

Review: *Sacred Histories: A Festschrift for Máire Herbert* (Carey, Murray and Ó Dochartaigh)



Sarah Waidler

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her brothers, Erc and Euny. Contemporary Cornish material records the name of the patron of Fowey parish as *Barriani* or *Fimbarri*, and it is clear that these references are to Finbarr of Cork. Fingar/Fimbarr/Gwinear is patron of the parishes of Fowey and Gwinear, the latter, significantly, lying centrally on the Land's End peninsula among a group of churches dedicated to Iath and her brothers (and thus in the nearest part of Cornwall to Cork). The life of Fingar tells how Iath arrived late for the departure to Cornwall and how an ivy leaf enlarged itself miraculously and ferried her across the sea to her companions. Details from a lost Cornish life of Iath herself also survive. These tell of how she was a nobleman's daughter from Ireland who landed at Hayle in pursuit of 'Barry', and got the local lord to found a church at Pendinas. That we are dealing here with Finbarr of Cork and Iath of Killeagh is confirmed by a reference in the thirteenth-century *Betha Bharra* to one Bishop Libur of Cill Iath as one of Finbarr's followers, and the implicit claim on the church of Cill Iath by that of Cork. Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, which can be dated to around AD 800, as well as the Irish *Cormac's Glossary* of a century later, both indicate the belief that centuries earlier the Uí Liatháin (in whose territory Imokilly lay) had settled in western Britain, particularly in Cornwall and Devon. In this pattern of ecclesiastical dedications and hagiography we must therefore have a memory, however garbled, of a remarkable nexus of connections between Cork, Imokilly, Cornwall and perhaps even Brittany. Iath's chief church, of which she was the eponym, was St. Ives, where her tomb could once be seen, and her feastday was February 3. She was also patron of the chapel of Troon in Camborne and near both churches are found holy wells dedicated to the saint. Recent excavations have dated the oldest level at Troon to the tenth century. The large parish of Plouyé (= 'parish of Yé' or Iath) in Brittany must also be named from Iath, although this dedication is now forgotten there. Her memory lives on in Cornwall today, where the Anglican parish of Lanivet and the Catholic parish of St. Ives bear her name. The rich irony here is that Iath is completely unknown in the parish of Killeagh, surely her oldest foundation.

Professor Ó Riain's *Dictionary of Irish Saints* is to be welcomed as a wonderful addition to the published corpus on this subject, and one wishes him many further years of scholarly productivity. *Ad multos annos*.

PAUL MACCOTTER

University College Cork

Sacred Histories: A Festschrift for Máire Herbert. Edited by John Carey, Kevin Murray and Caitriona Ó Dochartaigh. Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2015. xxv + 423 pp. €55. ISBN: 978-1-84682-564-4 (hardback).

A review of Máire Herbert's seminal work, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988), stated both that it was an 'exemplary' study of hagiography and that it would be required reading for students of early Irish history (Ó Cathasaigh 1990: 192, 195). The title of the volume under review and much of its contents reflect this broad reach of

Herbert's work. Not only do the substantial number and excellent quality of the chapters in this work demonstrate the high regard of the contributors for Herbert as a scholar, but the many kind asides at the beginnings of these pieces show her role as a valued friend, teacher and mentor to so many within and without her own specific field. This festschrift is well deserved and its editors present it with an attention to detail which makes it a smooth and enjoyable read.

A list of the honorand's publications is given at the beginning of this volume, which demonstrates the many and diverse fields to which Herbert has contributed. This is followed by thirty-three contributions which likewise prove this point. The majority of these are in English but there are also several chapters in Irish, including a poem that is presented by Hutton and which heads the list of contributions. The remainder of the chapters are arranged by alphabetical order of the authors' names and fall into several key categories, most notably literature, history and hagiography. There are several editions, most of which treat poetry from the late medieval to early modern period, including P. Breatnach's edition of two poems by women, Flahive's thorough edition of a Fenian 'relic lay' and Nic Cárthaigh's edition of a poem by Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh. An edition by Ó Macháin of *Ceasta Fhíthil* includes a very worthwhile commentary on the genre of wisdom literature and Simms' edition of a group of unusual verses relating to Colum Cille that are attributed to spirits returned from the dead contains a detailed historical study that suggests the circumstances behind the composition of these verses. Earlier medieval texts are similarly represented in this volume: a short passage from a legal text is edited and expertly discussed by Kelly and there is an edition of the poem *Senchas Gall Átha Cliath* by Boyle and L. Breatnach, which is a wonderful example within a single article of everything that an edition can and should be. A perceptive discussion of the context of this poem, as well as a careful commentary that includes notes, indices, the manuscript text and an analysis of the language, accompany the edition and translation and will no doubt be revisited several times by those interested in central-medieval hagiography, pseudo-history and the history of Dublin and its environs. Other authors present texts which hail from a later period, such as de Brún's edition and discussion of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century song and Ó Conchúir's presentation of verses on the famine of 1739–40. As already suggested, many of the editions included in this volume are far more than simple editions of a text; they also provide commentaries that demonstrate how a particular text can add to our understanding of a historical period, such as Ó Conchúir's and Simms' offerings, and/or add colour and depth to how we conceive of different themes, images and genres within the literature produced in Ireland over a long period of time, as is the case with the contributions by Flahive, Nic Cárthaigh and many of the others listed above.

To balance the editions, there are many chapters studying literary aspects of texts, several of which reflect Herbert's own interest in literature that features saints or religious themes. In addition, many honour Herbert's observation that such texts 'are also to be placed in association with other forms of contemporary writing', which is cited approvingly by Flahive (p. 139). Thus, there is a

consideration of keening in the poems of Blathmac by Bergholm and of the paradigm of monasticism presented by the figure of Librán in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, as detailed by Ritari. Alongside these are Downey's notable and attentive discussion of both how a scribe could influence a text and the relationship between poetry and prose in different versions of *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*, and Ní Mhaonaigh's contribution on the image of Hector in Irish literature. This last chapter also demonstrates the influence of the political present informing the image of the past within Irish texts, a theme which has come across in much of Herbert's writing. Aspects of this approach are seen as well in Charles-Edwards' investigation of the dating of Recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, in which he argues against previous proposals and gives the text an eighth-century date, although with the likelihood that some elements have a seventh-century derivation. Several very good observations on the process and difficulties attendant on contextual dating are present in this article, such as the necessity to distinguish between 'a historical situation taken to be what a given text is about' and 'a historical situation with which a contemporary might compare an older text' (p. 99). Whether Charles-Edwards' dating suggestion will be accepted is yet to be seen, but this article certainly shines skilfully directed new light on an old question.

Additionally, geographical diversity appears in the selections discussing literature, and in some cases language. This is demonstrated by Oliver and Adolph's piece tracing the use and meaning of Old English *meowle* and Murray's reconsideration of the dating of evidence reflecting the Irish symbol of submission in which one king enters another's house, which in turn bears on the date of the Welsh *Branwen* and thus the rest of the *Mabinogi*. A broad geographical range is also seen in Carey's comparison of rare otherworld journeys by women in *Tochmarc Becfola* and Marie de France's *Yonec*. This last complements other articles throughout the volume in examining the role of women in texts and thereby overlaps with many of the honorand's own publications. Yet another article that stretches across geographical distance and time is that of Sims-Williams, which traces the connections between the classical Lupercalia and the evolution of the notion of leprechauns through the interpretation of this festival and its revellers by Christian writers. Discussion of Classical compositions appears elsewhere in the volume: Griffin-Wilson reveals classical influence on later works, alongside hagiography, in her clear and insightful chapter discussing Antaeus and St Patrick in the prose apologues accompanying a bardic poem. As was the case with the editions presented by the contributors to this volume, chapters on more modern literary topics prove that Herbert's influence has been felt by those whose interest lie not solely in the medieval world. A case in point is Coughlan's discussion of two poems by Máire Mhac an tSaoi written in the last decades of the twentieth century. Such chapters add to the volume as a whole not only in the high degree of scholarship with which they are presented, but additionally through the parallels that are discernible in the authors' treatment of medieval and modern literature, such as concerns with intertextuality and genre.

Hagiography and saints' cults have a central place throughout the volume, which is unsurprising given how greatly Herbert's research has contributed to those fields, and many of these bridge the gap between literary and historical studies. Many of the pieces already mentioned relate to hagiography in one way or another and for some, like Ritari's article mentioned above, it is the main focus. This is likewise the case with the offerings by Ó Cathasaigh, who discusses the genealogical preamble proceeding the Life of Declán, Lambkin, whose article on migration deals primarily with the later Life of Colum Cille by Manus O'Donnell, and O'Reilly, who discusses an episode in an earlier Columban text, Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*. This last details the title saint's visit to Clonmacnoise and O'Reilly deftly situates this much-discussed episode within a wider scriptural framework that well suits Adomnán's exegetical and hagiographical interests and knowledge. There is only one contribution, by Mac Conmara, that deals primarily with apocrypha, a field on which Herbert made a significant mark, in which the author gives a catalogue and commentary on early apocryphal and biblical texts in Ireland.

Hagiography as viewed from a more historical context also takes a prime position in this volume. Muhr's study of the *paruchia* of the little-known saint Lúrach demonstrates the considerable amount that can be achieved regarding the history and influence of a saint who has no Life or other major texts associated with him. Ó Dochartaigh also discusses the cult of a saint, that of Thecla, and she asks whether this international saint had a presence in Ireland. Ní Chatháin presents a catalogue of bells associated with Irish saints that in particular is concerned with the native names for these objects. Ó Riain reaches beyond the shores of Ireland to examine the source of the Irish elements in the Life of the Italian saint Cataldo, as does Mac Craith in his piece on connections between early modern Irish chieftains and the Veil of Veronica. We are furthermore reminded of Herbert's contribution to Scottish history by Broun, whose re-examination of *Cethri prímchenéla Dáil Riata* brings new ways of envisioning this important text. Bhreathnach presents a study of the memorandum in the Book of Durrow and, last but by no means least, Mac Eoin presents an informative study of the family of Maol Muire and its scribal affiliations. This is particularly interesting for considering education, family professions and ecclesiastical connections with individual families over a long period of time and it sheds light on the history of Clonmacnoise and its centre of learning.

This collection is impressive, providing many matters of interest to a wide range of readers, reaching from the earliest written documents pertaining to Irish history right up to poetry of the twentieth century and going beyond Ireland's shores to take in much of the rest of the Celtic world as well as Italy and other parts of Europe. There are only two minor complaints. One is that some of the chapters are too short to fully develop an argument. However, this is understandable and forgivable as the substantial number of contributors no doubt limited the length of submissions. Rather it is hoped that many of the authors (or other scholars) might return to some of the subjects discussed in the pages of this volume. The second shortcoming is the lack

of an index. While perhaps not seen as necessary for a volume that lacks a strong thematic focus such as a conference topic behind it, an index would have been beneficial both in order to highlight topics shared between different articles, of which there are many, and, of course, to assist researchers looking for specific subjects. These, however, are minor complaints and this volume will assuredly be valued on many shelves. No doubt its individual chapters will inform future studies on a wide variety of topics.

REFERENCE

- Ó CATHASAIGH, Tomás 1990: Review of Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The history and hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba*, Éigse 24, 192–5.

SARAH WAIDLER

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

Sgéalta Mhuintir Luinigh: Munterloney Folktales. Irish Tradition from County Tyrone. Collected and edited with introduction, notes and glossary by Éamonn Ó Tuathail. Translated by Seosamh Watson. Foreword by Séamas Ó Catháin. Folklore notes by Kelly Fitzgerald. Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann/An Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann. Dublin, 2015. liv + 335 pp. €20. ISBN 978-0-9565628-6-9.

When Dr Wilhelm Doegen, Director of the Lautabteilung of the Prussian State Library, was engaged by the Royal Irish Academy (1928–31) to record native speakers of Irish in those areas in which the language still endured, he was able to record material from no fewer than eighteen of the country's thirty-two counties. Many of his informants were by then quite elderly and in several cases were the last native speakers of Irish in the districts from which they came. With their passing, in the decades that followed, the final vestiges of the inherited local dialects were lost in twelve further counties with the result that the present-day *Gaeltacht* is confined to areas in only a third of the number of counties from which Doegen had recorded native speakers.

Tyrone, along with Derry, Antrim, Armagh and Cavan was one of five Ulster counties in which the local dialects of Irish were to be lost after 1931, at which point Doegen and his assistant, Karl Tempel, commenced their work in the province. In September of that year they recorded material from four speakers of Tyrone Irish at sessions held at the Queen's University of Belfast and in Letterkenny Courthouse in Co. Donegal. Given the subsequent fate of Irish in Tyrone, these recordings, available on the Royal Irish Academy's Doegen Records Web Project (www.doegen.ie) and also published in *Ulster Gaelic Voices* (Ní Bhaoill 2008), are invaluable. Further and quite detailed background information on the speakers from Tyrone and on those from other parts of Ulster who were recorded by Doegen has been provided by Dr Ciarán Ó Duibhín on the website: <http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~oduibhin/doegen/index.htm>.