

## Glorious by association: the Clontarf obituary of Brian Boru

MÁIRE NÍ MHAONAIGH

More than a thousand years after the battle of Clontarf, the principal source concerning the battle, a twelfth-century literary account, *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (The War of the Irish against Foreigners) has lost none of its appeal.<sup>1</sup> Presenting a detailed description of the encounter as the noble end-point in what is set out as the glorious career of Brian Boru, its skilful creator composed what is in effect an heroic biography of his main subject, a Munster king whose power extended throughout much of Ireland during the latter part of his long period of rule.<sup>2</sup> Written at the behest of Brian's great-grandson, Muirchertach, in the early years of the twelfth century, it was designed, in part at least, to bolster the younger man's ambitions.<sup>3</sup> The first of his dynasty to bear the surname of Ua Briain (O'Brien), this successful ruler consciously cultivated his ancestor's image, in whose reflected glory he sought profitably to bask. It is in this narrative text that Brian's persona was primarily cultivated, Clontarf being cast as a quasi-national conflict and one in which the aged, holy king was well-nigh martyred. This much has long been recognized and the literary nature of the *Cogadh* is clearly signalled in recent discussions of the events of a millennium ago.<sup>4</sup> Such is the dramatic power and pervasive influence of this sophisticated composition, however, that many contemporary commentators remain in its thrall and our perception of the battle fought at Clontarf in April 1014 continues to owe much to its author's pen.<sup>5</sup>

It was ever thus, and the *Cogadh*'s effects can be detected not long after it came into being. In form, content, as well as style, it provided a model for the story of Brian's Mac Carthaig counterpart, Cellachán mac Buadacháin

1 CCG. 2 An excellent introduction to his career is provided in Ó Corráin, *Normans*, pp 120–31; I discuss the medieval sources concerning him in Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*. 3 Anthony Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain, politics and naval activity in the Irish Sea, 1075–1119' in Gearóid Mac Niocaill and Patrick F. Wallace (eds), *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway, 1988), pp 397–415; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib: some dating considerations', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 354–77. 4 See, for example, Duffy, *Brian Boru*, who suggests that the *Cogadh* 'must be taken with a pinch of salt' (p. 198), drawing attention to the text's 'good deal of embroidery' (p. 199). Similarly, Darren McGettigan, *The Battle of Clontarf: Good Friday 1014* (Dublin, 2013), claims 'that it is a mistake to try to find a historical basis for much of what appears in the Irish and Icelandic sagas' (p. 130, n. 1), among which the *Cogadh* is paramount. 5 See, for example, Colmán Etchingham, review of Duffy, *The Battle of Clontarf*, *Irish Literary Supplement: A Review of Irish Books*, 34:2 (Spring 2015), 3–4, and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'The life and after life of Brian Boru', *Irish Literary Supplement: A*

(d. 954), *Caithréim Cellacháin Chaisil* ('The Martial Career of Cellachán of Cashel') probably composed in the second or third decade of the twelfth century, as argued by Donnchadh Ó Corráin.<sup>6</sup> There may indeed have been two versions of the *Cogadh* circulating at that point, if the ending highlighting the heroic endeavours of Brian's son and successor, Donnchad mac Briain, represents a reworking on the part of the latter's grandson, Brian, son of Murchad in Sgéith Gírr mac Donnchada, known as Brian Gleanna Maidhir (d. 1118), as Denis Casey has suggested.<sup>7</sup> The original form of the narrative remains a matter of uncertainty, as the only complete surviving copy is that written by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh in Multyfarnham, Co. Westmeath, in 1635 based on a transcript he had made seven years previously of the now lost manuscript *Leabhar Con Chonacht Uí Dhálaigh* ('The Book of Cú Chonnacht Ó Dálaigh').<sup>8</sup> Emphasis on Muirchertach's line through his grandfather, Brian's son Tadc, whom his brother, Donnchad, had killed in 1023 is a prominent feature of *Brjáns saga*, the name given to a postulated Old Norse account of the battle which is preserved in the thirteenth-century text *Brennu-Njáls saga*.<sup>9</sup> This too was likely to have been written during Muirchertach's reign.<sup>10</sup> The popular composition was revised again in the middle of the twelfth century and interpolations were incorporated reflecting relations between Uí Briain and the influential king of Bréifne, Tigernán Ua Ruairc (d. 1172), at the time.<sup>11</sup> This version also lies behind a list of Clontarf battalions surviving in fragmentary fourteenth-century form.<sup>12</sup>

*Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* thus found immediate resonance and its composition was a significant event.<sup>13</sup> It was accorded space in a late twelfth-

*Review of Irish Books*, 35:2 (Spring 2016), 14–15. <sup>6</sup> 'Caithréim Chellacháin Chaisil: history or propaganda?', *Ériu*, 25 (1974), 1–69 at 5, 61, 63–4. <sup>7</sup> Denis Casey, 'A reconsideration of the authorship and transmission of *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh*', *PRIA*, 113C, 1–23, at 20–1. Casey considers the possibility that the text may have been written at one of two points in the eleventh century, but ultimately rejects this view (18–20); Seán Duffy's claim that Casey's work points to this earlier date is therefore misleading: *Brian*, p. 198 and n. 9. <sup>8</sup> Brussels, Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscript 2569–2572, fos 103–35; for the significance of the manuscript evidence for his argument, see Casey, 'Reconsideration', 6–7. <sup>9</sup> Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), pp 44–60 (§§154–5); see also Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland – afterthoughts' in Clarke et al. (eds), *Ireland and Scandinavia*, pp 421–52, at pp 450–52. Donnchad's treachery towards Tadc is recorded *AT*, pp 254–5; *AI* 1023.3 and *AU* 1023.5 do not specifically implicate Donnchad in his murder. <sup>10</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Viking Ireland', p. 450; see also Benjamin Hudson, 'Brjáns saga', *Medium Ævum*, 71 (2002), 141–68, reprinted in his *Irish sea studies, 900–1200* (Dublin, 2006), pp 143–71. In a forthcoming collaborative volume, Colmán Etchingham, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Elizabeth Ashman Rowe and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson set out a time-period and location for the composition of this Old Norse text, as well as a context for its transmission to Iceland. <sup>11</sup> This version is preserved in Dublin, Trinity College, Manuscript 1319 (H.2.17), which is acephalous as well as lacking an ending; see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Bréifne bias in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*', *Ériu*, 43 (1992), 135–58. <sup>12</sup> Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'A neglected account of the battle of Clontarf', *ZCP*, 59 (2012), 143–67, at 151–2. <sup>13</sup> There is evidence for repeated copying of other pseudo-historical

century codex, the Book of Leinster, though a lacuna in the manuscript means that only the first one-seventh or so of the composition now survives therein.<sup>14</sup> Its immediate context, surrounded as it is by texts concerned with both the theory and practice of kingship, suggests that this aspect of Brian's life is, not surprisingly, to the fore.<sup>15</sup> This is reinforced by the consequences allegedly brought about by his killing at Clontarf, heroes, clerics and women being robbed of their essential characteristics, namely 'valour and honour', 'piety and devotion', 'modesty and chastity' (respectively).<sup>16</sup> Employing a common literary motif, the author makes clear that the rightful king has been slain and the world is in disarray as a result. In Brian's case, his place in the next life is ensured and the language of resurrection is implied: death on Good Friday is followed by proper burial at Armagh on Easter Sunday, as well as generous payment of church dues.<sup>17</sup> Revival of Brian's power through control by his descendants is thus legitimized. As his heirs, they too have an innate and quasi-divine right to rule.

#### MEDIEVAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

In emphasizing Brian's authority and regal qualities, the *Cogadh* presents a story of his adult, active life. It constitutes his *res gestae*, the deeds specifically chosen to commend him to posterity. The narration of those selected actions

texts also in this period. Different versions of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cúailnge') and *Mesca Ulad* ('The Intoxication of the Ulstermen') are preserved in two early vernacular manuscripts, *Lebor na hUidre* ('The Book of the Dun Cow') and the Book of Leinster (respectively, LU, pp 142–206; LL, ii, pp 261–399; and LU, 50–53; LL, v, pp 1171–87r). *Cath Ruis na Ríg* ('The Battle of Ross na Ríg') is also found in the latter codex (LL, iv, pp 761–79); Uáitéar Mac Gearailt has argued that an Early Modern Irish version of the text is derived from a copy earlier than and different from the copy in the Book of Leinster ('*Cath Ruis na Ríg* and twelfth-century literary and oral tradition', *ZCP*, 44 (1991), 128–53, at 141–6). We may also note that *Lebor Gabála Érenn* ('The Book of the Taking(s) of Ireland') circulated in various forms in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (John Carey, *A new introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn*, ITS Subsidiary Series (London and Dublin, 1993), p. 6). The situation postulated for the *Cogadh*, therefore, was far from unique. <sup>14</sup> Dublin, Trinity College, Manuscript 1339 (H.2.18); LL v, pp 1319–25. <sup>15</sup> See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship revisited: Alfred, Æthelred and Brian Bórama compared' in John Bradley, Alan J. Fletcher and Anngret Simms (eds), *Dublin in the medieval world: studies in honour of Howard B. Clarke* (Dublin, 2009), pp 83–97, at pp 92–7. <sup>16</sup> *Ro sceind da trian einigh ocus engnama o laochaibh na hErenn le cloistecht an sceoil sin. Ro sceind da trian connla ocus crabhadh o cleirchibh Erenn don scel sin. Do cuaidh a náire ocus a ngeinmnaigeacht ó mnaibh Erenn don scel cedna ... Do cuaidh da trian lachta o ceitraibh fos don scel sin* ('Two-thirds of the valour and honour of Ireland's heroes vanished on hearing that news [of Brian's death]. Two-thirds of the piety and devotion of Ireland's clerics vanished because of that news. The modesty and chastity of Ireland's women disappeared because of that same news ... In addition, two-thirds of the cattle's milk disappeared because of that news'): CGG, pp 204–6 (§116). <sup>17</sup> CGG, pp 210–11 (§118); these arrangements are directed by Brian's son Donnchad; this portion of the text only survives in Ó Cléirigh's

casts him in a carefully constructed mould; through *narratio rerum gestarum*, Brian's *historia* was formed.<sup>18</sup> In representing Brian's past in this way, the author was working within well-established, intellectual parameters. Medieval chroniclers were concerned with *dramatis personae*, but also with the location (*locus*) of a given action, as well as its time (*tempus*).<sup>19</sup> By means of a chronological framework events were anchored in a linear history beginning with Creation and moving towards salvation itself. The idea of universal history and of the specific place of *res gestarum* within it, was the defining principle for much medieval discourse with the past.<sup>20</sup>

Within this overarching concept, memorialization and remembrance were achieved by various means and in many different, often interconnected forms, among them annals, sagas and hagiography. Chronicles set out happenings in sequence, synchronization orientating an audience by reference to what were perceived as defining world events, including the siege of Troy and the foundation of Rome.<sup>21</sup> For Marianus Scotus, alias Máel Brigte, a monk who received his early education in Moville, Co. Donegal, before moving in 1056 when he was in his late twenties to continental centres such as Cologne, Fulda and Mainz, the ordering of deeds was key. To accommodate historical happenings to his satisfaction within a temporal scheme, he adjusted the received Christian chronology, justifying his complex calculations.<sup>22</sup> Affairs in Ireland are recorded in his Chronicle (*Chronicon*), alongside biblical and imperial events. Brian's killing is noted by him, although not the actual encounter at Clontarf: according to Marianus, the Munster king was killed during the preparations for Easter 'with his hands and minds directed towards God' (*manibus et mente ad Deum intentus*).<sup>23</sup> The author of the Cogadh draws

seventeenth-century copy. <sup>18</sup> Isidore of Seville specifically equated *historia* with *narratio rerum gestarum*; see Hans-Werner Goetz, 'The concept of time in the historiography of the eleventh and twelfth centuries' in Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried and Patrick J. Geary (eds), *Medieval concepts of the past: ritual, memory, historiography* (Cambridge, 2002), pp 139–65, especially pp 143–5. <sup>19</sup> Goetz, 'The concept of time' provides a useful introduction, as do the essays in Jean-Philippe Genet (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe: actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation Européenne de la Science au Centre de Recherches Historiques et Juridiques de l'Université Paris I du 29 mars au 1er avril 1989* (Paris, 1991). See also Franz-Josef Schmale, *Funktion und Formen mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreibung: eine Einführung* (Darmstadt, 1985) and R.W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing: 1. the classical tradition from Einhard to Geoffrey of Monmouth', *TRHS*, 20 (1970), 173–96. <sup>20</sup> See, for example, Hans-Werner Goetz, 'On the universality of universal history' in Genet (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe*, pp 247–61, and R.W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing: 2. Hugo of St Victor and the idea of historical development', *TRHS*, 21 (1971), 159–79. <sup>21</sup> In an Irish context, what was considered to be the foundation battle of Mag Tuired (*Cath Maige Tuired*), for example, is synchronized with the Trojan war: Elizabeth A. Gray (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Tuired: the Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, ITS 52 (London and Dublin, 1982), pp 40–1 (§69). <sup>22</sup> See, for example, Peter Verbist, *Duelling with the past: medieval authors and the problem of the Christian era (c.990–1135)*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 21 (Turnhout, 2010), pp 85–146. <sup>23</sup> Bartholemew MacCarthy (ed. and trans.), *Codex*

on chronicle entries, placing Brian's achievements in the context of a selective reading of earlier events.<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on successive waves of plundering Vikings signalled by the formula *táinic longes ele i* ('another fleet came to [a specific place]') sets the scene for Brian's ultimate triumph against ferocious foreign foes.<sup>25</sup> Behind this hovers a further structuring feature of medieval historiography, that of 'translation of imperial power (*translatio imperii*)' to accommodate change.

*Translationes imperii* provided a model whereby change could be accommodated, while continuity was also maintained. Within fixed points along a timeline, history could be viewed as cyclical, one great kingdom succeeding another in an ordered transfer of control.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the Assyrians, Persians and Macedonians were believed to have held power in turn before it moved westwards through Alexander the Great from Babylon to Rome.<sup>27</sup> The Roman Empire was deemed similarly flexible to allow translation of authority from one dynasty to another: as successors of Augustus Caesar, later rulers were accorded the mantle of rule.<sup>28</sup> Brian claimed the same imperial sanction, his spiritual advisor, Máel Suthain, describing him as *imperator Scotorum* (Emperor of the Irish) in the Book of Armagh.<sup>29</sup> The parallel with the designation, *imperator Romanorum*, accorded to his German contemporary, Otto III, has long been noted. The latter's predecessor, Otto II, was linked directly with Augustus, being known as *Romanorum imperator Augustus* from the 980s.<sup>30</sup> Brian too is styled *August iartair tuaiscirt Eorpa uile* ('the Augustus of the whole of northwest Europe'), in what is an augmented later record of the battle of Clontarf in the Annals of Ulster.<sup>31</sup> Prestige and precedence were expressed through identification with the first Roman emperor Augustus, or Octavianus, as he was originally known.<sup>32</sup> The decline of that empire led

*Palatino-Vaticanus*, no. 830: texts, translations and indices, RIA, Todd Lecture Series 3 (Dublin, 1892), p. 8; Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp 58–9. 24 I have attempted to identify his sources in 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the annals: a comparison', *Ériu*, 47 (1996), 101–26. 25 Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib and the annals', 118–20; see most recently, Clare Downham, 'The 'annalistic section' of *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*', *Peritia*, 24–5 (2013–14), 141–72. 26 See, for example, Goetz, 'The concept of time', 154. 27 See, for example, Emily Reiner, 'Meanings of nationality in the medieval Alexander tradition' in Markus Stock (ed.), *Alexander the Great in the Middle Ages: transcultural perspectives* (Toronto, 2016), pp 30–50, at pp 33–5. 28 For vivid visual representation of this, see Goetz, 'The concept of time', pp 155–7. 29 John Gwynn (ed.), *The Book of Armagh: Liber Ardmachanus* (Dublin, 1913) fol. 16v; for discussion, see Duffy, *Brian Boru*, pp 140–44; Denis Casey and Bernard Meehan, 'Brian Boru and the Book of Armagh', *History Ireland*, 22:2 (Mar./Apr. 2014) pp 28–9; and see also Casey, above. 30 Aubrey Gwynn, 'Brian in Armagh (1005)', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha*, 9 (1978), 38–51; Odilo Engels, 'Theophano, the western empress from the east' in Adelbert Davids (ed.), *The empress Theophano: Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium* (Cambridge, 1995), pp 28–48, at p. 35; for context see the article by Karl Leyser in the same volume, 'Theophanu divina gratia imperatrix Augusta: western and eastern emperorship in the later tenth century', pp 1–48. 31 *AU* 1014.2; on the nature of this record, see Duffy, *Brian Boru*, pp 177–86; Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp 55–6. 32 Tenth-century Anglo-Saxon kings were also styled

seamlessly to the triumph of Christianity, and it was as part of that historical tradition that these global Christian rulers were portrayed.<sup>33</sup>

#### BRIAN'S DEATH-NOTICE

That Brian Boru should be placed in such company is entirely to be expected: Ireland was part of this wider learned Latinate world. Its history was Christian history; a biblically inspired origin-legend, *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (The Book of the Taking(s) of Ireland), situated Ireland among divine nations, equating the Irish (Gáidil) with God's chosen people, the Israelites, *tuatha Dé*.<sup>34</sup> That Brian saw himself in these terms can be deduced from the fact that Máel Suthain accorded him the title 'Emperor' in the king's own presence (*in conspectu Briani*).<sup>35</sup> The *Cogadh* followed its subject's lead but went further, particularly in one passage which functions as the death-notice of the king (see appendix 8.1 below).<sup>36</sup> In a eulogistic obituary occurring at a point in the text immediately after the account of Brian's slaying at Clontarf, he is proclaimed as *an tOchtauin aobhdha ilbhudhach im shochar ocus im saordhacht a atharrdha ocus a chineoil* ('the beautiful, ever-victorious Octavian, as far as the benefit and nobility of his patrimony and kin is concerned').<sup>37</sup> There are echoes in this passage of the Aeneid, specifically of Virgil's portrayal of Augustus Caesar therein, encompassed in the prophecy attributed to Anchises in Book 6 of that work: *hic vir, hic est tibi quem promitti saepius audis / Augustus Caesar, divi genus ...* ('this is the man, this is he who you are frequently told is promised to you, Augustus Caesar, offspring of a god ...').<sup>38</sup> The detail is not reproduced in the vernacular Irish prose version of the poem, *Imtheachta Aeniása* ('The Wanderings of Aeneas'), which was adapted about the same time as the *Cogadh*

emperor, though not specifically of Rome. Edgar, for example, was deemed *basileus et imperator omnium regnum Anglorum*; see Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish society, Anglo-Norman settlers, Angevin kingship: interactions in Ireland in the late twelfth century* (Oxford, 1989), p. 179. <sup>33</sup> The link between these two major powers, Roman and Christian, was the dominant theme of an influential fourth-century history by a student of St Augustine, Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII* ('History against the pagans in seven books'): Carolus Zangemeister (ed.), *Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 5 (Heidelberg, 1882; reprinted Hildesheim, 1967). <sup>34</sup> See Carey, *New introduction to Lebor Gabála Érenn* and his 'Lebor Gabála and the legendary history of Ireland' in Helen Fulton (ed.), *Medieval Celtic literature and society* (Dublin, 2005), pp 32–48. <sup>35</sup> Gwynn, *Book of Armagh*, fol. 16v; the assumption that the inscription was written in Armagh during Brian's well known visit there in 1005 has been challenged by Casey and Meehan, 'Brian Boru and the Book of Armagh', 29, and in Casey, above. <sup>36</sup> CGG pp 202–5 (115). I refer throughout to my transcription and translation of the death-notice in Appendix 8.1 below, while also providing references to Todd's edition of the paragraph in question. This passage is only preserved in the seventeenth-century copy of the text written by Micheál Ó Cléirigh. <sup>37</sup> CGG, p. 204 (§115). <sup>38</sup> J.W. Mackail (ed.), *The Aeneid* (Oxford, 1930), 6.791–5.



was composed.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the essence of Virgil's text remains in the Irish work, *Iuil Cesair 7 Octafin airdri in domain co fine na Sesarda* ('Julius Caesar and Octavian, emperor of the world, with the family of the Caesars') being included among the kings and nobles numbered among Aeneas's illustrious descendants.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the original Latin text, the exact tenor of the depiction of the Emperor and the poet's view of his contemporary has been intensely debated.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding the perceived ambiguities in Virgil's own text, later commentators predominantly favour a pro-Augustan stance, including Servius, a fourth-century critic, whose work formed part of a wider compendium (known as Servius Danielis) which was highly influential in the Middle Ages.<sup>42</sup> As the successor of Rome's founder, Aeneas, Augustus represents a crucial stage in the continuation of power and thus its ultimate transfer into a Christian era.

This is the perspective reflected in Irish material and the *Cogadh* is no exception in this regard. In the narrative, Brian is praised as Augustus for his beauty and military victories, as well as the benefit he brought to his kin. The emphasis on the quasi-legal terms *sochar* ('valid contract', as well as more generally 'privileges, profit') and *sáerdacht* (the concept of being *sáer*, 'free, possessing legal status') could have recalled the *pax Romana* with which Rome's first emperor was associated. As Augustus brought law, order and stability to his kingdom, so too was Ireland in Brian's time peaceful and secure.<sup>43</sup> The point is reinforced in more familiar rhetoric in the paragraph following the equation of the Roman emperor and the Munster king, with reference to the calamitous effects experienced as a result of Brian's death. In addition to the loss of valour, devotion and chastity on the part of heroes, clerics and women in turn (noted above), two-thirds of cows' milk will be dissipated in a dramatic depiction of the reduction in fertility that Brian's

39 George Calder (ed. and trans.), *Imtheachta Aeniasa: the Irish Aeneid being a translation made before AD1400 of the XII books of Vergil's Aeneid into Gaelic*, ITS 6 (London, 1907); see also Erich Poppe, *A new introduction to Imtheachta Aeniasa The Irish Aeneid: the classical epic from an Irish perspective*, ITS Subsidiary Society 3 (London and Dublin, 1995), and his, 'A Virgilian model for *lúirech thredúalach*', *Ériu*, 54 (2004), 171–7, at 176. 40 Calder, *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, pp 90–91 (line 1447). A further specific reference to Augustus in Book VII of the Aeneid concerning his entry into Rome as depicted prophetically on Aeneas's shield is not reproduced in the Irish text: Mackail, *The Aeneid*, Book 7; Calder, *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, pp 124–5 (lines 1960–67). 41 For a summary of the debate, see Richard F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan reception* (Cambridge, 2001), pp 2–14. Thomas himself reads Virgil as critical of Augustus; for a more positive interpretation, see James E.G. Zeitzel, 'Rome and its traditions' in Charles Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Virgil* (Cambridge, 1997), pp 188–203, at pp 197–9. 42 On Servius's view of Virgil and Augustine, see Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan reception*, pp 92/121; use of Servian commentary in Ireland is discussed by Brent Miles, *Heroic saga and classical epic in medieval Ireland*, *Studies in Celtic History* 30 (Woodbridge, 2011), pp 23–33. 43 This is stated clearly in an earlier panegyric of Brian's reign: CGG, pp 100–1 (§63), pp 138–41 (§80); see Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship revisited', 93–4.

killing will cause.<sup>44</sup> Warfare will become prevalent, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Berchán: 'blood-red' (*fordercc*) will be the conflicts of Irish and Foreigners – *Gaill* and *Gáidil*.<sup>45</sup> In combination with this well-known imagery, the equivalence of Brian and Augustus becomes focussed on their mutual role as successful leaders and dynastic founders. And as Roman power is translated to a Christian successor, the underlying implication is that Brian's descendants can (and will) triumph in time.

The reference to Augustus may also have recalled another great leader, Conchobar mac Nessa, king of the Ulaid. As Ireland's history was aligned with global events in annalistic and other sources, it is with Augustus's period as emperor that Conchobar's rule was synchronized. Thus, both leaders are said to have come to power at the same time; the beginning of the reign of Conchobar is recorded immediately after the defeat by his Roman counterpart of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, marking the end of the Roman Republic and the commencement of Empire: *Marcus Antonius Niger uictus ab Augusto ... Hoc anno cepit regnare in Emain Conchobor mac Nessa ....*<sup>46</sup> This equation forms part of material from the so-called Irish World Chronicle, the source from which non-contemporary annals concerned with the period before the time of St Patrick are likely to have been derived.<sup>47</sup> Augustus predeceased Conchobar according to this scheme.<sup>48</sup> However, one version of Conchobar's death-tale (*Aided Chonchobair*), claims that Octavian (alias Augustus) sent a tax official, Altus, to the Ulster king, who also brought news of Christ's crucifixion to him.<sup>49</sup> Conchobar died of anger and grief as a result, one of only two men in Ireland who believed in God 'before the coming of Christianity (*ria tiachtain creitmi*)'.<sup>50</sup> Octavian's son, Tiberius, is ruling when Jesus was crucified, in other versions of the story, in line with biblical chronology.<sup>51</sup>

Through Conchobar's precocious conversion in this and other sources, Ireland's pre-Christian heroes are associated with Christ and placed at the beginning of what was known as the Sixth Age which began with the Incarnation and would lead on to eternity in the Seventh. In the universal chronology within which medieval historiography was structured, therefore, the Ulster king was something of a lynchpin. Any association between him and Brian in the *Cogadh* is at best indirect: if A[ugustus] = B[rian], then B must

44 CGG, p. 205 (§115). 45 CGG, pp 204–5 (§116). 46 AT, p. 35. 47 Thomas Charles-Edwards (trans.), *The chronicle of Ireland*, Translated Texts for Historians 44, 2 vols (Liverpool, 2006), i, p. 3. 48 AT, p. 38. 49 *Nō dano co mbad é Altus in consul dodechaid ō Ochtauin do chungid in chīsa co Gādelaiḃ no-inmised do Chonchobur Crīst do chrochad* ('Or, again it may have been Altus, the consul who had come to the Gaels from Octavia to seek the tribute, who told Conchobar that Christ was crucified'): Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *The death-tales of the Ulster heroes*, RIA, Todd Lecture Series 14 (Dublin, 1906), pp 10–11 (§14). 50 Meyer, *Death-tales*, pp 9–10 (§12). 51 Meyer, *Death-tales*, pp 12–13 (§1) in which Tiberius is *mac August rī[g] Rōmān* ('the son of Augustus, king of the Romans'); pp 14–15 (§2): *Tibir Sesair Aughiust rīgh Rōmān* ('Tiberius Caesar Augustus, king of the Romans').



equal C[onchobar]. By contrast, a comparison between Brian and other Irish heroes is made explicit in the elegy of Brian with which we are concerned: together with Lug Lámfhata and Finn mac Cumail, he forms the triad of Ireland's best births (*an treas gein as fearr rugadh a nÉirinn riamh*).<sup>52</sup> Significantly, Lug Lámfhata is accorded a key position in a sophisticated chronology of heroes into which Brian's son and chief commander, Murchad, is placed at an earlier point in the text.<sup>53</sup> Subservient only to Hector in strength, Lug also functions as a key anchor since the foundational battle with which he is associated, *Cath Maige Tuired* ('The Battle of Mag Tuired') was coeval with the conflict in which Hector lost his life, the destruction of Troy.<sup>54</sup> Immediately above Murchad in this heroic hierarchy in the earlier passage is Mac Samáin who is associated with Finn mac Cumail elsewhere. In this panegyric of Brian, therefore, placed after the narrative of his killing, it is likely that the powerful eulogy of his valorous son, Murchad, is being deliberately recalled.

As Murchad is stated specifically to be *int Ectoír intamlaigtech* ('the metaphorical Hector'), in the earlier passage in the *Cogadh*, does this make Brian the equivalent of Hector's father, Priam?<sup>55</sup> This is nowhere clearly expressed in the text and, indeed, Brian is equated with Alexander in his death-notice. Following on from his identification as 'the beautiful, ever-victorious Octavian', he is described as *an tAlaxandar tailc, talcar tánaiste ar treoir ocus ar oirbert, ocus ar innsaighidh, ar chathaibh, ocus ar choscraibh* ('the second strong, resolute Alexander for effort, exploit and attack, for battles and for triumphs').<sup>56</sup> In this way is Brian's military prowess hailed, by comparison with the heroism of the most celebrated of war commanders, Alexander the Great. As Macedonian king, the latter's triumphant campaign secured the successful transfer of power from east to west, for which he is celebrated in medieval sources.<sup>57</sup> It is with this significant legacy that Brian's success is thus placed on a par.

By contrast, Priam is less exalted, overshadowed by his heroic sons, Hector and Troilus, as well as by his more distant relative, Aeneas, who went on to

<sup>52</sup> CGG, pp 202–3 (§115). <sup>53</sup> CGG, pp 186–7 (§107). I discussed this passage in my lecture at the millennial conference commemorating Clontarf; my assessment of it has since been published: "'The metaphorical Hector': the literary portrayal of Murchad mac Briáin' in Ralph O'Connor (ed.), *Classical literature and learning in medieval Irish narrative*, Studies in Celtic History 34 (Woodbridge, 2014), pp 140–61, especially pp 145–55. <sup>54</sup> Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired*, pp 40–1 (§69), as noted above; see also Peter Smith (ed. and trans.), *Three historical poems ascribed to Gilla Cóemáin*, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie 8 (Münster, 2007), pp 186–7 (stanza 17) and Leslie Diane Myrick, *From the De excidio Troiae historia to the Togail Troi: literary-cultural synthesis in a medieval Irish adaptation of Dares' Troy tale*, Anglistische Forschungen 223 (Heidelberg, 1993), p. 84. <sup>55</sup> Alex Wolf asked precisely this question at the end of the lecture I gave at the conference in April 2014, with apologies to him for the delayed fuller response. I am also grateful to Denis Casey for discussion on this point. <sup>56</sup> CGG, pp 204–5 (§115). <sup>57</sup> See, for example, George Cary, *The medieval*

found Rome. His story was well-known to Irish audiences, since *De excidio Troiae historia*, a fourth- or fifth-century Latin account of the Trojan war, purported to be derived from the report of an eye-witness, Dares Phrygius, was translated into Irish in a number of different versions between the tenth or eleventh century and the twelfth.<sup>58</sup> The Irish adaptation, *Togail Troí* ('The Destruction of Troy'), was a seminal text in the medieval Irish literary corpus whose influence was pervasive; it is preserved along with the *Cogadh, Táin Bó Cúailnge* and other narratives in the Book of Leinster.<sup>59</sup> The ruling Trojan king at the time of Troy's destruction, Priam is, not surprisingly, matched with Ulster's ruler and Augustan counterpart, Conchobar mac Nessa, in a sustained comparison between the warriors of Troy and the Ulaid (*Tro-fhian fhir na hÉireann*, 'the true Trojan band of Ireland') in a well-known twelfth-century poem, *Clann Ollaman úaisle Emna* ('The children of Ollam are the nobles of Emain').<sup>60</sup> A eulogy of a contemporary ruler of the Ulaid, Eochaid mac Duinnshléibe, to whom the poet turns after cataloguing the latter's sixty-six predecessors, the poem casts the twelfth-century king, however, as Hector rather than Priam. The heroism of the younger Trojan warrior would have served Eochaid well in literary terms at many points in what was often a chequered career. In addition, the specific association with Hector may also have highlighted a subtle link with an earlier northern leader, Muirchertach mac Néill, who is termed *Echtair iarthair beatha* ('Hector of the western world') in his annalistic obit of 983, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in general Hector appears to have been considered a more appropriate heroic comparison than his father Priam.

Notwithstanding this, an association between Brian and Priam could have naturally presented itself to the author of the *Cogadh*, and there are specific points of comparison between the two men. In their respective final battles in which neither plays an active part, both are apprised of events by an observer in variations of the literary technique known as the 'watchman device'. In

Alexander, ed. D.J.A. Ross (Cambridge, 1956) and Z. David Zuwiyya (ed.), *A companion to Alexander material in the Middle Ages*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Traditions 19 (Leiden and Boston, 2011), pp 255–90. 58 Ralph O'Connor provides a convenient summary of the editions and scholarship concerning the date of the text: 'Irish narrative literature and the classical tradition 900–1300' in his edited volume, *Classical literature*, pp 1–22, at pp 13–14 (with earlier references). To his list we can add the twelfth-century poetic version of the Troy tale: Gearóid Mac Eoin, 'Dán ar chogadh na Traoi', *Studia Hibernica*, 1 (1961), 19–55. The relationships between the manuscript witness to the text's recensions, including the unpublished Recension II, are set out clearly in Michael Clarke, 'The extended prologue of *Togail Troí*: from Adam to the wars of Troy', *Ériu*, 64 (2014), 23–106, at 27–8. 59 LL, iv, pp 1063–117; Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Togail Troi: the Destruction of Troy from the facsimile of the Book of Leinster* (Calcutta, 1881). 60 Francis John Byrne (ed. and trans.), 'Clann Ollaman uaisle Emna', *Studia Hibernica*, 4 (1964), 54–94, at 61 and 76 (stanza 3): *Priam ainm Conchobair Codail / borrfadaig im Thoraig thuaid* ('Priam is the name of Conchobar of Codal who rages around northern Troy'). 61 'The Hectors of Ireland and the western world' in John Carey, Kevin Murray and Caitríona Ó

Brian's case, his attendant, Latean, reports to him the progress of the battle, punctuating the king's psalm recital at regular intervals. It is from him that the king learns of the fall of Murchad's standard, as a result of which Brian realizes that all is lost.<sup>62</sup> A more conventional watchman device, with typical riddling treatment,<sup>63</sup> is employed in *Togail Troí* at a point in the two main versions of the text (recensions I and II) in which Dares presents what is termed the 'Portrait Catalogue', a descriptive list of warriors involved in the encounter.<sup>64</sup> This addition to Dares's text is thus the work of an Irish author, though whether his inspiration is classical or Irish is a matter of some debate.<sup>65</sup> The two recensions differ in the role accorded to Priam in the sequence. In the more elaborate version in the Book of Leinster, in contrast to Brian in the *Cogadh*, Priam is the expert witness, explaining to a Trojan messenger the true meaning of what the latter has erroneously interpreted as mighty mountains, a roar of wind and the like.<sup>66</sup> In the earlier Recension I, the role of the king of Troy is more of a bystander, his questions prompting a messenger to reveal what he has described in terms of natural features (similar to those in Recension II) really are.<sup>67</sup> In this narrative scenario, therefore, observer and expert are one. Notwithstanding this (and other) differences, in both versions of *Togail Troí* the interchange functions very much as a set piece. In the *Cogadh*, on the other hand, the conversation between a royal leader anxiously praying while he awaits battle-developments, and his observant retainer has a much more realistic feel.

Brian's study of the psalter during the battle, as depicted in the *Cogadh*, ensures that his slayer, Brodar, initially mistakes him for a priest. His real identity is betrayed by a Judas-figure who had been a warrior of the Munster king (*robh ócclach do Brian féin e*).<sup>68</sup> Priam was slain at Minerva's altar by Pyrrhus for whom there was no uncertainty concerning his victim. The contrast between Brodar happening upon Brian and the violent means by which Achilles's son reached Priam could not be more stark.<sup>69</sup> Priam's attempt to defend himself with a spear-cast is presented as ineffectual *fo bith robo senior*

Dochartaigh (eds), *Sacred histories: a Festschrift for Máire Herbert* (Dublin, 2015), pp 258–68, at pp 264–6. <sup>62</sup> CGG, pp 196–201 (§113); most of this passage is preserved only in the seventeenth-century copy of the text by Ó Cléirigh, the earlier manuscript breaking off CGG, p. 198. <sup>63</sup> The typical feature is that the observer mistakes what he sees for something else, usually natural features: see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Riddling treatment of the "watchman device" in *Branwen* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*', *Studia Celtica*, 12/13 (1977–8), 83–117, republished in revised form in his *Irish influence on medieval Welsh literature* (Oxford, 2011), pp 95–133. <sup>64</sup> Myrick, *From the De excidio*, p. 136. <sup>65</sup> The matter has been reassessed by Ralph O'Connor, 'Was classical imitation necessary for the writing of large-scale Irish sagas? Reflections on *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the "watchman device"' in his *Classical literature*, pp 165–95. <sup>66</sup> LL, iv, pp 1098–101 (lines 32169–263). <sup>67</sup> Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Destruction of Troy' in Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch (eds), *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*, Series II, part 1 (Leipzig, 1884), pp 1–142, at pp 28–30, 93–5 (lines 847–904). <sup>68</sup> CGG, pp 202–3 (§114). <sup>69</sup> Stokes, 'Destruction of Troy', p. 58 and p. 130.

*díblide hé ann* ('because he was then a feeble old man').<sup>70</sup> Notwithstanding Brian's similarly advanced age, he slew both Brodar and one of his companions in the attack in which he lost his life.<sup>71</sup> We may also note the very different reactions to the two elder statesmen after the deaths of their fighting sons. Priam is advised to surrender Helen and enter into an agreement with his enemies. Instead he advocates war and plans to betray his advisers who have counselled peace with disastrous results.<sup>72</sup> While he does not advise retreat (*ní maisi an teiched*), Brian's tone is above all grief-stricken in the *Cogadh* and accepting of his prophesized fate.<sup>73</sup> He arranges his affairs, concerned for his dynasty's continued prosperity before encountering Brodar's battle-axe (*tuag*).<sup>74</sup>

As the father of a Hector-figure, Brian's likeness to Priam may have occurred to some of those experiencing the text. Yet the *Cogadh* does not advocate the connection, despite apparent similarities between the two men. Clontarf's resonance with Troy highlighted by means of the equivalence between Murchad and Hector, may also extend to the parallel triumph of both fallen Trojans and Munster men through the supremacy of their descendants.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, it was Aeneas's subsequent foundation of Rome which was significant and that key moment in history is alluded to through Brian's identification with Augustus, as well as with Alexander who facilitated the move westwards of imperial power, as we have seen. The comparative strand in the *Cogadh* continues throughout the remainder of Brian's death-notice and the Munster king is identified with three biblical greats, Solmon, David and Moses in turn. As *Solamh ... na nGaoidel* ('Solomon of the Gaídil'), his 'prosperous, powerful, peaceful (*sona, saidbhir, siodhamail*)' attributes are brought to the fore. Embodying Solomon's father as 'the David of Ireland (*Dauit ... na hÉrenn*)', his 'ingegrity (*firinne*)', 'honour (*inracas*)' and 'guarding of sovereignty (*coimhétt flaitheamhnais*)' is extolled. In Moses the parallel is deemed to be their mutual 'piety (*cundla*)' and 'devout holiness (*cáidhe cráibthighe*)'.<sup>76</sup>

David and Solomon, together with Samuel and Saul, are the defining figures of early medieval kingship.<sup>77</sup> As outstanding kings of Israel, they formed an important part of the depiction of particular peoples, including the Irish, as the Israelites, God's chosen people.<sup>78</sup> The enduring significance of

70 Ibid., lines 18887–8. 71 CGG, pp 202–3 (§114). 72 Stokes, 'Destruction of Troy', pp 54–5, 125–6. 73 CGG, pp 200–1 (§113). 74 CGG, pp 202–3 (§114). 75 Ni Mhaonaigh, 'The metaphorical Hector', p. 161. 76 CGG, pp 204–5 (§115). 77 The extensive literature on this topic includes Yitzhak Hen, 'The uses of the Bible and the perception of kingship in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7 (1998), 277–90; Janet L. Nelson, 'Kingship and royal government' in Rosamond McKitterick (ed.), *The new Cambridge medieval history, III, c.700–c.900* (Cambridge, 1995), pp 383–430; Walter Ullman, *The Carolingian Renaissance and the idea of kingship* (London, 1969); Hans Hubert Anton, *Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherethos in der Karolingerzeit* (Bonn, 1968). 78 See, for example,

biblical rulers in this regard is evident in medieval illustrations pertaining to Ottonian emperors, including the late tenth-century portrait of Otto III in the Reichenau Gospel-book,<sup>79</sup> and a late twelfth-century wax seal belonging to Otto IV, both of whom are adorned with insignia (sceptre and orb) associated with biblical kings.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, David and Solomon are represented on the eleventh- or twelfth-century German imperial crown.<sup>81</sup>

The importance of this ideology in Irish terms can be seen in the deliberate and extended comparison between Solomon and Cormac mac Airt, who is portrayed as an ideal ruler in medieval Irish narratives.<sup>82</sup> In Cormac's case, the typology centred on the comparable wisdom of both kings, while this is only indirectly alluded to in the *Cogadh* with reference to the peaceful nature of Solomon-Brian.<sup>83</sup> The biblical ruler's famed wealth informs the depiction of the composite character in our text as *saidbir*, 'rich, prosperous, powerful'. Such was the prevalence of the specific association between Cormac and Solomon in the Middle Irish literary corpus, including texts sharing with the *Cogadh* the Book of Leinster's pages,<sup>84</sup> that it may have resonated with an audience encountering a correlation between the biblical ruler and Brian. Moreover, like Brian, Cormac too 'was comparable to Octavian Augustus', specifically in his collection of *in cís rigda* ('the royal rent'), though 'Cormac never deprived any one of that which was his own'.<sup>85</sup> Solomon is also adduced by Asser in his 'Life of King Alfred' to highlight his subject's wisdom and learning in a passage in which the biblical ruler's great wealth is also noted: 'In

Mary Garrison, 'The Franks as the new Israel? Education for an identity from Pippin to Charlemagne' in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (eds), *The uses of the past in the early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 114–61 and Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon verse: becoming the chosen people* (London, 2013); for an Irish context, see Ralph O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: kingship and artistry in a mediaeval Irish saga* (Oxford, 2013), pp 272–5. <sup>79</sup> Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 4453, fol. 24, reproduced in Henry Mayr-Harting, *Ottonian book illumination: an historical study, part I: themes* (London, 1991), illustration XXI; for general discussion, see pp 157–78. <sup>80</sup> Aliza Cohen-Mushlin, *Scriptoria in medieval Saxony: St Pancras in Hamersleben* (Wiesbaden, 2004), p. 122 (and references n. 56); parallel contemporary biblical illustrations are presented by her pp 120–1. <sup>81</sup> Reinhart Staats, *Theologie der Reichskrone: Ottonische 'renovatio imperii' im Spiegel einer Insignie*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 13 (Stuttgart, 1976), pp 36–43 and more generally his *Die Reichskrone: Geschichte und Bedeutung eines europäischen Symbols* (Göttingen, 1991). <sup>82</sup> Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt* (Dublin, 1978), pp 85–6; Edward Gwynn (ed. and trans.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas, part I: text, translation and commentary*, RIA, Todd Lecture Series 8 (Dublin, 1903), pp 70–4. <sup>83</sup> On Cormac's Solomonic wisdom, see, for example, Máirín O Daly (ed. and trans.), *Cath Maige Mucram: the battle of Mag Mucrama*, ITS 50 (London and Dublin, 1975), pp 58–9 (§§ 63–4); and Standish Hayes O'Grady (ed. and trans.), *Silva Gadelica: a collection of tales in Irish with extracts illustrating persons and places*, 2 vols (London, 1892), ii, pp 96–9 ('The Panegyric of King Cormac'), at p. 96 (§2). <sup>84</sup> See Dagmar Schlüter, *History or fable? The Book of Leinster as a document of cultural memory in twelfth-century Ireland*, Studien und Texte zur Keltologie 9 (Münster, 2010), p. 118. <sup>85</sup> O'Grady, *Silva Gaedlica*, ii, p. 97 (§3).

this respect he resembled the holy, highly esteemed and exceedingly wealthy Solomon ...<sup>86</sup> This Latin *vita* has been posited as a possible model for Brian's biography in the *Cogadh*, although it is more likely that both were drawing either directly or indirectly on the same source, Einhard's *Vita Caroli magni*.<sup>87</sup> The common reference to Solomon is not sufficient to allow a connection between the two texts to be drawn, in particular since the Welsh author emphasizes the biblical ruler's wisdom, unlike his Irish counterpart, as we have seen.<sup>88</sup>

The Davidic reference in the *Cogadh* is longer and somewhat more specific than the allusion to Solomon which immediately precedes it. It draws attention to the universal regal trait of *firinne*, the quality of justice which marks out the legitimate king. The imperial crown (*Reichskrone*) presents the Old Testament ruler in similar terms, since he holds a scroll citing Psalm 99:4: 'The renowned king delights in doing justice.'<sup>89</sup> King David's role as author of the psalms assured his place in intellectual circles in Ireland, as elsewhere.<sup>90</sup> In the *Cogadh*, however, it is his association with retention of rule (*coimét flaithemnaís*) that is most striking. This may be an allusion to David's extensive struggles to retain his kingship in 2 Samuel; having triumphed against a range of adversaries, he also ensured the succession of his chosen son, Solomon. References to David elsewhere in medieval Irish literature draw more frequently on 1 Samuel, Ralph O'Connor having noted that a prime focus of interest is the interplay between David and Saul.<sup>91</sup> Notwithstanding this, the king's depiction is varied in Irish narrative sources;<sup>92</sup> he is seen as the source of Solomon's wisdom in one anecdote concerning him,<sup>93</sup> but his lack of charity in another may reflect anti-clerical feeling in the twelfth century, as Elizabeth Boyle has proposed.<sup>94</sup> In its allusion to David's success in maintaining his

86 William Henry Stevenson (ed.), *Asser's life of King Alfred, together with the annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1904), pp 60–1; Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (trans.), *Alfred the Great: Asser's life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 92. 87 See Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingship revisited', pp 90–1. 88 For discussion of the passage in Asser and its dependence on Matthew, see Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon verse: becoming the chosen people*, New Directions in Religion and Literature (London and New York, 2013), p. 46 n. 142 and the more detailed analysis in David Pratt, *The political thought of King Alfred the Great*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 67 (Cambridge, 2007), pp 152–3. 89 Staats, *Die Reichskrone*, p. 55. 90 See Martin McNamara, *The psalms in the early Irish church* (Sheffield, 2000). 91 O'Connor, *Destruction*, pp 264–5. 92 Kuno Meyer, 'Nachlass Kuno Meyer: Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', *ZCP*, 13 (1920), 166–94, at 175–9; one of the David stories (177) is translated in Máire Herbert and Martin McNamara (trans.), *Irish biblical apocrypha: selected texts in translation* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 22. 93 See Meyer, 'Nachlass Kuno Meyer', *ZCP*, 13 (1920), p. 179; the text has been translated by Elizabeth Boyle, 'David and Solomon', <https://blogafragments.wordpress.com/page/4/> (accessed July 2016). 94 Paul Grosjean (ed. and trans.), 'King David and the beggar' in John Fraser, Paul Grosjean and J.G. O'Keefe (eds), *Irish texts*, part 4 (London, 1934), pp 113–18; Elizabeth Boyle discussed the text and other David narratives in a lecture at the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and



kingship in the struggle against foes, the *Cogadh* may have made the Brian-David parallel particularly apposite. In associating the Munster king with the biblical father-son royal duo, a general message concerning the excellence of Brian's kingship throughout the narrative was reinforced.

In casting Brian as the equivalent of 'great, graciously illustrious' Moses (*mórdha mínéttrocht*), it is the latter's piety that is to the fore. It is as lawgiver that the biblical prophet is primarily renowned in Irish sources, as elsewhere in the medieval world. *Liber ex lege Moysi* was an influential Irish compendium of Old Testament law which may date from the seventh century.<sup>95</sup> It has been suggested that King Alfred drew on the text in his compilation of his lawbook, *Domboc*.<sup>96</sup> *Recht Moisi* ('the law of Moses') is frequently referred to in Irish texts, and was brought to Ireland by St Finnian of Moville, Co. Donegal, according to some sources.<sup>97</sup> The tablets on which this law was written are also prevalent throughout the literature.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, his fame as a poet is reflected in the attribution to him of a cosmological poem in Irish.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, this is not the Mosaic aspect highlighted in the *Cogadh* at least overtly; as a religious leader, Moses recalls the holy Brian beseeching God through the psalms as the Clontarf battle raged. The image of a Christian leader seeking God's assistance in a conflict presented as one against a heathen enemy had very particular resonances against a contemporary background of crusading.<sup>100</sup> The implication is that as the equivalent of Moses, Brian's actions and approach are justified by God.<sup>101</sup>

Cumulatively, the identification of Brian with a trio of biblical leaders in turn – David, Solomon and Moses – serves to justify his life's work in divine terms. As a result, his legacy should continue, an implication reinforced by the preceding depiction of him as Augustus Caesar and Alexander the Great who are both associated with imperial continuity in medieval historiography. It was in this context, therefore, that the *Cogadh* was read. As part of that reading, a

Celtic, Cambridge, 23 Jan. 2015: 'Absalom, Absalom! Translating the story of King David in medieval Ireland'. <sup>95</sup> Sven Meeder, 'The Liber ex lege Moysi: notes and text', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 19 (2009), 173–219; on the difficulties of dating the text, see 181–2; for a general introduction, see Raymond Kottje, 'Der Liber ex lege Moysis' in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission, Ireland and Christendom: the Bible and the missions* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp 59–69. <sup>96</sup> Pratt, *Political thought of King Alfred the Great*, p. 230; also Patrick Wormald, *Legal culture in the early medieval west: law as text, image and experience* (London, 1999), p. 34, n. 153. <sup>97</sup> See John Carey, 'Scél Tuáin meic Chairill', *Ériu*, 35 (1984), 93–111, at 107. <sup>98</sup> See, for example, R.I. Best (ed. and trans.), 'The settling of the manor of Tara', *Ériu*, 4 (1910), 121–72. <sup>99</sup> John Carey, 'A cosmological poem attributed to Moses' in Seán Duffy (ed.), *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of Katharine Simms* (Dublin, 2013), pp 412–43. <sup>100</sup> See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Pagans and holy men: literary manifestations of twelfth-century reform' in Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Reform and renewal: Ireland and twelfth-century reform* (Dublin, 2006), pp 143–61, at pp 149–51. <sup>101</sup> O'Connor has suggested that the comparisons with David, Solomon and Moses in the text 'help to justify and even glorify the harsh treatment of infidels ascribed to

pair of Irish heroic kings, Conchobar mac Nessa and Cormac mac Airt, may have been compared with Brian by association, since they were firmly identified with Augustus and Solomon respectively in texts contemporary with the *Cogadh*. It is with Lug Lámfhata and Finn mac Cumhaill, the Munster leader is linked, however (though not specifically equated), as the eulogy opens, echoing the earlier panegyric on his military leader and son, Murchad. Though his offspring may be Hector, the author of the *Cogadh* does not develop a parallel portrait of Brian as Priam, though he would have been well equipped intellectually to do so. This may have been deliberate; shadows surrounding the Trojan king's depiction should not be allowed to diminish the light of Brian.

Curiously perhaps, this litany of seven historical giants on whom Brian is set on an equal footing (two Irish heroes, an emperor and classical war leader, as well as three biblical kings), is preceded by an introductory observation concerning an earlier Munster ruler, the king-bishop of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennáin (d. 908). While the Ua Briain ancestor is said to stand shoulder to shoulder with illustrious past figures, the beheading of a royal predecessor (*oirlech chinn Corbmaic maic Cuilennáin*), may be the sole deed greater than the killing of Brian (*aongníomh badh mó iná sin*).<sup>102</sup> Cormac's role at an earlier point in the narrative is pivotal, as he is cited as the expert (*in rigfilid ocus in sai senchais*, 'the royal poet and sage in *senchas*') concerning the legal privileges of Brian's dynasty, Dál Cais.<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere his famed wisdom in the matter of royal behaviour and procedure is also to the fore, specifically in *Tecosca Cormaic* ('The Teachings of Cormac'), a *speculum principum*-type text associated with him.<sup>104</sup> As an authority on matters of succession, with which Brian's descendants and the *Cogadh*'s audience would have been particularly concerned, Cormac's status was of a special kind. This may explain the exalted position he is given in the text in general and specifically introducing this eulogistic obituary of Brian.

As an ideal king himself and acknowledged expert on royal behaviour and *historia* more generally, Cormac mac Cuilennáin's paramount position underlines the importance of kingship in the text. A narrative of kings and for kings, the *Cogadh* told the story of royal leaders, at the apex of which was Brian, for his own and other's ruling descendants. It was as medieval historiography, therefore, that the narrative was read. It is in this context that Brian's elaborate obituary and its carefully chosen litany of prominent personages with whom the Munster king is equated should be understood. Whether Irish, imperial, classical or biblical, each specific correspondence was designed to evoke particular resonances embedding the preeminent Ua Briain royal ancestor and 'emperor of the Irish' in a universally recognizable, elevated

Brian': *Destruction*, p. 298. <sup>102</sup> CGG, pp 202–3 (§115). <sup>103</sup> CGG, pp 54–5 (§51). <sup>104</sup> Kuno Meyer (ed. and trans.), *The instructions of King Cormac mac Airt*, RIA, Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin, 1909).



world. While Brian's heroic deeds were recounted in the body of the *Cogadh*, his glory was reinforced by association with the world's outstanding figures in the skilful death-notice with which the account of the king's killing ends. Embodying the collective traits of seven such influential characters, Brian could tower over them individually; in a familiar medieval rollcall of world leaders, he has been accorded the perfect place.

## APPENDIX 8.1

Brian's obituary: text and translation<sup>1</sup>

Nocha dernadh iar ccreidemh i nÉrinn acht oirlech chinn Corbmaic maic Cuilennáin aongníomh badh mó iná sin. Rob é sin iaramh an treas gein as fearr rugadh a nÉrinn riamh, agus an treas fer sochair Érenn .i. Lugh Lámfada agus Fiond mac Cumaill agus Brian mac Ceinnéittigh. Dóigh is ē ro fuaslaic fir Érenn agus a mnā a daeire agus ó dochar gall agus allmurach; is ē ro bris cūicc catha fichit for gallaibh, agus ros marbh agus ros indarb amal ro rāidsemar romhainn. Rob ē sin an tOchtauin aobhdha, ilbhudhach, im shochar agus im saordacht a atharrdha agus a chineoil. Rob é an tAlaxandar tailc, talcar tánaiste ar treoir agus ar oirbert agus ar innsaighidh, ar chathaibh agus ar chosccraibh. Agus rob ē an Solamh sona, saidbhir síodhamail na nGaoidel. Rob ē an Dauit dil, díochra, deghmenmnach, deghgníomach na hÉrenn ar firinne agus ar inracas agus ar coimhéitt flait[h]emhnais. Rob ē an Maoisi mōrdha, mīnéttrocht ar chundla agus ar chāidhe cráib[h]ighe.

(‘Apart from the beheading of Cormac mac Cuilennáin, there was not committed in Ireland since the coming of Christianity a more significant deed than that [Brian’s killing]. Moreover, he was one of the three best people ever born in Ireland, and one of the three men of true benefit for Ireland, i.e., Lug Lámfhada, Finn mac Cumaill and Brian mac Cennétig. For it was he who released the men of Ireland, along with her women, from bondage, and from the oppression of Vikings and foreigners; it was he who won twenty-five battles against Vikings, and he killed and banished them, as we have already related. It was he who was the beautiful, ever-victorious Octavian, as far as the benefit and nobility of his patrimony and kin is concerned. He was the second strong, resolute Alexander for effort, exploit and attack, for battles and for triumphs. And he was the prosperous, powerful, peaceful Solomon of the Irish. He was the faithful, fervent David of Ireland, noble in mind and deed, in terms of integrity and honour, as well as guarding of sovereignty. He was the great, graciously illustrious Moses in the matter of piety and devout holiness.’)

<sup>1</sup> The text here is reproduced from Brussels, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 2569–2572, fol. 132, written by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh; the translation is my own. All expansions are italicized; 7 has been silently expanded to *ocus*. Punctuation is editorial, as are accents indicating length; macrons are used when the length mark is scribal. Square brackets mark letters omitted by the scribe.