

# Eschatological Justice in *Scéla Láí Brátha*

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*Scéla Láí Brátha* is a Middle Irish homily on universal judgment preserved only in *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25).<sup>1</sup> Written in a complex rhythmic and alliterative prose style, the text draws on a wide range of sources, both poetic and homiletic, in Latin and Irish. The purpose of the present study is to analyse the presentation in *Scéla Láí Brátha* of the moment of collective judgment and the descriptions of the eschatological kingdoms which, Christians believe, will exist thereafter. I suggest that the central theme of the text is the role of Christ as the source of ultimate justice, and that the author describes the communities of the elect and the damned in terms of 'citizenship' of the *civitas Dei* or the *civitas diaboli*. The extensive use of vocabulary pertaining to kingship, community, and judgment is, I argue, a significant aspect of the literary coherence and theological sophistication of a text which has hitherto been largely overlooked by scholars of medieval Irish literature.<sup>2</sup>

The homily explicates the so-called 'Eschatological Discourse' of Matthew 25, 34–45, in which Christ utters his words concerning ultimate reward and punishment: 'Venite benedicti Patris mei ...' ('Come, ye blessed of my Father ...') and 'Discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum ...' ('Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire ...'). The author's

<sup>1</sup>See the diplomatic edition by R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: The Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929), pp. 77–81. See also 'Tidings of Doomsday: An Early-Middle-Irish Homily', edited and translated by Whitley Stokes, *Revue celtique*, 4 (1879–80), 245–57; *Mil na mBeach*, edited by Paul Walsh (Dublin, 1911), pp. 62–68. In what follows, all references to, and quotations from, *Scéla Láí Brátha* are by line number from Best and Bergin's edition; all translations are my own. <sup>2</sup>Interest in *Scéla Láí Brátha* has been confined primarily to the light it can shed on the compilation of *Lebor na hUidre*: David N. Dumville, "'Scéla Láí Brátha" and the Collation of *Leabhar na hUidhre*', *Éigse*, 16 (1975–76), 24–28. However, the text is currently receiving some scholarly attention: see the forthcoming article by Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, 'The Middle Irish Homily *Scéla Láí Brátha*', *Apocrypha*, 21 (2010). Dr Mac Gearailt also has a new edition of the text in press as part of the *Apocrypha Hiberniae* series.

narrative of the events of Judgment Day begins with Christ returning in glory at the moment of cosmic destruction and resolution, seated on a throne, flanked by angels, and dividing the souls of the righteous and the sinners. This orthodox twofold division, derived from Matthew, is significant, as the author then returns to his initial image — again he outlines the arrival of Christ in judgment — but this time he proceeds to outline a fourfold division of souls: the *mali ualde* and *mali non ualde*, both destined for hell; and the *boni ualde* and *boni non ualde*, both destined for heaven. This fourfold division is followed by a lacuna in the text, which resumes with a lengthy description of hell and a shorter description of heaven. The text concludes with a passage in praise of the hierarchy of heaven, ending with the Trinity. The author's choice of Matthew's gospel for this expository sermon is important. David Sim has noted those features of Matthew's eschatological scheme which are particular to his gospel account alone.<sup>3</sup> The present study will demonstrate that the author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* draws on many of these uniquely Matthean features. However, before we examine the ways in which the author interprets Matthew's account, we should be aware that he is not slavishly dependent on it. For example, Matthew accords great significance to the idea of Jesus as the 'son of man', rather than the 'son of God'.<sup>4</sup> The author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* does not make use of this idea: Jesus is 'Isu Crist mac Dé' ('Jesus Christ, son of God'), and later he uses the Augustinian formulation 'mac Dé 7 duini i n-óenpersaind' ('son of God and man in one person').<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on Christ's dual identity is consonant with the text's concern with his status as the embodiment of both ecclesiastical and temporal justice, but it also highlights the author's ability to distance himself from some aspects of Matthew's account. It is useful to bear this in mind as we examine the ways in which the author selects particular themes and elements of the gospel of Matthew in order to articulate his ideas of eschatological justice.

The central theme in *Scéla Láí Brátha* is that of judgment, and more particularly of the role of Christ, not only as judge but as the source of true justice. Sim has shown that 'references to the event of judgement are both many and widely distributed throughout [Matthew's] gospel. The sheer number of allusions testifies to the importance of this theme in the

<sup>3</sup>David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge, 1996). <sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 94–99. See also Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, translated by J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge, 1995), p. 3, originally published as *Die Jesusgeschichte des Matthäus* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1993). <sup>5</sup>Lines 2307 and 2317. On Augustine's use of *una persona/unitas personae* to express the union between Christ's divine and human natures see Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 91–92.

evangelist's theology'.<sup>6</sup> Judgment and the terminology of justice are also vital to the eschatology of *Scéla Láí Brátha*. Throughout the text we see the use of terms such as *mes* ('judgment'), *smacht* ('rule', 'command'), *recht* ('law'), *riagail* ('rule'), *gell* ('pledge'), and *mesrugud* ('moderation', 'adjudication').<sup>7</sup> Of course it is hardly surprising to find terms relating to judgment in a text about Judgment Day; however, the range and repetition of legal vocabulary serves to enforce the central theme of the text, that is, Christ's return as the moment of ultimate justice. Particular to Matthew's account of the eschaton is the idea that it is not God who will sit in judgment, but rather Jesus Christ. In the accounts of Judgment Day in the gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus appears in the role of advocate rather than that of judge.<sup>8</sup> The author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* adopts Matthew's version of events, and it is of Jesus that he states:

suidfid in tan sin fora chathair rígda 7 for sossad a míadamla. 7 tinolfiter and sin na huli daine na fiadnaisi 7 dogéna a ndeligid 7 a terbod iar tain.<sup>9</sup>

He will sit then upon his majestic throne, and upon the seat of his glory, and all the people will be gathered there in his presence, and he will separate and divide them after that.

Another uniquely Matthean aspect of the eschaton is the role of the righteous who, it is said, will participate in judging others. Unfortunately this theme is taken up by the author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* precisely at the place where the extant text becomes fragmented and the lacuna begins. We cannot know how the author developed this idea, but we can be certain that he did at least address it, as the text breaks off at the point where Christ says to the righteous: 'is sibsi oc mes in chiniuda dóenna ...'<sup>10</sup> ('and you judging the human race ...'). Matthew also states that the damned will repent belatedly for their sins once they realise the nature of the fate that awaits them. This is a feature used in many medieval Irish texts; the belated repentance of the damned is of

<sup>6</sup>Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, p. 114. <sup>7</sup>For examples see lines 2369, 2375, 2377, 2378, 2381, 2390, 2394, etc. <sup>8</sup>Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, p. 116; Luz, *The Theology*, p. 3. Augustine follows Matthew in casting Christ as judge: *De Civitate Dei*, xx.1 and xx.5, edited by D. Bombart and A. Kalb, 2 vols, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 47–48 (Turnhout, 1955). Compare, for example, the Old Irish poem 'Bráth, ní ba beg a brisim', which follows Mark and Luke in casting God as judge: 'A Poem on the Day of Judgment', edited and translated by J. G. O'Keeffe, *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 29–33 (pp. 30 and 32). There is also an Irish tradition of Patrick being cast as either judge or advocate at Judgment Day: 'Adamnan's Second Vision', edited and translated by Whitley Stokes, *RC*, 12 (1891), 420–43 (p. 424); *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose, and Verse*, edited and translated by Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1901–3), II, 307–21 (p. 319). <sup>9</sup>Lines 2318–20. <sup>10</sup>Lines 2399–400. The biblical passage is Matthew 19, 28; see also Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, pp. 126–27.

course a useful thematic device for any text with a hortatory function.<sup>11</sup> In accordance with his own hortatory purpose, the author of *Scéla Lai Brátha* is careful to stress that it is not only saints who will merit a place in heaven, but also sinners who repent of their misdeeds and go on to lead a virtuous life, their good deeds serving to hide their bad:

... co ndíchletsida na pecca doronsat riam. connach cumnig in Comdiu dóib thall na hulcu dorónsat i fus.<sup>12</sup>

... so that these conceal the sins they have committed before, so that the Lord does not remember them there for the sins they committed here.

It was noted above that the author twice presents the scene of Christ in judgment. At first glance this may seem awkward or repetitive, but I would argue that this repetition serves a vitally important function, not only structural but also thematic, by emphasizing the role of Christ as judge. Robert Dodaro has shown that, in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine is 'interested in demonstrating the interrelationship between the political and theological implications of true justice'.<sup>13</sup> I suggest that this is also a central aim of the author of *Scéla Lai Brátha*. The author's starting point for establishing the theme of *iusititia* is his use of Matthew's account of the eschaton. This serves to highlight Christ's position as the source of true justice because, as we have seen, it is Matthew's account which casts Christ in the role of judge. The repetition of Christ's moment of judgment emphasizes the importance of that moment within the wider eschatological scheme. The use of repetition in Matthew's gospel is of profound theological and literary significance; as Luz has argued, Matthew's 'repetitions are deliberate, not proof of literary incompetence'.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, we should not suppose that the repetition of the scene of Christ in judgment in *Scéla Lai Brátha* is the result of a fault in the structure of the text, particularly given its otherwise impressive stylistic and structural coherence. The selection of a Matthean model for the basis for this sermon may have been the result of a conscious decision to highlight Jesus's ultimate political and judicial authority, in addition to his more obvious divine authority. The idea of royal, ecclesiastical, and judicial powers being united in one person may have had particular potency at a time when the

<sup>11</sup>For example, 'A Poem', edited and translated by O'Keefe, pp. 30 and 32. This aspect of Matthew's account was also emphasized by John Scottus Eriugena: Gustavo A. Piemonte, 'Some Distinctive Theses of Eriugena's Eschatology in his Exegesis of the Gospel According to Matthew', in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Maynooth and Dublin, August 16–20, 2000*, edited by J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (Leuven, 2000), pp. 227–42 (pp. 228–29). <sup>12</sup>Lines 2384–86. <sup>13</sup>Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 16. <sup>14</sup>Luz, *The Theology*, p. 4.

boundaries between ecclesiastical, secular, and judicial power could be fluid and imprecise.

In his account of the process of judgment, Matthew is concerned solely with universal eschatology and there is no mention of any intermediate state between death and the final judgment as would be necessary in a consideration of individual eschatology. As Sim states, there is 'no hint in Matthew that the wicked dead or the righteous dead receive a sample of their respective eschatological fates in the intermediate period between death and final judgement ... all emphasis falls on the final judgement and its aftermath'.<sup>15</sup> The same is true of *Scéla Lai Brátha*. Although some scholars have characterized a fourfold division of souls as being a precursor to the doctrine of purgatory, in the case of *Scéla Lai Brátha* the fourfold division occurs only at the moment of collective judgment, and is not indicative of any interim state for the individual.<sup>16</sup> In Matthew's account of the eschaton, there is no possibility of neutrality, no middle ground. This is reflected in the twofold and fourfold divisions of souls in *Scéla Lai Brátha*. Sim has shown that the vocabulary and imagery that Matthew employs emphasizes his vision of the events of the apocalypse as involving the armies of Christ and the devil engaged in cosmic warfare. Our Irish author also emphasizes this aspect of the final judgment. The use of *buiden* (in its widest sense 'group', but also with the militaristic sense of 'troop', 'company') to describe the fourfold division of souls is evidence of this; the author no doubt expected his audience to hear the martial resonances of *buiden*, and exploiting this militaristic aspect of Matthew's account accords with the imagery he later employs in his description of hell.

The punishment which Christians expect the soul to experience in hell must by its very nature be indescribable; descriptions of hell can only describe hell as it is experienced by man in life, that is, either the dystopian society, or the savage environment. This concept was acknowledged by a number of medieval Irish authors who stated that the imagery used to convey the idea of hell is only the 'likeness' of hell which can be found in this world.<sup>17</sup> During the Middle Ages there was a common repertoire of imagery

<sup>15</sup>Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, p. 129. <sup>16</sup>cf. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated by A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984); Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, 2001). The early development of the idea of a fourfold division of souls, either immediately after death or at the moment of collective judgment, has an Insular context, on which see Helen Foxhall Forbes's forthcoming article, "'Diuiduntur in quattuor': The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England", *Journal of Theological Studies* (2010). <sup>17</sup>'Ataát dano cosmúiliusa flatha nime 7 ifirn isin bithsa. Cosmúilius ifirn dano chétamus .i. gaemridh 7 snechta sin 7 uacht. aes 7 crine. Galar 7 bás' ('There are,

of hell, from which authors selected the motifs that they wished to highlight or emphasize.<sup>18</sup> In *Scéla Lai Brátha* the images employed to represent hell can be placed in one of two categories: the first is violent conflict and related physical suffering, the second is the threatening environment (physical, animal, and meteorological). Each of these categories reflects a recognizable type of suffering, a suffering which is extreme and yet not outside the limit of possibility. The torture of hell is thus rendered immediate, comprehensible and, most importantly, plausible. What is most striking about *Scéla Lai Brátha* is that its hell is overwhelmingly natural — in the modern sense of 'nature', that is, the natural world, the landscape, as opposed to humans or human creations — whereas its heaven is entirely urban. Hell is populated with dogs, toads, adders, lions, birds, and cats.<sup>19</sup> Individually, each of these animals may have had a symbolism which we cannot now reconstruct (for example, toads are used elsewhere in medieval literature to represent the souls of demons);<sup>20</sup> but collectively this demonic menagerie serves to recast the natural world in dark and threatening terms. The landscape is one of valleys and lakes, but these too are malevolent: 'ríg na cláini i gclind na píán' ('the king of perversion in the valley of tortures'); 'brenlocha ainbthencha úara iffernaide' ('stormy, hellish, freezing, fetid lakes').<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the hostility of the natural landscape and its animal population may reflect the ambivalence toward nature which Giles Constable has identified as a feature of some eleventh- and twelfth-century literature.<sup>22</sup>

We should be wary of being too literal in our interpretation, but we may wish to view this imagery in terms of the physical geography of the monastic community. Although the land immediately surrounding the monastery was

moreover, likenesses of the kingdom of heaven and of hell in this world. The likeness of hell therein first, i.e. winter and snow, tempest and cold, age and decay, disease and death': 'An Old-Irish Homily', edited and translated by John Strachan, *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 1–10 (pp. 5 and 9). The Latin *De Tribus Habitaculis Animae*, attributed to Gilla Pátraic, bishop of Dublin, also discusses the idea that heaven and hell are incomprehensible and therefore can only be described in terms of their earthly 'similarities': *The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074–1084*, edited and translated by Aubrey Gwynn, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 1 (Dublin, 1955), pp. 106–25 (pp. 106–8).<sup>18</sup>Hildegard L. C. Tristram, 'Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Poetry and Prose', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 79 (1978), 102–13. <sup>19</sup>Lines 2418–25. <sup>20</sup>This tradition seems to derive from Revelation 16, 13–14. See Mary E. Robbins, 'The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages', in *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, edited by Nona C. Flores (New York and London, 1996), pp. 25–47. See also Wanda Cizewski, 'The Meaning and Purpose of Animals According to Augustine's Genesis Commentaries', in *Collectanea Augustiana*, II, *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, edited by Joseph T. Leinhard and others (New York, 1993), pp. 363–73. <sup>21</sup>Lines 2416 and 2423. <sup>22</sup>Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 139.

likely to have been developed for economic purposes, the unexploited landscape further afield may have been viewed as hostile and dangerous. From the perspective of the monastery, of course, it was from out of that landscape that military attacks would arrive.<sup>23</sup> The imaginative geography of the threatening environment may reveal something of the physical circumstances in which the text was composed. We have seen that the militaristic imagery of *Scéla Lai Brátha* represents Matthew's theology of cosmic warfare; this is developed extensively in the text's description of hell. Hell is 'claideb do dígail' ('a sword for vengeance');<sup>24</sup> it is 'arm uathmar do guin 7 do letrad' ('terrifying weaponry for wounding and mutilating');<sup>25</sup> there are 'claidib ic cirriud' ('blades bludgeoning');<sup>26</sup> hell is 'sraigell do esorgain. is fáebur do athchumma' ('a lash for flogging; it is a blade for lacerating').<sup>27</sup> The imagery of hell is suffused with militarism. The abode of sinners is also described in military terms: 'it é beti i scoraib 7 i llongphortaib Diabuil' ('it is they [i.e. the sinners] who will be in the encampments and longphuir of the devil').<sup>28</sup> The hell of *Scéla Lai Brátha* depicts a threatening rural environment, out of which military attackers may appear to strike with terrifying ferocity.

Indeed, the author uses stylistic devices with impressive effect in order to emphasize the relentlessness of the punishment of hell; in particular one might suggest that the passages of anaphoric accumulation serve to intensify the depiction of the chaos of battle. For example, the rhythm of the following passage conveys a sense of unyielding privation; the acceleration in the second half of the passage intensifies this effect, before the deceleration at the end of the passage, which signals the change in tone of the subsequent section:

is bréo do loscud. is [s]raigell do esorgain. is fáebur do athchumma. is adaig do erdallud. Is dethach do muchad. is croch do phianad. Is claideb do dígail. is arm uathmar do guin 7 do letrad. is buriud píán. is rubne todernam. is báduç; is plágud; is [s]rainiud; is brúid; is linud; is tragud; is dóid; is léoid; is loscud; is [s]lucud; is ard; is isel; is róuar; is rothe; is cumung; is farsiuing; is mór bréni a brothgaile.<sup>29</sup>

It is a fire for burning; it is a lash for flogging; it is a blade for lacerating; it is a night for blinding; it is smoke for suffocating; it is a cross for torturing; it is a sword for vengeance; it is terrifying weaponry for wounding and mutilating; it is

<sup>23</sup>To give one example, between c. 900–c. 1130, *Chronicon Scotorum* records Clonmacnoise being raided or plundered in 922, 936 (twice), 942, 953, 959, 1002, 1044, 1050 (four times), 1060, 1065, 1092, 1095, 1111, 1115, and 1129: *Chronicon Scotorum*, edited and translated by W. M. Hennessy, Rolls Series (London, 1866).

<sup>24</sup>Line 2450. <sup>25</sup>Lines 2450–51. <sup>26</sup>Line 2424. <sup>27</sup>Lines 2448–49. <sup>28</sup>Lines 2401–2.

<sup>29</sup>Lines 2448–54 (incorporating in square brackets emendations suggested by Stokes, 'Tidings of Doomsday', §21).

a screaming of pains; it is a multitude of tortures. It is a drowning; a plaguing; a dragging; a pounding; a flooding; an ebbing; a hardship; a hacking; a burning; a swallowing. It is high, low, freezing, burning. It is constricted; it is far-reaching. Great is the stench of its steaming flesh.

The stylistic sophistication of the text as a whole is outside the scope of the present study, but the passage's depiction of hell as a place under threat from hostile military and environmental forces may reflect the author's view of a very real and immediate dystopia; we should bear this in mind as we explore the exact nature of the infernal 'community' which our author envisages.

Throughout the text there is a repeated use of *muinter* to describe the communities of the sinners and the righteous.<sup>30</sup> The use of the term *muinter* (which, as Paul Grosjean noted, is used in Irish to denote Latin *familia*)<sup>31</sup> in formulations such as *muinter nime*, *muinter talman*, or *muinter iffirn*, seems to be peculiar to Irish texts; while the formulation *caelestis familia* is common in many Latin texts, reference to *familia(e) caeli* (or *terrae*, or *inferni*) seems to be confined to texts with an Irish connection.<sup>32</sup> We may posit an influence on the author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* of texts such as those in the *Catechesis Celtica* which depict Christ as *princeps familiae caeli*.<sup>33</sup> *Muinter* can be read as secular term, simply the 'household' of Christ or the devil, but the author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* intends that *muinter* also be understood in its sense of a monastic *familia*. This is made explicit when he describes Satan as an *ap* ('abbot' or 'head of a church') and sinners as *manaig* ('monks', but also, as Etchingham has shown, 'monastic tenants').<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Lines 2314, 2344, 2367, and 2398. That the author's choice of vocabulary is deliberate is suggested by comparing the passage in *Scéla Láí brátha* which states 'Matha mac Alphin sui Ebraidi in dara fer déc ro thog Ísu na muinterus ...' with a parallel passage in a Leabhar Breac homily: 'Matha imorro mac Alphe, in sui Ebraide 7 in dara apstal déc do-roga Ísu i n-apstaldacht ...': *The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac*, edited and translated by R. Atkinson, Todd Lecture Series, 2 (Dublin, 1887), p. 124. Despite the similarities between the passages, the author of the Leabhar Breac homily does not use of image of the *muinter* of Jesus. <sup>31</sup>Paul Grosjean, 'A propos du manuscrit 49 de la Reine Christine', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 54 (1936), 113–36 (p. 121). <sup>32</sup>Charles D. Wright, 'Bischoff's Theory of Irish Exegesis and the Genesis Commentary in Munich clm 6302: A Critique of a Critique', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 10 (2000), 115–75 (pp. 123–24). <sup>33</sup>'Catecheses celtiques', edited by A. Wilmart in his *Analecta Reginensia*, Studi et Testi, 59 (Vatican City, 1933), p. 46. Other possibly-Hiberno-Latin texts which refer to the *familiae* of heaven, earth, and hell are Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f. 61, and the so-called *Catechesis Cracouiensis*: Wright, 'Bischoff's Theory', pp. 123–24, n. 27. <sup>34</sup>See Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, A.D. 650–1000* (Maynooth, 1999), for an in-depth discussion of the meaning of *manach*. Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 178, follows Etchingham in using the

The context within which the author develops this image is also interesting. He states that:

Biaid dano and sin maing 7 iachtad. gol 7 egmech. cnet 7 grechach. cach óenbeoil. 7 mallacht cen chumsanad ona pechachaib fora n-apaíd .i. for Diábul. ar iss ed dosbeirsium ic fulang phéne cach olc dorónsat triana aslachsom. Ocus mallacht dano úadsom fora manchaib imme .i. forsna pechachaib ar is moti a píansom féin cach olc doronsatsom triana aslom forro oc aslach cach uilc.<sup>35</sup>

There will be there, moreover, sorrow and groaning, weeping and wailing, sighs and screaming, from every single mouth. And ceaseless malediction from the sinners on their abbot, i.e. on the devil, for it is he who allows their punishment for every evil they did through his temptation; and a malediction, moreover, from him on his monks around him, i.e. on the sinners, because his own pain is greater for every evil that they did through his persuasion, on account of him inducing every evil.

Here, then, we have a motif in which the devil is himself punished for the deeds of sinners.<sup>36</sup> One might be tempted to read this as a lesson to earthly abbots; they bear responsibility for the moral character of those who live within their community and will be punished for the sins of their *manaig*. We might even interpret this as suggesting disapproval of monastic life; the image is reminiscent of the twelfth-century schoolmaster Theobald of Etampes's description of a monastery as 'a place and prison of the damned, that is, of monks who damn themselves in order to avoid perpetual damnation'.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the relationship between *ap* and *manach* is a complex legal and economic one, and the use of this terminology to denote the relationship between the devil and sinners complements the secular legal terminology used to characterize the relationship between Christ and the virtuous.

There is great significance accorded in the text to the vocabulary of the laws that govern secular relations. For example, when Jesus welcomes the righteous into heaven he welcomes them not only into his *muinter*, but also into his *comaitches*, which denotes a secular relationship of community.<sup>38</sup> Again, when addressing those sinners who will go straight to hell, the author states that those sinners have had no regard for *smacht*, *recht*, or *riagaíl*,<sup>39</sup>

term 'paramonastics'. <sup>35</sup>Lines 2434–40. <sup>36</sup>I am aware of only one other Irish example of the devil being called an 'abbot'. In Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.f.12 (Codex Paulinus Wirzburgensis), it is written of the devil that 'gebitit iudei i n-apid' ('the Jews will receive him as abbot'): *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, edited and translated by Stokes and Strachan, I, 665, gloss 26a8. <sup>37</sup>Cited in Constable, *Reformation*, pp. 134–35. <sup>38</sup>Lines 2377–78. See also Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 108–9 and 306. <sup>39</sup>Lines 2377–78. Note Augustine's argument in *De Civitate Dei*, XIX.21, that nothing can be done lawfully (*iure*) which is not done justly (*iuste*): 'quod enim fit iniuste, nec iure fieri



which suggests that the author may be stressing the importance of both secular law and monastic rule. This appropriation of the terminology of the laws governing secular relations for the purpose of describing one's relationship with God has a long history in medieval Ireland: for example, those monks who considered themselves to be *céli Dé* ('clients of God') used the secular notion of clientship in order to articulate their self-perceived ecclesiastical status.<sup>40</sup> However, it is striking that in *Scéla Láí Brátha* the author never uses the term *céile* to describe the relationship between Jesus and the righteous. In sum, this vocabulary of secular and ecclesiastical law, along with the martial and natural imagery of hell, and the striking representation of the devil as abbot, presents the audience with a dystopia which is characterized by constant and horrific military attacks on a perverted and evil monastic *muintir*, whose territory is surrounded by a hostile physical landscape populated with ferocious and demonic animals. This is indeed a terrifying, sophisticated, and coherent literary creation, drawing upon a complex textual network of literary hells, but it is a creation which is also rooted in a reality which could be identified with any number of places and periods in the history of medieval Ireland.

In contrast to the image of hell, the heaven of *Scéla Láí Brátha* is lacking in any corresponding natural imagery, which could have been utilised in simple opposition to the negative landscape of hell.<sup>41</sup> Positive natural imagery is used, for example, in *Saltair na Rann*, where we see a heaven which includes 'mag maith moínech' ('a good rich plain')<sup>42</sup> on which flow

sruth d'fin, sruth d'ola, dál dil,  
sruth loga lemnacht lángil,  
sruth maith mela, monar nglan,  
fri sásad na noebanman.

a stream of wine, a stream of oil, dear distribution, a valuable stream of very white milk, a good stream of honey, pure work, to satisfy the blessed animals.<sup>43</sup>

In the heaven of *Fís Adamnáin* there are birds and horses.<sup>44</sup> The 'Old Irish Homily' describes heaven as 'bláth lígdae' ('a fair blossom') and 'rían

potest': Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 12. This could explain the author's use here of vocabulary which seeks to emphasize the sinner's disregard for what is lawfully right. <sup>40</sup>Follett, *Céli Dé*, p. 214. <sup>41</sup>It must be remembered that the text of *Scéla Láí Brátha* is incomplete; the lacuna may have included a lengthy description of heaven to parallel that of hell in lines 2406–54. Thus my conclusions here must remain tentative, based as they are on the extant text. <sup>42</sup>*The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann*, I, *Text and Translation*, edited and translated by David Greene and Fergus Kelly (Dublin, 1976), line 989. <sup>43</sup>*ibid.*, lines 997–1000. See also John Carey, 'The Heavenly City in *Saltair na Rann*', *Celtica*, 18 (1986), 87–104. <sup>44</sup>*Lebor na hUidre*, edited by Best and Bergin, lines 1993 and 2018.

romra' ('a course of an ocean').<sup>45</sup> In *Scéla Láí Brátha*, however, the author chooses not to create parallels with, say, the Garden of Eden, or use other natural imagery to describe heaven. Rather, heaven is simply a *cathair* ('city', 'stone enclosure', 'monastic settlement').<sup>46</sup> It is significant that the author specifies *cathair*; he does not use *tempul*, *damliaic*, *cell*, or any of the other 'church' words that could have been used in a narrower sense. It is likely, then, that the author intended to include the whole semantic range of *cathair* in his explication of heaven: heaven is both the perfect city and the perfect ecclesiastical foundation.<sup>47</sup> The *cathair* is characterized by its *cobsaide* ('stability') and *fostacht* ('steadiness'); its *sid* ('peace') and its *oentu* ('unity').<sup>48</sup> It is an ordered and hierarchical place, 'i sudigfider cach óenduine ara mmíad 7 ar dlíged 7 ara sognim fodéin' ('in which every person will be placed according to their rank and according to right and according to their own fair deeds').<sup>49</sup> We can perhaps detect the outside world in the use of *bruig* ('cultivated land, farm(-house)') and *min* ('smooth, level', but also with the sense 'arable, fertile' in relation to land), but this is not the untamed wilderness of hell; it is land which is subject to man and which forms part of the *cathair*.<sup>50</sup> McDannell and Lang have argued that the 'urbanisation' of heaven was a response to a society that was itself becoming increasingly urbanized; the urban heaven of Revelation, as opposed to the

<sup>45</sup>'Old-Irish Homily', edited and translated by Strachan, pp. 7 and 10. <sup>46</sup>On the term *cathair* in early Irish and Hiberno-Latin sources see Deirdre Flanagan, 'Ecclesiastical Nomenclature in Irish Texts and Place-Names: A Comparison', in *Disputationes ad Montium Vocabula Aliorumque Nominum Significationes Pertinentes*, edited by Herwig H. Hornung (Vienna, 1969), pp. 379–88. On the concept of the *cathair attaig*, the levitical 'city of refuge', in medieval Ireland see Donnchadh Ó Corrain, 'Irish Vernacular Law and the Old Testament', in *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission — Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions*, edited by Proinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 284–307 (pp. 296–307). <sup>47</sup>See also John Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, IV.805, where the heavenly society of angels and people is the *caelestis civitas*: Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Imagery of the New Jerusalem in the *Periphyseon* and Eriugena's Irish Background', in *History and Eschatology*, edited by McEvoy and Dunne, pp. 245–59 (p. 247). On the semantic range of Latin *civitas* see Johannes van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 102–8. <sup>48</sup>Lines 2480–86. <sup>49</sup>Lines 2476–77. <sup>50</sup>That this imaginative geography of heaven bears comparison with the economic and social reality of medieval Irish monasteries is supported by Aidan MacDonald's discussion of Columba's entry into Clonmacnoise in the *Vita Sancti Columbae*, I.3, where Columba 'moves with "hymns and praises" from the fields (*agelluli*) adjacent to the monastery, through the *uallum*, to the church (*ec(c)lesia*): Aidan MacDonald, 'Aspects of the Monastic Landscape in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*', in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, edited by John Carey and others (Dublin, 2001), pp. 15–30 (p. 19).

pastoral paradise modelled on the Eden of Genesis, was being used by writers such as Peter Damian as early as the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>51</sup>

If the author had wanted to create an image in opposition to that of the 'encampments and *longphuirt* of the devil', discussed above, he could have used the biblical image of the 'tents of the just' (for example, 'Videbis asperitatem generis tui, carens tabernaculis iustorum', 'You will see the bitterness of your kind who have abandoned the tents of the just'), which is used by the author of the first of the Hiberno-Latin sermons beginning *In Nomine Dei Summi*.<sup>52</sup> Earlier in *Scéla Láí Brátha* the author used *buiden*, with all its military connotations, to describe the righteous; this was in order to emphasize the theme of cosmic warfare at the eschaton. However, once the author begins his description of heaven the militaristic imagery ceases — after all, there will be no need for troops in a kingdom whose defining features are *cobsaide* and *oentu* — and he chooses quite deliberately to rely on the *muinter* and, most frequently, the *cathair* to supply the imagery of the kingdom of heaven.

The role of Christ as the source of justice is emphasized, as we have seen, through the extensive use of legal terminology. The use of legal terminology in medieval Irish religious poetry was discussed with great insight by E. G. Quin in his study of the poem *Ísucán*, which probably dates from the tenth century.<sup>53</sup> The author of *Scéla Láí Brátha* would probably have been familiar with the types of legal imagery and metaphor used in such texts. This terminology specifically highlights the overlap and interplay between secular and ecclesiastical justice, which in turn emphasizes the author's message that Christ's jurisdiction extends to both. It has been argued above that the imagery of hell contrasts the sinful earthly city with the 'city of God'. This is also part of the author's overarching thematic structure. The chaos of the *civitas diaboli*, which is evoked in the staccato rhythm of the passages of anaphoric accumulation, as well as in the imagery used to describe hell, provides diametric opposition to the perfect, ordered *civitas/cathair* which Christ rules. It must be admitted that ideas regarding divine and secular justice in *Scéla Láí Brátha* are not as explicitly stated as they are in the

<sup>51</sup>C. McDannell and B. Lang, *Heaven: A History*, second edition (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 72–78. <sup>52</sup>*In Nomine Dei Summi*: Seven Hiberno-Latin Sermons', edited by R. E. McNally, *Traditio*, 35 (1979), 121–43 (p. 135, 1.26–27); 'The Celtic Homily: Creeds and Eschatology', translated by Thomas O'Loughlin, *Milltown Studies*, 41 (1998), 99–115 (p. 103). See also 1.50–1: 'Deducimus te ad tabernacula sanctorum carens iniustorum habitationibus', 'We are going to lead you to the tents of the just away from the haunts of the wicked' (*In Nomine Dei Summi*), edited by McNally, p. 136; 'The Celtic Homily', translated by O'Loughlin, p. 105). <sup>53</sup>E. G. Quin, 'The Early Irish Poem *Ísucán*', *CMCS*, 1 (Summer 1981), 39–52.

*Sermo ad Reges* extant in *An Leabhar Breac*.<sup>54</sup> This Irish and Latin text, which may be contemporary with *Scéla Láí Brátha*, clearly articulates the nature of kingly justice and the responsibilities of just kings.

Na rig immorro na herlathrigit 7 nach ordaigit ar-rigi 7 a flathius iar riaglaib in recha diada, fuasnaighther aire-sin a flathius o threblaitib 7 o doccomlaib imda. Uair is [ar] tairmtecht timna Dé do na rigaib tuaslaicter sith 7 comchetfaid i n-a popul, 7 tódúscthar debtha 7 decétfaide etarru, co mbí cách dib i n-agaib araile tria indliged na rig n-anfhiren.<sup>55</sup>

The kings, moreover, who do not govern and regulate their kingdom and lordship according to the rules of divine law, their kingdom is disturbed for that reason by many troubles and calamities. For it is [through] transgression of the will of God on the part of kings that peace and concord are broken among their subjects, and troubles and dissension aroused in their midst, so that everyone of them is against the other through the ill-conduct of the unjust kings.

However, the text claims to draw on Augustine for its model of good kingship and *iustitia*, which supports the present argument that the Augustinian influence on *Scéla Láí Brátha* can be read on a political as well as a theological level.<sup>56</sup>

The significance of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* as a philosophical work, and its influence on medieval literature, is well-documented.<sup>57</sup> In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine outlines his idea of civic virtue, and he compares the qualities of Roman statesmen with those of Christ, 'the founder and ruler of the City of God'.<sup>58</sup> In *Scéla Láí Brátha* its author tentatively explores notions of civic

<sup>54</sup>Unfortunately this is only available in Atkinson's inadequate edition and translation (Atkinson appends the Latin portion of the text to his English translation): *Passions and Homilies*, pp. 151–62 and 401–18. The text is dated to the eleventh century by F. Mac Donncha, 'Medieval Irish Homilies', in *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, edited by Martin McNamara, Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association, 1 (Dublin, 1976), pp. 59–71 (p. 67). <sup>55</sup>*Sermo ad Reges*, edited by Atkinson, *Passions and Homilies*, pp. 158–59. <sup>56</sup>*Sermo ad Reges*, *ibid.*, p. 416, refers to Augustine *De Iustitia Regis*, although the quotation which follows is actually from the seventh-century text *De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi*. Mac Donncha, however, possibly reads too much into a connection with Sedulius Scottus and his use of *De Duodecim*; the text was popular one in medieval Europe and misattribution of the text to Augustine (or sometimes to Cyprian) was widespread. Mac Donncha (p. 67) does not show evidence of a direct link between Sedulius Scottus and the *Sermo ad Reges*. <sup>57</sup>The scholarly literature is vast, but key works include van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*; John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), and references therein. <sup>58</sup>Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 10. See also Richard J. Dougherty, 'Christian and Citizen: The Tension in St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*', in *Collectanea Augustiniana*, 1, *Augustine, Second Founder of the Faith*, edited by Joseph C. Schnaubelt and Frederick Van Fletern (New York, 1990), pp. 205–24; R. A. Markus, 'De Ciuitate Dei: Pride and the Common Good', *ibid.*, pp. 245–59; Donald X. Burt,

virtue and good rulership — these explorations are embodied in the vocabulary and imagery employed to create the picture of hell as a perverted community, and heaven as an idealized 'city of God'. Similar ideas are also probed in the imagery of Christ as military commander, judge, and 'neighbour' (in the sense that *comaitches* is used to describe the community of heaven). The significance of the theme of the 'city of God' for *Scéla Lai Brátha* suggests that the text may have a more coherent manuscript context than has hitherto been recognized. The text which precedes *Scéla Lai Brátha* in *Lebor na hUidre* is *Fis Adamnáin*. Not only does this text share certain theological, and particularly eschatological, features with *Scéla Lai Brátha*, but the concluding section of *Fis Adamnáin* is an extended description of the *civitas Dei*:

Is amlaid iarom atá in chathir sin .i. flaith cen úaill cen díummu cen goí cen écnach cen díupert cen taithlech cen gres cen ruci cen meabail cen mélacht cen tnúth cen mórdaitid cen teidm cen galar cen bochtaí cen nochtai cen díth cen díbad cen chasir cen snechta cen gaíth cen flechud cen deilm cen toraind cen dorche cen úardaitid. flaith úasal adamra aerarda co suthi co soilsi co mbolud tíri láin hi fáil aer cech mathiusa. Finit amen finit.<sup>59</sup>

That city, moreover, is thus: i.e. a kingdom without pride, without vanity, without falsehood, without outrage, without deceit, without pretence, without blushing, without shame, without reproach, without insult, without envy, without arrogance, without pestilence, without disease, without poverty, without nakedness, without death, without extinction, without hail, without snow, without wind, without rain, without clamour, without thunder, without darkness, without cold. A noble, wonderful, pleasant kingdom with wisdom, with light, with the scent of a bountiful land, in which is the enjoyment of every good thing. Finit amen finit.

This comes after what would be the more obvious conclusion for the text,<sup>60</sup> and is probably unique to the *Lebor na hUidre* version of the text; certainly it is not found in any of the other extant manuscript copies.<sup>61</sup> In style and in tone the passage bears a close resemblance to *Scéla Lai Brátha*. That the concept of the heavenly city is afforded this coda to the text of *Fis Adamnáin*

'Friendship and the State', in *Collectanea Augustiniana*, II, *Presbyter Factus Sum*, edited by Leinhard and others, pp. 249–61; Michael J. Hollerich, 'Augustine as Civil Theologian?', *ibid.*, pp. 57–69. <sup>59</sup>*Lebor na hUidre*, edited by Best and Bergin, lines 2294–301. <sup>60</sup>That is, 'Béirtair immorro ind naim 7 ind fhreóin lucht na deirce 7 na trócairi for deis Dé do bithaittreb flatha nimi .i. áit i mbiat isin mórglóir sin cen áes cen urchra cen crích cen forcend tria bithu sír' (*ibid.*, lines 2290–93) 'The blessed and the just, the alms-givers and the merciful, will be borne to the right hand of God, to live forever in the kingdom of heaven, where they will be in great glory, without age or withering, without end or termination forever' (*Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation*, translated by Máire Herbert and Martin McNamara (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 147). <sup>61</sup>David N. Dumville, 'Towards an Interpretation of *Fis Adamnáin*', *Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977–78), 62–77 (p. 65).

could possibly hint at the interaction between the *Lebor na hUidre* scribes known as M and H being more coherent than has previously been thought.<sup>62</sup>

It is not only the topography of heaven which reveals concerns particular to the author of *Scéla Lai Brátha*, but also the nature of those who are chosen to inhabit the *civitas Dei*. In *Scéla Lai Brátha* there are two groups who are entitled to enter heaven: the *boni ualde* and the *boni non ualde*. The community of heaven is described as 'lucht ógi 7 athrigi 7 fedba irescha ar dia' ('virgins and penitents and widows faithful for the sake of God').<sup>63</sup> Charles Wright has argued that it is a feature of Irish texts that the division of the faithful includes not only *virgines* and *continentes*, but perhaps also a distinctively Irish group, the *poenitentes*.<sup>64</sup> What is interesting regarding the use of these categories in *Scéla Lai Brátha* is that the author uses the term *lucht*, which carries the sense of 'occupants of a household' and which is therefore consonant with the significance of the *muintir* throughout the text, rather than the term *áes*, which seems to be the more common formulation.<sup>65</sup>

It is tempting to look for a specific political context for this emphasis on community, justice, and good leadership. Attempts to identify particular moments of social or political tension which act as triggers for eschatological speculation have long been a feature of scholarship on eschatological literature.<sup>66</sup> However, it must be borne in mind that the 'city of God' in *Scéla Lai Brátha* is always a metaphorical and imagined community, rather than any explicitly named group or kingdom.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, linking the text to any particular historical moment, in the absence of further evidence, can only be

<sup>62</sup>The coherence of *Lebor na hUidre* is further illustrated by the text which follows *Scéla Lai Brátha*, namely *Scéla na Esérgi*, in the hand of scribe H, which also explores eschatological themes, and also draws extensively on Augustinian motifs. See Elizabeth Boyle, 'Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: The Evidence of *Scéla na Esérgi*', *Medium Ævum*, 78 (2009), 216–30. <sup>63</sup>A homily on the Epiphany in *An Leabhar Breac* outlines 'na trí dána édbras ind eclais do Christ .i. óige 7 athrigi 7 lánamnu dligtech' ('the three gifts offered to Christ by the Church, i.e. virginity, penitence and lawful marriage'): *Passions and Homilies*, edited and translated by Atkinson, pp. 238 and 475. Note also a further significant similarity between *Scéla Lai Brátha* and *Fis Adamnáin*. The latter text includes the following statement: 'Is iat lucht diarbo soirb in sét sain áes óige áes atrige lere áes dergmartra dutrachaige do Dia' (*Lebor na hUidre*, edited by Best and Bergin, lines 2158–59). <sup>64</sup>Wright, 'Bischoff's Theory', pp. 154–55. <sup>65</sup>Particularly in conjunction with *aithrige*: the *DIL* gives, for example, *áes na aithrige* (*Thes. Pal.*, II, 255 9); *áes atrige* (O'Dav. 3); *áos aithrigi* (Mon. Tall. 146.27 §52). See also *int ais firian* (MI. 55 d 11), and other similar examples given s.v. *áes*. An examination of the uses of *lucht* in *DIL* suggests that the primary senses of that term were more secular. <sup>66</sup>Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, third edition (London, 1970). <sup>67</sup>Compare Eva Maria Rapp, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (New York, 2004), esp. p. 228.



a speculative exercise. The author does not name any specific Irish community, saint, or geographical region. As Johannes van Oort has shown, Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei* states that a *civitas* is 'nothing else but a number of people held together by some communal bond'.<sup>68</sup> The author of *Scéla Láí Brátha*, in outlining the *civitas diaboli* and the *civitas Dei*, is not necessarily condemning the morals of an identifiable community, nor asserting a special position among the elect for his own; rather, he shows that all those who are bound by the 'communal bond' of righteousness, as defined by Christian doctrine, will be fellow-citizens in heaven. This fellow-citizenship and the concept of 'neighbourliness' in *Scéla Láí Brátha* is not at odds with the hierarchical nature of heaven as it is emphasized in the text; in accordance with the political structures of Late Antiquity and early medieval Europe, the ideal society is still conceived of as a hierarchical one.<sup>69</sup> It is not surprising that a member of an ecclesiastical foundation might draw on his own physical surroundings in describing otherworldly landscapes, as I have argued is the case here, but the message of the text may be directed in more general terms to those who misuse their power, to remind them that in a Christian kingdom the ultimate power to dispense true justice lies with Christ.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup>Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, p. 103, citing Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xv.8: '... civitas, quae nihil est aliud quam hominum multitudo aliquo societatis vinculo conligata ...'. <sup>69</sup>Rist, *Augustine*, pp. 210–16. <sup>70</sup>I would like to thank Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Patrick Sims-Williams, and the anonymous reviewer, for their comments and suggestions. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust for supporting my research.