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Pre-Christian Characters in Medieval Irish Literature:

An Examination of *Fástini Airt meic Cuind*, *De Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, *Aided Chonchobair* and *Aided Echach maic Maireda*

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This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. The dissertation does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes, references and appendices but excluding the bibliography. I have used the stylesheet of *Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England* and the ASNC stylesheet.

SUMMARY

Pre-Christian Characters in Medieval Irish Literature: An Examination of Fástini
Airt meic Cuind, De Suidigud Tellaig Temra, Aided Chonchobair *and* Aided
Echach maic Maireda
Helen Imhoff

This dissertation consists of an analysis of the representation of the pre-Christian
protagonists of the four medieval Irish tales *Fástini Airt meic Cuind*, *De Suidigud
Tellaig Temra*, *Aided Chonchobair* and *Aided Echach maic Maireda*. In
examining the portrayal of pre-Christian characters, I have addressed a
particularly characteristic feature of medieval Irish literature.

The four tales discussed here have, for the most part, not previously been
studied in detail. For this reason, the dissertation is divided into two parts. Part I
(chs. 1–3) focuses on questions of date, literary context and manuscript
transmission of three of the tales (*Fástini Airt*, *De Suidigud* and *Aided
Chonchobair*) and it serves as background to the thematic analysis of all four tales
in Part II (chs. 4–8).

In the thematic discussion, the bible is shown to have been an important
influence on the depiction of the pre-Christian period and its relationship with the
Christian present (ch. 4). In addition, biblical characters, God and Christ served as
models for the representation of the tales' protagonists (ch. 5). In *Fástini Airt* and
Aided Echach, saintly characteristics are applied to the protagonists, highlighting
the extent to which Christian and pre-Christian ages were presented as part of a
continuum (ch. 6). This view was not, however, universally shared, as the poem *A
chloch thall* in *Aided Chonchobair* shows (ch. 6). In *Fástini Airt* and *De Suidigud*,
kingship is seen to derive its authority both from the pre-Christian past and from
Christian ideas (ch. 7), both tales perhaps illustrating the relevance medieval tales
could have to contemporary developments. Finally, the pre-Christians' salvation
in these four tales is in accordance with the teaching of the bible and theological
authorities, as all four protagonists have faith in God (ch. 8).

A number of aspects emerge as common to the representation of the pre-
Christian past in these four tales. The most important of these are the use of the
bible as a model, the idea of continuity from the pre-Christian past to the Christian
present and the possibility of acquiring Christian faith in pre-Christian times.

ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

The following list of abbreviations includes primary sources the title of which is not identical to that of the editions in which they are found.

A chloch thall	ed. and trans. K. Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1906), pp. 18–21
AC	*Aided Chonchobair*; ed, and trans. K. Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1906), pp. 2–21
AE	*Aided Echach maic Maireda*; ed. *LU*, 2925–3134
AFM	The Annals of the Four Masters; ed. and trans. J. O'Donovan, *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, 7 vols., 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1856)
AI	The Annals of Inisfallen; ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin, 1951)
Amra Choluim Chille	ed. and trans. T. O. Clancy and G. Márkus, ed. and trans., *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 96–128
ATig	The Annals of Tigernach; ed. and trans. W. Stokes, 'The Annals of Tigernach', *Revue celtique* 16 (1895), 374–419; 17 (1896), 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–97, 267–303; reprinted as *The Annals of Tigernach*, 2 vols. (Felinfach, 1993) (references in the footnotes are to the reprint)
AU	The Annals of Ulster; ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster (To A. D. 1131), Part I: Text and Translation* (Dublin, 1983)

Augustine, *De baptismo*	ed. M. Petschenig, *Sancti Aureli Augustini scripta contra Donatistas, Pars I: Psalmus contra partem Donati, Contra epistulam Parmeniani libri tres, De baptismo libri septem*, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 51 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1908), pp. 143–376
Augustine, *De peccatorum*	Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*; ed. C. F. Urba and I. Zycha, *Sancti Aureli Augustini: De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum 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*, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 60 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1913), pp. 1–152
CMM[2]	*Caith Mhaighe Mochruimhe*; ed. M. Ó Dúnlainge, 'Caith Mhaighe Mochruimhe', *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* 17 (1907), 385–7, 406–8, 427–31, 434–9; 18 (1908), 30–4, 75–82, 180–1
CS	*Chronicon Scotorum*; ed. G. Mac Niocaill (unpublished edition), available online at the CELT website, http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/G100016/index.html (viewed 5 July 2009)
DIL	Quin, E. G., *et al*., ed., *Dictionary of the Irish Language Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin, 1983)
DSTT	*De Suidigud Tellaig Temra*; ed. and trans. R. I. Best, 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', *Ériu* 4 (1910), 121–72
FA	*Fástini Airt meic Cuind*; ed. *LU*, 9821–9990
Gregory, *Moralia*	Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*; ed. M. Adriaen, *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob libri i–x*, 3 vols.,

	Corpus Christianorum series Latina 143 (Turnhout, 1979)
Immram Curaig Ua Corra	ed. A. G. van Hamel, *Immrama*, Medieval and Modern Irish Series 10 (Oxford, 1941), pp. 93–111
Isidore, *De officiis*	Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*; ed. C. M. Lawson, *Sancti Isidori episcopi Hispalensis De ecclesiasticis officiis*, Corpus Christianorum series Latina 113 (Turnhout, 1989)
L	*Aided Chonchobair* in the Book of Leinster
LL	The Book of Leinster; ed. O. Bergin, R. I. Best, M. A. O'Brien and A. O'Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, 6 vols. (Dublin, 1954–83); numbers refer to lines
Longes Chonaill Chuirc	ed. and trans V. Hull, 'The Exile of Conall Corc', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 56 (1941), 937–50
LU	Bergin, O., and R. I. Best, ed., *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929); numbers refer to lines
Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*	ed. and trans. L. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10 (Dublin, 1979), pp. 61–123
N	*Aided Chonchobair* in Dublin, RIA 967 (23 N 10)
NLS	National Library of Scotland
PL	Migne, J.-P., ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–1864)
RIA Catalogue	Mulchrone, K., *et al.*, ed., *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 28 fascs. (Dublin, 1926–70)
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
Scél na Fír Flatha	ed. W. Stokes, 'The Irish Ordeals, Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise, and the Decision as to Cormac's Sword', in *Irische Texte mit*

	Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch, ed. W. Stokes and E. Windisch, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1880–1909) III.1 (1891), 183–229
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
Tertullian, *De praescriptione*	Tertullian *De praescriptione haereticorum*; ed. R. F. Rafoulé and trans. (into French) P. De Labriolle, *Tertullien: Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques*, Sources chrétiennes 46 (Paris, 1957)
Tertullian, *De baptismo*	ed. and trans. (into German) D. Schleyer, *Tertullian: De baptismo, De oratione. Von der Taufe, Vom Gebet*, Fontes Christiani 76 (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 160–217
Tírechán, *Collectanea*	ed. and trans. L. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10 (Dublin, 1979), pp. 122–67
VSH	Plummer, C., ed., *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1910)
ZCP	*Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*

Bible quotations are from *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. W. J. Harrelson (Nashville, TN, 2003)

Following stylesheet guidelines, I have cited the editor's name in references to primary sources. However, an exception has been made for *Fástini Airt meic Cuind*, *Aided Chonchobair*, *De Suidigud Tellaig Temra*, *Aided Echach maic Maireda*, *A chloch thall* and *Caith Mhaighe Mochruimhe*, to which I refer frequently. For these texts, only the page or line number of the editions (and translations, where applicable) above has been cited.

All quotations from the poem recited by Conchobar in versions L and N of *Aided Chonchobair* are taken from p. 46 (text) and p. 47 (translation) of Corthals, 'The *retoiric* in *Aided Chonchobuir*', *Ériu* 40 (1989), 41–59; no page reference has, therefore, been given in the footnotes. Text and translations of annal entries are taken from the editions and translations listed above without any further reference.

If no reference is given, translations are my own. Published translations have been silently updated where appropriate (for example, 'thou' has been replaced by 'you'). In published editions, question marks, brackets, etc. are the editor's, unless otherwise indicated. In translations, anything supplied by me is placed in square brackets.

The text of *Aided Chonchobair* in Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 72.1.5, is cited from my preliminary transcription made from a microfilm of the manuscript. The manuscript is not easily legible and a number of readings are uncertain. These are indicated by square brackets. I have replaced illegible sections of the manuscript with '…' and have used italics to indicate expanded abbreviations.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking features of the rich body of medieval Irish literature is the role which the pre-Christian past plays. Many apparently secular tales are set in the pre-Christian past, such as the tales of the so-called Ulster cycle, or describe encounters between pre-Christian characters and representatives of the Christian era, a story-type which was popular throughout the early medieval period as examples such as *Echtrae Chonnlai*, *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind* and *Acallam na Senórach* show. In many cases, pre-Christian characters are described in a sympathetic and even positive way.

Medieval Irish literature before 1200 differs in a number of respects from other European medieval literatures. The remarkably early use of the vernacular for a wide range of surviving texts, including sagas, laws and saints' lives, and the use of prose contrast, for example, with German and French literature. Many of the earliest surviving texts produced in German deal with religious subjects or are of a more functional nature, such as glosses and medical texts.[1] From about the twelfth century onwards, literary production increases and courtly romances begin to appear, as well as heroic compositions such as the Nibelungenlied.[2] Likewise, before around 1100, the relatively small number of surviving French texts is mainly concerned with religious subjects. Although the eleventh-century, fragmentary *chanson de geste Gormont et Isembart* provides evidence for the composition of more secular tales at a slightly earlier date, it is not until the twelfth century that the number of texts increases.[3] Neither German nor French pre-twelfth-century literature are, therefore, on the scale or of the nature of early medieval Irish literature.

For our purposes, the most significant feature which sets medieval Irish literature apart from that of other medieval European cultures is the importance

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[1] See Knight Bostock, *A Handbook*, for an overview of Old High German literature. Although the Hildebrandslied shows that the German vernacular was used for "heroic" subjects as early as the ninth century, it is the only example of its kind at this early period. It also differs from many Irish texts in that it is written in verse.

[2] For an outline of the transition from Old High German to Middle High German periods, see Murdoch, *Old High German Literature*, pp. 123–30 (chapter 12: 'Development and Expansion').

[3] See Gaunt and Kay, 'Introduction', pp. 1–2. Like the Hildebrandslied, *Gormont et Isembart* is also a verse composition.

given to the pre-Christian past and the efforts made to accommodate it within the Christian world view of those who produced the surviving texts. The past was important in the rest of medieval Europe too, and different claims could be "verified" by recourse to supposed past events and characters which carried great authority.[4] As in Ireland, the past was relevant to the present and narratives about the past could be related to events in the present.[5] In Ireland, however, the pre-Christian past, rather than the Christian, biblical or classical past, carried great authority, and it is this, in particular, that makes Irish literature distinct from other medieval European literatures.

In recent decades attention has been drawn to the ecclesiastical background of medieval Irish texts that are apparently secular in nature.[6] This has illustrated that the dichotomy sometimes assumed between "native" and Christian elements is not appropriate. In addition, a number of studies have highlighted the dynamic nature of medieval Irish literature, the authors of which re-shaped and merged the rich traditions upon which they drew with reference to their own Christian outlook, creating texts which responded to contemporary intellectual and historical developments.[7] Above all, however, medieval Irish texts are now considered to be the product of highly learned, ecclesiastical authors, who were responsible for producing different "genres" of text, such as laws and sagas.[8]

Given the ecclesiastical background of the literature, the tolerant attitude towards pre-Christian characters seems surprising at first and one must assume a set of underlying ideas concerning the pre-Christian past, which allowed medieval Irish authors to assign their pre-Christian ancestors a place within their own Christian world view. Much work remains to be done on many medieval Irish texts; some, including those discussed here, have received very little, if any, attention since being edited in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. For

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[4] See Goetz, 'Die Gegenwart', for a discussion of the theme in slightly later, continental medieval sources. These are mainly historiographical, but also include saints' lives and foundation legends.
[5] See Goetz, 'Die Gegenwart', p. 95. For a discussion of a tale which is set in the past and relates to present events see, for example, Herbert, 'The Death'. In addition, Nagy, *Conversing*, has examined the interaction between characters in dialogue tales, or *(imm)acallam* texts, as a means of preserving knowledge from the past for the present.
[6] Amongst others, important contributions are McCone, *Pagan Past*; Carey, *Single Ray* and Nagy, *Conversing*.
[7] McCone, *Pagan Past*, discusses, along with other things, the importance of biblical models. Carey's first chapter of *Single Ray*, 'The Baptism of the Gods', pp. 1–38, shows clearly the importance of Christian learning for "native" tales.
[8] See Ó Corráin, for example, 'Irish Vernacular Law', p. 294, and 'Legend as Critic', p. 26.

that reason, my examination of ideas regarding pre-Christian characters must focus on a selection of texts. For this dissertation I have chosen a corpus of four tales, dating from about the tenth to the twelfth centuries. These are *Fástini Airt meic Cuind* (*FA*), *Aided Chonchobair* (*AC*), *De Suidigud Tellaig Temra* (*DSTT*) and *Aided Echach maic Maireda* (*AE*).

There are two main reasons for choosing these texts. First of all, these tales explicitly refer to Christianity, as their protagonists come into contact with the new religion and convert. The tales are thus much better suited to an analysis of the themes in and influences on the portrayal of pre-Christian characters than tales which do not refer to Christianity at all, such as some of the Ulster cycle tales. In choosing the texts, I have taken my cue from the earliest surviving fully vernacular Irish manuscript, *Lebor na hUidre*, Dublin, RIA 1229 (23 E 25), which includes the only surviving copies of both *AE* and *FA*. *AC* and *DSTT* are preserved in a number of other, later manuscripts,[9] including the late twelfth-century Book of Leinster, which contains a version of *AC*. Nevertheless, it is clear that the protagonists of these latter two tales, Conchobar mac Nessa and Fintan mac Bóchra, were familiar characters at the time when *Lebor na hUidre*, our earliest extensive source, was written.[10] My aim in choosing two texts from our earliest vernacular manuscript and two tales preserved elsewhere is to ensure that my selection of tales does not simply reflect the preoccupations of one particular manuscript compilation.

THE TALES

The Texts in Lebor na hUidre

Neither *AE* nor *FA* has received much attention, and my analyses of the tales have produced interesting results. *AE*[11] is one of the texts written entirely by scribe H, and it tells the story of Lí Ban, the daughter of Eochaid, a son of a Munster king

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[9] See below, p. 6.
[10] In *Lebor na hUidre*, Conchobar appears, for example, in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*LU*, 4479–6722) and is mentioned in *Senchas na Relec* (*LU*, 4040–4204) as one of three people who believed before the coming of Christ (see *LU*, 4049–50). Fintan is mentioned in *Cethri Arda in Domain*, a fragmentary copy of which is also found in *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*, 10063–87).
[11] ll. 2925–3134.

who is drowned in the eruption of Loch nEchach (Lough Neagh). Lí Ban survives into the early Christian period as a mermaid-like character, and is then baptised by Comgall of Bangor and goes to heaven. Very little work has been carried out on the story since it was edited and translated in the nineteenth century, and the most recent printed translation, itself a reprint of the 1892 translation by O'Grady, does not discuss the text in any great detail.[12] *FA*,[13] written by scribe M, consists of a short prose section followed by a 39-stanza poem. It, too, has received practically no attention since it was edited and translated by MacNeill in 1895.[14] According to the prose section, Art mac Cuind, legendary king of Tara, father of Cormac mac Airt and son of Conn Cétchathach, and ancestor of Uí Néill and Connachta, experienced a vision of angels whilst hunting on the eve of the Battle of Mag Mucrama, in which he was to die. As a result of the vision, Art was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and spoke the prophetic poem which makes up the greater part of *FA*, one of the main subjects of which is the monastery of Treóit (Trevet, Co. Meath).

Both tales are preserved only in *Lebor na hUidre*, and the date of the manuscript thus has obvious implications for their dating. *Lebor na hUidre* is of prime importance to early Irish literature, containing tales with a wide range of both date and subject matter. The date of *Lebor na hUidre* and the manner of its compilation, however, have been the subject of some discussion. The manuscript was written by three scribes, designated A, M and H, and although it appears that A and M were working at no great temporal or spatial distance, the role of H is more problematic. H made a number of changes to the manuscript, erasing and changing text and adding folios. The manuscript as it comes down to us is thus essentially his product. However, H's identity, date and place of work have proved, so far, impossible to determine. Based on a fourteenth-century note in the manuscript and *probationes pennae* by M, it was believed for some time that M should be identified as Máel Muire mac meic Cuind na mBocht, who is recorded as having been killed at Clonmacnoise in AFM, *s. a.* 1106. In 1973, however, Ó

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[12] See Bourke, *Field Day Anthology*, pp. 271–2. This consists of extracts from O'Grady's translation which is found in his *Silva Gadelica: Translation and Notes*, pp. 265–9, and which omits most of the verse. O'Grady edited the story in *Silva Gadelica: Irish Text*, pp. 233–7. The story was also edited and translated by O'Beirne Crowe, 'Ancient Lake Legends'. A translation mainly of the prose of the tale was included in Joyce's *Old Celtic Romances*, pp. 97–105.
[13] ll. 9821–9900.
[14] 'Three Poems', pp. 532–39. This is slightly less accurate than *LU*, but it includes a translation.

Concheannain suggested that the *probationes pennae* which identified M as Máel Muire was in fact written by scribe H.[15] This would have considerable implications for the dating and location of H, but the question has not been settled with any certainty.[16] *AE* was written entirely by scribe H, whereas *FA* was written by M. Despite the problems with dating H, language and orthography suggest that the scribe was writing in the twelfth or late eleventh century,[17] but certainly not as long after the two main scribes A and M as Thurneysen initially suggested.[18] M is to be placed somewhat earlier than H, and was thus probably writing at some point in the eleventh century.

A number of sources and parallels can be found for the events recounted in *AE* and it is possible that the tale is roughly contemporary with scribe H.[19] In the case of *FA*, comparative evidence from the Early Modern version of *Cath Maige Mucrama* suggests that *FA* as it is preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* is not the original version of the text.[20] Linguistic analysis suggests that it was perhaps composed in the tenth century,[21] although it should be noted that linguistic dating can only give a rough indication of a text's date. Apart from the difficulties in determining precisely when linguistic changes took place, the language of a text is liable to have been updated in the course of a text's transmission. This is particularly true of phonological changes as these are easiest to introduce while copying a text. In addition to these considerations, a homogenous linguistic picture cannot be assumed in the case of poetry, as the text may be composite, drawing on older verses of differing dates and perhaps including new verses composed for the purpose of inclusion. Thus an early eleventh century date, which may also be possible on thematic grounds,[22] would probably also be compatible with the linguistic evidence.

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[15] 'The Reviser'.

[16] For the different views on the matter see the following articles: Oskamp, 'Notes', as well as his 'Mael Muire'; Ó Concheanainn, 'The Reviser', and 'LL and the Date of the Reviser'; Mac Eoin, 'The Interpolator'; and Breatnach, 'Review'.

[17] In favour of a twelfth-century date, Mac Eoin, 'The Interpolator', p. 41, has argued that H was writing no earlier than the mid-twelfth century. On the other hand, Oskamp, 'Mael Muire', p. 182, came to the conclusion that H was writing before 1130, and more recently, Breatnach has suggested that H was writing in the second half of the eleventh century ('Review', p. 207).

[18] Thurneysen suggested a thirteenth-century date (*Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, p. 31).

[19] See this suggestion in Imhoff, 'Themes', pp. 110 and 126–7.

[20] See the discussion in chapter 1, pp. 17–22.

[21] See the linguistic evidence analysis presented in chapter 1, pp. 10–17.

[22] See the suggestion in chapter 7, pp. 170–1.

AC has been mentioned in passing in scholarly literature on a number of occasions, usually in discussions concerning pre-Christian Irish characters who came to believe in God before the Christianization of Ireland.[23] The tale tells the story of the conversion and death of the Ulster king, Conchobar, when he hears of the Crucifixion. It is preserved in seven medieval manuscripts,[24] not all of which were known to Meyer, the story's editor,[25] and the versions contained in these manuscripts differ significantly from one another. My analysis of the different versions makes some changes to Meyer's four-fold division and thus contributes to our understanding of the development of the different versions of the tale. The multiple versions, which are difficult to date, reflect the popularity of Conchobar's death-tale in medieval times,[26] and the variation between them represents a particular challenge to critical discussion of the tale. On the other hand, the differences between the versions also provide a particularly good opportunity for the study of developing and changing attitudes towards the tale and its theme of Conchobar's conversion and death. My main focus is on Meyer's versions A and B, that is, the texts preserved in the Book of Leinster and in RIA 967 (23 N 10), which contain a poem spoken by Conchobar not preserved in the other versions. In addition, I consider the poem preserved in Meyer's version D and attributed to Cináed ua hArtacáin elsewhere in some detail.

DSTT is preserved in two manuscripts: The Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD 1318; H.2.16; s. xiv) and the Book of Lismore (private ownership, s. xv/xvi).[27] It

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[23] See, for example, McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 74–5, and Ó Corráin, 'Irish Vernacular Law', p. 287.

[24] These manuscripts are the Book of Leinster (TCD 1339; s. xii), Dublin, RIA D.iv.2 (Stowe 992; 1300), the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (Dublin, RIA 476, 23 O 48; s. xv), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud misc. 610 (s. xv), Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 72.1.5 (s. xv), Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 72.1.40 (s. xvi) and Dublin, RIA 967 (23 N 10; s. xvi). In addition to this, the nineteenth-century manuscripts *Leabhar Caol* (Edinburgh, NLS, 72.3.5) and Dublin, RIA, 184 (23 B 21) preserve post-medieval transcriptions of the text from one of the medieval manuscripts, Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 72.1.40.

[25] Meyer edited and translated the text in his *Death-Tales*, pp. 4–21. He did not make use of Laud misc. 610 or of Adv. 72.1.5 in this edition, but published the Laud version later in 'Mitteilungen' (*ZCP* 13), p. 7.

[26] The similarities between Conchobar's death and that of Níall Noígíallach, to which Ní Mhaonaigh has drawn attention ('Níall Noígíallach's Death-Tale', p. 184), also show links with traditions about another important pre-Christian hero.

[27] Corthals actually lists three manuscripts that contain the tale, the third being Dublin, RIA B IV 2, 130v–2r (see 'MS-OMIT'). RIA Catalogue, however, does not list *DSTT* as being in the

was edited and translated by Best in 1910[28] and has been tentatively dated to the tenth or eleventh century.[29] In *DSTT*, Fintan mac Bóchra, a figure known from a number of other sources which will be considered in the course of this analysis, is summoned to Tara to judge a dispute between Diarmait mac Cerbaill, the historic sixth-century king of Tara, and his nobles. This dispute concerns the extent of the lands of Tara, or *suidigud tellaig Temra*, translated by Best as 'the settling of the manor of Tara'.[30] Diarmait initially calls on a series of wise old men, each of whom refers him to the next, because they do not believe that they themselves have sufficient knowledge and authority to answer the question. Finally, Diarmait is referred to Fintan mac Bóchra who judges that Tara's lands consist of all of Ireland. This judgment is made on the basis of knowledge received from a mysterious figure, Trefuilngid Treochair, who appeared in Ireland on the day of Christ's Crucifixion. My discussion of the tale shows how Irish traditions, legal learning and biblical influences are brought together in a narrative which focuses on Tara's place within Ireland.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The four tales discussed here have not previously been examined in detail. Although *AC* and *DSTT*, in particular, are well known, full analyses of their structure, sources and focus of all four tales are necessary. *FA* has received virtually no attention. For this reason, it has been necessary to include three chapters in Part I, 'Background', which discuss the literary context, dating, structure and manuscript transmission of *FA*, *DSTT* and *AC*.[31] The relevance of each of these aspects for my discussion varies from tale to tale, depending also on what work has already been done elsewhere. Thus chapter 1 discusses the linguistic date and the structure of *FA*, as well as including background information on the text's potential place of origin, the monastery of Treóit.

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manuscript and lists the following for fol. 130: 'Ceanfolaoladh mac Ailella. *Suidiccad thighe midhcuarta.* 31 qq' (see RIA Catalogue, p. 3027).

[28] 'The Settling'.

[29] McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 75, dates it to the tenth or eleventh century. Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, p. 18, describes it as 'probably tenth-century'.

[30] 'The Settling'.

[31] For a survey of references and analogues to the events of *AE*, as well as a discussion of the tale's structure, see Imhoff, 'Themes'.

Chapter 2 consists of an examination of the literary context and structure of *DSTT*, and chapter 3 is an analysis of the relationship of the different manuscripts of *AC*.

Following this, Part II, 'Themes', consists of five chapters focusing on the portrayal of the tales' protagonists: Art, Conchobar, Fintan and Lí Ban. It begins with chapter 4, which analyses the way in which Irish history and the relationship between pre-Christian and Christian times is presented in the tales. This leads on to a discussion of parallels between the tales' protagonists and biblical characters, including Christ and God. Chapter 6 moves on to an analysis of the saintly attributes with which Art and Lí Ban, in particular, are endowed and to discuss the importance of relics in the tales. Chapter 7 examines the theme of kingship, important in *FA* and *DSTT*. Finally, chapter 8 turns to the reasons for the pre-Christian characters' salvation and the ways in which this salvation could be granted.

These tales, previously little studied, contribute to our understanding of medieval Irish authors' attitudes towards their own past and towards the literary traditions they inherited. They show that a level of continuity was imagined in the relationship between pre-Christian past and Christian present, and that the bible contributed significantly to the depiction of this relationship. The tales also show the variety of subjects that could be addressed by recourse to pre-Christian characters, from *AE*'s focus on baptism to *FA*'s concern for the monastery of Treóit. Finally, the characters' salvation is ensured by means that conformed to views found also in the bible, in patristic writings and in the works of other medieval theologians.

PART I: BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1: *FÁSTINI AIRT MEIC CUIND*

LANGUAGE AND DATE

The latest date at which *FA* might have been composed is determined by the date of *Lebor na hUidre*. Regardless of the discussion surrounding H, M was very probably writing in the late eleventh century.[32] In order to further refine the date of *FA*, linguistic evidence must be taken into consideration, which may also determine whether prose and poem date from around the same period.

Given the date at which M was writing, it is possible for later phonological features to have been introduced into *FA*. Therefore, developments such as the loss of distinction between unstressed final vowels would only be of diagnostic significance if they were part of rhyme. Lack of late forms in the morphology, on the other hand, will indicate an earlier date. For these reasons, the following linguistic analysis will consider the occurrence of late morphological developments as the most decisive diagnostic features.

The prose consists of 14 lines and 155 words, whereas the verse comprises 156 lines and 641 words. In the following, prose and verse will be considered separately and under the headings of phonology and morphology. In the tables the first column indicates the line number in *LU*, the second the form of a particular word in the text, and the third the grammatical form with the Old Irish form of the word in brackets where relevant.

Prose

Phonology

The prose contains no clear hiatus forms, two cases of main clause lenition, one inorganic *f* and metathesis in one word. Somewhat more prominent is the lack of distinction between unstressed vowels.

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[32] See above, p. 5.

Falling together of unstressed vowels		
9823	*sudi*	dat. sg. (*suidiu*)
9826	*spiruta*	gen. sg. (*spiruto*)
9821, 9827	*fastini*	gen. sg. (*fáitsine*)
9832	*cretmi*	gen. sg. (*cretme*)
Metathesis		
9821, 9827	*fastini*	*fáitsine*
Main clause lenition		
9831	*díar chomraic*	3 sg. perf. ind. of *comraic(c)id*[33]
9833	*ro chansom*	3 sg. perf. ind. of *canaid*
Inorganic *f*		
9825	*co faca*	3 sg. pret. ind. (*co n-accae*)

Morphology

Features typical of Old Irish, such as neuter gender and dual number, are not found in the prose and there is no confusion of cases after prepositions.[34] In the verbs the following changes have occurred:[35]

Use of simple verbs		
9831	*diar chomraic*	3 sg. perf. ind. of *comraic(c)id*, simple verb from *con-ricc* (3 sg. perf. ind. of *con-ricc*: *con-ránaic*)
9832	*ro togsom*	3 sg. perf. ind. of *togaid*, simple verb from *do-goa* (3 sg. perf. ind. of *do-goa*: *do-roígu*)

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[33] The abbreviation 'ind.' refers to 'indicative', not 'independent'.
[34] Sixteen prepositions in the prose are followed by a noun or verbal noun. I do not count the prepositions in 'fó chetóir' (l. 9827), 'iar tain' (ll. 9828 and 9833), 'ara bárach' (l. 9829) and 'fo déig' (l. 9832) as they are part of set expressions.
[35] There are no instances in which infixed pronouns would be used in the prose of *FA*, so their usage cannot be analysed.

Spread of weak verb pattern		
9833	*ro chansom*	3 sg. perf. ind. of *canaid*; would expect reduplicated form (*ro-cachain*)
Confusion of *ro* and *no*		
9833	*ro biad*	3 sg. sec. fut. ind. of *at-tá* (*no biad*)

The prose is relatively short, and thus linguistic data is somewhat limited. What becomes clear is that the main phonological change is the falling together of unstressed final vowels. As might be expected, the main morphological changes, in as far as the brevity of the prose allows any judgment, are found in verbs.

Verse

On the whole, the poetry in *FA* shows roughly the same features as the prose.

Phonology

      As in the prose, the main phonological change appears to be the falling together of unstressed final vowels. Most of the rhyme is with consonant-final words, and those vowels that are in rhyming position are long, so it is not possible to make any inferences in this regard on the basis of rhyme. However, other words in the verse show quite clearly that unstressed final vowels are no longer distinct.

Falling together of unstressed final vowels		
9906, 9940	*ma*	1 sg. poss. pron. (*mo*)
9969	*ingi*	preposition *inge*
9984	*uasli*	comparative of adj. *úasal* (*úasliu*)
9871, 9904, 9921	*messi, misi, messi*	1 sg. emph. pers. pron. (*messe*)

9975	*tasi*	nom. sg. of *taise*
9976	*masi*	nom. sg. of *maise*
9846, 9884, 9906	*ra*	preposition *re* (*fri*)

In addition to this, some prepositions, such as *fri*, are confused or are affected by the spread of lenition, and there are a few other phonological changes, such as the change from *mr-* to *br-*, monophthongisation, the spread of lenition and later spelling.

Confusion of prepositions		
9856, 9859	*ma*, *fa*	preposition (*fo*)
mr- to br-		
9911	*brecht*	adj. (*mrecht*)
Monophthongisation		
9887	*ébind*	adj. (*oíbind*; although note that in the same stanza the comparative of the adjective is spelt *aebni*).
Spread of lenition and main clause lenition		
9846, 9884, 9906, 9968	*ra*, *ri*	preposition (*fri*)
9855	*no thogfaind*	1 sg. sec. fut. ind. of *togaid*
9893	*atchíther*	sg. pres. pass. ind. of *ad-cí*
9914 and 9987	*atchíd*	2 pl. pres. ind., 3 sg. impf. ind. or later 3 pl. pres. ind. of *ad-cí*[36]

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[36] I translate this form as a 2 pl. pres. ind., but the other possible translations would also make sense in the context of the poem. See my comments below, pp. 128–9, on the relevance of this form.

Despite these developments, it should be noted that some older phonological features are also preserved. Thus, the prepositions *for* and *ar* remain distinct, there are no cases of metathesis and no glide vowels, and on two occasions the older form *már* for *mór* is found (ll. 9850 and 9854).

Morphology

Morphologically, more features of interest are found in the poetry than in the prose, but this may be due to the relative lengths of the prose and the poetry in *FA*. As in the prose, the neuter gender is not found in the verse. Infixed pronouns are used correctly on a number of occasions, with the exception of the petrification of the neuter 3 sg. class A infix in *ad-ci*, listed below.[37] The correct cases are used after prepositions, the passive is used correctly and adjectives agree with their antecedents. Despite the spread of the weak verb pattern to some strong verbs, the s-future in *fuigset*,[38] probably a 3 pl. future of *fo-guid*,[39] might suggest that the weak verb pattern has not yet taken over. The conjunction *noco* is followed by the subjunctive,[40] whereas it is more usually followed by the indicative in Middle Irish. There are, however, also a number of verbal forms based on later forms or stems, as well as forms reflecting the spread of the weak verb pattern or of particular endings.

Later forms of verbs or verbal stems		
9836	*addonruacht*	3 sg. perf. ind. *ad-roich* with 1 pl. class B infixed pronoun; *ad-roich* is a later form of the verb *do-roich*

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[37] See below, p. 16. There is also one case of an independent pronoun: 'bad é luag ail trom' (l. 9947; 'a heavy stone will be a reward'), which may comply with Old Irish usage. One would, however, expect at least one of the nominals to be definite. For comparable examples, i.e. those including two nominals, see Thurneysen, *A Grammar*, §§ 406 and 815. For a discussion of such constructions, see Mac Coisdealbha, *The Syntax*, pp. 81–5. It should be noted that the examples discussed in these two works are prose, whereas the instance in *FA* occurs in verse. As one cannot exclude the possibility that metrical requirements might influence the syntax of verse, it is difficult to assess its significance in connection with the text's date.
[38] l. 9960.
[39] *DIL* 470.37–41.
[40] ll. 9930 and 9918.

9855	*no thogfaind*	1 sg. sec. fut. ind. of *togaid*, simple verb from *do-goa* (1 sg. sec. fut. ind. of *do-goa*: *do-gegainn*)
9948	*dola*	later acc. sg. of *dul*, vn. of *téit*
9950	*soich*	3 sg. pres. ind. of *saigid*, but based on later stem *soich-* rather than *saig-*
Spread of particular endings and weak verb pattern		
9899	*faícfid*	3 sg. f-fut. ind. of *fo-ácaib*; would expect long-vowel future in Old Irish
9932	*farcbur*	1 sg. pres. subj. of *fo-ácaib* with ending *-ur*; would expect *farcab*
9968	*tabraim*	1 sg. pres. ind. of *do-beir* with ending *–aim*; would expect *tabur*
9897	*nigfea*	3sg. f-fut. ind. of *nigid*; would expect reduplicated future

Other developments in verbs are also found. Thus, *ro* and *no* are confused once, and, although infixed pronouns are used correctly, the neuter pronoun is petrified in the verb *ad-cí*, thus leading to main clause lenition.

Confusion of *ro* and *no*		
9963	*rombéra*	3 sg. fut. of *beirid* with 1 sg. class A infix (*nombéra*)

Petrified neuter infix		
9893	*atchither*	sg. pres. pass. ind. of *ad-cí*
9914, 9987	*atchíd*	2 pl. pres. ind., 3 sg. impf. or later 3 pl. pres. ind. of *ad-cí*

Some later developments are also found in other types of words.

Declension of *Temair* as k-stem		
9915	*temrach*	gen. sg. of *Temair* (*temra*)
Conjunctions		
9932, 9867	*da*	later form of *día*
9940	*ria*	for *re*
Numerals		
9953	*dá sreith*	would expect *dí sreith*, as *sreth* is feminine; but note correct use of *dí* in 9977 (*úaig dil fo dí*)

In summary, on the whole, both the poetry and prose show Middle Irish developments above all on the phonological level and in verbs. There are no instances in which an infixed pronoun would be used in the prose but the system of infixed pronouns is still working well in the poetry, with the exception of the petrified neuter infix in *ad-cí*, which is linked to the loss of the neuter gender. In addition, the distinction between *for* and *ar* is upheld, inorganic *f* is also rare and the old form *már* is found.

A poem such as that preserved in *FA* may have been put together from older sources. It is therefore possible that a poem might exhibit older features in some places, but later developments in others. Thus, despite the fact that the verse section of *FA* seems overall to preserve more older features than the prose, the

later forms found in both suggest that the poem was put together in the form in which it survives at around the same time as the prose was written. Given the arguments made below concerning the thematic unity of prose and poetry,[41] it is possible that both were intended to form a unit from the outset. The language of prose and poem is clearly not Old Irish throughout, but a number of developments that are found in Middle Irish have not yet taken place. A date at the beginning of the Middle Irish period is, therefore, most likely. If one takes 900 as a rough dividing line between Old and Middle Irish, a tenth-century date for *FA* would be possible.

TEXTUAL TRADITION

Fástini Airt *and Related Texts*

As its title suggests, *FA* is concerned with a prophecy of Art mac Cuinn. He prophesies his death and his burial at Duma Derglúachra, or Treóit, because he knows that it will become a place associated with Christianity. The statement in the prose that the vision took place on the eve of the Battle of Mag Mucrama immediately associates it with the ninth-century tale of that battle, *Cath Maige Mucrama*.[42] However, the story of Art's prophecy is not told in the Old Irish tale as it survives today. Instead, a shorter and slightly different version of the poem is preserved in the Early Modern tale about the battle, *Cath Mhaighe Mochruimhe* (hereafter *CMM*[2]). In this tale the paragraph introducing it is more detailed than the prose section in *FA*. In addition to this, a variant version of the first line of the poem is quoted in the seventeenth-century Martyrology of Donegal under the entry for St Lonán of Treóit (1 November), who is mentioned in glosses in M's hand in *FA*.[43] Another text preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*, *Senchas na Relec*, also quotes the first line of the poem.[44]

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[41] See below, p. 24.
[42] See O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*, p. 18, for this date.
[43] The line in the Martyrology of Donegal runs 'Caoin do dhionnaibh dén' (Todd, Reeves and O'Donovan, p. 290). For a discussion of the Martyrology of Donegal, see Ó Riain, *Feastdays*, pp. 281–313. For the glosses in M's hand, see *LU*, p. 298, nn. c and d.
[44] See *LU*, 4092.

There are indications that *FA* and *CMM*[2] formed part of a greater body of traditions relating to Art's death and burial, some of which have not survived. *FA* contains one gloss by scribe H, which informs us that the name Denna Den in the first stanza should be understood as 'Denna Dimor fer grada Airt'.[45] We have no corroboration for H's statement in the gloss, but as the information he gives cannot be deduced from *FA* as it stands, it may be that he had access to a tradition which is now lost. *Senchas na Relec* also provides evidence for the existence of information, now lost, concerning Art's death. This text is concerned with the burial of ancient kings of Ireland, including Art, and refers directly to the events related in *FA*:

> Is airi dano nach and ro adnacht Art. ar ro chreit in lá ría tabairt chatha Muccrama 7 ro tharngir (.i. co forbérad in cristaidecht for Erind) in cretim 7 asbert combad and no beth a fert i nDuma nDerglúachra áit hi fail Treoit indiu. diaro dechtsom isin duain (.i. dúan dorigni Art 7 iss e a toissech. Cain do Denna Den. 7 r.) dorigni sin .i. Cain do Denda Den.
> In tan roucad (.i. co Duma nDerglúachra) a corp (.i. Airt) sair iar tain dia mbetís fir Herend oca sreing ass ni fetfaitis coro adnacht isind inud sain. fo déig ar rop eclas (.i. Treoit indiu) cathalacda iar tain bali in ro adnacht. fo déig na fírinni 7 na cretmi ro mbí ar ro faillsiged tria fír flatha dó.[46]

FA could thus be viewed to some extent as a poetic expansion on some of the information in *Senchas na Relec*. That text's statement that Art's body could not be moved from Duma Derglúachra once it had arrived there is not found in *FA*, and it is therefore unlikely that *FA* served as a source for the main text of *Senchas na Relec*. There is no variation between the text in *Lebor na hUidre* and the other manuscript copy of *Senchas na Relec*, in TCD H.3.17, but the glosses by

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[45] *LU*, p. 296, n. a; 'Denna Dimor, Art's trusted servant'. I have not been able to find a reference to Denna Den or Denna Dimor which is unconnected to the poem. From the poem itself it is not clear whether it is a place name or a personal name.

[46] *LU*, 4089–96 (round brackets indicate glosses by M); 'This, then, is why Art was not buried there [Brug]: because he believed the day before the Battle of Mucrama took place, and he prophesied the faith (that is, that Christianity would prosper in Ireland) and he said that his burial mound would be there in Duma Derglúachra, the place in which Treóit is today. He spoke of this in the poem which he composed, that is 'Cain do Denda Den' (that is, the poem which Art composed, and this is its beginning, 'Cain do Denda Den', etc.). Afterwards, when his body (that is, Art's) was brought (that is, to Duma Derglúachra) eastwards, if the men of Ireland had been dragging it away, they would not have been able to [move it], so he was buried in that spot, because there would be a catholic church (that is, Treóit today) afterwards in the place in which he was buried, because of the truth and the faith which are there, for it was revealed to him because of the justice of his rule'.

M, added in brackets in the quotation above, are not found in the TCD manuscript.

There is also a thematic link between *FA* and the text which follows it in the manuscript, *Echtrae Chonnlai*. The latter opens with the question 'Cid día n-apar Art Óenfer?'.[47] A case could thus be made for thematic considerations influencing the inclusion of these three texts in *Lebor na hUidre*. This might then help explain why a text such as *FA*, the focus of which is so strongly on the monastery of Treóit, should be contained in *Lebor na hUidre*.[48]

Caith Mhaighe Mochruimhe *and* Fástini Airt

The order of the stanzas in *CMM*[2] is different from that in *FA* and *CMM*[2] does not contain all the stanzas contained in *FA*.[49] Interestingly, the stanzas not in *CMM*[2] include those in which Art appears to be issuing a warning (18–22). In addition, the stanzas concerned with relics and Art's grave as a place of pilgrimage (32, 36, 38) are not preserved in *CMM*[2]. Conversely, *CMM*[2] preserves 2 stanzas not found in *FA*. They read as follows:

[4] Biaidh dile eaglaise,

mo chean cathair cháidh

ar Magh Breagh ós Bóinn,

budh cádhasach cáin.

[5] San aimsir dhéidheannaigh

budh torthach do chách,

biaidh eagna go h-iolardha,

ó indiu go dtí an bhreath.[50]

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[47] *LU*, 9992; 'How is Art Óenfer named?'.

[48] The argument is, however, weakened by the fact that *FA* and *Senchas na Relec* are found quite far apart from one another in *Lebor na hUidre*. *Senchas na Relec* is found on pp. 50–52 of the manuscript, whereas *FA* is found on pp. 119–120.

[49] The *FA* stanzas not contained in *CMM*[2] are stanzas 5, 6, 8, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 34, 36, 37 and 38. The poem in *CMM*[2] contains some lines from *FA*'s stanzas 2 and 28. The fourteenth stanza in *CMM*[2] seems to be a variant of *FA*'s stanza 31.

[50] *CMM*[2], pp. 427–8; '[4] It will be property of a church, welcome holy city on Mag Breg above the Boyne, it will be venerable, fair. [5] At the end of the world it will be fruitful for all, there will be wisdom plentifully from today until judgment'.

Neither of these stanzas would be out of place in *FA*. Indeed, the first stanza would fit very well into the context of Art's association with the ecclesiastical establishment of Treóit and might be seen to actually strengthen the claims of power which appear to be made in *FA*.[51] On the other hand, the stanzas not contained in *CMM*² are not necessary in the context of that tale. In particular, the stanzas on relics and Art's warnings to a future king or kings would not necessarily make sense in the later narrative. As these stanzas are central to the idea that *FA* may reflect contemporary political changes, as will be argued in chapter 7,[52] it is very interesting that they should be omitted in *CMM*², and it may be that they do not survive because they make no sense in the context. Given that both the poem in *FA* and that in *CMM*² contain stanzas not found in the other, it seems likely that both draw on an earlier poem and that *FA* as it is preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* is not the original form of the tale.[53] This might also go some way towards explaining the structure of the poem in *FA*, which at times is very logical, but at other times seems rather more haphazard. Nevertheless, although a few stanzas are not as well linked to those surrounding them as others, there is no reason to suppose that there is necessarily more missing than the two stanzas which are preserved only in *CMM*² but not in *FA*.

There is a fair amount of variation between the poem in *CMM*² and *FA*. Frequently, whole lines are different and yet it is clear that the stanzas derive from a common source. Sometimes only one line varies and divergences can be explained. Thus, the first line of *CMM*²'s stanza 21 reads 'mo chonách go tric', which corresponds to 'mo thonach go tric' in stanza 23 of *FA*. The confusion of the two words is likely to be due to the similarities in shape between the two letters *c* and *t*. In the first stanza, *CMM*² reads 'do dhéanamh is do ghean' instead of *FA*'s 'do Denna Denn', perhaps suggesting that the name Denna Denn was unfamiliar. The third line of the same stanza is again different in *CMM*² from the corresponding stanza in *FA*, but the use of similar-sounding vocabulary, such as 'bruighnibh' and 'brug', suggests that *CMM*²'s stanza is ultimately derived from the same source as the one in *FA*:

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[51] See below, p. 154–5.
[52] See below, pp. 168–71.
[53] This does not, however, affect the argument, made on linguistic grounds above and on thematic grounds below, that prose and poem form a coherent unit.

CMM²	*FA*
[1] Caoin do dhéanamh is do ghean, ós Dúmha dom' ruacht ós bruighnibh Breagh mbarc, Dearg-luachra gan fhuacht.[54]	[1] Caín do Denna Den doma addonrúacht úas Brega brug drécht Derglúachra cen uacht.[55]

In *CMM²*'s stanza 7, *FA*'s stanza 9, the first line is different from the line in *FA*, and yet it still mentions St Patrick. The remaining lines are clearly derived from the same source:

CMM²	*FA*
[7] D'ainm an Tailgin shoir ba amhra mo bhrígh, a Dhé do ghní an mhuir! a Dhé do ghní an tír![56]	[9]Dána társind talcind ropad amra in bríg a Dé doní in muir a Dé doní in tír.[57]

Due to these factors it is rather difficult to determine the precise relationship between the poem as it is preserved in *FA* and in *CMM²*.

The prose preceding the poem in *CMM²* contains the same basic information as the prose in *FA*, but it is considerably more detailed. It is not possible to tell whether *CMM²* represents an embellishment of the account in *FA* or whether it had access to a more detailed source. *Senchas na Relec* certainly indicates more detailed traditions associated with Art's burial, although not with his prophecy, and if one considers the stanza just quoted, *CMM²*'s stanza 7, the reference to a movement eastwards might be related to the statement in *Senchas na Relec* that Art's body was moved east after the Battle of Mag Mucrama.[58]

The nature of the variation between the two poems and the tentative connection made between *Senchas na Relec* and *CMM²* suggest that the text of *FA*

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[54] *CMM²*, p. 427; 'Fair your form and your smile, over a mound it reached me, over the lands of Brega of barks, of Dearg-luachair without coldness'.

[55] ll. 9835–8; 'Fair is Denna Den, a mound has appeared to us above Brega, a mound of poems, of Derglúachair, without coldness'.

[56] *CMM²*, p. 428; 'In the name of the Tálcend [St Patrick] eastwards, my power was wonderful, O God who makes the sea, O god who makes the land'.

[57] ll. 9867–70; 'If I might have reached the Tálcend [St Patrick], the power would have been wonderful. O God who makes the sea, O God who makes the land'.

[58] *LU*, 4093–95.

in *Lebor na hUidre* and the poem in *CMM*[2] are drawing on a common source and that one is not directly dependent on the other. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the first line as it is quoted in the Martyrology of Donegal differs both from the line in *FA* and in *CMM*[2].[59] Nevertheless, the statement in the Martyrology of Donegal that Treóit was to be named from the three sods cut by Art and that he was to be buried in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, suggest a closer relationship with *CMM*[2] than *FA*, which does not mention these things specifically.[60] The traditions surrounding the Battle of Mag Mucrama may have been more extensive than the surviving medieval material on the battle suggests, and it is possible that they included traditions about Art's burial and the poem we find in *FA* and *CMM*[2]. These traditions did not survive in *Cath Maige Mucrama* or the other medieval tales about the characters connected to this story, but they do survive to a greater or lesser extent in *CMM*[2], *Senchas na Relec*, the Martyrology of Donegal and *FA*.

<center>THEMATIC STRUCTURE</center>

The focus of the poem is on Art, his grave and his connection with the monastery of Treóit. As will be discussed in chapter 6,[61] Art is depicted as a quasi-saint who enjoys a close relationship with that monastic community, and in this role he issues a warning to unnamed descendants of his and to a king of Tara who, likewise, remains anonymous. As will be discussed below, some of the verses make it clear that Treóit is a monastic establishment. However, apart from such references, Art's vision in the prose section already indicates the nature of Duma

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[59] See the Martyrology of Donegal (ed. Todd and Reeves, p. 290) and *CMM*[2], p. 427.

[60] According to the martyrology, Art explains Duma Derglúachra's new name, Treóit, as deriving from the 'trí fódaibh do bhenfadh sé an uair sin, .i. fód fona chenn acus fód ceachtar a dhá thaobh, acus gurab ann do hadhnaicfidhe é in ainm an athar, an mic, acus an spirat naoim' (ed. and trans. Todd, Reeves and O'Donovan, pp. 290–1; 'three sods which he would cut at that time, viz., a sod to be put under his head, and a sod under each of his sides, and that it is there he should be buried in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'). For the corresponding passage in *CMM*[2], see Ó Dúnlainge, p. 427 (cited also below, p. 153). It should be noted that in *CMM*[2] the sods refer to a sod under Art's head, his side and his feet.

[61] See below, pp. 125–36.

<center>22</center>

Derglúachra/Treóit and its future establishment: 'Conid and ro togsom a adnacol isind inud sin fo déig na cretmi ro bíad iar tain'.[62]

From the outset, there is no doubt about where the episode takes place. Brega and more specifically Duma Derglúachra are named, and the narrator also gives the name by which Duma Derglúachra is known *indiu*, 'today', namely Treóit. The narrator refers to his time here, which, given the lack of indications to the contrary, can be understood to mean the audience's time. In the first sentence, then, two different time levels are established and a sense of continuity and of contrast, familiarity and distance, is created. By distinguishing between the two names for the same place in this way, the narrator focuses attention on what was, in his time, a monastic establishment and not a hunting place somewhere in Brega and clearly highlights the change that the place has undergone.[63] On the other hand, although the place has changed over time, the audience is still in a position to identify the place by its name *indiu*, and thus reflect on the changes which have taken place.

The scene which follows presents Duma Derglúachra as a special place already in Art's time. The vision of angels ascending and descending may well be modelled on Jacob's vision at Bethel in Genesis.[64] That narrative follows a similar pattern, although Jacob falls asleep and has a dream, whereas Art is awake when he experiences his vision.[65] In his dream Jacob sees 'a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it'.[66]

In connection with an earlier text, entitled *Longes Chonaill Chuirc* by its editor, Hull, Byrne has drawn attention to the fact that the story of Jacob's ladder forms part of the mass for the consecration of churches.[67] Hull dated the text to the eighth, or more probably, the ninth century.[68] In this story, a swineherd describes a vision he experienced in which he saw, on a flagstone in front of a

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[62] ll. 9831–3; 'So that it was then that he chose his burial to be in that place because of the faith which would be there afterwards'.

[63] This is not uncommon in medieval Irish literature. For a well known example, see the passage on the monastery of Drogheda, or Mellifont, in *Acallam na Senórach* (ed. Stokes, 'Acallamh', p. 2).

[64] As noted by Mac Neill, 'Three Poems', p. 530.

[65] The connection is much closer in *CMM*[2], where Art also falls asleep and dreams rather than having a waking vision.

[66] Gen. XXVIII.12.

[67] Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 186.

[68] 'The Exile', p. 940.

church, "'Timthirecht angel ond licc súas 7 anúas'".[69] In *Longes Chonaill Chuirc*, the parallel with the story of Jacob is found side by side with possible symbols of kingship, such as the yew and the flagstone, and is interpreted within the tale as marking out the future royal residence of Munster. There need not be any connection between *FA* and *Longes Chonaill Chuirc*, but given the claims made with regard to royal authority in Art's poem,[70] the parallels are significant and show the extent to which secular and ecclesiastical power were interlinked.

Just as Jacob awakes from his dream, understands the special nature of the place in which he is and renames it, so does Art prophesy the coming of Christianity to the place in which he is and which is given the two names, Duma Derglúachra and Treóit. Given the fact that Art's prophecy also concerns the establishment of the monastery and church of Treóit, the parallels between the two accounts are likely to be based on the liturgical function of the Genesis passage. The parallels would have been immediately obvious to a medieval ecclesiastical audience, but some members of a lay audience may also have been aware of their significance. Thus it is clear from the outset that the reference to Treóit at the beginning of the prose section is not merely a reference to the place as such, but a reference to the ecclesiastical establishment there. The prose section does more than simply set the scene for Art's vision and prophecy or serve as an explanatory introduction to the poem. Rather, it is an integral part of the tale, important for understanding *FA*. This fits in with the linguistic evidence presented above, which shows the prose and poetry sections of the text to be of roughly the same date.

Overall, the stanzas in the poem follow onto one another in a way that brings out the main themes. The subject of the different stanzas leads from one to the next and the ordering of the stanzas can have implications for their meaning. Although not all stanzas follow on from one another logically, for the most part, the poem as it stands is structured in a thematically coherent way.

The opening stanza describes the mound at Duma Derglúachra and sets the scene for the poem, but also, perhaps, connects it with features still visible at

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[69] *Longes Chonaill Chuirc* (ed. and trans. Hull, pp. 942 (text) and 949 (translation)); "'Angels were in attendance going up and down from the flagstone'".
[70] See below, pp. 154–5.

Treóit in the monastery's own time.[71] The description of the mound's appearance over Brega has vision-like qualities and sets the mound apart as a special place. The special nature of the place as it is described in this stanza leads on to the next four stanzas, which are essentially prophecies about Treóit. Stanzas 2 and 3 establish Treóit's ecclesiastical, monastic nature, whereas stanzas 4 and 5 include prophecies about Treóit's future status and power. This block is followed by two stanzas about Art's burial in this special place that the first five stanzas have described. Stanza 8 then brings all of this together by linking the ecclesiastical institution which will be established at Duma Derglúachra with Art's burial mound:

[8] Bádat ail cach clúain

niptar dirna oiss

immá duma dess

hi tairndfet do chrois.[72]

The first eight stanzas can, then, be taken as a unit, linked thematically in the following way:
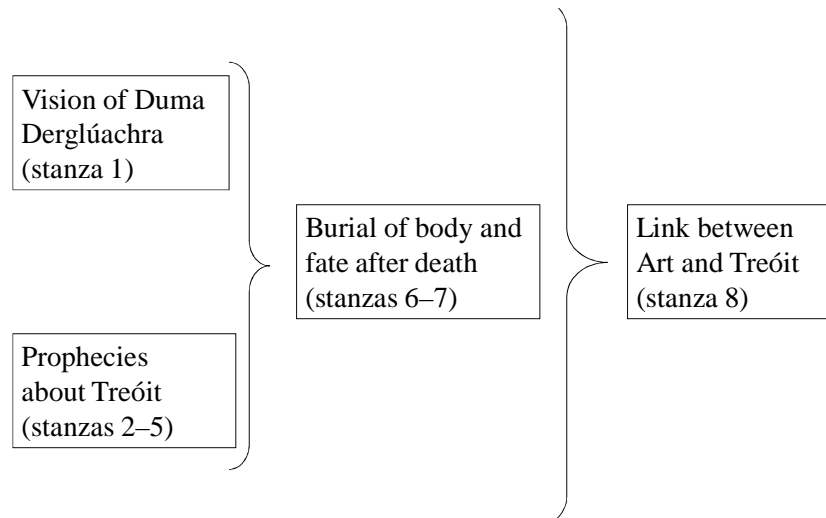
Art's exclamation in the first line of stanza 9 takes us back to him and to his own time: 'Dána társind talcind'.[73] The line can be understood as Art

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[71] See the discussion of the archaeological remains below, p. 32, and the suggestion below, p. 158, that the poem may refer to existing features at Treóit.

[72] ll. 9863–6; 'Every meadow will be pleasant to you, a herd of deer was not around its southern mound, on which they will set up your cross'. Although the word *ail* also occurs in l. 9949, where the meaning of 'rock, boulder' is appropriate, I take *ail* in l. 9863 to be *áil*, 'wish, request', as this seems to make the most sense in the context. For *áil* in copula-constructions, see *DIL* 114.45–78.

lamenting the fact that he did not live long enough to meet St Patrick and thus to experience the Christianization of Ireland and the beginnings of the monastery of Treóit, the foundation of which by Patrick is referred to in stanzas which will be discussed below. Indeed, had Art lived that long, he claims that 'ropad amra in brig'.[74] It is not entirely clear whether Art means his power, that of Treóit, which has already been referred to in the poem, or Patrick's power in general, but the sense of regret which is expressed in the two lines is clear. The stanza finishes with a statement of God's power:

> a Dé doní in muir
>
> a Dé doní in tír.[75]

Because stanza 9 has brought us back to Art's time, this stanza leads nicely into the next stanzas which are concerned with the events of the Battle of Mag Mucrama, which is to take place the following day. Stanzas 10 to 12 return to Art's more immediate, earthly future and the battle's effects on Ireland. The return to the topic of Treóit and Art's burial in stanza 13 suggests that its relationship with the preceding stanzas is one of contrast. Art's burial and the peace he will find in his grave at Treóit contrast with the events of the Battle of Mag Mucrama and the manner of his death, as is clear from stanza 13:

> [13] Mo duma mo dín
>
> iar scarad ram slúag
>
> mo phort idan án
>
> m' ilad 7 m'úag.[76]

This contrast is extended to a general contrast between earthly and heavenly life in stanza 14:

> [14] Gid ébind bith sund
>
> oc seilg ar cach fíad
>
> aebni in maith iar cind
>
> ocond flaith find fíal.[77]

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[73] ll. 9867; 'If I might have reached the Tálcend [St Patrick]'.

[74] ll. 9868; 'The power would have been wonderful'.

[75] ll. 9869–70; 'O God who makes the sea, O God who makes the land'.

[76] ll. 9883–6; 'My mound, my shelter, after separating from my host, [it is] my pure splendid abode, my tomb and my grave'.

[77] ll. 9887–90; 'Although it may be pleasant being here, hunting every game, more pleasant [is] the good ahead with the noble white ruler'.

Diagrammatically, the progression of stanzas up to this point can be represented as follows:

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          ┌─────────────────────┐
          │ Art's regret at not  │
          │ having lived long    │
          │ enough to meet       │
          │ St Patrick (stanza 9)│
          └─────────────────────┘
         ╱            │           ╲
┌──────────────────┐  │  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Treóit and Art   │  │  │ Battle of Mag Mucrama │
│ (stanzas 1–8)    │  │  │ (stanzas 10–12)       │
└──────────────────┘  │  └──────────────────────┘
         ╲            │           ╱
          ┌─────────────────────┐
          │ Peace of the grave   │
          │ (stanza 13); contrasts│
          │ with battle in       │
          │ preceding stanzas    │
          └─────────────────────┘
                    │
          ┌─────────────────────┐
          │ General contrast     │
          │ between this life    │
          │ and the next         │
          │ (stanza 14)          │
          └─────────────────────┘
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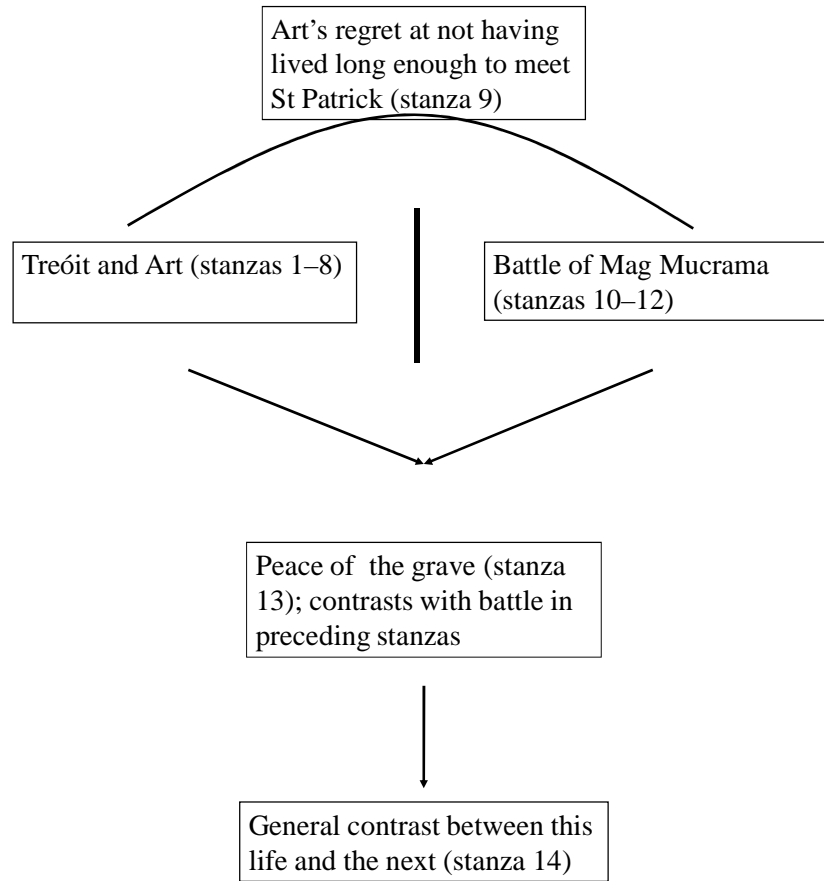
Stanza 14 does not refer to characters from *FA* or those associated with the Battle of Mag Mucrama, and the stanza can stand alone as a general piece of wisdom. The sentiments expressed are found in other Old and Middle Irish poetry, such as in the probably ninth-century poem known as the Lament of the Caillech Bérre,[78] and a medieval audience is likely to have agreed with the statement made in *FA*'s stanza 14, namely that this life is far inferior to that which is to come. Of course, only those who behaved appropriately in this life would have been thought to be rewarded in the next, and so stanza 14 can be taken as a bridge between 13 and the group of stanzas, 15–18, which illustrate Art's close links with God, Patrick and his saint. In stanzas 15, 16, and 17, Art moves down a religious hierarchy: stanza 15 mentions God, in stanza 16 we are told about Patrick, and, based on the context, the beginning of stanza 17 probably refers to Treóit's and

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[78] Ed. and trans. Ó hAodha, 'The Lament'.

Art's saint. The last stanza of this section, stanza 18, depicts Art and his saint working together to avenge their 'wounds':

> [18] Ic dígail ar cned
>
> misi 7 mo naem
>
> bid mé in t-ere mór
>
> is ma thene ram tháeb.[79]

Similarly to stanza 14, this quatrain provides a link with the next section, stanzas 19–22, which consists of the warning stanzas to Art's descendants and the king of Tara. Taking stanzas 14–22 together, we have a bridging stanza 14, then a block about Art's close relationship with God and his saints, which in turn can be taken as preparation for the warning which will follow, as it lends Art the authority to give his warning:

This life – next life contrast (stanza 14 leading on from stanzas 1–13)

Art's relationship with God and his saints (Patrick and Lonán (?)) (stanzas 15–17)

Art and saint avenging their wounds (stanza 18)

Warning to future generation/king of Tara (stanzas 19–22)

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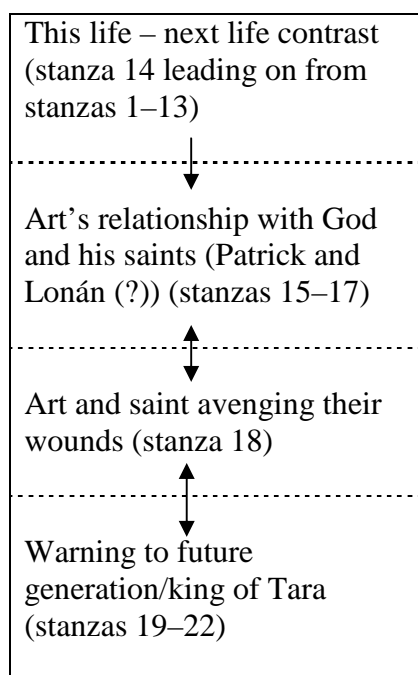
[79] ll. 9903–6; 'In avenging our wounds, I and my saint, I will be the great burden and my flame by my side'.

The stanzas which follow, 23–25, are concerned with Art's death and the arrival of his son, and create parallels with Christ and God, which serve to present Art as the ideal king.[80] Their link with the preceding thematic blocks is not entirely clear, but their purpose may be to remind the audience of Art's importance and to reinforce his authority. Proceeding to stanzas 26 and 27, we find a description of Art's move to a different, heavenly world if we translate the line 'dar dercaib slúag saer'[81] as 'beyond the eyes of noble hosts' and read it as indicating a move to a world which the hosts cannot perceive. Again, the reason for the placement of these stanzas at this point within the poem is not entirely clear. Stanza 28, however, in which Art asks for forgiveness, follows on well from 26 and 27. It is anticipated by Art's request to God in stanza 27 that his body might rest in peace, and the theme of forgiveness in a group of stanzas concerned with an individual's fate after death is logical.

The interpretation of stanza 29 is problematic:

[29] Lúagni cen recht rim

cen dola ar fecht lem

bád é luag ail trom

co soich bond is chend.[82]

The Luigne were one of the vassal tribes of Uí Néill, but their presence in this stanza is not easily explained. Mac Neill notes the connection with the twelfth-century tale *Cath Ruis na Ríg* in which the Luagni Temrach appear. The stanza may be a reflection of traditions surrounding Mag Mucrama which are no longer extant. The stanza is ambiguous, but it is possible that that the rock referred to in the stanza is to be understood as Art's grave-stone, which is mentioned in the last line of stanza 28:

[28] Arco fuin dom ríg

ferr múin ná cach main

mo chorp uag i n-úaig

cona chloich cruaid chain.[83]

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[80] See the discussion of the parallels between Art and Christ and God in chapter 5, below, pp. 107–9.

[81] ll. 9938.

[82] ll. 9947–50; 'The Lúagni are not being ruled by me, [and] are not going on a [military] expedition with me. A heavy rock will be a reward [or 'price'] until it reaches sole and head'.

[83] ll. 9943–6; 'I beseech my king for forgiveness, for whom earth is better than every treasure; my whole body in a grave with its hard fair stone'.

The next run of five stanzas, 30–34, is not entirely logical in its progression. Stanza 30 probably describes the Battle of Mag Mucrama, but as no characters are named, this is not certain. The stanza which follows, 31, is slightly unclear. It may be, however, that battle is here being used as a metaphor for life:

[31] Tíagsa for cath coí

mór bas bath dom ré

ar cach lá i tú i crí

nad sechna tol Dé.[84]

Stanza 32 emphasises the popularity of Art's grave, as will be discussed below. Stanza 33 is again concerned with the contrast between life and death and sees Art welcoming death. This fits in quite well with stanzas 30 and 31, and it might be taken to lead on to stanza 34, a statement of Art's faith in the Holy Trinity.

Stanza 30: Description of battle (Battle of Mag Mucrama?)
Stanza 31: Battle as metaphor for life? Includes reference to end of life and wish to serve God well while alive.
Stanza 32: Popularity of Art's grave
Stanza 33: Contrast between life and death, death as welcome release from life
Stanza 34: Art's belief in the Holy Trinity

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[84] ll. 9955–8; 'I go upon a path of battles, great will be the end of my life. On every day in which I am alive may I not avoid the will of God'.

Stanza 32 seems a little out of place in the sequence of this group, but on the other hand, it appears to be concerned with Art's grave, which, in turn, is obviously connected to his death, the subject of stanza 33. In addition, stanza 32 describes 'slúag Dé', and this fits in with the battle imagery in stanzas 30 and 31. One cannot determine whether the stanza was originally in this position or not, as thematic links can be made between it and the surrounding stanzas, but compared to the ordering of the stanzas up to stanza 22, the order of stanzas 30–34 appears more haphazard.

The last group of stanzas, 36–38, focuses on relics and the monastic connections of Art's grave. Stanza 36 can be understood as an invitation to take part in a relic cult for Art. Stanza 37 brings together a *cell*, 'church' or 'ecclesiastical settlement', Ireland and Tara, before the poem moves back to the importance of relics in stanza 38. As Treóit is the only church mentioned in the poem, it is apparent that the word *cell* in stanza 37 should refer to Treóit. Its description as *mo dind*, 'my stronghold' or 'my hill', shows the close connection between Art, his grave and Treóit.

Finally, stanza 39 is a description of Art's grave, and it seems to be referring to Art's audience, surveying the scene which is being described: Art's grave on the edge of a lake.

Lecht meic Cuind atchíd
co tuind dara thaíb
for brú in locha láin
ní scél crotha cain.[85]

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7,[86] it is possible that the stanza describes the actual geography of Treóit and thus the poem shows the contrast between Duma Derglúachra in Art's time and Duma Derglúachra/Treóit in the audience's time. The final stanza would thus balance the first stanza of the poem very well. The beginning of *FA* presents itself as an account of Art's prophecy, but the last stanza makes it clear that *FA* has arrived in the "present": Art is dead and his grave is his monument. He is, however, still presented as

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[85] ll. 9987–90; 'The grave of Mac Con you see, with a wave upon its side, upon the edge of the full lake. It is not a story of pleasant form'.
[86] See below, p. 158.

speaking these final stanzas of the poem, and here, as elsewhere, one has a sense of Art speaking to his audience from the grave.

THE MONASTERY OF TREÓIT: *FÁSTINI AIRT*'S PLACE OF ORIGIN?

The monastery of Treóit, which is presented as the burial place of Art mac Cuind in *FA*, is the focus of the tale. *FA* is the only surviving text to focus on Treóit in this way, and the tale presents it in a very favourable light. Art's relationship to the monastery means that the warnings issued by him are also warnings on behalf of that house.

Treóit (Trevet, Co. Meath) lies about four kilometres south of Tara and approximately three kilometres north-east of Dunshaughlin. In medieval terms, Treóit was situated in southern Brega, in what Newman has designated the core 'Tara landscape'.[87] Apart from Tara, another significant site in the vicinity is Lagore crannog, which lies just over three kilometres to the south-east. Other archaeological monuments in the area include a ringfort roughly two kilometres east of Treóit[88] and a bivallate ringfort about a kilometre to the north-east.[89] Two earthworks are located in the area.[90] At Treóit itself, a number of features are found: a tumulus;[91] the ruins of a church;[92] and a rectilinear enclosure[93] with an associated field system covering ten acres and including a road.[94] The remains and traces of buildings and the field system are not dated in Moore's *Archaeological Inventory*, but it is likely that the tumulus, at least, is prehistoric.[95] It is not clear from the archaeology at what point the monastery of Treóit went into decline. The final mention of the monastery in annals is in an entry in the Annals of the Four Masters reporting its plundering in 1152. There are no indications of its existence

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[87] Newman, 'Re-composing the Archaeological Landscape'; for maps, see fig. 1, pp. 398–9, and fig. 5, pp. 406–7.

[88] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 897, p. 92.

[89] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 896, p. 92.

[90] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, nos. 1182, p. 113, and 1144, p. 111. No. 1144 is no longer visible.

[91] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 222, p. 33. This measures sixteen metres in diameter north-east to south-west, eleven metres north-west to south-east and two metres in height.

[92] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 1521, p. 147. The church's interior measures twenty-six metres in length and just over six metres in width.

[93] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 1236, p. 119.

[94] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 1294, p. 124.

[95] See the general remarks on tumuli in the introduction to Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, p. 10.

after this point and it is possible that it went into decline after this event. In his will Thomas Cusack, Lord Chancellor of Ireland from 1550–1553 and a member of the Privy Council, who died in 1571, left money for the building of a chapel at Trevet where he wished to be buried.[96] By the seventeenth century, the church the remains of which are visible today was in ruins.[97]

Treóit in the Written Sources

Apart from the chronicles, Treóit features rarely in the surviving medieval written sources.[98] Most of our information comes from annal entries relating to the monastery, and the Annals of Ulster mention it regularly from the first part of the eighth century down to the eleventh, creating a continuous record, which begins in 739 and ends in 911 (AU 739, AU 774, AU 793, AU 813, AU 839, AU 850, AU 888, AU 903, AU 911). The Annals of the Four Masters also record the killing of Innreachtach, abbot of Treóit, at the monastery for the year 917. Three further entries, AU 1005, AFM *s. a.* 1145 and AFM *s. a.* 1152 also relate to the house. However, it appears that these three latter entries cannot be considered part of this continuous record; the time that elapses between them, and between the earliest of them and the entries relating to the earlier part of the tenth century mitigates against this. AU 1005 reports that a man called Áed of Treóit died at Armagh. The entry in AFM *s. a.* 1145 records the burning of the monastery of Treóit by Donnchad Ua Cerbaill in an attack on Uí Maelsechlainn, in which a significant number of people were killed. AFM *s. a.* 1152 reports the plundering of the house by Uí Briain.

One could ask whether the end of the continuous record indicated a decline in Treóit's status. It is noticeable, however, that the continuous record in the Annals of Ulster stops in 911, and, with the help of the Annals of the Four Masters, can be extended to 917. This is at about the same time as the Chronicle of Ireland is thought to have moved from the midlands (*c*. 911), subsequently splitting into its Clonmacnoise and Armagh branches. Charles-Edwards has

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[96] Hickey, 'Monument', pp. 76–7.
[97] Hickey, 'Monument', p. 89.
[98] For a brief list of references to Treóit, see Gwynn and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 46.

argued that Treóit is a suitable candidate for the home of the Brega branch of the Chronicle of Ireland in the period *c*. 740–911, precisely because of the number of times the house is mentioned in the annals.[99] We cannot, therefore, say whether Treóit is mentioned less frequently in the annalistic record because it declines in importance or whether it is simply due to the fact that the Chronicle was no longer kept at the house or in the area, although it might be argued that a decline in importance could be linked to the Chronicle being continued elsewhere. However, as we do not know for certain whether the Chronicle was kept at Treóit, any arguments must remain speculative.

Most of the annal entries that mention Treóit are death notices of scribes and superiors. The names of superiors (*princepes*) whose deaths are recorded in 793 (Doimtech), 813 (Conall mac Daimthig) and 839 (Cormacc mac Conaill) suggest that the office was hereditary. An entry in AU 888 points to the monastery's Patrician connections: 'Mael Patraicc scriba 7 sapiens optimus, princeps Treoit 7 maer muintiri Patraicc fri Sliabh andes, quieuit'.[100] As Charles-Edwards has outlined, *máer*, equivalent to the term *rechtaire*, designated an official responsible for the interests of churches and rulers, and one of the tasks that fell upon him was the collection of dues.[101] He further suggests that when 'Armagh appointed a local churchman to such an office [...] the position may have entitled him to enjoy some of the dues owed to Armagh'.[102] Etchingham has also considered the judicial function of the *máer*.[103] Even if Treóit did not benefit financially from having the *máer* of Armagh as one of its number, the position suggests that the links with Armagh were close and that Treóit was significant enough for Armagh to bestow the office on a member of the community.

It seems likely that Treóit was connected to the Uí Chernaig dynasty and Bhreathnach has connected the activities of Uí Chernaig to those of the Scandinavian settlers in Dublin under the leadership of Amlaíb Cuarán (Norse: Óláfr kvaran).[104] She relates Amlaib's retirement to Iona in 980 to Uí Chernaig connections with Columban foundations. Uí Chernaig support for Columban

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[99] Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle* I, 15.
[100] 'Mael Pátraic, scribe and excellent scholar, superior of Treóit and steward of the community of Patrick for the district south of the Mountain, rested'.
[101] *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 256.
[102] *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 256.
[103] Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 211–13. See also pp. 213–14 for further discussions of the office of *máer* of Patrick.
[104] 'Columban Churches'.

foundations in the later tenth century and the Patrician links of Treóit do not necessarily conflict with each other, as Herbert has shown that on a number of occasions the headship of the Columban and Patrician *familae* were held by one person.[105] That links between Armagh and Treóit still existed in 1005 is suggested by the fact that Áed of Treóit died in Armagh.

The account of the burning of Treóit in AU 850 states that seventy people were burned in the church. The number of people who died is recorded as being significantly higher in the Annals of the Four Masters (AFM *s. a.* 848: 260 people) and the *Chronicon Scotorum* (*CS* 850: 270 people). According to Etchingham the higher figure of 260 or 270 is correct.[106] This suggests a sizeable building, and the term used to describe the church, *dairthech*, indicates a wooden structure.[107] The burning of Treóit in 1145 and its plundering in 1152 suggest that the monastery was still of some importance after the early tenth century, and it may be, then, that the end of the continuous record of entries in the 910s reflects the Chronicle of Ireland's move away from the general area, rather than a decline in the monastery's importance.[108]

Treóit also appears to have had episcopal status, at least periodically, as is indicated by the mention of a bishop of Treóit whose death is recorded in AU 774. The entries for AU 739 and AU 888 record the deaths of *scribae* of Treóit. As Charles-Edwards has discussed, a *scriba* was more than simply a scribe. He was an expert in biblical law and a learned man.[109] Máel Pátraic, whose death is recorded in AU 888, is described as 'scriba 7 sapiens optimus'[110] and Áed of Treóit is described as 'suí ind ecnai 7 i crabad'[111] in AU 1005. Of course, the entries may not be objective. If the Brega branch of the Chronicle of Ireland was kept at Treóit prior to 911, the entry for 888 may be favourable towards the monastery. In the case of AU 1005, it is also not possible to say whether Áed's epithet *Treoiti*, 'of Treóit', refers to his origins or to membership of the

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[105] *Iona, Kells and Derry*, p. 74 and pp. 83–4.

[106] As stated by Manning, 'References to Church Buildings', p. 38, n. 5.

[107] Manning, 'References to Church Buildings'; see p. 38 for the definition of the term *dairthech* and p. 46 for a brief consideration of the size of the *dairthech* of Treóit which was burned in 850.

[108] Alternatively, the house may have regained a role in political developments after declining somewhat.

[109] For a discussion of the term *scriba*, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 265–77. Charles-Edwards also suggests that the meaning of the term seems to have changed and that by the ninth century, the office may have become hereditary (*Early Christian Ireland*, p. 274).

[110] 'Scribe and excellent scholar'.

[111] 'Paragon of knowledge and piety'.

community at Treóit. On the whole, however, the entries and the references to *scribae* suggest that the community at Treóit included learned members. Presumably, this also meant that the monastery had access to literary resources, as well as being in a position to produce its own documents, as would be the case if the Brega branch of the Chronicle of Ireland was indeed kept at Treóit prior to 911.

On the basis of the annalistic record, Treóit appears to have been perhaps a medium-sized house which had well-educated members and good links with Armagh. It seems likely that Treóit had the capacity to produce texts. At least for a short time, the monastery was of episcopal status and played some role in the politics of the region, as the burning of the house on several occasions shows. However, it was not of great enough significance to have left much of an impression in the surviving written record beyond the annals. It is possible to argue that *FA* was composed at Treóit itself, as the monastery does not seem to have been significant enough for a text supporting it to have been composed elsewhere. The suggestion must remain speculative, but it is a possibility which cannot be discounted and which will be taken into consideration in this dissertation.

Treóit's Political Affiliations

The political situation of early medieval Brega was complex and only a brief outline of Treóit's political position will be given here as background to the text. It is likely that the monastery was associated with Uí Chernaig Sotail, whose prime residence was at Lagore crannog in Loch Gabor, only a short distance from Treóit. Loch Gabor itself no longer exists, but its outline has been reconstructed.[112] A connection between the monastery and Lagore is suggested by the entry in AU 850, in which Treóit and Lagore crannog are mentioned together: 'Cinaedh m. Conaing, rex Ciannachtae, du frithtuidecht Mael Sechnaill a nneurt Gall cor indridh Ou Neill o Sinaind co mm[uir] etir cella 7 tuatha, 7 cor[o] ort innsi Locha Gabur dolose corbo comardd fria lar, 7 coro loscad leis derthach

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[112] See fig. 29, p. 114, in O'Sullivan's *The Archaeology of Lake Settlement*.

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Treoit 7 tri .xx.[it] dec di doinibh ann'.[113] Uí Chernaig were a branch of Síl nÁeda Sláine, tracing themselves back to Cernach Sotal, grandson of Áed Sláine. Their area of influence lay just south of Tara, in the baronies of Lower Deece and Rataoth.[114] Bhreathnach states that Uí Chernaig were 'to play an important role in the political affairs of the region until the twelfth century'.[115]

The entry for the year 677 is the first in the Annals of Ulster to mention Loch Gabor. The place and its kings are mentioned on a fairly regular basis from then on until 969. Lagore crannog was discovered in 1839 and excavations were undertaken in 1934 and 1936.[116] The range of finds is impressive and includes evidence of bronze-working, glass-working, woodworking and shoe production as well as a number of objects imported from Europe.[117] In addition, a large number of human remains were found, including headless bodies. Weapons and chains, possibly used for hostages or slaves, indicate the crannog's involvement in military affairs.[118] The annals mention Lagore for the last time in 969, and Hencken's report originally proposed that the crannog lost its significance at the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century.[119] However, Hencken's dating has been revised by a number of scholars and Bhreathnach has suggested that Lagore may not have been abandoned suddenly but that the inhabitants gradually moved to another location, such as Dunshaughlin or Treóit.[120] She argues that from the early eleventh century Dunshaughlin became the prime church of Uí Chernaig and that it is likely that they took up residence there.[121]

Treóit's association with Lagore in AU 850 suggests that it was of regional importance and of some standing in the area, which is in keeping with the

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[113] AU 850.3; 'Cinaed son of Conaing, king of Ciannacht, rebelled against Mael Sechnaill with the support of the foreigners, and plundered the Uí Néill from the Sinann to the sea, both churches and states, and he deceitfully sacked the island [lit.: islands] of Loch Gabor, levelling it to the ground, and the oratory of Treóit, with seventy people in it, was burned by him'. This incident will be discussed further below, pp. 169–70.

[114] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 3.

[115] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 1.

[116] For an account of the excavation results and finds, see Hencken, 'Lagore Crannog'. Aspects of Hencken's description and analysis of the site have been subject to revision, in particular his dating of the phases of habitation at Lagore crannog. For a summary of Hencken's phases and references to differing interpretations, see O'Sullivan, *The Archaeology of Lake Settlement*, pp. 113–15.

[117] O' Sullivan, *The Archaeology of Lake Settlement*, pp. 115–16.

[118] See also O'Sullivan's suggestion that the chains and collars may have been used for dogs (*The Archaeology of Lake Settlement*, p. 117).

[119] See Price, 'The History of Lagore', p. 34.

[120] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 4.

[121] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 4.

evidence from the chronicles. In addition, Bhreathnach has stated that it 'was significant to Síl nÁedo Sláine from the early medieval period'.[122] The twelfth-century attacks on the monastery which are recorded in the annals suggest that it was still of importance at that time, although one might expect a decline in significance after the Uí Chernaig dynasty's possible move to Dunshaughlin.[123]

CONCLUSION

In sum, then, the copy of *FA* preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* cannot be the original text, as it predates the manuscript linguistically, and it may have been included in *Lebor na hUidre* due to thematic links with other texts. Some text is likely to have been lost, as the comparison with *CMM*[2] suggests, and this may go some way towards explaining the lack of logical thematic progression between some stanzas in the poem. *FA* is related to traditions about the Battle of Mag Mucrama, although the nature of this relationship is not entirely clear. Despite possible loss of text, *FA* is largely structured in a coherent way and its main subject is the relationship between Art and Treóit, his burial place. The text may have been composed at this monastery, which was a house was of medium size. It was a significant monastery for the Uí Chernaig Sotail dynasty of Lagore, but there are no indications in the surviving sources that it was of any wider importance.

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[122] 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 18.
[123] See also below, pp. 170–1.

CHAPTER 2: *DE SUIDIGUD TELLAIG TEMRA*

LITERARY CONTEXT

Fintan in Medieval Irish Literature

DSTT has been dated tentatively to the tenth or eleventh century,[124] and it is thus slightly later in date than *FA*. *FA*'s focus is on a particular place, probably the monastery of Treóit, and by contrast, *DSTT* is concerned with issues relating to Tara and kingship over Ireland. Fintan mac Bóchra is the central character of the tale and he is presented as the only one of Ireland's elders who is capable of answering the question with which the king at Tara, Diarmait mac Cerbaill, and the nobles are concerned. In this way and through his knowledge of places in Ireland, Fintan is connected with the entire island and can thus address a matter of national importance. With the help of knowledge acquired during an encounter with a mysterious stranger, Trefuilngid Treochair, Fintan answers the question put to Diarmait by the nobles.

It is clear that Fintan's connection with all of Ireland was current also in the later medieval and Early Modern period. Fintan is mentioned a number of times in bardic poems, in some cases clearly associated with the whole of Ireland.[125] In the early medieval period Fintan appears in a number of sources, and his encounter with Trefuilngid is also found in texts other than *DSTT*. Fintan is associated with the preservation of the history of Ireland in *Lebor Gabála*, but Carey has argued that Fintan, who is connected to Cessair's invasion in *Lebor Gabála*, was initially independent of her story.[126] Fintan, then, it appears, had a literary tradition of his own, which developed over several centuries and which is

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[124] McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 75, and Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, p. 18. As outlined in the Introduction, it is preserved in two manuscripts, the Yellow Book of Lecan and the Book of Lismore.

[125] See, for example, stanza 13 of the early seventeenth-century poem *Dána an turas tríalltar sonn* by Eoghan Ruadh Mac an Bhaird for a reference to Ireland as Fintan's land: 'Foghla gráineamhla an ghille/ ní chuimhnigh cath Duibhlinne,/ lé fonn a síothoighthe soin/ fa fhonn bfíochfhoirbhthe bFionntoin' (ed. and trans. Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry*, pp. 29 (text) and 221 (translation); 'As for the youth's dreadful forays, the army of Dublin remembers them not for their longing to be at peace throughout Fintan's Land, old in wrath').

[126] Carey, 'Origin and Development', p. 47.

illustrated by the following survey. It is on this established tradition which *DSTT* appears to be drawing.

In a recent article, Nic Cárthaig has considered the portrayal of Fintan in several texts.[127] These are *Airne Fíngein*, probably the earliest surviving source to deal with Fintan in any detail;[128] the text beginning 'Cethra arda in domain';[129] the story of Fintan's encounter and conversation with the Hawk of Achill;[130] the Early Modern Irish narrative, *Cath Maige Léana*; prose and verse *dindsenchas*; and *DSTT*. In addition, she has compared Fintan with Túán in *Scél Túáin meic Cairill*.[131] *DSTT* is not the only text to present Fintan as the greatest authority on Irish history and Nic Cárthaigh's analysis illustrates the importance of traditions about Fintan 'as transmitter of history'.[132] The range of her sources shows the longevity of these traditions. Although Nic Cárthaigh suggests that *DSTT* may be 'older in origin' than *Airne Fíngein*,[133] the latter is the earlier of the two texts as they survive. *Airne Fíngein* includes Fintan's regaining of his speech among the wonderful events which the text claims took place in the night of Conn Cétchathach's birth. Nic Cárthaigh argues that Fintan's 'distinction and renown are used indirectly as a means of glorifying the birth of Conn'.[134] In addition, she suggests that Fintan's muteness may be a device invented by the author of *Airne Fíngein* in order to emphasise the great significance of Conn's birth, which causes such a strong reaction in Ireland 'that even long-lost hopes like Fintan are jolted out of obscurity and back into action'.[135] These conclusions suggest that *Airne Fíngein* was making use of what must have already been an established tradition of Fintan as a great historian and repository of Irish lore.

Given the sources discussed by Nic Cárthaigh, it comes as no surprise to find a number of poems in *Lebor Gabála* ascribed to Fintan and to see the transmission of the traditions preserved in that work attributed to him. Fintan is said to have survived the flood because God protected him 'conidh he ro innis

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[127] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore'.
[128] Vendryes has identified linguistic features in *Airne Fíngein* which he assigns to the ninth or tenth century (Vendryes, *Airne Fíngein*, p. xxii).
[129] This is preserved in fragmentary form in *Lebor na hUidre* (*LU*, 10063–10087) and in the Book of Fermoy.
[130] Ed. Meyer, 'The Colloquy'.
[131] Ed. and trans. Carey, 'Scél Túáin'.
[132] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 61
[133] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 46, n. 28.
[134] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 61.
[135] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 61.

gabala Erenn'.[136] In addition, Fintan is said in *Lebor Gabála* to have recorded the names of the first people to have come to Ireland in Diarmait's reign.[137] Comparing Fintan and Túán, also mentioned in *Lebor Gabála* and *DSTT*,[138] Níc Cárthaigh draws attention to the similarities between the two characters and argues that Fintan is based on Túán.[139] The two characters are specifically identified with one another in one manuscript version of *Lebor Gabála* which also appears to contain a reference to *DSTT*:

> ocus ro dealbustair Dia i rechtaib imda in aimseraib ilardaib, 7 ro mair in t-aen fer sin o aimsir Parrtoloin co haimsir Finden Moigi Bili 7 co Colam Cilli condeachaid doib Gabala Erenn o aimsir Cheasrach, cetna rogob Eir. Cosin n-aimsir sin (na naem 7 Diarmata maic Cerbaill ri Erenn. Doig is e Fintan ro ordaig soigiugad thellaich Themrach do Diarmait iar trill mair ar sin 7 is follus de sin corab e Fintan Tuan).[140]

Although *Lebor Gabála* is not the only text to mention Diarmait's assembly, the wording of the passage, 'Fintan ro ordaig soigiudad thellaigh Themrach',[141] combined with *Lebor Gabála*'s eleventh- or twelfth-century date, strongly suggests that *Lebor Gabála* was drawing on a version of *DSTT*. This shows that *DSTT* was not only based on a body of well-established tradition, but it also appears to have influenced later texts.

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[136] *Lebor Gabála* (ed. and trans. Macalister II, 194–5); 'so that it was he who related the Taking of Ireland'. Similar statements are made elsewhere too (see also below, n. 137).
[137] See *Lebor Gabála* (ed. and trans. Macalister V, 24–5). It should be noted that not all manuscripts mention Diarmait in this connection.
[138] See *DSTT*, p. 126.
[139] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 56.
[140] *Lebor Gabála* (ed. and trans. Macalister III, 22–3, using variants on p. 22; the passage is from the third recension of *Lebor Gabála* and the reference to the events of *DSTT* is found in the Book of Lecan, the reading of which is given in the brackets); 'And God fashioned him [Túán] in many forms in many times, and that man survived alone from the time of Partholon to the time of Findian of Mag Bile and to Colum Cille, so that he related to them the Takings of Ireland from the time of Cessair, who first took Ireland, to that time (of the saints and of Diarmait mac Cerbaill King of Ireland. For it was Fintan who arranged the settlement of the household of Temair for Diarmait after a long time following that, and from this it is clear that Fintan was Tuan)'.
[141] The Book of Lecan copy of the tale is headed by the title, and the text in both manuscripts refers to the 'suidigud tellaig temra' (see *DSTT*, p. 126).

Fintan's Association with Irish Place-name Lore

Another text which is related to *DSTT*,[142] but which is not discussed by Nic Cárthaigh, is the short text preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 610, and in the Book of Lismore. The text is appended to Best's edition of *DSTT*.[143] In Laud 610, this text is titled *Interrocacio Cennfáelad* (hereafter *Interrogatio*) and is attributed to Bec mac Dead.[144] It is a version of the dialogue between Trefuilngid and Fintan in which the different places in Ireland are listed, but there are a number of differences between the *Interrogatio* and the corresponding section in *DSTT*. In the former text Fintan talks to Cenn Fáelad and there is no mention of Trefuilngid. In addition, it is Fintan who passes on information to Cenn Fáelad. Interestingly, although Cenn Fáelad appears in *DSTT*, no direct connection is made between him and Fintan. Cenn Fáelad does not refer Diarmait to Fintan, but tells him to seek out the 'five seniors' of Ireland.[145] Moreover, the order of names and places listed varies in all three versions of the dialogue, that is in *DSTT* and both manuscripts of the *Interrogatio*. This suggests that there is no direct relationship, but that the texts are likely to be drawing on a common source. There is no narrative context for the *Interrogatio* as it survives and it is therefore impossible to say whether it was linked to the story of Diarmait's assembly or any other narrative. Although direct borrowing between the two texts does not appear to have taken place, the similarities suggest that the author of *DSTT* was not just drawing on a general body of tradition, but was engaged in textual borrowing from at least one other source, now lost. Interestingly, the Book of Lismore preserves both *DSTT* and the *Interrogatio*, although this may simply be an indication that the similarities between the two texts were recognised when the manuscript was written.

Another text which may be closely related to *DSTT* is the introduction to the prose *Dindsenchas* in Bodleian Rawl. B 506, and the similar account preserved in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*.[146] This tells the story of Diarmait's assembly and in the Bodleian prose *Dindsenchas* includes a poem attributed to

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[142] Carey, 'Sages', p. 59.

[143] Best, 'The Settling', pp. 162–4.

[144] See Best, 'The Settling', p. 122; see pp. 162–4 for the text itself. A quotation from this text is found in the copy of *Sanas Cormaic* in the Yellow Book of Lecan and in *Dúil Dromma Cetta* (see Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic*, p. 66, n. 1, and Russell, 'Notes', pp. 195–6).

[145] Best, 'The Settling', pp. 120–1.

[146] For the passage in the Bodleian *Dindsenchas*, see Stokes, 'The Bodleian Dinnshenchas', p. 469, and for that in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*, see Stokes, 'The Prose Tales' 15, 277–9.

Cúan úa Lothcháin (d. 1024), poet to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Tara.[147] There are some differences between the prose introduction and *DSTT*, but we also find important similarities. Thus Fintan, Flann Febla and Cenn Fáelad are mentioned. Unlike in *DSTT*, they are present at Diarmait's assembly from the beginning, but the prose introduction's description of Fintan as 'ardsenoir Erenn'[148] matches his description in *DSTT*, although the term itself is not used in the tale. Aimirgin mac Amald, poet of Diarmait, is a character not mentioned in *DSTT*, but his behaviour in the *Dindsenchas* introduction is similar to that of the nobles at Diarmait's feast in *DSTT*:

> Sencas Dinn Erinn dorigni Aimirgin mac Amal[ga]dha, fili dona Deissib .i. fili Diarmata meic Cerbaill. Is e dorat algais for Fintan mac Bocra hi Temair dia mbae mordail fer nErinn hi Temair im Diarmait mac Cerbaill 7 im Flann Febla mac Scannlain comarpa Patraic 7 im Cennfaelad mac Ailella meic Eogain meic Neill 7 im Finntan mac Bochrai amm ardsenoir Erenn, 7 coro throsc teora laithi 7 teora aithche for Finntan hi fiadhnaisi fer nErenn sceo macu 7 ingena hi Temair, co ndeicsed do senchasa fira dind insi hErind, fodeig rola cach duine 7 cach dine di o aimsir Cessrai na hingine do Grecaib Sceia — is i cetna rogab Erinn— co flathius Diarmata meic Cerbaill. Unde poeta dixit, Cuan .i. ua Lochan...[149]

Aimirgin fasts against Fintan in order to obtain the history of Ireland from him, reminiscent of the nobles' refusal to partake of Diarmait's feast before the question of *tellach temra* has been settled. In *DSTT*, this question is settled with recourse to Fintan and the traditions he knows. The pattern in the two texts is thus comparable.

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[147] This poem is edited by Gwynn as 'Temair V' (*Metrical Dindshenchas* I, 38–45).
[148] Bodleian *Dindsenchas* (ed. and trans. Stokes, p. 469); 'Chief elder'.
[149] Bodleian *Dindsenchas* (ed. and trans. Stokes, p. 469); 'The story of the noteworthy steads of Ireland, which Amirgin MacAulay, a poet of the Dési, to wit, the poet of Diarmait, son of Cerball, composed. It is he who made demand of Fintan, son of Bochra, at Tara, when there was a great gathering of the folk of Erin round Diarmait, son of Cerball, and Flann Febla, son of Scannlan Saint Patrick's successor, and Cennfaelad, son of Ailill, son of Eogan, son of Niall, and Fintan, son of Bochra, the chief elder of Ireland. And Amirgin fasted on Fintan for three days and three nights in the presence of the men of Erin, both boys and girls, at Tara, so that Fintan might declare to him the true stories of the noteworthy steads of the Island of Erin, since he, Fintan, had dismissed (?) every person and every tribe from it from the time of Cessair, the maiden, of the Greeks of Scythia — she was the first that occupied Ireland — to the reign of Diarmait, son of Cerball. Hence said the poet, Cuan Ua Lochan …'.

Most of the poem included in the Bodleian version is made up of an alliterative list of place names from throughout Ireland.[150] If the attribution of the poem to Cúán is correct, the poem is roughly contemporary with *DSTT*, and interestingly, it makes similar statements to *DSTT* with regard to the status of Tara:

> Ce beith ós Banbai brainig
>
> ríg amrai, ard a medair,
>
> ní fuil rechtas ríg foraib
>
> acht a ríg techtas Temair.[151]

This survey of sources concerning Fintan shows the extent to which he is associated with historical knowledge and place-name lore in other sources, too. As mentioned above, Nic Cárthaigh's suggestion that Fintan's muteness and subsequent reacquisition of speech are devices employed to highlight the significance of the night of Conn's birth implies that his status as a knowledgeable historian was established by the time *Airne Fíngein* was composed, perhaps in the ninth or tenth century.[152] This in turn suggests that *DSTT* made deliberate use of Fintan's reputation in this regard in order to lend authority to the point which the story makes, namely the primacy of the kingship of Tara within Ireland. The *Lebor Gabála* passage quoted above, on the other hand, is likely to be influenced by *DSTT*. The precise nature of the relationship between the *Dindsenchas* introduction, the *Interrogatio* and *DSTT*, however, is unclear. Since the *Interrogatio* as it survives has no narrative context, it is tempting to see it as deriving from a source which *DSTT* expanded, perhaps changed and incorporated into the narrative of *DSTT*, but such a suggestion must remain speculative.

Trefuilngid and the Trees

The mysterious figure from whom Fintan receives his knowledge of places in Ireland in *DSTT*, Trefuilngid, also appears in other sources. In all of these, he is

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[150] Gwynn also attempted to identify the places (see the notes on the poem in *Metrical Dindshenchas* I, 75–9).

[151] 'Though there be over imperial Banba famous kings – high their mirth! no kingly authority is binding on them save from the king that possesses Temair' (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas* I, 44–5).

[152] See Vendryes, *Airne Fíngein*, p. xxii.

associated with the planting of at least one of the trees, which, according to *DSTT*, grew from the berries from Trefuilngid's branch. Thus, he is mentioned in the prose *dindsenchas* on the tree of Mugna where his name is given as Trefuilngid treorach: 'caera dona caeraib dobert trefuilndig treorach for a craeb. Tri toirrthi fair [.i.] dercu 7 uball 7 cnu'.[153] Stokes interpreted Trefuilngid's name as 'an alliterative kenning for God or Christ',[154] partly, it seems, because of a reference to a sister's son in the Mugna *dindsenchas* and the description of Mary as 'our sister' elsewhere,[155] but partly also because of Fintan's identification of Trefuilngid in *DSTT*. Although the figure in the *dindsenchas* may well be supernatural, neither Christ nor God are explicitly mentioned, and Trefuilngid cannot be unambiguously identified in this passage.

Trefuilngid's magic branch in *DSTT* seems to be the same as the branch mentioned in the *dindsenchas* of the tree, but a direct relationship between the prose *dindsenchas* passage quoted above and *DSTT* is unlikely, as Trefuilngid's name is slightly different and the *dindsenchas* does not mention Fintan's involvement in the planting of the tree. However, the mention of Trefuilngid indicates that he may have been connected to the planting of the trees independently of the traditions concerning Fintan.

Airne Fíngein, *DSTT* and the text about Fintan's encounter with the Hawk of Achill connect this tradition of Trefuilngid and the trees with Fintan. *Airne Fíngein* states that the tree of Mugna is said to be a scion of the tree in Paradise. This tale gives two versions of how the tree of Mugna might have grown and one possibility is that it grew from a berry from Trefuilngid's branch, which was planted by Fintan: 'Mugna a ainm in chraind sin [...] mac in chraind a parrdus. Dorúacht la gáeth ascnam na ndúl, .i. gráinne dia bláth, condatarla for maig

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[153] Rennes *Dindsenchas* (ed. and trans. Stokes, pp. 419–20); 'Berries from the berries the strong (guiding?) Upholder put upon his tree. Three fruits upon it, namely acorn, apple and nut'.
[154] 'The Prose Tales', p. 420, n. 2.
[155] The relevant passage in the entry reads 'Nó Mugna moo gnía .i. mo macaib sethar, quia fit gnia mac sethar, ut dicitur i mBreathaib Neimedh gnia sethar .i. mac sethar, mac som didiu caera dona cæraib dobert trefuilgid treorach for a craeb' (Rennes *Dindsenchas*, ed. and trans. Stokes, pp. 419–20; 'Or Mugna from *moo-gnia*, that is, greatest of sister's sons, because *gnia* means a sister's son, as is said in the *Bretha Nemed gnia sethar*, that is a sister's son. He was indeed a son. Berries from the berries the strong (guiding?) Upholder put upon his tree'). Stokes's note on 'He was indeed a son' reads 'Christ apparently is referred to. His Virgin mother is called "our sister" in the Félire, Dec. 14, and in Cormac's Glossary, s. vv. *niae* and *sethor*. The *Trefuilngid treorach* "strong upholder", seems an alliterative kenning for God or Christ' ('The Prose Tales', p. 420, n. 2).

Mughna, no comad a cáer din chráeib ro buí i láim Trefuilngid no ásad iar n-a cur do Fintan mac Bóchra i r-rígi Conaing Becfíaclaig'.[156]

It is notable, however, that only *DSTT* and the Hawk of Achill, which Nic Cárthaigh suggests may be directly related,[157] explain that it was as a result of the encounter with Trefuilngid that Fintan learned various traditions about Ireland. Although *Airne Fíngein* associates both Trefuilngid and Fintan with the planting of the tree of Mugna (or Eo Rossa according to one manuscript) during the reign of Conaing Bececlach, the text does not mention the knowledge which Trefuilngid transmits to Fintan in *DSTT* and which is so important in that tale. Trefuilngid's dealings with Fintan, unlike in *DSTT*, appear to be restricted to the planting of the tree. One might speculate that there were two separate traditions, which are brought together in *DSTT*. On the one hand we have a tradition in which Fintan is associated with knowledge of various places in Ireland, on the other hand a tradition which concerns Trefuilngid and the trees and which, in *Airne Fíngein* at least, also makes mention of Fintan's role in the planting of the tree or trees.

The next miraculous event to be recounted in *Airne Fíngein* after the planting of the trees concerns Fintan regaining his ability to speak. As Nic Cárthaigh argues, this may well be a device employed by the author of *Airne Fíngein* rather than a genuinely old tradition. Nevertheless, it is important in the context of *Airne Fíngein*'s relationship with *DSTT*. The regaining of Fintan's speech is described in the following terms: 'Is anocht doroíded (.i. ro foíded) ón Choimdid spirut Samuéil fátha i r-richt máeth-óclaíg, co n-ecmoing builliu i n-a béolu di gaí gréine, co r-raba tria chlais a dá chúlad, co fuil secht slabraid nó secht solabra for a thengaid iar sin. Corub anocht ra foillsiged senchus 7 coimgne'.[158] In two other manuscripts of the text the spirit is identified merely as 'saineam fathacda' or 'saineamail faisdine' and not associated with Samuel.[159] Fintan is not

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[156] *Airne Fíngein* (ed. Vendryes, pp. 4–5, text omitted by me); 'Mugna is the name of that tree [...] a son of the tree in Paradise. It arrived with a wind of the seeking of the elements, that is, a seed from its flower, so that it fell upon Mag Mughna, or it was a berry of the branch which was in Trefuilngid's hand which grew after its planting by Fintan mac Bóchra during the reign of Conaing Becfíaclach'.

[157] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', p. 59.

[158] *Airne Fíngein* (ed. Vendryes, pp. 6–7); 'It is tonight that the spirit of Samuel of prophecy was sent (that is, was sent) from the Lord in the shape of a noble young warrior, so that a blow of a ray of the sun came into his mouth so that it was [i.e. it went] through the hollow between his two shoulders, so that there are seven chains or seven eloquences upon his tongue after that. And it was tonight that history and historical knowledge were revealed'.

[159] *Airne Fíngein* (ed. Vendryes, p. 6, notes); 'prophetic excellence', 'excellent prophecy'.

mute in *DSTT*, nor does the spirit of Samuel appear to him, but the passage from *Airne Fíngein* shares similarities with *DSTT*: an encounter with a young warrior figure with divine associations leads to the acquisition of historical knowledge on Fintan's part.[160] The spirit is clearly not identified with Trefuilngid in *Airne Fíngein*, given that the text mentions him just a few lines before the spirit. The latter's role, however, is comparable to Trefuilngid's role in *DSTT*. Although the dates of much of the material discussed here are unclear, it may be that Trefuilngid's portrayal in *DSTT* and his interaction with Fintan is related to the spirit in *Airne Fíngein*.[161]

The Setting of De Suidigud Tellaig Temra

Trefuilngid's arrival at Conaing's assembly, however, is also similar to the arrival of an unfamiliar, marvellous stranger in other tales too.[162] On the other hand, Fintan's identification of Trefuilngid with God or an angel of God makes it clear that the meeting is a Christian divine encounter and the tale is thus quite different from other examples. It may be that *DSTT* changes a common motif and plays with the audience's expectations.[163]

Because of the religious element in Trefuilngid's portrayal, there is the possibility that the description of his appearance may have partly been inspired by religious texts, in particular the bible. Indeed, there are similarities between his appearance and a number of biblical passages in which God, the risen Christ or angels are described, but in particular with passages in Revelation and with the

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[160] In addition, the sun also features in the description of Trefuilngid in *DSTT* (see p. 138).

[161] Trefuilngid's supernatural qualities may be indicated by his description as 'scálfer mór' in *DSTT* (p. 138). Although Best translated this as 'great hero' ('The Settling', p. 139) and although *scálfer* can also be translated as 'giant' (*DIL* 72.67), the supernatural connotations of *scál* (*DIL* 72.41–69) may be significant.

[162] See, for example, the arrival of an unknown warrior at a royal assembly in the twelfth-century text *Fled Dúin na nGéd* (ed. Lehmann, pp. 22–3, ll. 684–93). The tenth-century tale *Fled Bricrend* uses the term 'scálfer mór', applied to Trefuilngid in *DSTT*, to describe an unknown stranger (ed. Henderson, p. 44).

[163] For example, the arrival scenes in both *DSTT* and *Fled Bricrend* begin in a similar way: 'Láa n-aind dúin isin dáil sin iarum co n-acamar in scálfer mór', *DSTT* (pp. 138–9; 'On a day then in that assembly we beheld a great hero') and 'A m-boí and in gilla, co n-acca in scáilfer mór ina dochum', *Fled Bricrend* (ed. Henderson, p. 44; 'When the servant was there, he saw a great giant come towards him', my translation). However, the descriptions of the unknown strangers that follow are entirely different.

description of the transfiguration of Christ in Matthew.[164] Revelation, in particular, has a number of colourful descriptions and Rev. X.1–3 describes an angel in the following way:

> And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring.

The angel described is clearly of great size, like Trefuilngid, and sun imagery is also used, although in Revelation the angel's face is described as shining like the sun, whereas *DSTT* simply mentions the sun being visible between Trefuilngid's legs. Furthermore, the description of the wood of Trefuilngid's branch as 'illdathach'[165] might be compared to the occurrence of a rainbow in the passage from Revelation.[166] The passage of Christ's transfiguration in the Gospel of Matthew is not as descriptive, stating simply that Christ's 'face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white',[167] but it is still of interest to *DSTT* because it also mentions Moses and Elijah. Fintan shares a number of similarities with Moses,[168] and Elijah and Enoch are both mentioned at the end of *DSTT*: 'is dóig leo is ina chorp chollaigi rucad i nnach ndíamair ndíada amail rucad Ele 7 Enócc i pardus condafil ic ernaidi eiseiséirgi in sruthseanóir sáeghlach sin .i. Fintan mac Bóchra'.[169]

The meeting between Trefuilngid and Fintan represents something of a revelation to Fintan and the assembled men and a comparison might also be made with other Irish texts. Thus, the crystal veil which Trefuilngid wears around himself[170] is similar to the crystal veil, fortress and screen associated with heaven

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[164] See, for example, descriptions in the Book of Daniel (Dan. VII.13, VII.9, X.6) and in Rev. I.12–17 as well as the account of Christ's transfiguration in Matt. XVII.1–8.

[165] *DSTT*, pp. 140–1; 'many coloured'.

[166] For other passages in which a rainbow or the colours of the rainbow form part of similar descriptions see Rev. IV.3 and Ezek. I.28.

[167] Matt. XVII.1–3.

[168] See the discussion in chapter 5, pp. 99–103.

[169] *DSTT*, pp. 160–1; 'But some think that he was borne 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'.

[170] 'Fíal étrocht glainidi imme amal étach línda' (*DSTT*, pp. 138–9; 'A shining crystal veil about him like unto raiment of precious linen').

in *Fís Adomnáin*.[171] *In Tenga Bithnua*[172] also shares similarities with *DSTT*, including the setting: in *In Tenga Bithnua* the revelation takes place during a large assembly at Easter time, and the meeting between Fintan and Trefuilngid occurs on the day of the Crucifixion. *In Tenga Bithnua* and to some extent the recitation of the places in *DSTT* also employ a question and answer format, and the nature of the knowledge that is passed on could also be considered similar. In both cases, it is knowledge about the order of the world around the audience who experience the revelation. In *In Tenga Bithnua*, this knowledge is more general and concerns the creation and order of the world; in *DSTT*, it concerns the organisation of Ireland.

This brief survey of similarities is not intended to suggest a direct relationship between the texts concerned. Instead, it provides a literary context for the assemblies in *DSTT*, showing that in their description, as in the presentation of Fintan and Trefuilngid, the tale is drawing on familiar patterns from secular and religious Irish texts, as well as the bible.

THE STRUCTURE OF *DE SUIDIGUD TELLAIG TEMRA*

DSTT consists of the main frame narrative about Diarmait's assembly at Tara and Fintan's judgment in the conflict between Diarmait and the nobles. This narrative is, however, broken up by shorter accounts which Fintan relates to the assembly. These take the form of six poems which frequently draw on his experience in his long life and two subtales. Fintan's poetry emphasises his old age and his experience of Ireland's history, focusing on his approaching death towards the end of the tale.[173] The combination of history and poetry is not unusual and Smith has argued that poetry may have been considered 'the medium *par excellence* for

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[171] See, for example, ll. 1984, 2036–40 and 2050.

[172] *In Tenga Bithnua* is edited and translated in Stokes, 'The Evernew Tongue', and dated by him to the tenth or eleventh century ('The Evernew Tongue', p. 97). A more recent translation, with an introduction, is found in Carey's *King of Mysteries*, pp. 75–96. The text is discussed in detail by Carey in the third chapter of his *Single Ray*, 'The Resurrection of the World', pp. 75–106, in which he dates it to the late ninth or early tenth century (*Single Ray*, p. 75).

[173] Three of Fintan's poems are also found in *Lebor Gabála*. These are the poems beginning 'Hériu cia fíarfaider dim' (*DSTT*, pp. 128–33; *Lebor Gabála*, ed. and trans. Macalister II, 210–15, poem XXI) and 'Cóic hurrunda Érend' (*DSTT*, pp. 152–5; *Lebor Gabála*, ed. and trans. Macalister IV, 60–3, poem XLIX). The poem 'Féni ó Fénius', whose first stanza is found in *DSTT*, pp. 140–1, is found in *Lebor Gabála*, ed. and trans. Macalister II, 86–7, poem X.

historical scholarship'.[174] Toner has illustrated the authority with which verse could endow an account, stating that it was considered 'an appropriate medium for preserving *senchas*' and he also stresses the importance of the eye-witness.[175] The frequency of verse in *DSTT* thus may indicate the importance of history to the tale, while at the same time heightening Fintan's standing as historian. However, Fintan's poems, along with the subtales, are also structurally significant for the narrative. Three of his poems are linked to the development of the narrative, whereas the other three work together with the two subtales to assign Fintan's judgment at Diarmait's assembly an important place in Fintan's life.

Poems Marking the Resolution of a Problem

DSTT opens with the discussion by the nobles of Uí Néill concerning the justifiability of the extent of Tara's lands:

> Bátar húi Néill fecht and i mMaig Breg i n-imaccalaim i n-aimsir Diarmata meic Fergusa Cerbaill, 7 ba hed imráidset: ba mór leo do thír aurland Temrach .i. maigen i mbátar secht radairc for cech leath, 7 imráidset a himdibe ina faithchi sin iarum. ar ba dímáin leo in cutruma sin do ferond occaib cen tech cen trebad fair, 7 cen fognam tellaich Temrach.[176]

This issue becomes a very real problem when they refuse to partake of the feast to which they have been invited by Diarmait. The historical feast of Tara was, according to the annals, last held by Diarmait mac Cerbaill in the sixth century, and although Diarmait is not called king of Tara in *DSTT*, it is likely that this is how he should be understood in the tale. Binchy has argued that the feast marked the culmination of the king of Tara's reign,[177] but by the time *DSTT* was being written the feast was no longer held. Nevertheless, from surviving tales it is clear

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[174] Smith, 'Early Irish Historical Verse', p. 327.
[175] Toner, 'Authority'; see p. 62 for the quotation regarding *senchas* and pp. 71 and 79 for references to Fintan.
[176] *DSTT*, pp. 124–5; 'The Ui Neill were once in conference in Magh Bregh in the time of Diarmait son of Fergus Cerball, and this was what they discussed. The demesne of Tara seemed excessive to them, that is, the plain with seven views on every side, and they considered the curtailing of that green, for they deemed it unprofitable to have so much land without house or cultivation upon it, and of no service to the hearth of Tara'. In the Book of Lismore, it is the nobles of Ireland who discuss the problem.
[177] Binchy, 'Fair of Tailtiu', p. 135.

that it was still an important part of the literary portrayal of the kingship of Tara. It is clear, then, that the nobles' refusal to come to Diarmait's feast is a serious matter, perhaps questioning his authority. This is, therefore, a conflict which must be resolved urgently and Diarmait immediately goes about the business of finding a suitable judge to arbitrate. As one venerable old man after the next is brought before Diarmait, the tension rises as to whether the king will succeed in finding a person to resolve the conflict. Fintan's arrival seems to signal this resolution and the grandiose manner in which he arrives underlines the significance of the event:

> Dochoid iarum Berrán gilla Chindfáelad húaidib ar cend Findtain co Dún Tulchai re Luachair Deadaid aníar. Ocus roráid a teachtairecht ris. Dodeachaid lais iarum Findtan do Themraig. Ocus isé lín tánic, och mbuidne déc .i. nói mbuidne reme 7 nói mbuidne ina díaig, 7 ní roibi andsin acht síl Findtain uile .i. meic 7 húi 7 íarmái 7 indái dó in lucht sin. Roferad fáilti mór re Findtan i tig midchuarta, 7 robo failed re cách a ríachtain do cloistin a bríathar 7 a senchasa. 7 atrachtatar remi huile, 7 roráidset ris suide hi cathair bretheman.[178]

Once the welcome has died down, Fintan addresses the assembly and then recites the poem beginning 'Héiriu cía fíarfaidir dim'[179] (hereafter poem 1). To the audience, there is every hope that the problem will now be solved and that the story can continue. However, following Fintan's poem, those present at Diarmait's assembly demand proof of Fintan's reliability: 'Is maith sin, a Fintain, arsiad. Is ferrde dún cech follugad doberum fort, ocus is maith lind a fis úait caidi tairisiu do chuimne fén'.[180] Again, it is uncertain whether the elder summoned, Fintan, will prove himself sufficiently qualified to help the assembled company. In response to the question posed to him, Fintan tells the story about a tree he planted and watched grow, in the end outliving the tree and all the implements made from it. This, finally, seems to satisfy the assembly and Diarmait exclaims

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[178] *DSTT*, pp. 128–9; 'Then Berrán, Cenn Fáelad's attendant, went for Fintan to Dún Tulcha to the west of Luachair Dedaid. And he delivered his message to him [that Fintan should come to Tara]. Then Fintan came with him to Tara. And his retinue consisted of eighteen companies, namely, nine before him and nine after him. And there was no one among them who was not of the seed of Fintan – sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, and descendants of his was that host. A great welcome was given to Fintan in the banqueting house and all were glad at his coming to hear his words and his stories. And they all rose up before him, and they bade him sit in the judge's seat'.
[179] *DSTT*, pp. 128–32.
[180] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; '"Good, O Fintan," said they "We are the better for every neglect (?) which we may cause you, and we should like to know from you how reliable your memory is"'.

that 'Is tíachtain tar breith Senórach tíachtain tar do breith'.[181] Once more, a solution to the problem appears to have been reached and again Fintan recites a poem, 'As éol dam sund amne' (poem 2),[182] illustrating his knowledge of various types of judgment and the history of judgments and showing his old age. This time, a resolution really is arrived at and Fintan begins his story of the encounter with Trefuilngid and his acquisition of knowledge about different places in Ireland.

After the recital of a list of places and their respective qualities and abilities, the next section is narrated in the third person and we are brought back to Diarmait's time.[183] This section contains another poem (poem 3) recited by Fintan, which begins 'Is fodeirc damsa indiu'.[184] Again, the topic is his old age, but this time it is connected to his approaching death. One gets the sense that Fintan, having spent many years transmitting Trefuilngid's knowledge, has now reached the end of his lifespan. After this poem, the narrative goes back to Diarmait's assembly and at this point the audience finally hears Fintan's judgment on the question of Tara: 'Acus así breth ruc dóib: a bith amail dosairnicmair, ar Finddtan, ní thargom tara n-ordugud forfácaib Tréfuilngid Tre-eochair remum, ar ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin'.[185] The conflict has been resolved and Fintan and the nobles of Ireland go to Usnech where Fintan sets up a pillar-stone. This final resolution, given symbolic expression by the pillar-stone, is marked by Fintan's poem concerned with the division of Ireland into five parts with Usnech at its centre, 'Cóic hurrunda Érind iter muir is tír' (poem 4).[186] This is followed by a prose statement, which includes a reference to Tara and which reiterates the poem's main import: 'Roforgell tra andsin Fintan conid coir gabáil cóic cóicead hÉrend a Temraich 7 a hUissnech, 7 conid coir a ngabáil-seom as cech cóiced i n-Hérind'.[187]

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[181] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'It is transgression of an elder's judgment to transgress your judgment'.
[182] *DSTT*, pp. 134–8.
[183] This is the section beginning 'Fácbais iarum Tréfuilngid Treeochair...' (*DSTT*, pp. 150–1).
[184] *DSTT*, pp. 150–2.
[185] *DSTT*, pp. 152–3; 'And this is the judgment he gave to them, "let it be as we have found it," said Fintan, "we shall not go contrary to the arrangement which Trefuilngid Tre-eochair has left us, for he was an angel of God, or he was God Himself"'.
[186] *DSTT*, pp. 152–4.
[187] *DSTT*, pp. 154–5; 'So Fintan then testified that it was right to take the five provinces of Ireland from Tara and Usnech, and that it was right for them also to be taken from each province in Ireland'.

Thus, Fintan's poems (poems 1 and 2) when he arrives at Diarmait's assembly mark the resolution or supposed resolution of problems within the narrative. His Usnech poem on the division of Ireland (poem 4) expresses the definite and final resolution of the story's main problem, that of the division of Ireland, and the prose supplies the answer to the problem of Tara's status within Ireland.

There is, then, a pattern of problem-(supposed) resolution-poem found in the text. The following diagram illustrates the structure of the tale in terms of this pattern and the role of some of Fintan's poems within this:
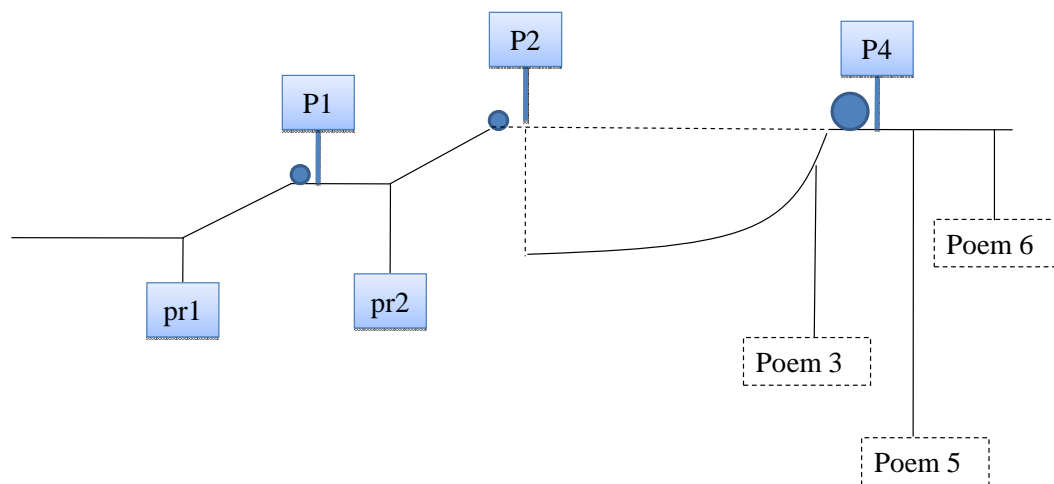
pr1= problem 1: The nobles of Ireland refuse to attend Diarmait's feast

pr2= problem 2: Is Fintan reliable enough?

● Resolution or supposed resolution

P1 = poem 1: 'Héiriu cía fíarfaidir dím'

P2 = poem 2: 'As éol dam sund amne'

P4 = poem 4: 'Cóic hurrunda Érind iter muir is tír'

The basic problem underlying the tale as a whole is the question as to the extent of Tara's lands (pr1 in the diagram). A prolonged attempt to resolve the conflict gets under way and the heightening tension is marked in the diagram by the rising line. Finally, the arrival of Fintan appears to represent a solution, symbolised by the first circle in the diagram. Fintan's arrival is immediately

followed by his first poem (P1), and it seems that a resolution of the main question is imminent. However, a second problem arises when the assembly then asks for proof of Fintan's reliability (pr2). Again, tension rises while Fintan tells the story of the tree he grew, but his account satisfactorily resolves the problem of Fintan's eligibility, a moment marked by poem 2. It is now possible to return to the tale's initial problem, and in order to do so, Fintan tells the subtale about Trefuilngid, which takes Fintan's audience back in time and which is represented in the diagram by the curved line. Towards the end of this subtale the narratorial voice changes from Fintan's first person to third person and the audience is slowly brought back to Diarmait's time. It is clear that Trefuilngid's knowledge, passed on by Fintan, represents a permanent solution to the tale's main problem, and this is indicated in the diagram by the enlarged circle. Fintan's judgment is summarised in poem 4, and the importance of the poem in resolving the tale's initial problem lends the statements made in it, and reiterated in the prose and marked symbolically by the pillar-stone, particular authority.[188]

The Subtales and Poems 3, 5 and 6

The subtale of Conaing Bececlach's assembly and Fintan's meeting with Trefuilngid is central to the story of *DSTT* as it is this encounter which allows Fintan to act as a judge at Diarmait's assembly and thus to solve permanently the problem with which *DSTT* begins. Structurally, the two royal assemblies, frametale and subtale, mirror each other. Just as Trefuilngid comes to Conaing's assembly and imparts new knowledge to the people assembled there, Fintan arrives at Diarmait's assembly and instructs the assembled nobles in the traditions which he received from Trefuilngid. Fintan provides the link between both assemblies in his role as the preserver of knowledge, and, structurally at least, takes on Trefuilngid's role at Diarmait's assembly. Both assemblies also mark the beginning and end of Fintan's role as the keeper of the divine knowledge imparted to him by Trefuilngid, as the following discussion will illustrate.

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[188] Poems 3, 5 and 6 do not relate to this structure. Their function will be discussed below, and they are given in this diagram for the sake of completeness.

In order to prove the reliability of his memory, Fintan tells the story of a tree he planted. This yew tree grew from a berry which he had picked in a wood in West Munster. The tree grew to great size and age, but when it began to die, Fintan felled it and made several different wooden containers from it. When these became so old that they could no longer be used, he reworked them into smaller ones. Fintan finishes his account with the words 'Ocus dofung-sa do Día uilichumachtach nacon fetar-sa ca hairm i fail an inadach sin iarna scíth lim ar críne'.[189] In the same way that the two assemblies in the *DSTT* form a pair, this subtale has a counterpart in the short statement that Fintan was given berries by Trefuilngid, which he planted and from which five important trees grew: 'Fácbais iarum Tréfuilngid Tre-eochair firu hÉrend fon n-ordugud sin co bráth, 7 fácbais ní do chóeraib inna cróibi bái inna láim oc Fintan mac Bóchra conasrola-side isna hinadaib in robo dóig leis a nn-ás i nHérind, 7 ité craind rofásait isna cóeraib sin: Bili Tortan, 7 Eó Rosa, Eó Mugna 7 Cróeb Daithi 7 Bili hUissnig'.[190]

Among these trees are yew trees, which can grow to a great age, and Nic Cárthaigh has drawn attention to a text in the Book of Lismore which relates the lifetimes of various creatures, including humans and yew trees, to one another. She has suggested this is the reason why the trees are chosen to illustrate Fintan's extraordinarily long life.[191] While this argument is important, it should be noted that not all of them are said to be yews, and the trees also have additional structural and thematic significance. It may be possible that the trees relate to the theme of kingship,[192] but the stories of the trees in *DSTT* together with the remaining three poems recited by Fintan also help to create the impression that Fintan has fulfilled his purpose at the end of the story and that this is why he dies. In Fintan's account of the first tree he planted, his life and that of the tree are implicitly connected. The story about the tree is intended to illustrate his own old age, and his lifetime is thus linked to the tree's although he outlives it, having been born before it and living to a greater age than it. This is illustrated by the

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[189] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'And I swear to Almighty God I know not where those substitutes are since they perished with me from decay'.

[190] *DSTT*, pp. 150–1; 'So Trefuilngid Tre-eochair left that ordinance with the men of Ireland for ever, and he left with Fintan son of Bóchra some of the berries from the branch which was in his hand, so that he planted them in whatever places he thought it likely they would grow in Ireland. And these are the trees which grew up from those berries: the Ancient Tree of Tortu and the tree of Ross, the tree of Mugna and the Branching Tree of Dathe, and the Ancient Tree of Usnech'.

[191] Nic Cárthaigh, 'Revenants and Antediluvian Lore', pp. 51–2.

[192] See below, pp. 160–2.

way in which he describes himself as growing with the tree: 'Roairis 7 roairis mo ibar co 'matormolt dúind. [...] Roairisius-[s]a didu béos 7 mo ibair-lestair ocom co torchradar a circla díb ar críne 7 aesmaire'.[193] Later on in *DSTT* Fintan's lifetime seems connected to the trees which grow from Trefuilngid's berries: 'Ocus airis Fintan ic sloind seanchassa do feraib hÉrenn co mbo hé ba hiarlathi dona bilib, 7 co racrínsad ria lind. O roairig iarum Findtan a sentaith fén 7 sentaigh na mbili is and doróne in láid'.[194]

As the quotation illustrates and as mentioned above, it is Fintan who preserves Trefuilngid's traditions. At the end of *DSTT*, one gets the sense that Fintan's life has come to an end because he has fulfilled this purpose by passing on his knowledge to Diarmait's assembly. This is because the assembly is framed by comments and poems referring to Fintan's death, as well as suggestions that the encounter with Diarmait and his men was to mark the end of his role as a transmitter of knowledge. His third poem, 'Is fodeirc damsa indiu' (poem 3), follows the death of the trees and the quotation just cited. It focuses on Fintan's age and suggests a degree of weariness in particular in the second stanza, although not all the words can be translated with certainty:

> Missi a debrad am fer sean
>
> am leisciu ar cách re tairdead
>
> hisí is cían ó tib dig
>
> dílind ós imlib Usnig.[195]

The final stanza of the poem states that 'am seanchaid',[196] the present tense suggesting Fintan is still willing to continue to transmit historical knowledge. The sentence which follows this poem, however, states that Fintan did this *until* Diarmait's assembly: 'Doróne iarum in láid sin, 7 roairis re sloind senchasa do feraib hÉrend 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

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[193] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5 (text omitted by me); 'I remained and so did my yew flourishing together. [...] So I remained then and my yew vessels with me until their hoops fell off through decay and age'.
[194] *DSTT*, pp. 150–1; 'And Fintan remained relating the stories to the men of Ireland until he was himself the survivor (?) of the ancient trees, and until they had withered during his time. So when Fintan perceived his own old age and that of the trees, he made a lay'.
[195] *DSTT*, pp. 150–1; 'By God's doom I am an old man, I am more unwilling than ever for ... It is long since I drank (?) a drink of the Deluge over the navel of Usnech' (text omitted by Best).
[196] *DSTT*, pp. 152–3; 'I am a shanachie'.

brith breithi dóib im suidigud tellaig Themra'.[197] Diarmait's assembly thus appears as the final point in Fintan's career as a preserver of knowledge. Read alone, the poem simply appears to emphasise Fintan's old age and express a slight weariness on his part. Read in conjunction with comments which precede and follow, however, the sense is that Fintan is aware of his death approaching but, although weary, he has enough strength to make use of his knowledge and old age for his last task, the judgment at Diarmait's assembly.

In the tale's narrative, these comments and the poem come after Fintan's encounter with Diarmait. Chronologically, however, Fintan actually recites the poem before he comes to Diarmait's assembly. Once he has given the information to Diarmait and set up a stone at Usnech, he returns to his home in Dún Tulcha and dies there, reciting another two poems before his death, 'Fand indiu mo beatha búan' (poem 5) and 'Am crín indiu i Comor chúan' (poem 6).[198] These emphasise his age and weariness and make it clear that his death is approaching. The two poems work together with poem 3 and its accompanying statements to create the sense that the passing on of Trefuilngid's traditions to Diarmait's assembly is a final act and Fintan's purpose in life has now been fulfilled.

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[197] *DSTT*, pp. 152–3; 'So he made this lay, and remained to relate the stories of the men of Ireland even until the time he was summoned by Diarmait son of Cerball, and Flann Febla son of Scannlan, and Cennfaelad son of Ailill, and the men of Ireland also to pronounce judgement for them concerning the establishment of the manor of Tara'.

[198] *DSTT*, pp. 154–8 and 158–60.
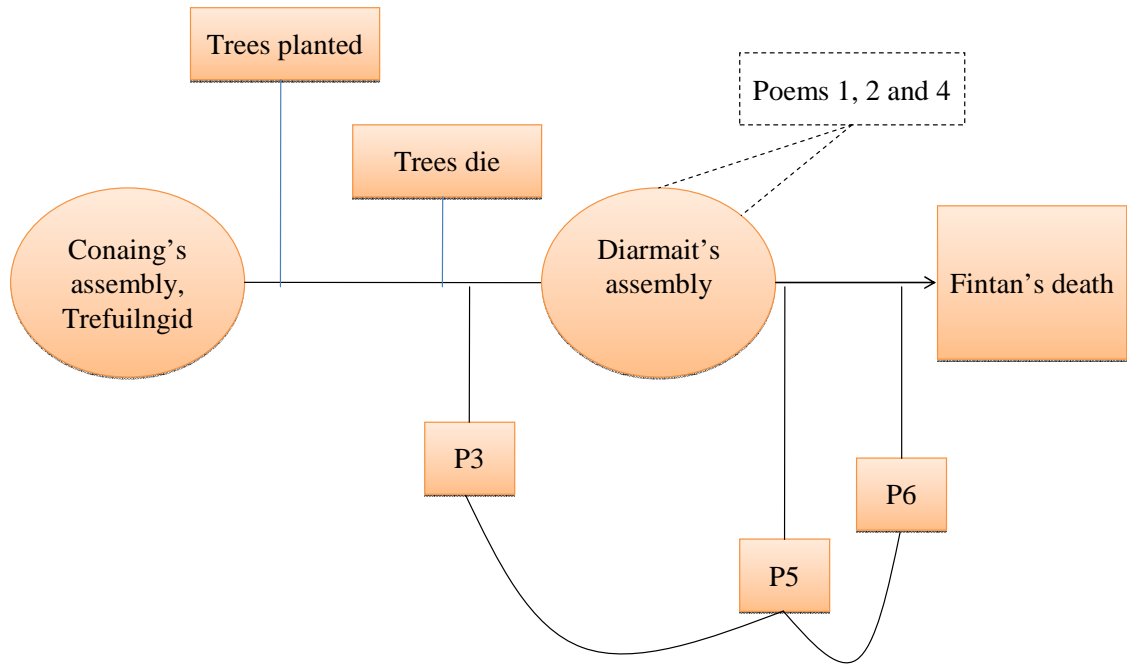
P3 = poem 3: 'Is fodeirc damsa indiu' along with prose introduction and conclusion

P5 = poem 5: 'Fand indiu mo beatha búan'

P6 = poem 6: 'Am crín indiu i Comor chúan'

Poems 1, 2 and 3 are given for completeness sake.

In sum, Fintan survives several generations as one of Ireland's first settlers until Conaing's assembly. He transmits Trefuilngid's traditions for several generations until the death of the trees signals his own old age. At this point he recites poem 3, and the prose immediately preceding and following it suggests that Fintan's ultimate task was to pass on Trefuilngid's knowledge to Diarmait's assembly. At some later point, he is summoned to the assembly and, having solved the problem there, he recites a poem about his age and weakness (poem 5), followed quickly by a second on the same subject (poem 6). Following these poems, *DSTT* relates his death. Thus, poems 5 and 6 are clearly linked, but poem 3 and its associated prose already point towards them. Together, the poems form a bracket around Diarmait's assembly and Fintan's appearance there, placing

particular emphasis on that event and showing it to be Fintan's final act of transmission.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the surviving sources clearly illustrate Fintan's popularity in the medieval period. Elements of his depiction in *DSTT* as an authority on Irish history, associated also with a detailed knowledge of various places, are found in a number of other texts. Sources such as *Airne Fíngein* also link him with Trefuilngid. The relationship of these different texts with *DSTT* is not always clear, but it seems likely that the tale drew on pre-existing traditions about Fintan. Fintan's encounter with Trefuilngid can be read both against the background of more religious texts as well as similar scenes in the saga literature. Finally, the structure of *DSTT* appears to be intended to highlight the prime importance of Fintan's judgment at Diarmait's assembly.

CHAPTER 3: *AIDED CHONCHOBAIR*

AC exists in several, significantly different versions. Dating these is difficult, as different elements of the story have been reused and changed in the various versions. Linguistic dating may, therefore, offer an indication of the date of a particular passage, but it cannot necessarily pinpoint the date at which a version was put together in the form in which it survives. In addition to this, some of the surviving versions are too short to provide sufficient data for linguistic analysis. However, a consideration of the relationship of the different versions to one another is fundamental to literary analysis of the accounts. Although the tale is relatively well known, no thorough analysis of this kind has been attempted. In the following discussion I will examine the manuscript versions, suggesting modifications to Meyer's four-fold division of the versions of the tale and making some suggestions as to the development of the narrative as it is reflected in the surviving manuscripts.

THE MANUSCRIPTS AND THEIR TEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP

In his edition of the tale, Meyer distinguished between four different versions, which he called A, B, C and D; references to *AC* are usually to A, the longest account.[199] However, he did not attempt a detailed examination of the relationship of the different versions to one another or of the development of the story as a whole. The differences between the manuscript versions are too great to allow for a direct and straightforward relationship between them, but there are indications that there was one version of Conchobar's death, from which the surviving versions indirectly derive.[200] As Meyer's edition stands, only one of his versions, namely A, is preserved in more than one manuscript, and one might question to what extent it is necessary to distinguish between versions A–D rather than talk about individual manuscripts. I will begin my analysis of the manuscript tradition

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[199] Meyer, *Death-Tales*, pp. 4–11.
[200] In addition, Carney believed that the first section of the tale, the story of how Conchobar was injured by Mess Gegra's brain, reflected the original form of the tale (*Studies*, pp. 295–6).

of *AC* by first examining verbal correspondences between the different manuscripts and then discussing the distribution of shared narrative elements.

The seven manuscripts in which the text is preserved date from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. For his edition, Meyer used five of these manuscripts: the Book of Leinster (TCD 1339, s. xii, pp. 123b–124b; hereafter L); Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 72.1.40 (s. xvi, pp. 2–4); Dublin, RIA 967 (23 N 10; s. xvi, pp. 16–28; hereafter N); the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (Dublin, RIA 476, 23 O 48; s. xv, fol. 105); and Dublin, RIA D.iv.2 (Stowe 992; 1300, fol. 52rb).[201] In addition to this, in 1921, Meyer published separately a version of the story found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud misc. 610, fol. 42b, a fifteenth-century manuscript,[202] but he does not appear to have been aware of this copy at the time of his edition of *AC*. A further manuscript which was apparently not known to Meyer is the fifteenth-century manuscript Adv. 72.1.5 in the National Library of Scotland. Like Adv. 72.1.40, it is slightly damaged and sections of the text are difficult to read or illegible. I have made preliminary transcriptions of both Adv. 72.1.5 and the beginning of Adv. 72.1.40 using a microfilm of the manuscripts, and conclusions concerning these manuscripts are based on my transcriptions.[203]

Meyer's Version A

In Meyer's edition, version A is represented by L and Adv. 72.1.40. Both texts include the story of the battle between Ulster and Connacht during which Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head. The texts are similar in wording, although the poor state of the opening section of Adv. 72.1.40 makes it difficult to say anything about the beginning of the story. It is clear that the other Edinburgh manuscript, Adv. 72.1.5, is similar to Adv. 72.1.40. However, the damaged state of the beginning of Adv. 72.1.40 makes a detailed comparison with the other two manuscripts impossible. Nevertheless, the odd word and letter that can be discerned on the first page of the text suggest that it was, at this point, similar to the version of Adv. 72.1.5, and a close textual relationship is confirmed

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[201] Meyer's folio reference on p. 18 of *Death-Tales* appears to be incorrect.

[202] Meyer, 'Mitteilungen' (*ZCP* 13), p. 7.

[203] Table 1, pp. 69–71, gives a summary overview of the contents of the tale in the various manuscripts and is intended to aid the discussion of the manuscripts in this chapter.

by the strong similarities in wording and structure of the rest of the narrative. However, there are also differences between the two manuscripts. In Adv. 72.1.5, the scene involving Conchobar's fools, or jesters, is more detailed and, furthermore, this manuscript includes a verse which is attributed to Flann Mainistrech (d. 1056) and which is also contained in the RIA D.iv.2 version of *AC*. This verse is found neither in Adv. 72.1.40, as far as it can be read, nor in L. The end of the version in Adv. 72.1.5 also contains a quatrain which is not preserved in any of the other manuscripts:

> Ba sgel gach muig*h*igom[un]
>
> oi[g]ead i*n* rig*h Con*chub*air*
>
> ba mor naeng[ui]ne gan cath
>
> [do l]ai*m* Cet moir m*eic* Madach
>
> *et reliqua*.[204]

The words *et reliqua* at the end of the verse may indicate that it is taken from a longer versified account of Conchobar's death which does not survive.

The sequencing of events in the two Edinburgh manuscripts differs slightly from that in L. After the battle L recounts an episode in which Conchobar is carried off the battlefield by his attendant Cenn Barraide. This episode is included in both Adv. 72.1.40 and Adv. 72.1.5, but it has been placed nearer the end of the tale. After the story of the battle, all three manuscripts go on to give an account of how Conchobar heard about the Crucifixion and how he reacted. At this point, however, the manuscripts diverge substantially: L alone includes a long poem, or *retoiric*, recited by Conchobar when he is informed by his druid of the Crucifixion of Christ. This poem is likely to have originally been separate from the story of Conchobar's death.[205] After the poem L reports that there are two alternative traditions of how Conchobar was informed of the death of Christ, namely either by a Leinster poet called Bachrach or by the Roman consul Altus, both of whom appear in the other versions of the story. In the Edinburgh manuscripts the story continues in quite a different way: Conchobar threatens to kill many men in an attempt to save Christ and, weapons in hand, he goes into a frenzy, during which

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[204] My transcription of 72.1.5, 8rb10–12 (the verse is written as continuous text in the manuscript); 'It was the story of every .... the death of King Conchobar, - it was a great single slaying without battle - by the hand of great Cet mac Magach, etc'.

[205] See Corthals, 'Early Irish *retoirics*', p. 22, and below, p. 109. Note also, however, Cronan's view in '"Beowulf"', p. 153, that prose and poem are of the same date.

he clears the surrounding forest to create Mag Lamraige.[206] Because of his anger Mess Gegra's brain bursts from his head and Conchobar dies. Following this, he is said to have gone to heaven because of his desire to aid Christ. The text then goes on to recount the story of Cenn Barraide and finishes with the information that Mess Gegra's brain has become associated with Buite mac Brónaig, the sixth-century founder of Monasterboice, and that to come into contact with it at the point of death results in direct entry into heaven.

The comparison of the two Edinburgh manuscripts and L is complicated by the fact that there appear to be *lacunae* in the text of L. Fortunately, these occur in that part of the tale which is similar to that of the two Edinburgh manuscripts. In L the scene in which Cet mac Mágach encounters Conchobar's jesters playing with Mess Gegra's brain makes sense as it stands, but we are not told what the jesters actually say to one another: 'Intan bátar na ónmite 'co cluchiu do inchind Me[i]sgegra, issed atbert ind ónmit fri araile. Rocluinedar Cet aní sin'.[207] Elsewhere in L dialogue is included, for example during the warriors' contest, when Fíngen comes to treat Conchobar and when Conchobar asks his druid about the signs that announce the Crucifixion; hence, this passage seems rather abrupt. Adv. 72.1.40 is only legible with difficulty at this point in the narrative, but the slightly extended version of the story of the jesters in Adv. 72.1.5 certainly suggests that some text has been lost in L:

> at*con*nca[d*ar*] t*ra* da oinm*h*id *Con*chab*air* cind ... a*n* ca[in]gen mor doríg*h*ned*h* imon cind i*n* oid*h*che sin istig*h* *ocus* nosberad [.] leo iarnamaruch amach dia cluic*h*... dorala and da*no* cett m*ac* madach do *Con*[*acht*]aib*h* t[*air*] ... la hUltuib*h* *id est* in f[*h*]est as docomla *ocus* is angbuid*h*e an[e] Cet sin · is and doluig*h* sen for fait*h*che na hEm*h*[i] ... laech chind do Ult[*h*]aib[*h*] leis · Intan iarom ...idi i cluit*h*che don inchind *id est* don ichind M... lar na faithche is [a]nd sin adb*er*ed*h* i*n* oinm[id] ... dibsin aso ari*n* oinm*h*id f*ri*a ara[il] ... ce ... edofæth rig*h* de oraraile ... Robui alaím indala nai i*n* inchind ....[208]

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[206] For the text of Adv. 72.1.40, see *AC*, pp. 9–11, notes. Adv. 72.1.5 is not fully legible here, but enough of the text can be read to indicate that it is very similar to Adv. 72.1.40.

[207] *AC*, pp. 4–5; 'When the jesters were playing with the brain of Mess Gegra, this is what one jester said to the other. Cet hears that'.

[208] 7vb. My tentative translation is as follows: 'Then Conchobar's two fools saw the head … there was a big discussion (?) inside the house concerning the head that night and they [reading nosberat, rather than nosberad] took it with them outside the next morning to play with it ... it

The second apparent *lacuna* in L is during Conchobar's conversation with his druid. It seems clear that part of the conversation has been lost in the course of transmission and that the druid's response has not been preserved in full.[209] This idea is supported by the fact that both the Edinburgh manuscripts contain a more extended version of the dialogue in which the druid tells Conchobar about the Crucifixion, although it is not fully legible in Adv. 72.1.5.

It has also been suggested that the ending is missing in L.[210] Given the possible textual *lacunae* just discussed, there is some justification in arguing this and one might assume that the ending would originally have been similar to that of the Edinburgh manuscripts. However, there are also arguments against assuming a violent reaction on Conchobar's part to the news of the Crucifixion in L, as will be discussed in chapter 5.[211]

None of these potential *lacunae* are due to the state of the manuscript. It is not clear whether the instances of possible *lacunae* just discussed represent *lacunae* already present in L's exemplar or whether they were introduced by its scribe. In the case of Conchobar's conversation with his druid, comparison with Adv. 72.1.40 suggests that some form of eye-skip may explain the omission of text. The *lacuna* in L begins after the words 'ar in drúi', and the text continues 'Is mór in gním sin'.[212] The section in Adv. 72.1.40, which probably corresponds to the missing text in L, begins with the words 'in gnim mor'.[213] Unfortunately, a similar explanation of the first potential *lacuna*, in the jester-scene, cannot be attempted due to the difficulties with the legibility of both Edinburgh manuscripts. L's lack of a "proper" ending fits this version of *AC* well,[214] and it is therefore not possible to say whether it is deliberate or not.

Overall, the pattern that emerges is one of a textual relationship between the three manuscripts that is close enough to justify retaining Meyer's group A

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happened that Cet mac Mágach of the Connachta was there … with the Ulstermen, that is that Cet [was] the (most) *docomlae* (?) and fiercest monster (?). It was then that that one came upon the green of Emain ... an Ulster warrior's head with him. When thereafter....playing with the brain, that is the brain [of Mess Gegra?] ... [in the] centre of the green, it is then that the fool said ... of them (?), "Behold," said the fool to the other ... king falls on account of it," said the other ... The brain was in the hand of the other one of them'.

[209] *AC*, p. 9.
[210] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 42, and Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon', p. 90.
[211] See below, p. 116.
[212] *AC*, p. 8.
[213] Meyer, *Death-Tales*, p. 9, n. 20.
[214] See below, p. 116.

and adding Adv. 72.1.5 to it. However, the second part of the story, the textual *lacunae* and Conchobar's *retoiric* sets L apart from the two Edinburgh manuscripts.

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                        ┌──────┐
                        │  *A  │
                        └──────┘
                        ╱       ╲
                  ┌──────┐       ╲
                  │  *A1 │        ╲
                  └──────┘         ╲
                  ╱      ╲          ╲
          ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌───────────┐
          │Adv. 72.1.5│ │Adv.72.1.40│ │  Book of  │
          │           │ │           │ │  Leinster │
          └───────────┘ └───────────┘ └───────────┘
```
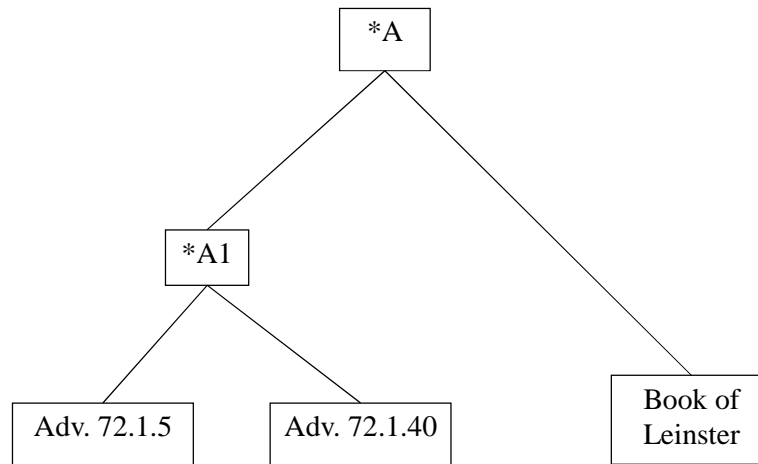
Meyer's Versions B, C and D

If we consider the remaining manuscripts and Meyer's division of them, we are not faced with the same problems as with version A. Both versions B and C are represented by one manuscript only. Version D is preserved in an extended and a shorter manuscript version, but the text shared by both contains no significant variation.

Meyer's version B of *AC* is represented by N.[215] It is very different from the texts in version A, as it does not explain how Mess Gegra's brain came to be in Conchobar's head. As a result, it is also significantly shorter than L and the Edinburgh versions. In N, the Roman Christian Altus, an envoy from Tiberius, tells Conchobar about the Crucifixion and teaches him the basic tenets of Christian belief. Conchobar's reaction to the news of the Crucifixion is to recite the long poem also preserved in L and to go into a battle-like frenzy, which causes Mess Gegra's brain to come out of his head. Conchobar dies but his death constitutes a baptism of blood and, consequently, he goes to heaven.

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[215] Meyer, *Death-Tales*, pp. 12–15.

This short summary indicates that version B, despite significant differences, shares features with the A-version manuscripts. L and N both contain the long poem recited by Conchobar, thus differing significantly from all the other manuscripts which do not preserve it, and Altus's role in Conchobar's conversion and death is in agreement with the short comment at the end of L: 'No dano co mbad é Altus in consul dodechaid o Ochtauin do chungid in chisa co Gædelib no-innised do Chonchobur Crist do chrochad'.[216] However, Conchobar's frenzy and his entry into heaven in N are closer to the end of the tale as it is preserved in the two Edinburgh manuscripts.

Meyer's version C is that contained in the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*.[217] Parts of this version show significant verbal overlap with N, although the orthography has been updated. It seems to be a composite text, drawing on a number of different versions, including that of N. It begins with an account of how Bachrach, a Leinster poet, told Conchobar, in creed-like wording, about Christ and the Crucifixion. An alternative account follows this, in which Altus conveys the news of Christ's death. This, in turn, is followed by a version in which Conchobar asks his druid Cathbad for an explanation of the marvellous signs that can be observed and that, as is explained to him, indicate that the Crucifixion is taking place. Conchobar's reaction is described in what seem to be two separate accounts, one of which may preserve a variant first line of the long poem contained in L and N. In both cases, however, Conchobar goes into a battle frenzy, which causes his death when Mess Gegra's brain comes out of his head. He is said to have received blood baptism in this way, but nevertheless, the *Liber* version has the Ulster king remain in hell until its harrowing by Christ. The different accounts of how Conchobar heard of the Crucifixion and of his reaction to the news are linked by short narratorial introductions, such as the comment 'No is amlaid so atcæmnacair he'.[218]

There are similarities in content between the section in the *Liber* in which Conchobar talks to Cathbad and the accounts in the version-A manuscripts of how Conchobar hears of the Crucifixion, a point in the narrative at which the three A-manuscripts are still in agreement with one another. For example, the *Liber* and

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[216] *AC*, pp. 10–11; 'Or, again, it may have been Altus, the consul who had come to the Gaels from Octavian to seek the tribute, who told Conchobar that Christ was crucified'.
[217] Meyer, *Death-Tales*, pp. 14–17.
[218] *AC*, pp. 16–17; 'Or 'tis thus it happened'.

the version-A manuscripts claim that Conchobar and Christ were born on the same day, although not in the same year. The wording of the texts, however, is not sufficiently similar to argue for a direct relationship between the *Liber* account and version A as it survives. In addition, the marvellous sign of the Crucifixion in the *Liber* is a solar eclipse, and not an earthquake as in version A. By contrast, the shared wording between the *Liber*'s account of Altus's role in the tale and the version preserved in N indicates a very close relationship between the two. However, it is difficult to determine the precise nature of this. N is a later manuscript than the *Liber*, yet it contains the full poem recited by Conchobar, whereas the *Liber* only contains the poem's first line. This varies from the first line in N, so even if one were to argue that N was drawing directly on the *Liber*, an additional source is needed for the poem.

Finally, the texts in manuscript RIA D.iv.2,[219] assigned to version D by Meyer, and Laud misc. 610 are closely related to one another. The story in RIA D.iv.2 consists of a short prose introduction and two poems, which form the bulk of the text and thus make it quite distinct from the other surviving manuscripts. The first poem consists of two stanzas, one about Tadg mac Céin and one about Conchobar. It is attributed to a poet named Flann, who, as mentioned above, is identified as Flann Mainistrech in Adv. 72.1.5 which includes the stanza about Conchobar. The stanza about Tadg mac Céin is also found in Laud misc. 610, where it is preserved separately from *AC*.[220] The second poem in RIA D.iv.2 is attributed to 'in fili'.[221] This poem is also preserved in the Book of Leinster, p. 150a26, where it is ascribed to Cináed úa hArtacáin (d. 975). The RIA D.iv.2 version as a whole places much greater emphasis on Mess Gegra's brain, to which the second poem contained in this version is addressed, than the other manuscripts do.[222] The short prose passage which introduces the poems and which names Bachrach as conveyer of the news of the Crucifixion is also found, with older orthography in Laud misc 610, fol. 42vd.[223] The close similarities with RIA D.iv.2 make it clear that the two manuscripts are related, and the Laud manuscript can

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[219] Meyer, *Death-Tales*, pp. 18–21.
[220] See Meyer, 'Mitteilungen' (*ZCP* 10), p. 42.
[221] *AC*, p. 18.
[222] Clancy has argued that this version focuses on Mess Gegra's brain as a relic, that the second poem, *A chloch thall*, attributed to Cináed in the Book of Leinster, was probably written at Monasterboice and that the brain was 'the prime relic of Monasterboice, at least in the tenth century' ('Lethal Weapon', pp. 108 and 113).
[223] See Meyer, 'Mitteilungen' (*ZCP* 13), p. 7.

also be assigned to version D. It is possible that this prose section, a summary of the tale of Conchobar's death as it is found in L and the Edinburgh manuscripts, formed the basis to which the poems attributed to Flann Mainistrech and Cináed úa hArtacáin were added to create the version which survives in RIA D.iv.2.

Table 1: The Manuscripts and Their Contents, Arranged According to Meyer's Versions

A (Meyer, pp. 4–11)			B (Meyer, pp. 12–15)	C (Meyer, pp. 14–17)	D (Meyer, pp. 18–21)	
Book of Leinster (TCD 1339; s. xii), pp. 123b–124b; L	**NLS, Adv. 72.1.40 (s. xvi), pp. 2–4**	**NLS, Adv. 72.1.5 (s. xv), 7v–8rb**	**RIA 967 (23 N 10; s. xvi), pp. 16–28; N**	***Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (RIA 476, 23 O 48; s. xv), fol. 105**	**RIA D.iv.2 (Stowe 992, c. 1300), fol. 52rb**	**Laud misc. 610 (s. xv), fol. 42b**
Detailed story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head.	Detailed story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head.	Detailed story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head.			Story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head.	Story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head.
Conchobar's druid informs him of the Crucifixion.	Conchobar's druids inform him of the	Conchobar is informed of the Crucifixion.[224]	Altus, envoy from Tiberius, informs	The Leinster poet and druid Bochrach informs Conchobar of the Crucifixion.	Bachrach, Leinster poet, tells Conchobar	Bachrach, Leinster poet, tells Conchobar

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[224] Due to the illegibility of parts of the manuscripts, it is not clear whether it is Conchobar's druids who inform him. Comparison with Adv. 72.1.40 suggests, however, that this is likely to be the case.

	Crucifixion. The Leinster poet Bachrach tells him about the Crucifixion.		Conchobar of the Crucifixion.	Altus, Tiberius's envoy, had also told Conchobar. An alternative version is given in which Cathbad, Conchobar's druid, tells the king about the Crucifixion.	about Crucifixion.	about Crucifixion.
Conchobar believes, and he recites the poem.	Conchobar believes, and breaks into a fury, destroying the surrounding forest.	Conchobar believes, and breaks into a fury, destroying the surrounding forest.	Conchobar believes, and he recites the poem.	On hearing the story from Altus, Conchobar believes. In the Cathbad version, Conchobar 'made an onslaught' (Meyer's translation) and recites what may be a variant first line of the poem.	Conchobar clears the plain at Mag Lamraige.	Conchobar clears the plain at Mag Lamraige.
Ending 2 versions: Conchobar recites poem when Bachrach, Leinster druid, tells him of the Crucifixion;	Ending Mess Gegra's brain bursts out of Conchobar's head, killing him. Conchobar is said to have gone to	Ending Mess Gegra's brain bursts out of Conchobar's head, killing him. Conchobar is said to have	Ending Mess Gegra's brain bursts out of Conchobar's head, causing his death.	Ending Mess Gegra's brain falls out because of Conchobar's onslaught and Conchobar dies. Story claims his death is case of blood baptism and that he is the first pagan to go to heaven.	Ending Conchobar dies while clearing the plain. 2 poems follow: 1. Tadg mac Céin and	Ending Conchobar dies while clearing the plain.

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Altus, envoy from Octavian, tells Conchobar of the Crucifixion.	heaven. Cenn Barraide episode. The brain is revealed to Buite and becomes his pillow, which ensures salvation for those who touch it when dying. Prophecy concerning supremacy of Leinster.	gone to heaven. Cenn Barraide episode. The brain is revealed to Buite and becomes his pillow, which ensures salvation for those who touch it when dying. Prophecy concerning supremacy of Leinster.	Story claims his death is a case of blood baptism and that he is the first pagan to go to heaven.	However, he has to wait for the Harrowing of Hell to get there.	Conchobar (mentions clearing of Lamraige) 2. Poem about Mess Gegra's brain. Alludes to the story of Cet, and mentions Lamraige as the place where Mess Gegra's brain fell out of Conchobar's head. Describes it as Buite's pillow.

Significant verbal parallels between manuscript versions are the strongest indication of a close textual relationship. However, in addition to this, one can also consider the different narrative elements that make up the story and examine which of them occur in the individual manuscripts and in what constellation. Such structural considerations can show differences between the manuscripts of one version more clearly, as well as highlighting connections between manuscripts of different versions. For example, neither of the Edinburgh manuscripts contains one distinctive feature of L, Conchobar's poem. However, this is contained in N. On the other hand, the Edinburgh manuscripts' description of Conchobar's frenzy is more in keeping with the story as it is preserved in N, Meyer's version B, and in the manuscripts of version D. Taking the various versions of the tale together, several narrative elements can be identified. A number of manuscript versions begin with the story of how Mess Gegra's brain came to be lodged in Conchobar's head. Another key element is the identity of the person who informs Conchobar of the Crucifixion. The conveyers of this news are either druids/poets who are named as Cathbad, Bachrach or remain anonymous, or a Roman consul who is depicted as an envoy either from Octavian or from Tiberius. Equally significant is Conchobar's reaction to the news of the Crucifixion. It consists either of his recital of the poem or of his entering into a frenzied rage, which can also involve clearing the plain of Mag Lamraige. These variations can be depicted in diagrammatical form as follows:

```
                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │ Conveyer of news │
                        └──────────────────┘
                       ╱                      ╲
                      ╱                        ╲
            ┌───────────┐              ┌──────────────┐
            │ druid/poet│              │ Roman consul │
            └───────────┘              └──────────────┘
            ╱     │     ╲              ╱            ╲
     ┌─────────┐  │  ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌────────────┐
     │ Cathbad │  │  │ Bachrach │ │ fr Tiberius│ │ fr Octavian│
     └─────────┘  │  └──────────┘ └───────────┘ └────────────┘
               ┌─────────┐
               │ unnamed │
               └─────────┘
```

```
                     ┌──────────┐
                     │ Reaction │
                     └──────────┘
                    ╱            ╲
              ┌────────┐      ┌────────┐
              │  poem  │      │ frenzy │
              └────────┘      └────────┘
              ╱        ╲      ╱          ╲
        ┌────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌───────────────────┐
        │ in full│ │ first line│ │ frenzy alone │ │ clearing of plain │
        └────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────────┘ └───────────────────┘
```
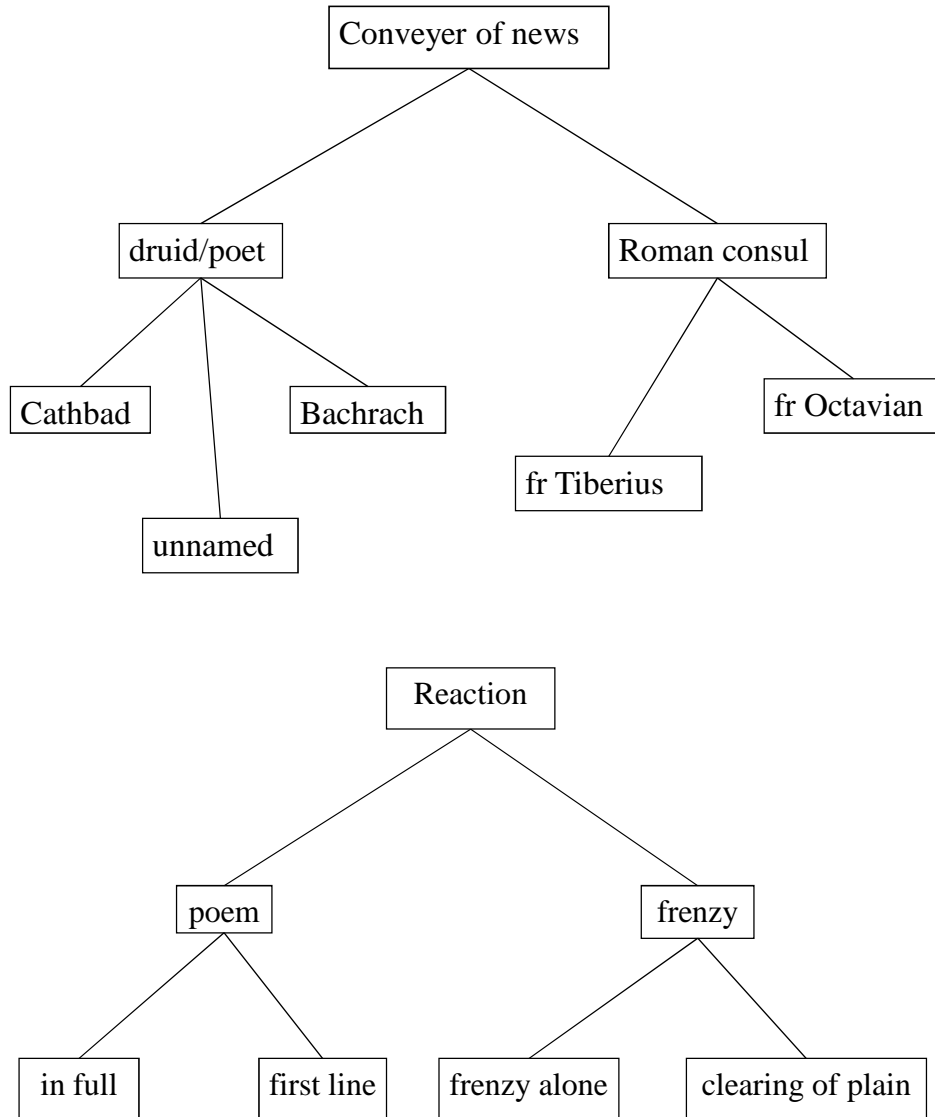
When considering how these three elements, the Mess Gegra story, the conveyer of news and Conchobar's reaction, are distributed across the different manuscript versions of the story, some similarities emerge. As Table 2 shows,[225] it is clear that RIA D.iv.2, Laud 610 and the Edinburgh manuscripts are structurally similar to one another. All three contain a version of the story of how Mess Gegra's brain came to be in Conchobar's head, and they agree on how Conchobar heard about the Crucifixion, although the Edinburgh manuscript also includes a conversation between Conchobar and a group of unnamed druids, as well as a description of how he reacted. There is, therefore, some justification in grouping these manuscripts together.

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[225] See below, pp. 74–5.

Table 2: Distribution of Narrative Elements, Arranged According to Meyer's Versions

Manuscripts	Story elements						
A (L)	**M** **D**	**P**(F)				**D**(B)[226]	**C** (O)
A (40)	**M** **D/P**(B)[227]	**F**(C)					
[A] (5)	**M** **D(?)**[228]	**F**(C)					
B	**C**(T)	**P**(F) **F**					
C	**D/P**(B)		**C**(T)	**D**(C) **P**(I) **F**			
D (S)	**M** **P**(B)	**F**(C)		poetry section begins (second poem ascribed to Cináed ua hArtacáin, d. 975, in Book of Leinster, p. 150a26; no details other than statement that Conchobar takes vengeance)			
[D] (610)	**M** **P**(B)	**F**(C)					

Order of elements as in story; spacing, however, does not reflect relative length of textual passages

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[226] The druid is identified as Bachrach after Conchobar has recited the poem, but not during the conversation between Conchobar and the druid.

[227] Conchobar initially talks to his druids, who are not named, but then the story states that Bachrach, a Leinster poet, told Conchobar about the Crucifixion.

[228] Unclear whether Conchobar is informed by his druids, as the text is only partially legible at this point. Comparison with Adv. 72.1.40 suggests that it is indeed his druid(s) who inform him.

Manuscripts

Square brackets are used with the two manuscripts not found in Meyer's edition.

A (L) – Version A, L

A (40) – Version A, NLS Adv. 72.1.40

[A] (5) – [Version A] NLS Adv. 72.1.5

B – Version B, N

C – Version C, Liber Flavus Fergusiorum (RIA 476, 23 O 48)

D – Version D, RIA D.iv.2 (Stowe 992)

[D] (610) – [Version D], Laud misc. 610

Pre-story

M Story of how Mess Gegra's brain became lodged in Conchobar's head

Conveyer of News

D/P	unnamed druid(s)/poet	**C$_{(O)}$**	Altus, Octavian's consul
D$_{(B)}$/P$_{(B)}$	Bachrach, Leinster druid/poet	**C$_{(T)}$**	Altus, Tiberius's consul
D$_{(C)}$/P$_{(C)}$	Cathbad, druid		

Conchobar's Reaction to News

P$_{(F)}$	poem, in full	**F**	frenzy
P$_{(I)}$	poem, initial line, but variant version	**F$_{(C)}$**	frenzy and clearing of plain

------ indicates division made by narrator's comment

Meyer's version C, the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* version of the tale, contains almost all the elements in their different variations: Bachrach, Altus and Cathbad appear as conveyers of the news, Conchobar breaks into a frenzy on hearing about the Crucifixion, and he also recites what may be a variant first line of the poem. The presence of all of these elements confirms the suggestion, made above, that Meyer's version C represents a compilation of the various traditions known to its redactor.

Turning to the versions in L and N, it is clear that they are structurally quite different from one another. N does not contain the story of Mess Gegra's brain, and in addition to this, in L, it is an unnamed druid who informs Conchobar of the Crucifixion as opposed to N's Roman envoy, Altus. In L Conchobar recites his poem in full on learning about Christ's death, and the text goes on to refer to Bachrach and Altus, Octavian's consul. N, on the other hand, only mentions Altus, who is said to have been sent by Tiberius. Conchobar reacts by reciting his poem in full and then goes into a battle-like frenzy.

It is striking that, although these two versions of the story differ in a number of respects, they are the only two to preserve in full the poem recited by Conchobar, especially given that there are reasons to think that this poem was not originally connected to the tale.[229] Interestingly, it is also only these two manuscripts - aside from the compilatory *Liber* version whose passage on Altus is clearly related to N in some way - that include Altus, although his emperor's name differs. The nature of the relationship between L and N is unclear, however. It may be that both drew on the poem independently of one another and that they are thus unrelated. However, as the poem does not allude to the story of Conchobar's death and as the emperor named in the two manuscripts is different, it seems likely that both L and N drew on an earlier version of *AC* which connected the poem with the tale.[230] Changes must, of course, have been introduced at various points in the transmission of the tale as a whole, and these explain, for example, that Bachrach and the druid are alternative conveyers of the news of the Crucifixion in the different versions. However, the fact that Conchobar's poem and Altus both appear in L and N, which otherwise do not share many features, is significant. It leaves us with a grouping of the manuscripts

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[229] Corthals, 'Early Irish *retoirics*', p. 22.
[230] This is also suggested by the inclusion of the variant first line of the poem in the *Liber* version.

in which L and N are distinct from the other manuscripts of the tale. As Conchobar's poem does not appear to have originally been part of his death-tale, one can argue that the Edinburgh manuscripts, the *Liber*, RIA D.iv.2 and Laud misc. 610 preserve a version of the story which is closer to the "original". The following is a putative outline of the development of the tale:[231]

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[231] Those manuscripts which are the only surviving representatives of their group are placed in brackets, as it is not clear how close they are to the original form of their particular version.
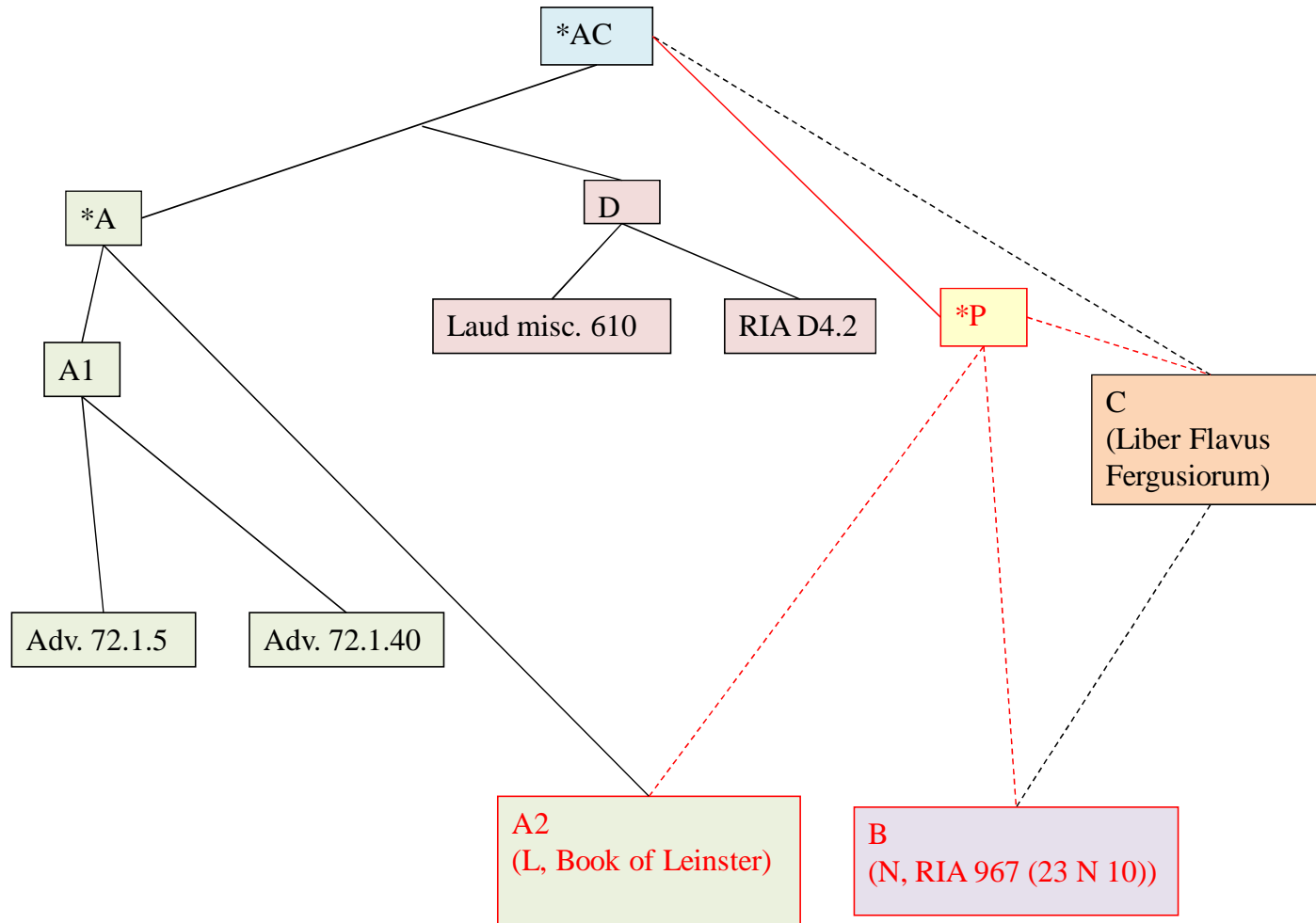
In sum, versions A and D stem from the same basic story. Version A then subdivides into A1, represented by two, slightly differing, manuscript witnesses, and A2, represented by the Book of Leinster. L belongs with version A, but is also related to version B, represented by manuscript N, although the nature of this relationship is not clear. I have suggested a common source, *P, most likely a version of *AC* which introduces the poem,[232] but mutual influence of the two versions on each other should not be excluded. Because it is unclear whether *P consists of just the poem or a version of *AC* which included the poem, *P's relationship to *AC is also unclear. The nature of the relationship between version C, as represented by the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*, and the other versions is not entirely clear. I have here suggested a relationship with *AC and *P, as well as some sort of relationship with B. It may, of course, be possible that there were other versions on which C also drew, but I have included as few hypothetical texts as possible.

CONCLUSION

The relationship of the different versions is significantly more complex than Meyer's four versions would suggest. Meyer's version A can be retained, but instead of dividing the versions of the story into four groups, one must probably distinguish between two main branches of the stemma, one of which further divides to give us Meyer's versions A and D, and one of which, *P, introduces the poem. In addition, the development of these versions involves relationships between manuscripts which, according to Meyer, belong to different groups. L and N are of particular interest, as their inclusion of Conchobar's *retoiric* sheds light on the variability of the tale and of the way in which Conchobar is presented.[233]

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[232] In the *Liber* account, the variant first line of the poem cited as part of a version of the tale which is close to A suggests that there was another version of *AC* which already included the poem. In addition, L refers to Altus after Conchobar's poem.

[233] These two versions and the poem will be discussed below, pp. 91–5, 109–17, 188–90 and 198.

PART II: THEMES

CHAPTER 4: PAST AND PRESENT IN THE TALES

My main focus, drawing on the corpus of material I have set out in the
Introduction and Part I, is how medieval Irish authors presented their
pre-Christian past. Much of the narrative literature is set in pre-Patrician Ireland,
and although it is arguable in some cases whether the representation of the
characters who inhabit that world is positive or negative,[234] it is clear from the
surviving texts that the Irish pre-Christian past was of great importance. Early
medieval Ireland is not unique in this regard,[235] but what differentiates it from
other European countries is the authority which emanated from the pre-Christian
Irish past rather than from the early Christian or classical period. This is reflected
clearly in tales set in this period which justify and explain later political claims, as
well as in genealogies which were deliberately traced back to pre-Christian
times.[236] The concern of medieval Irish authors to accommodate their
pre-Christian past within the framework of Christian, biblical history is evident in
the attempts to harmonise Irish pre-Christian history with Christian biblical
history. To this end, a typological approach was taken to Irish history and, in
addition, events of the pre-Christian Irish past were directly connected to events
of the bible.[237] The eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála Érenn* is an example of this
approach, bringing the ancestors of the Irish into direct contact with the biblical
Israelites and consciously paralleling the histories of the two peoples. The
pre-Christian Irish past and its relationship with the present is depicted in very
similar ways in the four tales under discussion here.

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[234] See, for example, Martin's argument that *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó* can be read as a Christian
satire ('The medieval Irish Stories'). Similarly, Radner considers the depiction of the Ulaid in the
Táin deliberately negative (see '"Fury"').
[235] See Goetz, 'Die Gegenwart', for a discussion of the importance of the past and its relation to
"present" concerns in continental medieval writings.
[236] For a discussion of these aspects of medieval Irish literature, see Ó Corráin, 'Historical Need'
and 'Legend as Critic', McCone, *Pagan Past*, and Ó Cuív, 'Literary Creation'.
[237] See McCone, *Pagan Past*.

The so-called Pseudo-historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már* makes the following statement regarding the supposed incorporation of pre-Christian elements within Christian medieval Irish law:

> Ar in Spirut 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-uasalaithre i recht petarlaice; ar rosiacht recht aicnid már nád roacht recht litre. Ina bretha fíraicnid trá didiu ro labrastar in Spirut Naem tre ginu brethemon 7 filed fíréon fer nÉrenn ó congbad in insi-seo co cretem anall, dosairfen Dubthach uili do Pátraic. Ní didiu nád tudchaid fri bréthir nDé i recht litre 7 núfiadnaise 7 fri cuibse na crésion, conairged i n-ord brethemnachta la Pátraic 7 ecailsi 7 flaithi Érenn do neoch.[238]

The prologue has been dated to the eighth century by McCone[239] and to the eighth or ninth century by Carey.[240] *Comthoth Lóegaire*, found in *Lebor na hUidre*, is a version of the same story,[241] and the law text *Córus Béscnai*, also eighth-century, contains a similar account to the Pseudo-historical Prologue.[242] The reference to a law of nature in the Pseudo-historical Prologue and related texts has been discussed by Carey and McCone,[243] but regardless of the precise meanings of *recht aicnid* and *recht litre*, the passage quoted above explicitly equates pre-Christian Irish individuals, especially judges and poets, with Old-Testament

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[238] Pseudo-historical Prologue §7 (ed. and trans. Carey, pp. 12 (text) and 18–19 (translation)); '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; for the law of nature reached many things which the law of scripture did not reach. As for the judgments of true nature which the Holy Spirit uttered through the mouths of the righteous judges and poets of the men of Ireland, from the time when this island was settled until the coming of the faith: Dubthach revealed them all to Patrick. Whatever did not go against God's word in the law of scripture and the New Testament, or against the consciences of the faithful, was fixed in the system of judgement by Patrick and the church and the princes of Ireland severally'.

[239] See McCone, 'Dubthach maccu Lugair', pp. 18–28 for a detailed discussion of the text's date. McCone concludes that it is from the eighth century, a view restated in *Pagan Past*, p. 96.

[240] 'An Edition', p. 10. He adds that 'a few [linguistic] features incline me to suspect that it was written in the second half of this period' ('An Edition', p. 10).

[241] This is edited in *LU*, 9732–9820, and by Stokes, with translation, in *Tripartite Life* II, 562–7. Other manuscripts containing versions of the story are TCD H.3.18 and H.3.17, and London, British Library, Harley 432.

[242] See McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 92.

[243] Carey, 'The Two Laws'; McCone, 'Dubthach maccu Lugair' and *Pagan Past*, especially pp. 92–102.

prophets and patriarchs, thus perhaps suggesting that the pre-Christian period as a whole could be considered as analogous to the Old-Testament period of the bible. The similarities between pre-Christian past and Old Testament in turn suggest that it was possible to regard the Christian period as equivalent to the New Testament and to consider the relationship between both "ages" in the light of these similarities.

As discussed in chapter 1,[244] the opening scene of *FA* is based on the Old-Testament story of Jacob's Ladder. The inclusion of this passage is likely to be due to its liturgical significance as part of the mass for the consecration of a church, but at the same time, it awakens Old-Testament associations. As is the case in *AE*, the text as a whole makes no reference to events outside Ireland and we find ourselves firmly in pre-Christian heroic Ireland. The liturgical parallels may be taken as an indication that we should consider this period equivalent to the Old Testament, and Art, in some ways, acts like a prophet foretelling, amongst other things, the coming of Christianity. Art's prophecy concerns the coming of Christianity, and in some ways his poem moves back and forth between different times, addressing an imaginary audience within the story and the tale's actual audience.[245] It is evident that *FA* cannot be divided into clearly pre-Christian and Christian sections in the same way as *AE* can. In *FA*, the Christian period exists in the tale in so far as it is the subject of Art's prophecy and the world in which the tale's audience lives. The text, therefore, has a much more "Old-Testament" setting than any of the other tales under consideration. At the same time, it is very similar to *AE* in that the relationship between pre-Christian and Christian periods is one of prophecy and fulfilment. In the same way that Old-Testament passages were taken by Christian exegetes to refer to the coming of Christianity, Art's prophecy in the tale concerns a future, Christian time.

FA, through its reference to places and perhaps landscape features familiar to its audience, only implicitly alludes to the Christian period in which it was created, but *AE* expresses the notion of a two-fold division of Irish history, analogous to the division of the bible much more strongly. Of the four tales, it is the one which most clearly models the Irish past on the biblical division into Old

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[244] See above, pp. 23–4.
[245] On the different, shifting time levels and the possibility that Art's poem addresses the tale's medieval audience directly, see above, pp. 23 and 31–2, and below, pp. 126 and 128–9.

and New Testament, but the other tales, too, reflect this idea to some extent. This is despite the fact that other sources, such as chronicles and synchronisms, show that medieval Irish authors were aware of when the events described in these tales took place in relation to events occurring outside Ireland.[246] The lack of any kind of outside context draws attention away from the fact that other parts of the world were already Christian at the time, and it makes a clearer distinction between pre-Christian and Christian periods possible.

In *AE* the flooding of Loch nEchach and Lí Ban's baptism are given particular prominence. Given that flood and baptism are connected in the bible and patristic sources,[247] it can be argued that both should be read as typologically related in *AE* too.[248] This, in turn, would suggest that that the relationship between the two prose sections of the narrative corresponds to the relationship between Old and New Testament. The flood in *AE* occurs in pre-Christian Ireland in the same way that Noah's flood also occurred in the pre-Christian era, whereas baptism, as one of the most important Christian sacraments, could obviously only be granted after the arrival of Christianity. The flood story might, therefore, represent "Old-Testament" Ireland, whereas Lí Ban's baptism in a by then Christian Ireland relates to the New Testament.

The links of the flood narrative with the Old-Testament story of Noah are further strengthened by the inclusion in the tale of verses by Curnán 'óinmit', which act as a warning to Eochaid and his family.[249] As Noah was warned about the flood,[250] so Eochaid and his family are warned, but the prophecy goes unheeded or is not understood. Curnán's epithet, *óinmit* ('fool'), denotes a person who despite being a fool can 'possess considerable shrewdness and intuition or

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[246] Thus, the flooding of Loch nEchach and Loch Rí is referred to in the Synchronisms of Flann Mainistrech, who died in 1056, and in the Annals of Inisfallen, as well as in the fragment of the Annals of Tigernach in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502, which all date the event to the reign of the Emperor Nero. For the Synchronisms of Flann, see Mac Carthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (p. 306 for the eruption of Loch nEchach and Loch Rí); for the reference in the Annals of Innisfallen, see AI, p. 33, § 226; and for the reference in the fragmentary Annals of Tigernach see ATig I, 43.
[247] See I Peter III.20 for the biblical passage which supported the connection.
[248] Much of the following discussion of the typological relationship between baptism and the flood and its significance for *AE* is taken in abbreviated form from Imhoff, 'Themes', pp. 120–3.
[249] See ll. 2962–5. For a possible textual problem with the first verse, see Imhoff 'Themes', p. 121, n. 66.
[250] See Gen. VI.13–21.

even occasionally inspiration'.[251] Curnán, 'the fool', in fact seems divinely inspired, foretelling the disaster and Lí Ban's survival. The narrator draws attention to the fact that Curnán's prediction did indeed come true, illustrating again the relationship between prophecy and fulfilment as expressed in the relationship between flood and baptism.[252]

Because the flood is seen as prefiguring baptism, a medieval audience familiar with biblical typology may well have regarded the flood as a promise of redemption to come. Indeed, in *AE*, history is seen as a progression towards the ultimate goal of salvation. As in the bible, the flood is caused by human transgression: in this case, Ebliu's illicit love for Eochaid and their subsequent elopement. Their relationship, both adulterous and incestuous, would in any case have been regarded as sinful, but in addition, this story contains echoes of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden and brings to mind the role of concupiscence in original sin as set out, for example, by Augustine.[253] Eochaid is forced to leave his father's kingdom, which is in itself symbolic, and once he has done so, he is doomed to die. Essentially, Eochaid's fate is the result of Ebliu's behaviour. This is similar to Eve's contravention of God's commandment, which led to the expulsion from Eden, the mortality of man and the legacy of original sin. The unreliability of the unnamed woman who is supposed to guard the well further underlines the role of women in the Fall of Man.

However, as already mentioned, the flood carries a promise of redemption, and baptism is an important part of this process. In fact, Lí Ban, who survives through the ages to be baptised and to die as a saint, bears witness to the different stages of man's progression towards the ultimate goal of salvation and eternal life: the Old-Testament or pre-Christian period and the Fall of Man, the coming of

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[251] *DIL* 122.33–5. As pointed out by Clancy, 'Fools', p. 113, *óinmit* also appears to be used in this sense with reference to Mac Da Cherda, best known from *Imthechta na dá nÓinbhidhe* (see O'Keefe, 'Mac Dá Cherda'). The tale as a whole has not been edited; the manuscripts in which it is found include Dublin, RIA 236 (B.iv.1), pp. 149a–178a (s. xvii); Dublin, RIA 726 (23 C 19), pp. 89–157 (s. xix); and Dublin, RIA 538 (D.iv.1) (s. xiv/xv), 26va–35r.

[252] 'Fir on dosom sin' (l. 2966; 'Indeed, that was true for him').

[253] See McMahon, 'Anselm', p. 83. McMahon quotes Augustine, *De peccatorum* I.ix.10. The passage in Augustine reads 'ille, in quo omnes moriuntur, praeter quod eis qui praeceptum domini uoluntate transgrediuntur imitationis exemplum est, occulta etiam tabe carnalis concupiscentiae suae tabificauit in se omnes de sua stirpe uenturos' (ed. Urba and Zycha, p. 11; 'He, in whom all die, apart from being a model to be followed by those who out of their own free will transgress the Lord's command, has furthermore through hidden decay of his carnal concupiscence wasted in himself all who were to come of his stock').

Christianity, which is seen as a new era and, finally, a Christian's new life after death. In this way, Lí Ban brings together the pre-Christian past and the present, and this underlines the continuity of history implied in the pattern of promise and fulfilment exhibited in the story.

The metrical section in *AE* connects the pre-Christian past with the Christian period in terms of content,[254] as well as structurally. It is introduced and concluded by short passages forming a chiastic pattern. The first passage refers to Lí Ban's capture by Béoán, which, in the narrative, comes after she has recited the poem: 'Fir on dosom sin ar ro boi Li Ban tri chet bliadna ar fut in mara 7 a orci i rricht dobran ina díaid cach conair no theiged can scarad fria eteir do gréss. Conid si fein ro innis a imthechta do Béoan mac Inli dia ragaib hí ina línaib conid and sin ro chansi inna briatra sís iarom'.[255] The second passage refers to the flood, an event which comes before Lí Ban's poem: 'Iss ed sin dano is mó ro scail Ultu fo Érind tomaidb Locha Echach. fo thír'.[256] In this way the section set in pre-Christian Ireland and that set in early Christian Ireland are connected, and this underlines the linking function of the poetry. By bringing the Old- and New-Testament parts of the story together in this way, the author avoids creating a break between the two ages and thus emphasises the sense of continuity from one to the other, despite the apparently non-chronological sequence of events. Lack of a strict chronological sequence actually helps the past and the present to meet at the centre of the symmetrically structured narrative, highlighting the relationship of prophecy and fulfilment, which is central to biblical typology.

In both *AE* and *FA*, the parallels with the biblical narrative suggest that Irish history is deliberately made to reflect biblical history. In addition to its liturgical associations, *FA*'s allusion to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 and the statements following it concerning prophecy also create the Old-Testament "tone" of the tale. The statement concerning Art's receiving of the Holy Spirit and the

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[254] For more details, see Imhoff, 'Themes', p. 125.

[255] ll. 2966–70; 'That was true for him for Lí Ban wandered throughout the sea for three hundred years and her lapdog always following her in the shape of an otter wherever she went without ever parting from her. And it was she herself who told her wanderings to Béoán mac Inli when he caught her in his net, so that it was then that she recited the words below'.

[256] ll. 3059–60; 'That which most scattered the Ulaid throughout Ireland was the eruption of Loch nEchach throughout the land'.

grace of prophecy[257] can be related to the explanation in II Peter I.20–1 that Old-Testament prophets prophesied through the grace of God: 'Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'. Reading the beginning of *FA* against this passage strengthens the Old-Testament parallels of *FA*'s opening scene and suggests similarities between Art and Old-Testament prophets.

In *AE*, too, it is a specific Old-Testament parallel, that of Noah's flood, which most strongly suggests a view of the pre-Christian Irish past as equivalent to the Old Testament. This author of the tale, however, appears to have worked out this historical scheme in more detail, suggesting that all of Irish history reflected biblical history. This is supported by the special relationship between God and the Irish, which is implicit in the parallels between *AE* and the story of Noah. Genesis 9 ends with God saying to Noah: '"This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on earth"'.[258] 'All flesh' could be understood to include the Irish, and the dichotomous structure of *AE*, which is modelled on the bible and which, unlike *FA*, includes an explicitly Christian section, suggests that the author regarded the Irish as being included in this covenant and that God's promise had been extended to them.

In this way, Ireland is assigned a place within salvation history, an aspect which is much more strongly marked in *AE* than in *FA*. In *AE*, this idea appears to be continued through the entire tale. Taken in conjunction with the fact that Béoán has just returned from Rome, the seat of Peter the fisherman, Béoán's description as 'iascairi Comgaill'[259] is significant because it suggests that the author was keen to stress links with Rome and the universal church. As with the covenant parallel, the author is placing Ireland firmly within a Christian context and showing that the Irish are part of God's history. This fits in well with other writings of the time, such as *Lebor Gabála*,[260] and it shows that the author of *AE* was part of the

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[257] 'Ro línad o rath in Spiruta Naím fó chetóir. 7 tic rath fastini fair. 7 fallsigthir dó cach ní no biad dó iar tain' (ll. 9826–8; 'he was immediately filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. And the grace of prophecy came upon him').
[258] Gen. IX.17.
[259] l. 3072; 'Comgall's fisherman'.
[260] According to Scowcroft, the purpose of *Lebor Gabála* was 'to find a place for Ireland in the biblical history of the world, for her inhabitants among the descendents of Noah' ('*Leabhar Gabhála* – part II', pp. 13–4).

literary culture within which he was writing, a fact which the sources and analogues of the tale also demonstrate.[261] The reference to Gregory should be viewed in a similar way. Unlike in *FA* or the pre-Christian section of *AE*, which do not refer to characters or events outside Ireland at all, the Christian part of *AE*'s narrative makes reference to Rome and Gregory.[262] Although the tale does not tell us who *Grigar* is, the reference to Rome and the date of Comgall, whose death is recorded in AU 602,[263] makes it clear that the Gregory in question must be Pope Gregory I, or "the Great". The fact that the Christian section makes reference to such a prominent Pope, whereas the pre-Christian section focuses exclusively on Irish events, draws attention to the fact that with the arrival of Christianity, Ireland, too, has officially become one of the Christian nations of Europe. In this way the idea that Ireland's history was part of one universal history is confirmed and illustrated, and this abstract idea is made concrete in the relations between an Irish churchman and a great Pope.

Both *FA* and *AE*, then, appear to present the pre-Christian past in the context of a universally applicable history, which is created by God and in which man progresses from the Fall to Judgment. As reflections of the same history, Irish pre-Christian and Christian times could be taken naturally to have the same relationship to one another as the biblical pre-Christian and Christian periods. In *AE* the idea is more fully worked out and the tale includes the Christian period. The author's primary concern appears to have been to show how Irish history conformed to the universal salvation history, and the one reference to external events, which is to Gregory, is not simply a way of setting events in a wider historical context. Instead it confirms Ireland's membership in the community of Christian peoples and thus continues the theme introduced through the parallels with the flood in the pre-Christian section of *AE*.

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[261] For a survey of these, see Imhoff, 'Themes', pp. 110–18.

[262] 'Ro laí Comgall úaid Beoán mac Indli o Thig Da Beóc co Roim do accallaim Grigair for cend uird 7 riagla' (ll. 3094–5; 'Comgal sent Béoán mac Indli from Tech Dabeoc out to Rome to talk to Gregory about good order and monastic rule').

[263] The *Chronicon Scotorum* also dates his death to 602, but the dates given in the Annals of Innisfallen (605) and the Annals of the Four Masters (*s. a.* 600) differ slightly.

Unlike in *AE* and *FA*, the temporal relationship of the events of *AC* and *DSTT* to what is happening elsewhere in the world is clearly indicated by reference to Christ's Crucifixion, and it is clear that the tales are set at or after the time of Christ's death. Nevertheless, it can be argued that *DSTT* makes some use of the technique of foreshadowing and fulfilment to link pre-Christian and Christian sections in a similar way to *AE*, although for a quite different purpose. In addition, the L version of *AC* divides its narrative much more clearly into a pre-Christian and a "Christian" section than the other versions.

"Christian" and "Pre-Christian" Sections in De Suidigud Tellaig Temra

It has been argued in chapter 2 that the assemblies of Conaing Bececlach and of Diarmait mac Cerbaill mirror each other and that there are indications in the tale that the narrative's main character, Fintan mac Bóchra, has fulfilled his purpose by transmitting to Diarmait and his assembly the knowledge which he received from Trefuilngid Treochair during Conaing's assembly.[264] Diarmait's time, the main time of the narrative, is clearly Christian,[265] and the fact that the first person to be sent for in order to resolve the dispute is Flann Febla, *comarba Pátraig*,[266] is a clear indication of this. Conaing's assembly, on the other hand, takes place at a time when Ireland was still pre-Christian.[267] Trefuilngid's explanation of his

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[264] See above, pp. 54–9.

[265] Diarmait's reign is dated to the sixth century in the annals, as entries in the Annals of Ulster, the Annals of Tigernach, the Annals of Inisfallen, the Annals of the Four Masters, the *Chronicon Scotorum* and the Cottonian Annals show (the Cottonian Annals are edited in Freeman, 'The Annals').

[266] *DSTT*, pp. 126–7; 'successor of Patrick'.

[267] Conaing appears in the genealogies in Rawlinson B 502 (O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum*, pp. 117–8), the Book of Leinster (*LL*, 2479–2493), and Laud Misc. 610 (Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies', p. 337), as well as in *Cóir Anmann* (Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann* I, 91 and II, 41). Awareness of Diarmait's and Conaing's different faiths, and thus the different periods in which they lived, is indicated by Conaing's inclusion in a list of kings who did not believe in Christ. This is contained in the Rawlinson B 502 genealogies (O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum*, pp. 123–4; for Conaing, see p. 123). It is followed by a list of the names of Christian kings, which includes Diarmait's name (O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum*, pp. 124–5: 124). Through *DSTT*'s setting of Conaing's assembly on the day of the Crucifixion, the text appears to make him a contemporary of Christ. The synchronisms in Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 610, on the other hand, date his reign to the time of Artaxerxes I (Meyer, 'The Laud Synchronisms', p. 476). The Annals of the Four

arrival dates the assembly to the very day of the Crucifixion, a pivotal day in the history of man's salvation. Trefuilngid's appearance therefore allows the Irish around Conaing[268] to share in the central event of Christianity as it happened, and this surely makes them some of the first to hear of the event. In terms of understanding the Crucifixion, it is almost as if they had witnessed the event directly and come to a similar realisation as the onlookers in Jerusalem in the three synoptic gospels.[269] The Irish, although not nominally Christian, are thus given special importance.

This special status of the Irish is entirely in keeping with the pseudo-historical traditions linking the Irish to the Israelites, which are found in *DSTT* and which are expressed in most detail in *Lebor Gabála*. Although the Irish do not become Christian immediately, Trefuilngid's appearance and the news of the Crucifixion might be taken as an indication of Ireland's future adoption of Christianity. From his comments to Diarmait's assembly many years later it is clear that Fintan, at least, believes in God, presumably as a result of the meeting with Trefuilngid. The events of Diarmait's assembly can thus be seen as more than a Christian version of Conaing's pre-Christian meeting with the men of Ireland. Instead, Diarmait's assembly marks the fulfilment of what was promised at Conaing's assembly. Not only is Ireland clearly Christian at this point, it is at Diarmait's assembly that the divine knowledge passed on by Trefuilngid is accepted as fully valid for Ireland. Diarmait's assembly thus embodies Ireland's movement to governance and a legal system based on the bible.

Fintan's encounter with Trefuilngid is modelled on Moses's reception of

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Master assign him to a period between AM 4357 and AM 4388, whereas the coming of Christ follows the entry for AM 5194.

[268] The texts describes Conaing's assembly as an assembly of the men of all of Ireland, with Conaing as king of Ireland: 'Bámar-ni feachtus i mmórdáil fer nÉreand sund im Chonaing Begeclach im ríg nErend' (*DSTT*, pp. 138–9; 'Once we were holding a great assembly of the men of Ireland around Conaing Bec-eclach, King of Ireland').

[269] After the signs that follow Jesus's death, the centurion who watches over Jesus's Crucifixion exclaims that the latter is the son of God (Matt. XXVII.54 and Mark XV.39). Interestingly, in the Gospel of Luke, the centurion's words are 'Certainly this man was innocent!' (Luke XXIII.47) and the onlookers go home greatly distressed, but it is not explicitly said that they concluded that Jesus was the son of God. It might be argued that this is closest to *DSTT*, in which Jesus is not described as the son of God, but merely said to have been crucified. The sun has not shone on the people who crucified him, the implication being that the deed was unjust: 'Fer imrinodair .i. rocrochad le hIúdaidib indiu, rochechaing iarum tairsiu taréis in gníma, 7 ní rothaitne friu' (pp. 140–1; 'A man who has been tortured – that is, who has been crucified by Jews today; for it [the sun] stepped past them after that deed, and has not shone upon them').

the Ten Commandments from God.[270] *DSTT* combines both Old- and New-Testament elements by bringing together the Crucifixion, and thus the beginning of the new law of Christianity, and Fintan's Old-Testament style reception of the "law" from Trefuilngid. A similar effect is achieved by the references to Enoch and Elijah as well as Patrick, Brigit and communion in Fintan's death-scene. In this way, *DSTT* goes beyond simply equating the pre-Christian Irish past with the Old-Testament period.

Ignorance and Enlightenment in Aided Chonchobair

Turning to *AC*, one finds a different emphasis, despite some basic similarities. In the same way that the Irish under Conaing learn of Christianity through the news of the Crucifixion, Conchobar also learns about the new religion and, in the L version of the tale, comes to understand its meaning.[271] The poem which the Ulster king recites in this version and in N appears to have been originally separate from the tale of the king's death,[272] but it can be argued that the poem is connected to some of the themes which appear at the beginning of the tale during the Ulster champions' contest and later during the battle in which Conchobar is wounded. I would argue that the main part of the prose section, up to Conchobar's forced immobility, is intended to reflect, at least to some extent, the moral ills of a society which has not yet received enlightenment through the teaching of Christianity. The passage in which Conchobar hears about the Crucifixion represents a turning point, and his poem expresses his newly-found understanding, which comes with the news of Christ's death. This, if one were to divide the text, could be understood as the "Christian" section.

It is clear that in L the story of Mess Gegra's brain is more than just background to the death of Conchobar and that it is more relevant and thematically connected than it may at first seem. The tale opens with the Ulstermen arguing over who is the better warrior, and it is evident that military

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[270] See below, pp. 99–102.
[271] On the importance of the poem in L and the different interpretations of it in L and N, see below, pp. 116–17 and 188–90.
[272] See Corthals, 'Early Irish *retoirics*', p. 22.

prowess and valour are highly prized qualities. It is through these that Conchobar wishes at the beginning of his poem that he could have saved Christ.[273] It is, however, also clear that Christ could not and should not have been saved in such a way.[274] The Ulster warriors are clearly proud of their achievements and their abilities, but vanity and pride also appear to be presented as negative qualities to the audience, as it is these that lead to Conchobar's downfall.[275] Conchobar's pride in his warriorship is so great that he assumes at the beginning of the poem that he could have prevented the Crucifixion, an event with a firm place in God's design, and this in itself might be considered an arrogant thought. In the poem, however, the futility of pride appears to be acknowledged in the line 'Ron-ort innar menman méd, nad Ríg roachtamar'.[276] The society of which Conchobar and his warriors are members is presented as proud and bellicose, neither of which characteristics are particularly positive in a medieval Christian context and both of which are presented as useless in the poem which Conchobar recites after his "enlightenment". Clancy's analysis of the tale lends support to the idea that pride and vanity are important themes in the tale. He argues convincingly that Conchobar's seven-year period of inactivity should be considered penance for his sin of vainglory, a 'period of purgation', and an act of humility as prescribed in the Penitential of Cummian.[277]

However, it is not only the Ulster warriors who are portrayed rather negatively. Cet mac Mágach comes away less well than the Ulaid if we accept another, more tentative connection which might be made between the prose and the poem. If we accept the biblical parallels with the story of Jesus's betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane suggested by Corthals,[278] then the circumstances of Conchobar's injury by Cet *might* be connected to Jesus's betrayal through Judas. What appear to be friendly gestures, a kiss in the gospel

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[273] See the opening stanza of the poem: 'Ba haprainn nan dáil cu Artrig n-arnac:/ atum béo-ir hi richt chroadchurad –cichtis' ('Alas that I did not get to meet the High-King: mankind would have seen me in the shape of a harsh warrior'); all references to this poem and its translations are to Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', pp. 46–7.

[274] See the analysis of the poem below, pp. 109–15.

[275] Conchobar is killed when he steps aside from the battle after the Connachtwomen, acting on Cet's instructions, have requested to see him because he is so beautiful (see *AC*, pp. 6–7).

[276] 'We have been slain in our pride of mind, while we didn't reach the king'.

[277] Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon', p. 99.

[278] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 52. These parallels are extended further in my analysis of the poem (see below, pp. 113–14).

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account and compliments from the women in *AC*, are in fact intended to make the killing of the person at whom these gestures are directed possible. Cet mac Mágach is thus portrayed as parallel to Judas, an entirely unflattering comparison.

On the whole, then, the L version of *AC* depicts the pre-Christian Ulaid as a society in need of moral reformation. Conchobar needs the revelation of the Crucifixion to find new moral understanding and healing, to which he refers in his final stanza, but the understanding which he achieves indicates that he, although pre-Christian, is considered capable of learning and not irredeemable. Cet, on the other hand, through the parallels to Judas, appears to embody a worse kind of pre-Christian.[279]

In some ways, the distinction in judgment between the Ulaid and Cet is similar to that made in *A chloch thall*, the poem preserved in the Stowe version of the tale (RIA D. iv. 2) and attributed to Cináed ua hArtacáin in the Book of Leinster,[280] but the L version is more optimistic regarding pre-Christian capacity for understanding and faith. With regard to the tale's structure and the poem's place in L, which has been criticised by Corthals and Clancy,[281] it has to be said that although the poem may not be as well integrated structurally into the narrative of L as it is into N, it is not out of place thematically. The lack of any mention of anger on Conchobar's part at the end of the tale is in line with the ideas expressed in the poem, and as shown here, there are more specific connections between the poem and the text of the prose.

THE NEW-TESTAMENT SETTING OF *AIDED CHONCHOBAIR* IN N

The N version of *AC* presents a very different picture. This version of the tale goes beyond simply referring to Christ's Crucifixion. Instead, a New-Testament-like setting is created in a way that is not paralleled in the other tales discussed here. The mention of Tiberius at the beginning of the tale indicates that N is set around the time of the death of Jesus, although there is no suggestion

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[279] See Christ's statement regarding the one who will betray him (Matt. XXVI.24, Mark XIV.21 and Luke XXII.22).
[280] See below, pp. 138–45, for a discussion of this poem.
[281] See Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 52, and Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon', pp. 90–1.

that the events take place on the day of the Crucifixion: 'Altus immorro is he dothathaiged co cloemclodaib sed o Tibir mac Augaist ri[g] Roman co Conchobar mac Nesa. Ar ba cuma batar rechtairea rig Roman in n-aimsir sin for medon in uetha 7 for indsip fuinid 7 turcbalai, co mba comderb insin mbit[h] nach sgel n-airdirc forcumcad ann'.[282]

Conchobar's relationship with Rome offers a more rational explanation of how the Irish king was able to hear about the Crucifixion, and there is no need to resort to the interpretation of signs such as the earthquake, as is done in other versions of the tale. The Roman setting is, however, also similar to the gospel accounts, which naturally contain references to Roman rule in Jesus's lifetime. The Gospel of Luke, like *AC*, uses Roman emperors to set the scene historically and to date events. The account of the nativity, for example, opens with the words 'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world',[283] and the beginning of the account of John the Baptist mentions Tiberius:

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.[284]

N is thus using the same historical framework as the gospel accounts, in particular the Gospel of Luke. This is not necessarily surprising, given the story's time setting, but it also has a particular effect. Rather than portraying Conchobar as a pagan king in a society which, however receptive to enlightened ideas it might be, is still pre-Christian, the N version of *AC* sets Ireland squarely within a Christian and European context. It does so in imitation of the gospel narrative, precluding an interpretation of the pre-Christian Irish past as an Old-Testament period.

After the opening paragraph, the tale tells us that Altus was a Christian and that he told Conchobar about Christ and his Crucifixion. The wording of this

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[282] *AC*, pp. 12–13; 'Altus, however, used to visit Conchobar mac Nessa with exchanges of treasures from Tiberius, the son of Augustus the Roman. For at that time stewards of the King of the Romans were equally over the centre of the world and over the islands of the west and east, so that every famous story that would happen there was equally known in the world'.
[283] Luke II.1.
[284] Luke III.1–2.

paragraph is interesting: 'Ar atfet do Altus ba he Crist dorosat nem 7 talmain 7 is airi arfoit colainn ar tathcreicc in cineda doenai'.[285] This sentence reads very much like part of a creed, and the statement that Christ assumed flesh is reminiscent of the Nicene Creed: 'Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis. Et **incarnatus** est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est'. The creation of heaven and earth are attributed to God in the Nicene Creed, but in the section on Jesus, he, as of the same essence as God, appears also as the creator of all things: 'Et [credo] in unum Dominum Iesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula. Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri; **per quem omnia facta sunt**'. Altus then goes on to tell Conchobar about the Crucifixion and is thus still following the sequence of the Nicene Creed: 'Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est'.[286] The use of the creed as a model in Altus's account of the Crucifixion may have been natural for a medieval author, but it also underlines the orthodoxy of the account. It might be argued that the Roman setting has the same effect, both through its associations with the gospel and through Rome's importance in a Christian medieval context. Unlike the other versions of the tale, N makes no mention of the idea that Conchobar was born on the same day as Christ, and there is nothing in the story that detracts from the orthodoxy and succinctness of the narrative.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the relationship between past and present in *AE*, *FA*, *DSTT* and *AC* shows that all four are influenced strongly by the bible. They do, however, fall into two groups. *AE* and *FA* are more strongly influenced by the

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[285] *AC*, pp. 12–13; 'For Altus told him that it was Christ who had made Heaven and earth, and that to redeem mankind He had assumed flesh'.

[286] By contrast, the Apostles' Creed mentions Christ's birth and does not use the word *incarnatus*. It does not add the explanatory section on why Christ became man and the sequence concerning Christ's death is suffering-crucifixion-death-burial: 'Et [credo] in Iesum Christum, Filium eius unicum, Dominum nostrum, qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine, passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus'.

typological equation of the pre-Christian past with the Old Testament and hardly mention events outside Ireland. *DSTT* and *AC*, on the other hand, refer directly to Christ's Crucifixion. The N version of *AC* is unique in this group in presenting its entire setting in New-Testament terms. The presentation of the past in this way, influenced so strongly by the bible, is related to the portrayal of the main, pre-Christian characters as closely parallel to important biblical and Christian figures, as the next chapter will show.

CHAPTER 5: PARALLELS WITH BIBLICAL AND CHRISTIAN CHARACTERS

The clear relationship between the Irish past and biblical events that has been discussed in the previous chapter leads on to another important topic, namely the distinct parallels between characters in the tales and biblical and Christian "characters", including Christ and God. This is nothing unusual in medieval literature from Ireland. The parallels between Lóegaire and Nebuchadnezzar as well as Herod in Muirchú's account of Patrick's encounter with the king have been highlighted by McCone.[287] In the tale *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind*, the pre-Christian hero Cú Chulainn is modelled on the risen Christ and tries to help Patrick convert Lóegaire, who is reminiscent of Christ's disciple Thomas. Likewise, Cú Chulainn, in a phantom chariot, appears to fifty women after his death in the earlier version of *Aided Chon Culainn*. He recites a poem prophesying the coming of Christ and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland,[288] thus again paralleling the risen Christ, especially given the fact that Cú Chulainn appears only to a select group of women, albeit women with whom he does not have a friendly relationship.[289] It is thus apparent that the similarities between characters in the tales under discussion in this dissertation and biblical characters or even God and Christ are by no means unusual.

In addition to these literary parallels, it is clear that Irish authors believed that characters such as Cú Chulainn and Conchobar had lived at around the same time as Christ. Their lifetimes are aligned with the birth and death of Christ in more "literary" texts, such as *Compert Chonchobair* and *AC*. The annals, too, reflect this idea,[290] although annals could draw on secular literature.[291] There

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[287] The comparison with Nebuchadnezzar is explicit in the text itself (see Muirchú, *Vita Patricii* I.xv.2, ed. and trans. Bieler, p. 84). For McCone's discussion, see *Pagan Past*, pp. 33–4.

[288] See *LL*, 14174–215, for an edition and Tymoczko, *Two Death Tales*, pp. 67–72, for a translation of the passage.

[289] 'Ro damastar im anim Con Culaind co tarfád don .l. rígan ro saraigestar a lla re tuidecht don chath' (*LL*, 14174–5; 'CuChulainn's spirit, however, allowed itself to appear to the fifty queens whom he had shamed the day he went to battle', trans. Tymoczko, *Two Death Tales*, p. 67).

[290] For example, the Annals of Tigernach (ATig I, 37–9) and the Annals of Inisfallen (ed. Mac Airt, p. 31) place the deaths of Conchobar and Cú Chulainn amongst references to the life of Christ and other associated characters, such as Herod. Conchobar's death, however, precedes that of Christ. For the date of these entries, see Kelleher, 'The Táin'. For criticism of Kelleher's dating,

appears to have been a desire to relate the two great figures of the Irish pre-Christian past with the hero of Christianity, and the question of the extent to which Irish authors believed in the historicity of these characters and characters and events in the sagas more generally, has been discussed by different scholars.[292] In the tales under discussion here, the parallels between the pre-Christian characters and biblical and Christian figures are important for the way in which they are understood. In at least *DSTT* and *FA*, the characters' portrayal, including the parallels, is relevant to the tales' contemporary context.[293] It has already been mentioned that some medieval Irish texts made use of a narrative set in the past in order to address specific events of the author's present,[294] and it seems that pre-Christian characters, too, could be "utilized" in a similar way. Instead of concentrating on the past nature of the events told, these tales focus on the pre-Christian quality of the main characters. Their interaction with the Christian present, however, indicates that in these tales present issues are addressed by means of reference to the past.[295]

It is noticeable that within the four tales, the two tales which feature pre-Christian survivors, that is *AE* and *DSTT*, make use of parallels with characters from the bible. The other two tales, *AC* and *FA*, both of which deal with pre-Christian characters in a pre-Christian setting, portray their characters in terms which create a degree of identification between them and Christ and, on occasion, even with God. For this reason, I will first consider parallels of the two pre-Christian survivors, Fintan and Lí Ban, with biblical characters and then move on to discuss the similarities of Conchobar and Art with Christ and God.

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see Dumville, 'Ulster Heroes'. Kelleher states 'the choice of that date [of Cú Chulainn's death in A.D. 2] – like 33 A.D. for the death of Conchobar – was clearly to associate these heroes with Christ' ('The Táin', p. 121).

[291] For examples, see Herbert, '*Fled Dúin na nGéd*', pp. 77–8, and Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, xxxv.

[292] See, for example, Toner, 'The Ulster Cycle', and Poppe, 'Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory'.

[293] For suggestions as to possible historical contexts for the tales, see pp. 162–71.

[294] See above, p. 2.

[295] In this context, see also Nagy's study, *Conversing*, of dialogue tales.

De Suidigud Tellaig Temra *and the Old Testament*

In *DSTT*, the pre-Christian and the Christian era, represented by the assemblies of Conaing and Diarmait respectively, are linked by the main character, Fintan mac Bóchra. Fintan is an unnaturally old survivor, similar in this respect to Lí Ban in *AE*. However, whereas Lí Ban not only bridges the gap between the different times but also herself transforms, becoming a saint and sharing features with Mary, as will be discussed below,[296] Fintan remains a distinctly Old-Testament representative of a pre-Christian era. He is depicted as a national figure of great importance, the most knowledgeable man in Ireland and closely linked with the island itself.[297] In *DSTT*, he is, to some extent, to the Irish what Moses was to the Israelites and there are close parallels between the depiction of Fintan and what we are told of Moses in the Old Testament.

When Trefuilngid Treochair, whom Fintan indentifies as God or his angel,[298] appears in *DSTT*, he is carrying stone tablets, an image which immediately triggers associations with Moses receiving the Law from God on two stone tablets in the Pentateuch.[299] A closer examination of the text reveals further parallels with the Pentateuch and in particular between Fintan and Moses. Moses is explicitly mentioned in *DSTT* in a poem on judgements and law recited by Fintan:

> Tidnocol deoda Dé dil
> ara mbeith breth ag dáinib
> doridnacht recht bérlai báin
> do Moyse mó cech degdáil.
>
> Dálais Moyse, monar nglé,
> bretha lánmaithi litre

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[296] For Lí Ban's similarities with Mary, see below, pp. 104–5; on Lí Ban's saintly nature, see below, pp. 122–5.

[297] See below, pp. 164–5.

[298] 'Ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin' (*DSTT*, pp. 152–3; 'he was an angel of God, or he was God Himself').

[299] See Exod. XXIV.12 and XXXI.18, and Deut IV.13, V.22, IX.10, and X.2-4.

dális Duid iar sene

bretha fíra fáitsine.[300]

The poem presents law as a gift from God to mankind, and just as Moses's ability to give good judgements is traced back to God, so the just judgment which Fintan gives is ultimately derived from God in *DSTT* as it is based on the knowledge which Trefuilngid Treochair has transmitted to Fintan. *DSTT* appears to link the story of the encounter between Fintan and Trefuilngid Treochair deliberately to the giving of the law in the Pentateuch.

The connection between Moses and Fintan also implies a connection between the Irish and the Israelites, and it can be argued that *DSTT* deliberately creates parallels between the two. The references to Irish history in *DSTT* point to an understanding of that history which is similar to the one found in *Lebor Gabála*, including the idea that the ancestors of the Irish were invited to Egypt by Pharaoh and were friendly with the Israelites while they were there. The paths of the Irish and Israelites diverge after the latter leave Egypt, but a similar fate is in store for the Irish, who embark on their own wanderings across the sea until they reach Ireland. These parallels between the Irish and the Israelites have long been acknowledged as deliberate, as for example by *Lebor Gabála*'s editor, Macalister.[301]

In the Pentateuch, Moses is chosen by God to receive the law and to teach the Israelites. Fintan, too, is singled out by Trefuilngid Treochair to preserve and transmit the knowledge he imparts to him: 'is rimsa, ar Fintan, rohérbad ar eisnéis 7 a acallaim fíad int slúa[i]g'.[302] Afterwards, Fintan spends the rest of his life passing on the knowledge he has received. It is in his capacity as custodian of this ancient knowledge that he is brought to Diarmait. Fintan's encounter with Trefuilngid Treochair becomes part of the stories which Fintan passes on to future generations. His audience in *DSTT*, as well as the audience of the tale itself, only experience the encounter indirectly through Fintan's retelling. Although the story of God's giving of the law to Moses is told directly in the Old Testament, Moses

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[300] *DSTT*, pp. 136–7; 'The gift divine of dear God, so that men should have judgement, the law of fair speech was given to Moses, greater than every good law. Moses delivered, bright deed, the perfect judgements of the letter. David delivered after that the true judgments of prophecy'.
[301] Macalister remarked that the parallels between the story of the Gaels in *Lebor Gabála* and the Israelites was 'too close to be accidental' (Macalister, *Lebor Gabála* I, xxvii).
[302] *DSTT*, pp. 144–5; 'It was to me, said Fintan, it was entrusted for explanation and for delivery before the host'.

retells his experiences on Sinai and the details of the laws laid down there to later generations of the Israelites in Deuteronomy, referring directly to his order to preserve and pass on the law: 'See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy'.[303] The preservation of knowledge by Fintan and the retelling of this to later generations may then have been reminiscent of the account in Deuteronomy.

As mentioned above, the stone tablets which Trefuilngid Treochair carries in *DSTT* are a clear allusion to the stone tablets given to Moses by God. In addition to this, there are other similarities between Trefuilngid's behaviour in *DSTT* and that of God in the Pentateuch. When Trefuilngid Treochair wants to tell the Irish about Tara and its *senchas* and *coimgne*, he asks for seven elders from every quarter of Ireland to meet him: 'Tucaid iarum chucam-sa mórfesear cecha hairdi i nÉirind do neoch is mó ergna díb 7 is mó gáes 7 glicus béos 7 seanchaidi ind ríg fadesin fileat for tellach Temrach, ar is ceathar-aird as chóir chum fodail na Temrach 7 a comgni, co ruca cech mórfeisiur díb a chuit chóir dona hailgib comgni sin thellaich Themra'.[304] Similarly, God asks Moses to call together seventy elders of Israel, as opposed to *DSTT*'s seven elders from every province of Ireland, so that God can explain the law to them also.[305]

These similarities reinforce the parallels between Fintan and Moses, and just as God singles out Moses, whose role as mediator of God's law is mentioned frequently in the bible, Trefuilngid Treochair chooses Fintan to preserve and transmit the knowledge he imparts to him.

As guardian of the lore which Trefuilngid Treochair has passed on to him, Fintan recommends that everything should be preserved as Trefuilngid ordered it to be transmitted, since he was God or God's angel: 'Acus así breth ruc dóib: a bith amail dosairnicmair, ar Findtan, ní thargom tara n-ordugud forfácaib

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[303] Deut. IV.5.

[304] *DSTT*, pp. 144–5; 'Bring to me then seven from every quarter in Ireland, who are the wisest, the most prudent and most cunning also, and the shanachies of the king himself who are of the hearth of Tara; for it is right that the four quarters [should be present] at the partition of Tara and its chronicles, that each seven may take its due share of the chronicles of the hearth of Tara' (square brackets supplied by Best).

[305] Num. XI.16–17.

Tréfuilngid Tre-eochair remum, ar ba haingel Dé héside, nó fa Día féisin'.[306] One is reminded of the repeated warning to the Israelites in Deuteronomy not to change God's law.[307] This parallel is perhaps a little vague as such a warning would be quite natural. However, taken in conjunction with the structural parallel with Deuteronomy mentioned above, it may also be of significance and further strengthen the case for a deliberate connection between Fintan and Moses, the Irish and the Israelites.

Building on these parallels between Moses and Fintan, the five-ridged stone which Fintan sets up at Usnech after the dispute between Diarmait and Uí Néill[308] may also be explained in this context. McCone suggests that the passage should be read in the light of I Sam./Kings. VII.12 or Josh. XXIV.27.[309] However, the twelve pillar-stones set up by Moses in Exod. XXIV.4 after receiving commandments and laws from God represent as convincing a parallel, if not a stronger one: 'And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel'.

Relating this passage to the passage in *DSTT* implies a correspondence between the twelve tribes of Israel and the five provinces of Ireland.[310] This is not unreasonable if one considers the parallels between the Israelites and the Irish mentioned above. If one accepts this relationship between the five provinces of Ireland and the twelve tribes of Israel, the blessings which Moses places on the twelve tribes of Israel at the end of his life and which also include short

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[306] *DSTT*, pp. 152–3; 'And this is the judgement he passed, "let it be as we have found it," said Fintan, "we shall not go contrary to the arrangement which Trefuilngid Tre-eochair has left us, for he was an angel of God, or he was God Himself"'.

[307] See, for example, Deut. IV.2: 'You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you'.

[308] See *DSTT*, pp. 152–3.

[309] See *Pagan Past*, p. 76, for McCone's suggestion. The passage in I Sam. VII.12 follows a battle between Israelites and Philistines and reads as follows: 'Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Miz'pah and Jesha'nah, and named it Ebene'zer; for he said, "Thus far the Lord has helped us"'. The passage in Joshua follows the covenant at Shechem: 'Joshua said to all the people, "See, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, if you deal falsely with your God"'.

[310] That the five ridges on Fintan's pillar-stone correspond to the five provinces of Ireland is explicitly stated (see *DSTT*, pp. 152–3).

descriptions of the tribes[311] might be seen as a parallel to the enumeration of the provinces and their qualities by Trefuilngid Treochair.[312]

When Fintan dies, *DSTT* describes the scene and his blessing by Patrick and Brigit, but the story also states that no one knows where Fintan was buried : 'Is indemin immorro cía baile in rohadhnocht'.[313] This is strongly reminiscent of the statement at the end of Deuteronomy which says that the exact place of Moses's burial is also unknown: 'He was buried in a valley in the land of Mo'ab, opposite Beth-pe'or, but no one knows his burial place to this day'.[314] The similarities between Fintan and Moses are thus carried through to the end of the narrative.

Lí Ban and the New Testament

AE is clearly divided into a "pre-Christian" and a "Christian" section, but the links of the main character, Lí Ban, are clearly with the New Testament. In some ways, this is not surprising, given that the emphasis is on baptism and thus on the new, Christian era. These are seen as fulfilments of promises made in the pre-Christian period and the typological approach thus highlights baptism and the Christian age. There are different ways of understanding Lí Ban, and she can be seen both as representing the church more generally and Mary specifically. In addition, the typological view of history reflected in *AE* as a whole is also found within the figure of Lí Ban herself, if one understands her as a reference to the bride in the Song of Songs, and thus to an Old-Testament character, and relates this to her similarities with Mary.

Lí Ban expresses her faith in God in her poem and the fact that she has survived the flood suggests that she, unlike the other members of her family, has found favour with God. Because of this and because of the way Lí Ban brings together the different periods of salvation history it is possible to see her as the

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[311] Deut. XXXIII.

[312] The censuses in Numbers are also similar to the lists of places in the different parts of Ireland in *DSTT*. In particular the census of the Levites in Num. III.14–38, which includes descriptions of the various duties given to the different clans, could be seen as similar to the assignment of particular qualities to the different regions of Ireland.

[313] *DSTT*, pp. 160–1; 'The place in which he was buried is uncertain, however'.

[314] Deut. XXXIV.6.

medieval allegory of a woman representing the church or Christianity.[315] Tertullian, for example, considered Noah's ark to represent the church,[316] and this metaphor could be extended to Lí Ban as the one who survived the flood. I Peter refers to 'the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago' in connection with the passage from the same letter which connects flood and baptism.[317] These spirits had usually been interpreted as Noah's contemporaries, who had gone to hell and had to be saved when Christ descended to the underworld.[318] Augustine, however, read the passage allegorically, equating the ark with the church. Thus, he saw the disobedient spirits not as Noah's contemporaries, but as those who did not believe in Christianity in the early period of the church.[319] This view was accepted in the medieval West,[320] and if one accepts the extension of the ark metaphor to Lí Ban, one might speculate that it supports considering her as an allegory of the church.

Lí Ban eventually meets Béoán, a man from the monastery of Tech Dabeoc. In her encounter with him Lí Ban is likened to an angel, which gives the meeting a distinctly revelatory character, again associating Lí Ban with Christianity.[321] However, another interpretation might be at least equally, if not more valid. On account of her virtue and faith in God, Lí Ban stands in contrast to Ebliu in the tale, whose behaviour has been likened to that of Eve.[322] In addition, Lí Ban makes good the wrongdoing of Ebliu and the unnamed woman at the beginning of *AE*. Because of this, and because of the contrast with Ebliu, one might regard Lí Ban as similar to Mary, not as the Mother of God, but as a sinless woman. If so, the author of *AE* is deliberately emphasising one of the most important typological relationships of the bible: that of Eve and Mary.

Lí Ban means 'beauty of women', and this name may itself have some significance in this context.[323] Considering Lí Ban's saintly nature, to be

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[315] For the discussion of an Irish example of this, see McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 100–4.
[316] See Tertullian, *De baptismo* viii.4 (ed. Schleyer, *Tertullian*, p. 182).
[317] I Peter III.20–1.
[318] See Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, p. 6, n. 5, and p. 15.
[319] See Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, p. 15.
[320] Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, p. 15
[321] See ll. 3095–7.
[322] See above, p. 85.
[323] I understand the name to consist of the words *lí* and *ban*. There are no rhyming examples in the verse of *AE*, and so the length of the vowel cannot be determined decisively. Taking the *ban*-element of the name to be the genitive plural of *ben*, 'woman', as suggested by the *DIL* (see 141.67) in connection with the name Lí Ban in *Serglige Con Culainn*, I translate the name 'beauty of women'. O'Beirne Crowe considered it to be *bán*, 'white', consequently translating the name as

discussed in the next chapter, and the association with Mary, the name Lí Ban might be seen as alluding to Elizabeth's words to Mary in Luke I.42: "'Blessed are you among women'". Even more fitting when considering Lí Ban's name is the repeated description of the bride in the Song of Songs as the 'fairest among women'.[324] The relationship between bride and bridegroom in this Old-Testament poem was, in the Middle Ages, often interpreted as the relationship between Christ and his church, expressing the New Covenant foreshadowed in the Old Testament. However, already in the ninth century Paschasius Radbertus interpreted sections of the Song of Songs with reference to Mary in his treatise *Cogitis me*, which circulated under the false authorship of Jerome.[325] The association with Mary became common in the twelfth century, with the bride in the Song of Songs being systematically identified with her.[326] As the analysis in the previous chapter has shown, the structure of *AE* underlines the relationship between Old Covenant and New, and this supports interpreting Lí Ban as a Marian figure. It can be argued that the author of *AE* was quite consciously using the name Lí Ban to associate her character even more strongly with biblical and exegetical traditions about Mary.

Thus, the two examples of Fintan and Lí Ban show how the figure of the ancient survivor could be understood with respect to the old, pre-Christian period as well as the new, Christian era. In both cases the idea that the Irish pre-Christian past and the Old-Testament period were in some ways similar is significant. Nevertheless, there is a distinct difference in the treatment of the two characters. In Fintan's case, his Old-Testament parallels complement the other characteristics

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'white beauty' ('Ancient Lake Legends', p. 103, n. 5). Recently, de Vries has considered the name, concluding that it should be understood as Lí Bán (see 'The Names', pp. 43–4). Dooley has, however, pointed out that H's work in the *Lebor na hUidre* version of *Táin Bó Cúailgne* reflects a particular interest in words and etymological word play (see Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, pp. 91–3), and one might, therefore, argue that the name is deliberately ambiguous, as the colour white is also associated with baptism, for example, with white robes of catechumens.

[324] Song of Songs I.8, V.9 and VI.1.

[325] See Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved*, pp. 152–5. The text is edited in Ripberger, *Der Pseudo-Hieronymus-Brief IX*.

[326] This is the case, for example, in *Sigillum Beatae Mariae* by Honorius Augustodunensis (*PL* 172.495D–518D), as well as in the commentary on the Song of Songs composed around 1126 by Rupert of Deutz (ed. Haacke, *Commentaria*). For Honorius and *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, see Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved*, 155–9, and Astell, *The Song of Songs*, p. 44. On Rupert's commentary, see Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved*, 159–63, and Astell, *The Song of Songs*, pp. 43–4, who states that Rupert's commentary, 'innovative in treatment and tone, marks a clear break with the past' (*The Songs of Songs*, p. 43). See van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, p. 291, for the dating of the commentary.

which endow him with authority, that is, old age and great historical knowledge, and they fit into the overall importance of the Old Testament in medieval Irish law.[327] His portrayal thus reflects the accommodation of Irish historical lore within a biblical and historical context by relating it to the Old Testament. It serves to give Fintan's lore a firmer foundation and greater legal weight by creating similarities with the Old Testament and the giving of the law to Moses. In *AE*, Lí Ban's New-Testament links highlight the new dispensation and the sacrament of baptism. It is not so much an attempt to justify certain practices as an illustration of the things necessary for contemporary medieval Christians, creating an Irish version of salvation history to highlight the importance of baptism. The differences between the two texts may be due to the fact that *DSTT* appears to be responding to more immediate, political developments,[328] and the focus on law and the Old Testament makes sense in a political context. *AE*, on the other hand, appears to be a more general reflection on salvation and salvation history, although this does not mean that such issues would have been considered any less immediate.

PARALLELS WITH GOD AND CHRIST

In *FA* and *AC* the main characters are presented as similar to Christ and God rather than to human biblical characters. In *FA*, this is related to ideas of kingship and in *AC*, the identification with Christ is linked to an idea of suffering with Christ as a way to salvation. Parallels may be detected between Cet mac Mágach and Judas in the L version of *AC*,[329] but they are related to the general parallels with Christ and with the event of his death.

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[327] On the influence of the Old Testament on medieval Irish law, see McCone, *Pagan Past* (in particular, chapter 4: 'The law and the prophets', pp. 84–106), Ó Corráin, 'Irish Vernacular Law' and Ó Corráin, Breatnach, and Breen, 'The Laws'.
[328] As suggested below, pp. 162–8.
[329] See above, pp. 92–3.

As part of his prophecy, Art foretells the birth of his son, Cormac, after his own death, and it is this which provides the basis for seeing parallels between Art and God and Art and Christ. The clear parallels between Art and God as well as Christ combine with the indications of sainthood and ideas of kingship to lend weight to the claims made in the text. Art's time may be something of an Old-Testament period, but the focus of the text is more on what will happen in the future than on Art's time itself. This is naturally so, given that the bulk of the text is made up of a prophecy, and it could be argued that in this regard, it is very much like the Old Testament which, in a Christian context, can derive its meaning and significance from what it prophesies and what is to come.

Stanzas 24 and 25 are important with regard to the parallels with God and Christ. In these stanzas Art prophesies the birth of his son through whom Ireland, which was left desolate after his own death in the Battle of Mag Mucrama, will prosper once again. The stanzas in which Art describes the arrival of his son and his significance to Ireland present his son as a saviour for the country:

> [24] Is mé Art a Dé
>
> cen mo mac hi crí
>
> is sáeth lem in bith
>
> cen ith nó co tí
>
>
> [25] Bid less d'Erind úair
>
> da farcbur in main
>
> dom echtra hi tech nUilc
>
> ría crad mo chuirp chain.[330]

In the context of a poem with a clear religious focus, the phrase *hi crí*, 'in the flesh', is reminiscent of Christ, the son of God, who became incarnate. In the light of the following two lines, in which this son is presented as a saviour to the suffering world, such a reading seems appropriate. One can say then, that in stanza 24, Cormac mac Airt is portrayed as a saviour not just of Ireland but of the

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[330] ll. 9927–34; '[24] I am Art, O God, without my son in the flesh, [i.e. alive] I pity the world, without grain until he comes. [25] It will be an advantage to Ireland one time if I might leave the gift [i.e. Cormac] from my expedition to the house of Olc before the torment of my fair body'.

world in terms that are reminiscent of Christ. It should be noted in this context that Carney argued that Cormac, like a number of other figures in Irish history and literature, was presented as 'a human analogy to Christ'.[331] *FA*, then, would appear to fit into this picture.

One must consider the implications which representing Cormac in these terms has for an understanding of Art. In stanza 24 Art's role as father of Cormac, the son who is the gift which will save Ireland, is emphasised. In theory, this implies a comparison between Art and God himself, but the last line of stanza 25, which refers to the torment of Art's body, suggests the same Christ-comparison that has already been applied to Cormac. It should be borne in mind that God and Christ are actually one, and thus the similarities between Art and Cormac can be considered in this context.

From *Cath Maige Mucrama* we know that the reason why Ireland needs saving by Cormac is that it has suffered through the rule of an unjust king. Lugaid Mac Con's inability to rule well is shown when he gives a false judgment concerning some sheep, whereas the young boy Cormac points out the fault in his judgment to him. As a result of the bad judgment, the part of the house in which the judgment was given slides down the hill, giving rise to the name Clóenferta in Tara.[332] After that, nothing grows in Ireland during the following year of Lugaid's kingship until he is driven out by the men of Ireland.[333] Art, on the other hand, is the ideal prince, as Lugaid himself tells the king of Scotland: '"In maith flaith Airt meic Cuind?" "Is maith", olse, "ni thánic i nHérind ríam flaith samlaid"'.[334] Art is acknowledged as the best king Ireland has ever had and I would argue that Cormac's Christ-like features serve to highlight the loss of Art's just kingship, which must be restored. Art's role as the father of Cormac, the saviour, does not mean that he is equal to God on the divine level, but one can argue that an equation of the two is made as far as their respective roles as kings are concerned. God is the perfect ruler, and the term king is used in references in the poem which are presumably to God.[335] Art, through the parallels between Christ and Cormac,

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[331] Carney, 'Cath Maige Muccrime', p.153.
[332] See *Cath Maige Mucrama* § 65 (ed. and trans. O Daly, pp. 58–9).
[333] See *Cath Maige Mucrama* § 66 (ed. and trans. O Daly, pp. 58–9).
[334] *Cath Maige Mucrama* § 19 (ed. and trans. O Daly, pp. 44–5); '"Is Art son of Conn's rule good?" "It is good", said he, "there never before came in Ireland a prince like him"'.
[335] For example, in ll. 9939 and 9943.

might be seen to be as close to the perfect ruler as possible. Given that kingship and royal power are concerns within the text,[336] such a reading would make sense.

Aided Chonchobair *and Parallels with Christ*

Turning to *AC*, one is faced with a more complicated picture. More texts are preserved in which Conchobar plays a role, and his death-tale survives in a number of versions, of which the relationship to one another is not straight-forward, as outlined in chapter 3. There are clear links between *AC* and other stories, and as one would expect, Conchobar's death-tale picks up on the idea of a connection between Christ and Conchobar found in other sources. Thus, the prose of the Book of Leinster, Adv. 72.1.40, Adv. 72.1.5 and of the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* versions of the tale include the statement that Conchobar shared a birthday with Christ,[337] an idea also found in the tale *Compert Chonchobair*.[338]

The poem which Conchobar recites in two of the manuscripts of *AC* adds an extra dimension to the tale, as it appears to have been introduced into the story from another context altogether. Corthals tentatively dated the poem to the eighth century, and in a later article suggested a possible date of around 700.[339] Given the lack of references to characters or events of the story, or indeed to any events other than the Crucifixion, it is possible that the poem was originally entirely separate from the tale of Conchobar's death. This has been suggested by Corthals who has put forward the idea that it might originally have formed part of the vigil on Holy Saturday.[340] Given this possibility, it is therefore necessary to consider it

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[336] See below, pp. 153–6.
[337] *AC*, pp. 8 and 16.
[338] Meyer, 'Anecdota', pp. 175–6.
[339] 'Early Irish *retoirics*', p. 22.
[340] 'Early Irish *retoirics*', p. 22. I find the suggestion that prose and poem were initially separate entirely plausible, especially given that the poem occurs in very different prose contexts in L and N but is absent from the two Edinburgh manuscripts, the first section of which is close to L. Cronan, however, appears to take a different view. Referring to Corthals's discussion of the poem in 'The *retoiric*', Cronan objects to some of Corthals's conclusions, in particular that Conchobar's poem fits better into N, and he argues for the narrative unity of L ('"Beowulf"', pp. 151–3). I would agree with a number of his points, but in his discussion of the poem Cronan does not consider the possibility that, although prose and poem may well 'constitute a single, integrated literary unit' ('"Beowulf"', p. 151), this does not preclude both being originally separate

as a text in its own right in order to then investigate its integration into the tale. It is noteworthy that, although there are explicit connections between Conchobar and Christ in the prose, as just mentioned, the tale does not elaborate on these and their main function appears to be to serve as an explanation of why Conchobar felt so strongly about Christ's death.[341] It is the poem which creates a degree of identification of the speaker with Christ, and thus, in the context of the tale, between Conchobar and Christ. This is the case in L, at least, where the suffering which Conchobar undergoes is linked to his salvation. The tale's redactor builds on parallels already found in the story and strengthens them through the insertion of the poem.[342]

Conchobar's Poem – Suffering with Christ

The poem consists of thirteen stanzas and is not easy to understand. Although Meyer included it in the text of L and N in his *Death-tales*, he left it untranslated. It is only fairly recently that it has been made more accessible by Corthals's edition, translation and commentary, which also includes a brief discussion of the poem's relationship to the surrounding prose and gives the poem the attention it deserves.[343] According to Corthals, Conchobar changes in the course of the poem, which 'describes Conchobar's conversion from being a pagan king, who would resort instinctively to the force of the sword, to being a Christian believer'.[344] Conchobar's initial wish is to die defending Christ, and thus, presumably, to prevent Christ from being crucified and having to suffer. However, Conchobar's attitude changes in the course of the poem as he gains a better understanding of the deeper meaning of the Crucifixion. According to Corthals, 'Conchobar's belief consists in his readiness to die, not on behalf of Christ, as was his first intention, but in spiritual communion with Christ's death'.[345]

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compositions combined by a skilled redactor. Instead, placing Meyer's Version A in the eighth century, he suggests that this version and the poem are contemporary ('"Beowulf"', p. 153).

[341] The *Liver Flavus* version explicitly describes Christ and Conchobar as foster-brothers (see *AC*, p. 16), thus explaining the reason for Conchobar's anger particularly clearly, given the close links between foster-kin.

[342] The identification of the poem's speaker with Christ does not seem to be the focus of the N version of the tale, and for this reason it will not be considered here.

[343] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*'.

[344] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 51.

[345] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 52.

After Conchobar expresses his desire to defend and support Christ in the first stanzas of the poem, a turning point is reached, according to Corthals, in stanza 8 when Conchobar realises that his despair at his inability to help is pointless.[346] The next stanza is interpreted by Corthals as a repeated expression of Conchobar's willingness to die for Christ: 'ron-cráidi crochad Críst: ma chuto[n?]-occaibmis, at-bélmis'.[347] In stanza 11, Conchobar's words should, according to Corthals, be taken to mean that Conchobar's 'death because of Christ will be in vain':[348]

> Dia ráith no-regainn hi mbás asmu(?) flaith
>
> fo-léicib fachel n-éco. – Niba ní.[349]

In connection with stanza 12, Corthals adduces convincing biblical parallels with the events in Gethsemane,[350] when Christ tells some of his disciples that he is filled with deathly sorrow and asks them to keep watch with him. His disciples, however, fail to do so and fall asleep, and Corthals relates their behaviour to Conchobar's statement in the poem 'mo chride a clóas im Artrach at[h]gubai'.[351]

It is true that the speaker of the poem, who is identified as Conchobar only in the prose of the tale, changes in the course of the poem.[352] However, this change in the speaker's desire is linked to his realisation that the Crucifixion was necessary to redeem mankind and that he must accept his inability to help Christ, whose suffering and death represent mankind's deliverance. Stanza 10 also clearly shows that he understands the meaning of the Crucifixion: 'hóasal-Rí ro-c[h]és croich cóirt ar doíne ndíc[h]mairc'.[353]

An overarching theme of the poem is the speaker's suffering. Although he comes to terms with his inability to act, he finds this difficult to bear and the last stanza closes with the words 'Air inrud (?) dom dul druib cen Dúileman dígail'.[354]

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[346] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 51.

[347] 'The crucifixion of Christ has afflicted us: if we should have risen (=taken up arms?), we would have died'.

[348] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 51.

[349] 'Because of Him I would have gone into death out of (?) my lordship, I will let down apprehension of death. – It will be worth nothing'.

[350] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 52.

[351] 'My heart should have hastened to precede the pure heavenly Hero'.

[352] As I am considering the poem separately from the prose at this stage and as the speaker is not identified with the Ulster king in the verse, I do not refer to the speaker as Conchobar.

[353] 'The noble King who suffered the cross (and) the ring (=the crown?) in redemption of the sin of mankind'.

[354] 'For it is a trial (?) to me to go to the abode (= to die) without having avenged the Creator'.

In the first six stanzas, the speaker expresses his desire to defend Christ and to support and protect him,[355] even if this means his death, but he acknowledges that his behaviour contrasts with that of Christ when he says in stanza 7 that Christ, though innocent, 'nibu scíth ce chéstæ'.[356] The implication might be that the speaker, too, has to accept Christ's suffering and thus also his own suffering, caused by his helpless position. In some sense, then, the speaker's suffering changes in the poem from suffering that is due to his own pride, which is hurt because of his inability to help Christ, to a suffering more shared with Christ. Although, as Corthals points out, stanza 8 does reflect the change of mentality that the speaker is experiencing, the quotation from stanza 7 also indicates that it is not the first time that the speaker is having doubts about whether violence is the correct path of action to take. In fact, as early in the poem as stanza 3, the speaker's cry is described as 'baíth'.[357]

The theme of foolishness reappears in stanza 9 when the speaker mentions his 'menman méd'.[358] In the same stanza, the speaker connects rising with dying: 'ma chuto[n?]-occaibmis, at-bélmis'.[359] This statement seems a curious reversal of the biblical dying and then rising which, based on the Crucifixion, is also the imagery used of baptism by Paul in Romans VI.3–5:

> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Although the use of such imagery may be coincidental, its presence in a poem concerned with the Crucifixion requires closer attention. One might suggest that the speaker is here pondering the curious dilemma in which he finds himself.

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[355] For example, stanza 5: 'Atum-c[h]ichthæ i ngním fir, hi tinól tairisem,/ tríun úaisib i Coimded c[h]oímthecht c[h]ongnam'; 'I would have been seen doing a manly deed, withstanding companies, as a strong man above them protecting (and) assisting the Lord'.

[356] 'Was not unwilling to be caused to suffer'.

[357] 'Foolish'.

[358] 'Pride of mind'. Although *mét*, literally 'magnitude, extent', does not necessarily carry negative connotations, the context of the stanza would support Corthals's translation. See *DIL* 101.27–33 for other instances of the phrase, including those meaning 'pride' or 'arrogance'.

[359] 'If we should have risen (=taken up arms?), we would have died'.

Although his initial reaction is to fight, he realises this will in no way benefit him. On the contrary, fighting goes against much of what is taught by Christ in the gospel and fighting for Christ was, at least in the context of the early medieval church, understood as a spiritual, not a physical battle,[360] as suggested in Paul's second letter to Timothy: 'Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus'.[361] That this idea was known in early medieval Ireland is evidenced by a number of writings. It has been pointed out, for example, that Sulpicius Severus's Life of St Martin contrasts the saint as a soldier of Christ with the soldier of Caesar.[362] The description of Colum Cille in *Amra Choluim Chille* is another indication that in early medieval Ireland fighting for Christ was understood in a spiritual way. Although Colum Cille is not called a soldier of Christ, his life as monk and religious leader is presented in a militaristic way. Thus he fights the flesh[363] and gluttony[364] and is described as a hero or warrior on a number of occasions,[365] but this clearly does not mean that he carries out military action.

Returning to the poem in *AC*, we see that stanza 9 expresses the speaker's helplessness. Although he is troubled by the Crucifixion, there is nothing he can do. It may seem somewhat extreme to suggest that rising, that is to say taking up arms, would in fact mean the speaker's death, but an episode recounted in all four of the gospels would lend support to this idea. When Jesus is arrested, one of his disciples cuts off the ear of one of those who have come to arrest him.[366] In all accounts, except for that in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus explicitly condemns this action and Matt. XXVI.52 reads: 'Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword"'. When one considers this passage, the suggestion that the speaker of the poem risks his own death if he chooses to react violently does not seem implausible. If this reading of stanza 9 is accepted, the irony of the position in which the speaker finds himself

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[360] See, for example, Erdmann, *Entstehung*, p. 11. Erdmann also points out that in the lives of the early soldier saints, such as St Martin, their life as a soldier was distinct from their life as a saint.
[361] II Tim. II.3.
[362] Robinson, 'Gregory VII', p. 178.
[363] 'Cath sí so-ch –fir fiched fri coluain' (*Amra Choluim Chille*, ed. and trans. Clancy and Márkus, pp. 110–11; 'he fought a long and noble battle against flesh').
[364] 'Catha gulae gaelis' (*Amra Choluim Chille*, ed. and trans. Clancy and Márkus, pp. 108–9; 'he won battles against gluttony').
[365] For example, by the word *nía*, 'warrior, champion' (see *Amra Choluim Chille*, ed. and trans. Clancy and Márkus, p. 112).
[366] Matt. XXVI.51–4, Mark XIV.47, Luke XXII.50–1, John XVIII.10–11.

becomes clear. Rising would in fact mean his (spiritual) death in a situation where the death of Christ and belief in him lead to resurrection.

The next two stanzas continue this theme. Stanza 10 shows that, although the speaker does not find it easy to accept his helplessness, he has certainly understood the reason for the Crucifixion:

Ba hassu nad bemmis íar n-Artrad écomnart,

hóasal-Rí ro-c[h]és croich cóirt ar doíne ndíc[h]mairc.[367]

In stanza 11, quoted above,[368] the speaker again expresses his willingness to die for Christ. In addition, the second part of this stanza can be read as a reference to Christ's victory over death which is linked to resurrection: 'But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him'.[369] The stanza thus builds on the preceding two, illustrating the speaker's new-found understanding of the Crucifixion.

Following stanza 12's statement concerning the correct behaviour for a follower of Christ,[370] stanza 13, the last in the poem, clearly expresses a certain insight into Christian theology. The poem's speaker understands that he is helpless. The fact that he was not able to assist Christ causes him great sorrow and he still finds it difficult to accept his helplessness. However, he also understands that it is not necessary for him to have avenged Christ:

Armu éda inscib, inna roacht fír – fortacht Críst,

fritom-thá.[371]

Conchobar's healing, to be understood, I would argue, as his spiritual salvation, is not obtained through military action on his part. In addition, he does not achieve his own salvation. It is granted to him by God. It is his words, perhaps meaning his expression of faith, which save him. This is consonant with Paul's statement in Eph. II.8–9: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast'.

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[367] 'It were easier, had we not lived after the trouble of the High-King, the noble King who suffered the cross (and) the ring (= the crown?) in redemption of the sin of mankind'.
[368] See above, p. 111.
[369] Romans VI.8–9.
[370] 'Mo chride a clóas im Artrach at[h]gubai' ('my heart should have hastened to precede the pure heavenly Hero').
[371] 'Because of my words, in which I was not able truly to assist Christ, my Lord heals me'.

The speaker's helplessness at the end of the poem is thus different from that at the beginning. His firm belief that he should have helped Christ and his anger that this was not possible give way to his acceptance of the fact that this would not only have been impossible, but also unnecessary and not compatible with proper Christian conduct. He still suffers at not having been able to avenge Christ, but he realises that his love of Christ and his willingness to suffer on his behalf have an effect his actions could not have had. The poem thus moves from feelings of anger and from a desire for vengeance to a deeper insight into the true meaning of the Crucifixion, becoming quieter and more contemplative in tone.

Interestingly, the episode referred to above in connection with rising and dying is reminiscent of the events in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus's arrest, the same story to which, as mentioned, Corthals has also cited parallels. The similarities between the words of the poem and those spoken by Christ in the biblical passages to which Corthals has drawn attention imply a parallel between the speaker of the poem – Conchobar, in the overall context of the tale – and Christ himself.[372] Clancy's suggestion that the brain of Mess Gegra functions, in a similar way to the cross, as 'the instrument of death and the means of redemption for the king',[373] further strengthens this parallel. A similar parallel occurs in the probably ninth- or tenth-century *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind*, in which correspondences are created between Cú Chulainn and Christ.[374] In addition, both Cú Chulainn's poem in *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind* and that found in *AC* emphasise the speaker's suffering. It can be argued that this leads to an identification of the speaker with Christ and that the biblical parallels in *AC*'s poem are working together with the theme of suffering to create this identification.[375]

The L version of *AC* has been considered inferior in some ways to the N version by Corthals and Clancy, the scholars who have commented in most detail on the poem.[376] I would argue the contrary and suggest that the poem's prose

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[372] This is the case particularly for the parallel suggested by Corthals for the phrase 'brón báis' (see 'The *retoiric*', p. 52).

[373] Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon', p. 111.

[374] For a discussion of the tale and such parallels, see Johnston, 'The Salvation'.

[375] Another text concerned with similar themes is the Old English poem 'The Dream of the Rood', found in the tenth-century Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Cathedral Library, CXVII). Clancy has also drawn attention to the similarities with the poem in *AC* ('Lethal Weapon', pp. 106–7).

[376] See also Cronan's comments on the poem ('"Beowulf"', pp. 151–3).

contexts in L and in N show that it was received and interpreted in different ways.[377] The identification of the speaker with Christ and the rejection of violence, which has just been outlined in the analysis of the verse, were intended as the poem's key features when it was composed, and it is the prose of the L version that suits this interpretation best, suggesting that its redactor understood the poem in the spirit in which it was originally intended. Clancy acknowledges the different possible readings of the poem: 'it would equally be possible to read the poem as a somewhat militant "confession of faith", deriving from an almost crusader-like mentality. By this analysis, Conchobar's healing comes from his desire (even though real action was impossible) to avenge Christ'.[378] It is this more militaristic reading of the poem that is reflected in N.[379]

Clancy's analysis of L's prose also shows that Conchobar's behaviour is viewed in a critical light in this version of the text, and he draws attention to the fact that the poem appears to express disapproval of violence. Nevertheless, he refers to 'the confusion of Conchobar's monologue'[380] which, placing the poem alongside other medieval Irish poetry, he concludes 'may be intentional'.[381] This is not impossible, but the suggestion appears to be based on the belief shared by Corthals and Clancy that L lacks an ending and that this ending would have looked similar to that in the other manuscripts and in N, in which Conchobar breaks into a violent frenzy. The more peaceful tone of the poem would thus be at odds with the ending as Corthals and Clancy envision it. However, although at least one *lacuna* and possibly a second are found in L,[382] this version's rather abrupt ending fits L's thematic concerns well and we cannot say whether it is deliberate or constitutes a *lacuna*.[383] I would therefore suggest that there is no intentional confusion with regard to Conchobar's poem, but would instead argue that L and N provide examples of two very different approaches to the verses. The redactor of L appears to have understood the poem along the lines of my interpretation offered above. The redactor of N, on the other hand, places great

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[377] For a discussion of the poem's place in N, see below, pp. 188–90.
[378] 'Lethal Weapon', pp. 104–5.
[379] See below, pp. 189–90.
[380] 'Lethal Weapon', pp. 105.
[381] 'Lethal Weapon', pp. 105.
[382] See above, pp. 63–4.
[383] Cronan has also come to this conclusion ('"Beowulf"', p. 153).

emphasis on Conchobar as a warrior and seems to have read the poem in a much more militaristic way.

The tone of L's prose is on the whole more restrained than that of N. Conchobar is told about the Crucifixion after asking his druid about the cause of the earthquake, also mentioned in Matt. XXVII.51, that has just occurred. The text then goes on to state: 'Is andsin rochreiti Conchobar. Ocus issé sin indara fer rochreti do Dia i nHerinn ria tiachtain creitmi é .i. Morand in fer aile. "Maith tra," ar Conchobar. "Ba hapraind…'.[384] Nothing else is told of Conchobar's fate after he has recited the poem, apart from the references to alternative versions of the story. His anger and desire for vengeance are expressed entirely in the poem and not in the prose, and his death is not mentioned in L.

A Thematically Related Text: Síaburcharpat Con Culaind

Since the poem is presented as spoken by Conchobar in the L version of his death-tale, these parallels between the poem's speaker and Christ can be extended to Conchobar himself. This is not the only instance of such correspondences in medieval Irish literature. For example, an extended parallel of Christ with a pre-Christian character is also found in the tale *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind* and, like in *AC*'s L, the parallel is linked to suffering and redemption. *Síaburcharpat* is preserved in different versions in three manuscripts[385] and has been assigned variously to the ninth or tenth century.[386] Although the manuscripts are all later, and we cannot therefore argue that the wording of particular passages reflects the archetype, the general storyline is shared by all three manuscripts. In his efforts to convert the pagan king of Tara, Lóegaire mac Néill, St Patrick

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[384] *AC*, pp. 8–9; 'It was then that Conchobar believed. And he was one of the two men that had believed in God in Ireland before the coming of the Faith, Morann being the other man. "Well, now," said Conchobar, "it is a pity [... here follows the poem]"'.

[385] These are *Lebor na hUidre*, where part of the text is written by H; London, British Museum Egerton 88 and British Museum Additional 33,993. The latter two manuscripts both date from the sixteenth century, and the problems of dating associated with *Lebor na hUidre* have been noted in the Introduction (see above, pp. 4–5). In my discussion here I will refer to the *Lebor na hUidre* version of the story (*LU*, 9220–9565). For a translation, see the edition and translation by O'Beirne Crowe in 'Siabur-charpat'. Meyer's 'Síaburcharpat' collates the two British Museum manuscripts.

[386] McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 200, and Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, p. 567. The tale has been examined most recently by Ó Béarra, who concludes that all three manuscripts ultimately derive from an archetype written in the first half of the tenth century (see 'A Critical Edition', p. 69).

summons the dead Cú Chulainn. He addresses Lóegaire in a long poem, detailing his own suffering in hell and urging the king to convert.

In the text, parallels are built up between Lóegaire and Christ's disciples, especially Thomas and Peter, as well as between Cú Chulainn and Christ. It is the Christ-Cú Chulainn parallel, in particular, which brings out the New-Testament themes of suffering and resurrection as part of salvation. In the context of *Síaburcharpat*, Cú Chulainn has suffered and been resurrected in order to save Lóegaire. As in *AC*, the theme of suffering is linked to salvation. The pattern is somewhat more complex in *Síaburcharpat*, however, as the themes of suffering and resurrection are also played out in the figure of Lóegaire. Unwilling to believe even after his vision of and conversation with Cú Chulainn, Lóegaire is buried alive. However, in the *Lebor na hUidre* version, he is quickly "resurrected" once he accepts the faith.[387] His burial and resurrection signal the resurrection of all Christians through Christ, and the narrative contains echoes of Paul's letter to the Romans.[388] Lóegaire's resurrection, once he accepts Christianity, is strongly reminiscent of this passage which links Christ's suffering and death with salvation and which promises life after death to Christians.

Lóegaire's behaviour is also similar to that of Christ's disciples' reacting to the news of his resurrection, and in particular to the behaviour of Thomas who refuses to believe what he is being told until he has seen and touched Christ.[389] The Christ-Cú Chulainn and Thomas-Lóegaire parallel is strengthened by Cú Chulainn's claim that he, like Christ, is not a ghost: 'ní síabrae rodatánic is Cú Chulaind mac Soalta'.[390] In another twist to the theme of suffering and resurrection, Cú Chulainn, initially presented as a damned and suffering pre-Christian hero, is granted heaven by St Patrick. Lóegaire, on the other hand, is given the opportunity to learn from Cú Chulainn's "mistake" of not believing in Christ. In addition, he is also given a positive example to follow from the Irish past when Cú Chulainn mentions Conchobar, who, despite never having had the

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[387] In the Egerton 88 version and in Additional 33,993 the tale simply ends with Lóegaire's burial and Cú Chulainn's acceptance into heaven (see Meyer, 'Síaburcharpat', p. 56).
[388] Rom. VI.3–5. Quoted above, p. 112.
[389] John XX.24-5; this parallel has been noted by Johnston, 'The Salvation', p. 121.
[390] *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9302); 'It is not a spectre that has come to you, it is Cú Chulainn, son of Soalta'. This echoes Christ's statement in Luke XXIV.37–40. Johnston draws attention to this parallel in 'The Salvation', p. 122.

Christian faith preached to him, believed in Christ and thus has been spared hell.[391]

This brief outline of *Síaburcharpat* shows that parallels between Christ and pre-Christian characters are not unique to *AC*. *Síaburcharpat* plays with the biblical parallels and presents the audience with different permutations of them, resulting in a more complex picture than that in *AC*. Underlying both texts, however, is an acceptance of the idea that Christ's suffering is connected to the salvation of mankind, and that re-enacting this suffering had salvific potential.[392] The parallels between Christ and pre-Christian characters in these two texts suggest that this was seen to apply to all humans, even those who had lived before Christ's coming, as long as they believed in him.

CONCLUSION

As this brief discussion of *Síaburcharpat* shows, extended parallels with Christ are not unique to *AC*. The implication that Art is somehow similar to God is more unusual, but as outlined above, it is probably to be understood in the context of Art's status as king. The portrayal of the main characters in *FA* and *AC* as similar to God and Christ is logical within the texts as well as within the wider context of medieval Irish literature. *FA*'s focus on kingship and royal power,[393] and *AC*'s meditation on the relationship between a morally deficient pre-Christian society and an enlightened Christian ideology of compassion and suffering explain the parallels made. It is interesting to note that both *Síaburcharpat* and *AC* are about the conversion of pre-Christian kings, Lóegaire and Conchobar. Suffering and identification with Christ seems to play an important role in the context of conversion and it appears to be linked to salvation.

Overall, the differences between *FA* and *AC* are similar to those between *DSTT* and *AE*. Like *DSTT*, *FA* may reflect contemporary political concerns.[394] *AC*, with its concern for the wider question of appropriate Christian behaviour and

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[391] See *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9463–6).
[392] This point is discussed further in chapter 8, see below, pp. 186–92.
[393] Discussed below, pp. 153–6.
[394] See below, pp. 168–71.

salvation, is similar to *AE*. All texts, however, make use of the technique of paralleling their main characters with biblical and Christian characters in order to form and reinforce their main emphases.

Sainthood and relics are important themes in *AE*, *FA* and *AC*. There are a number of indications that characters in these tales are portrayed in terms normally reserved for saints, including references to relics. In *AE* miracles occur at Lí Ban's grave and Art's remains at Treóit appear to be venerated. The poem *A chloch thall*, preserved in the Stowe version of *AC* and attributed to Cináed ua hArtacáin in the Book of Leinster, does not take a particularly positive view of the pre-Christian past but it does focus on Mess Gegra's brain as a relic of St Buite. This role of the brain is contrasted with its relationship to Conchobar.[395]

PRE-CHRISTIAN SAINTS? LÍ BAN AND ART MAC CUINN

Connections between vernacular sagas and hagiography have long been acknowledged and discussed. Attention has been draw to the "heroic biography" pattern shared by secular heroes and some saints, and motifs common to both types of text have been highlighted.[396] Similarities in vernacular saga and hagiography are not surprising, given that all of the written material which survives from the period in question was produced in the same ecclesiastical environment. It has been argued that the saint may be interpreted as the Christian equivalent of the secular hero, and this may explain similarities in biographical pattern.[397]

The problem in some cases is determining the direction of influence.[398] When it comes to some motifs, such as the motif of the lost piece of jewellery which is miraculously recovered in *Táin Bó Fraích* and Cogitosus's Life of

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[395] In *DSTT*, Fintan's portrayal does not include saintly characteristics, perhaps because his depiction is inspired primarily by the Old Testament.

[396] For discussion of this subject see Ó Briain, 'Saga Themes', Bieler, 'Hagiography', Bray, 'Heroic Tradition' and McCone, *Pagan Past* (in particular chapter 8, 'Heroes and Saints', pp. 179–202).

[397] McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 188.

[398] See McCone, *Pagan Past*, pp. 179–80.

Brigit,[399] it is not possible to determine the direction of influence and it is debatable how important answering that particular question is. Other motifs are perhaps more likely to have found their way into the sagas from hagiographical sources or are at least inspired by religious practices and motifs associated with saints. Such motifs are found in *AE* and *FA* and they have specifically Christian, religious connotations, as they relate to miracles and a concern for burial at a particular foundation.

'Ferta 7 mirmaili': Hagiographical Elements in Aided Echach

AE ends with the following statement concerning Lí Ban and her place of burial: 'Dogniter dano ferta 7 mirmaili trethisi and sin. 7 ita amal cach naemóig co n-onoir 7 co n-airmiten amal dorid[n]acht Dia di i nnim'.[400] It is clear that this statement presents her very much as a saint but this is not the only indication in the tale that she should be regarded in this way. The statements in *AE* that God preserved her under the lake already create the impression that Lí Ban is especially worthy of divine favour.[401] Her encounter with Béoán supports the notion that she is particularly holy: 'In tan imorro ro batar lucht curaig Beoan oc imrum forsind farrci co cúalatar celebrad aingel fon churuch. Coro íarfaig Beoán cid dia ta in celebrad sa for se. Messi dogní for Li Ban'.[402] The religious and even revelatory character of this encounter is indicated by the description of the sound which Béoán hears as being like that of angels. In addition, it should be noted that, although the *DIL* cites this particular instance under the meaning 'conversation, talk, discourse',[403] *celebrad* can also have the more religious meaning of 'act of celebrating, holding (a religious ceremony, etc.)'.[404] Thus, although the reference

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[399] For a description of this particular motif see, for example, Ó Briain, 'Saga Themes', pp. 39–40.

[400] ll. 3132–4; 'Moreover, miracles and wonders are done through her there. And, like every saintly virgin, she is with such honour and respect as God has granted her in heaven'.

[401] See the comment in l. 3087: 'Dia oca anacul ar uscib Locha hEchach' ('God [was] protecting her from the waters of Loch nEchach') as well as comments in Lí Ban's long poem.

[402] ll. 3095–8; 'When, moreover, the crew of Béoán's boat were rowing across the ocean, they heard singing of angels below the boat. And Béoán asked "What is this singing coming from?" he said. "I am doing it," said Lí Ban'.

[403] *DIL* 108.86

[404] *DIL* 108.60–84. The majority of citations for *celebrad* in the *DIL* come under this heading (for all citations, see *DIL* 108.54–109.11.

to angels already indicates the holy nature of the sound Béoán hears, the choice of the word *celebrad* as opposed to a different word with the sense of conversation, for example *comrád*, may be intended to strengthen the religious aspect of Lí Ban's character.

As the exchange between Béoán and Lí Ban continues, there are further indications of her special nature. Already in this conversation Lí Ban's burial is mentioned. Lí Ban asks Béoán to arrange a meeting for her with the saints of Dál nAraide, but he will only do this on one condition: 'Ni ebur sin for Beoan acht mani thucthar a log dam. Cia log connaigi ol isi. T'adnacul ocumsa fein im manistir. Rot fiasu sin tra ol sisi'.[405] At this point we are clearly no longer meant to regard Lí Ban as a pre-Christian character, and indeed, the long poem recited by her earlier in the text clearly expresses her faith. However, the fact that Béoán should be interested in having Lí Ban buried in his monastery suggests that she would be of particular benefit to his institution. This only makes sense if Béoán already senses Lí Ban's holiness. The passage which follows strengthens this picture of Lí Ban by including a motif which is clearly hagiographical. The argument regarding the ownership of Lí Ban, which starts at her meeting with the saints of Dál nAraide, is solved in the following way:

> Ro troiscet ule inna naim sin tra co rucad Dia breith etorro imma n-imresain. Asbert in t-aingel fri araile nduni and. Ticfat da dam allaid i mbarach for se a Carnd Airend 7 tabraidsi in carpat foraib for se 7 in leth bertait sin hí lecidsi dóib. Tancatar na daím arna bárach amal ro thingell in t-aingel 7 rucsat hí co Tech Da Beóc.[406]

This reflects a motif which is found in Irish saints' lives and which concerns the burial of a saint about which there is disagreement, indicating the importance of a saint's burial place to the community which "possesses" the saint's tomb. An angel gives the instructions that the saint's body should be loaded onto a cart pulled by two wild oxen. The place in which the cart stops is to

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[405] ll. 3103–5; '"I will not say that [i.e. I will not agree]", said Béoán, "unless I am rewarded for it" "What reward do you seek?" she said. "Your burial by myself in my monastery." "That will be granted to you then," she said'.

[406] ll. 3121–3126; 'All those saints fasted so that God might adjudicate between them concerning their contention. The angel said to one of the people there. "Two wild oxen will come tomorrow", he said, "from Carn Airend, and yoke the chariot to them," he said, "and the place to which they carry her, leave her there". The oxen came the next day as the angel had prophesied and they took her to Tech Dabeoc'.

be the burial place of the saint. This motif is found in the lives of other Irish saints, including those of Patrick, Enda and Molua.[407] As an example of the motif, the *Vita Sancti Moluae* is particularly fitting in the context of *AE* as the angel also appears as the result of a disagreement: 'In illa contencione venit angelus Domini ad quosdam viros, et dixit eis: "Ponite corpus sancti in plaustro, duosque boues indomitos in eo; et dimit[t]ite eis ire quocunque voluerint." Et concordantes de sententia angelica vtrique, ita fecerunt. Boues autem nutu Dei perrexerunt iter ad supradictam ciuitatem, Cluain Ferta; et steterunt cum plaustro ante ostium monasterii'.[408] The similarities between this motif here and in the passage in *AE* are obvious. The motif in the saints' lives has been linked to the saintly body's function as as 'relic in itself and as a future source of further relics',[409] but could also be connected to the belief that a saint's burial place was their place of resurrection and that this would be an advantage to others buried in the same place.[410] In addition to this, a foundation which could claim to be the burial place of a saint enjoyed higher status and the saint's burial could result in financial or political advantage for the monastery involved. This motif, then, makes most sense in a hagiographical context and it can be argued that it originates there. The employment of a hagiographical motif to describe Lí Ban's burial may be included in order to suggest that a similar degree of holiness should be attributed to her as it is to saints.

The indications of holiness are made explicit in the last sentence of the tale, quoted above, where she is described as *naemóg*. It justifies the concern about her place of burial, and the miracles which occur at her grave illustrate her status. Again, there are similarities with saints' lives in which accounts of posthumous miracles often follow the account of the saint's burial. *Vita Sancti Moluae* serves as an example here also, although this structure is found in other lives too. The passage quoted here follows immediately after the description of the oxen's arrival at Clonfert:

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[407] For occurrences, see Bieler, 'Hagiography', p. 20, and Bray, *A List*, for example p. 88.

[408] *VSH* II, 224; 'During that dispute, an angel of God came to certain men and said to them: "Place the body of the holy man in a cart and [put] two wild oxen before the cart; and let them go wherever they want". And they both acted according to the angelic words. The oxen, however, according to God's will, proceeded on the journey to the above-mentioned city, Clonfert; and they stopped with the cart in front of the door of the monastery'.

[409] Lucas, 'Social Role', p. 7.

[410] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', pp. 146–7.

Et ilico quidam vir sanctus et sapiens, nomine Manchenus, venit ad plaustrum, et posuit oculum suum cruentatum pene tractum extra capud ad corpus, et statim sanatus est, ac si nichil ei vnquam noceret. Postea a multitudine sanctorum beatissimum corpus sancti senis Molue cum honore debito traditum est humo in loco edificato in suo monasterio, quod ipse de agro construxit; ubi clara ciuitas creuit, in qua Christi gratia in signis et prodigiis iuxta reliquias sancti Moluae per seculum apparet.[411]

This last section of *AE*, from the story of the oxen to the end, thus follows a hagiographic structure. The indications in the tale preceding the end – Lí Ban's favour with God, her angel-like *celebrad*, the dispute concerning her burial – indicate her holy nature, but the final sentence very strongly suggests that she should be regarded as saint-like. Lí Ban, although a pre-Christian character in origin, undergoes a quite remarkable transformation which goes beyond her physical change of form.

'Mo thasi for coí bád masi la Día': Art and his Grave

Turning to *FA*, one finds that Art is also described consistently in terms which are redolent of sainthood. In *AE*, it is the description of Lí Ban's grave and the miracles worked there that make her saint-like status explicit, although allusions and motifs elsewhere in the narrative help to create the impression of a saintly individual. In *FA*, it is also Art's grave that most clearly associates Art with sainthood. The poem appears to suggest that his remains will be venerated, and it is clear that Treóit, the place of his burial, is considered to be of special status because of its role as Art's burial place.

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[411] *VSH* II, 224; 'And in that very place [i. e. at the door of the monastery] a certain holy and wise man called Manchenus came to the cart and cast his bleeding eye, almost pulled out of his head, on the body [of the saint], and immediately he was healed, and in fact [it was] as if nothing had ever injured him. Afterwards the most blessed body of the holy old man Molua was committed to the earth with the honour owed to it by a crowd of holy people in a place built in his monastery, which he himself had built from the land; where a distinguished city grew, in which the grace of Christ appears in signs and portents next to the remains of St Molua forever'.

Description of Treóit and of Art's Grave

FA tells us that Treóit is Art's burial place, and the close connection between the monastery and Art's burial mound is one of the main themes of the poem. The poem opens with a description of a mound at Duma Derglúachra, which has appeared to the speaker and at least one companion:

[1] Caín do Denna Den

doma addonrúacht

úas Brega brug drécht

Derglúachra cen uacht.[412]

This description has the mound towering, almost floating over Brega, which gives it a vision-like character. Given that, from the story's point of view, Art is predicting his burial, it is appropriate that the mound should appear as a vision. However, it is not clear to whom the "us" of the stanza refers. It is possible that Art and Denna Den, who is explained as Art's servant in a gloss,[413] are meant. Another reading of the 1 pl. infixed pronoun is, however, also possible, especially given that it is not certain that Denna Den is a personal name. Given the existence of a mound at Treóit in the audience's time, it is possible that the "us" refers to Art as well as the audience. Just as the mound appeared to Art on the day before his death, the audience can still see the mound in their own day. The first stanza can thus be taken to work on two different time levels, like the beginning of the prose section, in which the two names Duma Derglúachra and Treóit are given, and a shifting of such layers can also be observed at other points in the poem.

The role of the prose section in informing the audience of Treóit's nature has been discussed in chapter 1,[414] and a number of stanzas in the poem also make it clear that Treóit is a monastic establishment. An example is Art's prophetic description of the place in stanza 3 with its references to angels, a bell and the tribes of Patrick:

[3] Sosod sóe co cned

aithne aingel ngel

comrad clocán bind

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[412] ll. 9835–8; 'Fair is Denna Den, a mound has appeared to us above Brega, a mound of poems, of Derglúachair, without coldness'.
[413] See above, p. 18.
[414] See above, pp. 23–4.

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ra lind tailcend treb.[415]

The designation *tálcend* is a name for St Patrick, and here, as in other stanzas in the poem, it is implied that the monastery will be a Patrician foundation.[416]

The poem's focus on Treóit is also made clear early on in the poem. Stanza 4 is a false etymology of the place name, linking it closely to a king.

[4] Treóit tréde fót

im thri fotu ind ríg

in tan bas bec cách

and bas már a mbríg.[417]

Art's grave is mentioned repeatedly in the poem, where it is presented as his dwelling place. There are eleven references to this grave or dwelling and the terms in which the grave is described on these occasions are either neutral or positive, as the following list shows:[418]

stanza		
8	*duma dess*	'southern mound'
8	*lecht*	'grave'
11	*firt*	'mound'
13	*duma* (equated with *dín*)	'mound' ('shelter')
13	*port idan án*	'pure splendid abode'
13	*ilad*	'tomb'
13	*uag*	'grave'
23	*cnocán caín*	'fair little mound'
28	*úag* (associated with *cloch cruad caín*)	'grave' ('hard fair stone')

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[415] ll. 9843–6; 'Dwelling of sages with a wound, commandment of bright angels, conversation of bright bells in the time of the families of the Tálcend.'

[416] St. Patrick, 'in tailcend', is mentioned in again in stanza 16 (l. 9895) and he is presumably also the subject of the first two lines of stanza 17 (ll. 9899–9000). Connections between Treóit and Armagh are also suggested by some of the annal entries concerning Treóit (see AU 888 and AU 1005).

[417] ll. 9847–50; 'Treóit, three sods, including the three sods of the king, when all may be small, then their power may be great.'

[418] In addition to the references listed in the table, stanzas 32 (l. 9960) and 37 (l. 9979) mention Art's 'dind', 'stronghold' or 'hill, height', which is very likely to be a reference to his grave if not to Treóit itself. Likewise, in stanza 29, the heavy stone, 'ail trom' (l. 9949), may be a description of Art's grave.

36	*uag dil fo dí*	'grave twice dear'
39	*lecht*	'grave'

In addition to this, the description 'cen uacht' in the first stanza,[419] might also be intended to highlight the positive associations of Art's grave, given that coldness is a quality often associated with graves.[420]

The lack of any negative associations with the grave, and therefore with death, in this list indicates that Art does not fear his grave. On the contrary, on more than one occasion in the poem earthly life is unfavourably compared with life after death and Art explicitly welcomes death, as for example, in stanza 14 and stanza 33:

> [14] Gid ébind bith sund
>
> oc seilg ar cach fíad
>
> aebni in maith iar cind
>
> ocond flaith find fíal.[421]

> [33] Beth rom béra dráeth
>
> mo chen amlaid éc
>
> mese im lá im rith
>
> cid ba bith is bréc.[422]

The references to Art's grave listed in the table above make it clear that his burial will take place in a mound, and the portrayal of his grave as his dwelling place has further implications. It is implied that Art will enjoy some sort of life after death, and stanzas 6 and 7 suggest that Art will go to heaven.[423] In addition, the form *atchíd*, used twice in the poem,[424] is here likely to be a 2 plural present

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[419] l. 9838; 'without coldness'.

[420] As, for example, in the first line of *A chloch thall* in *AC* : 'A chloch thall for elaid uair Buite buain' (pp. 18–19; 'O stone yonder upon the cold tomb of ever-famous Buite').

[421] ll. 9887–90; 'Although it may be pleasant to be here, hunting every game, more pleasant [is] the good ahead with the noble white ruler'.

[422] ll. 9959–62; 'It is life that will make me foolish, welcome thus death. I myself [am] in my day in my life's course - though it may be life, it is a lie'.

[423] ll. 9855–62.

[424] Stanza 20 (l. 9914) and stanza 39 (l. 9987).

indicative of *ad-cí*.[425] It is not clear from the prose preceding the poem or from the poem itself to whom this form refers, and this opens up the possibility that Art is being presented as talking about or to the poem's audience.[426] Combined with the idea of Art's grave as his dwelling place, it creates the image of Art speaking, as it were, from the grave.

Another implication of the description of the grave in terms of a dwelling place is the link with the monastic establishment which Art foretells will be founded in Duma Derglúachra and which the audience knows from their own time. The close connection between grave and monastery is brought out most strongly in stanza 37 when Art refers to *cell*. This word describes a church, monastic settlement or sanctuary,[427] and in stanza 37 of Art's poem is it is equated with his *dind*, a word which refers, amongst other things, to a hill or stronghold.[428] The context suggests that Art's *dind* is his grave, and it thus becomes clear how the description of Art's grave inextricably links his burial place with the monastic community of Treóit, implying also that Art has become part of this community. Similarly, Art's grave in stanza 13 is described as 'mo phort idan án'. *Port* is here probably best translated as 'abode' and the *DIL* notes that the word is frequently applied to 'a chief's residence'.[429] At the same time, however, the word can be applied to a monastic settlement.[430] As with the double-naming of Duma Derglúachra/Treóit and the description of the mound in the first stanza, potential ambiguity or shifting time levels serve to link Art's time with the monastic establishment of the audience's present.

Art's Saint-Like Characteristics

The focus on Art's grave and its close association with the community at Treóit indicates its importance for that particular foundation, something one would more readily associate with a saint's grave. Association with the burial

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[425] According to the *DIL*, this form could also be a 3 sg. impf. ind. or a later 3 pl. pres. ind. of *ad-cí* (*DIL* 41.54 and 42.18–20).
[426] Even if one chooses to interpret *atchíd* as a 3 sg. or 3 pl., the form would indicate a reference to an external observer.
[427] *DIL* 110.29–69.
[428] *DIL* 123.71–124.80.
[429] *DIL* 197.15.
[430] *DIL* 197.35–41.

place of a saint would have been of great importance for any church or monastic community, in particular with regard to its founding saint, but it is interesting that *FA* does not appear to be overly concerned with its patron saint, Lonán, who is not even mentioned by name in the main body of the poem. The focus is plainly on Art and his burial. There are clear indications in the poem that Art's burial place is given the same status as that which a saint's tomb might receive, and this is very surprising given that he is a pre-Christian king. In stanza 32, Art describes many people coming to his *dind*, 'stronghold', which appears to be a reference to his burial place at Treóit. It is unclear whether it should be taken to mean the actual mound or the community associated with it, but to some extent this does not matter and it may be that the ambiguity is deliberate and intended to associate both more closely. Stanza 32, then, may be understood as a description of the veneration of Art's grave by later generations:

[32] Bas lir fidbad fér

fir fuigset mo dind

slúag Dé do nim nél

co n-etib én find.[431]

The *slúag Dé* with their white wings in the third and fourth line of the stanza can be understood as angels, who also appear elsewhere in *FA*. In the prose section they appear in Art's vision and in the poem they are mentioned in the description of Treóit[432] and they take Art's body to heaven.[433] It is unlikely, however, that a medieval poet would have applied the word *fir* to heavenly messengers. The *DIL* does not list 'angel' as a possible translation of *fer*, and so we must take the first two lines to refer to mortal visitors to Art's stronghold.

The importance of Art's grave to later generations is indicated in stanza 36 in which Art states the following:

[36] Mo thasi for coí

bád masi la Día.[434]

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[431] ll. 9959–62; 'More numerous than the grass of woodlands will be the men who have sought my stronghold. The host of God from cloudy heaven with wings of white birds'.

[432] 'Aithne aingel ngel' (l. 9844; 'commandment of bright angels').

[433] 'La lúth aingel ngel/dobérthar nem dó' (ll. 9861–2; 'with strength of bright angels, heaven will be given to it').

[434] ll. 9975–6; 'My remains being lamented will be pleasing to God.'

The lamenting of Art's remains is pleasing to God, but the second part of the stanza refers to Art's grave:

> a úaig dil fo dí
>
> mo chin ri co rría.[435]

As a whole, stanza 36 may then be understood as saying that the veneration of Art's grave is an act which is pleasing to God, thus creating similarities between Art and a saint whose relics are venerated, especially as the word *taise* can refer to saints' relics.[436] The penultimate stanza removes any doubt that this is the sense intended when it refers to bone and *mind*, 'a halidom', 'a venerated object':

> [38] Consoífi cruth cnáim
>
> úas lí mind cach main
>
> la hor betha búain
>
> bad buaid cetha caín.[437]

It appears that the focus on Art's grave in the poem is aimed at establishing or perhaps contributing to an already existing tradition of what is essentially the secular equivalent of a saint's relic cult. In this context, one should note the connection made by Ó Riain between the location of medieval churches and older religious sites,[438] as well as Ó Carragáin's argument that saints' burial places 'appropriated the legal functions of ancestral focal tombs' in the context of oath-taking.[439] Given that Art's role as ancestor is important in the poem,[440] perhaps *FA* reflects the merging of pre-existing traditions with ideas concerning the function and significance of saints' burials. In the poem, the cult of Art's grave certainly appears to be very similar to a Christian saint's relic cult. This idea finds corroboration in the fact that Art is in some respects portrayed in ways which would more usually be reserved for saints. For example, the last two lines of stanza 23 could be understood as suggesting that Art's body has remained incorrupt:

> [23] Mo thonach co tric
>
> a tiprait in trír

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[435] ll. 9977–8; 'O grave twice dear, welcome the king who comes'.

[436] *DIL* 53.36–41.

[437] ll. 9983–6; 'Bone will change shape - nobler than every treasure is a venerated object - at the end of the everlasting world, it will be a victory of a fair shower'.

[438] 'Boundary Association' and 'Pagan Example'.

[439] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', pp. 149–50.

[440] See below, pp. 154–6.

> mo chorpan glan glúair
>
> isin cnocán caín.[441]

Art at this point may be referring to the washing of his body before burial and it may therefore simply be a description of his body being deposited in the mound. However, the stanza, like others mentioned above, may be understood on different levels. In the context of relics and saints' burials, it is interesting to note that preparation of a saint's relics involved ritual washing.[442] The pureness of Art's grave is mentioned in stanza 13,[443] stanza 26 also refers to the washing of his body[444] and stanza 16 refers to his 'cleansing' by Patrick.[445] The poem is intended to be an expression of Art's faith as well as a prophecy and it is possible that the references to the washing and cleansing of his body are to be understood in a spiritual, as well as a literal way. The phrase 'tiprait in trír' might be connected to the frequent association of the number three with Tara,[446] but it might also be intended to awaken associations with baptism, which is undertaken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 'Tiprait in trír' would be an apt description of a baptismal font, and it is possible that this association, rather than any possible connection to other traditions, is intended. In addition, the line 'bad buaid cetha caín'[447] might also be understood as referring to baptism. Mac Neill took it as a reference to battle,[448] presumably understanding the shower to be a shower of arrows. However, a religious explanation might also make sense. Baptism is described as a shower elsewhere in medieval Irish literature, for example in *AE*, where Lí Ban refers to her baptism in the following way: 'atlochor braen batais báin'.[449]

Stanza 28 also refers to Art's body in the grave. Given that the poem might well be understood as Art speaking directly to his audience from the grave, as

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[441] ll. 9923–6; 'My swift washing in the well of the three, my clean pure corpse in the fair little mound'.

[442] See Thomas, *Bede*, p. 7.

[443] The grave is described as 'mo phort idan án' (l. 9885; 'my pure, splendid abode').

[444] 'Tonuch mo tháeb' (l. 9936; 'the washing of my sides').

[445] 'Nom nigfea dom ucht' (l. 9897; 'he will cleanse me to my breast').

[446] See, for example, the frequent mention of the number three in the poem 'Temair III' (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas* I, 14–27), but also the reference to 'Tara of the three' in *FA* (ll. 9913 and 9915).

[447] l. 9986; 'it will be a victory of a fair shower'.

[448] 'Three Poems', p. 539, n. 4.

[449] l. 2998; 'I rejoice at/give thanks for water of fair baptism'. *Bráen* can also mean 'rain' or 'drops' (see *DIL* 151.70–152.28).

suggested above, one can argue that this stanza is intended to create the image of Art's body incorrupt in its grave in the audience's time:

> [28] Arco fuin dom ríg
>
> ferr múin ná cach main
>
> mo chorp uag i n-úaig
>
> cona chloich cruaid chain.[450]

Applying these characteristics of sainthood to a pre-Christian figure may seem remarkable, but they are not completely out of character in an early Irish text, given the parallels created between Christ and pre-Christian characters such as Cú Chulainn or Conchobar, discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, the "sainting" of a king is not something commonly found in medieval Irish literature. Royal saints are found in other countries: a notable example is the Northumbrian King Oswald, to whom Bede devotes considerable attention in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. At a later date, the Scandinavian king Óláfr Tryggvason comes to be described much like a saint in the literature, and Óláfr Haraldsson actually becomes St Óláfr or Óláfr Helgi.

This is less common in Ireland, but there are some examples. Ó Corráin has examined the case of Tairdelbach ua Briain, an eleventh-century Munster king who is portrayed as a saint in two lives of Flannán of Killaloe.[451] Ó Corráin ascribes the description of Tairdelbach to 'clerical propagandists of the Uí Briain',[452] but also suggests that the lives might be linked to a fear on the part of Killaloe of loss of royal patronage.[453] Tairdelbach is clearly presented as much more of a saint than Art in *FA*, but Ó Corráin's comments may nonetheless be of interest in connection with *FA*, as one can speculate that it, too, might be linked to the possible loss of patronage.[454] Another example of a royal Irish saint is discussed by Mac Shamhráin.[455] This is the Síl nÁeda Sláine king Máel Finnia of

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[450] ll. 9943–6; 'I beseech forgiveness from my king, for whom earth is better than every treasure, my complete body in a grave with its hard fair stone'.
[451] Ó Corráin, 'Foreign Connections', pp. 213–31.
[452] 'Foreign Connections', p. 228.
[453] 'Foreign Connections', p. 229.
[454] See below, pp. 170–1.
[455] Mac Shamhráin, 'Church and Dynasty'.

Brega, a member of the Uí Chonaing family, who died in 903 and who is listed in martyrologies.[456]

Returning to Art's depiction in *FA*, it is clear that the text does not claim outright that the pre-Christian king is a saint. Art himself mentions his saint and the support he receives from him in stanzas 17 and 18:

[17] Faícfid acom sund

nech dá tic mo dín

bid moti bas trén

mo scél hi tig ríg.

[18] Ic dígail ar cned

misi 7 mo naem

bid mé in t-ere mór

is ma thene ram tháeb.[457]

Art's authority is strengthened because he is presented as working together with his saint, but it seems clear that Art is distinct from the saint. It appears, therefore, that the poem is not intent on claiming that the pre-Christian king was a Christian saint, but instead Art is being depicted as a quasi-saint. He may not have been an actual saint, but he has qualities that allow him to be portrayed in a similar way and which suggest that he is of similar importance to God as a saint would be. By implication, he should be treated with a similar degree of respect. The references to baptism, Art's faith in God and his desire to please him and his expression of regret in stanza 9 that he, Art, did not meet Patrick all go towards showing Art to be as Christian as a pre-Christian king could possibly have been. Consequently, the fact that he was not fully Christian cannot be blamed on him, but merely on the circumstances of the time in which he lived. Art's standing is enhanced by the divine experience of his vision, and by the associated acquisition of faith before his time, which is expressed clearly in one of the stanzas:

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[456] Mac Shamhráin, 'Church and Dynasty', pp. 126 and 139. He appears to be mentioned at 6 February the twelfth-century Martrology of Gorman (ed. and trans. Stokes, p. 30) and in the seventeenth-century Martyrology of Donegal (ed. and trans. Todd, Reeves and O'Donovan, p. 40). For a discussion of the Martyrologies of Gorman and of Donegal, see Ó Riain, *Feastdays*, pp. 147–71 and 281–313 respectively.

[457] ll. 9899–9906; '[17] He [Patrick] will leave with me here someone from whom my protection comes. It will be all the more that my story will be strong in the house of a king [or: of kings]. [18] In avenging our wounds, I and my saint, I will be the great burden and my flame by my side'.

[34] Ní ní i nErind áin

risi tabraim thóeb

ingi Athar Mac

7 Spirut Náem.[458]

Stanzas 17 and 18, quoted above, make it clear that Art's saint supports
and protects him. Any lack of saintliness on Art's part is thus compensated for by
the fact that he is fully endorsed by God and his actual saint, as well as by the
faith and devotion to God which he expresses.

In some ways, one might regard Art as a peculiar kind of *érlam*, perhaps
best translated as 'patron saint' or 'founding saint'.[459] *Érlam* can also denote the
corresponding abstract concept, 'patronage', and, in both senses, the word is
found applied to secular as well as religious individuals. Charles-Edwards has
discussed the meaning of the term, and comes to the conclusion that the secular
érlam was 'the common ancestor of the lineages that shared the kingship'.[460]
From different sources, it appears that the secular *érlam* had the authority to
decide the point at which kingship was to pass from one branch of a family to
another. The ecclesiastical *érlam*, on the other hand, acted as the patron of the
church to whom the *érlam* was linked, and the *érlam*'s kin had priority when it
came to succession to the headship of a church.[461] In many cases, *érlam* and
founding saint were identical, but this was not necessarily the case.[462] According
to Charles-Edwards, the ecclesiastical *érlam* acts as 'heavenly patron' for his
church, he was involved in founding the church, he laid down a 'rule' for the
community, which included regulations concerning 'succession to the headship of
the church', his grave is at the church and on Judgment Day he is to protect others
buried with him.[463] In addition, Charles-Edwards suggests that 'there may have
been non-ecclesiastical notions of an *érlam*, ancestor-kings who prescribed a rule
of succession among their descendants'.[464] Art does not fulfil all the criteria

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[458] ll. 9967–70; 'There is a not a thing in beautiful Ireland in which I trust except for Father, Son
and Holy Spirit'.
[459] For discussions of the term, see Ó Riain, 'Conservation', Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*' and
Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 225–32.
[460] Charles-Edwards, *Érlam*, p. 281.
[461] See Ó Riain, 'Conservation', p. 360, Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*', p. 273, and Etchingham,
Church Organisation, pp. 225–32.
[462] Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*', p. 287.
[463] Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*', p. 290.
[464] '*Érlam*', p. 290.

outlined by Charles-Edwards, and most importantly, he is not actually a saint. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Art's saint-like character, his burial and the connection with one particular community is striking, and his role as ancestor figure is likely to be of relevance. In addition to being a saint-like individual, Art is also presented as the ideal king, as discussed in the previous chapter.[465] This depiction is utilised in the text in order to make statements regarding Treóit's standing, or that of that of the monastery's associated dynasty.[466] It is possible, then, that his depiction in *FA* draws on and merges the concepts of ecclesiastical and secular *érlam*.

SAINTS' BURIAL PLACES AND RELICS

As mentioned above, the graves of Lí Ban and Art are clearly considered to be of great importance and they are an important element, in Art's case *the* most important element, in these figures' characterisation as saintly individuals. The cult of saints' relics grew up around the graves of saints in late antiquity and appears to have been well established by the late fourth century, and thus by the time Christianity was introduced to Ireland.[467]

The importance of a saint's burial place was linked to the belief that he would be able to help others buried near him on the Day of Judgment. The saint's body was also important because the *virtus*, with which it was believed the saint was endowed, was thought to remain in the body even after death.[468] In an Irish context, it appears that a belief developed that the saint's buried body 'sanctified the whole space' and this influenced the development of cemeteries in medieval Ireland.[469] It is clear that the passage concerning the ownership of Lí Ban in *AE* is related to the benefits, both spiritual and secular, which having a saint's tomb onsite entailed. The political aspect of this appears to be reflected in *FA*, which

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[465] See above, pp. 108–9.
[466] See below, pp. 154–5 and 168–9.
[467] For the development of saints' cults, see Brown, *The Cult*. For a discussion of medieval ideas regarding relics, see also Sansterre, 'Les justifications'. For the cult of relics in Ireland, see Lucas, 'Social Role', Doherty, 'The Use', Picard, 'Le culte' and Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting'.
[468] For a discussion of this term mainly in the context of Anglo-Saxon hagiography, see Thomas, *Bede*, esp. pp. 1–5.
[469] Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting', p. 147.

mentions veneration for Art's *taise* ['tasi'], 'dead body', 'remains', a word regularly used for relics.[470] The authority which allows Art to address kings, and especially the kings of Tara, derives from his status as ancestor figure on the one hand and saintly individual on the other. Art's connection with Treóit in *FA* allows his authority to be transferred to the monastery, the place in which Art is buried and the place which represents his "new" community. Authority is derived from Art's grave much like the sanctity which was believed to emanate from a saint's tomb.

Relics are closely related to the significance of a saint's burial and their role in medieval Ireland has been discussed on a number of occasions.[471] One should not dismiss genuine religious feelings connected to their veneration, but the authority that the possession of relics bestowed had very real political and financial implications. It is, therefore, not surprising that monasteries and individuals tried to obtain relics and were keen to claim a particular saint's burial at their foundation. The hagiographical motif of the dispute concerning a saint's burial, the role of which in *AE* has been discussed above, is cited by Lucas as an expression of individual foundations' concerns to ensure that their saint was buried at their church.[472]

In addition, the saint's *virtus* preserved in his dead remains was believed to be transferred to objects which had come into contact with these remains. These in turn could transfer the miraculous powers to other objects and in this way contact relics were created, that is, objects which were not the remains of the saint but which had some line of contact with them, although this could consist of several degrees of separation.[473] The great esteem in which relics were held in medieval Ireland is evidenced by the surviving relic shrines, made of valuable materials and by the frequent reference in the surviving literature to the various objects – bells, staffs, teeth and books – which had belonged to saints and then became relics.[474] The social importance of relics is indicated by the connection between the taking on circuit of a particular saint's relics, the promulgation of laws and the raising of

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[470] See Lucas, 'Social Role', p. 6, and *DIL* 53.25–42.
[471] See, for example, Lucas, 'Social Role', Doherty, 'The Use', Picard, 'Le culte', Ó Carragáin, 'Architectural Setting' and Bannerman, '*Comarba*'.
[472] Lucas, 'Social Role', p. 7.
[473] For a discussion of the term *virtus*, see Thomas, *Bede*, pp. 1–4.
[474] On relics in medieval Ireland, see Lucas, 'Social Role', Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines*, and Picard, 'Le culte'.

payments.[475] Relics could also play a role in military warfare, the most famous surviving example of this being the *Cathach*. It is therefore natural that relics and the grave feature in texts the authors of which endeavoured to portray their characters as saintly individuals.

Mess Gegra's Brain in Pre-Christian and Christian Times

In *AE* and *FA*, the main characters Lí Ban and Art are given what must have been seen as a considerable honour by being portrayed in terms normally reserved for Christian saints. When we turn to *AC*, we find that Conchobar is depicted differently in the various versions of the tale. In the N version, for example, he appears to be considered a martyr of sorts, although he is quite different from the early Christian martyrs. Instead, Conchobar is portrayed as a warrior, whose martyrdom consists of dying as he sets out to fight for Christ. This ultimately positive depiction differs sharply from that found in the poem *A chloch thall* in the Stowe version (RIA D.iv.2). This poem, ascribed to Cináed úa hArtacáin in the Book of Leinster,[476] is addressed directly to Mess Gegra's calcified brain, which is described as being 'for elaid uair Buite buain maic Bronaig bain'.[477] The reference is to the sixth-century saint and abbot of Monasterboice, Buite mac Brónaig, and the stone-brain's link with the saint and his grave is made clear from the beginning of the poem and is continued all the way through, assuming that the verses which survive here and in The Book of Leinster represent the entire poem.[478]

That Mess Gegra's brain was connected with Buite and considered a relic is also made clear at the end of *AC* in Adv. 72.1.40 and Adv. 72.1.5. The brain is

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[475] See Hughes, *The Church*, p. 168, and Doherty, 'The Use', pp. 96–7. More recently, see Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, pp. 199 and 270–1, and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 564–5.

[476] Book of Leinster, p. 150a26.

[477] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'upon the cold tomb of ever-famous Buite, the blessed son of Bronach'.

[478] The poem consists of the same number of stanzas in the same order in both manuscripts, with little variation between the texts. Meyer incorporated manuscript readings from both versions in his *Death-Tales* (pp. 18 and 20). The Stowe version is unlikely to derive directly from the Book of Leinster, as the ascription to Cináed is found only in the latter manuscript, and there is no obvious reason why it should have been omitted it RIA D.iv.2, had the scribe found it in his exemplar.

described as 'adart Buiti' and miraculous powers similar to those of the hide of Ciarán's cow are ascribed to it: anyone who is touched by the calcified brain when dying will be granted heaven.[479] Both manuscripts also associate the relic with political authority, though Mess Gegra's brain has not, it appears, delivered its promise yet, as the wording of Adv. 72.1.40 makes clear: 'ata briathar a breth fodes a Lagnib 7 fortamlus doib iarsin'.[480] The same is said of the brain in Adv. 72.1.5, albeit in slightly different wording.

The transformation of Mess Gegra's brain into a relic is not directly linked to the story of Conchobar's death in the two NLS Adv. manuscripts. Rather, the history of the brain is added to the end of the story and it is not clear that the two things, the brain's relationship with Buite and its role in Conchobar's death, should be seen as connected to one another. The situation is different in *A chloch thall*. The brain's history in relation to both Conchobar and Buite is told and contrasted. Although the poem tells the story of Conchobar's death in a rather allusive way, it is easy enough to understand because of the other prose versions of *AC* which survive. Aside from the reference to the brain as being on Buite's grave in the first stanza of the poem, the next seven stanzas relate the stone-brain's role in Conchobar's death. This is followed by two stanzas referring to Buite's finding of the brain and its subsequent role as a relic, and the final stanza brings both narrative strands together.

Clancy has drawn attention to the use of the word 'mind' in the first stanza of the poem to describe the calcified brain:

A chloch thall for elaid uair   Buite buain maic Bronaig bain

ropsa mind i tressaib tóir   dia mba i cind maic Nessa nair.[481]

Clancy draws attention to the fact that *mind*, in addition to having the meaning 'diadem', is also used to refer to Christ's crown of thorns, as well as denoting a relic.[482] This is an important and relevant point, and I would agree with Clancy's argument that the word is a deliberately ambiguous way of introducing the object.

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[479] For the text of Adv. 72.1.40, see Meyer, *Death-Tales*, p. 10, variant apparatus. St Ciarán's stone pillow also became a relic, see Lucas, 'Social Role', p. 9.
[480] *AC*, pp. 10–11, variant apparatus and n. a; 'And there is a saying that it will be carried southward into Leinster, and that thereafter Leinster will have superiority'.
[481] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'O stone yonder upon the cold tomb of ever-famous Buite, the blessed son of Brónach, you were a diadem in battles of pursuit while you were in the head of the noble son of Ness'.
[482] 'Lethal Weapon', p. 109.

The image of the brain on Buite's grave in the first line fits in with the meaning of 'relic' of the word *mind* in the second. On the other hand, the association with Christ's crown of thorns is also suited to the context. The poem, as mentioned above, is a fairly brief summary of events and we must assume that the audience would have had to be familiar with the story of Conchobar's death if they were to understand the verses. It is thus likely that they would have known of Conchobar dying on hearing about the Crucifixion, and, if we assume that the idea of Conchobar's supposed foster-brotherhood with Christ was known at the time the poem was composed, the crown of thorns would be another parallel between these two individuals who were linked by their birth and death.

In the second stanza, the brain is described almost as a parasite, an enemy to the king who nourished it for seven years, until he set off to avenge Christ:

Ciapsat náma dó rot-chelt   secht mbliadna lána rot-alt:

dia luid do digail Ríg recht,   is and fo-frith a lecht latt.[483]

On the face of it, Conchobar is the noble king, martyred when he sets out to avenge Christ, and this depiction is similar to that found in the N version of *AC*. Clancy argues that Conchobar's conversion is understood in a very positive way by the poet, suggesting that 'his [Conchobar's] *imitatio Christi* consists not just of humility and restraint, but of "loving his enemy and doing good to those who persecuted him"'.[484] Building on this argument, Clancy sees the brain's own conversion represented in the penultimate stanza of the poem and comes to the conclusion that in the poem, 'we contemplate the brain itself as it commits treachery upon its Christian host Conchobar, and then, on the slopes of Leittir Lamraige, shelters Buite's head without harming him, and as a result changes forever from being an instrument of bodily destruction to being a means of spiritual salvation at the moment of death'.[485]

Going on the first two stanzas of the poem, it is indeed possible to see the poem leading up to such a conclusion, but it is also possible to read the poem in another way. In fact, one can argue that the poet deliberately builds up a positive image of Conchobar and his death in the first two stanzas, only to change this

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[483] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'Though you were an enemy to him, he hid you, he nourished you for seven full years: when he went to avenge the King of laws, 'tis then was found his grave through you'.
[484] Clancy, 'Lethal Weapon', p. 109.
[485] 'Lethal Weapon', p. 111.

picture and show that Conchobar and his pre-Christian contemporaries did not have the necessary understanding of Christianity to be saved, and in fact represent a much darker period, which lacked the light of faith.

Clancy's interpretation supposes that the brain itself also needed converting and that it belonged as much to the pre-Christian period as did Conchobar and his men. However, in the poem, the brain and Conchobar appear, in fact, to be very different. A look at the third stanza illustrates the "enmity" between Conchobar and the brain by describing the blow the brain deals to the king:

> Láech frisralais co mbúaid chain   fúair lat loimm tonnaid iar sin:
> for mac Cathbath, cóinsit fir,   dális di nathrach neim.[486]

The fact that the stone apparently hit 'co mbúaid' appears to be a positive description of the stone and its action. It might be taken as meaning that its action was not completely bad and creates the impression that the stone is carrying out a rightful fight against an enemy who is not entirely undeserving of his fate. The image of the previous stanza of the good king Conchobar, slain whilst trying to defend Christ, is changed.

There are further indications of a somewhat negative depiction of Conchobar. The stone, as Conchobar's enemy, is described as giving 'loimm tonnaid'[487] to the king and dealing him 'dig di nathrach neim'.[488] Given the religious tone of the content of the poem, which addresses a relic, the reference to serpent's venom may well be taken as a reference to the Fall, especially considering the alternative meaning of *tonnad*, that is 'death'.[489] Conchobar may have tried to help Christ, but essentially he was a pagan king living in a pagan era. Unable to convert to Christianity, he is doomed. In the first stanza, Conchobar, like Buite, is given a matronym, 'mac Nessa', by which he is more commonly known. In the third stanza, however, reference is made to Cathbad, the druid. Calling him Conchobar mac Nessa strengthens the parallels between him and Buite, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. Referring to his druid father, however,

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[486] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'The hero whom you hit victoriously thereafter found through you a draught of poison: to the son of Cathbad – men wailed – you dealt a drink of a serpent's venom'.
[487] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'a draught of poison'.
[488] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'a drink of a serpent's venom'.
[489] *DIL* 249.46.

highlights the contrast between Conchobar, Christ and the saint, Buite, and draws
attention to the pre-Christian king's pagan connections.

Moving on to the fourth stanza of the poem, we find that Cet, like
Conchobar, does not appear to find favour with the poet:

> Neimnech dotuc Cet an-dess   a tress ard Ailbe dria aiss,
>
> cenn ríg Emna orgsi leiss,   a inchinn Meis-gegra glaiss.[490]

Cet is 'neimnech', presumably not a positive characteristic, and stanza 5 goes on
to portray him as treacherous, stating that he killed Conchobar 'dar árach'.[491] By
contrast, Conchobar is depicted much more positively in stanza 6, which describes
him as 'ferr do láech darsa taitned gáeth is grían'.[492] He appears to be the heroic
victim of Cet's treachery. Although, as has been noted, stanza 3 seems to present
Mess Gegra's brain's "actions" in a positive light, it is possible that stanza 8
introduces a slightly more critical note in the second line 'do gleo frit chomthach
ba gand'.[493] Stokes translated the word *gand*, used in the second line, as 'rare', but
it can also be translated as 'mean' or 'evil'.[494] If one translates the word in this
way, we are presented with a more ambiguous image of the stone and of
Conchobar, whose role as victim would be highlighted here. This would agree
with the positive description of the king in stanza 6. Nevertheless, the last stanza
of the poem describes the encounter between Conchobar and Cet as 'gleo fri
demna troch',[495] illustrating that ultimately both pre-Christian heroes are
considered doomed, regardless of noble attributes and potentially redeeming
merits.

Parallels and contrast are important in the poem. The contrast between
'mac Nessa' and 'mac Cathbath' has already been mentioned, and contrast and
parallel are used to illustrate the relationship between Mess Gegra's brain in the
time of Buite and the brain in the time of Conchobar. Thus, in the first stanza, as
discussed above, the brain is, although ambiguous, a relic on Buite's grave and a
relic in Conchobar's head. The stone pierces Conchobar's skull and causes his

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[490] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'Venomous from the south Cet brought you upon his back from the
noble battle of Ailbe, the head of Emain's king you have wrecked thereby, O brain of the youthful
Mesgegra'.
[491] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'in violation of a bond'.
[492] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'the best hero on whom wind and sun would shine'.
[493] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'Your struggle against your comrade was rare'.
[494] *DIL* 42.40–4.
[495] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'a fight against demons of doomed men'.

death, but it allows Buite to rest his head and promises salvation to those who come into contact with it while dying, a contrast to which Clancy has drawn attention.[496] One of the most striking contrasts, however, is presented by stanzas 8 and 10 of the poem.

Stanza 8 is slightly obscure, but judging by the context and by what we know from the other versions, it can be read as a description of Conchobar's subjects' reaction to his injury by Cet:

Fo Lettir Lamraigi luimm   rotgiallsat druing na fian find,

do gleo frit chomthach ba gand   co torchar and assa chinn.[497]

The king's enforced immobility and his men's desire to do what it takes to save the king could be interpreted as submitting to the brain in the sense that it is the stone which now dictates all their actions. Stanza 10 of the poem, again describes crowds venerating the stone, but this time, we can be safe in interpreting this as Christian veneration of a relic:

Ó chonattail fritt cen brath   Buite co rath rúamnai cloth,

tairnit duit in tslúaig for ruth   co rochloemchlais cruth, a chloch.[498]

The Ulaid's enforced submission to the brain in order to avoid Conchobar's death in stanza 8 foreshadows the willing and continuing veneration of the brain by Christians of the poet's time.[499] At the same time, this 'eager humbling' contrasts with the enforced submission to the stone by the hosts in Mag Lamraige two stanzas earlier. This is a key contrast within the poem, illustrating on the one hand the stone-brain's transformation and on the other, the differences between Conchobar's time and Buite's Christian era.

Stanza 9 bridges the gap between these two contrasting stanzas. It describes how God revealed the brain to Buite, a saint of the early Christian period. It is through the coming of the faith that the hosts in stanza 10 are able to

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[496] 'Lethal Weapon', p. 110: 'the conversion of the brain itself occurs when it repays the act of hospitality [of being nourished by Conchobar] to Buite mac Bronaig'. Although I do not necessarily agree that the brain converts and repays a debt, the contrast itself is important.

[497] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'On the bare slope of Lámraige hosts of fair bands submitted to you: your struggle against your comrade was rare, until you fell out of his head there'.

[498] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'Since Bute with grace of fame has slept on you without treachery, the hosts have eagerly humbled themselves to you, until you changed colour [or better: shape?], O stone!'.

[499] See Meyer, *Death-Tales*, p. 21, n. f, for the suggestion that the present-tense form *tairnit* expresses action continuing up to the present.

venerate the brain properly, and God's revelation of the brain in stanza 9 makes its transformation to properly venerated, Christian relic complete:

> Fotroilsig Rí rodelb nem   do mac Bronaig uas brí Breg,
>
> i ndún daingen i n-rotail   i fail ilar angel ngel.[500]

The revelation of the brain by God to Buite in stanza 9 can be seen as symbolic of the coming of Christianity when we consider the structure of the poem and the position of the stanza between the two parallel and yet contrasting descriptions of people serving the brain.

The transformation of the stone's 'cruth' in stanza 10 presumably refers to the transformation into a Christian relic, and, interestingly, it is reminiscent of the statement made in *FA*, which also appears to be a reference to relics:

> Consoífi cruth cnáim
>
> úas lí mind cach main
>
> la hor betha búain
>
> bad buaid cetha caín.[501]

The changing of shape appears to refer to the transformation that an apparently everyday object undergoes when becoming a relic. On a material level, "normal" bones and bones that are relics appear to be the same and the difference to the observer may not be immediately obvious. In their nature, however, they are completely different things and entirely distinct from one another.

The poem's final stanza, stanza 11, creates yet another parallel. The poem begins with a stanza which places the stone-brain's relationship with Buite and its role in Conchobar's death side by side. This juxtaposition is found again in the final stanza:

> Inchind Meiss-gegra 'sin chath,   ropo gleo fri demna troch,
>
> adart Buti co tí bráth   bud é th'ainm la cách, a chloch.[502]

The poem has thus come full circle. However, by contrast with the ambiguous first stanza, the last two lines of the poem clearly compare and evaluate the two eras, that of Conchobar and that of Buite. Conchobar's pre-Christian age was the

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[500] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'The King who has shaped Heaven has revealed you to the son of Brónach above Brí Breg; in a strong fortress in which he slept, where there is a multitude of white angels'.

[501] ll. 9983–6; 'Bone will change shape - nobler than every treasure is a venerated object - at the end of the everlasting world, it will be a victory of a fair shower'.

[502] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'The brain of Mesgegra in the battle, it was a fight against demons of doomed men; "pillow of Bute," until Doom that shall be your name with every one, O stone!'.

age of condemned warriors, but in Buite's Christian era people place their trust in saintly relics.

I would argue that *A chloch thall* presents a very different picture of Conchobar from the other versions of his death-tale, which state that he was the first Irish pre-Christian to go to heaven. The view taken in the poem appears to be that only true belief in Christ can lead to salvation, regardless of an individual's merits and achievements. Conchobar stands out as being comparatively good and, although he dies in an attempt to save Christ, apparently losing his fear of death when he hears of the Crucifixion, the reference to the 'gleo fri demna troch' in the final stanza suggests that even he cannot be saved. The pre-Christian past may be considered noble, as is the case in the poem.[503] Ultimately, however, it is doomed and redemption can only come through Christianity, a contrast expressed well by the first and the final stanza of the poem, contrasting 'Buite buain maic Bronaig bain'[504] and his pillow with Conchobar, who is merely the noble son of Ness[505] and who takes part in 'gleo fri demna troch'.[506]

It is difficult to speculate on the reasons for this difference between the portrayal of Conchobar in the poem and in the other versions of his death-tale. The Stowe version of *AC* as a whole gives the impression of being a collection of different texts about Conchobar's death. Thus, the prose section at the beginning is found also in Laud misc. 610. This is followed by the two verses on Tadg mac Céin and on Conchobar. After that, *A chloch thall* is introduced with the words 'Is don cloich sin romudaig Conchobur rochan in fili'.[507] Assuming the poem's ascription to Cináed in the Book of Leinster is correct, the poem would be datable to the tenth century. It is clear, however, that the poem's date alone cannot explain the views reflected in it. It is evident from the discussion of *FA*, which may well also be of tenth-century date,[508] that that text takes a very positive approach to Art, the pre-Christian king. Without knowing the context and circumstances of *A*

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[503] See for example Conchobar's description as 'nár', 'noble', in stanza 1 and 'rán', 'noble, pre-eminent', in stanza 7. In stanza 6, Conchobar is said to be the 'ferr do láech darsa taitned gáeth is grían' (*A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'the best hero on whom wind and sun would shine'), and the hosts on Mag Lamraige are described as 'find', 'fair, bright', in stanza 8.
[504] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'ever-famous Buite, the blessed son of Brónach'.
[505] 'Ropsa mind i tressaib tóir dia mba i cind maic Nessa náir'(*A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'you were a diadem in battles of pursuit while you were in the head of the noble son of Ness').
[506] *A chloch thall*, pp. 20–1; 'a fight against demons of doomed men'.
[507] *A chloch thall*, pp. 18–19; 'Of that stone which ruined Conchobar the poet has sung'.
[508] See the linguistic analysis of the text (above, pp. 10–17).

chloch thall's composition, it is thus not possible to try to ascertain why its presentation of Conchobar should differ from the depictions in other versions of *AC* which, from a Christian point of view, are more favourable.

CONCLUSION: PRE-CHRISTIAN SAINTS AND SINNERS

The discussion of the texts in this chapter has shown that in both *AE* and *FA* attempts are made to endow the main characters with saintly characteristics. This blurs the distinction between pre-Christian and Christian aspects, creating a sense of continuity from one age to the other. *A chloch thall*, however, is somewhat different. It appears to depart from traditions which suggest that Conchobar was one of the few people in Ireland to believe in Christ before the conversion, instead seemingly depicting the king as a noble but doomed pagan and suggesting that salvation can only come through the full adoption of Christianity.

The picture which emerges from these texts is thus one of two different approaches to the pre-Christian past and to the question of pre-Christian salvation. *AE* and *FA* appear to express the view that pre-Christian characters could gain a measure of faith that made their salvation possible, although baptism in its different forms is an important part of this, whereas *A chloch thall* appears to preclude this.

However, regardless of what attitudes lie behind the texts, by using the idea of the saint and focusing on relics, it can be argued that they all express an understanding of history as universal, created and shaped by God. In a medieval Christian context, a saint's life and the miracles he or she worked were understood as an expression of God's grace, and a saint's grave, and therefore relics, could be seen as a place in which 'the joining of Heaven and Earth'[509] occurred. God had become incarnate in Christ, but through his saints he continued to interact with the world as it progressed towards final judgment.

The texts discussed here reflect that belief, and it can be argued that all three texts suggest that God ruled over everything at all times, even if it was not generally acknowledged in the pre-Christian period. In *FA*, Art's status as pre-

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[509] Brown, *The Cult*, p. 1.

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Christian "saint" is a striking expression of the belief that God had not abandoned pre-Christian people despite their lack of faith. *AE* similarly suggests that an originally pre-Christian character could find such favour with God that she could become something akin to a saint and enter heaven. In *A chloch thall*, the situation is somewhat different. The lack of faith on the part of pre-Christians makes their unbelief a sin which prevents their salvation.

CHAPTER 7: CHRISTIAN KINGSHIP AND THE PRE-CHRISTIAN PAST

FA and *DSTT* share the theme of kingship and royal authority. In both tales, the importance of both pre-Christian past and Christian ideas for this theme is evident. In *FA*, kingship and authority are connected to the political importance of the pre-Christian past as reflected in some medieval tales and in genealogies.[510] Art's authority derives to some extent from his status as an important ancestral king and in his poem he and his son are presented as perfect rulers. One might argue that, as an ancestor of some of the most important dynasties in medieval Ireland, Art might naturally assume such an elevated position. However, Art is presented as Christian before his time and his special relationship with God raises his status further. In addition, kingship is presented as having to be divinely endorsed. In *DSTT*, the importance of the kingship of Tara and Diarmait as its holder is confirmed by Fintan, the ancient pre-Christian character, who was among the first settlers of Ireland and is an authority on all of Ireland's history. The knowledge which enables Fintan to make his judgment in the dispute between Diarmait and his nobles, however, derives from Trefuilngid Treochair, identified as God or his angel.

THE BASIS OF KINGSHIP AND ROYAL AUTHORITY IN *FÁSTINI AIRT* AND *DE SUIDIGUD TELLAIG TEMRA*

Divinely Derived Tradition and Legal Aspects in De Suidigud Tellaig Temra

The question posed by the nobles who are summoned to Diarmait's feast at the beginning of *DSTT* concerns the *tellach*, the household or lands, of Tara. However, the answer and the information that Fintan gives Diarmait regarding the settling of the *tellach* of Tara is not restricted to Tara alone. Fintan's answer to the king's question addresses the arrangement of all of Ireland. The apparently simple question about the extent of the lands of Tara is turned into something much more

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[510] See the reference above, p. 81, n. 236.

significant through Fintan's answer, which indicates that all of Ireland constitutes Tara's lands. In *DSTT*, as Mac Airt has noted, Tara appears to be used synonymously with Ireland.[511] It is also notable that in confirming all of Ireland as Tara's lands, Fintan also confirms Diarmait as king of Ireland, although he is not given this title in the tale.

The context in which Fintan receives the knowledge which enables him to be an arbiter of the conflict between Diarmait and the nobles draws attention to the tale's legal dimension, indicating the importance of legal aspects to the idea of kingship reflected in the tale and illustrating the links between law, Irish and biblical learning and their relevance to political questions. Thus Trefuilngid is carrying stone tablets when he appears at Conaing's assembly, a clear allusion to the stone tablets on which Moses received the law from God: 'Láa n-and dúin isin dáil sin iarum co n-acamar in scálfer mór cáin cumachtach chucaind aníar la fuinead ngréne. [...] Taibli lecda inna láim cli, cróeb co trí toirthib ina láim deis'.[512]

However, legal associations are evoked already at the very beginning of the tale. The term *tellach* which appears in the title of *DSTT* in the Yellow Book of Lecan and in the main body of the text in both manuscript of the tale,[513] is a term found also in early Irish law, where it denotes the process of laying claim to and obtaining land.[514] Although *tellach* in *DSTT* should be taken to mean 'household' or 'land', it is likely that a learned medieval audience would also have been aware of the legal process known as *tellach*. It is plausible that the use of this term is also intended to trigger such specifically legal associations, especially given that legal matters are also highlighted in other places in the tale. At the beginning of *DSTT*, the nobles refuse to come to Diarmait's feast before their question concerning *tellach Temra* has been resolved: 'Et roráidset nád cathfitis feis Temra co rochindtea dóib suidigud tellaig Temra'.[515] I would suggest

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[511] Mac Airt, '*Filidecht*', p. 148: 'But it is quite evident that *tellach Temra* (the household of Temair) is a kenning for "Ireland", or rather more precisely for "the important families of Ireland, Goidelic and non-Goidelic"'.

[512] *DSTT*, pp. 138–9 (text omitted by me); 'On the day then in that assembly we beheld a great hero, fair and mighty, approaching us from the west at sunset. [...] Stone tablets in his left hand, a branch with three fruits in his right hand'.

[513] See, for example, 'suidigud tellaig Temra' (*DSTT*, p. 126).

[514] See Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship*, pp. 259–73.

[515] *DSTT*, pp. 126–7; 'And they said that they would not partake of the feast of Tara until the settling of the manor of Tara was determined'.

that this is a reference to *troscad*, the legal process of fasting against someone. Thus, the question which the nobles pose at the beginning of the tale is a legal problem, and in order to bring about its resolution they resort to legal measures. Fintan's qualifications as a judge are brought out in Diarmait's words to him, after he responds to the nobles' question regarding his memory.[516] In reply to Diarmait, Fintan claims to be an expert in true judgment[517] and he recites a poem on different judgements and types of law throughout the ages.[518]

On a "legal" level, then, the text can be read as follows: the nobles force Diarmait to find an answer regarding the legal problem of the *tellach* of Tara by resorting to the legal measure of fasting, and the situation is not resolved until a competent judge, Fintan, is found who can pronounce on the initial problem. The knowledge which enables Fintan to solve the dispute has been passed on to him through a divine agency, and this, along with the allusion to Moses's stone tablets, sets the giving and receiving of law, as well as the giving of good judgment, in a religious context. Discussing the poem which Fintan recites about different judgments in history, McCone has drawn attention to the division of Old-Testament history into periods of different types of judgements or law, culminating in the birth of Christ and a new covenant.[519] Like the stone tablets, then, the poem makes a clear connection between the Old-Testament period and the giving of law, in keeping with Fintan's parallels with Moses.

Law and the Pre-Christian Past

DSTT links law and judgment to Christian teaching, and presents good judgment as coming from God, but the role of the king is also important. The judgment given by Fintan confirms Tara as the centre of Ireland, and therefore also confirms Diarmait's power as its king. The judgment, derived from God, is

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[516] 'At arrsaig sin samlaid, ol Diarmait. Is tíachtain tar breith senórach tíachtain tar do breith' (*DSTT*, pp. 134–5; '"You are indeed venerable," said Diarmait. It is transgression of an elder's judgment to transgress your judgment"').

[517] 'Am éolach in cech breithemnos fírén dorónad ó thosuch domuin cosinndiu' (*DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'I am skilled in every just judgement that has been given from the beginning of the world until this day').

[518] *DSTT*, pp. 134–9.

[519] *Pagan Past*, p. 93. McCone relates this division of Old-Testament history into different ages of law to the eighth-century Irish text known as the 'Bibelwerk' or 'Reference Bible'.

thus seen to support the legitimate ruler Diarmait. Christian teaching, law and kingship are interlinked. In addition to this, Fintan's role as a poet is also of interest; it is his judgment which confirms Diarmait's status as king.[520]

The linking of Christianity, kings and poets with law and judgment is found also in the Pseudo-historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*, an aspect most explicit in the description of the setting down of the laws after Dubthach's judgment: 'Pátraic 7 Benignus 7 Cairnech, trí epscoip; Loegaire mac Néill rí Hérenn 7 Dáire rí Ulad 7 Corc mac Lugdech rí Muman, trí ríg; Dubthach maccu Lugair 7 Fergus fili 7 Ros mac Trechim suí bélra Féne'.[521]

The Pseudo-historical Prologue presents the Christian period as superseding the pre-Christian age, but in doing so it accommodates certain elements of pre-Christian tradition and practices. The text thus creates a deliberate sense of continuity from the earlier period to the later. Dubthach, the pre-Christian poet, passes judgment on a dispute in the early Christian period and is able to do this through divine inspiration. He is chosen by Patrick to pass judgment and he delivers his decision in poetic form. Although Dubthach is initially unwilling to pass judgment, Patrick encourages him, saying 'a ndobera Dia for erlabrai, ráid amin. Non uos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus patris uestri quo loquitur in uobis'.[522] This quotation from Matt. X.20 illustrates how Dubthach's judgment can be seen as divine revelation. There are certain similarities between Dubthach and Fintan, who has lived through Ireland's pre-Christian period and judges a dispute in Christian times. He does so on the basis of knowledge acquired in pre-Christian Ireland through Christian revelation. Thus Fintan and Dubthach are both able to solve a conflict through knowledge received from God, although the circumstances and settings of the two stories are different and Fintan's revelation takes place long before the judgment. In addition to this, although Fintan is not referred to as *file* in *DSTT*, he does recite a number of poems. Indeed, this is one

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[520] Watson stresses the role of poets in royal inauguration and connects it to inauguration sites and trees ('The King', pp. 176–9). It might be argued that Fintan reflects this possible part of poets.
[521] Pseudo-historical Prologue §8 (ed. and trans. Carey, pp. 12 (text) and 19 (translation)); '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; (and) Dubthach maccu Lugair, and Fergus the poet, and Ros mac Trechim the expert in legal language'.
[522] Pseudo-historical Prologue §6 (ed. and trans. Carey, pp. 12 (text) and 18 (translation)); 'Whatever God may give (you) to say, speak thus. It is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you'.

of the characteristics he shares with Moses, who is referred to as the inventor of psalms, along with David, in the Milan glosses to the Antiphonary of Bangor.[523]

DSTT is a vernacular text which deals with a political question, that of the significance of the kingship of Tara to Ireland as a whole, but the tale draws on biblical tradition and contains allusions to legal practices. In addition, Mac Airt has pointed to the legal role of *coimgne*,[524] a term denoting historical knowledge but difficult to translate precisely, which is applied by Trefuilngid to the knowledge he is about to impart to Conaing's assembly: 'rodosuidighuib-sa dúib sreith seanchusa 7 ailgi chomgni tellaich Temrach fésin co ceithri hardaib hErenn imbi'.[525] Analysing the function of verse, Toner has come to conclusions which suggest that verse was considered authoritative enough to carry legal weight.[526] The interrelationship between law, history, theology and vernacular literature has been elucidated by Ó Corráin who has discussed the influence of the bible, and in particular the Old Testament, on vernacular Irish law.[527] Drawing on the evidence from a number of texts, including *DSTT*, he comes to the conclusion that law was greatly influenced by the ecclesiastical context of literary production in medieval Ireland and that the same individuals were involved in the production of what would now be considered different genres, those of 'scriptural studies, sacred history, patristic, Irish history, vernacular literature and poetry'.[528] On the whole, *DSTT* is in line with other Irish material in associating law and biblical matter. Fintan's "law" is presented as the result of divine revelation, lending it great authority. Thus, his judgment that Tara is at the centre of Ireland and that the kingship of Ireland comes from Tara is given almost legal status, but biblical tradition and Irish historical learning, *coimgne*, are combined and the latter is presented as deriving from Christian revelation.

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[523] See Hennig, 'The Literary Tradition', p. 255.
[524] Mac Airt, '*Filidecht*', pp. 145–6.
[525] *DSTT*, pp. 144–5; 'I will establish for you the progression of the stories and chronicles of the hearth of Tara itself with the four quarters of Ireland round about'.
[526] 'Authority', p. 61: 'verse was considered in legal circles as a reliable witness to the past on a par with written texts'.
[527] 'Irish Vernacular Law'. For studies on the same subject, see Ó Corráin, Breatnach, and Breen, 'The Laws', and McCone, *Pagan Past*, especially chapter 4, 'The Law and the Prophets', pp. 84–106.
[528] 'Irish Vernacular Law', p. 294.

Church and kingship are also closely linked in *FA*. This text's focus is on Treóit, which, it is suggested a number of times in the poem which Art recites, has royal connections. Apart from the associations with Art in Art's own time, the etymology of Treóit in stanza 4 stresses the place's association with kings or a king;

> Treóit tréde fót
>
> im thri fotu ind ríg
>
> in tan bas bec cách
>
> and bas már a mbríg.[529]

The nature of the three sods of the king is not explained further in *FA*, although a more detailed explanation of it is found in *CMM²* when Art talks about the dream he has had concerning the place in which he finds himself: 'agus ba Trefóid a-ainm ó so amach do na trí fódaibh bhainfead-sa do chois na sleighe so im' láimh ann, .i. fód fám' cheann, fod fám' thaobh, agus fód fám' chosaibh'.[530] The passage which follows in *CMM²* suggests that these sods refer to the earth in which Art will be buried. Although the author of *CMM²* may be extrapolating from the prophecy that Art was to be buried at Treóit, it is possible that he knew a different version of the story from that preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*[531] and thus this explanation of the three sods might be original. Treóit's name itself would then be understood to be referring to a king's burial.

Later on in the poem in *FA*, in stanzas 20–22, other kings, including contenders for the kingship of Tara, are addressed:

> [20] Mairg ríg co bráth brecht
>
> gébas eill mo naím
>
> do Themraig in trír
>
> atchíd nibá caín.

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[529] ll. 9847–50; 'Treóit, three sods, around the three sods of the king, when all will be small, then their power will be great'.

[530] *CMM²*, p. 427; 'Trefóid would be its name from now on from the three sods which I will dig out with the tip of this spear in my hand here, that is a sod beneath my head, a sod beneath my side, and a sod beneath my feet'.

[531] See the discussion of the textual tradition of *FA* above, pp. 17–22.

[21] Rí Temrach in trír

gen Erind na laim

co bráth níbá ri

noco tí nar ndáil

[22] Trosced tréde sund

a thol féin ros bía

messi leiss com náem

a thol féin ros bia.[532]

These three stanzas issue a clear warning to a king, should he harm Art's saint, and in stanza 21, the king of Tara is addressed. Given Art's connections with Treóit, one can assume that the saint in stanza 20 is Lonán, Treóit's patron saint. The glosses in M's hand on stanzas 17 and 18 also clearly indicate that at least parts of the poem were understood as relating to Treóit and its patron saint by a medieval scribe.[533] Treóit's saint, presumably representing the house itself, is supported by Art, who issues the warning on his behalf and lays down the conditions for the king of Tara's successful rule and the implementation of the king's wishes in stanzas 21 and 22. Treóit is thus perhaps presented as threatened, a point suggested by stanza 5 of the poem, which indicates that the power claimed in stanzas 21 and 22 is not a reality.[534] In any case, *FA* presents the monastery as being supported by royal power and by God, thus connecting church and kingship.

Stanza 19 also appears to belong to the group of stanzas, 20–22, as it is the first in a pair issuing a warning and beginning with *mairg*, but it does not explicitly mention a king. It is not clear whether the youth mentioned in the stanza should be identified with the king of stanza 20 or with the king of Tara mentioned

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[532] ll. 9911–22; '[20] Woe to the king until splendid judgment who will take advantage of my saint, to Tara of the three, you see it will not be pleasant. [21] The king of Tara of the three without Ireland in his hand, until judgment he will not be king until he comes to us [lit.: to our assembly]. [22] May he fast for three days here, he will have his own will, myself with him with my saint, he will have his own will'.

[533] In stanza 17 'sund', (l. 9899; 'here') is glossed '.i. hi Treóit' (*LU*, p. 298, n. b; 'that is, Treóit') and 'nech dá tic mo dín' (l. 9900; 'someone from whom my protection comes') is explained '.i. Lonan Treoiti' (*LU*, p. 298, n. c; 'that is, Lonán of Treóit'). In stanza 18, 'ma thene' (l. 9906, 'my flame') is glossed '.i. Lonan' (*LU*, p. 298, n. d; 'that is, Lonán').

[534] 'Básá már ar thús/ ic Dia dígrais gail/ bása bec bíaid úair/ basa már iar tain' (ll. 9851–4; 'You will be [considered] great in the beginning by the splendid God of valour. You will be small, there will be a time, you will be great after that').

in 21 and 22. However, given the position of Art as royal ancestor,[535] it is likely that the youth should also be regarded as royal:

[19] Mairc ócán dom síl

asa holc donrúa

digeltar co prapp

mairg a mac 's a úa.[536]

Stanzas 21 and 22 of *FA* claim that the king of Tara derives his authority from "us". From stanza 22 it appears that this refers to Art and his saint, who may represent the saint's monastic community. *FA* thus claims that the king of Tara must seek the monastery's approval in order to hold the kingship, and this reflects a thinking according to which the church should have a decisive role in legitimising a king's authority, because a king's power was believed to be ultimately derived from God. Thus, it was to be bestowed on a ruler through the church. This idea fits in with other aspects of *FA*, for example, the descriptions of God as king[537] and the hierarchical order of God, Patrick, Lonán, and Art which is established in stanzas 15 to 18 and which implicitly derives Art's status from God.

In the poem there are several different kings: God, who is described as ruler, Art, the ideal king, and the king or kings to whom Art addresses his warning. One can arrange these kings in a hierarchy in which God is at the top. His favour and support give Art, next in the hierarchy, the authority to speak to the kings who are addressed in the stanzas quoted and who are below him on the scale.

The poem reflects the importance both of ancestry and genealogies as well as Christianity to ideas of kingship. There are a number of references to a ruler or king in the poem, which are to be understood as references to God, and he is clearly represented as the ruler of the world, and thus the highest of kings.[538] Art's address to one of his descendents in stanza 19, on the other hand, also shows very clearly the authority that he holds as an ancestral figure. His elevation to the level of perfect king through the use of God-parallels in stanzas 24 and 25[539] shows the

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[535] Art was considered to be the ancestor of both Connachta and Uí Néill.
[536] ll. 9907–10; 'Woe to the youth of my seed out of whose evil he will come to us. He will be punished quickly. Woe to his son and his grandson'.
[537] See ll. 9939 and 9943.
[538] See 'ra ríg ríchid rind' (l. 9894; 'before the king of heaven of the stars').
[539] See above, pp. 108–9.

merging of different elements in the thinking of the poem's compiler. Art's authority is derived from this representation as a perfect king, as well from his genealogical position. In addition, he is seen acting together with his saint, which strengthens his authority, and he plays a prominent role, significantly greater than that which has been suggested for other tales.[540] His Christian faith supplements this and ensures him a positive depiction.[541] Art's position is thus founded both on the importance of pre-Christian genealogy and on Christian ideas.

INAUGURATION AND SYMBOLS OF KINGSHIP

Ecclesiastical Involvement in Royal Inauguration

FA also suggests a degree of church influence on royal succession and inauguration. However, there are very few descriptions of early medieval royal inauguration in Irish sources, and thus it is difficult to know the precise nature of any such ceremony and consequently to establish the degree of ecclesiastical involvement. It is clear, nevertheless, that ties between ecclesiastical and secular power were close throughout the medieval period. Enright has argued that the claims made in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* regarding the divine sanction of Diarmait mac Cerbaill and Aedán mac Gabráin reflect claims made by Iona in the seventh century concerning ecclesiastical involvement in royal inauguration.[542] In Munster, the ninth- and tenth-century kings who were also churchmen illustrate the degree to which kings were involved in ecclesiastical, as well as secular affairs.[543] Furthermore, Southern Uí Néill assemblies, in particular in the ninth century, regularly involved ecclesiastics.[544] In Brega, Máel Finnia, mentioned

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[540] Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography*, p. 38; 'While Art son of Conn figures in a number of tales in his own right, it is not unreasonable to say that his main function in Irish legend is to father Cormac'.

[541] See in particular stanza 34 (ll. 9967–70), in which Art explicitly states his faith in the Holy Trinity.

[542] Enright, *Iona*, p. 9.

[543] See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, pp. 213–15.

[544] On the nature of *rígdála*, the participants involved and the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical assemblies, see Bannerman, 'The Convention', pp. 122–4, Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 279–81, and FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 173.

previously,[545] may have been both king and head of Inis Pátraic,[546] and Mac Shamhráin associates this with his dynasty's recent expansion of power.[547] In the early eleventh century, specifically in 1005, Brían Bóruma's visit to Armagh, important to Uí Néill, illustrates the importance of the church to his political activities.[548] The ideas expressed in *FA* are not, therefore, unusual.

If one accepts that the text emanates from Treóit, it is uncertain that the claims made reflect real power, as Treóit appears to have been a house of local or regional importance.[549] It is more likely that the claims should be understood as an appeal or a warning and read against the background of common ideas on ecclesiastical and secular relations. It is not possible to establish with certainty at whom such a warning or appeal might have been directed, but some speculative suggestions might be made. Treóit appears to have been linked to the Uí Chernaig Sotail dynasty at Lagore in the early medieval period,[550] and it can be argued that this connection plays a role in *FA*. The final stanza of the poem describes Art's grave as being by the shore of a lake:

> [39] Lecht meic Cuind atchíd
> co tuind dara thaíb
> for brú in locha lain
> ní scél crotha caín.[551]

If one accepts the connection between *FA* and Treóit, this description may be a reference to Loch Gabor, the only lake in the vicinity of Treóit and the lake in which Lagore crannog was situated. Although the reference to a lake may be coincidental, it seems unlikely as it does not appear to serve any other purpose in *FA*. The nature of Art's burial place elsewhere in *FA* is also important. Throughout the poem we find references to Art's grave as a mound,[552] and it is clear that this is how his burial was imagined in the poem. The archaeological

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[545] See above, pp. 133–4.
[546] Mac Shamhráin, 'Church and Dynasty', p. 137.
[547] Mac Shamhráin, 'Church and Dynasty', p. 138.
[548] See Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp. 46–8. On Brían's visit, see, for example, Gwynn, 'Brian in Armagh'.
[549] See above, pp. 36–7.
[550] See above, pp. 36–7.
[551] ll. 9987–90; 'The grave of Mac Con you see, with a wave across its side, upon the edge of the full lake. It is not a story of pleasant form'.
[552] Thus, 'duma dess' (l. 9865, 'southern mound'), 'firt' (l. 9876, 'mound'), 'duma' (l. 9883, 'mound') and 'cnocán caín' (l. 9926, 'fair little mound').

features at Treóit include a tumulus which is probably pre-historic.[553] Taken in combination with the reference to the lake in stanza 39, it is possible that the text describes the location of Treóit as it would have been in the early medieval period.

Given the references to royal power in the poem, the poem's emphasis on Art's burial in a mound may be of importance. FitzPatrick's discussion of inauguration sites, their archaeological features and the nature of the surrounding landscape is of interest in this context. Although she deals primarily with a later period, she also uses earlier sources. She concludes that there is a great deal of variation in the nature of identified inauguration sites, but that mounds appear to be the most common feature.[554] Discussing these mounds, FitzPatrick draws attention to the fact that they are often connected to the dynasty whose inauguration site they represent, for example, through a claim that the mound is the burial place of an important ancestor. This connection was intended to show the king's legitimacy, but the historical veracity of the claims was of little importance. If a traditional association did not exist, it could be created and the landscape could be interpreted in relation to the dynasty which was claiming it as its traditional inauguration place.[555] One of the examples of this process which FitzPatrick discusses is the inauguration site of Síl Muiredaig at Carn Fraích. She argues that the connection of this site and the surrounding landscape with the dynasty's ancestor Fráech may not have been an ancient association but a tradition created when Síl Muiredaig gained political power in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.[556]

If one accepts Treóit as a possible place of origin of *FA*, one can read the poem against the background of the practices outlined by FitzPatrick. The mound at an inauguration site did not have to be particularly large or high, and FitzPatrick gives examples which have about the same dimensions as the mound at Treóit.[557] It cannot be determined whether there were pre-existing traditions of

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[553] Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 222, p. 33 See also the list of archaeological features at Treóit, above, p. 32.

[554] FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 35–7. Another notable feature of these sites is a good view of the surrounding countryside (FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 35).

[555] FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 68.

[556] FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 68

[557] For example, Carn Fraích, which is about 2 metres in height and 11 metres in diameter (FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 62). The tumulus at Treóit is also 2 metres high and has a

Art's burial at Treóit, but the textual evidence discussed in chapter 1 may perhaps be taken as an indication of this.[558] Even if such traditions did not exist, the example of Carn Fraích shows that it is was possible for traditions to be created and it is not inconceivable that a similar literary invention could have come about in connection with Treóit, although *FA* is to be dated later than the late eight or early ninth century. The Uí Chernaig Sotail dynasty was a member of Uí Néill and thus counted Art among their ancestors. Given the probable connection between Treóit and Lagore, one might speculate that Treóit functioned as an inauguration site for this dynasty, although it is less likely that the church would seriously have claimed to be the inauguration site of the kings of Tara. What is clear, however, is that *FA* draws on both Christian and "traditional" ideas of legitimate kingship, and it is possible that *FA* is using these ideas in order to support the monastery or its associated dynasty.

Trees as Symbols of Kingship

In addition to mounds, inauguration stones and trees could also be features of inauguration sites. Trees have been linked to royal inauguration sites by a number of scholars,[559] and Watson discusses the relationship between the five trees mentioned in *DSTT*, poets and kings, stating that 'the sacred tree was intimately connected with the concept of kingship'.[560] On the basis of the twelfth-century Life of Máedóc of Ferns, Simms and FitzPatrick have argued for a connection between *slat na ríghe* used in later inauguration ceremonies and inauguration site trees.[561] Taking up this line of argument, Clancy has suggested possible links

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diameter of eleven to sixteen metres (Moore, *Archaeological Inventory*, no. 222, p. 33). Medieval sources also suggest that an inauguration stone was present at an inauguration site (FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 4–5). It might be suggested that there is a reference to such a stone in stanzas 28 and 29 of *FA*, in which attention is drawn to the slab on Art's grave ('mo chorp uag i n-úaig/ cona chloich cruaid chaín', ll. 9945–6; 'my whole body in a grave with its hard fair stone'; and 'bád é luag ail trom/ co soich bond is cenn', ll. 9949–50; 'a heavy stone, which reaches from sole to head, will be a reward').

[558] See the discussion of *FA*'s textual tradition above, pp. 17–22.

[559] See, for example, Lucas, 'Sacred Trees', in particular pp. 25–6, Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, pp. 30–1, Clancy, 'King-making', pp. 88–90, and Fitzpatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 57–8.

[560] Watson, 'The King', p. 170.

[561] See Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, p. 30, and Fitzpatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 58.

between inauguration trees, biblical imagery and otherworldly trees in medieval Irish literature, and, like Lucas and Watson, has connected the significance of trees in the context of inauguration to the description of kings as trees.[562]

It is in this context that Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill's felling of the *bile* of Mag nAdair can be understood as an attack on Dál Cais kingship, as the site was in the heartland of his opponent Brían Bóruma's territory.[563] The same tree, or its successor, was cut down by political rivals in 1052, and similar events occurred at Cráeb Telcha in 1009, Tulach Óg in 1111, and in 1129 when the tree of the Uí Fhiachrach Aidne was felled.[564]

The trees in *DSTT* play a relatively prominent role and, although they have a structural function,[565] they may also play a thematic part as illustrations of legitimate and illegitimate kingship.[566] The special nature of the named trees which Fintan plants, Bile Tortan, Bile Mugna, Cráeb Daithi and Eo Rosa, is evident from the other medieval sources in which they appear.[567] In *DSTT*, there is degree of similarity between them and the unnamed tree, whose story Fintan tells in order to prove the reliability of his memory, as all trees are planted from berries and all grow to be tall and old. However, the named trees grow from berries from Trefuilngid's branch and they are thus given a divine origin. In addition, their special status becomes clear from the *dindsenchas* sources on them and from the tradition of descent from the tree in paradise, found in *Airne Fíngein*.[568] The sources concerning the trees also indicate that they, like Fintan, were likely to have been well known.[569] The unnamed tree, on the other hand, is not divine in

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[562] Clancy, 'King-making', pp. 88–90, Lucas, 'Sacred Trees', p. 22, and Watson, 'The King', pp. 170–2.

[563] See FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, pp. 57–8 (see *CS* 982, AFM *s. a.* 981, ATig II, 235).

[564] FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration*, p. 58.

[565] As suggested above, pp. 54–9.

[566] This may, however, be one of a number of thematic functions. For another interpretation of the trees, see Nagy, *Conversing*, p. 5. Nagy considers the trees to be markers of the knowledge imparted by Fintan and he understands the pillar-stone and Fintan himself in a similar way.

[567] These trees have been discussed in detail by Lucas ('Sacred Trees', in particular pp. 17–18), as well as by Watson ('The King').

[568] See above, pp. 45–6.

[569] The trees are mentioned, for example, in the metrical *dindsenchas* of Mag Mugna (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 144–5), Eó Mugna (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 146–7) and 'Eó Rossa, Eó Mugna, etc.' (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 148–9). These are unlikely to be derived from *DSTT* as they contain information not found in the tale, such references to the time and circumstances of the trees' demise (see, for example, the reference to poets playing a role in Eó Mugna's death, Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 146). The *dindsenchas* of *Temair Luachra* (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 236–9) also refers to Eó Rossa in the context of the events which occurred in the night of Conn

origin. Although it is a large and impressive tree, it is not unusual in any other way. This is given most striking expression by the everyday, practical articles into which Fintan turns the tree when he realises that it will no longer be of any profit to him: 'Antan iarum tallus mo chéill dia thorbu dam chena, dochuas limsa chuici co roleoad dia bun, 7 co ndernait limsa de secht ndabcha 7 secht n-éna 7 secht ndrolmacha 7 secht muidi 7 secht cilairn 7 secht milain 7 secht metair cona cerclaib uile diblínaib'.[570] When they disintegrate, they are further downgraded and fashioned into smaller containers than before. Finally, even these objects become useless, so much so that Fintan cannot even remember where they are: 'Ocus dofung-sa do Día uilichumachtach nacon fetar-sa ca hairm i fail an inadach sin iarna scíth lim ar críne'.[571]

In addition to this, Fintan himself appears to be more closely connected to the named trees. Although he outlives them, he becomes aware of his own old age when he sees them wither. His lifetime thus appears to be tied more closely to them than to the unnamed tree, which he outlives by a significant period of time, although he is presented as prospering together with it.[572]

It is striking that Fintan, whose memory is so impressive, should not be able to remember where the items made from the unnamed tree have gone. There is something almost paradoxical in the fact that the only time he says he has forgotten anything is in a story designed to prove the reliability of his memory. In the context of *DSTT*, the episode is of course designed to draw attention to Fintan's great age. The life cycle of the tree and the objects made from it span generations. The fact that Fintan has forgotten what has happened to the second generation of objects further emphasises how much time has elapsed since the events he relates. However, on another level, Fintan's lack of memory at this point also draws attention to the tree's insignificance when compared to the named trees. If the audience knew traditions about the famous trees named in *DSTT*, the contrast with the unnamed tree and Fintan's uncharacteristic lack of memory

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Cétchathach's birth. One of the verses is placed in Fintan's mouth (see Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* III, 238), creating the impression that he recited the whole poem.

[570] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'Then when I had no hope of turning it [the tree] even so to my profit, I went and cut it from its stock, and made from it seven vats and seven ians and seven drolmachs, seven churns, seven pitchers, seven milans, and seven methars with hoops for all of them'.

[571] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'And I swear to Almighty God I know not where those substitutes are since they perished with me from decay'.

[572] See above, pp. 55–6.

regarding that tree would have been all the more noticeable. It is even possible that Fintan's detailed account of what happened to the unnamed tree is intended to carry a note of ridicule and humour, although this is of course very difficult to determine.

The tree planted from the berry which Fintan picked in West Munster, then, is only at first glance similar to the other trees, and these similarities are superficial. In reality, it is of an entirely different nature. It is a normal tree which does not have the same divine source as the other trees, and this is expressed by its rather mundane demise and its passing into oblivion. If one reads the trees in *DSTT* as carrying symbolic significance, the trees which grow from the berries of Trefuilngid's branch might be considered symbols of legitimate kingship, because of their special nature and divine origins. The tree from West Munster, however, is nothing out of the ordinary, and if it is a symbol of kingship, it represents mediocre kingship that is not based on any authentic legitimating tradition. As such, it will inevitably disappear without leaving any lasting legacy.

The connection between the trees and kingship suggested here is somewhat speculative. However, the named trees' connection with Trefuilngid's appearance and the comparatively long sub-tale regarding the unnamed tree suggest that they are of some importance in the tale. Given that Fintan's judgment in *DSTT*, which solves the central problem in the story, concerns the status of Tara and its kingship, it is justified to consider the trees thematically in this way.

TARA AND THE KINGSHIP OF IRELAND IN *DE SUIDIGUD TELLAIG TEMRA*

DSTT's focus is very strongly on Tara and its relationship to the kingship of Ireland. Trefuilngid's detailed division of Ireland into several parts stresses Tara's importance to and status in Ireland as a whole. The division begins with the question: 'Éri cía gabad ca rabad inde?'.[573] The lengthy answer which follows begins with this statement: 'Íaruss fis. tuadus cath. airthis bláth. teissus séis.

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[573] *DSTT*, pp. 146–7; 'Ireland, how has it been partitioned, where have things been therein'.

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fortius flaith'.[574] This is followed by lists of places in the various parts of Ireland and the qualities or activities associated with them. It ends with a section which includes Tara and concludes with the statement that 'a forbflaithius for Érind uili eistib sin'.[575] Tara and the region surrounding it are shown to be at the centre of power over all of Ireland.

Other aspects of the tale also indicate this view. Within the text, the emphasis is clearly on Ireland as a whole. The story never specifies over which part of Ireland Diarmait rules, but we know that the historical Diarmait was a member of Uí Néill and is recorded in the annals as having held the feast of Tara in 560,[576] a prerogative of the king of Tara. The kingship of Tara had long been associated with an idealised kingship of Ireland, which was not a historical reality, and this central importance of Tara is reflected in *DSTT*. Diarmait summons the nobles of Ireland, rather than simply those of Uí Néill, to attend his feast, which suggests that the author of *DSTT* wants to portray him as holding power over all the country: 'Rohifúacrad iarum for maithib Érend tíachtain dochum na fleidi do thig Themra co Diarmaid mac Cerbaill'.[577] Apart from illustrating the tale's focus on all of Ireland, the fact that the various men that are summoned to solve the dispute between Diarmait and the nobles of Ireland come from different parts of the island also indicates Tara's national importance. The strong connection between Tara and Ireland as a whole is made explicit for the first time in the tale in Fintan's words to the nobles of Ireland when he arrives: 'is hí a glún gnáthach na hindsi-sea, in tulach-sa itáthai-si .i. Temair'.[578]

As suggested previously,[579] by refusing to partake of Diarmait's feast, the nobles may be seen to be questioning his authority as king of Tara. Given Tara's links with ideas of kingship over all of Ireland, the question becomes one that is of importance to the entire country. *DSTT* presents Fintan as someone extremely

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[574] *DSTT*, pp. 146–7; 'Knowledge in the west, battle in the north, prosperity in the east, music in the south, kingship in the centre'. But see also Russell's analysis of the word *forthus* and his conclusion that 'forthus flaith' should be translated as 'over it, kingship' ('Notes', pp. 195–8).
[575] *DSTT*, pp. 150–1; 'the overlordship of all Ireland from these'.
[576] See, for example, AU 560.
[577] *DSTT*, pp. 126–7; 'The nobles of Ireland were then summoned to the feast to the house of Tara by Diarmait son of Cerball'. The opening line in the Book of Lismore also reads 'bui mordhal bfear nEirend' (*DSTT*, p. 124, n. 1; 'there was a great assembly of the men of Ireland') whereas the text of the Yellow Book of Lecan refers to Uí Néill (see Best, 'The Settling', p. 124).
[578] *DSTT*, pp. 128–9; 'the familiar knee of this island is the hill on which ye are, namely Tara'.
[579] See above, p. 51.

well suited to judge such a matter of national importance. Fintan's seniority appears to be a decisive factor in his ability to resolve the conflict between Diarmait and the nobles. His enormous retinue of descendents when he arrives at the assembly underlines his age, and Diarmait's response to Fintan's account of the tree which he planted shows that he considers Fintan's memory and age as qualifying him to act as a judge in the dispute concerning *suidigud tellaig Temra*.[580]

However, the fact that Fintan turns out to be the most qualified of the elders summoned by Diarmait, is not solely due to his age. As mentioned above, each of the men first summoned by Diarmait refers him on to someone more senior than himself, and Diarmait is referred to a group of men described in the story as 'ar cóic sinser uile'.[581] The five seniors of Ireland, Finchad, Cú Alad, Bran Bairne, Dubán and Túán mac Cairill, come from different parts of the island.[582] It is this group of men that tells Diarmait to ask Fintan for advice because, as they say, he is 'a sindser 7 a n-aiti diblínaib in nHérind'.[583] By being placed above a group of men considered to be the most senior figures in Ireland, Fintan is assigned a place as the most important elder in the country and he becomes something of a "national" elder.

Fintan's address to the assembled nobles at Tara when he arrives, further associates him with all of Ireland: 'nocho riccid a lles lúathgair do chor immum-sa, ar is tairise lim chena for fáilte amal is tairise do cach mac a bume, 7 isí iarum, ar Fintan, mo buime-sea, in indsi-sea itáthai-si .i. hÉri, 7 is hí a glún gnáthach na hindsi-sea, in tulach-sa itáthai-si .i. Temair'.[584] Fintan's claim that Ireland is his

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[580] See *DSTT*, pp. 134–5.

[581] *DSTT*, pp. 126–7; 'The five seniors to us all'.

[582] Finchad and Bran Bairne are from Leinster, Dubán is from Connacht, and Túán from Ulster. Cú Alad is said to be from Cruachu Conalad, which Best does not identify. Likewise, Hogan offers no location for this place in his *Onomasticon*. In *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, Senlaech Arad, one of Ailill and Medb's warriors, is described as 'a Cruachnaib Con-Alad aníar' (ed. Thurneysen, p. 7, l. 4; 'from Crúachain Alad in the west'). Thurneysen offers no identification beyond 'a place of the Arad' (*Scéla*, notes, p. 65). The Araid appear as subjects of the kings of Cashel in *Frithfolad Muman* (Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 544) and were located in the area of modern counties Limerick and Tipperary. The Araid Clíach were located south of modern Limerick city, and the Araid Tíre north-east of it, east of Lough Derg (see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 532, map 13). Cruachu Conalad may thus be located in the south-west of Ireland, in Munster territory.

[583] *DSTT*, pp. 128–9; '[Both] their senior and fosterer in Ireland'.

[584] *DSTT*, pp. 128–9; '"There is no need to make rejoicing for me, for I am sure of your welcome as every son is sure of his fostermother, and this then is my fostermother," said Fintan, "the island

foster-mother associates him with all of Ireland, creating a strong connection between himself and Ireland as a country.

In addition to this, Fintan's life-story also associates him with the entire island. The poetry he recites, which refers to events and people known from *Lebor Gabála* and some of which is, indeed, also found in *Lebor Gabála*, refers to places in all five provinces. In the poems, these places are associated with events in the history of Ireland, which is closely tied to Fintan himself because he is the only surviving person to have experienced it from the beginning. Although Fintan is said to come to Tara from Cíarraige Lúachra in the south-west and also returns there after his duty in Tara is done, he is established not merely as a wise and authoritative elder, but as the only person who is competent enough to be a reliable judge of matters concerning all of Ireland's history, without his knowledge being restricted to any one region. He is presented as a figure of national importance who can judge a question pertaining to all of Ireland. The presence of Patrick and Brigit, two of Ireland's most prominent saints, at Fintan's death underlines this: 'Roforbastair tra Fintan a beathaid 7 sáegul fon indus sin, 7 dofarraid aithrighi 7 rochaith comaind 7 sacarbaigg do láim epscuip Erc meic Ochomoin meic Fidhaich, 7 dodechaid spirat Pátraic 7 Brigde co rabatar a fíadnaisi a éitsechta.'[585]

The kingship of Tara's association with all of Ireland was not a new idea. *Baile in Scáil*, in which the kingship of Tara and Ireland are given to Conn Cétchathach, contains some Old Irish features and has been considered an eleventh-century reworking of a ninth-century text.[586] Likewise, *Echtra mac nEchach meic Mugmedóin*, although an eleventh-century compilation, appears to be drawing on an earlier text.[587] By the time *DSTT* was being written, probably in the tenth or eleventh century,[588] the idea that the king of Tara should also be the most powerful king in Ireland was not new. What is striking, however, is that the surviving versions of both *Baile in Scáil* and *Echtra mac nEchach* appear to have

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in which ye are, that is Ireland, and the familiar knee of this island is the hill on which ye are, namely, Tara'.

[585] *DSTT*, pp. 160–1; 'So Fintan ended his life and his age in this manner, and he came to repentance, and he partook of communion and sacrifice from the hand of bishop Erc son of Ochomon son of Fidach, and the spirits of Patrick and Brigit were present at his death'.

[586] Murray, *Baile in Scáil*, p. 4, and Herbert, 'Goddess and King', p. 273, n. 4.

[587] Downey, 'Intertextuality', p. 79.

[588] See McCone, *Pagan Past*, p. 75, and Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, p. 18.

been created in the eleventh century, at roughly the same time, therefore, as *DSTT*. It has been suggested that the composition of *Echtra mac nEchach* was a response to the growing power of Brían Bóruma of Dál Cais,[589] and in this connection Bhreathnach has pointed to a general renewal of literary interest in Tara at this time.[590] It may be that *DSTT*'s interest in Tara should be seen in this context. According to extant chronicle entries, tenth-century kings designated kings of Ireland before Brían are of Uí Néill.[591] However, Brían's growing power led to the kingship of Ireland no longer being exclusively associated with Uí Néill. Although Máel Sechnaill became king of Ireland after Brían's death at Clontarf, the Uí Néill were unable to regain their former dominance over Ireland in any significant way in the eleventh century.[592] In this context, *DSTT*'s emphasis on the connection between the kingship of Tara and the kingship of Ireland would make sense.

A consideration of sources related to *DSTT* and the geographical locations in the narrative supports this. *DSTT* seems to underline the rights of Uí Néill kings, as Diarmait is a member of Uí Néill. The renewal of literary interest in Tara, to which Bhreathnach has drawn attention,[593] has been linked in particular to Cúán úa Lothcháin (d. 1024), poet to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill, king of Tara, and his work has been interpreted by scholars as an attempt to strengthen Máel Sechnaill's position during this time.[594] As discussed previously,[595] there are some parallels between *DSTT* and the introduction to the *Dindsenchas* in Rawl. B. 506, which includes a poem ascribed to Cúán. The poem, a list of places, concludes with the statement that the king of Tara is the only person to hold rightful authority over these. It ends with the following stanzas, clearly supporting Máel Sechnaill as king of Tara:

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[589] See Herbert, 'Goddess and King', p. 272, for the suggestion that the story of Níall's acquisition of the kingship is linked to the political situation of the early eleventh century. See also Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Níall Noígíallach's Death-tale', p. 179.
[590] *Tara*, p. 14.
[591] In the Annals of Ulster, these are Níall Glúndub, Congalach mac Maíl Mithid and Domnall Ua Néill. The Annals of Inisfallen also mention Flann mac Mail Sechnaill, and the Annals of the Four Masters refer to Donnchad mac Flainn and Domnall, son of mac Lochlainn.
[592] See Duffy, *Ireland in the Middle Ages*, pp. 36–7.
[593] See Bhreathnach, *Tara*, p. 14.
[594] Bhreathnach, *Tara*, p. 15.
[595] See above, pp. 42–4.

Maelsechlaind, géc co nglan-rath,

focheird síth ima sen-mag;

sech brón mbáis ós cach díniu,

robé i rígiu Temrach.

Iarsin co bráth rosfodail

re cách ós chách cen mebail,

a chland fri soichle sírblad,

narab díbdad i Temair.[596]

One might speculate that *DSTT* is linked to eleventh-century texts produced to support Máel Sechnaill, like Diarmait a member of the southern Uí Néill. The tensions between Brían and Máel Sechnaill, however, were part of a longer history of attempts by southern and northern kings to extend their authority,[597] and without a firmer date for the tale, it is not possible to draw any conclusions in this regard. An additional point of interest in connection with north-south rivalry, however, is the geographic location of the trees, which, as suggested above, may represent different types of kingship. Watson argued that the trees represent individual *cóiceda*, although he acknowledged that the five trees are not actually located in the five provinces.[598] The origins of Fintan's unnamed tree, representative of falsely based kingship, are in the southern part of Ireland, more specifically in West Munster: 'Lod-sa láa tría fid a nÍar-Mumain tíar. Dobiur lim cóer ndeirg do ibur co nusroclandus i llubgort mo lis 7 ásais and co mbad comard fria fer'.[599] The description of this tree, at first apparently powerful and mighty but later old and weak, and the items fashioned from it, which become progressively more insignificant and are finally resigned to oblivion by the man who made them, might have been considered an apt

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[596] 'Temair V' (ed. and trans. Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas* I, 44–5); 'Maelsechlaind, branch of bright fortune, spreads peace about the ancient plain, far from mortal pain beyond all generations, may he be in the kingship of Temair!   Thereafter till Doomsday, may it be shared, before and above everyone without shame, by his line, ever famed for hospitality, may it never be extinct in Temair!'.

[597] See Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp. 19–21, for an overview. See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 469–521, on the importance of Tara and on non-Uí Néill kings of Tara.

[598] 'The King', p. 174.

[599] *DSTT*, pp. 134–5; 'One day I passed through a wood in West Munster in the west. I took away with me a red yew berry and I planted it in the garden of my court, and it grew up there until it was as big as a man'.

description of southern kingship by an audience with northern, Uí Néill, sympathies.

Unlike the named trees, the West Munster tree was not divinely derived. Perhaps the implication was that southern rule, unlike the Uí Néill kingship of Tara, was not based on old and legitimate tradition and was not divinely sanctioned. The possibility that the story of Fintan's unnamed tree and the fact that he has forgotten where the objects made from the tree have gone carry a note of ridicule and humour would fit well into this context. One might speculate, therefore, that the trees in the tale are designed to illustrate the kingship of Tara's basis in legitimate tradition, in contrast to any rival claims of kingship to Ireland from the south. Southern kingship, symbolised by the unnamed tree, could be read as a symbol of weak and perhaps illegitimate kingship, suggesting to an Uí Néill audience that any southern gain in power was not to be of long duration and would leave no lasting legacy. Relating these ideas to Máel Sechnaill and Brían Bóruma is tempting, especially given Máel Sechnaill's probable felling of the tree at Mag Adair in 982, but until the date of *DSTT* is established with greater certainty, such ideas must remain speculative.

CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS IN *FÁSTINI AIRT*?

If one accepts Treóit as a place of origin for and focus of the text, *FA* may read as a text concerned with developments relating to that house. The warning stanzas in Art's poem create a sense of danger to the monastery and perhaps its associated dynasty, and it is possible that the statements made in the poem concerning Treóit's royal associations and suggestions of king-making power are a response to a decrease in significance of the monastery, the dynasty or both.

Art and his saint are seen working together, and one might take this to represent co-operation between ecclesiastical and secular power. This might be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, Treóit and the Lagore dynasty could be seen as a unit and any threat to the church would then be understood as a threat to Uí Chernaig power and vice versa. *FA* could thus be read as a response to an external threat to the Treóit-Lagore community. The reference to the king of Tara

might support this reading. On the other hand, *FA* may reflect internal problems within a possible Treóit-Lagore unit. Thus, it is possible to read the text as an appeal from the monastery for patronage, perhaps reflecting a weakening in the ties with Uí Chernaig Sotail. The strong focus on the church itself would argue for this interpretation. The historical context of *FA* cannot be reconstructed with certainty, but this section will make some speculative suggestions with regard to the circumstances which might have been seen to lend weight to the warnings issued in *FA*.

Cináed mac Conaing's burning of Treóit and his destruction of Lagore in 850 is indicative of Treóit's political importance at least at a local level. In addition, the killing recorded as having taken place at the monastery in 903 was, according to the Annals of Ulster, instigated by Flann Sinna, Clann Cholmáin king of Tara who came to power after the death of Áed mac Néill in 879 and died in 916. The killing may, therefore, have had a political background, although it is not clear whether it represents an attack on the monastery itself. The reasons for the killing of the abbot of Treóit recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters for 917 are uncertain.

Cináed's burning of Treóit in 850 was a significant event if the number of people killed was indeed around 260 or 270.[600] Its importance is also indicated by its inclusion in a poem about the kings of Síl nÁeda Sláine, *Síl Aeda Sláne na sleg*, preserved in the Book of Leinster and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 502:

> Cinaed coic bliadna cia bé
> co ár torsech Treote
> coro baded mac meic Flaind
> lasin flaith la Mael Sechnaill.[601]

This verse also refers to the drowning of Cináed mac Conaing, an event recorded in the Annals of Ulster in an entry for the year 851: 'Cinaedh m. Conaing, rex Ciannachta, demersus est in lacu crudeli morte o Mael Sechnaill 7 o

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[600] See above, p. 35.
[601] *Síl Aeda Sláne na sleg* (*LL*, 24055–24196); 'Cináed, five years - whatever may be - until the grievous slaughter of Treóit, until the son of the son of Flann was drowned by the ruler, by Máel Sechnaill'.

Tigernach di foesmaib degdoine n-Erenn 7 comarbbai Patraicc specialiter'.[602] Máel Sechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid punishes Cináed for his attack on Treóit and is joined by Tigernach, king of Lagore, a relative of Cináed. According to AU 850, Cináed's attack on Treóit was part of a rebellion against Máel Sechnaill, which probably explains the latter's willingness to punish Cináed. In addition, Cináed was engaged in rivalry with his Uí Chernaig relative,[603] and the attack on Lagore and Treóit should probably be seen in this context, too. Máel Sechnaill and Tigernach, on the other hand, had previously acted together in a joint attack on Dublin, as recorded by the *Chronicon Scotorum* for the year 849. These events show the involvement of Lagore and Treóit in dynastic rivalry as well as wider political developments, as the involvement of Máel Sechnaill, described as king of Tara in AU 854, suggests.

The last verses of the poem *Síl nAeda Sláne na sleg* refer to tenth-century individuals and the last stanza probably refers to Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill who died in 1022. At the earliest, the poem can have been composed at the end of the tenth century, although it may of course be later than that. This indicates that the burning of Treóit and punishment of Cináed had been remembered for a considerable time afterwards. *FA*'s stanza 19 contains a warning to Art's descendant, claiming that he will be punished swiftly, should he cause harm to "us". It is perhaps possible that the events of 850 and 851, significant enough to have been included in a poem composed more than a century later, are the basis of such a warning. Cináed was a member of Síl nÁeda Sláine, and thus would have been considered a descendent of Art.

If *FA* was a response to an external threat to Treóit or Lagore, the threat cannot be reconstructed with certainty. A possible scenario for an appeal for patronage by Treóit to Uí Chernaig Sotail can, however, be suggested. Early in the eleventh century, the Uí Chernaig dynasty took on the name Mac Gilla Shechnaill, and Bhreathnach argues that this suggests links with the church at Dunshaughlin.[604] She suggests a gradual departure from Lagore crannog and a

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[602] AU 851.2; 'Cinaed son of Conaing, king of Cianacht, was cruelly drowned in a pool by Mael Sechnaill and Tigernach, in spite of the guarantees of the nobles of Ireland, and the successor of Patrick in particular'.
[603] Byrne, 'The Viking Age', p. 616.
[604] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 4.

move of the main Uí Chernaig residence to Dunshaughlin from Lagore.[605] If Dunshaughlin increased in significance for Uí Chernaig, this presumably affected the importance of Treóit for the dynasty. The date suggested in chapter 1 on the basis of the tale's linguistic features is tenth-century,[606] but linguistic analysis can only provide an approximate date and an early eleventh century date for the text is not impossible. If one places the text in a period when Uí Chernaig tendencies towards Dunshaughlin were beginning to gain strength, but the move was not yet inevitable, *FA* might reflect Uí Chernaig factions, some in favour of a move to Dunshaughlin, some, together with Treóit, hoping to uphold the connection with the monastery. The warnings to descendents and the reference to the kings of Tara would, in this context, perhaps have to be explained as an attempt to emphasise the importance of Treóit as part of the appeal for continued Uí Chernaig patronage. The background of the events of 849 to 851 would still be relevant in this context.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

Both *FA* and *DSTT* illustrate the role of the pre-Christian past with regard to the theme of kingship. At the same time Christian ideas regarding royal authority are central to both tales. In *FA*, the importance of Art as an ancestral figure is combined with the idea that royal authority ultimately comes from God. In *DSTT*, Trefuilngid's traditions which confirm Tara's preeminent status within Ireland are also depicted as divinely derived, and they are transmitted by a pre-Christian survivor. The quasi-legal nature of these traditions endows Diarmait with authority, which is thus presented as being based on both God-given law and pre-Christian tradition. The theme of kingship thus exemplifies the merging of pre-Christian and Christian aspects very well, and the two tales show the importance attached to both areas as providing the basis of well-founded claims of authority. In addition, the possible political contexts suggested here for *FA* and *DSTT* indicate that these ideas could be applied widely and had a role to play in more

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[605] Bhreathnach, 'Authority and Supremacy', p. 4.
[606] See above, pp. 10–17.

local developments as well as in connection with claims to power on a wider, national level.

CHAPTER 8: SALVATION

Having discussed different aspects of the pre-Christian characters' representation "on earth", this chapter will turn to their fate after death. The question of the characters' salvation is of great importance, because it shows Christian authors' acceptance of the pre-Christian characters. In most of the tales under consideration, the main characters are saved. In some cases, this is explicit, as for example in the statement that Lí Ban went to heaven. In other cases, this must be inferred, as in *FA*, where Art's depiction suggests that he has found favour with God. The different ways in which the characters are saved illustrates the way in which Christian authors justified their positive presentation of the past.

PRE-CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL

The Bible, the Fathers and Medieval Theologians

In claiming that some of the pre-Christian Irish had been saved, medieval Irish authors could look to the bible, patristic authorities and medieval theologians for confirmation. The difficulties in establishing which authors influenced Irish thinking on the matter of pre-Christian salvation lies in the nature of the manuscript evidence. It goes without saying that the bible was very influential,[607] but when it comes to the works of early Christian and medieval theologians, the situation is more complicated. Arguments can be based on manuscripts or texts which are thought to have either been produced under Irish influence on the continent, although determining this is in itself difficult, or which show evidence of use by Irish ecclesiastics, for example through glosses in Irish.[608] Because of

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[607] The Pauline epistles, in particular, appear to have been held in great esteem in medieval Ireland, as the statement that the pre-Christian judge Moran used to wear a letter from Paul around his neck when passing judgment suggests (*Scél na Fír Flatha* §16, ed. Stokes, p. 190; see also McCone *Pagan Past*, pp. 73–4).

[608] Kenney's *Sources* contains references to Irish manuscripts and manuscripts which may be connected to Ireland or Irishmen on the continent. Bischoff's 'Wendepunkte' article attempted to identify Irish biblical commentaries, but his methods have come under criticism, for example by

the complexities of this matter, I will outline the most important views and developments from the point of view of this dissertation. My survey will focus on those views which might be seen as similar to the attitudes observable in the Irish tales, and my aim is not to deliver a comprehensive survey of views on the matter of salvation for non-Christians in the Middle Ages or to identify those authorities and texts which may have been used by medieval Irish authors. Rather, the aim is to show that the attitudes seen in the four tales discussed here fit in with general theological ideas held in the Middle Ages.[609]

The New Testament

The gospels, Acts and epistles lay the emphasis on faith as the most important factor in salvation.[610] Of the New-Testament epistles, Paul's epistle to the Romans and his letter to the Galatians, both dating from around the 50s of the first century AD, deal in most detail with the matter of salvation. Both the Pauline epistles and the Acts of the Apostles display a concern for the question of who can be saved. Both express the same sentiment, namely that faith as opposed to adherence to law, a reference to Judaism, leads to salvation, and that Jews and Gentiles alike can be saved through faith. These texts were written in the context of the early conversions to Christianity, a time when the question of how salvation is obtained, in particular by non-Jews, was especially relevant, as the Jews were considered to be God's chosen people. Paul's epistle to the Galatians is briefer than that to the Romans, but the ideas expressed in both are very similar. Paul asserts that salvation cannot be earned by observance of the law, but that it is

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Stancliffe, who draws attention to the problems in identifying such texts in 'Early "Irish" Biblical Exegesis'.

[609] For more detailed discussions of various patristic and medieval authors and their views on the matter of the salvation of non-Christians, see the analyses by Sullivan, *Salvation*, Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, and Colish, 'Virtuous Pagan'. It should be noted that there is little secondary information on the period from about the eighth to the tenth centuries, due to lack of scholarly focus on it.

[610] The Gospel of John makes this very clear in Jesus's story of the good shepherd, which includes Jesus's statement that 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved' (John X.1–XVII.9). The accounts of Jesus healing a blind man or blind men also stress the role of faith (Matt. IX.29, Mark X.52, Luke XVIII.42), blindness being metaphorical blindness to God's revelation. The thief crucified with Christ is promised paradise after he acknowledges Christ's innocence and accepts his authority (Luke XXIII.40–3). Faith in Christ is sometimes connected to suffering and self-denial, points which will be discussed in more detail below. Charity is also important for salvation, as Jesus's encounter with the rich man shows (Matt. IX.16–22, Mark X.17–22, Luke XVIII. 18–23). However, the significance of charity in the context of the Irish texts here is limited, so I will not consider it in this survey.

bestowed by God through grace as a result of faith. It is thus open to all who believe. God is the God of all men and all can obtain righteousness through faith.[611] Paul thus extends the circle of those who would be considered righteous beyond those who were members of Israel.

Paul illustrates this by discussing Abraham's faith and role as father of many nations, a status which he was promised by God. He argues that Abraham's faith was decisive, concluding that all who share Abraham's faith should also be considered his children, thus extending the number of those who could consider themselves heirs of Abraham.[612] In Galatians, too, Paul asserts that 'those who believe are the descendants of Abraham',[613] and asserts that all 'are one in Christ Jesus' as the distinctions between different peoples, religions or social classes count for nothing under the new faith.[614] In the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, Paul focuses on Abraham as an example of an Old-Testament Father justified by faith. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews goes further, providing a long list of examples of Old-Testament figures whose faith dictated their lives.[615]

The importance of Paul's epistles, including the pseudo-Pauline letter to the Hebrews,[616] to discussions of salvation is clear. Paul directly addresses the question of who can be saved and by what means. In general, Paul's view is that a person's righteousness is granted by God through faith and not by adherence to Jewish law. No one is therefore excluded on the basis that they are not Jewish. For medieval Irish authors, the idea that faith is granted by God and that salvation could be granted to those living in pre-Christian times would probably have held a great deal of appeal, even if the original context in which Paul's statements were made was very different from the situation in medieval Ireland.

In the Acts of the Apostles, probably written in the 80s by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, Peter, Christ's disciple, states very clearly that salvation comes through Christ.[617] Similarly to Paul, Acts presents this salvation as open to

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[611] Rom. III.27–30; see also the similar statement in Gal. V.5–6.
[612] Rom. IV.11–17.
[613] Gal. III.7.
[614] Gal. III.25–9.
[615] See Hebrews XI.
[616] Hebrews was not written by Paul, but although the authorship of the letter has been disputed since the early centuries of Christianity, it was frequently attributed to Paul.
[617] Acts IV.12.

all who believe in Christ, as the story of the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, clearly illustrates. Cornelius was not Jewish, and yet Acts shows him as finding acceptance with God through his faith. According to the account, he was the first Gentile to be converted and he is told by an angel that he has found favour with God. Peter understands the implications of Cornelius's experience, telling his household: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'.[618] During Peter's visit to Cornelius, the converted Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, much to the astonishment of the converted Jews who are present.[619]

The Fathers and Medieval Theologians

Faith has emerged as the prerequisite for salvation in the New Testament in the preceding brief discussion. Nevertheless, a number of early Christian thinkers, such as Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215), Origen (d. 253/4), the fourth-century Gregory of Nyssa and perhaps Ambrose and Jerome,[620] argued that, if Christ was the Saviour of all,[621] ultimately, all humans would be saved. However, this view was also vehemently opposed by others.[622] Nevertheless, even if one disagreed with the views of theologians such as Justin, the example of Abraham, cited by Paul, showed that those who had lived in pre-Christian times could be saved through faith too.[623] One way in which this could come about was

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[618] Acts X.34–5.

[619] Acts X.44–6. The problems which the conversion of the Gentiles presents is expressed clearly in Acts XV, in which the salvation of converted Gentiles is questioned, because they have not been circumcised and do not keep the law of Moses (Acts XV.5).

[620] For details on these theologians and their views, see Daley, *The Hope*.

[621] See I Tim. I.40.

[622] See Daley, *The Hope*, in particular the brief summary of disagreement on the matter on p. 222 and his discussion of the controversies regarding Origen's writings in the fourth and sixth centuries (pp. 89–91 and 188–90 respectively).

[623] The question of what kind of understanding constituted Christian faith influenced the opinions of early Christian theologians on who, of the people who lived before Christ, was saved. Thus, for some early thinkers, such as Justin, in the second century, even Greek philosophers could be saved (for a brief discussion of this aspect of Justin's thought and his understanding of *logos*, see Sullivan, *Salvation*, pp. 14–15). Tertullian on the other hand, who lived in the later second and early third century, opposed attempts to reconcile pagan philosophy and Christianity. In his *De praescriptione haereticorum*, Tertullian derives heresies from pagan philosophy and argues for a clear distinction between Christianity and philosophy (see Tertullian, *De praescriptione* vi, ed. Rafoulé, pp. 96–9). A similar idea is also articulated by Eusebius in his history of the church (see Colish, 'Virtuous Pagan', p. 18), a work familiar in the medieval West in Rufinus's Latin translation.

through divine revelation. One of the most influential Fathers in medieval western Christianity, Augustine of Hippo (354–430), also agreed in principle that before the coming of Christ, faith was possible because it was revealed to some:

> ab exordio generis humani quicumque in eum crediderunt eumque utcumque intellexerunt et secundum eius praecepta pie iusteque uixerunt, quando libet et ubi libet fuerint, per eum procul dubio salui facti sunt. [...] ab initio generis humani alias occultius alias euidentius, sicut congruere temporibus diuinitus uisum est, nec prophetari destitit nec, qui in eum crederent, defuerunt ab Adam usque ad Moysen et in ipso populo Israhel, quae speciali quodam mysterio gens prophetica fuit, et in aliis gentibus, antequam uenisset in carne. cum enim nonnulli commemorantur in sanctis Hebraicis libris iam ex tempore Abrahae nec de stirpe carnis eius nec ex populo Israhel nec aduenticia societate in populo Israhel, qui tamen huius sacramenti participes fuerunt, cur non credamus etiam in ceteris hac at que illac gentibus alias alios fuisse, quamuis eos commemoratos in eisdem autoritatibus non legamus?[624]

It is clear that to Augustine, faith is absolutely necessary for salvation, but he allows for the possibility that people other than the Jews of the Old Testament may have been saved. Augustine's seemingly tolerant approach is modified somewhat by his belief that different people are predestined for salvation whereas others are not, illustrating clearly the extent to which faith is bestowed by God.[625]

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[624] Augustine, *Epistula* 102, §§12 and 15 (ed. Goldbacher II, 554–57, text omitted by me); 'Therefore, from the beginning of the human race, all those who believed in Him and knew Him and lived a good and devout life according to His commands, whenever and wherever they lived, undoubtedly were saved by Him. [...] from the beginning of the human race, sometimes obscurely, sometimes openly, as it seemed to His providence to suit the times, He did not cease to prophesy, and before He appeared in the flesh there were not lacking men to believe in Him, from Adam to Moses, among the people of Israel, which by divine ordinance was the prophetic race, and among other peoples. In the sacred books of the Hebrews there is mention of many from the time of Abraham, who were not of his stock, nor of the people of Israel, nor were they joined by any chance alliance to the people of Israel, yet were partakers in His worship; so why should we not believe that sometimes there were other men, here and there among the races, who were worshippers of Him, although we do not find mention of them in the same sacred Books?' (trans. Parsons, *Saint Augustine*, pp. 155–9).

[625] See, for example, the following passage: 'ac per hoc et, quibus omnino adnuntiata non est, non credituri praesciebantur et, quibus non credituris tamen adnuntiata est, in illorum exemplo demonstrantur; quibus autem credituris adnuntiatus, hi regno caelorum et sanctorum angelorum societati praeparantur' (*Epistula* 102, §15 (ed. Goldbacher II, 558); 'And that is why it is not made known at all to some, because it was foreknown that they would not believe, yet it is also made known to some who will not believe, as a warning of the former. As to those to whom it is made known and who do believe, they are being made ready for the kingdom of heaven and for the companionship of the holy angels', trans. Parsons, *Saint Augustine*, p. 159).

Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–c. 604), probably the Gregory mentioned in *AE*, held opinions close to Augustine's and he, too, was in agreement with the views expressed in the New-Testament epistles that the Hebrew fathers of the Old Testament could be saved because of their faith in the coming Saviour, but without that faith salvation was not possible.[626]

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the role of reason in gaining faith, and thus salvation, played a role in different theologians' thinking on whether pre-Christian could be saved.[627] For a number of twelfth-century theologians, including Bernard of Clairvaux, faith was the necessary prerequisite which could not be acquired through reason.[628] Peter Abelard, on the other hand, believed that reason could play an important role in faith and argued that philosophers in classical antiquity had been able to come to an understanding of Christian truth.[629]

This brief overview shows that the idea that those who had lived before Christianity could be saved was not uncommon. Belief in the Saviour applied, for the most part, to the pre-Christian Jews and their prophets, who, although pre-Christian, had lived in anticipation of the Saviour. The righteousness obtained by Abraham and other Old-Testament characters through faith has been mentioned above, but other comments in the bible were also taken as confirmation that some of the Old-Testament Fathers had been saved. Thus, for example, the prophet Elijah was described as being taken to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11: 'As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven'. This idea could, then, be applied to the pre-Christian Irish, whose pre-Christian period could be recast as an Old-Testament era, as discussed in chapter 4.[630]

However, patristic and medieval theologians made a distinction between those who were truly pre-Christian, that is who had lived before the arrival of Christ, and those who remained non-Christian after Christ's coming. This aspect,

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[626] On Gregory's eschatological views, see Daley, *The Hope*, pp. 211–15. On Gregory in general, see Markus, *Gregory the Great*, and Kennengiesser, 'Boethius'.

[627] See Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, pp. 17–28, for a detailed discussion of relevant ideas in the eleventh to thirteenth century.

[628] Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, pp. 18–22.

[629] Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, pp. 22–5. But see also Colish, 'Virtuous Pagan', pp. 20–2, who draws attention to inconsistencies in Abelard's ideas.

[630] See, in particular, pp. 82–8 above.

too, influenced discussions of the matter in patristic and medieval times.[631] It is possible that the distinction between unbelievers before and after the coming of Christ may also play a role in the four tales on which this dissertation focuses.

Divine Revelation in Medieval Irish Texts

The themes of divine revelation in pre-Christian times and the importance of faith for salvation are clearly reflected in the surviving medieval Irish texts. Thus, the probably eighth-century Pseudo-historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már* equates the pre-Christian Irish period with the Old-Testament age, as outlined previously. Like the Old-Testament prophets, pre-Christian Irish people also received the Holy Spirit, which allowed them to prophesy in accordance with II Peter I.20–1: 'First of all, you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God'.

Another way by which God could reveal himself is suggested by Paul at the beginning of his epistle to the Romans: 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made'.[632] Paul condemns those who did not worship God despite the fact that he could be understood from his creation, but at the same time shows that God *can* be understood from creation. This view is found in the Middle Irish text *Senchas na Relec*, which mentions three famous examples of pre-Christian Irish characters who gained some understanding of Christianity before the conversion of Ireland, Conchobar mac Nessa, the judge Morann, and Cormac mac Airt. Of these three, the text is most concerned with Cormac and it opens with the following passage:

> Mórrí mórbrethach ro gab os Herind .i. Cormac mac Airt meic Cuind Cetchathaig. Bá maith iarom baí ind Eriu ria lind fó déig ro scaíled breth rechtgae fo Érind acciseom. Conná laimtheá guin duni i nHérind fri ré iúbili bicci .i. uii. mbliadna. ar baí cretim in óenDé oc Cormac do réir

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[631] See Sullivan, *Salvation*, who splits his chapters into a discussion of views on salvation for those who lived before and those who lived after the coming of Christianity.
[632] Rom. I.19–20.

rechta. ar ro ráidseom na aidérad clocha ná crunnu acht no adérad intí

dosroni 7 ropo chomsid ar cul na uli dúla .i. in t-óenDia nertchomsid ro

crutaig na dúli is dó no chreitfed. Conid eseom in tres ro creti i nErind ría

tíachtain Patraic .i. Conchobor mac Nessa díaro innis Altus dó cesad Crist.

Morand mac Corpri Cind Chaitt indarna fer. Cormac in tres. 7 ane is doig

co ndeochatár drem aile fora slicht imón cretim sin.[633]

The passage shows Cormac believing in the creator of the things he sees around

him. Unlike the people condemned by Paul for worshipping the created rather

than the creator, Cormac understands the difference and worships God. The belief

that the creator revealed himself in his creation is also found in early Irish poetry,

as, for example, in the poem *Adram in Coimdid*:

Adram in Coimdid

cusnaib aicdib amraib,

nem gelmár co n-ainglib,

ler tonnbán for talmain.[634]

Similarly, those poems in which the ideal of the hermit is promoted show a

religious view of nature, even if they cannot be considered authentic hermit

poetry.[635] In addition, voyage tales such as *Immram Curraig Uí Corra*, combine

the wonders of the ocean with ideas concerning correct Christian behaviour.[636]

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[633] *LU*, 4041–52; 'A great king of great judgments ruled over Ireland, that is Cormac mac Airt meic Cuind Cétchathaig. Ireland thrived in his time because lawful judgment was established throughout Ireland by him. So that no one dared to slay a person in Ireland in a small jubilee, that is, seven years. [This was] because Cormac believed in the one God, according to the law. For he said that he would not worship rocks and trees but that he would worship the one who had made them and who was the master of protection of all creatures, that is the one God, powerful master who created the creatures; it is in him that he would believe. So he was one of three men in Ireland who believed before the coming of Patrick, that is Conchobar mac Nessa when Altus told him of Christ's Crucifixion. Morand, mac Corpri Cond Chaitt, [is] the second man. Cormac [is] the third and thus it is likely that a number of other people followed them concerning that faith'.
[634] Ed. and trans. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, no. 4, pp. 4–5; 'Let us adore the Lord, maker of wondrous works, great bright Heaven with its angels, the white-waved sea on earth'. Murphy dates the poem to the ninth century.
[635] See Ó Corráin, 'Early Irish Hermit Poetry?'.
[636] *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* explicitly states 'ro bátar cethracha lá 7 cethracha aidchi forsin aicén. Co tarfas dóib ó Dia d'ingantaib écsamla' (ed. van Hamel, p. 102, ll. 216–7; 'they were forty days and forty nights upon the ocean. So that God might show them diverse wonders'). At the same time, encounters with pious hermits as well as meetings with sinners and glimpses of hell-like islands have a clear moral purpose. Similarly, towards the end of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, which has been linked to Irish voyage tales, an unnamed man tells Brendan: 'Ecce terram qam quesisti per multum tempus. Ideo non potuisti statim [illam] inuenire quia Deus uoluit tibi ostendere diuersa sua secreta in oceano magno' (*Navigatio* xxviii, ed. Selmer, p. 80; 'See, this is the country which you have been seeking for a long time. But you could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his diverse mysteries in the great ocean'). On the *Navigatio* as

Faith is clearly of paramount importance in the tales discussed here. Thus, Lí Ban expresses her faith very clearly in her long poem in *AE*, as does Art in *FA*. With the exception of the Stowe text and Laud 610, all the versions of *AC* explicitly say that Conchobar believed, and the prose in the Stowe manuscript and Laud 610 implies this by relating his reaction to the news of the Crucifixion. Apart from this text, *DSTT* is the only text not to mention the pre-Christian characters' faith in God explicitly, but from Fintan's behaviour and respect for Trefuilngid, it is clear that he also believes in God.

Divine revelation is also the way in which Art, Fintan and arguably Conchobar come to hear about God and Christ. In *FA*, Art sees a heavenly vision and is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit and of prophecy, giving him knowledge of things to come:

> A mbaí and iarom oc fegad ar ind radairc for cech leth co faca timthirecht na n-aingel súas 7 anúas and. Dobeir di oíd aní sin 7 ro línad o rath in Spiruta Naím fó chetóir. 7 tic rath fastini fair. 7 fallsigthir dó cach ní no biad dó iar tain. 7 a imscar 7 Meic Con asin chath ro boí ar bert oco.[637]

As a result of his vision, Art recites the poem in which his belief in God becomes clear, and the prose introducing the poem tells how Art chose his burial place because of the faith which was to be established there: 'Conid and ro togsom a adnacol isind inud sin for déig na cretmi ro bíad iar tain. Conid for slicht na fisi sin ro chansom na runnu sa 7 ic tairngiri na cretmi'.[638] Thus, the gift of grace has led to Art's faith, and it appears that the author clearly saw faith and grace not as an achievement of an individual but as bestowed by God.[639] *FA* is the only one of the four texts to explicitly mention divine grace and the gift of prophecy which is given to Art and of which he makes use to prophesy the coming of Christianity. It

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illustrating the wonders of creation, see Anderson, 'The Voyage'. Like *Immram Curaig Ua Corra*, episodes in the *Navigatio* have a moral purpose. In addition, the text may also be a metaphorical depiction of monastic life (see Bray, 'Allegory').

[637] ll. 9824–8, 'When he was there looking at the sight on every side, he saw angels going up and down there. He gave heed to that thing and he was immediately filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. And the grace of prophecy came upon him. And every thing which was to happen to him after that was revealed to him. And [i.e. including] his and Mac Con's parting in the battle which was to be their exploit'.

[638] ll. 9831–4, 'So that it was there that he chose his burial to be in that place because of the faith which would be there afterwards. And it was following that vision that he sang these verses prophesying the faith'.

[639] Cf. Eph. II.8–9.

can be argued that this assigns him the role of Old-Testament prophet, corresponding to II Peter I.20–1, quoted above.

DSTT also belongs in this context, given the parallels between Fintan's encounter with Trefuilngid and Moses's meeting with God. In some ways, *DSTT* is very different from the other tales, as it does not explicitly mention Fintan's conversion. Nevertheless, it is clear that Fintan believes in God, whom he thinks he may have met face to face. In addition, it seems that Fintan has already converted in a more official way, given the description of his death-scene: the spirits of Bridget and Patrick are present at his death, and he takes communion before dying. The reference to communion, in particular, is curious, as it suggests that Fintan had been previously converted and baptised, as communion has no effect on someone who is not baptised. The presence of the spirits of Patrick and Bridget at Fintan's death certainly indicates that Fintan's chances of salvation are good and indeed the text suggests that he may be similar to Elijah and Enoch: 'is dóig leo is ina chorp chollaigi rucad i nnach ndíamair ndíada amail rucad Ele 7 Enócc i pardus condafil ic ernaidi eiseiséirgi in sruthseanóir sáeghlach sin .i. Fintan mac Bóchra meic Eithieir meic Rúail meic Annida mic Caim meic Náe meic Laimiach'.[640] The example of the prophet Elijah, who did not die but was taken to heaven, has been cited above, and Elijah also plays a role in the New Testament, as he was believed to return at the end of time in keeping with a statement to that effect in the Book of Malachy.[641] In the gospels, Elijah's return is clearly an important theme.[642] Genesis V.24 says of Enoch: 'Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him'. This description of Enoch's fate suggests that he did not die a normal death. He is included in the list of Old-Testament faithful in Hebrews XI, where it is clearly stated that he did not die.[643] The reference to Elijah and Enoch at the end of *DSTT* thus relates Fintan to well-respected Old-Testament characters, implying that Fintan had found favour

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[640] *DSTT*, pp. 160–1; 'some think that he was borne 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, son of Eithier, son of Rual, son of Annid, son of Ham, son of Noah, son of Lamech'.

[641] Mal. IV.5–6: 'Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse'.

[642] Thus, John the Baptist is frequently identified with Elijah. See, for example, Matt. XVII.10–13.

[643] Hebrews XI.5–6.

with God in the same way.[644] It thus strengthens the Old-Testament aspect of Fintan's character already apparent in the parallels with Moses. There is, therefore, some justification for considering Fintan's description to be based on Old-Testament figures who were justified by their faith, inspired by the divine revelation they experienced.

The fact that Enoch and Elijah are awaiting Fintan's resurrection in Paradise is a clear indication that at least those whose opinion the tale purports to cite believed him to have been saved in the end. The secret place referred to in this passage is not further specified, but it may be that it should be identified with the bosom of Abraham, a place in the upper region of hell, in which righteous souls might rest after death and before being received into heaven.[645] An idea in some ways linked to the bosom of Abraham is that of the Harrowing of Hell. The tradition that Christ descended to hell to free those souls who were deserving of it but had died before the arrival of Christ is based on various scriptural passages, the statement in the Apostolic and the Athanasian creed that Christ 'descendit ad inferos' and the narrative of Christ's descent into hell preserved in the Gospel of Nicodemus. According to Jewish tradition, all the dead went to one place, *sheol*, but in Christian tradition, those Old-Testament people who had been worthy of salvation had been taken out of the underworld on Christ's descent to hell. The idea that Christ went and freed the just dead souls was widely accepted by patristic writers and popular throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.[646]

In addition to Conchobar's baptism by blood, the *Liber Flavus*, which draws on different versions of the tale, is the only surviving version which refers to the Harrowing of Hell: 'Conadh [d]esin adber[a]t na Gæidhil conadh he Concubur cetgeinntlide docoidh docum neimhi a nEirinn, fobith robo baithis do in fuil dobidg as[a] cinn. Et as annsin rucadh ainim Concobuir a n-ifrinn gu comraiced Crist fria ac te:uir na broide a hifrinn, co tuc Crist leis anim Concabair docum neimhi'.[647] A later vernacular version of the Gospel of Nicodemus was

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[644] The parallels between Fintan and Moses have already been discussed (see pp. 99–103), and it is interesting to note that Moses and Elijah appear together in the account of Christ's transfiguration (Matt. XVII.1–9, Mark IX.2–10, Luke IX.28–36.

[645] On the bosom of Abraham, see Luke XVI.19–31.The idea of the bosom of Abraham was widespread; for a discussion of it, see Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, *passim*.

[646] For an overview, see Vitto, *Virtuous Pagan*, in particular pp. 5–35.

[647] *AC*, pp. 16–17; 'Hence the Gaels say that Conchobar was the first pagan who went to heaven in Ireland, for the blood that sprang out of his head was a baptism to him. And then Conchobar's soul

known in Ireland,[648] but there is earlier evidence for the story of the Harrowing of Hell in Ireland.[649] This comes in the form of a Latin poem, *Precamur patrem*, composed before the end of the seventh century,[650] which does not appear to be drawing on the Gospel of Nicodemus. The text *In Tenga Bithnua*, also refers to Christ's descent into hell,[651] and the text's earliest version, that in the Book of Lismore, has been dated variously to the ninth and to the tenth to eleventh centuries.[652] The *Liber Flavus* itself contains a great deal of religious material along with secular tales. The religious texts include texts connected to the devotion of the cross, an account of Christ's passion and texts about the Harrowing of Hell.[653] The compiler's thematic concern might also go some way towards explaining the compilatory nature of this particular version of Conchobar's death-tale and, in particular, the reference to the Harrowing of Hell in the *Liber Flavus* version of *AC*.

FAITH AND SUFFERING

The tales discussed here show the necessity of faith for salvation. The pre-Christian characters can be saved, but their faith is a prerequisite for this. The tales are not unusual in this regard, and other medieval Irish texts also show that faith is of paramount importance. The surviving literature also suggests that ideas concerning universal salvation, such as those held by Origen, are unlikely to have had much, if any, influence. Lack of faith was thought to cause serious problems as a number of saints' lives show. Thus, in Tírechán's seventh-century *Collectanea* Patrick moves the cross which had been mistakenly placed on an

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was taken to hell until Christ encountered her as He brought the captive host out of hell, so that Christ took the soul of Conchobar with Him to Heaven'.

[648] See Hughes, *Stair Nicoméid*, who dates the Leabhar Breac version, which contains the Harrowing of Hell, to the twelfth century, but states that the text preserved in other manuscripts is later (see *Stair Nicoméid*, p. xii).

[649] For a detailed discussion of the idea of the Harrowing of Hell in the British Isles, see Herren and Brown, *Christ*, pp. 151–60.

[650] See Herren and Brown, *Christ*, p. 157.

[651] See Stokes, 'The Evernew Tongue', § 149, pp. 140–1.

[652] See Stokes, 'The Evernew Tongue', p. 97 for a suggested tenth- to eleventh-century date. Carey puts forward the ninth century as a date in *King of Mysteries*, p. 276, and the late ninth or early tenth century in *Single Ray*, p. 75.

[653] See the list of contents in RIA Catalogue, pp.1258–73.

unbaptised man's grave. Tírechán's conclusion is that God had not wanted to save him.[654] In the ninth- or tenth-century tale *Síaburcharpat Con Culaind*, discussed previously, the necessity of faith for salvation is clear from Cú Chulainn's poem to Lóegaire. The torments of hell which Cú Chulainn has suffered are said to be the very real result of not believing in God, and the narrative makes it quite clear that belief in Christ is essential for salvation, with hell being presented as the terrible alternative to heaven. *Síaburcharpat* presents Conchobar as the only one of the Ulaid warriors to have escaped hell, because he believed in Christ and, as a result, went straight to heaven.[655] Cú Chulainn who is summoned by Patrick as part of the latter's efforts to convert Lóegaire, the king of Tara, is eager to submit to Patrick because his experiences in hell have been so terrible, and his description of his past deeds and his time in hell forms the core of the tale.[656] Cú Chulainn's first words in the text are a request to Patrick to be let into heaven:

> Ateoch a nóemPatraic
>
> itt arrad iteó.
>
> Romucca lat chretmecho
>
> hi tírib na mbeó.[657]

After that he turns to Lóegaire, urging him to convert and warning him of the dangers of not believing: 'Creit do Dia 7 do náemPatraic a Loegairi ná túadaig tond talman torut [...] ar is dord síabrai cen midisiu'.[658] Cú Chulainn contrasts his great feats as a warrior and the torments he has suffered in hell, making it clear that they are far worse than any hardships he had endured previously:

> An ro chesusa d'imned a Loegairi
>
> for muir 7 tír.
>
> bá ansa damsa óenadaig
>
> la demon co n-ír. [...]

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[654] See Tírechán, *Collectanea* xli.4 (ed. and trans. Bieler, pp. 156–7). This statement is reminiscent of Augustine's views on predestination, on which see Wetzel, 'Predestination'.

[655] See *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9463–4).

[656] This is emphasised by the structure of the tale. Lóegaire's account of the first vision of Cú Chulainn directs the audience's attention towards the second vision which the audience, as well as Patrick, witness directly.

[657] *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9297–300); 'I entreat you, O holy Patrick, that I might be in your company. Take me with your believers to the land of the living'.

[658] *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9301–4, text omitted by me); O'Beirne Crowe makes the necessary emendation of *cen* to *cech* and translates the passage as 'Believe in God and holy Patrick, O Loegaire, that a wave of earth may not dash over you, [...] for of the order of demons is every thing you ponder on.' ('Siabur-charpat', p. 379).

Bá comnart mo gaiscedsa

mo chlaideb ba crúaid.

domrimartsa in demon co n-óenmeór

isin richis rúaid.[659]

This contrast shows Lóegaire that even heroes such as Cú Chulainn himself are powerless against the devil and divine punishment, and it helps to emphasise the importance of faith and salvation.

A century or two later, the homily *Scéla na Esérgi*, preserved only in the eleventh- or twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre*, states clearly 'Cip é immorro na crete co forbthe 7 co comlan esergi in ciniuda dóennai fon n-innas sa sechmalfaid tall on tslanti suthain tairngirther dona naemaib 7 dona fírénaib fora n-iris'.[660] Bad faith, and linked to this, disrespect for the clergy, the men of God, also feature in a number of other tales, but their presentation serves to highlight the necessity of good faith. In the ninth-century *Scél Túáin meic Cairill* the unfriendly warrior of bad faith at the beginning of the tale contrasts negatively with Túán himself. In the twelfth-century tale *Buile Suibne*, it is Suibne's disrespect for God's saint that brings the latter's curse on him, causing him to go mad and to lead a life of exile and suffering.

Suffering can, however, also be linked to salvation, and this view is perhaps found in *AC* and *AE*, where the characters' faith is linked to suffering and endurance. Conchobar's poem expresses the idea of suffering with Christ, as has been seen. Although the poem appears to have been understood in different ways by the redactors of the two versions, both pick up the theme of suffering, even if their interpretations of it are at variance. In *AE*, Lí Ban is presented as a faithful believer who endures the trials imposed on her by God. In both tales, the characters' suffering is linked to their faith and thus to salvation. A similar link between suffering and salvation is found in *Síaburcharpat*, in which the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ that were necessary for mankind's salvation are

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[659] *Síaburcharpat* (*LU*, 9438–54, text omitted by me); 'What I suffered of trouble, O Loegaire, on sea and land; More severe for me was a single night with the angry Demon. [...] Powerful was my heroism, my sword it was hard: the Demon crushed me with one finger into the red charcoal!' (trans. O'Beirne Crowe, 'Siabur-charpat', p. 391).

[660] *LU*, 2719–21; 'But whosoever does not believe perfectly and completely in the resurrection of the human race in this wise shall be left out [yonder] of the everlasting salvation which is promised to the saints and to the righteous for their faith' (trans. Stokes, 'Tidings', p. 253).

the main themes of the text, expressed through the parallels between Cú Chulainn, Lóegaire and biblical characters.

Suffering with Christ is an idea already found in the New Testament,[661] when, for example, Christ foretells his own suffering and the suffering of those who follow him.[662] According to Christ, only those who endure the hardships they will suffer in his name can be saved.[663] The necessity of Christ's suffering is clearly illustrated in his admonition of Peter who argues with him regarding the necessity of his death and resurrection.[664] Immediately following this, Christ addresses those who want to follow him, relating their fate to his own suffering and death: "'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it'".[665]

The references to suffering on behalf of Christ in the New-Testament epistles must be seen in the context of adversity faced by early Christians. Paul recounts his own sufferings for Christ in II Cor. XI.24–8, and a number of statements regarding suffering should be seen in this light.[666] Paul also sees a connection between suffering and salvation,[667] and he encourages imitation of Christ. Thus, he tells the Corinthians: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ'.[668] Similarly, I Peter sets Christ's suffering as an example, to those who are afflicted in daily life.[669] Referring specifically to the Crucifixion, Paul uses the image of the faithful sharing in Christ's death and resurrection, as for example in Romans VIII.17, and his words in Galatians II.19–20 illustrate the need to give oneself up to Christ: 'For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have

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[661] For an examination of the idea of suffering in the gospels and the epistles, see Gerstenberg and Schrage, *Leiden*, in particular pp. 155–62.

[662] For Christ's suffering, see, for example, Matt. XVI.21; for that of his followers , for example Matt. X.17–23 and XXIV.9.

[663] See Matt X.22 and XIV.13, Mark XIII.13, Luke XXI.19.

[664] Matt. XVI.21.

[665] Matt. XVI.24–5. Cf. Mark VIII.34–5 and Luke IX.23–3.

[666] See, for example, Paul's reference to the 'sufferings of the present time' in Rom. VIII.18 and to persecutions in I Thess. III.3–4.

[667] See, for example, Rom VIII.15–17: 'When we cry "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him'.

[668] I Cor. XI.1.

[669] I Peter II.18–24.

been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me'.[670]

The Crucifixion, of course, is central to Christian thought. The cross appears to have functioned as a symbol of Christ's suffering and his Crucifixion from the earliest Christian period.[671] The statement quoted above from Matt. XVI.24–5 uses the cross as a symbol of suffering, and Paul's letter to the Galatians shows the cross as synonymous with belief in Christ and as symbolic of Christ's suffering and mankind's salvation: 'It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [...] May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world'.[672] Likewise, Paul's reference to 'enemies of the cross of Christ' shows this use of the image.[673] The symbolic importance of the cross is evidenced also by the story of Constantine's vision of the cross before the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 and the importance attached to the finding of the true cross by his mother.[674] By the fourth century, relics of the cross were in circulation,[675] and devotion to the cross is also evidenced in medieval Ireland, for example, by the probably tenth-century poem *Cros Chríst tarsin n-gnúisse*.[676] Several centuries later, the arrival of a relic of Christ's cross in Connacht is recorded in the *Chronicon Scotorum*: 'Croch Crist i gConnachta in hoc anno'.[677]

Suffering and the Crucifixion

The link between suffering, salvation and the Crucifixion is expressed in the poem preserved in the L and N version of *AC*. It is likely, too, that the idea of

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[670] Gal. II.19–20.
[671] For an overview of the use of the cross as a symbol of Christianity, see Pocknee, *Cross*. For a more detailed treatment of the cross in the Middle Ages, see Köpf, 'Kreuz'.
[672] Gal. VI.12–14.
[673] Phil. III.18.
[674] For a discussion of Constantine's reign, see Cameron, 'Constantine' and 'The Reign'. On the story of Helena's discovery of the true cross, see Young, 'Prelude', pp. 1–8.
[675] Köpf, 'Kreuz', col. 1478.
[676] Poem 13 in Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 32–5. See Murphy's notes on the poem, pp. 186–7, for the reliability of the ascription of the poem to the tenth-century coarb of Colum Cille, Mugrón, and the poem's date.
[677] *CS* 1123: 'The Cross of Christ [came] to Connacht in this year'.

suffering as a spiritual struggle[678] is reflected in the poem's move from the initial instinct to fight physically to the speaker's suffering with Christ. It has been argued above that L is more in tune with the poem's original meaning,[679] but it is clear that N, too, takes up the poem's theme of suffering. Conchobar's anger in N, leading to his death, is an expression of his anguish, and it explains his depiction as a martyr-like figure who dies and is baptised by his own blood in this version and in the *Liber Flavus*.[680] Conchobar's anger appears to be represented as an extreme expression of faith. As his reaction leads to his direct entry to heaven through blood baptism, it does not seem to be viewed in a negative light. Instead, it appears to elevate his status and can perhaps be understood as a form of suffering for Christ.

The poem as interpreted in chapter 5 does not fit this sort of spirit, but the evidence from N indicates that it was understood in a different way by that version's redactor. N elaborates on Conchobar's anger and warlike attitude, and his death as a result of these underlines the strength of his feelings on hearing about Christ's death. After Conchobar hears about Christ, N, like L, states that Conchobar also believed in Christ. However, it adds that Conchobar desired to take vengeance: 'Concreid Conchobur do Christ 7 is iarum asmbert Concobur rofestais fir in betha a chumang oc cathugud fri hIudaidi croc[h]siti Crist, ma nubet[h] hi comfogus do Christ. Is de ismbert Conchubar…'.[681] The prose is clearly linked to the poem by the use of the words '**Is de** ismbert Conchobar',[682] and a connection is thus made between Conchobar's anger and the poem. Following the poem, the text again focuses on Conchobar's great fury that eventually leads to his death: 'Is iar sin cotnoscrastur amail bid oc techt hi roi cathai ar belaip Crist co sesceand asa c[h]inn an inc[h]inn Meisgedra 7 conidebilt ind ar sin. Ised isber[at] dee iarum is e cet-gentlide docoid hi flait[h] nimea, fobit[h] robad bat[h]ais do ind fuil donescmacht 7 rocreit e do Christ. Finit.

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[678] See, for example, II Tim. II.3: 'Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus'.
[679] See above, pp. 115–16.
[680] *AC*, pp. 14 and 16. Baptism of blood will be discussed further below.
[681] *AC*, pp. 12–3; 'Conchobar believes in Christ; and then he said that if he were near Christ the men of the world would know what he could do in fighting against the Jews that had crucified Christ. Hence Conchobar said [here follows the poem]'.
[682] *AC*, p. 12.

Amen'.[683] The last paragraph which depicts Conchobar as the military hero preparing for battle and dying as a martyr places the emphasis on martial action, vengeance for the Crucifixion of Christ and justified violence towards the people responsible for it. It fits in with the beginning of this version of the tale, which emphasises Conchobar's status as ruler and statesman, who would presumably also wield military power, and illustrates the narrative unity of the account in N.

Despite the discrepancy between N's interpretation of the poem and the original meaning of the stanzas, N's depiction of Conchobar, like the other tales, lays great importance on his faith and willingness to suffer and even die for Christ. N and L interpret the poem differently, but both versions share the same idea of a faith in Christ great enough to cause Conchobar to willingly suffer on Christ's behalf.

Suffering, Self-Denial and Endurance

The author of I Peter exhorts his audience to emulate Christ and connects suffering to the renunciation of human desires: 'Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God'.[684] A similar connection between imitation of Christ's suffering and the rejection of earthly desires is also found in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*.[685] Commenting on Job II.8, Gregory interprets Job's cleansing of his wounds with a potsherd as a cleansing of bad delights and he equates the puss oozing from Job's wound with the temptation leading to bad thoughts.[686] Gregory argues that only if one rids oneself of outer

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[683] *AC*, pp. 14–15; 'Thereupon he shook himself as if he were going into a battlefield in the presence of Christ, so that Mess Gegra's brain jumped out of his head, and then he died there. This is what they say, that he was the first pagan who went into the Kingdom of Heaven, because the blood which he had shed was a baptism to him, and (because) he had believed in Christ. Finit. Amen'. For 'rocreit e' read 'rocreite' (see Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 52, n. 9).

[684] I Peter IV.1–2.

[685] That Gregory's *Moralia* was certainly known in Ireland in some form at least in the seventh and in the early ninth centuries is clear from the abbreviated version of the work by Laithcend mac Baíth of Clonfert and by the inclusion of extracts from the *Moralia* at the end of the Gospel of John in the Book of Armagh. For Laithcend's work, see Adriaen, *Egloga*.

[686] 'Testa ergo saniem mundare, est mortalitatis cursum fragilitatemque pensare et putredinem miserae delectationis abstergere. Nam dum quisque considerat, quam citius caro ad puluerem redeat, festine superat hoc quod se de carne intus turpiter impugnat. Cum ergo ex tentatione praua

desires, will God reveal inner secrets.[687] Continuing his line of thought and referring to the story of the encounter between Gideon, or Jerobaal, and an angel in Judg. VI, Gregory relates the imitation of Christ's suffering to the renunciation of bodily desires:

> Qui occidi haedum praecipit, id es omnem appetitum nostrae carnis immolari carnesque super petram poni, et ius carnium desuper fundi. Quem alium signat petra nisi eum de quo per Paulum dicitur: *Petra autem erat Christus*. Carnes ergo super petram ponimus, cum corpus nostrum in Christi imitatione cruciamus. Ius etiam carnium desuper fundit qui in conuersatione Christi ipsas a se etiam carnales cogitationes exinanit.[688]

The renunciation of bodily desires, which Gregory sees in Job's actions, is also linked to endurance, a theme of the Book of Job. As mentioned above, endurance is also a quality stressed by Christ in the gospels, and the epistle to the Hebrews expresses the idea that sufferings are a form of divine discipline that the faithful must endure.[689] In *AE*, Lí Ban expresses her faith clearly in her poem, but her suffering marks her out as particularly faithful. Endurance and acceptance of divine will are important in this context.

Lí Ban's long poem has a structural function in linking pre-Christian past and Christian present, but it is also very important in characterising Lí Ban and illustrating the extent of her faith. The poem does not, at first glance, give an impression of great coherence, and the references to characters and places that otherwise play no role in the story are partly to blame for this. However, it can be

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mentem cogitatio influit, quasi ex uulnere sanies decurrit' (Gregory, *Moralia* III.xxx.58, ed. Adriaen, p. 151; 'To clean the blood with a potsherd is to think about the progess and fragility of mortality and to wipe away the rotteness of wretched delight. For while whoever considers how very quickly flesh returns to dust, he hastily overcomes that, which, stemming from the flesh, attacks him shamefully inside. Therefore, when a thought flows into the mind because of base temptation, it is as if blood runs from a wound').

[687] 'Sed haec agentibus angelus apparet quia tanto magis Dominus interiora denuntiat, quanto se studiosius homines ab exterioribus purgant' (Gregory, *Moralia* III.xxx.59, ed. Adriaen, p. 151; 'To those who do this the angel appears, because the Lord reveals internal things the more, the more zealously men cleanse themselves of external things').

[688] Gregory, *Moralia* III.xxx.59 (ed. Adriaen, p. 151); '"Who orders the killing of the goat", that is all desire of our flesh to be sacrificed and the meats to be put on the stone, and the broth of the meat to be poured from above. What else does the stone signify, except the one of whom it is spoken of by Paul: but Christ was the rock. Therefore, we put the meat onto the stone when we crucify our body in imitation of Christ. Furthermore, he who in association with Christ empties out from himself his own carnal thoughts, pours out the juice of the meat from above'. It should be noted here that Laithcend's version of the *Moralia* does not refer to imitating Christ's way of life, but it does interpret Job's actions in a similar way.

[689] Heb. XII.5–11.

argued that the purpose of the poem is to heighten the audience's sense of Lí Ban's suffering and endurance by emphasising her struggles, loneliness and helplessness. The tone of the verses is often sad, and sometimes desperate or pleading. Nevertheless, Lí Ban has faith in God and refers to his power over her and all things, as for example in the following stanza:

> Fomtiu do chach crad meic Dé
>
> dáig iss e conic cach ní
>
> comsid na náem násad n-an
>
> Día már midedar cach ní.[690]

The stanza underlines Lí Ban's fortitude and virtue: the flood tests her, but her faith prevails. She resigns herself to God's will, suffers 'like a good soldier of Christ'[691] and takes up her 'cross daily'.[692] The references to eating fish in the nineteenth and twentieth stanzas bring to mind fasting and penance, strengthening the sense of self-denial: 'blaisiu magri matan moch'.[693] I have argued that the author of *AE* decided to bring together, for literary effect, different verses which were not originally about one person, but which were linked thematically by association with water or suffering.[694] The result is a poem which presents Lí Ban as a self-denying, willing sufferer and faithful believer in God.

<center>BAPTISM</center>

The question of the necessity of baptism for salvation is clearly a concern in texts such as *AE*, and some of the versions of *AC* refer to blood baptism. In addition, it can be argued that *FA* contains allusions to baptism. Baptism is modelled on John the Baptist's activities in the New Testament and Matt. XXVIII.19 gave the direct command to baptise and illustrated that baptism was part of the conversion process: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. In a section added to

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[690] ll. 3039–42; 'Everyone must beware of tormenting the son of God since it is he who has power over everything; lord of the saints - splendid gathering, great God who judges every thing'.
[691] II Tim. II.3.
[692] Luke IX.23.
[693] ll. 3045 and 3049; 'I taste salmon in the early morning'.
[694] See Imhoff, 'Themes, pp. 117 and 123–5.

the Gospel of Mark in the second or third century, a similar statement is followed by the assertion that 'the one who believes and is baptised will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned'.[695] The practice seems to have already been common in the earliest Christian communities.[696] The Acts of the Apostles recounts the baptism of thousands of people in mass baptisms,[697] and the Pauline epistles elaborate on the significance of baptism, the well known passage in Romans VI.2–5 linking baptism to resurrection. In I Cor. XIII, baptism appears as a characteristic of Christians and is linked to the Holy Spirit: 'For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink'. Paul refers to vicarious baptism of the dead,[698] suggesting that this was a widespread practice and again indicating the belief that baptism is necessary for salvation. It also appears that the possibility of vicarious baptism was allowed by the likes of Tertullian, Ambrosiaster and Augustine.[699] Isidore includes a discussion on baptism in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, a work which was known in medieval Ireland.[700]

In the saints' lives, baptism is clearly central to conversion to the Christian faith and thus to salvation. In Tírechán's *Collectanea* and in the Tripartite Life of Patrick, Patrick encounters and converts Lóegaire's daughters. In the account of this conversion, stress is laid on baptism and Patrick's explanations to the girls emphasise God as the creator of the world.[701] In the ninth-century *Bethu Brigte*, Brigit refuses to accept a good heathen's food until he has been baptised.[702] Infant baptism was also clearly known as the reference to the resurrection of baptised children in poem 160 of *Saltair na Rann* shows.[703] Patrick also practises baptism of the dead in Tírechán's text when he resurrects a dead giant swineherd in order to grant him baptism,[704] a passage which has been considered in connection with

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[695] Mark XVI.16.
[696] For a recent overview of baptism, see Alles, 'Taufe'.
[697] See, for example, Acts II.41.
[698] I Cor. XV.29.
[699] Colish, 'Virtuous Pagan', p. 17.
[700] See Book II.xxv (ed. Lawson, pp. 102–6). The work also influenced the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (see Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Law', p. 362).
[701] Tírechán, *Collectanea* xvi (ed. and trans. Bieler, pp. 142–5).
[702] See *Bethu Brigte* xli (ed. and trans. Ó hAodha, p. 5)
[703] 'Isint [s]ess*ed* eisseirgi/ heirgit othalmain ta[i]sced/ aes óge, aes athirge,/ nanoidin iarnambaisted' (ed. Stokes, p. 121; 'That is the sixth resurrection: the remains of chaste people, of penitents and of infants after their baptism arise from the ground').
[704] Tírechán, *Collectanea* xl (ed. and trans. Bieler, pp. 154–5).

Síaburcharpat and the Trajan episode in the Whitby Life of Gregory.[705] Baptism plays an important role in the twelfth or early thirteenth-century text *Acallam na Senórach* and the theme has been considered in connection with theological developments of the time.[706]

The division of *AE* into Old-Testament and New-Testament sections has been discussed in chapter 4,[707] and this relationship is extremely important with regard to the theme of baptism. The typological connection between Noah's flood and baptism has a scriptural basis, as mentioned in chapter 4.[708] In *AE*, it is this relationship between flood and baptism which is used to illustrate the importance of baptism to salvation and to connect the pre-Christian and Christian sections of the narrative.[709] The flood is understood as a promise of baptism, and therefore salvation, to come, and this relationship of promise and fulfilment is expressed well through Lí Ban's life in the lake. In a stanza of the poem that Lí Ban recites to Béoán, she gives thanks for, or rejoices at, baptism:

> Dia mbá fo lind locha láin
> imrordus ríg richid ráin
> ateoch in n-athair is náem
> atlochor braen batis báin.[710]

At this point in the narrative, Lí Ban has not yet received actual baptism, but her life in the lake might be understood as metaphorical baptism through the waters of the lake. This foreshadows her actual baptism by Comgall as well as bringing together the redemptive aspect of both the flood and baptism. Lí Ban's life in the lake, therefore, combines baptism with its type, the flood, and brings together Old and New Testament, illustrating the power of baptism and its significance in history.

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[705] See Szövérffy, 'Heroic Tales', 'Síaburcharpat' and 'Die Trajan-Legende'. The connection has been disputed by Carney, 'Raising the Dead', and Bieler, 'Ancient Hagiography'. The Trajan story became popular in the Middle Ages and had considerable influence on ideas about the salvation of pagans (see Colish, 'Virtuous Pagan', pp. 4–16).

[706] See Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Pagans and Holy Men'.

[707] See above, pp. 83–8.

[708] See above, p. 84.

[709] Most of the following discussion of baptism in *AE* is taken from Imhoff, 'Themes'.

[710] ll. 2995–8; 'When I was under the water of a full lake I reflected on [the] king of glorious heaven. I call on the father who is holy, I give thanks for the water of fair baptism'. 'Atlochor' can also be translated as 'I rejoice'.

As in the bible, *AE*'s Irish covenant of the pre-Christian period is supplanted by the New Covenant, the coming of Christianity and salvation. In the bible, the New Covenant is explicitly associated with the death of Jesus,[711] and this in turn is connected to the redemption of mankind from original sin. In the same way, baptism is associated with the death of Jesus in Paul's letter to the Romans, but also with new life through his resurrection.[712]

Through its associations with the death of Christ, baptism is closely connected to the New Covenant mentioned by Jesus in the gospels. In *AE* it symbolises this covenant, the counterpart to the Old Covenant of Noah and central to the salvation of Man. The passage from Paul's letter also shows the connection between baptism and the rebirth of an individual freed from sin, and in John III.5, which has been understood to refer to baptism,[713] this connection is also made, with baptism being seen as a prerequisite for salvation: 'Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit"'. Lí Ban chooses to die immediately after her baptism, but this contrasts with the tragedy of the death of Eochaid and his family because Lí Ban's baptism and death allow her to be reborn in a spiritual sense and are the beginning of a new life. Because of her new mermaid-like shape, her survival after the flood can perhaps be considered a rebirth of sorts into a new Christian age, thus foreshadowing her baptism and entry into heaven. Lí Ban's baptismal name, Muirgein, is also significant in this context, and attention is drawn to it through the separate set of verses after Lí Ban's poem. Literally 'sea-birth', this name alludes to Lí Ban's rebirth through baptism, that is through water, and echoes the phrase 'born of water' from John III.5.

The power of baptism in remitting sin is also underlined at the end of the tale. Following her death, Lí Ban goes straight to heaven and is later essentially venerated as a saint. Hence, the author of *AE* appears to have shared Augustine's view that an individual who died immediately after baptism was completely free of sin: 'Denique si continuo consequatur ab hac uita emigratio, non erit omnino,

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[711] See Mark XIV.24, Matt. XXVI.28, Luke XXII.20, and I Cor. XI.26.
[712] Rom. VI.3–5.
[713] See Dinkler's contribution, 'II: Im Urchristentum', col. 628, in Beckmann, 'Taufe'.

quod obnoxium hominem teneat solutis omnibus quae tenebant'.[714] Although Lí Ban has already shown her faith in God and has been saved from the flood, it is baptism that grants her access to heaven.

Other Forms of Baptism

Through Lí Ban's "double" baptism, the metaphorical baptism through the flood and her baptism at the end of the story, *AE* also addresses the idea of Baptism of Desire, or *baptismus flaminis*. Baptism of Desire designates the salvation and forgiveness of sins through faith and a wish for baptism when it is not possible for an individual to be baptised.[715] It was recognised by early Christian writers and medieval churchmen that redemption could also be achieved in this way. Augustine, for example, places this form of "baptism" alongside martyrdom: 'inuenio non tantum passionem pro nomine Christi id quod ex baptismo deerat posse supplere, sed etiam fidem conuersionemque cordis, si forte ad celebrandum mysterium baptismi in angustiis temporum succurri non potest'.[716]

Lí Ban appears to fulfil Augustine's criteria for qualifying for this substitute for baptism. In one of the stanzas of her poem, Lí Ban expresses her faith in God by describing how he protected her: 'rom anacht rí rethes ler'.[717] In addition to this, the connection between faith and baptism as found in Augustine may be reflected in the stanza beginning 'Dia mbá fo lind' which, as explained above, suggests that Lí Ban has been baptised.[718]

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[714] Augustine, *De peccatorum* II.xxviii.46 (ed. Urba and Zycha, p. 117); 'If immediately [after baptism] there follows the departure from this life, there will be absolutely nothing that a man must answer for [...], for he will have been freed from everything that bound him' (translated in Fanning, 'Baptism', p. 268).

[715] The *Catechism* states the following under §1260: 'Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity'. For the term *baptismus flaminis*, see Fanning, 'Baptism', p. 266. Unlike Fanning's article, which is in the old edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, the entry on the sacrament of baptism in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Jungmann and Stasiak, 'Baptism') no longer contains reference to Baptism of Desire.

[716] Augustine, *De baptismo* III.xxii.29 (ed. Petschenig, p. 257); 'I find that not only suffering for the name of Christ can fill up that which is lacking in baptism, but even faith and conversion of the heart, if perhaps it is not possible for the celebration of the mystery of baptism to take place because of dangerous times'.

[717] ll. 3003–6, 'the king who causes the sea to move protected me'.

[718] ll. 2995–8; see above, p. 194.

Baptism of Desire, however, can only replace actual baptism if the administration of the sacrament is not possible. If there is a possibility of baptism with water, Baptism of Desire is not sufficient.[719] This view is expressed, for example, by Tertullian, who illustrates the relationship between Old-Testament and New-Testament worlds with regard to baptism by saying that: 'Fuerat salus retro per fidem nudam ante domini passionem et resurrectionem: at ubi fides aucta est credentibus in nativitatem passionem resurrectionemque eius, addita est ampliato sacramento obsignatio baptismi'.[720] A similar view seems to be reflected in *AE*. Lí Ban is baptised by faith while she is still living in the lake at a time which can be taken to be still pre-Christian, but once she comes into the Christian era, her baptism by faith is validated by actual baptism. In effect, then, one can conclude that the author held a similar view to Tertullian, namely that Baptism of Desire was essentially a way of obtaining salvation in pre-Christian times, but that Christian baptism with water was superior. The story's focus on baptism and the concern with possibilities of salvation for someone for whom baptism is not possible also suggest that, to the author of *AE*, baptism was the standard and necessary way of gaining salvation. However, it also shows the author attempting to accommodate the pre-Christian past and pre-Christian characters within a Christian framework: a strong sense of continuity from the pre-Christian past into the present is created by showing how the events of the pre-Christian past relate to those of the Christian present.

From the analysis in this and the preceding chapters, it is clear that *AE* is a sophisticated typological exposition of theological issues concerning baptism. The story presents a narrative that is based on the dichotomous structure and linear chronology of the bible, showing salvation to be the ultimate goal towards which history is directed. The relationship between the pre-Christian past and the author's own Christian present is seen in terms of biblical history, allowing the author to accommodate the Irish pre-Christian age within a Christian framework. The pattern of prophecy and fulfilment results in continuity from the old age to the new, and Christianity and redemption are seen as natural consequences of the

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[719] *Catechism*, §1257.

[720] Tertullian, *De baptismo* xiii.2 (ed. Schleyer, *Tertullian*, p. 196); 'Salvation was in past times through faith alone before the suffering and resurrection of the Lord: but when faith is enriched for those believing in his birth, suffering and resurrection, the seal of baptism is added, the sacrament [i.e. faith] having been expanded'.

pre-Christian age. Baptism is portrayed as pivotal in salvation history and as the most important sacrament, granting an individual access to salvation.

Another form of baptism, that of baptism of blood, is mentioned in *AC* in N and in the *Liber Flavus*. Blood baptism was an accepted concept in the Middle Ages which was laid out by Tertullian in his treatise on baptism[721] and was included by Isidore in his discussion of baptism in *De officiis*,[722] as well as being recognised by other authorities. Baptism of blood makes a reality of the symbolic connection between baptism, death and resurrection, and it was also associated with martyrdom.[723] Conchobar, of course, does not die as a persecuted martyr, but, with reference to N, Corthals points out that Conchobar's story might be a case of non-literal martyrdom,[724] as his death is still presented as being on behalf of Christ. Baptism of blood also represents a good solution to the problem of how Conchobar was able to enter heaven despite being a pagan. A person who died immediately after baptism was believed to gain instant access to heaven,[725] and baptism by blood is the most logical way for Conchobar to be able to go straight to heaven. On the other hand, baptism of water could in theory have been administered, at least in the N version, where Altus, as a Christian, could have conferred the sacrament. However, in N, at least, Conchobar's baptism by blood fulfils another function: it is seen to justify his aggressive reaction to the news of the Crucifixion, and it is thus part of the image of Conchobar as Christ's servant, willing to suffer and die on his behalf. He is presented as a 'good soldier of Christ'[726] in a rather more literal way than the author of II Tim. had intended, and his baptism of blood is an important element in this depiction.

Baptism and Grace in Fástini Airt?

Post-humous baptism of a more abstract kind may be observed in *FA*. The suggestion was made in chapter 6 that the references in Art's poem to the washing of his body, his cleansing, to the 'well of the three' and to a 'victory of a fair

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[721] See, in particular, *De baptismo* xvi (ed. Schleyer, p. 202).
[722] See *De officiis* II.xxv (ed. Lawson, p. 103).
[723] See, for example, Isidore, *De officiis* II.xxv.2 (ed. Lawson, p. 103).
[724] Corthals, 'The *retoiric*', p. 53.
[725] See, for example, the passage from Augustine's *De peccatorum* cited above (*De peccatorum* II.xxviii.46, ed. Urba and Zycha, p. 117).
[726] II Tim. II.3.

shower' might be taken as references to baptism.[727] The explicit reference to 'the holy spirit'[728] may perhaps connect to the theme of baptism as well as to that of prophecy, given that baptism and the Holy Spirit are explicitly connected in the account of Jesus's baptism and in John the Baptist's differentiation between himself and the Messiah.[729] In Paul's epistles, baptism is also clearly understood as conferring the grace of the Holy Spirit.[730] Although the conferral of the holy spirit on Art in the prose section of *FA* appears to belong with his reception of the grace of prophecy, the connection between baptism and the holy spirit might make it possible to argue that the conferral of the holy spirit on Art strengthens the sense created by the allusions to baptism in the poem, namely the impression of Art as a quasi-baptised pre-Christian king.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the four tales under discussion here could draw on biblical and later theological authorities in order to devise ways in which the stories' pre-Christian protagonists could be saved. The idea that God revealed himself to people before the incarnation of Christ is taken up in the tales and connections are made between pre-Christian Ireland and the Old Testament. Although the idea that pre-Christian characters might be saved seems at first unusual, it is clear that the tales' presentation of faith as a necessary prerequisite for salvation associates them with orthodox Christian thinking. The well known idea of the Harrowing of Hell is referred to in the Liber Flavus version of *AC* but does not appear to have influenced the other tales or versions thereof in any great way. Some of the tales draw on the idea of suffering for Christ, expressing it in different ways. Baptism is seen as crucial in *AE*, and its various forms appear in some of the other tales, too. The sacrament's importance is illustrated by the

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[727] References are in stanzas 16 (l. 9897), 23 (ll. 9923–4), 26 (l. 9936) and perhaps 38 (l. 9986). See above, p. 132, for the suggestion regarding baptism.

[728] l. 9826.

[729] Matt. III.11. Cf. also Mark I.7–8, Luke III.16 and John I.26–7 and 33.

[730] I Cor. XII.13. See also Titus III.5–7: 'he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life'.

attempts to strengthen Art's credentials by making him appear as a quasi-baptised figure.

In this context, the fact that theologians distinguished between those who were truly pre-Christian and those who remained un-Christian after the coming of Christ may be significant. It is possible that when pre-Christian Irish authors recast their own past according to the biblical model, splitting it into Old-Testament and New-Testament eras, they were not just aligning their pre-Christian ancestors with Old-Testament faithfuls. They may also have been mindful of the fact that the pre-Christian protagonists of many of the tales had lived after Christ's coming. Perhaps the use of the biblical model was an attempt to minimise the significance of that fact by presenting the Irish pre-conversion past as truly pre-Christian. It is interesting to note that metaphorical baptism and allusions to the sacrament play the greatest role in *AE* and *FA*, the two tales, which most present pre-Christian times as an Old-Testament period. As *AE* appears to be something of an exposition of salvation history and the role of baptism within it, this is natural enough. However, this is not the case in *FA*. As the events recounted took place after the coming of Christ, baptism would have been considered necessary by most theological authorities. Presenting Art as baptised or quasi-baptised ensured his salvation, and thus his acceptability, even though he had lived after the coming of Christ. By contrast, it is clear that *AC* and *DSTT* are set at the time of the Crucifixion or shortly afterwards. Fintan and Conchobar convert with the coming of Christianity and, unlike Art, they do not live as unbelievers after the coming of Christ. Perhaps baptism was therefore not considered as necessary a component of their depiction.

However, regardless of how it is expressed and regardless of which formal expression is given to it, the crucial factor which determines the characters' fate after death is their unwavering Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been concerned with the representation of pre-Christian characters in *FA*, *AC*, *DSTT* and *AE*. The discussion of these tales has shown that they address different concerns, but that their presentation of the pre-Christian protagonists is also very similar in several important regards. The date range of the tales, from the early tenth-century *FA* to the twelfth-century *AE*, shows the enduring importance and popularity of the pre-Christian past and pre-Christian characters in medieval Irish literature. The differences between the tales, however, also highlight the adaptability of such tales. *AC*, in particular, with its different versions and its inclusion of an earlier poem, *Ba haprainn*, is witness to the many reworkings a tale could undergo. The occurrence of verses in a number of manuscript versions even distinguishes those versions from one another which are otherwise very close.[731] The poem *A chloch thall* presupposes knowledge of the story of Conchobar's death, and its marked departure from the presentation of the pre-Christian king found in the other known versions of the tale suggests that it is deliberately different from those other versions.

FA may also be drawing on pre-existing traditions about the legendary Art's association with the monastery of Treóit. As has been argued in chapter 7,[732] the tale makes use of the idea of a connection between the king and the house to enhance the monastery's standing. Like *FA*, *DSTT* may be concerned with contemporary developments. It focuses on all of Ireland and, in particular, on Tara's status within Ireland, and it may be related to developments in the early eleventh century. *DSTT* appears to make use of Fintan's status as a knowledgeable historian, as well as of ideas concerning the interrelatedness of biblical teaching, Irish law and kingship in order to lend weight to its main point, the kingship of Tara's primacy within Ireland. *AE*, probably the latest of the texts discussed here, differs from both *DSTT* and *FA* in that its focus is on more immediately spiritual matters, that is, baptism and salvation history.

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[731] This is the case, for example, for the two NLS Adv. manuscripts. Adv. 72.1.5 includes verse on two occasions, whereas Adv. 72.1.40 does not.

[732] See, in particular, pp. 154–5 and 168–9 above.

Nevertheless, despite the variety of themes and concerns discernable in the texts, they share some basic ideas about the pre-Christian past and its relationship with the Christian present. Thus, chapter 4 has shown the importance of the bible to ideas about Irish history and the representation of pre-Christian Ireland. This goes hand in hand with the pre-Christian protagonists' similarities with biblical and Christian characters discussed in chapter 5. Hence pre-Christian Ireland could be imagined as an Old-Testament era, as in *AE* and *FA*. The Christian present, as in *AE*, could be seen as the corresponding New-Testament age. Similarly, in *DSTT*, Fintan's similarities with Moses and the allusions to the story of the patriarch's reception of the Ten Commandments create links between the Irish and the Israelites. It is likely that the tale's audience might already have known such ideas from other pseudo-historical texts, which fed into *Lebor Gabála* at a slightly later date. *DSTT* brings together the story of the giving of the law to Moses with the event of the Crucifixion, thus combining both Old and New Testament. *AC*, although it does not divide Irish history into Old- and New-Testament eras, reflects the influence of biblical narrative above all in the setting of the N version. A division into a morally deficient pre-Christian past and a saving Christian period appears to be found in L.

In the tales one gains a sense of continuity from the pre-Christian past to the Christian present, and this is linked to the use of the bible and biblical history as models. Thus *FA*'s prophecy, an event set in the pre-Christian past, connects the pre-Christian king Art with the Christian community at Treóit, as well as potentially creating links between the tale's Christian audience and the pre-Christian king through ambiguities of meaning and shifting time levels.[733] The transmission of Trefuilngid's knowledge to Fintan in pre-Christian times, then to Diarmait in the early Christian period and finally to the story's audience through the tale also creates the sense of an unbroken line of transmission, connecting the audience with their pre-Christian past.[734] *AE* makes use of prophecy and fulfilment to link its "pre-Christian" and "Christian" sections, as well as enforcing this link structurally, with the verse section of the tale at the centre.[735] In *AC* the reference to the Crucifixion connects Conchobar's Irish pre-Christian time to the

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[733] See above, pp. 23, 31–2, 126 and 128–9.
[734] Nagy, *Conversing*, p. 6, draws attention to this aspect of *DSTT*.
[735] See, in particular, p. 86 above.

central event of Christianity. This sense is particularly strong in the N version through the use of the Roman, New-Testament-like setting. Thematic links between L's pre-Christian section and Conchobar's poem serve to link and contrast the pre-Christian king's former life and his new-found Christian understanding. This linking of past and present is seen also in the application of saintly characteristics to Lí Ban and Art, as discussed in chapter 6. It shows God interacting with Irish figures even before the conversion of the country and thus suggests a line of divine involvement running through Irish history.

All the texts appear to agree on the basic requirement for salvation, that is, faith in God. In this, they are entirely orthodox. The pre-Christian protagonists in most of the four tales or tale versions discussed here all become believers as a result of a divine revelation. Art experiences an angelic vision, Fintan has a divine encounter, Lí Ban somehow knows of God after the disaster that killed her family. In some of the versions of *AC*, Christ's Crucifixion is announced through an earthquake or an eclipse. Medieval Irish authors were not the inventors of the idea that God could reveal himself to those who lived in pre-Christian times, and the ideas found in the texts are supported by the views of a number of important theological authorities, as discussed in chapter 8. Other themes related to the characters' salvation vary across the tales. Thus suffering is an important theme in *AE* and in some versions of *AC*, and baptism plays a particularly prominent role in Lí Ban's story, but also in *FA* and in versions of *AC*.

A few words must be said about *A chloch thall*, the poem about Conchobar's death which forms part of the version of *AC* in RIA D. iv. 2. It is somewhat different from the other tales, as suggested above, in that it presents the pre-Christian king Conchobar as a noble hero, but seems to raise serious doubts as to his chances of salvation. The reasons for the differences between the poem and the other tales can only begin to be established if more is known about the circumstances of the poem's composition, including its date. Thus one possible avenue would be to attempt to establish whether the ascription to Cináed ua hArtacáin is plausible. If so, the poem would be of tenth-century date, but this would not be enough to explain Conchobar's depiction, given the fact that *FA*,

too, is likely to be of roughly tenth-, perhaps early eleventh-century date.[736] If the ascription to Cináed could be confirmed, this would provide a strong basis for the exploration of possible historical circumstances that might have influenced its composition.

Despite the differences between the poem and the other tales, *A chloch thall* appears to some extent to share the idea of a degree of similarity between pre-Christian past and Christian present, as the use of parallels in the poem show. In the poem these have the effect of contrasting the different ages, rather than highlighting continuity between them, despite the fact that the stone-brain relic could be taken as a symbol of continuity throughout the ages. Thus it could be argued that, while disagreeing with the notion that Conchobar was saved and went to heaven, *A chloch thall* still has recourse to an idea found in the other tales, that of a correspondence between past and present.

Finally, it remains to be said that all the characters discussed here – Conchobar in the versions of *AC* except for the poem *A chloch thall*, Lí Ban, Art and Fintan – are portrayed in very positive terms. They interact with the Christian period both in a literal and in a slightly more abstract sense. Fintan meets with early Christians in his tale, as does Lí Ban in hers. Art perhaps "interacts" with *FA*'s audience, and the tale certainly appears to address the concerns a medieval audience associated with Treóit might have. Likewise, a medieval audience could learn from the example of Conchobar's conversion, either by following him in his contemplation of the Crucifixion as in L, or in emulating his ardent faith in Christ, expressed in his desire to protect him. The tale of *AE* addresses an extremely important issue for medieval Christians, salvation, and Lí Ban herself, with her patient and unquestioning acceptance of God's will, would also have made a good model for a medieval audience. The depiction of Fintan, Art, Lí Ban and Conchobar, who have been so entirely and so well accommodated into a Christian framework, is witness to the learning, imagination, skill and self-confidence of the authors of the tales. Nagy has described Fintan in *DSTT* as 'almost more Christian than the sixth-century audience to which he imparts his tale'.[737] This perceptive statement might also be applied to the other three characters discussed in this

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[736] See the linguistic analysis of *FA* above, pp. 10–17, and the suggestions made concerning Uí Chernaig connections with Dunshaughlin, pp. 170–1.
[737] *Conversing*, p. 6.

dissertation. They are not, it seems, pre-Christian, but rather Christians who lived before the conversion.

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