

St Máedóc of Ferns and the fifty bishops of
St Davids: an anecdote from the Book of
Leinster



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ST MÁEDÓC OF FERNS AND THE FIFTY BISHOPS OF ST DAVIDS:
AN ANECDOTE FROM THE BOOK OF LEINSTER¹

ABSTRACT

An edition, translation and discussion of a humorous anecdote from the Book of Leinster, with reference also to a shorter version preserved in the commentary to *Féilire Óengusso*. The anecdote concerns a group of British bishops from St Davids who visit St Máedóc at Ferns and insist on eating meat during Lent. An ingenious scriptural justification for this breach of discipline is offered. Besides the anecdote, other traditions regarding the controversial place of meat at St Davids are also discussed here.

COÍCA EPSCOP DO-DEOCHATAR DOCHUM *M'Óedóc Férna do Bretnaib Cille Muine* is a short humorous anecdote preserved in a section of the Book of Leinster that contains other anecdotes about saints and clerics, some of them serious, some irreverent. Briefly, *Coíca epscop* – as it will be called from here on – tells how a group of British bishops from St Davids come to visit St Máedóc at Ferns.² The story takes place during Lent, and naturally the visitors are served the usual Lenten fare of bread, leeks and whey-water. Surprisingly, they refuse these and demand instead the meat of a pig and an ox. Máedóc allows this breach of discipline but the next morning he demands to know why the British bishops insisted on breaking the rules. Their leader explains that they were following Scripture: since rearing pigs and oxen requires very little labour, these can be eaten without guilt, but bread demands a huge amount of labour to produce it and therefore they would have sinned if they had eaten it without working for it first. The visitors then clear a woodland north of Ferns. Only then do they eat bread that – it is implied – was baked from corn grown on that clearing. The moral of the story is given at the end: no-one is to eat without labouring for their meal, either through physical toil or prayer.

That this story offers tongue-in-cheek humour goes almost without saying. The eating of meat during Lent was not acceptable, whatever scriptural passages were called on to suggest otherwise. The humour is in any case made clear early on: in an apparent historical aside, the text mentions a successor of Máedóc who one day came to St Davids and introduced meat into the community's vegetarian diet, for which good deed he gained great glory. In spite

¹This article has benefited from commentary by Liam Breatnach and Ruairí Ó hUiginn and I am also grateful to the anonymous reader for numerous improvements. I retain responsibility for all errors.

²In Irish text I use the more accurate punctuation *M'Áedóc*, as the name is a hypocorism formed with the possessive *mo* (*m'*), but in English *Máedóc* is so well-established that I prefer to use it.

of the ironical treatment, it is possible that the moral lesson is seriously meant and that the humour was intended as a teaching tool.³

In this article I edit and translate the anecdote from the Book of Leinster, drawing also on a shorter version of the same anecdote that is preserved in some witnesses to the commentary to *Félire Óengusso*. I then discuss its significance together with some other medieval sources that mention the place of meat at St Davids.

1. EDITION

Manuscripts

There are five manuscripts that contain versions of the anecdote:

1. Dublin, TCD MS H. 2. 18 (1339), the Book of Leinster, p. 285, column b, ll. 6–44 [BL]

Written around the middle of the twelfth century. Some of the text is quite faded and hard or impossible to read, especially at the ends of lines. There is a diplomatic edition in *LL* v, ll. 36874–903. Both *LL* and the older facsimile made by Seosamh Ó Longáin offer some readings where the manuscript is now illegible,⁴ but some uncertainties remain. The Book of Leinster copy will be referred to from now on as BL, reserving *LL* for the printed diplomatic edition.

2. Dublin, RIA 23 P 16 (1230), Leabhar Breac, p. 80, ll. 64–73 [LB]

Copied by Murchadh Ó Cuindlis, 1408–11.⁵ The text occurs here within the commentary to *Félire Óengusso* for January 31, St Máedóc's feast-day. The anecdote begins two lines below the main text of the *Félire*, following a note on St Sebastian. It was published in Whitley Stokes's 1880 edition of the *Félire*.⁶ There is a facsimile of the manuscript by Ó Longáin but the manuscript is quite legible and so it is not necessary to cite this.⁷

3. Dublin, UCD OFM A 7, fol. 8r, column b, ll. 7–25 [F]

Written by *Rūaidhrī Hūa Luinīn* for Cathal Mac Magnusa Meguidhir who died in 1498 (AU s.a.).⁸ A copy of *Félire Óengusso* with commentary. The

³On the balance between humour and teaching in other anecdotes in this part of the manuscript, see Elizabeth Boyle, 'Lay morality, clerical immorality, and pilgrimage in tenth-century Ireland: *Cethrur macclérech* and *Epscop do Gáedelaib*', *Studia Hibernica* 39 (2013), 9–48; eadem, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (London and New York, 2021), 106–7.

⁴The facsimile is reproduced in Robert Atkinson (ed.), *The Book of Leinster Sometime Called the Book of Glendalough* ... (Dublin, 1880).

⁵Tomás Ó Concheanainn, 'The scribe of the Leabhar Breac', *Ériu* 24 (1973), 64–79.

⁶Whitley Stokes (ed.), *On the Calendar of Oengus*, Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, Irish Manuscript Series 1/1 (Dublin, 1880), xxxix–xl (text in column a, translation in column b).

⁷[Royal Irish Academy], *Leabhar Breac: The Speckled Book* ... (Dublin, 1872–6).

⁸Myles Dillon, Canice Mooney and Pádraig de Brún, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney* (Dublin, 1969), 14–16. On the Ó Luinín learned family and their service to the Maguires of Fermanagh, see Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988),

anecdote follows a short poem on *Mag Ferna* and Máedóc, and is followed by a note on Bríg, another saint whose feast is on 31 January.

4. Oxford, Bodley Rawlinson B. 512, fol. 57r, column b, ll. 17–37 [R²]

A composite manuscript, the relevant part copied by Conchubhar Ó Maolchonaire, 1500.⁹ This text is again in a copy of the commentary to *Féilire Óengusso*, and follows the note on St Sebastian as in LB. It was published in Whitley Stokes's 1905 edition of the *Féilire*.¹⁰

5. Dublin, NLI G10, p. 27 [C]

Also a composite manuscript, the second part being a copy of *Féilire Óengusso* and its commentary. Scribe unknown, sixteenth century.¹¹ The surviving text of the anecdote begins at the top of a recto, but there is a lacuna in front of it so that only about half the text survives. It is followed by Máedóc's genealogy.

For the copies in the *Féilire* commentary, it seems simplest to retain Stokes's sigla: LB for Leabhar Breac, F for the UCD Franciscan manuscript, R² for Rawlinson B. 512, and C for NLI G10, which was in Cheltenham when Stokes saw it. All of these manuscripts are digitally reproduced on www.isos.dias.ie except for R², which is reproduced on <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>. All of the digital images were checked on 29 August 2023. The anecdote is not in the remaining copies of the *Féilire* commentary (Stokes's R¹, L, P, B, and also B², that is, Brussels 5057–9).¹² I did not check C² (NLI G169) as this is merely a nineteenth-century transcript of C.

Transcripts of the two versions

Below are given transcripts of BL and of the oldest surviving copy of the *Féilire* commentary version from LB, with variants against LB from the other witnesses. The following conventions apply. Completely illegible letters are represented by angle-brackets < >, but if the published facsimiles include letters that cannot now be read, these are offered in curly brackets { }. Standard abbreviations are expanded with italics, but suspension marks are expanded with underlining. Bold stands for coloured letters. Punctuation follows the manuscripts except that proper nouns are capitalized and word division, apostrophes and hyphenation have been imposed. Line numbers are given between square brackets at intervals of five lines.

260 and Katharine Simms, 'Charles Lynegar, the Ó Luínín family and the study of *Seanchas*', in Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (eds), *A Miracle of Learning: Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning. Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan* (Aldershot, 1998), 266–83.

⁹Brian Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries*, part 1: *Descriptions* (Dublin, 2001), 233.

¹⁰Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London, 1905), 54 (text), 55 (translation).

¹¹Nessa Ní Shéaghda, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland*, fasc. 1: *Mss G1–G14*, *Studies in Irish Manuscripts* (Dublin, 1967), 60–2.

¹²I am grateful for the assistance of Dr Nike Stam with R¹ (Oxford, Bodley Rawlinson B. 505).

BL: Book of Leinster, p. 285, col. b, ll. 6–44

[285b6] **Coica** epscop do-deochatar dochum M'Oedoc Ferna do Bretnaib Cille Muine. ina n-ailithre do-deochatar. ar ropo dalta int í M'Oedoc Ferna do Dauid Cille Muine. **O** amsir Dauid [285b10] ni rucad feoil i praintech Cille Muine conad ruca comarba M'Oedoc Ferna. **IS** do ro rath < >suide dó fri Dauid don chomarbu nod bera.¹³ 7 anad {dano}¹⁴ na hapdaine Cille Muine nad chomraicfet a chossa fri talmain céin bes i mbethu. **Tancatar** {didu in}d [285b15] ailithir co M'Ædoc. **Ructha** i tech n-óiged hi c{org}us erraig in sin. **Do-breth** dóib coica bargaen do chruithnecht 7 luss 7 medgusce prainni cecha haini. **Cid** dia tucad so ol int epscop uasal. **Dia** thomailt duib-si ol in ferthigis. **Ber** latt dorísi ol int epscop. [285b20] **Mo** chobais ni caithfidher mír de sund. co rraib mucc 7 ag and. **IS** ed so ol in ferthigess. **Cet** cet ol M'Ædóc. **Dentar** dóib. do-gnither o{n.} berair dóib. do-gnither ón. **Berair** dóib. **IS** maith ón orse. **Ber-siu** lat a n-arbor 7 facaib in feoil. [285b25] **Do-melat** iarum. bít and co arnabarach. **Bennachaid** M'Oedóc dóib. maith or M'Ædóc. cid a n-i drosaid ni ar far cursachad ind fhéoil do thomailt duib issin chorgus 7 int arán cen ithi. **IN** assi{n}d legund tucais sin a M'Oedóc ol int epscop. **Maith** ol M'Ædóc. [285b30] ni ansa ám ol int epscop. **IN** mucc thucad dún a{reir} ass a mmathar at-ib co ndúaib in talman. **Nirbo** {ecen} iar sin acht a comét ar chonaib 7 gataigib. **IS**{s ed} a cétna ro sæthraiged frisin n-ag. **Ni** col didu a thomailt ar laiget a sæthair. **IN** bargaen immorro ruca{d} [285b35] immach. **Cóic** fhuropre ar tri fichtib ar trí cétaib {for}sind oenbargin .i. in lín lá bís issin bliadain. iss ed a llin {fhu}ropra bís forin bargin, 7 do-thæt a ll< > la cech < >. **A** soethar mór-sin iarum dar th'orddan-so, nocho tom{el} ón corop sæthar mo da lam-sa do-rromiul-sa [285b40] iar sæthrugud assa thalmain. **Ba** fír són ní doid bargin i nHeri. **conid** siat ro selaig in ceppaig < > Ferna Moir atúaid. **Conid** sin bargaen ceta-dóid i nHerind. **Connach** inchathmi do neoch ní cen shæthar lubra no ernaigthi.

LB: Leabhar Breac, p. 80, ll. 64–73, with variants

[80.64] **.L.** espoc do-dechutar dochumⁱ M'Oedóc Ferna do Bretnaib Chille Muine. ina oilithreⁱⁱ do-dechutar. ar ba dalta [80.65] inⁱⁱⁱ M'Oedoc Ferna do Dauid Chille Muine.^{iv} **O** amsir Dauid ni ructha feóil i proinntech Cille Muine.^v conus ruc comorba M'Oedoc Ferna^{vi} is dorath 7 comshuide do fria Dauid don chomorba^{vii} not bera^{viii} 7 ana dó^{ix} isin proinntig .i. in abdaine Chille Muine nat^x cómraicfed a cossa fria lár i céin bess^{xi} i mbethu. tancutar didu i n-ailithre co M'Oedóc. **Ructha** i teach n-óeiged i corgus erraig. do-breath doib .l. bairgen 7 luss 7 meadgusce prainde. **Cid** dia tucad so^{xii} ol in espuic.^{xiii} dia thomeilt dúib-se ol in ferthigis. ber lat iterum ol in espuic.^{xiv} ni caithfither ní de sund^{xv} co raib mucc ocus agh and. **IS** ed ol in ferthigis.^{xvi} **Cead**^{xvii} ol M'Oedóc. berair dóib. is maith olse do-melut in fhéoil. bít ann co [80.70]

¹³Facs has a length mark over this word, but *LL* does not. The digital image is not clear.

¹⁴Facs *dō*. Cannot be read at all now.

arabarach. bendachaid^{xviii} M'Oedóc dóib. Maith ol M'Oedóc ní furail bar cursachud isin^{xix} feoil da thomailt dúib^{xx} isin chorgus 7 i n-arán^{xxi} do obad^{xxii} Ni hassin légiund tucais sin a M'Oedóc ol in espuic.^{xxiii} Maith ol M'Óeóc. ní ansa ol in espuic.^{xxiv} Ass a mathar at-ib^{xxv} in mucc 7 in n-agh tucad dunn 7 nocha duaid acht fér in talman^{xxvi} .u. oirbe^{xxvii} ar tri .xxib ar .ccc. atá^{xxviii} icon bairgen 7^{xxix} is aire^{xxx} naro chaitsium.

- i. **dochum:** co R^2 .
- ii. **ina oilithre:** dia n-ailithri R^2 .
- iii. **in:** not in FR^2 .
- iv. and v. **Muine:** Not in R^2 .
- vi. **Ferna** not in FR^2 .
- vii. **is dorath 7 comshuide do fria Daid don chomorba:** IS dorath 7 comshuide do fri Dauith 7 don comarba F , 7 is dó do rath 7 comsuide do Daid frisin comorba R^2 .
- viii. **not bera:** nos berai R^2 .
- ix. **ana dó:** ana do F , anad do R^2 .
- x. **nat:** 7 nad R^2 .
- xi. **i céin bess:** airt no bethi R^2 .
- xii. **so:** inn so R^2 .
- xiii. and xiv. **in espuic:** int epscop R^2 .
- xv. **ní de sund:** ní de R^2 , surviving part of C starts here.
- xvi. **IS ed ol in ferthigis:** IS ed ol Mædhoic. Co cæt ol in fertighis F , Innisid in ferthaigis R^2 .
- xvii. **Cead:** Is cet F .
- xviii. **bendachaid:** Bennaighis F , Bennaigis R^2 , bennaige C .
- xix. **isin feoil:** inn .i. in feoil R^2 .
- xx. **dúib:** not in R^2 .
- xxi. **i n-arán:** int arán R^2 , aran F .
- xxii. **do obad:** not in R^2 , dobadh F , dobad C .
- xxiii. and xxiv. **in espuic:** int epscop R^2 , int espoc C .
- xxv. **at-ib:** do ibh F .
- xxvi. **7 in n-agh tucad dunn 7 nocha duaid acht fér in talman:** 7 in agh tucadh duin 7 ní dhuadur acht fer 7 uisqui in talman F , 7 int agh tuccad dun nocha duaid acht fér inn talman R^2 , 7 int ag tucad duinn areir *noco* duaig. in talum C .
- xxvii. **oirbe:** uroipri F , uroibri R^2C .
- xxviii. **atá:** not in R^2 .
- xxix. **7:** not in FR^2C .
- xxx. **aire:** uime C .

Relationship of the manuscripts

BL is significantly longer and fuller than the version in the *Félire* commentary manuscripts. The latter all represent a single version, as can be seen from the

relatively trivial nature of the variants listed above. It is not practical to discuss the possible relations of LB, F, R² and C in isolation from the rest of the commentary, but it can be seen that R² is slightly innovative compared with the others, though in one or two places it preserves readings found in BL and lost elsewhere (see below).¹⁵ Pádraig Ó Riain has argued that this anecdote was included in the *Félire* commentary by the original compiler of the commentary, who he believes was working in Armagh in the late twelfth century, and who, in Ó Riain's view, drew on texts closely related to the Book of Leinster for several such anecdotes. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the anecdote occurs only in one of the two branches in Ó Riain's stemma, a branch that he attributes to a reworking of the Armagh commentary done in the Midlands, perhaps at Clonmacnoise or Seirkieran.¹⁶ The question will have to remain open here.

Both BL and the *Félire* commentary version agree almost completely until the British bishops begin to explain their behaviour to St Máedóc (l. 17, beginning *In mucc ...* in the edited text below). At this point the *Félire* commentary version gives a much more concise account of the conversation, and it stops altogether before reaching the bishops' vow not to eat bread in Ireland until they have grown their own corn. Indeed, the *Félire* commentary version is so concise here that the point behind the bishops' odd behaviour is barely comprehensible. This contrasts with the coherent account in BL, which ends with the (alleged) moral of the story. For this reason, it is safe to assume that BL represents an older version, which was curtailed when it entered the *Félire* commentary. It is possible, however, that the *Félire* commentary version preserves words lost from BL in one place (*isin proinntig*, see l. 5n. below).

Title

None in the manuscripts. The text will be referred to here as '*Coīca epscop*'.

Edited text

This is a critical text, based on the Book of Leinster, but with a very few emendations and readings adopted from the *Félire* commentary version where BL cannot be read or seems to be faulty. These editorial interventions are marked with square brackets.

Coīca epscop

Coīca epscop do-deochatar dochum M'Ōedōc Ėrna do Bretnaib Cille Muine.
Ina n-aillithre do-deochatar, ar ropo dalta int í M'Ōedōc Ėrna do Dauīd
Cille Muine. Ō amsir Dauīd nī rucad fēoil i praintech Cille Muine conad
4 ruca comarba M'Ōedōc Ėrna. Is dō ro rath [7 com]suide dó fri Dauīd, don

¹⁵Recent discussions of the commentary manuscripts are Pádraig Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints: A History of Irish Martyrologies*, Subsidia Hagiographica 86 (Brussels, 2006), 173–203 and Nike Stam, *A Typology of Code-Switching in the Commentary to the Féilire Óengusso* (Utrecht, 2017), 99–153.

¹⁶Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints*, 182 (stemma), 192–3 (on the compiler's access to texts close to the Book of Leinster), and 200–2 (on a possible Midlands stage in transmission).

chomarbu nod bera, 7 anad danó 'na haptaine Cille Muine, nād chomraicfet a chossa fri talmain céin bes i mbethu.

Tāncatar didiu ind ailithir co M'Áedóc. Ructha i tech n-oíged hi corgus
 8 erraig in sin. Do-breth dóib coíca bargaen do chruithnecht 7 luss 7 medgusce
 prainni cecha hāini. 'Cid dīa tucad sō?', ol int epscop ūasal. 'Dīa thomailt dūib-
 si', ol in ferthigis. 'Ber latt dorísi', ol int epscop. 'Mo chobais, nī caithfider
 mír de sund co rraib mucc 7 ag and!' 'Is ed sō', ol in ferthigess. 'Cet, cet', ol
 12 M'Áedóc, dēntar dóib.' Do-gnūther ōn, berair dóib. 'Is maith ōn', or sē. 'Ber-siu
 lat a n-arbor 7 fācaib in fēoil.' Do-melat iarum. Bít and co arnabārach.

Bennachaid M'Ōedóc dóib. 'Maith', or M'Ēdóc. 'Cid a n-ī d[o]-rosaid? Nī
 ar far cūrsachad ind fēoil do thomailt dūib issin chorgus 7 int arán cen ithi.' 'In
 16 assind Lēgund tucais sin, a M'Ōedóc?', ol int epscop. 'Maith', ol M'Áedóc.
 'Nī ansa ám', ol int epscop. 'In mucc thucad dún arēir, ass a mmāthar at-ib co
 ndúaib in talman. Nīrbo ēcen iar sin acht a comét ar chonaib 7 gataigib. Is ed a
 cétna ro sāethraiged frisin n-ag. Nī col didiu a thomailt ar laiget a sāethair. In
 20 bargaen immorro rucad immach, cóic fūopre ar trī fichtib ar trī cétaib forsind
 ōenbargaen, .i. in lín lá bís issin blīadain, iss ed a llīn fūopra bís forin bargaen,
 7 do-tháet a ll[ín] la cech [n-óen]. A sōethar mór-sin iarum, dar th'orddan-so,
 nocho tomēl ón corop sāethar mo dā lām-sa do-rromiul-sa iar sāethrugud assa
 24 thalmain.'

Ba fír són. Ní dōid bargaen i nHēri conid siat ro selaig in ceppaig [fri] Ferna
 Mōir atúaid. Conid sin bargaen ceta-dóid i nHērind. Connach inchathmi do
 neoch ní cen sāethar lubra nō ernaighi.

Translation

Fifty bishops of the Britons of St Davids came to Máedóc of Ferns. They came for their retirement, for that same Máedóc of Ferns had been a pupil of David of St Davids. From David's time meat was not brought into the refectory of St Davids until the successor of Máedóc of Ferns brought it. It is to him, the successor who may bring it, that was granted both a seat equal to David's, and to remain furthermore in the abbacy of St Davids, in which his feet will not touch the ground as long as he is alive.

Thus, the pilgrims came to Máedóc. Those men were taken into the guest-house during Lent. Fifty loaves of wheat and leeks and whey with water [suitable for] the main meal of every fast-day were brought for them. 'Why has this been brought?', asked the superior bishop. 'For you to eat', said the steward. 'Take it back', said the bishop. 'I vow, not a morsel of this will be eaten until there are a pig and an ox there.' 'That's how it is', said the steward. 'Alright, alright', said Máedóc, 'let it be done for them.' It is done, it is brought for them. 'That's fine', said he [the bishop]. 'Take the bread away and leave the meat.' They eat then. They remain there till the next day.

Máedóc greets them. 'Right', said Máedóc, 'what is it that you might be after? It is not in order to be reproached that you ate the meat during Lent and did not eat the bread.' 'Did you get that from Scripture, Máedóc?', asked the bishop. 'Indeed', said Máedóc. 'It's easily explained', said the bishop. 'The pig that was brought to us last night consumed the milk of its mother along

with what was due from the earth. After that, there was no need to do anything except keep it safe from dogs and thieves. The labour expended on the ox was the same. It was no sin to eat it, then, because the labour for it was so light. But as to the loaf that was brought out, there are three hundred and sixty-five stints of additional labour needed for a single loaf, that is, the number of days in the year is the number of stints of additional labour that a loaf demands, and with every one comes its number [of stints]. By your honour, I will not eat such a huge labour as that until I can eat the labour of my own hands after having toiled on its soil.'

And that transpired. He did not eat a single loaf in Ireland until they had felled the clearing north of Ferns. And that was the first loaf that he ate in Ireland. And so, nothing is to be eaten by anyone without the exertion of labour or of prayer.

Notes

1. M'Ōedōc Āerna: the diphthong in the name is variously spelled in BL: *oe*, *æ* and once even *e*. It is not declined except once, where the vocative *M'Ōedōc* appears (l. 16). See *GOI* §271 for the formation of ecclesiastics' names in *-óc* and their vocative forms. Even though the name does not show a distinctive genitive inflection, *Āerna* is still lenited after it as would be expected after a regular *o*-stem gen. sg.

1. Cille Muine: written out in full in BL here, but abbreviated after this. *Cell Muini* was the usual Irish name for St Davids: for example, *Félire Óengusso* under 1 March has '*Dauid Cille Muni*' (rhyming with *ngudi*), see Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, 80, stanza 1, l. 4. See further Pádraig Ó Riain et al. (eds), *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames*, iv (London, 2011), s.n. *Ceall Mhuine* (2). The matching name in medieval Welsh was *Mynyw*, which unlike Ir *muine* 'thicket, briar patch' is not attested in use as a common noun.

2. int í M'Ōedōc Āerna: *LL* has *Āerna* but I cannot see a dot in the digital image and it is not in the facsimile. Lenition would not be expected after the nom. sg.

3–6. Ō amsir Dauīd ... í mbethu: the first part of the anecdote is made initially difficult to follow through the insertion of this historical aside, whose events do not come to pass until well after the events of the anecdote proper. Since the account refers to a successor of Máedóc, it can hardly have been fulfilled in Máedóc's lifetime. Everything between these words must be taken therefore as a digression.

3. conad: MS *onad*, *LL connad*. This seems to be for OIr *conid*, *co^N* + 3 sg. neut. class C, although *féoil* is fem. A similar confusion of gender is seen in *nod bera* below. The *Félire* commentary version has *conus* with typical MÍr generalization of *-s* as an infixed pronoun of the 3 sg.

4. ruca: apparently 3 sg. pres. subj., contrasting with past *ruc* in the *Féilire* commentary version, but we might expect a past indicative here as the verb in the main clause is in the past. Just possibly, therefore, this is an instance of the rare MÍr preterite ending *-a*, see Kim McCone, *The Early Irish Verb*, second ed. (Maynooth, 1997), 236; *SnaG* III.12.32; cf. 3 sg. perf. *ro-da-ucai* in *ML*. 46a19.

4. [7 com]suide: the first three letters of ...*suide* cannot be read at all in BL and were not transcribed in the facsimile. It is not even possible to determine how many letters were once there. *com-* would fit the space, however, and is the reading of LB, R² and F (C is lacking here). These also have 7 before *com-*, and with the eye of faith it is possible to see a trace of a long descender in the right place in BL, so I adopt 7 *comsuide* here. The meaning is uncertain; I have translated it as ‘a seat equal to David’s’, implying ‘equal status with David’. It might also mean ‘a seat alongside David’, but the arrival of the *comarba* of Máedóc seems to be envisaged long after David’s lifetime. The interpretation is discussed further below, 172–5.

5. nod bera: again, class C 3 sg. neut. where in strict OÍr the fem. would be used. Cf. LB and F *not bera*, where *not* is probably a variant of *nod*, while R² *nos berai* shows another form being generalized in the 3 sg.

The present subjunctive, rather than the past, is unexpected after *ro rath*, although the phrase *don chomarbu nod bera* is only loosely connected to the main clause, but cf. also *chomraicfet* below, which is future where conditional might be expected. It is possible that *bera* is future *béra* too, see footnote 13 above.

5. anad danó: the second word is very uncertain. It is at the end of a line and very faded. There are perhaps two letters. The facsimile reads *dō*, with what appears to be a suspension mark and not a length mark. This would stand for *danó/donó*, which gives good sense here. If the facsimile is correct, the *d* must be the straight-backed variety, which we do find several times in this text, e.g. in *bennachaid* (below). The second letter is bowl-shaped and could be *o* or the compendium *o*. I cannot see the mark above.

The difficulty is that LB has *dó* with a length mark and not a suspension, while R² and F have *do*, which should also stand for *dó*, not *danó*. The reading *dó* would also give sense here, giving the agent of the verbal noun *anad*. On the other hand, it would be easy for *dō* to become *dó* in transmission. I follow the facsimile of BL here.

5. 'na hapdaine Cille Muine: *a* is proleptic, referring to *Cille Muine*. Cf. *Wb.* 28c25 *ní pi cian a masse in choirp* ‘the beauty of the body is not long lasting’ (lit. ‘its beauty of the body’). The *h-* is written as a spiritus asper above and presumably here has a phonetic value, marking the *h-* that regularly attaches to initial vowels after the 3 sg. fem. possessive. The *Féilire* commentary version (LBR²F) lacks the possessive. Furthermore, LBR²F all read here *isin proinntig*, *i. i n-abdaine* (the LB spelling is cited). This specification that the *comarba*

was to remain in the refectory, and that this symbolized his taking the headship of St Davids, may be a rare instance in which the *Félire* commentary version preserves an older reading, shortened in BL. Alternatively, *isin proinntig* may be an addition in the *Félire* commentary version, made on the understanding that *comsuide* refers initially to seating arrangements in the refectory, and then secondarily to the succession to David.

5. nād chomraicfet: only R² supplies 7 before this clause; it is definitely not in BL, which is quite legible here. The reading without 7 is rather difficult to construe, but one possibility is a locative relative clause, for which see Liam Breatnach, ‘Some remarks on the relative in Old Irish’, *Ériu* 31 (1980), 1–9, and Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ‘A note on relative marking in Irish’, in Pamela O’Neill (ed.), *The Land Beneath the Sea: Essays in Honour of Anders Ahlqvist’s Contribution to Celtic Studies in Australia*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 14 (Sydney, 2013), 163–9. The lenition *ch-* shows Middle Irish retreat of the nasalizing relative clause. The future tense is also peculiar where the conditional might have been expected. Both LB and R² have *-ed*, as if for a 3 sg. conditional (it is unlikely that this a later spelling for 3 pl. future), and this is even clearer in F, which has *-edh*, in spite of the plural subject.

Liam Breatnach points out to me that there is evidence for a transitive verb *con-ruici* ‘causes to come together’, which was confused with *con-ricc*: the best example is in O’Davoren’s glossary and is cited to explain a very similar phrase in *Scéla Mošauluim* in Máirín O Daly, *Cath Maige Mucrama*, ITS 50 (London, 1975), 134 n. 567: *ar is baeth nech conid fri robaeth ruici* ‘for anyone who consorts with a very foolish person is foolish’; cf. Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘O’Davoren’s glossary’, *ACL* 2 (1904), 197–504, at §1337. If this verb were understood here, it might be possible to adopt the 3 sg. *-ed* from the *Félire* commentary versions and translate: ‘who would not allow his feet to touch the ground (?i.e., go barefoot)’. The conditional tense would suit this interpretation. However, it is difficult to see how the meaning would fit the context, which is apparently a list of privileges acquired by the Ferns cleric (and perhaps his successors) rather than choices made by him. More likely this is some kind of miraculous levitation that symbolized his separation from earthly bonds.

7. didiu ind: only the final *-d* is now legible. I follow the facsimile. The *Félire* commentary versions all have *didiu i n-ailithre*, minor orthographic variants apart.

7. hi corgus: faded; *-org-* is now hard to confirm but is in the facsimile (and the *Félire* commentary version).

8. in sin: i.e. the British bishops. For the demonstrative referring to animates, see Liam Breatnach, ‘The demonstrative pronouns in Old and Middle Irish’, in Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu and David Stifter (eds), *Morphosyntactic Variation in Medieval Celtic Languages: Corpus-Based Approaches* (Berlin, 2020), 115–41, at 131–5.

9. int epscop úasal: this seems to refer to a bishop of higher authority than the others. For the use of *úasal* in the ranking of bishops, see Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999), 162, 165. The *Féilire* commentary version lacks *úasal*. Furthermore, there is apparently confusion between singular and plural among the various manuscripts. The noun itself is always abbreviated, so we have to follow the forms of the article before it. R² and C have *int* here and subsequently, and thus refer to one bishop, whereas LB and F have *in*, which appears to be pl. (being a MÍr simplification of *ind*, see *SnaG* III.7.7); we would expect *int* before the sg. form, so it would seem that *eps-* and *esp-* must be expanded as pl. in LB and F.

11. mucc 7 ag: the facsimile has a length mark above *ag* but I cannot see this in BL and the word is *ag* ‘ox’, not *ág*.

11. ‘Is ed sō, ol in ferthigess: these words might be addressed either to the British bishop or to Máedóc. The latter is more likely since the saint responds to it, but I have tried to make the translation fit either case. The *Féilire* commentary version is very similar but R² has *innisid in ferthaigis* ‘the server informs [sc. Máedóc]’, while F attributes these words to Máedóc and has an extra phrase in which the server apparently asks for permission to serve the meat.

12. Do-gnīther: there is a definite but unexplained dot above *d*, not reproduced in the facsimile. See next note.

12. Do-gnīther ōn, berair dóib: the BL scribe accidentally repeated these words. No dot over the second *do-gnīther*. Perhaps the earlier dot draws attention to the duplication, but it does not seem to be an erasure mark.

13. a n-arbor: *DIL* does not give the metonymic meaning ‘bread’ but it is required here.

14. cid a n-ī d[o]-rosaid: BL *cid anidrosaid*. This is the most difficult reading in the text but at least the MS is clear. I take the second part to be a form of *do-roich* ‘attain, reach, aim for’, 2 pl. pres. subj., and so I emend by adding [o]. The non-palatal *s* is a problem as the attested forms of 3 pl. are *-toirset*, *-torset*, and likewise in the past subj. 3 sg. *-toirsed*, etc. On the other hand, the non-palatal *s* here could have spread from the attested sg. forms: 1 sg. *-torus*, 2 sg. *-torais*, 3 sg. *-tora* could have influenced the 2 pl. here. See *DIL* s.v. *do-roich*. Another possibility, suggested to me by Ruairí Ó hUiginn, is to read *do-rósaid*, 2 pl. perf. of *do-fuissim* ‘creates, begets’, if its meaning can be extended somewhat to ‘bring about’: ‘what is this thing that you have brought about?’

Even if the emendation to *do-rosaid* or *do-rósaid* is wrong, some phrase meaning ‘What are you up to?’ seems to be required to explain the next sentence, in which Máedóc perceives that there is some meaning to the Britons’ behaviour, and wishes to know what it is. In the *Féilire* commentary version

the phrase *cíd a n-í d[o]-rossaid* is absent altogether and the next sentence was apparently altered to give a simpler sense, see the next note.

14–15. ní ar far cūrsachad: the *Félire* commentary version is *ní furail bar cūrsachud* (LB) ‘it is necessary to reproach you for it’. This, together with the absence of the preceding words, makes Máedóc’s response much less sophisticated. Instead of seeing any hidden purpose behind the bishops’ odd behaviour, he merely condemns it.

15–16. In assind Lēgund: the *Félire* commentary version has the negative *nī* here; confusion between *in* and *nī* is quite understandable. It is in fact not easy to derive a requirement to abstain from meat during Lent from the bible, even though the practice was practically universal. See Carl Frayne, ‘On imitating the regimen of immortality or facing the diet of mortal reality: a brief history of abstinence from flesh-eating in Christianity’, *Journal of Animal Ethics* 6.2 (2016), 188–212. A case can therefore be made for both readings, *in* and *nī*. In BL, the British bishop merely questions whether Máedóc can actually find scriptural justification for his demand, whereas in the *Félire* commentary version he denies the entire idea of a scriptural basis.

17. In mucc thucad: from this point on the *Félire* commentary version starts to become drastically shorter than BL.

17. arēir: *-eir* is no longer legible in BL, and the whole phrase is lacking from the *Félire* commentary version. I follow the facsimile of BL which reads *areir*. The date at which the form *arēir* becomes current is not clear from *eDIL* s.v. *irrāir*. The alleged 9th-century example in *Thes* ii, 294.12 is interpreted as *a réir* ‘according to (his) will’ in Rudolf Thurneysen, *Old Irish Reader* (Dublin, 1949), 99. The examples from the Middle Irish tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* are recorded in *Leabhar Breac* c. 1400 and so cannot be used to trace the form any earlier. If this passage in BL was already damaged in Ó Longáin’s time, then perhaps the reading was *arair* vel sim., but his facsimile is our only guide.

17–18. co ndúaib in talman: *DIL* lists this example under *dú* in the sense ‘appurtenances, products’, deriving from the commoner use of the word to mean ‘what is due’. There is no close parallel for the plural form, however, though the sg. appears in *doberar dam co tinniu dóib cona dú di chormaim* ‘with its due (i.e. corresponding amount) of ale’, see Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch (eds), *Irische Texte*, ii.2 (Leipzig, 1887), 209 [= *Táin Bó Flidais*].

The *Félire* commentary version is rather different here. By this point it seems to be abbreviating. The sentence is recast as *Ass a mathar at-ib in mucc 7 in n-agh tucad dunn 7 nocha duaid acht fér in talman* (LB; R² and C lack the second 7, probably correctly, while F makes both animals subject (7 *ní dhuadur* ...]). The problem is that *dúaib* and *duaid* are remarkably similar readings and it is tempting to feel that one reading must derive from the other. *Dúaib* is the

lectio difficilior, but given that the pl. lacks good parallels, it would be possible to emend the BL text to *co ndúaid fēr in talman* ‘until it ate the grass of the earth’, thus assuming that this part of the *Félire* commentary version is closer to the original than BL, even though the sentence as a whole has been rearranged in the various witnesses. As the act of eating food produced by the earth is implied, a form of the verb *ithid* (*duaid*) would not be out of place. The misreading of *-id* as *-ib* in BL could then be put down to a slip of the eye after the previous word, *at-ib*, or else to the occasional M^{Ir} confusion of lenited *d* and *b* (Liam Breatnach, ‘Lebor na hUidre: some linguistic aspects’, in Ruairí Ó hUiginn (ed.), *Lebor na hUidre*, Codices Hibernenses Eximii 1 (Dublin, 2015), 53–77, at 75–6). This would fit rather better with *íar sin* in the next sentence, which seems to look back to an expression of time in this one.

18. nīrbo ēcen: barely legible beyond *r*; *-bo* can just about be seen, but for *ēcen* I rely on the facsimile. This sentence is absent from the *Félire* commentary version.

20–1. fūopre ... fūopra: *DIL* defines *foropair* as ‘additional or extra labour’, ‘supererogatory labour’. All its examples are from contexts relating to ecclesiastical discipline. The bishop says that making bread – in which he evidently includes the whole process of growing grain from ploughing to processing – is a job that occupies every day of the year: it is an unceasing labour, in other words.

20–1. forsind ōenbairgin: after this, the *Félire* commentary version hastens to an end with the phrase *⁊ is aire naro chaitsium* (LB) ‘and that is why we did not eat it’. Only BL is now available.

21. a llīn fūopra: only *a ll-* and *-opra* can now be read; I follow the facsimile.

22. do-tháet a ll[ín] la cech [n-ōen]: the reading is not certain here. The facsimile marks one letter missing after *all-* whereas *LL* takes it to be abbreviated and expands it as *allus* ‘sweat’. I tend to agree that there is a suspension stroke rather than a missing letter or letters, but the expansion is open to doubt. Though it makes reasonable sense in the context, since sweat arises from labour, nevertheless it is odd that the word *allus* should be abbreviated so ambiguously with a simple suspension stroke, especially as the scribe uses the *-us* compendium twice elsewhere in the passage in writing *corgus*. We might expect *all-* to stand for something that a reader would find easier to expand, and *a llīn* has already occurred in the same sentence. The words *la cech* are now quite hard to read but are confirmed by the facsimile. The following word, however, is at the end of the line and was already illegible to Ó Longáin. There is room for three or four letters, perhaps. A plausible reading would be *n-ōen*, which fits the context very well. If this guess is correct, then the bishop is pointing out that not only does each loaf demand 365 stints of labour, but so therefore does each of the fifty loaves that were served. That is, even if only enough wheat were sown

for a single loaf, it would still take the same length of time to be grown and processed.

22. dar th'orddan-so: Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin, 2000), 454–5 takes this to refer to the labour as ‘greater than Máedóc’s dignity’, and then considers that Máedóc, not the British bishop, makes the vow not to eat bread (*nocha tomēl* ...) and cuts down the assart north of Ferns. However, it seems simpler to take this phrase as no more than a standard oath, for which a close parallel exists in *tar t’ortan-su* ‘by thy dignity’, see Whitley Stokes (ed.), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick with Other Documents Relating to that Saint* (London, 1887; reprinted Wiesbaden, 1965), 246.21. The British bishop’s words run on, then, and include *nocha tomēl* etc., and it is the Britons who make the assart and eat their ‘first loaf in Ireland’. The subject here cannot be Máedóc, a native Irishman who must have eaten thousands of Irish loaves by this point in his life.

23. tomēl: *-el* cannot now be read; I follow the facsimile.

23–4. assa thalmain: apparently the prep. *a* + poss. masc. or neut. But what does the poss. refer to if so? The only candidate seems to be *sāethar*. The prep. *a* may be taken in the sense of ‘cause of an action, by, which, because or by reason of’, *DIL* II(b). The literal sense of ‘out of’ might work too as a description of winning produce through labour out of the earth, but we might expect *īarna sāethrugud* in that case. Perhaps *assa* could be taken as the gen. of *ás* ‘growth’, which seems to have an optional gen. *ása* in EModIr, though *DIL* does not record early examples. MS *thalm-* would then need to be expanded as the gen. *thalman*, which is not a problem, and lenition after *u*-stem gen. sg. forms is found in MIr, see *SnaG* III.4.4. If so: ‘after labouring for the increase of the earth’.

25–6. [fri] Ferna Mōir: *fri* cannot be seen at all and is not in the facsimile. However, it is at the end of a severely faded line, there is enough room for the usual abbreviation (*f* with superscript *i*), and it is needed for sense.

On the name *Ferna Mór* for Ferns, see Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin, 1910), in the revised version by Donnchadh Ó Corráin (<https://www.dias.ie/celt/celt-publications-2/onomasticon-goedelicum>), s.n. 16087.

Translation of the Félire commentary version

Whitley Stokes gave a translation of R² in *Félire Óengusso*, 55. He did not initially recognize *uroibri* ‘additional stints of labour’, instead guessing that it might mean ‘weevils’. Stokes corrected his mistake in the corrigenda to the volume, but to avoid confusion it seems best to offer here a fresh translation of the *Félire* commentary version from LB.

Fifty bishops of the Britons of St Davids came to Máedóc of Ferns. They came for their retirement, for that Máedóc of Ferns was a pupil of David of St Davids.

From David's time meat was not brought into the refectory of St Davids until the successor of Máedóc of Ferns brought it. To him, the successor who brought it, was granted¹⁷ both a seat equal to David's, and that he should remain in the refectory, that is, in the abbacy of St Davids, in which his feet would not touch the floor as long as he might be alive.

Thus, they came on pilgrimage to Máedóc. They were taken into the guest-house during Lent. Fifty loaves and leeks and whey with water [suitable for] a main meal were brought for them. 'Why has this been brought?', asked the bishops. 'For you to eat', said the steward. 'Take it away', said the bishops. 'Nothing of this will be eaten until there may be a pig and an ox there.' 'That's how it is', said the steward. 'Alright', said Máedóc. It is brought for them. 'That's fine', said he [?the bishop]. They eat the meat. They remain there till the next day.

Máedóc greets them. 'Right', said Máedóc, 'it is necessary to reproach you for eating meat during Lent and for refusing bread.' 'You did not get that from Scripture, Máedóc', said the bishops. 'Indeed', said Máedóc. 'It's easily explained', said the bishops. 'The pig drank the milk of its mother, and the ox that was brought for us ate nothing¹⁸ save grass of the earth. But for the loaf there are three hundred and sixty-five stints of additional labour,¹⁹ and that is why we did not eat it.'

2. DISCUSSION

1. *St Máedóc, St David and the question of eating meat*

St Máedóc of Ferns, co. Wexford, is well known from four Latin Lives and two Irish Lives. In addition, he appears in the Lives of St David from Wales. All of these sources agree that he was a pupil of St David. The date of the oldest Latin Life of Máedóc is disputed, but the oldest Life of St David, that by Rhygyfarch, can be safely dated not later than 1099, when its author died.²⁰ Close and repeated contacts between Ferns and St Davids are demonstrated not only by the appearance of each saint in the Lives of the other but also by the fact that the unique copy of the oldest Latin Life of St Máedóc is preserved in a Welsh manuscript of the late twelfth century.²¹

St David was famous for his extreme asceticism and it is clear that the author of the anecdote knew of this aspect of David's persona and that it is crucial to

¹⁷Reading *is dó do rath* with R².

¹⁸Or: 'and it ate nothing' if LB's reading 7 is retained, see note to l. 17 above.

¹⁹Reading *uroipri* with FR²C.

²⁰For the hagiography of Máedóc, see Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin, 2011), 432–6. Ó Riain's view that all of the saint's Lives are late, beginning only in the later 12th century, should be contrasted with Charles Doherty, 'The transmission of the cult of St Máedhóg', in Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Texts and Transmission* (Dublin, 2002), 268–83. For Rhygyfarch's Life of David, see Richard Sharpe and John Reuben Davies (ed. and trans.), 'Rhygyfarch's Life of St David', in J. Wyn Evans and Jonathan M. Wooding (eds), *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* (Woodbridge, 2007), 107–55.

²¹London, BL Cotton Vespasian A.xiv; for discussion, see the works by Ó Riain and Doherty cited in n. 20.

the humour both in the historical aside about St Davids and in the rest of the anecdote. Rhygyfarch's *Life* describes David's harsh diet and explains that he was known as *aquilentus* – the 'waterman' – because he never drank anything else. He also, needless to say, did not eat meat, nor did his monks:

Non diuersorum fercula saporum, non esculentiores pastus
apponunt, sed pane et oleribus sale conditis pasti, ardentem sitim
temperato potionis genere restingunt.

'They do not serve dishes of different flavours, nor richer types
of food, but feeding on bread and herbs seasoned with salt, they
quench their burning thirst with a temperate kind of drink.'²²

In our text, the responsibility for introducing meat into the refectory of St Davids is attributed to an unnamed *comarba* of Máedóc, that is, an abbot or head of the church of Ferns. This anonymous hero is said to have been awarded a seat equal to that of David, or by another interpretation, a seat alongside David (*comsuide dó fri Daid*). This either means that he inherited David's throne as bishop of St Davids, or that he was allotted a seat next to St David in heaven – possibly both. Secondly, he remained (*anad*) at St Davids and filled the office of abbot (i.e., bishop). It seems from this phrase that the *comarba* in question arrived as a mere visitor, not as an appointee to the bishopric, but that his audacity won him the office. Thirdly, his feet did not touch the ground as long as he lived: either he was carried everywhere by his acolytes or he hovered a few inches above the ground, this miracle bearing perpetual witness to his spiritual elevation above worldly things.

The idea that St Davids was a meatless foundation until some point in the fairly recent past is found also in the writings of Gerald of Wales. Gerald, however, blames one of the later bishops of St Davids, Morgenau, for the lapse into carnivorousness, and explains that he came to a suitably sticky end as a result. The story occurs in a list of the past bishops of the see incorporated into Gerald's *Itinerarium Cambriae*:

Morgeneu qui primus inter episcopos Meneuiae carnes comedit,
et ibidem a piratis interfectus est; unde et eadem nocte quam
duxit extremam apparuit cuidam episcopo in Hibernia, ostendens
uulnera sua et dicens, "Quia carnes comedi, caro factus sum".

'Morgeneu, who was the first Bishop of St David's to eat meat. He
was murdered by pirates in his own city. On the very night when
he was killed, he showed himself in a vision to a certain bishop in
Ireland, pointed to his wounds and said: "Because I ate flesh, I am
become flesh."'²³

²²Sharpe and Davies, 'Rhygyfarch's *Life* of St David', 126–7, §24.

²³Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, ii.1, ed. in J. F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 8.6 (London, 1868), 104; Lewis Thorpe (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales* (London, 1978), 163.

A date is supplied for this event by the Welsh annals, which state that Morgenau was killed by Scandinavian raiders in 999.²⁴ Gerald's anecdote appears only in the third version of his *Itinerarium*, datable c. 1214; in the previous versions, Morgenau's name is unannotated.²⁵ The eating, non-eating, and transgressive eating of meat were issues on which Gerald had views, as we see from other works.²⁶ His story of Morgenau is much later than any possible date for the Irish anecdote, yet it is striking that it has an Irish dimension: it was to a bishop in Ireland, not Wales, that Morgenau's ghost appeared. It cannot be ruled out that some genuine historical incident lay behind both Gerald's story and the Irish anecdote, and that an abbot of Ferns had indeed at some point become bishop of St Davids. We know little of the early bishops beyond their names, preserved in the annals and in Gerald's writings. *Morgenau* is a Welsh name but it means 'cub of the sea' and would be fitting for a foreigner, a *cú glas*.²⁷ Alternatively, the story might refer mischievously to some controversy over the diet of the clergy at Ferns itself. The depiction of the St Davids community rapturously welcoming the chance to eat meat does rather hint that this could be a sore issue for those clergy or monks who lived under a strict rule.

Illicit eating of meat appears as a bone of contention in the period of the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland as well. Pope Alexander III in 1172 accused the Irish of eating meat during Lent.²⁸ In Jocelin of Furness's *Life of St Patrick* there appears a story in which Patrick yields to temptation and conceals some meat to eat in secret when nobody can see him, but he is warned by a vision not to do so. Patrick is contrite, but the angel Victor now appears to him and instructs him to place the meat in water, at which point it turns into fish, which it was permissible to eat. A passage found only in one manuscript of the *Life*, but probably part of Jocelin's original composition, accuses the Irish of using this miracle as an excuse to eat meat on St Patrick's day, 17 March, which always falls within Lent: according to this passage, 'very many of the Irish' were accustomed to immerse meat in water just as Patrick did, before removing it for cooking, and to call the pieces of meat 'Patrick's fishes'.²⁹ Jocelin

²⁴Thomas Jones (ed. and trans.), *Brut y Tywysogyon or The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version* (Cardiff, 1955), 18–19 (s.a. 999): *Ac y dipoplet Mynyw y gan y Kenedloed, ac y llas Morgeneu esgob y gantunt* 'And Menevia [St Davids] was pillaged by the Gentiles, and bishop Morgenau was slain by them.'

²⁵See Huw Pryce, 'Gerald of Wales and the Welsh past', in Georgia Henley and A. Joseph McMullen (eds), *Gerald of Wales: New Perspectives on a Medieval Writer and Critic* (Cardiff, 2018), 19–45, at 35–6.

²⁶Robert Bartlett, 'Gerald of Wales and the *History of Llanthony Priory*', in Henley and McMullen, *Gerald of Wales*, 81–96, at 90–1.

²⁷On this status, see Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 6.

²⁸Maurice Sheehy (ed.), *Pontificia Hibernica: Medieval Papal Chancery Documents Concerning Ireland, 640–1261*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1962–5), i, no. 6.

²⁹The passage is printed in John Colgan, *Trias Thaumaturga* (Louvain, 1647; reprinted Dublin, 1997), p. 66 (Chapter XXIII). See also Helen Birkett, *The Saints' Lives of Jocelin of Furness: Hagiography, Patronage and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Woodbridge, 2010), 161 n. 92, on the authenticity of the passage, and Marie Therese Flanagan, 'Jocelin of Furness and the cult of St Patrick in twelfth-century Ulster', in Clare Downham (ed.), *Jocelin of Furness: Proceedings of the 2011 Conference* (Donington, 2013), 45–66, at 61.

is scathing about this belief among the *populus stultus et insipiens* ‘stupid and foolish people’.

2. *The anecdote proper: Qui non laborat, non manducet.*

There is a close thematic link between the historical aside and the anecdote proper, namely, a humorous justification for eating meat. This time, the humour lies in the creative reinterpretation of some very well-known passages of scripture. As indicated above in the notes, the forty-day penitential fast during the season of Lent does not rest on an explicit injunction in the bible. Lent does, of course, have a scriptural parallel in Christ’s fasting in the wilderness, but there was no unequivocal demand in the gospels or elsewhere for a forty-day fast preceding Easter. Attitudes to eating meat are also not clear-cut. On the one hand, eating meat could be seen as a consequence of the Fall and was only permitted by God after the Flood (compare Genesis 1.29–30 with 9.2–3). On the other hand, passages such as Acts 10.13–16 and 1 Timothy 4.4 could be read as freeing Christians from all dietary prohibitions.³⁰ In other words, the British bishop, in asking whether Máedóc could find scriptural justification for his complaint, put his finger on a weak spot. He, on the other hand, could cite unequivocal scriptural authority for his own behaviour. This rested on two key passages. Firstly, Genesis 3.17–19:

Adae vero dixit: Quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae, et comedisti de ligno, ex quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes, maledicta terra in opere tuo: in laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitae tuae.

Spinas et tribulos germinabit tibi, et comedes herbam terrae.

In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es: quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris.

‘And to Adam he said: “Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. [18] Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. [19] In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.”’

And secondly, II Thessalonians 3.10:

Nam et cum essemus apud vos, hoc denuntiabamus vobis: quoniam si quis non vult operari, nec manducet.

‘For also when we were with you, this we declared to you: that, if any man will not work, neither let him eat.’

³⁰On this, see further Frayne, ‘On imitating the regimen’, 190–1, 193–4.

It is striking that this second passage is cited almost at the beginning of Rhygyfarch's account of the rule of St David, in the simplified form *Qui enim non laborat, ait apostolus, non manducet*. There, it is followed by a graphic account of the exertions of David's monks, who did all the agricultural work themselves without the help of servants or draught animals.³¹ It is tempting to think that the author of the Irish anecdote had access to a form of Rhygyfarch's text, or an older document that may lie behind Rhygyfarch's account of David's monastic rule.³² He certainly shows David's own clerics turning this traditional scriptural justification for monastic labour to a very different purpose. Offered more or less exactly the same three ingredients of penitential fare that David's monks were required to live on (as cited above p. 173),³³ the British bishops outrageously demand rich meats instead, and proceed to justify their breach of Lenten discipline by reference to these same passages in the bible. Their argument: pasturing animals is easy work, therefore it is fine for them as newcomers to Ireland to eat meat for which they have not laboured, whereas producing and processing the grain needed to make bread is a task that essentially never ends: since they, having only just arrived in Ireland, have not yet laboured for their food, they cannot touch Irish bread.

3. The topographical story

The last part of the text provides an origin story for a field north of Ferns that used to be wooded but was converted to arable – an assart, for which the Irish term is *ceppach* (*DIL* s.v.). It does not seem possible to identify this place now, and I have found no trace of the word in local place-names.³⁴ The extent of the church enclosure of Ferns is still not known for certain, despite recent research,³⁵ but the *ceppach* should have lain beyond it, probably in one of the townlands of Ferns Demesne, Ferns Upper, Coolpuck or Rosemaryhill.

Another anecdote in which an ecclesiastic from Britain is made responsible for an assart belonging to an Irish church occurs in the commentary to *Féilire Óengusso*, 11 March. Here St Constantine is described as *rí Bretan* and *rig Alban* who came to Rahan, co. Offaly as a penitent. He dug the monastic ditch of Rahan and *ro lesaig cepaigh Cusantín fri Raithin andes* 'and bettered *Cepach Cusantín* "Constantine's Plot," to the south of Rathen'.³⁶ By 'bettered' is presumably meant that he improved the land by clearing it of trees. The incident

³¹ Sharpe and Davies, 'Rhygyfarch's *Life* of St David', 126–7, §§21–2.

³² It has been suggested that Rhygyfarch was citing a much older document, perhaps dating back to David's time. See David N. Dumville, *St David of Wales*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures, 1 (Cambridge, 2001), 12, building on a theory of John Morris.

³³ The word *olera* covers green vegetables in general but so does *Ir lus*, even though the commonest reference seems to be to leeks. See Kelly, *Early Irish Farming*, 255.

³⁴ Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, revised by Ó Corráin, no. 8858, gives this name under *Cepach Ferna Móire*, but the only evidence cited is this passage.

³⁵ Barry Lacey et al., 'Chasing St Aidan's monastery at Ferns', in Stephen Mandal, Michael Potterton and Denis Shane (eds), *Discovering Medieval Ferns, County Wexford* (Dublin, 2023), 199–220; see illustration 8.6. on p. 214.

³⁶ Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, 92 (text), 93 (translation).

occurs also at the beginning of the undated tale *Indarba Mochuda a rRaithin*, whose earliest copy is in the mainly fifteenth-century Book of Fermoy.³⁷

4. The date of the anecdote

No firm date can be extracted from the historical background of relations between Ferns and south-west Wales. Such relations are attested in the work of Rhygyfarch in the late eleventh century, and Rhygyfarch's own father Sulien is known to have spent ten years studying in Ireland earlier in that century.³⁸ If the *Morgenau* story is at all relevant, then the narrative might have been created after his death in 999. None of this is more than speculative, however. BL is a late Ml manuscript and there are Ml features in the text, such as negative particle *nocho* (l. 23) and 3 pl. pronoun *siat* (l. 25), and loss of neuter gender in *in lín* (l. 21), and the use of the sg. verb *do-breth* with pl. subject (l. 8). On the other hand, a few features look relatively early: the neuter article in *a n-arbor* (l. 13), *a llin* (ll. 21, 22, contrasting with *in lín* 21), *a sōethar* (l. 22), retention of the m. nom. pl. article in *ind ailithir* (l. 7), use of the verbal prefix *ceta-* (l. 26) and use of the demonstrative *sund* after a preposition in *de sund* (l. 11).³⁹ These features might push the story backwards from the time of BL and Gerald of Wales towards the eleventh-century period noted above as a possibility, but the argument is not conclusive.

CONCLUSION

Coīca epscop takes its place alongside other anecdotes about saints and clerics in the Book of Leinster that make serious moral points through the use of irony and humour. Behaviour that is apparently (and indeed actually) outrageous by the standards of the time is shown to conform to the demands of Scripture. The point is not, of course, to justify the behaviour itself, but to illustrate the moral teaching through a memorably far-fetched example. The anecdote shows knowledge of traditions of St Máedóc and may have been composed at Ferns. The author also drew on knowledge of the traditions of St David. *Coīca epscop* is further evidence, beyond the links attested in the hagiography of the two saints, that these two institutions carried on a relationship in the pre-Norman centuries.

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³⁷ Charles Plummer (ed. and trans.), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn: Lives of Irish Saints*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1922), i, 300, §2; ii, 291, §2; for discussion, see his vol. i, xxxviii–xxxix, and Constant J. Mews, 'The flight of Carthach (Mochuda) from Rahan to Lismore: lineage and identity in early medieval Ireland', *Early Medieval Europe* 21/1 (2013), 1–26.

³⁸ Michael Lapidge, 'The Welsh-Latin poetry of Sulien's family', *SC* 8–9 (1973–4), 68–106, at 86–7, 103 n. 118; Sarah Elizabeth Zeiser, 'Latinity, manuscripts, and the rhetoric of conquest in late-eleventh-century Wales', unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2012, 34–49.

³⁹ The prefix *ceta-* becomes 'rare in Middle Irish', see Liam Breatnach in *SnaG* 263 (III.9.2). Likewise the use of *sund*: Breatnach, 'Demonstrative pronouns', 129: 'became rare in Middle Irish'.