at page 38, the author warns that the chance he may have inadvertently missed some examples is higher in the *Bretha Nemed* tracts than elsewhere. For another exhaustive list of examples both in the *Bretha Nemed* and elsewhere, but, in this case, organised according to the figures to which they are attributed, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 362-67.

<sup>319</sup> Early Irish examples of all these possibilities are provided in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 170. Of these, the only example given from a *Bretha Nemed* text is the pairing of the jurist, Sencha mac Ailella, with the ruler, Conchobar, in their combined judgement concerning Magna's pigs in *BNT* [*CIH* 2217.24-35], another version of which appears as the third of the 'Stories from the Law Tracts' [*CIH* 2213.16-25]. It clearly portrays Sencha's judgement as subordinate to that of Conchobar. For further discussion, as well as an edition and translation of an excerpt from *BNT*'s version of the story, see Stacey, ed. and tr., *Dark Speech*, 71-2. For an edition and translation of the account of the judgement found in the 'Stories from the Law Tracts', see Dillon, ed. and tr., 'Stories from the Law Tracts', ed.44-5 and tr.53. For the language of this later version as indicating that the story goes back to an Old Irish original, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 349.

judgements of the other, given that the truth of their respective judgements is, as we have seen in the first chapter, manifest in strikingly different ways which, as such, may be confirmed independently of each other. Whether or not this is perceived self-consciously as an advantage of this arrangement is a matter of pure speculation at this point. But it is hard to deny that there is a certain practicality to requiring more than one set of launch-codes for the bomb, as it were.<sup>320</sup> All speculation aside, this much is at least is clear: there are a number of different forms or modes of a complete perspective on natural law as it applies to and is known by the vocational hierarchies of a given jurisdiction; they depend in some way on each other; moreover, in their own several ways, they all involve such poetic ability as allows them to understand and use *roscada*.

Thus, barring the emergence of evidence for a further conception of this matter which contrasts fundamentally with both the *Bretha Nemed* and *SM*, where the later literature portrays a king as being capable of making just judgements in or based on *roscada*, the poetic ability involved is not something incidental to his nature as king. Rather, it is an essential part of what makes his capacity for the ‘justice of the ruler’ possible, even in its distinction from the ‘justice of poets’. But this should be carefully distinguished from a king’s capacity to practice the poetic art generally.<sup>321</sup> For one thing, if a king, by virtue of being a king, was understood to be necessarily capable of practicing the poetic art, then *BND*’s distinction of the *rígbard* (king-bard) from kings in general, would become non-sensical.<sup>322</sup> How can there be a category for the bard who is also a king if

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<sup>320</sup> It seems likely that the ambiguity we have found in the *Bretha Nemed*, regarding the interrelations of the noble *nemed*s, could persist only so long it was still possible for an *ollam* to be an official of the *túath*, rather than an appointee of the king. On this distinction, and its lack of continuing relevance in the Middle Irish period, see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 92-3. On the ‘noble *nemed*s’ (cleric, lord, poet and sometimes ecclesiastical scholar) in the *Bretha Nemed*, see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 201.

<sup>321</sup> On this, see Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Ireland*, 168: ‘The legendary fostering of the future Leinster king Fáelán mac Colmain († 666) by St Kevin of Glendalough, although almost certainly invented, does offer an open-ended model for the fostering of noble children in monasteries and their later return to the secular world’. The scholar-kings which seem to have been produced by such an arrangement include Áed mac Scannláin, king of Íarluachair († 943), Flannacán mac Cellaig, king of Brega († 896), Fogartach mac Suibni, king of Ciarraige Cuirche († 908) and Cormac mac Cuillenáin, bishop-king of Munster († 943); Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Ireland*, 63 note 25, 136, 168-9. Johnston suggests that these are likely exceptional figures but, on the other hand, that the ‘frequent appearance of difficult passages called *retoiric* or *rosc* in the sagas presupposed a wider audience / familiar with sophisticated metaphor and symbolism’; Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Ireland*, 171-2.

<sup>322</sup> *BN[D]* XII, lines 10-13 [=CIH 1131.24-6]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.50 and tr.51: ‘ᵹ ríoghbbhard .i. ríge ᵹ bairdne lais amhail ro bhaóí Tnuthghal mac Ceallaigh rí Muscraige Miotaine, no

all kings are not only capable of the bardic art, but of *fildeacht*? Moreover, even though the examples of kingly legal authorities given in the *Bretha Nemed* seem to show that at least high-ranking rulers are understood to be capable of composing judgements in *roscada*, this does not mean that they are able to compose the metrical forms of the compositions that are proper to professional poets: *anamain*, *nath* etc.,<sup>323</sup> or that they will be either permitted to, or capable of using, *tréfocal* as a legal procedure rather than distraint.<sup>324</sup> It remains that insofar as a ruler must be capable of judging poets, there would need to be, as discussed above, such an understanding of its principles as would allow this to be possible. But this is altogether different than being able to practice poetry as an art.

Here the character of the contrast between The Prologue and the *Bretha Nemed* begins to become clear. In one sense, the role that the various poetically capable legal authorities have in the *Bretha Nemed* texts (including King Conchobar) seems quite close to the role of King Conchobar in The Prologue. Like them, the Conchobar of The Prologue is capable of presiding as the principle judge over all the vocations, only, in this case, the poets are definitely subject to his judgement and not he to theirs. This might seem to suggest that he has some level of intrinsic understanding of these vocations, including the poets, even if neither he nor the other rulers can understand the *roscada* of the poets. At least, so our reading of the *Bretha Nemed* would lead us to expect. Yet when we consider the nature of Conchobar's just judgement concerning poetry and the other arts there, it appears to involve little more than the recognition that

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Bran Fionn mac Maoil Oetraigh forna Désibh, no . . . ? (=and the rígbard, i.e. he has kingship and the bardic art, as was Tnúthgal son of Cellach, the king of Múscraige Mittine, or Bran Finn son of Máel Ochtraig, over the Déisi, or . . .).

<sup>323</sup> *BN[T]* I, lines 62-72 [=CIH 2215.5-10]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.22 and tr.24: 'ni neme nad elluing, / ni elluing nad elluing nath, do-fairce nath nemtiús, do-fuasluice laid loagha . . . de chriús de cosuir firlaoda la hemuin dligid marsai mís marfaosam fo-rfacbad . . . ? (=he is no *nemed* who does not compose, he who does not compose a *nath* does not compose, a *nath* brings about privilege, a *laíd* releases calves . . . as a result of arranging true *laíd* and *emain*, a great sage is entitled to leave great protection for a month . . .). *BN[T]* IV, lines 4-5 [=CIH 2219.17-18]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.36 and tr.37: 'Imus for-osnam, divedul do conduib, cedul n-anomuin cethirriach cato cach suad' (=Great knowledge which illuminates, extempore chanting, the singing of *anamain* of four varieties are what confer dignity on a sage). For relevant Middle Irish material, see also tables 5-6 showing *UB*'s expectations (*UB* VI [=CIH 2126.1-2127.5]; *UB* IX [=TCD MS E 3.3 21b33ff.]) regarding which the forms of poetic composition must be composed by each poetic grade; Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 182-3, with an edition and translation of *UB* IX found at 171-5.

<sup>324</sup> See discussion in Chapter 1, page 58, incl. notes 171-2.

neither the rulers, nor any other vocation, know enough about the others to judge anything but their own vocation appropriately. They must, for this reason, all judge themselves.<sup>325</sup>

It remains that the rulers seem to understand enough about the other vocations to judge the ‘measure of lawsuit and speech’ that is appropriate for each rank of a given vocation correctly.<sup>326</sup> But then the reckoning of rank that this depends on is said by The Prologue to be found in the *Bretha Nemed*.<sup>327</sup> In which case, even if the speech of the *Bretha Nemed*’s poetic and poetically capable authorities is a problem for the Conchobar of the The Prologue, their judgements are apparently intelligible enough, and sufficiently free of suspicion, that they are depended upon as the sole source of knowledge about the various vocations’ relative relations to each other. Thus, with the removal of the poets’ juridical authority over the other vocations, the possibility of any further judgements concerning the various fields of natural knowledge as an interrelated totality seem also to have been removed, that is, until such time as Patrick’s superior authority enables at least one of poets to take up this role again, after significantly enhancing his capacity to do so. The rulers, on the other hand, while clearly superior in authority to the poets, seem to be able to determine no more concerning those they rule than the degree of legal enfranchisement which it is appropriate to award to a given person relative to a rank that has already been determined by other means. Although, that said, the king is certainly held responsible for the legal decisions of his judges in the *SM* itself.<sup>328</sup> So to the extent that *SM* may be taken to apply to descriptions of the legal situation that preceded its founding, the task of maintaining the congruity of legal franchise with rank, while of limited scope, is far from insignificant.

In *SM* itself, *Córus Bésgnai*’s description of these events does not include the story of Conchobar’s division of judgement.<sup>329</sup> Thus, there is nothing there to suggest that the

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<sup>325</sup> *PSM* §11; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19.

<sup>326</sup> *PSM* §11.7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19: ‘tomus n-aí 7 innisce’.

<sup>327</sup> *PSM* §11; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.13 and tr.19. For the text and translation of the relevant passage, see note 92 above.

<sup>328</sup> See discussion and references in Breatnach, ‘The King in *SM*’, 113-5, esp.114.

<sup>329</sup> *Córus Bésgnai* §30-37; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.32-34 and tr.33-35.



plain prose style of the *SM* was not a direct result of the Church's interaction with the natural law, as presented and embodied by the righteous poet Dubthach. If, as it suggests, the natural law had been something which was revealed only through the prophecies of Ireland's poets and prophets,<sup>330</sup> there would be little to differentiate it from the understanding of natural law that we have found in the *Bretha Nemed*, excepting that rulers are not included with the poets as mediators of this law. However, with the emergence of the story of Conchobar's judgement in The Prologue, the plain prose style of *SM* is revealed to have its roots in the contribution of the rulers to the legal embodiment of natural law.<sup>331</sup> In which case, the rulers have their own clearly demarcated sphere and mode of natural legal activity which is integral to the whole, so much so that three rulers are among the nine legal authorities by whom the *SM* is founded,<sup>332</sup> whereas no rulers are depicted as contributing to the making of *SM* in *Córus Bésgnai's* account. King Lóegaire's significance to the process is only as a way of establishing the time in which the *SM* was founded, and as a form of initial political resistance to Patrick in general.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> *Córus Bésgnai* §35; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.34 and tr.35: 'Ro ráidi Dubthach maccu Lugair in fili bretha fer nÉrenn a recht aicnid 7 a recht faide. Ar ro follnastar fáidsine i recht aicnid i mbrithemnas inse hÉrenn 7 inna filedaib, toch-airrchechnatar fáidi leo do-n-icfad bérlae mbán mbiait .i. recht litre' (=Dubthach maccu Lugair the learned poet stated the judgements of the men of Ireland [delivered] out of the law of nature and the law of the prophets. For prophecy in accordance with the law of nature had ruled in the judgement of the island of Ireland and in her learned poets, and prophets among them had foretold that the pure language of the *Beati* would come, that is, the law of Scripture [slightly modified]).

<sup>331</sup> This is implied by the fact that the ruler, Conchobar, removed juridical authority from the poets due to the other rulers protesting that they could not understand the poets in question; *PSM* §10; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19.

<sup>332</sup> *PSM* §8; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19: 'Nónbur trá doérglas dond ordugud-sin .i. Pátraic 7 Benignus 7 Cairnech, trí epscoip; Loegaire mac Néill rí Hérenn 7 Dáire rí Ulad 7 Corc mac Lugdech rí Muman, trí rí; Dubthach maccu Lugair 7 Fergus fili 7 Ros mac Trechim suí béla Féne' (=Nine men were chosen to arrange [the laws]: Patrick and Benignus and Cairnech, three bishops; Loegaire mac Néill king of Ireland and Dáire king of Ulster and Corc mac Lugdech king of Munster, three kings; Dubthach maccu Lugair and Fergus the poet and Ros mac Trechim expert in legal language).

<sup>333</sup> *Córus Bésgnai* §30-2; ed. and tr., Breatnach, *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.32 and tr.33: '30. Recht aicnid ro boí la firu Érenn co tíchtain creitme i n-aimsir Lóegairi maicc Néill. Is inna aimsir-side tánic Pátraic . /32 . . Fris-bruid didiu Lóegaire fri Pátraic dáig in druad Mathu macc Úmóir. Do-rarngart-side, in druí, do Lóegairiu gétaid Pátraic biu 7 marbu airi' (=30. It is the law of nature which held sway among the men of Ireland until the comin of the faith in the time of Lóegaire son of Níall. It was in this time that Patrick came . /32 . . Lóegaire, moreover, rejected Patrick because of the wizard Mathu macc Úmóir. The latter, the wizard, had prophesied to Lóegaire that Patrick would steal the living and the dead from him).

This would seem to be an unqualified affirmation of the hierarchy of rulers on the part of The Prologue, were it not that the new legal status quo initiated by Conchobar is, as we have seen above, completely dependent on the findings of the poetic authorities it had now silenced relative to matters of law, and were it not that the conciliation of natural and ecclesiastical law is first achieved, not in the plain prose of the rulers, but in a poetic judgement given in the form of *rosca(ad)*.<sup>334</sup> But given that *SM* itself is written in the plain prose of the rulers (albeit with a ‘thread of poetry’ in it),<sup>335</sup> and given also their strong representation among its nine founders, this seems likely to have more to do with a perception of the inherent inability the two forms of natural law to compose themselves into an organic unity apart from the intervention of the Church than anything else. The lack of the intelligibility of the one makes it impossible for the other to operate without shutting out part of what it depends on in order to be itself, that is, until the coming of Patrick. The conciliation of natural law with the scriptural law in The Prologue is also the conciliation of poetic and kingly versions of natural law which, in themselves, are mutually deficient.

## Conclusions

In summary, both the *Bretha Nemed* and The Prologue conceive of the relationship of the non-poetic hierarchies to natural law by analogy to the poet’s inspired knowledge of natural law. Both agree that the disciplines and learning that belong to each vocation are sufficient for the maintenance of the justice which is particular to them. Moreover, both associate the *roscada* of the poets with such trans-vocational judgement as may be

<sup>334</sup> Prologue to *SM* §6; McCone, ed. and tr., ‘Dubthach maccu Lugair’, ed.29 and tr.7-8. See Carey, ‘The Two Laws’, 13: ‘we see the *filid* being exalted, not superceded as the result of Patrick’s ascendancy’.

<sup>335</sup> This is only found in the later version C of The Prologue [= *CIH* 1653.16-1655.56, at 1654.32-7]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 357: ‘It ē im-ardugdur int Sencusa Fergus File 7 Dubthuth mac hua Luguir at-rachtudur sūainemain filidechta fōu la Pātraic. ginmothā an urlam ro baī ara cinn do brethaib ala n-aile n-ughduir dos-ruīdetur .i. Sen mac Aighe 7 Doidin mac Nin 7 Mōenach macc Nine 7 Fīachna Fialbrethuch 7 Credine Cerd 7 Luchtaine Saor 7 Dīan Cēcht 7 aili qui in libro mainefesdantur’ (=The principal authors of the *Senchas* were Fergus the Poet and Dubthach maccur Lugair who bound a threat of poetry through it together with Patrick; apart from what was already before them, i.e. Sen, etc. and the other who are revealed in the text). Six of the component tracts (*Cethairslicht Athgabálae* [*SM*2]; *Din Techtugud* [*SM* 11]; *Tosach Bésgnai* [*SM* 12]; *Dí Thúaslucud Rudrad* [*SM* 15]; *Bretha Crólige* [*SM* 33]; *Bretha Déin Chécht* [*SM* 34]) do indeed display such a thread, in the form of significant passages in *rosca*; for discussion of these references, see Liam Breatnach, ‘Law and Literature’, 224. The later introduction of *Cáin Fúithirbe* [*CIH* 687.37-688.26, at 688.10-5] claims that Amaigen played a similar role in the making of *Cáin Fúithirbe*, a book which, when finished by him, was presented to Patrick, who subsequently augmented and corrected it; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 359-60.

possible prior to the advent of the Church in Ireland. But where the *Bretha Nemed* sees poetic *rosc(ad)*, and the kind of natural knowledge associated with it, as the common denominator between poets, judges and rulers, whatever their relationship to each other might be, The Prologue finds an insurmountable ambiguity in *rosc(ad)* against which the narrower but more intelligible knowledge of natural law, manifested in the prose of kings and the judges, must define itself. In the former view, the various kinds of judgement made according to the natural law are so integrated that it is challenging to determine the nature of their interrelations, or if they suffer any deficiency, besides the lack of the sacraments, which the Church is then thought to subsequently amend. Patrick's role here is not to make a new law, but to reinforce *Cáin Einech*, or 'The Law of Honour' which the poets and kings made at the beginning of time.<sup>336</sup> Yet in the latter view, a poetic form of judgement which has a total view of the various vocational instantiations of natural law, and a royal form of judgement which transparently appraises each individual hierarchy in distinction from each other, do not seem to be able to coexist prior to the introduction of the law of Scripture, and the law of *SM* which it makes possible.

Therefore, given this significant contrast between The Prologue and the *Bretha Nemed*, it is striking that neither legal tradition seems to attribute the kind of prophecy, whereby Christian doctrines are directly perceived or foreknown, to kings. Thus, it appears to be uncontroversial in the texts which succeed them, that such prophecy belongs only to the superlative poet to whom, on account of his outstanding learning and purity,

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<sup>336</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1111.12-28] = [56] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, ed.299 and tr.299-300: 'in Chāin Einech so thrá doruirmhisíom, do rónadh la ríoghuibh, ⁊ filedhoibh Éreann ó thosach domhain, ro naomhadh ⁊ ro nuaidhghedh la Pádraicc mac Calpruinn ⁊ la Dubhthach macu Lughair an file in aimsir Laogaire meic Néill, ⁊ im-deisidh la fearaibh Éreann a beith gan díol gan diobhadh go bráth, cidh idir chríochaibh imdergaibh airm imba díles do chāch colann a chéle do ghuin. Niba díles a aighidh do aoir; amhail asbeir i mbainbhrethaibh Uin meic Aimh' (=This *Cáin Enech* then that we have mentioned, it was made by the kings and the poets of Ireland since the beginning of the world; it was sanctified and it was renewed by Patrick son of Calpurnius and by Dubthach macu Lugair the poet in the time of Lógair son of Níall, and it was agreed upon by the people of Ireland that it should be without discharging [and] without extinction until Doomsday, even between mutually hostile territories, where it would be legitimate for anyone to wound the body of another, it would not be legitimate to satirise his face, as it says in the white judgments of On mac Aim). This, and its likely basis on some version of The Prologue to *SM*, is discussed in Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 198.

‘grace’(rath), in the words of *The Caldron*, has come,<sup>337</sup> and to such others, like Cú Chulainn or Finn, who are not poets as such, but are evidently taken to have achieved the summit of the poetic art,<sup>338</sup> that is, insofar as we are still speaking of humans, and not including gods like the Morrígan of *Cath Maige Tuired*.<sup>339</sup> The prophecy of matters confined to the natural world, such as notable births and deaths, or the presence or absence of the various effects of *fir flathemon* is evidently well within a much more attainable scope of natural knowledge.<sup>340</sup> We have variously found this lower order of prophetic insight to be accessible to lower order poets,<sup>341</sup> righteous rulers,<sup>342</sup> and even to notable craftsmen.<sup>343</sup> However, beyond the basic knowledge of God which the Milan Glosses and Muirchú’s *Vita* claim are accessible to all with no respect to education, pre-Christians, as conceived in early Irish literature, appear to have been completely dependent on high-level poets for any theological knowledge beyond this. Even in the Christian Era, this kind of knowledge is not generally attributed to anyone else besides the saints themselves.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> *The Caldron of Poesy*, §12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.67 and tr.69. However, druids are, on occasion, portrayed in a way that indistinguishable from poets, even in this regard. Bachrach of Leinster, the druid of version A of the death-tale of Conchobar, for example, accurately foreknows and preaches Christ’s passion to Conchobar in such a way that Conchobar comes to believe in Christ; *Aided Chonchobair* A §11; Kobel, ed. and tr., *A Critical Edition of ‘Aided Chonchobair’*, ed.220-21 and tr.223. In version C, Christ is additionally described by Bachrach as the one who has been foretold by the ‘seers and druids’ (*fáithi ⁊ druíd*); *Aided Chonchobair* C §1-2; Kobel, ed. and tr., *A Critical Edition of ‘Aided Chonchobair’*, ed.378 and tr.379.

<sup>338</sup> See pages 159-62 above.

<sup>339</sup> See Chapter Four, pages 265-9 and Chapter Six, pages 395-6.

<sup>340</sup> Sometimes there is not a clear distinction between the lower-order supernatural effects of natural inspiration and magical practice. See, for example, *UR*, which, among the forms of poetic satire, lists ‘magical wounding’ (*congain comail*), which is glossed as involving some kind of chanting, and ‘sorcery’ (*corrguinecht*), which is glossed as involving piercing a clay image with thorns in tandem with chanting something called the ‘*glám dícenn*’; *UR* §24; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, ed.114 and tr.115, incl. notes. For a discussion of the *glám dícenn*, see Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 140. Where a lack of clear distinction between magic and natural inspiration occurs it runs the possibility of cutting either way, signifying to interpreters either that 1) the so-called inspiration by which the poets are said to know that natural law is, in fact, only diabolical magic, or 2) that some things which are seen as diabolical magic are, in fact, examples of the Holy Spirit’s ‘natural’ mode of manifestation. Pursuing this ambiguity further is beyond the scope of this study. However, Mark Williams has a monograph in preparation which is dedicated to the subject of magic which seems likely to address these issues at length.

<sup>341</sup> See pages 118-25, 130-3 above.

<sup>342</sup> See pages 147-8 above.

<sup>343</sup> See pages 158-62 above.

<sup>344</sup> On natural law as theological vision, see pages 111ff. above.

## CHAPTER THREE – THE CHRISTIAN ERA AS THE APOGEE OF NATURALNESS

### **Introduction**

We have seen, then, that the possibility of a strict correspondence between appearance and reality in the secular institutions of the state, such as characterises Isidore's understanding of natural law and natural language, depends entirely upon the availability of an inspired knowledge of natural law. The knowledge of the natural law is entirely a revelation of the Holy Spirit rather than the vestige of an inborn ethical capacity, a revelation which is, nevertheless, distinct from the inspiration by which the Holy Spirit is manifest in and through the Church. As such, it amounts to an assimilation of broadly Augustinian ideas of natural law to those of Fathers like Cassian. The capacity to receive this revelation is acquired through the study of nature, such as we find attributed to the Abraham of the Latin Josephus' *Antiquitates Iudaicae* and to other pre-Mosaic patriarchs, in apocryphal literature. In which case, those whose study of nature involves no prior education are enabled by such study to be illuminated by this natural revelation only to the point that it provides them with the ethical and scientific knowledge necessary for reliable deliberation in the sphere of personal morality. Whereas, those at the height of the hierarchy of poets, and thus of the learning with which that hierarchy is concerned, are illuminated by the revelation of the law of nature to a superlative degree, such that they possess the ethical and scientific knowledge necessary for the promulgation and maintenance of the law of the State in its entirety. Likewise, while even the most uneducated are, through natural inspiration, granted sufficient revelation of theological truths for the beginnings of the life of faith, only the upper reaches of the poetic hierarchies seem to be able to apprehend to central doctrines of the Church in a complete and detailed form.

Given that the highest-ranking poets evidently have access to theological knowledge that is available to no one else, it might be expected, on this basis alone, that the various degrees and kinds of capacities for natural inspiration which are enjoyed by the upper reaches of the other secular hierarchies would be understood by analogy to the *ollam*.

But the natural inspiration of the poets does not lend itself to being the measure of other superior forms of natural inspiration merely by virtue of its potential extent. Far more fundamental is the fact that it is the poetic hierarchy which is, above all, concerned with knowledge itself. Since the natural law, in the sense of the term developed in the Second Chapter, is the extent of revealed secular knowledge, it stands to reason that it will be discussed with greater conceptual clarity relative to a hierarchy which is defined precisely by its relation to knowledge than it will be relative to hierarchies whose concern with knowledge is inseparable from other orientations more fundamental to them. At any rate, what we find certainly is in keeping with this. For even though the juridical authority of the ruler is, as we have found, not uncommonly thought to be superior to that of the poet, the way that natural inspiration operates is uniformly more intelligible in descriptions of the poetic hierarchies than it is in descriptions of the hierarchies of rulers. Where the means by which one may have a grasp of *fír* sufficient to the promulgation and maintenance of law is discussed, it either, as in *The Prologue*, is defined in relation to the poets' knowledge of natural law, or else, as in the *Bretha Nemed*, involves the attribution of the ability to make judgements in poetic *rosc(ad)* to the members of other hierarchies.

However, this does not yet reveal anything about the degree to which the capacity of the secular hierarchies to receive and live according to this natural inspiration is actually thought to be realised, whether before the coming of the Church to Ireland, or thereafter. To show how Isidorean naturalness is possible for the secular sphere is not the same as saying that this potential is or has been fully expressed. While we have seen that natural law is primarily associated with pre-Mosaic history, we have yet to give focused consideration to the ongoing role of the reception and enactment of natural law in history, as perceived by medieval Irish authors. The shape that this history is thought to take will doubtless determine a great deal about what an author supposes may, in their own time, be reasonably known about or expected of this natural law. There is not, of course, only one such history. But any attempt to discover the basic assumptions these histories hold in common relative to our question will require that we subject Eusebius to more detailed consideration than we have to this point.

In the First Chapter, we found that early Irish law is one step more natural than Isidore himself. The ways in which appearance and reality match each other in natural language and natural politics are not quite parallel in Isidore, since the naturalness of a political role lies in the strict correspondence of action and identity, whereas the naturalness of language lies in the strict correspondence of sensory manifestation (sound) and identity. However, the picture that prevails in medieval Ireland is one in which a political role is also directly revealed through appropriate sensory manifestations. It has been suggested that, in thus bringing Isidore's concept of natural politics into closer agreement with his concept of natural language, they are following Eusebius. However, this claim has yet to be substantiated. Now we will do so. Except, whereas the inspired knowledge by which the secular hierarchies are thought to be capable of this correspondence between appearance and reality is most clearly expressed relative to the *fír filed* of the poetic hierarchy, the correspondence itself is most clearly expressed relative to the *fír flathemon* of the rulers.

### ***Fír Flathemon Revisited***

The doctrine of *fír flathemon*, that is, of the 'justice' or 'truth of the ruler',<sup>1</sup> is one of the best-known features of medieval Ireland's ideological landscape, and rightly so.

Throughout medieval Irish literature, even in some of the earliest texts extant, we find the idea that the sovereign's maintenance of the justice that belongs to him as sovereign has a significance that goes far beyond any consideration of the specific judgements by which it is manifest, or of the finite practical effects which result from them. By ruling according to *fír flathemon*, the sovereign, it would seem, by the very act of just judgement, directly maintains the peace and fecundity of his kingdom, both as a whole and in all its parts. One of the most important and early witnesses of this concept is *Audacht Morainn* (*AM*)<sup>2</sup> or 'The Testament of Morann', an Old Irish wisdom-text,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the ambiguity of the word '*fír*' in this context, see Anders Ahlqvist, 'Paragraph 16 of *Audacht Morainn*: Linguistic Theory and Philological Evidence', in Jacek Fisiak, ed., *Historical Linguistics and Philology* (Berlin 1990), 1–10, at 1; *idem*, 'Le testament de Morann', *Études Celtiques* 21 (1984), 151–70, at 157; Julianna Grigg, 'The Just King and *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi*', *Parergon* 27.1 (2010), 27–51, at 38; P.L. Henry, 'Review of Fergus Kelly's *Audacht Morainn*', *Studia Hibernica* 17–18 (1977–78), 202–10, at 204.

<sup>2</sup> That is, Recension B of *AM*; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*.

likely of the seventh century. Although, here it bears mentioning that while this dating is widely accepted, it depends in part upon interpreting the archaic features of its grammar<sup>4</sup> as abiding features of earlier sources from which it was compiled,<sup>5</sup> rather than archaising interpolations on the part of a Middle Irish scribe,<sup>6</sup> a difficult ambiguity which we will not attempt to solve here. In it, the judge, Morann,<sup>7</sup> is presented as giving advice to the young king, Feradach,<sup>8</sup> through the mediation of his foster-son, Neire.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *AM* has often been described as a *speculum principum*. See, for example, D.A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford 1970), 9; Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xiii; Patrick Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship: Some Further Thoughts', in P.E. Szarmach and V.D. Oggins, eds., *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture* (Kalamazoo 1986), 151-83, at 156; Roland Mitchell Smith, 'The *speculum principum* in Early Irish Literature', *Speculum* 2 (1927), 411-45, at 415-19. The Hiberno-Latin text, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*, which, as we shall see, shares *AM*'s concern with 'the justice of the ruler' certainly is known to have had a decisive effect on the formation of the *speculum principum* as a genre. For an overview and references, see Rob Meens, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm' *Early Medieval Europe* 7.3 (1998), 345-57. However, to identify these examples of the medieval Irish genre of *tecosc* as actually belonging to that of the *speculum principum* seems to risk confounding what are arguably distinct genres. If the term *tecosc* is not to be used, a term like 'wisdom text' seems best, both because it is a more general term and because of its association with the parts of the Bible that appear to have provided models for the formation of the *tecosc* as a genre and *AM* in particular. On this, see McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 31; Grigg, 'The Just King', 27-51: 31; O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 278-85.

<sup>4</sup> Fergus Kelly lists the following archaic features: 1) the absence of the copulative conjunction *ocus*, 2) the absence (with one exception) of the definite article, 3) the use of the independent dative, 4) the use of verbs in final position and 5) the infrequency of Latin loan-words; see Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xxxiii-xl. Anders Ahlqvist adds *AM*'s apparent preservation of the primitive value of short unstressed vowels in the interior of words to this list. See Ahlqvist, 'La testament de Morann', 152.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xxxiii.

<sup>6</sup> Ahlqvist, 'La testament de Morann', 152.

<sup>7</sup> Although Morann appears elsewhere in medieval Irish literature, his use as an authority is a hallmark of the *Bretha Nemed* family of legal texts; Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 23; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 183. For an overview and interpretation of his relationship to Feradach, as recounted in the Middle Irish text *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*, see Ralph O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral in *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*', *Ériu* 56 (2006), 117-43; *idem*, *The Destruction*, 302-6.

<sup>8</sup> By the time that the first recension of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* [*LGÉ*, hereafter] had been written in the eleventh or twelfth century, Feradach Find Fechnach was understood to have been king over all Ireland during the first century A.D. See *LGÉ* §589; R.A.S. Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 5 vols. (Dublin 1938-56) V, ed.305 and tr.306. On Feradach in the *Lebor Gabála*, see O'Connor, 'Searching for the Moral', 122-3. For references to Feradach in the annals, see A. Martin Freeman, ed., 'The Annals in Cotton MS Titus A. XXV [Cottonian Annals; Annals of Boyle]', *Revue Celtique* 41 (1924), 301-30; 42 (Paris 1925), 283-305, at 41 (1924), 315; Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds., *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131): Part I, Text and Translation* (Dublin 1983), 5; M.A. O'Brien, ed., 'Genealogies from Rawlinson B 502', in *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962), 115a l. 53, 115b l. 29, 116a l. 31, 116c l. 20, 117f l. 43, 136a l. 45, 136b l. 55, 137b l. 44, 144a l. 11, 148a l. 22. In *Bruiden Meic Da Réo*, his nickname, *Fechnach* ('Fortunate'), is said to be on account of his having a judge (Morann) in his court who is infallible, due to his possession of a collar that strangles the guilty and spares the innocent. See O'Connor, 'Searching for a Moral', 135. In *Scél na Fír Flatha* §16, Morann is said to have two additional collars which also ensure true judgement, one of which was received from St. Paul; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.190 and tr.208-9; this is cited and discussed in Ó Corráin, 'Irish Vernacular Law', 286. See discussion of these and other 'ordeals' in Chapter 1, pages 70-1 and Chapter 6, pages



This advice consists mostly of a description of the actions that belong to *fír flathemon* and the inherent significance that such actions have for the well-being of the kingdom which the ruler governs.

Until recently it was common to see this notion of *fír flathemon*, at least as it is developed in *AM*, as a primarily pre-Christian concept. The idea that *AM* in this and other respects has ‘no trace of Christian influence’ was most famously argued by Daniel Binchy<sup>10</sup> and subsequently become the predominant scholarly view.<sup>11</sup> Fergus Kelly gave greater nuance to this position by drawing attention to its use of Latin loan words,<sup>12</sup> but arguing that, apart from these, *AM* ‘seems devoid of Christian elements’.<sup>13</sup> However, since it is now generally accepted that the literature of medieval Ireland must be understood in the light of the Christian intellectual context that produced it,<sup>14</sup> current

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391-4. Feradach is also mentioned in *Fled Bricreen* and in the Yellow Book of Lecan’s version of the *Táin*; on this, see Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> While Neire is present as no more than a means of conveying Morann’s message to Feradach in *AM*, in other law texts, such as *BNT* [CIH 2220.26-2221.21], he appears as a legal authority in his own right. See Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 24; *idem*, *A Guide*, 235-6; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 76-7, 192, 202. For a further example, see Gwynn’s edition of *BND*; Gwynn, ed., ‘An Old-Irish Tract’, 33.9ff. and 43.6ff. For discussion of other legendary judges in the *Bretha Nemed*, see Chapter 2, pages 114-8 and 157ff.

<sup>10</sup> Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 9 and 48 note 8; *idem*, ‘Bretha Déin Chécht’, *Ériu* 20 (1966), 1-66, at 4, esp. note 1. However, his own view was anticipated by scholars such as Roland Michael Smith; see Smith, ‘The *speculum principum* in Early Irish Literature’, 412-14, 443.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Dublin 1973, 2001, repr. 2004), 24; Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin 1972), 36; Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition* (New York 1988), 86-7; Wormald, ‘Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship’, 156, 160-2.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly notes the use of the word *bendacht* (blessing, §59) from the Latin *benedictio/nis*, but goes on to suggest that this may have been a scribal addition made in the Old Irish period. He also draws attention to the use of *dúilem* (creator, §32) as a word that is only used in explicitly Christian contexts elsewhere. However, in doing so, he raises two alternative possibilities: 1) that it may also have been added at a later point, to supply a Christian element to the beginning of the *ad-mestar* sequence that it introduces, or 2) following Binchy, that since *-em* was obsolescent as a suffix of agency before the Old Irish period (*GOI* §268), *dúilem* must represent a native concept which was only later taken up by Christian theology: Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xl, 43, 54. However, given the theological sense that it is consistently given, McCone’s suggestion that *dúilem* is ‘an obvious calque on Latin creator’, and as such, further evidence of *AM*’s Christian authorship, seems rather more likely; see McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 141. Fomin has accepted McCone’s conclusion in his recent work. See Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 114.

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, *A Guide*, 235-6; *idem*, *Audacht Morainn*, 43. Following Kelly, Stacey argues that the contrast of the putative pre-Christian basis of *AM* with the overtly ecclesiastical themes that tend to characterize other *Bretha Nemed* texts is an obstacle to our understanding of the common intellectual environment that produced them; see Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 185. The current chapter will endeavour to demonstrate that this obstacle is only apparent.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the seminal studies here are Ó Corráin, ‘Legend as Critic’; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 110-37; Breatnach *et al*, ‘The Laws of the Irish’.

scholarship tends towards a more guarded affirmation of *AM*'s putative pagan content.<sup>15</sup> Yet this tendency is by no means absolute. Byrne's epitome of the old argument, and Enright's speculative expansion of it,<sup>16</sup> continue to be reprinted without significant alteration.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Fomin's recent study, while accepting the import of the Church's involvement in part, still tends towards the character of an apology for earlier scholarly belief in the fundamentally pre-Christian character of the kingship ideology found in texts such as *AM* and *Tecosca Cormaic*.<sup>18</sup> The persistence of this sense that *AM*'s development of the concept of *fir flathemon* is unequivocally pagan is likely due, in part, to the inherent difficulty<sup>19</sup> involved in showing how a text without unambiguous reference to its Christian context functions as a natural expression of its author's ecclesiastical outlook.<sup>20</sup> The recognition that all such early Irish literary remains were,

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Edel Bhreathnach, 'Perceptions of Kingship in Early Medieval Irish Vernacular Literature', in Linda Doran and James Lyttleton, eds., *Lordship in Medieval Ireland: Image and Reality* (Dublin 2007), 21-46, at 23, 26; O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 279-84; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 142-3; Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> The most important sources relative to this argument are Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Regnum et Sacerdotium: Notes on Irish Tradition [Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture]', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979), 443-79, at 448, 452, 456; Myles Dillon, 'The Consecration of Irish Kings', *Celtica* 10 (1973), 1-8, at 3. For a recent argument to the contrary, see Thomas Owen Clancy, 'King-Making and Images of Kingship in Medieval Gaelic literature', in Richard Welander *et al*, eds., *The Stone of Destiny* (Edinburgh 2003), 85-105, at 97-9.

<sup>17</sup> Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 186-9; Michael J. Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons: The Origin of the Royal Anointing Ritual* (Berlin 1983, rev. 2004, repr. 2011), 49-55, especially 52, where he claims that the doctrine of *fir flathemon* 'is the product of a purely pagan viewpoint'.

<sup>18</sup> Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 104-5, 203-4, 328-9, 356, 362, 366-7. He does not argue that any of the existing texts are uninfluenced by the Christian context which gave them their existing form, and makes many qualifications about what cannot be known about the pre-Christian past of these ideas because of the nature of the evidence. However, his conclusion is still that their 'native' content can in fact be separated from later Christian influences with a reasonable degree of certainty. This conclusion seems to depend to a great extent on two errors: 1) not reading Rufinus/Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* at greater length, and 2) the surprising assumption that the Christian theological principle that 'there is no respect of persons with God' (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9 etc.) is inherently incommensurable with the idea the justice involves the maintenance of the hierarchical distinctions of social class. On the contrary, Biblical evocations of this idea in a legal context are consistently concerned with the necessity of refraining from accepting bribes, or allowing one's judgements to be influenced by a fear for one's safety, rather than a concept of equality: Deut. 1:17; Deut. 16:19; 2 Paral./Chron. 19:7; Prov. 24:23; Prov. 28:21; James 2:9.

<sup>19</sup> This difficulty is noted by Kelly, *A Guide*, 235-6, esp. 236: 'If it were the work of a cleric, one would surely expect him to attribute the prosperity of the territory not only to the king's justice (*fir flathemon*) but also to divine favour'.

<sup>20</sup> However, cf. E. J. Gwynn and Walter J. Purton, ed. and tr., 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 29 C (1911-1912), 115-179, at 157-8: 'Rofasaigthea na toirten 7 clanda in talman *cona fil nert na brig indib idiu fri fulang neich. Go 7 peccad 7 anfhair na ndaine dorelacht annert 7 a brig asin talmin cona thoirthib. INtan rombatar in duine do reir dé Robui an nert coir in clandaib in talman nirbo messa int usce hisuide do fulung neich quam lac hodie* (=The fruits and plants of the earth have been devastated; so that there is neither force in them to-day to support anyone. The falsehood and sin and injustice of men have robbed the earth with its fruits of their strength and force. When men were obedient

necessarily, the products of a Christian society remains the very possibility of interpreting them appropriately. However, until it is demonstrated, concretely, how what one might call the stranger doctrines of that literature (such as *fir flathemon*) are fully intelligible as features of the context that evidently produced them, they will likely continue to be interpreted in contradiction of it, through lack of ready alternatives. To show that a text is ecclesiastical is not yet to show how it makes sense that it is ecclesiastical.

It may be objected that we are talking here of propaganda, which, as such, cannot be depended upon to make sense at all, except in terms of whose political agency stands to benefit from it. At least, such a conclusion could easily be taken to follow from McCone's contention that *AM* is 'the product of learned ecclesiastical sophistry',<sup>21</sup> or Ó Corráin's tendency to characterise early Irish literature in general as primarily expressive of the learned elite's adventures in *Realpolitik*.<sup>22</sup> Yet to the extent our texts reveal a concern for the maintenance or acquisition of someone's or something's power, this cannot be the full story. As O'Connor has rightly said, leaving the study of any text there would result in the neglect of any literary dimension that it may have. Among other things, it seems unlikely that even a text's political purposes will be understood with any accuracy without a careful consideration of what their literary embodiment reveals about them.<sup>23</sup> But more importantly for our present concerns, determining whose interests an ideology may serve does not yet tell us anything much about how it is able to be successful as an ideology. Even the most brazen propaganda must be convincing to its intended audience in order to be effective. Therefore, even an entirely cynical reading of *AM* still leaves us with the problem of answering how it is that the doctrine of *fir flathemon* could operate as at once a self-conscious and coherent part of a medieval Catholic understanding of reality.

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to God's will the plants of the earth retained their proper strength. At that time water was not worse for sustaining anything than milk is to-day'). My thanks to Liam Breatnach for directing me to this quotation.

<sup>21</sup> McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 141.

<sup>22</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need and Literary Narrative', 141-3; *idem*, 'The Church and Secular Society', 281-4, 306, 317, 320-1; *idem*, 'Legend as Critic', *passim*; *idem*, 'Irish Vernacular Law', *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> For this and further references to scholarship which interprets early Irish literature as a kind of 'Political Scripture', see O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 287ff.

In our case, the matter is made somewhat easier by a similar and roughly contemporary Hiberno-Latin text, treating the matter of the *rex iniquus* or ‘unjust king’, which is found within *De XII abusivis saeculi* (*De XII*),<sup>24</sup> that is, ‘On the Twelve Abuses of the World’. While it has not been demonstrated that either text directly influenced the other,<sup>25</sup> the presentation of *iustitia regis* in the ninth *abusio* of *De XII* is close enough to that of *fír flathemon* in *AM* that it appears beyond argument that they are, at the very least, both working with the same concept, within the same intellectual *milieu*.<sup>26</sup> This is significant because, unlike *AM*, *De XII* does bear unambiguous marks of Christian theology, in the form of references to the Bible, and borrowings from the Church Fathers.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the most recent scholarship would seem to indicate that *De XII* was composed somewhat earlier than *AM*, perhaps by more than half a century.<sup>28</sup> Be that as it may, since no dating of *De XII* thus far has taken into account all of the relevant arguments, and those who have argued for similar dates have sometimes done so for contrary reasons, it will be useful to trace the way these arguments have unfolded rather than simply accept the opinion of the most recent scholars on account of their recentness.

### The Dating of *De XII* and *AM*

In his introduction to what is still the most current published edition of *De XII*,<sup>29</sup> Siegmund Hellmann argued for 630 as its earliest possible *terminus post quem*, on the

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<sup>24</sup> Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, *Audacht Moraim*, xv: ‘A comparison . . . will show that the two traditions have much in common, though there is nothing which would imply influence in either direction’.

<sup>26</sup> Meens, ‘Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible’, 352; Grigg, ‘The Just King’, 30-1; Hans Hubert Anton, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian’, in Heinz Löwe, ed., *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart 1982) II, 568-617, at 594-5; Aidan Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* and the Bible’, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission / Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart 1987), 230-45, at 231 note 5; Ó Corráin, ‘The Church and Secular Society’, 290. Cf. Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 203-4.

<sup>27</sup> Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, *passim*; *idem*, ‘The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis in Pseudo-Cyprian, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 87 C (1987), 71-101; Richter, *Medieval Ireland*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, 231; *idem*, ‘*De XII abusivis*: Text and Transmission’, in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages* (Dublin 2002), 78-95, at 81-5; Anton, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian’, 574-6; James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical: An Introduction and Guide* (Dublin 1968), 281-2; Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 1-10.

<sup>29</sup> Aidan Breen had been working on a new edition in which he intended to restore the text of *De XII* by means of manuscripts belonging to the neglected, but superior recension attributed to St. Augustine. This was to be based on the edition that was included in his PhD thesis, *Towards a Critical Edition of ‘De XII*

basis of its apparent use of Isidore of Seville.<sup>30</sup> He established its *terminus ante quem* at the end of the seventh century, due to the fact that the ninth *abusio* of *De XII*, the same section in which it develops the idea of ‘the justice of the ruler’ at issue here, is quoted at length in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* (*CCH*)<sup>31</sup> which is itself dated to the early eighth century.<sup>32</sup> However, given the improbability of *De XII* being written instantaneously upon the arrival of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, or immediately before its use in the *CCH* (which Hellmann dates quite early, at c.700),<sup>33</sup> his implied range of dates for *De XII*’s authorship is, as Breen suggests, likely something closer to c.650-670.<sup>34</sup> James Kenney followed Hellmann on the issue of Isidore’s influence, but suggested that since *CCH* attributes the section of *De XII* that it uses to one *Patricius* (which he takes to mean St. Patrick himself), *De XII* must have already been of significant antiquity when the *CCH* was written. Thus, in his view, 650 is not the earliest, but the latest likely date for *De XII*’s authorship and the *terminus post quem* was a firm 630, just a few years after the earliest possible introduction of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* to Ireland.<sup>35</sup> Hans Hubert Anton subsequently granted Kenney that it was indeed possible that the *terminus post quem* for *De XII* is as early even as 625, but thought it more likely not to

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*abusiuus*: *Introductory Essays with a Provisional Edition of the Text*, unpublished PhD thesis (Trinity College, Dublin 1988). He speculated that the text of the 1988 edition might not require much alteration, but that the critical apparatus and preliminary analysis certainly would. See Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De Duodecim*’, 88. Sadly, he did not have a chance to finish this important work.

<sup>30</sup> Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 1-4; Clayton, ‘Lordship and Kingship’, 142; Kenney, *The Sources*, 282.

<sup>32</sup> The quotation is found at *CCH* XIX.3-4; Wasserschleben, ed., *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 77-8. On the early eighth-century date of *CCH*, see Kenney, *The Sources*, 250, 282; Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London and Ithaca 1972), 68. For the controversy surrounding the chronological and textual relationships of recensions A and B, see Liam Breatnach, ‘Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland: The Significance of *Bretha Nemed*’, *Peritia* 3 (1984), 439-59, at 456; Lunedd Mair Davies, ‘Isidorean Texts and the *Hibernensis*’, *Peritia* 11 (1997), 207-49; Bart Jaski, ‘Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*’, *Peritia* 14 (2000), 51-69, at 52-3.

<sup>33</sup> Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, 230; *idem*, ‘The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis’, 76 note 7; *idem*, ‘*De XII abusiuus*: Text and Transmission’, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Kenney, *The Sources*, 281-2. Michael Herren suggested that Isidore’s *Etymologiae* were certainly known in Ireland by the middle of the seventh century and possibly earlier. See Herren, ‘On the Earliest Irish Acquaintance’. However, in this paper he seems to rely exclusively on Hellmann for his knowledge of *De XII*’s dates and relation to Isidore. Thus, he does not take a position relative to the controversies at hand. Even so, his findings suggest that a 630 *terminus post quem* for the quotation of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* in Ireland is exceedingly optimistic.

have been written before 650<sup>36</sup> and saw this conclusion as a more accurate representation of Hellmann's own position.<sup>37</sup> Conversely, while he admitted the plausibility of Hellmann's placement of the *terminus ante quem* at 700, he remained doubtful regarding the certainty of such a limit. In his view, the lack of word-for-word correspondence between the *CCH* and the relevant section of *De XII* suggests that the *CCH* may be quoting, not *De XII* itself, but a lost collection of Irish maxims which predated them both as a common source.<sup>38</sup> In this case, the *terminus ante quem* of *De XII* could not be known with any real accuracy. It is not evident how much he is influenced in this by his idea that the doctrine of *fír flathemon* represents a 'pagan-mythical element' that, as such, would be understandably objectionable to Christian clergy.<sup>39</sup> However, such an idea would certainly require that *De XII* be written as late as possible, so that it could plausibly function as a transitional moment between 'pagan' ideas of kingship in *AM* and the 'Christian' ideas of later texts.

Breen, however, saw the 650 *terminus post quem* that Hellmann (and then Anton) ascribed to *De XII* as unfounded since it wholly depended on faulty assumptions about *De XII*'s dependence on Isidore.<sup>40</sup> In his most recent paper, he conceded to Anton that *De XII* may have used Isidore's *Sententiae* (c.612-615),<sup>41</sup> something for which Anton himself thought there was better evidence than his argument that it also used the *Etymologiae*.<sup>42</sup> However, in Breen's view, the use of such an early work of Isidore does not point to a later date in the way that any use of Isidore's *Etymologiae* certainly would. This freed him to consider the significance of the intellectual context that produced *De XII* for determining its date.<sup>43</sup> He argued that *De XII*'s use of biblical and

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<sup>36</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 574-6.

<sup>37</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 576 note 29.

<sup>38</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 576-9.

<sup>39</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 597: 'Zitiert ist er gleich mehrfach in dem merkwürdigen pseudo-bedanischen Collectaneum, das wohl auf das 8. Jahrhundert zurückgeht und in dem man spezifisch irische Färbung erkannt hat, Bonifatius verwendet die 9. abusio, wobei verständlicherweise die heidnisch-mythischen Elemente weggelassen sind, zur Paränese für den König Aethelbald von Mercien'.

<sup>40</sup> Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*', 230-45: 231; *idem*, 'The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis', 76 note 7.

<sup>41</sup> Breen, '*De XII abusiuis*: Text and Transmission', 78-95, at 84.

<sup>42</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 574-5 note 26.

<sup>43</sup> For an early, and less developed, form of Breen's following arguments, see Breen, 'The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis', 76, 81, 100.

patristic sources, its canonical form, the attribution to Patricius that it shares in the *CCH* with the *First Synod of Patrick*, and canon X of the *Second Synod*, together with its concern for the unity of the Church,<sup>44</sup> all point to it being a product of the *Romani* reform. Based on this association, he was able to place the *terminus post quem* of *De XII* at the Synod of *Mag Léne* in 630/1.<sup>45</sup>

As for its *terminus ante quem*, Breen concluded that the evidence (especially considering that the quotation of *De XII* in the *CCH* is the longest it makes of any Insular text) points towards an intermediate source that depends on a manuscript of the superior Augustinian recension, rather than a lost common source.<sup>46</sup> This is a point he was uniquely qualified to make since he had, at that point, restored the text of the ninth *abusio* (together with the rest of *De XII*) based on the Pseudo-Augustinian recension, whereas Anton's work had been limited to Hellmann's edition, which is based entirely on the recension attributed to St. Cyprian, a recension which, Breen contended, was both later and more Carolingian in character.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, he also contested Anton's view that the *CCH* is the only means of establishing a *terminus ante quem* for *De XII*.<sup>48</sup> Its evident association with the *Romani* suggests, he added, not only that it would have been written after 630/1, but that it would have been written no later than the mid-seventh century.<sup>49</sup>

This suggestion, to his mind, is further supported by *De ordine creaturarum* and *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, because of their evident dependence on it for certain

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<sup>44</sup> Breen, 'De XII abusiuus: Text and Transmission', 82-5. On the significance of *De XII*'s concern with the unity of the Church for our understanding of its immediate intellectual context, see also *idem*, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*', 235; *idem*, 'The Evidence of Antique Irish exegesis', 77-8, 81, 95, 100.

<sup>45</sup> Hellmann and Anton also argue that *De XII* is a product of the *Romani*, but in their case it is not evoked as a way of establishing its *terminus ante quem*, since their argument for its dependence on Isidore keeps it from becoming relevant in this way. See Hellmann, *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 10-14; Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 574-6. Pádraig Ó Néill also characterised *De XII* as a *Romani* text, but seems to have based his position entirely on Hellmann's arguments. See Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'Romani Influences on Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Literature', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter, eds., *Ireland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter / Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (Stuttgart 1984), 280-90, at 288-9.

<sup>46</sup> Breen, 'De XII abusiuus: Text and Transmission', 82, 89.

<sup>47</sup> Breen, 'De XII abusiuus: Text and Transmission', 85-9; *idem*, 'The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis', 101.

<sup>48</sup> Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian', 576.

<sup>49</sup> Breen, 'De XII abusiuus: Text and Transmission', 84.

‘verbal and phraseological similarities’. Of course, such similarities might just as easily be said to demonstrate *De XII*’s dependence on these two texts as their dependence on it. However, if Breen is taken to be right about *De XII*’s *Romani* context, an issue, indeed the only issue, in which he is in complete agreement with his interlocutors,<sup>50</sup> it would seem far more plausible that they are dependent on it, than it on them. Thus he concludes that these similarities, in the case of *De ordine*, mean it must have been written significantly earlier than 700, and in the case of *De mirabilibus*, before 655.<sup>51</sup> Nor have his arguments fallen on deaf ears. Clayton, in recently summarizing his arguments, has taken them up as her own.<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, if Breen and Clayton are right<sup>53</sup> (and if they are not, they have not yet been answered) *De XII* is most likely from the early side of the mid-seventh century, in contrast to *AM*, which scholarship has tended to place in the second half of the seventh century.<sup>54</sup> This raises the possibility that the development of the concept of *fir flathemon*

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<sup>50</sup> See note 45 above.

<sup>51</sup> Breen, ‘*De XII abusivis*: Text and Transmission’, 83. Here Breen corrects the dating proposed by Madoz. This correction is based on the fact that *De ordine creaturarum* is an Insular text not, as Madoz thought, a genuine work of Isidore’s. Some of the similarities noted by Breen were previously noted by Díaz y Díaz in his edition of the text. However, he took them indicate influence in the opposite direction (*De ordine* influencing *De XII*), because he followed Madoz in mistakenly attributing *De ordine* to Isidore. See Joseph Madoz, *Le symbole du XIe concile de Tolède* (Louvain 1938), 33, 79, 99, 104; M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Liber de ordine creaturarum: un anonimo Irlandés del siglo VII* (Santiago de Compostela 1972), 38. There is no controversy regarding the dating of *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* since this can be established internally. The similarities in *De mirabilibus* noted by Breen were not mentioned by its editor. See Gerard McGinty, *The Treatise ‘De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae’: Critical Edition, with Introduction, English Translation of the Long Recension and Some Notes*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2 vols. (National University of Ireland, Dublin 1971). For an example of the similarities shared by *De XII* and *De mirabilibus*, see Breen’s account of their shared conflation of Matt. 12:18 with Isaiah 42:1 in Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, 238.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Clayton, ‘*De duodecim abusivis*, Lordship and Kingship’, in Stuart McWilliams, eds., *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture* (Woodbridge 2012), 141-63, at 142-3. Her account of his argument involves a helpful overview of the debate to this point. For another overview, see Maxim Fomin, ‘Wisdom-Texts from Early Christian Ireland: Aspects of Style, Syntax and Semantics’, in Maria Bloch-Trojnar, ed., *Perspectives on Celtic languages*, Lublin Series in Celtic Linguistics (Lublin 2009), 161-86, at 162, 166, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Of course, Kenney is also in close agreement with the dates that Breen and Clayton later assigned to *De XII*. However, he is not listed here with them because his reasons for adopting those dates are in direct conflict with theirs. On this, see Breen, ‘*De XII abusivis*: Text and Transmission’, 84; *idem*, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, 230; *idem*, ‘The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis’, 76 note 7.

<sup>54</sup> No significant contributions have been made to the arguments for the date of *AM* since those made by Fergus Kelly. See Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xxxii: ‘The dating of the text cannot be confirmed by internal historical references, as Morann, Neire, and Feradach Find Fechnach are hazy mythical figures. It does however share archaisms of spelling and syntax with *Baile Chuind* . . . In his edition of this list of Tara



in *AM* may represent an expansion of the more overtly biblical account of *iustitia regis* in *De XII*<sup>55</sup> and with it the question as to whether the doctrine of *fír flathemon*, rather than a ‘baptized’ pagan notion,<sup>56</sup> may have been Christian<sup>57</sup> from its very conception.<sup>58</sup>

### Theological Considerations

However, all speculation aside, apart from providing further nuance to the sense in which we understand these texts to be works of Christian scholarship, this does not, in itself, prove very much. The idea that a ruler’s justice was the immediate cause of the peace and fecundity of his kingdom may have pre-existed the arrival of the Church in Ireland, and it may not. Whatever the case may be, the very existence of *AM* shows that its seventh-century author took such an idea to be, at the very least, compatible with the Christian Scriptures.<sup>59</sup> *De XII* shows us further that, by the time of *AM*, if not earlier, some Irish scholars thought such an idea, not only to be compatible with Scripture but fully derivable from it, a conclusion in which they would be followed, not only by

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kings (*Ériu* xvi 145-51) Murphy dates it on historical grounds to the second half of the seventh century’. The most recent editors of this latter text have been content to refer to Kelly’s evidence, but are fairly conservative in their suggestion that it is ‘possibly’ earlier than c. 700. See Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, ‘*Baile Chuind Chétchathaig: An Edition*’, in Edel Bhreathnach, ed., *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara* (Dublin 2005), 73-94, at 73.

<sup>55</sup> Despite the fact that Fomin takes *fír flathemon* to be, in essence, a doctrinal vestige of Ireland’s pagan past, he sees *AM* as younger than *De XII*. However, this is not a result of him choosing between Breen’s and Kenny’s earlier dating of *De XII*, or Hellmann’s later dating of it. Their positions are listed without comment. See Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> This is with reference to John Carey’s important treatment of ‘baptism’ the pagan gods in medieval Ireland; Carey, *A Single Ray*, 1-38.

<sup>57</sup> It is, however, important to keep in mind that Christian conceptions of kingship emerge as a reinterpretation of earlier Judaic and pagan authorities, and as such, are only properly intelligible as features of a discussion that is much larger than Christianity. See pages 205-7 for a brief discussion of some of the relevant Jewish and pagan sources and references.

<sup>58</sup> Breen certainly seems to see this as a result of his dating of *De XII* when he describes *AM* as ‘pseudo-paganized’. See Breen, ‘*De XII abusiuis: Text and Transmission*’, 83. Mary Clayton and Ralph O’Connor have raised this issue as well, albeit with more caution. See Clayton, ‘Lordship and Kingship’, 146-149; O’Connor, *The Destruction*, 282-4. Here O’Connor rightly warns against Breen’s implicit assumption that this proves pre-Christian Irish ideology had no influence whatever on these texts. It does, however, make it that much more untenable to characterize *De XII* as an example of ‘how the Church desecralized kingship in Ireland’ as some have been tempted to do at times. Cf. Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World AD 400-1000: Landscape, Kingship and Religion* (Dublin 2014), 51; Enright, *Iona, Tara and Soissons*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> For an overarching description of knowledge that is thought to accord with the Christian Scriptures, but not to derive from them, see the account the ‘law of nature (*recht aicnid*) in *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18-19. This subject is dealt with at length in Chapter 2, but especially pages 133-46.

framers of *CCH*<sup>60</sup> but by the *Céli Dé*<sup>61</sup> and scholars associated with the Carolingian renaissance,<sup>62</sup> among others.<sup>63</sup> Yet as Peter Abelard once demonstrated at great length in his *Sic et non*,<sup>64</sup> the Bible is a long and complicated enough collection of texts that a person can find apparent support in it for almost any position whatever, be they justified in doing so or no.<sup>65</sup> It has been justly noted that the author of *De XII* uses his scriptural references naturally, without forcing the meaning.<sup>66</sup> However, this does not yet show us anything about where the author acquired the theological perspective that moved him to treat that particular configuration of verses<sup>67</sup> as most authoritative on the issue and not another that might have supported a different position.<sup>68</sup> St Augustine, for example, in his *De civitate Dei*, finds the opposite view in the Christian Scriptures,<sup>69</sup> arguing that the relative goodness or badness of a king has no relation whatever to the material

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<sup>60</sup> See note 32 above.

<sup>61</sup> See note 20 above.

<sup>62</sup> Cathwulf's letter to Charlemagne; 'Epistola IV', in Ernst Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II* (Berlin 1895), 503.36-44; for Clive Tolley's translation of 'Epistola IV', see Clayton, 'Lordship and Kingship', 151. Alcuin's letter to Charlemagne; 'Epistola CLXXVII', in Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, 292-3, at 292.17-19. Alcuin's letter to Æthelred of Northumbria; 'Epistola XVIII', in Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi II*, 49-52, at 51.29-32; 'Letter 13', in Stephen Allott, tr., *Alcuin of York, c. A.D. 732 to 804: His Life and Letters* (York 1974), 32. For discussion and further sources, see Clayton, 'Lordship and Kingship', 152.

<sup>63</sup> Including the Middle Irish homily *Sermo ad reges*; see Miles, 'The *Sermo ad reges*'; Liam Breatnach, 'Varia I', *Ériu* 64 (2014), 205-211. For a discussion of *De XII*'s influence in Anglo-Saxon England, and sources, see Clayton, 'Lordship and Kingship', 153ff.

<sup>64</sup> Blanche Beatrice Boyer and Richard Peter McKeon, eds., *Peter Abailard: Sic et non: A Critical Edition* (Chicago 1976); Priscilla Throop, tr., *Yes and No: The Complete English Translation of Peter Abelard's Sic et Non* (Charlotte, VT 2007).

<sup>65</sup> This sense of the openness of the Christian Scriptures to conflicting interpretations is internal to them as well, where it is primarily manifest through the repeated insistence that divine help is required in order to interpret them correctly. See for example, Luke 25:45, John 16:1, 2 Peter 1:20.

<sup>66</sup> Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De Duodecim*', 232: 'In no instance has the author's choice of biblical text been found to be irrelevant or arbitrary'; Meens, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible', 356-7; Wormald, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship', 162; Clayton, 'Lordship and Kingship', 147. Clayton points to McCone as a precedent for her view; see McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 139.

<sup>67</sup> McCone has made some suggestions regarding which passages in the Bible may have formed the basis for the doctrine of *fir flathemon*; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 141-5.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Job, Matt. 5:45 and John 9:3.

<sup>69</sup> This has potential significance for our understanding of what is going on in *De XII* since the section dealing with the '*rex iniquus*' (52.5-6); noted above (p.181ff.) seems to derive its interpretation of Eccl.10:16 from *De civitate Dei* XVII.xx (if not from St Jerome's commentaries on Ecclesiastes and Isaiah) while strongly contrasting with the kingship ideology articulated in the context of the borrowed passage; on this, see Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*', 233. This also highlights why St. Augustine would not be evoked by the 829 Council of Paris that adopted *De XII*'s understanding of kingship as authoritative. On this, see Michael Edward Moore, 'La monarchie carolingienne et les anciens modèles irlandais', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 51.2 (Mar.-Apr. 1996), 307-24, at 323.

prosperity of his kingdom.<sup>70</sup> Yet it remains that, of the many possible interpretations of the Bible, there are also those which, lacking any known precedent in Catholic tradition, would have been rejected as heretical.<sup>71</sup> Thus, if we are to determine anything definite about what made this concept of *fir flathemon* an orthodox, which is to say, a possible interpretation or supplement of Scripture in the eyes of its various ecclesiastical theorizers,<sup>72</sup> it will be necessary to find of way of tracing it to the influence of a text that states the doctrine in less polyvalent manner than the Bible, but situates it in a broader theological context than it has in either *AM* or *De XII*.<sup>73</sup>

This should not be confused with the related question of literary influences. A concept may be transmitted in wording which is radically different to its initial formulation and yet, in spite of such metamorphoses, remain recognisably itself. Granted, in a text which seems to have inherited or been influenced by a concept from another (whether directly or through intermediaries) any similarities in language will strengthen the conclusion that this is in fact the case. Of course, in a text which, like *AM*, is taken to represent pre-Christian wisdom, it is only insofar as Christian doctrine is thought to have been available to pre-Christian forms of revelation that definitively Christian language can reproduced without introducing impossible contradictions. However, we

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<sup>70</sup> *De civitate Dei*, V.xxiv-xxv, XVII.xx; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 160-1, II, 574; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 219-221, 753-7. The principles on which this position is based are developed in Book I of that work. For a helpful discussion of the role of *De civitate Dei* in Irish and Carolingian kingship ideology and further references to relevant scholarship, see O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 265, 271-2 and 301-2.

<sup>71</sup> Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*', 232: 'the degree of fundamental innovation to be expected of, or permissible to, the exegete was minimal. The Irish interpretation and use of Scripture, though it may at appear odd, was therefore dependent upon and operative within an established tradition.'

<sup>72</sup> John Carey suggests that important features of medieval Irish kingship ideology may have been the result of Christian missionaries attempting to 'wean' kings away from pagan ideas by means of 'a new conception of the divine which was shrewdly bound up with a seductive vision of empire'. See John Carey 'From David to Labraid: Sacral Kingship and the Emergence of Monotheism in Israel and Ireland', in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm, eds., *Approaches to Religion and Mythology in Celtic Studies* (Newcastle 2008), 2-27, at 23. This seems plausible so far as political motivations are concerned. However, this does not yet account for the necessary theological means by which the interpretation of Scripture involved could be recognized and received as an authentic expression of the Church's doctrine.

<sup>73</sup> Breen has already shown that *De XII*'s interpretation of each individual verse of Scripture always follows on patristic precedent. In addition, he argues that the various ways in which these individual interpretations are linked together also arise out of patristic tradition. See Breen, 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*', 232: 'His use of any particular text, or the association of a number of them, is always informed by . . . his reading of the Fathers.' However, despite demonstrating this to be so in many instances, he does not indicate what patristic view guides the marshalling of scriptural support for the doctrine of the 'justice of the ruler' in *abusio* 9.

have found that this is not a very significant limitation for most early Irish accounts of pre-Christian authorities, since these authorities are, as we have seen, generally taken to have been capable of directly perceiving the doctrines which the Church would later confirm.<sup>74</sup> More important are matters of emphasis.

When early Irish authors attribute prophetic knowledge of Catholic doctrine to figures they see as pre-Christian authorities, this necessarily involves attributing them the theological language that the Church used to articulate those doctrines as well. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this is ‘Udhucht Athairne’, in *BND*, where we have seen that the ancient poet Athairne is taken to have foreknowledge of the Athanasian Creed’s precise formulations of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity.<sup>75</sup> Where this occurs, it certainly does much to secure the authority of the pre-Christian figure in question, but does little to show yet what such an authoritative figure has to offer that is not yet more clearly understood through the Church’s interpretation of its Scriptures. This is well enough if the author’s goal is simply to present the Church as the fulfillment of what was less perfectly known by pre-Christian poets and judges. However, insofar as an author is convinced, or wanting to convince others, that these pre-Christian authorities add something to the Church’s knowledge which it is not capable of on its own, as is claimed in *Senchas Már*,<sup>76</sup> among other places, this will not be sufficient. Such purposes demand additional forms of language. The extent to which a putatively pre-Christian doctrine is to be understood as a desirable supplement to the doctrines thought to be knowable by the Church in itself, and not just an anticipation of those doctrines, will be the extent to which unambiguously scriptural or patristic terminology

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<sup>74</sup> For our purposes, it is noteworthy that even some very conservative catalogues of pre-Christian authorities, which, as such, limit those who enjoyed the equivalent Christian faith prior to the establishment of the Church to two or three, number Morann among them. *Aided Conchobar A* lists only Conchobar with Morann. The Middle Irish tale *Senchas na Relec* lists him together with Conchobar and Cormac. See Chantal Kobel, *A Critical Edition of ‘Aided Chonchobair’*, 71, 222, 224, for the relevant passages, their translations, and further discussion.

<sup>75</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1115.3-22]; Breatnach *et al*, eds. and tr., ‘The Laws of the Irish’, 421-2, with discussion following. See also *Immacallam* §175ff.; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 36ff. *The Cauldron of Poesy* §12; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Cauldron of Poesy’, ed.68 and tr.69. For further discussion, see Chapter 2, page 111ff.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) §36; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘Atá már i recht aicnid ro-siachtatar nád roacht recht litre’ (=There is much in the law of nature which they [the poets and prophets of Ireland] covered, and which the law of Scripture did not cover [lightly edited]). Further discussion is found throughout Chapter 2.

must play a diminished role in an ancient authority's articulation of it. This is for a simple reason. The more successfully the language of the Scriptures and the Fathers may alone be used to articulate a concept, the less conceivable it will be that it has something to contribute which is not better found in those same Scriptures and Fathers. On the other hand, works in which a concept is taken to be directly derived from Scripture will have absolute freedom relative to the language of Christian theology. In which case, there is a much higher probability that such a text will share common language with the theological sources that influence its development of a given concept than there will be in one which presents that same concept as a pre-Christian addition to such knowledge as may be derived from Scripture, as interpreted through the Fathers and Councils.

In sum, the limited linguistic evidence of *AM*'s theological influences<sup>77</sup> would appear to suggest that its author - in accord with *Senchas Már* and The Prologue to *SM*, which forms a part of its Old Irish glosses<sup>78</sup> - sees its primary subject, the doctrine of *fír flathemon*, as a genuine contribution to the knowledge of which the Church is capable in itself, rather than a constitutive species of it. In this it is unlike *De XII*, whose sustained use of Christian theological language to articulate this doctrine presents it precisely as a species of the Church's own particular knowledge. In which case, the language of the theological authorities which are relevant to the doctrine of *fír flathemon*, while not certain to be found in *De XII*, are evidently more likely to be found there than in *AM*. Yet in either instance a means is required, whether direct or indirect, by which we may understand the intelligibility of this concept to its ecclesiastical intellectual context. What we are looking for then is an authoritative Christian text (or texts), known to have circulated in seventh-century Ireland, that of all such authorities as are known to us can best account for the doctrine of *fír flathemon* either emerging as a convincingly natural result of Biblical interpretation or coming to be recognized, through Biblical

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<sup>77</sup> See note 12 above.

<sup>78</sup> *PSM* §7; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.18-19. For a discussion of *SM*'s Old Irish glossing, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 338-46. On The Prologue to *Senchas Már* as a part of that Old Irish glossing, see Breatnach, *A Companion*, 24, 40, 71, 160, 338 and esp. 345.

interpretation, as its necessary compliment. That text is Rufinus' fifth-century Latin translation of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica (HE)*.<sup>79</sup>

### **Eusebius in Medieval Ireland**

It is now widely recognized that Eusebius' *Chronicon* had a significant influence on medieval Irish historical writing. This was, of course, not due to direct exposure to the original Greek, but through the mediation of a Latin translation (likely St. Jerome's)<sup>80</sup> of the historical tables that make up the second of its two books.<sup>81</sup> A considerable amount of work has been done on the important role that this translation had in the development of the pre-Patrician material in the Irish annals and in other historical works such as *Lebor Gabála Éirenn (LGÉ)*.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, the influence of Eusebius' *HE* in medieval Ireland has not enjoyed nearly so much attention.<sup>83</sup> This may be partly due to the fact that only the last two books of Rufinus' Latin translation, through which the *HE* would have been known in medieval Ireland, have yet been translated into English.<sup>84</sup> However, it certainly does not arise from any lack of evidence. It is a commonplace, among scholars who write on the *HE*, that Rufinus' translation would have been the heart of any medieval library's

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<sup>79</sup> Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte*.

<sup>80</sup> John Morris argued that the Irish Annals (together with Bede's dependent Chronicle) provide evidence of a Latin recension of the *Chronicon*, now lost, that differs significantly from St. Jerome's on a number of points. Whatever the case, the text used by the *Irish Annals* would at the very least have included a continuation of the text by a writer (or writers) later than St. Jerome, since the *Annals of Tigernach*, and, after them, those of Clonmacnoise and Ulster, seem to rely on it for dates as late as 607/8. See John Morris, 'The Chronicle of Eusebius: Irish Fragments', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 19.1 (December 1972), 80-93.

<sup>81</sup> Fotheringham, ed., *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones*; Pearse et al, tr., *The Chronicle of St. Jerome*.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Daniel McCarthy, 'The Status of the Pre-Patrician Annals', *Peritia* 12, (1998), 98-152; *idem*, 'The Chronology and Sources of the Early Irish Annals', *Early Medieval Europe* 10.3 (2001), 323-41; R.M. Scowcroft, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu* 38 (1987), 81-142, at 119-30; *idem*, 'Leabhar Gabhála Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu* 39 (1988), 1-66, at 29-32, 63.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel McCarthy is the first to have made additions to Breen's advances in this area, but has not presented these additions as such. That is to say, he has identified a number of places where the *Annals* rely on information found in the *HE*, but argues that these instances are evidence for his hypothesis that Rufinus wrote a lost chronicle which included details in the *HE* and was known in medieval Ireland, rather than further evidence of the *HE*'s direct use by the annalists. See McCarthy, 'The Chronology and Sources', 335-9.

<sup>84</sup> Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History'*.

collection.<sup>85</sup> But what is most often stated without clear reference to evidence,<sup>86</sup> Aidan Breen proved to be true of medieval Ireland<sup>87</sup> in his 1987 paper, ‘A New Irish Fragment of the *Continuatio* to Rufinus-Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica*.’<sup>88</sup>

It remains that Breen did not attempt there to create an exhaustive list of all the medieval Irish witnesses of the *HE*. General reference is made, for instance, to the use of the *HE* in Old and Middle Irish texts, but he lists no examples.<sup>89</sup> Yet, even his non-exhaustive list includes no fewer than five other early Hiberno-Latin texts that make use of Rufinus’ translation, in addition to the fragment of a complete manuscript of the work that he refers to in his title, the greater part of which may be dated to the sixth or early

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<sup>85</sup> Breen, ‘A New Irish Fragment’, 185-204, at 198; Michel Sot, ‘Local and Institutional History (300-1000)’, in Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, ed., *Historiography in the Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston 2003), 89-114, at 90; Peter Van Deun, ‘The Church Historians after Eusebius’, in Gabriele Marasco, ed., *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth century A.D.* (Leiden 2003), 151-76, at 166; Amidon, *The ‘Church History’*, xii; Torben Christensen, *Rufinus of Aquileia and the ‘Historia Ecclesiastica’*, *Lib. VIII-IX, of Eusebius*, Det Kongelige Danske videnskabernes selskab: Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 58 (Copenhagen 1989), 10; M.L.W. Laistner, ‘Some Reflections on Latin Historical Writing in the Fifth Century’, *Classical Philology in the Fifth Century* 35.3 (July 1940), 241-58, at 243 and 254; Yves-Marie Duval, ‘Julien d’Eclane et Rufin d’Aquilée: Du Concile de Rimini à la répression pélagienne: L’intervention impériale en matière religieuse’, *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 24.3-4 (1978), 243-71, at 269-70.

<sup>86</sup> Despite the fact that ready proof exists, at least of its wide distribution - in the form of Mommsen’s extensive, though not exhaustive, list of the numerous manuscript sources (Schwarz and Mommsen, *Die Kirchengeschichte* III, ccliii-cclvi) - the reasons for making this generalization are seldom offered by the scholars who make it. On the non-exhaustiveness of Mommsen’s list of manuscripts see Van Deun, ‘The Church Historians’, 166. Van Deun’s comments here are based on Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, ‘Das neue Rufinfragment in irischer Schrift und die Überlieferung der Übersetzung der *Kirchengeschichte* Eusebius’, in R. Gryson, ed., *Philologia Sacra: Biblische und patristische Studien für H.J. Frede und W. Thiele zu ihrem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, 2 vols., *Vetus Latina* 24.2 (Freiburg 1993) II, 483-513, at 491-510.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Herren previously suggested that Rufinus’ translation of the *HE* was known in early medieval Ireland, but based this only on Columbanus’ use of him in his letters. On this, see Michael Herren, ‘Classical and Secular Learning among the Irish before the Carolingian Renaissance’, *Florilegium* 3 (1981), 118-57, at 146, 158, [repr. in his *Latin letters in Early Christian Ireland* (Aldershot 1996) I, 28, 38]. The relevant evidence is found at G.S.M. Walker, ed. and tr., *Sancti Columbani opera*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 2 (Dublin 1957, repr. 1970), 73-4. Comparable work has now been done on the impact of Rufinus’ *HE* on other specific parts of Early Medieval Europe. On Rufinus’ *HE* in Early Medieval England, see, for example, Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford 2006), 88-90, 127; *idem*, ‘Rufinus at the School of Canterbury’, in Pierre Lardet, ed., *La Tradition vive: Mélanges d’histoire des textes en l’honneur de Louis Holtz* (Turnhout 2003), 119-29; Danuta R. Shanzer, ‘Bede’s Style: A Neglected Historiographical Model for the Style of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*?’ in C.D. Wright, F.M. Biggs, and T.N. Hall, eds., *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill* (Toronto 2007), 329-52. On Rufinus’ *HE* in the Carolingian Empire, see, for example, Rosamond McKitterick, *Texts, Authority and the History of the Church* (Cambridge 2004), 226-34 and 245-7.

<sup>88</sup> Breen, ‘A New Irish Fragment’, 185-204.

<sup>89</sup> Breen, ‘A New Irish Fragment’, 199.

seventh century.<sup>90</sup> One of these five is *De XII* itself, in the very place that it describes the doctrine of *iustitia regis*. As Fomin notes, Breen would later retract his claim that *De XII* borrows directly from *HE* IX.vii.9-12 in this section,<sup>91</sup> and therefore concluded that the question of *De XII*'s use of *HE* must remain 'undecided for the present'.<sup>92</sup> In this, his change of heart was not provoked by linguistic evidence, but by his subsequent realisation that the phrases of *HE* which *De XII*'s articulation of the doctrine seems to echo are found in the mouth of a pagan emperor, as a justification for the persecution of Christians. However, in this premature conclusion, both he and Fomin demonstrate how easy it is to misinterpret the significance of linguistic evidence when a sufficient consideration of the ideological context is still lacking. For as we shall see, this passage, as deeply (and intentionally) ironic as its placement is, remains as close to summary of Rufinus' own position regarding the results of just rule as one can find in the whole of *HE*. There seems no reason to suppose that the author of *De XII* would not have found it useful in this capacity. But in refuting Breen's interpretation in this instance, as significant as it is, we only strengthen the conclusion that he seems to be on sure footing when he dismisses any doubt that Rufinus' version of the *HE* 'formed an essential part of the intellectual apparatus of Irish monastic culture' from the earliest times. If there is any qualification to be made here it is only by way of querying his limitation of its sphere of influence to 'monastic culture'.<sup>93</sup> Since, in the time since this paper was published, there has come to be a greater understanding of non-monastic

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<sup>90</sup> Breen, 'A New Irish Fragment', 198-9. Here he names *De ratione Paschali* (pre-600), Columbanus' third epistle (pre-615), *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* (655) and *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* (700-25). He also names the ninth *abusio* of *De XII* (630-50), the section which is most relevant to our purposes here, but left it to others to verify this and determine its significance.

<sup>91</sup> Compare the 'aeris . . . laeta temperies . . . terrae fecunditas abundantior . . . segetum copia uberior' (=pleasant tempering of the air . . . more abundant fecundity of the earth . . . [and] richer abundance of crops) which the pagan Emperor assumes are the result of just rule in *HE* IX.vii.8-12 [Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 817.3-819.2], with the 'temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terrae fecunditas' (=temperate weather, clams seas [and] fertile lands) said to result from just rule in *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 53, lines 8-9; Throop, tr., 'The Twelve Abuses', 128. See page 195 below for a complete citation and translation of *HE* IX.vii.8-12. For the inverse of these same effects relative to the unjust ruler, see *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 52, lines 16-17; Throop, tr., 'The Twelve Abuses', 128).

<sup>92</sup> Breen, *Towards a Critical Edition*, 171; Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 104-5.

<sup>93</sup> Breen, 'A New Irish Fragment', 199.



expressions of ecclesiastical scholarship in medieval Ireland,<sup>94</sup> it seems likely that this way of delineating the extent of its influence may be too narrow.

Subsequent scholarship has affirmed Breen's findings.<sup>95</sup> However, because interest has generally been limited to the import that the Irish manuscript has for our understanding of the earliest stages of the *HE*'s transmission,<sup>96</sup> and for establishing the best possible edition of Rufinus' text,<sup>97</sup> the potential it has for transforming our understanding of early Irish kingship ideology has gone largely unnoticed.<sup>98</sup> Yet it does indeed have such potential. For what we have in the *HE* is a text that is demonstrably well-known in medieval Ireland which provides a comprehensive and extended articulation of kingship ideology that has remarkable parallels to the doctrine of *fír flathemon* as articulated in *AM* and *De XII*. By tracing these parallels, we will not only see how the doctrine of *fír flathemon* naturally crowns a certain patristic understanding of sovereignty, but the ways in which it develops that understanding in new directions.

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<sup>94</sup> See, for instance, T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Context and Uses of Literacy in Early Christian Ireland', in Huw Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), 62-82. An explicit account of the various forms of education available before the reform of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries is found in the poem *Cinnus atá do Thinnrem* which Breatnach dates to the eleventh century on linguistic grounds. See Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., '*Cinnus atá do Thinnrem: A Poem to Máel Brigte on his Coming of Age*', *Ériu* 58 (2008), 1-35.

<sup>95</sup> Caroline P. Hammond Bammel is the only scholar I have been able to find who has been in any way critical of Breen's findings. She agreed that that the manuscript in question was copied by an Irish scribe, but contends that this scribe did so in Italy with Italian materials rather than in Ireland itself, as Breen argued; see Bammel, 'Das neue Rufinfragment', 483-513, at 499-505; *idem*, 'A New Manuscript of Rufinus' Account of the Conversion of Georgia and the Legacy of Rufinus in East and West', in Tamili Mgaloblishvili, ed., *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus: Iberica Caucasica* (Oxford and New York 1998), 75-82, at 75-8; Rosalind Love reports this controversy but does not take a position herself. See Rosalind Love, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede', in Richard Gameson, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 1, c.400-1100* (Cambridge 2012), 606-32, at 615.

<sup>96</sup> Love, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede', 615; Bammel, 'Das neue Rufinfragment', 483-513.

<sup>97</sup> Van Deun, 'The Church Historians after Eusebius', 151-76, at 162-3.

<sup>98</sup> Aidan Breen is himself somewhat of an exception to the rule. In 'A New Irish Fragment', 199, he argued that *abusio* 9 of *De XII*, the section that develops the concept of *iustitia regis*, 'makes use' of Rufinus' *HE*, but does not go beyond the mere saying of it, or suggest the implications this may have for the subject at hand here. Julianna Grigg also anticipated the approach taken here in part, but, in this regard, without reference to Breen. She hypothesized that the development of kingship ideology, such as we find in texts like *AM* and *De XII* was 'clearly influenced' by the political theology of Hellenistic writers such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Plutarch. However, she makes no attempt to give any reason for her certainty of this influence or to determine its form and extent. See Grigg, 'The Just King', 33.

## Rufinus' Kingship Ideology

Rufinus' kingship ideology is most explicitly developed in books VIII and IX,<sup>99</sup> through his interpretation of the events that frame Constantine's victory over the other members of the Roman tetrarchy. Constantine is portrayed here as the ideal ruler. Yet, strangely enough, the principle on which Rufinus' concept of sovereignty hangs is most clearly articulated in the mouth of one of Constantine's rivals, namely Maximin, who is held up along with his confederates, Maximian (Galerius) and Maxentius, as a quintessential example of the evils inherent in anti-Christian rule. At the culmination of a vivid description of his manifold acts of tyranny, we learn of his successful attempt to renew Christian persecution,<sup>100</sup> this following a brief peace that he had been compelled to observe against his will.<sup>101</sup> Yet, for our purposes, it is not that he does this, but his reason for doing so that is of particular interest. For in a proclamation that he had displayed in every city, he says that all the Christians must be banished, so that

aeris esset laeta temperies et terrae fecunditas abundantior ac segetum copia  
uberior, et ideo satis recte consuli ad deorum immortalium gratiam  
there might be a pleasant tempering of the air and a more abundant fecundity of  
the earth, and a richer abundance of crops, and thus enough, moreover, for it to  
be rightly considered the grace of the immortal gods<sup>102</sup>

Of course, Maximin is very much mistaken here.<sup>103</sup> His persecution of the Church brings about the complete ruin of his realm and people.<sup>104</sup> Nations which were allies of

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<sup>99</sup> Of course, the Theodosius of Book X is portrayed by Rufinus as the more ideal than any of the preceding emperors, including the Constantine of Books VIII and IX. However, it is in Books VIII and IX, as the dramatic pinnacle of Rufinus' version of the *HE*, that Rufinus' understanding of ideal sovereignty is most clearly worked out relative to its contrary. That ideal may be more perfectly enacted by Theodosius, but it is through Constantine's battles with pagan tyrants that Rufinus is able to make its specific features most visible. Thus, in Thélamon's words, while Theodosius is 'plus parfait' than Constantine, he is able to be known as such insofar as he is 'un nouveau Constantin'. See Rennes Françoise Thélamon, 'L'Empereur idéal d'après *l'Histoire ecclésiastique* de Rufin d'Aquilée', *Studia Patristica* 10 (1970), 310-14, at 311. On Books VIII and XI as the dramatic climax of Rufinus' *HE*, see G.W. Trompf, 'Rufinus and the Logic of Retribution in Post-Eusebian Church Histories', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43.3 (July 1992), 351-71, at 362-7.

<sup>100</sup> *HE* IX.ii.1-vii.15; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 807.19-821.2.

<sup>101</sup> *HE* IX.i.1-7; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 803.2-10.

<sup>102</sup> *HE* IX.vii.8-12; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds. *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 817.3-819.2. All translations from Rufinus' *HE* are my own.

the empire turn against it.<sup>105</sup> A famine strikes<sup>106</sup> that is of such extent that nobles beg alms<sup>107</sup> and parents sell their children<sup>108</sup> and emaciated figures stagger through the streets until they fall from exhaustion.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, a corruption of the air causes an ulcerous plague that blinds or kills many of those not taken by famine,<sup>110</sup> so that, between hunger and disease, piles of the dead are found in every street and alley<sup>111</sup> where they are devoured by dogs.<sup>112</sup> In short, the devastation that befalls the empire because of Maximin's anti-Christian laws is so severe that Rufinus links it typologically to the Biblical account of the ten plagues that befell Egypt on account of Pharaoh's injustice to Israel.<sup>113</sup> However, what is apparent in all this is that Maximin was not wrong in judging that there is a link between the prosperity of a land and the piety of its ruler. This is something that pagans and Christians seem to have in common. Where he is wrong is that he judged the suppression of the Church to be a true expression of his piety as a ruler. As Rufinus says elsewhere:

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<sup>103</sup> Fomin takes notice of this passage but decides that it is not an important source for *De XII*. See Fomin, *Instructions for Kings*, 104-5. However, this seems to be the result of deficient methodology. A search for ideological precedents cannot be usefully limited to a search for strictly literary precedents. No mention is made of the other relevant sections of books VIII and IX of *HE*. See page 186ff. for further discussion.

<sup>104</sup> For texts specifically attributing the following disasters to the renewed persecution, see *HE* IX.vii.16-viii.1, viii.3, 14; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 821.8-11, 823.5-8, 825.21-24. This is an instance of a greater principle, namely that divine punishment is the direct result of deficient politics. However, it is important to note that, by book VIII, which is to say, insofar as the Church begins to be thematised as the religion of the state in anticipation of Constantine's reign, deficient politics seem to arise, for Rufinus, as an indirect result of the Church falling into decadence. In such cases the ministers of the state are appointed by God to punish the Church so that it may remember and recover its true self, but when they overstep their mandate this directly results in the disasters outlined below. On this, see *HE* VIII.i.7-xiii.11, esp. xiii.11; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 739.11-775.9, esp. 775.5-9.

<sup>105</sup> *HE* IX.viii.2-4; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 821.21-823.8.

<sup>106</sup> *HE* IX.viii.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 821.11-14.

<sup>107</sup> *HE* IX.viii.7; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 823.19-23.

<sup>108</sup> *HE* IX.viii.6; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 823.14-17.

<sup>109</sup> *HE* IX.viii.8; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 823.23-825.5.

<sup>110</sup> *HE* IX.viii.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 821.14-19.

<sup>111</sup> *HE* IX.viii.1, 5, 9; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 821.19-21, 823.11-14, 825.9-12.

<sup>112</sup> *HE* IX.viii.10; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 825.12-13.

<sup>113</sup> *HE* IX.viii.14-15; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.5-25. This is not only due to the severity of the plague, or how it was caused, but in regard to the way that the Christians, like the Hebrews of Egypt, were spared the punishments intended for those the persecuted them; *HE* IX.viii.14; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.5-13.

Primo, dum pacem servarent ecclesiae, cum omni prosperitate imperium gubernaverant in tantum rerum permutationem deducit, ut Augustus ipse in id vanitatis atque amentiae perveniret

at first, while they (the founders of the tetrarchy) preserved the peace of the Church, they had ruled the empire with all prosperity, [but] he (God) overturned things to the same degree, when the Emperor himself fell into a state of vanity and mindlessness<sup>114</sup>

Thus, in the context of the *HE*, the prosperity of the empire under rulers that were friendly to the Church, the devastation that Maximin and his allies brought upon the empire through their persecution of it, and the biblical example of the plagues of Egypt are presented together as mutually reinforcing proofs of the immediate connexion that the piety of a sovereign has with the material fate of his kingdom as a whole. However, Rufinus points to a yet further bit of evidence, that of Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge. For Constantine's victory there, he says, was as one who 'intended to surpass in religion and piety all those, if it were possible, who had held the principate before him'<sup>115</sup> and it is through the sign of the cross<sup>116</sup> and by an all-night vigil that it was achieved.<sup>117</sup> Thus, it clearly reinforces the established pattern<sup>118</sup> that his deliverance of the people from the 'yoke of the tyrant' (*iugo tyrannicae*)<sup>119</sup> as the 'restorer of freedom' (*restitutorem libertatis*)<sup>120</sup> is also his saving of them from the 'monstrous plague' (*ingenti peste*)<sup>121</sup> as the 'author of health' (*salutis auctorem*).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *HE* VIII.xiii.9-11; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 775.9-11. The specific 'Augustus' in question in this ambiguous statement appears to be Maxentius; see Christensen, *Rufinus of Aquileia*, 113-4.

<sup>115</sup> *HE* IX.ix.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 829.17-18: 'qui omnes, si fieri posset, qui ante se principatum gesserant, pietate et religione cuperet superare'.

<sup>116</sup> *HE* IX.ix.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.31-829.14.

<sup>117</sup> *HE* IX.ix.4; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 829.21-24.

<sup>118</sup> Significantly, Constantine himself, or at least, Constantine as Eusebius, Theodoret and Gelesius quote him as writing in a letter to Sapor II, king of Persia, seems not only to share Eusebius/Rufinus' belief that physical fortune directly results from pious rule, but to interpret that battle of Milvian Bridge precisely in this light. For this and references, see Trompf, 'Rufinus and the Logic of Retribution', 353-356.

<sup>119</sup> *HE* IX.ix.9; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II 831.19. All quotations from *HE* appear in the grammatical form they have in Mommsen's edition.

<sup>120</sup> *HE* IX.ix.9; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 833.1-2.

<sup>121</sup> *HE* IX.ix.9; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 831.19.

## The Ruler's Body

It seems then that there is indeed a strong likeness between the significance Rufinus attributes to what we may call 'the piety of the emperor' and that which *De XII* and *AM* attribute to the 'justice of the ruler'. When *De XII* ascribes famine, war, chaotic weather and political disunity to a ruler's injustice,<sup>123</sup> and when *AM* claims that plagues are kept at bay, and peace, riches and fecundity acquired, through a ruler's justice,<sup>124</sup> this is clearly in keeping with what would have been widely known at that time in Ireland regarding Rufinus' kingship ideology.

What is perhaps, startling, however, is just how far this likeness goes. For Rufinus' understanding of the piety of the emperor includes the idea that the state of the ruler's sovereignty is directly related, not only to the state his kingdom, but to the state of his body, an idea often listed among the most unimpeachably native concepts in medieval Irish literature, and which is, moreover, broadly associated with the doctrine of *fír flathemon* in that literature.

In the texts we have most recently been dealing with, we have seen that it is the disorders of a kingdom that function as evidence that a ruler has undermined his *fír flathemon* through false judgement, and thus, his own identity as ruler.<sup>125</sup> However, we must remember that, in later literature, we often find that disorders of the ruler's body are also understood to follow on his false judgement as an outward and visible sign to his subjects that his inward nature as sovereign has been compromised. The idea that there is a strong connection between any disordering of the ruler's body and the ruler's loss of sovereignty verges on ubiquity in medieval Irish literature.<sup>126</sup> Yet, as we saw in

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<sup>122</sup> *HE* IX.ix.9; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 833.1.

<sup>123</sup> *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 52.9-53.6; Throop, tr., 'The Twelve Abuses', 128.

<sup>124</sup> *AM* §12-21, 24-8; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.6-8 and tr.7-9.

<sup>125</sup> While this is already implicit in the features of *De XII* and *AM* dealt with thus far, it is also said explicitly both in *AM* and in *SM*. See *AM* §56-59; Kelly, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.16-8 and tr.17-9. See Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The King in *SM*', 113-4, for an edition and translation of a relevant passage [i.e. *CIH* 219.5] from *Recholl Breth* (*SM* 13), together with references to variant readings. Further discussion on this topic may be found in Chapter 1, pages 30-5.

<sup>126</sup> For an early example, see *Bechbretha* (*SM* 21) §31-2 [= *CIH* 449.25-7]; Thomas Charles-Edwards and Fergus Kelly, eds. and tr., *Bechbretha: An Old Irish Law-Tract on Bee-Keeping* (Dublin 1983, repr. with

Chapter 1, there seems to be contrasting views regarding their exact relationship. In some cases, a ruler, without acting contrary to the *fír flathemon* by which he is able to act and exist as ruler, is nevertheless deprived of that capacity through the disordering of his body.<sup>127</sup> But, in other cases, such disorders as may be manifest in the ruler's body are, like the disorders of the state, depicted as the result, rather than the cause, of his loss of sovereignty, a sign of having undermined his *fír flathemon* through false judgement, rather than the means by which his capacity to enact it was lost.<sup>128</sup> Thus, with reference to this latter and better attested form of the doctrine, it is especially noteworthy that two of the three sovereigns that Rufinus sees as most guilty of impiety, precisely because of their impiety, both lose control over their own bodies as they lose control over the empire.

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additional appendix 2008), 69. However, note *De XII*'s similar, if more ambiguous, claim that just as the ruler is 'hominum primus . . . sic et in poenis, si iustitiam non fecerit, primatum habiturus est' (=first among the people, so also, if he has not done justice, he will have primacy in punishment).

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Meyer, ed. and tr., 'The Expulsion of the Dessi', ed.106, 130 and tr.107, 131.

<sup>128</sup> For notable examples, see: 1) Conchobar mac Nessa (displayed his form to enemy women during a battle as a prelude to head-injury); *Aided Chonchobair A*; Kobel, ed. and tr., 'A Critical Edition', ed.219-221 and tr.221-3; 2) Fergus mac Léti (ignored a warning not to look under Lake Rudraige as a prelude to facial deformation); *Echtra Fergus mac Léti* §4-7; D.A. Binchy, ed. and tr., 'The Saga of Fergus Mac Léti', ed.37-8 and tr.41-3; 3) Ailill Ólomm (attempted grazing his horses on Áne Chlíach and rapes Áne as a prelude to losing the flesh of his ear) and Lugaid Mac Con (made a false sheep-judgement as a prelude to the loss of his cheek); *Cath Maige Mucrama* §3, 63-71; Ó Daly, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Mucrama*, ed.38, 58-60 and tr.39, 59-61; on this, see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Theme of *lommrad* in *Cath Maige Mucrama*', *Éigse* 18.2 (1981), 211-24 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 330-41]; 4) Bres (who neglected hospitality as a prelude to the 'decay' (*meth*) of his person); *Cath Maige Tuired* §39; Elizabeth A. Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.34 and tr.35. It is noteworthy here that in three of these latter examples (Conchobar, Fergus and Bres), the disorders of the ruler's body provoke deliberations about the status of the ruler as ruler, rather than his immediate loss of that status, thus reinforcing its role as a kind of evidence or witness. However, disorders of a ruler's body that are caused by satire present a problem, as it remains difficult to see if such disorders belong more to the first understanding of their role or the second. It is clear that it does not reveal actual injustice in the ruler, which would seem to place it with the first. However, the possibility must at least be considered that the power by which satirists operate may be understood, in the context of the sagas that report these instances, to be superior to that of the *fír flathemon*, by which the ruler operates, since even with his *fír flathemon* intact it does not seem to be enough to defend his person from the satirist. In this case, unjust satire would, above all, be a way of inflicting the ruler, not only with convincing evidence of his guilt regarding a false-judgement he did not commit, but with the physical appearance and thus the public role of a ruler who is thus guilty. An example of this is the account of Néide's unjust satire of Caier of Connacht in *Cormac's Glossary*; see note 63 in Chapter 1; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 123. Likely such instances will need to be judged on a case by case basis. Related discussion may be found in Chapter 1, pages 34-5, 42. For a general overview of the relevant primary sources regarding the blemishes of rulers, see Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, 82-7.

God's vengeance on Maximian (Galerius) for his persecution of Christians is not limited to his removal from office, but includes inflicting him with a terrible disease. In addition to its other macabre symptoms, we learn that

fistulis quibusdam in superficiem purulentis meatibus adaptis de interioribus putrefacti vulneris venis ebullire undatim coepit innumera vermium multitudo

through certain ulcers in [his] skin, festering passages having been thrown open from the innermost parts of the putrefying wound, an innumerable multitude of worms began to bubble out, undulating<sup>129</sup>

Maximian (Galerius) orders that the persecution be stopped, when the reason for his disease is revealed to him.<sup>130</sup> However, it is too late to save him from a horrifying death.<sup>131</sup>

Maximin is no more fortunate. After losing in battle to Constantine, and fruitlessly attempting to appease God with bribes, he is, on account of his injustice, 'seized with pains of the internal organs'<sup>132</sup> so that he could not lie anywhere but on the ground, not even able to taste the food or smell the wine with which he had fed his gluttony, until he died, having confessed the justice of God's punishment.<sup>133</sup> All this, surely, is very close to the kingship ideology of the saga *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*.<sup>134</sup> For in either *historia*,<sup>135</sup> the destruction of the king's body acts as both the culmination and symbol of

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<sup>129</sup> HE VIII.xvi.4; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 791.4-6.

<sup>130</sup> HE VIII.xvi.5-xvii.10; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 791.11-795.18.

<sup>131</sup> HE VIII.xiii.15; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 779.5-12.

<sup>132</sup> HE IX.x.14; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II 847.8: 'doloribus internorum viscerum correptus'.

<sup>133</sup> HE IX.x.13-15; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 847.7-849.3.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. A.C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, 'Togail Bruidne Da Derga and the Politics of Anatomy', *CMCS* 49 (Summer 2005), 1-20, esp. 14-20. My point here is in partial disagreement with the relevant statements in Ralph O'Connor's recent book, where he affirmed that the bodily destruction of Conaire is a result of his breaking of *fir flathemon*, but nevertheless suggested that the orthodox connection between physical perfection and *fir flathemon* is problematized by *TBDD*. See O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 312.

<sup>135</sup> On the *Togail* as *historia*, see O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 40-1, 228, 332-3. For more general considerations of medieval Irish saga as *historia*, see Gregory Toner, 'Authority, Verse and the Transmission of *Senchas*' *Ériu* 55 (2005), 59-84; *idem*, 'The Ulster Cycle: Historiography or Fiction?' *CMCS* 40 (Winter 2000), 1-20; Erich Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory: The Lesson

the destruction of the kingdom which has been brought about through the destruction of the ‘piety’, or else, ‘justice’ of the ruler.

### **The Piety of the Emperor vs. The Justice of the Ruler**

But here an important issue must be addressed. It is true that the portrayal of the ‘piety of the emperor’ seems very close to that of the ‘justice of the ruler’, both in *De XII* and *AM* and in some of the more immediate inheritors of the political ideology to which they bear witness. However, we have not yet asked how alike this ‘piety’ and this ‘justice’ really are. For initially, it would seem that the concepts they represent are somewhat different, and perhaps significantly so. If so, it will be important to determine how this may affect the interpretation of our findings thus far.

In *De XII* piety certainly is an *aspect* of the ‘justice of the ruler’, but his justice also includes such things as impartial legal judgements, putting the right people in leadership, appropriate military practice<sup>136</sup> and in general, the governance of the state in accordance with the law.<sup>137</sup> All of this seems to imply that the ‘justice of the ruler’ involves a capacity for discernment that goes far beyond a simple submission to the teachings of the Church.

In this regard, *AM* seems even more problematic. The idea of piety, unless it is in regard to the idea that the ruler must judge things in accordance with way that the Creator (*dúilem*) has created them,<sup>138</sup> is not evoked anywhere. Moreover, the implication in *De XII* that the ‘justice of the ruler’ depends upon his capacity for discernment is made explicit in *AM*. The ‘justice of the ruler’ is emphatically not his simple obedience to the established rules set out for him, but a nuanced application of

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of *Airec Menman Uraird maic Coise*’, *CMCS* 37 (Summer 1999), 33–54; Wilson M. Hudson, ‘The Discovery of Irish Literature: The Distinction between History and Fiction’, *The University of Texas Studies in English* 30 (1951), 107-15. For some problems with understanding Irish sagas to always function as *historia* for their medieval Irish context, see Ó Néill, ‘The Latin Colophon’; Boyle, ‘Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal arts’.

<sup>136</sup> *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 51.9-52.8; Throop, tr., ‘The Twelve Abuses’, 127-8.

<sup>137</sup> *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 52.9-10; Throop, tr., ‘The Twelve Abuses’, 127-8.

<sup>138</sup> *AM* §32; Kelley, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.10-12 and tr.11-13.



these rules.<sup>139</sup> This is famously compared to the act of driving an old chariot,<sup>140</sup> which, being old, demands constant alertness on the part of the driver, so that he looks all around it to every side, defending, protecting and attending to it, and so ensuring that its wheels do not break.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, this capacity for discernment seems to depend, in turn, on the ruler's true understanding of the whole hierarchy of natures that he has been given to rule. For if he is not able to judge 'each thing according to its benefits',<sup>142</sup> not only will he be unable to make true legal judgements about them, but the natures of the beings thus misjudged 'will not give them (their profits) with full increase'.<sup>143</sup> The connection between knowledge and justice implied by the 'fir' of *fir flathemon*<sup>144</sup> is thus one which the author of *AM* consciously affirms.

However, it turns out that this capacity for discernment is a part of Rufinus' understanding of the 'piety of the emperor' as well.<sup>145</sup> The most dramatic evidence is found in his account of Emperor Gratian in book XI. Gratian, he says, surpassed most previous rulers 'in piety and religious fervour' (*pietate et religione . . . paene*).<sup>146</sup> However, because of his 'youthful boisterousness' (*iuvenili exultatione*) and 'excessive modesty' (*plus verecundus*),<sup>147</sup> he was unable to turn back the evil times begun under

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<sup>139</sup> *AM* §4-11, 23, 29-52; Kelley, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.4, 8-14 and tr.5, 9-15.

<sup>140</sup> On this theme, see Philip O' Leary, 'A Foreseeing Driver of an Old Chariot: Regal Moderation in Early Irish Literature', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 11 (Summer 1986), 1-16, at 13-16.

<sup>141</sup> *AM* §22; Kelley, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.6-8 and tr.7-9.

<sup>142</sup> *AM* §32; Kelley, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.10-12 and tr.11-13: 'nach réit nad asa moinib'. The translation above is lightly modified.

<sup>143</sup> *AM* §32 Kelley, ed. and tr., *Audacht Morainn*, ed.12 and tr.13: 'nícope lánoruth toda-béra'.

<sup>144</sup> This association is discussed at length throughout Chapter 2.

<sup>145</sup> Most recent scholarship on Rufinus' kingship ideology is fundamentally concerned with differentiating Rufinus' version of the *HE* from that of Eusebius, so as to highlight the positive ideological contribution Rufinus makes through his reshaping of Eusebius' original, in reaction to those who see these differences only as signs of deficient translation. As a result, the importance of the role discernment in Rufinus' vision of imperial piety tends to go unnoticed since it receives more obvious emphasis in that of Eusebius. Cf. Mark Humphries, 'Rufinus's Eusebius: Translation, Continuation, and Edition in the Latin *Ecclesiastical History*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.2 (Summer 2008), 143-64, at 157-8; Thomas C. Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography*, Supplements to *Vigilia Christianae* 75 (Leiden 2005), 93-6, 102-3, 121; Trompf, 'Rufinus and the Logic of Retribution', 351-71; Thélamon, 'L'Empereur idéal', 310-14. Of these, Trompf comes closest to the present argument through his brief evocation of *πρνοία* (*pronoia*, i.e. 'discernment') relative to the discussion of the *εὐσεβεία* (*eusebeia*, i.e. 'piety') of the emperor in Hellenistic histories (both pagan and Christian) in general. See Trompf, 'Rufinus and the Logic of Retribution', 352, 357.

<sup>146</sup> *HE* XI.xiii; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 1020.7-8.

<sup>147</sup> *HE* XI.xiii. Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II 1020.8-9; Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History'*, 75.

the previous emperor.<sup>148</sup> Thus, it would seem that Rufinus thought that there was something operative in the piety of Constantine that was lacking in the piety of Gratian, something that was the difference between the empire flourishing or failing.<sup>149</sup>

That something is wisdom. It remains that Constantine is habitually described as ‘pious’<sup>150</sup> and it is on account of this quality that the empire is said to thrive under him. Yet we are also told that he is the ‘most moderate’ (*moderatissimus*)<sup>151</sup> of rulers and that his ‘moral instruction’ (*institutio morum*), ‘rectitude’ (*probitate*) and ‘sobriety’ (*sobrietatis*) shine in the friends of the state.<sup>152</sup> Of themselves, these are very ambiguous terms, as likely to apply to one who is merely obedient to the law, as to a person who judiciously interprets and applies it. However, their meaning is clarified through their contrast with Constantine’s enemies. Maximin, for example, in the same paragraph as these virtues are ascribed to Constantine, is described, not only as lacking sobriety and moderation, but also prudence (*prudentia*)<sup>153</sup> and adequate intellectual capacity (*meritum et capacitatem mentis*).<sup>154</sup> Moreover, through his arrogance (*adrogantia*) and conceit (*superbia*),<sup>155</sup> he suffers a ‘wildness of mind’ (*mente ferox*)<sup>156</sup> that causes him to seek a position in the state far beyond what is suitable for one of his modest faculties.<sup>157</sup> Simply put, in lacking Constantine’s ‘sobriety’ and ‘moderation’ he lacks the sound judgement that makes Constantine suitable to be the true emperor. Yet, in the context of

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<sup>148</sup> HE XI.xiii; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 1020.4-10; Amidon, tr., *The Church History*, 75.

<sup>149</sup> For this reason, it seems impossible to be satisfied with Humphries’ rather muted assessment that ‘Rufinus showed that emperors who favoured the church enjoyed some measure of success’. See Humphries, ‘Rufinus’s Eusebius’, 158. By presenting the piety of the emperor as the only significant factor for Rufinus, Humphries would appear to be compelled to include Gratian in the same category as Constantine and Theodosius, and thus to mistakenly downplay the direct connection Rufinus draws between the Emperor’s piety and the flourishing of his kingdom.

<sup>150</sup> HE IX.ix.1, 6; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.26, 829.14, 16, 18, 831.5. In the description of Constantine’s piety, versions of *religiosus* rather than *pius* predominate. For ascriptions of ‘pietas’ to Constantine, see HE IX.viii.13, x.7; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 825.23, 843.6.

<sup>151</sup> HE IX.ix.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.27.

<sup>152</sup> HE IX.x.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.13-14: ‘in quibus regalis institutio morum probitate et sobrietatis ac religionis gratia refulgebat’.

<sup>153</sup> HE IX.x.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.11.

<sup>154</sup> HE IX.x.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.10.

<sup>155</sup> HE IX.x.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.12.

<sup>156</sup> HE IX.ix.12; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.7.

<sup>157</sup> HE IX.x.1-2; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.9-17.

the *HE*, it would be a mistake to see sound judgement as something external to piety, or false judgement as external to impiety.

In Maximin's case, the erosion of his judgement that begins with his overestimation of himself, hastens to its completion through his impiety. For it is through his impiety that he moves from confusing himself with an emperor to confusing himself with a deity. Maximin surpasses the primary impiety involved in his reestablishment of pagan religion<sup>158</sup> by the secondary impiety of directly manipulating its oracles.<sup>159</sup> Yet the belief involved in the primary impiety is such that, in spite of his cynical control of them, he, in yet a third kind of impiety, still receives them as oracles, so that they become the means by which his gods deceive him into fighting an unwinnable battle against Constantine.<sup>160</sup> Thus, in his thrice impious obedience to the pagan oracles, Maximin ceases even to make false judgements, since, having confused his every whim with divine providence, he has lost any means of distinguishing between them.

Constantine's piety however, emerges as the perfection of his judgement. He is granted a sign portending his victory against Maxentius.<sup>161</sup> However, this omen is not, for Constantine, a pretext to suspend judgement, but a means by which his judgement is thrown into action. He hesitates, not because he doubts the sign, but because he knows that attacking the city would mean polluting himself with the blood of citizens, and judges correctly that this is not justified by the omen. In consequence, he prays all night to be kept free of such guilt.<sup>162</sup> It is only then that Maxentius is struck with madness, so that he rides out of the city over a bridge, where he is swept to his death by sudden waves with only a few of his men about him.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *HE* VIII.xiv.8; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 781.26-783.9. This is in addition to the impiety understood to be involved in his destruction of the Church (*HE* IX.iii.1-iv.3; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 809.13-811.4) and his dramatic subversions of the political order (*HE* VIII.xiv.10ff.; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 782.11ff.).

<sup>159</sup> *HE* IX.ii.1-iv.2; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 807.26-809.20.

<sup>160</sup> *HE* IX.x.2-6; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 839.17-843.1.

<sup>161</sup> *HE* IX.ix.1; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 827.33/829.2.

<sup>162</sup> *HE* IX.ix.4; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 829.21-4.

<sup>163</sup> *HE* IX.ix.4; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 829.24-33.

Thus, Constantine is granted the portended victory in a way that preserves him from the guilt that seemed inseparable from it. Yet it is only through his accurate recognition of his predicament that its solution could emerge in answer to his prayer. For while his prayer is certainly a pious act, it is because of his sound judgement that he is able to recognize it as the only practical course left to him. Therefore, it is through his sound judgement that his piety became the power to achieve the means and ends that judgement required, but could not achieve of itself.<sup>164</sup> In short, we are not dealing here with the political ideal of a naïve piety which, because of its purity of devotion, has no need for discernment, but of a superlative capacity for true judgement to which piety is absolutely essential. But then the idea that piety plays an essential role to true judgement will certainly not be new to us following the material we covered in Chapter 2.

### **Conclusions Regarding *AM* and *De XII***

There seems then to be very little found in *De XII*'s concept of the 'justice of the ruler' that is not found in Rufinus' *HE*. But this does not lessen its achievement so much as make our appreciation of that achievement more precise. For in its apparent abstraction of the concept of 'the justice of the ruler' from Rufinus' *HE*, it is effectively re-constituting the philosophical ideas of kingship (going back to Philo of Alexandria, the Stoics and Plato)<sup>165</sup> which informed the portrayal of kingship in Rufinus' Eusebian exemplar.<sup>166</sup> This is not to say that the concept of the 'justice of the ruler' may not have

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<sup>164</sup> Further examples of this same principle at work are found at the scene of Constantine's judgement at the Council of Nicaea (*HE* X.ii; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 961; P.R. Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History'*, 9-10) and Theodosius' preparation for the battle of Frigidus (*HE* XI.32-3; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 1036-9; Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History'*, 32-3); compare *HE* VIII.i.8; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II 739.22-3, where the purpose of the various plagues is to restore 'intellectus'.

<sup>165</sup> For an excellent summary of the Platonic and Stoic context and pre-history of Philo's conception of the ideal ruler and the relevant scholarship, see Emily Parker, *The Ideal Statesman in the Political Philosophy of Philo of Alexandria*, unpublished PhD thesis (Trinity College, Dublin 2014), 23-70. The development outlined here may be broadly characterized as a movement from a largely implicit analogy between the philosopher king of Plato's *Republic* and the *Demiurge* (i.e. the Artificer) of the cosmos, in his *Timaeus*, to an increasingly explicit analogy between them in the Stoics and Middle Platonists. Some of the important primary sources here are: Plato's *Republic* 7.501e-502c, 540a-c, *Timaeus* 28a-31b, *Thaetetus*. 176b-3 and *Phaedrus* 245b; Seneca's *Epistle* CX; Ps. Aristotle's *De mundo*, 397b-401a; Plutarch's *Ad principem ineruditum*, 780c-781a, and *De fortuna Romanorum*, 317c; Ephantus, in Stobaeus' *Anthology*, IV.7.64. The most important Philonic text in this regard is his *De vita Mosis*; F.H. Colson, ed. and tr., *Philo: On Abraham, on Joseph, on Moses* (Harvard 1935), 274-596.

<sup>166</sup> The evidence of Philo's decisive role in Eusebius' reinterpretation of Plato's kingship ideology is not simply implicit in his respective descriptions of Constantine in Books IX and X of his *HE* and in *Vita*

had a pre-Christian history in Ireland as well, but that if so, it seems to be as a conceptualization of Rufinus' kingship ideology that it was comprehensible as a Christian doctrine. This conclusion is reinforced by that fact that the Carolingian Empire which, through exposure to *De XII* and the mediation of *CCH*, would later take this medieval Irish formulation for its own, seems to have been made receptive to it by its own engagement with Rufinus' *HE*.<sup>167</sup> *AM*'s treatment of *fír flathemon* presents more difficulty. Its insistence that the justice of the ruler rests on accurate knowledge of the natural order is reminiscent of Eusebius' original version of the *HE*, but seems to have no precedent in the Latin version available to its author. Eusebius, following Philo's depiction of Moses, describes Constantine in language borrowed from Plato's account of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*, presenting him as a kind of incarnate *logos* who, through his inherent ability to discern the essential realities is uniquely capable of understanding, and thus ruling, the cosmic and political order, since their existence is

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*Constantini*. In Book II of the *HE*, he writes about Philo at length, presenting him as a Christian precursor and provides a long list of his works. Moreover, his frequent quotations of Philo in *Praeparatio Evangelica* (esp. VIII onwards) show that he had direct knowledge of many of the works listed there; Karl Mras, ed., *Eusebius Werke, Band 8: 'Die praeparatio Evangelica'*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 43.1-2, 2 vols (Berlin 1954-6). *Vita Constantini*; Friedhelm Winkelmann, ed., *Eusebius Werke, Band 1.1: 'Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin'*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 7 (Berlin 1975). On Philo's influence on Eusebius' kingship ideology, see Parker, 'The Ideal Statesman', 229-31; *idem*, 'Reflecting the Divine: Philo's Moses and the Roman Ideal: Response to Peter O' Brien', in Wayne J. Hankey and Nicholas Hatt, eds., *Changing our Mind on Secularization: The Contemporary Debate about Secular and Sacred in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Proceedings of the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Atlantic Theological Conference, Charlottetown, June 23<sup>rd</sup> to June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (Charlottetown 2010), 71-7, esp. 71: 'As we illumine Philo's notion of divine kingship in Moses, let us keep in mind that this is the foundation from which Eusebius' Constantine arises'. Professor Hankey has adopted her findings; see Wayne J. Hankey, 'Philo's Moses and his Pagan, Christian and Islamic Successors', in Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar and Bilal Bas, eds., *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2013), 3-16, at 6-8. Cf. John J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis* (Oxford 2003), 145-151, who prioritises the influence of pagan Middle- and Neo-platonism on Eusebius' refashioning of Plato's philosopher-king.

<sup>167</sup> Walter Ullmann, *The Renaissance of Society* (London 1969), 15, esp. note 2, where he attributes the mediation of 'ancient and notably Hellenistic Ruler ideology and Ruler cult' to the mediation of Latin translations of patristic authors in general and Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *HE* in particular. This conclusion is based on the findings of a number of earlier scholars. See Louis Bréhier and Pierre Batiffol, *Les survivances du culte impérial romain* (Paris 1920), esp. 6ff.; F.J. Dölger, 'Zur antiken und frühchristlichen Auffassung der Herrschergewalt von Gottes Gnaden', in *Antike und Christentum*, 6 vols. (Münster 1932) III, 117-27, at 119; Norman H. Baynes, 'Eusebius and the Christian Empire', in *Annaire de l'institute de philologie d'histoire orientales* 2 (Brussels 1934, repr. 1955), 13-18; Erik Peterson, *Theologische Traktate* (Munich 1951), esp. 49ff.; George Léonard Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London 1952, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 92ff.; Lucien Cerfaux and Julien Trondriau, *Un concurrent du christianisme: le culte des souverains* (Paris 1957); Johannes A. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart 1939, repr. 1964); Fritz Taeger, *Charisma: Studien zur Geschichte des antiken Herrscherkultes*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart 1960), esp. II, 246ff.

precisely that of an image of those realities.<sup>168</sup> It is the one who knows that of which they are an image, who is able to know their true nature as image, and thus how they may best function collectively as the image that they are, in this way enacting judgements that not only imitate but manifest the very creative principles from which every entity receives its being and life. However, in Rufinus' version of the *HE*, while Constantine's prudence is everywhere indicated, neither the character of the knowledge on which it is based, nor the basis of that knowledge is anywhere to be found. In this respect, *AM* would seem to occupy an intermediate position between them. Similar to Eusebius, the discernment of the ruler is dependent on his correct apprehension of the cosmic order, although the basis of such knowledge, as in Rufinus, is not indicated. But the impetus behind *AM*'s need to define the knowledge on which the practical wisdom of the ruler depends in a way that goes further than Rufinus, and, moreover, what the unmentioned basis of this knowledge could be for its authors, should not now be dark to us. The combination of a Josephan understanding of the spiritual and theological significance of the study of nature with a Cassianising understanding of natural law as a kind of inspiration by the Holy Spirit, which we observed in the last chapter, amply account for the transformation of Rufinus' doctrine in the direction of Eusebius at his most Philonic.

### **Eusebian Historiography**

In all of this, Rufinus (like Eusebius) depicts history as a fundamentally progressive movement from lesser to greater instantiations of human political capacity, a movement whose upward trajectory culminates in the Christian emperors of the present. The superior piety and justice which the Christian faith has made possible for Constantine has resulted in a level of prosperity, in his own person and in the state, which has seemingly not been possible previously. This newly attainable level of piety and justice, and its resulting prosperity, is realised to an even greater degree in Theodosius I. To the extent that the Gospel has spread among political rulers, humanity's capacity for true

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<sup>168</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 29a-31a; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* IV; Zeyl, ed., 'Timaeus', 1235-6. Philo, *De vita Mosis*, II.xv.71ff.; Colson, ed. and tr., *Philo*, ed.484ff. and tr.485ff. Eusebius, *HE*, X.25-72; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 870-83; Kirsop Lake and J.E.L. Oulton, tr., *Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History*, 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library 153, 265 (Cambridge, MA 1926-32) II, 413-45.

government, together with the desirable physical results of true government, has dramatically improved.

*De XII* remains close to Rufinus in this respect as well. We have already discussed how it treats the concept of the ‘*iustus regi*’ as fully derivable from the Christian Scriptures. However, some of the contents of this ‘justice’ force the further conclusion that it is *only* in the context of the Church that it is achievable in its fullest sense. The ideal of royal justice it describes is definitively that of a pious Christian monarch, who, among other things, ‘defends churches’, ‘holds the Catholic faith in God’, and prays at the appropriate times.<sup>169</sup> Since features of explicitly Christian devotion are integral to this justice it will mean that it is not only a fully realizable ideal in the Christian era but that there was no way for it to be fully realised prior to the establishment of the Church. Moreover, this sense of optimism - that there is a new-found potential in the Christian era for the achievement of such royal justice as is necessary to maintain the material prosperity and peace of a kingdom - is further heightened by its presentation of this ideal to the Christian reader in the present tense, rather than as a record of advice given by an idealised interlocutor of the proto-Christian past.

This, however, is certainly not what we have found in *AM*. By presenting the ideal of *fīr flathemon* as something that can be adequately exemplified and articulated by figures of ancient history, it suggests more than the way that pre-Christian revelation may be said to contribute such knowledge as is proper to the Church itself. For in locating this ideal in an exemplary past it leaves the question open regarding the degree to which the *fīr flathemon* it speaks of may be fully attained by would-be rulers of its seventh-century context and onward. That it is taken to be achievable in some measure seems self-evident. It would have no purpose as a wisdom-text if the kind of royal justice it describes was not thought to be presently attainable in any respect. However, a text which locates the quintessential expression of kingly justice deep in the pre-Christian past, evidently has quite a different understanding of sacred history than a text which

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<sup>169</sup> *De XII*; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 51.15-52.5; Throop, tr., ‘The Twelve Abuses’, 127-8: ‘Iustitia vero regis est . . . esseclias defendere . / . . fidem catholicam in Deum habere . . . certis horis orationibus insistere’.

sees it as fully expressible only after the arrival of the Christian faith. Different theories about how natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration interact with each other require different interpretations of history.

We have already discussed how the attempt to conciliate a Cassianising doctrine of natural law with a tri- or tetra-partite history of revelatory modes (i.e. nature, Mosaic law, [Prophets], the Gospel/law of the New Testament) seems to account for developments of that doctrine in medieval Ireland which would be hard to account for otherwise. This historiographical arrangement is, as we have seen, present in Rufinus and the Latin Doctors alike.<sup>170</sup> Yet it seems to exemplify rather than contrast with Rufinus' conception of history as an escalation from lesser to greater realities. We will have to look elsewhere to account for such departures from Rufinean historiography as we seem, at first glance, to find in *AM*. But we will be better able to do so relative to a point of contrast which elaborates on Rufinus' triumphalism to the greatest degree. For this we must return to The Prologue to *SM*.

### **The Prologue to *SM* as Rufinean Historiography**

In *SM* itself, there is already a sense that with Patrick came categorically better times than had even existed before.<sup>171</sup> It is said that he 'has established' (*rosuidigestar*) some laws for the first time,<sup>172</sup> and has forbidden (*ar-rogart; roindarb*) a number of bad practices which were previously permitted.<sup>173</sup> But more important than *SM*'s attribution of these specific laws and emendations of laws to Patrick is *Córus Bésgnai*'s (*SM* 8)

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<sup>170</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 79-3.

<sup>171</sup> The next sentences closely follow Fangzhe Qiu's argument in *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 124.

<sup>172</sup> *OGSM* on *Cethairslíocht Athgabálae* (*SM* 2) [*CIH* 884.1-3, 9] = [47] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 295-6, with further discussion at 67. *Di Astud Chirt 7Dligid* (*SM* 14) [*CIH* 237.35-238.3, 238.18-19 and 23-25, 1420.26-29] = [10] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 284-5; with discussion at 44-5. *Di Astud Chirt 7Dligid* (*SM* 14) [*CIH* 240.21-28, 1378.25-26] = [12] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 285-6, with discussion at 45. *Bésgnae Ráithe* (*SM* 39) at *CIH* 2103.33-4; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text 'SM'*, 35, as cited in Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 89.

<sup>173</sup> *OGSM* on The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) [*CIH* 348.29-349.24, 878.27-879.22]; Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Three Things Required', 55-7; see discussion in Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 50-1. *Di Astud Chirt 7Dligid* (*SM* 14) [*CIH* 226.31-36; 1061.34-35] = [9] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 283-4, discussion at 44. Another edition and translation of 226.31-2 is found in Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text 'SM'*, 35, which updates those found in Breatnach, ed., and tr., *A Companion*, 313.



characterisation of the current state of Irish law, in its entirety, as the authoritative emendation and completion of the preexisting ‘law of nature’<sup>174</sup> which resulted from his conciliation of it with the Church’s ‘law of Scripture’.<sup>175</sup> Dubthach expounded (*dos-arfén*) to Patrick the whole of the law of nature, such as had been revealed by the prophecy of the pre-Christian poets and prophets, resulting in the perfection of that law, through the correction of any errors that had been added to it, and the addition of that which it still lacked.<sup>176</sup>

Yet, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the sense that *SM* marks a culmination of historical process to that point is far stronger in The Prologue. While the pre-Christian natural law is portrayed by *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) as covering things which the ecclesiastical law of Scripture ‘did not reach’, there seems to be no suggestion that the law of Scripture undergoes reinterpretation or any other form of transformation through its interaction with natural law. The influence runs all one way. But in The Prologue, the union of the respective laws of nature and Scripture which has been achieved by *SM* is not portrayed as involving only the perfection of the extra-ecclesiastical law of nature by the ecclesiastical law of Scripture, but as the result of their mutual perfection and completion of each other. In which case, the *SM* represents, not the mere assimilation of local pre-Christian law to that of the Church, but the dawning of a qualitatively different and superior stage in the development of either law, a stage in which a summit has been

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<sup>174</sup> *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) §30-7; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.32 and tr.33.

<sup>175</sup> As Breatnach notes, similar claims were subsequently made in the later introductions to *Cáin Fúithirbe* [*CIH* 687.37-688.20] and *Mellbretha* [*CIH* 1338.5] respectively, in *BND* [*CIH* 1111.3], and in *The Distribution of ‘Cró’ and ‘Díbad’* [*CIH* 600.5]. However, as we shall see, *BND*’s variation of the story (as well as that of *The Distribution of ‘Cró’ and ‘Díbad’*) departs from the doctrine of *SM* significantly. For the relevant section of *Cáin Fúithirbe*, see [35] of Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 289-90, with comments on 60; part of this section is found in Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 359. For the relevant section of *Mellbretha*, see Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 357, translation that of Daniel A. Binchy, ed. and tr., ‘*Mellbretha*’, *Celtica* 8 (1968), 144-54, at 144; see discussion in Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 84. For the relevant section of *The Distribution of ‘Cró’ and ‘Díbad’*, see Kevin Murray, ed. and tr., ‘A Middle-Irish Tract on *cró* and *díbad*’, in Alfred P. Smyth, ed., *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin 2000), 251-60, at 252; see comments in Qiu, *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 59, and Breatnach, *A Companion*, 361 note 7. For the relevant section of *BND*, see [36] of Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 291-2, with comments on 61.

<sup>176</sup> Thus far *SM* is matched by the account of *Cáin Fúithirbe*’s establishment; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 359-60.

reached which was never before attained in the Christian era prior to it. The present, as in Rufinus, is the best of times, or at least, no longer lacks any of the means of being so. In this, The Prologue seems to see itself as describing a parallel conclusion to that which resulted from the upward trajectory of the events recounted by Rufinus in his *HE*. Neither Constantine, nor Theodosius I, the last emperor Rufinus mentions, promulgated a total system of Christian law. This would await Theodosius II, the eponymous promulgator of *Codex Theodosianus*.<sup>177</sup> The chronology of Muirchú's *Vita*, in which we find the kernel of *SM*'s more developed account,<sup>178</sup> would make Theodosius II Patrick's older contemporary, up until about twenty years before Patrick's own death.<sup>179</sup> The idea that Patrick's mission was during the reign of Theodosius II is fairly standard, also appearing in '*The Chronicle of Ireland*'<sup>180</sup> and the *Vita tripartita Sancti Patricii*,<sup>181</sup> among other places. Moreover, *The Chronicle of Ireland* goes on to identify AD 438 as the year in which the *SM* was promulgated,<sup>182</sup> making its promulgation exactly simultaneous with that of the *Codex Theodosianus*.<sup>183</sup> However, the significance of the exactness of their synchronicity is as yet unclear, due to the fact that the year in which

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<sup>177</sup> Theodor Mommsen and Paul Martin Meyer, eds., *Theodosiani libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes* (Berlin 1905); Pharr Clyde, tr., *The Theodosian Code and Novels and Sirmondian Constitutions*, The Corpus of Roman Law 1 (Princeton 1952).

<sup>178</sup> On which, see Chapter 2, page 95, incl. note 91.

<sup>179</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii* I.viii.2; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', ed.72 and tr.73: 'pape Caelestini urbis Romae episcopi, qui tunc tenebat sedem apostolicam quadragesimus quintus a sancto Petro apostolo . . . ? (=Pope Celestine, the bishop of Rome, who was then occupying the apostolic see as the forty-fifth successor of St. Peter the apostle . . .).

<sup>180</sup> For the text and translations of the relevant items in the *Annals of Ulster* [years 431 and 432] and the *Chronicum Scottorum* [year 432], see Nicholas Evans, ed. and tr., *The Present and the Past in Early Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge 2010), 127, with further discussion and references at 14, 127-34, esp. 130, where he notes that the items on Palladius and Patrick are the only ones which 'are linked to the sequences of papal and imperial entries'. For a translation of the relevant item, as it is thought to have stood in the earlier '*Chronicle of Ireland*' (covering the years 431-911) which lies behind these later chronicles, and references, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, tr., *The Chronicle of Ireland*, Translated Texts for Historians 44 (Liverpool 2006), 63-4, incl. note 1 on page 64: 'The kalends of January, AD 432. Patrick, i.e. the archbishop, came to Ireland and began to baptize the Irish in the ninth year of Theodosius II, in the first year of the episcopacy of Xistus, 42nd bishop of the Roman Church, in the fourth year of the reign of Lóegaire son of Niall'. Note here that the *Chronicle of Ireland* seems to have placed the writing of *SM* in AD 438; for further discussion of the *Chronicle of Ireland* and the Annals, see Chapter 4, pages 238-40.

<sup>181</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint* (London 1887), ed.32 [lines 22-4] and tr.33 'Uíif. mbliadna flatha Tethos tanicc Patraic, u. fer .xl. a August' (=Patrick came in the eighth year of the reign of Theodosius, the forty-fifth from Augustus).

<sup>182</sup> Charles-Edwards, tr., *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 65.

<sup>183</sup> *Codex Theodosianus* was published on February 15<sup>th</sup> of AD 438; John E. Matthews, *Laying Down the Law: A Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven and London 2000), 7.

the *Codex Theodosianus* was promulgated is not present *The Chronicle of Ireland*, or, it would seem, any of the annalistic authorities on which it draws.<sup>184</sup>

Mere contemporaneity is not, of course, necessarily of historiographical significance. It would not have any significance at all for anyone who was skeptical that history had an order, or who thought that its order did not transcend traceable links of influence between societies in any way. However, we have already seen that the medieval Irish writers we have been considering, following both Rufinus and the Latin Doctors, understood world history to unfold through three or four successive revelatory ages, i.e. that at least in as far as forms of revelation are concerned, history is a kind of progress in which the same kind of things tend to happen at the same times and lesser institutions are succeeded through being assimilated by and built upon by greater institutions.<sup>185</sup> This historiographical tendency to see roughly contemporary events as parallel instantiations of the same moment in a universal historical process would only be further strengthened by the synchronisms of Biblical figures with contemporary non-Biblical figures in Jerome's well-known translation of Eusebius' *Chronicon*.<sup>186</sup> For such a view of history, Patrick's apparent contemporaneity with Theodosius II could not fail to be of the highest significance.<sup>187</sup> Patrick would not of course have needed to be associated with the time of Theodosius II in order to be seen as a comparable lawgiver to Ireland.

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<sup>184</sup> Prosper, Marcellus, Bede, etc. In this regard, Isidore's *Etymologiae* is notable. He certainly finds the *Codex Theodosianus* significant enough to conclude his section on the originators of laws in Book V; *Etym.* V.i.7; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117. Nevertheless, he does not make any mention of it in the chronicle which concludes Book V; *Etym.* V.xxxix.37; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 133.

<sup>185</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 79-83.

<sup>186</sup> See page 191 above. These synchronisms would have also been indirectly known through their Isidorean (and eventually Bedan) mediations. However, as we shall see, this is in the context of a less optimistic appraisal of pre-Apocalyptic history. This is not to suggest that the view of history in question here only exists insofar as it is ignorant of them. However, if known, such a view would indicate that Rufinean historiography was more authoritative for the author in question.

<sup>187</sup> A late Middle Irish poem, beginning 'Imarcaig sund ar gach saíd' provides a good example of this historiographical approach at work; Peter Smith, ed. and tr., 'Irish Synchronistic Poem about Emperors & Kings', *Peritia* 22-3 (2011-2), 107-48, ed. at 14 and tr. at 129: '5. Teothosius, fa thrén tair, / darb ainm 'Impire in Domain', / acus Laegaire ria lind / ina aedaire d'Éirind. / 6. Dá airdríg in aigne buic, / na trémse tháinic Pátraic / co port na Fóbla i fríth blad / d'fóca a holec, do díth deman' (=5. Theodosius—he was strong in the East—whose title was 'Emperor of the World', and Laegaire during his period [was] sheperd of Ireland. 6. Two over-kings of the tender advocate, in their period Patrick came to Ireland—in which was found renown—to banish her evil-doers, to slaughter demons). My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle for this reference.

But certainly this could only have encouraged the tendency - which we find already in Muirchú's *Vita*, where he is consistently associated with Mosaic imagery<sup>188</sup> - to portray him as the one who, in some manner, established the form that Irish law would have for the remainder of time.

It appears impossible to determine definitively whether it was in part Patrick's apparent contemporaneity with Theodosius II that made it necessary for him to be the central figure in the story about how the relationship of pre-Christian natural law with Church law came to be authoritatively established, or whether this contemporaneity simply added further significance to already existing accounts of him in this role. Whatever the case, this correspondence between Patrick and Theodosius II in such a historiographical context would have the tendency to make the legal results of Patrick's lawgiving the Irish counterpart to (and perhaps the equal of) the *Codex Theodosianus*, and The Prologue envisions *SM* as the comprehensive result of Patrick's legal activity. This situation is the most explicit in the later version of The Prologue found in *CIH* 1650.1-1657.9., at 1650.12, where, as a part of a traditional question and answer schema at the beginning of a work (regarding its *tempus*, *persona*, and *locus*), we are reminded that the *SM* was composed during the reigns of Lóegaire and Theodosius II.<sup>189</sup>

It is uncertain how much or little this correspondence meant to the authors of the other extant versions of The Prologue, since they do not comment on it. Yet the implicit temporal context of *SM*, if assumed, does indeed seem to help illuminate a comment present in Carey's critical edition of the text, namely the injunction that no human judge 'of the Gaels' (*do Gaedelib*) can undo anything found in *SM*.<sup>190</sup> This would appear to mean that *SM* is thought to be authoritative for Ireland in the same way that other comparable laws are for other *imperii*, or in other words, as the *Codex Theodosianus* is for those understood to belong to the Roman Empire. The subsequent promulgation of

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<sup>188</sup> Carey, 'The Two Laws', 12. On the tendency of Patrick to be portrayed as a second Moses in early Irish literature generally, see Hennig, 'The Tradition of Moses', *passim*.

<sup>189</sup> Breatnach, ed. and tr., *A Companion*, 356.

<sup>190</sup> *PSM* §8; Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.12 and tr.19: 'Is í trá in cháin Pátraic. Iss ed nád cumaic nach breithem doennae do Gaedelaib do t[h]aithbiuch, nach ní fogaba i Senchus Már' (=This is then Patrick's law. No human judge of the Gaels can undo anything which he may find in the *Senchas Már*).

Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis*<sup>191</sup> in the early sixth century might raise some doubts as to whether a seventh- or eighth-century audience could see the *Codex Theodosianus* as having the same finality as is claimed for *SM* here. But here we must bear in mind that the *Corpus iuris civilis* seems to have gone almost unnoticed in the West prior to the High Middle Ages,<sup>192</sup> and only then did it finally usurp the authority and influence the *Codex Theodosianus* had enjoyed to that point, both in itself, and through the mediation of *Lex Romana Visigothorum* and the *Breviary of Alaric*.<sup>193</sup> In sum, *SM*'s purported simultaneity with the *Codex Theodosianus*, to whatever degree it became an explicit or implicit factor for the authors of The Prologue's respective versions, places still further emphasis on the sense that, upon the propagation of *SM*, Ireland had entered into a new and superior sub-stage of the history of revelation (not yet reached by the point of time which concludes Rufinus' account), in which the political potential of the Gospel was for the first time fully realised in legal and institutional form. Again, this would, for The Prologue, be a stage in which natural and ecclesiastical modes of revelation had decisively brought about the perfection of the other.<sup>194</sup> Whereas, according to the more conservative position of *SM* itself, it would be a stage in which the natural mode of revelation had now been decisively assimilated to the revelations which belong to the Church alone, and thus made more truly itself in the process.<sup>195</sup> Either way, this

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<sup>191</sup> Paul Krüger, ed., *Codex Iustinianus* (Berlin 1877); Fred H. Blume *et al*, tr., *The Codex of Justinian*, 3 vols. (Oxford 2016).

<sup>192</sup> For the sparse evidence of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*' influence in the Latin West in the Early Middle Ages, see Charles Radding and Antonio Ciaralli, *The Corpus Iuris Civilis in the Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston 2007), 35-65. For the rediscovery of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* in the eleventh-century and the subsequent growth of scholarship on it, see Radding and Ciaralli, *The Corpus Iuris Civilis in the Middle Ages*, 67ff.

<sup>193</sup> Dafydd Walters, 'From Benedict to Gratia: The Code in Medieval Ecclesiastical Authors', in Jill Harries and Ian Wood, eds., *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (London 1993), 200-216, esp. 200: 'Gratian's *Decretum* or *Decreta* (more properly his *Concordia Discordantium Canonum* (c.1140) not only marks the transition from the *ius antiquum* of the canonists to the *ius novum*, it also brings an end to the practice of citing the Theodosian Code. Gratian, or his earliest redactors, followed Ivo of Chartres in substituting texts from the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* of Justinian for those from *Lex Romana Visigothorum* which earlier western compiler of canon law collections had used'. Ian Wood, 'Introductory Note' and 'The Code in Merovingian Gaul', in Harries and Wood eds., *The Theodosian Code*, 159-160 and 161-77, esp. 160: 'It was not until the Investiture dispute that the legal compilations of Justinian came to take precedence in the West over their Theodosian counterpart'.

<sup>194</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 139-46.

<sup>195</sup> Despite the fact that they are demonstrably influenced by The Prologue to *SM*, *AG* and *A9* more or less return to this position. See Chapter 2, pages 147-51.

historical manifestation of natural law, and those who maintain it and prophesy by it, never had it so good.

### **The Historiography of the *Bretha Nemed* tradition**

Of course, this is not the view which we found in *AM*, where the ideal ruler's knowledge and expression of natural law is envisaged as being fully articulable by a pre-Christian judge, without any evident deficiency which would require subsequent ecclesiastical correction. However, we should not then assume that this indicates a view of history which is necessarily in conflict with Rufinean triumphalism. It need not signify that the knowledge of the practice of natural law has been declining from earlier times. Nor is it certainly in contradiction to the idea that the capacity to know and maintain natural law has been increasing over time. All it tells us for certain is that, unlike *SM*, its conciliation with ecclesiastical law neither involves nor requires any correction of it. This is also what we found in *BND*, with which *AM* is often associated.<sup>196</sup> In *BND*'s account of Patrick's role in the establishment of the current state of Irish law, we saw that he and Dubthach are said to have done no more than 'sanctify and renew' the 'Law of Honour' (*Cáin Enech*), which 'was made by the kings and the poets of Ireland since the beginning of the world'.<sup>197</sup> No mention of any emendation is made. Nor will this law, as it stands, ever become obsolete. We are, on the contrary, informed that it will last until Doomsday.

If neither secular nor ecclesiastical authorities of the Christian era contribute anything to the actual content of natural law, as it was articulated by ancient authorities, it might

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<sup>196</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 165 note 315, 171-2.

<sup>197</sup> *BND* [*CIH* 1111.12-18] = [59] in Qiu, ed. and tr., *Narratives in Early Irish Law Tracts*, 299-300: 'in Chāin Enech so thrá doruirmhisiom, do rónadh la rīoghuibh, ⁊ filedhoibh Éreann ó thosach domhain, ro naomhadh ⁊ ro nuaidhgedh la Pádraicc mac Calpruinn ⁊ la Dubhthach macu Lughair an file in aimsir Laogaire meic Néill, ⁊ im-deisidh la fearaibh Éreann a beith gan díol gan diobhadh go bráth, cidh idir chríochaibh imdegaibh airm imba díles do chách colann a chéle do ghuin. Niba díles a aighidh do aoir; amhail asbeir i mbainbhrethaibh Uin meic Aimh' (=This *Cáin Enech* then that we have mentioned, it was made by the kings and / the poets of Ireland since the beginning of the world; it was sanctified and it was renewed by Patrick son of Calpurnius and by Dubthach macu Lugair the poet in the time of Lóegaire son of Níall, and it was agreed upon by the people of Ireland that it should be without discharging [and] without extinction until Doomsday, even between mutually hostile territories, where it would be legitimate for anyone to wound the body of another, it would not be legitimate to satirise his face, as it says in the white judgements of On mac Aim).

seem to suggest that the natural prophetic capacity, which is the basis of knowledge of this law to begin with, is then thought to have diminished from earlier times. This would be a perfectly valid interpretation were we to consider this story in isolation from the rest of the *Bretha Nemed*. However, when listing this natural prophetic capacity (*imbas*) among the other qualifications of the *filid*, it offers no more indication<sup>198</sup> that there is any danger of this qualification making membership in the poetic hierarchy unattainable or its existence unsustainable than does *SM*.<sup>199</sup> In which case, the story of Patrick in *BND* seems to have more to do with a sense of the integrity of the natural knowledge possessed by *filid* and other *roscaid*-capable judges, than it does with a pessimistic sense about present reception and practice of it. While a belief in the fundamental integrity of the natural knowledge of proto-Christian authorities could much more easily function as a part of a pessimistic view of history than what we found in *De XII*, *SM*, and especially The Prologue to *SM*, there is no definable challenge to Rufinean optimism in the form this belief takes here.

### **The Historiography of *Bretha Nemed* Commentary**

The commentary tradition on the *Bretha Nemed* and the literature associated with it are perhaps a somewhat different matter. As Carey has shown, beginning in the late Old Irish period, there is a tendency for commentators who engaged with the *BND*'s description of the qualifications of a *filid*, particularly those, it seems, under the direct or indirect influence *Sanas Cormaic*'s treatment of the subject, to ascribe a greater variety

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<sup>198</sup> *BN[T]* IV, lines 4-5 [= *CIH* 2219.16-8]; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Uraicecht*, 36: 'Imus for-osnam, dicedul do cenbuib, cedul n-anmuin cethirriach cato cach suad.' (=O wealthy mighty Morand, tell me he how the power of every lawfully established nemed is estimated, for it is on the basis of privileges that every upright lawful skilled person is chosen(?). Great knowledge which illuminates', extempore chanting, the singing of anmain of four varieties are what confer dignity on a sage). Similarly, *BND* [*CIH* 1114.41-1115.2]; Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Three Things Required', 44-5: 'Áirdemh uaisleamh anamhain, / imba ceithre ree righter. // Ad-sloinnn airdnemhídh iomhais, / aroslaicthe dlighedh / dicheadal docanar / do cholla cennaibh. / Gach úadh ní dligheadh derméin, / déach sgeo feadha: / slan sáoi rodasuidesttar' (=Loftiest, noblest is *anamain*, / when four varieties are composed. / A chant which is recited / extemporaneously / characterises the exalted privilege of *imbas*, / which opens up entitlements. / He should not forget the requirement of every metre / of syllable and letter: / sound is the sage who has set them in place).

<sup>199</sup> The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) §4; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *The Early Irish Law Text 'SM'*, ed.4 and tr.5: 'Is i Senchas Már ro airled comdíre do rí 7 epscop 7 águ recho litre 7 suid fíled di-chain di chennaib, for-osnai imbas . . .' (=It is in *Senchas Már* that the same compensation has been determined for a king and a bishop and a pillar of the law of Scripture and a master poet who chants extempore, whom inspiration illuminates . . .).

of prophetic powers to *filid* than we can find in such earlier texts as are extant.<sup>200</sup> One of these is the ability to divine the identity or history of dead animals or people by no more than their corpse or bones.<sup>201</sup> Even one of the more practical qualifications for poets came to be reinterpreted as having a mantic significance not at all evident in the *Bretha Nemed* itself. Where the *Bretha Nemed* states that a poet must be capable of composing ‘extemporaneously’ (*di chennaib*),<sup>202</sup> a Middle Irish commentator takes this term to mean, among other things, a specific kind of ritual chanting which causes hills to surrender their treasures, or reveal their *dindsenchas*.<sup>203</sup> It could be tempting for an unwary reader to see this tendency as evidence that the *Bretha Nemed* tradition was coming to be interpreted in a way that is influenced by the progressive view of history found in *De XII, SM*, The Prologue and others, and which seems not to be present in the *Bretha Nemed* itself. But we must not confuse an escalation over time in the way that the capabilities and the status of poets are perceived, with the perception that contemporary poets are themselves, because of the establishment of the Church, superior in the performance of their vocation to their predecessors. These are entirely different matters. I know of no evidence to suggest the latter view in any instance where these additional prophetic powers are seen in a favourable light. These texts, like the *Bretha Nemed* itself, remain highly ambiguous as to whether any real difference is understood to exist between the way that poets functioned before Patrick and how they came to function after.

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<sup>200</sup> Carey, ‘The Three Things Required’, *passim*.

<sup>201</sup> Carey, ‘The Three Things Required’, 47-8, 55-6. *Sanas Cormaic* is notable for such stories. For the story how Lugaid comes to know the lost history of a lap-dog by putting his poet’s staff on its head; see Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic*, Y 323; Russell, tr., ‘Poets, Power and Possessions’, 33-4. For other similar examples, see Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic*, Y 883, 1018;

<sup>202</sup> Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Three Things Required’, 45, esp. note 22.

<sup>203</sup> *UB II* [*CIH 552.3*]; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Three Things Required’, 54: ‘Dícedal do cennaib .i. adhþal-cantain do cennaib na tulach go tabraid a n-íofailghí airgid dó nó co roinnisidh a n-indsencas . . .’ (= Díchetal di chennaib, i.e., great chanting to the tops of the hills so that they give their silver treasures to him, or so that he may relate their *dindsenchas* . . .). *UB II* is from a ‘text on the seven grades of the the *filid*, deriving from *UBc* and *MV II*’; Breatnach, *A Companion*, 25. Its contents are described in Breatnach, *Uraicecht*, 7-13. This is an important point of comparison for *Acallam na Senórach*, where one of Patrick’s primary concerns is getting places to give up their treasures and *dindsenchas*; Stokes, ed., ‘*Acallamh na Senórach*’, *passim*; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders*, *passim*. Further Middle Irish interpretations of ‘dícedal do cennaib’ are described in Carey, ‘The Three Things Required’, 54ff.



However, there are also instances where these additional prophetic powers (and in one extreme instance, any kind of prophetic powers at all)<sup>204</sup> are not seen as part of what warrants a poet's full honour-price, but are taken to be prohibited by Patrick, on account of their inseparability from the pagan invocation of demons. Examples of this position seem to begin, more or less,<sup>205</sup> with *Sanas Cormaic*. There the term 'imbas', which we have seen earlier texts use to describe the inspired poetic knowledge of natural law, comes to be numbered among the forms of inspiration that are deemed inseparable from the invocation of devils. Whereas, 'díchetal do chennaib', which had been used to describe the need for poets to be capable of spontaneous performance, takes the place of 'imbas' in describing the form of poetic inspiration which continues to be cultivated in the Christian era, its use having been confirmed by Patrick.<sup>206</sup> Where this polemic obtains, we are indeed dealing with a story that is in true harmony (barring that one extreme example) with *Córus Bésgnai's* (*SM* 8) triumphalist vision of Patrick as a reformer and perfecter of the practice of natural law, although it is by no means a necessary outcome of that vision. And even in regard to this extreme example, it is not,

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<sup>204</sup> Middle Irish commentary on The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) [*CIH* 348.29-349.24]; Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Three Things Required', 57: 'Ro indarb Patraic immorro an treide-so onaib filedaib in tan ro cretset, uair anidan, ar ni denta teinm læga na imus forosna gin udbairt do deib idal ocaib . . . Ro facaib acu iar sin genealage fer nErenn 7 aisti cach airchetaill 7 duili sluinnti 7 duile feda 7 scelugud co laidib . . . et brethemnus firon a corus a cerde, amal rogab: 'A ro chet, a ra clais, a ro corad'. Ro facaib in sin ocna filedaib; 7 adubairt Patraic nach catu forfogain doib a nErinn in tan dognitis a treidi remepertaidd, a tabairt doib iarum; ar is ferr an ro gabsat oldas an ro threicset' (=Patrick forbade those three things to the filid when they were converted, for they were impure; for neither *teinm laedo* nor *imbas forosnai* was performed without offering to idols . . . He left to them after that the genealogies of the men of Ireland, and the metre of every poem, and the lore of names and letters, and storytelling and lays . . . and true judgements in the canon of their art: 'what had been sung, what had been heart, what had been established'. He left (all) that with the *filid*; and Patrick said that every honour which they had had in Ireland when they used to perform those three things aforesaid should be accordigned to them thereafter; for what had been taken up was better than what they had abandoned'.

<sup>205</sup> *Sanas Cormaic's* negative view of 'imbas' may have come from the entry for the word 'imbas' in the glossary *Dúil Dromma Cetta*, where it is said to involve a ritual in which demons are invoked; Carey, 'The Three Things Required', 48-9. For discussion of the relevant section of *Dúil Dromma Cetta*, see Paul Russell, 'Notes on Words in Early Irish Glossaries', *Études celtiques* 31 (1995), 198-204, at 198ff.

<sup>206</sup> Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic* Y, 756; Carey, tr., 'The Three Things Required', 48: 'atorbe Patraic anisin, 7 an teinm laoda 7 fotroirgell a briathar na bad nimhe na talman nach aon dogenai, ar is diultad bathis. dicetal docennaib immorro fodracbad son i corus cerdæ, ar is soas fodera son ni ecen audbairt do demnaib oca, acht aisneis do cennaib a chnamae fochedoir' (=Patrick rejected that [*imbas forosnai*], and also *teinm laedo*, and pledged his word that whoever performed it would belong neither to heaven nor earth, for it is a rejection of baptism. *Díchetal do chennaib*, however, was left in the canon of art. For inspiration is the cause of that; no offering to demons is necessary at it, but an instantaneous recital from the ends of his bones). Note that the word that Carey justifiably translates here as 'inspiration' (i.e. *soas*), presumably based on context, is the same word which is used to describe the highest cauldron in the *Caldron of Poesy*; see Chapter 2, pages 125ff.

in the first instance, particularly surprising that we find a version of this understanding of the matter in a section of Middle Irish commentary on The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1). However, its contention - that *all* forms of uniquely poetic inspiration, by any name, are not only separable from the practice of poetry, but necessarily so – is in fundamental conflict with the doctrinal of natural law that The Introduction to *SM* (*SM* 1) and *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) share with the texts we have been looking at thus far. Its refusal to recognise any ongoing role for inspiration that is not specifically ecclesiastical in character shows the influence of the more standard doctrine of natural law which we observed in the Latin Doctors.<sup>207</sup>

The apparent influence of *SM*'s triumphalist view of history on the *Bretha Nemed* commentary tradition seems to take a more affirmative form in the passage from *UB* we were looking at in the previous chapter,<sup>208</sup> and in the subsequent texts influenced by its understanding of kingship. Where the judgement of a ruler is defined as presiding over both the *roscaid*-based judgements of the poets and the scripturally-based judgements of the Church, we are clearly dealing with a political ideal that could not be conceived of as achievable prior to the arrival of the Church. In Chapter 2, it was suggested that the Dubthach of The Prologue to *SM* was comparable to the Constantine of Eusebius' original version of *HE* (i.e. more than the Constantine of the Latin version known in Ireland at the time) in being conceived of as transcending the difference between natural and ecclesiastical forms of revelation,<sup>209</sup> and that the role of the ruler, as conceived in *UB*, and in *Scél Néill Frossaig* following it, was comparable to it in this. But in this comparison, the *UB* and *Scél Néill Frossaig* are surely closer to Eusebius than The

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<sup>207</sup> See also *MV* II, where *imbas forosnai* seems no longer to be poetic inspiration, but a literary genre. This does not in itself prove that some form of inspiration was not seen as necessary to poetry, but given the fact that 'imbas' is most often the word that is used to describe this, it seems to point in that direction; *MV* II §91; Thurnysen, ed., 'Mittelirische Verslehren', 49-50; Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Three Things Required', 52: 'Is hí dano foglaim na hochtmaide bliadna .i. fiscomarca filed .i. duili berla 7 clethchor choem 7 reicne roscadach 7 laíde .i. tenm laída 7 immac forosnai 7 dichetal do chennaib na tuaithe 7 dínshencha 7 primscéla Hérend olchena fria n-aisnéis do ríghaib 7 flaithib 7 daghoimib' (=These are the studies of the eighth year, that is, a fili's catechism (?): that is *dúili bérla* and *clethchorchoem* and *reicne rosadach* and the lays (*laíde*), that is *teinm laedo* and *imbas forosnai* and *díchetal do chennaib na tuaithe*; and *dindshencha* and the chief tales of Ireland besides, to recite them to kings and princes and nobles'. See further discussion of this and similar features of *MV* III in Carey, 'The Three Things Required', 52-3.

<sup>208</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 151-3.

<sup>209</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 144-6, esp. note 260.

Prologue is itself, given that they, like Eusebius, are speaking of a sovereign as fulfilling this role, rather than a poet, an aspiration far beyond the dreams and plots of the Pharaonic Loegaire of Muirchú's *Vita, Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) and The Prologue, and beyond even the most idealised portayals of Conchobar and Cormac, being, as they are, too early in historical time. In which case, even if, as seems likely, the kingship ideology of *UB* owes this transcendent aspect of its conception of kingship to the influence of The Prologue, it is in *UB* that the triumphalist Eusebian doctrine of history-as-progress and the Eusebian doctrine of the sovereign as someone whom the secular and ecclesiastical, the natural and the supernatural are united, are first fully synthesised into a single theory, albeit due, it would seem, to the interactions of many mediations, including Rufinus' version of *HE*, rather than direct knowledge of Eusebius' original vision of Consantintine.

### **A Fresh Dilemma**

Relative to the *Bretha Nemed*, *SFF* is another interesting case. At first glance, it seems to attribute an even greater self-sufficiency to natural law and its practitioners than the story of Patrick in *BND*. Like *BND* it claims that the natural law, such as it was manifest to the righteous in pre-Christian times, shall remain in force in Ireland for all time.<sup>210</sup> Yet, in this instance, Patrick is not involved in the authoritative confirmation of the content of this law. This is done by Cormac, one of the righteous pre-Christians in question.<sup>211</sup> The natural law is therefore both framed and its contents appraised and ratified well before the establishment of the Church in Ireland. In all this, Cormac is himself as clear an exemplar as we could ask of the doctrine of *fír flathemon*. The justice of his enactment of these judgements is revealed both in the flourishing state of his kingdom<sup>212</sup> and in the perfection of his body.<sup>213</sup> However, the degree to which it is

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<sup>210</sup> *SFF* §4; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.186 and tr.204.

<sup>211</sup> *SFF* §80; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.202 and tr.221. See discussion in Chapter 2, pages 147-8.

<sup>212</sup> *SFF* §1; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.185 and tr.203: 'Ba lan in bith do gach maith ria lind in rig sin. Bai mes 7 clas 7 murthoradh. Báí sídh 7 saime 7 subha. Ní bai guin na díberg fa ré sin, *acht* cach 'na n-inadh duthaigh fodhen' (=At the time of that king the world was filled with every good thing. There were mast and fatness and seaproduce. There were peace and ease and happiness. There was neither murder, nor robbery at that season, but every one (abode) in his own proper place).

<sup>213</sup> *SFF* §3; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Irish Ordeals', ed.185-6 and tr.203-4: 'Alaind tainic Cormac isin mór/dháil sin, or ní tainic samhail a dhealba son *acht* Conaire mac *Etarsceoil*, nó *Conchobar* mac

thought still to be possible to uphold the ‘natural truth’ (*firindi aignidh*) of this law effectively in the present remains very unclear, seeing as its maintenance depends upon various ‘ordeals’ (*fír flatha*), mostly of extra-ecclesiastical origins, none of which seem to be thought extant at the time of *SFF*’s twelfth-century authorship.<sup>214</sup> A resignation that there has been precipitous decline in the present world’s capacity to maintain the natural law seems to be undeniably implicit.

This is a puzzling situation which, as such, requires more careful formulation as a problem. In Chapter 1, we saw that there was a tendency in early Irish literature to assume a symmetry between the political embodiment of natural law and the verbal embodiment of natural language of a sort that was suggested, but not quite achieved, by Isidore. That is to say, we saw that they understood the relative identity or difference between the members of the secular political hierarchies and the political roles they had, as such, to be directly revealed through physical manifestations. We have seen now that this refinement of Isidore’s political and linguistic theory does indeed seem to rely, to a great extent, on Rufinus’ version of Eusebius’ *HE* for its intelligibility as Christian doctrine. However, sometimes the early Irish sources have been closer to the doctrine of Eusebius’ original version of *HE* than can be accounted for by Rufinean reworking of it which would have been available to them. This proximity to Eusebius and to his Philonic exemplar, where it occurs, has most often seemed to be best accounted for with reference to the influence of Josephus, and various apocryphal sources on the Cassianising understanding of natural law we have discussed in Chapter 2, where the natural law is conceived of as something revealed by the Holy Spirit, rather than a deficient grasp of ethics that is implicit in every soul, and where the depth and kind of

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*Cathbada, nó Ængus mac in Dagda. Ba derscaightech tra ecosc Cormaic isin dail sin. . . Is eisium iarum cruthach cæm cen ainimh, gen athais. Dar-let ba fros do nemthondaibh rolad ina chind. Dar-let ba dual partaingi a bhél. Ba gilithir sneachta a chorp særdenmach. Ba casmail fri forcli cailli no sían sléibi a gruaidh. Cosmail fri bug[h]a a suili. Cosmail fri taitineam ngormlaindi a mailghi 7 a abraid’ (=Splendidly did Cormac enter that great meeting, for excepting Conaire son of Etarscéil, or Conchobar son of Cathbad, or Oengus son of the Dagda, his like in beauty had never come. Distinguished, indeed, was Cormac’s appearance in that meeting . . . He was, moreover, shapely fair, without blemish, without disgrace. Thou wouldst deem that a shower of pearls had been cast into his head. Thou wouldst deem that his mouth was a cluster of rowan-berries. Whiter than snow was his nobly-built body. His cheek was like a forest-forcele or a mountain-foxglove. Like blue-bells were his eyes: like the sheen of a dark-blue blade his eyebrows and eyelashes).*

<sup>214</sup> *SFF* §11-77; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.188-202 and tr.206-220.

one's own knowledge of that revelation is thought to be conditioned by one's vocational progress in the scientific and ethical knowledge that the Holy Spirit has previously revealed, either to oneself or others. But now, in *SFF*, we have at hand a situation where we have to account for a departure from some Eusebian doctrines that were indeed known through Rufinean mediation, doctrines which, in that mediation, are bound up with other Eusebian doctrines that continue to be maintained. More specifically, we must now determine how the Eusebian expectation that the political enactment of the natural law is directly revealed through physical signs has come, at least in some cases, to be detached from its embodiment in an optimistic view of history-as-unequivocal-progress. The answer to this enigma will lie in the direction of Augustine. Whereas our initial task in Chapter 2 was to distinguish the understanding of natural law which predominates in early Irish literature from that of Augustine, it now falls to us to assess what happens to that understanding when it comes to be interpreted through the expectations of Augustine's historiography.

PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND:  
NATURE, HIERARCHY AND INSPIRATION

2 Volumes

Volume 2

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Nature as the Correspondence between Representation and Reality.....	18
Chapter 2 Nature as Inspired Knowledge.....	73
Chapter 3 The Christian Era as the Apogee of Naturalness.....	174
Volume 2	
Chapter 4 The Christian Era as the Fading Away of Naturalness.....	223
Chapter 5 The Limits of Nature: <i>Metempsychosis</i> and <i>Metamorphosis</i> .....	301
Chapter 6 The Gods of the Sagas as the Mediators of Nature.....	372
Conclusion.....	409
Bibliography.....	421

## CHAPTER FOUR – THE CHRISTIAN ERA AS THE FADING AWAY OF NATURALNESS

### Introduction

It has now been mentioned several times that Augustine and Rufinus both share an understanding of history as a three-fold movement which progresses from lesser to greater forms of revelation. However, where this understanding is more or less representative of Rufinus' historiography as a whole, in Augustine, it is radically reinterpreted through its assimilation to another historiographical scheme of his own devising, in which the history of the world is divided into six ages. He would articulate this theory of 'The Six Ages of the World'<sup>1</sup> with varying emphases and degrees of detail throughout his life,<sup>2</sup> with the most important treatments being found in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos (DGCM)* I.xxiii-v<sup>3</sup> and *De civitate Dei (DCD)* X.xiv, XVI.xliii and XXII.xxx,<sup>4</sup> but its architecture remains fairly consistent throughout his works. Its fundamental basis is that the ages of creation, recounted at the beginning of *Genesis*, the ages of individual human life, and the ages of world history are all analogous to each other, so that knowledge of any one of these things amounts to insight into the others. Knowledge of the self is also a knowledge of history.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge of the symbolically

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory in the context of other enumerations of world- and life-ages, see Roderich Schmidt, 'Aetates Mundi: die Weltalter als Gliederungsprinzip der Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 47 (1955-6), 288-317; Auguste Luneau, *L'Histoire du salut chez les Église: la doctrine des âges du monde*, Théologie historique: Etudes publiées par les Professeurs de Théologie à l'Institut Catholique de Paris (Paris 1964); Paul Archambault, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World: A Study of Two Traditions', in *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes* 12 (1966), 193-228; Christian Gnllka, 'Aetas spiritalis': *Die Überwindung der natürlichen Altersstufen als Ideal frühchristlichen Lebens* (Bonn 1972); J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man* (Oxford 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Other significant treatments of this theme by Augustine include, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXII*, I.lviii.36-85; Almut Mutzenbecher, ed., *Augustinus: De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, CCSL 44A (Turnhout 1975), 105-7; Burrow, tr., *The Ages of Man*, 199-200. *De vera religione*, XXVI; K.-D. Daur and Joseph Martin, eds., *Augustinus: De doctrina christiana; De vera religione*, CCSL 32 (Turnhout 1962), 217-9; John H.S. Burleigh, tr., 'Of True Religion', in John H.S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia 1953), 249-9. *Sermo CCXVI; PL* 38, col.1076-82, at 1081. On these, see Luneau, *L'Histoire du salut*, 288.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothea Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, CSEL 91 (Vienna 1998), 104-14; Roland J. Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis: 'Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees' and 'On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book'* (Washington 1991), 83-90.

<sup>4</sup> Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 288, 548-50, 865-6; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 710, 1090-1.

<sup>5</sup> For example, *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14-15; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 104; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 84. *DCD* XVI.xliii.47-52 and XVI.xliii.73-7; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De*



veiled origins of existence is also a knowledge of the self, and so on.<sup>6</sup> Like such Christians as believed in seven equal ages of 1,000 years,<sup>7</sup> he says that from the birth,<sup>8</sup> or else the preaching,<sup>9</sup> of Christ onwards, we have been in the Sixth Age.<sup>10</sup> But contrary to them, he argues that these ages are of varying length, and that the Sixth Age, like old age in an individual human, is of an unknowable length.<sup>11</sup> The Fourth Age of the world, analogous to the age of mature youth in a person, is described as the king and ornament of all the ages, and is the time of King David and the kings that followed him.<sup>12</sup> This summit, as in human life, is followed by a decline into weakness and decrepitude, but a weakness in which, as earthly hope and vigour fail, the divine hope on which all the ages depend is revealed.<sup>13</sup> In *DGCM* this process ends in an eternal Seventh Age which

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*civitate Dei*, 550; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 710. See also, *DTR* LXVI.11-14; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 463; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 157.

<sup>6</sup> For example, *DGCM* I.xxv.43; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 112-4; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 89-90. For knowledge of history amounting to knowledge of the self, see *DCD* X.xiv.1-11; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 288; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 392.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent summary of the various early medieval orderings of time, their spheres of influence and relevant sources, with special reference to the contrast between Augustinian and Millennialist ‘Six Ages’ schemes, see James T. Palmer, ‘The Ordering of Time’, in Veronika Wiester *et al*, eds., *Abendländische Apokalyptik: Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit*, Kulturgeschichte der Apokalypse 1 (Berlin 2013), 605-18, at 607ff. For examples of early Irish millennialism, see *Commentarius in Epistolas catholicas Scotti Anonymi: Epistola I Iohannis*, XVIII; Robert E. McNally, ed., *Scriptores Hiberniae minores I*, CCSL 108B (Turnhout 1973), 40.70-41.79. *Anonymi in Matthaum* 17.1-6; Bengt Löfstedt, ed., *Anonymi in Matthaum*, CCCM 159 (Turnhout 2003), 147. For the eighth-century dating of this latter text, see J.F. Kelly, ‘A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries II’, *Traditio* 45 (1989-90), 393-434, at 412-3.

<sup>8</sup> *DCD* XXII.17, 19-21, 29-30; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 835-42, 856ff.; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1090-1. *DTR* X.39-40, LXVI.37; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 311, 464; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158). *Etym.* V.xxxviii.5; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 133).

<sup>9</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.40:1-2; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 108; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86: ‘Mane autem fit ex praedicatione evangelii per dominum nostrum Iesum Christum et finitur dies quintus, incipit sextus’ (=Morning came [i.e. of the Sixth Age] with the preaching of the Gospel by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the fifth day ended).

<sup>10</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.40; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 108-9; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86-7. *DCD* XVI.xliii.47-52, XXII.xxx.134-5; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 549, 865-6; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 709, 1091.

<sup>11</sup> *DGCM*. I.xxiv.42; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 112; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 89. *DCD* XXII.xxx.136-8; Dombart *et al*, ed., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 865-6; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1091.

<sup>12</sup> *DGCM*. I.xxiii.38; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 106-7; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 85. See also *DTR* X.24-6, LXVI.29-30, but esp. LXVI.393-415ff.; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 311, 463-4, but esp. 475-6ff.; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158, but esp. 171-2ff.

<sup>13</sup> See note 11 above. See also, *DTR* X.39-41, LXVI.37, 977-8, 997-1000; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 311, 464, 495-6; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158, 195-6.

commences with Christ's return and judgement.<sup>14</sup> However, in his later work on the theory, in *DCD*, Augustine no longer understands the Seventh Age to be the eternal culmination of the first Six, but the rest enjoyed by the righteous throughout the Six Ages<sup>15</sup> as they await the eternal Eighth Age, in which the whole created order will be revived and renewed, just as Christ was on the mystical Eighth Day of the creation week, the Sunday of his resurrection.<sup>16</sup> This development was fully integrated with Augustine's earlier and more systematic treatment of the subject in *DGCM* by Bede, in Books X and LXVI-XXI of his *De temporum ratione (DTR)*.<sup>17</sup> In all its permutations, it is, in sum, a view of history that is motivated by the ideals of Christian (and pagan Platonic)<sup>18</sup> ascetic discipline.<sup>19</sup> The natural goods of bodily perfection, understood to

<sup>14</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.41; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 110-1; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86-7.

<sup>15</sup> *DCD* XII.97ff.; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 864-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1090-1. See also *DTR* LXVII.39-53, LXXI.8-24; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 536-7, 542; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 240, 246-7.

<sup>16</sup> *DCD* XXII.xxx.141-8; Dombart et al, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 866; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1091. Darby downplays Augustine's importance in the formation of this notion, emphasizing the importance of Bede's role in synthesizing Augustine's comments on the ages of the world in *DCD* with those in *DGCM*; Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham 2012), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, *DTR* X.42-4, LXVI.46-7, LXXI *passim*; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 312, 464, 542-4; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 128, 246-9. Bede outlines this theory in a number of other places as well, notably, *De temporibus* XVI-XXII; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 600-11; Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, tr., *Bede: On the Nature of Things*, Translated Texts for Historians 56 (Liverpool 2010), 131. In *Genesim*, I.1093-224; Charles M. Jones, ed., *Bede: In Genesim*, CCSL 118A (Turnhout 1967), 35-9; Calvin B. Kendall, tr., *Bede: On Genesis*, Translated Texts for Historians 48 (Liverpool 2008), 100-5. For a thorough source-based description of the development of Bede's thought on this theme, see Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 65-91. However, some of his conclusions seem to suggest a neglect of the way Bede's theory operates within his more general understanding of time and eternity.

<sup>18</sup> One of the most important images for subsequent Platonic theories about the body believed always belong to the soul (as opposed to physical body), is that of the soul's 'chariot' (ὄχημα/okhēma). See *Phaedrus* 247b; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* II; Nehamas and Woodruff, tr., 'Phaedrus', 525. See also *Timaeus* 41e; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* IV; Zeyl, tr., 'Timaeus', 1254. Dodds still provides one of the best historical summaries of Platonic thinking regarding this pneumatic body of the soul (usually identified with the soul's imagination) and regarding the moral and ritual purifications of this body thought to be the necessary means of the soul's ascent to its divine causes; E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford 1933), 313-23. See also Abraham P. Bos, "'The Vehicle of the Soul' and the Debate of the Origin of this Concept', *Philologus* 151 (2007), 31-50. For a more recent and detailed discussion of how this works in a specific case, see Watson, 'Images of Unlikeness', 64-8. This understanding of the soul's body is, however, not strictly pagan. For example, Eriugena's insistence that the relative perdition or blessedness of the final state of a person lies strictly in the kind of imaginations (*phantasia*) their virtues and vices have formed in them, is, evidently, based on just such an identification of the soul's proper body with the imagination, likely mediated to him through the works of Origen; *Periphyseon* V.923C-984B, esp. 945B-946A, 948C-950D, 955A-C, 961D, 963B-C; Jeaneau, ed., *Periphyseon* V, 484-716; O'Meara, tr., *Periphyseon*, 597-669. For an overview Eriugena's understanding of the Last Judgement, see Daniel Heide, 'Ἀποκατάστασις: The Resolution of Good and Evil in Origen and Eriugena', *Dionysius* 33 (2015), 195-213, at 207-12.

have been more abundantly present in the earlier ages of human life and world history, while recognised as good, are denied in favour of the superior goods of spiritual perfection, decisively manifest in the present age,<sup>20</sup> in the hope of an eventual resurrection and glorification of both soul and body together, at the end of time.<sup>21</sup> The consequence of this is that the losses of old age in human life<sup>22</sup> and in the world's life, while experienced as real losses, are also seen as an opportunity for spiritual progress, since the loss of bodily excellence leaves little to distract it from more spiritual aims.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Here a saying of Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), as reported by Bloom serves as a useful summary of the basic principles of Patristic ascetic doctrine: 'Kill the flesh to acquire a body'; Antony Bloom, 'Body and Matter in Spiritual Life', in A.M. Allchin ed., *Sacrament and Image: Essays in the Christian Understanding of Man* (London 1967), 33-41, at 41. In Augustine, see, for example, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXL.14-16; Eligius Dekkers and Iohannes Fraipont, eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: Enarrationes in psalmos*, 3 vols., CCSL 38-40 (Turnhout 1956) III, 2036-7; corresponds to Psalm 141 in Edward B. Pusey, H. Walford and Charles Marriot, tr., *Expositions on the Book of Psalms by S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, 6 vols., Library of the Fathers 24, 25, 30, 32, 37, 39 (Oxford 1847-57) VI, 250-2.

<sup>20</sup> See references in note 13 above; also *DTR* X.39ff.; Jones, ed., *Bedaе opera didascalica*, 311-2; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> *DCD* XX.ivff., esp. xx, XXII.xiff., esp. xxx.141-5; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 703ff., esp.733, 777ff., esp. 866; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 927ff. esp. 935, 1049ff., esp.1091. Bede, *DTR* X.52-3, LXVI.45-7, LXVII.52-3, LXX.30-41, 83-5, LXXI, *passim*; Jones, ed., *Bedaе opera didascalica*, 312, 464, 536, 537, 542ff.; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158 and 244-9; here see especially, LXX.31-4: 'Cum autem peracto iudicio fuerit caelum nouum et terra noua, id est non alia pro aliis, sed haec ipsa per ignem innouata et quasi quadam resurrectionis uirtute glorificata claruerint . . .' (=But when there will be a new heaven and a new Earth after the Judgement which is not one [heaven and Earth] replacing another, but these very same ones [which] will shine forth, having been renewed by fire and glorified by the power of the Resurrection); LXXI.6-8: 'non auferens gloriam, quam exutae corporibus a suae quaeque egressionis tempore beata in requie perceperant, sed maiore illas gloria etiam corporum redditorum accumulans' (=He will not take from them the glory which they, released from their bodies, receive in blessed peace from the moment of their departure [from this life], but will heap upon them the even greater glory of their restored bodies).

<sup>22</sup> Cross and Hill both point to the significance of the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin wisdom-text, namely *De XII*, relative to just such an ascetic characterisation of the stages of human life, and also to the importance of this theme for understanding the historiographical idea of the old age of the world; J.E. Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm in Old English Literature', *Comparative Literature* 14.1 (Winter, 1962), 1-22, at 19; Thomas D. Hill, 'The Age of Man and the World in Old English *Guthlac A*', *The Journal of English and German Philology* 80 (1981), 13-21, at 16-7, 20. The passage under discussion is *De XII*, II-III; Hellmann, ed., *Pseudo-Cyprianus: De XII abusivis saeculi*, 43-7; Throop, tr., 'The Twelve Abuses', 117-19.

<sup>23</sup> See Augustine, *DGCM* I.xxiii *passim*, xxv.25-34; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 108-9, 113; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86-7, 90, where the sixth day is explicitly described along the lines of the subjugation of carnal (*carnalis*) to spiritual desires. Bede informs us that the Church 'labouring on behalf of God in the Six Ages of this world, anticipates the splendor of the Seventh [Age] of the coming Sabbath' whereas 'the reprobate are content merely with present happiness' (=in sex huius seculi pro Deo laborans aetatibus in septima sabbati future gloriam dedicationis exspectat . . . reprobi sola praesenti sunt felicitate contenti), present happiness, of course, being much more readily available in the youthful ages; *DTR* LXVI.109-12; Jones, ed., *Bedaе opera didascalica*, 466; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 161. See also, Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, I.lviii; *PL* 40, col. 43-4; Burrow, tr., *The Ages of Man*, 199-200, where the Sixth Age is described as a time in which 'exterior homo tanquam

The sense of rising progress, which is present in the three-age theory of history that Augustine holds in common with Rufinus, is thus, in his theory of The Six Ages, tempered by a simultaneous sense of growing loss.

It may seem surprising that this nostalgia for lost natural perfection could coexist with the teleological push toward the end of time which is also present in this understanding of history. But our bewilderment will persist only insofar as we lose sight of the ideal which is articulated by the Apocalypse as Augustine understands it. Were the eschatological expectation of temporal process to be for the soul's eventual escape of the prison-house of the body, for the liberation of spiritual goods from the humbler demands of natural goods,<sup>24</sup> then the enlightened, yet infirm, Sixth Age would be the its best typological representation, and would, no doubt, have been idealised accordingly. However, we have already found that Augustine's understanding of the content of the Church's aspiration is rather different. It lies, not in the escape of the incorporeal from the corporeal, the spiritual from the merely natural, but in their mutual glorification in the restoration of the whole created order at the end of time.<sup>25</sup> This is, therefore, why the Fourth Age is given a certain preeminence. For it is the Fourth Age, which, as the age of David, Solomon and the prophets, is intermediate between the ignorant vitality of the First Age<sup>26</sup> and the visionary infirmity of the Sixth, and, as the mature youth of the world,<sup>27</sup> is analogous to the age of the bodies of the resurrected saints in the world to

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senectute corrumpitur qui etiam vetus dicitur, et interior renovatur de die in diem' (=the exterior or 'old' man is wasted by old age, while the interior man is from day to day renewed). For a similar sentiment, see Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, VII.i.; *PL* 111, col. 185; Priscilla Throop, tr., *Hrabanus Maurus: 'De Universo': Words and Their Mystical Significance*, 2 vols. (Charlotte 2009) I, 195-6.

<sup>24</sup> As is the case in Gnostic forms of Christianity; see Douglas John Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*, Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi 6 (Louvain and Paris 2001), 42, 130-36, 144, 264, 449-50. For Augustine's explicit rejection of such a view, see *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXLI.15-19; Gori, ed., *Augustinus: Enarrationes in psalmos 141-150*, 95.5.43-9; [=Psalm 142 in] Pusey *et al*, tr., *Expositions on the Book of Psalms VI*, 273-9.

<sup>25</sup> See note 21 above.

<sup>26</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14-5, xxiv.42.5-14 and xxv.43.3-5; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 104, 111-12; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 84 and 88-89. *DCD* XV.ix, xxiii and XVI.xliii.73-7; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 465-6, 488-92, 550; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 609-10, 641, 710). *DTR* LXI.11-14; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 463; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 157.

<sup>27</sup> See note 12 above.

come,<sup>28</sup> that, of all the ages, is the most fitting image of the future conciliation of natural and spiritual goods which has come to have been hoped for clearly, for the first time, in the Six Age.<sup>29</sup>

From the perspective of the Sixth Age, all the former ages will be objects of nostalgia insofar as they, to varying degrees, enjoyed natural capacities which will not be known again prior to their restoration at the end of time.<sup>30</sup> But such nostalgia for the prior ages is not simply proportional to the degree a given age is thought to possess natural goods no longer present in the Sixth. If this was so the First Age, with its extremely long life-expectancy and its semi-divine personalities, would be idealised, rather than the Fourth.<sup>31</sup> Neither is it simply a question of how close a given age is to the Fourth's typological approximation of the eschatological hope most clearly known and desired in the Sixth. Since each world-age is linked to a day in the cumulative unfolding of the creation week, there is implicit sense that, like the stages of the creation week, each world-age manifests some part of the goodness of the providential unfolding of the

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *DCD* XXII.xiv-v; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus, De civitate Dei*, 833-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1054-6. This seems to have been a common belief. At least, I am not currently aware of any contrary opinions among the patristic writers or their medieval interpreters.

<sup>29</sup> Bede's direct statements about the Fourth Age, as the 'ruler' of the other ages of this world, are not as effusive as Augustine's. Yet he seems to go beyond Augustine on the Fourth Age's typological relationship to the Eighth in his emphasis on the significance of the Solomonic temple. For him, the Solomonic temple, alone of any development that he recounts in the world's history, is an image (*figuram*) of the way that every age is gathered up into the unity of the Eighth; *DTR* LXVI.402-8; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 476; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 172: 'Salomon filius David annis XL. Qui quarto regni sui anno, mense secundo templum domino aedificare coepit . . . quod in figuram universi temporis, quo in hoc saeculo Christi aedificatur ecclesia, quae in future perficitur, VII annis perfecit et septimo octauis annis mense dedicavit' (=Solomon, son of David [ruled] 40 years. In the fourth year of his reign and the seventh month, he began to build a Temple for the Lord . . . [The Temple] was finished in seven years, and dedicated in the seventh month of the eighth year, as a symbol of the totality of time in which the Church of Christ, which is made perfect in the future [age], is built up in this world). For a similar statement, see his *De templo* II.xviii.1-2, 8; David Hurst, ed., *Bede: De templo*, CSSL 119A (Turnhout 1969), 196-7, 200-201; Séan Connolly, tr., *Bede: On the Temple*, *Translated Texts for Historians* 21 (Liverpool 1995), 71-3, 76-7.

<sup>30</sup> For similar arguments regarding the Old English poem known as 'Guthlac A', without, however, a representative presentation of the Patristic sources through which this theme was mediated, see Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm'; Hill, 'The Age of Man and the World'.

<sup>31</sup> *DCD* XV.ix-x; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei*, 465-67; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 609-11. For Augustine's contention that the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6 are not fallen angels, but the righteous descendants of Seth, and that angelic lineage is not necessary to account for the proliferation of giants in the First Age, see *DCD* XV.xxii-iii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei*, 487-92; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 636-42. *DTR* X.7-8, LXVI.101-4; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 310, 466; Wallis, tr., *The Reckoning of Time*, 40, 160.

created order that is not present in any other stage of the process to which it belongs, a part, without which, the goodness of that order would be deficient and incomplete.<sup>32</sup> The Fourth Age may, of all the ages, be the best image of that which is to come at the end of all ages. However, it is also but one age among all of those that will be gathered up in the eternal unity to which it points.<sup>33</sup> As such, the union which the Fourth Age typologically represents is manifested in the other ages in ways that it cannot be by the

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<sup>32</sup> *DGCM* I.xxi.32.1-31; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 100-1; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 80-1; *Gen.* 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. Augustine notes that God calls the creation of each day ‘good’ (*bonum*), but that, in verse 31, he calls all the created things, created in all the days of creation, taken together as a totality, ‘very good’ (*valde bona*).

<sup>33</sup> See *DGCM* I.xvi.25-6; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 91-4; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 72-4 where we are told that the ‘*summa mensura summus numerus et summus ordo*’ (supreme measure, number and order) that is in God alone, is known through the ‘*mensuras et numeros et ordinem*’ (measures, number and order) of the creation, and that the seemingly insignificant aspects of the created order can reveal things about the supreme order that would not be known by us otherwise. In *DCD* such a doctrine is also present, but with emphasis on the other side of the resurrection: *DCD* X.14-5, XI. 4-31, XXII.18-30 *passim*; Dombart *et al.*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 288-9, 323-51, 373-85; Bettenson tr., *The City of God*, 392-3, 432-66, 815-66. The eternal state of the Eighth Age is described as the perfect experience and knowledge of God as ‘all in all’ (*omnia in omnibus* [XXII.18.38, 29.89, 30.2-3, 33, 114-5]). Even now, the goodness of any given feature of the created order necessarily corresponds to something in God’s own goodness (X.14-5, XI.24, 29-30), so that the ‘invisible things of God’, can, to some degree, be known by humans through such (XI.22). Yet it remains that any created good can also be distraction from the eternal reality that is symbolically manifest in it (X.14). However, in the Eighth Age, the human intellect will effortlessly see God ‘by means of bodies, in every body,’ (*per corpora in omni corpore*) that is a part of the ‘new heaven and new earth’ (*caelo nouo et terra noua* [XXII.29]). Since Augustine firmly associates temporality with corporeality (XI.6, 22), this transfiguration of bodies would seem to result in a similar glorification of temporality, a conclusion which seems to be emphasised by his return to the theme of the Six Ages at the culmination of the work, towards the end of his description of the Eighth Age (XII.30). Thus, it would appear that the temporal structure of the Six Ages not only reveals something about God himself, but reveals something, albeit enigmatically, about the character of the ‘all’ in which God shall be ‘all’ in the Eighth Age. Elsewhere, Augustine conceives of this return, much more succinctly, as a melting, of the divisions inherent in the soul’s temporal experience of reality, by love, so that they flow together into God’s unity; *Confessiones* XI.xxix.39; James J. O’Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions* I, 242; Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, 244. For Bede’s following of Augustine in these matters, see note 29 above, where the anticipated Eighth Age is conceived of as the simultaneity and perfection of the ‘totality of time’ (*universi temporis*). See also *DTR* LXXI.61-98; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 543-4; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 248-9, esp. lines 91-3, where the contemplation of the ‘feeting and wave-tossed course of time’ (*uolubili ac fluctuato tempore lapsu*) which has occurred over the course of *DTR* is revealed to have inherently been a contemplation of the ‘eternal stability and stable eternity’ (*aeterna stabilitate ac stabili aeternitate*) which is its end (and beginning). In this he, as Augustine, is operating within the Platonic definition of time as ‘εἰκὼ . . . κινήτων τινα αἰῶνος’ (a moving image of eternity). On this, see *Timaeus* 37d; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* IV; Zeyl, tr., ‘*Timaeus*’, 1241. Plotinus, *Ennead* III.vii.1; Armstrong, ed. and tr., *Plotinus Enneads* III, 296-7. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* XIII.38; Joseph Zycha, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi ad litteram, De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus, Locutiones in Heptateuchum*, CSEL 28.1 (Vienna, Prague and Leipzig 1894), 487.8-9; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 173. *De musica* VI.mclxxix.41ff.; Martin Jacobson, ed., *Augustine: De musica*, CSEL 102 (Berlin 2017), 214-5. See Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 373-5 for a helpful summary of this theme: ‘In short, what is now experienced as time, will then be experienced as eternity’.

Fourth, since their respective contents are also part of that which will be unified in it.<sup>34</sup> Thus, for such a view,<sup>35</sup> an apocalyptic yearning for the restoration of the whole created order at end of time will also, inescapably, be a yearning for the restoration of the lost graces of *all* former ages. This is partly because they are ages in which the natural goodness of creation, to varying degrees, was not yet so diminished and warped by toil and vice as it is in the present age in which the Gospel has been revealed, a natural goodness that has already largely been lost prior to the resurrection. But it is also because, as much as the means of that future union are most clearly known in the Sixth, and its character most evident in the Fourth, each age, as a part of what will be restored and glorified in that resurrection, manifests something of that longed-for state of blessedness which would remain hidden otherwise.

### **The Intellectual Context of the Six Ages**

In all this, Augustine's interpretation of historical process is certainly not exceptional in its understanding of the culmination of an individual's experience of time in terms of the reunification of their soul and body, any more than it is in its concern with six world-ages, or creation days. The decisive element of his contribution here lies, on the one

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<sup>34</sup> When the consummation of time conceived of as an eighth day, (as in *DCD* and *DTR*) rather the seventh, of the week of ages (as in *DGCM*), this conclusion is further emphasized. An eternity that is removed from the count of the age-week, rather than the last of that count, will more readily be perceived as a unity within which all the various goods that could be known and enjoyed only in a divided and sequential way within the process of time, exist and are experienced in simultaneity.

<sup>35</sup> There is a significant amount of scholarship on temporality and eternity in Augustine's thought. See, for example, Roland Teske, '*Vocans Temporales, Faciens Aeternos*: St. Augustine on Liberation from Time', *Traditio* 41 (1985), 29-47; *idem*, *Paradoxes of Time in St. Augustine*, The Aquinas Lecture 1996 (Milwaukee 1996); Angus T. Johnson, 'Time as a Psalm', *Animus* 1 (1996), 68-72; W.B. Torrence Kirby, 'Praise as the Soul's Overcoming of Time in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine', *Pro Ecclesia* 6.2 (1997), 333-50; Eva Brann, *What, Then, is Time?* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford 1999); M.B. Pranger, 'Time and Narrative in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Journal of Religion* 81.3 (Jul. 2001), 377-93; Matthew Robinson, 'Christ as the Central Metaphysical Principle in St. Augustine's Theory of Time: *Confessions*, Book 11', *Studia Patristica* 63 (2006), 227-33; Matthew L. Lamb, 'Eternity Creates and Redeems Time: A Key to Augustine's *Confessions* within a Theology of History', in Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten and Walter Hannam, eds., *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Doctor Robert D. Crouse*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 151 (Leiden and Boston 2007), 117-40; Thomas L. Humphries, '*Distentio Animi: praesens temporis, imago aeternitatis*', *Augustinian Studies* 40.1 (2009), 75-101. However, outside of a few comments in recent scholarship on Bede, studies of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory and those which consider his theory of time, as such, have tended to be mutually exclusive. The exceptions to this tendency include Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 373-5; Palmer, 'The Ordering of Time', 612; *idem*, James T. Palmer, 'The Ends and Beginnings of Bede's *De Temporum Ratione*', in Faith Wallis and Peter Darby, eds., *Bede and the Future* (Farnham 2014), 139-60, at 148-9.

hand, in bringing the individual and cosmic sides of the experience of time together through his interpretation of the progress of the world's ages by means of the analogy of an individual human's physical development from birth to resurrection. On the other, it lies in his linking of both to the absolute basis of time, the stages through which divine causality became manifest as creation, each of which has been affirmed as 'good' (*bonum*) by God himself.<sup>36</sup> For in doing so, Augustine universalised the nostalgia for the lost natural capacities belonging to each of the earlier stages of life which is implicit in the Christian hope of bodily resurrection. In this it became, simultaneously, a window onto, and even a local form of, the nostalgia for earlier world-ages, which it reveals to be inherent in the desire for the re-creation and restoration of all the ages in the eternity of the world to come, the microcosm revealing the form of the macrocosm made visible in it.<sup>37</sup> Of course, it cannot be assumed that a given medieval Irish author or reader will have picked up on every nuance of this historiographical approach. The important point is that the nostalgia for earlier ages which it evokes, on the simplest level of interpretation - through its metaphorical description of history as a movement from the youth of the ancient world to the broken down old age of the present - does not exist only in the absence of a more substantial grasp of how the underlying system operates as a theory of time. On the contrary, the more we have come to grasp what this metaphor means philosophically, the more this nostalgia has been revealed to be a necessary expression of its orientation towards the end of all things, given the character it understands that end to have.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See note 32 above.

<sup>37</sup> On the individual human as 'microcosm' (*microcosmos*), see *DTR* XXXV.21-5, LXVI.1-7; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 392, 463; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 100-1, 137. At LXVI.1-7 this is spoken of with direct reference to the 'Six Ages' theory. This interpretation of the macrocosm by means of the analogy of the microcosm is the reverse of Plato's *Republic*, 368c-369b, where the macrocosm (in this case, the state) is studied as a way of better understanding the human microcosm; S.R. Slings, ed., *Platonis Rempublicam* (Oxford 2003), 59-60; G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve, tr., 'Republic', in Cooper and Hutchinson, eds., *Plato: Complete Works*, 971-1223, at 1007-8.

<sup>38</sup> For a recent philosophical historiography, with striking [and, perhaps, self-conscious], affinities with Augustine's, see Walter Benjamin's *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*; Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds., *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. I.2 (Frankfurt 1974), 691-704; Harry Zohn, tr., 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Harry Zohn, ed., *Walter Benjamin: Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York 1969), 253-64. Benjamin's linking of his own thought, to that which he attributes to medieval monastics, medieval theology and theology in general [X, VII and I, respectively; Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', 698, 696 and 693; Zohn, tr., 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 258, 256 and 253], in tandem with the themes of an original Paradise, the Apocalypse and the Antichrist [IX, XVII-B and VI, respectively; Benjamin,



## Sources of the Six Ages

This is not to say that Augustine invented such an interpretation of history *ex nihilo*. In Christian circles, there had always been those who linked the idea of World Ages to the divisions of the creation week. Nor was it exactly novel to suggest that the succession of historical epochs could result in an aging process comparable to that of an individual human. The idea of a correlation between a three- or four-age division of human life, and that of the life of Rome, generally taken to have already entered into the decline of old age, was relatively wide-spread among Latin writers from Livy onward.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, some of these authors seem to have been known, at least in part, to medieval Ireland.<sup>40</sup> It is well known to us now that there was also a tendency among certain patristic authors, to match the stages of human life with the stages of revelatory history, one of the most common divisions being: nature, Mosaic law and grace,<sup>41</sup> but, again, such a comparison, taken on its own, generally tends towards a triumphalist culmination in maturity, rather than an intermediate culmination succeeded by feeble old age.<sup>42</sup>

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‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’, 696, 702-3 and 695; Zohn, tr., ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, 257-8, 263-4, 255] suggests that this similarity may indeed point to the direct or indirect influence of Augustinian historiography on his thought. My thanks to Chris Beausang (Maynooth) for first drawing my attention to the parallels between these two historiographies.

<sup>39</sup>Namely Livy, Florus Flavius Vopiscus and Ammianus Marcellinus; see Archambault, ‘The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World’, 195-200 for discussion and references. For Lucretius on the old age of the world, see Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, 5-6. For Philo of Alexandria on humanity’s necessary decline over time, see Cross, ‘Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm’, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup>Lactantius’ *De Opificio Dei* is, for example, cited in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* LXV.1 Wasserschleben, ed., *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 232-3. On the significance of Lactantius’ *DI* for medieval Irish thinking on natural law, but with its availability, unfortunately, assumed rather than proven, see Conrad-O’Brien, ‘Grace and Election’. For *De XII*’s use of Cyprian’s works, see Breen, ‘Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim*’, 235; *idem*, ‘The Evidence of Antique Irish Exegesis’, *passim*. For a citation of Cyprian’s *Epistola* 64.2, in *Commentarius in Iohannem*, and of *Epistola* 74.2, in *Commentarius in Lucam*, see Joseph F. Kelly, ed., *Scriptores Hiberniae minores II*, CCSL 108C (Turnhout 1974), 114, 128. For the citation of Cyprian in Cummián’s *Paschal Letter*, see Maura Walsh, ‘Some Remarks on Cummián’s Paschal Letter and the Commentary on Mark ascribed to Cummián’, in Ní Chatháin and Richter, eds., *Irland und die Christenheit*, 216-29, at 218, 221; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘Hiberno-Latin Literature to 1169’, in Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland*, 371-404, at 377. For descriptions of two early Insular manuscripts of Cyprian and arguments for their Irish origin, see Hillgarth, ‘Visigothic Spain and Early Christian Ireland’, 172 note 26. However, to my knowledge, there is not, as of yet, any direct confirmation that either Cyprian’s *De mortalitate* or his *Ad Demetrianum*, were known, either in whole or part, in early medieval Ireland.

<sup>41</sup> Archambault, ‘The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World’, 200-1.

<sup>42</sup> Tertullian, *De virginibus verlandis*, I.40-51; Vinzenz Bulhart, ed., *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani opera: pars quarta*, CSEL 76 (Vienna 1957), 80; Geoffrey D. Dunn, tr., *Tertullian* (London 2004), 102. Ambrose, *De Abraham*, II.ix.65; Carl Shenkl, ed., *Sancti Ambrosii Opera* I.1, CSEL 32.1 (Leipzig 1896), 620.8-621.6; Theodosia Tomkinson, tr., *Saint Ambrose of Milan: On Abraham* (Etna 2000); for discussion, see Archambault, ‘The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World’, 202.

There are certainly those, like Lactantius and St. Cyprian, who anticipate the synthesis and extension of these two strands in Augustine.<sup>43</sup> Lactantius, in his *Divinae Institutiones*, following a summary of his Christian Millennialist views, applies the metaphor of decrepit old age (which he elsewhere, like so many other Latin writers, reserved for the current state of Roman Empire)<sup>44</sup> to the Sixth Age of the world itself.<sup>45</sup> Cyprian, also a Millennialist, similarly compares the present wearing away of the world, to the final stages of human life.<sup>46</sup> In these instances the nascent universality of the correlation between human and Roman ages becomes unambiguous through making human aging an analogy of the historical development of the cosmos itself, rather than that of the universal city which had come to rule it. Moreover, such a development would seem to have potential for the kind of nostalgia which is at issue here. Yet, in the absence of a more deliberate affirmation of earlier stages of world history, it remains unclear, especially in Cyprian, whether this does indeed reflect a nostalgic tendency, or more of a ‘good-riddance-to-bad-rubbish’ view of the pre-apocalyptic world.

In short, it is possible that such nostalgia for pre-Christian realities as we may find in early Irish literature could be derived, in part, from his kind of pre-Augustinian Millennialism, but not that it is wholly so. Augustine’s theory of history remains alone in making the nostalgia for the ancient past, which is characteristic of a certain strand of Roman historiography, fundamental to a Christian understanding of the Ages of the World. For it is only in Augustine that this occasional metaphor is transformed into a

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<sup>43</sup> Archambault, ‘The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World’, 202.

<sup>44</sup> *Institutiones Divinae* VII.xv.12-19; Brandt and Laubmann, eds., *Lactantius Firmianus: opera omnia* I, 632.19-634.21; Antony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, tr., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, Translated Texts for Historians 40 (Liverpool 2003), 423. Though, in his case, the old age of the empire is a sign of the old age of the world as a whole.

<sup>45</sup> *Institutiones Divinae* VII.xiv.5-xv.11, esp. xiv, line 17; Brandt and Laubmann, eds., *Lactantius Firmianus: opera omnia* I, 628.20-632.19, esp. 630.20-21; Bowen and Garnsey, tr., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, 419-22, esp. 422: ‘saecularium prophetarum congruentes cum caelestibus uoces finem rerum et occasum post breue tempus adnuntiant describentes quasi fatigati et delabentis mundi ultimam senectutem’ (=Utterances by prophets of this world, in agreement with prophets of heaven, announce an end of things, and shortly after their ruin; they describe a sort of extreme old age for a world exhausted and collapsing).

<sup>46</sup> *Ad Demetrianum* III-IV; Edouard Fredouille, ed. and tr., *Cyrien de Carthage: ‘A Démétrien’*, Sources chrétiennes 467 (Paris 2003), 74-9; Roy Joseph Deferrari, tr., *Saint Cyprian: Treatises*, The Fathers of the Church 36 (New York 1958), 169-70. *De mortalitate* XXV; Manlio Simmonetti, ed., *Sancti Cypriani episcopi opera*, CSEL 3A (New York and London 1972), 312-3; Deferrari, tr., *Saint Cyprian: Treatises*, 219.

systematically applied historiographical principle<sup>47</sup> which is, in turn, fully integrated with the related issues of ascesis, eschatology and psychology. Insofar as nostalgia for the pre-Christian past preexisted him in the literature, he is the one who moved it from a loose, if powerful, metaphor, of largely undetermined significance for Christian thinking about the historical development of the cosmos, to a central characteristic of the experience of time itself, and of the status of the individual human as microcosm of the cosmos.

Moreover, this nostalgia does not seem even to be intelligible in the context of any of the fully-realised theories of history that rivaled his own in the Latin West. Orosius' importance to early Irish historical writing cannot be overestimated, but tends towards an 'if-you-think-this-is-bad' approach to historiography, in which present troubles are compared favourably to a rather more severe pagan past.<sup>48</sup> Few resources for pre-Christian nostalgia are to be found there. Eusebius, whether in Jerome's translation of the first book of his Chronicle,<sup>49</sup> or, in Rufinus' reworking of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, might have seemed like a natural place to look, seeing as he strongly affirms the way that pre-Christian developments (even non-Hebrew pre-Christian developments) pointed the way to Christ.<sup>50</sup> Yet, we have found that he is far more interested in the triumphal Christian present than in the lesser realities that he understands to be finally realising

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<sup>47</sup>Ambrose is another important precursor of Augustine in this regard; Archambault, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of the World', 202. Augustine seems to follow the lead of his teacher, Ambrose, in bringing various three or three- or four-age schemes mentioned above into self-conscious agreement with the Christian idea of the correlation of the six or seven ages of creation with the ages of the world; Ambrose, *Epistola XLIV*; PL XVI, col. 1133-1142; = Letter 50 in Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka, tr., *Saint Ambrose: Letters*, Fathers of the Church 26 (New York 1954), 264-72. Note, however, that the nostalgic implications which Augustine found in a conciliation of these various kinds of ages are not present in Ambrose's preliminary form of it, given that his concern in this letter seems to have more to do with the significance of the distinction between seven and eight, rather than any of those involved in the first six numbers. As we can see in all the major Augustinian 'Six-Age' sources we have been dealing with, this does not result in a hostile take-over of the three- or four-age system in favour of the 'Six-Ages', so much as a harmonisation in which each is used for different purposes.

<sup>48</sup> Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, ed., *Orose: Histoires contre le païens*, 3 vols., Collection des Universités de France Série latine 291, 296-7 (Paris 1990-1); Andrew T. Fear, tr., *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, Translated texts for Historians 54 (Liverpool 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Fotheringham, ed., *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones*; Pearse et al, tr., *The Chronicle of St. Jerome*.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.ii.18-23; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* I, 21, 23, 25. In the *Chronicle* this is more implicit (i.e. through his extensive listing of the events of non-Biblical history alongside the events recounted in Scripture).

their potential in that present.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Augustine's achievement would seem to have an immeasurable importance for our understanding of the nostalgia for the natural splendor of pre-Christian past where it might appear medieval Irish literature, or in medieval literature generally.<sup>52</sup> Where such a nostalgic stance may have been taken up, in part, from other late Roman authors, notably Lactantius and Cyprian, we can expect that these statements of the theme will have been interpreted in light of some form of Augustine's more substantial and broadly known synthesis.<sup>53</sup> Given the evident uniqueness of Augustine in this regard, one would not seem to go too far to say that instances of this kind of nostalgia should be taken as proof itself of the influence (whether directly or indirectly) of this aspect of his thought. However, this in no means the only evidence which proves that Augustine's theory was circulating in medieval Ireland so as to be capable of such influence.

### **Irish Reception of the Six Ages**

Augustine's version of the 'Six Ages' theory appears to have been widely known in medieval Ireland, even where it may not have been known directly from Augustine's

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<sup>51</sup> This is even more the case of Eusebius' Constantine than Rufinus' Constantine and Theodosius, but Rufinus' reworking of Eusebius' history remains a more moderate example of the same tendency. This difference in emphasis is primarily manifest in Rufinus' replacement of the panegyrics in praise of Constantine, in Book X of Eusebius version, with an account of the history from Constantine to Theodosius, in Books X and XI of his own version. For the Greek text of Eusebius' Book X, in Schwartz's edition, together with the Latin text of sections of it still used by Rufinus, in Mommsen's edition, see Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte*, II.856-904. For the Latin text of Rufinus' Books X and XI, see Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* II, 957-1040; Amidon, tr., *The 'Church History'*. For a translation of Eusebius' Book X, see Andrew Louth and G.A. Williamson, tr., *Eusebius: History of the Church* (London and New York 1989), 303-33.

<sup>52</sup> On nostalgia for the pre-Christian past in *féanaigeacht* literature, see Geraldine Parsons, 'Revisiting *Almu* in Middle Irish Texts', in Boyle and Hayden, eds., *Authorities and Adaptations*, 221-31.

<sup>53</sup> The same also applies to later writers who would mediate something of this aspect of Augustine's thought in a less systematic fashion than Bede or Isidore; see, for example, Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*, II.vi.16.20, IV.xviii.33.53, IV.xxii.18.44, VI.xxx.16.53, VI.xxxiv.1.1; Adriaen, ed., *Gregorius Magnus: Moralia in Iob*, 297-8, 921, 1123-5, 1527-8, 1733; Marriott, tr., *Morals on the Book of Job I*, 1844-50, II, 355, 583-4, IV, 401-2, 619-20. Gregory, *Homiliae in evangelia*, II.xxix; *PL* 76, col. 1214; David Hurst, tr., *Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies*, Cistercian Studies 123 (Kalamazoo 1990). Gregory, *Dialogi*, IV.41; Adalbert de Vogüé and Paul Antin, eds., *Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues*, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 251, 260, 265 (Paris 1978-80) III, 154-167; Odo John Zimmermann, tr., *Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, Fathers of the Church 39 (Washington, D.C. 1959), 251. cf. Cross, 'Aspects of Microcosm and Macrocosm' and Hill, 'The Age of Man and the World', both of which tend to present Gregory as a rather more central figure than he seems to be, in the dissemination of the theme of the 'old age' (*senectus veteris*) of the world.

own writings,<sup>54</sup> through Bede's *DTR* (of which there are manuscripts with Old-Irish glossing in the ninth-century, and perhaps even the eighth-),<sup>55</sup> and, in a much simplified form, through Isidore's *Etymologiae*, by the mid-seventh.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob* and *Homiliae in euangelia* would also have been significant mediators of its general characterisation of world history as an aging human, now decrepit, together with its resulting nostalgia for times past.<sup>57</sup> That this theory was not only available to, but taken up by, early Irish scholars is seen by the number and variety of its witnesses from the eighth century onwards. The 'Ages of Man' aspect of the theory is found in the ninth-century Old Irish of the *Milan Glosses*<sup>58</sup> and its rough

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<sup>54</sup> Smyth has suggested that Augustine's *DGCM* was likely the exemplar for a number of seventh-century Hiberno-Latin texts and presents the descriptions of Mount Olympus in *De Ordine Creaturarum* as a case in point; Marina Smyth, *Understanding the Universe in Seventh-Century Ireland* (Woodbridge 1996), 183-4. McGinty has found the section of *Pauca Problemmata [Das Bibelwerk]* which covers the Pentateuch dependent on it in at least ten separate instances; McGinty, ed., *Pauca problemmata*, 324.

<sup>55</sup> For the Old-Irish Glosses on the Carlsruhe copy of Bede's *DTR*, see Stokes and Strachan, eds., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* II, 14-30. For those on the Vienna copy of Bede's *DTR*, see Stokes and Strachan, eds., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* II, 31-7; but note subsequent corrections in Myles Dillon, 'The Vienna Glosses on Bede', *Celtica* 3 (1956), 340-5; Bernhard Bauer, 'New and Corrected MS Readings of the Old Irish Glosses in the Vienna Bede', *Ériu* 67 (2017), 29-48. For general overview of early Irish glosses on Bede's *DTR* and further references, see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Oldest Irish Names for the Days of the Week', *Ériu* 32 (1981), 95-114, at 96-7 [repr. in his *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin 2003), 7-27 at 8-9]. Bernhard Bauer has informed me that unedited Latin glosses on *DTR* in both Carlsruhe and Vienna include those which make direct reference to the theory of the 'Six Ages'.

<sup>56</sup> *Etym.* V.xxxviii-ix, IX.vi.28 and XI.ii; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 130-3, 210, 241. The account of the 'Six Ages' scheme in the *Etymologiae* is relatively brief. However, it still includes the characteristic comparison of the ages of the world to those of human life; *Etym.* V.xxxviii.5-6; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 130: 'etas autem proprie duobus modis dicitur: aut enim hominis, sicut infantia, iuventus, senectus: aut mundi, cuius prima aetas est ab Adam usque ad Noe . . .' (=The term 'age' properly is used in two ways: either as an age of a human – as infancy, youth, old age – or as an age of the world, whose first age is from Adam to Noah . . .). Moreover, in contrast to Millennialist 'Six Age' theories, it emphasizes the indeterminate length of the sixth age; *Etym.* V.xxxvix.42; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., 133; 'Residuum sextae aetatis tempus Deo soli est cognitum' (=The remaining time of the Sixth Age is known to God alone). For the dating of the earliest Irish reception of the *Etymologies*, see Chapter 1, page 23.

<sup>57</sup> See note 53 above.

<sup>58</sup> *MGP* 44e, glosses 12, 26; Stokes and Strachan, eds., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 128: 'AETATIS PRIMAE: 12 .i. inmachtad in dentar cech semplae ⁊ cech semplae ⁊ cech báis . . . AETATE PRIME: 26 .i. sechis ho oclachas ón cendid as chetnae náis in homine' (=THE FIRST AGE: 12. i.e. the boyhood in which every silliness and every folly is done . . . FROM THE FOREMOST AGE: 26. i.e. from prime, though that is not the first age in man). There remains some possibility that these statements may be in reference to a tripartite division of the ages of man that is paired with a similar division of the ages of revelation (i.e. nature, law, grace). As we have seen, this is not a rival theory to the six-age system, but appears in both Bede [*DTR* LXIV.23-30; Jones, ed., *Beda's opera didascalica*, 456; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 152] and Isidore [*Etym.* VI.xvii.16, XI.iii.33; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al.*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 144, 245] in tandem with it. For another example of the three ages from Augustine, *Epistola* 55.8; Alois Goldbacher, ed., *Augustinus: Epistolae*, CSEL 34.2 (Turnhout 1895-8), 174.20-175.6; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine I, 218.

contemporary, *Sanas Cormaic*.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, its ‘Ages of the World’ aspect is found in the Early Middle Irish of Airbertach mac Cosse’s poem on the psalter,<sup>60</sup> and *Saltair na Rann*,<sup>61</sup> something in which they are anticipated by a number of eighth-century Hiberno-Latin texts, namely, *Liber de numeris*,<sup>62</sup> *Liber questionum in euangeliis*<sup>63</sup> and *Pauca problesmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis*.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, while it uncertain whether the *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae* is a specifically Irish text, it is clear that it is an Insular

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<sup>59</sup> *Sanas Cormaic* has the full list of the Six Ages of Man: namely, infancy, adolescence, youth, manhood, old age, decrepitude. See Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic* B, 253: ‘Colomna air 1 ais 1 áisse .i. aimsera .i. náidendacht. macdacht. gillacht. hóclachus. séndacht. díblidect (1 dimligdetu)’; Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic*, Y 322: ‘Colamna ais .i. aimsera ais .i. naoidendacht 7 macdacht, gillacht 7 oglachass, sendatu 7 diblideta’. These seem to be rehearsals of the first line of Isidore, *Etym.* XI.ii; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 241: ‘Gradus aetatis sex sunt: infantia, pueritia, adolescentia, iuventus, gravitas atque senectus’. On the likely ninth-century date of *Sanas Cormaic*, see Carey, ‘The Three Things Required’, 47; Liam Breatnach, ‘An Edition of *Amra Senáin*’, in Ó Corráin *et al*, eds., *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, 7-31, at 20-3; Russell, ‘The Sounds of a Silence’, 10-15, esp. 10 note 42; Kuno Meyer, *Fianaigeacht: Being a Collection of Hitherto Inedited Irish Poems and Tales Relating to Finn and his Fiana*, Todd Lectures Series 16 (London 1910), xix-xx; *idem*, ‘*Sanas Cormaic: An Old Irish Glossary Compiled by Cormac uá Cuilennáin, King-Bishop of Cashel in the Tenth Century*’, in Bergin, *et al*, eds., *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts IV*, 1-128, at xvii note 2. For cautions against assuming this dating of *Sanas Cormaic* applies to every entry, see Paul Russell, ‘*Read it in a Glossary: Glossaries and Learned Discourse in Medieval Ireland*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture 6 (Cambridge 2008), 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> For the text, see Pádraig P. Ó Néill, ed. and tr., ‘Airbertach mac Cosse’s Poem on the Psalter’, *Éigse* 17.1 (Summer 1977), 19-46. For discussion of this aspect of the text, see Pádraig P. Ó Néill, ‘Old Wine in New Bottles: The Reprise of Early Irish Psalter Exegesis in Airbertach mac Cosse’s Poem on the Psalter’, in Boyle and Hayden, eds. *Authorities and Adaptations*, 121-40, at 136-40.

<sup>61</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed., *The Saltair na Rann: A Collection of Early Middle Irish Poems* (Oxford 1883); David Greene, ed. and tr., *Saltair na Rann* (unpublished typescript), which may be viewed at the website, ‘Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies’ (online at: <https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/celt-saltair-na-rann/>), last accessed 13.09.2018. It has been suggested that Airbertach mac Cosse may be the author of this work as well; references in Ó Néill, ‘The Reprise of Early Irish Psalter Exegesis’, 137 note 54, although this is not generally accepted.

<sup>62</sup> Hildegard L.C. Tristram, ed., *Sex Aetates Mundi: Die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren Untersuchungen und Texte* (Heidelberg 1998), 294-7.

<sup>63</sup> For Rittmueller’s dating of *Liber questionum euangeliis* to the first quarter of the eighth century, see Jean Rittmueller, *Liber questionum in euangeliis*, CCSL 108F, *Scriptores Celtigenae* 5 (Turnhout 2003), 11ff. For its treatment of the ‘Six Ages’ see *Liber questionum euangeliis*, VI and XXV; Rittmueller, ed., *Liber questionum*, 137.33-138.49, 398.93-96. Despite the fact the *Liber Questionum*, as noted by Rittmueller, seems to be quoting from Augustine’s *DCD* XXII.30: 127-35 [Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 865; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1091], the concept of the Eighth Age/Day which is postulated there is either unknown to the author, or has been ignored in favour of a Seventh Age culmination, such as we find in *DGCM* I.xxiii.41 and I.xv.42; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 110-1, 113; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 88, 90, among other places.

<sup>64</sup> *Pauca problesmata*, 390.13; McGinty, ed., *Pauca problesmata*, 172: “Quid est quod VI die duplum collegitur de manna sufficiat in sabbato?” Id est, sex dies sunt sex etates mundi . . .’. As McGinty notes, this seems to be a quotation from Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum: In Exodum*, XXIII.5; *PL* 83, col. 298B-C.

production of the eighth century,<sup>65</sup> and therefore the fact that both human and historical sides of the ‘Six Ages’ tradition are present in it is also worth noting.<sup>66</sup> But what will prove to be the most decisive source-evidence for our purposes is the *Pre-Patrician Annals*, (or else, the *Irish World Chronicle*).<sup>67</sup> The theme of the Six Ages could, of course, have entered into the manuscript tradition at any point prior to the twelfth-century production of their earliest extant witnesses, but since the respective *Annals of Inisfallen* and *Tigernach* are both organized along these lines, there seems no reason to

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<sup>65</sup> For other eighth-century Insular treatments of the Augustinian theory of the ‘Six Ages’, see Palmer, ‘The Ordering of Time’, 610-11, esp. notes 31-33. See Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old Irish Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge 1993), 68 for the enumeration of the ‘Six Ages’ of man and of the world in an unpublished dialogue of Hiberno-Irish identity or affiliation, on folio 90v of *Cologne, Dombibliothek 15*, a manuscript which has been dated to the ninth century. For the dating of the manuscript, and arguments for its Hiberno-Irish character, see Wright, *The Irish Tradition*, 62-77, 91.

<sup>66</sup> *Collectanea*, §377-8; Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 14 (Dublin 1998), 180-2. For the Insular, possibly Irish, and likely eighth-century, origin of the text, see Bayless and Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, 1-12, esp. 10. They note here that the closet analogues to the section on the ‘Six Ages’ are ‘found in Anglo-Saxon texts of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries’, but that they are not themselves ‘precisely datable’. For other insular witnesses to Augustine’s theory of the six ages, see Palmer’s excellent essay ‘The Ordering of Time’, 610-11. Significant here also is the outline of the ‘Six Ages’ in the *Catechesis Celtica*; André Wilmart, ed., *Analecta Reginensia: Extraits des manuscrits latins de la reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, *Studi et Testi* 59 (The Vatican 1933), 76.65-77.97. However, more work needs to be done on this text before its potential significance for understanding ninth- and tenth-century Irish works, such as *BMMM*, can be confirmed or denied.

<sup>67</sup> On the dating of the ‘Pre-Patrician Annals / Irish World Chronicle’, see Thomas Francis O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin 1945), 253-4: ‘certainly not earlier than the ninth century’; Séan Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin 1951), xviii: ‘the earliest possible date . . . lies in the first decades of the eighth century’; Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction and Sources* (Ithaca, New York 1972), 144: world-chronical element added to Annals of Tigernach after c.913; David Dumville, ‘Ulster Heroes in the Early Irish Annals: A Caveat’, *Éigse* 17 (1975-6), 47-54, at 52-3: 725 A.D. publication date of Bede’s *DTR* the only firm *terminus post quem* – no *terminus ante quem* earlier than 1050, the date of the first witness of the text, in the absence of further proofs; Kathryn Grabowski and David Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Suffolk 1984), 122, 156: Clonmacnoise Chronicle produced in early years of the tenth century . . . the ‘Irish World Chronicle . . . seems likely to be an integral part of the Clonmacnoise Chronicle’, but ‘the conclusion is scarcely more than a guess’; Molly Miller, ‘The Chronological Structure of the Sixth Age in the Rawlison Fragment of the “Irish World-Chronicle”’, *Celtica* 22 (1991), 79-111, at 79: ‘took its origin at Clonmacnoise (Co. Offaly) in the tenth century’; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 3: in the tenth-century ‘prefixed to the Chronicle of Ireland in a daughter chronicle compiled in the monastery of Clonmacnoise’. For a helpful, if polemic, overview of the history of the dating of this text, see Daniel Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin 2008), 81-116. In his recent book, McCarthy has restated his argument that the ‘Pre-Patrician Annals / Irish World Chronicle’ did not develop separately from the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’; McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 112-3, 150-2, 166-7, 196-7. However, while his emphasis on the role of the earliest Irish chronological achievements (at 110, esp. note 161) is no doubt justified, the seeming dependence of this theory on the thesis that a hypothetical and unattested Rufinian chronicle is the source of the Annals’ similarities to Rufinus’ *Ecclesiastical History*, rather than the *Ecclesiastical History* itself, places it, to all appearances, on very shaky ground; see Roy Flechner, ‘The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now’, *Early Medieval Europe* 21.4 (2013), 422-54, at 426-7, esp. note 19, for this problem, among others, with McCarthy’s reconstruction of the evidence, and references.

assume that it would not have been incorporated into the *Pre-Patrician Annals* along with the rest of the information which is generally agreed to have been incorporated into them from Bede's *DTR*, LXVI in the ninth or tenth century.<sup>68</sup>

There is then a significant amount of evidence that this theory was known in Ireland well before becoming the framework of the *LGÉ*, *Lebor Bretnach* and the *Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* in the eleventh century. It now remains to determine how early or widespread the nostalgia for lost natural perfection, both fostered and made intelligible by Augustinian historiography, is found in medieval Irish literature. For this, the best place to start will be *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni* (*BMMM*), the reason being that among the earliest witnesses of this Augustinian nostalgia, it seems to have the most detailed relationship to the minutiae of the theory from which this nostalgia arises as a natural result.

### **The Case of *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni***

*BMMM*<sup>69</sup> survives only as a single copy in LL 119a-123b and in a series of glossed excerpts found in Trinity MS H.3.18, on which we rely for our fragmentary knowledge of the beginning of the saga, which is missing in LL.<sup>70</sup> The scholarship on *BMMM* is not yet very developed,<sup>71</sup> but there is a recent edition and translation of the text by Bettina Kimpton,<sup>72</sup> who argues on linguistic grounds,<sup>73</sup> and on the basis of the excerpts of the

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<sup>68</sup> For the ninth- or tenth-century date of the 'Pre-Patrician Irish Annals / Irish World Chronicle', see note 67 above. For Bede's *DTR* LXVI as among its fundamental sources, and references to earlier scholarship, see Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen*, xvii-iii, esp. xvii note 2. Further references to earlier scholarship relative to this claim may be found in Grabowski *et al*, *Chronicles and Annals*, 122. McCarthy argues for the latest possible incorporation of this material, i.e. ca.1071; McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 120-1, 151, 195-6. However, he also suggests that some form of the 'Six Ages' was present as an organizing principle in it from ca. 687, through both Augustinian [Isidore] and other sources [Jerome-Eusebius *et al*]; McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 120-131, 167.

<sup>69</sup> LL 13763-14295; Best *et al*, eds., *The Book of Leinster* II, 442-57. This is Thurneysen's 'Version A', as opposed to the early modern version of the saga, which he designated 'Version B'. See Rudolf Thurneysen, *Die Irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum Siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle and Saale 1921), 548. On 'Version B', see Julia Sophie Kuhns, *The Pre-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Manuscript Tradition and Testual Transmission of the Early Modern Irish Tale 'Oidheadh Con Culainn': A Preliminary Study*, unpublished PhD thesis (Glasgow University 2009); my thanks to Kate Mathis for this reference.

<sup>70</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 1; Ruth Lehman, 'Death and Vengeance in the Ulster Cycle' *ZCP* 43 (1989), 1-11, at 7; Maria Tymoczko, *Two Death Tales from the Ulster Cycle: The Death of Cu Roi and the Death of Cu Chulainn* (Dublin 1981), 14.

<sup>71</sup> But see Kuhns, *The Pre-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Manuscript Tradition*, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.11-34 and tr.35-49.



saga found in *Sanas Cormaic*,<sup>74</sup> that it is a ‘late ninth- or tenth-century reworking of an early eighth-century composition, with later scribal innovations’.<sup>75</sup> If the typological content of *BMMM* could indeed be demonstrated to be part of an eighth-century version of the text, this would prove highly significant, seeing as it would likely place the association of Cú Chulainn with Christ in the saga earlier, even than the disputed<sup>76</sup> hypothetical exemplar (ca.790), that Kelleher argued was ultimately responsible for the brief overlap between Christ’s and Cú Chulainn’s life in the Annals.<sup>77</sup> However, the greater part of recent scholarship on the *Pre-Patrician Annals*<sup>78</sup> would seem to indicate that any attempt to connect the Annals’ doctrine of Christ’s temporal coincidence with Cú Chulainn to *BMMM*’s typological content will make a ninth- or tenth-century origin for that content rather more likely.<sup>79</sup> This would, moreover, have the added plausibility of making the development of this theme in the death-tale of Cú Chulainn, roughly contemporary with related developments in that of Conchobar,<sup>80</sup> as well as the earliest historiographical precursors to the grand synthesis of *LGÉ* in the eleventh century.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 1, following Thurneysen, *Die Irische Helden-*, 548-9; Julius Pokorny, ‘Germanisch irisches’, *ZCP* 13 (1919), 111-29, at 123.

<sup>74</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 1; Thurneysen, *Die Irische Helden-*, 548. The excerpts in question refer to Cú Chulainn’s post-mortem prophecy of Christ: *BMMM* §30.489-32.575; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.27-30 and tr.46-7. For the excerpts, see Russell *et al* eds., *Sanas Cormaic* B, 28, 520, La, 83, M, 24 Y, 26, 959.

<sup>75</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Dumville, ‘Ulster Heroes in the Early Irish Annals’.

<sup>77</sup> John V. Kelleher, ‘The *Táin* and the Annals’, *Ériu* 22 (1971), 107-27, at 115, 119, 122. Daniel McCarthy also argues that Cú Chulainn’s obit was added in the eighth century, but for different reasons. See McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, plate I: commentary) where he attributes this to the ‘Moville Compiler’, and McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*, 169-187, 196, for his arguments regarding that compiler’s eighth-century date.

<sup>78</sup> On the ninth- or tenth-century dating of ‘Pre-Patrician Annals / Irish World Chronicle’, see note 67 above.

<sup>79</sup> Dumville has argued that it is ‘difficult to place the Irish material in the prehistoric section of the annals before the tenth century’, but that it is, at any rate, ‘current at Clonmacnois in the eleventh century and . . . transmitted to Munster not later than 1056X1072’; Dumville, ‘Ulster Heroes in the Early Irish Annals’, 52, 54. While this would seem to push us towards the likelihood of a tenth-century date for *BMMM*, the possibility remains that *BMMM* may date from the ninth century, a possibility, moreover, which is further supported by the dating of similar developments in *Aided Chonchobair* (see note 80 below). This would seem, to cast doubt on any attempt to make the tenth century a hard *terminus post quem* for such ideas in annalistic literature.

<sup>80</sup> For the date of the original composition of *Aided Chonchobair*, and those of its oldest existing recensions, see Kobel, *A Critical Edition of ‘Aided Chonchobair’*, 69-108. Imhoff takes the *Vita S. Albei*, which places Conchobar’s death hundreds of years later than that of Christ [i.e. contemporary with Palladius], to be evidence for a late eighth-century version of these events; Helen Imhoff, ‘Different Versions of *Aided Chonchobair*’, *Ériu* 62 (2012), 43-99, at 50, 73-6, 78, 80. She suggests further that the *Vita*, and recension B of *Aided Chonchobair*, in taking Conchobar to have received the news of Christ’s

## Typology – General Considerations

As for the actual features of the Christ-typology in the saga, these are numerous enough that both McCone and Kimpton were content to mention only the most salient examples.<sup>82</sup> The following list represents a moderate expansion of their findings. On the level of narrative development, Cú Chulainn, like Christ, prophesies his coming death,<sup>83</sup> but does not avoid it,<sup>84</sup> a death which results from a plot against him,<sup>85</sup> and involves him being wounded by a spear,<sup>86</sup> as well as thirsting for and receiving drink,<sup>87</sup> for which female mourners are the most important witnesses,<sup>88</sup> and after which he gives a message

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passion at some point after the fact, and from a foreign messenger, are most likely derivative from an earlier version, attested by recensions A and D, in which Conchobar receives the news of the Christ's passion from a local poet or magus (*druí*), contemporaneous with its occurrence; Imhoff, 'Different Versions', 65-6, 76-8, 80. If this is so, and her dating of the *Vita* is correct, these recensions would seem to present the earliest evidence (i.e. prior to the late eighth century) for the doctrine of Christ's coincidence with the heroes of Emain Macha. However, Kobel argues that, with a critical edition of *Vita S. Albei* lacking, a later eighth-century dating for it can only be tentatively asserted; Kobel, *A Critical Edition of 'Aided Chonchobair'*, 72. If so, the theory that *Vita S. Albei* introduced the activity of an 'external agent' into *Aided Chonchobair* which then resulted in recension B can also only be tentative. Moreover, Kobel's analysis of the linguistic evidence suggests that recension B is classical (or possibly late) Old Irish, whereas recension A is either late Old Irish or early Middle Irish, and D is solidly Middle Irish; Kobel, *A Critical Edition of 'Aided Chonchobair'*, 86, 92, 97. This, taken together with the fact that the other early witnesses of *Aided Chonchobair* begin only in the ninth century, and, when they appear, do not seem to side with A and D against B on the matter of who informs Conchobar of Christ's death, suggest that the basis for postulating that the foreign messenger of B represents a departure from an earlier form of the story is uncertain; Kobel, *A Critical Edition of 'Aided Chonchobair'*, 72-4. In which case, the evidence for the doctrine of Conchobar's and Christ's coincidence which *Aided Chonchobair* provides may be no earlier than the early Old Irish date which Kobel has assigned to B, and the evidence for the idea that his knowledge of Christ's passion was instantaneous and by inspired means, no earlier than the late Old Irish or early Middle Irish date she has assigned recension A.

<sup>81</sup> For an overview of its precursors, see John Carey, *A New Introduction to 'Lebor Gabála Éirenn', The Book of the Taking of Ireland, Edited and Translated by R.A. Stewart Macalister* (Dublin 1993), 3-6; *idem*, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History 1 (Cambridge 1994), 9-18; *idem*, 'Lebor Gabála and the Legendary History of Ireland', in Helen Fulton, ed., *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin 2005), 33-41.

<sup>82</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 4-5; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 197. See also, Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', 121-2.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Matt. 16:21-28, 17:22-3, 20:17-22, 21:33-45, 26:21-31, etc.

<sup>84</sup> *BMMM* §10, lines 129-185; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.16-17 and tr.38; Matt. 26:39-56, Mark 14:35-50, etc.

<sup>85</sup> *BMMM* [H.3.18] §31, lines 1-6; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.11 and tr.35; Matt. 26:3-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 20:19-20, 22:1-6, etc.

<sup>86</sup> *BMMM* §20, lines 358-9, §31, line 507; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.23, 28 and tr.42, 46; John 19:20.

<sup>87</sup> *BMMM* §21, lines 362-9; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.23 and tr.42; Matt. 27:48; Mark 15:36; John 19:28-30.

<sup>88</sup> *BMMM* §8, lines 94-116, §30, lines 489-90; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14-5, 27 and tr.37, 46; Matt. 27:55-28:9; Mark 15:40-7; Luke 23:27-8 and 55, 24:10-24.

to his people before disappearing into the heavens.<sup>89</sup> On the level of images, we find that Cú Chulainn, like Christ, is compared to a slain lamb,<sup>90</sup> and that his horse sheds tears of blood prior to his death,<sup>91</sup> evoking the drops of blood shed by Christ during his passion.<sup>92</sup> Then there is also the question as to whether his ‘hero’s-light’ (*lón gaile/láith*)<sup>93</sup> is intended to bring to mind the glory around the head of a saint, or his ‘phantom-chariot’ (*síaburcharpat*),<sup>94</sup> that of the prophet Elijah’s own prefiguration of Christ in his ascent to heaven in a chariot of fire.<sup>95</sup> Whatever the case may be regarding these latter images, this typology is expressed in *BMMM*’s phrasing as well. Erc’s *rosc(ad)* which warns of Cú Chulainn’s approach is simultaneously a warning of the coming of the ‘son of God, son of man’ (*mac Dé mac duini*),<sup>96</sup> one of Christ’s titles in

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<sup>89</sup> *BMMM* §31, line 504-32, line 575; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.28-30 and tr.46-7); Mark 16:14-19; Luke 24:36-51; Acts 1:2-9.

<sup>90</sup> *BMMM* §31, lines 505, 511; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.28 and tr.46; Exod. 12; John 1:29-36; Rev. 5:6-13.

<sup>91</sup> *BMMM* §8, lines 94-5; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14 and tr.37; Luke 22:44. My thanks to Michael Clarke for reminding me that the literary *topos* of a horse’s weeping for his master’s death is likely from Virgil’s *Aeneid* XI.89-90, by way of Servius’ commentary on the same; Roger A. Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis opera* (Oxford 1969), 365; Georgius Thilo and Hermannus Hagen, eds., *Servii grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, 3 vols. (Leipzig 1881-1902) II, 487.9-11. In this case, we seem to have a synthesis of this *topos* with the Old Irish theme of the tears of blood. Tears of blood in early Irish literature seem to arise relative to three kinds of situations: they are 1) provoked by Christ’s passion [*The Poems of Blathmac* §132; Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed.44 and tr.45; Andrew Breeze, ‘The Virgin’s Tears of Blood’, *Celtica* 20 (1988), 110-22, at 115], 2) caused by distress at being forced to work on the Lord’s Day [*Cáin Domnaig* §9; J.G. O’Keeffe, ed. and tr., ‘*Cáin Domnaig*’, *Ériu* 2 (1905), 189-214, ed. at 194 and tr. at 195; Vernam Hull, ed. and tr., ‘*Cáin Domnaig*’, *Ériu* 20 (1966), 151-77, ed. at 168-70 and tr. at 169-71], or else, 3) a spontaneous result of being forced into exile [Kuno Meyer, ed., ‘The Expulsion of the *Déssi*’, *Ériu* 3 (1907), 135-42, at 136, line 23; Vernam Hull, ed. and tr., ‘The Later Version of *The Expulsion of the Déssi*’, *ZCP* 27 (1957), 14-63, ed. at 29 and tr. at 46]; Vernam Hull, ‘Celtic Tears of Blood’, *ZCP* 25 (1956), 226-36, at 231]. For examples of tears of blood in subsequent Irish literature, see Hull, ‘Celtic Tears of Blood’, 228-35. Later in *BMMM*, Emer expects that every eye which has seen him will weep with ‘gushes of blood’ (*frassaib fola*); *BMMM* §34, line 671; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.32 and tr.49. Given the grammatical similarity that Kimpton has noted (see note 100 below) between this later passage and the ‘heavy tear of blood’ (*tromdér folo*) passage in *The Poems of Blathmac* §132, together with the thematic similarity between the keening of Christ, in Blathmac, and the keening his typological representative in *BMMM*, it seems that Blathmac’s treatment of the idea has the most relevance for both instances of gory tears in this text.

<sup>92</sup> Luke 22:44.

<sup>93</sup> *BMMM* §12, line 265 and §23, line 378; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.19, 23 and tr.39, 43.

<sup>94</sup> *BMMM* §30, line 490; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.27 and tr.46.

<sup>95</sup> For Elijah’s ascension into heaven, see 2 Kings 2:11; for Christ’s ascension into heaven, see Luke 24:50-53, John 3:13, 20:17, Acts 1:6-26, 2:34, 25:1; Ephesians 4:8-10.

<sup>96</sup> *BMMM* §13, line 277; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.20 and tr.40.

context of the Bible,<sup>97</sup> but also fitting for Cú Chulainn since the idea, found elsewhere, that Lug is his father,<sup>98</sup> is taken to apply here.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Kimpton has suggested that there are echoes of the keening of Christ, made by Blathmac in his eighth-century religious poetry,<sup>100</sup> in Emer's keening of Cú Chulainn, and also, of the narrator's description of his attack on the Leinster hosts, in Cú Chulainn's own description of Christ's all-encompassing victory over the powers of Hell, later in the saga.<sup>101</sup> Of all these, the last, together with Cú Chulainn's description of himself as a slain lamb, are, perhaps, the most significant. For in prophesying Christ's triumphant return in a way that parallels the narrator's description of his own martial achievements, and in applying iconography that typically pertains only to Christ to himself, Cú Chulainn becomes his own exegete (as Christ often is of himself in the Gospels),<sup>102</sup> not only being presented by the narrative as a type of Christ, but effectively interpreting himself as such, and inviting the reader to do the same.

Yet it is not sufficient to say that Cú Chulainn functions as a type of Christ in this text and to leave it at that. Typology is not a one-way street. The appearance of the archetype in the type means something about the type as well.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, there are

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<sup>97</sup> For 'Son of man' (*filius hominis*), as applied to Christ, see Matt 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 32, 40, 13:37, 41, 16:13, 27-28, 17:9, 12, 22, 18:11, 19:28, 20:18, 28, 24:27, 30, 37, etc. This expression is used by all four Gospel-writers. See also *BMMM*'s description of Cú Chulainn as a 'heavenly nobleman' (*nár neóil*) §14, line 280; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.20 and tr.40.

<sup>98</sup> *Compert Con Culainn* §5; Van Hamel, ed., *Compert Con Culainn*, 5. *Táin Bó Cúailnge I*, 2108ff; O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed.65 and tr.183.

<sup>99</sup> *BMMM* §35, lines 689-90; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.33 and tr.49.

<sup>100</sup> *Blathmac* §132, line 525; Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed.44 and tr.45. Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 67, speaking of the 'ba méite' (it were likely) construction, used in *BMMM* to indicate the necessity of lamenting Cú Chulainn, and, in Blathmac, relative to the necessity of lamenting Christ. Kimpton's suggestion that there is a connection between these texts is further strengthened by their shared theme of Christ as 'sister's son'. See *BMMM* §32, line 543; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.29 and tr.46: 'nia'. Compare to *Blathmac* §100, line 400; Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed.34 and tr.35: 'deirbsethar'. Compare also *Blathmac* §103, line 412; Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed.36 and tr.37: 'firbráthair'. Although in *BMMM* Christ is the sister's-son of humanity, whereas he is the sister's-son of the ancient Israelites in Blathmac. On the theme of the sister's-son in early Irish literature, with reference to both these texts, see Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son in Early Irish Literature', *Peritia* 5 (1986), 128-60 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 65-94].

<sup>101</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 4.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Luke 24:58; this is true of St. John the Baptist as well, who, significantly for our purposes, interprets his own role as that of the forerunner of Christ [Mark 1:3; John 1:23]. See also, pages 251-2, esp. note 134.

<sup>103</sup> Seminal texts for the relationship of archetype and type include: Plato, *Symposium* 210a-211d; Dover, ed., *Plato: Symposium*, 60-2; Nehamas and Woodruff, tr., 'Symposium', 492-3. Plato, *Republic* 508e-

different kinds of types. To say that something is a type of another merely indicates that it has a likeness to it which is that of a lesser thing to a greater, insofar as the lesser is a manifestation of something that is more perfectly present in the greater. In biblical typology, this most often also involves a temporal distinction in which the type most often precedes, but sometimes succeeds, its archetype in time.<sup>104</sup> However, a wide array of possibilities remains within these basic parameters. To put it broadly, a sociopath might be said to be like a scholar in being poorly socialized and a bat might be said to be like a scholar in hiding from sunlight, and both, by virtue of their likeness, to foreshadow something that is fully present only in the scholar, but this clearly does not allow us to assume that the respective relationships of the sociopath and the bat to the scholar, as likenesses of him, are in any way equal. Differences of both degree and kind are at play. What then is the significance of Cú Chulainn's Christ-typology in *BMMM* for how he and his context are understood by its author? Kimpton has suggested that it is fundamentally a narrative of Christian pacifism over pagan violence,<sup>105</sup> something which has been argued for other Ulster Cycle texts.<sup>106</sup> If so it would seem to be an example of Rufinian progressivism rather than Augustinian nostalgia. However, upon a

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518c; Slings, ed., *Platonis Rempublicam*, 254-64; Grube and Reeve, tr., 'Republic', 1129-35. Plato, *Timaeus* 27d-29c; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* IV; Zeyl, tr., 'Timaeus', 1234. Note how, in Biblical examples, the movement from the lesser reality of the type to the higher reality of the archetype, such as we find in Plato, has come to include a temporal movement, usually from an earlier epoch to a later. See, for example, Rom. 5:14; Gal. 4:22-26; Col. 2: 16-17; Heb. 8:5, 9:6-25, 11:17-19, 19:1; 1 Pet. 3:20-2. This temporal dimension could, however, be argued to be implicit in the metaphors which Plato uses to describe the movement from inferior to superior realities. The way Plato tends to characterise ancient eastern cultures as the pre-philosophical source of subsequent Greek intellectual accomplishments, certainly provides amenable historiographical ground for such an interpretation; for example: *Tim.* 21e-25e; Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* IV; Zeyl, tr., 'Timaeus', 1229-30. Significantly, for the world of Hellenic-Judaism in which the New Testament emerged, the Middle-Platonist philosopher and Biblical exegete, Philo of Alexandria (15-10 B.C – 45-50 A.D), despite his belief in the eternity of the world, had already done much to develop this potentiality of Plato's work, notably in his lives of the patriarchs of *Genesis* in *De Abrahamo* and in his *De vita Mosis*; Colson, ed. and tr., *Philo: On Abraham, on Joseph, on Moses*.

<sup>104</sup> Examples of both tendencies are found in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 1) The type precedes its archetype, e.g. the liturgy instituted by Moses, is a type of the heavenly liturgy, such as it is subsequently revealed in Christ [Heb. 9:9-24, esp. 23]; 2) The type succeeds its archetype, e.g. the liturgy instituted by Moses, is a type of the heavenly liturgy, such as it was previously revealed to Moses [Heb. 8:4-5].

<sup>105</sup> Kimpton, *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, 1, 4: 'It will be argued that the narrative and poetic devices of the text address the conflict between the destructive and protective aspects of war, and serve to transform the tale of vengeance into one of pacifism, social cohesion, and Christian salvation. . . . the text promotes a conversion from a martial ethos to pacifism under Christian law. *BMMM* thus adapts a tale of vengeance to a Christian one of salvation, and depicts a victory over pagan violence'.

<sup>106</sup> Joan N. Radner, 'Fury Destroys the World: Historical Strategy in Ireland's Ulster Epic', *Mankind Quarterly* 23 (1982), 41-60.

further consideration of the saga's typology, this seems rather unlikely. For our purposes, the most important thing here is the way that the Day of Doom, prophesied by Cú Chulainn, is anticipated in his own exploits at Mag Muirthemne.

### **Kinds of Violence**

Placing Cú Chulainn's enemies under the rubric of 'pagan violence' is apt enough so long as we keep in mind that this term applies equally to him and his activities. He has not been baptised, nor has he even heard news of Christ from a Roman messenger, as Conchobar does in two versions of his death-tale.<sup>107</sup> He is, however, the kind of pagan who not only foreshadows the coming of Christ to Ireland, both in the person of St. Patrick, and at the end of the world, but is capable of seeing and knowing what he foreshadows, apparently by some sort of divine inspiration.<sup>108</sup> Yet while his paganism is one which reveals what is to come, the paganism of his opponents is characterized by magical deception, and, moreover, by treachery relative to himself and, thus, to what he typologically represents. But these qualities are not confined to the pre-Christian past. If those who lead the Leinstermen against the Ulaid, the children of Calitín, are, by virtue of their wizardry (*druíghecht*), sympathetic magic (*tosúgud*),<sup>109</sup> conjuration (*dolbit*) and sorcery (*amaitecht*),<sup>110</sup> capable of creating false sounds and sights of battle,<sup>111</sup> putting spells on a roast dog,<sup>112</sup> and sufficiently cursing three spears that they succeed in killing Cú Chulainn, together with his horse and his chariot-driver,<sup>113</sup> the Antichrist will succeed in deceiving the entire world and perversely transforming the whole created order. If they deny Cú Chulainn the 'truth of men' (*fír fer*)<sup>114</sup> on the

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<sup>107</sup> Meyer's versions B and C §1-3; Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *The Death Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, Todd Lecture Series 14 (Dublin 1906), 12-15 and 14-17 respectively. For an up-to-date discussion of these versions, see Kobel, *A Critical Edition of 'Aided Chonchobair'*, 8-20, 38-57, 77-91. For new editions and translations of these versions see Kobel, ed. and tr., *A Critical Edition of 'Aided Chonchobair'*, 219-377.

<sup>108</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 159-61.

<sup>109</sup> *BMMM* §2.6, 9; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.12 and tr.36.

<sup>110</sup> *BMMM* [H.3.18] §1, line 1; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.1 and tr.35; *BMMM* §2, lines 6-10; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.12 and tr.36.

<sup>111</sup> *BMMM* §2, lines 10-13; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.12 and tr.36.

<sup>112</sup> *BMMM* §11, lines 233-4; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.18 and tr.39.

<sup>113</sup> *BMMM* [H.3.18] §5-6; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.11 and tr.35. *BMMM* §14, lines 283-292, §16, line 302 - §20, line 361; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.20-23 and tr.40-42.

<sup>114</sup> *BMMM* §10, line 159; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.16 and tr.38.

battle-field and use his honour as a means of manipulating him into enabling his own destruction,<sup>115</sup> the Antichrist will remove justice from civilization as a whole:

Mean is the person who will be born shortly before the destruction of the world. His clientship will be base; his time will be dark; he will deceive a multitude; he will pervert many . . . He will extend falsehood; he will destroy truth . . . perverse proud laws; gold in homages, silver on trees, gems from rockslabs will fill the greed of a crystal mountain; offering will be insulting; dissembling, noble.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, the dilemma of the poem would seem to be, not between pagan and Christian, but between false and true belief (together with their respective practical manifestations), whether before Christ or after, whether in its inchoate pagan prefiguration, or in the more definite form of the future struggle between orthodoxy and heresy. Indeed, it is doubtful that the term ‘pagan’ is truly a useful one here at all. The characterization of pre-Christian belief in this saga seems to have much more in common with a Pauline distinction between spiritual and the fleshly forms of Judaism, between what is believed to be the true and authentic form of pre-Christian belief and its false distortions,<sup>117</sup> than it does with a distinction between Christianity and something that is thought to be wholly other than it. This is evidently not a Tertullianesque ‘what does Emain Macha have to do with Jerusalem, the sagas with psalter?’<sup>118</sup> but, if we will, a careful

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<sup>115</sup> *BMMM* §11, lines 234-241, §14, lines 283-292, §15, lines 307-210, §17, lines 321-332, §19, lines 346-352; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.18, 20-22 and tr.39-42.

<sup>116</sup> *BMMM* §10, lines 192-221; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.17-18 and tr.38: ‘Gand gein / gignithar gair / ría ndomu[i]n díth. / Bith dáer a acille. / Bid dorcha a amser. / Togaéthfaid sochaide. / Soífid iliu. / . . . /Riris goí. / Cloífid fír. / . . . / sáebrehta úabair, / ór urraib, / arget ar crannaib, / gemma a leccaib / línfait saint / sléibe glainithe, / gressach taircsiu, /sáer diamlaid. / Ar do:fessammar fair / i forciund a dála / lathe dia mbáidfíder bith / móras doíne dúib / dúile dia cennach.’ (Kimpton’s translation above, lightly edited).

<sup>117</sup> Rom. 8-9.

<sup>118</sup> The above is derived from a conflation of Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII.1ff., esp. 9; Refoulé, ed., *Tertullien. Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques*, 96-7 with Jerome’s similar sentiments in *Epistulae* XXII.29.7; Hilberg, ed., *Hieronymi: Epistulae* I, 189. See also Alcuin, *Epistolae* CXXXIV; Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* II, 183.21-26: ‘Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? . . .’.

Augustinian delineation between ‘the earthly Emain Macha and the heavenly’<sup>119</sup> bearing in mind that according to this author, its worldly, false, form would, as such, seem to be closely associated with Leinster.

As far as violence is concerned, it is something of which Cú Chulainn and Christ seem eminently more capable than their heretical counterparts. The delight which the saga-author seems to take in the carnage caused by Cú Chulainn, in the greyness of the field of battle from the brain-matter strewn over it, in the hands, feet, heads and bones, that, like the descendants divinely promised to Abraham in Genesis, are as numerous as the ‘stars of heaven’ (*renna nime*) and the ‘sand of the sea’ (*gainem mara*),<sup>120</sup> is much what we would expect regarding the hero of a Tarantino film,<sup>121</sup> but seems an unlikely feature of a narrative seeking to contrast the peacefulness of the Christian faith that Cú Chulainn typologically represents with the putative violence of its rivals. The violence of Christ’s apocalyptic return is manifested mostly through its type in this saga, yet in the more general description made of his ‘victory in battle’ (*búaid catha*) and the ‘establishment of his rule’ (*suidiugad suide*) over the whole of heaven, earth and hell by means of his ‘mighty battle-host’ (*lánarbur catha*),<sup>122</sup> it is clear that even Cú Chulainn’s violence, in all its exuberance, is only a dim shadow of that greater, more perfect (and

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<sup>119</sup> The opposition between the ‘heavenly city’ (*civitas caelesta*) and the ‘earthly city’ (*civitas terrena*) is the fundamental distinction on which St. Augustine’s *DCD* is based: *DCD* XIV.28; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei*, 451-2; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 593-4.

<sup>120</sup> *BMMM* §15, lines 295-301; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.20-1 and tr.40; *Gen.* 22.17: ‘benedicam tibi et multiplicabo semen tuum sicut stellas caeli et velut harenam quae est in litore maris’ (=I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea shore).

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Quentin Tarantino, *Kill Bill, Vol.1* (Santa Monica, CA 2003), 1:22:06ff.

<sup>122</sup> *BMMM* §32, lines 543-573; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.29-30 and tr.46-7: ‘Nia doíne ticfa. \ Arecht cach leth línfaid. \ . . \ Tróethfaid Ísu ifferrn \ immergib áil Ádaim \ . . \ Cía rí seo, cía tuili dia n-epérat arbuir? \ In rí ro:icc talmáin ar fláith ffordon:os[n]dá, \ ar ríchid na:tesbaí do foirm nert nime. \ La forlínad suide \ séis for dindaib flatha \ in rí iar mbúaid chatha \ óenaib dédaib trédaib \ tria chumachta nat:érglond nad:érgut(h) nad:erbur. \ . . \ Ísu as úasliu as ísliu \ tria ercartad ifferrn, \ tria súidigud suide, \ tria thúaslucud flatha, \ tria lánarbur catha \ tria lánchumacta nime \ im nimib, im doíne, im duile, \ im bethu tria bethu. Críst’ (=A sister’s son of men will come; His law will fill every place . . . Jesus will vanquish Hell for the tribes of Adam’s offspring . . . What king is this, what flowing of hosts will speak? [It is] the king who has saved the earth, our Lord / for the sake of the Lord who illumines us, for the kingdom which does not lack any form of the virtues of Heaven. With a fullness of seats the king after victory in battle will sit above mighty kingdoms, as one, as two, as three, through His power which I cannot examine, which cannot tell, which I cannot say. . . Jesus most noble, most humble, though His harrowing of Hell, through His establishment of rule, through his deliverance of the kingdom, through His mighty battle-host, through his great heavenly power encompassing the heavens and mankind and Creation and life everlasting. Christ’.



successful) violence which the author locates in Christ. The greater violence is associated with the future Apocalypse rather than the battles of the pre-Christian past, but it remains that at any point in time, past or future, it is distinguished by a truthful and just manifestation on one hand, and a deceptive and unjust manifestation on the other.

### **Cycles of Time**

Thus, history, as we find it in this saga, is not truly linear,<sup>123</sup> since what happens in the past is the likeness and image of what will occur in the future. The past is not a pagan other, but a struggle in which the structure of the future conflict of Christ and Antichrist, orthodoxy and heresy is seen, known and lived to some degree or another. Nor is it merely cyclical, since it does not repeat itself exactly, but moves irresistibly towards the *eschaton*, the consummation of time at Christ's return. One might say, then, that for *BMMM*, history is a kind of spiral that ascends through cycles whose typological imaging of the apocalyptic victory of Christ over the Antichrist grows ever closer to its reality as they grow closer to it in time. Yet, thus far, there is nothing here which would allow us to determine whether the just maintenance of natural law, and, consequently, the manifestation of its attendant physical signs, is thought to be more or less possible as history unfolds. Christ's apocalyptic return is certainly superior to Cú Chulainn's heroic sortie. But by definition, the Last Judgement is at the end of time,<sup>124</sup> rather than a point in it, and so does not reveal anything definite about the character of the Christian era in which the death-tale is being written, except insofar as it marks the end of that era, in addition to the end time as a whole. The Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ figured in Cú Chulainn's divine parentage, suffering on Mag Muirthemne and ghostly appearance over Emain Macha, occur within time. Yet what exactly these

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. Flechner's description of Augustinian temporality as 'linear'; Roy Flechner, 'The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now', 447. However, see Palmer, 'The Ordering of Time', 612: 'such interpretative strategies upset the linear progression of time through the introduction of repetitive but unpredictable types of events'. For a fuller exploration of how deeply non-linear time can be for Augustine, see *Confessiones* XI; O'Donnell, ed., *Augustine: Confessions* I, 148-164; Chadwick, tr., *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, 221-45.

<sup>124</sup> Or for a Millennialist, the end of human history and the beginning of divine history. But this does not mean anything about the character of human history before. We have seen that Millennialists like Lactantius and Cyprian are quite capable of seeing human history, as such, as a decline into old age. See pages 233-4 above.

things might indicate for the age that follows, as to whether it will be an age in which the kind of natural virtues manifest in Cú Chulainn will wax or wane, is far from self-evident at this point.

### **An Augustinian Cú Chulainn**

The nostalgic character of *BMMM*'s view of history does not lie in its portrayal of Cú Chulainn as a figure of Christ, so much as in the fact that his qualities and acts are imbued with a significance that goes far beyond their significance as types. One might say, their very effectiveness as types of the various aspects of Christ's nature and life lies, at least in part, in that they, like the mysteries which they represent, have a weight of meaning for the author of *BMMM* which is irreducible to their likeness to anything else, in this case, even to their likeness to Christ. The lesser may, as such, necessarily point beyond itself to the greater, but has a worth of its own which, however much it may be implicitly present in the greater, is nowhere fully manifest except in its own lesser mode of being. As much as the figure of Cú Chulainn, like St. John the Baptist, points to the coming of one who is 'greater than he',<sup>125</sup> this seems to do nothing to mute the loss which his death represents. Were we to remove the awe-struck descriptions of Cú Chulainn, by both friend and foe alike,<sup>126</sup> and together with them, the lamentations that are occasioned by the anticipation and fulfillment of his death,<sup>127</sup> very little of the saga would be left. The longest speech and the conclusion of *BMMM* is not Cú Chulainn's prophecy of Christ, but Emer's keening of Cú Chulainn.<sup>128</sup>

This brings us back again to our central argument. If we are to make any attempt to understand how such a nostalgia for pre-Christian realities functions as a central feature of the Christian author's interpretation of history, and how this relates to its otherwise

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<sup>125</sup> Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28. See notes 102 and 134.

<sup>126</sup> The most extended and idealised description of Cú Chulainn, while still alive, is by his enemy, Erc mac Caipri: *BMMM* §12, line 256 - §13, line 282; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.19-20 and tr.39-40. See also, the narrator's description of him at *BMMM* §15, lines 293-301; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.20-21 and tr., 40, and the poem quoted at *BMMM* §24, lines 389-412; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.24-5 and tr.43-4.

<sup>127</sup> For example, *BMMM* §7, line 72 - §8, line 116; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14-15 and tr.37.

<sup>128</sup> *BMMM* §33, line 577ff.; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.30ff and tr.47ff.

apocalyptic orientation, we are compelled to attempt to understand this nostalgia in light of the theories of history which we know, in a general sense, to have been available. We have seen that it is only in the contexts of Augustine's theory of the 'Six Ages', and then, only in a form of it which includes a detailed comparison of the ages to the world's history to the ages of human life, in which such a poignant nostalgia is fully intelligible as a Christian interpretation of the pagan past. It remains possible that Millennialists, such as Lactantius or St. Cyprian, may have contributed in some way to this sense of bereavement for the lost heroism of the pre-Christian past. However, given how incidental this theme is to their thought by comparison with its centrality to Augustine's full-wrought theory of history, it seems unlikely that any such influence would escape assimilation to some version of this account of the 'Six Ages' in ninth- and tenth-century Ireland. *BMMM*'s powerful nostalgia for the lost heroism of the Ulster Heroes would appear to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Augustinian historiography was a significant influence on more than reckonings of time by the late Old Irish period, and perhaps earlier.

As significant a conclusion as this is, the literary context of *BMMM* invites us to more precise affirmation of the Augustinian character of its nostalgic relationship to the pre-Christian past. The most decisive source-evidence for our purposes is the fact that the *Pre-Patrician Annals*, (or else, the *Irish World Chronicle*) in which we find the only other early attempt to draw a connexion between Cú Chulainn and Christ, presents Cú Chulainn's death as the first event of the Sixth Age of the world, following its initiation by Christ's birth. This claim is found both in the version attested in the *Annals of Inisfallen*<sup>129</sup> and in that of the *Annals of Tigernach*.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, contemporaneity with Christ, though without reference to world-ages, is also claimed for Conchobar in versions A and D of *Aided Chonchobar*, also in the ninth- or tenth-century. The extant evidence all points to the conclusion that Cú Chulainn's Christ typology in *BMMM* is related to the idea that his death partially overlaps with Christ's life, much as we found in the case of Patrick relative to Theodosius II. As Kelleher notes, there are

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<sup>129</sup> *Annals of Inisfallen* §205-6; Mac Airt, ed. and tr., *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed.31.

<sup>130</sup> Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Annals of Tigernach', *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), 374-419; 17 (1896), 6-33, 119-223, 337-420; 18 (1897), 9-59, 150-198, 267-303, at 16 (1895), 406-7.

discrepancies in the Pre-Patrician Annals regarding the exact dates of Conchobor and Cú Chulainn.<sup>131</sup> Some of his suggested birth-dates, for example, do not square with the 2 A.D. death-date mentioned above. Yet while the strong connexion that *BMMM* draws between Cú Chulainn and Christ does not absolutely necessitate any particular version of the dates, it seems most in harmony with the idea that Cú Chulainn's death happened after Christ's birth - the overlap thus accounting for the strength of the typological connexion drawn between them - and before Christ's passion and harrowing of Hell - seeing as Cú Chulainn prophesies concerning them.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, as we would expect of the commencement of the 'old age' (*senectus veteris*) of the world, this transition involves the final passing away of the glory of the natural excellence that belongs to the world's youth<sup>133</sup> in the person of Cú Chulainn, his horse, Liath Macha, and his charioteer, Lóeg, each of which are confirmed to be the best of their own kind<sup>134</sup> by the nature of the enchantment on the respective spears that kill them.<sup>135</sup> In Conall Cernach, some vestige remains of the heroic ideal<sup>136</sup> which they embodied as its superlative

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<sup>131</sup> On this, see Kelleher, 'The *Táin* and the Annals', 108-113.

<sup>132</sup> *BMMM* §32, *passim*; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.29 and tr.46.

<sup>133</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.39.1-9; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 107; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 85. *DTR* LXVI.36-40; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 464; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 158 [= *Epistola ad Pleguinam* IV.70-3 Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 619; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 407]).

<sup>134</sup> It is worth noting here that the first biblical death of a notable righteous person, within the parameters of the Sixth Age of Augustine *et al*, is that of St. John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6), who is described by Christ as greater than the prophets of all the previous ages (Matt.11.11-13; Luke 7:28). This could be taken to be implied by Augustine's statement in *DGCM* I.xxiii.40: 1-3 [Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 108; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86], that the 'Sixth Age' begins with the preaching of the Gospel (John 1:29). However, the only Augustinian version of 'Six Ages' doctrine, of which I am aware, that is either prior, or potentially contemporary, to *BMMM*, and makes John the Baptist an explicit means of defining the transition from the Fifth Age to the Sixth, is found in the *Catechesis Celtica*; ed.; Wilmar, ed., *Analecta Reginensia*, 77.92-95. The fact that, in both cases (*BMMM* and *Catechesis Celtica*), such good as existed prior to Christ is summarised in a person, or persons, who endures violent death in conjunction with their role in pointing the way to Christ's manifestation, at the very least makes it necessary to consider whether there may be an implicit comparison between Cú Chulainn and John the Baptist here. Such an idea could, nevertheless, just as easily have its ultimate sources in a Millennialist understanding of the Six Ages. For a late seventh-, or early eighth-century Irish example, see *Commentarius in Epistolas catholicas Scotti Anonymi: Epistola I Iohannis*: 'Et VI milibus annorum aetas mundi describitur . . . et a transmigratione Babiloniae usque ad Iohannem, et ab Iohanne usque ad finem mundi . . .'; McNally, ed., *Scriptores Hiberniae minores I*, xvi (dating), 40 (text).

<sup>135</sup> *BMMM* §17, line 313 - §20, line 361; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.21-3 and tr.41-2.

<sup>136</sup> *BMMM* §27, line 437 - §29, line 481; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.25-7 and tr.44-5.

examples.<sup>137</sup> However, the tone is primarily elegiac, filled with prolonged utterances of mourning for a good that has passed from the world and will not be seen again.<sup>138</sup> ‘Wretched is the ailing world’<sup>139</sup> Emer concludes. The last glimmering of this natural excellence in the person of Cú Chulainn nevertheless, prefigures and foretells the spiritual excellence that will be manifest in the Sixth Age through the advent of the Gospel and, beyond that, the eventual reconciliation of both natural and spiritual goods, in the superlative and simultaneous martial prowess *and* holiness of Christ at the end of time.<sup>140</sup>

The ‘Six Ages’ framework of *BMMM*, thus established, also enables us to refine our understanding of the role of violence in the saga. We have already established that *BMMM* does not seem to associate the enactment of violence with the heretical party of a given age any more than it does with their orthodox adversaries. The difference seems to be purely qualitative. Moreover, the more profound violence seems to be associated with the end of the world rather than with the struggle between Cú Chulainn and the Leinstermen. This conclusion is now further reinforced. In Augustine’s or Bede’s account of the ‘Six Ages’, each world-age, like the ages in which the world was created, have, a ‘morning’ (*mane*) and an ‘evening’ (*vespera*).<sup>141</sup> This has a number of layers of meaning relative to the ages of creation,<sup>142</sup> but for the ages of history, the ‘evening’ of

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<sup>137</sup> Particularly important since he is understood to be the progenitor of the subsequent rulers of Ireland, in the Sixth Age of the Annals; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘Annals of Tigernach’ (1895), 407ff. *Annals of Inisfallen* §220ff; Mac Airt, ed. and tr., *Annals of Inisfallen*, 32ff. Discussion in Kelleher, ‘The Táin and the Annals’, 110, 114.

<sup>138</sup> *BMMM* §8, line 94 - §10, line 229, §33, lines 576ff.; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14-18, 30ff. and tr.37-8, 47ff.

<sup>139</sup> *BMMM* §35, line 704; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.34 and tr.49: ‘Is trúag in bith táthar and’.

<sup>140</sup> *BMMM* §10, lines 217-225, §32, lines 535-75; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.18, 29-30, tr.38, 46-7.

<sup>141</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.36-41 *passim*; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 104-111; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 83-88). While the system of mornings and evenings of ages is preserved in Bede *DTR* LXXI.1-20 [Jones, ed., *Bedaes opera didascalica*, 542; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 246-7], he only makes use of evenings when speaking of specific ages; *DTR* X.6, 12, 19, 26, 33-4, 43; Jones, ed., *Bedaes opera didascalica*, 310-2; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 39-41.

<sup>142</sup> In *DGCM*, Augustine takes this to be a metaphorical way of speaking about the beginning and the end of a complete divine work: *DGCM* I.xiv.21; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 87-8; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 69). In his *De Genesi ad litteram*, the emphasis is more on morning as form, and evening as privation of form, thus bringing it closer to his historiographical use of these terms elsewhere;

an age is predominantly understood to refer to its end, something which always results from a disaster brought about by a collapse into collective sin.<sup>143</sup> If then, as we concluded previously, the battle at Mag Muirthemne marks the end of the Fifth Age, just as the Day of Doom, prefigured in it, marks the end of the Sixth, then neither battle can be taken to be directly indicative of the relative violence or peace of their respective ages, so much as evidence that their respective ages are indeed coming to end. It could be inferred that since the collapse of the Sixth Age appears more calamitous than that of the Fifth, the Sixth Age must have a more generally more violent character than the Fifth. However, such a conclusion only moves us further from characterizing the pre-Christian past as a time of violence in contrast to the Christian era which follows.

Among other things, the culmination of successive ages in purgative destruction,<sup>144</sup> and not just the last, points to the influence of the articulation of the ‘Six Ages’ theory found in Augustine’s *DGCM*, or Bede’s transmission of its ideas in *DTR*, rather than one of its non-Augustinian counterparts, or even an Augustinian version of it that makes no relevant statements on this issue, such as Isidore’s *Etymologiae* or Augustine’s *DCD*. Between these two sources, *BMMM*’s additional attention to the theme of the Antichrist suggests that Bede’s version of the theory may, perhaps, be more decisive in determining the character of its overall conception of the ‘Six Ages’.<sup>145</sup> It seems to be only there, at any rate, that the nature of the Antichrist is explored as a major part of an account of this historiographical system.<sup>146</sup>

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*De Genesi ad litteram* VII.28, XV.51-2; Zycha, ed., *De Genesi ad litteram*, 478-9, 495.12-496.14; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 163-5, 180-2.

<sup>143</sup> *DGCM* I.xxiii.35.14, 36.9-10, 37.20-2, 38.9-10, 39.20-3, 41.1-4; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 104-108, 110; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 84-86, 88. For the general association of ‘evening’ (*uespera*) with sin, see *DTR*.V.120ff.; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 289-90; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 23. For the application of this association to each age, see *DTR*.X.6-7, 12-5, 19-22, 26-8, 33-6, 42-4; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 310-2; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 40-1.

<sup>144</sup> See pages 248, 252-3 above.

<sup>145</sup> For the theme of the Antichrist, see *BMMM* §10.192-225; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.17-18 and tr.38. Compare *DTR*, LXIX; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 538-9; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 241-3.

<sup>146</sup> *DCD*’s discussion of the end of the world certainly includes an account of the Antichrist. However, this is not done in close proximity to the sections where he deals with the theme of the ‘Six Ages’, such as it is in Bede’s *DTR*; *DCD* XVIII.52-3, XX.8, 13-14; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 650-3, 712-5, 721-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 835-9, 910-4, 921-5.

## Augustine Transformed

Yet the question remains as to how this application of the Six Ages theory came about, especially seeing as its potential in this direction does not seem to have been self-consciously developed by either Augustine or Bede, or even by many of their early medieval successors.<sup>147</sup> The inherent nostalgia of Augustine's system is articulated exclusively with reference to the pre-Christian figures of the Bible. Even the fact that the Cú Chulainn of *BMMM* functions as a type of Christ at all is somewhat unusual in this context. In most 'Six Ages' texts, and indeed, most often in patristic literature, the only people who are interpreted as types of the salvific future are those who are thought to have an institutional continuity with the Church, which is to say, only spiritual leaders of Israel or their patriarchal ancestors.<sup>148</sup> This is not always the case, but where there are exceptions they tend to indicate that the author believes that the figure in question belongs to a revelatory tradition which is in some way comparable to that which God granted Israel and its Biblical predecessors, something which Rufinus, for example, suggests regarding Greek philosophy and Latin law in the first book of his revision of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>149</sup>

Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* is an interesting exception here when compared to the other major Augustinian 'Six Ages' authorities. The nostalgic elements of this theory of history are not at the forefront in Isidore, since he discusses the ages of the world and the ages of individual human life only tangentially in relation to each other.<sup>150</sup> However,

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<sup>147</sup> Since Donahue's pioneering work on the subject, there has been a tendency to downplay the possibility of Augustine as a source of early Irish affirmations of pre-Christian Irish realities; Charles Donahue, 'Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good', *Traditio* 7 (1949-51), 263-77; *idem*, 'Beowulf and Christian Tradition'; see also, Márkus, 'Pelagianism'; O'Sullivan, 'The Anti-Pelagian Motif'. Conrad-O'Briain has offered an important, if somewhat overstated, corrective to Donahue; Conrad O'Briain, 'Grace and Election'. However, none of these have considered the significance of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory relative to these matters. Donahue is surely right that one is unlikely to account for such things 'by means of Augustine alone'; Donahue, 'Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good', 266. Yet it is equally true that it will be hard to account for the character of many examples of this tendency, such as what we find in *BMMM*, without recourse to Augustine. See further discussion in Chapter 2, pages 96-8.

<sup>148</sup> i.e. Adam, Eve, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abr(ah)am, Sara(h/i), Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Judah, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, etc.

<sup>149</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.ii.18-23; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* I, 21, 23 and 25.

<sup>150</sup> *Etym.* V.xxviii.5; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 130: 'Aetas autem proprie duobus modis dicitur: aut enim hominis, sicut infantia, iuventus, senectus: aut mundi, cuius prima

his tendency, inherited from Jerome's translation of Eusebius' Chronicle, to people his account of the Augustinian world-ages with an abundance of non-Biblical figures, and, elsewhere in the *Etymologiae*, to list non-Biblical founders of a given art together with its subsequent non-Biblical practitioners,<sup>151</sup> results in a much stronger identification between Biblical figures and their non-Hebrew contemporaries than we find either in Augustine or in the uses to which Bede put Augustine. Perhaps the most striking result of this tendency, relative to the *BMMM*, is found at the end of his chronicle of the events of the Fifth Age. There, he does not follow Augustine and Bede in describing the Jewish people's failure to recognise Christ,<sup>152</sup> or else their loss of sovereignty to the Romans,<sup>153</sup> as the disaster which brings that age to its close,<sup>154</sup> but (albeit without comment) closes the Fifth Age with the reign of Julius Caesar.<sup>155</sup> This is too little information on which to base a claim that that the author of *BMMM* necessarily sees an analogy between the death of Julius Caesar and that of Cú Chulainn, or that Isidore's placement of Julius Caesar in his chronicle implies that he understands him to be, in some way, a successor to the Patriarchs and perhaps even a type of Christ.<sup>156</sup> However, such details as this, in tandem with Augustine's own warm description<sup>157</sup> of such non-

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aetas est ab Adam usque ad Noe' (=The term 'age' is properly used in two ways: either as the age of a human – as infancy, youth, old age – or as an age of the world, whose first age is from Adam to Noah).

<sup>151</sup> Notable here, for example, is his placement of Moses at the head of a list of the law-givers of other countries; see *Etym.* V.iff.; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 117ff. Their association with him is further encouraged by: 1. his description of Moses as the first to promulgate 'divine laws' (*divinas leges*), 2. the definition of divine law as being such law as is based on nature (*Etym.* V.ii), and 3. the claim that natural law is common to every nation (*Etym.* V.iv).

<sup>152</sup> *DGCM.* I.xxiii.39.21-3; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 108; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 86.

<sup>153</sup> *DTR* X.33-6; Jones, ed., *Beda opera didascalica*, 311; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 40.

<sup>154</sup> Augustine links these two disasters; *DCD* XVIII.xlvi; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 643-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 827.

<sup>155</sup> *Etym.* V.xxix.25; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 132.

<sup>156</sup> Dante is, perhaps, the most famous exponent of such a parallel. In the lowest level of the inferno, Judas only has Caesar's betrayers for company; *Inferno*, 34.61-9; Robert Hollander, ed. and tr., *Dante Alieghieri: Infero* (New York 2000), ed.885-6 and tr.567-8.

<sup>157</sup> *DCD* XVIII.xxiii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei*, 613-15; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 788-791. Here he makes direct reference to Lactantius' discussion of the oracles; see *Institutiones Divinae* I.6-8, 11, 14-5, II. 4, 8-13, 17, IV.6, 13-20, V.14, VI. VII.7, 13-25; Brandt and Laubmann, eds., *Lactantius Firmanus: opera omnia* I, 18-28, 36-48, 53-61, 107-114, 128-60, 172-4, 286-91, 316-67, 443-7, 681, 685-700; Bowen *et al*, tr., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, 69-75, 79-87, 91-6, 126-30, 139-59, 164-6, 232-3, 243-63, 308-11, 406-7, 417-37. Lactantius suggests that other extra-Hebraic oracles, such as Hermes Trismegistus, and, somewhat more sporadically, the philosophers, are true oracles as well; see *Institutiones Divinae* I.6-8; II.9, 13, 15-16; IV.6, 9, 13, 27; V.15; VI.25; VII.9; Brandt and Laubmann, eds., *Lactantius Firmanus: opera omnia* I, 18-25, 143-6, 161-2, 165-72, 287-91, 300-301, 317-24, 384-8,



Hebrew ante-Sixth Age personalities as the Sibylline Oracles,<sup>158</sup> show, at any rate, that the intellectual *milieu* that produced the Cú Chulainn of this saga did not operate in a theological vacuum. On the most basic level, what we seem to have in a text like *BMMM*, is an interpretation of Augustinian historiography from the perspective of a less guarded affirmation of non-Hebraic forms of pre-Christian revelation, such as they would have found in Rufinus' translations of Eusebius and Lactantius, among others, a trajectory which is already anticipated, in some measure, by Isidore.<sup>159</sup> While much that is at work in such an interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of the Six Ages must remain obscure for the time being, it remains clear enough that, of the theories of history both known to us, and conceivably known to the author of *BMMM*, some fairly robust version of version of Augustine's 'Six Ages', but extended in the way suggested above, seems to provide the best way forward for explaining the way that its nostalgia for a pre-Christian Emain Macha functions as a part of its overall outlook.

### **Conclusions regarding *BMMM***

Such a path of inquiry opens a number of complexities which it will not be possible to address here. We do not know, for example, if another idea implicit in the 'Six Ages' theory, that knowledge of the ages of history is a knowledge of the self, would have been a part of what the author of *BMMM*, or its contemporary readers, would have had in mind. It would certainly be consistent with this historiographical perspective to take Cú Chulainn, for example, to be not only an important type of Christ at the end of the Fifth Age, but also a type of some aspect of the individual soul's spiritual progress.<sup>160</sup> Yet proving this would require more evidence than is present here. Such an approach

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447-9, 577-80, 610-14; Bowen *et al.* tr., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, 69-72, 147-50, 158-9, 161-4, 232-3, 236-7, 243-6, 273-5, 311-2, 386-8, 409-11.

<sup>158</sup> Johannes Geffcken, ed., *Die Oracula Sibyllina*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 8 (Leipzig 1902); John J. Collins, tr., 'Sibylline Oracles', in Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* I, 317-472. Books 1-3 of the Sibylline Oracles have received more recent editions and translations; Jane J. Lightfoot, ed. and tr., *The Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction Translation and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (Oxford 2007); Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, ed. and tr., *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting, with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden 2003).

<sup>159</sup> As such, *BMMM* is further proof of Boyle's thesis that the same eschatological themes are expressed in both Latin and Irish texts; Elizabeth Boyle, 'The Rhetoric and Reality of Reform in Irish Eschatological Thought, Circa 1000-1500', *History of Religions* 55.3 (February 2016), 269-288, at 270.

<sup>160</sup> See *DGCM* I.xxv.43; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 112-4; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 89-90.

also renders the role of the goddess, Morrígan, in attempting to prevent Cú Chulainn from going to his death,<sup>161</sup> all the more perplexing in its strangeness. The place of the gods of the sagas in the Christian cosmology of their writers, especially when they, as here, seem not to be presented as angels, devils, or mortal people of the distant past, evidently needs much more study than it has received to date before such an ambiguity can be adequately addressed.<sup>162</sup> This is something to which we will return in the final chapter. That said, it is surely a further testimony to the importance of Augustinian historiography for clarifying the kinds of meaning found in a saga like *BMMM* that such difficulties are now made so starkly visible. Furthermore, while its relevance in other ways cannot be assumed, the broad transmission of the idea of the ‘Six Ages’ in medieval Ireland, which we have observed, would seem to suggest that it may - both in regard to, and beyond, the theme of nostalgia explored here - be similarly important for our understanding a wide range of texts as early as the ninth- or tenth-century composition of *BMMM* and perhaps earlier.

### **A Return to *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad***

The *Immacallam* provides similar, though less complex, evidence that the influence of Augustinian nostalgia on medieval Irish literature may have begun even earlier than the ninth century. Short of this, it is, at the very least, roughly contemporary. It all depends on how one dates the relevant content. Based on linguistic evidence, Thurneysen dated the *Immacallam* to the ninth century,<sup>163</sup> and Stokes, to the tenth.<sup>164</sup> However, as Carey has pointed out, the reference to it in The Prologue - which is itself dated to the second half of the eighth century<sup>165</sup> - indicates the existence of a significantly earlier version of the *Immacallam*, prior to it.<sup>166</sup> Of course, this does not mean that we can say much about what this eighth-century version might look like in comparison to the text as

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<sup>161</sup> *BMMM* §7, lines 78-9; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14 and tr.37.

<sup>162</sup> But see these important contributions: John Carey, ‘Time, Space and the Otherworld’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* (1987), 1-27; *idem*, *A Single Ray*, 1-38; *idem*, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’. Mark Williams’s recent book should do much to facilitate rapid advancement in this area; Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*.

<sup>163</sup> Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, 520.

<sup>164</sup> Stokes, ‘The Colloquy’, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Breatnach, *A Companion*, 344.

<sup>166</sup> Carey, ‘An Edition’, 10 note 33. But see also his modifications of this position in Carey, ‘The End of the World’, 630.

we have it. But if the relevant features of the text cannot be definitively demonstrated to be older than *BMMM*, it also seems unlikely that they would be younger than it by a significant degree. The most important feature of the *Immacallam*, for our purposes, is once again the contrast between the respective prophecies of Néde and Ferchertne. But where, in Chapter 2, the concern was what these prophecies revealed about the character of the respective grades of inspiration which produced them,<sup>167</sup> now the concern is what they reveal about the different times of which they speak.

Néde prophecies, in the present tense, of the true observance of natural law, together with all the physical signs of prosperity that typically follow from such observance. The time he speaks of is one which does not lack for ‘abundant valour’<sup>168</sup> and ‘wonderous wisdom’,<sup>169</sup> attributes which are embodied in the form of ‘sunny kings’,<sup>170</sup> ‘fair men’<sup>171</sup> and the perfect practice of every art,<sup>172</sup> each person busy with their proper occupation,<sup>173</sup> and receiving proper compensation for it.<sup>174</sup> Thus, the sea is fruitful,<sup>175</sup> ‘fruit-trees flourish’,<sup>176</sup> ‘cornfields grow’,<sup>177</sup> and ‘bee-swarms are many’.<sup>178</sup> The world is radiant,<sup>179</sup> and has kindly weather in the summers.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, it is peaceful,<sup>181</sup> since battles have ceased.<sup>182</sup> However, there is no mention of the Church in any of this. We have already determined that the kind of prophecy which is possible for a poet of Néde’s status as *anruth*, according to this author, does not seem to reach as far as definite knowledge of ecclesiastical matters. But then, we have seen that a significant number of the texts we

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<sup>167</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 118-25.

<sup>168</sup> *Immacallam* §169; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘laith lán’.

<sup>169</sup> *Immacallam* §162; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘gáis adamrai’.

<sup>170</sup> *Immacallam* §161; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘ríg griandai’.

<sup>171</sup> *Immacallam* §171; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘cáin cach fó’.

<sup>172</sup> *Immacallam* §161; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘lán *cach* cerdd’..

<sup>173</sup> *Immacallam* §164-6; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘cáich dia cheird, / fir do gail / grés for mná’ (=every one to his [own] art, / men to valour, / needlework for women).

<sup>174</sup> *Immacallam* §160; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘sluaig rathaig’ (=armies with pay).

<sup>175</sup> *Immacallam* §150 (Stokes, 32-3): ‘muir thoirthech’ (=sea fruitful).

<sup>176</sup> *Immacallam* §154; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘fechait oblaind’.

<sup>177</sup> *Immacallam* §155; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘asait ithgoirt’.

<sup>178</sup> *Immacallam* §156; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘ili bethamain’.

<sup>179</sup> *Immacallam* §157; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘bith sorchi’ (=a radiant world).

<sup>180</sup> *Immacallam* §159; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘sam sogar’ (=kindly summer).

<sup>181</sup> *Immacallam* §158; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘síd subach’ (=happy peace).

<sup>182</sup> *Immacallam* §163; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.34 and tr.35: ‘echtraid cath’ (=battle goes away).

have looked at thus far do not see any very specific theological knowledge as necessarily in order to foresee, understand, or bring about a time in which natural virtues and their resulting physical benefits flourish.<sup>183</sup>

Ferchertne's prophecy is a different story. Unlike Néde's prophecy, his is given in the future-tense, suggesting that the things he prophesies are in the less immediate future. If the time Néde reveals is characterised by wisdom and valour, this later time which Ferchertne speaks of is characterised by 'false-judgement',<sup>184</sup> 'inhospitality',<sup>185</sup> immodesty,<sup>186</sup> unrighteousness,<sup>187</sup> 'adultery',<sup>188</sup> unbelief,<sup>189</sup> perjury<sup>190</sup> and treachery.<sup>191</sup> As a result, everyone, though their arrogance, will depart from their proper rank and state,<sup>192</sup> turning 'their art into false-teaching and false-intelligence' in their attempt to surpass their superiors,<sup>193</sup> so that neither poets,<sup>194</sup> nor any other art remains,<sup>195</sup> and all honour and dignity passes away, seeing as no one has any shame left.<sup>196</sup> Every lawful prince that is not made a pauper will be killed by usurpers,<sup>197</sup> and the usurpers will satirise each other.<sup>198</sup> Every person will hurt their neighbour, betray their brother,<sup>199</sup> and kill the one with whom he eats and drinks.<sup>200</sup> This complete collapse of the social order brings about, in turn, the collapse of the physical order of the world itself. There will be terrible tempests with such lightening as will cause trees to cry out.<sup>201</sup> The crops<sup>202</sup> and

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<sup>183</sup> See Chapter 2, esp. pages 114-33. Related matters are discussed in Chapter 3, pages 186-90.

<sup>184</sup> *Immacallam* §199, 214, 221, respectively; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38-42 and tr.39-43: 'audbretha', 'ssáib[b]retha' and 'esbretha'.

<sup>185</sup> *Immacallam* §198, 202, 219, respectively; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38-42 and tr.39-43: 'dochell', 'dibi' and 'roecessacht'.

<sup>186</sup> *Immacallam* §177, 224; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36, 44 and tr.37, 45.

<sup>187</sup> *Immacallam* §225; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.44 and tr.45.

<sup>188</sup> *Immacallam* §217; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41: 'adaltras'.

<sup>189</sup> *Immacallam* §192; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38 and tr.39.

<sup>190</sup> *Immacallam* §237; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and tr.47.

<sup>191</sup> *Immacallam* §206; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>192</sup> *Immacallam* §187, 211; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36, 40 and tr.37, 41.

<sup>193</sup> *Immacallam* §220, 223; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.42 and tr.43; esp. §223 'sófid cách a dán i sáibforcital' (=Every one will turn his art into false teaching).

<sup>194</sup> *Immacallam* §224; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.44 and tr.45.

<sup>195</sup> *Immacallam* §188; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36 and tr.37.

<sup>196</sup> *Immacallam* §187, 223; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36, 42-4 and tr.37, 43-5.

<sup>197</sup> *Immacallam* §189-91; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38 and tr.39.

<sup>198</sup> *Immacallam* §204, 210; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>199</sup> *Immacallam* §207; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>200</sup> *Immacallam* §208; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>201</sup> *Immacallam* §230; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38, 46 and tr.39, 47.

even the flowers will fail,<sup>203</sup> and the crops that do not fail will be burnt by raiders.<sup>204</sup> Cattle will be afflicted by a multitude of diseases.<sup>205</sup> Moreover, two-thirds of people will also die from disease and famine, together with a third of the animals of the sea and forest.<sup>206</sup> The hiding place will have no treasure, and such treasures as exist will lack a possessor.<sup>207</sup> The seasons will be disordered.<sup>208</sup> The forest will become plains, and the plains, forests.<sup>209</sup>

Thus far, the time Ferchertne describes could be at any point farther in the future than that of which Néde has spoken. However, among the disasters recounted by him is the collapse of the ecclesiastical institutions that would only come to be established in the Christian era. Sunday, he says, will no longer be properly observed.<sup>210</sup> The ecclesiastical tenant will not fulfil his duties to his church and abbot.<sup>211</sup> Civil law will be used against the Church.<sup>212</sup> The sentries of churches will be attacked,<sup>213</sup> and the churches themselves will be burnt and robbed.<sup>214</sup> But the Church will not only be a sufferer of harm; evil will be done by the bishops of the church itself,<sup>215</sup> and the life of the warring *fian*-bands will be taken up, not by young nobles, but by monks and clergy.<sup>216</sup>

Moreover, following all this, Ferchertne tells of the subsequent coming of the Antichrist, and the signs by which his coming will be known.<sup>217</sup> Some of these are merely more intense examples of the way that physical disorder is the immediate result of injustice:

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<sup>202</sup> *Immacallam* §199, 236; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and tr.47.

<sup>203</sup> *Immacallam* §198, 242; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38, 46 and tr.39, 47.

<sup>204</sup> *Immacallam* §225; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.44 and tr.45.

<sup>205</sup> *Immacallam* §233; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and tr.47.

<sup>206</sup> *Immacallam* §230, 232, 239; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and tr.47.

<sup>207</sup> *Immacallam* §234; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and 47.

<sup>208</sup> *Immacallam* §231; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.46 and 47.

<sup>209</sup> *Immacallam* §228; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.44 and 45.

<sup>210</sup> *Immacallam* §224; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.44 and tr.45.

<sup>211</sup> *Immacallam* §222; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.42 and tr.43.

<sup>212</sup> *Immacallam* §215; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>213</sup> *Immacallam* §184; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.36 and tr.37.

<sup>214</sup> *Immacallam* §195-6; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.38 and tr.39.

<sup>215</sup> *Immacallam* §216; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>216</sup> *Immacallam* §213; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.40 and tr.41.

<sup>217</sup> Making the *Immacallam* a significant early witness of the 'Signs of the Antichrist' literature in medieval Ireland; Carey, 'The End of the World,' 631-2, incl. notes.

monsters are born in every family, rivers run backwards, etc.<sup>218</sup> But, as in *BMMM*, the injustice of the Antichrist is different, in that it is more often manifest through deceitful inversions of the physical effects that otherwise necessarily accompany injustice. The transformation of lowly materials into high-status commodities,<sup>219</sup> and infertile land, into arable land<sup>220</sup> are the kind of effects which we might expect to result from a just reign. But, in the case of the Antichrist, these physical signs of justice (or the semblances of them)<sup>221</sup> manifest the greatest injustice, an alarming prospect in a world where justice, or its lack, is primarily thought to be revealed and known through physical signs. Whereas, before his coming, the integrity of the hierarchies of ruler, poets and artisans were already fundamentally compromised, it seems that in the time of the Antichrist himself, the immediate connexion between physical and ethical realities which made those hierarchies possible in the first place has been fatally severed.

Of course, it is possible for a similarly horrifying portrayal of the Antichrist's coming not to imply anything like the kind of nostalgia for pre-Christian times of which we have been speaking. However, this is entirely due to the fact that not every such account is juxtaposed with an idealised description of the successful pre-Christian practice of natural law, a practice, moreover, to which not even the Mosaic precursors to ecclesiastical institutions appear, in this case, to be relevant. Given that Néde utters his prophecy in the present tense, it evidently is taken to apply to the immediate future, i.e. the time of the heroes of Emain Macha.<sup>222</sup> But wherever we might place the situation described in Néde's prophecy temporally, it is necessarily prior to the establishment of

<sup>218</sup> *Immacallam* §255-6; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.48 and tr.49.

<sup>219</sup> *Immacallam* §257-8; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.48 and tr.49.

<sup>220</sup> *Immacallam* §259-60; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.48 and tr.49.

<sup>221</sup> It is not clear that horesedung in this case is truly made into gold, or water into wine, but that horesedung will have 'gold-colours' (*órdathu*) and water will have the taste of wine. The variants in the Rawlinson B. 502 and the Yellow Book of Lecan would seem to suggest that this is a deceptive semblance without real transformation; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', 48 note 6. On this, and points of contrast in the poem, *Ceithre coimperta caema*, the *Life of Maignenn* and *The Passions and Homilies from the Leabhar Breac*, where the actual transformation of various worthless things into gold is implied, see Carey, 'The End of the World', 631-2, esp. notes 14, 18.

<sup>222</sup> Compare, for example, the present tense of Feidelm's repeated prophecy of the immanent destruction of Medb's host in the *Táin. Táin Bó Cúailnge I*, lines 50, 55, 65; Cecile O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge I* (Dublin 1976), ed.2 and tr.126-7; 'Atchíu forderg, atchíu rúad' (=I see it blood-stained, I see it red). *Táin Bó Cúailnge II*, lines 205, 210, 215, 220, 225, 231; Cecile O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: From the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967), ed.6-7 and tr.143-4: 'Atchíu forderg forro, atchíu rúad' (=I see red on them. I see crimson).

the Church, due to the aforementioned absence of reference to the Church's institutions or clergy in his account of it, in contrast to the time spoken of in Ferchertne's prophecy. Again, this seems consistent with his theological limitations as an *ánruth*.<sup>223</sup> If a person's prophetic insight is not sufficient to allow them a glimpse of any doctrine beyond that of the bare existence of God, it seems to follow a certain logic that it would also not allow them to grasp the character of a time which is distinguished from those preceding it precisely by the revelation of theological doctrines that are beyond its field of vision. Conversely, Ferchertne, who, as an *ollam*, shows no such theological limitations, is able to discern the shape that the Christian era would have. It is apparently a time when the secular hierarchies that enact and embody the natural law break down to such a degree that the even the Church's superior enactment and embodiment ecclesiastical law comes, in time, to be completely (or almost completely) corrupted. Granted, we do not know how close to the end of the Christian era that these events are supposed to take place. Yet it is instructive that Ferchertne does not inform Néde of any sort of improvement upon the pre-Christian situation he had described, which would precede the rapid decline heralded by his own prophecy. However we may interpret it, the time in which the establishment of the Church occurs is not presented as anything other than a time of decline, in contrast to the prosperous stability of the pre-Christian realities to which Néde's knowledge is confined.

It remains that Ferchertne is superior to Néde because he possesses more of the theological knowledge on which the Church will be based. But the time in which the Church will be manifest seems to be one in which the very basis of the secular hierarchy of poets, or indeed any secular hierarchy, will be much eroded, so much so that even the Church itself will ultimately not be able to maintain its integrity. It seems likely enough that the author of the *Immacallam* understands Ferchertne to be speaking of the time in which he writes, when Ferchertne speaks of a failure in the observance of both natural and ecclesiastical laws at some unspecified interval prior to the subsequent appearance

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<sup>223</sup> See Chapter 2, page 122.

of the Antichrist.<sup>224</sup> Yet as we have seen, such nostalgia for what has been lost since the pre-Christian past does not make him a self-conflicted medieval antecedent of ‘Celtic Twilight’ era W.B. Yeats, so much as a good Augustinian of a certain sort.

There are, however, some noteworthy differences with the *Immacallam*’s nostalgia for the grand old days of Emain Macha, and that of *BMMM*. In *BMMM*, it is manifest as a sense of loss for the passing of ancient heroism, a loss that cannot be fully assuaged by the advent of Christ which it prefigures. It is only in the Apocalypse, at the end of time, that this tension can be resolved.<sup>225</sup> However, in the brief mention of the Church itself that *BMMM* makes, through its reference to the coming of Patrick, there is no indication that it will fail to maintain its integrity. These ecclesiastical realities are gestured at only as a comfort to the hearers.<sup>226</sup> There is, like the *Immacallam*, talk of the Antichrist, but considerations of this are dominated by the affirmation of Christ’s triumphant return. Its ‘backward look’<sup>227</sup> as such seems to arise primarily from a sense that there is an ascetic necessity, in this present world, of denying (or losing) natural goods, to a certain extent, in favour of those that are more spiritual.<sup>228</sup> Like his contemporary, John the Baptist, the

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<sup>224</sup> On of the features of the *Immacallam* that has been considered significant for dating purposes is that it lists ‘fer ndubga[e]’ (=men of black spears) among the many threatening realities which will be present just before the end of the world. These have most often identified as Vikings, which, if correct, would place this feature of the text no earlier than the ninth century. Carey, however, has suggested that this may reflect anxiety about earlier waves of invaders, such as on find in the supplementary notes to *Tírechán’s Collectanea* and *Críth Gablach*; Carey, ‘The End of the World’, 630. The significance of both these readings for our purposes is that, in either case, it would involve the writer assuming that they themselves are living in the last days before the end of the world, as described by Ferchertne. I am hesitant about coming to any very certain conclusion about specific waves of invaders based on so little. However, the basic principle that the author of the *Immacallam* understands themselves to be living in or near the last days described in their text would seem to be in keeping with the character of Apocalyptic writing generally.

<sup>225</sup> See pages 248ff. above.

<sup>226</sup> *BMMM* §30, line 492ff.; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.27 and tr.46ff. ‘Eomiun, Eomiun, / oll olleith tan:ré. / Talcind trebait íathu Emna . . .’ (=Emain, Emain, great the Lord who will come to us. Priests will dwell in the lands of Emain . . .)

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Frank O’Connor, *The Backward Look: A Survey of Irish Literature* (London 1967); Joseph Nagy, ‘Staging the Otherworld in Medieval Irish Tradition’, in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm eds., *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past* (Cardiff 2015), 69-82; *idem*, ‘Introduction’, in J.F. Nagy, ed., *Memory and the Modern in Celtic Literatures*, CSANA Yearbook 5 (Dublin 2006), 7-14.

<sup>228</sup> See pages 225-6.



fact that ‘Christ must increase’ is inseparable from the fact that ‘Cú Chulainn must decrease’.<sup>229</sup>

In the *Immacallam*, however, the loss does not seem to arise from a difficult ascetic necessity inherent in all present spiritual progress so much as the growing and seemingly irresistible momentum of the human capacity for evil over time. It remains that the doctrine of the Church is supremely authoritative. We have seen that Ferchertne’s superiority over Néde lies in his foreknowledge of the Church’s doctrine, and of the interpretation of history that results from that doctrine.<sup>230</sup> However, the ecclesiastical hierarchies seem, in the long run, to be incapable of withstanding this momentum, and to have fully succumbed even before the Antichrist appears. In which case, the *Immacallam*’s nostalgia for the pre-Christian past is, as we have said, not about the unfortunate displacement of one good by another that is required by the process of human salvation both individually and historically, but about the exponentially escalating destruction of harmonious political and ecological order that has resulted from humanity’s loss of natural virtues over time. Neither appears to be any more legitimate than the other as an application of Augustinian historiography. Both have simply emphasised different sides, as it were, of Augustine’s own thought. Nor are they any more irreconcilable than Augustine’s thought is to itself on this issue. For him these are parallel and complimentary perspectives on the same development. The difference between the involuntary deprivations that result from sin and the voluntary privations of the penitent is entirely on the side of the will of the person in question. Yet it remains undeniable that, while mutually complimentary in their general conception, both works are profoundly different in emphasis and mood.

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<sup>229</sup> John 3:28-30: ‘Ipsi vos mihi testimonium perhibetis, quod dixerim: Non sum ego Christus: sed quia missus sum ante illum. 29. Qui habet sponsam, sponsus est: amicus autem sponsi, qui stat, et audit eum, gaudio gaudet propter vocem sponsi. Hoc ergo gaudium meum impletum est. 30. Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui’ (=Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. 30. He must increase, but I must decrease).

<sup>230</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 118-20.

### The Case of *Cath Maige Tuired*

In this, *Cath Maige Tuired* (*CMT*) follows the similar line to the *Immacallam*. The greater part of it is generally thought to been written in the ninth century (and thus at younger end of the suggested dates for our existing witness of the *Immacallam*), but with substantial additions and revisions in the eleventh.<sup>231</sup> Like the *Immacallam*, it juxtaposes an idealised pre-Christian situation with the rather dismal state of affairs in the Christian era just prior to the end of the world. This occurs in the prophecy with which *CMT* concludes. It begins by gesturing towards an immediate future which will be characterised by the physical signs of natural justice. ‘Peace’, it says, is ‘up to heaven’ and ‘heaven down to earth’.<sup>232</sup> Everyone is strong, every cup full of honey and abundant mead.<sup>233</sup> Even the winter is like summer. The army is well-equipped.<sup>234</sup> People, animals, trees and plants are fruitful.<sup>235</sup> However, in contrast, the end of the world will be characterised by battles<sup>236</sup> and abandoned fortifications.<sup>237</sup> There will be conquests, but they will be conducted by outlaws, with no kings to lead them.<sup>238</sup> Women will have no modesty; men, no courage.<sup>239</sup> Neither land nor sea will produce crop; nor cattle, offspring.<sup>240</sup> It will be a time of tempests.<sup>241</sup> Judges will give false maxims.<sup>242</sup> Custom and just-judgement will be abandoned even by the eldest,<sup>243</sup> so that there is no-

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<sup>231</sup> For discussion, linguistic analysis and references, see Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 11-21; John Carey, ‘Myth and Mythography in *Cath Maige Tuired*’, *Studia Celtica* 24–25 (1989-90), 53–69, at 53-4.

<sup>232</sup> *CMT* §166, line 819; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.70 and tr.71: ‘Sith co nem. Nem co domain’.

<sup>233</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 819-20; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.70 and tr.71.

<sup>234</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 820-1; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.70 and tr.71. Gray’s translation trails off half-way through this passage of text. Lines §i-k in Isolde Carmoldy, ed. and tr., *Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis: An Examination of Three Rosc Passages from ‘Cath Maige Tuired’*, unpublished MPhil Thesis (Trinity College, Dublin 2014), ed.45-7, at 45 and tr.47-9, at 48, provide a translation for the remainder of the passage.

<sup>235</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 821-26; Gray, ed., *Cath Maige Tuired*, 70 = §l-hh in Carmoldy, ed. and tr., *Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis*, ed.45-6 and tr.47-8.

<sup>236</sup> *CMT* §167, line 24; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>237</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 13-4; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>238</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 7-9; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed. and tr.67.

<sup>239</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 5-6; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed. and tr.67.

<sup>240</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 3-4, 10-11; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>241</sup> *CMT* §166, line 12; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>242</sup> *CMT* §166, line 30; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>243</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 20, 29; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘Myth and Mythography’, ed.67 and tr.68.

one at all that is not a betrayer.<sup>244</sup> Both prince and father alike will be betrayed by their own.<sup>245</sup> Incest will become commonplace.<sup>246</sup>

Despite its strong parallels to the structure of the *Immacallam*, the pre-Christian situation *CMT* describes is at a much earlier time, in which Ireland's secular institutions are said to be first taking definite shape,<sup>247</sup> and in which gods (the Tuatha Dé Danann) and Fomorians, rather than unambiguously mortal peoples, populate Ireland. If the events of the *Immacallam* are thought, along with the heyday of Emain Macha generally, to be more or less contemporary with Christ, the *Cath Maige Tuired*, at least, insofar as it came to be grafted into *LGE*'s more definite chronology,<sup>248</sup> is thought to have taken place at the same time as Agamemnon's siege of Troy.<sup>249</sup> According to the reckoning of Bede or Isidore this would place it in the Third Age rather than at the transition from the Fifth to the Sixth.<sup>250</sup> Be that as it may, the similarity of the Morrígan's prophecy, at *Cath Maige Tuired*'s conclusion, to the combined content of Néde and Ferchertne's respective prophecies, in the *Immacallam*, is sufficient to have

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<sup>244</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 21-2, 31-2; Carey, ed. and tr., 'Myth and Mythography', ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>245</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 27, 39-40; Carey, ed. and tr., 'Myth and Mythography', ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>246</sup> *CMT* §166, lines 33-6; Carey, ed. and tr., 'Myth and Mythography', ed.67 and tr.68.

<sup>247</sup> Namely: 1) medical practice [*CMT* §39; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.32. and tr.33], 2) the practice of satire [*CMT* §69-4; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.34. and tr.35], 3) true scholarship/kingship [*CMT* §39; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.40-42 and tr.41-3]. The latter, moreover, seems to bring about a fitting division of labour which did not exist previously. Compare the chaotic division of labour under Bress, in which abilities and roles are mismatched, at *CMT* §25, 36; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.28, 32 and tr.29, 33, to the orderly division of labour under Lug, in which each is given a role that matches their ability, even the chaotic Bres, at *CMT* §74-82, 96-120, 149-61; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.42-4, 50-4, 66-8 and tr.43-5, 51-5, 67-9. This contrast has been discussed in detail; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'Cath Maige Tuired as Exemplary Myth', in Pádraig Brúm, Seán Ó Coileáin and Pádraig Ó Riain, eds., *Folia Gadelica: Essays Presented by former Students to R.A. Breatnach* (Cork 1983), 1-19 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 135-54]; Elizabeth A. Gray, 'Cath Maige Tuired: Myth and Structure', *Éigse* 19 (1982), 1-35.

<sup>248</sup> Carey, 'Myth and Mythography', 54: 'it seems safest to conclude that *CMT* in its original form existed independent of the historical scheme which was to evolve into *LG*, and that the battle of Mag Tuired was portrayed as having been fought "once upon a time" rather than at a definite point in the canonical sequence of invasions'. We shall encounter further reasons for agreeing with Carey's assessment in Chapter 6, pages 396-7.

<sup>249</sup> *CMT* §69; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.40 and tr.41: 'Úair is a n-áonaimsir rogníadh cath Muigi Tuired 7 togail Traoi' (=for the battle of Mag Tuired and the destruction of Troy occurred at the same time).

<sup>250</sup> *DTR* §66; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 474; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 170. *Etym.* V.xxxix.11; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney, et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 131.

prompted speculation about the connexion that this similarity seems to imply.<sup>251</sup> Insofar as Carey was correct in his speculation that the apocalyptic elements of both texts are provoked by the onset of Viking raiding on Ireland, this would make Ferchertne's prophecy part of the later content of the *Immacallam*, the second part of the Morrígan's prophecy, part of earlier content of *CMT*, and both of them 'approximately contemporary' to each other, presumably in the ninth-century. But whatever may have provoked their apocalyptic outlook, the important thing here is that by giving these prophecies of the ruination of the final age of human history a counterpoint, in the form of a prophecy of the natural justice, and thus, the natural splendour, of some point in the pre-Christian past, they are conforming to the Augustinian historiographical expectations we have been considering.

Before moving on, the content of the Morrígan's prophecy deserves some further comment. As a prophecy about the end of the world, this prophecy would be understood by its medieval audience to refer to the events towards the end of the Christian era. But while this prophecy covers some of the same apocalyptic territory as Ferchertne's prophecy in the *Immacallam*, it says nothing at all about the ecclesiastical realities that are part-and-parcel of Ferchertne's vision of these things. Since the Morrígan of *CMT* is a god, and seems to be without peer as a prophet, we cannot account for this gap in her knowledge with reference to her rank in the way that we did with Néde.<sup>252</sup> She would appear to be of the highest rank however we understand the hierarchy to which she belongs. Possibly the lack of any insight regarding what is beyond the created order in her prophetic knowledge of the rising of natural justice, and its subsequent decline, reflects that she is understood to be speaking at an early Age of the World, in which these matters are perhaps not yet deemed available to such inspiration as then existed. Yet if so, the Morrígan of *BMMM*, though roughly contemporary with Christ, seems no wiser regarding the theological realities which Cú Chulainn typologically represents, in that she tries to save him in a way that, if successful, would

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<sup>251</sup> Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 11 (possibly reflections of a 'native eschatological tradition'); Carey, 'Myth and Mythography', 61 (both examples of the kind of apocalyptic literary response provoked by the Viking invasions from the ninth century onwards).

<sup>252</sup> See Chapter 2, page 122.

undermine his typological representation of Christ.<sup>253</sup> She does not realise that if Christ must have his passion, so must Cú Chulainn.

Of course, we noted in Chapter 2 that *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) and The Prologue leave the possibility open that the theological knowledge necessary to natural inspiration (given its divine source) may be of an extremely implicit sort, even at the highest levels.<sup>254</sup> But this would be irrelevant for *BMMM*, where Cú Chulainn, by contrast, has extremely explicit theological knowledge.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, even these texts understand natural inspiration to include, at the very least, the basic anticipation that the ‘white language of the *Beati*’ would at some point come to Ireland.<sup>256</sup> The Morrígan of *CMT* is then, on the one hand, attributed much more knowledge of the Christian future - concerning the things that pertain to natural law - than is attributed to ‘righteous poets and judges’ which are said to have anticipated *SM*. If they are taken to know anything about the future development (or else destruction) of the secular orders comparable to what she foresees, The Prologue and *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) do not mention it. But on the other hand, she seems to have none of the knowledge they enjoy regarding the ecclesiastical character of that future. Therefore, if this is to be interpreted as saying something about what belongs to natural inspiration as such,<sup>257</sup> *CMT* represents an extreme position, beyond even that of *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) and The Prologue, in which natural inspiration’s dependence on the Holy Spirit is either entirely implicit, or else has an explicit dimension which the author of *CMT* does not deem important enough to relate

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<sup>253</sup> *BMMM* §7; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *The Death of Cú Chulainn*, ed.14 and tr.37: ‘Et ro:scaíl in Morrígu in carpat issind aidchi remi, ar nirbo áil lé a dul Con Culaind dochum in chatha. Ar ro:fitir noco:ricfad Emuin Macha afrithisi’ (=And the Morrígu had broken the chariot on the preceding night, for she did not wish Cú Chulainn to go to battle. For she knew he would not reach Emain Macha again); St. Peter’s awkward attempts with a sword in Gethsemane come to mind; Matt. 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50, John 18:10.

<sup>254</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 114-8, 130-3.

<sup>255</sup> *BMMM* §10, 30-31; Kimpton, ed. and tr., *Cú Chulainn*, ed.16-8, 27-29 and tr.38, 46. For further discussion, see 243-5 above and Chapter 2, pages 159ff.

<sup>256</sup> *PSM* §7, lines 6-8; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘An Edition’, ed.12 and tr.18. *Córus Bésgnai* (*SM* 8) §35; Breatnach, ed. and tr., *Córus Bésgnai*, ed.34 and tr.35.

<sup>257</sup> Insofar as this is read in light of the opening paragraphs of *CMT* as it stands, this reading would not be possible, given that it claims an infernal origin for the arts practiced by the *Túatha Dé Danann*; *CMT* §1-2; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.24 and tr.25. However, as Carey has noted, this section seems to reflect subsequent influence of *LGÉ* on *CMT* rather than an original part of *CMT*; Carey, ‘Myth and Mythography’, 53-4; see quotation in note 248 above. As also stated above, there is further evidence which confirms Carey’s assessment which will be discussed in Chapter 6, pages 396-7.

to its audience. But then this limitation, in either version of the Morrígan, may have something to do with her being a god, or, a god in whatever sense *BMMM* and *CMT* may understand the term, a matter which we will consider at length in the Chapter 6. There is likely a certain degree of irreducible ambiguity here. However, what this diversity of possibilities shows is that the meaning of the lack of ecclesiastical references in the Morrígan's prophecy is not limited to what it may unverifiably reveal to a modern scholar about pre-Christian belief. The precise significance of this feature of the *CMT*'s Augustinian historiography to its medieval Christian audience may not be possible, for the moment, to determine definitively. But the multiplication of these possibilities clearly demonstrates that the fact of its intelligibility to such a context is beyond doubt.

### **Another Early Example: *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill***

As far as ninth-century texts are concerned, the Tuán of *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* (*STMC*)<sup>258</sup> is well-nigh a personification of the idea that the process of history is like an aging man. It is only the First Age, the age which Augustine and Bede say is, like human infancy, lost to oblivion,<sup>259</sup> for which Tuán is not present or able to recount. His transformations also conform to the number of ages which are understood to occur between the flood and the Christian era,<sup>260</sup> each of which have a brilliant beginning<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> John Carey, ed. and tr., '*Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*', *Ériu* 35 (1984), 93-111; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 223-6. Translations from this text will follow those of *The Celtic Heroic Age*. For Carey's linguistic dating of *Scél Tuáin* to the second-half of the ninth century, and its connexions with other texts, see Carey, '*Scél Tuáin*', 93-100.

<sup>259</sup> *DCD* XVI.xliii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 548-50; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 710: 'Quam profecto aetatem primam demergit obliuio, sicut aetas prima generis humani est deleta diluuiio. Quotus enim quisque est, qui suam recordetur infantiam?' (=And this first age of infancy is sunk into oblivion, as the first age of mankind is wiped out by the Flood. For how many are there who can remember their infancy? [edited]). *DTR* LXI; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 463; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 157: 'Quae universali est deleta diluuiio, sicut primam cuiusque hominis oblivion demergere consuevit aetatem; quotus enim quisque est qui suam recordetur infantiam?' (=This [First Age] was wiped out in the universal Flood, just as the first age of every person is usually submerged in oblivion, for how many people can remember their infancy?).

<sup>260</sup> i.e. four transformations: stag, boar, eagle, salmon.

<sup>261</sup> [As a stag] *STMC*, lines 34-5; Carey, ed., '*Scél Tuáin*', 101; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Basa óc, maith mo menma lim 7 bassa urrae alma' (=I was young and in good spirits; I was the leader of a herd). [As a boar] *STMC*, lines 44-5; Carey, ed., '*Scél Tuáin*', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Éim lim ón dano 7 maith lim mo menma 7 basa urrae' (=That was opportune for me: I was in good spirits, and was the leader of a herd of boars). [As an eagle] *STMC*, lines 54-5; Carey, ed., '*Scél Tuáin*', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Maith ón lim

and precipitous decline<sup>262</sup> analogous to the mornings and evenings of each age in Augustine's *DGCM* and Bede's *DTR*.<sup>263</sup> Likewise, the peak of his powers is the third cycle following the flood, for it is only in this cycle that he is said to have been 'learning all things'.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, in both cases, the Christian era marks an end of the capacity for the self-renewal necessary to begin another cycle.<sup>265</sup> Given the brevity of the text, and the generality of the details of these transformative cycles, it seems impossible to decide whether their resemblance to some of the more detailed versions of the 'Six-Ages' theory is intentional or not. Yet there is, at any rate, no tension between them. As with the *Immacallam* and *CMT*, the central issue is that the overall portrayal of the relationship between the Christian era and those previous reflects a nostalgia for the pre-Christian past that betrays either the direct or indirect influence of some form of Augustinian historiography. People who shape-shift and live almost indefinitely come only from the ancient past. Moreover, such people of this sort as survive into the Christian era do not survive long once they come into direct contact with the sacraments of the Church. But this is not because someone like Tuán has become irrelevant. On the contrary, despite his protestations that the Gospel is a better matter for conversation

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dano. Ba fortrén mo menma. Basa sáithech imholtanach' (=It was well with me. My spirits were mighty. I was satisfied, eager). [As a salmon] *STMC*, lines 64-5; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 101; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Amrae lim ón dano 7 basa setrech sáithech 7 basa urrae snáma' (=That was wonderful for me then. I was contented, vigorous, supreme in swimming).

<sup>262</sup> [As a stag] *STMC*, lines 42-3; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 101; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Doluid críne form sa assennath 7 bá sa for techud re ndoínib 7 chonaib altaib' (=Decrepitude came on me at least, and I was fleeing from men and wolves). [As a boar] *STMC*, lines 51-2; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Doluid críne form sa 7 ba toirresch mo menma 7 foréimdius comaítecht na torc 7 na trét' (=Decrepitude came upon me and my spirits were oppressed, and I could no longer keep up with the boars and the herds but dwelt alone). [As an eagle] *STMC*, line 62; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Tuirsech mo menma. Addró luamain 7 addágain éonu aile' (=My spirits were oppressed. I could not fly, and I feared other birds). [As a salmon] *STMC*, lines 67-8; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 101; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'ro mbáatar biasta oc mo ingreim 7 romfinnad cach línaige in cach lin, dombert línaige and do mnaí Chairill' (=water-monsters were attacking me, and every fisherman knew me in every pool, I was caught in a net and fetched to the wife of Cairell).

<sup>263</sup> See pages 252-3 above.

<sup>264</sup> *STMC*, line 55; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Rofinnain cach rét'.

<sup>265</sup> *STMC*, line 67; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Fecht and, in tan romba mithig la Dia mo chobair sea . . .' (=At last, when it seemed to God that it was time to help me . . .). This 'help' results in the breaking of the cycle of rebirth. The fact that he is still alive at the time of the founding saints of Ireland, shows that he is understood to have been born again as a human well after the time of Christ. Carey concludes from this that the Cairill in question is likely Cairill Muirecadh Muinderg, 'one of the first recorded kings of the Dál Fiatach of Ulster'; see Carey, 'Scél Tuáin', 97.

than anything he might have to say, the clergy who come to meet him are far more interested in his knowledge of extra-Biblical realities in pre-Christian times.<sup>266</sup> Nor is it merely the rank-and-file of the Church in which he has inspired this interest, but Sts. Finnia(n), Patrick and Colum Cille. Through his conversations with them, with specific reference to Finnia(n)'s relation of his knowledge to others, we are told that he became the basis of all historical and genealogical knowledge in Ireland.<sup>267</sup> In these matters, the Tuán of this text anticipates Middle Irish portrayals of Fintan mac Bóchra, Lí Ban and subsequent accounts of himself.<sup>268</sup> The past can produce wondrous people, both long-lived and capable of metamorphoses, in a way that the Christian era cannot. They cannot survive the Christian era in the way they have in times past, but provide it with knowledge to which it would not have access otherwise.

Thus the figure of Tuán (among those who parallel him in later sources) provides an alternative to poetic inspiration - such as we saw in *Sanas Cormaic*, its rough contemporary - for how the lost ancient past can be recovered.<sup>269</sup> If the ancient world is able to produce people who are so much more durable than those who are born in the Christian era that they are able to survive until the arrival of the Church's literary culture, then, even if poetic inspiration is thought incapable of retrieving the lost historical knowledge - or to have become incapable of doing so, due to the general decline of the world in its old age - there is still a way to augment the Christian era with

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<sup>266</sup> *STMC*, lines 13-8; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 101; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 223: 'Rosiacht Rinnia coibsená fair do imthechtaib Érenn aní forcoemnacair ó amsir Parthalóin meic Agnomain. Asbert Finnia nad n-airbértis bith chucci. Asbert Tuán fri Finnia, 'Nammuiregar sa imin les sin. Is diliu dúnd briathar Déi adcois dún do imrádu.' 'Is cett dait dano,' ol Finnia, 'do imthechta fadéin 7 imthús na Hérend do innisin dún coléic' (=Finnia besought him to reveal what had happened in Ireland since the time of Parthólón son of Agnoman; he said that they would not accept any food until [he told them]. Tuán said to Finnia, 'Do not confine me to that subject; I would rather meditate on what you may have to tell me concerning the word of God.' Nevertheless,' said Finnia, 'it is granted to you to tell us about your own adventures, and events in Ireland).

<sup>267</sup> *STMC*, lines 78-81; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 225: 'Anait sechtmain i ssuidiu oc imacallaim. Nach senchas 7 nach genelach fil i nHéire is ó Thuán mac Cairill a bunadus. Attaglastar Pátraic ri sin 7 atcuaid dó 7 atraglastar Colum Cille 7 atcuaid Finnia dó i fiadnaisi lochta in tire' (=They remained there conversing for a week; every history and genealogy in Ireland derives from Tuán son of Cairell. Patrick had spoken with him before that, and he had told [these things] to him; and Colum Cille had spoken with him. And Finnia spoke with him in the presence of the people of the region).

<sup>268</sup> See discussion in Chapter 2, pages 109-111; Chapter 5, pages 338-42.

<sup>269</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 216-7.



the knowledge (if not with the vigour and natural splendour) of the deep past. This is not to say that the idea of certain ancients surviving into the present to function as reliable witnesses to ancient history is incommensurable with the idea that lost information of the past may be retrieved through poetic inspiration. Both are, for instance, found side by side in the late Middle Irish prosimetrum, *Acallam na Senórach*.<sup>270</sup> However, the contention that certain ancient people were capable of extraordinarily long-life, metamorphoses, or other outstanding physical capabilities that are impossible for any person in the Christian era, presupposes an Augustinian sense that the natural world is, regrettably, declining over time. Whereas, the claim that high-ranking poets can be sufficiently inspired so as to fill in gaps in the historical record, while not necessarily in conflict with this historiographical tendency, certainly presupposes no such thing.

### **Middle Irish Evidence: *Togail Troí***

Between these four texts then, we have seen that Augustinian historiography was broadly influential in early Irish saga-literature from the ninth and tenth centuries, and perhaps earlier, particularly as concerns the various ways they exemplify a nostalgia for an idealised pagan past which depends on his doctrine of the Six Ages for its intelligibility in a medieval Christian context. Yet as significant and various as the narrative evidence is from this early point, the sense that natural virtues have been declining towards their near extinction in the Christian era is not stated as an explicit concept until *Togail Troí*'s eleventh-century adaption of Dares Phrygius' *De Excidio Troiae Historiae* into Middle Irish.<sup>271</sup> By way of its description of the Greek heroes sailing to Ilium, *Togail Troí* claims

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<sup>270</sup> Most often, in the *Acallam*, poetic inspiration involves prophecies of the future, rather than revelations regarding what has already occurred in the past, but there is at least one instance of the latter. Finn, by his tooth of wisdom, is able to discern the identity of the thief of some dogs, who has otherwise left no trace; Stokes, ed., '*Acallamh na Senórach*', 7; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders*, 9.

<sup>271</sup> The language of the extant texts seems to suggest that a tenth-century version preceded them. However, the presence of the relevant section in that version can only be a matter of speculation. For the dating of *Togail Troí* and references, see Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*, Studies in Celtic History 30 (Cambridge 2011), 9-10, 54-5; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, "'A Metaphorical Hector': The Literary Portrayal of Murchad Mac Bríain", in Ralph O'Connor, ed., *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative* (Cambridge 2014), 140-164, at 140, esp. references in note 2.

‘Fó dágin is and ro baí in domun i mmedon a aísi 7 a brotha 7 a borrfaid. i mmedón a úalli 7 a allaid. a déini 7 a dífumsa. a nirt 7 a niachais. a crotha is a chalmachta. Is and raptar tressiu a thrénfhir 7 rap fherdu a fhir. 7 roptar calmu a churaid. 7 roptar menmnachu a mílidi. Is airesin nad rabi remainb nó iarmaib fiallach bad cumma gaisced frisin dínsin’<sup>272</sup>

Since the world was then in the middle of its life, valour and magnificence, its pride and glory, its impetuosity and arrogance, its power and prowess, its beauty and bravery, it is then that its strong men were the strongest and most manly; its heroes were heroic and its soldiers were spirited. For that reason, there did not come before or after them a warrior-band who were as valorous as those people<sup>273</sup>

Neither the terminology of ‘ages’ (in the sense we have been speaking of them)<sup>274</sup> nor the authorities associated with the theory of the ‘Six Ages’ are mentioned here. However, this is indeed its defining analogy between the development of world history and the development of an individual human life. Moreover, it follows the theory further in presenting this aging of the world along human lines as the reason why the middle (*medon*) of its history is superior to its youth or its age.<sup>275</sup> Because it is only at the siege of Troy that history reaches its middle, there had never before been heroes like

<sup>272</sup> LL 32130-66; Best *et al.*, eds., *The Book of Leinster* IV, 1098. My thanks to Michael Clarke for first drawing my attention to this quotation in his presentation, ‘The Barbarity of the Ulstermen (*Mesca Ulad*)’, given at the fifth meeting of *Ulidia*, at Maynooth University, on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>273</sup> The translation here is Ní Mhaonaigh’s; Ní Mhaonaigh, tr., ‘A Metaphorical Hector’, 145 note 47; see also Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Destruction of Troy’, in Stokes and Windisch, eds. *Irische texte übersetzungen und wörterbuch* II.1, 1-142, ed. at 27-8 and tr. at 93.

<sup>274</sup> ‘aísi’ is the genitive singular of the o-stem neuter noun ‘áes’ (age), the word which would tend to translate feminine latin noun, ‘aetas/tis’ (age), in any discussion of the *Sex Aetates Mundi* (i.e. the Six Ages of the World); for a roughly contemporary example, see *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* §4a-4; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ed. and tr., *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* (Dublin 1983), ed.64, line 6 and tr.110: ‘4. [Sex sunt aetates hominis.,] Prima aetas hominis infantia . . . SEX AETATES SUNT MUNDI, id est ó Ádam co dílinn in chétna-aés. Ó dílinn co Abrám ind aés tánaisi’ (=4a. The Ages of Man are six in number . . . 4. There are six Ages of the world, i.e from Adam to the deluge [is] the first Age, from the deluge to Abraham [is] the second Age . . .). However, it is being used here, not to speak of a stage of human life or the world’s history, but of the duration of human life in its entirety. Thus, while this word may indeed be an additional (albeit oblique) way in which this passage makes reference to the ‘Six Ages’, the degree to which it may be said to be so remains unclear.

<sup>275</sup> See pages 224-30 above.

those of that war. Because this middle was passed following Troy, there would be none like them afterwards. For as it is in the midst of life that one is at the height of one's heroic capacity, so it is in the midst of history that this capacity was best able to be fulfilled. The degree to which humanity in general or particular is extremely young or old will be the degree to which this heroic ideal is less possible. Yet as Michael Clarke has rightly noted,<sup>276</sup> there is something more than a bit odd in all this. This is as clear a demonstration of Augustinian historiographical principles as we could ask for, but with an important difference. We noted previously, in our consideration of *CMT*, that both Bede and Isidore place the fall of Troy in the Third Age.<sup>277</sup> But where such distinctions are made, it is consistently the Fourth, rather than the Third Age that is held up as the summit of the sequence of ages. What shall be made of this anomaly?

### **The Middle of Time in *Togail Troí***

If *Togail Troí* had not made such clear reference to certain features of Augustine's theory of history, then its contrast with that theory could perhaps be seen as an expansion of one of its less complete mediations in ignorance of the whole. However, since this point of contrast emerges relative to an aspect of Augustine's theory with which *Togail Troí* has explicitly shown itself familiar – that the maturity of the world and the individual human tends more towards the ideal than the extremities of youth or old age - then it would seem to represent a deliberate, self-conscious reinterpretation of Augustinian historiography.<sup>278</sup> That said, it remains that such a reinterpretation is not wholly without basis in Augustine. While it is the Fourth Age that Augustine idealises as the peak of both world-history and human development, it is clear that he envisions the world's capacity to produce physical bodies as steadily decreasing over time, and with it, the size, strength and longevity of the bodies it produces, including human bodies. Virgil, Homer and Pliny the Elder are all cited as ancient witnesses of this.<sup>279</sup> Yet if, in the days that Virgil describes, a hero was able to snatch up an enormous

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<sup>276</sup> Clarke, 'The Barbarity of the Ulstermen'.

<sup>277</sup> See notes 248-50 above.

<sup>278</sup> This reinterpretation may apply to the extant form of *CMT* as well [i.e the form which includes its Middle Irish assimilation to *LGE*'s version of 'Six Ages' chronology], given its synchronisation of an idealised genesis of secular Irish institutions with the siege of Troy. See page 266 above.

<sup>279</sup> *DCD* XV.ix, *passim*; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 465-6; Bettenson, tr., *City of God*, 609-10.

boundary-stone as a weapon in battle ‘that scarcely twice six picked men could shoulder / with bodies such as the earth now produces’, how much more would the earth produce bodies of immense size and strength, Augustine concludes, in the antediluvian times when the world was yet younger?<sup>280</sup> Considerations of size, strength and longevity are clearly relevant to the concept of heroic valour. Even so, it is not the beginning of history, when all these attributes would be at their greatest extent, that *Togail Troí* holds up as exemplary in this regard, but a modified version of Augustine’s idealised middle.

However, the conceptualisation of a Third Age event, like the siege of Troy, as the middle point of history poses more than a bit of a problem. In what way can the Third Age be the middle of Seven? By way of addressing this problem it is perhaps significant that only the first Six Ages involve the normal historical sequence of temporally successive events. In *DGCM* and Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, the Seventh Age is eternal (i.e. simultaneously and completely present to all times) rather than temporal. Whereas, in Bede’s *DTR* and Augustine’s *DCD*, where it is the Eighth Age that has the character of eternity, the Seventh Age is still not successive on the others, being the post-mortem repose of the righteous of all ages, while they await the fulfilment of temporal process in the eternity of the Eighth Age.<sup>281</sup> In a series of six, three will be no less median than four. In which case, the Third Age could conceivably be ‘just as good’ as the Fourth, so to speak, as a symbolic mean of temporality. We would then have only to determine what should make the Third Age preferable in this regard. But if such rough figuring is in fact at play here, it becomes hard to account for how it is that *Togail*

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<sup>280</sup> *DCD* XV.ix; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De Civitate Dei* II, 465; Bettenson, tr., *City of God*, 609: ‘Vnde et nobilissimus eorum poeta Vergilius de ingenti lapide, quem in agrorum limite infixum uir fortis illorum temporum pugnans et rapuit et cucurrit et intorsit et misit: Vix illum (inquit) lecti bis sex ceruice subirent, Qualia nunc hominum producit corpora tellus, significans maiora tunc corpora producere solere tellurem. Quanto magis igitur temporibus recentioribus mundi ante illud nobile diffamatumque diluuium!’ (=Now the most distinguished pagan poet, Virgil, has something on this point. He is describing a huge stone set as a boundary mark on the land; a mighty warrior snatches it up in battle, runs on, then swings it round and hurls it. And Virgil says: ‘That stone twice six picked men could scarce upheave / With bodies such as the earth now produces.’ He means it to be understood that in those days the earth normally produced larger bodies than now. How much more in the days when the world was newer, before that renowned and far-famed flood!’). He is quoting Virgil’s *Aeneid* XII.899-900 here; Mynors, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis opera*, 421.

<sup>281</sup> For a summary of the Seven- and Eight-Age versions on the Six Ages, see pages 224-5 above.

*Troí* derived idea that the ‘middle’ (*medon*) of time is its peak<sup>282</sup> in the first place. The passages in Augustine’s *DGCM* and Bede’s *DTR* which present the Fourth Age as superior to the others do not describe the Fourth Age as the median Age outright; it simply happens to be so, as the fourth age among seven.<sup>283</sup> *Togail Troí*’s notion that the middlemost age is the pinnacle of both world and human development seems then as if it could only be abstracted from a situation where the Fourth Age is held up as in some way the most ideal among seven, given that this notion exists only in this implicit form beforehand. The very fact that its author is interested in doing so shows that this sense of middleliness is, we may say, ‘central’ to how they understand the place of the siege of Troy in history.

That said, since the temporality of the Seventh Age runs parallel with the running count of the years of the Six Ages, rather than adding to them, it is conceivable that a scholar wishing to determine the true temporal middle of historical development, while aware of Augustine’s and Bede’s characterisation of Fourth Age as middlemost among seven, may have concluded that they have reckoned inaccurately. In a set of six ages, the transition between the Third and Fourth Ages will be the middle-point of time rather than one age or the other. Such an approach, if followed, would have the significant effect of universalising the apex of temporal process which, for Augustine, is manifest only in and through the Israel of David, Solomon and their successors.<sup>284</sup> That is to say, if the middle of history is defined in such a way as includes the siege of Troy, *in the same way* as it includes the founding of Jerusalem as a royal and religious centre, it opens the door to the possibility that the pinnacle of temporal development which is associated with that middle may be achieved by other places as well, places such as, perhaps, Ireland at the time of the events portrayed by *CMT*. Yet the siege of Troy is understood to be 130 years short of the Fourth Age in Bede,<sup>285</sup> 100, in Isidore<sup>286</sup> and

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<sup>282</sup> On the idealised middle of time in Augustine, see pages 224-30 above.

<sup>283</sup> *DGCM*. I.xxiii.38; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 106-7; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 85. See also *DTR* X.24-6, LXVI.29-30, but esp. LXVI.393-415ff.; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 311, 463-4, but esp. 475-6ff.; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158, but esp. 171-2ff.

<sup>284</sup> *DGCM*. I.xxiii.38; Weber, ed., *Augustinus: De Genesi*, 106-7; Teske, tr., *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 85. See also *DTR* X.24-6, LXVI.29-30, but esp. LXVI.393-415ff.; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 311, 463-4, but esp. 475-6ff.; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 41, 158, but esp. 171-2ff.

<sup>285</sup> *DTR* LXVI; Jones, ed., *Bedae opera didascalica*, 474; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 170.

100, in Jerome/Eusebius' *Chronicon*.<sup>287</sup> This is indeed towards the latter part of the Third Age, but not so much so as to provide any certainty that the transition from Third to Fourth Age, rather than the Third Age itself is the point of emphasis. As such, it remains a perfectly plausible interpretation, but one which, nevertheless, does not preclude the possibility other viable alternatives, should they be found.

### **An Alternative Interpretation of the Middle of Time**

If it is indeed the Third Age that is meant, and not the transition from the Third to the Fourth Age, it can only be a middle, as we have said, of a set of five ages. What then could distinguish the first five ages from that which temporally succeeds them<sup>288</sup> – in a way that would give the former some sort of unity in contrast to the latter – but their lack of such revelation as is only mediated by the Church, in contrast to the latter's characterisation by this same revelation? This would mean that where Augustine focuses on the Fourth Age as the height of Israel's capacity for virtue as a whole, *Togail Troí* understands the Third Age to be the height of all humanity's capacity for strictly natural virtues.<sup>289</sup> In this line of interpretation, one might say that universal heroism peaks earlier than human nature as a whole does in Israel, but does so according to the same logic which determines that humanity, more holistically conceived, must peak later and in a more specific political context. Albeit, it is unlikely that heroism here is understood to be the exhaustive manifestation of the peak of natural virtue which it appears to represent. The Third Age is also the age in which the Mosaic law is founded, as well as the age in which *CMT* and *LGÉ* (following the synchronisms of Eusebius)<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> *Etym.* V.xxxix.11; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 131 [following the *Chronicon*].

<sup>287</sup> Fotheringham, ed., *Eusebii Pamphili Chronici Canones*, 95; Pearse *et al*, tr., *The Chronicle of St. Jerome*.

<sup>288</sup> All Six Ages already have a unity which is distinct from the Seventh in being part of the same temporal process, a process which runs in parallel with that of the Seventh Age.

<sup>289</sup> Bearing in mind that the developments we have been speaking of in previous chapters mean that this will tend to be understood quite differently in a medieval Irish context than it is in Augustine.

<sup>290</sup> On *LGÉ*'s general dependence on the synchronisms of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius/Jerome, see Chapter 3, page 191, incl. note 82. On *CMT*'s dependence on *LGÉ*'s synchronisms, see note 248 above. Aside from the influence of the *Chronicon* itself, Isidore is a significant mediator of its portrayal of the Third Age as the Age which is most characterised by the founding of arts and institutions; *Etym.* V.xxxix.8-12; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 131.

place the founding of the secular intuitions defined by natural law.<sup>291</sup> If *Togail Troí* designates the Third Age as the middlemost age - insofar as it marks the peak of humanity's strictly natural capacities, in contrast to the capacities which would become available only through the Church - it certainly stands to reason that the full array of these capacities would be the implied context of the peak of heroic valour which is its exclusive focus.

However, to the degree this is the case, it will introduce a further point of contrast with Augustine. Augustine not only idealises the Fourth Age, rather than the Third, as the noontide of human capacity; we have seen that he associates this age in particular with kingship.<sup>292</sup> It is theoretically possible that since *Togail Troí* is, in this passage, exclusively concerned with the historical development of heroic valour, rather than with kingship, it may possibly still assume Augustine's association of the Fourth Age with kingship. Yet if so, it is hard to know what basis there could be for dissasociating the apogee of kingship from that of other secular institutions in a way which would make sense of such an exception. It seems more plausible, especially when we consider them in relation to the supporting evidence of *CMT* and *LGÉ*,<sup>293</sup> that the implied doctrine is

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<sup>291</sup> The Third Age, in Irish terms, begins with Partholón and ends with the 'taking' of the Mílesians. However, it is only towards the latter end of the Third Age, with the 'taking' of the Tuatha Dé Danaan, that we see a flowering of the arts envisioned. For *CMT*, see discussion above on pages 265ff. For *LGÉ*, see Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* III, ed.150, 6 and tr.151, 7; IV, ed.11, 20, 24, 32, 44, 106ff. and tr.12, 21, 25, 33, 45, 107ff.

<sup>292</sup> See page 224 above.

<sup>293</sup> In both *CMT* and Recensions 1 and 2 of *LGÉ*, Lug, a ruler of the Third Age, seems to be presented as the prime example of exemplary kingship. In *CMT* this occurs relative to the fact that Lug is idealised, not simply as a true and rightful king, but the true and rightful king of a political a social situation which 1) involves the founding and perfecting the secular institutions of Irish society known to the writer, and which 2) is deemed a worthy counterpoint to horrors of the pre-apocalyptic future envisioned in the Morrígan's prophecy; see discussion at 269-73 above, esp. note 247. In addition to the similar general portrayal of Lug in *LGÉ* IV, Section VII as a uniquely learned (and therefore as a uniquely rightful and victorious) ruler, see *LGÉ* §312, 322-6, 361; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* [A Recension 1 text: Lug is implicitly a type of David, portrayed as slaying a giant with sling-stones; compare 1 Sam. 17:40-50] IV, ed.18 and tr.19; [A Recension 2, and a Recension 3 text - the *Lia Fáil* of the Tuatha Dé Danann the primary and effectual means of identifying true kings (at least those before Christ)] IV, ed.142-4, 174 and tr.143-5, 175. In Recensions 1 and 2, all the major developments of the institution of kingship seem already to have occurred during the Third Age. However, note that in Recension 3 the Third Age is not thought to end with the invasion of the Mílesians, but with the reign of King Tigernmas, whose role seems to be conceived of as an Irish parallel to that of David and Solomon, in this way, it would seem, surpassing even Lug; *LGÉ* §505; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* IV, ed.206-8 and tr.207-9. However, here too his kingship appears to represent a perfection of all the arts which had previously been developing, rather than the perfection of kingship being something that only comes about

that kingship (at least such kingship as is possible without the influence Mosaic or Christian ecclesiastical institutions)<sup>294</sup> shares a Third Age peak with the rest of the secular hierarchies, but then lacks some of the eschatological significance it has for Augustine as a result.

Again, this interpretation, like the former, seems plausible, but is difficult to demonstrate with certainty. The problem, in this latter case, is that it assumes a fairly invasive reconfiguration of Augustinian historiography in a way that the former does not. The former requires only that the relevant scholar be interested in a less symbolic and more literal middle of temporal process than what they find in Augustine or Bede. The latter requires that the strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration, such as we have found broadly attested in early Irish literature, introduce a profound contrast – namely, between the character of the first five temporal ages and the final one - that is entirely foreign to Augustine’s emphasis on their continuity. However, the converse side of this is that it has the advantage of being just the sort of adaption we might expect this distinction to bring about. We have found that, for Augustine, the virtues that are possible with reference to no more than the natural law, while reliable enough relative to their immediate practical context, do not yet truly deserve the name of virtue until they have become oriented towards God through a revelation which is of the same order as that which belongs to the Church.<sup>295</sup> In this, his

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after the arts have passed their peak and begun to decline. In short, we seem thus far to lack any early Irish precedent or analogy for the idea that kingship can attain its apogee independently of the arts which it governs. For a contrast with the idealised portrayal of Tígermas above, see *LGÉ* §505, in Recension 1, where his innovations alternatively seem to be examples of perverse Cain- or Ham-like ingenuity, appearing as they do in a passage which associates him with the worship of the false god Crom Cruich; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* IV, ed.202 and tr.203. It is only this last instance which seems not to require a similar modification of the way that Augustine’s characterises the Third and Fourth Ages.

<sup>294</sup> That is to say, just because a text may not portray any Fourth-Age forms of kingship as more ideal than those in the Third Age in an Irish context, does not necessarily prove anything about how David and Solomon are understood in the context of ancient Israel, or salvation history generally. No one takes David to be inventing kingship. He is, rather, the first to successfully assimilate the institution to the demands of the revealed Mosaic law. Where it is not thought possible to independently accomplish something parallel to David and Solomon in other places, its possibility will depend upon on when and how the mediation of the Mosaic law to Ireland is thought to have become available, bearing in mind that the later the age in which this occurs, the less there will conceivably be to work with on the natural, secular side of things, given the general wearing away of the world.

<sup>295</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 75-9.



concept of natural law is useful for distinguishing the kind of science and ethics that do not yet involve revelation from the kind of science and ethics that does, but provides little help in distinguishing the forms of divine revelation thought to have pre-existed the sacraments and institutions of the Church, or to have remained in some way exterior to them after the fact, from those which are thought to be available only in the Church itself.<sup>296</sup>

He does indeed, as we have seen, make use of the three-fold distinction between natural law, Mosaic law and the law of grace, as successive stages of history. However, ‘natural law’ and ‘Mosaic law’ here are not seen as amounting to saving faith of themselves. Insofar as the steps of this history are taken to be a history of such revelation as is necessary for righteousness, it is the history of the same revelation’s progressive institutional unfolding from its most particular instantiation to the most universal (i.e. from the family-basis of the Abrahamic covenant, to the state-basis of temple cult at Jerusalem, to the spread of the Church through the whole world), rather than a cumulative succession of a qualitatively different kinds of revelation. But where, as is so often the case in early Irish literature, ‘the natural’ has its own mode of prophetic revelation which, while complementary to that of the Church, is different from it in kind, there will be both the means and the need to distinguish between the kind of faith which is thought to have been possible without the divinely instituted hierarchies of the Church, and that which is only possible afterwards, together with their respective political instantiations.

However, this is not to suggest that such an adaption of Augustine is an inescapable result of this distinction. There seems to be no reason why the Augustinian theory of the Six Ages could not be interpreted along these lines without significant alteration to its structure, even though the reasons for interpreting it in this way are not internal to it. In the case at hand it remains quite possible that *Togail Troí*’s association of the middle of

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<sup>296</sup> e.g. The Erythræan, or the Cumæan Sibyl is identified as possible member of the City of God, but in being identified as such no distinction is made between her and other members of this ‘city’; *De civitate Dei* XVIII.23; Dombart, *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 613-5; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 788-91.

time with the siege of Troy could reflect no more than an association of the height of human capacity with the literal middle of the sequence of temporality, at the transition between the Third and Fourth Ages. Nor should it simply be assumed that *CMT* or the relevant recensions of *LGÉ* are exemplars of a revision of Augustine which makes the Third Age, in certain manner of speaking, the middle age, simply because they locate the founding (and perhaps the perfecting) of most secular institutions and arts in the Third Age.<sup>297</sup> Though Augustine recognises the Third Age as the age in which the Mosaic law was first founded, he does not therefore idealise it, relative to the others;<sup>298</sup> nor does Bede idealise the Second Age, though he understands it, rather than the Fourth Age of David and Solomon, to be the time of the first rulers and temples.<sup>299</sup> But be that as it may, such a modification of Augustinian historiography certainly would provide a means, not provided by Augustine's theory itself, of discovering the strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of revelation and politics, which often obtains in early Irish literature, in the structure of historical process.

### ***Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaib: A Related Example?***

A similar and, perhaps, related ambiguity is found in the early twelfth-century text,<sup>300</sup> *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaib (CGG)*.<sup>301</sup> In *CGG*, we find what is likely the most transparent medieval Irish evidence for the presence of the nostalgic view of history which results from Augustinian historiography. Its subject matter is not, like *Togail Troí*, the siege of Troy itself, but the battles fought by the Dál gCais and their allies in the time of Brian Bóruma. Nevertheless, it sees these more recent events as worthy of comparison to those which transpired before the walls of Ilium. Notably, Murchad Mac

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<sup>297</sup> For another Middle Irish example of a historiographical text which locates a watershed of art and science in the Third Age, see *Lebor Bretnach* §12; A.G. van Hamel, ed., *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the 'Historia Brittonum' Ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin 1932), 22; James Henthorn Todd, ed. and tr., *Leabhar Breathnach annso sis: The Irish Version of the 'Historia Brittonum'* (Dublin 1848), ed.44-6 and tr.45-7.

<sup>298</sup> See pages 224-234 above.

<sup>299</sup> *DTR* LXVI; Jones, ed., *Beda's opera didascalica*, 467-81; Wallis, tr., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, 163.

<sup>300</sup> Likely composed between the years 1103 and 1113; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaib: Some Dating Considerations', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 354-77.

<sup>301</sup> James Henthorn Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill, or The Invasions of Ireland by the Danes and other Norsemen*, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 48 (London 1867). The foundational discussion of the role of the 'Six Ages' in *Cogadh Gaedhl re Gallaibh* is Ní Mhaonaigh, 'A Metaphorical Hector', esp. 143-5.

Bríain is compared to Hector, the son of Priam, king of Troy.<sup>302</sup> Yet as interesting as this comparison may be in itself, it is *CGG*'s disambiguation of it that is most important for the considerations at hand. We are told that Murchad 'was the last man in Erin who was a match for a hundred' and, moreover, 'the last step that true valour ever took in Erin'.<sup>303</sup> However, it is not as Hector's equal that he is compared to Hector, or to Samson, Hercules and Lugh Lamha-fada.<sup>304</sup> While certain acts of his resemble theirs, it would take seven of him to be a match for Mac Samhainn, seven Mac Samhainns to match Lugh Lagha, seven Lugh Laghas to match Conall Cernach, seven Conall Cernachs to match Lugh Lamha-fada, and seven Lugh Lamh-fadas to match Hector.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> *CGG* §95; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.166 and tr.167: 'Bai rompu side in Hechtoir intamlaigtech ilbuadach nah Adam clainni ilcenealaichi allatai .i. Murchad mac Briain, eo Rossa, rigdraidi Erend; cend gaili, ocus gascid, ocus gnimrada, enig ocus engnuma, ocus aebdachta fear talman, re re ocus re remis; daig ni armit senchaidi goedel combeth don Adamclaind re re fein oen duni no chongbad sciath comrestail imbualta do' (=At the head of these was the matchless, ever-victorious Hector of the man-nationed, heroic children of Adam, namely Murchad son of Bríain, the Yew of Ross of the princes of Ireland; the head of the valour and bravery, and chivalry, munificence and liberality, and beauty, of the men of the world in his time and his career; for the historians of the Irish do not relate that there was any man of the sons of Adam in his time who could hold a shield in mutual interchange of blows with him).

<sup>303</sup> *CGG* §107; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.186 and tr.187: 'Ise duni dedenach irraibí in fírgaisced in Erind é. Ise tuc a brethir fírlaig nach berad oen traig teighchíd reisin cinind doenna uli, ar coma sa bith, ar minbad cinnti leis can ec tre bithu. Ise duni dedenach irraibí comlond cet in Erind e. Ise duni dedenach ro marb cet in oen lo e' (=He was the last man that had true valour in Erin. It was he the pledged the word of a true champion, that he would not retreat on foot before the whole of the human race, for any reason whatsoever but this alone, that he might die of his wounds. He was the last man in Erin who killed a hundred in one day. His was the last step that true valour ever took in Erin).

<sup>304</sup> *CGG* §107; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.186-8 and tr.187-9: 'Ro be sin intEctoír intamlaigtech na Erend, ilbuaðaigi, ar credium, ocus ar gail, ocus ar gaisced, ar eneach, ocus ar engnum. Robe sin in Samson suaírc, socomáind, segdaínd, soerbesach na nEbraídi, im sochar ocus im saírí a atarda ocus a ceneoil re ré fen, ocus re amsir. Ro begin intercoil totachtach tanasí ro seris, ocus ro / delaris piasta ocus torathru a hErind, ro sir lacha, ocus linti, ocus uamanna, na Fotla fondardi, ar nach rabi dun no digenn is in domun. Robe in Lug Lamata comcosmail, ro ling cach docair, ocus ro lomair cach trencend, ocus ro scrís, ocus ro marb gullu ocus allmarathu a hErind' (=He was the metaphorical Hector of all-victorious Erin, in religion, and in valour, and in championship, in generosity and in munificence. He was the pleasant, affable, intelligent, accomplished Samson of the Hebrew, for promoting the prosperity and freedom of his fatherland and his race, during his own career and time. He was the second powerful Hercules, who de-/stroyed and exterminated serpents and monsters out of Erin; who searched the lakes, and pools, and caverns, of noble-landed Fodhla, whom no fortress or fastness in the world could resist. He was the Lugh Lamha-fada, who, like him, sprang over every obstacle, laid bare every brave head, and exterminated and expelled the foreigners and pirates out of Erin). See also the similar statements comparing Brian with Lugh Lamha-fada and Finn Mac Cumhaill, and identifying him with Octavian, Alexander, David, Solomon and Moses; *CGG* §105; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.202-4 and tr.203-5.

<sup>305</sup> *CGG* §107; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.186 and tr.187: 'Daig ised innisít senchaidi na nGodel, morfesiur amháil Murchad comlond Mac Shamain, ocus .uii. a mail Mac Shamain comlond Luga Laga, ocus .uii. a mail Lug Laga comlond Conaill Cernaig, ocus .uii. a mail Conall Cernach comlond Loga Lamafata mic Etlenn, ocus .uii. a mail Log Lamafata comlond Hechtoir mac Priam' (=For this is what the historians of the Gaedhil say, that seven like Murchadh, would be a match for Mac Samhain; and seven like Mac Samhain, a match for Lugh Lagha; and seven like Lugh Lagha, a match for Conall Cernach; and

The reason the list only goes back as far as Hector, is that ‘illustrious championship’ did not exist in the world before him, seeing as ‘world was only an infant’ until his time, and thus ‘not fit for action’. The reason the list terminates in Murchad is that true heroism is not taken to be able to exist after him, since the world is a ‘palsied drivelling dotard ever after’.<sup>306</sup>

In this, *CGG* has already gone farther than *Togail Troí* in more than its details. We have again the comparison between world-history and an aging person. This aging process of the world accounts for the time of Troy being the most exemplary of all times for ‘illustrious championship’, as well as its previous absence and subsequent decline. However, the insistence that there was no such heroism at all before Troy, or that it would become completely obsolescent in the Christian era could not have been assumed based on *Togail Troí*’s account. Moreover, it is only in *CGG* that we find self-reflexive reference to the theory of the Six Ages itself. When describing what it has done in tracing the relative comparisons of heroic valour from Murdach to Hector it comments: ‘And thus championship and the world are compared to human life according to the intellectual metaphor’.<sup>307</sup> Yet the attention that *CGG* draws to its own use of this Augustinian metaphor only increases the perplexity already arising from its close conformity to *Togail Troí* at the very point where *Togail Troí* contrasts most with Augustine.

Like *Togail Troí*, history is said here to have reached its apogee at the siege of Troy, that is, in the Third Age, rather than the Fourth. Conspicuously absent from *CGG*, however,

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seven like Conall Cernach, a match for Lugh Lamha-fada, the son of Eithlenn; and seven like Lugh Lamha-fada, a match for Hector, the son of Priam). This principle should then be applied to *CGG*’s comparisons of Brian with great figures of the past as well. See note 304 above.

<sup>306</sup> *CGG* §107; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.186 and tr.187: ‘Ocus conid iat sin uideda ocus imtechta in primgaiscid o tus in domain, ocus gunach beith in primgaisced reim Hechtor, uair naidin e conici sin, ocus nir mengnuma e ro hocci, ocus cona beith iar Murchad; uair senior crithach crindiblid e o hin amach. Ocus cosmaillius aisi duneta tomtenaigit amlaid sin don gairced ocus don domun ar nintamlugud intliuchta’ (=Such are the degrees and variations of illustrious championship from the beginning of the world; and there was no illustrious championship previous to Hector, because it was only an infant till his time and was not fit for action, nor shall there be after Murchadh, because it shall be a palsied driveling dotard ever after. And thus championship and the world are compared with human life according to the intellectual metaphor).

<sup>307</sup> See note 306 above.

is any echo of *Togail Troí*'s straightforward characterisation of this apogee as occurring at the middle of temporal process. Since the doctrine of the Fourth Age's superiority only occurs amid complete lists of the World Ages, *CGG*'s position is not adopted in ignorance of its median position among those ages. Nevertheless, the middleness of the pinnacle of temporal process, though likely taken for granted here, does not, as it did in *Togail Troí*, seem especially important to *CGG*'s presentation. Whatever we are dealing with here, it is manifestly not an attempt to more accurately locate this pinnacle at the exact centre of time's extent, something which may very well be the case in *Togail Troí*. Conversely, this opens the possibility which *Togail Troí*'s preoccupation with the historical middleness of the siege of Troy rules out. Namely, providing that *CGG*'s author is not bothered by rough figures, they may simply have decided that, out of the six successive temporal ages, the Third Age has just as much cause to be characterised as central peak of that succession as the Fourth Age. Alternatively, it is still a more literal middle, but as in the second of our options for understanding *Togail Troí*, marks the middle of pre-ecclesiastical history, as opposed to the middle of all of history generally. In which case, it would also mark the summit of strictly natural human capacities, rather than the combined natural and supernatural, secular and ecclesiastical capacities of humanity as a whole. However, it is not simply *CGG*'s lack of preoccupation with the middleness of the siege of Troy in time which suggests that it is the Third Age in general, rather than the transition from the Third Age to the next, that it sees, in some fashion, as the culmination of human ability.

As noted above, *CGG* is unlike *Togail Troí* in claiming that Hector's time is not merely the time most notable for heroic valour but, rather, the time that heroic valour *first* came into being. In Eusebius' *Chronicon* and the derivative chronology of Isidore,<sup>308</sup> the founding of arts and vocations is characteristic of the time between Abraham and the coronation of David, rather than the time between his coronation and the Babylonian Captivity. If the apex of heroic valour is to be identified, not only as the middle of time, in some manner of speaking, but as the time of its own founding, then an attempt to

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<sup>308</sup> See note 290 above. The chronologies of Orosius and Bede in *DTR* do not disagree in this regard. However, since their focus is almost entirely limited to political and religious developments, it means that they do not have much to say about invention of arts and disciplines generally.

conciliate Eusebius' synchronisms with Augustinian historiography could account for such a significant revision of Augustine as this arrangement would require. Admittedly, this still does not determine the specific way in which the Third Age, as the age in which most arts and disciplines are founded, is the middle of history. It is tempting to conclude that it is middlemost in the sense of being the summit of humanity's strictly natural capacities, given that this interpretation is the only one which potentially works for both *Togail Troí* and *CGG*. This is made the more attractive by the fact that it would fit nicely with the developments discussed in earlier chapters.

Yet even if *CGG* is directly influenced by *Togail Troí*, it does not follow that its presuppositions would necessarily mirror it exactly, or at all. Moreover, since there appears to be nothing in Augustine's theory of the Six Ages which would prevent their reinterpretation, without structural alteration, in light of a strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of revelation and virtue, there consequently appears to be no reason to insist that this distinction, if implied, necessarily determined the character of the alterations made by *Togail Troí* or *CGG*. Any greater certainty on this matter awaits focused research of a sort that the present argument may not indulge in with losing its own orientation.<sup>309</sup> For the argument at hand, the most important conclusion which may be drawn from these texts is that, by the time that overt references to Augustinian historiography begin to emerge in saga-literature, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, fairly significant revisions of it are already in place.

These Middle Irish sagas, like our Old Irish examples, see the pre-Christian past as time which enjoyed the natural perfection associated with the secular hierarchies in a way no longer possible in the Christian present. However, *Togail Troí* and *CGG*'s more transparent relationship to their Augustinian influences is not accompanied by a closer fidelity to them so much as a greater willingness to subject them to reinterpretation. In *Togail Troí* this may be for the sake of universalising the significance of the middle of time in Augustinian historiography, or for the sake of better accommodating other

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<sup>309</sup> A consideration of the eleventh-century Latin chronicle of Marianus Scottus may, for example, shine further light on these matters. My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle for this suggestion.

historical authorities, such as Eusebius/Jerome. In *CGG*, it seems in one way or the other, to involve a further conciliation of the Six Ages to Eusebius (or else, to synchronisms derived from him) in which the superlative excellence of a secular institutions is associated with the time of their founding. But whether or not we should understand them to be alike in their respective adaptations of Augustinian historiography, they are alike in discovering applications for it which only emerge relative to other authorities and concerns.

### **Further Modifications to Augustine**

That said, this does not mean that the Old Irish examples above are not involved in the reinterpretation of Augustine's 'Six Ages' theory and its meaning. Their own reinterpretations are simply somewhat more restrained than we have observed in *Togail Troí* and *CGG*. It will be useful here, by way of overview, to remind ourselves of how it is that we came to be addressing historiographical questions to begin with. In Chapter 2, we outlined the character of the 'natural revelation' that was conceived as allowing the secular orders, both before and after the establishment of the Church in Ireland, to achieve the capacity for justice necessary to order themselves rightly, a right ordering which we found, in Chapter 1, to be directly manifest in clear physical signs. The question that remained was the degree to which the achievement of secular (i.e. natural) justice and its attendant forms of physical prosperity was deemed possible. While we turned towards Eusebian historiography as a way of contextualising the view, where it occurs, that the capacity to realise natural justice, thus conceived, had been improving over time through into the Christian era, Augustinian historiography has provided us with a means of accounting for the occurrence of the opposite view in early Irish literature, namely, that a capacity for natural justice had been decreasing as the Christian era approached, an era in which it may indeed, according to some accounts, fade away altogether. However, such an application of Augustine's theory of history implies that it has already been significantly reinterpreted, given that his concept of natural justice and its basis is radically different from what we have been dealing with in the first two chapters.

For Augustine, physical flourishing, whether of one's person or of one's land, is not, as we have seen, a dependable sign of one's justice. It is not altogether unrelated to questions of justice, seeing as the diminishing of the world's bodies in strength, longevity and size seems to be a result of The Fall.<sup>310</sup> However, it does not follow that this decline is reversed or even slowed by a ruler who exercises such provisional virtues as he grants as possible for those who have not yet attained faith in God, or even by a ruler who exercises the true righteousness of a saintly believer.<sup>311</sup> He is willing to grant that, prior to the Incarnation of Christ, pre-Christians who never attained faith in God, such as would allow their pseudo-virtues to become true virtues, were sometimes granted material rewards for their approximations of virtue, so that they would not seem to be without any reward at all for their efforts. But he is quite adamant that even this exception did not continue after the Incarnation. The spiritual benefits of righteous rule are revealed in the piety of the population, not in physical prosperity.<sup>312</sup>

Just as this is contrary to the early Irish texts we have considered in previous chapters, it is contrary to the majority of our examples of Augustinian nostalgia in the sagas. In *BMMM*, the *Immacallam* and *CMT*, the failure of crops and proliferation of violence which will prevail towards the end of the world are connected to the unrighteousness of those in political office, in contrast to the fecundity and peace which accompanies righteous rule, such as they locate it at some point in the pre-Christian past.<sup>313</sup> Similarly, Murchad's capability in battle, hundreds of years after the establishment of the Church in Ireland, seems to be inseparable from his Hector-like piety, generosity and munificence, as well as his Samson-like pleasantness, affability, and devotion to his *patria*.<sup>314</sup> They follow Augustine in seeing the physical capacities of humanity, and of the earth itself, as dwindling away over time. However, in their case, this waning of the physical world reveals in turn, a waning capacity for (and enactment of) justice in the

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<sup>310</sup> *DCD* XV.ix, *passim*; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 465-6; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 609-10. See pages 228, 274-5 for discussion of this theme elsewhere.

<sup>311</sup> *DCD* V.xxiv-xxv, XVII.xx; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* I, 160-1, II, 574; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 219-221, 753-7; see discussion in Chapter 3, page 187.

<sup>312</sup> *DCD* V.xv-xvi, xxiv-xxv; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* I, 160-1; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 204-5, 219-220.

<sup>313</sup> See pages 249-56, 257-64, 265-69 above

<sup>314</sup> See notes 302-5 above.



secular sphere, a waning which, according to the *Immacallam*, is severe enough to eventually undermine the possibility of justice in the ecclesiastical sphere as well.<sup>315</sup> Moreover, insofar as this natural justice is taken to depend on the kind of inspired knowledge that we discussed in Chapter 2, its progressive diminishment over time will also indicate the progressive diminishment of its prophetic basis. The general structure of the loss is Augustinian, but its extent and intensity goes far beyond what can be calculated according only to his understanding of history. What is being lost is not merely corporeal. The same holds for *SFF*, the *Acallam*, or any other early Irish text which understands nature along the more expansive lines set out in the first two chapters, and yet, like Augustine, sees physical nature as something that is wearing away, until its restoration in the end of all things.

### **Possible Exceptions to the Rule**

However, it is not certain that this applies to all our early Irish examples of Augustinian nostalgia in the sagas. It seems clear enough that Tuán is not the sort of person that the author of *Scél Tuáin meicc Chairill* sees as being able to emerge in the Christian era. However, we are not offered any clues regarding why he, rather than someone else from the ancient past, was capable of living such an extraordinarily long life, and of undergoing the transformations which made that longevity possible. Where the longevity and transformative power of the Fintan of *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*'s much later account seems to be the expression of a unique degree of reliance on God,<sup>316</sup> such as makes him worthy of comparison to such extraordinary ancient righteous people as Enoch and Elijah,<sup>317</sup> we are simply not told why the Tuán of the earlier account has been

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<sup>315</sup> See pages 263-4 above.

<sup>316</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §9, 34-5; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling', ed.130, 154-8 and tr.131, 155-9: 'Mad misi romanacht mac Dé dín úas druíng' (=As for me I was saved / by the Son of God, a protection over the throne); 'Bá fo dílind bliadain láin, / fo chumachta in Choimdead c[h]áid' (=I was a full year under the Deluge / in the power of the holy Lord); 'ó rofidir corbo mithigh re Día a bás-som do thuidecht cen clóemclodh ndelba dó ó sin imach, conid andsen doroinde-seom in láid-sea: . . . Doridnacht dam ón ríge réll mo sóg do thachar i céin . . .' (=when he knew that God deemed it time for him to die, without undergoing further change of form, he then made the following lay: . . . 'The bright King vouchsafed to me / that my good fortune should be prolonged. . .').

<sup>317</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §36; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling', ed.160 and tr.161: 'acht is dóig leo is ina chorp chollaigi rucad i nnach ndámair ndíada amail rucad Ele 7 Enócc i pardus condafil ic ernaidi eiseiséirgi in sruthseanóir sáeghlach sin .i. Fintan mac Bóchra . . .' (=But some think that he was borne

able to survive into the Christian era. He evidently received God's help relative to his transformation into a salmon, and his eventual escape from the cycle of transformations.<sup>318</sup> He is also the kind of person that becomes a Christian ascetic who is more interested in theology than in *senchas* at the end of his life, an ascetic, moreover, whom St. Finnia describes as being 'good'.<sup>319</sup> But without further information, it seems impossible to tell which way the evidence should be interpreted.

It is possible that he simply exemplifies the Augustinian theme of the ancient fecundity of the world, as contrasted with the broken-down state of its physicality in the present, or in a similar vein, the kind of miracles which God enacted in the long past, but not after the time of the great founding-saints, miracles which reflect his providential purposes more than anything about the justice of their recipients.<sup>320</sup> The transformations which he undergoes are not, in any event, the kind of occurrence that Augustine wants include in the realm of possible things, short of taking the miraculous into account. Yet apart from the contrast with the bishop of Hippo that such metamorphoses themselves represent,<sup>321</sup> there seems no reason to assume that a contrary conception of nature to Augustine's is at work here. But even so, neither does there seem to be anything which would bar its interpretation along the lines of the high doctrine of nature we have been considering to this point. Since his transformations, as such, seem to involve ideas that are strange to the Latin Doctors, this could possibly be an oblique indication that *Scél Tuáin meicc Chairill*'s assumptions about the character of what physical form does or does not reveal about one's spiritual state are also determined by other authorities. But if so, it would be difficult to prove. The question of just how thoroughly Augustinian this text really is on this issue will not be solved here.

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away in his mortal body to some divine secret place as Elijah and Enoch were borne into paradise, where they are awaiting the resurrection of that venerable long-lived Elder, Fintan son of Bóchra . . .).

<sup>318</sup> *STMC*, lines 63-7; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: 'Domchuirethar / Dia isin n-abaind . . . / Fecht and, in tan romba mithig la Dia mo chobair sea' (=God put me into the river . . . At last, when it seemed to God that it was time to help me).

<sup>319</sup> *STMC*, lines 4-5; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 101; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 223: 'Asbert Findia fria muintir: Dobicfa fer maith.' (=Finnia said to his followers: 'A good man will come to you).

<sup>320</sup> See page 296 below, esp. note 339, for further discussion and supporting references to Gregory the Great's *Moralia*.

<sup>321</sup> This is dealt with at length in Chapter 5, esp. pages 339-42.

*Togail Troí* presents us with a similar ambiguity. On the one hand, it could be read as a cautionary tale about the repercussions of false-judgement. In this case, the mass destruction of both Greek and Trojan heroes, culminating in the scene where the Badb and various attendant demons goad the remnants of both armies to mutual slaughter,<sup>322</sup> reflects the initial descent from a previously exemplary maintenance of natural justice. The level of heroism which was the immediate expression of this pinnacle of the exercise of judgement cannot survive its diminishment.<sup>323</sup> The less perfect exercise of royal justice<sup>324</sup> results in the destruction of the heroic manifestation proper to a superior enactment of royal justice, and in the instantiation of a reduced form of heroism which is proper to itself. As royal justice declines, so must the form of heroism which expresses it.

On the other hand, *Togail Troí* could be read as an Augustinian tragedy on the futile attempts of naturally virtuous ancients, lacking faith, to practice natural virtue as an end in itself, or for the sake of glory and honour, rather than for the sake of God, who, as the source of all things, is the primary goal of every endeavour.<sup>325</sup> According to this interpretation, the self-eradication of the flower of the world's heroism would not be due

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<sup>322</sup> *Togail Troí* §1895-1900; Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Destruction of Troy*, ed.59 and tr.131: ‘Ní rabi cumsanadh ann, tra, co find na matne for indriud 7 orcain na cathrach. Roloisced an chathir coraibe tría chorthair tenedh 7 for smúit dethcha. Robúrestar 7 robécestar Badb úasv. R[o]gaírset demna aeoir úasv chind, ar rop aitt léo martad mar sin do thabhairt for síl n-Ádhaim, fobíth rop fórmach muinntire dóib sin’ (=The city was burnt, so that it was in[?] a fringe of fire and under vapour of smoke. Badb bellowed and roared above it. Demons of the air shouted above . . . ; for pleasant it was to them that slaughter should befall Adam’s seed, because it was an increase to their [the demons’] household).

<sup>323</sup> *Togail Troí* §1297-1305; Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Destruction of Troy*, ed.41-2 and tr.109: ‘INtan iarvm roinnis in techtaire do Achíl a scéla 7 a imthecht[a], robái oc gerán 7 ic accaini móir sechnón in dúnaid co n-érbairt: “Mór in bvrba”, ol sé “donither sund .i. cathmílid chalma 7 curaid chróda na hAisía 7 na hEórpa do chomthinól co mbátar oc slaide 7 oc míairlech a chéile tría fochund óenmná.” Trom leis dano clanda na rígh 7 na tóisech 7 na n-octhigern do díbudh 7 do triasi[n] fothasin, 7 athigh 7 doeraicme / do mórath díaneis’ (=Now when the messenger had related to Achilles his tidings and his goings, he (Achilles) was lamenting and bewailing greatly throughout the leaguer, and he said: ‘Great the folly’, saith he, ‘that is done here, namely, to collect the valiant champions and hardy heroes of Asia and of Europe, so that they have been a-smiting and slaughtering each other because of one woman.’ Grievous it seemed to him, then, that the children of the kings and the captains and the nobles should perish and fade through that cause, and peasants and mean races should become great after them).

<sup>324</sup> The prime example being Priam’s decision to raid the Greeks. See Cassandra’s prophecy at *Togail Troí* §432-4; Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Destruction of Troy*, ed.16 and tr.79: “‘Biaid trá”, ol sí, “mor d’vlecc din scéol sin. Dofóethset láeich 7 ánruid, rig 7 rurig, tóisig 7 ócthigeirn na hAssía dond imradud sein”’ (=Much evil will there be from that news! The heroes and warriors, kings and princes, chieftains and nobles of Asia will fall in consequence of that resolve).

<sup>325</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 75-9 above.

to a faltering of natural justice, but a failure to subordinate it to the absolute justice of divine providence. In which case, it is the very integrity of the natural justice of these heroes and rulers that gives it the power to be the source of their destruction when not directed towards that which is beyond nature. The fact that Priam's fateful decision to attack the Greeks is in response to real insult could certainly be taken to support such a conclusion.<sup>326</sup> Whichever way we interpret it, it will alter how we interpret Cassandra's prophetic powers.<sup>327</sup> If hers is the kind of prophecy by which the Holy Spirit speaks through righteous pre-Christians, then the failure to heed her prophecy is a fundamental step in the failure of Priam to maintain his justice as a ruler. However, if it is following Augustine more closely, since she is not prophesying of Christ, like a Sibylline Oracle, her prophecy seems more likely to represent some kind of diabolical knowledge which is given to further torment those whose natural virtues, through their misdirection, have become their assured means of self-destruction. Any details which would cause us to prefer one reading over another seem not to be present.

### ***The Monastery of Tallaght***

In sum, the early Irish examples of Augustinian nostalgia we have considered tend to assume an Eusebian sense of the immediate correspondence between the relative flourishing of nature and the State and the justice of the ruler, rather than an Augustinian sense that no such correspondence exists (least of all in the Christian era) apart from the sense that the eventual decline of the natural and political world is a direct result of the Fall. However, in *Togail Troí* and *Scél Tuáin meicc Chairill* we have also found that this tendency is not necessarily absolute. Now having considered the possibilities for how far the generally Eusebianising early Irish examples of Augustinian nostalgia may at times conform to their Augustinian sources, we have only to consider, in the other direction, how non-Augustinian nostalgia for the past can be. That is to say, we have yet to consider examples where a nostalgic view of the past does not seem to appear as a total theory of history in its own right, so much as a minor (if significant) modification of Eusebian historiographical triumphalism.

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<sup>326</sup> *Togail Troí* §232-294; Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Destruction of Troy*, ed.10-11 and tr.71-4.

<sup>327</sup> *Togail Troí* §535; Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Destruction of Troy*, ed.19 and tr.82-3.

For example, the ninth-century Céili Dé text known as *The Monastery of Tallaght* seems very close to the *Immacallam* and *CMT* insofar as it paints a picture of the present as the latest extremity of a long decline which has been brought about through ‘falsehood’ (*go*), ‘sin’ (*peccad*) and ‘injustice’. The food and drink which the earth produces has wasted away because of this, so that they no longer have the ‘strength’ (*ner*) and ‘force’ (*brig*) they once did. Water was once just as sustaining, the author says, as milk is in their time.<sup>328</sup> Evidently, this degradation of justice and the resulting degradation of the food supply are perceived to be permanent, given that the countermeasure suggested is not a renewal of efforts towards justice, but a permanent increase in the amount of food allowed to penitents, so that they will receive enough nourishment to keep them alive.<sup>329</sup>

Thus far, all is much as we would expect. The difficulty here is regarding when this past was in which the water was as sustaining as the present-day milk in ninth-century Tallaght. Since these considerations arise as a rationale for lightening the previously existing requirements for Christian penitents which had obtained in Ireland, the idealised past in question is most definitely not a pre-Christian past, but rather the time when the disciplines of the Church, and especially of the monastic community in question, were perceived as first being established in Ireland. It remains possible, in principle, that the time of the great founding-saints is not, as it seems, perceived as the high-water mark for the maintenance of justice, and the fecundity resulting from it, from which there has since been an ebbing. It may be that as exemplary as the time of these saints was, their time as a whole was merely a slightly earlier stage in an even longer decline, which, insofar as it was somewhat earlier in time, was that much less barren of

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<sup>328</sup> *The Monastery of Tallaght* §73; Gwynn and Purton, ed. and tr., ‘The Monastery of Tallaght’, 157, lines 22-30: ‘Rofasaigthea na toirten ⁊ clanda in talman cona fil nert na brig indib idiu fri fulang neich. Go ⁊ peccad ⁊ anfhir na ndaine dorelacht annert ⁊ a brig asin talmin cona thoirthib. INtan rombatar in duine do reir dé Robui an nert coir in clandaib in talman nirbo messa int usce hisuide do fulung neich quam lac hodie’ (=The fruits and plants of the earth have been devastated; so that there is neither force in them to-day to support anyone. The falsehood and sin and injustice of men have robbed the earth with its fruits of their strength and force. When men were obedient to God’s will the plants of the earth retained their proper strength. At that time water was not worse for sustaining anything than milk is to-day’).

<sup>329</sup> *The Monastery of Tallaght* §73; Gwynn and Purton, ed. and tr., ‘The Monastery of Tallaght’, 157, line 30 – 158, line 34: ‘Is iarum atbert int aingel friu ni de min do chummusc doib aranim combed menadach arna toitsitis an aes pende immallama fobithin arna forfoelnangair into uisce ⁊ int aran’ (=Then the angel told them to mix some meal with / their butter to make gruel, so that the penitents should not perish upon their hands (?), because the water and the bread did not suffice to support them).

both virtue and nourishment than the present, but which, for the same reason, was inferior in this regard to still earlier times. Something like this, is, after all, more or less what we found in *CGG*, where the last true hero is indeed a Christian in the Christian era, but the least, rather than the greatest of the heroes by virtue of being the most recent.<sup>330</sup> But if this logic is at work in our text here, it is assumed in absolute silence. Laying aside any speculation on what may have been silently assumed, we would seem, rather, to be dealing with some kind of nostalgic modification of the Eusebian triumphalism discussed in Chapter 3, in which the full establishment of the Church and its institutions is indeed the unambiguous apogee of history, but, in this case, one which all too quickly succumbs to the decline that heralds the end of the world.<sup>331</sup> If *The Monastery of Tallaght* stood alone in this regard, it would be tempting to assume that something approaching what *CGG* definitely claims is likely still implicitly present here. However, as we shall see in a moment, it is not a solitary example of the ambiguity that it represents.

### **Glosses on The Prologue to *SM***

In two versions of The Prologue to *SM* there is some commentary on Dubthach's judgement which partially undermines its force.<sup>332</sup> In that it does so, Carey seems to be right in concluding that this is a later addition, and not part of the canonical text.<sup>333</sup>

Whereas Dubthach's judgement was that a murderer should die for their crime, these

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<sup>330</sup> See pages 281-3 above.

<sup>331</sup> The effects described by *The Monastery of Tallaght* are those which tend to be associated specifically with the hierarchy of rulers. Thus when it says that 'the falsehood and sin and injustice of men' (=Go 7 peccad 7 anfhir na ndaine [see note 328 above]) are the cause of these effects, it would seem, in mentioning 'men', to be placing the blame on the hierarchy of rulers, as the hierarchy concerned with the people as such, rather than people insofar as they possess a specific art, or people insofar as they are members of the Church. However we interpret it, not much can be made of the lack of more explicit distinction here, seeing as this passage is concerned with the food which is appropriate for penitents given the decline of physical nature, rather than determining institutions which are most properly held culpable for such a decline.

<sup>332</sup> *CIH* 341.24-32, 1653.10-15.

<sup>333</sup> Carey, 'The Two Laws', 7: 'The principal thrust of this passage is undermine the judgement itself. Dubthach's sentence of death for murder is replaced by the normal system of *éraig*. Nothing in the judgement itself, or in the rest of the prose, gives any indication that this watering down of the divinely inspired verdict was any part of *PHP*'s [*PSM*'s] doctrine'. See also Carey, 'An Edition', 28-31, for the Middle Irish dating of this passage, and further comments. In this he disagrees with McCone, who sees this passage as 'a deliberate ploy' which is integral to *PSM*'s 'almost breathtaking sophistry'; McCone, 'The Two Laws', 17-8.

two versions of the story state further that the penalty for murder is no longer death, but, so long as the murderer has the means of paying it, the appropriate *éraig*-fine (i.e. wergild). The reason given for this subsequent departure from Dubthach's precedent is that 'no one now has power over heaven such as there was then'.<sup>334</sup> Dubthach's sentence of death was made on the understanding that the soul of the murderer would indeed attain heaven. Now that there is no-one who can guarantee this, the punishment cannot be death as it was in the good old days when saints were saints and the exercise of the law was, consequently, perfect in its approximation of heavenly justice.<sup>335</sup> In this small detail the meaning of *SM* is transformed. *SM* is still the pinnacle of the historical development of law, rather than the last glimmer of a glory which had been long declining. However, insofar as one were to adopt the position of this gloss, it is no longer a fully realisable pinnacle. Rather it is a legal ideal that should be followed as much as possible, but which cannot be absolutely binding, given the diminished capacities of the present. It may be objected this is not relevant to our question, since The Prologue to *SM* does not itself express the idea that the relative fecundity and prosperity of the land and kingdom directly reflects the degree to which the judgements of its rulers are correct. However, we must bear in mind that The Prologue is part of the Old Irish Glosses on *SM*, and that it this doctrine is found in multiple places in the *SM* itself.<sup>336</sup> It is to be expected then that this lessening of the capacity for justice would be taken to be evident in a lessening of the wholeness of physical reality, as it seems to the glossator.

Between the poles of Eusebian optimism and Augustinian nostalgia, it seems beyond argument that the historiography of instances such as these glosses and *The Monastery*

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<sup>334</sup> *PSM* [version B] (*CIH* 341.24-30, 1653.11-14); Appendix I, lines 17-21 in Carey, ed. and tr., 'An Edition', ed.29 and tr.30 = Appendix I: 'Is é tiachtain eter dílgud 7 indechad doníther inniu, uair ná fuil comus nime ac neoch inniu amail roboí in lá-sin: cen duine do marbad ina chintaib comraite i céin fogabar éiric, 7 cach uair ná fuigbe is a marbad ina chintaib comraite' (=This is the middle way between pardon and punishing that is taken today, since no one now has power over heaven such as there was then: no one to be killed for a deliberate crime so long as *éraig* can be obtained, but whenever he should not obtain (it), he should be killed for a deliberate crime).

<sup>335</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 136-9.

<sup>336</sup> Including *Recholl Breth* (*SM* 13), *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligud* (*SM* 14), *Di Dligiud Raith 7 Somaíne la Flaith* (*SM* 18); for quotations, translations, references and discussion, see Breatnach, ed. and tr., 'The King in *SM*', 113-6.

*of Tallaght* exist at an intermediary point that tends towards Eusebius. Be that as it may, once a nostalgia for the past takes the form of a nostalgia for an earlier stage of the Church's development, rather than for a pre-Christian past, it becomes very difficult to know if it reflects Augustinian influence or not. Certainly, a nostalgia for the early Church is not out of harmony with what we have seen of Augustine's view of history. Each of the Six Ages is taken to begin in a morning of promise and end in an evening of ruination and disaster.<sup>337</sup> Moreover, given the similarity in structure between the decline of history generally and the decline of a particular age, the description of a decline, say, from the Third to the Sixth Age, such as we have in *CMT*, could easily double, typologically, as the description of a decline that is internal to the Six Age. However, in most of the cases above, it was the presence of nostalgia for specifically pre-Christian times which allowed us to identify Augustine as the relevant theological authority. There are considerably more theological resources available which might help us understand how nostalgia which is directed only towards the early days of the Church in Ireland would be theologically intelligible to early Irish writers.

For instance, any collection of the sayings of theological authorities, once it had obtained a sense of completeness as a collection, would certainly encourage a sense that it depicts a mode of life which is available for imperfect emulation rather than full attainment. If such a text is truly complete, it would seem to suggest the number of those who can attain the magnitude of existence which qualifies them to be included in such a collection may also be complete. Here the various Latin versions of *Apophthegmata Patrum* are a good early example in Western Christendom generally.<sup>338</sup> A similar logic would seem to obtain relative to the hagiographical stories regarding the

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<sup>337</sup> See pages 252-3 above.

<sup>338</sup> For an overview the early history of the Latin versions of *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see Wilhelm Bousset, *Apophthegmata. Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (Tübingen 1923), 60-76. The major Latin collection, of the sixth-century, is known variously as *Verba Seniorum*, or *PJ*, after its attributed translators, Pelagius and John. This is edited in *PL* 73, col.855-1022, and translated in Benedicta Ward, tr., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of Early Christian Monks* (London 2003). The *Verba Seniorum* was a direct influence on an early Irish narrative of the late ninth or early tenth century known to modern scholarship as 'The Two Deaths'; Katja Ritari, ed. and tr., 'The Two Deaths', in Carey *et al*, eds., *The End and Beyond I*, 101-11, with further discussion of *Verba Seniorum* and references at 101. For discussion of, and references to, Freire and Barlow's editions of minor Latin collections of *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see Samuel Rubenson, 'The Formation and Reformations of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers', *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013), 5-23, at 12, incl. notes 34-5.



founding saint of one's church, or form of monastic life. It would be unusual for the founder of an institution or discipline not to maintain at least a certain pre-eminence over even its most exemplary constituent members. On the issue of saintly founders, Gregory the Great is an important authority to consider. He attempted to present the problem of the perceived obsolescence of miracles, in his own time, in a positive light. That is to say, he saw miracles as something necessary to the time of the Church's earlier missionary efforts, but not the time of the Church's stable progress towards maturity.<sup>339</sup> However, he also makes the more sobering claim that the time of the Antichrist will be marked by the withdrawal of miraculous signs of God's presence with the Church.<sup>340</sup> In sum, he provides multiple explanations regarding why earlier saints appear to have been thaumaturgically superior to those of his time that do not require him to evoke his Augustinian views on history in order to make them comprehensible. It is not hard to see how such arguments might be relevant to a medieval Christian's reflections on the time of the founding saints of Ireland, and why they might not seem to

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<sup>339</sup> *Moralia* XXVII.xviii.36-7; *PL* 97 col.420; Marriott, tr., *Morals on the Book of Job* III.i, 226: 'Tunc quippe sancta Ecclesia miraculorum adiutoriis indiguit, cum eam tribulatione persecutionis pressit. Nam postquam superbiam infidelitatis edomuit, non jam virtutum signa, sed sola merita operum requirit, quamvis et illa per multos cum opportunitas exigit ostendat. Scriptum quippe est: Linguae in signum sunt non fidelibus, sed infidelibus (I Cor. Xiv, 22). Ubi ergo omnes fideles sunt, quae causa exigit ut signa monstrentur? Unde citius fortasse satisfacimus, si quid de ipsa apostolica dispensatione memoremus. . . Quid est ergo mirum si, propagate fide, crebro miracula non fiunt, quando haec ipsi quoque apostolic in quibus jam fidelibus non fecerunt?' (=For Holy Church required then the assistance of miracles, when the tribulation of persecution oppressed her. For after she has overcome the pride of unbelief, she requires no longer the signs of miracles, but the merits of deeds alone, though she displays even them by many persons, when opportunity demands. For it is written, Tongues are for a sign not to them that believe, but to them that believe not. Where then all are faithful, what cause demands signs to be displayed? On which head perhaps we the more readily give satisfaction, if we make some mention of the Apostolic dispensation . / . What wonder is it then, that miracles are not frequently displayed, when the faith has been spread abroad, when even the Apostles themselves performed them not in the case of some who already believed?). Other relevant sections include *Moralia* II.lvi.91-2; XX.vii.17; XIV.ii.27-8; XXVI.xviii.32; XXXI.ii.2.

<sup>340</sup> Cf. *Moralia* XXXIV.iii.7; *PL* col.721; Marriott, tr., *Morals on the Book of Job* III.ii, 622-3: 'Terribili quippe ordine dispositionis occultae, priusquam Leviathan iste in illo damnato homine quem assumit appareat, a sancta Ecclesia virtutum signa subtrahuntur. Nam prophetia absconditur, curationum gratia aufertur, prolixioris abstinentiae virtus imminuitur, doctrinae verba conticescunt, miraculorum prodigia tolluntur. Quae quidem nequaquam superna dispensatio funditus subtrahit, sed non haec sicut prioribus temporibus aperte ac multipliciter ostendit (=For by the awful course of the secret dispensation, before this Leviathan appears in that accursed man whom he assumes, signs of power are with/drawn from Holy Church. For prophecy is hidden, the grace of healings is taken away, the power of longer abstinence is weakened, the words of doctrine are silent, the prodigies of miracles are removed. And though the heavenly dispensation does not entirely withdraw them, yet it does not manifest them openly and in manifold ways as in former times).

be able to ensure heaven's reception of murderers, in the manner of the saints of former times.

### **Conclusions**

No one will find it controversial that a nostalgia for the 'apostolic age' of Ireland's founding saints is intelligible, in one way or other, within the theological context that produced these texts. Thus, the issue at hand here is not to decisively establish the patristic authorities that are most relevant to the nostalgia for earlier Christian times which is found in these, or any further, instances. It is, rather, to distinguish this kind of nostalgia from the kind of nostalgia for pre-Christian realities we have been addressing thus far. While Augustine's theory of history is fully commensurable with the idea that the earlier Christians were at one time more capable of such justice as causes the physical order of things to flourish, we now see that it is not necessary to it in the same way as it is to an extension of the same idea further back, to righteous pre-Christians. In making this distinction we then have three answers, broadly speaking, to our question regarding the degree to which the secular hierarchies described in Chapter One are thought to have been currently realisable by medieval Irish authors:

- 1) We have the most straightforward view, where the Eusebian doctrine of the correspondence between righteous rule and the wholeness of nature is matched with a Eusebian view of history in which righteous rule - and thus its local and cosmic effects - tend towards being realised more perfectly over time.
- 2) We have the view that the above is true up to and including the time of the founding of Christian institutions in Ireland, but that there is a decisive decline afterward. This sense of subsequent decline may reflect Augustinian influence, but it need not.
- 3) We have a view where the capacity to exercise righteous rule, and thus, to bring about the physical prosperity by which a Eusebian perspective takes it to be immediately known, are thought to have been most perfectly realised at some

point in the Third or Fourth Age of the pre-Christian past, and to have been declining since. Such a perspective demonstrably relies on Augustinian historiography for its intelligibility in Christian theological terms.

Aside from these three, there is still the possibility that Augustinian historiography's affirmation of the pre-Christian past is sometimes found in early Irish literature without necessarily being accompanied by the Eusebian doctrine that there is a direct correlation between just rule and physical wholeness of what is ruled. This cannot at least be ruled out as an interpretation in the case of *Togail Troí* and *Scél Tuáin meicc Chairill*. But while we must always remain aware that this possibility exists, so as to avoid confusing it with the third of the options above, it is not, of itself, of any particular relevance to the question we are considering. Since such a possibility, by definition, would not involve the distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration we have been working with, it cannot help us understand the degree to which the institutions that are thought to be founded upon natural inspiration, thus defined, were deemed realisable in the Christian era. Albeit, the question of how the bases for the hierarchies of rulers and poets are understood according to early Irish writers who subscribed to a more Augustinian understanding of humanity's natural capacities would be a very profitable area of study. In principle, we should also look out for the equally relevant possibility that there may be texts that demonstrate Eusebian triumphalism in their view of history together with an Augustinian understanding of nature. However, if such examples exist, I have not been able to identify any thus far.

Of primary interest is the durability of the Eusebian conception that there is a direct correspondence between just secular rule and natural flourishing, not only in the times before the establishment of the Church, but in those following. It is not particularly surprising that it would be found in the context of an interpretation of history which tends towards Eusebius' sense that the temporal process of the world is a relatively simple movement from lesser to greater. However, to find it synthesised with Augustine's Janus-like view of history - where the yearning for the *eschaton* involves a longing for the restoration of natural goods, deemed to already be long gone in the

Christian era – is quite remarkable. One wonders how it survived the transition. As with so many things, it is hard to know if one should look more to creative engagement with textual sources for such a result, especially as the influence of Augustine came to be more ubiquitous, or if we should look to the forms of political adversity as requiring a less sanguine view of history to render the world intelligible. Likely it is not a simple matter of one or the other. In philosophical and theological study there is always the possibility of learning what has not been anticipated, even as what one seeks in study is conditioned by, and must interpret, one's historical experience of the world.

Perhaps even more remarkable, however, relative to the matter at hand, is our general conclusion that nostalgia for the natural justice pre-Christian past, where it is found in early Irish literature, is fully intelligible in the context of Augustinian historiography. This is not to say that such a nostalgia necessarily has no reference to such beliefs as pre-existed Christianity in Ireland. Such may very well be the case, even though it seems not to be definitely provable. Yet it seems worth bearing in mind that where such a nostalgia for the pre-Christian as we find in Augustine is found together with the more Eusebian ideas that cluster around the concepts of *fir flathemon* and *fir filed*, we are dealing with a more complex patristic synthesis than we are when they appear in the context of a view of history that tends more towards the forward-looking approach of Eusebius. The former involves a conciliation of Augustine to Eusebius; the latter, only a conciliation of Eusebius to himself. It is not claimed here that any of these ideas necessarily began in Ireland with these patristic authors. But there may be a case for saying that a perspective which requires the synthesis of more patristic sources in order to be intelligible in a medieval Christian theological context, is likely to be somewhat younger than a perspective which requires the synthesis of fewer such sources. With the possible exception of *AM* and the *Bretha Nemed*, our examples of Augustinian nostalgia for a time when *fir flathemon* and *fir filed* (or even *fir fer*)<sup>341</sup> were practiced more perfectly seem generally to be later than *De XII*, *SM* and The Prologue to *SM*, our earliest examples of texts which, in a Eusebian mode, see the practice of these as improving, or perhaps, only truly being possible, in the Christian era. However, the

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<sup>341</sup> See Chapter 1, page 36; Chapter 2, page 160.

ambiguity of *AM* and the *Bretha Nemed* on this issue make it unwise to see this as anything more than a provisional conclusion.

## CHAPTER FIVE – THE LIMITS OF NATURE: *METEMPSYCHOSIS* AND *METAMORPHOSIS*

### **Introduction**

We now have a reasonably complete overview of such inspiration as is often thought by medieval Irish writers to be possible without recourse to the institutions and rituals of the Church. The initial reception of this natural inspiration, such as is necessary for personal morality, requires no education, depending on no more than the basic distinction between Creator and Created. However, the degree and mode of one's reception of this inspiration seems to be determined largely by the degree and mode of education one has achieved relative to one's vocation. That is to say, it is known according to one's progress in a particular secular vocational education as the basis of that vocation's enactment. The intelligibility of this idea as Christian doctrine appears to depend on a synthesis of Apocryphal, Josephan and Cassianite ideas on natural law (among others), together with those of the Latin Doctors, who tend to define the normative understanding of natural law and pre-Christian inspiration elsewhere.

In addition, the degree to which the natural law, which is known through this inspiration, is justly realised in a person's given vocational enactment of it is directly manifest through physical signs appropriate to the vocation in question. Some see the just enactment of natural law in the secular vocations as uniquely (or perhaps only) possible in the Christian era. In this they stick close to Eusebius, through whom, in tandem with Isidore, the idea that secular justice is directly manifest by clear physical signs seems to have been comprehensible as Christian doctrine in the first place. There are others who see the just enactment of natural law as having been more possible in pre-Christian times than it is now. In this nostalgic relationship to the pre-Christian past, they show the influence of Augustine's historiography. Other cases occupy more ambiguous territory between these poles.

Thus, to whatever degree aspects of this system may reflect strong continuities with a pre-Christian past, we have seen, at every step, the way in which it has the character of

Christian theology, which is to say, the way in which it emerges as admissible belief for its medieval Christian authors and readers. There is, however, one way in which such a conclusion may yet be premature. Various points in our discussion have involved peculiarities such as the apparent transmigration of souls between various embodiments, and gods of a sort that are not easily identifiable with Christian saints or angels. Can such things be seen as anything but incomprehensible *aporiae* within with this theological system? Or if comprehensible, how are they then anything better than distractions from its otherwise coherent presentation? We shall begin first with the problem of *metempsychosis*.

### **The Problem of *Metempsychosis***

The problem posed by apparent examples of *metempsychosis* is not a matter of a few isolated instances. The prevalence of people that have the habit of passing from one form of embodiment to another could be said to be one of the more characteristic features of medieval Irish literature generally. Among the most common ways for this to unfold is as an interplay between a human (or human-like) form and that of a bird. However, in many such instances, a dizzying number of different embodiments follow successively upon another. Moreover, as we have already seen in the case of Tuán, there sometimes seems to be little limit, if any, to the variety of the forms which these embodiments may take. This has led some scholars to conclude that the Classical writers are right about at least one thing regarding pre-Christian druidic belief, namely that (in Gaul and Ireland) their ideas about the individual soul included something like the Pythagorean doctrine of *metempsychosis*, usually evoked in the most general sense possible, as the idea that each soul tends to be reborn in a new and different physical body following the death of its previous body.<sup>1</sup> However, given the overwhelming

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<sup>1</sup> An early example is D'Arbois de Jubainville, *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique* (Paris 1884), 344ff. More recent examples include Carey's description of the relevant evidence in *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* in Carey, *King of Mysteries*, 58 note 7: 'This remarkable statement appears to indicate that, in the middle of the seventh century, there were still in Ireland druids . . . preaching some form of the doctrine of transmigration ascribed to their continental counterparts by Greek and Roman authors'. He has since modified his stance on this specific text in his entry 'Reincarnation and Shapeshifting', in John T. Koch, ed., *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara 2006), 1484-6, where he continues to draw parallels to the Pythagorean tradition relative to other forms of early Irish evidence, but without explicitly claiming their continuity with the ideas attributed to druids by Greek and Roman authors, a stance that has persisted in his most recent work (see references in note 26 below).

evidence that these accounts were produced in an ecclesiastical intellectual context, it seems quite dubious to assume that their content necessarily provides unambiguous evidence regarding the form of pre-Christian belief in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Thus we find ourselves confronted with a rather thorny problem. What could these strange accounts, seemingly of *metempsychosis*, possibly signify in the eyes of the ecclesiastically trained scholars that wrote them?

### **The Significance of Allegory**

The simplest solution would be to take these accounts as strictly allegorical. Elizabeth Boyle's recent paper, 'Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts in Medieval Irish Literature', has been a salutary reminder of the importance of allegorical interpretation in our understanding of these, or any, medieval Irish texts.<sup>3</sup> Although medieval Irish exegesis has often been characterised by scholars as exhibiting a strong interest in the literal interpretation of Scripture, it remains that it is only one kind of interpretation among the multiple levels of figurative interpretation in which early Irish exegetes were trained. Given that the education that was preliminary to both ecclesiastical and secular professions seems to have begun with grammatical and exegetical study of the Psalms, it seems beyond question that the potential significance of the various forms of allegorical interpretation should always be considered relative to the writing or the reading of any given medieval Irish text.<sup>4</sup> Yet, when allegory is present, there generally seems to be

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However, in the same volume, other scholars stay closer to the earlier form of his argument; see Philip Freeman, 'Greek and Roman Accounts of the Ancient Celts', in Koch, *Celtic Culture*, 844-850, at 850: 'Pagan Celtic views about an afterlife as found in later Irish and Welsh literature are often a mixture of reincarnation and an otherworldly land of the dead . . . It is likely that some ancient Celts viewed an afterlife in an otherworld as a temporary state before reincarnation, similar to Plato's Pythagorean myth of Er (*Republic* 10)'.

<sup>2</sup> As Carey has said in 'Reincarnation and Shapeshifting', 1485: 'It would be strange indeed if the medieval literatures preserved unambiguous testimony of a doctrine of the afterlife which was in fundamental disagreement with Christian teaching'.

<sup>3</sup> Boyle, 'Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts'.

<sup>4</sup> Pádraig P. Ó Néill, *Biblical Study and Mediaeval Gaelic History*, Quiggin Memorial Lectures 6 (Cambridge 2003); *idem*, 'The Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter and Its Hiberno-Latin Background', *Ériu* 30 (1979), 148-164, at 163-4; T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Context and Uses of Literacy in Early Christian Ireland', in Huw Pryce, ed., *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge 1998), 62-82, at 66-7, 74-5. An explicit account of the various forms of education available before the reforms of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries is found in the poem *Cinnus atá do Thinnrem*, which Breatnach dates to the eleventh century on linguistic grounds. See Liam Breatnach, ed. and tr., '*Cinnus atá do Thinnrem*', 1-35. The ever present possibility of allegorical readings is also discussed in Chapter 6, on pages 377ff.



little reason to assume it is at the expense of it also being understood as a literal record of historical events. We must bear in mind that, of the patristic authorities often quoted in medieval Irish biblical commentary, even Origen of Alexandria, perhaps the greatest pioneer (though not the founder)<sup>5</sup> of Christian allegorical exegesis, only accepted that an allegorical interpretation replaces, rather than augments, the historical sense of the Scriptures, when the historical sense was deemed impossible.<sup>6</sup>

One of the examples he offers is the account of Christ's temptation in the Gospel according to St. Matthew and St. Luke, respectively.<sup>7</sup> At Matt. 4:8 and Luke 4:5, Satan is said to have shown Christ all the nations of the world from the top of a mountain. This, Origen says, is physically impossible. There is no mountain from which the whole world would be visible to corporeal vision. Therefore, Satan must have shown him all the nations of the world in some other sense. In this instance, this other sense will then be the appropriate way to understand the historical event, i.e. the way in which Satan should be understood to have shown him the world at that time. However, there are, of

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<sup>5</sup> That honour falling to the Philo of Alexandria. Philo was a Hellenic Jew rather than a Christian. However, his approach to the interpretation of Scripture became foundational for Christian exegesis from at least the time of St. Clement of Alexandria onward; David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, Compendium rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3 (Assen and Mineapolis 1993). For a vigorous overview of the essentials of Philo's exegetical approach, see Gary W.A. Thorne, 'The Structure of Philo's Commentary on the Pentateuch', *Dionysius* 13 (1989), 17-50.

<sup>6</sup> *De principiis*, IV.iii.4; Paul Koetschau, ed., *De Principiis [Περὶ Ἀρχῶν]* (Leipzig 1913), 329; G.W. Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles* (New York 1966), 294-5: 'respondendum ergo est quoniam evidenter a nobis decernitur in quam plurimis servari et posse et oportere historiae veritatem. Quis enim nagare potest quod Abraham in duplici spelunca sepultus est in Chebron, sed et Lsaac et Iacob et singluae eorum uxores? vel quis dubitat quod Sicima in portionem data est Ioseph? vel quod Hierusalem metropolis est Iudaeae, in qua constructum est templum dei a Solomone? et alia innumerabilia' (=We must reply, therefore, that it is perfectly obvious to us that in most instances the truth of the historical record can and ought to be preserved. For who can deny that Abraham was buried in the double cave at Hebron, together with Isaac and Jacob and the one wife of each / of them? Or who doubts that Shechem was given as a portion to Joseph? Or that Jerusalem is the chief city of Judaea, in which a temple of God was built by Solomon; and countless other facts? For the passages which are historically true are far more numerous than those which contain a purely spiritual meaning). See also, Peter W. Martens, 'Origen against History? Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory', *Modern Theology* 28.4 (October 2012), 635-56.

<sup>7</sup> *De principiis* IV.iii.1; Koetschau, ed., *De Principiis*, 324; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 289: 'cum vel >in excelsum montem< Iseum inposuisse diabolus dicitur, ut inde ei >universa mundi regan monstraret et gloriam eorum<, Quod secundum litteram quomodo fieri potuisse videbitur, ut vel >in excelsum montem< educeretur a diabolo Iesus, vel etiam carnalibus oculis eius tampquam subiecta et adiacentia uni monti >monia mundi ostenderet regna< . . .' (=as when the devil is said to have taken Jesus up into 'a high mountain' in order to show him from thence "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them". How could it possibly have happened literally, either that the devil should have led Jesus up into a high mountain or that to his fleshly eyes he should have shown all the kingdoms of the world as if they were lying close to the foot of a single mountain . . .).

course, other instances where the historical meaning is absent rather than subject to reinterpretation.<sup>8</sup> His argument is that if there were no such ‘impossibilities’ or ‘incongruities’ to interrupt the historical sense of the Scriptures, no one would ever know to look beyond its literal meaning for those which are more spiritual.<sup>9</sup> Yet the principle remains that there is always an historical interpretation except where it is impossible, and that these instances are the exception rather than the rule.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when

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<sup>8</sup> e.g. composite animals; *De principiis* IV.iii.2; Koetschau, ed., *In Principiis*, 325-6; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 290-1: ‘Si vero etiam de impossibilibus legibus requirendum est, invenimus tragelafum dici animal, quod subsistere omnino not potest, quod inter munda animalia etiam edi iubet Moyes, et / grifum, quem nullus umquam meminit vel audivit humanis minibus potuisse succumbere, manducari prohibet legislator’ (=And if we are to look for laws that are impossible, we find mention of an animal called the goat-stag, which can/not possibly exist, but which Moses allows to be eaten among clean animals; while as to the griffin, which the lawgiver forbids to be eaten, there is no record or knowledge that it has ever fallen into the hands of man).

<sup>9</sup> *De Principiis*, IV.ii; Koetschau, ed., *In Principiis*, 321; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 285-6: ‘Sed quoniam, si in omnibus indumenti huius, id est historiae, legis fuisset consequentia custodita et ordo servatus, habentes continuatum intellegentiae cursum non utique crederemus esse aliud aliquid in scripturis sanctis intrinsecus praeter hoc, quod prima fronte indicabatur, inclusum: ista de causa procuravit divina sapientia offencicula quaedam vel intercapedines intellegentiae fieri historialis, impossibilia quaedam vel et inconvenientia per medium inserendo; ut interruptio ipsa narrationis velut obicibus quibusdam legenti resistat obiectis, quibus intellegentiae huius vulgaris iter ac transitum neget et exclusos nos ac recussos revocet ad alterius intitium viae, ut ita celsioris cuiusdam et eminentioris tramitis per angusti callis ingressum inmemsam divinae scientiae latitudinem pandat’ (=But if in every detail of this outer covering, that is, the actual history, the sequence of the law had been preserved and its order maintained, we should have understood the scriptures in an unbroken course and should certainly not have believed that there was anything else buried within them beyond what was indicated at a first glance. Consequently the divine wisdom has arranged for certain stumbling-blocks and interruptions of the historical sense to be found therein, by inserting in the midst a number of impossibilities and incongruities, in order that the very interruptions of the narrative might as it were represent a barrier to the reader and lead him to refuse to proceed along the pathway of the ordinary meaning: and so, by shutting us out and debarring us from that, might recall us to the beginning / of another way, and might thereby bring us, through the entrance of a narrow footpath, to a higher and loftier road and lay open the immense breadth of the divine wisdom).

<sup>10</sup> For further examples, see also, Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* III.xxii.32; *PL* 34, col.78; D.W. Robertson, tr., *Saint Augustine: On Christian Doctrine* (New York 1958), 98: ‘Ergo, quamquam omnia vel paene omnia quae in Veteris Testamenti libris gesta continentur, non solum proprie, sed etiam figurate accipienda sint; tamen etiam illa quae proprie lector acceperit, si laudati sunt illi qui ea fecerunt, sed ea tamen abhorrent a consuetudine bonorum, qui post adventum Domini divina praecepta custodiunt, figuram ad intellegentiam referat, factum vero ipsum ad mores non transferat. Multa enim sunt quae illo tempore officiose facta sunt, quae modo nisi libidinose fieri non possunt’ (=Therefore, although all or almost all of the deeds which are contained in the Old Testament are to be taken figuratively as well as literally, nevertheless the reader may take as literal those performed by people who are praised, even though they would be abhorrent to the custom of the good who follow the divine precepts after the advent of the Lord. He should refer the figure to the understanding, but should not transfer the deed itself to his own mores), and III.xxix.41; *PL* 34, col.81; Robertson, tr., *Saint Augustine: On Christian Doctrine*, 104: ‘quia, cum sensus, ad proprietatem verborum si accipiatur, absurdus est, quaerendum est utique, ne forte illo vel illo tropo dictum sit quod non intellegimus; et sic pleraque inventa sunt quae latebant’ (=for when the sense is absurd if it is taken literally, it is to be inquired whether or not what is said is expressed in this or that figurative sense which we do not know; and in this way many hidden things are discovered [lightly edited]). Cassian emphasises the simultaneous operation of all levels of Scriptural interpretation in his

we find such hesitance to undermine the historicity of Scripture in even the most allegorically-oriented of Patristic exegesis, it cannot then be assumed that, where an allegorical meaning is detected in a medieval Irish text, it will necessarily be the expense of a literal meaning. This would seem to be the case only where a literal meaning is deemed to be intentionally incongruous with historical knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it remains that while potential allegorical levels of meaning must, as Boyle has shown, always be considered, Irish exegesis does indeed seem to tend towards the historical emphasis it found in the exegetical works of Ps. Jerome (i.e. Theodore of

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classic expression of its fourfold interpretation; Cassian, *Conlationes* XIV.8; *PL* 49, col.964; Ramsey, tr., *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 510: ‘una atque eadem Jerusalem quadrifariam possit intelligi: secundum historiam civitas judaeorum, secundum allegoriam Ecclesia Christi, secundum anagogem civitas Dei illa coelestis quae est mater omnium nostrum; secundum tropologiam anima hominis, quae frequenter hoc nomine aut increpatur, aut laudatur a Domino’ (=one and the same Jerusalem can be understood in a fourfold manner. According to history it is the city of the Jews. According to allegory it is the Church of Christ. According to anagogy it is the heavenly city of God ‘which is the mother of us all.’ According to tropology it is the soul of the human being, which under this name is frequently either reproached or praised by the Lord). Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, I.iii-iv; *PL* 75, col. 513-4; Marriott, tr., *Morals on the Book of Job* I, 7-9: ‘Nam primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus; deinde per significationem typicam in arcem fidei fabricam mentis erigimus; ad extremeum quoque per moralitatis gratiam, quasi superducto aedificium colore vestimus . . . Aliquando vero exponere aperta historiae verba negligimus, ne tardius ad obscura veniamus: aliquando autem intelligi juxta litteram nequeunt; quia superficie tenus accepta, nequaquam instructionem legentibus, sed errorem gignunt . . . Sed nimirum verba litterae, dum collate sibi convenire nequeunt, aliud in se aliquid quod quaeratur ostendunt, ac si quibus dam vocibus decant: Dum nostra nos conspiciat superficie destrui, hoc in nobis quaerite, quod ordinatum sibique congruens apud nos valeat intus inveniri. 4. Aliquando autem qui verba accipere historiae juxta litteram negligit, oblatum sibi veritatis lumen abscondit; cumque laboriose invenire in eis aliud intrinsecus appetit, hoc quod foris sine difficultate assequi poterat, amittit’ (=For first, we lay the historical foundations; next, by pursuing the typical sense, we erect a fabric of the mind to be a strong hold of faith; and moreover as the last step, by the grace of moral instruction, we, as it were, clothe the edifice with an overcast of colouring . . . Yet it sometimes happens that we neglect to interpret the plain words of the historical account, that we may not be too long in coming to the hidden senses, and sometimes they cannot be understood according to the letter, because when taken superficially, they convey no sort of instruction to the reader, but only engender error . . . Yet doubtless whereas the literal words when set against each other cannot be made to agree, they point out some other meaning in themselves which we are to seek for, as if with a kind of utterance they said, Whereas ye see our superficial form to be destructive to us, look for what may be found within us that is in place and consistent with itself. 4. But sometimes, he who neglects to interpret the historical form of words according to the letter, keeps that light of truth concealed which is presented to him, and in laboriously seeking to find in them a further interior meaning, he loses that which he might easily obtain on the outside).

<sup>11</sup> This conclusion would seem to be supported by early Irish exegesis itself, where the tendency is to present historical and allegorical levels of meaning as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. See, for example, the glosses on the Southampton Psalter; Pádraig P. Ó Néill, ed., *Psalterium sythantoniense* (Turnhout 2012).

Mopsuestia)<sup>12</sup> and Jerome himself,<sup>13</sup> among others.

Thus, it is no surprise that we find a similar emphasis in secular literature. The significant historical value the sagas had for their authors and readers is everywhere evident, whether this is through a careful contextualization of their characters and events relative to the putative events of world history, or through the appearance of the same in chronicles and other historiographical literature.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that there are no strict allegories in medieval Irish literature, but that the identification of such would seem to require clear evidence, either in the form of signposting, such as we find in authors like Macrobius<sup>15</sup> and Prudentius,<sup>16</sup> or else in the form of proof that the writer

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<sup>12</sup> This is a perennial theme in McNamara's scholarship, see Martin McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 165 (Sheffield 2000), *passim*; see also Ó Néill, *Biblical Study*, 28-9.

<sup>13</sup> For Jerome's reception of Antiochene exegesis, see Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the 'Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim'* (Oxford, 1993), 126-74. However, see Graves' caution the similarities between Jerome's preoccupation with the 'Hebraica Veritas' may be just as much due to his training as a grammarian with Donatus as much as any other influence; Michael Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his 'Commentary on Jeremiah'*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 90 (Leiden and Boston 2007), 13ff. If Graves is right, conclusions about the fundamentally 'Antiochene' origin and source of medieval Irish preoccupation with historical meaning may need to be revisited, given the importance of grammarians such as Donatus and Priscian in the scholarship of the time.

<sup>14</sup> Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory'; Toner, 'Authority, Verse and the Transmission of *Senchas*'; Ralph O'Connor's general discussion of sagas and romances as medieval genres also applies here; O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories and Romances*, 19ff.

<sup>15</sup> i.e. *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis* I.ii.9 and 13, iv.1; Ludwig von Jan, ed., *Macrobii Ambrosii Theodosii opera quae supersunt*, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1848-52) I, 19-20, 30-1; William Harris Stahl, tr., *Macrobius: The Dream of Scipio* (New York and Chichester 1990, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 85, 92 'hoc iam vocatur narratio fabulosa . . . ut sunt cerimoniarum sacra, ut Hesiodi et Orphei que de doerum progenie active narrantur, ut / mystica Pythagoreorum sensa referuntur . . . Sciendum est tamen non in omnem disputationem philosophos admittere fabulosa ve licita. Sed his uit solent, cum vel de anima vel de aeriis aetheriisve potestatibus vel de ceteris locuntur . / . . propositum praesentis . / . . ut animas bene de re publica meritorum post corpora caelo redid et illic frui beatitatis perpetuitate nos doceat' (=This is called the fabulous narrative . . . examples of it are the performances of sacred rites, the stories of Hesiod and Orpheus that treat the ancestry and deeds of the gods, and the mystic conceptions of the Pythagoreans . . . We should not assume, however, that philosophers approve the use of fabulous narratives, even those of the proper sort, in all disputations. It is their custom to employ them when speaking about the Soul, or about spirits having dominion in the lower and upper air, or about gods in general . / . . the purpose of this dream is to teach that the souls of those who serve the state well are returned to the heavens after death and there enjoy everlasting blessedness).

<sup>16</sup> i.e. *Psychomachia*, 21-7; H.J. Thomson, ed. and tr., 'The Fight for Mansoul', in H.J. Thomson, *Prudentius*, 2 vols. (Cambridge 2006, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.) I, ed.274-342, at 280 and tr.275-343, at 281: 'prima petit campum dubia sub sorte duelli / pugnatura Fides, agrestic turbida cultu, / nuda umeros, intonsa comas, exerta lacertos; / namque repentinus laudis calor ad nova fervens / proelia nec telis meminit nec tegmina cingi, / pectore sed fidens valido membrisque relectis / provocat insani frangenda pericula belli' (=Faith first takes the field to face the doubtful chances of battle, her rough dress disordered, her shoulders bare, her hair untrimmed, her arms exposed; for the sudden glow of ambition, burning to enter fresh contests,

does not believe that the events he recounts or transcribes are historically possible. The latter, would not, of course, necessitate an allegorical reading, since with a non-sacred text it would always be an option, depending on how one understood the intentions of the author, to see it merely as faulty history. Yet such evidence at least raises the possibility of the perceived need for such a reading, as it did for many Christian interpreters of Virgil,<sup>17</sup> for example, regardless of what his own opinions of the historical merits of his work may have been. Moreover, relative to the case at hand, examples of the allegorical interpretation of the idea of metempsychosis seem to have been available.<sup>18</sup>

However, such ambiguities will not save us. What is most astonishing here is that these apparent descriptions of *metempsychosis* occur, not only in sagas whose contents seem to be both presented and understood as historical, but even in hagiographical contexts,<sup>19</sup> and not only in these, but also in self-conscious historiography, such as *LGÉ*. In *LGÉ*, the long ages of successive incarnations undergone by Tuán mac Cairill<sup>20</sup> and Fintan

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takes no thought to gird on arms or armour, but trusting in a stout heart and unprotected limbs challenges the hazards of furious warfare, meaning to break them down).

<sup>17</sup> Fulgentius, *The Vatican Mythographers*, Augustine, Ps. Bernardus Silvestris *et al*; Étienne Wolff, ed. and tr., *Fulgence: Virgile dévoilé: Mythographes* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq 2009); Peter Kulscar, ed., *Mythographi Vaticani I et II* (Turnhout 1987); Georg Bode, ed., *Scriptores rerum mythicarum Latini tres Romae nuper reperti*, 2 vols. (Celle 1834, repr. Hildesheim 1968); Ronald E. Pepin, tr., *The Vatican Mythographers* (New York 2008). Julian Ward Jones and Elizabeth Frances Jones, eds., *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the Aeneid of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris* (Lincoln and London 1977); Earl G. Schreiber and Thomas E. Maresca, ed., *Commentary on The First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid by Bernardus Silvestris* (Lincoln and London 1979).

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, VII.x.14-xi.16; *PL* 34, col.360-2; John Hammond Taylor, tr., *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols. (New York 1982) II, 12-13. But see also, Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, IV.iii [prosa].14-25; Weinberger, ed., *Boethii Philosophiae Consolationis*, 86-7; Watts, tr., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> See pages 338ff. below, esp. note 125; Chapter 2, pages 109-11; Chapter 4, pages 269-72.

<sup>20</sup> *LGÉ* IV prose §222, 236 and poem §39, esp. §236; Macallister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn III*, ed.22, 42, 80-2, esp. 42 and tr.23, 43, 81-3, esp.43: ‘Ocus do dealb Dia i rechtaib imdaib eisiden, 7 ro mair o aimsir Parrtholoin co haimsir Cholaim Cilli, co ro fáisnesed doib fis 7 forus 7 gabala Erenn 7 a scela, o thanic Cesair co sin. Ocus is airi sin do fuirich Dia he co haimsir na naemh’ (=God fashioned him in many forms, and he survived from the time of Partholon to the time of Colum Cille, and revealed to them the knowledge and history and Takings of Ireland and her histories, from the coming of Cessair until then. For this purpose, God kept him alive until the time of the saints). See also, the ninth-century text *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill*, lines 79-80; Carey, ed., ‘*Scél Tuáin*’, 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 225: ‘Nach senchas 7 nach genelach fil i nHéire is ó Thuán mac Cairill a bunadus’ (=every history or genealogy there is in Ireland, drives from Tuán son of Cairell).

mac Bóchra<sup>21</sup> make them uniquely qualified authorities on the history it seeks to recount, due to their status as eye-witnesses of the ancient events it describes. As such, *LGÉ* makes the apparent reality of their *metempsychosis* a fundamental part of the authority on which it rests the veracity of its own view of history.<sup>22</sup> It is evident that not everyone in medieval Ireland believed such things.<sup>23</sup> Yet there seems no avoiding the conclusion that traversing successive forms of embodiment was seen as a legitimate historical possibility (for at least some individuals) by a significant number of medieval Irish writers.

### *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*

This is what seems to have driven Professor Carey to characterise these accounts as an audacious and ongoing affirmation of pagan belief *as such*, despite his recognition of the Christian intellectual *milieu* that produced them. In support of this claim of their pagan origin he has referred to an important bit of evidence found in Ps. Augustine's *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, a seventh century Hiberno-Latin work of speculative theology:

But if it were conceded that all these things that are made from earth are changed into each other in turn, that, for instance, an animal could be turned into a tree, a loaf of bread into a stone, a man into a bird; then because of these things, nothing could remain firmly in the bounds of its own nature, and we would seem to give assent to the laughable fables of the druids who say that their elders flew

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<sup>21</sup> *LGÉ*, *passim*; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Érenn* I, ed.32, 166, 220 and tr.33, 167, 221; II, ed.172, 176, 182, 188-194, 200-214, 220-24 and tr.173, 177, 183, 189-195, 201-215, 221-5; III, ed.22, 44-6, 166 and tr.23, 45-7, 167; IV, ed.12, 204, 282 and tr.13, 205, 283; V, ed.22-6, 224, 486 and tr.23-7, 225, 487. See also, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §31; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling', ed.152 and tr.153: 'Doróne iarum in láid sin, 7 roairis re sloind senchasa do feraib hÉirind béos conice in inbaid sin tánic fo gairm Diarmata meic Cerbaill 7 Fland Foebla meic Scandláin 7 Chindfáelad meic Aililla 7 fer nÉrenn ar chena do brith breithi dóib in suidigud tellaig Themra' (= So he made this lay, and remained to relate the stores of the men of Ireland even until the time he was summoned by Diarmait son of Cerball, and Flann Febla son of Scannlan, and Cannfaelad son of Ailill, and the men of Ireland also to pronounce judgement from them concerning the manor of Tara).

<sup>22</sup> See related discussion in Chapter 4, pages 270-1.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the discussion of *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* immediately below.

through the ages in the substantiality of birds,<sup>24</sup> and by this would speak of God, in such instances, not as the governor, but as the changer of natures<sup>25</sup>

While he is less committal elsewhere in the same volume, Carey takes this to be evidence that druids ‘were still preaching a doctrine of transmigration in the seventh [century]’.<sup>26</sup> Yet this is not self-evident. While *magus* is indeed a standard Latin translation of *druí*, it remains an ambiguous term that may also refer, especially when speaking with the mouth St. Augustine, to a *magus* proper. In which case, the author, rather than describing contemporary *druíd*, may otherwise be attributing this belief to such *magi* as Augustine could be taken to have known, or else to *magi* in a more general sense which includes all the persons describable by this term in Irish, Biblical and (to the extent it was known) Classical literature. Given this indeterminacy, it would be difficult to identify, based on this text alone, which way the influence is going. Is he

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<sup>24</sup> The contrast of Jerome’s understanding of the doctrine of *metempsychosis* with the situation in Ps. Augustine is highlighted by their shared concern with temporality; *Comm. in Matt.* II.1106-11; David Hurst and M. Adriaen, eds., *Sancti Hieronymi Presbyteri: Commentariorum in Mathaeum libri iv*, CCSL 77 (Turnhout 1969), 116-7; Thomas P. Scheck, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on Mathew*, The Fathers of the Church 117 (Washington, D.C. 2008), 166-7: ‘quasi erroris alieni nobis reddenda sit ratio, aut μετεμψύχσεως secta ex his uerbis habeat occasionem, cum utique eo tempore quo iohannes decollatus est, dominus triginta esset annorum, μετεμψύχσις autem post multos annorum circulos in diuersa corpora dicat animas insinuari . . .’ (=As though we need to give a reason for the error of an outsider! Or as if the sect of μετεμψύχσις [*metempsychosis*] needs a pretext for their doctrine from these words! Surely, at the time when John was beheaded, the Lord was thirty years old, but the doctrine of μετεμψύχσις [*metempsychosis*] says that souls are inserted into different bodies after many cycles of years). Sedulius Scottus’ wording differs from him only slightly; *In Euangeliam Matthei* II.xiv.1ff.; Bengt Löfstedt, ed., *Sedulius Scottus: Kommentar zum Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 2 vols. *Vetus Latina: Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel* 14, 19 (Freiberg 1989-91) II, 369.91: ‘quasi erroris alieni nobis reddenda sit ratio aut per μετεμψύχσιν secta ex his uerbis habeat occasionem, cum utique eo tempore, quo Iohannes decollatus est, Dominus XXX esset annorum, μετεμψύχσις autem post multos annorum circulos in diuersa corpora dicant animas commotari . . .’. Paschius Radbertus also makes use of similar phrasing in his *Expositio Matheo*, liber 7, linea 1385ff.

<sup>25</sup> *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, I.17; *PL* 35, col. 2164: ‘Sed si omnia, quae de terra facta sunt, in alterutrum mutari vicissim conceduntur, hoc est, ut animal in arborem, panis in lapidem, homo in volucrum verti posse concedatur; nihil ex his firmiter possit intra suae naturae terminos permanere, et ridiculosis magorum fabulationibus dicentium in avium substantia majores suos saecula pervolasse, assensum praestare videbimur; ac per hoc Deum in his non gubernatorem, sed mutatorem naturarum dicemus’. Translation above adapted from Carey, *A Single Ray*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> Carey, *A Single Ray*, 21. In this he reaffirms his earlier statement in John Carey, ‘Saint Patrick, the Druids, and the End of the World’, *History of Religions* 36.1 (Aug. 1996), 42-53, at 42-3: ‘that they were not merely conjurors but retained some kind of parareligious role is apparent from the allusion in the early *Synodus episcoporum* to their serving as guarantors of oaths and the tantalizing allusion in the theological treatise / *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* to their promulgation of a doctrine of metempsychosis in the mid-seventh century’. However, he has since come to interpret this as an example of serial transformation rather than *metempsychosis*, turning to other texts for evidence of the latter; see his ‘Reincarnation and Shapeshifting’, 1486; *idem*, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 64-65.

imputing characteristics to Biblical or Classical *magi* on the analogy of his experience of or beliefs about Irish *druíd*,<sup>27</sup> or imputing characteristics to *druíd* based their presumed equivalence with *magi*?<sup>28</sup>

Context does much to clarify matters. In the first place, it is indeed possible that Ps. Augustine may have had first-hand experience of *druíd*. The comments on their status in early Irish law-texts and penitentials<sup>29</sup> demonstrate that *druíd* of some sort would have been contemporary with him. Of course, this is no guarantee that a description of them or their views will reveal more about them, than it will the author's reinterpretation of them, say, in light of the *magi* of Exodus and Daniel, such as we find in the roughly contemporaneous *Vita Patricii* of Muirchú.<sup>30</sup> 'Magi' is, after all, the same term Ps.

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<sup>27</sup> Descriptions of Biblical *magi* (or *malefici*) as *druíd* include: Würzburg Glosses 30c17; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* I, 695: 'i. da druith agetptacdi robatar ocimbresun frimmoysi' (=i.e. the two Egyptian wizards who had been contending with Moses); *The Poems of Blathmac* §12.45-8; Carney, ed. and tr., *The Poems of Blathmac*, ed.4 and tr.5: 'Ad-ces réglu co mméit móir tairngert Bálam mac Bëóir; ba sí do-deraid an-air na tri druídea co ndánaib' (=A star of great size was seen, which Balaam, son of Beoir, had prophesied; it guided from the east the three *magi* bearing gifts).

<sup>28</sup> Concerning the influence of biblical and patristic portrayals of *magi* on medieval Irish portrayals of *druíd*, see Mark Williams, *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales 700-1700* (Oxford 2010), 51ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Bretha Crólige* §51 [=CIH 2300.6-10]; Daniel A. Binchy, ed. and tr., 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu* 12 (1938), 1-77, ed. at 40 and tr. at 41. *UB* §37 [CIH 1612.8]; MacNeill, tr., 'Ancient Irish Law', 277. *Synodus I S. Patricii* §14; Ludwig Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Synodus I S. Patricii', in Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 54-9, ed. at 56 and tr. at 57. *Canones Hibernenses* §4; Bieler, ed. and tr., *The Irish Penitentials*, ed.160 and tr.161. *The Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations* §5; D.A. Binchy, ed. and tr., 'The Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations', *Ériu* 19 (1962), 47-72, ed. at 58 and tr. at 59. General discussion in Kelly, *A Guide*, 60-1.

<sup>30</sup> *Vita sancti Patricii*, I.13.1-15.2; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', ed.82-4 and tr.83-5: 'Adpropinquavit autem pasca in diebus illis, quod pasca primum Deo in nostra Aegypto huius insulae ./. . relictaque ibi nauis pedestri itinere uenierunt in praedictum maximum campum, donec postremo ad uesperum peruenierunt ad ferti uirorum Feec, quam, ut fabulae ferunt, foderunt uiri (id est serui) feccol ferchertni, qui fuerat unus e nouim magis profetis Bregg ./. . Contigit uero in illo anno ut aliam idolatriae sollempnitatem, quam gentiles incantationibus multis et magicis inuentionibus nonnullisque aliis idolatriae superstitionibus, congregatis etiam regibus, satrapis, ducibus, principibus et optimatibus populi, insuper et magis, incantatoribus, aurspicibus et omnis artis omnisque doni inuentoribus doctoribusue uocatis ad Loigaireum uelut quondam ad Nabucodonossor regem in Temoria istorum Babylone exercere consuerant' (= In those days Easter was approaching, the first Easter to be offered to God in the Egypt of this our island . . . There they left their boat and went by foot to that great plain. In the evening they at last arrived at the burial place of (i.e. constructed by) the men of Fíacc, which, as stories tell us, the men (that is, the servants) of Fíacc had dug—says Ferchertne, who was one of the nine druid-prophets of Brega . . . It so happened in that year that a feast of pagan worship was being held, which the pagans used to celebrate with many incantations and magic rites and other superstitious acts of idolatry. There assembled the kings, satraps, leaders, princes, and the nobles of the people; furthermore, the druids, the fortune-tellers, and the inventors and teachers of every craft and every skill were also summoned to king Loíguire



Augustine uses, just a few lines later, to describe the ‘wise-men’ or ‘magicians’ of Pharaoh which Moses confronts in the book of Exodus.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, there is also no guarantee that the beliefs of pagan *druíd* contemporary to him would not have come to be influenced to some degree over time by their encounter with Christian theology.<sup>32</sup> Even so, the characteristic ubiquity of avian transformations in medieval Irish literature, in seeming to lack an answering ubiquity in the literature made available through Latin learning, suggests, on this specific issue, some kind of continuity with, rather than rupture from, a pre-Christian past. Therefore, it seems more likely than not that his opinions about *magi* did indeed involve his observations of seventh-century *druíd*, and perhaps, given his hostility to them, of Christians whom he may have identified with

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at Tara, their Babylon, as they had been summoned at one time to Nabuchodonosor). For general discussion, see Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, 21, 40.

<sup>31</sup> *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* I.17; *PL* 35, col. 2165; John Carey, tr., ‘Selections from Augustinus Hibernicus: *On the Miracles of Sacred Scripture*’, in Carey, *King of Mysteries*, 51-74, at 58: ‘Si ergo imaginarius serpens ille per signa tantum ostenditur, cur coram Phraone caeteri magorum serpentes per eum devorantur’ (=If then what appeared as a sign was only an imaginary serpent, why were those other serpents of the wizards [*magi*] devoured by it in Pharaoh’s presence). Note that Carey’s translation inconsistently renders ‘magi’ as ‘wizards’ here, whereas he rendered ‘magi’ as ‘druid’ relative to the ‘magi’ we have been considering above. It is of interest that the term used by the Vulgate in the relevant section is not ‘magi’ but ‘sapientes’ (wise men) and, more often, ‘malifici’ (enchanters); Exodus 7:11-2ff.: ‘vocavit autem Pharaon sapientes et maleficos et fecerunt etiam ipsi per incantationes aegyptias et arcana quaedam similiter / proieceruntque singuli virgas suas quae versae sunt in dracones sed devoravit virga Aaron virgas eorum . . .’. It is possible this reflects a reading from an Old Latin version of the same text. The confirmation or denial of this waits upon an edition of the extant fragments of Old Latin translations of Exodus. However, given that the Septuagint also does not refer to the ‘wisemen’ or ‘magicians’ as ‘μάγοι’ (*magoi*), but as ‘σοφισταί’ (*sophistai* / wise men) and ‘φαρμακοί’ (*pharmakoi* / sorcerers) respectively, this seems unlikely. In which case, this identification of the enchanters/wise men of Pharaoh as ‘magi’ (like the ‘magi oriente’ of Matt. 2 or king Nebuchadnezzar’s ‘magi’ in Daniel 1-4) is rather more likely to be a product of scriptural exegesis subsequent to whatever Latin text of Exodus was at hand.

<sup>32</sup> Bondarenko also raises this possibility; Grigory Bondarenko, ‘The Migration of the Soul in *De Chophur in Dá Muccida* and Other Early Irish Tales’, *Ulidia* 3 (2009), 137-49, at 144 [repr. in Grigory Bondarenko, *Studies in Irish Mythology* (Berlin 2014), 183-196, at 192]: ‘Alongside all these doctrinal traces and ornithological symbolism one can discern in this passage a reflection of late (degraded?) druidic attitude towards the power of their mighty forebearers’. This statement is also found in Grigory Bondarenko, ‘Hiberno-Rossica “Knowledge in the Clouds” in Old Irish and Old Russian’, in Séamus Mac Mathúna and Maxim Fomin, eds., *Parallels between Celtic and Slavic*, *Celto-Slavica* 1 (Coleraine 2006), 185-200, at 192 [repr. in Bondarenko, *Studies in Irish Mythology*, 1-14, at 7-8]. Christian theology certainly seems have been an influence on late antique pagans in the Classical world. The most famous is example of this is the question of the pagan Platonist Numenius (mid-second century A.D.): ‘τί γὰρ ἐστὶ Πλάτων ἢ Μωσῆς Ἀττικίζων’ (=For what is Plato but an Atticizing Moses?) translation my own; Kenneth Guthrie, ed. and tr., *The Neoplatonic Writings of Numenius* (Lawrence, Kansas 1987), tr.2 and ed.3. In a seminar entitled ‘The Seventh Letter to Polycarp and Links to Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus, and a Debate Concerning the Eternity of the World’, given at the Classics Department in Halifax, NS on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Professor Istavan Perzcel made a detailed and convincing case that this kind of influence is far more widespread and well-documented than is generally believed.

them based on perceived ‘pagan’ tendencies.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, it appears that these observations described aspects of their belief which - by an undetermined number of interpretive steps of uncertain character - were derived from beliefs that pre-existed the Church’s influence in Ireland.

On other issues, we would need to be concerned about the hermeneutic interference which might arise relative to this second category of person: Christians who seem to be associated with *druíd* from the point of view of a more rigorist Christian perspective. *CCH*’s identification of the ‘Irish tonsure’ with Simon Magus<sup>34</sup> is, for instance, a reinterpretation of what *druíd* are, in addition to a reinterpretation of a particular party within the Irish Church. For if the *Hibernenses* are *magi* in some respect, through their identification with Simon Magus, and *druíd* simply are *magi*, then insofar as the *Hibernenses* are *magi* they are also *druíd*.<sup>35</sup> Such associations could not help but introduce new ideas about *druíd* and their beliefs that could not have existed prior to a Christian context. However, in the case of the idea that a soul may undergo serial-bird embodiments, especially given the all but absolute absence of any clear analogy to it in the literature mediated to Ireland by the Church,<sup>36</sup> there is not enough information

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<sup>33</sup> For example, it is possible that the way the hierarchy of the *filid* is defined in the law-tracts may have been motivated in part by a desire to make it more difficult to identify Christian *filid* with pagan *druíd*. On this, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2004), 197ff.; Stacey, *Dark Speech*, 57, 135-6, 158-9.

<sup>34</sup> *CCH* 52.2, 6; Wassersleben, ed., *Kononensammlung*, 211-2: ‘*Romani dicunt, quod quinque causis Petrus tonsuram accepit: ./. . quinta, ut a Simone mago christianorum discerneret tonsuram, in cuius capite cesaries ab aure ad aurem tonsa anteriore parte, cum ante magi in fronte cirrum habebant . . . Romani dicunt: Brittonum tonsura a Simone mago sumpsisse exordium tradunt, cuius tonsura de aure ad aurem tantum contingebat, pro excellentia ipsa magorum tonsurae, qua sola frons anterior tegi solebat, priorem autem auctorem hujus tonsurae in Hibernia subulcum regis Loigairi / filii Neili extitisse Patricii sermo testator, ex quo Hibernenses pene omnes hanc tonsuram sumpserunt.*’

<sup>35</sup> On this, see Williams, *Fiery Shapes*, 53-4.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the Strix, in Ovid’s *Fasti* V.131ff. and *Amores* I.viii.13ff., Statius, *Thebaid* III.508ff, and Isidore, *Etym.* IX.iv.2ff., XII.vii.42ff., see Samuel Grant Oliphant, ‘The Story of the Strix: Ancient’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 44 (1913), 133-49; *idem*, ‘The Story of the Strix: Isidorus and the Glossographers’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 45 (1914), 49-63. For the secondary significance of the birds of Diomedes to this issue, as reported by Augustine’s *DCD* and Isidore’s *Etym.*, see discussion below on pages 366-7, esp. notes 214-5. Note, however, that none of these associate bird-transformation or embodiment with *magi* in particular. The closest we get would seem to be Horace, *Odes* II.20, where Horace claims that his inspiration as a poet will allow him to transcend death through transformation into a swan. In this he appears to be drawing off of similar themes in Pindar and Ennius; for discussion and references see Mario Erasmo, ‘Birds of a Feather? Ennius and Horace, *Odes* 2,20’, *Latomus* 65.2 (Avril-Juin, 2006), 369-77.

present to indicate any of the ways that Ps. Augustine may have been influenced in his understanding of druidic belief, through any confusion of it with the beliefs of Christians which may have seemed all-too-druidic in their thinking to him. Therefore, however distorted his perception of druidic belief, or perhaps, of the views of Christians who seemed to him to have taken up the mantle of that belief, it remains that the evidence of *De mirabilibus* points, even if somewhat vaguely, in the direction of a certain degree of continuity between subsequent stories of *metempsychosis* (or something like it) and pre-Christian Irish metaphysical doctrine. What it does not tell us is how such continuity was intelligible to the medieval Irish context that produced these stories. Why is *De mirabilibus*' cynical attitude towards the veracity of these stories not universal?

### **The Theory of Intentional Heterodoxy**

For Professor Carey, the apparent continuity of accounts of serial embodiment with pre-Christian times points, in turn, to the continuity of fundamentally pagan belief. In his early paper, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', it is the evident contrast of this (and related ideas) with orthodox Christianity, or at least, their lack of an intelligible function within it, that leads him to say that they 'can only be plausibly interpreted as part of a non-Christian belief system - the remains of the pagan Irish doctrine of the Otherworld'.<sup>37</sup> In recent work he has mused, less polemically, about the 'implication' such things may have 'for our understanding of Christianity in medieval Ireland', but still insists on describing them as self-consciously associated by authors 'with an

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However, to my knowledge, it has yet to be proven that there was any knowledge of Horace's *Odes* in early medieval Ireland.

<sup>37</sup> Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', 12: 'Are we therefore to see the concepts examined above as themselves of Christian origin, representing perhaps a clerical attempt to impose a rationale upon the muddled uncertainties of paganism? Were this the case, one would expect the guiding ideas to be far clearer in the tales than they appear to be; they would not so often be woven into their structure, or indeed buried beneath it. It may also be asked what purpose such an artificial elaboration could serve: even when not incompatible or at least competitive with the Christian vision – and the idea of a pagan eternity beyond time and space could scarcely be seen in any other light – it could never further the Church's purposes in any but the most doubtful fashion. Whatever the language or imagery in which they are conveyed, however remarkable the degree of the accommodation with the orthodox religion, these concepts can only be plausibly interpreted as part of a non-Christian belief system – the remains of the pagan Irish doctrine of the Otherworld'.

unorthodox alternative to the Christian afterlife'.<sup>38</sup>

Their unorthodoxy may be real enough. However, 'that', in the words of Father Ted, 'would be an ecumenical matter'<sup>39</sup> and is, at any rate, an insufficient understanding of how all this worked for the writers of such accounts. No one sees *themselves* as unorthodox unless they subscribe to an orthodoxy which defines its dogmatic boundaries through a rejection of the very notion of orthodoxy. While this is certainly the case for many forms of modern Romanticism,<sup>40</sup> some of which have striven to see their ideological reflection in medieval Ireland, it is hard to know what basis there could be for attributing a self-consciously heterodox outlook to medieval Irish writers. Insofar as their ideas may have been considered heterodox by others they evidently would not have seen them as such any more than Arius would have, the doctrines for which council of Nicaea had condemned him.<sup>41</sup> Nor did the medieval Irish ideas in question result in similar excommunication, even if they did sometimes serve as a pretext for the expansion of reform movements in the twelfth century and the conquests of the secular authorities associated with those movements.<sup>42</sup> But even this is nothing new. The

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<sup>38</sup> Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 64-5: 'There is accordingly a body of evidence that, between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, the Irish intelligentsia were grappling in various ways with a persistent notion that the Túatha Dé Donann were somehow associated with an unorthodox alternative to the Christian afterlife . . . it is clear enough that the nature of the old gods, and their relationship with ideas concerning the realm of the dead and perhaps some kind of reincarnation, were living issues in the Ireland of the High and later Middle Ages'.

<sup>39</sup> As periodically stated in the episode Graham Linehand and Arthur Matthews, 'Tentacles of Doom', in their *Father Ted*, 3 seasons (London 1995-8) II, ep.3 [03.04.1996], *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York 1975), 47-101, 248-54 and 268ff., for a sympathetic intellectual history of Romanticism as a tendency to maintain an inverted form of Immanuel Kant's distinction between aesthetic and scientific modes of knowledge, which, as such, not only gave priority to the aesthetic over the scientific, but increasingly denied any possibility of scientific knowledge of the contents of aesthetic knowledge, a tendency which reached a kind of culmination in Martin Heidegger's philosophy, where scientific knowledge was reduced to a species of aesthetic knowledge. For cautions concerning the revisionist intellectual histories which necessary result from uncritically reading a Heideggerian conflation of knowledge and poetic creativity back into pre-modern theology and philosophy, see Wayne J. Hankey, "'Poets Tell Many a Lie": Radical Orthodoxy's Poetic Histories', *Canadian Evangelical Review: Journal of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Society* 26-7 (Spring 2004), 35-64; *idem*, 'Radical Orthodoxy's *Poiēsis*: Ideological Historiography and Anti-Modern Polemic', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80.1 (Winter 2006), 1-21.

<sup>41</sup> For the relevant passages of the Council of Nicaea, see Norman P. Tanner, ed. and tr., *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (London 1990) I, 6, 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> e.g. *Topographia Hibernica* III.25ff.; J. S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock J. F. and G.F. Warner, eds., *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, 8 vols. Rolls Series 21 (1861-91) V, 169ff.; John J. O'Meara, tr., *Gerald of Wales: History and Topography of Ireland* (London 1982), 109ff.

tension between those who are cautious regarding sources of knowledge that are perceived to be pre- or extra-ecclesiastical, and those who emphasize the potential of such knowledge to augment the Church's pursuit of the knowledge which is specific to itself, is not found for the first time in the twelfth-century Irish monastic reform, but through the whole sweep of the Church's history.<sup>43</sup>

The basis for assuming the purposeful heterodoxy of the relevant authors would seem to lie, contrary to the evidence, in the assumption that orthodox medieval Christianity is an easily defined monolith, rather than a complex organism which was full of writers who saw each other as alarmingly heterodox to some degree or another, relative to their own respective understandings of orthodoxy, such as it had been defined by the councils and Fathers to that point.<sup>44</sup> We are a long way yet from the degree of doctrinal uniformity that would be brought about by the counter-Reformation,<sup>45</sup> or even from the uniformity in sacramental doctrine and in moral discipline toward which Lateran IV and the *Decretales* of Gregory IX would severally aspire the thirteenth century.<sup>46</sup> This is not to

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<sup>43</sup> See Introduction, pages 1-3.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Gregory the Great's denunciation of the Patriarch on Constantinople's assumption of the title 'Ecumenical Patriarch' (a title which the Patriarch of Constantinople continues to use to this day) as 'a sign of the coming of the Antichrist' and 'born of the Antichrist'; *Registrum epistolarum* 5.39, 7.24; Dag Norberg, ed., *S. Gregorii Magni registrum epistolarum*, 2 vols., CCSL 140–140a (Turnhout 1982) I, 314–18, 478–80. An irenic discussion of this still-controversial issue may be found in George E. Demacopoulos, 'Gregory the Great and the Sixth-Century Dispute over the Ecumenical Dispute', *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), 600–21, esp. 613 note 69. Another colourful example is the local synod convened at Rome on October 25<sup>th</sup> in 745 by Pope Zachary, where there was an attempt to limit the supplications of named angels exclusively to Gabriel, Michael and Raphael; Michael Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Epistolae Selectae 1 (Berlin 1955), 108–20, esp. 117, lines 26–9: 'Quia octo nomina angelorum, que in sua oratione Aldebertus invocavit, non angelorum praeterquam Michaelis, sed magis demonis in sua oratione sibi ad prestandum auxilium invocavit'. In saying so, Uriel, is notably identified as a demon by this council, which puts it into direct conflict with Isidore, for example, who identifies Uriel as an angel; *Etym.* VII.v.15; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, eds., *The Etymologies*, 161. The recognition of only three named angels, where observed, would also create problems from the idea that Patrick was attended by an angel named 'Victor[icus]'; *Vita sancti Patricii*, I.i, vii, xi, II.v, ix; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Muirchú', ed. 68 and tr. 69. However, neither the identification of Uriel as a demon, or the general prohibition of the invocation of angels besides the three named above, seems to have attained universality; Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford 2016), esp. 185–219; Richard Kieckhefer, 'Angel Magic and the Cult of Angels in the Later Middle Ages', in Louise Nyholm Kallestrup and Raisa Maria Toivo, eds., *Contesting Orthodoxy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft* (Basingstoke 2017), 71–110.

<sup>45</sup> For the text of the Council of Trent, see Tanner, ed. and tr., *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* II, 660–779.

<sup>46</sup> For the text of the Council of Lateran IV, see Tanner, ed. and tr., *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* I, 227–72. For the text of Gregory IX's *Decretales*, see Emil Fieberg, ed., *Corpus iuris*

say that the apparent belief in *metempsychosis* which we find in medieval Irish literature may not have a pre-Christian Irish source, but that if so, this belief, to those who held it, would be no more pagan than the Neoplatonic terminology used in the christological definitions of Chalcedon,<sup>47</sup> the Stoic allegorical practices used in the interpretation of the Bible,<sup>48</sup> or the use of the iconography variously associated with Hermes, Orpheus and Sol Invictus in early depictions of Christ.<sup>49</sup> Our task remains then to understand how the progress of an individual soul through various bodily forms emerges as an intelligible idea within the context of their recognized theological authorities, insofar as they were available to medieval Irish authors.

### **Origen and the Descent of the Soul**

Here the most obviously relevant authority is Origen of Alexandria, whom we have already evoked as the most decisive authority on the allegorical interpretation of Christian Scripture. He was an early theologian of the late second and early third centuries (ca. 185-254 A.D.) whose influence can be found in a wide range of patristic

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*canonici*, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1879-81, repr. Graz 1955) II. On the mediation of Lateran IV to medieval Ireland, as well as the historical significance of its sacramental doctrine, and pastoral legislation, see Salvator Ryan and Anthony Shanahan, 'How to Communicate Lateran IV in 13<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland: Lessons from the Liber Exemplorum (.c1275)', *Religions* 9.3 (2018), 75-99. The primary significance of Gregory's IX's *Decretales* was that they represented an incorporation of 'all earlier collections of decretals into a single volume'; Kenneth Pennington, 'The Decretalists 1190-1234', in Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington, eds., *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140-1234: From Gratian to the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX* (Washington, D.C. 2008), 211-245, at 240. A fascinating (if somewhat freewheeling) discussion of Lateran IV, the *Decretales* of Gregory IX and other related developments is to be found in Charles Williams, *Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London 1939), 110-20. Of particular interest is his argument that their proliferation of legislation concerning the practical details of life is the direct result of Lateran IV's sacramental doctrine.

<sup>47</sup> Ernest Fortin, 'The *Definitio Fidei* of Chalcedon and its Philosophical Sources', *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962), 489-498. See also, Ruth M. Siddals, 'Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria', *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 (1987), 341-67.

<sup>48</sup> Ilaria Ramelli, 'The Philosophical Stance of Allegory in Stoicism and its Reception in Platonism, Pagan and Christian: Origen in Dialogue with the Stoics and Plato', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18.3 (2011), 335-71.

<sup>49</sup> Robin Margret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London and New York 2000), 37-44, 127, esp.42: 'Unlike Hermes *criophorus* imagery, which developed as the Christian Good Shepherd in large part because of direct support from symbolic metaphors in scriptural texts, the Orpheus image was transferred to the new religion almost purely by virtue of its signification in Greco-Roman tradition. A similar process of adaptation, without direct scriptural parallel, also explains the rare third-century mosaic usually described as "Jesus-Helios" discovered in the Vatican necropolis, mausoleum of the Julii . . . '.

writers,<sup>50</sup> and even, as Origen's Latin translator, Rufinus, is fond of pointing out, in the works of one of his greatest detractors, St. Jerome.<sup>51</sup> He was posthumously condemned in 543 A.D.<sup>52</sup> by the Second Council of Constantinople for his reputed promulgation of various heretical doctrines.<sup>53</sup> However, he continued to be turned to as an authority, especially in Biblical exegesis, throughout the Christian world, perhaps most notably by

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<sup>50</sup> e.g. Sts. Anthony, Athanasius, Augustine, Cassian, Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, and in Eusebius, Rufinus and Ps.Dionysius. For discussion and references, see Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the Fourth Century* (Farnham and Burlington 2009), 1-36, esp.27; Daniel Watson, 'The Trouble with Origen and the Idea of Catholicity', in Susan Harris ed., *The Church Visible and Invisible: 'The Blessed Company of All Faithful People'*, The Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Atlantic Theological Conference (Charlottetown, PEI 2017), 117-52, at 122-6. On Ps. Dionysius as an Origenist, see István Perczel, 'God as Monad and Henad: Dionysius the Areopagite and the *Peri Archôn*', in Lorenzo Perrone, P. Bernardini and D. Marchini, eds., *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition / Origene e la tradizione alessandrina*, Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress, Pisa, 27-31 August 2001 (Leuven 2003), 1193-1209; *idem* 'Pseudo-Dionysius and Palestinian Origenism', in Joseph Patrich, ed., *The Sabite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven 2001), 261-82.

<sup>51</sup> See Rufinus' *Apologiae in S. Hieronymum libri duo* as a whole, but esp. I.27; *PL* 27, col.541-622, at 565; William Henry Freemantle, tr., 'The Apology of Rufinus', in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2 III, 434-82, at 449: 'Mundum, ais, fuisse invisibilem antequam hic visibilis fieret: in quo mundo cum reliquis habitatoribus, Angelis scilicet, et animae erant. Ista animas, ais, ob quasdam causas soli Deo cognitae, in hoc visibili modo nasci in corporibus, et quae ante habitaverant caelum apud prius saeculum, nunc hic habitant, terram scilicet non extra causas aliquas, quas ipsae inibi vivendo commiserint. Et ais, quod Sancti quique, ut est Paulus et caeteri similes ei per generationes singulas ad eruditionem earum a Deo destinati sunt, ut eas praedestinatione sua ad illam habitationem suam unde collapsae fuerant, revocarent, et hoc copiosissimis Scripturarum testimoniis firmas. Et quae sunt alia quae dicta pro quibus Origenem in jus vocas? quae alia sunt in quibus eum damnari jubes?' (=There was, you [Jerome] say, an invisible world before this visible one came into being. You say that in this world, along with the other inhabitants, that is the angels, there were also souls. You say that these souls, for reasons known to God alone, enter into bodies at the time of birth in this visible world: those souls, you say, who in a former age had been inhabitants of heaven, now dwell here, on this earth, and that not without reference to certain acts which they had committed while they lived there. You say further that all the saints, such as Paul and others like him in each generation were predestinated by God for the purpose of recalling them by their preaching to that habitation from which they had fallen: and all this you support by very copious warranties of Scripture. But are not these statements precisely those for which you now arraign Origen, and for which alone you demand that he should be condemned?).

<sup>52</sup> Illaria L.E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apocatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christiana* 120 (Leiden 2013), 737.

<sup>53</sup> This is a complicated matter. Most of the doctrines for which Origen was condemned seem not to have been his own, but those of a particular Origenist faction of the sixth century, the *Isochristoi* (as opposed to the *Protocristoi*); Ramelli, *Apocatastasis*, 735-7; Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553 with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, 2 vols., Translated Texts for Historians 51 (Liverpool 2009) II, 272-3, at 278-80. He does seem to have at least entertained the idea that all created beings, without exception, may eventually be restored to union with God. However, although St. Gregory of Nyssa endured significant criticism from some of his contemporaries for following him in this, he came to be canonized rather than condemned; Ramelli, *Apocatastasis*, 410, 725, 738. For further such examples, see Kallistos Ware, 'Dare we Hope for the Salvation of All? Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and St. Isaac the Syrian', in *Bishop Kallistos Ware: The Inner Kingdom: Volume 1 of the Collected Works* (Crestwood, New York 2001), 193-216.

the ninth-century Irish Carolingian scholar and philosopher, Eriugena.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it is not particularly unusual that he is commonly cited in medieval Irish Biblical exegesis despite the anathemas pronounced against him.<sup>55</sup> Rather more difficult are the instances where Origenist doctrines which were condemned by Constantinople II are presented as unproblematic in early Irish literature.

The first of the anti-Origenist canons associated with the council<sup>56</sup> anathematizes Origen's reputed doctrine that the soul had a disembodied heavenly pre-existence before its fall into a state of embodiment appropriate to its faults.<sup>57</sup> Thus, it is of particular interest when we find the following statement in the eighth century Hiberno-Latin text, the *Collectio canonum Hibernesi*:

Jerome said: I do not pronounce on the status of the soul, whether it may be fallen from heaven, as Pythagoras, and all the Platonists and Origen believe, or whether it is (made) of the very substance of God, as the Stoics and Manichees

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<sup>54</sup> In V.922C and 929A of his *Periphyseon*, Eriugena lauds him as 'the blessed Origen' (*beatum Origenem*) and 'the great Origen' (*magnum Origenem*); for further references and discussion of his conciliation of Origen's eschatology with that of Augustine, see Heide, 'Ἀποκατάστασις', esp.206. For general discussion, see Robert Crouse, 'Origen in the Philosophical Tradition of the Latin West: St. Augustine and John Scottus Eriugena', in R. Daly, ed., *Origeniana Quinta* (Louvain 1992), 565-9.

<sup>55</sup> Both in Ireland and elsewhere in the Latin West, Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' extended eulogy on Origen in the *HE* (*HE* VI.i-xxvii, *passim*; Schwarz and Mommsen, eds., *Die Kirchengeschichte* I, 519-81) would have been a significant Origenist text; on the *HE* in Ireland; see Chapter Three, pages 191-4. Rufinus' translation of the *Historia Monachorum* may also be a factor here; E. Schulz-Flügel, ed., *Tyrannius Rufinus, Historia monachorum sive De vita sanctorum patrum* (Berlin 1990). Rufinus builds on the pro-Origenist character of the Greek original considerably with the addition of a chapter on Origen himself (Ch.26), and expands on its positive portrayal of the Origenist, Evagrius; on this, see Andrew Cain, *The Greek Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: Monastic Hagiography in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 2016), 10-1, 15-7, 21, 43, 259-70.

<sup>56</sup> Canon 1; Karl Joseph von Hefele and Henri Leclercq, eds. and tr., 'Les quinze anathèmes contra Origène', in *Histoire des conciles*, 8 vols. (Paris 1907-21) II.ii, 1191; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 284 'Εἴ τις τὴν μυθώδη προὔπαρξιν τῶν ψυχῶν, καὶ τὴν ταύτῃ ἐπομένην τερατώδη ἀποκατάστασιν πρεσβεύει· ἀνάθεμα ἔστω' (= If anyone advocates the mythical pre-existence of souls and the monstrous restoration that follows from this, let him be anathema). See also Canon 4; von Hefele and Leclercq, eds., 'Les quinze anathèmes', II.ii, 1191-2; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 284: 'Εἴ τις λέγει, τὰ λογικὰ τὰ τῆς θείας ἀγάπης ἀποψυγέντα, σώμασι παχυτέροις τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐνδυθῆναι, καὶ ἀνθρώπους ὀνομασθῆναι· τὰ δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς κακίας ἐληλακότα, ψυχροῖς, καὶ ζοφεροῖς ἐνδυθῆναι σώμασι, καὶ δαιμόνας ἢ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας εἶναι τε, καὶ καλεῖσθαι· ἀνάθεμα ἔστω' (= If anyone says that the rational beings who grew cold in divine love were bound to our more dense bodies and were named human beings, while those who had reached the acme of evil were bound to cold and dark bodies and are and are called demons and spirits of wickedness, let him be anathema).

<sup>57</sup> To a lesser extent, the anathemas of canons 2, 10, 11 and 14 are also relevant; von Hefele and Leclercq, eds., 'Les quinze anathèmes', II.ii, 1191-6; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 284-6.



believe, or whether they are kept in a treasure-chest which is established from of old, as some ecclesiastics, in (their) foolish opinion, believe, or whether they are made by the Lord every day and (then) sent into bodies, as (it is written) ‘my Father is at work until now and I work’, or whether they are born at the same time as the body; as body from body, so soul from soul. But I do not say that the soul is (made) from God, for God alone is immortal and immutable and incorruptible and passionless<sup>58</sup>

How is it that the canonists who framed *CCH*<sup>59</sup> seem to see it as at least permissible for orthodox Christians to believe that the soul is what it is due to having fallen from a heavenly existence? A single saint’s authority would certainly not be enough to outweigh the authority of an ecumenical council. Moreover, it seems unlikely that our canonists, as canonists, would have been simply ignorant of Constantinople II.

### ***CCH* and the Latin reception of Constantinople II**

There has, however, been significant scholarly controversy about the nature and degree of its influence in the Latin West in general, due in part to Pope Virgilius’ failure to confirm any of its results besides its condemnation of the Three Chapters. If the council’s condemnation of Origen was not confirmed by the pope who was contemporary to the council, or by those that came after him, as some have suggested,<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *CCH* 64.1; Wasserschleben, ed., *Irische Kanonensammlung*, 232: ‘Non confirmo de statu animae, utrum de coelo sit lapsa, ut Pythagoras et omnes Platonici et Origines, an ipsam substantiam Dei, ut Stoici et Manichei, an in thesauro habeantur olim conditae, ut alii ecclesiastici stulta persuasione fidunt, an cottidie a Domino fiant et mittantur in corpora, ut pater modo operatur, et ego operor, an simul cum corpore nascuntur, ut corpus a corpore, sic anima ex anima. Ego vero non dico, animam hominis de Deo esse, quia Deus solus immortalis est, et inmutabilis et incorruptibilis et impassibilis’; the translation above has been adapted from Flechner, tr., *The Hibernensis*, 506.

<sup>59</sup> It is traditionally attributed to Cú Chuimne of Iona and Ruben of Dairinis on the basis of their names appearing ‘at the end of a ninth-century copy of the text, now Paris BNF lat. 120221’; Roy Flechner, ‘The Problem of Originality in Early Medieval Canon Law: Legislating by Means of Contradictions in the *Collectio Hibernensis*’, *Viator* 43.2 (2012), 29-47, at 32. For further discussion of its authorship, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, ‘The Construction of the *Hibernensis*’, *Peritia* 12 (1998), 209-37, at 213 note 7; Davies, ‘Isidorean Texts and the *Hibernensis*’, 212-5; Jaski, ‘Cú Chuimne, Ruben and the Compilation’. See also further discussion of *CCH* in Introduction, pages 9-10; Chapter 3, pages 182-4.

<sup>60</sup> Price, *Constantinople I*, 100: ‘The claim made by Pelagius II and the other popes of the later sixth century to the effect that the council of 553 had simply judged individuals without touching the faith, plus the fact that Pope Vigilius himself had confirmed no more than the condemnation of the Three Chapters, has enabled a whole galaxy of modern Catholic theologians to argue that the dogmatic canons of 553 – Canons 1–10, with their strongly Cyrillian and neo-Chalcedonian Christology – were never formally

it would certainly not appear to be binding on our Irish canonists. But this would seem to go too far. The situation is, admittedly, somewhat complicated by the fact that Pelagius II (Virgilius' successor), and the popes immediately following him, evidently argued that the council was doctrinally authoritative, but, nevertheless, open to revision in respect to its judgements of individuals. Even so, these subsequent popes, in recognising the authority of the doctrine of the council as whole, would also appear to be recognising the authority of its dogmatic canons, which would thus include the condemnation of Origen found in Canon 11.<sup>61</sup> This is, at any rate, precisely what we find in the Lateran Council of 649, which, in addition to quoting the dogmatic canons of Constantinople II, lists Origen in its own catalogue of heretics.<sup>62</sup>

Yet even if there were cases in which Origen's name was disassociated from the condemnations of Constantinople II, and from the anti-Origenist canons associated with it, this still would not help us with our current problem. For there would still be the substance of the canons to deal with, the first of which, as we have said, anathematizes the very doctrine that our Irish canonists present Jerome as ascribing to Origen here. The answer to our problem does not lie in the assumption that the authors of *CCH* are

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accepted in the west . . . The claim of non-recognition has been extended by admirers of Origen to Canon 11, which includes him in a list of heretics'. Ramelli goes so far as to claim that the council never condemned Origen in the first place, claiming that the one place in which Origen's name is mentioned in the official acts of the council (i.e. other than the anti-Origenist anathemas which came to be associated with it) is a later interpolation; see Ramelli, *Apocatastasis*, 737 note 210; in this she follows Henri Crouzel, 'Les condamnations subies par Origène et sa doctrine', *Origeniana* 7 (1999), 311-8; Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* I, 106. However, it seems not to be an interpolation into the acts of the council, but an interpolation made by the council itself into Anathema 10 of Justinian's of *De fide orthodoxa*, the work which was the basis of the canons of the council. On this see, Price, *Constantinople II*, 104, 123 note 86, 270-1.

<sup>61</sup> Canon 11; Tanner, ed. and tr., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* I, 106; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 123: 'Si quis non anathematizat Arrium, Eunomium, Macedonium, Apollinareum, Nestorium, Eutychem et Origenem cum impia eorum conscripta . . . talis anathema sit' (=If anyone does not anathematize Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, Eutyches and Origen, with their impious writings . . . let him be anathema).

<sup>62</sup> *The Lateran Council of 649*, canon 18; Rudolf Riedinger, ed., *Concilium Lateranense a.649 Celebratum* (Berlin 1984), 379.29-381.12; Richard Price, tr., *Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, Translated Texts for Historians 61 (Liverpool 2014): 'Si quis secundum sanctos patres consonanter nobiscum eadem credens non respuit et anathematizat anima et ore omnes quos respuit et anathematizat ne fandissimos hereticos cum omnibus impiis eorum conscriptis usque ad unum apicem / sancta dei catholica et apostolica aecclesia, hoc est sanctae et uniuersales quinque sinodi et ipsi omnes consonanter probabiles aecclesiae patres, dicimus autem Sabelium, Arrium, Eunomium, Macedonium, Apollinarem, Polemonem, Euticen, Dioscorum, Timotheum Elurum, Seuerum, Theodosium, Cholutum, Themestium, Paulum Samosatenum, Diodorum, Theodorum, Nestorium, Theodulum Persam, Origenem, Didimum, Euagrium, et compendiose alios omnes hereticos . . .'. For further discussion, see Price, *Constantinople* I, 99-101.

uniquely ignorant or dismissive of the council, or else, of its relevance to the interpretation of Origen, but in the general character of the council's reception in the Latin West. While Constantinople II enjoyed the forms of early acceptance described above, Richard Price has demonstrated that it does not, following the Lateran Council of 649, seem to persist in being ascribed the authority of an ecumenical council - or even to have been given much attention of any sort - during the centuries that followed, so much so, that there are instances as late as the eleventh century where it is not listed in the number of ecumenical councils.<sup>63</sup>

The eighth-century canonists of *CCH* then evidently provide further illustration Price's characterisation of Constantinople II's Latin reception.<sup>64</sup> Insofar as the canonist is aware of the content of the relevant anathema, he does not seem to regard it as having an authority superior to that of Jerome and Origen. In pointing, without further comment, to the inoffensiveness of the doctrine of the soul's heavenly pre-existence to an orthodox Father such as Jerome, our canonists seem to think this sufficient to either rescue or else affirm the respectability of some form of the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul from the condemnations of what likely seemed to be a significant but, ultimately, local council. Still, they do not exactly argue for this position either. Be that as it may, it remains that despite its inclusion among the Origenist doctrines taken to be condemned by Constantinople II, the canonists present the idea that the soul pre-existed its fall into embodiment, on the authority of Jerome, as something that is among the viable ideas about the soul, and a matter of indifference relative to orthodoxy, unlike the false opinions

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<sup>63</sup> Price, *Constantinople I*, 99, 101.

<sup>64</sup> An interesting point of comparison is Isidore's, *De natura rerum* §27; *PL* 83, col.963-1018, at 1000-1; Calvin B. Kendall and Faith Wallis, tr., *Isidore of Seville: On the nature of Things*, *Translated Texts of Historians* 66 (Liverpool 2016), 155-6. There his engagement with the relevant statements by Augustine, Solomon and Vergil tends towards concluding that the movement of the heavenly bodies demonstrates that they are ensouled, only that he does not know what this would mean for them in the resurrection. This is not expressly anathematized by the anti-Origenist canons of Constantinople II; cf. Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford 1991), 150. However, it is anathematized by the sixth of the anti-Origenist canons promulgated by Emperor Justinian in 543 which pope Virgilius signed in the years prior to Constantinople II; Heinrich Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum* (Freiburg 1911), 87-9, at 88; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 281: 'Si quis dicit coelum, et solem, et lunam, et stellas, et aquas, quae super coelos sunt, animates et materiales esse quasdam virtutes, A. S.' (=If anyone says or holds that heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the waters above the heavens are ensouled and rational powers, let him be anathema).

of the Stoics and Manichees on the subject.<sup>65</sup>

### **CCH's Scholastic Approach**

But we have not yet freed ourselves of the complexities in which this quotation involves us. Its original context also requires consideration.<sup>66</sup> In the first place, Jerome's original letter, *Epistola* 126, does not in fact, as *CCH* has it, declare that he is ambivalent on the various theories regarding the soul's origin. Rather, Jerome simply lists these options as those mentioned in the 'important theological question' put to him by Marcellinus and Anapsychia.<sup>67</sup> Secondly, *CCH*'s citation of the letter does not include Jerome's reference to his own opinion, by way of saying that he has discussed it in his polemic work against Rufinus.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, his claim that the normative position among the Latin Fathers is the theory of the soul's production by soul, as body by body, has been removed from the middle of the quotation itself.

Thus, whether it was the canonists or their source who gave this quotation its present form, it seems that whoever did so was not interested in identifying the most prevalent position, or even Jerome's position, as they were in the full array of philosophical positions that, according to Jerome, were potentially consonant with Christian orthodoxy. As Flechner, who is currently preparing a edition of *CCH*, points out, this scholastic tendency to set forth as many viable positions as possible, without attempting to reconcile them, is characteristic of *CCH* as a whole<sup>69</sup> and has been suggested

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<sup>65</sup> Augustine entertained this idea more directly in some of his early work. On this, see Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* I.xii.24 and III.xx.57-xxi.59; Green, ed., *De libero arbitrio*, 226-7, 308-10; King, tr., *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 20, 111-12.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Epistola* 165; *PL* 33, col.718-20 = Jerome, *Epistola* 126; *PL* 22 col.1085-7; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine III, 74-77.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *Epistola* 165 §1; *PL* 33 col.718 = Jerome, *Epistola*, 126 §1; *PL* 22 col.1085; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine III, 74: 'Super animae statu memini vestrae quaestiunculae, imo maxime ecclesiasticae quaestionis . . .' (=I have not forgotten the brief query, or rather, the very important theological question you propounded in regard to the nature of the soul . . .).

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *Epistola* 165 §1; *PL* 33, col.719 = Jerome, *Epistola*, 126, §1; *PL* 21, col. 1085; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine III, 74: 'Super quo quid mihi videretur, in opusculis contra Ruffinum scripsisse me novi' (=I know that I have published my opinion on this question in my brief writings against Rufinus).

<sup>69</sup> See especially the section entitled 'De contrariis causis' in *CCH* §77; Wassersleben, ed., *De irische Kanonensammlung*, 240-3. For general discussion of this aspect of *CCH*, see Roy Flechner, 'The Problem of Originality', 29-47. In the sections of his upcoming edition of *CCH* which he has posted online, Flechner traces this tendency towards a 'sic et non' style of exposition to Jerome, specifically his

elsewhere to be a common characteristic of medieval Irish scholarship in general.<sup>70</sup> However, in this case, this tendency has the odd result of producing an interpretation of Jerome's *Epistola* 126 which attributes to him the same indeterminacy in these matters as he accusingly attributes to Rufinus in the *Apologia adversus libros Rufini*,<sup>71</sup> the work which Jerome alludes to in the letter itself as expressing his opinion on these matters.<sup>72</sup>

As an interpretation of the significance of the letter itself, in isolation from the *Apologia* Jerome references in it, or perhaps holding the opinions of the latter work in balance with Jerome's earlier opinions on this subject,<sup>73</sup> it seems valid enough. Jerome does not criticize Marcellinus and Anapsychia for treating the matter as open in the way he criticizes Rufinus in his *Apologia*. But it seems impossible to determine whether this reflects a true ignorance of Jerome's *Apologia*<sup>74</sup> or an imitation of Rufinus' own tendency to read Jerome as self-contradictory on the subject of Origen, given a younger

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*Commentary on Jeremiah*; see Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, 29. However, in a recent paper his emphasis is on the possibility that this may reflect the influence of Gildas; Flechner, 'The Problem of Originality', 43-7.

<sup>70</sup> Flechner, 'The Problem of Originality', 43-7; Ó Néill, *Biblical Study*, 19. Ó Néill attributes this characteristic of early Irish scholarship to the influence of Pelagius for unstated reasons. Whether or not Pelagius is in fact important in this regard, it also seems important to bear in mind the potential significance of etymological practice. It would seem neglectful not to at least consider the possibility that the tendency of late antique and early medieval etymological practice to produce multiple etymologies of a single word (see Chapter 1, pages 21-3, incl. notes 15, 18), may have had some part encourage a similar tendency to produce multiple answers for a single question.

<sup>71</sup> *Apologia contra Rufinum*, III.28-30; *PL* 23, col. 477-80; John N. Hritzu, tr., *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, The Fathers of the Church 53 (Washington, D.C. 1965), 197-201. Granted, Rufinus is right in pointing out that Jerome actually does take this opinion in some of his earlier works, such as his *Commentary on Ephesians*, esp. on Chapter 1, verses 4, 5b-6, 12, 17, 22, Chapter 2, verses 3, 7; Elizabeth E. Clarke, 'The Place of Jerome's *Commentary on Ephesians* in Origenist Controversy: The *Apokatastasis* and Aescetic Ideals', *Vigilia Christiana* 41 (1987), 154-71; Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford 2002), 12-15; Alexandra Pârvan, 'Genesis 1-3: Augustine and Origen', *Vigiliae Christianae* 66 (2012), 56-92, at 84 note 50.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *Epistola* 165; *PL* 33, col.718-20 = Jerome, *Epistola* 126; *PL* 22 col.1086; Teske, tr., *Letters, The Works of Saint Augustine III*, 75: 'Super quo quod mihi videretur, in opusculis contra Ruffinum scripsisse me novi, adversus eum libellum' (=I know that I once wrote what I thought upon this point in my works in opposition to Rufinus).

<sup>73</sup> See note 71 above.

<sup>74</sup> And other letters of his also; for example, *Epistola* 120.x; *PL* 22, col.998: 'Nobis autem nihil placet, nisi quod Ecclesiasticum est, et publice in ecclesia dicere non timemus: ne juxta Pythagoram, et Platonem, et discipulos eorum, qui sub nomine Christiano introducunt dogma gentilium, dicamus animas lapsas de coelo esse: et pro diversitate meritorum, in his vel in illis corporibus poenas antiquorum luere peccatorum'. See also, *Epistola* 51.iv; *PL* 22, col.520-1: 'Illud quoque quis Origenem dicentem patiat, quod animae, angeli fuerint in caelis: et postquam peccaverint in supernis, dejectas esse in istum mundum, et quasi in tumulos et sepulcra, sic in corpora ista relegatas, poenas antiquorum luere peccatorum? et corpora credentium non templa Christi esse, sed carceres damnatorum?'.

Jerome's sympathy with the doctrine of the soul's pre-existence and fall.<sup>75</sup>

### **The *Naviagtio Sancti Brendani***

Whatever the motives of the canonists' reading of Jerome here, the presence, in such an influential text as *CCH*,<sup>76</sup> of the idea that the soul may indeed have fallen from from heaven into its current state goes a long way towards helping us understand the theological framework of one of the stranger parts of its rough contemporary, the hagiographical voyage-tale, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*.<sup>77</sup> During his voyage, St. Brendan encounters certain beings that exist in the form of beautiful birds. They exist in this state because they have fallen from heaven, but not so low as devils, or, it would seem, as humans.<sup>78</sup> This has understandably struck many of its readers as a rather unusual situation from a medieval Christian standpoint. However, if it is an established possibility that not only devils, but humans, fell from heaven into their current state of embodiment, then there seems little reason why there may not be as many kinds of

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<sup>75</sup> On the possibility of Jerome's self-contradiction on this subject, see also, Augustine's early letter, *Epistola* 82 III.xxiii; *PL* 33, col.286; Teske, tr., *Letters*, The Works of Saint Augustine I, 328: 'Origenem vero ac Didimum reprehensos abs te lego in recentioribus opusculis tuis, et non mediocriter, nec de mediocribus quaestionibus, quamvis Origenem mirabiliter ante laudaveris. Cum iis ergo errare puto quia nec te ipse patieris, quamvis hoc perinde dicatur, ac si in hac sententia non erraverint. Nam quis est qui se velit cum quolibet errare?' (=and as to Origen and Didymus, I read in some of your more recent works, censure passed on their opinions, and that in no measured terms, nor in regard to insignificant questions, although formerly you gave Origen marvellous praise. I suppose, therefore, that you would not even yourself be contented to be in error with these men; although the language which I refer to is equivalent to an assertion that in this matter they have not erred. For who is there that would consent to be knowingly mistaken, with whatever company he might share his errors?).

<sup>76</sup> See page 320 above, incl. note 58.

<sup>77</sup> On the dating of the *Navigatio*, see David Dumville, 'Two Approaches to the Dating of *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*', *Studi Medievali* 29 (1988), 87-102 [742x786]. cf. Jonathan Wooding, 'The Date of *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*', *Studia Hibernica* 37 (2011), 9-26 [795x950].

<sup>78</sup> *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* §11; Carl Selmer, ed., *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis from Early Latin Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, Indiana 1959), 24; Carey, tr., *A Single Ray*, 22-3: 'Nos sumus de illa magna ruina antique hostis, sed non peccando in eorum consensu fuimus. Sed uib fuimus create, per lapsum illius cum suis satellitibus contigit et nostra ruina. Deus autem noster iustus est et uerax. Per suum magnum iudicium misit nos in istum locum. Penas non sustinemus. Hic presenciam Dei possumus uidere, sed tantum alienauit nos a consorcio aliorum qui steterunt. Vagamur per diuersas partes aeris et firmament et terrarium, sicut alii spiritus qui mittuntur. Sed in sanctis diebus atque dominicis accipimus corpora talia qualia nunc uides et commoramur hic laudamusque nostrum Creatorem' (=We belong to the mighty downfall of the ancient Enemy, but did not sin by joining in their company. But when we were created, our own ruin was occasioned by his fall, together with his followers. But our God is just and true. / Through his great judgement he has sent us to this place. We do not suffer punishments. Here we can behold the presence of God, save that he has banished us from the company of those who remained faithful. We wander through the various regions of the air and firmament and earth, like other emissary spirits. But on holy days, and Sundays, we assume bodies such as you see now, and linger here, and praise our Creator).

intermediary beings – between humans and angels and devils – as there are degrees of sin (and conversely, of righteousness) between them. This linking of forms of embodiment with individual ethical states,<sup>79</sup> here, as in *CCH*, is not yet the overt doctrine of *metempsychosis*, but the doctrine, wherever it occurs in antiquity, does not occur except as a feature of such a metaphysical context, and is arguably a necessary implication of it. Insofar as there is the possibility of further developing the configuration of vices and virtues that have determined one's current embodiment, there would seem also to be the possibility of different forms of future embodiment.

It remains that Jerome is wrong here in thinking that Origen (or most Platonists) believed that the soul was disembodied before its fall. In both cases, it is the *character* of one's embodiment that changes in one's fall from heaven or return to it, not *whether* one is embodied.<sup>80</sup> In which case, it is difficult to determine if the *Navigatio* should be interpreted more on the side of St. Jerome's Origen in *CCH* or on the side of Origen himself, especially if evidence emerged suggesting that its author may have been aware of other relevant passages from Origen's works, either in Rufinus' translation, or as quoted by other patristic theologians.<sup>81</sup> Whichever way it is interpreted, it certainly

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<sup>79</sup> For another example of this doctrine which is likely to have been known to an early Irish context, see also Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony* §10, 14; Herculius Hoppenbrouwers, ed., *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase* (Nijmegen 1960), 91, 96-98; 'Haec audiens surgens orauit, et in tantum confortatus est ut sentiret ampiorem se habere uirtutem in corpore ab ea quam antea habuit . / . . et tunc rogatus Antonius processit quasi de aliquo abdito, educates sacra/mentis et diuinitate diuinitus plenus. Tunc primum castris procedens uisus est eis qui uenerunt ad illum. Et illi quidem, ut uiderunt, mirati sunt. Uidebant enim in eandem formam corpus ipsius. Neque enim pingue factum est quasi a ieiuniis et pugna daemonum. Talis autem uisus est illis qualem sciebant illum esse ante secessionem, [none] et animi ipsius puros et mundos mores uidebant. Neque enim a labore ut tristis apparebat, neque quasi a gaudio perfusus, nec a risu (uel) maerore tenebatur animus ipsius, neque uidens multitudinem turbatus est, nec iterum quia a tantis salutabatur gaudebat, sed to/tus erat aequalis. Gubernabatur enim oratione, et ideo in aequalitatis animo stabat'. Perhaps more significantly, the implied doctrine here is directly stated in the first letter of the Latin version of the Letters of St. Anthony; *S. Antonii M. Abbatis Epistolae* I.70-1; *PL* 40, col.978-1000, at 981; Rubenson, tr., *The Letters of St. Anthony*, 201-2. There he 'supposes' (*aestimo*) regarding one's physical body, that through aestic practice which is guided by the Holy Spirit's discernment 'talis habitation jam acceperit etiam in hoc partem quamdam spiritualis corporis, acceptura erat in resurrectione iustorum' (=such a dwelling / will have received, even now, some part of that other spiritual body which it will receive at the resurrection of the just); this is Rubenson's translation of the critical edition, modified here to better reflect the language of the Latin version alone.

<sup>80</sup> Origen, *De principiis*, II.ii.1-2; Koetschau, ed., *De principiis*, 111-3; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 81-2. This should interpret I.iv.1; Koetschau, ed., *De principiis*, 63-4; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 40-1, rather than the reverse. See also Chapter 4 note 18 above.

<sup>81</sup> Bracken notes that *The Reference Bible, Liber de ortu et obitu patriarcharum*, and *The Irish Liber Hymnorum* all demonstrate awareness of Origen's identification of Melchizedek as an angel by way of

seems unlikely that such a thoroughly Origenist situation as we find in the *Navigatio* would come about based on no more than we have found in *CCH*.<sup>82</sup> That, however, is no guarantee that Jerome's interpretation of Origen would fail to be dominant, as the example of a significant amount of modern speculation on Origen has demonstrated.<sup>83</sup> And there is more at stake in this ambiguity than there may seem. For in allowing (or seeming to allow) for the idea that the soul is disembodied prior to its fall into embodiment, *CCH* attaches Jerome's (as well as Origen's and Plato's) authority to a thoroughly Gnostic idea that Origen would have enthusiastically condemned along with the council that condemns it as his.<sup>84</sup> What is important for medieval Ireland, though, is that the canonists believe it to be Origen's opinion and that St. Jerome declared it admissible in this important instance. Nor was this the only time that St. Jerome's name would grant patristic authority to a heretical doctrine by erroneously identifying it as

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Jerome's *Epistola* 73 (*PL* 22, col. 677). For this theme and further references, see Bracken, 'The Fall and the Law in Early Ireland', 149 note 12. If this amounted to, as Bracken puts it, knowledge of Origen's argument that 'beings of exemplary holiness, like Melchisedek, approached an angelic state' this would be of great significance for the argument at hand. However, the relevant quotation from Jerome does not actually say so much: 'Statimque in fronte Geneseos primam Homiliarum Origenis reperi scriptam de Melchisedech, in qua multiplici sermone disputans, illuc devolutus est, ut eum Angelum diceret.

Iisdemque pene argumentis, quibus Scriptor tuus de Spiritu sancto, ille de supernis virtutibus est locutus'.<sup>82</sup> Jerome expands on his understanding of Origen's doctrine in other epistles at much greater length than he does in *Epistola* 126. See, for example, *Epistolae* 84.vii, 101.iv-v, 120.x (*PL* 22, col.748-50, 819-20, 997-8), and also 98.xi-xii (*PL* 22, col. 800-801) in which he translates Theophilus' views on the subject. *Epistola* 124 is especially notable on this theme. See the discussion of *Epistola* 124 below on pages 328-32. Other potentially relevant descriptions of this aspect Origen include Augustine, *DCD* XI.23; Dombart *et al.*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 341-3; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 454-6. Jerome, *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum ad Pammachium* §16-9; *PL* 23, col. 368-71.

<sup>83</sup> Most examples of such speculation are of a more popular nature, but see Geddes MacGregory, *Reincarnation as a Christian Hope* (New York 1982), 54-7.

<sup>84</sup> Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, "'Preexistence of Souls'?: The ἀρχή and the τέλος of Rational Creatures in Origen and Some Origenians', in Markus Vinzent, ed., *Studia Patristica LXII*, 18 vols. (Leuven 2013) IV, 167-227; *idem*, 'Origen and the Platonic Tradition', in J. W. Smith ed., *Plato among the Christians* (repr. in *Religion* 8.2, 12 (2017), 1-20; doi:10.3390/rel8020021), at 2: 'Origen attacked "pagan" and "Gnostic" Platonism and non-Platonic philosophies, but not Plato, whom he admired and whose ideas he furthered. He did not support metempsychosis, which, implying the eternity of the world, clashed with Scripture, but Plato alluded to it only mythically, for instance in *Republic* 10. Origen opposed metempsychosis (a soul entering various bodies) to ensomatosis (a soul uses one single body, which will be transformed according to the soul's state: *Commentary on John* 6.85). Porphyry, a holder of metempsychosis, probably in polemic with Origen used ἐμψύχωσις, "animation" of a body (*Gaur.* 2.4; 11.1-3), a rare term, employed only once by Plotinus (*Enn.* 4.3.9) and Galen (4.763), and μετεμψύχωσις, "transanimation" or transmigration of souls (*Abst.* 4.16). Porphyry never used "ensomatosis" or "metempsychosis"; Plotinus used "metempsychosis" twice (*Enn.* 2.9.6; 4.3.9), but never Origen's own term, "ensomatosis". For further references, see Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, 'Adam in Origen', in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge 1989), 62-93, at 86 note 21 and 88 note 36.



Origen's.

### Jerome's *Epistola* 124 and Animal Embodiment

Constantinople II's anti-Origenist canons also condemned the implication of the above doctrine, which it also took to be intrinsic to his position, namely, that angelic, demonic, and human identities are not distinguished by a difference of essence, but as differing embodiments which are fundamentally interchangeable reflections of a soul's ethical development. However, it does not explicitly link the Origenist doctrine it condemns to the *metempsychosis* of Plato and Pythagoras.<sup>85</sup> Nor does it extend the possibilities of this doctrine to the kinds of animal embodiment which seem so ubiquitous in medieval Irish literature and which we have seen in the bird-embodied rational beings of the *Navigatio*. Justinian's letter to the council does both - but seeing as it survives only in the context of Byzantine chronicles, it seems doubtful that this would have played a role in shaping how Origen was understood in the Latin West at this point.<sup>86</sup> However, the council is not the only evidence we have to work with. In another of Jerome's letters, *Epistola*

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<sup>85</sup> Canons 4 and 5; von Hefele and Leclercq, ed. and tr., 'Les quinze anathèmes', 1192; Price, tr., *Constantinople II*, 284-5: '4. Εἴ τις λέγει, τὰ λογικὰ τὰ τῆς θείας ἀγάπης ἀποψυγέμενα, σώμασι παχυτέροις τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐνδυθῆναι, καὶ ἀνθρώπους ὀνομασθῆναι· τὰ δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς κακίας ἐληλακότα, ψυχοῖς, καὶ ζοφεροῖς ἐνδυθῆναι σώμασι, καὶ δαίμονας ἢ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας εἶναι τε, καὶ καλεῖσθαι ἀνάθεμα ἕστω 5. Εἴ τις λέγει, ἐξ Ἀγγελικῆς κατστάσεως, καὶ Ἀρχαγγελικῆς ψυχικῆν κατάστασιν γίνεσθαι, ἐκ δὲ ψυχῆς δαιμονιώδη, καὶ ἀνθρωπίνην, ἐκ δὲ ἀνθρωπίνης, Ἀγγέλους ἄλλιν, καὶ δαίμονας λίνεσθαι, καὶ ἕκαστον τάγμα τῶν οὐρανίων δυναμένη, ἢ ὅλον ἐκ τῶν κάτω, ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω, ἢ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω καὶ τῶν κάτω συνεστηκέναι· ἀνάθεμα ἕστω' (=4. If anyone says that the rational beings who grew cold in divine love were bound to our more dense bodies and were named human beings, while those who had reached the acme of evil were bound to cold and dark bodies and are and are called demons and spirits of wickedness, let him be anathema 5. If anyone says that from the state of the angels and archangels originate that of the soul, and from that of the soul that of demons and human beings, and from that of human beings angels and demons originate again, and that each order of the heavenly powers is constituted either entirely from those below or those above or from both those above and those below, let him be anathema).

<sup>86</sup> Justinian, *Letter of Justinian to the Holy Council about Origen and those Like-Minded*; Karl de Boor, ed., *Georgi monachi chronicon*, 2 vols. (Leipzig 1904) II, 630-3, at 632.20-633.15; Price, *Constantinople II*, 283-4: 'Πυθαγόρας τοῖνυν καὶ Πλάτων καὶ Πλωτίνος καὶ οἱ τῆς ἐκείνων συμμορίας ἀθανάτους εἶναι τὰς ψυχὰς συνομολογήσαντες προυπάρχειν ταύτας ἔφησαν τῶν σωμάτων καὶ δῆμον εἶναι ψυχῶν, καὶ τὰς πλημμελοῦσας εἰς σώματα καταπίπτειν, ὡς ἔφην, καὶ τοὺς μὲν πικροὺς καὶ πονηροὺς εἰς παρδάλεις, τοὺς δὲ ἀρπακτικοὺς εἰς λύκους, τοὺς δὲ δολεροὺς εἰς ἀλώπεκας, τοὺς δὲ θηλυμανεῖς εἰς ἵππους . . . κατακρίναί τε καὶ ἀναθεματίσαι μετὰ τοῦ δυσσεβοῦς Ὀριγένους καὶ πάντων τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα φρονούντων ἢ φρονησάντων εἰς τέλος' (=So Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus and their followers, who agreed that souls are immortal, declared that they exist prior to bodies and that there is a great company of souls, of which those that transgress descend into bodies, as I said above, the vindictive and wicked into leopards, the ravenous into wolves, the treacherous into foxes, and those mad after women into horses . . . condemn and anathematize each of these articles together with the impious Origen and all those who hold or have held these beliefs till death). For its transmission history, see Price, *Constantinople*, 283 note 53.

124,<sup>87</sup> he summarises the problems that he perceives in Origen's *De Principiis* rather more polemically:

Then after adducing various arguments in support of his thesis and maintaining that while not incapable of virtue the devil has yet not chosen to be virtuous, he has finally reasoned with much diffuseness that an angel, a human soul, and a demon - all according to him of one nature but of different wills - may in punishment for great negligence or folly be transformed into / brutes. Moreover, to avoid the agony of punishment and the burning flame the more sensitive may choose to become low organisms, to dwell in water, to assume the shape of this or that animal; so that we have reason to fear a metamorphosis not only into four-footed things but even into fishes<sup>88</sup>. / . . In saying these things he clearly defended the *metempsychosis* of Pythagoras and Plato<sup>89</sup>

In reality Origen speaks at length against the doctrine of *metempsychosis* in the way that it is defined here.<sup>90</sup> As noted above, he does not believe that the soul is ever disembodied, but that its own particular embodiment is manifest to greater or lesser degrees of perfection depending on the state of the soul in question. Moreover, any decisive changes in the mode of the soul's embodiment are thought to occur at the end of successive *aeons* or 'worlds'<sup>91</sup> (rather than after mere passage of time in the present world) and never to result in it taking the form of an irrational animal,<sup>92</sup> this latter

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<sup>87</sup> While the doctrine that 'the soul, angels and demons were manifestations of the same spiritual essence' could be argued to be implicit in what *CCH* LXI quoted from Jerome's, *Epistola* 126, such as we have been discussing above, Bracken is mistaken in saying that Jerome says this outright in that epistle, or that this idea is clearly present in *CCH*'s quoting of that epistle. However, he is the first, I believe, to point to the importance of Jerome as a mediator of Origen to Ireland; Bracken, 'The Fall and the Law in Early Ireland', 150.

<sup>88</sup> *Epistola* 124 §4; *PL* 22, col.1062-1063; William Henry Freemantle, tr., 'The Letters of St. Jerome', in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2 VI*, 33-497, at 412-13.

<sup>89</sup> Jerome, *Epistola* 124 §7; *PL* 22 col.1065-1066; Freemantle, tr., 'The Letters of St. Jerome', 414. See also *Apologia contra Rufinum*, I.20; III.39; *PL* 23, col. 413-4, 484-6; Hritz, tr., *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, 85-6, 209-12.

<sup>90</sup> See note 84 above.

<sup>91</sup> *De Principiis* II.iii.4-5; Koetschau, ed., *In Principiis*, 119; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 87-9.

<sup>92</sup> For discussion and sources, see Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, 'Preexistence of Souls?'; *idem, Evagrius's Kephalaia Gnostika: A New Translation of the Unreformed Text from the Syriac* (Atlanta 2015), 56: 'Origen rejected the transmigration of souls and rather maintained and metaphorical "animalization" of the worst sinners'. On its own, the evidence of *De principiis* is inconclusive on this matter. The Greek

position being one he held in common with most Platonists who would come after Plotinus.<sup>93</sup> Yet again, what is important here is not what Origen actually argued in the *De Principiis*, or anywhere else, but how St. Jerome, an authority who is evoked even more commonly by medieval Irish writers than Origen, interpreted his arguments.

It seems that no evidence has yet been identified which would prove direct knowledge of the *De Principiis* in Ireland prior to the twelfth century, unless it is perhaps the *Navigatio* itself.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, if known and understood, neither it, nor any other of Origen's writings, could account for rational souls coming to be embodied as animals.<sup>95</sup> Jerome's letters, however, were used from a very early date, as evident in *CCH* and elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> At this point, confirmed use of this specific letter is wanting, but there seems no reason to assume that it would not have been transmitted and read along with the others. It may seem unlikely that opinions appearing only in the context of Jerome's polemic against them would be used so affirmatively. But if then, on Jerome's authority, Origen's position (and thus its implications) are at least acceptable, even

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version of *De principiis*, I.viii.4, which we have from one of Justinian's polemical works against Origen, presents him as claiming that erring souls can indeed come to be embodied as animals. Rufinus' Latin translation states the opposite; Koetschau, ed., *De principiis*, 104-5; Butterworth, tr., *On First Principles*, 74. However, it is Rufinus' version of the text which agrees with the larger picture of Origen's work traced by Ramelli. Moreover, it is only Rufinus' text is that of potential relevance for an early Irish context.

<sup>93</sup> Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London 1972), 113; John Dillon, 'Harpocration's *Commentary on Plato*: Fragments of a Middle Platonic Commentary', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 4 (1971), 125-46, at 136-8; *idem*, *Iamblichus: The Platonic Commentaries* (Leiden 1972, repr. Westbury 2009), 45-6. Although post-Plotinian rejections of the animal embodiment of human souls sometimes still allow for it in a certain manner of speaking, e.g. Sallustius' *Περί θεῶν καὶ κόσμου* §20; Arthur Darby Nock, ed. and tr., *Sallustius: Concerning the Gods and the Universe* (Cambridge 1926, repr. Chicago 1996), ed.34 and tr.35: 'αἱ δὲ μετεμψυχώσεις, εἰ μὲν εἰς λογικὰ γένοιτο, αὐτὸ τοῦτο ψυχῆ γίγνεται σωματῶν εἰ δὲ εἰς ἄλογα, ἐξῶθεν ἔπονται ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμῖν οἱ εἰληχότες ἡμᾶς δαίμονες. οὐ γὰρ μήποτε λογικῆ ἀλόγου ψυχῆ γένηται' (=If transmigration of a soul happens into a rational creature, the soul becomes precisely that body's soul, if into an unreasoning creature, the soul accompanies it from outside as our guardian spirits accompany us; for a rational soul could never become the soul of an irrational creature). See also related details in note 18 in Chapter 4.

<sup>94</sup> But see Bracken's identification of the use of Origen's *De principiis* IV.iv.6 in *The Homilies from Leabhar Breac* §39; Bracken, 'The Fall and the Law in Early Ireland', 148 note 11; see also Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, 'Insular Manuscripts of Origen in the Carolingian Empire', in Gillian Jondorf and David N. Dumville, eds., *France and the British Isles in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Essays by Members of Girton College, Cambridge, in Memory of Ruth Morgan* (Woodridge 1991), 5-16.

<sup>95</sup> See notes 84 and 92 above.

<sup>96</sup> Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, 1046 [*CCH* quotes Jerome's *Epistolae* 6, 14, 16, 22, 36, 52, 53, 54, 64, 107, 126]. McGinty, *Pauca problemsmata*, 330-1 [*Pauca problemsmata* ('The Reference Bible') quotes Jerome's *Epistolae* 36, 73, 78, 79, 121, 123, 126].

when they conflict with anti-Origenist canons associated with Constantinople II, then why should his own opinion regarding these purported implications of that position - as the opinion of a single authority who is speaking against matters not addressed by the council - suddenly be a decisive factor? Given the apparent lack of alternative texts which attribute such a doctrine to Christian theological authorities,<sup>97</sup> St. Jerome's portrayal of Origen in *Epistola* 124<sup>98</sup> seems like the most straightforward way of accounting for how the medieval Irish writers who relate instances of the (re)embodiment of a rational soul in an animal form (in addition to angelic or demonic form),<sup>99</sup> like the author of the *Navigatio*, would understand such things as an aspect of their Christian belief.

Even so, the most straightforward way is not the only way. While this letter is the only place we have found where Origen is explicitly attributed a doctrine of *metempsychosis* that includes animal embodiments, it is certainly not the only place that such a doctrine is attributed to Plato or Pythagoras. Its attribution to Plato is, for instance, found in Augustine's *DCD* as well.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, as we have seen above, it is also not the only

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<sup>97</sup> To a lesser extent, see his *Commentary on Matthew* II.xiv.1-2 as well; *PL* 26, col.96; Thomas P. Scheck, tr., *St. Jerome: Commentary on Mathew*, 166-7; see note 24 above, for quotation and translation of this and derivative statements from later authors.

<sup>98</sup> Although, see statements that come close to it in his *Apologia contra Rufinum*, I.20; *PL* 23, col. 413-4; Hritz, tr., *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, 85-6: 'Origeni tuo licet tractare de μετεμψυχώσει, innumerabiles mundos introdu-/cere, et rationabiles creaturas aliis atque aliis vestire corporibus . . .' (=Your Origen is allowed to discuss the transmigration of souls, to introduce countless worlds, to clothe creatures first with one body and then with another . . .); *Apologia contra Rufinum*, II.12; *PL* 23, col.436-7; Hritz tr., *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, 123-4: 'et rationabiles creaturas omni corporum faece deposita, novus de mundi exsilio populi revertentis / monstraverit exercitus, tunc rursus ex alio principio fieri mundum alium, et alia corpora, quibus labentes de caelo animae vestiantur, ut verendum nobis sit, ne qui nunc viri sumus, postea nascamur in feminas; et quae hodie virgo, tunc forte prostibulum sit' (=and when they have attained this form and measure of equality, and a new army of people, returning from exile in the world, will reveal rational creatures stripped of every taint of bodily / corruption, then, again, another world shall arise from another beginning, and other bodies, in which souls that fall from heaven shall be clothed; so that we must be apprehensive lest we who are now males may subsequently be born females: and that she who is a virgin today may then, perhaps, be a common prostitute).

<sup>99</sup> While it is not clear that a 'síabair' (i.e. a spectre, or phantom), can necessarily be equated with a devil or demon, the reembodyment of the two swineherds as such, seems worth mentioning here; *De Chophur in Dá Muccida* [LL version], line 71; Ernst Windisch, ed., 'De Chophur in Dá Muccida', in Windisch and Stokes, eds., *Irish Texts* III.1, 243-7, 245; Alfred Nutt, tr., 'The Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth', in Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal to the Land of the Living*, 2 vols. (London 1895-7) II, 1-281, at 66: 'Scáth 7 Sciath imtar dí síabair' (= [their names were] Scáth and Sciath when they were spectres).

<sup>100</sup> For instance, *DCD*.X.xxx.30; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* I, 307-8; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 417: 'Nam Platonem animas hominum post mortem reuolui usque ad corpora bestiarum scripsisse

place where Origen's understanding of the soul is identified with that of Plato and Pythagoras.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, this identification, where it occurs, would have the potential to extend Origen's authority to the instances where a Platonic or Pythagorean understanding of the doctrine is spoken of without reference to Origen.<sup>102</sup>

### Back to Isidore's *Etymologiae*

There is, however, a third kind of evidence to consider which is perhaps best exemplified by Isidore's *Etymologiae*. He gives a mixed picture of Origen, praising him as second only to Augustine,<sup>103</sup> but also associating Origenists with certain heresies, including the idea that the soul underwent its embodiment as the result of a fall,<sup>104</sup>

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certissimum est' (=For it is an established fact that Plato wrote that after death the souls of men return to earth, and even enter into the bodies of beasts). Note also that his criticism of this presumed aspect of Platonism is immediately followed by a criticism of the idea of reincarnation generally which parallels that which he will direct at Origen in XI.23. See also his *De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim*, VII.ix.12-xi.17; *PL* 34, col. 360-2; Hammond John Taylor, tr., *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols., Ancient Christian Writers 41-2 (New York 1982) II, 10-13. Jerome, *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum ad Pammachium* §19; *PL* 23, col. 371.

<sup>101</sup> See esp. 319, incl. note 58.

<sup>102</sup> However, one must bear in mind that even Plato is not always understood to believe that a rational soul may come to be embodied in animal form in the available literature. See Calcidius, *Timaeus Platonis* §198; John Magee, ed. and tr., *On Plato's Timaeus: Calcidius*, ed.430 and tr.431: 'Sed Plato non putat rationabilem animam vultum atque os ratione carentis animalis induere sed ad vitiorum reliquias accedente corpore incorporationem auctis animae vitiis efferari ex instituto vitae prioris . . . anima quondam hominis nequaquam transit ad bestias iuxta Platonem' (=Plato, however, does not think that the rational soul *assumes* the countenance or appearance of an animal, but that as the body succumbs to its lingering defects the embodiment becomes beastly, with vices increasing in the soul according to the conduct of its prior life . . . the soul of what was once a human being is, according to Plato, in no way transferrable to beasts). That said, I know of no confirmed evidence for the use of Calcidius' translation and commentary in medieval Ireland prior to the annotated eleventh-century copy which makes up the first of Auct. F. 3.15.'s four sections; Ó Néill, 'An Irishman at Chartres in the Twelfth Century, *passim*. Therefore, its testimony should not be taken to necessarily be relevant to texts earlier than the eleventh-century unless evidence of its earlier use emerges.

<sup>103</sup> *Etymologiae* VI.iii.2-3; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 139: 'De nostris quoque apud Graecos Origenes in scripturarum labore tam Graecos quam Latinos operum suorum numero superavit. Denique Hieronymus sex milia librorum eius legisse fatetur. [3] Horum tamen omnium studia Augustinus ingenio vel scientia sui vicit. Nam tanta scripsit ut diebus ac noctibus non solum scribere libros eius quisquam, sed nec legere quidem occurrat' (=From us [i.e. Christians] also Origen, among the Greeks, in his labor with the Scriptures has surpassed both Greeks and Latins by the number of his works. In fact, Jerome says that he has read six thousand of his books. 3. Still, Augustine with his intelligence and learning overcomes the output of all these, for he wrote so much that not only could no one, working by day and night, copy his books, but no one could even read them).

<sup>104</sup> *Etymologiae* VIII.v.40; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 177: 'Origeniani Origene auctore exorti sunt, dicentes quod non possit Filius videre Patrem, nec Spiritus sanctus Filium. Animas quoque in mundi principio dicunt peccasse, et pro diversitate peccatorum de caelis usque ad terras diversa corpora quasi vincula meruisse, eaque causa factum fuisse mundum' (=The Origenians began with their founder, Origen; they say that the Son cannot see the Father, nor the Holy Spirit see the Son. They also say that souls sinned at the beginning of the world and went from heaven to

something which we have seen *CCH* take Jerome to allow as an indifferent position. However, he does not include Platonic *metempsychosis* among the heresies he finds in Origen. Further on, he names the idea that souls can be transformed (*converti*) into beasts or demons as a heresy, but this is also not associated with Origen, for he says that it has no known origin.<sup>105</sup> However, on its own, this does not therefore signify that Plato is similarly thought to be innocent of influence on this nameless and founderless heresy. All the heresies that Isidore names after their founders are named after a Christian heretic, not after whatever pagan philosophical influence(s) may have contributed to its character. However, if he perceives such an influence at work here, he does not mention it. Moreover, just after this, he presents the purportedly Platonic idea that ‘souls return (*redire*) to different bodies through many cycles of years’<sup>106</sup> without evident criticism, in contrast to his fulsome criticism of the Cynics and Epicureans.

This is too little information yet to put the matter beyond all doubt, but cumulatively such information as we have thus far appears to indicate that he sees the unnamed heresy and the Platonic doctrine as different in some way. The proof that he does indeed see them as differing theories lies in the clear contrast in the meaning between the verbs *convertere* and *ridire* in this context. The verb *convertere*, here meaning ‘to change, alter or transform’, indicates that the soul in question undergoes a fundamental change of nature, in which a rational soul becomes irrational in itself, not as an accidental state it temporarily suffers, but in its very identity. The verb, *ridire*, here meaning ‘to return or come to’, indicates that the soul’s rational nature is not seen as changing, so much as existing in a process of undergoing different bodily situations in which it nevertheless preserves its own specific character. In which case, the Platonic

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earth, where they earned a variety of bodies, like shackles, according to the variety of their sins – and the world was created for this very reason).

<sup>105</sup> *Etymologiae* VIII.v.69; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 178: ‘Sunt et aliae haereses sine auctore et sine nominibus: ex quibus aliae triformem putant esse Deum . . . aliae animas converti in daemones et in quacumque animalia existimant . . .’ (=There are other heresies without a founder and without names. Of these some believe that God is tri-form . . . others suppose that [human] souls are converted into demons and into all sorts of living things).

<sup>106</sup> *Etymologiae* VIII.vi.7; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 179: ‘Platonici a Platone philosopho dicti. Hi animarum creatorem esse Deum, corporum angelos asserunt; per multos annorum circulos in diversa corpora redire animas dicunt . . .’ (=The Platonists are named from the philosopher Plato. They assert that God is the creator of souls, and angels the creators of bodies; they say that souls return into different bodies through many cycles of years).

doctrine that a soul goes into many kinds of bodies successively is, for Isidore, distinct, both from the nameless heresy that says that the human soul can transform into other kinds of soul, and from the Origenist heresy that says that the soul has fallen into embodiment as a kind of penance which has been imposed on it as a result of its fall from heaven.

In this, it is important to remember that Isidore is not without criticism of Plato. Among the ‘errors of the philosophers’ (*philosophorum errores*) which he sees as introducing heresies within the Church, he names the ‘Platonic madness’ of the founder of the Valentinian heresy.<sup>107</sup> However, he does not evoke the doctrine we are considering now in his criticism of them, objecting rather to the introduction of a form of temporality to God and to the idea that Christ was born of Mary ‘as through a pipe’.<sup>108</sup> Other doctrines he attributes to Plato, such as the rejection of astral determinism,<sup>109</sup> God’s unchangeability and timelessness<sup>110</sup> and his providential role as ‘guardian, ruler and judge’<sup>111</sup> are evidently not among the ‘errors of the philosophers’. But neither can we

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<sup>107</sup> *Etymologiae* VIII.vi.22; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 180: ‘Hi philosophorum errores etiam et apud Ecclesiam induxerunt haereses . . . apud Valentinum Platonicus furor’ (=These errors of the philosophers also introduced heresies within the Church . . . [hence] the Platonic madness of Valentinus).

<sup>108</sup> *Etym.* VIII.v.11; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 175: ‘quasi per fistulam’.

<sup>109</sup> *Etym.* III.lxxi.39-41; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 107: ‘Sed nonnulli siderum pulcritudine et claritate perfecti in lapsus stellarum caecatis mentibus conruerunt, ita ut per subputationes noxias, quae mathesis dicitur, eventus rerum praescire posse conentur: quos non solum Christianae religionis doctores, sed etiam gentilium Plato, Aristoteles, atque alii rerum veritate conmoti concordi sententia damnauerunt, dicentes confusionem rerum potius de tali persuasione generari. [40] Nam sicut genus humanum ad varios actus nascendi necessitate premerentur, cur aut laudem mereantur boni aut mali legum percipiant ultionem? Et quamvis ipsi non fuerint caelesti sapientiae dediti, veritatis tamen testimonio errores eorum merito perculerunt. [41] Ordo autem iste septem saecularium disciplinarum ideo a Philosophis usque ad astra perductus est, scilicet ut animos saeculari sapientia implicatos a terrenis rebus abducerent, et in superna contemplatione conlocarent’ (=Not only those learned in the Christian religion, but also Plato, Aristotle, and others among the pagans, were moved by the truth of things to agree in condemning this in their judgment, saying that a confusion of matters was generated by such a belief. For if humans are forced towards various acts by the compulsion of their nativity, then why should the good deserve praise, and why should the wicked reap the punishment of law? And although these pagan sages were not devoted to heavenly wisdom, nevertheless they rightly struck down these errors by their witness to the truth. 41. But clearly that order of the seven secular disciplines was taken by the philosophers as far as the stars, so that they might draw minds tangled in secular wisdom away from earthly matters and set them in contemplation of what is above).

<sup>110</sup> *Etym.* VIII.vi.19; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 180.

<sup>111</sup> *Etym.* VIII.vi.20; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 180: ‘curatorem et arbitrum et iudicem’.

conclude, based on Isidore's lack of overt criticism, that he is likely to have supported the idea of any version of Platonic *metempsychosis* as he understood it. Another philosophical doctrine he lists without comment is, for example, the Stoic belief that the soul perishes with the body, an idea irredeemably at odds with even the most heterodox forms of medieval Christian eschatology.<sup>112</sup> Yet relative to the point of view of a medieval reader who might not themselves mark any tension between some form of *metempsychosis* and the Church's broader account of the soul, it remains significant that his presentation of Plato's doctrine of serial embodiments does not involve it in his censure of Origen's account of the soul's embodiment, or any clear censure whatever.

Moreover, his apparent disentanglement of Platonic *metempsychosis* from the ethical significance he still attaches to Origen's account of the soul's embodiment also makes it better (albeit still not perfectly)<sup>113</sup> suited to explain cases where the possibility of serial embodiments does not arise as a cosmological fact of the existence of souls generally (as the *Navigatio* seems to imply) but rather, as something this is undergone by certain exceptional people (like the *magi* of *De mirabilibus*), for those who may have been more credulous of such things than Ps. Augustine. We may conclude, then, that whether it is through something like St. Jerome's polemic version of Origen, Isidore's strangely ambivalent attribution of *metempsychosis* to Plato,<sup>114</sup> or even some form of middle ground between the two, in which the position of Plato is thought to have the authority of Origen behind it, there do indeed seem to be means available by which medieval Irish accounts of humans reborn as animals (or other beings) could in good conscience be understood by their writers to enjoy the stamp, not of ecclesiastical consensus, but

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<sup>112</sup> *Etym.* VIII.vi.10; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney et al, tr., *The Etymologies*, 179: 'Hi etiam animam cum corpore perire dicunt, animam quoque' (=They also say that the soul perishes with the body).

<sup>113</sup> This state of returning into many kinds of bodies does, after all, seem to be presented here as something which soul undergoes generally, rather than in certain specific instances.

<sup>114</sup> Also of potential relevance is Servius, who attributes the doctrine to Vergil in multiple places (sometimes referring it to Plato and Pythagoras before him) in his commentary on the Aeneid; Servius, *Commentarius in Vergilii Aeneidos in libros*, III.68, VI.448, 532, 603; Thilo and Hagen, eds., *Servii Grammatici* I, 350.9-15, II, 69.17-8, II, 76.10-5, II, 84.5-10. Due to Augustine's dismissal of the theological value of the *Hermetic Corpus* in *DCD* VIII.23ff., the brief account of the doctrine in the Latin *Asclepius* §6 is not likely relevant to thinking on this theme prior to the revival of interest in the Hermetic Corpus in the twelfth-century; Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge 1992), xlv.



certainly of ecclesiastical precedent and authority. They may not be ‘mainstream’ Christian ideas, as Carey says,<sup>115</sup> but the support they would have enjoyed, or seemed to enjoy, is from authors who are central to Christian tradition.

### Issues of Reception

But as with so many others we have seen, this was not an idea passively received. Medieval Irish writers would likely have been far more aware than we are of the potential conflict with central Christian doctrines. Thus it is, in the first place, noteworthy that none of the existing descriptions of a soul’s rebirth into another body give any sign that this is part of the normal operation of the cosmos. The *Navigatio* seems to be as close as we get to this, but even it does not explicitly speak of the possibility of subsequent embodiments. Moreover, in most of the relevant instances, the person in question is not a human, but an immortal inhabitant of the otherworld. To the degree that their authors understood these interchanges of body to be actual,<sup>116</sup> this

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<sup>115</sup> Carey, ‘Old Gods of Ireland’, 52.

<sup>116</sup> In the cases where the people of the *síde* were taken to truly be demons or angels, in the sense of essentially different categories of being from that of a human, these changes of embodiment - along with the rest of the otherworldly manifestations recounted in the sagas - seem to have been taken as merely *apparent*, i.e. as apparitions not actualities. See, for example, the Latin colophon which follows the Leinster recension of *Táin* and version A of *Serglige Con Culainn* §41 respectively. The author of the Latin colophon describes some of the events of *Táin* which he has recounted as ‘praestrugia demonum’ (= deceptions of demons); O’Rahilly, ed. and tr., ‘*Táin Bó Cúailnge*’ from *LL*, ed.136 and tr.272. *Serglige Con Culainn* A closes with similar sentiments; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, ed.36-7 and tr.37, following Myles Dillon, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dublin 1953), 29: ‘Conid taibsiu aidmillti . . . la háes sídi sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, 7 ba hé a méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib 7 co taisféntais afbniusa 7 díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib-sin atberat na hane-olaig síde 7 áes síde’ (=That was a ruinous apparition wrought . . . by the people of the *síde*. For before the coming of the Faith the demons had great power, and it was so great that they did bodily battle with humans, and revealed delights and mysteries to them as though they were eternal. And so they were believed in. And so the ignorant call those apparitions *síde*, and people of the *síde*). The end of *Scél na Fír Flatha*, at §80, takes such things to be angelic rather than demonic apparitions; in Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, ed.37 and tr.37-8, following but modifying Windisch and Stokes, ed. and tr., *Irish Texte* III.1, 202: ‘Acht adberaid na hecnaidi cach uair notaisbenta taibsi ingnad dona righflathaibh anall – amal adfaid in Scal do Chund, 7 amal tarfas Tír Thairngiri do Chormac –, conidh timtírecht diada ticedh fan samla-sin, 7 conach timthírecht deamnach. Aingil immorro dosficed da chobair, ar is firindi aignidh dia lentais, air is timna rechta ro foghnad doibh’ (=But the learned say that whenever a wonderful apparition was revealed to the royal princes in the old days – as when the Phantom spoke to Conn, and the Land of Promise appeared to Cormac – that it was a divine vision which came in that semblance, and not a devilsih visitation. It was an angel that used to come to their assistance, for they / were faithful to the truth of nature; for the precept of the Law was served by them). For further discussion, see John Carey, ‘The Uses of Tradition in *Serglige Con Culainn*’, *Ulidia* 1 (1994), 77-84, at 77-9; Ó Néill, ‘The Latin Colophon’.

applies, at the very least,<sup>117</sup> to *Aislinge Óenguso*,<sup>118</sup> *De Chopur in Dá Muccida*,<sup>119</sup> *Serglige Con Culainn*<sup>120</sup> and *Tochmarc Étaíne*.<sup>121</sup> The significance of this is that insofar as *metempsychosis* is understood to apply to a kind of being that is potentially not human, diabolical or angelic, it is not clear if any of the patristic critiques of the doctrine

<sup>117</sup> *Compert Con Chulainn* should be added to this list were Bondarenko to be correct that it exhibits the god, Lug, undergoing metempsychical rebirth as Cú Chulainn; Bondarenko, 'The Migration of the Soul', 140-2. However, this seems as if it may be taking Lug's role in fathering Cú Chulainn farther than the text allows; *Compert Con Chulainn*, §6-8; Van Hamel, ed., *Compert*, 5.1-6.8; Jeffrey Gantz, tr., 'The Birth of Cú Chulainn', in Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 130-33, at 132-3. It is rather more likely that the nameless youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* belongs in this list, but still ambiguous; John Carey, ed. and tr., 'The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts: *Immacaldam Choluim Chille rind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg*', *Ériu* 52 (2002), 53-87, at 60-1: 'Ro giult-sa a mbasa os; ro senas a mbasa é, a mbasa rón; ro ráth a mbasa cú allaid; imma-rulod a mbasa duine . . . Ro iachtsat mná dím; acht nád fitir atharmáthair, cid beras' (=I have grazed on it [the lough] when I was a stag; I have swum in it when I was a salmon, when I was a seal; I have run upon it when I was a wolf; I have walked upon it when I was a human . . . Women have cried out because of me, although father and mother do not know what they bear). It may be the he is one of the gods of the *síd*-mounds, but the author informs us that 'as-berat alaili bad é Mongán mac Fiachna' (=some say that he was Mongán mac Fiachna), who, although sometimes thought to be the son Manannán mac Lir, and a magician at that, is definitely human, in some manner of speaking. For the likelihood that the identification of this youth with Mongán is secondary, see John Carey, 'On the Intertellings of Some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* Texts', *Ériu* 46 (1995), 71-92, at 82-3; James Carney, 'The Earliest Bran Material', in J.J. O'Meara and B. Naumann, eds., *Latin Script and Letter A.D. 400-900: Festschrift Presented to Ludwig Bieler on the Occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Leiden 1976), 174-93, at 192 [repr. in Jonathan M. Wooding, ed., *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism* (Dublin 2000), 73-90, at 89]. For further discussion of Mongán, see pages 342ff. below.

<sup>118</sup> Eduard Müller, ed. and tr., 'Two Irish Tales', *Revue Celtique* 3 (1878), 344-60, ed. at 344-7 and tr. at 347-350; Francis Shaw, ed., *The Dream of Óengus - Aislinge Óenguso* (Dublin 1934), 43-64; Jeffrey Gantz, tr., 'The Dream of Óengus', in Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 107-12; Wolfgang Meid, ed. and tr., *Die Suche nach der Traumfrau. Aislinge Óenguso: Oengus' Traum. Eine altirische Sage*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Neue Folge 14 (Innsbruck 2017). Otherworldly beings alternating between bird and human forms; see Shaw, ed., *The Dream*, 59, 63; Gantz, tr., 'The Dream', 12: "'Ced cumachtae mór fil lee?" ol Ailill. "Ní anse; bíid i ndeíl éuin cach la bli.adnai, in mblíadnai n-ailli i ndeíl duini." . . . Téiti cucci. Fo-ceird-sium dí láim forrae. Con-tuilet i ndeíl dá géise . . . To-comlat ass i ndeíl dá én fínd' (= 'What is the magic power she has?' said Ailill. 'Easily told; she is in the shape of a bird every other year, and in a human shape the other years' . . . She went to him [Óengus]. He cast his arms around her. They fell asleep in the form of two swans . . . They went away in the form of two white birds).

<sup>119</sup> Windisch and Stokes, eds. and tr., *Irische Text*, III.1, 230-77; Ulrike Roider, ed. and tr., *De chopur in da muccida: wie die beiden Schweinehirten den Kreislauf der Existenzen durchwanderten. Eine altirische Sage*, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 28 (Innsbruck 1979); Thomas Kinsella, tr., 'The Quarrel of the Two Pig-Keeper and How the Bulls were Begotten', in Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin: From the Irish Epic 'Táin Bó Cuailnge'* (Oxford 1969), 46-51; Nutt, tr., 'The Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth', 57-72. Otherworldly cowherds undergo multiple reembodiments until they become the bulls of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.

<sup>120</sup> *Serglige Con Culainn*, §7.59ff.; Dillon, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn*, 2ff.; Jeffrey Gantz, tr., 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn & The Only Jealousy of Emer', in Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, 153-78, at 157ff. Otherworld women appear to Cú Chulainn first as birds and then later in human form.

<sup>121</sup> Osborn Bergin and R. I. Best, ed. and tr., 'Tochmarc Étaíne', *Ériu* 12 (1938), 137-196. An otherworldly woman is transformed into a fly and is swallowed after falling into a woman's drink. This results in a pregnancy in which she is born as a human girl that cannot remember her divine origin. Subsequently she transforms into a swan upon being reunited with her divine husband, who also transforms into a swan. She appears again as a woman following this.

would even apply, since they are fundamentally concerned with its application to these three kinds of beings. Of course, this raises a whole other spectrum of problems about what such a being would be and how it would function within a Christian cosmology.<sup>122</sup> We will, however, return to this matter at later point.

In the instances where it is clearly humans that are portrayed as undergoing serial embodiments, it seems to occur only in exceptional cases, to notable people,<sup>123</sup> and then because of otherworldly involvement<sup>124</sup> or more explicitly divine miracle.<sup>125</sup> It is decisively not put forward as an essential feature of the soul's metaphysical character or as an argument for the justice of providence, as it invariably was in antiquity, but as something in addition to the general ordering of things. Thus, it makes perfect sense that Ps. Augustine, with his hesitation about miracles that disturb the natural order, such as he is able to understand it, does not approve of such stories any more he would generally approve of the report of any miracle which seemed to be make more of it than an acceleration of the standard operation of created natures.<sup>126</sup> However, such an

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<sup>122</sup> See note 64 above, for an interesting point of comparison. Isidore accepts the possibility that stars may indeed be rational beings. However, if they are, he finds himself unsure how to conceive of their fate in the *eschaton*.

<sup>123</sup> Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London 1983), 122: 'Far from implying that a process of serial reincarnation affected all animate beings, the legends restrict it to a relatively small number of instances concerning either deities or mythical personages'.

<sup>124</sup> One might easily suppose that Mongán mac Fiachnai is the prime example of this; see, for example, *Immram Brain*; §50-9 [=McCone/White §1-10]; Séamus Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain: Bran's Journey to the Land of the Women* (Tübingen 1985), ed.33-45, at 41-2 and tr.46-58, at 54-5; Kim McCone, ed. and tr., *A First Old Irish Grammar and Reader Including an Introduction to Middle Irish* (Maynooth 2005), 145 [repr. in Nora White, ed. and tr., 'Compert Mongáin' and Three Other Early Mongán Tales (Maynooth 2006), 39-40]. However, we shall see that it is by no means certain that he is understood to have an essentially human identity; see pages 356ff. below.

<sup>125</sup> Besides Tuán mac Cairill and Fintan mac Bóchra, mentioned above, Lí Ban's alternation between a human form and that of a sea-creature in *Aided Echach maic Maireda* is an important example; Standish Hayes O'Grady, ed. and tr., 'Aided Echach mheic Mhaireda: Lebar na hUidre, p. 39a', in O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, ed. I, 233-7 and tr. II, 265-9; Ranke de Vries, ed. and tr., *Two Texts on Loch nEchach: De causis torchi Corc' Óche and Aided Echach maic Maireda*, Irish Texts Society 65 (London 2012), ed.200-18 and tr.201-19. This story has been most recently dated to the twelfth-century; de Vries, *Two Texts on Loch nEchach*, 23. Her alternation of form, as described by *Aided Echach*, is also recounted in detail by the Middle Irish commentary on *Félire Óengusso* §27; Whitley Stokes, ed. and tr., *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee: Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé*, Henry Bradshaw Society 29 (London 1905), ed.52 and tr.53. It is further alluded to in the *Cottonian Annals*. See Freeman, ed. and tr., 'The Annals in Cotton MS Titus A. XXV', *Revue Celtique* 43 (1926), 362; 44 (1927), 359. In the *Annals of Tigernach*, however, it is Lí Ban's sister, Airiu, who changes form; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'Annals of Tigernach', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896), 147. For further discussion and notes, see Helen Imhoff, 'The Themes and Structure of *Aided Echach maic Maireda*', *Ériu* 58 (2008), 107-31.

<sup>126</sup> See pages 309-10 above.

opinion was hardly universal in medieval Christianity. Augustine, for example, would similarly not allow that any miracle could be against nature, but is much more comfortable than Ps. Augustine with the idea of miracles that may not conform to his own understanding of the natural order.<sup>127</sup> His objections regarding the idea that the soul may undergo successive embodiments arise, as we shall see, relative to other concerns.

### **Answers to Augustine's Critique**

Apart from these commonalities, the existing accounts diverge somewhat. Almost all such accounts, in which there is a human protagonist, end, to my knowledge, with the protagonist regaining their own natural form before they die in a way that is absolute and final. In the case of those whose reembodiments are brought about by divine miracle, this invariably occurs immediately prior to, or because of, an encounter with one of the saints.<sup>128</sup> Thus, any awkward dilemmas about the resurrection-body are avoided which would necessarily follow were all of a soul's embodiments to be on equal footing, to say nothing of the additional complications that would result for the doctrine of the resurrection if some of these equally legitimate embodiments were non-human. This also answers St. Augustine's greatest concern with *metempsychosis* in *De civitate Dei*, namely, that if the process of *metempsychosis* continues ceaselessly,<sup>129</sup> then

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<sup>127</sup> For an example for the opposite extreme, see St. John Chrysostom's statement in *In Natalem Christi Dei*; PG 56, col. 386 [my translation]: 'ubi enim Deus vult, ibi naturae ordo cedit' (=for where God wills, there the order of nature yields). However, Augustine's considerably more qualified statements on the subject are more likely to have been known; *Contra Faustum* 26.3; *PL* 42, col.481; Stothert, tr., 'Reply to Faustus the Manichaen', 321-2: 'Sed contra naturam non incongrue dicimus aliquid Deum facere, quod facit contra id quod novimus in natura. Hanc enim etiam appellamus naturam, cognitum nobis cursum solitumque naturae, contra quem Deus eam aliquid facit, mangalia vel mirabilia nominantur' (=There is, however, no impropriety in saying that God does a thing contrary to nature, when it is contrary to what we know of nature. For we give the name nature to the usual common course of nature; and whatever God does contrary to this, we call a prodigy, or a miracle). Aquinas' famous statement, 'gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat' (=grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it) is probably the most useful way of summarizing the commonalities and contrasts that Augustine's earlier understanding of the subject has with Ps. Augustine's narrower affirmation of the natural order; *Summa Theologiae* I, q.1, art.8; Gilby, ed. and tr., *Summa theologiae* I. Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, I.xvii.33; Green, ed., *De libero arbitrio*; King, tr., *On the Free Choice of the Will*, 169: 'Quoniam ipse ut velimus operator incipiens, qui volentibus cooperator perficiens' (=He begins by working [in us]. For he begins by working that we will, which he perfects by working along with our willing).

<sup>128</sup> See page 338 note 125; Chapter 2, 109-111; Chapter 4, 269-72.

<sup>129</sup> *DCD* X.30; Dombart *et al.*, eds., *De civitate Dei* I, 307-8; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 418-9: 'Qua sententia profecto abstulit, quod esse Platonicum maxime perhibetur, ut mortuos ex uiuis, ita uiuos ex mortuis semper fieri . . . credere stultum est ex illa uita, quae beatissima esse non poterit nisi de sua fuerit aeternitate certissima, desiderare animas corruptibilium corporum labem et inde ad ista remeare, tamquam

there will be no truly blessed state since, no matter how complete one's ascent to heaven, it will always be marred by the anticipation of one's eventual fall back into the sufferings of the physical world, or worse.<sup>130</sup> However, if the soul's movement from body to body is arrested by its encounter with the Gospel, then this dilemma never emerges and the Gospel itself is potentially given the added significance of being that which frees a person from cyclical reembodiment. Or at least, such an interpretation seems as if it could easily result from any attempt to interpret the stories in which the process of serial-embodiment is presented as a predicament in light of those in which it is presented as a special act of providence. This is especially so relative to a text like the *Navigatio*, since we have seen that it subscribes to an Origenist understanding of the soul which, in light of Jerome, could well be taken to imply that the soul is necessarily caught in temporally successive embodiments until purged of its vices.<sup>131</sup> Which is to say, if there is anything in Carey's suggestion that some notion of reincarnation as the general lot of souls may have existed in pre-Christian Ireland, and persisted into the

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hoc agat summa purgatio, ut inquinatio requiratur . . . Non enim beata erit nisi segura; ut autem segura sit, falso putabit semper se beatam fore, quoniam aliquando erit et misera. . . Quod etiamsi uerum esset, quid hoc scire prodesset . . . ?' (=By this belief he [Porphyry] did away with the theory which is regarded as a principle feature of Platonism, the theory that just as the dead came from the living so the living always come from the dead . . . it is really absurd to believe that in that other life, which could not be completely blessed if there were not complete assurance of its eternity, souls year for the taint of corruptible bodies and desire to return from thence to those bodies; as if the final purification were a longing for renewed defilement . . . it will not be happy without without a sense of security; and to have a sense of security it must believe that its happiness will be everlasting, which is a false belief, since in time it will come to misery . . . Even if this were true, what advantage would be gained by knowledge of it?).

<sup>130</sup> *DCD XXI.17*; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 783; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 995: 'Qua in re misericordior profecto fuit Origenes, qui et ipsum diabolium atque angelos eius post grauiora pro meritis et diuturniora supplicia ex illis cruciatibus eruendos et sociandos sanctis angelis creditit. Sed illum et propter hoc et propter alia nonnulla et maxime propter alternantes sine cessatione beatitudines et miserias et statutis saeculorum interuallis ab istis ad illas atque ab illis ad istas itus ac reditus interminabiles non inmerito reprobauit ecclesia; quia et hoc, quod misericors uidebatur, amisit faciendo sanctis ueras miserias, quibus poenas luerent, et falsas beatitudines, in quibus uerum ac securum, hoc est sine timore certum, sempiterni boni gaudium non habent' (=On this subject the most truly compassionate was Origen, who believed that the both the Devil himself and his angels, after the more grievous and long-lasting punishments, according to their merits, will be brought out from those crucifixions and united with the holy angels. But not undeservedly the Church has rejected him [in the council of Alexandria, 400 A.D., confirmed by Pope Anastasius I], on account of this opinion and several others, and especially on account of [his theory of] alternating felicities and afflictions, by intervals of endlessly returning fixed ages, from this to that and from that to this. For in fact, that compassion which he seemed [to have] he lost when he assigned to the saints true afflictions, by which they could pay for [their] penalties, and false felicity, in which they could not truly and securely, that is, without fear, have the certain joy of everlasting good).

<sup>131</sup> See pages 320-332 above.

High and later Middle Ages,<sup>132</sup> the stories in which a sequence of incarnations comes to an end in the time of the saints would seem to represent a certain optimism relative to this belief, namely, that the revelation of the Gospel is a merciful limit to the penitential process of reincarnation.<sup>133</sup> But this will only be so if reincarnation was indeed ever thought to occur in the human world apart from some kind of miraculous or otherwise otherworldly intervention in the lives of specific persons.<sup>134</sup> For we must keep firmly in our mind that there seem to be no early Irish texts which directly claim - however much they may seem to suggest it - that the rebirth of souls is intrinsic to their (fallen) nature.

Whatever may be the case, the important thing is that, insofar as reincarnation is thought to occur, it is not understood to do so in a way which would threaten the coherence of the bodily resurrection or, following the resurrection, the stable enjoyment of the

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<sup>132</sup> In this Carey seems to be cautiously following in the wake of Henri d'Arbois de Joubainville's *Le cycle mythologique irlandais* (Paris 1884); Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 65; *idem*, 'Reincarnation and Shapeshifting', 1485: 'If Arbois was too confident, Nutt was probably too dismissive. It would be strange indeed if the medieval literatures preserved unambiguous testimony to a doctrine of the afterlife which was in fundamental disagreement with Christian teaching. In the Pythagorean tradition also, the narrative focus is not on the general run of humanity, but on those exceptional individuals who are able to remember their prior lives'. Kruta makes similar claims for both Pythagorean and Orphic views of the subject; Venceslas Kruta, 'Celtic Religion', in Sabatino Moscati *et al*, eds., *The Celts* (Venice 1991), 499-507, at 50. Whether or not Carey is right about the currency of reincarnation as an idea in medieval Ireland, it is hard to know what basis there could be for saying that the 'narrative focus' of Pythagorean literature on *metempsychosis* is comparable to the relevant early Irish literature. Where the narrator is someone who can remember something of their past lives, the primary significance of this seems to be the authority it gives the narrator on the subject of the post-mortem fate and rebirth of souls generally. The classic example here is the Myth of Er in Book X of Plato's *Republic*; Slings, ed., *Platonis Rempublicam*, 369-409; Grube and Reeve, tr., 'Republic', 1199-23. Such narrative descriptions of *metempsychosis* in its general operation as we find in Pythagorean material are precisely what we do not have in early Irish literature. For the difficulty of distinguishing between Pythagorean and Orphic doctrine from their later Hellenistic philosophical reception, see Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie and David Fideler, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library* (Grand Rapids 1987-8), 38ff.

<sup>133</sup> It is worth bearing in mind (*contra* Bondarenko) that a Christian perspective is not required in order to see *metempsychosis* as a kind of suffering; cf. Bondarenko, 'The Migration of the Soul', 144-6. It is challenging to think of any account of it where it is not presented as a kind of purgation or purification of a soul that is not yet perfect. Nevertheless, since this is, as we have seen, also a dominant theme in Jerome's Origen, neither can one be certain that it is pre-Christian; see pages 320-32 above.

<sup>134</sup> For the contention that the occurrence of something like reincarnation only in these exceptional cases shows that there was no general pre-Christian theory of *metempsychosis*, see Nutt, 'The Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth', 120-1; Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, 123; Venceslas Kruta, 'Celtic Religion', in Sabatino Moscati *et al*, eds., *The Celts* (Venice 1991), 499-507, at 506 - noting that his speculations are made here relative to an unreliable characterisation of the relevant aspects Orphic and Pythagorean doctrine (compare to Carey's statements in note 1302 above); Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Tochmarc Étaíne: A Literal Interpretation', in Michael Richter and J.-M. Picard, eds., *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002), 165-81, at 173-4; Bondarenko, 'The Migration of the Soul', 142.

beatific vision by the righteous. On the contrary, *metempsychosis* would seem to grant those who undergo it a greater likelihood of a resurrection to blessedness, having been kept alive by it long enough to receive baptism. In sum, as pagan as its intellectual forebears may be, the greater part of the instances of *metempsychosis* that we find in medieval Irish literature seem to amount to a conciliation of Jerome's understanding and equation of Origen and Plato with the more general Patristic critique of *metempsychosis*, especially as embodied in St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, an achievement which seems to be accomplished nowhere else, since other attempts to show Origen's orthodoxy tend to have involved a much more accurate understanding of Origen's position than that of Jerome, and a more critical appraisal of Plato than we find in Isidore.<sup>135</sup>

### **An Early Alternative: Mongán mac Fiachna**

However, at least one of the Old Irish stories about Mongán does not appear to fit into this synthesis. In the clumsily named *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní dia fíl aided Fothaid Airgdig*,<sup>136</sup> it is not at all clear which bodily form is intrinsic to Mongán. As the title of the story suggests, Mongán is discovered to be Find, such that an old friend of Find's, upon meeting Mongán, does not say the he *was* Find, but greets him *as* Find.<sup>137</sup> Such a claim is not, of course, without certain parallels to the later developments we have been discussing. Like Tuán mac Cairill, among others, he seems to enjoy a continuity of memory between past and present embodiments.<sup>138</sup> The story tells us: 'Mongán was Find except that he did not

<sup>135</sup> One is reminded of the high-medieval developments of the idea of courtly love made possible by misunderstandings of Ovid; C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford 1936, repr.1968), 5-8, 20-1, 26, 31-2.

<sup>136</sup> i.e. 'A story from which it is inferred that Mongán was Find mac Cumail and the cause of the death of Fothad Airgtech'.

<sup>137</sup> *Scél asa mberar co mbad hé Find mac Cumail Mongán ocus aní dia fíl aided Fothaid Airgdig* §12; Nora White, ed. and tr., '*Compert Mongán*' and *Three other Early Mongán Tales*, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 5 (Maynooth 2006), ed.73-74, at 74 and tr.79-81, at 81: 'We were with you Find' (=Bámar-ni lat su, la Find).

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *Tochmarc Étaíne*, where Étaín does not remember her identity prior to her embodiment as the daughter of Étar's wife; Bergin and Best, eds., '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', 170; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 155-6; "Ba tocha duid toidheacht cucamsa, ol an tan rupsa Etain Echraidhe ingen Ailella ba misi do cetmuidter 7 ba iar do sarlugaib do primmuigib Erenn 7 uiscib 7 or 7 airget co tici do chutruma do facbail dar [th]eis." "Ceist," ol sisi, "cia h'ainmsiú?" "Ni hannsa, Midir Brig Leith," ol sé. "Ceist," ol sisi, "cid rodn édarscar?" "Ni hannsa, fithnaisi Fuamnaige 7 brechtaí Breasail Edarlaim." Asbert Midir fri hEdain: "An ragasu liumsa?" "Nitó," ol sí. "Noco ririub ri[g] nErenn ar fer na fedar claimn na cenel dó' (= 'It would be right for you to come to me; for when you were Étaín Echraide

allow it to be told',<sup>139</sup> thus implying that Mongán was fully conscious of his preceding life as Find. Moreover, Find and Mongán are each - as we have come to expect of these situations - exceptional figures in their own right: as recurring figures in early Irish literature, as uniquely gifted persons at the pinnacle of the political hierarchies to which they belong, and as humans who are, furthermore, connected to the divinities of the otherworld of the sagas. Therefore, like the latter texts we have been considering, *Scél asa mberar* seems to be a long way from presenting Find's rebirth as Mongán as emblematic of any cosmic process thought to apply to all souls generally. The significance of the idea in other early tales about Mongán, that the god Mannánan mac Lir is his father,<sup>140</sup> is worth keeping in mind here, especially given that we have found such reembodiments to be more commonly attributed to the divinities of the sagas than to mortals.<sup>141</sup>

Thus far, the parallels with the stories of Tuán mac Cairill, Fintan mac Bóchra, Lí Ban and the like are fairly strong. However, *Scél asa mberar* still differs radically from them in providing no definite way of knowing which embodiment - whether that of Find, Mongán, or someone else entirely - is the protagonist's proper bodily form, or if there is indeed such a thing as a proper bodily form for Mongán from its perspective. It remains at least hypothetically possible that Find is understood to be the 'true' bodily form of the person temporarily embodied in the form of Mongán, or that this Mongán could be a restoration of a true form that preexisted his embodiment as Find, or, perhaps, that both are identical in form, seeing as his old friend, Caílte, is apparently able to recognize him immediately without any sign on Mongán's part.<sup>142</sup> If so, the presentation of *Scél asa*

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daughter of Ailill it was I who was your souse, after giving in exchange for you a mighty payment of the chief plains and waters of Ireland, and gold and silver amounting to your own weight.' 'What is your name?' she said. 'Midir of Bri Léith,' he said. 'What parted us?' she said. 'The magic of Fuamnach, and the spells of Bresal Etarlam.' Midir said to Étaín. 'Will you go with me?' / 'No,' she said. 'I will not sell the king of Ireland for a man whose family and kindred I do not know.'

<sup>139</sup> *Scél asa mberar* §15; White, ed. and tr., *Compert Mongáin*, ed.74 and tr.81: 'Ba hé Find . . . inti Mongán acht nand-léic a forndissiu'.

<sup>140</sup> *Compert Mongáin* §6-11; White, ed. and tr., *Compert Mongáin*, ed.71-2 and tr.78-9. *Immram Brain* §50-1, 58 [=McCone/White §1-2, 9]; Séamus Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain: Bran's Journey to the Land of the Women* (Tübingen 1985), ed.33-45, at 41-2 and tr.46-58, at 54-5; McCone, ed., *A First Old Irish Grammar*, 145; White, ed. and tr., *Compert Mongáin*, ed.38-40 and 39-41.

<sup>141</sup> See page 337 above.

<sup>142</sup> See note 138 above.



*mberar* would still be at least potentially conciliable with more standard Christian ideas about the resurrection body seeing as this would remove any confusion regarding which body would be properly resurrected as his when the time came. However, if the author does in fact assume that the protagonist has a body that is proper to him, they seem to show no particular interest in making it clear. Things being as they are, it would appear fairly dubious to claim that it in any way exemplifies the synthesis of Jerome's Origen and Augustine's *DCD* described above.

Nevertheless, not every early story about Mongán's rebodiments offers so little information of relevance to a more standard medieval understanding of the doctrine of the resurrection. Mannánan mac Lir's prophecy concerning Mongán in *Immram Brain*,<sup>143</sup> for instance, seems to envision him as being born a human and then, despite many alternations of bodily form between, dying in that same human form at the age of fifty, this without any indication of further embodiments preceding this birth or succeeding this death.<sup>144</sup> Granted, it provides no indication of his baptism, or that he meets Christian saints, such as the tales of Lí Ban, Tuán or Fintan might lead us to expect.<sup>145</sup> However, his theological significance is made intelligible in another way, namely, through the typological connexion that the *Immram* traces between his identity as both god and man - having the divinity, Mannánan mac Lir for his father, and the human woman, Caíntigern, for his mother - and that of Christ, as both 'God and man' in the most absolute sense.<sup>146</sup> As for his baptism, it is likely to have simply been assumed,

<sup>143</sup> On the dating of this text, see notes 154 and 172; see also pages 357-8 below.

<sup>144</sup> *Immram Brain* §49-59 [McCone/White §1-10]; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.41-3 and tr.54-6; McCone, ed., *A First Old Irish Grammar*, 145-6; White, ed. and tr., *Compert Mongáin*, ed.38-40 and tr.39-41.

<sup>145</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 109-11; Chapter 4, pages 269-72; also pages 336-9, esp. note 125 above.

<sup>146</sup> Note also that, like Christ, Mongán will be accepted by the mortal husband of his mother; Matt. 1:18ff. *Immram Brain* §48-51; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.41-2 and tr.54-5: '48. Ticfa tessarcon ó(a)sal .i. Crist. ónd Ríg do-reä-rósat, recht find fo-glóisfe[a] muire, sech bid Dä, bid duine. 49. In delb í no-fethi-su, ricf[e]a it lethi-su, arum-thá echtra[e] dia taig cosin mnaí i lLinemaig. .i. compert mongain, 50. se(i)chis Monindán mac Lir asin charput cruth ind fir, biëid dia chlaind densa i ngair fer cain i corp criäd-glain. .i. Mongan, 51. Con-lé .i. coibli coiblide. Monand macca Lirn lúthlige la Caíntigern, géthair dia mac i mbith gnó, atn-didma Fiachna[e] mac ndó' (=48. A noble deliverance will come / from the King who has created the heavens, / the Lord will set in motion a just law, / He will be both God and man. / 49. This shape on which you are looking / will come to your parts, / a journey is in store for me to her house, / to the woman in Mag Line. / 50. The shape of the man [speaking] from / the chariot is Monindán son of Ler, / there will be of his progeny in a short while / a fair man in a chalk-white body. // 51. Monand, the descendant of Ler, will lie, / a vigorous lying with Caíntigern, / his son shall be called

seeing as the annals have his life as ruler over Dál nAriade ending in 625 A.D.<sup>147</sup> Thus far, the *Immram* remains relatively uncontroversial in its expression, at least, so far as the doctrine of the resurrection is concerned.

The nameless youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg*,<sup>148</sup> is another matter.<sup>149</sup> It is, to my knowledge, the one early instance where we have a saint (Colum Cille) speaking with someone whom at least some early Irish readers identified as Mongán.<sup>150</sup> As above, insofar as he is identified with Mongán, and Mongán is thought to be an early seventh-century ruler, it is not really very significant that the saint neither baptizes him, nor offers baptism.<sup>151</sup> What *is* significant is that there is no sign of his encounter with the saint bringing about (or else heralding) the final end of his life – which apparently goes farther back than the initial formation of Lough Feail – or of his sequence of reembodiments. Mongán (for those who identified him as such) simply disappears following his conversation with Colum Cille, leaving no clues regarding the character of his future. Nor does the narrator offer any indication, even indirect

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into the fair world, / Fíachnae will acknowledge him as son). Compare to the Cú Chulainn of *BMMM* in Chapter 4, pages 241-5.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, the *Annals of Ulster* entry for 625 A.D.; Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, ed. and tr., *The Annals of Ulster*, ed.112 and tr.113: ‘Aedhan m. Cumuscaigh 7 Colman m. Comgellain ad Dominum migrant; 7 Ronan m. Tuathail rex na nAirthir, 7 Mongan m. Fiach[n]ae Lurgan moriuntur’ (=Aedán son of Cumusach and Colmán son of Comgellán migrate to the Lord; Rónán son of Tuathail king of the king of the Airthir, and Mongán son of Fíachnae of Lurga die).

<sup>148</sup> Initially, Carey dated this text to the seventh century; John Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships of Some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* Texts’, *Ériu* 46 (1995), 71-92, at 77-80, 91. However, in his subsequent edition of the text he found it ‘difficult to be confident’ that it was any earlier than the eighth century; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts’, 53. For a recent treatment, see Elva Johnston, ‘*Immacallam Choluim Chille 7 ind Óclaig*: Language and Authority in an Early-Medieval Irish Tale’, in Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan and John Sheehan, eds., *Clerics, Kings and Vikings: Essays on Medieval Ireland in Honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin 2015), 418-28.

<sup>149</sup> Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts’, ed.60 and tr.61.

<sup>150</sup> This is with reference to its subtitle; *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, lines 1-2; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle’, ed.60 and tr.61: ‘as-berat alaili bad é Mongán mac Fiachnai’ (=some say that he was Mongán mac Fiachnai). Note that while the attribution is put forward as one interpretation among others here, his identification as Mongán is assumed by a later poem attributed to him in Ms. Laud 615 [Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., ‘The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal’, in Meyer and Nutt, ed. and tr., *The Voyage of Bran I*, 88-90], and by Magnus Ó Domhnaill’s Early Modern Irish *vita* of Colum Cille; *Betha Colaim Chille* §87, 159; A. O’Kelleher and G. Schoepperle, eds. and tr., *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille. Compiled by Manus O’Donnell in 1532 [Edited and Translated from Manuscript Rawlinson B. 514 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford]*, University of Illinois Bulletin 15.48, (Urbana, Illinois 1918), ed.78-82, 166-70 and tr.79-83, 167-71.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Carey, *A Single Ray*, 10, where Tuán’s baptism is used as a means of distinguishing between the meaning of his encounter with the saint, and that of the nameless youth with Colum Cille.

indication, of his true form (if he has one), or that any end to the rebirths he has been speaking of is in sight.<sup>152</sup> But *Scél asa mberar* seems to push the *aporia* represented by Mongán even farther than this, so that not only the identity of his true body, but even the identity of the person undergoing rebodiments has become unclear. Is Find a prior embodiment of Mongán, Mongán a subsequent embodiment of Find, or are they both subsequent embodiments of an identity which is fundamentally prior to and distinct from both of them? Is Mongán the last incarnation of this identity, or are there many more to come? It seems to provide no answer.<sup>153</sup>

The question, then, is what we are to make of these apparently contrasting portrayals. The simplest approach would be to interpret the portrayal of Mongán *Immram Brain* as in fundamental contrast with these latter examples, were it not that *Immram Brain* and the four early stories about Mongán are all thought to have been produced by the same northern scriptorium (possibly that of Druimm Snechta).<sup>154</sup> Moreover, the extant versions of these stories, and *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* with them, have come to us from the same manuscript (certainly the lost *Cín Dromma Snechta*),<sup>155</sup> and exhibit significant textual connexions, in addition to their common thematic concerns.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, lines 24-7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy’, ed.60 and tr.61: ‘Óro bátar isin chobrunn, leth lai nó ó oentráth co raile, muintir Choluim Chille oca ndéicsi di etarchéin. Óro glé, co n-accatar talmaidiu do-celar erru ind óclach. Ní fetatar cia luid nó can to-luid’ (=They were conversing [?] for half the day, from one day to the next, as Colum Cille’s followers watched them from a distance. When [the conversation] ended, they suddenly saw that the youth was hidden from them. They did not know whither he went nor whence he came).

<sup>153</sup> But this shall be seen below; pages 357-61.

<sup>154</sup> For the argument that it was composed at Druimm Snechta: John Carey, *Ireland and the Grail* (Aberystwyth 2007), 29, 35-40. For the argument it later became associated with Druimm Snechta: Francis John Byrne, ‘Church and Politics’, in Ó Cróinín, ed., *A New History of Ireland*, 656-79, at 678; Proinsias Mac Cana, ‘Mongán mac Fiachnai and *Immram Brain*’, *Ériu* 23 (1972), 102-42, at 103-6. For the history of the dating of *Cín Dromma Snechta* and the conclusion that it was assembled in the eighth century, see Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships’, 27 note 10; *idem*, *Ireland and the Grail*, 27, incl. note 3. Further arguments in support of an eighth-century date for *Cín Dromma Snechta* are made in White, *Compert Mongán*, 35-37. McCone argues that while these texts do indeed have an eighth-century archetype, it is still at least possible that *Cín Dromma Snechta* may have been a tenth-century mediation of that archetype; Kim McCone, ‘*Echtrae Chonnlai*’ and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 1 (Maynooth 2000), 67-8.

<sup>155</sup> White, *Compert Mongán*, 35-7; Carey, ‘On the Interrelations’, *passim*, but esp.72.

<sup>156</sup> As outlined in White, *Compert Mongán*, 57: Carey has argued that *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, are among the texts which formed the basis for composition of *Immram Brain* and the Mongán tales; Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships’, *passim*, but esp. 91. In a later paper he amends this somewhat. Given that he is no longer confident that *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* is earlier than the eighth century, he then concludes that this may turn out to have implications for his earlier characterisation of

Therefore the possibility is raised, perhaps even the necessity, that the decisive limits to Mongán's process of reembodiment which *Immram Brain* seemed, above, to establish should be interpreted in light of the relevant elements of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* and *Scél asa mberar*. In which case, the absolute birth and death of Mongán which we seem to find in *Immram Brain*, when considered on its own, would threaten to become no more than the birth and death of the Mongán-centric<sup>157</sup> embodiment which has most recently been undergone by an uncertain identity of uncertain age, intrinsic form, and end.<sup>158</sup> The significance that the interrelations of these *Cín Dromma Snechta* texts have for our interpretation of their various portrayals of Mongán's fate will be further elaborated in the next stage of the argument.

### The Ambiguity of Mongán

Ambiguity of this sort in a human life remains comprehensible enough relative to Jerome's Origen and the sometimes associated, sometimes disassociated, reports of Plato's doctrine of *metempsychosis*, but makes no effort to solve the potential complications relative to the doctrine of the resurrection, or to deflect Augustine's critique of *metempsychosis* in *DCD*. Moreover, the onesided consonance that the Mongán of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* or *Scél asa mberar* has with Jerome's Origen in this respect only makes it more difficult to determine what the significance of such a

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these texts' relationships, but does not discuss what these implications may be; Carey, 'The Lough Foyle Colloquy Texts', 53. More recently he has placed it in the 'Northern Group' of texts, which, together with the 'Midland Group', are drawn upon by the later 'Mixed Group' of texts to which *Immram Brain* and the Mongán stories belong; Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, 27-40. This seems to amount to a refinement of his previous theory rather than a new direction.

<sup>157</sup> Mongán-centric, because it is said that he will be embodied as many different things between his birth and death as Mongán. *Immram Brain* §49-59 [McCone/White §4-5 and 9]; McCone, ed., *A First Old Irish Grammar*, 145-6; White, tr., *Compert Mongáin*, 39-41: '4. Bieid i fethol cech míl / Etir glasmuir ocus tír; / Bid drauc re mbuidnib i froiss, / Bid cú allaid cech indroiss. / 5. Bid dam co mbennaib arcait / I mruig i:n-agtar carpait. / Bid écne brecc i llind lán / Bid rón, bid elae findbán /. // . . / 9. Bieid bes ngairit a ré / Coicait mblédne i mbith ché / Oirthi ail . . .' (= 4. He will be in the shape of every animal / Between blue-grey sea and land; / He will be a dragon before bands in a shower, / He will be a wolf of every great forest. // 5. He will be an ox with horns of silver / In a land in(to) which chariots are driven. / He will be a speckled salmon in a full lake / He will be a seal, he will be a pure white swan /. . . / 9. It shall be that his time will be short, / Fifty years in this world / A rock slays him . . .).

<sup>158</sup> As we shall see below, such an interpretation would bring about a different sense of the 'findríg' in which it is said that Mongán will come to be §55 [McCone/White §6], as well as duration of his time there: 'Bieid tre bithu síru, Cét mblédne i findríg'; Carney, 'The Earliest Bran Material', 193: 'Manannán also foresees that Mongán's life will be short. But the *drong find*, the fair host (of angels), will take him away and he will be 'through eternities of / centuries' in a fair kingdom'.

singular person might be. This would not be the case if they agreed with Jerome's Origen in every respect. However, neither text, as we have seen, agrees with Jerome's Origen so far as to suggest that all souls undergo temporally successive reembodyments as a penitential process. Here, as elsewhere in early Irish literature, physical rebirth is evidently something that happens only to certain exceptional people and then only those who are caught up in the activity of agencies that are something more than human. In other words, *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* and *Scél asa mberar* mirror the adventures ascribed to the soul by Jerome's Origen, but also appear to abandon any gesture towards a cosmology or anthropology that would require such an account of souls generally.

The other, later, examples we have been dealing with are able to get away with this because they resituate the possibility of serial embodiment in a different cosmology and anthropology that modifies the idea of this possibility so as to make it intelligible in a new way. The claim that a fallen soul requires successive reembodyments as the education by which it may return to its naturally disembodied state is replaced with the claim that the soul in question not only has a body that is proper to it (the actual belief of Origen himself and most Platonists), but a proper *biological* body which has a definite and final death prior to its resurrection, such as we find in Augustine, among others. Thus, while the framework to which such a process of embodiment belongs is rejected, the process itself is reinterpreted in such a way as give it a new meaning within an Augustinian framework. But in the two stories at hand, the radical ambiguity regarding the relation of Mongán's identity to the as-yet unlimited sequence of his embodyments appears to be irreconcilably at odds with any such attempt to limit it by clearly establishing which embodiment and which death of the many are absolute and final for the soul in question. Yet in seeming also to present the structure of Mongán's relationship to embodiment as an exception of some sort, rather than representative of human souls generally, it also appears to resist any unmodified form of the cosmology and anthropology of Jerome's Origen such as would normally make someone like him intelligible in the first place. The place of such a soul in the order of reality, when it represents an exception rather than the rule, as Mongán's evidently does in these examples, is not visible relative to the poles of Jerome's Origen and Augustine.

### A Third Way: The Deathless Earthly Paradise

There is, however, at least one other option. The Middle Irish text, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, suggests that Fintan mac Bóchra may not actually be dead, but that, if alive, is waiting in paradise (*pardus*) with Enoch and Elijah for the resurrection of the last day.<sup>159</sup> We must take care here not to confuse this paradise with the state that is said to await the righteous following the last day. As in Iranaeus' *Adversus Haereses*,<sup>160</sup> among other

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<sup>159</sup> *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §36; Best, ed., *The Settling of the Manor of Tara*, 160-1; Joseph Falaky Nagy, tr., *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca and London 1997), 6 [lightly edited]: 'Is indemin immorro cía baile in rohadhnocht, acht is dóig leo is ina chorp chollaigi rucad i nnach ndíamair ndíada amail rucad Ele 7 Enócc i pardus condafil ic ernaidi eiseisérigi in sruthseanóir saéghlach sin .i. Fintan mac Bóchra' (=It is uncertain, moreover, where he was buried, but they suppose that he was taken up in his fleshly body to a godly hidden place, just as Elijah and Enoch were taken into paradise, where that long-lived ancient, Fintan mac Bochra awaits the final resurrection).

<sup>160</sup> Iranaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V.v.1; PG 7, col.1134-5; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, tr., 'Irenaues: Against the Heresies', in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, 10 vols. (1867-85) I, 834-1391, at 1310: 'multo tempore perseverabant corpora, in quantum placuit Deo bene habere . . . Quandoquidem Enoch placens Deo in quo placuit corpore translates est, translationem justorum praemonstrans. Et Elias, sicut erat in plasmatis substantia, assumptus est, assumptionem partum prophetans: et nihil impediit eos corpus in translationem et assumptionem eorum . . . dicunt Presbyteri, qui sunt Apostolorum discipuli, eos qui translati sunt illuc translatos esse; (justis enim hominibus et Spiritum habentibus praeparatus est paradus, in quem Paulus Apostolus asportatus audivit sermons inenarrabiles, quantum ad nos in praesenti) et ibi manere eos qui translati sunt usque ad consummationem, coauspicantes incorruptelam' (=bodies did continue in existence for a lengthened period, as long as it was God's good pleasure that they should flourish . . . Enoch, when he pleased God, was translated in the same body in which he did please Him, thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just. Elijah, too, was caught up when he was yet in the substance of the natural form; thus exhibiting in prophecy the assumption of those who are spiritual, and that nothing stood in the way of their body being translated and caught up . . . the elders who were disciples of the apostles tell us that those who were translated were transferred to that place [for paradise has been prepared for righteous men, such as have the Spirit; in which place also Paul the apostle, when he was caught up, heard words which are unspeakable as regards us in our present condition], and that there shall they who have been translated remain until the consummation of all things, as a prelude to immortality). For another important example, see Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, I.iii; PL 44, col.111; Peter Holmes, tr., 'On the Merits and Remission of Sins and on Baptism', in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 V, 15-79, at 16: 'Neque enim Enoch et Elias, per tam longam aetatem senectute marcuerunt, nec tamen eos credo iam in illam spiritalem qualitatem corporis commutatos, qualis in resurrectione promittitur, quae in Domino prima praecessit; nisi quia isti fortasse nec his cibis egent, qui sui consumptione reficiunt, sed ex quo translati sunt ita vivunt, ut similem habeant satietatem illis quadraginta diebus, quibus Elias ex calice aquae et ex collyride panis sine cibo vixit; aut, et his sustentaculis opus est, ita in paradiso fortasse pascuntur sicut Adam, priusquam propter peccatum inde exire meruisset. Habebat enim, quantum existimo, et de lignorum fructibus refectionem contra defectionem, et de ligno vitali stabilitatem contra vetustatem' (=For Enoch and Elijah were not reduced to the decrepitude of old age by their long life. But yet I do not believe that they were then changed into that spiritual kind of body, such as is promised in the resurrection, and which the Lord was the first to receive; only they probably do not need those aliments, which by their use minister refreshment to the body; but ever since their translation they so live, as to enjoy such a sufficiency as was provided during the forty days in which Elijah lived on the cruse of water and the cake, without substantial food; or else, if there be any need of such sustenance, they are, it may be, sustained in Paradise in some such way as Adam was, before he brought on himself expulsion therefrom by sinning. And he, as I suppose, was supplied with sustenance against decay from the fruit of the various trees, and from the tree of life with security against

places,<sup>161</sup> this is a paradise of a preliminary sort. In the *Suidigud* this is demonstrated by the fact that it is the sort of place in which one anticipates rather than enjoys the consummation of all things taken to follow upon the resurrection. Thus its inhabitants are, to use Iraneaus' words, everliving 'presages' or 'tokens of imperishableness' (*coauspicantes incorruptelam*), rather than immortals in the absolute sense of the word.<sup>162</sup> The same doctrine is found - albeit much more directly and expansively - in *Dá Brón Flatha Nime* (i.e. 'The Two Sorrows of Heaven'),<sup>163</sup> a Middle Irish text which Kenney dates to the eleventh century.<sup>164</sup> Perhaps, then, something similar is thought to be the case with Mongán: the open-endedness surrounding his absolute death - if not his

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old age). See also Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, II.xxvii; PL 44, col. 397-8; Peter Holmes, tr., 'On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin', in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1 V, 217-257, at 246.

<sup>161</sup> Dumville draws attention to the significance of apocryphal texts generally, and the *Visio Pauli* §20-1 specifically in this regard; David Dumville, 'Echtrae and Immram: Some Problems of Definition', *Ériu* 27 (1976), 73-94, at 79, incl. notes. For the text itself, see Theodore Silverstein and Anthony Hilhorst, eds., *Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva 1997), 112-5; M.R. James, tr., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford 1963, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. [corrected]), 525-554, at 536. However, it is worth bearing in mind that in *Visio Pauli*, Enoch and Elijah dwell in the Third Heaven to which St. Paul ascended (2 Cor. 12:2), rather than the terrestrial paradise, a place which it characterises as the home of the disembodied, rather than the embodied, righteous [St. Gall]: 'Quis locus hic est? Et dixit mihi: Haec est terra repromissionis. Aut non audisti quod scriptum est: Beati mansueti, quoniam ipsi hereditabunt terram? Animae autem iustorum cum exeunt de corpore, in hunc locum interim dimittuntur' (=what is this place? And he said to me: This is the land of promise [*terra repromissionis*]. Hast thou not yet heard that which is written: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth? The souls therefore of the righteous, when they are gone forth of the body are sent for the time into this place). This term 'terra repromissionis', together with 'Tír Tairngire', its Irish translation, became an important designation for this earthly paradise in medieval Irish literature from at least the *Navigatio* onwards; Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 55. However, note that even the *Navigatio* seems to conceive of its referent in a way that contrasts with the *Visio*. That is, it gives no indication that this *terra repromissionis* is the temporary dwelling place of the disembodied righteous; *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* §28; Carl Selmer, ed., *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts* (Dublin 1989), 80; John J. O'Meara, tr., *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Journey to the Promised Land* (Dublin 1978), 68-9: 'Ecce terram quam quesisti per multum tempus . . . Reuerter itaque ad terram natiuitatis tue, portans tecum de fructibus terre istius et de gemmis quantum potest tua nauicula capere . . . Post multa uero curricula temporum declarabitur ista terra successoribus uestris, quando Christianorum super uenerit persecutio' (=There before you lies the land which you have sought for a long time . . . Return, then, to the land of your birth, bringing with you some of the fruit of this land and as many precious stones as you can carry. . . After the passage of many times this land will become known to your successors, when the persecution of the Christians will have come).

<sup>162</sup> i.e. that is, transcendent of time itself, rather than simply capable of enduring the passage of time endlessly.

<sup>163</sup> Nicole Volmering, ed. and tr., 'Dá brón flatha nime': *A Semi-Diplomatic Edition, Translation and Verbal Analysis of Version LL fol. 280a-281a*, unpublished M.Phil dissertation (Trinity College, Dublin 2009); Georges Dottin, ed. and tr., 'Les deux chagrins du royaume du ciel', *Revue Celtique* 21 (1900), 349-387; Máire Herbert, tr., 'The Two Sorrows of the Kingdom of Heaven', in Máire Herbert and Martin McNamara, eds., *Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation* (Edinburgh 1989), 19-21.

<sup>164</sup> Kenney, *The Sources*, 738 note 614.

absolute bodily form - is portrayed as unresolved because, like the openendedness of the lives of Biblical prophets who have escaped death in their own way,<sup>165</sup> it will only be brought to a close at the end of the world. Of course, *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, in itself, can only be of limited relevance to the issue at hand, given that it was composed centuries later than *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* and *Scél asa mberar*. But then, it is not the earliest text in which we find such ideas.<sup>166</sup>

The verse version of the voyage-tale, *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* - dated by Thomas Clancy to the rule of the abbot Máel Brige mac Tornáin as abbot of both the Armagh and Columban churches from Kells (891-927),<sup>167</sup> but by Kevin Murray to ca.1000<sup>168</sup> - describes a voyage made by two clergymen associated with Colum Cille. The penultimate island they discover is a place ‘without barbarous sin, without transgression, without suffering, without blemish’,<sup>169</sup> which is inhabited by people who had been banished from Ireland, as well as Elijah and Enoch, all of whom await their martyrdom at in the battle against the Anitchrist at the end of the world.<sup>170</sup> Many of the

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<sup>165</sup> In the case of Enoch, this is based, in the first place, on Genesis 5:21-4, which is in turn expanded upon by Hebrews 11:5: ‘fide Enoch translatus est ne videret mortem et non inveniebatur quia transtulit illum Deus ante translationem enim testimonium habebat placuisse Deo’; in the case of Elijah, on 2 Kings 2:1-15. On such basis, they came to be associated with the ‘two witnesses’ of Rev.3:2-13: ‘3. et dabo duobus testibus meis et prophetabunt diebus mille ducentis sexaginta amicti saccos . . . 5. et si quis eos voluerit nocere ignis exiet de ore illorum et devorabit inimicos eorum et si quis voluerit eos laedere sic oportet eum occidi. 6. hii habent potestatem cludendi caelum ne pluat diebus prophetiae ipsorum et potestatem habent super aquas convertendi eas in sanguinem et percutere terram omni plaga quotienscumque voluerint 7. et cum finierint testimonium suum bestia quae ascendit de abyssio faciet adversus illos bellum et vincet eos et occidet illos . . . 11. et post dies tres et dimidium spiritus vitae a Deo intravit in eos et steterunt super pedes suos et timor magnus cecidit super eos qui viderunt eos 12. et audierunt vocem magnam de caelo dicentem illis ascendite huc et ascenderunt in caelum in nube et viderunt illos inimici eorum’. The germ of this association and subsequent elaboration of the theory may found in Ecclesiasticus 44:16: ‘Enoch placuit Deo et translatus est in paradiso ut det gentibus paenitentiam’, and 48:10 [concerning Elijah]: ‘qui receptus es in turbine ignis in curru equorum igneorum, / qui inscriptus es indiciis temporum et lenis iracundiam Domini conciliare cor patris ad filium et restituere tribus Iaco’.

<sup>166</sup> For a helpful overview of this and other theories of the interim state of the soul relative to an early Irish context, see Charles D. Wright, ‘Next-to-Last Things: The Interim State of Souls in Early Irish Literature’, in Carey *et al*, eds., *The End and Beyond*, 309-96.

<sup>167</sup> Thomas Owen Clancy, ‘Subversion at Sea: Structure, Style and Intent in the *Immrama*’, in Jonathan M. Wooding, ed., *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism* (Dublin 2000), 195-226, at 222, with a full account of the various versions of the text running from 212 to 225.

<sup>168</sup> This is solely on linguistic grounds. He leaves Clancy’s arguments regarding intellectual and political context unanswered; Kevin Murray, ‘The Voyaging of St Columba’s Clerics’, in Carey *et al*, eds., *The End and Beyond* II, 761-823, at 764-5.

<sup>169</sup> *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* §53; Murray, ed. and tr., ‘The Voyaging’, ed.794 and tr.795: ‘cen pecadh no-om cen chol cen cesadh cen gaile’.

<sup>170</sup> *Immram Snédgusa* §48-66; Murray, ed. and tr., ‘The Voyaging’, ed.792-6 and tr.793-7.



early Irish tales which speak of journeys to a sinless earthly paradise are hagiographical,<sup>171</sup> thus it is of no surprise here that our voyagers are clergy. But more significant for our purposes - given that Mongán is consistently understood to be a king, rather than clergy - is that the greater part of the people they find living in this sinless place awaiting the end of the world are Irish lay-people, namely sixty couples of the Fir Roiss. This is also, however, still a good deal later than the texts we are considering.

### Contemporary Examples

Most relevant to this aspect of our Mongán texts are two early Old Irish tales: *Echtrae Chonnlai*<sup>172</sup> and *Immram Brain*.<sup>173</sup> Like *Snédgus* and *Mac Riagla*, the eponymous heroes of these tales both travel to a sinless paradise<sup>174</sup> never to return to mortal lands. Enoch

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<sup>171</sup> For instance, *The Litany of Irish Pilgrim Saints* a.k.a. *The Litany of Irish Saints II*; Charles Plummer, ed. and tr., ‘Litany of Irish Saints II’, in Plummer, *Irish Litanies*, ed.68-76 and tr.69-77. It includes, in David Dumville’s words, ‘allusions to voyages and the Land of Promise in connexion with SS. Ailbe, Ibar, Munnu mac Tulchain, and Patrick’; Dumville, ‘*Echtrae* and *Immram*’, 79. It has most recently been dated by Thomas Clancy to c.900; Clancy, ‘Subversion at Sea’, 195. In this he affirms Mac Cana’s and Sanderlin’s earlier position; Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1980), 43, and 76-7; Sarah Sanderlin, ‘The Date and Provenance of the *Litany of Irish Saints-II* (*The Irish Litany of Pilgrim Saints*)’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75 C (1975), 251-62. Carey argues that the very idea of a paradise over the sea is ecclesiastical in origin; John Carey, ‘The Location of the Otherworld in Early Irish Tradition’, *Éigse* 19.1 (1982), 6–43 [repr. in Jonathan M. Wooding, ed., *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism* (Dublin 2000), 113-9]. In this he confirms Carney’s earlier comment; James Carney, ‘Review of *Navigatio sancti Brendani Abbatis*’, *Medium Aevum* 32 (1963), 37-44, at 40 note 9 [repr. in Wooding, ed., *The Otherworld Voyage*, 42-51, at 46 note 9]. See also the gloss of §251 in the version of the *Immacallam* found in Dublin, TCD 1319 (H.2.17), which says that the communities of Brendan, Cainnech and Munnu will settle the Land of Promise following the Apocalypse; John Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The End of the World’, 641, with further sources on 631 note 11.

<sup>172</sup> Kim McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlai*. McCone argues for an early eighth-century date; McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, 29: ‘*Echtrae Chonnlai* belongs at least as far back as the Old Irish period of the eighth and ninth centuries . . . The text conforms so faithfully to Old Irish usage along with the odd possible hint of archaism that the former century seems rather more likely than the latter and, indeed, there is no apparent linguist objection to a date as early as the first half of the eighth century’. Carey suggests that its composition took place in the late seventh century, along with the other texts of the ‘Midland Group’; Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships’, 83-89, esp.89: ‘I propose accordingly that the midland group dates from the reign of Fínnechta Fledach mac Dúchada, perhaps specifically from the years 688-9’. Carey, has since reiterated this argument; Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, 28.

<sup>173</sup> McCone concluded that *Immram Brain* was, like *Echtrae Chonnlai*, composed in the eighth-century, but that *Echtrae Chonnlai* was likely composed a little before it; McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, 47. Carey argues that *Echtrae Chonnlai* not only preexisted *Immram Brain*, but that *Echtrae Chonnlai* directly influenced it; Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships’, 77-86. McCone concurs with the general outline of this assessment, but adds that the influence may not have been entirely one way; McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, 115.

<sup>174</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlai* §3, 9 [=Carey §1, 9]; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlai*, ed.121-2 and tr.132-6, 169-72; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 28, 32 [text and translation here follows Carey]: “Dodeochad-sa,” for in ben, ‘a tírib beó, / áit inna bí bás nó peccad na imorbus / Domelom fleda búana can rithgnom. /

and Elijah do not appear in either instance<sup>175</sup> - the description of Eden in Genesis 1-3 replaces them as the dominant biblical reference point<sup>176</sup>- but Connlae's and Bran's avoidance of the normal human experience of death is also manifested as inseparable

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Cáincomrac leind cen debaid. / Síid mór i taam: / conid de suidib nonn ainmnigther aés side . // . . [I] n-all suide saides Condla / eter marbu duthainai, / oc idnaidiu éca uathmair. / Tochurethar bí bithbi. / At gérat do daínb Tethrach, / ardotchiat cach dia / i ndálaib t'athardai, / eter du gnathu inmaini' (=I come from lands of living folk, / said the woman, 'where there is no death nor sin nor transgression. / We consume everlasting feasts without labour. / There is concord among us without strife. / It is a great síid in which we are; / so that because of this we are called the *aes side* . . . Upon a cliff's edge is Connlae's seat / among the impermanent dead, / awaiting fearsome death. / Ever-living ones summon you. / You are the darling of the folk of Tethra / who see you every day). On the double-meaning of *síid* as both 'peace' and 'hollow hill' [i.e. otherworld-dwelling], see Carey, *A Single Ray*, 29; Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *síid*', 137-55 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 19-34]. *Immram Brain* §9-10, 44-5; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.34-5 and tr.40: '9. Ní gnáth ecoiniud ná mrath i mruig de(a)nda etargnath: ní-bí nach guth garc fri cró(a)is acht mad céul mbind friss-ben cló(a)is, / 10. Cen brón, cen [sic L] dub(a)e, cen bás, cen na galar [or] nach ngalar, cen indgas . / . . 44. Fil dún ó thossuch dú(i)le cen aíss, cen forbthe n-ú(i)re ní-frescam de mbeth anguss, nín-táraill int immarbuss' (=Not known is wailing or treachery / in the land of the well-known citadel; / there is no rough or harsh voice / save only sweet music that strikes the ear // 10. Without sorrow, without grief, without death, without any sickness, without any debility from wounds . // . . 44. We are from the beginning of creation / without age, without decay of freshness, / we do not expect lack of strength through decay, / the sin has not reached us // 45. Bad was the omen when the serpent came to // the father in this city, it perverted him, moreover, in this world / so that there came an ebbing which was not original). See also the similar idea in, *Tochmarc Étaíne* III.10; Osborn Bergin and R.I. Best, ed. and tr., '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', ed.180 and tr.181; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 149: 'Atchiam cach for cach leath, / 7 nícon aice nech; / teimel imorbuis Adaim / dodonarcheil ar araim' (=We see everyone on every side, / and no one sees us; it is the darkness of Adam's sin / which prevents our being counted).

<sup>175</sup> This is interesting in itself. One might be tempted to argue that this reflects the influence of a text like *Visio Pauli*, which does not place Enoch and Elijah in the earthy paradise. However, the idea that a person can, while in their pre-resurrection body, inhabit such a place seems as if it would most likely have emerged with reference to the early idea that Enoch and Elijah inhabit the earthly paradise bodily; see note 160 above. If so, the secondary idea would then seem to be appearing in the absence of the primary idea which serves (or served) as its basis: a remarkable situation. This issue merits further study on another occasion.

<sup>176</sup> As Carney has noted the giving of the apple in *Echtrae Chonnlae* is an inversion of the eating from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 3:16ff; Carney, 'The Deeper Level', 162-5; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 80-82. *Echtrae Chonnlae* §7-8; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlae*, ed.122 and tr.159-63: '7. Do:cachain iarum for suidiu inna mná co-nna:cóle nech guth inna mná 7 co-nna:haccae Connle in mnaí ind úair sin. In tan luide in ben ass re rochetul in druad, do:corastar ubull do Chonnlu. 8. Boí Connle iar sin co cenn mís cen díg cen biad, nabu fiu lesi nach tóare do thomailt acht a ubull. Na nní do:meled, nícon:dígbad ní dend ubull acht ba hóg-som beos. Gabais éolchaire iarom Connle immun deilb inna mná ad:condaic' (= 7. Then he intoned over the seat/location of the woman so that no one heard the woman's voice and so Connlae did not see the woman at that time. / When the woman went away [lit. out of it] in response to [lit. before] the druid's chanting she threw an apple to Conlae. / 8. Thereafter Connlae was without drink [and] without food until the end of a month and he did not deem any substance worth eating [lit. any sustenance was not worthwhile with him for consuming] save his apple. / . . . / Nothing that he at took anything away from the apple but it remained [was still] whole). *Immram Brain*'s comments on the Fall, imply that the sinless paradise it describes is, in fact, Eden; see *Immram Brain* §45; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.35 and tr.40, in note 174 above.

from answering a summons to live in such a place.<sup>177</sup> The inhabitants of this paradise are less explicitly awaiting the resurrection, and the Day of Judgement, than they are in the *Suidigud* or *Immram Snédgusa*. Nevertheless, the Day of Judgement remains the limit of the undiminishing youth and beauty promised to Connlae,<sup>178</sup> and the repeated prophecies of Christ in *Immram Brain*<sup>179</sup> involve the inhabitants of this paradise in a gesture toward future realities that are beyond their own considerable capacities. That is to say, the earthly paradise found in these texts is consistent with the later examples we considered above in not being confounded with the heaven of Christian expectation. In its ‘ever-living’ quality, its ‘permanence’<sup>180</sup> it is a typological anticipation of eternity,<sup>181</sup>

<sup>177</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9 [=Carey §1, 9]; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, ed.121, 122 and tr.132-6, 169-72; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 28 and 32. *Immram Brain* §9-10, 44-5; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.34-5 and tr.40.

<sup>178</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §5; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, ed.121 and tr.144: ‘Ma cho-tum:éitis, ní crínfa do delbae oítiu áilde / co bráth mbrindach’ (=If you come with me the you (and) beauty of your appearance (/form) will not perish until the Judgement of the Apocalypse) – following McCone’s translation in all but ‘bráth mbrindach’ in which I tend towards the more literal sense of Carney’s ‘Day of Doom’; James P. Carney, ‘The Deeper Level of Early Irish Literature’, *Capuchian Annual* (1969), 160-71, at 163 [=Angela Bourke *et al*, eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume IV Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions* (New York 2002), 268.

<sup>179</sup> *Immram Brain*, §26-8, 48; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.37-8, 41 and tr.50-1, 54: ‘26. Ticfa mórgéin .i. Crist. .i. ci.íar mbethaib nád-biä for forclethaib; mac mná nád-festar céle, gébaid flaith na n-ilmíle. / 27. Flaith cen tossach cen forcenn, do-rósat bith co coitchenn; dos-roirbe talam oculus muir, is mairc bías foa étuil. / 28. Is é do-rigni nime, cé (i)n-mair dia-mba findchride; glainfid slúagu tre linn nglan, is é ícfas for tedman . // . 48. Ticfa tessarcon ó(a)sal .i. Crist. ónd Ríg do-reä-rósat, recht find fo-glóisfe[a] muire, sech bid Diä, bid duine’ (=26. A great birth will come after ages / which will not be in high places; the son of a woman who will not know a mate, / He will assume the kingship of many thousands. / 27. A king without beginning without end; / He has created the whole world / His are land and sea / Woe to him who will be under his displeasure. // 28. It is he who has made the heavens, / Happy he whose heart will be pure; / He will purify hosts by means of a holy pool / it is He who will heal your sicknesses. // . . 48. A noble deliverance will come / from the King who has created the heavens, / the Lord will set in motion a just law, / He will be both God and man). Theological prophecy is an aspect of *Echtrae Chonnlaí* as well; see *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §11; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, ed.122 and tr.181: ‘Mo-tub:ticfa a recht. / Con:scéra brichtu druad tárdecho / ar bélaib demuín duib dolbthig’ (=His law will soon come to you. He will destroy the spells of the druids of base teaching in front of the black, bewitching Devil).

<sup>180</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlaí* §3, 9; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlaí*, ed.121, 122 and tr.144, 170: ‘Mulier respondit: “Do:dehad-sa a tírib béo . // . . 9. To-t:chuiretar bí bithí”’ (=The woman responded, ‘I have come from [the] lands of [the] living . / . . The everliving living invite you . . .’); *Immram Brain* §21; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., *Immram Brain*, ed.36 and tr.49: ‘is i nImchíuin co n-ó(a)gi do-fet bóane la há(i)ni’ (=Into faultless Imchíuin / come permanency and pleasure). See also the corresponding features of Carey’s text and translation in note 174 above.

<sup>181</sup> Among other things this means that something along the lines of the allegorical reading of Song of Songs is still on the table, as suggested by McCone in *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 81-2. Because the consummation of erotic desire, in either instance, appears to occur without sin in this paradise, it will be a more adequate image of the union of the soul and God, or Christ and the Church/Resurrected Cosmos than that which is found in fallen human marriages. The wellspring of subsequent allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs is Origen; *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*, esp. prologue, ii;

rather than eternity itself.<sup>182</sup>

It is of further significance that these tales also involve non-clerical mortals from Ireland coming to live a deathless life. Although we have also seen this in the *Suidigud* and *Immram Snédgusa*, the proximity of *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain* in time and context to *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* and *Scél asa mberar* make this a notable feature. But the most important detail in these stories relative to the matter at hand is their identification of the otherworld of the sagas with the sinless earthly paradise of Christian theology. This is a question of the beings whom they understand to be the natural inhabitants of this paradise. The exceptional people who leave the lands of mortality behind to become residents of this sinless paradise are, by definition, not aboriginal to it. The question of what sort of beings might belong there originally is not an issue that is addressed in the *Suidigud* or *Immram Snédgusa* or, to my knowledge, in the patristic and apocryphal speculation which informs them. Their concerns in this area tend to be more apocalyptic than cosmological. However, according to *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*, the native inhabitants of this earthly paradise are evidently the deathless people of the *síde*,<sup>183</sup> the same as are always getting mixed up elsewhere with the likes of Cú Chulainn, Conaire Mór and Finn mac Cumail in stories of the pre-

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PG 13, esp. col.71-2; R.P. Lawson, tr., *Origen: The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (London and Westminster, Maryland 1957), esp. 36-9. For this theme in medieval exegesis more generally; E.A. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Medieval Western Christianity* (Philadelphia 1990); Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Studies Series 156 (Kalamazoo 1995). For a good general characterisation of Origen's interpretation, see J. Christopher King, *Origen and the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture: The Bridegroom's Perfect Marriage Song* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>182</sup> *contra* Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', 8. He is right in claiming that otherworld temporality is qualitatively different from mortal time. This is everywhere evident, and beyond any serious dispute. However, he is wrong in seeing it as transcending temporality. These prophecies of future things that are made by the residents of the otherworld in these texts no longer make sense from the point of view of a state in which 'all time exists simultaneously in an eternal present'.

<sup>183</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *síd*', 149 [repr. in Boyd, ed., *Coire Sois*, 29]: '*síd* enjoys a special status as a term for the Otherworld: it is the normal generic term which can be used without further definition to denote the Otherworld . . . It is true that, when used of a particular localization of the Otherworld, *síd* seems almost invariably to refer to a mound or a tumulus . . . But when used less specifically in collocations such as *ben síde* it must mean simply "(the) Otherworld": thus, *ben síde* (or *ben a sídib*) "goddess, woman of the Otherworld," *fer síde* "god, man of the Otherworld," *áes síde* "Otherworld folk, gods"'.

Christian past.<sup>184</sup> In which case, the earthly paradise, in such a view, is not simply a remote place where a blissful few await the glory of matrydom at the end of the world, but an ever-present reality whose inhabitants are somehow aware, interested and involved in the secular hierarchies to which these notables belong, and was so, long before Christian penitents began to seek the company of Enoch or Elijah there.<sup>185</sup>

For our purposes, one of the most interesting examples of this awareness, interest and involvement is that, in *Immram Brain*, the paradisaic inhabitant who prophesies to Bran and his companions concerning the advent of Christ, and of Mongán after him, is himself the soon-to-be father of Mongán. Our hypothetical solution to the ambiguity as to whether Mongán is the sort of person who dies or not is now not looking like so much of a stab in the dark. However, it now requires reformulation. This is no longer a question of whether Mongán is thought to be an exemplary, but mortal human, who, by some special grace, has gone away, like Enoch, Elijah, like Fintan and the Fir Roiss, or even like Connlac and Bran, to live in eternal youth in the earthly paradise until the end of the world. It is a question of whether he is, in his very nature, thought to be one of the proper inhabitants of such a place, or at least more so than he is a proper inhabitant of mortal lands. According to the perspective of *Immram Brain*, Mongán's father is a

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<sup>184</sup> See, for example, *De Gabáil in t-Shída*, in Vernam Hull, ed. and tr., 'De Gabáil in t-Shída (Concerning the Seizure of the Fairy Mound)', *ZCP* 19 (1933), 53–58; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 145. *Tochmarc Étaíne* I.23, III.15–20; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., 'Tochmarc Étaíne', ed. 158–9 and tr. 184–9; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 153, 161–3. *TBDD* §3, 35; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 2, 10; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 167, 173. *Echtra Chorbmaic Uí Chuinn*; Vernam Hull, ed. and tr., 'Echtra Cormaic maic Airt', "The Adventure of Cormac mac Airt", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 64 (1949), 871–883; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 184–7. *Macgnímartha Find* §21–8; Kuno Meyer, ed., 'Macgnímartha Find', *Revue Celtique* 5 (1882), 195–204, at 202–4; Koch and Carey *et al.*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 194–201, at 198–201. Cf. *Tirechani collectanea de sancto Patricio* XXVI.1–3; Bieler, ed. and tr., 'Tírechán', in Bieler, *The Patrician Texts*, 122–65, ed. at 142 and tr. at 143: '1. Deinde autem uenit sanctus Patricius ad fontem qui dicitur Clebach in lateribus Crochan contra ortum solis ante ortum solis et sederunt iuxta fontem, 2. et ecce duae filiae regis Loiguirí Ethne alba et Fedelm rufa ad fontem more mulierum ad lauandum mane uenierunt et senodum sanctum episcoporum cum Patricio iuxta fontem inuenierunt. 2. Et quocumque essent aut quocumque forma aut quocumque plebe aut quocumque regione non cognouerunt, sed illos uiros side aut deorum terrenorum aut fantassiam estimauerunt' (=1. Then holy Patrick came to the well called Clébach, on the slopes of Cruachu to the east, before sunrise, and they sat beside the well, 2. and, behold, the two daughters of king Loíguire, fair-haired Ethne and red-haired Fedelm, came to the well, as women are wont to do, in the morning to wash, and they found the holy assembly of bishops with Patrick beside the well. 3. And they did not know whence they were or of what shape or from what people or from what region, but thought they were men of the other world or earth-gods or a phantom).

<sup>185</sup> Carey, *A Single Ray*, 35.

natural inhabitant of this sinless paradise. This being so, is it possible that, like all its native inhabitants, he is inherently deathless in a way that mere visitors to it, such as the hapless Nechtan, are not?<sup>186</sup> Which is to say, might the openendedness concerning Mongán's death exhibited by *Scél asa mberar* and one of the early interpretations of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* emerge as no more than the simple result of the *Immram*'s understanding of his lineage? There is, at any rate, nothing intrinsic to the portrayal of the Mongán of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* or *Scél asa mberar* which would be in tension with such an interpretation, something which could not be said for the two options we have just been considering. Given the intertextual connexions between these accounts of Mongán, this interpretation certainly seems to be best way of interpreting all the relevant details in a way that does not involve them in direct contradiction of each other. However, *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* allows us to confirm this with a much higher order of certainty.

### **Intertextual Considerations: *Cín Dromma Snechtai***

The significance of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* will be best appreciated if we first take a closer look at the interrelations of all these texts. *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán tales all appear to have been produced by the same seventh- or early eighth-century east-Ulster scriptorium.<sup>187</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* were not. However, they seem to have been among the texts on which the composition of *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán tales was based. Albeit, this picture includes one important proviso: Carey convincingly attributes the identification of the youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* as Mongán to the creative activity responsible for *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán texts.<sup>188</sup> These intertextual connexions suggest, in the first place, that those responsible for the composition of *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán texts were in a position to make use of any aspects of

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<sup>186</sup> *Immram Brain* §65; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., '*Immram Brain*', ed.45 and tr.58: 'Do-cuirethar úadaib in fer asin churuch. Amal con-ránic-side fri talmain inna hÉrenn, ba ló(i)thred fo chétóir amal bid i talam no-beth tresna hilchéta *blíadnae*' (=The man leaps from them out of the coracle. As soon as he touched the land of Ireland, he became ashes immediately as if he had been in the earth for hundreds of years).

<sup>187</sup> See pages 346-7 above, incl. notes 154-6.

<sup>188</sup> See especially White, *Compert Mongáin*, 35ff. Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, 27-41; *idem*, 'On the Interrelationships, 71-92, esp.82-3. But see also Murray, *The Early Finn Cycle*, 87; Proinsias Mac Cana, '*Fianaigecht* in the Pre-Norman Period', *Béalóideas* 54/55 (1987), 75-99, at 88.

*Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* that they may have seen as relevant to the ambiguities that make Mongán hard to place in the order of reality. In addition, since the *Immram* and the four Mongán stories seem to have been produced together, one should, until it is proven otherwise, expect that their respective portrayals of Mongán - including those of the *Immram* and *Scél asa mberar* - will mutually inform each other. Finally, one must also bear in mind that the physical proximity of all these texts to each other in the *Cín Dromma Snechta* would have encouraged subsequent readers to interpret them as interpreting each other.<sup>189</sup>

Most of this has been said already relative to the claim that *Immram Brain*'s portrayal of Mongán should be interpreted as being consonant with the portrayals of Mongán in the four early Mongán texts, and with the identification of the otherworldly youth in *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* as Mongán. Earlier this meant that the short life prophesied for Mongán in *Immram Brain* should be placed in the context of the long and possibly unlimited process of rebirths attributed to him by *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* and *Scél asa mberar*.<sup>190</sup> Just now, it has meant that the process of rebirths described by these later texts should be placed in the context of *Immram Brain*'s claim, that his father is an aboriginal - and thus deathless - inhabitant of the sinless earthly paradise in *Immram Brain*. However, *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* allows the necessity of both arguments to be demonstrated with much greater precision.

The youth which - *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* tells us - some identify as Mongán, has evidently come from the same sinless paradise as the mysterious woman who first appears to Bran, summoning him to travel there. We cannot conclude this based on any direct statements to this effect in the *Immacaldam* regarding the place he has come from,<sup>191</sup> but it seems to be an inescapable conclusion when we consider its linguistic and structural parallels with *Immram Brain*. Both texts use exactly the same phrase to

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<sup>189</sup> Note also that the four early Mongán tales always appear together (and in the same sequence) in their five extant manuscript contexts; White, *Compert Mongáin*, 36; Carey, 'On the Interrelationships', 73.

<sup>190</sup> See page 342-7. above.

<sup>191</sup> See, however, the Middle Irish poem beginning 'Coinne Mongain is Coluim caim', where Mongán is quoted as saying that he has come to Colum Cille from the 'Land of Promise' (*Tír Taingire*); Meyer, ed. and tr., 'The Voyage of Bran', 87.

describe the place from which the otherworld visitor has come. They come ‘from lands of strange things’ (*a tírib ingnad*).<sup>192</sup> Both protagonists, moreover, subsequently disappear in such a way that those present do not know where they went,<sup>193</sup> the latter being something which they also have in common with the otherworldly woman of *Echtrae Chonnlai*.<sup>194</sup>

This disappearance from sight is the key to understanding the significance of the parallels at issue here. For in *Immram*, *Echtrae* and *Immacaldam* alike, it is only the natural inhabitants of the earthly paradise that are capable of doing this. Moreover, the one mortal visitor who manages to return to mortal lands - Nechtan in the *Immram* - does so by means of moving through space in the manner of a normal physical body, and, having done so, immediately withers into ash upon arrival.<sup>195</sup> Whereas Mongán, prior to disappearing back where he came from, seems no worse for his experience of mortal lands. There are certainly reasons besides these for supposing that Mongán is understood to be more like the inhabitants of the earthly paradise than those of the

<sup>192</sup> *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, lines 20-21; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy’, ed.60 and tr.61: ‘Do-dechad-sa’ ol inde óclach, ‘a tírib ingnad, a tírib gnáth . . .’ (=‘I come,’ said the you, ‘from the lands of strange things, from lands of familiar things . . .’). *Immram Brain* §1; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., ‘*Immram Brain*’, ed.33 and tr.46. On this correspondence, among others, see Carey, ‘On Some Interrelationships’, 79: ‘Cóeca rand ro-gab in ben a tírib ingnad for lár in t(a)ige do Bran mac Febail’ (=It was fifty quatrains that the woman from the lands of strange things sang to Bran in the middle of the house [translation lightly modified]).

<sup>193</sup> *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, lines 26-7; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy’, ed.60 and tr.61: ‘Óro glé, co n-accatar talmaidiu do-celar erru ind óclach. Ní fetatar cia luid nó can to-luid’ (=When [the conversation] ended, they suddenly saw that the youth was hidden from them. They did not know whither he went, nor whence he came). *Immram Brain* §31; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., ‘*Immram Brain*’, ed.33 and tr.51: ‘Luid in ben úadaib íarom, a nnád-fetatar cia-luid, ocus birt a croib lee’ (=The woman went from them then, while they did not know where she went, and she took her branch with her).

<sup>194</sup> Although, in her case, this occurs in the context of the king’s *magus* attempting to drive her away, at the king’s request. Moreover, it also differs in that she was invisible to all but Connlae beforehand; *Echtrae Chonnlai* §4, 7; McCone, ed. and tr., *Echtrae Chonnlai*, ed.136, 157-159 and tr.137, 159-60: ‘4. “Cía ad-gláiter”, ol Conn fria macc, óir ni-acca nech in mnaí acht Conle a óenur . / . . 7. Do-cehuin íarom in druí forsin n-guth inna mná cona cóale nech guth inna mná ocus cona-accaí Conle in mnaí ind óir sin. In tan lude in ben ass re rochetul in druid, do-corastar ubull do Chonlu’ (=4. ‘Who are you talking to?’ said Conn of the Hundred Battles. No one saw the woman but Connlae alone . / . . 7. Then he [the magus/druid] intoned over the seat/location of the woman so that no one heard the woman’s voice and so that Connlae did not see the woman at that time. When the woman went away [lit. out of it] in response to [lit. before] the druid’s chanting she threw an apple to Connlae).

<sup>195</sup> *Immram Brain* §63-5, esp.65; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., ‘*Immram Brain*’, ed.45 and tr.58: ‘Do-cuirethar úadaib in fer asin churuch. Amal con- ránic-side fri talmáin inna hÉrenn, ba ló(i)thred fo chétóir amal bid i talam no-beth tresna hilchéta *blíadnae*’ (=The man leaps from them out of the coracle. As soon as he touched the land of Ireland, he became ashes immediately as if he had been on earth for hundreds of years).



mortal world. Among them, there is the fact that Mongán is seen by Colum Cille as an authoritative and fitting interlocutor for speech of ‘earthly and heavenly mysteries’ that are best to be kept from mortals.<sup>196</sup> But given what we know about the interrelationships shared by this text with *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*, it is his disappearance which is the most decisive signal that, whatever ambiguities remain, he is fundamentally one of the *aes síde* from its perspective.

That said, it does not seem to be from the original perspective of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* that the otherworldly youth in it was first identified with Mongán. Insofar as Carey is right (and I know no reason to suggest otherwise) that this identification is a secondary feature which reflects the influence of the creative process that produced *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán stories,<sup>197</sup> it would indicate that their authors were already thinking of Mongán beforehand as a person who was more fundamentally a native of the earthly paradise, where the undying people of his father lived, than the human world, where he was the king of Dál nAriade. Were this not the case, it would have been impossible for them to recognize Mongán in the story of a youth who clearly belongs to that other world. As such, the reason that Mongán’s beginning and end are unclear in *Scél asa mberar* is simply that the inhabitants of the earthly paradise have been present from the creation and will remain unaging until the end of the world. This also means that the ‘hundred years in a fair kingdom’ which the Mannanán mac Lir of the *Immram* prophesies that Mongán will have following the death of his coming embodiment is not, as Carney would have it, an eternity in heaven,<sup>198</sup> but a long yet finite interval in the earthly paradise to which he most truly belongs on this side of the Judgement. All of this, in turn, makes the ambiguity regarding his true embodiment,

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<sup>196</sup> Carey, ed. and tr., ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy’, ed.60 and tr.61: ‘At-raig Colum Cille, oca ndécsin a muintire, leis for leith dia acaldaim 7 dia iarfaigid na rún nemdae 7 talmandae . . . In tain mboie a muintir oca guidi Choluim Chille ara foillsiged dóib ní don chobrunn, as-bert Colum Cille friu nád coimnacuir cid oenbréthir do epirt do neuch ro ráided fris, ocus as-bert ba móu do les do doinib a nemaisnéis dóib’ (=Looking toward his followers, Colum Cille arises and went aside with him, to speak with him and to ask him about the heavenly and earthly mysteries . . . When Colum Cille’s followers were asking him to reveal to them something of the conversation (?), Colum Cille told them that he could not tell them even a single word of anything that he had been told; and he said that it was better for mortals not to be informed of it’.

<sup>197</sup> Carey, ‘On the Interrelationships’, 82-3; *idem*, ‘The Lough Foyle Colloquy’, 62.

<sup>198</sup> See note 158 above.

providing he has one, a bit of a non-issue. If he is not going to die in any final way before the end of the world, any questions regarding the nature of his resurrected body are, at the least, suspended almost indefinitely. But then, as discussed above, it is not clear that these concerns would even apply to the, in some sense, ‘divine’ inhabitants of the earthly paradise. It is at least possible that a process of ongoing reemodiment is conceived as natural for these ever-living beings, given how frequently they are portrayed as undergoing such a process. *Tochmarc Étaíne*, one of the texts which would best seem to support such a conclusion, was, after all, also included in the *Cín Dromma Snechta*, together with these stories of Mongán.

But if the respective authors of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, *Immram Brain* and the four early Mongán tales understand him to be one of the ever-living people of the sinless earthly paradise, rather than a properly mortal inhabitant of this world, it is certainly not a priority for them to state this unambiguously. We have seen that it is everywhere implied, but nowhere directly claimed. In this they are in stark contrast to the later stories that conciliate Jerome’s Origen and Augustine on the question of humans undergoing a process of serial embodiments. In the accounts of Tuán mac Cairell, Fintan mac Bóchra and Lí Ban, the pains taken to define their remobodiments in a way that anticipates any theological objections (especially those arising from eschatological and cosmological concerns) are much more pronounced than the comparable accounts of Mongán’s reemodiments. What then is most preoccupying about Mongán for these texts if the definition of his place in Christian eschatology and cosmology is not?

### **Mongán as an Apology for Natural Law?**

This becomes somewhat more evident when we consider the contrast of their ideological significance to that of most texts which portray someone who has undergone serial embodiments meeting with a saint. We have briefly touched in this in Chapter 4 above. The restoration of their human form and ultimate death, in the Christian Era, serves to do more than satisfy any eschatological concerns about the resurrection body. It also confines the body of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge that they exhibit and represent to the past. They have passed on the knowledge which has been enabled by

their miraculously enabled longevity to the saints who, in turn, have passed it on to scholarship. This is, on the one hand, a powerful affirmation of the body of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge which is attributed to them, some of the relevant texts even going so far as to claim that all subsequent historical and genealogical scholarship in Ireland is based on this saintly mediation of their knowledge.<sup>199</sup> However, on the other, it would appear to undermine, or at least erode any perceived need for further extra-ecclesiastical knowledge in the present, especially insofar as it pertains to the recovery of lost history. If all subsequent historical and genealogical knowledge depends on the saintly mediation of this knowledge, this does not, for instance, seem to leave much room for the recovery of lost history through the inspiration of poets, such as we have seen attested in *Sanas Cormaic*, and other subsequent texts.<sup>200</sup> In short, such accounts seem to sit better with attempts to minimize the ongoing importance of the inspired knowledge associated with the secular hierarchies of poets and rulers than attempts to emphasize it, even though there is no reason they could not be brought into agreement with the latter, a possibility which is realised in *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*<sup>201</sup> and the *Acallam*,<sup>202</sup> among other places.

Our Mongán texts are another matter. The representative of extra-ecclesiastical knowledge that they describe persists in living and will likely live until the end of the world. Moreover, in all instances, Mongán's knowledge is not limited to that of a long-lived multi-formed observer, but includes an understanding of things that are not available to the normal operation of human thought in any embodiment. In *Immacaldam Choluim Chille*, his knowledge extends, as we have seen, to 'heavenly and earthly mysteries' that are beyond what is generally advisable for mortals.<sup>203</sup> *Immram Brain* likewise has him relating 'mysteries in the course of his knowledge'.<sup>204</sup> *Scél asa mberar* does not claim so much, but nevertheless portrays him as having confident and

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<sup>199</sup> *STMC*, lines 79-80; Carey, ed., 'Scél Tuáin', 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 225; see also Chapter 4, note 267.

<sup>200</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 216-7, incl. notes 201, 203.

<sup>201</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 109-11.

<sup>202</sup> See Chapter 4, note 270.

<sup>203</sup> See note 196 above.

<sup>204</sup> *Immram Brain* §52; Mac Mathuna, ed., and tr., 'Immram Brain', ed.42 and tr.55: 'ad-fí rúna ri[u]th ecn(a)i?'.

accurate foreknowledge of the approach of Cáilte's assistance.<sup>205</sup> In short, he is portrayed as exhibiting the knowledge and prophetic power which we have come to expect of those who preside at the pinnacle of the secular hierarchies whom the Holy Spirit is thought to have inspired with the law of nature.

Insofar as his human embodiment is concerned, he is certainly the right sort of person to be enjoying such inspiration, seeing as he is, like Cormac mac Airt (and Cú Chulainn, in some manner of speaking),<sup>206</sup> taken to be a king who is also a master of poetry.<sup>207</sup> As such, his correction of his poet, Forgoll, about a point of history, and his subsequent neutralization of the threat posed by him, do not seem as if they should be read as anti-poetic polemic.<sup>208</sup> Among other things, Mongán seems to take Forgoll's threat of satire, and of making the land barren through his chanting, quite seriously. If anything, *Scél asa mberar* seems to be an example of the contention, already familiar to us from *Tecosca Cormaic*, among other works, that it is the kingly rather than the poetic role which preeminently possesses the arts and the natural revelation by which they operate.<sup>209</sup> This would mean that the poet is not wrong in being poetic so much as in not showing due deference the preeminence of royal judgement over his and every art.<sup>210</sup>

The identification of the youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* as Mongán is particularly significant for our consideration of these differences. For of the relevant texts, it is this text alone that includes the familiar trope of the saint who is interested in hearing, and does hear, the extra-ecclesiastical knowledge of the long-lived person who

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<sup>205</sup> *Scél asa mberar* §7; White, ed. and tr., *Compert Mongáin*, ed.73 and tr.80.

<sup>206</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 156-60.

<sup>207</sup> See White's discussion and presentation of the evidence (in these early Mongán-tales and elsewhere) that illustrates Mongán's association with *filid*, and yet his superiority to them; White, *Compert Mongán*, 51-3. However, her tentative conclusion that this may reflect an anti-*filid* perspective seems not to follow from this, especially as Mongán seems to be idealised precisely for his superlative possession of the qualities associated with them.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Mac Cana, 'Mongán mac Fiachnaí and *Immram Bráin*', *Ériu* 23 (1972), 102-42, at 134; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 201.

<sup>209</sup> Chapter 2, pages 156-7; for some further examples, see Chapter 2, pages 147-53.

<sup>210</sup> Thus, agreeing in every respect with White's following statement, but not the conclusions she derived from it following Mac Cana and McCone; White, *Compert Mongán*, 53: 'What all this would seem to suggest is that Mongán (much like Tuán and Fergus) is a central player in the validation of the earliest Irish narrative writing. While represented as superior in knowledge and wisdom to the greatest poet(s) in Ireland he is, at the same time, portrayed as being connected with the church in his associations with Colum Cille and in the parallels drawn between his birth and Christ'.

has been undergoing reembodiments, in this case, seemingly inspired extra-ecclesiastical knowledge. However, here, the saint has by no means been exhaustive in his mediation of the extra-ecclesiastical knowledge to the ecclesiastical hierarchies. In the first place, the saint does not and will not convey this knowledge to his monks because he deems such knowledge unfitting for mortals; in the second, there is no indication that future meetings, either with him, or with some other saint may not occur in the future. In which case, the identification of the youth of *Immacaldam Choluim Chille* with Mongán, among other things, highlights the ongoing need in the Christian Era for the particular way that the Holy Spirit is taken to be revealed to secular hierarchies in contrast to the ecclesiastical. Just as Mongán himself shows no sign of dying, or of his knowledge ever being fully grasped by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, those who have a comparable proficiency in these modes of inspiration will always be necessary. For the saints are the only ones besides them who may fully partake of its results without risk to themselves.

This does not mean then, as we addressed earlier on, that these texts are therefore only an allegory of political theology. It would seem closer to the mark to interpret this as an example of the tendency of early Irish literature to use the figures of historiography as the means of working out abstract concepts, rather than formal dialectic. The history must be what it is because reality as experienced in the present, personally and institutionally, must be an intelligible result of it. But beyond history, part of what is so fascinating here is the cosmology that evidently becomes necessary relative to the extra-ecclesiastical revelation that is proper to the secular hierarchies. Insofar as Mongán may be taken to be emblematic of this secular form of prophecy, the earthly paradise described by certain patristic and apocryphal writings seems, in some fashion, to be the origin of the knowledge that is specific to it, and is so due to the awareness, interest and at least periodic involvement that its everliving inhabitants, the gods of the sagas have in the mortal world. Or at least, that is what appears to be the case. We shall address this possibility less impressionistically in a moment.

### ***Metamorphosis: A Proviso***

Now having traced the outline of this important earlier alternative to the texts which conciliate the *metempsychosis* of Jerome's Origen with Augustine's critique of it, one more significant issue remains regarding the examples of serial embodiment in early Irish literature. It is doubtful that all, or even the majority, of the examples of serial reembodiment which have sometimes been cited as evidence that a doctrine of *metempsychosis* existed in medieval Ireland are best understood as descriptions of *metempsychosis*.<sup>211</sup> Many of them seem, rather, to be examples of *metamorphosis*, comparable to what we might find in Ovid. Even when someone is said to be physically born into a new form, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two possibilities when this birth is, for example, the result of their having been swallowed in the form of an insect by the resultant mother.<sup>212</sup> Certainly most instances of ever-living or mortal people transforming into animals, as situations in which neither death nor birth appear relevant to the transformation, seem to conform better to the concept of *metamorphosis* than *metempsychosis*.

The question of theological precedent for *metamorphosis* is, thankfully, a much simpler matter than *metempsychosis*. For this we must turn again to Isidore's *Etymologiae*. Isidore's position on *metamorphosis* there is fairly unambiguous. He regards certain bodily forms to be impossible and to be invented only to explain the causes of things

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<sup>211</sup> Christian-J. Guyonvarc'h and Françoise Le Roux, *Les Druides* (Rennes 2005), 271. Alfred Nutt seems to have been the first to make a comparable distinction; Nutt, 'The Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth', 92-6.

<sup>212</sup> e.g. *Tochmarc Étaíne* I.22; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., '*Tochmarc Étaíne*', ed.156, tr.157: 'conda timart athach gaithi ar troige 7 lobrai 7 conda chorastar for cleithe thighe la hUlltu i mbatar ic ól, co torchair issin n-airdigh n-óir ro baí for laim mna Édair in cathmiled o Inbér Chichmaine a coiced Concobuir, condo sloicsidhe lassin dig bai isin lestur coimperta di suide foa broind combo hingen iar tain' (=The blast of wind drove her along in misery and weakness until she alit on the roof-tree of a house in Ulster where folk were drinking, and she fell into the golden beaker that was before the wife of Étar the champion from Inber Cíchmaine, in the province of Conchobar, so that she swallowed her with the liquid that was in the beaker, and in this wise she was conceived in her womb and became afterwards her daughter). *De Chophur in Dá Muccida* [LL version]; Windisch, ed., '*De Chophur in Dá Muccida*', in Windisch and Stokes, eds., *Irish Texts* III.1, 245; Nutt, tr., 'The Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth', 66: 'Dofuittet díblinaib assind áer comtar di dorbbi. Teit indala n-ái i topur Glaisse Cruind i Cualngiu, conda essib bó Dáiri mac Fiachnai. Ocus teit alaile i n-uarán n-Garad la Connachta conda ib bó Medba 7 Aillella conid díb ro chinset in da tharb, in Finnbennach Aí 7 in Dub Cualngi' (=They dropped down from the air and were two worms. One of them went into the well of Glass Cruind in Cualgne, where a cow of Dáire mac Fiachnai drank it up; and the other went into the well of Garad in Connauhgt, where a cow of Medb and Ailill's drank it, so that from them sprang two bulls, The Whitehorn Ai and the Dun of Cualgne).

allegorically. Among these he lists composite creatures from Classical myth.<sup>213</sup> Yet he believes *metamorphosis* to be a real phenomenon that can be brought about, possibly as a result of misdeeds, certainly by magic, or due, on Ovid's authority, to natural processes, such as the decomposition of animal flesh. Of particular significance for medieval Irish literature is his uncritical description of the magical transformations of Ulysses' companions into beasts, and of certain Acadians into wolves, and, contrary to Augustine,<sup>214</sup> his insistence that the transformation of Diomedes' companions into birds is proven by historical evidence.<sup>215</sup> The manifold bird-transformations of medieval Irish literature begin to be seen in a different light.

In contrast to Isidore, Augustine, in *De civitate Dei*, sees human-to-animal *metamorphoses* as something manifest to the senses or imagination by demonic agency, but which does not actually happen. However, he is careful not to limit the possibility

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<sup>213</sup> e.g. Cerebrus, the Chimera, the Hydra, the Sirens, and the Gorgons; *Etymologiae* XI.iii.28; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 245: 'Dicuntur autem et alia hominum fabulosa portenta, quae non sunt, sed ficta in causis rerum interpretantur . . .' (=Other fabulous human monstrosities are told of, which do not exist but are concocted to interpret the causes of things . . .).

<sup>214</sup> *DCD* XVIII.xviii; Dombart, *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 608-10; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 783: 'Diomedes autem uolucres, quando quidem genus earum per successionem propaginis durare perhibetur, non mutatis hominibus factas, sed subtractis credo fuisse suppositas' (=But the birds of Diomedes are said to preserve their species through successive generations, and therefore I do not believe that they came into being by the transformation of men who had been spirited away).

<sup>215</sup> *Etymologiae* XI.iv.1-3; Lindsay, ed., *Etymologiarum*; Barney *et al*, tr., *The Etymologies*, 26: 'De transformatis. Scribuntur autem et quaedam monstruosae hominum transformationes et commutationes in bestiis, sicut de illa maga famosissima Circe, quae socios quoque Ulixidis mutasse fertur in bestias: et de Arcadibus, qui sorte ducti transnatabant quoddam stagnum atque ibi convertebantur in lupos. Nam et Diomedis socios in volucres fuisse conversos non fabuloso mendacio, sed historica adfirmatione confirmant. Sed et quidam adserunt Strigas ex hominibus fieri. Ad multa enim latrocinia figurae sceleratorum mutantur, et sive magicis cantibus, sive herbarum veneficio totis corporibus in feras transeunt. Siquidem et per naturam pleraque mutationem recipiunt, et corrupta in diversas species transformantur; sicut de vitulorum carnibus putridis apes, sicut de equis scarabaei, de mulis locustae, de cancris scorpiones. Ovidius (*Metam.* 15, 369): Concava litorei si demas brachia cancri, scorpio exhibit, caudaque minabitur unca'. (=On Metamorphoses. Certain monstrous metamorphoses and changes of humans into beasts are recounted, like that of the most infamous *magus* Circe, who is taken to have transformed the companions of Ulysses into beasts, and that of the Arcadians who, when [their] lot was drawn, would swim across a certain lake and there be converted into wolves. That the companions of Diomedes were converted into birds is not a fabulous fiction, but [people] demonstrate this by means of historical confirmation. And some claim that witches were transformed from humans. For with regard to many types of outrages, the form of the wicked is changed and, either by means of magic incantations, or poisonous herbs, they wholly metamorphosize into wild animals. Indeed, many things naturally undergo mutation and, when they decay, are transformed into different species –for instance, bees, out of the rotted flesh of calves, or beetles from horses, locusts from mules, scorpions from crabs. [Thus] Ovid (*Met.* 15.369): If you take the curved arms from a crab of the shore, a scorpion will march out and threaten with its hooked tail – translation lightly modified).

that God may effect such a transformation for his own purposes.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, something like *Aided Echach meic Máireda*'s account of God's miraculous transformation of Lí Ban into the form of a salmon - so that her life is prolonged until she is baptised by St. Comgall<sup>217</sup> - is not even so controversial as siding with Isidore against St. Augustine.<sup>218</sup> For, as a divine miracle, it falls even within the narrow limits that Augustine allowed for actual *metamorphosis*.

What this means for the *metamorphoses* of otherworldly persons, who generally seem to undergo this process without explicit divine intervention, is more complex. Either the Augustinian idea that devils may make *metamorphosis* seem to occur, or the Isidorean notion that this can *actually* be brought about through magic, offered medieval Irish writers with a powerful basis for remythologizing the stories of their *metamorphoses* according to categories that were more standard throughout Latin Christendom. Yet these applications of Augustine and Isidore would not necessarily be employed by those medieval Irish writers for whom otherworldly beings evidently enjoyed a different ontological status altogether. Where an author portrays them as the ever-living inhabitants of the earthly paradise, the potential for such *metamorphoses* (just as for *metempsychosis*) often seems to be conceived of as innate.<sup>219</sup> Be that as it may, apart from demonic illusion, none of these possibilities are mutually exclusive. For instance, in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Étaín, one of the *aes síde*, is forcibly metamorphosised into the

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<sup>216</sup> DCD XVIII.xviii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 608-10; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 782: 'Haec uel falsa sunt uel tam inusitata, ut merito non credantur. Firmissime tamen credendum est omnipotentem Deum posse omnia facere quae uoluerit, siue uindicando siue praestando, nec daemones aliquid operari secundum naturae suae potentiam. Nec sane daemones naturas creant, si aliquid tale faciunt, de qualibus factis ista uertitur quaestio; sed specie tenus, quae a uero Deo sunt creata, commutant, ut uideantur esse quod non sunt.' (=Stories of this kind [i.e. of human-to-animal *metamorphoses*] are either untrue or at least so extraordinary that we are justified in withholding credence. And in spirit of them we must believe with complete conviction that omnipotent God can do anything he pleases, by way of either punishing or helping, while demons can effect nothing in virtue of any power belonging to their nature. Demons do not, of course, create natures, if they accomplish any such thing as the kind of things toward which this examination is turned. But they alter (only) to the extent of appearance what God has truly created, so that they seem to be what they are not). See also XXI.viii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* I, 770-74; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 982: 'Sicut ergo non fuit impossibile Deo, quas uoluit instituire, sic ei non est impossibile, in quidquid uoluerit, quas instituit, mutare naturas' (=So, just as it was not impossible for God to set in being natures according to his will, so it is afterwards not impossible for him to change those natures which he has set in being, in whatever way he chooses).

<sup>217</sup> See note 125 above.

<sup>218</sup> See notes 214-5 above.

<sup>219</sup> See examples on pages 336-8 above.



form of a puddle of water by the magic of Fuamnach, but then by natural processes metamorphosises from a puddle into a worm and thence into a fly.<sup>220</sup> Still later she and Midir metamorphosise into swans spontaneously, but without any evident external coercion. If there is a specific magical act, or natural process involved, it is not described.<sup>221</sup>

Yet despite the applicability of the concept of *metamorphosis* to many of the relevant examples, it is certainly not relevant to all. Even in the same account, it is often not a simple question of one or the other. Particularly in the case of Mongán, the distinction between *metamorphosis* and *metempsychosis* provides a helpful way of distinguishing between his various embodiments. When it is revealed that he was Finn,<sup>222</sup> or when he says of himself that ‘woman have cried out’ because of him, ‘although father and mother do not know what they bear’,<sup>223</sup> these are clearly examples of *metempsychosis*. But when Manannán prophecies that ‘he will be in the shape of every animal’ in the context of a life he in which he will be born at one point and die fifty years later,<sup>224</sup> this is clearly an example of *metamorphosis*.

Other examples, like the Tuán of *Scél Tuán meic Cairell*, seem to exhibit reembodiments that are located at different points in a continuum between the poles of *metempsychosis* and *metamorphosis*, rather than reembodiments that may be simply identified with one pole or another. Most of his reembodiments are preceded by the old age and decrepitude of his current embodiment.<sup>225</sup> If new embodiments become available only when the previous one fails, this would seem to tend towards *metempsychosis*. Yet there is no clear moment of death in most of these instances, which suggests that they are, in spite of this, closer to *metamorphosis*. There is, however, an exception. When he goes from the form of a fish to the form of a man, he is cooked and eaten as a prelude to becoming a developing baby in the womb of the

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<sup>220</sup> *Tochmarc Étaíne* I.16; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., ‘*Tochmarc Étaíne*’, ed.152 and tr.153.

<sup>221</sup> *Tochmarc Étaíne* III.15; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., ‘*Tochmarc Étaíne*’, ed.184 and tr.185.

<sup>222</sup> See pages 342-3 above.

<sup>223</sup> See note 117 above.

<sup>224</sup> See page 344 above.

<sup>225</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 269-72.

eater.<sup>226</sup> In least this one instance then, something more like *metempsychosis* is at play, since the movement from one embodiment to the other involves the death of the former body. Still, it cannot be said to be *metempsychosis* without qualification, as there seems to be unbroken continuity between the flesh of the fish and his new human flesh, with the ingestion of the one seeming in some way to be the cause of the other. In such cases, both terms are useful in interpreting what is going on in the text, but neither is realised in a form that allows it to be in perfect distinction from the other.

Nevertheless, as relevant as both these terms are to a significant amount of the earlier literature, it is not until the eleventh century that we find a text which formally contrasts these concepts. The Middle Irish treatise, *Scéla na Esérgi*,<sup>227</sup> includes a distinction between the *metaformatio* occurring in werewolves, and *revolutio*, which is defined as ‘the returning of the soul into different bodies’,<sup>228</sup> both of which are defined in contrast to the resurrection of Christian expectation. This does not, on its own, prove that so crisp a distinction, or a distinction on these exact lines, was present at any point prior, or was widespread even at the time. We need only turn to *De mirabilibus Hibernie*<sup>229</sup> to

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<sup>226</sup> *STMC*, lines 69-71; Carey, ed. and tr., ‘*Scél Tuáin*’, 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 225.

<sup>227</sup> *Scéla na Esérgi* is found only in the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century manuscript, LU; Boyle, ‘Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland’, 216. On linguistic grounds, it is unlikely to be much older than its manuscript context; Whitley Stokes, ‘Tidings of the Resurrection’, *Revue Celtique* 25 (1904), 230-259, at 230.

<sup>228</sup> *Scéla na Esérgi* §33; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘Tidings of the Resurrection’, ed.250 and tr.251: ‘Ind esergi coitche[n]n tra bias tall il-lo brátha, ní hinund 7 ind esergi dianid ainm isind augtarta praestrigia .i. esergi fuathaigthe, amal in pitóndacht. Nó ní inund 7 ind esergi dianid ainm reuolutio .i. tathchor na hanma i corpaib ecsamlaib iar ndesmirecht na tathcorthe. Nó ind esérge dianid ainm metaformatio .i. tarmchrutad, iar ndesmirecht na conricht. Nó ní inu[n]d 7 ind esérge díanid ainm subductio .i. fothudchestu .i. amal bíte lucht ind remeca. Nó ind esérge dianid ainm suscitatio .i. todúscud marb tria mírbail, iar ndesmirecht Lazáir’ (=Now the general Resurrection which shall be beyond on the Day of Judgement is not the same as the resurrection which in the authority is called Praestrigia, that is, an appositional resurrection, like the pythonism. Nor is it the same as they resurrection call Reuolutio, that is, the transmigration of the soul into various bodies, after the example of transmigrated person. Nor the resurrection called Metaformatio, that is, transfiguration, after the example of werewolves. Nor is it the same resurrection called Subductio, that is subduction, as in the case of the prematurely dead. Nor the resurrection called Suscitatio, that is, the awakening of the dead by a miracle, after the example of Lazarus); for this aspect of *Scéla na Esérgi* in relation to *De mirabilibus Hibernie*, see Elizabeth Boyle, ‘On the Wonders of Ireland: Translation and Adaption’, in Boyle and Hayden, eds., *Authorities and Adaptations*, 233-62, at 250-1; for a similar argument, Carey, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 64.

<sup>229</sup> For the late twelfth-century as the *terminus ante quem* of *De mirabilibus*, see Boyle, ‘On the Wonders of Ireland’, 234: ‘he does not observe a strict theological divide between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ marvels. This is in keeping with what we know with any certainty regarding the date of the text, namely that its earliest manuscript witness pre-dates the end of the twelfth century, which is when the ontological

see how fraught such a distinction can become. It reports that the werewolves of Ossory left their human bodies temporarily behind in order to become wolves, albeit with some sort of connexion preserved between these bodies.<sup>230</sup> Yet *Scéla na Esérgi* provides werewolves as an example of the *metamorphosis* of a body, not of movement from one body to another.<sup>231</sup> However, since similar distinctions seem to have been available in the ecclesiastical sources circulating in Ireland from at least the eighth century, and embodied in its subsequent literature from the *Cín Dromma Snechta* onwards, it is certainly suggestive that both categories are deemed necessary by the Middle Irish author of the treatise.<sup>232</sup> Whatever else may be said, the relevance of such categories to its author evidently does not emerge as a mere theological aberration that persists in spite of hundreds of years of Irish Christianity, but as a natural expression of one of the distinctive ways that Christian theology developed in Ireland through the ongoing reinterpretation of those aspects of pre-Christian Irish belief which had been, or been made, intelligible through a similarly ongoing conciliation of ecclesiastical authorities.

Different examples will, of course, demonstrate all kinds of different shades of understanding between the poles of *metempsychosis* and *metamorphosis*, between Augustine on one hand and a Jerome's darkest dreams of Origen on the other, between

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distinction between *mirabilia* and *miracula* began to be defined clearly'. That said, we have seen throughout this study that such a distinction is certainly not without early Irish anticipations.

<sup>230</sup> *De mirabilibus Hibernie*, XVI.96-109; Aubrey Gwynn, ed. and tr., '*Versus santi Patricii episcopi de mirabilibus Hibernie*', in his *The Writings of Bishop Patrick 1074-84* (Dublin 2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), ed.56-70, at 62 and tr.57-71, at 63: 'Sunt homines quidam Scottorum gentis habentes / Miram naturam maiorum ab origine ductam, / Qua cito quando uolunt ipsos se uertere possunt / Nequiter in formas lacerantum dente luporum. / Unde uidentur oues occidere sepe gementes: / Sed cum clamor eos hominum seu cursus eorum / Fustibus aut armis terret, fugiendo recurrunt. / Cum tamen hec faciunt, sua corpora uera relinquunt / Atque suis mandant ne quisquam mouerit illa. / Si sic eueniat, nec ad illa redire ualebunt. / Si quid eos ledat, penetrant si uulnera queque, / Uere in corporibus semper cernuntur eorum. / Sic caro cruda herens in ueri corporis ore / Cernitur a sociis: quod nos miramur et omnes' (=There are some men of the Scottish race / who have this wondrous nature from ancestry and birth: / Whensoever they will, they can speedily turn themselves / Into the form of wolves and rend flesh with wicked teeth: / Often they are seen slaying sheep that moan in pain. / But when men raise the hue and cry, / Or scare them with staves and swords, they take flight like true wolves. / But whilst they act thus, they leave their true bodies / And give orders to their women not to move them / If this happens, they can no longer return to them. If any man harm them or any wound pierce their flesh, / The wounds can be plainly seen in their own bodies: / Thus their companions can see the raw flesh in the jaws / Of their true body: and we all wonder at the sight). This seems to amount to a direct reinterpretation Augustine's *DCD* XVIII.18, where such transformations are seen as strictly illusory; Dombart *et al*, eds., *De civitate Dei* II, 608-10; Bettenson, tr., *City of God*, 783.

<sup>231</sup> See note 228 above.

<sup>232</sup> Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 64.

the sinless earthly paradise, and the world of mortals. Some of these will be impossible to interpret with any precision until more has been learned about how the otherworld of the Irish sagas features as a part of these equations. It is hoped, however, by having completed this preliminary assessment of some of the most central evidence, that the real work required to tease out the particulars of the conversation outlined may be able to begin in earnest. Much of this will rely on a fuller understanding of the way that Origen, and especially the image of Origen, is being used in medieval Ireland and in early medieval Christendom as a whole. But, in the meantime, we may, it seems, take comfort from Jerome's example, that sometimes even the worst of scholarly mistakes may give rise to fascinating intellectual developments.

## CHAPTER SIX – THE GODS OF THE SAGAS AS THE MEDIATORS OF NATURE

### Introduction

We are left now with the long-deferred problem of what to make of the gods of early Irish literature. It will by this point be apparent that this is not an issue which can simply be pushed to the side. Sometimes they are clearly portrayed as angels, devils, or illustrious humans of the distant past. But these have not been the problem. It is where they seem to fit into none of these categories that we have been forced to defer any but the most provisional judgement regarding their identity, or the role they are thought play. There is currently no scholarly consensus on this issue. Some scholars have emphasized the fact that these texts were produced by medieval Christians who, whether clerical or secular, had enjoyed the benefit of ecclesiastical education. They have tended to deduce from this that belief in the existence of beings of this kind would be impossible for such authors, and thus have favoured reading the relevant accounts as strict allegories: mere fictions with regard to literal meaning, but nevertheless profound in their metaphorical representation of contemporary beliefs and realities. Other scholars have drawn attention to the fact that these authors very often write as if they truly believe in the existence of these gods, and have pointed to other forms of textual evidence which further validate this impression. They have tended to conclude that this demonstrates residual pagan belief as such.

The most recent iteration of this debate can be found in Mark Williams' monograph, *Ireland's Immortals*,<sup>1</sup> on the one hand, and in John Carey's review of it, on the other.<sup>2</sup> However, both sides of the dichotomy depend on the assumption that the gods described in the sagas would be unintelligible in the context of a medieval Catholic cosmology. By this point in the argument it will be evident that such an assumption is most likely groundless. Yet it remains to discover the character of that intelligibility. Our consideration of Mongán has offered a few suggestive glimpses, but, be that as it may,

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, esp. 160-82.

<sup>2</sup> John Carey, 'Review: *Ireland's Immortals* by Mark Williams', *Studia Celtica* 51 (2017), 194-6.

the actual meaning of such glimpses awaits explanation and confirmation. To that end, *Immacallam in Dá Thuarad* will be the best starting point.

### The Three Gods of Skill

We have dealt with this text on multiple occasions earlier on.<sup>3</sup> However, a brief recapitulation of the basics will be of use in what follows. The *Immacallam* is an Old Irish account of a dialogue between two poets which is taken to have occurred at Emain Macha (modern-day Navan Fort) during the time that Conchobar was king of the Ulaid. Their dialogue has the character of a dispute over who should be the *ollam*, which is to say, the ‘chief-poet’, of Ireland. On one hand, we have Ferchertne, the current *ollam* of Ireland, on the other, Néde, a young poet of the second-highest rank who has been deceived about the supposed death of Ferchertne, and has thus assumed the *ollam*ship in Ferchertne’s absence. They take turns asking each other questions that test poetic knowledge, a contest in which Ferchertne is the decisive victor.

For our purposes what is most important is that both poets show themselves capable of prophecy, and that this, together with their other poetic capacities, seems in some way to rely on gods, in some sense of the word. Néde, as we have seen, attributes his wisdom to ‘the three gods of skill’,<sup>4</sup> which a Middle Irish gloss identifies as the sons of Brigit, the poetess, the daughter of Dagda (i.e. ‘The Good God’),<sup>5</sup> who here - and in a number

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 118-25; Chapter 4, pages 257-64.

<sup>4</sup> *Immacallam* §139; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.31 and tr.32: ‘na trí nDea 7 nDāna’. The translation above follows that of Williams, tr., *Ireland’s Immortals*, 166.

<sup>5</sup> glossing *Immacallam* §139; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 31 note 2: ‘tri maic Brigti banfili .i. Brian 7 Iuchar 7 Úar. tri maic Bressi maic Eladan, 7 Brigit banfile, ingen in Dagai Móir ríg Herenn a mmáthair’ (=three sons of Brigit the poetess, namely, Brian and Iuchar and Úar, three sons of Bres son of Elathu; and Brigit the poetess, daughter of the Dagda Mór, king of Ireland, was their mother). The idea that Brigit is in some fashion the ‘goddess of poets’ is also found in *Sanas Cormaic*; Russell *et al*, eds., *Sanas Cormaic* Y, 150; Williams, tr., *Ireland’s Immortals*, 162 [apart from untranslated Irish words, italics represent Latin sections of the text]: ‘Brigit .i. banfile ingen ingen .i. in Dagdae. isi insin Brigit be n-exe i. bandea no adratis filid, ar ba romor 7 ba roán a frithgnam. Ideo eum deum uocant poetarum, cuius sorores erant Brigit be legis 7 Brigit be Goibne ingena in Dagda, de quarum nominibus pene omnes Hibernenses dea Brigit uocabatur’ (=Brigit, i.e. a female poet, daughter of the Dagda. She is Brigit the female sage of poetry [or woman of poetic skill], i.e., Brigit a goddess whom the *filid* used to worship. For very great and very splendid was her application to the art [*frithgnam*]. Therefore they used to call her goddess of poets, whose sisters were Brigit the female physician and Brigit woman of smithcraft, daughters of the Dagda, from whose names almost all the Irish used to call Brigit a goddess). On the association of Brigit and the ‘gods of skill’ as older than their disassociation in *CMT*, see Carey, ‘Myth and Mythography’, 56; Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 163.

of other early Irish texts - occupies the pinnacle of the hierarchy of gods.<sup>6</sup> Also involved are certain ‘hazels of poetic art’,<sup>7</sup> which a Middle Irish gloss identifies as coming from Segais, the *síd*-mound from which the Boyne rises.<sup>8</sup> In similar fashion, we found that the inspiration that Ferchertne enjoys, as a poet of the highest level,<sup>9</sup> appears to be derived from the Boyne river,<sup>10</sup> which, the glossators remind us, is the same river as produces the ‘hazels of poetic art’ referred to by Néde.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the reason that the Boyne (*Bóane*) is said to be so named because it is identified with, and in some sense *is*, *Bóane*, the divine wife of the god Nechtan/Núada. It is from her *síd* that the river flows, a *síd* that is hers, perhaps, by virtue of the thought that she is, among other things, the river that flows from it.<sup>12</sup> What then are these gods of skill and these hazels of poetic

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<sup>6</sup> The *Immacallam* describes him as ‘ríg Herenn’ (=the king of Ireland). For another example of the Dagda as king, see *Tochmarc Étaíne* §1; Bergin and Best, eds. and tr., *Tochmarc Étaíne*, ed.142 and tr.143: ‘Bai ri amra for Eirinn do T[h]uathaib De a c[h]jenel, Eochaid Ollathar ainm. Ainm n-aill do dano an Dagda, ar ba hé dognith na firta 7 conmidhedh na sina 7 na toirthe doib. Ba head asbeirdis combo dé asberthe Daga fris’ (=There was a famous king of Ireland from the race of the god-peoples, named Eochaid Great-Father. He was called the Dagda [the ‘Good God’], for it was he who used to work wonders for them and control the weather and crops. As a result of which men said he was called the Dagda). But this is not always the case; e.g. *CMT* §74-81; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.42-4 and tr.43-5. Although, in this instance, he still has a certain similarity to the omnitalentedness of the one who is ruler instead of him. It seems that *CMT* rearranged this ‘pantheon of skill’; Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 160ff.; Carey, ‘Myth and Mythography’, 56-7. However, it is not clear to me whether or not this has significance relative to the Dagda’s humbler status in this work.

<sup>7</sup> *Immacallam* §24; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18 and tr.19.

<sup>8</sup> glossing *Immacallam* §24; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 19 note 1 [with slight modification of the translation]: ‘.i. a nóí collaib na Segsa’ (=that is, from the nine hazels of Segais). On Segais as the *síd*-mound from which the Boyne rises, see note 11 below. See also pages 388-90.

<sup>9</sup> *Immacallam* §81-2; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.24 and tr.25.

<sup>10</sup> *Immacallam* §77; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.24 and tr.25: ‘riascad Boinne’ (=cracking the Boyne?). The Middle Irish glossator of Rawlinson B 502 elaborates on this; glossing *Immacallam* §77, note 4; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 25 [my translation]: ‘.i. insce ind immais docíng iar mBoind .i. fúiscim na cnu docuridar Boann .i. cnoe ind immais’ (=i.e. speech of the inspiration running through the Boyne, i.e. I cracked the nuts which the Boyne produces, i.e. the nuts of inspiration). See also gloss of *Immacallam* §34 in Rawlinson B 502; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 19 note 6: ‘atib-seom sruth immais na ecsa essa’ (= he quaffed thereout [from the Boyne] the stream of inspiration of knowledge).

<sup>11</sup> See note 7 above. See also *The Caldron of Poesy* §11; Breatnach, ed. and tr., ‘The Caldron of Poesy’, ed.66 and tr.67: ‘fáilte fri tascor n-imbais do-fuaircet nóí cuill cainmeso for Segais i sídaib, conda-thochrathar méit moltchnaí iar ndruimniu Bóinde frithroisc luaithiu euch aige i mmedón mís mithime dia secht mbiadnae beos’ (=joy at the arrival of *imbais* which the nine hazels of fine mast at Segais in the *síd*’s amass and which is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne, as extensive as a wether’s fleece, swifter than a racehorse, in the middle of June every seventh year regularly).

<sup>12</sup> *Immacallam* §31-5; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, ed.18 and tr.19: ‘31. Os tussu, a mmo sruth, can dollod? . // . . 34. iar síd mnā Nechtáin, 35. iar rīg mnā Nuadat’ (= 31. And thou, O my senior, whence hast thou come? . // . . 34. along the elf-mound of Nechtán’s wife / 35. Along the forearm of Núada’s wife); see Stokes’ comments on page 19 notes 6-8. For *Bóane* as the wife of Nechtán, the source of the river’s name, and identified with the river itself see entries *Bóane I* and *II* in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *The Metrical Dindshenchas III*, 26-39. See further discussion on pages 388ff. below.

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### **A Literal Interpretation**

In light of our findings from the previous chapter, it may well be that the most straightforward approach is simply to see how far a literal interpretation can take us. Elsewhere in medieval Irish literature we certainly seem to find many examples of gods acting as mediators of the skills appropriate to secular occupations. There is, for instance, the Middle Irish story about Mac Enncae, which we briefly discussed in Chapter 2, the fifth of the ‘Stories from the Law Tracts’.<sup>13</sup> The superlative warrior, Cú Chulainn, demands that Mac Enncae, a craftsman, make him a shield and engrave it with a design he has never used before. The problem is that Mac Enncae has no more ideas for new designs, but will be killed by Cú Chulainn if he fails to produce one. A strange man approaches him and, having mercy on his predicament, tells him to clean his shop, and then to cover the floor with ashes until they are up to the thickness of a man’s foot. After he has done so, this stranger reveals himself to be something more than human by coming through an opening in the roof, and then proceeding to trace a new shield-design in the ashes with a forked stick that he bears in his hand. In short, his divine visitor helps him to practice his occupation in a way that would have been impossible for him otherwise.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the idea we find in other early stories about Cú Chulainn, that the immortal, Lug, is Cú Chulainn’s father (in some manner of speaking)<sup>15</sup> seems to be connected to the idea of his singularity as a hero. In the first instance, there is the way that the multiplicity and extent of Cú Chulainn’s heroic attributes, and his mastery of every art<sup>16</sup> seem to embody something of Lug’s defining multitalentedness.<sup>17</sup> But one thinks here also of the way the Lug heals his son on the battle-field during the Cattle-Raid of

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 159-62.

<sup>14</sup> *CIH* 2114.5-24, 2219.37-8; Best, R.I., ed., ‘Cuchulainn's Shield’, *Ériu* 5 (1911), 72; Carey, tr., ‘The Hand of the Angel’, 80-81; *idem*, tr., ‘The Waters of Vision’, 163-86. This is story number 86 in Qiu’s exhaustive list of ‘Stories from the Law Tracts’; Qiu, ‘Narratives in Early Irish Law: A Typological Study’, 135.

<sup>15</sup> *Compert Con Culainn* §5; Van Hamel, ed., *Compert Con Culainn*, 5; Gantz, tr., ‘The Birth of Cú Chulainn’, 133.

<sup>16</sup> *Compert Con Culainn* §7; Van Hamel, ed., *Compert Con Culainn*, 8; Louis Duvau, tr., ‘La légende de la conception de Cúchulainn’, *Revue Celtique* 9 (1888), 1–13, at 9.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. *CMT* §55-74; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.38-42 and tr.39-43.



Cooley, without which his continued defence of Ulster would have been impossible.<sup>18</sup> Another notable example of this principle is Conaire Mór, in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*. Like Cú Chulainn, his lineage is important to his role. He is partially descended from the gods on his mother's side,<sup>19</sup> and completely on his father's side.<sup>20</sup> However, it is not simply his descent from the gods which makes his kingship exemplary, but the way in which his lineage opens the door for him to make a contract with the kin of his father's people.<sup>21</sup> The perfection of his justice as a ruler transforms Ireland into a paradise so long as he does not break the prohibitions his father's kindred have put on him,<sup>22</sup> but quickly reverts to its opposite when he does so.<sup>23</sup> The list of examples could be extended much further yet.<sup>24</sup>

It is evident, then, that the *Immacallam* is by no means alone in portraying the divinities of the *síd*-mounds as mediaries of the knowledge and skills associated with secular occupations.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, given the tendency of medieval Irish authors to present and treat the sagas as relatively accurate records of historical events,<sup>26</sup> one might well be tempted to leave the matter here. After all, we ended up having to interpret the greater

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<sup>18</sup> *Táin Bó Cúailnge I*, lines 2090-2184; O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, ed.64-7 and tr.183-4. *Táin Bó Cúailnge II*, lines 2137-2201; O'Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge from LL*, ed.58-60 and tr.198-200; although, in this latter case, it is not clear that the *síd*-person in question is his father, Lug.

<sup>19</sup> *TBDD* §1-6; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 1-3; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 166-8.

<sup>20</sup> *TBDD* §7; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 3; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 168.

<sup>21</sup> *TBDD* §13-6; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 5-6; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 169. O'Connor, *The Destruction*, 75-81; Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Semantics of *síd*', 142-6; McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, 136-7. For previous discussion of *TBDD*, see Chapter 1, pages 52-5; Chapter 3, page 200.

<sup>22</sup> *TBDD* §17; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 6; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 170.

<sup>23</sup> When this occurs depends on which instance one identifies as the definitive breaking of these prohibitions; *TBDD* §18ff. or 24ff.; Knott, ed., *Togail*, 6ff. or 7ff.; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 170ff. or 171ff.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. *Baile in Scáil*; Kevin Murray, ed. and tr., *Baile in Scáil: The Phantom's Frenzy*, Irish Texts Society 58 (London 2004) - here the otherworld is presented as the source of sovereignty. On this aspect of *Baile in Scáil*, see Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld', 4, 10.

<sup>25</sup> In relation to this, it is well-worth keeping in mind Carey's characterisation of the otherworld of the gods as a place or state defined by artifice; John Carey, 'Otherworld and Verbal Worlds in Middle Irish Narrative', *Proceedings of the Harvard Colloquium* 9 (1989), 31-42, esp. 31; Carey, 'The Waters of Vision', 177-81. However, instead of his suggestion that its limits are only those of the imagination, I would want to argue that its limits are only those of the natural or secular mode of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, as defined in the preceding chapters.

<sup>26</sup> Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory'; Toner, 'Authority, Verse and the Transmission of *Senchas*'; Ralph O'Connor's general discussion of sagas and romances as medieval genres also applies here; O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories and Romances*, 19ff. See also Chapter 5, pages 303-9 above.

part of the portrayals of *metempsychosis* and *metamorphosis* in this literature (odd as they may seem) as having a literal meaning in addition to any figurative meanings they might have. In which case, the *Immacallam*'s 'three gods of skill',<sup>27</sup> together with the divine persons that it associates with the Boyne (and with 'hazels of poetic art' that float on it), would be actual otherworldly beings which are, in some fashion, the mediators of art and science to members (or at least certain members) of the poetic hierarchies. But if so, how are we to make sense of the twenty to thirty years of scholarship which have demonstrated that all our existing texts were, in various ways, the product of ecclesiastical education and scholarship? How could such beings as the ever-living god-peoples of the *síd*-mounds fit into, much less be necessary to, a medieval Christian cosmology?

### **Allegorical Reading**

But perhaps they do not need to fit into a medieval Christian cosmology. When we discussed the possibility of allegorical interpretations earlier, we concluded that while they are always at least potentially relevant to any given early Irish text, we should never take allegorical meanings, where found, to be at the expense of possible historical meanings, except where this is clearly signposted, or a historical interpretation is deemed impossible relative to what we know about the author's understanding of reality.<sup>28</sup> It is not, however, beyond belief that literal 'gods of skill' and 'hazels of poetic art' represent just such impossibilities for a literal interpretation. Such, at any rate, would be the guiding assumption of most antique or medieval Christian interpretation of pagan myths.<sup>29</sup> Fulgentius, Prudentius, The Vatican Mythographers and Pseudo-Bernardus Silvestris, to name a few, all interpret myths of the Classical gods in strictly

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<sup>27</sup> Keeping in mind that it is not the only witness of this idea; see notes 5-6 above.

<sup>28</sup> Scowcroft seems to have mischaracterised the medieval reception of classical mythology and, thus, early Irish literature's treatment of the *aes síde*, by his equation of the two; Scowcroft, 'Abstract Narrative in Early Ireland', 156-7: 'Once organised paganism ceased, its idéologie would be rapidly dissipated by mythopoeia itself, the multiplication and variation of ancient traditions diluting (if not obscuring) their specifically religious associations, to provide the literati instead with a corpus of hidden learning and "implicit metaphor" as compelling and useful as classical mythology for the rest of medieval Christendom'.

<sup>29</sup> For a helpful (if somewhat onesided) summary of this aspect of Christian interpretation in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, tr., Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago and London 2004), 26-36.

allegorical terms.<sup>30</sup> Determining if this is also the assumption of the author of the *Immacallam* will require that we make a closer analysis of the relevant passages.

The most important passage of the *Immacallam*, for our purposes, is Néde's answer when questioned about his ancestry. He says:

I am the son of Poetry / Poetry, son Scrutiny / Scrutiny, son of Meditation /  
Meditation, son of Great Knowledge, / Great Knowledge, son of Enquiry, /  
Enquiry, son of Investigation, / Investigation, son of Great Knowledge, / Great  
Knowledge, son of Great Sense, / Great Sense, son of Understanding /  
Understanding, son of Wisdom / Wisdom, son of the Three Gods of Skill<sup>31</sup>

Mark Williams, is, in a sense, right, when he says: 'it is clear that Néde intends his poetic family tree to be taken metaphorically: it describes a concatenation of mental processes proper to a mind trained in *filidecht* and he is keen to make that plain'.<sup>32</sup> If Néde had been answering literally, regarding his ancestry, he would have begun with his biological parents and moved backwards through his family tree. As it is, he has unfolded the causal chain of capacities on which his capacity for poetry depends. However, while his answer is metaphorical in relation to the question, none of the capacities that he lists are metaphorically expressed. Williams suggestion that the 'three gods of skill' are self-consciously fictional personifications of the poetic hierarchy then seems somewhat incongruous relative to the context in which they are evoked. Why should the source of this otherwise baldly literal causal series of dependent forms of knowledge alone be taken to be neither a cause, nor a form of knowledge in any respect? In addition, if the purpose such personifications were, as he suggests, that it was convenient way of shoring up the authority of the poetic hierarchy against ecclesiastical

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<sup>30</sup> For references, see Chapter 5, notes 15-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Immacallam* §129-39; Stokes, ed. and tr., 'The Colloquy', ed.30 and tr.31: '129. *macsa Dana*, / 130. *Dān mac Osmenda*, / 131. *Osmenad mac Imráti*, / 132. *IMradud mac Rofís*, / 133. *Rofís mac Fochmairc*, / 134. *Fochmore mac Rochmairc*, / 135. *Rochmore mac Rofessa*, / 136. *Rofís mac Rochuind*, *Rochond mac Ergnai*, *Ergna mac Ecnai*, *Echna mac na trí nDea 7 nDāna*'. The translation above reflects Williams' minor changes to Stokes' translation; Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 166.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 167.

authority,<sup>33</sup> then its success as propaganda would seem to depend on these personifications being confused for literal gods by their hearers. But if so, there seems to be no formal way to distinguish between those who only make instrumental use of such personifications, and those who make the mistake of believing them.<sup>34</sup> How is one, in the absence of clearer statements of intent, to distinguish a text whose author may believe in literal ‘gods of skill’ from one which understands them to be personifications of poetic skill, but intends that they be understood literally by a credulous audience?

It seems much more likely that the ‘three gods of skill’ might be a metaphor for something more fundamental than wisdom in the soul, which is the source of its wisdom and all that follows from it on the way to being realised in the form of poetic ability. Or even better, perhaps it could be a metaphor for the soul itself. In the latter case, the threeness of these gods might perhaps symbolize the triune structure which Augustine discovered in the soul, or, more specifically, in the ‘mind’ (*mens*) [i.e. the triad of Memory, Intellect, Will].<sup>35</sup> Then again, it could also stand for the trifold distinction between the soul’s imaginative/opinionative, rational and intellective powers,<sup>36</sup> such as

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<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 169, 172, 192: ‘The gods added to the aura of romantic antiquity which it had become convenient for the *filid* to stress, and ‘pagan’ supernatural tropes were invoked in order to underline their supposed roots in the ancient past and so assert their professional distinctiveness . // . . . However, as their order increasingly risked complete assimilation into the ranks of the ecclesiastical *literati*, foregrounding the native gods may have been a strategy to bolster their archaic mystique and distinct identity . // . . . The *filid* in turn—anxious about losing their distinctiveness and beings absorbed into the clerical ranks—may have increasingly used the gods to personify and allegorize aspects of their own intellectual curriculum, as well as underscore the secular status of their profession’.

<sup>34</sup> Williams has also pointed to this kind of uncertainty, but tends to interpret it as if it only cuts one way, i.e. against the certainty of literal meanings, and not against the certainty of figurative meanings. This is, no doubt, because of his tendency to present metaphor and personification as alternatives to literal meaning, rather than kinds of meaning that may often be coextensive with it; Williams, *Ireland’s Immortals*, 169-70: ‘if the gods—once the religious framework of Irish paganism had faded—were available to the *literati* for recycling as a stock of metaphors and personifications, then were are faced with the fundamental problem that we have no way to gauge how conservative or / radical that process was for any particular divinity’.

<sup>35</sup> *De Trinitate* X.xi.18; *PL* 42 col. 983; McKenna, tr., *Augustine: On the Trinity*, 58: ‘Haec igitur tria, memoria, intellegentia, uoluntas, quoniam non sunt tres uitae sed una uita, nec tres mentes sed una mens, consequenter utique nec tres substantiae sunt sed una substantia . . .’ (=Since these three, memory, understanding, and will, are, therefore, not three lives, but one life; nor three minds, but one mind; it follows certainly that neither are they three substances, but one substance. . .).

<sup>36</sup> i.e. (imaginative): that by which the soul is aware of the objects of sense perception and by which it is able to present its ideas to itself for reflection; (rational): that by which the soul knows its own ideas, but also inferior and superior realities, insofar as rational realities are analogous to them; (intellective): that by which the soul is aware of the realities superior to it, and thus able to ground its thinking in a divine form

made its way into numerous patristic writings, and seems to have been the basis for the distinction between the three ‘cauldrons’ of the soul in the roughly contemporary text, *The Cauldron of Poesy*.<sup>37</sup> Yet if so, neither alternative was seized upon by its ecclesiastically-educated glossators who (while locating figurative theological meanings elsewhere)<sup>38</sup> were content, as we have seen, to trace the divine genealogy of these ‘three gods of skill’ back to the Dagda.<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that they might not be understood allegorically in another text - perhaps together with a sense that they exist, perhaps without - but that they do not seem to be presented as such in this context, whatever their authors may have privately believed about them themselves.

This, together with the continued lack of any alternative interpretation in the relevant glosses increases the likelihood that the gods which the *Immacallam* links to the Boyne, and the associated ‘hazels of poetic art’ with them, are intended to be taken literally as well.<sup>40</sup> We will not be able to do justice to them at the moment as the ‘three gods of skill’ have given us enough to deal with for now. It is, however, worth pointing out, in a preliminary way, that the physicality of the Christian sacraments is often interpreted allegorically,<sup>41</sup> at the same time as they are taken to have existence as literal sacraments. Therefore, the allegorical meanings which Elizabeth Boyle has demonstrated to be of

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of thought that is unmoved by inordinate desire for inferior realities, such as often compromise the human soul’s exercise of rationality.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 125-33. Cf. Corthals, ‘Decoding the *Caldron of Poesy*’, esp.83. He alternatively identified the three cauldrons described in *The Cauldron of Poesy* with some version of the distinction between the appetitive, irascible, and rational parts of the soul in Plato’s *Republic*. As discussed earlier, he certainly seems right in suggesting that these three distinctions would have been available in the relevant literature. However, this particular trifold distinction seems not to map very well onto the three cauldrons that the anonymous author of *The Cauldron of Poesy* locates in the soul.

<sup>38</sup> glossing *Immacallam* §141, 143-4, 147, 154; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Colloquy’, 31 notes 1, 3, 4, 7 and 33 note 1. But see especially §154, where the glosses in LL and the Yellow Book of Lecan interpret the flourishing fruit trees (*oblaind*) prophesied by Néde as allegorically representing the sacramental presence of Christ’s body in the Mass. This seems to be out of keeping with the character of the knowledge which is attributed to Néde in contrast with Ferchertne, as discussed in Chapter 2, pages 118-25. However, in seeming to go farther than the text allows, it is an excellent demonstration of the glossators’ interest in the potential allegorical meanings of the text.

<sup>39</sup> See pages 373-4 above.

<sup>40</sup> See page 374, esp. notes 7-10.

<sup>41</sup> For numerous examples the additional allegorical meanings of sacraments in an early Irish context, see *The Tract on the Mass in Stowe Missal*, esp. §16; Stokes and Strachan, ed. and tr., *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* II, 252-5, esp. 254: ‘Ataat ·vii· ñgne forsinchombug .i. ·v· parsa diobli choitcinn hífiguir ·v· sense anmae’ (=The confection is of seven kinds, to wit, five particles of the host a figure of the five senses of the soul . . .).

potential relevance to any account of these ‘hazels of poetic art’,<sup>42</sup> where present, do not yet amount to evidence that no actual hazels are indicated. Any conclusions depend on a close analysis of the relevant texts individually and an establishment of the possibility or impossibility of a secular sacrament, used by poets, which while being secular, seems to be presented as a lesser typological mirror of the ecclesiastical sacraments.

We are now very close to the heart of the problem. If anyone ever partook of ‘hazels of poetic art’ as a means to poetic inspiration, it seems to be as a secular type of superior ecclesiastical mysteries that their efficacy would in some measure have been understood. Or, to return again to Cú Chulainn, there is a significant amount of scholarship which demonstrates that he is often reflected upon in the sagas as a type of Christ.<sup>43</sup> The Christ-typology of the Mongán of *Immram Brain* has also received its measure of scholarly attention.<sup>44</sup> However, integral to this typology in either case is the notion that while Christ is the son of God, in the absolute sense, the hero in question is the son of a god, in a qualified sense. Cú Chulainn is the son of Lug, and Mongán, of Mannanán mac Lir. If they do not actually have divine descent, in some manner of speaking, their typological connexion to Christ loses the basis for its assertion in the first place. Thus, there certainly are allegorical meanings to be found in the saga-literature. Yet while such allegorical meanings may, in some cases, reveal an author who turned to them only for their potential power as literary symbols, they evidently do not do so in every case, and in some cases the power of the allegory seems to depend on a literal interpretation of a presentation of the gods as deathless beings of some kind. Moreover, there are some cases, such as we have seen with ‘the gods of skill’ in the *Immacallam*, where a literal meaning seems to be unaccompanied by an evident allegorical meaning. Nevertheless, these ‘gods of skill’ and their divine cousins which are linked to the Boyne, as intrinsically pagan as they may seem, appear to be directly

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<sup>42</sup> Boyle, ‘Allegory’, 23ff: i.e. the knowledge that is obtained by partaking of ‘The Fountain of Knowledge’ and the streams of the five senses that flow out of it, but also the image of breaking the shell of a nut as a metaphor for allegorical interpretation itself. Compare to quotation in note 41 above.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 241-52 above.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 5, page 344 above. Among other places, this is discussed in Mac Cana, ‘The Sinless of Otherworld’, 95; Carney, ‘The Earliest Bran Material’, 89-90; Carey, *Ireland and the Grail*, 39.

responsible for Ferchertne's ability to prophetically apprehend something of the Church's character, doctrines and sacraments.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Mediation of Natural Law**

How then are we to escape either turning a blind eye to the ecclesiastical context that produced the sagas still extant, or else to the elements in these sagas which seem to presuppose a literal sense of the gods of these sagas *as* gods? The answer seems to lie in the direction of the strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical law which we observed in Chapter Two, a distinction best exemplified by the eighth-century Prologue to *SM*, but which tends towards ubiquity. There we found that an understanding of natural law predominates in early medieval Ireland that contrasts with the understanding of natural law which tends to predominate elsewhere in Latin Christendom. It too is the result of a synthesis of biblical and patristic authorities but puts them together in a different way. The term 'natural law' is generally used to describe the vestigial capacity for ethics which remains to the soul after the Fall. However, in early medieval Ireland it is most often used to describe a kind prophetic knowledge, received through inspiration by the Holy Spirit, but which is possible without the institutions of the Church, and thus, which was possible before the coming of the Faith to Ireland. This inspiration is in some ways lesser than that which is only found in the Church, but it involves knowledge which the Church does not possess on its own. In short, the inspired knowledge represented by the term 'natural law' is presented as the basis for the work of the secular hierarchies of rulers and poets. Conversely, the inspired knowledge represented by the term 'ecclesiastical law' is presented as the basis for the work of the ecclesiastical hierarchies of clergy and monastics.

Medieval Ireland is nothing if not hierarchical. In Chapter 2 we saw that the vocational hierarchies are presided over by superior hierarchies which were thought to be capable of making trans-vocational judgements.<sup>46</sup> Despite differences of opinion regarding whether the supreme ruler, poet or bishop is the most universal authority of all, there

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 118-25; Chapter 4, pages 259-63.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 164-73.

was a general tendency to see the secular hierarchies as dependent to a greater or lesser degree on the ecclesiastical hierarchies in order to fully realise themselves in their secularity.<sup>47</sup> However, it remained that, to a certain extent, the hierarchies of the secular and ecclesiastical orders are both independently grounded, according to the modes of revelation proper to them, in the highest possible authority,<sup>48</sup> the divine order of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as manifested in the sevenfold order of angels, and, according to some, the spheres of the planets.<sup>49</sup> It is thus a world without gaps in which even hierarchies themselves are hierarchically arranged in relation to each other. A chain of degree and rank stretches without interruption from the highest angel down to the lowest slave. Therefore, unless there is to be a violent rupture in the midst of this intricately ordered network of interrelations, both of these forms of inspiration will require some kind of mediation, just like everything else.

There is no problem for the Church in this respect. It has the hierarchies of angels as the mediators of the Holy Spirit's revelation to it. Accordingly, the angels tend to show up, with a few notable exceptions,<sup>50</sup> with the saints when they first appear in Ireland.<sup>51</sup> But

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<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 45-7; Chapter 2, 73-4.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2, page 73ff.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 45-7, esp. notes 110-12.

<sup>50</sup> e.g. *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* §31; Best, ed. and tr., 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', ed.152 and tr.153: 'Acus así breth ru dóib a bith amail dosairmicmair, ar Findtan, ní thargom tara n-ordugud forfácaib Tréfuilngid Tre-eochair remum, ar ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin' (=And this is the judgement he [Fintan] passed "let it be as we have found it," said Fintan, "we shall not go contrary to the arrangement which Trefuilingid Tre-eochair has left us, for he was an angel of God, or he was God himself). *Scél na Fír Flatha* §80; Stokes, ed., *Irische Texte* III.i, 202; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 37-8 [with Carey's minor alterations of Stokes' edition]: 'Acht adberaid na hecnaidi cach uair no taisbenta taibsi ingnad dona righflathaibh anall – amal adfaid in scal do Chund, 7 amal tarfas Tír Thairngiri do Chormac – conidh timtirecth diada ticedh fan samla-sin, 7 conach timthirecth deamach. Aingil immorro dosficed da chobair, ar is firindi aignidh dia lentais, air timn rechta ro foghnad doibh' (=But the learned say that whenever a wondrous apparition was revealed to royal princes in olden times – as when the phantom spoke to Conn, and the Land of Promise appeared to Cormac – that is was a divine visitation which came in that semblance, and not a devilish visitation. It was an angel which used to come to their assistance, for they / were faithful to the law of nature; for the precept of the Law was served by them). However, we must be careful not to arrive at any hasty conclusions where this word is used in exceptional cases. In early and medieval Christian theology, 'angelus' is not exclusive to the spiritual beings which are normally attributed that name, but can apply to any 'messenger' of God of any nature. On this, see, for example, Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos* CIII.i.15; *PL* 37, col. 1348 [my translation]: 'Spiritus autem Angeli sunt; et cum spiritus sunt, non sunt angeli; cum mittuntur, fiunt angeli. Angelus enim officii nomen est, non naturae. . .' (=Now the Angels are spirits, but it is not as spirits that they are angels; it is as ones that are sent that they are angels. For 'angel' is the name of an office, not a nature). On the office of 'angel' as parallel to the office of 'prophet', see Augustine, *Tractates Evangelium in Iohannem Tractates* XXIV.vii; *PL* 35, col.1596.



what then of the secular hierarchies? If there is no distinction between the mediators of the Holy Spirit to match the distinction between Natural and Ecclesiastical forms of inspiration, how is one to account for the way in which something was thought to be made manifest by the Church which was not made manifest before? It is a given that angels are taken to be the mediators of the knowledge and power by which the clergy were understood to be able to produce the sacraments and celebrate the rituals of the Church. But if it is the very same angels who are supposed to have been mediating the knowledge and power by which rulers were enabled to rule with perfect justice, and poets to be inspired with wisdom, how is it they did not already possess of themselves such revelation as seemingly only belongs to the Church? For this is not just a question of degrees of revelation - it is common enough to see pre-Christians as simply knowing less of the same revelation that was enjoyed by the apostles and those who succeeded them<sup>52</sup> – but of qualitatively different kinds of revelation, each with their proper and distinct content. Moreover, if it is the same angels in both cases, how would one then account for the Church’s ongoing need for the results of such inspiration as the secular hierarchies were thought to have always enjoyed, insofar as such a need was perceived in the literature?

There was a need then for some other kind of intermediary being, a being distinct from both angels and humans: in some way inferior to angels, just as the revelation of the law of nature was lesser than that of the law of Scripture, but superior to humans, as God’s mediators of this revelation to humanity. Thus, in a manner wholly comprehensible in terms of medieval Christian theology – such as it developed in Ireland – it was

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<sup>51</sup> On the unusual frequency of angelic visitation as a feature of early Irish saints’ lives; Clare Stancliffe, ‘The Miracle Stories in Seventh-Century Irish Saints’ Lives’, in Jacques Fontaine and J.N. Hillgarth, eds., *Le septieme siècle: Changements et continuités / The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity* (London 1992), 87-115, at 102-10. However, one of the most dramatic assertions of the connexion between the presence of the angels in Ireland, and the presence of the saints is quite late; *Acallam na Senórach*, lines 6305-8; Stokes, ed., ‘*Acallamh na Senórach*’, ed.174; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, 177: “‘Adræ buaid 7 bendachtain, a naem Patraic, are Cailte, “7 mo chin tainic a ngeinmain fer nEirenn in la tangais da n-indsaigid. Uair ro bóí deman a mbun cach énféornin inti reomut, 7 atá aingel [a] mbun cach énféornin aniu inti”’ (=‘May you have victory and blessing, holy Patrick,’ said Cailte, ‘and happy were the men of Ireland born the day you came to meet them. For there was a demon at the bottom of every single blade of grass in Ireland before you, and there is today in Ireland an angel on the bottom of each single blade of grass’).

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 97-9.

necessary that the gods be rediscovered in the form of a hierarchy of ever-living mediators of the particular revelation of the Holy Spirit that was proper to the secular hierarchies.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Earthly Paradise Reconsidered**

This conclusion reveals a new layer of significance in our previous discussion of *Echtrae Connlae* and *Immram Brain*, where the gods, or *aes síde*, are portrayed as being the natural inhabitants of the sinless earthly paradise. The earthly paradise, as we found, is to be distinguished from the heavens, with their angelic inhabitants, but also from the new creation which follows the Day of Judgement. The ‘ever-living’ quality of life there, as such, anticipates but does not possess the character of eternity.<sup>54</sup> The sinless enjoyment of the physical world and the effortless practice of the secular arts which are there point to, but are not yet, the enjoyment of ‘all-in-all’ in the beatific vision of God.<sup>55</sup> Those who inhabit it are not bound to the normal limitations of bodiliness, given that they are evidently untouched by time, may disappear from one place and appear in another, observe those in other physical places, and, according to other stories, change form and embodiment.<sup>56</sup> Yet they are not incorporeal like the angels;<sup>57</sup> they eat, endure or enjoy romance<sup>58</sup> and bear children, and again, according to some other stories,

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<sup>53</sup> *contra* Carey’s contention that the ‘gods’, in the plural are ‘by definition non-Christian’; John Carey, ‘Dee: “Pagan Deity”’, *Ériu* 62 (2012), 33-42, at 40.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 352-5.

<sup>55</sup> 1 Cor. 15:28; *DCD* XXII.xxix; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 856-62; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1083.

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 5, page 337 above.

<sup>57</sup> Although in some late-medieval examples this seems to be conceived of as involving no more than an ‘aerial body’; Carey, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 61-2. However, there seems no reason to assume, especially in a late medieval context, that such a body is necessarily ‘demonic’ in the sense of being ‘diabolical’. See note on the pneumatic body of the soul, often identified with the imagination, in Chapter 4, note 18.

<sup>58</sup> Byrne’s suggestion that Augustine’s understanding of the sinless sexuality of Eden is operative here is undoubtedly correct; Aisling Byrne, ‘Fairy Lovers: Sexuality Order and Narrative in Medieval Romance’, in Amandon Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse and Corey James Rushton, eds., *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Cambridge 2014), 99-111, at 101 note 9. Thus, Mac Cana was right to conclude that Carney’s unsuccessful attempt to downplay the erotic dimension to the otherworld in *Immram Brain* (or elsewhere) was a result of his understanding that such texts are products of Christian scholarship. However, he was wrong in his assumption that Carney’s characterisation of medieval Christian theology was correct; Mac Cana, ‘The Sinless Otherworld’, 101. The stark dichotomy of sexless Christian paradise vs. sexual pagan paradise, to which Carney and Mac Cana both subscribed, falls apart in the light of Augustine’s comments on the subject. See *DCD* XIV.xxi-xxiii, esp.xxiii; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei* II, 443-46; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 583-7, esp.585: ‘Quisquis

possibly even die between their successive embodiments.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, one can seemingly arrive and return from there in a way that involves traversing spatial distance, even if its natural inhabitants are not limited in this way.<sup>60</sup>

In short, the narrative descriptions of life in this sinless paradise give it an intermediate cosmological position, between the degraded character of post-Fall human experience, on one hand, and the incorporeal perfection of the angels of heaven, on the other.<sup>61</sup> This is only fitting, seeing as the apocryphal and patristic sources which speak of the earthly paradise ascribe it just such an intermediary position.<sup>62</sup> The significance of this is that, in occupying this intermediate position, it acts as the cosmological counterpoint to the intermediate metaphysical position occupied by the natural inspiration on which the arts depend, between uninspired human knowledge, on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical inspiration on which the sacraments and rituals of the church depend, on the other. Both alike hang between heaven and earth. Which is to say, these narrative descriptions of the ever-living god-peoples who inhabit the earthly paradise seem to describe just the sort of beings that our strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical inspiration requires. We spoke before about the awareness, interest and involvement that the ever-living inhabitants of the earthly paradise seemed to have in the mortal world, according to the Cín Dromma Snechta stories we were looking at above,<sup>63</sup> but now we have the means of beginning to understand it with precision.

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autem dicit non fuisse coituros nec generaturos, nisi peccassent, quid dicit, nisi propter numerositatem sanctorum necessarium hominis fuisse peccatum? (=If anyone says that there would have been no intercourse or procreation if the first human beings had not sinned, he is asserting, in effect, that man's sin was necessary to complete the number of the saints).

<sup>59</sup> Thinking of Mongán here in particular; see Chapter 5, page 342ff.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 358-9. Thus, Carey is using terms too imprecisely when he says things like 'the journey to the "lands of the living folk" leads through spirit, not through space'; Carey, *A Single Ray*, 34-5.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Siewers, who, similar to Carey (see note 60 above), does not make sufficient allowance for the difference between the earthly paradise, the eternal incorporealities of heaven, and such realities as may be understood to be beyond the difference between them; Siewers, 'The *Periphyseon*, the Irish "Otherworld", and Early Medieval Nature', 321-47; Carey, *A Single Ray*, 34-5. However, other comparisons to Eriugena may be made; see Chapter 2, pages 142-6.

<sup>62</sup> See discussion at Chapter 5, pages 349-57 above.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 355-6.

It is, of course, nothing new to say that the gods of the sagas are conceived of as the mediators of the arts. This has been said in many times before.<sup>64</sup> What is new here is the conclusion that this conception of the gods emerges as an expression of coherent developments in medieval Christian metaphysics and cosmology. To sum up, the idea of the earthly paradise goes here from being little more than a way of accounting for the pre-apocalyptic fate of certain exceptional people who did not die, or of the disembodied souls of the righteous following death (as it is in most patristic and apocryphal accounts), to providing a way of envisioning the realities and personalities that mediate natural inspiration, and are thus responsible for the whole array of secular realities and practices which that inspiration makes possible. Moreover, it does this in a way that accounts for natural inspiration's distinction from (and yet similarity to) ecclesiastical inspiration. For the earthly paradise is itself both like and unlike the heavenly realities to which the angelic mediaries of ecclesiastical inspiration belong, being an anticipation of the perfect complementarity that earthly creation will finally achieve in relation to the heavenly creation at the consummation of time, when it shall be perfectly ordered to itself, and to its heavenly counterpart, through being perfectly ordered towards its divine source and end.<sup>65</sup>

Relative to this, any stories that seemed to be about this earthly paradise and its personalities - however little or much material in those stories could be traced to pre-Christian beliefs if we had more information - would have been invaluable as a means of discovering the theological doctrine of natural inspiration (together with forms of mediation implied by it) in Christian history. Which is to say that, to this perspective, a story that appeared (however rightly or wrongly) to survive from the pre-Christian past, insofar as it also seemed to embody this theological position, would not be pagan, but an

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<sup>64</sup> This has been a perennial theme in Carey's work; see, for example, Carey, 'Time, Space and the Otherworld'; *idem*, 'Otherworlds and Verbal Worlds in Middle Irish Narrative', esp.31, but especially Carey, 'The Waters of Vision', esp.174-5: 'In either case, this direct identification of the gods with the 'people of skill' is a remarkable doctrine, suggesting that the artistic associations of the immortals may be more general than anything which we can explain by reference to isolate divine craftsmen . . . Even as the Otherworld is the source of inspiration, so its denizens and emissaries are paragons of craftsmanship . . . our art and theirs share a single essence'.

<sup>65</sup> For a pertinent description of the post-resurrection relationship between body and soul, see *DCD XXII.xix-xxii, xxvi-xxix*; Dombart *et al*, eds., *Augustinus: De civitate Dei II*, 785-7; Bettenson, tr., *The City of God*, 1060-5, 1078-1087.

expression of true belief as manifest in true historical events (gods and all), such as existed in Ireland before the advent of the Church. Such stories, insofar as they were identified as historical examples of the doctrine at work, would in turn provide medieval scholars with many potential means of further developing their understanding of the doctrine in itself.

### **An Important Case in Point: The *Metrical Dindshenchas***

A good example of a later text that brings many of these elements together in a single narrative is the Middle Irish *Metrical Dindshenchas*. In the first of two entries it has on the river Bóand,<sup>66</sup> or ‘Boyne’, we are told that the *síd*-woman, Bóand (here, as in the *Immacallam*, the wife of Nechtain)<sup>67</sup> was mutilated as a direct result of daring to walk around a ‘secret spring’, that was in Nechtain’s *dún*.<sup>68</sup> The nature of the spring was such that no one besides Nechtain and his two cup-bearers could look into it without risk of injury to themselves.<sup>69</sup> Thus when she came to make a trial of its power, three waves came out: one injured her foot, another shattered her hand, and another blinded her eye.<sup>70</sup> She fled the waters of the spring to the sea, so that no-one would see her blemished state, but everywhere she went the water of the spring followed her.<sup>71</sup> In this way the water flowing out from this *síd* came to be known as ‘Bóand’. The naming of parts of the river after the parts of Bóand’s body,<sup>72</sup> suggests that the river is seen as some kind of re-embodiment of Bóand following the death that resulted from this mutilation.<sup>73</sup> But the decisive detail here is that this river - that is, the river that the ‘hazels of poetic art’ were thought to fill with inspiration (*imbas*) in the *Immacallam*,

<sup>66</sup> The aspect of the entry at issue here is discussed in Carey, ‘The Waters of Vision’, 168-71.

<sup>67</sup> *Boand I*, lines 37-8; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.28 and 29: ‘Nechtáin mac Labrada laind, / diarbo ben Bóand, bágaimm’ (=Nechtáin son of bold Labraid, / whose wife was Boand, I aver). It also parallels the *Immacallam* in naming the river ‘the Arm of Nuadu’s wife’ (=Rig mná Nuadat); *Boand I*, line 15; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.26 and tr.27.

<sup>68</sup> *Boand I*, line 43; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.28 and tr.29: ‘topur diamair’.

<sup>69</sup> *Boand I*, lines 53-52; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.28-30 and tr.29-31.

<sup>70</sup> *Boand I*, lines 63-64; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, 30-1.

<sup>71</sup> *Boand I*, lines 65-71; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.30 and tr.31.

<sup>72</sup> *Boand I*, lines 13-6; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.26 and tr.27: ‘Otá Topur Mochúí choir / co cocrích Midi mag-móir / Rig mná Nuadat 's a Colptha / a dá ainm ána imarda’ (=From the well of righteous Mochua / to the bounds of Meath’s wide plain, / the *arm of Nuadu’s Wife* and her *Leg* / are the two noble and exalted names).

<sup>73</sup> While it is a part of the narrative, these events are nevertheless taken to describe the ‘aided Bóanne’ (=death of Boand); *Boand I*, line 60; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.30 and tr.31.

among many other such texts - is envisioned here as not only flowing finally to ‘the paradise of Adam’, but also as having its ultimate source in paradise:<sup>74</sup>

‘long is she in the east, a time of wandering / from paradise again hither / to the streams of this Sid’<sup>75</sup>

Note that there are no intermediary stages given between paradise and the *síd* as there are on the outward journey to paradise. In that its ‘time of wandering’ seems to include no further mortal destinations, the text appears to be identifying the otherworldly reality inside the *síd* in some way with ‘The Paradise of Adam’. One is the place that the Bóand disappears from mortal geography; the other, the place from which it reemerges into mortal geography. Moreover, both are in their own way the sources of this river. For it would seem that the spring in question must have always had ‘The Paradise of Adam’ as its origin, in order for it to have existed in the first instance. Yet the return of the water of this spring to ‘The Paradise of Adam’ as a river would never have occurred apart from the actions of Bóand. The question is, are the respective paradises of Adam and of the *síde* then in some way distinct, such as the four paradises of the late medieval tale, *Echtra Thaidg mheic Chéin*,<sup>76</sup> in which each paradise holds a different kind of righteous population until the Day of Judgement? Or are they one and the same? In the latter case, this would be another example the way in which the normal operation of space applies insofar as mortal experience relates to the earthly paradise (there are definite stages by which the Bóand returns to paradise), but not insofar as the earthly paradise relates to mortal experience (no stages are needed for the Bóand to emerge from its western source by way of its far eastern goal).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Boand I*, line 72; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.30 and 31. See also, Sinnan, the *síd*-woman identified with the river of that name, who is both ‘suthain’ (everlasting) and ‘marb’ (dead); *Sinnann*, lines 11, 59; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.286, 290 and tr.287, 291.

<sup>75</sup> *Boand I*, lines 34-6; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.28 and tr.29: ‘fota sair síst fri himlúad: / ó phardus darís ille: / co srothaib na síde-se’.

<sup>76</sup> Standish Hayes O’Grady, ed. and tr., ‘*Echtra Thaidg mheic Chéin*’, in O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, ed. I, 342-59, at 349-51 and tr. II, 385-401, at 391-4; discussed in Carey, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 61-2.

<sup>77</sup> For further examples, see Carey, ‘Time, Space and the Otherworld’, 2-7. However, as noted earlier, these do not amount to the transcendence of space (i.e. a situation in which space does not exist), but a suspension of the normal limitations of fallen human spatiality.

In the two entries on the river Sinann, or ‘Shannon’, the identification of the otherworld context of the Bóand within Síid Nechtain with ‘The Paradise of Adam’ is at least more straightforwardly confirmed. For if Segais is the name of the Bóand before it emerges into mortal geography,<sup>78</sup> it is also the name of the Sinann,<sup>79</sup> together with five other ‘principle rivers’ prior to their distinction from each other.<sup>80</sup> And in this instance, the spring of Segais is directly stated to be located in *Tír Tarnaire*, the ‘Land of Promise’,<sup>81</sup> which, as we have noted previously, is the Irish translation of *Terra Repromissionis*, the name which apocalyptic texts, like *Visio Pauli*, give to the earthly paradise and which first enters extant medieval Irish literature in the *Navigatio*.<sup>82</sup> We are still not able to resolve whether this earthly paradise is identical with, or the western counterpart of, ‘The Paradise of Adam’ for the framers of the *Metrical Dindshenchas*. Yet however one may look at it, the thought that one may receive inspiration<sup>83</sup> from such hazels as grow by the well-spring of a river, or from the waters of the river itself, when that river is thought to both begin and end in paradise, is not especially surprising.

### Contrasting Interpretations

The story of Senbecc and Cú Chulainn, which is found in *BND*,<sup>84</sup> exhibits a similar sense of these possibilities as concrete realities that are available at certain times and places,<sup>85</sup> and is especially noteworthy in that it does so in the eighth century: significantly earlier than the extant form of *Metrical Dindshenchas*, or even the extant

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<sup>78</sup> *Boand I*, lines 9-10; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.26 and tr.27: ‘Segais a hainim issin tsíd / ria cantain duit in cach thír: / Sruth Segsa a hainm otá-sin / co LInd Mochúí in chlérig’ (=Segais was her name in the Sid / to be sung by thee in every land: / River of Segais is her name from that point / to the pool of Mochua the cleric).

<sup>79</sup> *Sinann I*, lines 21, 25, 35, 54; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.286-90 and tr.287-91.

<sup>80</sup> *Sinann I*, lines 16-20; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.286 and tr.287: ‘Topur . / . . asmbuinnet secht prim-šrotha’ (=A well . / . . whence spring seven main streams). See also *Sinann II*, lines 10-11; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.292 and tr.293: ‘bunad Sinna srib-glaine . / . . sé srotha, nárb inann blad, / eisti, Sinann in sechtmad’ (=the origin of bright-streaming Sinann . / . . six streams, unequal in fame, rise from it, the seventh was Sinann).

<sup>81</sup> *Sinann I*, line 9; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.286 and 287.

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 325-8.

<sup>83</sup> This idea is not mentioned in the first entry on the Bóand, but is referred to several times in the two entries on Sinann. *Sinann I*, lines 21-4, 40, 47; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.286-90 and tr.297-91. *Sinann II*, line 36; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.294 and tr.295.

<sup>84</sup> Gwynn, ed., ‘An Old Irish Tract’, 26, line 17 – 27, line 3; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 67. Discussed in Carey, ‘Waters of Vision’, 169-70.

<sup>85</sup> The second entry on the Sinnan has the hazels that grow by the spring ripen instantaneously and simultaneously; *Sinann II*, line 20; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.292 and tr.293.

version of the *Immacallam*. There Cú Chulainn is said to have found one of the *aes síde*, Senbecc, while he was looking for the hazels whose nuts are the source of the inspiration (*imbas*) that runs in Boyne river. Given that Senbecc is himself seeking the inspiration that they provide, it would seem that even the deathless people of the earthly paradise are in some way dependent on the virtue of these hazels. This is something that he has in common with the *síd*-woman who gave the Sinnann her name in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*. For it was in pursuit of the bubbles of *imbas* which the juice of the hazel-nuts form in the river that she drowned.<sup>86</sup> Senbecc has been luckier than Sinnann; his past attempts to get *imbas* have been successful,<sup>87</sup> resulting in his current state of giftedness. The primary interest in this lies in that he describes these nuts (or else the *imbas* that he gets from them) as ‘mysteries of God’,<sup>88</sup> thus making of them - as suggested before - some kind of secular sacrament that is only fully intelligible as such by analogy with the sacraments of the Church. This analogy helps in turn to make sense of the gods’ own dependence on these hazels for inspiration, seeing as the members of the clerical hierarchies of the Church, to varying degrees, simultaneously produce the sacraments and rituals of the Church and yet remain dependent on them as individuals.

The late Middle Irish text, *SFF* (c.1200), is rather more complex matter. In Cormac’s journey to *Tír Tarrngire* he finds many of the things we will have come to expect. Similar to Bran in his *immram*, his guide is the god, Mannanán mac Lir.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, among other wonders that Mannanán shows him there is the *topur in fis*, the ‘Fountain of Knowledge’, from which five streams pour. Nine trees drop their hazels into the fountain where salmon break them open, leaving the husks to float down these

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<sup>86</sup> *Sinnan II*, lines 25-44; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.294 and tr.295.

<sup>87</sup> Gwynn, ed., ‘An Old Irish Tract’, 26.20-22; Carey, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 67: ‘Naoi ccuill chaoimhesa ate a ccno dofuair an iomhus, contuited isna tiobradoibh conadtoila an sruth an iomhus isin mBóinn’ (=There are nine fair-bearing hazels from whose nuts he got *imbas*: it used to drop into the wells, so that the stream bears *imbas* into the Boyne).

<sup>88</sup> Gwynn, ed., ‘An Old Irish Tract’, 26, lines 24-5; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 67: ‘fesa rom dânsattar dé dâimra Abhcânsa saoi fealbhais, file a Seghais, Senbhecc mo ainm’ (=The mysteries of God have made me gifted / I am Abcán, a sage of learning, a poet from Segais).

<sup>89</sup> *SFF* §53; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.198 and tr.216: “‘Misi Manandan mac Lir’, ar se, ‘righ Thíri Tarrngiri, 7 is aire doradus alle d’ fêchsain Tíri Tarrngire”’ (=‘I am Mannanan son of Lir’, says he, ‘king of the Land of Promise; and to see the Land of Promise was the reason I brought you hither’).



streams.<sup>90</sup> In a way this is very much as it should be. A title like ‘Fountain of Knowledge’, for instance, would not seem unfitting for Segais, even if the name ‘Segais’ is not used here.<sup>91</sup> But the knowledge that is in these streams does not seem to be due to any *imbas* being released from the hazels that fall into them. Moreover, the streams that flow from this spring are not the rivers of Ireland; they are the five senses. In which case, the knowledge that is in these streams seems to be neither more nor less than the knowledge that may be obtained through the normal operation of the five senses.<sup>92</sup> There is, of course, also the knowledge that is found in the ‘Fountain of Knowledge’ itself to consider. We are told that mastery of many arts depends on drinking out of it in addition to drinking the knowledge that is found in the senses.<sup>93</sup> We can only try to infer what this may be, lacking any direct statements, but it seems unlikely to be anything other than the mind itself. It would not, after all, be an unfamiliar philosophical position for the time to see the activity of sense perception as deriving from the activity of mind, and the knowledge which is gained through it fundamentally as a particularized and exteriorized form of mind’s self-reflection on its own interior reasons.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *SFF* §35; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.195 and tr.213: ‘Atchi didiu topur taitneamach isin lis, ⁊ coic srotha ass, ⁊ na sloigh imaseach ic ol usei na sroth. Nai cuill buana oscind in tobuir. Focerdaidh andsin na cuill corcarrda a cnaí isin topur conus-tennat na coic eicne filead isin topur, co curtar a mbolga for na srothaibh. Fuaim eassa na sroth sin didiu, ba bindi na cach ceol a contais’ (=Then he sees in the garth a shining fountain, with five streams flowing out of it, and the hosts in turn a drinking its water. Nine hazels of Buan grow over the well. The purple hazels drop their nuts into the fountain, and the five salmon which are in the fountain sever them and send their husks float/ing down the streams. Now the sound of these streams is more melodious than any song).

<sup>91</sup> Nor is the alternative title ‘Tipra Chonnlai’ (Connla’s Spring) used; cf. *Sinann II*, line 9; Gwynn, ed. and tr., *Metrical Dindshenchas III*, ed.294 and tr.295.

<sup>92</sup> *SFF* §53; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.198 and tr.216: ‘As e in topur adcon[n]arcais cusna coic srothaibh ass .i. topur in fis. IS iad na cuic cétfadha triassa tarrthaitear in fis’ (=The fountain which thou sawest, with the fives streams out of it, is the Fountain of Knowledge, and the streams are the five senses through which knowledge is obtained [?]).

<sup>93</sup> *SFF* §53; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.198 and tr.216: ‘⁊ didiu ní bia dan lais nach ní na hiba dig asin tobur fesin ⁊ asna srothaibh. Lucht na n-illdan is iad cabhus estib diblínaib’ (=And no one will have knowledge who drinketh not a draught out of the fountain itself and out of the streams. The folk of many are those who drink of them both).

<sup>94</sup> e.g. Calcidius, *Commentaria in Platonis Timaeum* I.46d, II.230-1; Magee, ed. and tr., *On Plato’s Timaeus: Calcidius*, ed.96, 484-6 and tr.97, 485-7. Boethius, *De consolation philosophiae* V.iv[prosa].31-9; Weinberger, ed., *Boethii Philosophiae Consolationis*, 117-8; Watts, tr., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, 157-9. Cf. Carey, ‘The Waters of Vision’, 166-8. The division between the knowledge that is derived from the streams of the sense that come from the spring, and the knowledge that comes from the spring itself seems worth comparing to the division between *Coire Goiriath* and *Coire Sofís* in *The Caldron of Poesy*; see Chapter 2, pages 125-33.

That said, we are not able to categorise this story as a simple allegory. Cormac does not return to the mortal world like someone out of a dream, but in a different physical location, with his family restored to him and two treasures from the Land of Promise in his possession: a branch which makes music that puts hearers to sleep when shaken, and a cup that allows him to distinguish truth from falsehood.<sup>95</sup> But this Land of Promise does not therefore have the same significance that it has in the texts we have been looking at. In the first place, the ‘natural truth’ that it is said that Cormac and other ‘royal lords’ used to follow, seems to be either indistinguishable from, or else certainly derived from the Mosaic law.<sup>96</sup> The ‘natural truth’ revealed to these rulers does not then possess an intrinsically different character than the knowledge that belongs specifically to the Church. The former is simply a less complete form of the latter, although it may still involve knowledge on specific issues which had not otherwise been known.

By thus removing any distinction between the character of ‘natural truth’ and ecclesiastical truth, it also removes any metaphysical need for a reality and personalities which could account for the fundamental distinction between them. Therefore, the beings found in this Land of Promise are not distinguished from angels in any way. We are told that the strange apparitions which used to be seen by righteous rulers, such as those seen by Cormac in his journey to the Land of Promise, were in fact angels pure and simple.<sup>97</sup> This is simply the doctrine of Augustine in *DCD*. Pre-Christian prophetic knowledge is possible - perhaps even of things not otherwise known to Church - but it is indistinguishable in kind from the revelation which characterises the Church.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *SFF* §54; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.198 and tr.216: ‘Antan tra atracht Cormac isin maidin arnamharach is and bai for faith[ch]i na Teamrach, a ceathrar 7 a craebh 7 a chuach oca’ (=Now on the morrow morning, when Cormac arose, he found himself on the green of Tara, with his wife and his son and daughter, and having his Branch and his Cup).

<sup>96</sup> *SFF* §24; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.193 and tr.211; ‘7 ro-marastair Cai co tormail .ix. ndine a n-*Erinn* iar firindi a breathumun (sic), ar at e bretha nobered .i. bretha rechta Maísi, 7 is aire sin isat airimda bretha rechta isin feneocus. Ba siad bretha rechta didiu rofognom do Cormac.’ (=And Cai remained in Erin until he had outlived nine generations, in consequence of the righteousness of his judgements, for the judgements which he used to deliver were the judgments of the Law of Moses, and therefore the judgements of the Law are very abundant in Fénechas. They were judgments of the Law (of Moses), then, that served for Cormac); *SFF* §80; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.202 and tr.221: ‘ar is firindi aignidh dia lentais, air is timna Rechta rofognamh doibh’ (=for they followed Natural Truth, and they served the commandment of the Law).

<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 147-8, esp. note 271.

<sup>98</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 96-8, 101-8, 119-120; Chapter 4, pages 288-91.

In this case, the Land of Promise is still a real place. Certain miraculous objects, or ‘ordeals’ (*fír flatha*) which aided the Cormac in the exercise of his rule are thought to have come from there upon a time. Nor is he the only person who seems to have received this kind of help from the Land of Promise.<sup>99</sup> However, it is the source of no revelation that is fundamentally distinguishable from that which is manifest in the relics, sacraments and writings of the Church. This is further highlighted by the fact that ordeals that have their origin in St. Paul and Moses are indiscriminately numbered among the ordeals which came from a *síd*, without any indication that they are seen as more or less authoritative in any respect.<sup>100</sup>

As far as the experience of Land of Promise itself is concerned, the significance of its wonders seems largely to be assimilated to the significance of the symbolic visions of saints, but with two important differences. Firstly, it officially extends the possible symbolic repertoire of such visions far beyond those of Scripture to include, in principle, any and all the images of otherworldly matters found in the saga-literature of the previous five-hundred years. Secondly, the symbolism of the Land of Promise seems to reveal things about the aspects of the law of Moses pertaining to the operation of the state rather than theology. This suggests that there may yet be some distinction between natural and ecclesiastical revelation in terms of subject-matter, such that the specific subject-matter of a given angelic revelation would reflect the concerns that belong to the secular or ecclesiastical role of the one receiving it, even if there is no qualitative difference in the character of the revelation itself implied as a result. This still leaves problems which we will not be able to address at the moment concerning how we are to understand the principles by which *fír flathemon*, as exemplified in Cormac, are thought to operate here.<sup>101</sup> But it indicates, at least, that its identification of the natural law with the law of Moses, and the gods with angels, does not necessarily mean that it has dispensed with every means of distinguishing between the Holy Spirit’s revelation to members of the secular hierarchies, and its revelation to members of the ecclesiastical

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<sup>99</sup> Similarly miraculous means for making true judgements come from the *aes síde* in a number of other places; *SFF* §16, 19; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.190-1 and tr.208-9.

<sup>100</sup> *SFF* §15, 24; Stokes, ed. and tr., ‘The Irish Ordeals’, ed.190, 192-3 and tr.208-9, 211.

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 220-2.

hierarchies.<sup>102</sup> Apart from these concerns, it also bears comment that, in addition to what the wonders of the Land of Promise allegorically reveal about the exercise of human capacities in the mortal world, it remains possible that they could have some significance in themselves. But if so, *SFF* does not give us any indication of what this significance might be.

### **The Scope of this Solution to the Problem**

*SFF* is somewhat of an outlier on these issues. Be that as it may, it is a helpful reminder that even a sympathetic depiction of The Land of Promise and its ever-living inhabitants will not necessarily agree with the metaphysical and cosmological position we have been describing in every particular, and may even depart from it significantly. The earthly paradise and its divine inhabitants are many things to many people. The influence of the idea that the gods are the secular counterparts of the angels must be determined on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, it is possible to define a few general principles of interpretation based on the evidence already at hand.

We may reasonably argue that such a doctrine is implied, even when not directly addressed, by early Irish texts that maintain a strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration, since this distinction seems to be what fundamentally requires such an understanding of the gods of the sagas. Albeit, we have seen that some of the things which generally seem to depend on natural inspiration in distinction from ecclesiastical inspiration, such as the concept *fír flathemon*, can sometimes be asserted

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<sup>102</sup> *SFF* remains consistent with the greater part of the texts we have discussed thus far in equating the justice of the ruler with the peace and fecundity of the land. If the means and form of revealed knowledge by which a ruler does this are indistinguishable from those by which the Church operate, this would seem to indicate one of three things: either 1) the ruler is the preeminent possessor of every kind of revelation. Thus, the ruler brings about physical peace and prosperity because he has care of both the souls and bodies of his subjects, whereas the Church, only having the care of the soul, does not, 2) contrary to any precedent in early Irish literature of which I am aware, it presupposes that the justice of the hierarchies of the Church as being revealed physically in the same way as it is in the case of the justice of rulers, or 3) it has simply not perceived the way in which its position undermines a more traditional understanding of how the justice that belongs to the Church operates, in contrast to the justice of the secular hierarchies. This is a problem that seems as if it would reward further study.

without maintaining all the things that are most often presupposed by it.<sup>103</sup> Conversely, early Irish texts that portray the gods as something other than angels, devils or notable humans of the past, especially when these gods are portrayed as mediators of the knowledge and skills which characterise the secular hierarchies, may be taken to imply this strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration. However, in narratives which portray the gods on their own, as it were, with little or no reference to those who are definitely mortal humans, it will sometimes be extremely ambiguous what kind of beings the gods are understood to be, even when they are characterised as the founders of secular Irish arts and institutions.<sup>104</sup> The best one can hope for in such situations is that there will be telling details in the disruption of them which will allow us to determine whether they are understood to be magically-trained humans of long ago, pre-Christian saints, devils, angels, or else gods of the sort we have been talking about.

For instance, it is evident that *CMT*, in the form it seems to have had in the ninth century,<sup>105</sup> did not understand the gods to be devils or humans empowered by devils, given that one of them, Morrígan, shows herself capable of prophesying truly concerning last things.<sup>106</sup> That is to say, her prophecy is sufficiently theological in both content and sympathy to distinguish it from diabolical foreknowledge. It also appears unlikely that it takes them to be either angels or saintly humans, given the combination of their famously Rabelaisian behavior,<sup>107</sup> and the lack of specifically Christian doctrine in Morrígan's prophecy. Moreover, the content of this prophecy, as we concluded in Chapter 4, assumes the correspondence of just judgement and physical flourishing that

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<sup>103</sup> In addition to *SFF*, see *CGG* §107; Todd, ed. and tr., *Cogadh*, ed.186-8 and tr.187-9. The latter does not see the god Lug as an angel so much as ancient and exemplary example of virtue, particularly the virtues associated martial prowess.

<sup>104</sup> One must bear in mind that, while the founding of institutions and arts will tend to be understood positively, in Genesis, the descendants of Cain are associated with the founding of many arts; Genesis 5:17-22. We have seen that Cassian, for instance, was somewhat skeptical about the invention of arts, and that this is reflected in his emphasis of this aspect of Genesis; see Chapter 2, pages 105-8, esp. note 130.

<sup>105</sup> Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, 11-21; Carey, 'Myth and Mythography', 53-4. See especially the quotation in Chapter Four, note 248.

<sup>106</sup> See Chapter Four, pages 265-9.

<sup>107</sup> e.g. *CMT* §88-93; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.46-50 and tr.47-51. Here following Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 118-26.

is characteristic of the secular hierarchies in contrast with the ecclesiastical.<sup>108</sup> This, together with the vaguely Christian apocalyptic content of her prophecy suggests that it is a prophecy in a natural rather than an ecclesiastical mode, but also that the author has a more pessimistic understanding of the possibilities of natural inspiration than some, since many texts we have considered see natural inspiration as perhaps the primary way of perceiving Christian doctrine directly. Considering all this in tandem with the rather more-than-human adventures that she and her fellow deities have been involved in against the Fomorians,<sup>109</sup> we may conclude that the oldest recoverable form of *CMT* does indeed take the gods to be the mediators of the bodies of natural knowledge that it severally ascribes to them. This is not, however, true of its eleventh-century form. The sections which appear to show the later influence of *LGÉ* on the text, are quite candid in their portrayal of the gods as gigantic people of the sort who were taken to be ubiquitous in the ancient world, and who had also enjoyed the benefit of extensive training in magic of a sort that is described as ‘diabolical’.<sup>110</sup> However, such editorial decisions seem to leave the reader of the resulting text with no way of adequately accounting for the character of the Morrígan’s prophecy.

Thus, even direct evidence of the idea that the gods are the divine mediators of secular knowledge can sometimes only be identified as such with care. As Augustine’s repeated attempts at a literal interpretation of Genesis bear witness, sometimes a literal reading can be harder to get right than an allegorical reading.<sup>111</sup> But not all the relevant evidence regarding the distribution of this conception of the gods is even as straightforward as this. The version of the third-recension *LGÉ* that is found in The

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<sup>108</sup> See Chapter Four, pages 287-8.

<sup>109</sup> e.g. *CMT* §96-123; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.50-4 and tr.51-5. However, the best evidence that these gods are seen as something more than human remains the Dagda’s adventures prior to the battle; see notes 6 and 107 above.

<sup>110</sup> *CMT* §1-2; Gray, ed. and tr., *Cath Maige Tuired*, ed.24 and tr.25: ‘1. [B]áatar Túathai Dé Danonn i n-indsib túascertachaib an domuín, aig foglaim fesa 7 fithnasachta 7 druídechtai 7 amaidechtai 7 amainsechta, combtar fortilde for súthib cerd ngenntlichtae. Ceitri catrachai i rrbatar og fochlaim fhesai 7 éolais 7 díabuldánachtaí .i. Falias 7 Goirias, Murias 7 Findias. (=1. The Túatha Dé Danann were in the northern islands of the world, studying occult lore and sorcery, druidic arts and witchcraft and magical skill, until they surpassed the sages of the pagan arts. 2. They studied occult lore and secret knowledge and diabolic arts in four cities: Falias, Gorias, Murias, and Findias).

<sup>111</sup> He has one book on the allegorical interpretation of Genesis (*DGCM*); but two [that latter of which is unfinished] on its literal interpretation; *De Genesi ad Litteram libri duodecim* and *De Genesi ad Litteram imperfectus liber*.

Great Book of Lecan<sup>112</sup> is one of the best examples of the more indirect evidence that must also be considered. Generally speaking, the contributors to *LGÉ* were none too impressed with the idea of the gods we have been working with, and this version of the third recension also considers a number of the available counter-arguments. After considering the possibility that they were humans who had the knowledge (presumably magical knowledge) necessary to come to Ireland through the air, this version of *LGÉ* goes on to consider that they may be devils:<sup>113</sup>

Others say that the Tuatha Dé Donann were demons of a special order, and that they came from heaven along with the banishment from heaven of Lucifer and his demons. They take on bodies of air and ruin and tempt the race of Adam . . . . That people, then, go into the hollow hills; and they go beneath the seas, and they take the form of wolves, and the visit witches and those who turn against the sun. The origin of them all is the devil's household. Their genealogy cannot be reckoned back, nor can the men of the world learn it; and that whole multitude was vanquished by the rightfulness of the [Gael] and by the prophecy of faith in Christ<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> i.e. 'M' in Macalister; 'Lc' in Scowcroft; Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* I, vi, xix-xxi; Scowcroft, 'Lebor Gabála. Part I', 87.

<sup>113</sup> For the mediation of relevant ideas in Isidore's *De differentiis* by the Hiberno-Latin text, *De ordine creaturarum*, see Carey, 'The Uses of Tradition', 79. For the relevant passage, see *De ordine creaturarum* VIII.16; Díaz y Díaz, ed., *Liber de ordine*, 142-4; Marina Smyth, tr., 'The Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Treatise: *Liber de ordine creaturarum*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 21 (2011), 137-222, at 186: 'At uero isti inprobi et inupri spiritus, uagi et subtiles, animo passibiles sunt et, aereis corporibus induti, nunquam senescent, et cum hominibus inimicitias exercentes, superbia tument, fallacesque atque in fraude callidi hominum sensus comouent, terroremque mortalibus inferentes, inquietudinibus somniorum et motibus et distortionem membris uitam turbant, praestrigia atque oracula fingentes, regentesque sortes, cupidinem illiciti amoris et cupiditatis humanis cordibus infundunt; et ueri similia mentientes / in bonorum etiam angelorum habitum et lucem se transformant' (=These treacherous and impure spirits are inconstant and subtle, their passible souls clothed in bodies of air. They never age and they swell with pride at exercising their actions inimical to men. Deceitfully and by skillful fraud they disturb the senses of men and, bringing terror to mortals, they trouble their life by the worries of dreams and by the movements and distortions of their members. Contriving wonders and oracles, and presiding over lots, they fill human hearts with the concupiscence of illicit love and cupidity, and even, pretending to their likeness, they transform themselves into the appearance and the light of good angels).

<sup>114</sup> Yellow Book of Lecan *LGÉ*, folio 277 ra 43-b 6 [cf. Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* III, ed.154 and tr.155]; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 18: ' . . . Atberaid aroile comad deamna grada ecsamla T.D.D. 7 comad iad-siden dodeachadar do nim araen risin loinges dodeachaid Luitcifear cona deamnaib do nibh. Arfaemad chuirp aerda umpu do millead 7 d'aslach for sil nAdaím . . . Tiagaid thra in lucht-sin i sidaib ocus tiagaid fo muirib ocus tiagaid i conrethaib ocus tiagait co hamaide ocus tiagait co tuathcingtha. Is as-sin is bunadas doib uili .i. muinte deamain. Ni ruca genelach na ndaine-sea for cula

Insofar as it entertains this possibility, it is in concert with the late Old Irish *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill*,<sup>115</sup> and a number of Middle Irish commentators after it, with notable examples found in the later version A of *Serglige Con Culainn*,<sup>116</sup> and the famous Latin Colophon of the Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.<sup>117</sup> But there is a subsequent section of the same version of *LGÉ* which presents a fairly nuanced counter to such a position. Among the reasons it gives as to why the gods cannot in fact be devils, is that: every darkness of art and every clearness of reading / and every craft of cunning that is in Ireland, they are of the Tuatha De Danann by origin and though the Faith came into Ireland those arts were not abolished, for they are good.<sup>118</sup>

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nocho rofheasidar fir in domain / olchena ocus doraebadar in sluag-sa uili la firindi mac Milead 7 la tairchedal chreidme Críst’.

<sup>115</sup> *STMC*, lines 56-8; Carey, ed., ‘*Scél Tuáin*’, 102; Koch and Carey *et al*, tr., *The Celtic Heroic Age*, 224: ‘Gabais Beothecht mac Iordanen in n-insi seo forsna cenéla bátar inti. Is díib in Gáliúin 7 Tuatha Dé 7 Andé dona fes bunadus lasin n-oes n-eólais. Acht ba dóich leo bith din longis dodeochaid de nim dóib’ (=Beothecht son of Iordanen conquered this island from the peoples who were in it. Of them are the Gálióin, and the *Tuatha Dé ocus Andé*, whose origin the men of learning do not know; but they thought it likely that they are some of the exiles who came to them from heaven).

<sup>116</sup> *Serglige Con Culainn* §11, lines 844-9; Dillon, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn*, 29; Carey, tr., ‘The Uses of Tradition’, 78: ‘844. Conid taibsiu aidmilti do Choin Chulaind la h-áes sídi / 845. sin. Ar ba mór in chumachta demnach ria cretim, & ba h-é a / 846. méit co cathaigtis co corptha na demna frisna doínib & co taisféntais / 847. aifnusia & díamairi dóib, amal no betis co marthanach. / 848. Is amlaid no creteá dóib. Conid frisna taidbsib sin atberat na / 849. h-anéolaig síde & áes síde’ (=And so that is the blighting vision [shown] to Cú Chulainn by the people of the *síde*. For the diabolical power was great before the Faith, so that demons could wage bodily war against men, and could show them beautiful and secret things, as if they were permanent. And so they were believed in. So that it is those apparitions which the ignorant call *síde*, and people of the *síde*). See also, *Serglige Con Culainn* §2, lines 7-11; Dillon, ed., *Serglige Con Culainn*, 1; Carey, tr., ‘The Uses of Tradition’, 77-8.

<sup>117</sup> *Táin Bó Cúailnge II*, lines 4921-5; O’Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge from LL*, ed.136 and tr.272: ‘Sed ego qui scripsi hanc historiam aut uerius fabulam quibusdam fidem in hac historia aut fabula non accomodo. Quaedam enim ibi sunt praestrigia demonum, quaedam autem figmenta poetica, quaedam silmilia uero, quaedam non, quadam ad delectationem stultorum’ (=But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, others poetic figments; some are probable, other improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men). For this colophon as a later addition to the text, see Ó Néill, ‘The Latin Colophon’, 269–275. cf. the earlier Irish colophon; *Táin Bó Cúailnge II*, lines 4919-20; O’Rahilly, ed. and tr., *Táin Bó Cúailnge from LL*, ed.136 and tr.272: ‘BEndacht ar cech óen mebraigfes go hindraic Táin amlaid seo 7 ná tuillfe cruth aile furri’ (=A blessing on every one who shall faithfully memorise the Táin as it is written here and shall not add any other form to it).

<sup>118</sup> *LGÉ* §371; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Érenn IV*, ed.200-2 and tr.201-203: ‘Ar gach ndiamair n-dana 7 ar gach lere leighis 7 gach amaidsi eladhna fuil an Erinn, is o / Tuatha De Danann ata a bhunadh; 7 ge thainig creideamh an Erinn, no ro dichuirthea na dana sin, daigh at mhaithe iad’. This is from a later third-recension of *LGÉ*. However, very nearly the same text is found - albeit without the reference to and subsequent quotation of Flann’s poem - in the second-recension; *LGÉ* §353; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Érenn IV*, ed.164 and tr.165. Carey tentatively dates the second-recension version of this passage to c.1100, and provides a new translation; Carey, tr., ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 56.



This does not, however, result in any particularly sanguine conclusions regarding the identity of the gods. As evidence in support of the argument that they were mortal humans, a poem attributed to the eleventh-century scholar, Flann Mainistrech (d.1056) follows.<sup>119</sup> It is, for the most part, a catalogue of the deaths they are thought to have endured as mortals, but concludes, in this version of the text,<sup>120</sup> with a more theological passage:

39. The Tuatha De Danann, a company like to crystal, / though men of false learning say here / that the people of ships and of drinking-beakers are in Tir Tairngire—,

40. The ‘Tir Tairngire’ here spoken of / which the Tuatha De Danann have,— / it is the ever-narrow steading wherein there is judgement; / it is the lowest Hell.

41. Though they say here in various ways, / false men of history, / that the folk of the curses, of the dwellings, were *sid*-folk, / the belief is displeasing to Christ.

42. Whoso believes in his heart / that they are thus in *sid*-mounds, / he shall not inhabit Heaven of the Powers, / for the cause that it is no truth to which he hearkeneth.<sup>121</sup>

What these arguments cumulatively presuppose is the existence of contemporaries who see the Tuatha De Danann as the inhabitants of a paradisaal ‘Land of Promise’ which is

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<sup>119</sup> On the role which this poem plays in the various versions of *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, see Thansich Eystein, ‘Flann Mainistrech's *Götterdämmerung* as a Junction with *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*’, *Quaestio Insularis* 13 (2012), 68–93.

<sup>120</sup> Carey argues that the stanzas quoted here were not actually written by Flann himself, given that they are only attached to the poem in one family of manuscripts (i.e. Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* IV, ed.240 and tr.241) and are attested separately in Dublin, National University of Ireland MS G1, folios 52v-53r. A translation of the latter text is found in Carey, tr., *A Single Ray*, 17-8, with the preceding argument at note 25.

<sup>121</sup> *LGÉ*: poem lvi §39-42; Macalister, ed. and tr., *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* IV, ed.240 and tr.241: ‘39. Tūatha Dē Danann drong mar gloin, / giatberaid sund sāebh-eōlaig / lucht na mbarc is na mblēdha, / atāit a Tīr Tairngire—/ 40. Tīr Thairngire adberar and / do bhīs ag Tūatha Dē Danand— / baile bith-sheang a mbī breth; / is e t-ifearnn ichtarach. / 41. Gideraid sund tār saine, / sāebuide na seanchaide, / sīdh ag lucht na trist na treabh, / nī maith la Crist in ereideam. / 42. Gebe ereidis eo n-anmain / a mbeadh a sīdhaibh samlaigh, / ni aitreabha neam na neart, / domnai nadh fir nos-eisteadh’.

also somehow interior to *síd*-mounds. They further presuppose that these god-people are in some way the source of the arts in Ireland, and also that they have done such things as fly through the air, change into animal form (wolf-form in particular) and go beneath the seas. The existence of these beliefs is, moreover, a serious enough problem that they are worthy of repeated refutation. Such details have, of course, been able to form a coherent picture according to the understanding of the gods that we have been dealing with. But part of the reason this recension seems not to be able to settle on a definitive view of what the gods are is that the ontological categories which are deemed acceptable make it difficult to account for all the relevant information which is available to them. The idea that the gods are truly devils seems best able to account for the diversity and extent of their superhuman activities, any nagging uncertainties regarding their genealogies, and the claim that they were still present in Ireland which the Church first came to it. The idea that they are magically-trained humans, however, seems better able to account for the goodness of the arts which they evidently originated in Ireland, as well as the fact that stories of their births and deaths exist in the first place.

What is most interesting here is that these polemics take, for the most part, the form of reinterpretations of the details provided by the available histories which speak about these matters, rather than an attempt to undermine the historicity of the details which pose problems for the coherence of their respective arguments. This suggests that the character of the historical sources they treat as authoritative had, to a great extent, been determined by an outlook for which the details of such accounts were an expression rather than a problem, that is, an outlook which saw them as neither human, nor diabolical, nor angelic, but as the ever-living mediators of the Holy Spirit's inspiration to the secular hierarchies.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *contra* Carey, who seems to see in this a persistence of some kind of unreflective attachment, rather than an intellectual problem posed by the way that the theological and cosmological presuppositions of recognized historical authorities were manifest in the details of their accounts of the gods; Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 57: 'it would be difficult to enumerate all the way in which the old gods are found associated with the arts: poetry, medicine, music, metalwork, carpentry and the *ogam* script are all placed under their patronage, and sometimes it is explicitly stated that their relationship with these skills is that of presiding deities. What is fascinating in the present instance is to encounter, in a relatively late source, evidence that this connection was still so vehemently believed in; for the author of our passage, an attack

### Variations of this Solution to the Problem

That said, it would be wrong to treat this way of conceiving the gods as identical in all its instances. Given that they are defined by their identification with the natural or secular expression of God's providence, in contrast with supernatural providence he manifests through the angels, the various ways in which their character and activity are understood can generally be taken to reflect differences of opinion regarding nature, as such, and the way that these two orders of providence relate to each other through the human hierarchies in which they are instantiated. For instance, where a distinction between artisan 'gods' and landholding 'non-gods' is made,<sup>123</sup> this would appear to reveal an attempt to go beyond the cosmological means of accounting for the primary distinction between natural and ecclesiastical forms of revelation. The presumed purpose of such a subdivision of the gods would be to have a way of understanding the difference between the way that natural inspiration is embodied by the hierarchies defined by their practice of the arts, in contrast to the way that it is embodied by rulers. But of course, such distinctions will be less likely where rulers are thought to preeminent possessors of what all the arts know in distinction from each other.<sup>124</sup>

Another notable example of the variations that are possible is found in the contrasting presentations of prophecies made by divine figures in *Immram Brain* and *CMT*. In *Immram Brain*, the inhabitants of the earthly paradise make multiple prophecies concerning Christ's advent,<sup>125</sup> suggesting a much higher doctrine of natural inspiration than *CMT*, where we have seen that the Morrigan's prophecy agrees with Christian eschatology, but remains stubbornly vague in regard to particulars.<sup>126</sup> Elsewhere, the

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on the Túatha Dé Donann was tantamount to an attack on the arts themselves'. Such polemics certainly seem to show that ideas of this kind had contemporary apologists, but the author in question is evidently not one of them.

<sup>123</sup> For discussion and examples, see Williams, *Ireland's Immortals*, 147, 168-9; Carey, 'Waters of Vision', 174, incl. note 34. This distinction seems to go at least as far back as Old Irish times, given that it occurs in the first recension of the *Táin*, as well as *STMC*.

<sup>124</sup> See Chapter Two, starting at page 151ff.

<sup>125</sup> *Immram Brain*, §26-8, 48; Mac Mathuna, ed. and tr., '*Immram Brain*', ed.37-8, 41 and tr.50-1, 54; see Chapter 5, page 354, esp. note 179.

<sup>126</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 265-9.

*Acallam*, in presenting Patrick as marrying the king to an *síd*-woman,<sup>127</sup> and as placing an *síd*-poet in charge of the mortal poets,<sup>128</sup> affirms the basis of the secular hierarchies in the earthly paradise, and the importance of both from the perspective of the Church. However, in its accompanying portrayal of Patrick enclosing the other *aes síde* within their respective *síd*-mounds,<sup>129</sup> it shows a great degree of pessimism about the degree the natural ideal embodied in the secular hierarchies can co-exist with the supernatural ideal embodied by the ecclesiastical hierarchies prior to the perfect conciliation they will enjoy following the Last Judgement.

Many such distinctions could be made. But of the many things one might consider in this respect one of the more important is the presence or absence of baptism. We have seen that the gods are sometimes understood to be sinless,<sup>130</sup> a doctrine which we found in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *Immram Brain*, among other places.<sup>131</sup> Sometimes this sinless state is evidently thought to be that of unfallen humans,<sup>132</sup> but not to the exclusion of the

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<sup>127</sup> *Acallam na Senórach*, lines 7826-34; Stokes, ed., ‘*Acallamh na Senórach*’, ed.219; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders*, 217. John Carey, ‘*Acallam na Senórach: A Conversation between Worlds*’, in Aidan Doyle and Kevin Murray, eds., *In Dialogue with the ‘Agallamh’: Essays in Honour of Seán Ó Coileáin* (Dublin 2014), 76-90, at 86-7.

<sup>128</sup> For this aspect of Cas Corach’s role in the *Acallam* and references, see Carey, ‘A Conversation between Worlds’, 87-9.

<sup>129</sup> *Acallam na Senórach*, lines 7532-7; Stokes, ed., ‘*Acallamh na Senórach*’, 147; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders*, 210.

<sup>130</sup> For references to relevant examples and discussion, see Carey, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 52; *idem*, ‘The Irish Vision of the Chinese’, *Ériu* 38 (1987), 73-79; *idem*, ‘Ireland and the Antipodes: The Heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg’, *Speculum* 64.1 (Jan. 1989), 1-10.

<sup>131</sup> See Chapter 5, pages 352-7.

<sup>132</sup> Carey seems to be right in asserting this. However, not all the evidence he provides is relevant to his case. The ‘Irish Reference Bible’, as Carey points out, entertains the idea that under the earth may be a place where unfallen descendants of Adam live; Carey, ‘The Old Gods of Ireland’, 52. However, this seems not to be the sort of place that righteous or otherwise notable humans like Connla, Bran or the like might hope to find. For the ‘Irish Reference Bible’ is opposed to the idea that fallen descendants of Adam, even the likes of Enoch and Elijah, could sojourn in the Paradise of Adam prior to the resurrection; Wright, ‘Next-to-Last Things’, in Carey *et al* eds., *The End and Beyond* I, 319. There is also the fact that, since we have seen that righteous people like Enoch and Elijah are often thought to have come to inhabit the earthly paradise, descent from Adam by one of the *aes síde* does not necessarily imply that they are absolutely (or at all) unfallen. Potential examples of this ambiguity include Lug, in *Baile in Scáil* and Banba, in a fragment from Cín Dromma Snechta; *Baile in Scáil* §7; Murray, ed. and tr., *Baile in Scáil*, ed.50 and tr.51. Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS D.III.i (671), folio 14 vb 33-7 [from the Book of Fermoy]; Carey, ed. and tr., *A Single Ray*, 31: ‘Atbert Lebur Dromma Snechta cor iarfaig Amairgen dia cenel. “Do chlaind Adhaim dam”, ar si. “Cid cenel do maccaib Nœ duit?” ol se. “Am sini-sea anas Nœ,” ol si. “For rind sleibe rob a-sa isin dilind’ (=The Book of Druimm Snechtai said that Amairgen asked concerning her race. ‘I am descended from Adam,’ said she. ‘To which lineage of Noah’s sons do you belong?’ said he. ‘I am older than Noah’, said she. ‘I was on the peak of a mountain in the Flood). It is

possibility that a state essentially beyond human existence, rather than a state which is simply beyond fallen human existence, may sometimes be envisaged. Thus, since the necessity of the sacrament of baptism only emerges relative to the sinful state of the one receiving it, when a text shows one of the gods receiving baptism, it is clear evidence that the doctrine of their sinlessness is not present. It is, moreover, evidence that they are at least close enough to being human that ecclesiastical sacraments are thought to be relevant to them.<sup>133</sup>

Each side has its own interpretive advantages. The more they are thought to transcend mortal human experience in their sinlessness, the greater the affirmation of the power, authority and dignity of the inspiration that is peculiar to the secular hierarchies, but the harder it is to make sense of the stories of their seductions, revenges, treacheries and the like. This tension is perhaps felt most acutely in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, where the doctrine of their sinlessness appears in conjunction with the author attributing a fair few specific bits of skulduggery to them.<sup>134</sup> Conversely, the closer they are thought to be to mortal human experience, the greater the means of defining the difference between natural and ecclesiastical forms of inspiration in the present world, but with the cost of being less able to articulate what the Church would lack apart from the inspiration that they make possible. A sinless god will give a stronger sense of the providential character of what it mediates. A god that seems to embody the enjoyment and expression of natural capacity and impulse without reference to any higher and more spiritual good will

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tempting to conclude that this latter example should be interpreted as attempting to describe the same realities as we have found in other Cín Dromma Snechta texts; see Chapter 5, pages 357-6. However, given that biblical commentary produced by the ‘Canterbury School’, in the late seventh century, suggests that certain prediluvian giants of Genesis 6 (usually characterised violent and wicked) may have survived the Flood by standing on mountain-tops, further research is likely needed before a more definite interpretation of this text will be possible; Tristan Major, *Undoing Babel: The Tower of Babel in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Toronto 2017), 83. My thanks to Elizabeth Boyle for this latter reference.

<sup>133</sup> *Altram Tige Dá Medar* 12; Lilian Duncan, ed. and tr., ‘*Altram Tige Dá Medar*’, *Ériu* 11 (1932), 184-225, ed.186-205, at 202 and tr.205-225, at 222. Cf. *Acallam na Senórach*, in which the king of the Túatha Dé Danann submits to Patrick, but not with any indication that his baptism will be a necessary, desirable or even a possible part of this; *Acallam na Senórach*, lines 5376-8; Stokes, ed., ‘*Acallamh na Senórach*’, 147; Dooley and Roe, tr., *Tales of the Elders*, 150.

<sup>134</sup> (the Dagda commits adultery with Eithne) *Tochmarc Étaíne* §1; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., ‘*Tochmarc Étaíne*’, ed.142 and tr.142. (Midir allows the daughter of his wife had by Eochaid to suffer incestuous union with Eochaid, something subsequently results in her murder) *Tochmarc Étaíne* §17-20; Bergin and Best, ed. and tr., ‘*Tochmarc Étaíne*’, ed.186-8 and tr.187-9.

provide a stronger sense of the limitations and dangers that characterise the goodness that is particular to the secular order, on this side of the resurrection.

## Conclusions

In any of its forms, the conception of the gods as the secular counterparts to the angels seems to best account, not only for the presence of gods in medieval Irish narratives that appear to insist on their existence, but for the fact that they often seem at their most distinct in the context of Biblical typology, or such things as providing prophetic knowledge of Christian doctrine. It also seems to be the best way of accounting for the evidence which John Carey has put forward regarding how these gods were sometimes supplicated in prayer, and even with ritual, without disregarding what we know about the ecclesiastical context which produced these texts.<sup>135</sup> If saints and angels could be supplicated in this way, why not these other intermediaries?

Then again, at the same time as this conception is a thoroughly coherent development of the high doctrine of natural law which flourished in medieval Irish theology, one can also sympathise with dissenting contemporaries who sometimes found this all rather pagan.<sup>136</sup> For it seems beyond question that such a reinterpretation of preexisting ideas must have involved its fair share of continuities as well as ruptures with the pre-Christian past, even though the means do not exist for knowing what these ideas were like before they came to be reinterpreted as an extension of Christian theology. But such tensions are not new to Christianity's ongoing engagement with its pagan precursors, even if some of the results of this particular engagement would not have

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<sup>135</sup> For an overview of prayers and rituals variously related to Mongfínd, Oengus and Donn Fírinne, with references to the relevant sources (which date from the eleventh-century onward), see Carey, 'The Old Gods of Ireland', 53. See also *Nuall Fir Fhio*, or 'Fer Fio's Cry'; John Carey, ed. and tr., '*Nuall Fir Fhio: "Fir Fio's Cry"*', in Carey, *King of Mysteries*, 136-8: 'Admuiniur secht n-ingena trethan . // . Admuiniur m'argetnía, / nád ba, nád beba . // . . Admuiniur Senach sechtaimserach, / conaltar mná side / for brunnib Buais . // . . Cotagaur cucum a lessa; / rob é rath in Spirito Noíb form-sa. / Domini est salus, ter. / Chrisiti est salus, ter. / Super populum tuum, Domine, / benediction tua' (=I invoke the seven daughters of the sea / who form the threads of long-lived youths . // . . I invoke my silver warrior, / who has not died, who will not die . // . . I invoke Senach of the seven ages, / whom fairy women fostered / on the breasts of inspiration . // . I summon their benefits to me; / may the grace of the Holy Spirit be upon me. / Salvation is of the Lord [three times]. / Salvation is of Christ [three times]. / May your blessing, Lord, / be upon your people).

<sup>136</sup> See pages 397-401 above; Chapter 5, pages 309-14.

many parallels until the High-Middle Ages, when a newfound interest in the good of physical nature caused the likes of Bernardus Silvestris, with Martianus Capella as his guide,<sup>137</sup> to explore the character of the various powers that ranged between the earth and lunar limit of the Plutonian Usiarch's realm:

All the same spirits of this rank (those just above the Moon) are blest with understanding and recollection, and their powers of vision are so subtle and penetrating that, plumbing the dark depths of the spirit, they perceive the hidden thoughts of the mind. They are wholly bound to charity and the common good, for the report the needs of man to God, and return the gifts of God's kindness to men, and so seek to show at once obedience to heaven and diligence in the cause of man. Thus the name 'angel' denotes their office but not their nature.

Accordingly, when the new design, the new creation of man has taken place, a 'genius' will be assigned to watch over him, drawn from this most merciful and serviceable race of spiritual powers, whose benevolence is so deep-seated, and unalterable, that they shut, out of hatred of evil, any contact with the vile or displeasing; but when, though the inspiration of divine powers, some virtuous act is undertaken, they are ever at hand.

. . . The class of spirits who dwell in the atmosphere, but in serenity, maintain calm of mind, as they live in calm. Second in rank to these is the genius which is joined to man from the first stages of his conception, and shows him, by forebodings of mind, dreams, or portentous displays of external signs, the dangers to be avoided. The divinity of these beings is not wholly simple or pure, for it is enclosed in a body, albeit an ethereal one . / . . Since their bodies are virtually incorporeal, and subtler than those of lower creatures, though coarser than those of higher powers, the feeble perception of man is unable to apprehend them.

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<sup>137</sup> *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, I.150-68; Adolf Dick, ed., *Martianus Capella* (Leipzig 1925), 64-9; William Harris Stahl *et al*, tr., *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts: Vol II. The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies 84 (New York 1977), 51-5.

Below the midpoint of the teeming air wander evil spirits and agents of the lord of cruelty . . . And since they persist in wickedness and the desire to do harm, they are often empowered by divine decree to inflict torment on those stained with crime. Often too they decide for themselves to inflict injury of their own accord. Often they insinuate themselves invisibly into minds at rest, or concerned with their own thoughts, through the power of suggestion. Often, assuming bodily existence, they assume the forms of the dead.

The first rank of spirits I call the guardians, those intermediary, the interpreters, and the lowest the renegade angels. Consider now these early beings who inhabit the world. Wherever earth is most delightful, rejoicing in green hill, flowery mountainside, and river, or clothed in woodland greenery, there Silvans, Pans, and Nerei, who know only innocence, draw out the term of their long life. Their bodies are of elemental purity: yet these too succumb at last, in the season of the dissolution.

The Plutonian Usiarch, whom I may call Summanus, or lord of the shades, is preeminent in his influence from the limits of the atmosphere down to the surface of the earth, and the empire over which he rules is the surface of the moon. But I pray you, let not a power whose potency is limited to the atmosphere appear to your judgement as vile or unworthy of the respect due to majesty. The atmosphere is the means of breathing, and without the gift of the atmosphere the health of created life cannot endure.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Microcosmos*, II.vii.6-12; Peter Dronke, ed., *Bernardus Silvestris: Comographia* (Leiden 1978), 135-6; Winthrop Weatherbee, tr., *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris* (New York and London 1973), 107-8: '6. [. . .] Verumtamen huius ordinis species, intelligencia, memoria, utraque felici, oculorum intuitu adeo substili, adeo penetrabili, ut, anime pervadens latebras, concepta pectoris deprehendat archani. Quorum ita benivola, ita communis est servitus, ut hominis indigencias ad deum, indulgenciarum dei beneficia ad hominem reportantes, et obsequium celo et terrenis diligenciam studeant inperitiri. Unde angelus officii nomen est, non nature. 7. Cum igitur homo, conductante quidem Providencia, novum figmentum, nova fuerit creatura, de clementissimo et secundario spirituum ordine deligendus est Genius, in eius custodiam deputatus. Cuius tam ingenita, tam refixa est benignitas, ut, ex odio malicie displicentis pollute fugiat conversantem. Et cum quid virtutis agendum insumitur, sacris per inspirationem mentibus assolet interesse 8. [. . .] Ea igitur spirituum distinctio que in aere mansitat, sed sereno, tranquillitas mentes contrahunt, quia cohabitant in tranquillo. Ex istorum quoque numero secundus est Genius, qui, de nascendi principiis homini copulates, vitanda illi discrimina vel mentis presagio, vel soporis ymagine, vel



The various interactions which the understanding of nature documented in the present study would come to have with the relevant features of twelfth-century Platonism are clearly a promising topic for future inquiry. These enticing matters, however, must await another occasion. For our present inquiry has, with this gesture past itself, now reached its end.

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prodigioso rerum spectaculo configurat. 9. Horum quidem non adeo sincera, non usquequaque simplex est divinitas, verum corpore –sed ethereo – circumplexa [. . .] Cum corpore igitur velut incorporeos, subtiliores inferis, set superis grossiores, inbecilla non sufficit humanitas intueri. 10. Ex medio porro aeris inferius turbulenti, spiritalis nequicie circumcursant, imperique satellites durioris [. . .] Quia igitur in malignitate et nocendi studio perserverant, divino plerumque iudicio potestatem accipiunt, ut tormentis afficiant sceleribus inquinatos. Plerumque ex arbitrio ultroneas inferunt lesiones. Sepe per suggestionem tacitis mentibus vel cogitationibus invisibiles illabuntur; assumpto sepe corpore formas umbraticas induuntur. 11. Primos igitur spirituum presules, medioximos interpretes, extremos angelos dixerim desertores. Telluros, qui terram incolunt, sic habeto. Ubi terra delectabilior nunc herboso cacumine, tergoque moncium picturato, nunc fluviis hilarescit, nunc silvarum viriditate vestitur, illic Silvani, Panes et Nerei innocua conversatione etatis evolvunt tempora longioris. Elementalibus quaedam puritate compositi, sero tamen obeunt in tempore dissolvendi. 12. A principiis igitur aeris adusque terre superficiem contingentis precipuus est Oyarses Plutonium, dixerim vel Summanus, quia – summus manium – a lunari iam circulo imperii regni que sui latitudines ordiatur. Porro numen, cuius potestas est in aere, maiestatis auctoritate apud conscientiam tuam nolo sordeat aut vilescat. Aer namque spirandi est organum, et sine aeris beneficio rerum incolumitas non subsistit’.

## CONCLUSION

### **A Summary of the Preceding**

The rough outline of early Irish contributions to the concept of nature is now in view. In Chapter 1 we found that the secular hierarchies of rulers and poets tended to be conceived as 'natural' in an Isidorean sense of the word. Isidore conceived of natural language as language which was composed of sounds that have a strict correspondence with the reality that they represent. Similarly, he conceived of natural law as a form of law in which the character of a person's physical acts directly corresponds to their political identity; a king who does not act like a king is not a king. However, a cumulative appraisal of the early Irish evidence indicated a further development of Isidore's understanding of nature in which his account of natural law is brought into greater agreement with his account of natural language. That is, we found there a tendency to locate political identity, not simply where the public actions appropriate to that identity are found, but where appropriate physical symptoms are clearly manifest to the senses. This occurs in different ways in different hierarchies. In the hierarchy of rulers, the identity of the ruler was generally understood to be manifest in the state of the state of the ruler's kingdom and of their body; the identity of poets, through the state of their face, and through the perfection, or else, faults of the metrical features of their juridical utterances.

In this respect, the ecclesiastical hierarchies contrast with the secular in that their members are characterised by no such correspondence between their identity and its physical instantiation. This seems to agree with another idea in Isidore, namely, that God cannot be adequately represented by language. As the hierarchy whose defining role is the mediation of the realities that cannot be adequately represented by comprehensible natural language, there can be no correspondence between reality and representation in the ecclesiastical hierarchies for the same reasons as there must be a just such correspondence in the secular hierarchies, given the latter's fundamental concern with realities that are eminently representable by language.

One of the things which we determined in Chapter 1 was that the existence of the secular hierarchies was conceived as being dependent, in some fashion, on the ecclesiastical. This created a problem for how the secular hierarchies were thought to have preexisted the Church in Ireland. Its answer lay in the fact that the ecclesiastical hierarchies were not the source of their own order. The seven-fold order of the ecclesiastical hierarchies was thought to have been dependent, in turn, on the seven-fold order of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit was the ultimate source of the order by which the ecclesiastical hierarchies were able to exist, and also to mediate that order to the secular hierarchies, then the existence of the secular hierarchies before the establishment of the Church in Ireland indicated that the secular hierarchies must also have some form of insight into the Holy Spirit's seven-fold order for which it did not rely on the Church. The Second Chapter was concerned with describing the perceived character of this insight.

This required that we consider the idea of natural law in another sense. The Latin Doctors tended to define natural law as the innate residual capacity for ethics that remained to the soul after its Fall. This capacity allowed for an understanding of virtue and vice that was sufficiently correct that it removed any excuse for sin. But neither did it, on its own, give the soul the means of achieving any alternative to it. For until the soul's virtuous acts were done for the sake of God - something which only the vision of faith could make possible - even its virtuous acts could not escape the subordination of higher goods to lower: the very definition of sin. However, the relevant early Irish material did not seem to be working with this definition of natural law. Rather we found that it followed Cassian, and others like him, in treating natural law as a kind of revelation by the Holy Spirit, a revelation which is, in this view, the prerequisite for any sort of moral life whatever.

In concord with the Latin Josephus, this revelation was conceived as being the result of the contemplation of the natural order. Upon realising that there must be a Creator, direct instruction of the contemplator by the Creator becomes possible. In the initial early Irish material that we considered, the role of education in this process was

deemphasized. Such inspired knowledge of God was portrayed as something that was possible for any person, even the most unlearned. However, this did not turn out to be a sign of an anti-intellectual impulse. Insofar as this revelation was conceived of as producing further scientific and ethical knowledge - either directly or through instruction of those who had received it directly - we found a general sense that this was productive of a more profound contemplation of the natural order, a more profound contemplation which, in turn, made possible a more profound reception of the inspiration that crowned such contemplation. Whereas the initial inspiration was sufficient for an individual to live a holy life, further learning could enable a reception of this inspiration so profound as to allow for the promulgation of laws for the state in its entirety. But this natural inspiration did not seem to have been thought of only as a matter of degree. Evidence in *The Caldron of Poesy*, The Prologue to *SM* and elsewhere suggested that every secular occupation was conceived of as having its proper form of inspired knowledge of the natural law by which the perfect and just enactment of that occupation would be possible.

In this respect, we saw that the early Irish material goes beyond Cassian. Cassian tended to have a Stoicising suspicion of technological developments. As such, he characterised pre-Mosaic technological developments as the dubious legacy of Ham and the Cainites before him. Insofar as early Irish texts conceive of the whole array of arts and sciences (including divinely inspired laws) as being possible before exposure to the Mosaic law they seem to be closer to apocryphal portrayals of Seth, Enoch and Abraham than any of the Fathers that were available to them. However, we discovered nothing out of the ordinary when it came to how early Irish writers conceived of the faith in Christ that is necessary for salvation. The authors we considered were certainly unusual in arguing that the prophetic revelation enjoyed by non-Hebraic pre-Christians was different in kind from that which was proper to the Church, but not in their argument that prophetic revelation was possible for them. In respect to the latter we found no tension between them and Augustine. However, it remained that the extremes of the debate would be hard to find before twelfth-century France.

In Chapter 3 we began to consider the degree to which the natural inspiration manifest in the secular hierarchies was thought to be possible. This began with a consideration of Rufinus' version of Eusebius' *HE*, which, as had been suggested in Chapter 1, was an important influence on the early Irish reception of Isidore's conception of natural law. We concluded that *HE* is, indeed, the best way we have of understanding how the idea that secular political identity is manifest in clear physical signs (i.e. the doctrine of *fír flathemon*) was intelligible as Christian doctrine. However, looking forward, we also turned to *HE* as our most important reference-point for a view of history in which the secular hierarchies, and the natural form of revelation on which they depend, were thought to become more possible over time.

The most dramatic example of this historiographical tendency was The Prologue to *SM*, a work which seems to regard itself as narrating a sort of sequel to the events recounted in *HE*, and, in this respect, to see Patrick's promulgation of *SM* as an Irish counterpoint to the contemporaneous promulgation of the Theodosian Code in the Roman Empire. *Bretha Nemed* proved to have a more ambiguous view of history which did not explicitly confirm or deny Eusebian triumphalism. However, a later text in the commentary tradition on the *Bretha Nemed*, *UB*, emerged as a clear exemplar of the idea that the justice which is particular to the secular hierarchies has become more realisable over time. *SFF*, on the other hand, presented us with new problem. On a superficial level, it seemed to be very optimistic about the degree to which the natural law may be revealed in the Christian Era, given its claim that the pre-Christian formulation of the natural law in the time of Cormac would survive for all time. However, since the actual enactment of true judgements based on this law, according to *SFF*, seemed to depend on certain 'ordeals' that no longer exist, we were left with the conclusion that its capacity of realizing the natural law was diminishing over time. This view of history clearly could not be explained with reference to *HE*.

In Chapter 4, the problem raised by *SFF* was addressed. We began with a consideration of *BMMM*, as one of the earliest and most detailed treatments of the idea that the secular hierarchies were better able to realise themselves in the distant past than they were in the

Christian Era. Our most important resource for understanding this view of history was Augustine's theory of the 'Six Ages of the World'. We found that Augustine's view of history was not absolutely nostalgic. That is, he did not idealise the beginning of time, and then conclude that everything which followed was progressively worse. However, in his view of history, each age of the world, like the ages of human life, has some good which is specific to it that is lost as it passes. Among the 'Ages of the World', he certainly regards the Fourth Age, the middlemost age of the world, the age that is analogous to mature youth, as the best typological representation of the restoration of all times, at the end of time. But it is not itself that restoration, being only part of what shall be restored in it. In which case, the eschatological hope of such a restoration, fully revealed to humanity during the decrepit old age of the world, is simultaneously a longing for the lost natural goods of all former times which are no longer present to the world in its extremity of age, not just those of the Fourth Age.

The principle difference we found between *BMMM* and Augustine in this regard was that the pre-Christian times for which Augustine is nostalgic are specifically those of the Church and its institutional precursors, such as they are described in the Christian Scriptures, whereas the nostalgia of *BMMM* is for pre-Christian Emain Macha. This seemed to reflect the influence of Jerome/Eusebius' *Chronicon*. The historical synchronisms of this work provided many means of tracing analogies between the events of salvation history and the events of other places contemporary to them, in this way making it possible to discover many more institutional precursors of the Church than those found in the Bible. *BMMM* was not alone in demonstrating the influence of an Augustinian nostalgia for the pre-Christian past. We found three other Old Irish examples before turning to the Middle Irish material. The Middle Irish examples differed from the earlier examples in two ways: they directly referenced Augustine's theory, and they demonstrated a far more creative relationship to his theory.

In Chapter 5, we turned our attention to some of the stranger aspects of the texts we had discussed in the preceding four chapters. The question was whether they represented incomprehensible interruptions of the otherwise coherent theological system which we

had found implicit in these texts, or if they were in some way intelligible features of that system. The specific concern of Chapter 5 was with narratives that appeared to describe the rebirth of a single soul in different incarnations. Given that those who were said to have undergone these rebirths were often relied upon for eye-witness confirmation of ancient historical events, it was evident that not every such narrative could be interpreted as strict allegory. This left us with the problem of how a soul's literal rebirths could make sense within the context of Christian belief. Rufinus' translations of the works of Origen seemed to be our best resource in this regard. In *CCH* we found that he was attributed some ideas about the preexistence of the soul that were helpful in understanding certain partially fallen angels in the *Navigatio*. However, this was not yet the idea of rebirth.

We determined that the idea that a soul may migrate from body to body is not an opinion of Origen himself. It is, however, an opinion which Jerome polemically attributed to him in quite a number of instances. This would, in effect, make it as if it were Origen's idea for anyone who was either unaware of the statements Origen made to the contrary, or was sufficiently persuaded of Jerome's interpretation of Origen that these contrary elements came to be interpreted in light of it. Thus, Jerome's Origen seemed to provide the best way of understanding instances of *metempsychosis* in Christian theological terms. In this regard we saw that Isidore's ambiguous portrayal of Plato was also of potential significance. That said, it was necessary to bear in mind that early Irish literature never presents *metempsychosis* as inherent to the nature of the human soul, but something which is undergone only by the gods of the sagas and also by certain exceptional humans who inevitably regain their proper form before death. This meant, in brief, that early Irish examples of the multiple rebirths of a soul successfully escape Augustine's critique of the doctrine of *metempsychosis* and avoid any dissonance with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

There was, however, a potential exception to this rule. There are a number of Old and Middle Irish texts which speak of someone who seems as if he might be human, but whose rebirths are not the clear result of divine miracle and, moreover, did not seem to

involve the idea that he returned to his proper form before death, or that he had a proper form at all. This was Mongán. The reason for these abnormalities turned out to be that he was not essentially human, but one of the ever-living inhabitants of the earthly paradise. The idea that Enoch and Elijah had not died, but awaited their martyrdom in the earthly paradise lost to Adam and Eve, was widespread in Patristic and Apocryphal literature. This opened the possibility that others, especially people who were notably righteous or penitent, might also join them there, a possibility which is explored in a number of early Irish texts. However, other early Irish texts explore the possibility that this paradise may have proper inhabitants, these in addition to the such righteous people as are thought to find their way there. These are identified with the gods of the early Irish sagas in a number of Old Irish texts and are characterised as ‘ever-living’ in contrast to the mortality of fallen humanity on the one hand, and the eternity of heaven on the other. Mongán would seem then to be numbered among these gods, and, as such, to undergo human embodiment in a way that is incidental rather than essential to his nature.

The last difficulty dealt with in Chapter 5, was in regard to how to classify these reembodiments. Many instances which have been claimed as examples of the transmigration of a soul between bodies, on closer examination, seem to be examples of the transformation of a body from one form to another. While there certainly are examples of something like *metempsychosis*, they appear to be the minority in comparison to examples of *metamorphosis*. *Metamorphosis* is a much less complicated matter. Augustine argued that magic may cause *metamorphosis* to appear to happen but does not have the power to actually effect it. Nevertheless, he does not rule it out as a possible result of God’s miraculous intervention. Isidore appears to have believed that *metamorphosis* can truly result from magic as well as miracle, and additionally sees it as occurring, in some instances, due to natural processes. This was not to say that every early Irish example will fall neatly into one category or another. Rather *metempsychosis* and *metamorphosis* seem to mark the opposing limits of the continuum of possibilities for human embodiment within an early Irish frame of reference.



In Chapter 6, we continued to address the elements of early Irish literature which seemed as if they might threaten the integrity of the doctrine of natural law discussed in the first four chapters. In this case, it was the question of how the gods of the sagas are to be understood. Our setting off point here was the ‘three gods of skill’ in the *Immacallam*. We found initially that it was only one of many texts which depict the gods as the mediators of the knowledge and abilities by which secular occupations are practiced. However, this did not solve the problem so much as demonstrate that it was widespread. The question as to whether we might be dealing with strict allegory had to be raised again. But we were not able to account for all the features of the *Immacallam*’s presentation with a strictly allegorical approach. Perhaps most notable here was the fact that the Middle Irish glossators of the *Immacallam*, while demonstrating an interest in allegorical interpretations elsewhere, do not discuss allegorical possibilities in their comments on these ‘gods of skill’.

We found then that the need for such beings as these gods in a medieval Christian cosmos was best understood in light of the strong distinction between natural and ecclesiastical modes of revelation which we discussed in Chapter 2. This distinction posed a problem regarding mediation. Medieval Ireland was profoundly hierarchical. Even hierarchies were understood to be hierarchically ordered in relation to each other. Therefore, unless there was to be a conspicuous gap in all these incrementally graded layers of reality and authority, natural revelation must have its mediaries like everything else. Ecclesiastical inspiration was understood to be mediated to its recipients by the hierarchies of angels. However, this was not a solution that could apply to natural inspiration. Natural inspiration was thought to exist in Ireland before the establishment of the Church, and, moreover, to have remained a necessity even after the Church was established. That is, it was sufficiently distinct from ecclesiastical inspiration that it would have posed serious difficulties for any attempt to account for it by means of the same angelic mediaries. A kind of mediation was then required that could account for both the similarity and the difference of natural revelation in relation to that of the Church. It needed to be in some way lesser than the angels, given that natural revelation was understood to be lesser than ecclesiastical revelation. However, it also needed to be

superior to humanity, precisely as a mediator to humanity of something that was understood to be beyond strictly human capacity. It was in this way then that it was necessary for the gods to be rediscovered as the mediators of the natural revelation of the Holy Spirit, or in other words, the inspiration which was the possibility and perfection of secular hierarchies in all their manifold constituent vocations.

This shed new light on the discussion in Chapter 5 regarding the role of the earthly paradise in early Irish literature. We had found there that the earthly paradise occupies an intermediate place between earth and heaven. It does not attain to the incorporeality of the angels, yet it does not suffer the limits which belong to corporeality after the Fall. It is also not eternal. Which is to say, it does not transcend time as the eternity of heaven does. Even so, it does not endure loss through the passage of time in the way that is characteristic of mortal places. In its ever-living quality, it is beyond the mortal experience of time, but not beyond time itself. In short, the descriptions of life in the earthly paradise in early Irish literature give it an intermediate cosmological position which mirrors the intermediate metaphysical position occupied by the natural inspiration and which the arts and sciences depend. Thus, by locating the gods of the sagas in this earthly paradise, as its natural inhabitants, the earthly paradise goes from becoming little more than a way of accounting for the fate of a few righteous people who do not suffer death until the time of the Antichrist, to providing a way of thinking about the hierarchy of beings that accounts for natural inspiration, in its similarity and difference from the inspiration that is proper to the Church.

This theory has a number of additional advantages. It allows us to make sense of instances where Christian theological claims and seemingly non-Christian mythological claims are made to depend on each other. One of the principle examples of this was that both Cú Chulainn and Mongán are portrayed as types of Christ. This typology depends on it being literally true in that they are each, in their own way, the son of a god. Being the son of a god points to their likeness to Christ. Their likeness to Christ relies on their being the son of a god. Moreover, it has the added advantage of giving us a way of making sense of the cultic practices that seem to have been carried out in honour of these gods at various times. That is to say, if prayers and rituals could be done by way

of supplicating the saints and angels, why could they not be done by way of supplicating these other ministers of divine grace? It remains that there are few parallels to be found to these theological developments in early medieval Europe. However, in the high Middle Ages, fruitful points of comparison do begin to emerge.

### **The Significance of the Preceding to Scholarship**

This study is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to subject any aspect of the theology of the early Irish sagas and law-texts to systematic study. While the methodology which has been used here is not new in any fundamental way, its application to early Irish literature is. As such it will be a necessary reference point for any future attempts to move beyond a merely descriptive account of what the early Irish evidence is saying to understand how the ideas found there ‘work’ as a form of thought.

As we discussed in the introduction, there has been a tendency for scholarship which emphasises the fundamental role which the Church played in the production of the extant literature to downplay the cosmological and theological elements of this literature which seem to be without any contemporary analogy elsewhere in the Latin West. Likewise, those who were interested in these more eccentric elements have attempted to downplay the Church’s known role in the production these texts. In both cases, this has generally resulted in the assumption that the authors of these texts must not really mean what they say in regard to some aspect or another of their presentation. In limiting ourselves to the consideration of what these authors say that they are saying (and thus to the texts themselves) we have discovered this to be a false dichotomy. The elements in these texts which are obvious expressions of the theology of the Church, and those which have been presumed incommensurable with it, have been found to be mutually dependent on each other. It is hoped that the demonstration of the mutual dependency of these elements will facilitate the discovery of comparable interdependencies between the bodies of scholarship which have favoured one side or another of this false dichotomy. However, it is only insofar as a rigorous understanding of the intellectual history of the Latin West is characteristic of the study of early Irish that this work will ultimately be possible. The tendency towards too easily or broadly identifying parallels

and departures from these larger developments will be hard to avoid otherwise. As demanding as this is, it does, however, seem to be a tale well worth telling. While early Irish writers were wrestling with many of the same *aporiae* that fascinated the rest of Latin Christendom, we have found, even in this preliminary study, that many of their proposed solutions are by no means the standard fare.

In accomplishing this, this study has also been the first sustained consideration of early Irish literature as a continuation of late antique philosophy and theology. There has, of course, been a great deal of work which has demonstrated the influence of various late antique authors on various works or ideas in early Irish literature. But it is one thing to show that a given work participates in such a conversation, and another to show what the character of that participation is, which is to say, what it adds to that conversation. The result of this has been the discovery of a branch of philosophical history, at least in its basic outlines. Among other things that might be said about it, it is more grammatical in its orientation than dialectical, or it understands the dialectic in very grammatical way. We find the juxtaposition of authorities, such as might usually be taken to be a hallmark of High-Medieval scholasticism, but for which the late antique tendency to see a given word as productive of endless etymological meanings seems a more likely context than the categories of Aristotle. Certainly, the truth or falsity of judgements made about apparent contrasts between authorities does not seem to be demonstrated through syllogisms, but through clear physical signs that, like the sounds of natural words, were taken in to immediately manifest the nature of what they represented.

What is not at all clear yet is the character of the thinking that produces these judgements. We are most often presented with the results of these judgements and their physical proof, but not with how the authority in question arrived at it. Moreover, even in the way that the extant literature interprets the significance of such judgements, thus portrayed, the conciliation of authorities generally emerges as something already fully achieved, in the form of historiography, rather than something that is reached through argument. This may be because such judgements are seen to be, fundamentally, a work

of the Holy Spirit's inspiration. However, if so, it is the sort of inspiration which is, as we have seen, achievable to the degree that one has previously been educated in the knowledge that pertains to the art or science in question. Any further determinations about this await future scholarship.

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