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NEW APPROACHES  
TO CELTIC RELIGION  
AND MYTHOLOGY

# UNDERSTANDING CELTIC RELIGION REVISITING THE PAGAN PAST

EDITED BY

KATJA RITARI AND ALEXANDRA BERGHOLM



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# 2

## CELTIC SPELLS AND COUNTERSPELLS

*Jacqueline Borsje*

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The study of Celtic religion is a difficult, almost taboo, subject area that we should explore further, using the knowledge that we have gained in the past decades.<sup>2</sup> Within Celtic Studies, the term ‘Celtic religion’ is a historical concept that refers to all religious phenomena connected with the cultural groups now identified as ‘Celts’ who spoke a Celtic language. Outside this discipline, however, the term is also used to refer to religious phenomena associated with adherents of modern Celtic Christianity and pagan Celtic religions.<sup>3</sup> In this contribution, the term is reserved for those forms of religion that pre-date the Christian missions and to a certain extent coexist with medieval Christian religion. The focus is on Irish forms of Celtic religion.

There are three types of sources that give access to ‘Celtic religion’: first, archaeological finds; second, Classical (i.e. Ancient Greek and Latin) witnesses; and third, texts in Celtic languages, of which Irish texts are most numerous. None of these sources is unambiguous; because what we find in the earth is silent, we must speculate a lot. The Greek and Roman authors represent the voice of outsiders whose view of the Celts is often far from neutral. The Celtic texts were written thanks to Christianity, which introduced manuscript literacy; therefore, they do not reflect a pristine Celtic religious view.

This book is the result of a round-table conference on ‘Celtic religion’ at the University of Helsinki organised by the Finnish scholars Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm, who asked various Celticists to describe their methodologies when they attempt to study Celtic religion. My field of study is religious phenomena in medieval Irish texts. The methodologies and analytical tools that I apply in this field of study have been to a great extent formed during my training as a theologian, and especially through the discipline of exegesis (the interpretation of biblical texts).

When I was trained in exegesis at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the main lesson was to approach the text as if for the first time, with an open eye and mind. This was very difficult, because many of the tales were so extremely familiar. I heard them at the end of each meal at home, every morning at primary school, and in various forms during church services. Moreover, these tales appeared to me in the whole culture around me through art, literature and other cultural manifestations, and yet my teachers in exegesis handed me the tools for a fresh reading of biblical texts.<sup>4</sup>

Irish texts were initially very unfamiliar to me; the methods of biblical exegesis I had previously learnt turned out to be very helpful in analysing them as well. They can be briefly summarised as follows. After a first reading, the questions that come up in one's mind need to be written down. One should copy the text and make a 'work translation'. This is a very literal translation, in which the several meanings of a word should be listed, divided by strokes, so that the whole semantic field is before one's eyes, which may open up new roads of interpretation. The structure of the text needs to be analysed on various levels, such as grammatical, lexical and motif. The reading of the commentaries, or secondary literature, must wait to the end of the analysis, in order not to be influenced too early in the interpretative process. Awareness of the well-known hermeneutical circles was also part of this process. What could the text have meant for the original audience; what has happened during the reception history of the text; and what does it mean to us? Who are we? In which ways are we different from the original and later audiences and how does this influence our reading of the text?

Two modifications were added to this basic training. Firstly, my main field was not Christian theology but the academic study of religion. I was interested in religion in general. The dominant culture at this Protestant department was one in which Christian beliefs were combined with left-wing political ideas. This meant that I trained myself in a continuous alertness to theological biases and I analysed everything offered from this critical perspective.

Secondly, I remember my days as a student as very exciting. One of the reasons for this was that I witnessed the birth of Feminist Theology, nowadays called Gender Studies Theology. Here, I learned about the hermeneutics of suspicion. What is not said? What is absent? What is hidden?<sup>5</sup> Women were either virtually absent in the texts that we studied, or the image of women was a constructed one, which needed to be analysed. This research perspective further sharpened my analytical tools.

The search into the shadows, the unorthodox and the hidden layers of texts has always fascinated me. When I wrote a thesis on ‘The Song of Deborah’ (Judges 5), I dived into Ugaritic mythology.<sup>6</sup> The goddesses Anat and Astarte appeared to stand in the shadows of the heroines Deborah and Jael. For the New Testament, I discussed the multiform religious background of Revelation 12 on the vision of the dragon and the woman.<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, no wonder that when I discovered Celtic Studies my interest was in the Christianisation process. The methodology followed in my study of monsters focused on the one hand on the use of external sources or their absence, and on the other hand on the analysis of the concept of evil in the texts studied.<sup>8</sup> My second project in Celtic Studies was a quest for fate in early Irish texts. Fate is hardly ever explicitly mentioned but nevertheless omnipresent.<sup>9</sup> The present contribution is part of my third project within Celtic Studies: the power of words in medieval Ireland.<sup>10</sup> This is another study into the margins and shadows of medieval Irish texts, and relevant to Celtic and Irish religion.<sup>11</sup>

The present contribution consists of three parts, and each has a guiding saint. The first part deals with missionaries in the Celtic lands, with Saint Patrick as our guide. The second part describes protective texts, and here Saint Columba comes into the picture. The last part of this contribution discusses two case studies of love magic: first, Saint Brigit’s charm for love and second, a spell for impotence.

### Celtic conversion

What happened when Christian missionaries went to the Celtic lands? What did they see? What did they hear? How did they interpret the numerous details that they witnessed of indigenous beliefs? What role did their own frame of reference play? How did the Celtic peoples experience this advent of foreigners who brought this impressive means of communication – writing – with them? What happened as a result of language differences, and what happened in the translation and adaptation processes?<sup>12</sup>

We are fortunate to have an eyewitness account in the documents of Saint Patrick, the most famous missionary who went to Ireland. For our present subject, it is unfortunate that he was not a scholar of religion. His interest was not Celtic religion but his message for the people. He went to Ireland to bring his good news – the gospel. We have to work with this perspective in the documents he left behind: his *Confessio*, ‘Declaration’, his letter to Coroticus and a few sayings.<sup>13</sup> The language he uses is not only different

from the language of the Irish, but he also clothes his narrative in biblical phraseology. If we want to arrive at a description of pre-Christian religion, we have to decode a lot. There are a few passages in Patrick's *Confessio* that are eligible for such decoding.<sup>14</sup> I have chosen one of these, which takes place just before Patrick's flight from Ireland. As is well known, Patrick went twice to Ireland. He was taken there from Britain as a slave; he escaped but was drawn back to Ireland by his vocation. We start our investigation at the point where he describes his existence as a slave in Ireland.

The sixteen-year-old adolescent toiled in the mud and pastured the flocks of his master in snow, frost and rain. These circumstances did not depress him, however. Patrick sees his forced exile from Britain as a punishment for his sins (*Confessio* §§1-3). He decides to make the best of this 'divine punishment', and spends his time increasingly in prayer. Before dawn he rises to pray, and at a certain stage he says a hundred prayers during the daytime, and almost as many at night. He notes that these prayers strengthen his faith and his love and fear of God (*amor et timor Dei*); they make him strong and diligent (§16).

Patrick seems to imply by this description of his devotion that it leads to his first miracle as recorded in his *Confessio*: he receives revelations. After six years, he hears a voice advising him to fast, and he is told to flee, for his ship is ready (§17). In the opening paragraphs of his *Confessio* (§5), Patrick quotes Psalm 49:15, which is presented as a promise from God:

Invoke Me in the day of your distress,  
and I shall deliver you and you will glorify Me.<sup>15</sup>

In Patrick's view, this promise is fulfilled in his life. God delivers him from distress after his many prayers.

When Patrick arrives at the ship, however, the captain refuses him as a passenger. Patrick then turns away (*separavi me ab illis*, 'I separated myself from them')<sup>16</sup> and prays while he is walking. Then a miracle happens. He is called back (§18) and the sailors suddenly offer him their trust and friendship. Patrick then mentions a ritual that seems to be part of the old religion because he condemns it on religious grounds:

'Veni, quia ex fide recipimus te; fac nobiscum amicitiam quo modo volueris' – et in illa die itaque reppuli sugere mammellas eorum propter timorem Dei, sed verumtamen ab illis speravi venire in fidem Iesu Christi, quia gentes erant – et ob hoc obtinui cum illis, et protinus navigavimus.<sup>17</sup>

‘Come, because we are receiving you on faith, make friendship [i.e. an alliance] with us in whatever way you will have wished’, and on that day, to be sure, I refused to suck their nipples on account of the fear of God (*timor Dei*), but nevertheless I hoped to come by them to the faith of Jesus Christ, as they were gentiles, and because of this I got my way with them, and we shipped at once.<sup>18</sup>

Before we have a closer look at this ritual, we need to pay attention to a thought-provoking article by Morten Lund Warmind. In the context of research into Celtic religion, he downplays the importance of the study of mythology and mythological literature as ‘only one aspect of religious life – and even an individual and very fleeting one at that’. In contrast with this, he argues, ‘the study of religious organisation and its tangible expression in rituals is more promising, since precisely this side of religious life is not a matter of individual speculation, but requires patterned behavior universally agreed upon’.<sup>19</sup> Warmind wants to weigh the Irish textual evidence against continental Classical and archaeological source material about Celtic religion, in which the latter is weightier because it is not mythological.<sup>20</sup> There are a few methodological problems with these statements.<sup>21</sup> Within the context of this contribution, I hope to show how important the connection is between ritual descriptions and literary or mythological texts.<sup>22</sup>

The ritual, condemned by Patrick, will now be studied from various perspectives: textual criticism, motif analysis, biology, cultural anthropology, the history of religions, reception history and source study.

Patrick’s refusal to partake in the ritual is interesting, because it shows that this procedure has a religious significance, thought to be incompatible with Christian belief. James Carney suggests the emendation *separavi* (‘I separated’) for *speravi* (‘I hoped’), which may be an echo of Patrick’s earlier above-quoted words: *separavi me ab illis*.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Carney adduces the text of non-Irish manuscripts here: *Speravi* [read: *separavi*] *ab illis ut mihi dicerent ‘Veni in fide Iesu Christi’ quia gentes erant*, ‘I separated from them (i.e. in the first place) so that they might say “Come in the faith of Jesus Christ,” for they were pagans.’<sup>24</sup> This would refer to their allowing Patrick to follow a Christian ritual instead of their own. Carney interprets the captain’s initial refusal to allow Patrick to embark in terms of a disagreement about this ritual. He suggests that the captain ‘agreed to take him if he performed the pagan rite of breast-sucking in token of loyalty.’<sup>25</sup>

How can we make sense of this ritual? We need to resort to early Irish literature or mythology first, before we cast our net wider into other

disciplines. The religious significance of the ritual seems to be connected with the belief in *fír*, 'truth' or 'justice', an ethical cosmic concept in medieval Irish literature. I base this connection upon the fact that this ritual is called *fír fer*, 'the truth/justice/pledge of men', in the Old Irish tale 'The adventure of Fergus mac Leite'.<sup>26</sup> People should live in accordance with *fír*, 'truth' or 'justice'. If one transgresses this ethical demand in public behaviour or solemn utterances, this is said to have cosmic resonances, according to Irish medieval texts. The elements are said to respond to this behaviour as sanctions pertaining to these transgressions. Thus, *fír* is an ethical law related to the cosmic order.<sup>27</sup> Even though truth and justice are also central ethical demands in the Christian religion and related to Christian cosmology, the ritual is unacceptable to Patrick. Why would this be the case?

The ritual is designated in the *Confessio* as the making of *amicitia*, '[a league of] friendship, an alliance', and consists of *sugere mammellas*, 'sucking breasts or nipples'. The central element in the most common instance of sucking breasts – a mother feeding her child – is mutuality. The mother wants to nurture her child and physically needs to get rid of her milk; the child needs the milk in order to live and grow. The mother is of course the more powerful party in this bilateral exchange. It seems that by means of this ritual a contract is made between two parties, one of whom – the one whose breast is sucked – is acknowledged to be the more powerful. It appears that Patrick refuses to take on the role of the less powerful party.<sup>28</sup>

We turn now from biology to anthropology and the history of religions. Bernhard Maier studied the ritual of symbolic suckling in an international context.<sup>29</sup> In Muslim law, suckling produces a foster-kinship, which grants the persons involved the same mutual rights and duties as a relationship based on birth-kinship.<sup>30</sup> The person who lets her breasts be sucked is here a female. In Maier's examples from the ancient Near East, suckling is a symbol for divine protection, for instance with Horus as the god who offers his breast and protection.<sup>31</sup> In an African context, the sucking of (male) breasts forms the conclusion of an inter-tribal treaty of friendship or a pact of non-aggression among Berbers. There is an Ethiopian ritual of taking the breasts of someone who is to become one's protector into one's mouth and in this way becoming the protector's fosterling.<sup>32</sup> Maier concludes with the hypothesis that

the custom of make-believe suckling as a symbol of granting protection was in origin a rite of both social and religious significance which had developed among the early cattle-breeders of the ancient Near

East, then spread westward in the course of the Neolithic revolution, and subsequently endured on the Celtic fringe of Western Europe down to the early Middle Ages.<sup>33</sup>

From this theory on the origin and spread of the ritual, we move to its reception history in Irish Christianity. Dorothy Bray has shown how the motif of sucking the breasts of holy men (including Christ) and women was used in Irish hagiography.<sup>34</sup> Here not adults but children are sucking, and they are either future saints or foster-children of holy men.<sup>35</sup> The religious significance of the motif has been changed or adapted under the influence of New Testament symbolism: giving milk symbolises giving spiritual food, i.e. Christian wisdom and teachings.

Does Patrick describe a ritual from pre-Christian Celtic religion? On the one hand, there is the widely spread ritual custom connected with protection and adoption, as shown by Maier, with a similar significance to the ritual rejected by Patrick. On the other hand, there is some biblical evidence that we need to consider in this discussion of the methodologies for studying Celtic religion. Ludwig Bieler has pointed out that Patrick borrowed the expression *sugere mammellas* from the Old Latin version of Hosea 14:1 (a prophecy that mothers and babies would be slaughtered as a divine punishment for the sins of Samaria) and Bieler compared this with Luke 11:27 (a blessing of the breasts that gave suck to Jesus).<sup>36</sup> These are literal references to breastfeeding women, but the Latin Bible also mentions male breast feeders in a metaphor.<sup>37</sup> In the Book of Isaiah, in a paradisiacal vision of the future, Israel is addressed as follows: *Et suges lac gentium et mamilla regum lactaberis*, 'And you will suck the milk of the nations/Gentiles and you will be suckled at the breast of kings' (Is. 60:16).<sup>38</sup> The nations/Gentiles and kings that are often a symbol of destruction and persecution now symbolise food and nurturing. We know that Patrick dressed his narrative in biblical language, so Isaiah 60 with its male imagery may have been on his mind as well.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars use the ritual described in 'The adventure of Fergus mac Leite' as explanation for Patrick's words. Please note that it is a king whose breast is sucked in this tale. If we did not have Patrick's autobiographical work from the fifth century, how would we look at this literary motif of a breast-sucking ritual from the eighth century? Would we adduce the verse from Isaiah, despite its different context and meaning, and argue for creative use of sources by the author of the tale? Saint Patrick's reference and Bernhard Maier's extensive study are arguments for seeing this ritual in a broader cultural context. It is highly likely that

it was a part of Celtic religion. This example also shows how deep the waters are in which we are swimming.<sup>40</sup>

The Bible is the model according to which Patrick structures the description of events in his life in his *Confessio*. Moreover, phrases from the Bible are literally used to convey what he wants to express.<sup>41</sup> This obviously is the model that we need to keep in mind in our search for traces of Celtic religion; the rich body of medieval Irish texts that has gone through the eyes, minds and hands of Christian scribes.

This, however, is also our starting point; deducing from the way certain things are described, we are given the impression that there was a certain overlap between the lore of Christians and the cultural heritage of the Irish. The phrase from the book of Hosea and the metaphor from the book of Isaiah may only be literary ‘vessels’ in Patrick’s reference to a Celtic ritual. The idea of truth or justice in early Irish literature is a pervading motif, and intuitively I would say that this was part of the native ethics and worldview. We know, however, that truth and justice are also central values in Christianity. Many elements in early Irish texts may have been taken over from the external literate culture, and yet some may have already been part of the indigenous culture. The missionaries did not arrive in a vacuum when they landed in Ireland. They had to use what they found there – the language, the images, the ideas, the knowledge and the customs – in order to be understood by the inhabitants.

In fact, when Irish authors used sources such as the Bible, the Apocrypha and classical literature, there may be an advantage for us. For instance, when we read of confrontations between saints and druids in Irish hagiography, and such textual sources have been used, we can make a comparison and find what does not stem from those sources. Could the extra material be native Irish? Or is it a Christian construction of pre-Christian religion? Each text will have to be carefully investigated. Source study needs to be performed meticulously in combination with other disciplines, such as the ones mentioned above.

### Celtic opposition

Patrick lived in Ireland, first in forced exile from Britain and then in voluntary exile. He will have encountered opposition to his message, and he will have had to face antagonism. His hagiographers have symbolized this opposition in their description of his encounters with the king and his druids.<sup>42</sup> Many scholars have analysed these descriptions; I mention the work of Joseph Nagy and Thomas O’Loughlin as examples.<sup>43</sup>

Another saint who also lived in exile and who faced opposition from pre-Christian religious functionaries, according to his hagiographer Adomnán (c. 628–704), is Saint Colum Cille or (in Latin) Columba (between 519 and 522–597).<sup>44</sup> Columba left Ireland and built a monasterial community on the island of Iona. All his encounters with ‘magicians’ (in Latin *magi*, and once – II.17 – *maleficus*) are in fact power contests. The magicians want to prevent their people from hearing the liturgy of the Christians (I.37). They rejoice when they see the saint approaching a dangerous well, a source of disease for those who touch or drink the water (II.11). They taunt and reproach Pictish parents, converted by Columba (with the aid of an interpreter), when their son becomes ill and dies (II.32). The foster-father of the Pictish king is a magician (probably a druid), and Columba threatens him with death if he does not release an Irish slave. When the magician almost chokes on glass, he has to let the girl go (II.33). On another occasion, this magician commands the weather in order to show his power and prevent Columba from travelling. This amuses the other druids, but in the end God’s omnipotence is said to prevail (II.34). A *maleficus*, or ‘evildoer’, shows his power by milking a bull, which almost kills the animal (II.17).

In all these encounters, Columba manifests his verbal power, which is attributed to God. He sings Psalm 44 in a miraculously loud way, so that everybody hears him despite the wishes of the magicians (I.37). He blesses the dangerous well by raising his hand and invoking Christ, which makes the water curative (II.11). He cries, prays, and invokes Christ’s name, so that the son of the above-mentioned converted Picts is resurrected from death (II.32). He blesses a white stone, which becomes a cure for the choking magician and for many others (II.33). He invokes Christ and is then able to sail against the wind; eventually, the wind changes its direction (II.34). He blesses the bull’s milk, which shows its true nature by appearing as blood. He blesses water with which the bull is sprinkled and healed (II.17).

The verbal power of the non-Christian religious functionaries is absent in all these examples. Neither is there reference to their spells nor are these powerful words quoted in direct speech. Adomnán believes that the power of the druids stems from demons or the devil, but he indicates neither how the druids draw upon this power nor what kind of words they utter during such rituals. It is as if he wants to keep the indigenous supernatural arts at as low a profile as possible.

If we compare this with the descriptions of Patrick’s encounters with the druids in the seventh-century *Life of Patrick* by Muirchú moccu Machthéni, we see that they satirise him, utter incantations and invoke

their gods, who are said to be demons.<sup>45</sup> No direct quote of the druidic words of power is given; the only possible exception is the satirical *Ascicaput*-poem, purportedly translated into Latin by Muirchú.<sup>46</sup> The whole point of these stories is the superiority of the saints as evidence for the value of the religion that they represent.

The saints use various forms of verbal power; Patrick invokes the 'Lord', curses, quotes a psalm, blesses and prays; Columba sings a psalm, invokes Christ, prays and blesses. The silence in the sources on the part played by the druids and the so-called evildoer does not reflect the reality of the pre- or non-Christian voices. When we look at the Irish terms for supernatural verbal power, we are stunned by their variety.<sup>47</sup> Many of these words are translated simply as 'magic, incantation, charm, spell', but this variety of terms seems to reflect a variety of meanings. The definitions of what they stood for have been lost.<sup>48</sup> This process perhaps started in the period when Christian literacy was introduced in Ireland, for many of the people who could write will have rejected these forms of verbal power in fear or anger. It may have been all the same to them: magic or magical arts (*magia; ars magica*).

The missionaries heard Celtic languages when they travelled through the Celtic lands. Some inhabitants will have been interested in their message; others may have seen the missionaries as a threat. They may have uttered their words of power against these newcomers. The missionaries may have replied to this with their Latin psalms, which in their turn are translations from the original Hebrew texts, or from their Greek translation in the Septuagint. If the hagiographies of Patrick and Columba reflect reality to some extent, then missionaries also uttered invocations, prayers, curses and blessings.

It may be important to emphasise in our secularised context that such battles with words must have had a very serious character. When indigenous holy people drew upon the power of their gods with words, the missionaries will have seen this as drawing upon demonic power. Demons were very much feared by many Christians in the early Middle Ages. Adomnán tells us of the difficult time that Columba has when he is attacked by demons during prayer in a wild, remote area (III.8). He uses the armour (*armatura*) of the apostle Paul, we are told, but needs the help of angels in order to overcome them. This armour is in fact the armour of God, mentioned in the Letter to the Ephesians 6:11–18 (the emphasis is mine):

Induite vos **arma** Dei ut possitis stare adversus insidias diaboli quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem sed adversus

principes et potestates adversus mundi rectores tenebrarum harum contra spiritalia nequitiæ in caelestibus propterea accipite **armaturam** Dei ut possitis resistere in die malo et omnibus perfectis stare. State ergo succincti lumbos vestros in veritate et induti **loricam** iustitiæ et calciati pedes in praeparatione evangelii pacis in omnibus sumentes **scutum** fidei in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea extinguere et **galeam** salutis adsumite et **gladium** Spiritus quod est verbum Dei per omnem orationem et obsecrationem orantes omni tempore in Spiritu et in ipso vigilantes in omni instantia et obsecratione pro omnibus sanctis.

Put you on the **armour** of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the **armour** of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the **breastplate** of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: in all things taking the **shield** of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the **helmet** of salvation, and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the word of God. By all prayer and supplication praying at all times in the Spirit; and in the same watching with all instance and supplication for all the saints.

The First Letter to the Thessalonians (5:8) likewise mentions spiritual armour: *Nos autem qui diei sumus sobrii simus induti **loricam** fidei et caritatis et **galeam** spem salutis*, ‘But let us, who are of the day, be sober, having on the **breastplate** of faith and love, and for a **helmet** the hope of salvation’. These metaphors have their roots in the Hebrew Bible or so-called Old Testament.

What is important to us is that a Celtic form of verbal power has come into existence, which was used as protection. The genre is indicated by a term borrowed from these biblical passages: the *lorica*, or ‘breastplate’.<sup>49</sup> Celticists have seen this type of text as a hybrid between pre-Christian Celtic and Christian culture.<sup>50</sup> Michael Herren argued that the origin of the *lorica* lies in Roman Britain. The basis for his theory is a suggestion by Wallace Martin Lindsay:

Is it possible that they [sc. *loricae*] were adopted by the early missionaries as a guard against the spells which the heathen sorcerers directed against them? Such spells often took the form of leaden execration-tablets with malignant specification of the various parts of the body.<sup>51</sup>

According to Herren, the *lorica* may have had two sub-literary models.<sup>52</sup> Firstly, he refers to curse tablets, of which specimens were found in Roman Britain. Curse tablets are texts, inscribed on lead, which were sometimes buried with an image of the person to be cursed. The structure of these texts has a pattern similar to the structure of the *lorica*:

1. invocation of the aid of a supernatural entity to curse/protect someone
2. a detailed list of parts of the body to be affected/protected, sometimes together with a list of evils
3. a pact between the performer and the supernatural entity whose power is sought.<sup>53</sup>

Herren furthermore mentions the use of nails, inserted in the curse tablets, and ‘the practice of stabbing an image of a person with a needle or sharp object in order to inflict real pain in the area affected’.<sup>54</sup> This metaphorical stabbing ritual was performed without the intended victim being aware of it.

Connecting these details with the narrative about Saint Columba’s fight with demons, I observe that the demons were said to fight with iron spikes. Columba explains later to the ignorant monks that he protected them from the demonic attack which would have caused pestilential diseases. Thus, we see a spiritual attack by supernatural entities striking with sharp implements aimed at ignorant victims, who were to receive physical wounds, i.e. a plague. The defence against this attack is with words, a spiritual attitude and supernatural help: Columba prays, metaphorically wearing God’s armour, and another monastery purportedly defends itself against their attack with fasting and prayer (III.8). Comparing this narrative with the curse ritual, we note that human performers of the supernatural attack are absent in the former, but otherwise a similar pattern of thinking appears to exist.

The second subliterate model that Herren adduces is represented by amulets inscribed with protective texts. He describes a relevant specimen, probably stemming from a Jewish community in Roman Egypt, which was found in Roman Britain. Amulets were carried, and hence could be easily

distributed across various countries. The model that they present has a double nature: as a text to be recited and as an object to be worn. Herren points out that the *lorica* is not a Celtic invention but a Celtic innovation, for he sees the roots of the genre in Graeco-Roman and Jewish diaspora religion. This new type of text may thus have been based on curse tablets and amulets, but was embellished with biblical phrases and items from glossaries. The link between these amulets and the *loricae* may have been Christian exorcism formulae.<sup>55</sup>

The following methodological issue is important for us. Herren bases his line of argument on the contents of extant texts, on the one hand on Celtic *loricae* and on the other on non-Celtic words of power that bear a structural similarity to these Celtic texts. From these forms of verbal power he gleans information of what might have been there in oral Celtic culture. Since the publication of his excellent book, we have learned that the custom of uttering dangerous words in combination with the piercing of an image of a person with a thorn (or a pin, nail, spike or pointed implement: *delg*) was also known in Ireland. We find this described in the Middle Irish glosses in the Old Irish *Uraicecht na Ríar*, 'Primer of the Stipulations', a law text on the poetic grades from the second half of the eighth century.<sup>56</sup> The dangerous words are identified as satire (*áer*), further specified as *congáin comail*, 'magical wounding', and *corrquinecht*, 'sorcery', in the Old Irish text, and explained as *túaithe*, 'a charm', and *glám dícenn*, which is a lethal type of satire, in the Middle Irish glosses.<sup>57</sup> Medieval Irish satire overlaps not only with magical texts but also with curses.<sup>58</sup> Thus, there is Irish evidence of a ritual involving stabbing a figurine combined with verbal power that may be compared with curse tablets and their ritual context.

Following in Herren's footsteps, I hope to show how pre-Christian culture may shimmer through our extant texts in at least three ways: by reflecting customs and beliefs rejected by Christian authors; by referring to pre-existent spells through loosening them or exorcising their influence; and by being hidden in a deep layer of a text.

The first part of this contribution gave an example of the rejection of a certain ritual in Patrick's *Confessio*. The rejection of certain beliefs will now be shown from a poem, of which two recensions are extant; therefore, we can follow its textual development. The poem discusses dangers on a journey. The author expresses the belief that everything is in God's hand; when one's time has come, one will die. The first recension is extant in two manuscripts and dated to c. '900 or perhaps a little later'.<sup>59</sup> The first and last stanzas of Recension I are as follows:

1. M'aenarān dam isa sliab  
 – a rī grian rob soraid sét – ;  
 nīm nesu éc ina mend  
 andās no bend tríchait c[h]ét.<sup>60</sup>

I go alone toward the mountain,  
 O King of suns let the way be smooth;  
 Death is no nearer to me in its pitfalls,<sup>61</sup>  
 Than were I thirty hundred strong.<sup>62</sup>

11. For faesam dē usail āin,  
 Athair naī ngrādh spirad naemh,  
 Nīm reilci i n-uathaibh bāis bāin,  
 Nō a ngrāin, gia nom tegma am aen.

M.aenurān.<sup>63</sup>

I place myself under the protection of God, noble and glorious,  
 Father of nine ranks of holy spirits;  
 May He not let me into the terrors of white death,  
 Or into horror, though I be alone.<sup>64</sup>

The later and longer Recension II is also extant in two manuscripts and attributes the poem to Saint Columba or Colum Cille.<sup>65</sup> The version in the Yellow Book of Lecan adds that the saint sang this text when he travelled alone and, moreover, promises protection for the person who sings it going on a journey (*sét*, literally 'a path').<sup>66</sup> In other words: the poem has become a *lorica* or protective text. The Early Modern Irish *Life of Colum Cille* by Manus O'Donnell supplied a narrative context; when the saint travelled through Sliab Breg on his own,<sup>67</sup> he was under the protection (*coiméd*) of God, who made him invisible. Singing his song, he travelled safely, while the king and his men waited in ambush in vain.

Some stanzas of this textual tradition merit close reading. Stanza 6 in Recension I reads:

6. Nīm dherbann do theacht for feacht  
 Cia s[h]rēidid nech a n-aireacht;  
 Fód for ro delbad mo leacht  
 Isam ēcean a thaireacht.<sup>68</sup>

It does not hinder me from going on a journey,  
 Though someone sneezes in an assembly;

The sod whereon my tombstone has been shaped,<sup>69</sup>  
I must needs approach it.<sup>70</sup>

A sneeze in public was apparently an evil omen for undertaking a journey.<sup>71</sup> Sneezing is also mentioned in stanza 13/14 in Recension II. The YBL version of Recension II reads:

14. Nocha n-ag sreód ata ar cuid,  
Nocha n-ag éoin da barr slat,  
Ní ag curnán do chrand chas  
Ní ag sordán, glac i n-glaic.  
Fear in té re tabraim taeb,  
In t-Athair 's-in t-Aen 's in Mac.<sup>72</sup>

It is not with a sneeze<sup>73</sup> our destiny is,  
Nor with the bird on the top of the twig,  
Nor with the trunk of a knotty tree,  
Nor with a humming<sup>74</sup> hand in hand;  
Better is He in whom we trust,  
The Father, the One, and the Son.<sup>75</sup>

The extra two lines in this poem, otherwise in quatrains, are absent in the Laud 10 version:

13. Nī hag sreoidh atá mo chuid,  
nī ag énaibh do bharr shlat:  
ferr in triúr ris'tabhruim taobh,  
Athair, Spirat naom is Mac.<sup>76</sup>

It is not with a sneeze that my destiny (lit. share) is,  
Nor with the birds on the top of twigs (tree branches),  
Better is the trio (i.e. Trinity) in whom we trust,  
Father, Holy Spirit and Son.

The authors seem to reject various types of divination and exhort the audience to trust divine guidance. Recension II lists more descriptions of this rejected belief in portents in another stanza, which has no parallel in Recension I. We read in the YBL version:

16. Ní adraim do gothaibh én,  
Na sreód na sén for bith-che,

Na mac na mana na mnai,  
Is e mo drai Crist mac De.<sup>77</sup>

I adore not the voice of birds,  
Nor a sneeze,<sup>78</sup> nor a portent<sup>79</sup> on the earthly world,  
Nor a son, nor an omen,<sup>80</sup> nor a woman,  
My Druid is Christ, the Son of God.<sup>81</sup>

The son and woman are somewhat enigmatic;<sup>82</sup> Laud 10 has again a different reading:

14. Nā hadhair do ghothaibh gerg,  
Ná sreōdh nā sén ar bith cé,  
Nā creid mana bīs ag mnái,  
Is é is rí[g]fhāidh Críst mac Dé.<sup>83</sup>

Do not adore/adhere to the voices of heath-birds/grouse,  
Nor a sneeze nor a portent in this world,  
Do not believe an omen that is with a woman/that a woman has,  
Christ the Son of God is [the] pre-eminent seer.

What we see here mentioned are instances of rejected belief. Is this pre-Christian belief? The time of the first missionaries was long gone when these texts were written, and, interestingly, the later recension lists even more unorthodox beliefs than the older recension. Let us consider the possibilities.

Two concepts are relevant to our question: genre and reception history. As for genre: the older first recension is in fact a poem that puts the belief in the protective force of a *lorica* in a different perspective: God is the one who protects and who decides when one's time has come. It may even be that the author objected to belief in *loricae*. The preface to the YBL version of Recension II, however, promises protection to those who utter the text when they go on a journey. This promise gives the text a *lorica*-function.<sup>84</sup>

When we consider the reception history of the text, we observe a parallel development concerning a *lorica* associated with Saint Patrick. The scene of Columba escaping invisibly from the king in Manus O'Donnell's *Life* may very well have been modelled upon a tale in Muirchú's *Life of Patrick*.<sup>85</sup> Patrick and his men await a royal ambush, but thanks to a blessing by Patrick, they escape either invisibly or in the form of deer.<sup>86</sup> The

Middle Irish preface to the famous Old Irish ‘Deer’s Cry’ or ‘*Lorica of Saint Patrick*’ not only identifies this text as Patrick’s blessing mentioned in Muirchú’s *Life of Patrick* but also promises protection to future reciters.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, our poem in Recension II has a *historiola* in Manus O’Donnell’s *Life of Colum Cille* on a miraculous escape by the saint and becomes a *lorica* for each reciter in the YBL version, although YBL literally refers to the text as a *coimdi*, ‘protection’.<sup>88</sup> This term is a designation for protective texts, such as charms and hymns.<sup>89</sup>

Recension I of the poem expresses a world view in which the only source of protection for human beings is identified as God (or the Trinity), and this protection is closely connected with the belief that life is predestined by God. Life predestined and in the hand of God is a common theological idea. The poem is put in the first person singular in both Recension I and II. The latter recension with its *lorica*-function, however, also uses plural forms and the imperative.<sup>90</sup> These traits are uncommon for the *lorica*, which is usually written in first person singular, but suit a sermon well. Could it be that the poem had a homiletic source?

When questions concerning the future or things hidden are not addressed to God, such types of divination, frequently associated with ‘magic’, are condemned in the Bible. Paradigmatic is Deuteronomy 18:10–11:

Nec inveniatur in te . . . qui ariolos sciscitetur et observet somnia atque auguria ne sit maleficus ne incantator ne pythones consulat ne divinos et quaerat a mortuis veritatem.

Let there not be found among you . . . anyone that consults soothsayers, or observes dreams and omens, neither let there be any wizard (lit. evil-doer), nor charmer, nor anyone that consults pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers, or that seeks the truth from the dead.

The tools for divination from our poem, however, such as sneezes and bird cries, are not mentioned in the Bible,<sup>91</sup> but Greek and Roman literature from the *Odyssey* (XVII.539–47) onwards does attribute ominous significance to sneezing, although some authors ridiculed this belief.<sup>92</sup> Sneezing at the outset of an undertaking, especially a journey, is often mentioned as being seen as an omen.<sup>93</sup> We also find lists of practices and beliefs similar to those mentioned in our poem in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and other theological treatises, but they forbid them.<sup>94</sup>

Some sermons of Caesarius of Arles (c.470–542) were of great influence on theological writings dealing with forbidden beliefs and practices. Caesarius used pseudepigraphy to augment the authority of his writings, and one particular sermon relevant to us – number 54 on omens and soothsayers – was in such a way ascribed to Augustine.<sup>95</sup> A list of forbidden things in sermon 54 shares items with our Irish poem. Caesarius comments on using bird sounds as a divination instrument for journeying:

*Similiter et auguria observare nolite, nec in itinere positi aliquas aviculas cantantes adtendite, nec ex illarum cantatu diabolicas divinationes adnuntiare praesumite.*<sup>96</sup>

Likewise, do not observe omens or pay attention to singing birds when you are on the road, nor dare to announce devilish prophecies as a result of their song.<sup>97</sup>

He adds that it does not matter on which day one leaves for a journey, for all days were made by God. Sneezing at the outset of a journey, therefore, is irrelevant:

*Illas vero non solum sacrilegas sed etiam ridiculas sternutationes considerare et observare nolite: sed quotiens vobis in quacumque parte fuerit necessitas properandi, signate vos in nomine Christi, et symbolum vel orationem dominicam fideliter dicentes, securi de dei adiutorio iter agite.*<sup>98</sup>

And do not pin any faith on or pay any attention to the both impious and ridiculous [interpretation of] sneezes. As often as there is need for you to hurry, sign yourself in the name of Christ, devoutly recite the Creed or Lord's Prayer, and go on your way secure in God's help.<sup>99</sup>

We encounter quotations and paraphrases of these lines in various theological writings.<sup>100</sup> How should we see this phenomenon? Is the repetition of the words of Caesarius sometimes a matter of convenience, or do the authors share his feelings concerning forbidden beliefs?<sup>101</sup> Are we dealing with a mere quotation phenomenon or do these repeated lists of forbidden beliefs reflect contemporaneous practice? According to Dieter Harmening, these beliefs mainly stem from Late Antique culture; he considers them as a literary tradition and hence a fiction within the Christian context.<sup>102</sup>

It is instructive to have a brief look at the reception history of this sermon in the vernacular. Aelfric of Eynsham (c.955–c.1010) used Caesarius's sermon for his own homily on auguries.<sup>103</sup> Aelfric preaches that those who trust divination through birds, sneezing, horses or dogs are no Christians. If someone goes on a journey and wants to be protected, no fortunate days need to be divined but one should sing the *Pater noster* and the *Credo* and cross oneself for divine protection.<sup>104</sup> Caesarius did not refer to horses and dogs. The extra material may stem from yet unidentified sources;<sup>105</sup> Aelfric may have heard about such things somewhere<sup>106</sup> and/or they may be his adaptations to the contemporary Anglo-Saxon context.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the comparison of Aelfric's sermon with an Old Norse version of this sermon brings out the phenomenon of contextualisation as well. The Old Norse text adapts Aelfric's text to the Norwegian context and thus leaves out the reference to divination through birds, sneezing, dogs and horses.<sup>108</sup>

Turning to an Early Modern Irish sermon on the Ten Commandments from Leabhar Breac, we note certain, now familiar, forbidden beliefs, although categorised not as auguries but as 'idolatry' or forms of veneration of other gods. The list consists of belief in casting lots, in the spells/charms of women, in the sound of birds, in visions/dreams, in the time of the moon, in forbidden days or in prophecies from now living people.<sup>109</sup>

It is not surprising that we find similarities in lists of forbidden practices and beliefs in penitentials, sermons and other literature. Theological ideas stemming from the Bible, the Church Fathers and other ecclesiastical authorities were influential and hence borrowed. The lists are not identical, however. Especially in regard to sermons, adaptations to the local context will have been made for pastoral aims. For example, Aelfric condemns lot-casting in general, but allows it for a specific purpose when dealing with 'worldly matters', for example in order to divide land.<sup>110</sup> This is his own additions to what he read in his sources,<sup>111</sup> thereby probably condoning local customs. This is why we need to study the lists and detect the differences. In our poem, for instance, the tree trunk (?) and humming as ways of divination stand out and deserve further study. The differences and the fact that they are found in the sermon genre are grounds for questioning the view that these lists are merely literary artefacts.<sup>112</sup> Why preach against these things, if they were no longer practised?

This leads to another relevant issue. If contemporary religious practices are being addressed, should these be seen as pre-Christian or Christian? Caesarius of Arles and, following in his footsteps, Aelfric are clear about this: people who practise the forbidden things are not Christians but 'pagans'.<sup>113</sup> Thus the Christian public is admonished not to

lose its Christian identity (literally: the sacrament of baptism)<sup>114</sup> and not to 'return' to pre- or non-Christian practices (literally, 'return again to the observance of omens' and 'return to their impious, detestable omens').<sup>115</sup> Caesarius distinguishes not only between Christians and pagans, but also between good and bad (literally, tepid and careless) Christians.<sup>116</sup> The Early Modern Irish sermon uses the label 'idolatry' in a similar vein. The sermons and versions of our poem are theological rejections of unorthodox belief that the authors associate with an earlier phase and with paganism.

Some people may have disagreed about the unorthodoxy of the beliefs and practices mentioned; value judgements on these have varied depending on time and place. That some of these beliefs and practices have their roots in an older pre-Christian past seems highly likely. Wearing an amulet or herb as protection, another ancient forbidden practice,<sup>117</sup> was suggested above as one of the models for the belief and practice of using *loricae*. Despite its condemnation,<sup>118</sup> many Irish (textual) examples are extant. Within Ireland, the First Recension of our poem would agree with the condemnation, whereas the YBL version of the Second Recension makes the poem into a *lorica* and thereby condones and promotes the practice.

The fact that medieval sermons and poems warn against belief in sneezes as omens seems to me to be evidence that not only Mediterranean peoples in the Classical period and Late Antiquity believed this.<sup>119</sup> Even today, people feel the need to say something when someone sneezes.

Finally, practices and beliefs deemed forbidden and unorthodox, according to some ecclesiastical authorities, may also be found in depictions of foreigners.<sup>120</sup> Hence, a Middle Irish poem attributes these beliefs to the Picts.<sup>121</sup> The teachings of six Pictish druids, who settle in Ireland, include some of the above-mentioned forbidden beliefs: idolatry (*ídlacht*), the honouring of sneezes and omens (*mórad sréd is mana*), lucky times (*amsona*) and paying attention to the voices of birds (*gotha én do aire/fhairi*).<sup>122</sup>

It is not unlikely that the Irish, just like their neighbours in Britain, heard premonitions in bird sounds. The reference to the cry of the Babb above the ford in which Cú Chulainn and Fer Diad will fight may be a literary reflection of this.<sup>123</sup> It is possible that one did not go on a journey when someone sneezed, or when the grouse or another bird made an unusual sound or when the weather showed inauspicious signs. This may have been pre-Christian belief to which some continued to adhere in Christian times. Hence, the poems that we just studied keep reminding their readership or audience that this is not the way one should think according to orthodox Christian doctrine.

What we are in fact dealing with in the poems and sermons discussed here is an attempt to establish 'orthodoxy'. The message given is that a 'true Christian' is a 'true Irish person' who neither adheres to such beliefs nor performs these practices. The texts address the whole population who are supposed to be Christian, but if people persist in these forbidden ways, they are threatened with rejection by the Church. They are then defined as non-Christians by the authors of the texts because of their beliefs and practices, which are associated with and may go back to pre-Christian times.

### Mirrors and layers

The first method to find Irish pre-Christian religious traces is, therefore, looking for rejection of belief forms in Christian sources. The second method closely follows Herren's theory. Can we find texts that refer to pre-existent spells by trying to overcome their effect? In other words, are there Irish counterspells other than the genre of the *lorica*? I think there may be several,<sup>124</sup> but I discuss one instance, which is not immediately obvious and therefore serves as another methodological example.

Andrei Toporkov has noted the structural similarity between ancient Greek love charms (from around the beginning of the Common Era until the fourth century) and more recent Eastern European love charms (from the seventeenth century onwards).<sup>125</sup> The formula 'let her neither eat nor drink' is a basic strand in these charms. All sorts of variations are added. The idea behind this formula is that through this charm a person suffers, being unable to eat, drink, sleep and so on until she or he has become the lover of the person for whose sake the charm is uttered. Toporkov points out a connection with 'love-sickness', described in Greek love literature and medical writings as someone who has fallen in love and may have difficulty eating and sleeping because of obsession with the loved one.<sup>126</sup> Herren's above-mentioned theory was limited to execration or curse texts; we should add the genre of love charms to this discussion. Some Greek *defixiones* or binding spells pertaining to love (or sex) show structural similarity to the *loricae* as well. Often, body parts are enumerated in the spells, and, similarly, invocation of and contracts with supernatural beings may be part of the ritual. The figurines that may accompany curse tablets are part of love magic too: the piercings of those dolls are, however, not accompanied by curses to harm but by constraining spells, equally consisting of violent, aggressive language: 'I pierce whatever part of you so that you will remember me'.<sup>127</sup>

One Graeco-Roman example from the fifth century (found in Upper Egypt) suffices to get an impression of what is involved. A clay pot with two wax figurines, originally deposited in a cemetery, was accompanied by a lengthy spell on papyrus.<sup>128</sup> The beginning of the binding spell gives an example of the 'let her not . . .' formula and the idea of binding someone's listed body parts:

I bind you with the unbreakable bonds of the Fates in the underworld and powerful Necessity. For I invoke you *daimones* who lie here, who are continually nourished here and who reside here and also you young ones who have died prematurely. I invoke you by the unconquerable god IAÔ BARBATHIAÔ BRIMIAÔ CHERMARI.<sup>129</sup> Rouse yourselves, you *daimones* who lie here and seek Euphêmia, to whom Dôrothea gave birth, for Theôn, to whom Proechia gave birth. Let her not be able to sleep for the entire night, but lead her until she comes to his feet, loving him with a frenzied love, with affection and sexual intercourse. For I have bound her brain and hands and viscera and genitals and heart for the love of me, Theôn.<sup>130</sup>

We also have a love spell of insular Celtic origin from the period between c. 600 and the late ninth century: the so-called Leiden *lorica*, which is simultaneously an exorcism and a binding spell.<sup>131</sup> It does not contain the 'let her not . . .' formula, but there is an extensive list of body parts to be scrutinised/tracked out for the sake of the love of the person who utters the text. Therefore, not only curses and curse rituals comparable to those associated with Late Antique curse tablets were known in the Celtic lands, but also binding spells and rituals for love. Toporkov noted the widespread pattern of the not eating, drinking and sleeping formula in the eastern parts of Europe.<sup>132</sup> We now have a look at the West, using a narrative about our third saint, Brigit.

Saint Brigit is visited by a man with marriage problems. His wife wants to leave him and he goes to Brigit for help.<sup>133</sup> According to the Middle Irish version of the *Life of Brigit*, the man asks for a spell or charm (*epaid*). The saintly charm consists of blessed water. In the Old Irish *Life*, the man sprinkles his wife with the water; in the other three versions he is told to sprinkle house, food, drink and bed with the water during the woman's absence. Three elements in this latter ritual – food, drink and bed – correspond to the elements of the well-known formula of 'let her neither eat nor drink nor sleep' from binding spells. The healing ritual in the Old Irish version could be an exorcism of the woman herself, and the ritual in the

other three versions might be a loosening spell; those places associated with desire and love need to be purified from an interfering substance or presence in order to heal the woman and restore the love. The tale does not say anything of the reason for the marriage problem. 'Magic' or demonic disruption of the relationship could have been a possible diagnosis in those days, and the similar structural elements that we know from binding spells leave open the possibility of the presence of such beliefs. What I have done here is argue backwards, just as Herren did in the case of his theory on the origin of the *lorica*. I have adduced further arguments for seeing Brigit's miracle as a counterspell elsewhere.<sup>134</sup>

Our third and last method of digging into the past focuses on textual layers. Just as the above-mentioned Jewish amulet wandered from Egypt to Britain and presumably stayed in use, pre-Christian Ireland may also have had useful charms for healing, love and other purposes that remained in use after the advent of Christianity. Despite the orthodox dislike of spells, we do find spells in Christian manuscripts.<sup>135</sup> People used spells in the Middle Ages, whether they saw themselves as Christians or not. It is possible that some spells are rooted in pre-Christian Irish culture. Again, we cannot go back to their pristine state. Charms usually exist in many variations and their form makes contemporary contextualisation possible. The use of the letter N, for which the name (Latin *nomen*) of the target of the charm's effect can be substituted, is a case in point.<sup>136</sup> The lists in spells can be made longer or adapted for a specific purpose. Often, spells are of a composite nature. If, for instance, we look again at the love charm of Theôn, we see that he is referred to in the third person singular in the 'let her not . . .' formula, whereas in other places the text is put in the first person singular. The name 'Theôn' may very well have been inserted as a generic mark for a name (cf. *N(omen)* in Latin) in a source text. John Gager comments on this binding spell:

As the many parallels with other texts indicate, almost every line of our spell was copied from recipes in reference works much like those preserved in the large collections of PGM [the Greek Magical Papyri].<sup>137</sup>

Can we detect composite and possibly layered structures in Irish spells as well? I will attempt to uncover such a structure in one example, also pertaining to love and sex.

Among the charms and incantations from manuscript H.3.17,<sup>138</sup> famous for its legal texts, there is one that appears to have been used for making men impotent.<sup>139</sup> The texts, written in vacant spaces and margins by the

principal scribe of some law tracts, were edited and translated by Richard Best.<sup>140</sup> The text to be discussed here is number IX in his collection; numbers V to IX are written on the two sides of a half page with a big hole in it. Best's translation is only partial,<sup>141</sup> hence I offer a new, tentative translation.<sup>142</sup>

Eolas do lemad fir

Fonriug do luth .ii.  
*fonriug* do lath.  
*fonriug* do nert.  
*fonriug* do thracht.  
*fonriug*  
 ben druth dam  
 tuli i n-ath.  
 focertar cros de dar da les in fir.  
 Fidula fadula fidaili  
 bibili belabili  
 au<sup>143</sup> tert tíua  
 gront in celi dei noinglenda  
 tilalup tilalup tilalup *et reliqua*.<sup>144</sup>

Knowledge/charm/spell/prescription to render a man impotent

1. I bind him,<sup>145</sup> your power of movement<sup>146</sup> (repeat)<sup>147</sup>
2. I bind him, your heat<sup>148</sup>
3. I bind him, your strength<sup>149</sup>
4. I bind him, your vigour<sup>150</sup>
5. I bind him.
6. A wanton woman to me
7. Floods/ Flooding in a ford.
8. The cross of God is made over the two thighs of the man.
9. *Fidula fadula fidaili*
10. *Bibili belabili*
11. *Autert* (or *autertert*) *tíua*<sup>151</sup>
12. *Gront* to the heavens of God or of the valley<sup>152</sup> (??)
13. *tilalup tilalup tilalup* etcetera.

This text shares characteristics with other charms: repetition, alliteration, obscure language, mysterious words, use of the first person singular, reference to ritual and to supernatural beings. The first five lines

are formed by performative words that would affect the intended victim with impotence. Lines 6-7 seem to stand in contrast with the preceding five lines: things should stagnate, stop moving, be bound, become weak for the victim of the spell, whereas the speaker wants to have a sexually active partner, in which case things (bodily fluids?) should move, flow and stream, perhaps metaphorically hinted at by flooding in a ford.

Line 8 seems to be a ritual prescription. The mention of the cross of God is clearly a sign of knowledge of Christian belief; referring to 'Christ' as 'God' was common in the Middle Ages.<sup>153</sup> Carey sees this line as a ground for interpreting the purpose of the text as healing impotence, contrasting it with the 'jingling lines at the heart of the charm' which would represent 'hostile magic'.<sup>154</sup> Although the making of the sign of the cross for the interconnected purposes of blessing, exorcism, protection and healing is well-known, on methodological grounds we cannot a priori ascribe healing to a Christian symbol (such as the cross) and damaging health to mysterious, 'magical' words.

The last five lines are obscure 'words of power' and thus clearly representatives of the mysterious language, characteristic of magical texts. If I am allowed to speculate: the first seven lines and the five last lines could have roots in a pre-Christian culture. The last five lines may have formed a separate, different spell, which in its current form is incomplete, judging from the 'etcetera'. It should be noted that the first part up to the ritual prescription are in smaller letters than the rest in the manuscript (beginning with line 9, the possibly second spell).

Richard Best suggests that 'the conjurations . . . appear to be fanciful names replacing those of the divinity usually found'.<sup>155</sup> If this is so, we would have here a clue to a deeper layer of the text. Could it be that the mysterious words are a corrupt version of oral incantation? Or are they indeed part of an invocation of supernatural beings? If so, have they been taken over from foreign-language amulets? Although not the same as the words *bibili belabili* from our spell, we find *BIA BI BIOTHÊ* in a list of names of the supernatural *BARBAR ADONAI* in an often-copied recipe for a binding spell for love from the papyrus manuscript from Egypt known as *Greek Magical Papyri IV*, dating from the fourth century CE.<sup>156</sup> The spell contains several variations of the 'Let X not eat, drink, sleep, without me' formula. The love spell of which the beginning was quoted above gives the names for the seven heavenly thrones, some of them being 'BALEÔ BOLBEÔ BOLBEÔCH BOLBESRÔ'.<sup>157</sup> A lead tablet from Egypt from the fourth or fifth century CE, originally deposited in a grave, gives an elaborate Greek spell to bind a man's anger. Among the many supernatural names and

mysterious words, there is an invocation of BELIAS BELIÔAS AROUÊOU AROUÊL CHMOUCH CHMOUCH.<sup>158</sup>

Closer to home, though, we find something which looks like a variant version of one term – *tilalup* – in a spell against fever in an English monastic miscellaneous manuscript.<sup>159</sup> The spell is part of a booklet, possibly originally a separate manuscript, with herbal and other medical remedies from Anglo-Saxon and ancient sources. The immediate manuscript context (fols 117r and 118r) is prescriptions for textual amulets, to be worn around the neck and ‘to be used in combination with standard Christian prayers, blessings, verbal formulas, and signs of the cross’.<sup>160</sup> The text is a combination of Latin, mysterious words and Irish; the relevant word is put in bold type:

Contra febres. [in the margin:] *cave*  
 In nomine patris & filii. ⁊ *spiritus sancti*.  
 Telon. Tecula. **Tilolob**. Ticon. Tilo. Leton. Patron. Tilud. Amen.  
 Ronbea. Furtacht. Italmon.  
 Ronbea. Beathatrococor. Laruithitt [Or: Lariuthitt]. inim.  
*Domini est salus. xp̄isti est salus.*  
*Salus tua domine sit semper mecum. N.*  
*Sancta trinitas sana me. ab hostibus corporis ⁊ animæ meæ.*  
*Ihesus nazareus rex iudeorum*  
*hæc scribentur. ⁊ in collo ligentur.*

Against fever. [in the margin:] Beware  
 In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
 Telon. Tecula. **Tilolob**. Ticon. Tilo. Leton. Patron. Tilud. Amen.  
 May there be His/Their help for us on earth<sup>161</sup>  
 May there be His/Their merciful life with glory for us in heaven.<sup>162</sup>  
 Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of Christ.  
 May your salvation, Lord, always be with me, N.  
 [Nomen – Name to be inserted].  
 Holy Trinity, heal me from the enemies of my body and soul.  
 Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.  
 Let these [words] be written and bound around the neck.<sup>163</sup>

The ‘Beware’ in the margin shows that some have deemed this healing text unorthodox. We deal with a composite text, which may well have had an oral pre-existence.<sup>164</sup> The heading indicating the text’s use and the common Trinitarian invocation are followed by enigmatic words presumably with healing qualities, two lines expressing wishes concerning life on

earth and in heaven<sup>165</sup> and three sentences that are adaptations of Psalm 3:9. These sentences have also been used as the conclusion of two Irish *loricae*.<sup>166</sup> The fever text personalises this conclusion by using the first person singular and adding N for the name to be inserted. Then another request for healing addressed to the Trinity follows together with a quote from the Gospels of the well-known inscription on the cross of Jesus.<sup>167</sup> Just as with a *lorica*, the text should be worn on the body.

A second variant version of *tilalup* is found in another Irish healing text. A charm to stop every flow consists of the following mysterious words: *Aluta abnis tota aluta beta nel nua pacit bel til tolalab* that need to be uttered thrice on a thumb before applying the thumb to the flow.<sup>168</sup> The mysterious sound *tilalup/tilolob/tiltolab* (or *tillolab*) is thus in all cases used for halting/hindering, be it an erection, a fever or a flow. These two healing texts share their restraining, halting or binding function with the impotence spell.

We have seen that John Carey suggested a possible healing function for the impotence spell. Yet another interpretation was suggested to me by Johan Corthals.<sup>169</sup> When I sent him my translation and asked for comments, he argued for seeing the text as a *lorica*, used by monks against feelings of lust.<sup>170</sup> His suggestions lead to the following translation of the first lines:<sup>171</sup>

I hold us (or emend: *fomriug*, 'me') back from [sexual] motion (or, the  
power of movement)  
I hold us/me back from heat  
I hold us/me back from strength  
I hold us/me back from vigour  
I hold us/me back.  
A wanton woman is for me  
A flood in a ford.

With the emendation, the text would fit the *lorica*-genre well, in that these texts are usually in the first person singular and uttered for one's own sake.<sup>172</sup> Unemended, the text appears to be spoken by one person on behalf of a group (of monks?). Line 8 with its impersonal ritual prescription would then describe this person performing the gesture of the cross over the thighs of every man in the group in order to exorcise or bless their thighs by the sign of the cross. Carey's interpretation of a healing would then fit, albeit as an exorcism of lust. In such a context, it would also make sense to interpret the words *celi dei* in line 12 as a reference

to the *Céli Dé*, or a member thereof. Another argument for seeing the text as a *lorica* is supplied by a comparison with the other charms in the manuscript. Four of Best's nine charms have *lorica* characteristics. Two of them (VII and VIII) are a *cúairt comgi*, 'circle of protection'; one of these literally refers to a *lorica*.<sup>173</sup> I have already referred to the protective textual genre designated *coimge/coimindi* when discussing the *lorica* of Colum Cille (YBL version).

Thus far, we have only looked at the charm (or charms) proper. The text is followed by a lengthy description of its purpose and, interestingly, impotence is absent from this list:

Ar tennta ḡ i snaithi focertar ḡ ar cosc fóla ḡ a cur i scathan ḡ a thais-benad<sup>174</sup> do mnai torraig ḡ ni bera in toirrchis gu faicea in scathan ariss. A cur i fot reisc ar seilb in fir teit i comruc ḡ a bél re lar ḡ beraid a roga baill don fir bes ina agaid ginmotha a chend.

For staunching, and let it be put/[let it be cast]<sup>175</sup> on a thread, and for stopping blood; and put it in/[cast it on] a mirror and show it to a pregnant woman and she will not give birth until she see the mirror again. Put it in/[Cast it on] a sod of turf in the possession of a man who goes into a fight and its/[his?] mouth to the ground, and he will seize whatever limb he chooses of the man who may be against him, save only his head.<sup>176</sup>

These purposes are in line with the whole idea of binding, restraining and holding back; it would help to stop blood from flowing (cf. the above-mentioned charm in 24 B 3), delaying a birth and restraining an opponent in battle. We may add to Toporkov's conclusion that 'the multitude of meanings of the formulae and the possibility of variant interpretations are characteristic of the whole poetics of charms',<sup>177</sup> that some of them also seem to have served multiple purposes.

This charm seems to have had a life before it was written in the manuscript. Perhaps there were initially two charms: firstly, the impotence charm consisting of the heading and lines 1 to 7, followed by the ritual prescription, and secondly, the abbreviated *fidula*-charm consisting of lines 9 to 13 together with the piece about its triple purpose. These two charms may have been clustered together in the manuscript because of their communal binding function. The impotence spell may have been read together with the second text and may have been put to use for staunching blood, control of the time of birth and one's opponent in

battle, because of its hindering and constraining qualities. For the same reason, people may have used it as a *lorica* against lust. We do not know when or how the text was used or who used it. It is tempting to suggest a diachronic development from pre-Christian impotence spell to Christian chastity *lorica*, but it is more likely that the text may have been used for different purposes by different people contemporaneously and in different times. There is no reason to suggest that the idea of making a competitor impotent was less attractive to some in Christian times than it may have been in pre-Christian times.<sup>178</sup> The composite text, however, makes different readings possible and its composite nature seems to be a case of being layered; people added and omitted pieces of text according to their wishes and needs. That the text has its roots in Celtic religion is a possibility, but we will never be able to prove it.

### Conclusion

In this contribution, various rituals that may have once been part of Irish society were discussed, such as a ritual for making a pact and forms of divination. I tried to argue backwards in my interpretation of an episode in the *Lives* of Saint Brigit by suggesting that she prescribed a loosening spell when supplying the husband with blessed water to regain his wife's love. Finally, a search for layers was done in a complex text by which sexual acts were restrained, either for external or internal use. The text was further used to hinder the flow of blood, the birth of a child and the movements of an opponent. The words of power used in this sort of ritual may have gone through a dynamic process of adaptation and reinterpretation.

This contribution has furthermore attempted to show that we should not study religious ritual in isolation in order to theorize about Celtic religion. Texts from various genres were related to each other. The ritual way to make a compact, defined by Saint Patrick, was put in a wider context not only through reference to real life situations in historical religious anthropology but also by reference to literary sources, such as medieval Irish sagas (i.e. mythology), biblical prophetic texts, and finally, Irish hagiography. The second example from hagiography of Saint Columba performing the ritual of prayer was connected on the one hand with New Testament epistles and on the other with the Irish custom of making, uttering and wearing *loricae*. Two recensions of a poem on this custom were discussed; the earlier first recension appeared to reject the custom, whereas the later second recension condoned and, in one manuscript version, even promoted the use of *loricae*. The poem was subsequently

incorporated in the Early Modern Irish *Life of Colum Cille* as a *lorica* for the saint within the context of a *historiola*. This was done in a fashion comparable to – and probably modelled on – the episode in the seventh-century *Life of Saint Patrick* by Muirchú, which attributes the saint's escape from a royal ambush to his not-quoted blessing. In the Middle Irish period, this blessing is said to have been the same as the Old Irish protective text, known as the 'Deer's Cry'. In both cases, an anonymous Old Irish text is connected with a saint and receives a *historiola* in the Middle Irish or Early Modern Irish period. The two recensions of the poem tried to establish Christian orthodoxy by listing forbidden beliefs and rituals. It is likely that treatises of the Fathers of the Church, who in their turn borrowed from biblical, Classical and Late Antique writings, were sources of inspiration in such lists of forbidden rituals and beliefs. On the other hand, there is reason to think that these lists were adapted to the local context. Again, we find examples of such forbidden belief in medieval Irish mythology, as part of the portrayal of the religion(s) of the past.

Another example discussed was the blessed water or love charm with which Saint Brigit let the desperate husband ritually exorcise his wife or their house. The source texts were of the hagiographical genre, but the texts adduced to understand what was going on stemmed from various other genres, such as instances of love magic from daily life. The models of harming with curse tablets and protecting with amulets suggested by Herren were extended with descriptions of rituals on satire, love magic, and exorcism. All these models have their descriptions in a ritual context, but we also find examples in mythological texts.

A final word needs to be said on the mysterious words in the 'impotence spell'. One word – *tilalup* – appeared to have variant versions in a charm against fever in an English manuscript and a staunching charm in an Irish manuscript. Although we do not know what the words mean, thanks to the headings and the ritual prescriptions we know that it served in medications with a restraining and halting function. In this way, ritual and words of power go hand in hand. Similarly, descriptions of ritual and mythology may reinforce each other. This should, however, be deduced from careful study of each separate text, which is the basis for our ideas on what Celtic religion(s) may have looked like.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This contribution is part of my VIDI-research project 'The Power of Words in Medieval Ireland', subsidized by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The project consists of two subprojects, a study of the

performers of verbal power conducted by Dr J. K. Reid, and my study of the ‘words of power’ themselves. See <http://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/research-projects/86/2300134086.html>. I am grateful to Phillip Bernhardt-House for his comments on an earlier version.

- <sup>2</sup> This sentence summarises a plea from the paper ‘Celtic religion: a scholarly reconsideration’ by Tom Sjöblom at the Thirteenth International Congress of Celtic Studies at Bonn (23–27 July 2007).
- <sup>3</sup> See J. Borsje, ‘The Secret of the Celts Revisited’, in *Religion and Theology: A Journal of Contemporary Religious Discourse*, forthcoming 2015/2016.
- <sup>4</sup> I am deeply indebted to Tjitze Baarda, Henk Leene †, Sybolt Noorda and Niek Schuman.
- <sup>5</sup> I have been influenced by the work of Mieke Bal, Mary Daly †, Carol Christ and Starhawk (born Miriam Simos).
- <sup>6</sup> *Het Lied van Je Grote Zus*, written together with Lieke Werkman (unpublished kandidaatsscriptie Old Testament, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, April 1984).
- <sup>7</sup> *Wie is Wie in het Twaalfde Hoofdstuk van de Openbaring van Johannes?*, also written with Lieke Werkman (unpublished kandidaatsscriptie New Testament, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, July 1983).
- <sup>8</sup> J. Borsje, *From Chaos to Enemy: Encounters with Monsters in Early Irish Texts. An Investigation Related to the Process of Christianization and the Concept of Evil*, *Instrumenta Patristica*, 29 (Turnhout, 1996); see the Introduction for general remarks on the methodology.
- <sup>9</sup> See, for instance, J. Borsje, ‘Fate in Early Irish Texts’, *Peritia*, 16 (2002), 214–31.
- <sup>10</sup> A fourth, related, project is Celtic cosmology, which resulted in J. Borsje, A. Dooley, S. Mac Mathúna and G. Toner (eds), *Celtic Cosmology: Perspectives from Ireland and Scotland*, *Papers in Mediaeval Studies* 26 (Toronto, 2014).
- <sup>11</sup> Compare J. Borsje, ‘Druids, deer and “words of power”’: Coming to terms with evil in Medieval Ireland’, in K. Ritari and A. Bergholm (eds), *Approaches to Religion and Mythology in Celtic Studies* (Newcastle, 2008), pp. 122–49.
- <sup>12</sup> To name just a few studies in this vast field of research: K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1990) and J. F. Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1997).
- <sup>13</sup> L. Bieler (ed.), *Libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi: Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Dublin, 1993); A. B. E. Hood (trans.), *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu’s Life* (London, 1978); D. R. Howlett (trans.), *The Confession of Saint Patrick* (New York, 1996).
- <sup>14</sup> See, for instance, J. Borsje, ‘Monotheistic to a certain extent. The “good neighbours” of God in Ireland’, in A.-M. Korte and M. de Haardt (eds), *The Boundaries of Monotheism: Interdisciplinary Explorations into the Foundations of Western Monotheism* (Leiden/Boston, 2009), pp. 53–82.
- <sup>15</sup> My translation; Patrick’s Latin text – *Invoca me in die tribulationis tuae et liberabo te et magnificabis me* (*Confessio* §5: Bieler, *Libri epistolarum*, I, p. 60) – is closer to the Latin translation of the Hebrew psalms (abbreviated as Psh) in the Vulgate text than the Latin translation of the Greek psalms from the

- Septuaginta (abbreviated as PsG): *et invoca me in die tribulationis et liberabo* (PsG: *eruum*, 'I shall rescue') *te et glorificabis* ('you will glorify'; PsG: *honorificabis*, 'you will honour') *me*. The reading *magnificabis* is present in the Vetus Latina, the Psalter version(s) that Patrick used; see M. McNamara, 'Tradition and creativity in early Irish psalter study', in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds), *Irland und Europa. Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter/ Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 338–89 (348–53).
- <sup>16</sup> Bieler, *Libri epistolarum*, I, p. 66; Howlett, *Confession*, p. 63.
- <sup>17</sup> Bieler, *Libri epistolarum*, I, p. 67, §18.
- <sup>18</sup> Howlett, *Confession*, pp. 63–4.
- <sup>19</sup> M. L. Warminde, 'Irish Literature as Source-material for Celtic Religion', *Temenos*, 28 (1992), 209–22 (217–18).
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 216–21.
- <sup>21</sup> To name a few: one could wonder whether mythology or even literature was an individualistic form of art, both before and during the Middle Ages. On the methodological problems concerning the connection between Irish texts and continental Celtic data (although on some points outdated), see M. Draak, 'The religion of the Celts', in C. J. Bleeker and G. Widengren (eds), *Historia Religionum: Handbook for the History of Religions, Vol. I: Religions of the Past* (Leiden, 1969), pp. 629–47; and cf. also the remarks on the sources for Celtic religion above.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. e.g. H. S. Versnel, 'What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: Myth and ritual, old and new', in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1990), pp. 25–90.
- <sup>23</sup> James Carney, *The Problem of St. Patrick* (Dublin, 1973), pp. 61–2. There is another echo in this passage: the basis of his refusal is the fear of God (*timor Dei*), which was also mentioned in the passage about his frequent praying during slavery.
- <sup>24</sup> Carney, *The Problem*, pp. 61–2; cf. Bieler, *Libri epistolarum*, I, p. 67 crit. app.
- <sup>25</sup> Carney, *The Problem*, p. 62, sees the reason for inclusion of this detail as apologetic: Patrick associated with non-Christian sailors but he remained true to his Christian identity. According to Eoin Mac Neill, *St. Patrick Apostle of Ireland* (London, 1934), p. 23, the captain may have deduced from Patrick's voice and appearance that he was a runaway slave, and therefore he refused to take him on board.
- <sup>26</sup> *Echtrae Fergusa maic Leiti* (D. A. Binchy, 'The Saga of Fergus Mac Léti', *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 33–48; for more about this tale and *fír*, see Borsje, *From Chaos*, pp. 17–91, esp. pp. 73–75; for more about *fír fer*, see M. E. Byrne, 'Note on a Gloss of O'Davoren', *Ériu*, 11 (1932), 94–6; Binchy, 'The Saga', 42; P. O'Leary, 'Fír fer: An Internalized Ethical Concept in Early Irish Literature?', *Éigse*, 22 (1987), 1–14.
- <sup>27</sup> This mythological, religious motif is hardly the view of just an individual author but can be found throughout the literature (contra Warminde).
- <sup>28</sup> But see J. Ryan, 'A Difficult Phrase in the 'Confession' of St. Patrick *reppuli sugere mammellas eorum*, §18', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5, 52 (1938), 293–9, on

*fir cíche*, ‘the guarantee of a breast’ (296), and on similar rituals of grasping the breast, cheek or knee of another adult as ‘an appeal from the weaker or less important to the stronger or more important that the latter should receive the former in his society on terms of complete friendliness and equality’ (299). According to Ryan (299), Patrick did not want to enter into such a relationship of friendliness and equality with the ‘pagan’ sailors.

<sup>29</sup> B. Maier, ‘*Sugere mamellas*: A pagan Irish custom and its affinities’, in R. Black, W. Gillies and R. Ó Maolalaigh (eds), *Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Vol. I: Language, Literature, History, Culture* (East Lothian, 1999), pp. 152–61.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155–6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156–8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158–9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160–1.

<sup>34</sup> D. A. Bray, ‘Suckling at the Breast of Christ: A Spiritual Lesson in an Irish Hagiographical Motif’, *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 282–96.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>36</sup> Bieler (*Libri epistolarum*, II, pp. 139–40) refers to the Vetus Latina text, Codex Bobbiensis, of Hosea 14:1: *sugentes mamillas illorum*. He characterises Patrick’s Latin expression as the equivalent of the Irish phrase *díde a cíche-som*, ‘[he] who sucked his breast’, from ‘The Adventure of Fergus mac Leite’. Bieler refers to the contract ritual from the tale as a ‘common pagan ceremony in ancient Ireland’. References to the Bible in this contribution are to the Vulgate, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>37</sup> Bieler (*Libri epistolarum*, II, p. 139, n. 107) also mentions the verse in Isaiah but deems it less likely as a source, because it concerns a metaphor, even though he admits that Patrick goes very far in his adaptation of biblical phraseology. Bray (‘Suckling’, 288) lists this metaphor among other imagery from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament from which the above-mentioned New Testament symbolism drew.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also Is. 49:23.

<sup>39</sup> Ryan, ‘A Difficult Phrase’, p. 295, refutes any biblical connection, isolating the phenomenon as being ‘fundamentally Irish’: ‘it is therefore a mistake to search for light and aid in Biblical or in classical sources’.

<sup>40</sup> The contract between Patrick and the sailors is in the end sealed in an unspecified way, according to Patrick’s wish. Despite his alternative ritual, however, Patrick at first sight seems to be the weaker party to the contract, because he needs the aid of the sailors. The mention of his successful prayer, however, makes the reader aware of the powerful entity that is on Patrick’s side.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Carney, *The Problem*, pp. 53–83.

<sup>42</sup> Although there is a variety of designations for Irish pre-Christian religious functionaries in hagiography, the druids are singled out as the most notable and important opponents of saints. In Latin, however, these druids are referred to as *magi*, ‘magicians’. For important observations on the

- overlaps and distinctions between druids (*druíð*) and magicians (*magi*), see C. McKenna, 'Between two worlds: Saint Brigit and pre-Christian religion in the *Vita Prima*', in J. Nagy (ed.), *Identifying the 'Celtic'*, CSANA Yearbook, 2 (Dublin, 2002), pp. 66–74.
- <sup>43</sup> Nagy, *Conversing*; T. O'Loughlin, 'Reading Muirchú's Tara-event within its background as a biblical "trial of divinities"', in J. Cartwright (ed.), *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* (Cardiff, 2003), pp. 123–35.
- <sup>44</sup> Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, in *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, eds and trans A. O. and M. O. Anderson (Oxford, 1991; revised edition of the 1961 publication).
- <sup>45</sup> Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, in L. Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, X (Dublin, 1979), pp. 62–123.
- <sup>46</sup> This textual tradition and the encounters between Patrick and the religious functionaries (briefly mentioned below) are analysed in my forthcoming *Saints and Spells: Miraculous Magic in Medieval Ireland*.
- <sup>47</sup> To name just a few instances: *aidmilled*, *airbe druad*, *amainse*, *ammaitecht*, *bluga*, *bricht*, *cerd cumainn*, *cerd ngenntlichtae*, *comal*, *corrguinecht*, *cumachtae*, *díchetal*, *doilbe*, *dolbaid*, *druídecht*, *elada*, *éle*, *eólas*, *epaid*, *faisdinecht*, *féth*, *felmas*, and so on (see <http://www.dil.ie/> for translations).
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. A. Murray, 'Missionaries and Magic in Dark-Age Europe' (review article of Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*), *Past and Present*, 136 (1992), 186–205 (187–9), on the variety of terms for performers of supernatural power.
- <sup>49</sup> For more on this genre, see L. Gougaud, 'Étude sur les *loricae* celtiques et sur les prières qui s'en rapprochent', *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes*, 1 (1911), 265–81; Gougaud, 'Étude sur les *loricae* celtiques et sur les prières qui s'en rapprochent (Suite)', *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes*, 2 (1912), 33–41, 101–27; G. S. Mac Eoin, 'Invocation of the Forces of Nature in the *loricae*', *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), 212–17; K. Hughes, 'Some Aspects of Irish Influence on Early English Private Prayer', *Studia Celtica*, 5 (1970), 48–61; M. W. Herren, *The Hisperica Famina II: Related Poems* (Toronto, 1987), and P.-Y. Lambert, 'Celtic *loricae* and ancient magical charms', in R. L. Gordon and F. M. Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, 168 (Leiden–Boston, 2010), pp. 629–48.
- <sup>50</sup> See Borsje, 'Druids', pp. 129–40.
- <sup>51</sup> W. M. Lindsay, *Early Welsh Script* (Oxford, 1912), p. 23, n. 1.
- <sup>52</sup> See Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, pp. 23–31.
- <sup>53</sup> I made one list out of the two lists that Herren (*Hisperica Famina*, p. 27) gives.
- <sup>54</sup> Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, p. 27.
- <sup>55</sup> Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, pp. 29–31.
- <sup>56</sup> L. Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Ríar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, *Early Irish Law Series* (Dublin, 1987), pp. 77–8, 114–15, 138–40.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.
- <sup>58</sup> For the overlap of satire with curse, see T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Curse and Satire', *Éigse*, 21 (1986), 10–15; see also B. Mees, *Celtic Curses* (Woodbridge, 2009).

- <sup>59</sup> The text was edited from Dublin, National Library, MS G 3 (formerly Phillips MS 7022) with some emendations from the version in Dublin, Trinity College, MS H.3.18, by J. Carney in 'M'aenarān dam isa sliab', *Éigse*, 2 (1940), 107-13; for the date, see Carney, *Medieval Irish Lyrics* (Dublin, 1967), p. xxix. According to A. Dooley, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Toronto, 2006), p. 139, the first recension poem is Old Irish; D. Greene and F. O'Connor, in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry A.D. 600 to 1200* (Dingle, 1967, repr. 1990), p. 161, assign this recension to the eleventh or twelfth century. Greene and O'Connor (*Golden Treasury*, pp. 161-4) give Carney's edition of Recension I, but emend some words and offer alternative translations. For more on this poem and the theme of 'being alone' in ecclesiastic poetry and heroic literature, see Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, pp. 130-2, 139-45.
- <sup>60</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 108.
- <sup>61</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 112, takes *mend* (H.3.18: *meind*) as *meing*, dative of *meng*, 'treachery', possibly referring to treacherous mountain paths.
- <sup>62</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 110.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 111.
- <sup>65</sup> The version in the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, H.2.16, now 1318, 14th-15th c.) was edited and translated by J. O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem Attributed to St. Columbkille; with a Translation and Notes', *The Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society*, 1 (1846), 1-15; the version in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud 615, 16th c., was edited by K. Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', *ZCP*, 7 (1910), 302-3.
- <sup>66</sup> O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem', pp. 3, 6. This preceding line is absent in the version in Laud (Meyer, 'Mitteilungen', p. 302).
- <sup>67</sup> A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle, *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille. Compiled by Manus O'Donnell in 1532* (Urbana, 1918), pp. 180-1. O'Donnell's *Life* quotes the first stanza only, which can be identified as the Second Recension.
- <sup>68</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 109.
- <sup>69</sup> For more on the sods of birth, death and burial, see Carney, *Medieval Irish Lyrics*, pp. xxix-xxxii.
- <sup>70</sup> Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 111.
- <sup>71</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 113.
- <sup>72</sup> O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem', p. 5.
- <sup>73</sup> O'Donovan gives 'the *sreod*', for he could not find the word in the dictionaries available to him; the same applies to *sordán*. See *DIL*, s.v. *sreód*.
- <sup>74</sup> O'Donovan gives: 'a *sordan*' (cf. above).
- <sup>75</sup> O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem', p. 12.
- <sup>76</sup> Meyer, 'Mitteilungen', p. 303.
- <sup>77</sup> O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem', pp. 5-6.
- <sup>78</sup> O'Donovan gives 'the *sreod*'.
- <sup>79</sup> O'Donovan translates 'a destiny'.
- <sup>80</sup> O'Donovan translates 'chance'.
- <sup>81</sup> O'Donovan, 'An Ancient Poem', pp. 12-13.

- <sup>82</sup> But compare the view expressed in the *Talmud*: ‘Although one may not deliberately divine by them, a house, an infant and a woman may be regarded as prognostics’ (J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York, 1939), p. 210).
- <sup>83</sup> Meyer, ‘Mitteilungen’, p. 303.
- <sup>84</sup> Gougoud (‘Étude’, part 1, p. 270) also characterised this version as a *lorica*.
- <sup>85</sup> More examples of this motif are discussed in my forthcoming *Saints and Spells*.
- <sup>86</sup> Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 90–1. In the narrative in O’Donnell’s *Life* (O’Kelleher and Schoepperle, *Betha Colaim Chille*, pp. 180–1), Colum Cille appears to be invisible thanks to God’s protection (*coiméd Dia*), just like Patrick and his companions (their invisibility is somewhat complicated; see Borsje, ‘Druids’, p. 142), but unlike Patrick’s adventure, in Colum Cille’s case the escape consists of two parts. After a conflict with the king, Colum Cille disappears invisibly from the meeting. Then Colum Cille and his retinue spend the night in Monasterboice. The next day, he is warned about a royal ambush in the mountains. Colum Cille sends his companions along a different road, and he travels on his own through the mountains (Sliab Breg). This breaking up of the company is clearly introduced to suit the context to the first line of the protective song ‘Alone I am on the mountain’. In all cases, the protection is explicitly ascribed to God.
- <sup>87</sup> See Borsje, ‘Druids’, pp. 131–40 and the literature there cited.
- <sup>88</sup> O’Donovan, ‘An Ancient Poem’, p. 3; see *DIL* s.v. *coimge*; cf. the above-mentioned *coiméd Dia* in O’Donnell’s *Life* that is believed to make Colum Cille invisible.
- <sup>89</sup> See also Charles Plummer (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1910), I, p. clxxix, n. 1.
- <sup>90</sup> Plural forms are found in stanza 13 in Laud 10 and 14 in YBL; the imperative is found in stanza 11 in YBL and stanza 14 in Laud 10.
- <sup>91</sup> Bird divination is introduced in the Septuagint but not taken over to the Vulgate (B.-C. Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen* (Berlin, 2011), p. 282). The Septuagint influenced the Church Fathers, such as Origen (H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 259).
- <sup>92</sup> A. S. Pease, ‘The Omen of Sneezing’, *Classical Philology*, 6, 4 (1911), 429–43, esp. 429–31; P. W. van der Horst, ‘Niezen als omen in de antieke wereld’, *Hermeneus*, 68 (1996), 179–81. The belief was also present in ancient India; Pease (‘The Omen’, p. 442, n. 3) refers to amuletic protection in the case of having ‘an evil dream, seeing an inauspicious animal, hearing an ominous sneeze or evil shriek of a bird’, mentioned in the *Atharva Veda* (X.3.6).
- <sup>93</sup> Pease, ‘The Omen’, p. 433.
- <sup>94</sup> For references, see Pease, ‘The Omen’, pp. 431–3 (on page 431, note 4, the column number should be 675); J. T. McNeill, ‘Folk-paganism in the Penitentials’, *Journal of Religion*, 13 (1933), 450–66: esp. 456, 463; E. S. McCartney, ‘Wayfaring Signs’, *Classical Philology*, 30 (1935), 97–112: esp. 106–8; Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979), pp. 81–94.

- <sup>95</sup> V. I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 42-3, who points out that sermon 54 seems to have been the most popular one (p. 43, n. 31).
- <sup>96</sup> G. Morin (ed.), *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis sermões*, I, CCSL, 103 (Turnhout, 1953), pp. 235-41 (236).
- <sup>97</sup> Sister M. M. Mueller, *Saint Caesarius of Arles Sermons* (Washington DC, 1956), I (1-80), p. 266.
- <sup>98</sup> Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, p. 236.
- <sup>99</sup> Mueller, *Saint Caesarius*, p. 266.
- <sup>100</sup> The texts referred to by Celticists (J. H. Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (Dublin, 1848), p. 145; Carney, 'M'aenarān', p. 113) as sources for this Irish tradition, such as a seventh-century sermon ascribed to Eligius of Noyon and the eighth-century *Libellus abbatis Pirminii*, were in fact influenced by sermon 54 of Caesarius (Flint, *The Rise*, pp. 42-3).
- <sup>101</sup> Flint, *The Rise*, p. 43.
- <sup>102</sup> Harmening, *Superstitio*, pp. 318-19.
- <sup>103</sup> For the edition and translation of this homily, see W. W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints* (London, 1881), II, pp. 364-83. See further A. L. Meaney, 'Ælfric's Use of his Sources in his Homily on Auguries', *English Studies*, 66 (1985), 477-95.
- <sup>104</sup> Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives*, pp. 370-1, ll. 88-99.
- <sup>105</sup> Audrey Meaney ('Ælfric's Use', pp. 480-9, esp. p. 481) has shown that they occur in two other often-quoted sources albeit not together, while some other ideas in lines 80-165 appear to be Aelfric's own. She points out that it is exceedingly doubtful if Aelfric ever saw these two sources (i.e. *Indiculus Superstitionum* and Pseudo-Augustine's *Homilia de Sacrelegiis*; cf. below).
- <sup>106</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 481.
- <sup>107</sup> See J. Russell-Smith, 'Ridiculosae sternutationes (o nore in Ancrene Wisse)', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 8, 31 (1957), 266-9 (266-7).
- <sup>108</sup> D. Kick, 'Old Norse translations of Aelfric's *De falsis diis* and *De auguriis* in Hauksbók (Summary)', in J. McKinnell, D. Ashurst and D. Kick (eds), *The Fantastic in Old Norse / Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles* (Durham, 2006), pp. 504-7. I am grateful to Professor John McKinnell for sending me this paper summary.
- <sup>109</sup> *gan credium do chrandchuraib, na d'upthaib ban, na do glór en, no d'aislingthib, no d'aimmsir escai, no do la chrosta, no d'fháistine duine d'a marand indú*; R. Atkinson, *The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac: Text, Translation, and Glossary* (Dublin, 1887), pp. 245 (text), 479 (translation). For more on this sermon, Augustine and Caesarius, see Borsje, *From Chaos*, pp. 220-2, n. 530.
- <sup>110</sup> Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives*, pp. 370-1, ll. 84-7.
- <sup>111</sup> Meaney, 'Ælfric's Use', p. 481.
- <sup>112</sup> Cf. C. Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2006), p. 30.
- <sup>113</sup> Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, p. 236; Mueller, *Saint Caesarius*, p. 266; Aelfric adapts this by writing such a person is not a Christian, but an infamous apostate (Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives*, pp. 370-1).

- <sup>114</sup> Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, p. 236; Mueller, *Saint Caesarius*, p. 266. Aelfric adapts this by writing that such a person lets their Christianity go (Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives*, pp. 370–1).
- <sup>115</sup> Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, p. 237; Mueller, *Saint Caesarius*, p. 267.
- <sup>116</sup> Morin, *Sancti Caesarii*, p. 237; Mueller, *Saint Caesarius*, p. 267.
- <sup>117</sup> Cf. also A. Murray, 'Missionaries and Magic', 192–3.
- <sup>118</sup> E.g. from Pseudo-Augustine, *Homily on Sacrilegious Practices*, an eighth-century Latin sermon from Germany: 'whoever ties around the neck of humans or dumb animals any characters, whether on papyrus, on parchment, or on metal tablets made from bronze, iron, lead, or any other material, such a person is not a Christian but a pagan'; J. G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 263–4.
- <sup>119</sup> I am indebted to Máire Herbert for pointing out an early Welsh example to me; a poem in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (the poem dates to the period after the tenth/eleventh century and before c.1250; J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 389, 499–500) rejects belief in sneezes as omens and contrasts this with the daily utterance of 'may the cross of Christ be as armour about me' as 'good' belief; cf. Russell-Smith, 'Ridiculosae', pp. 267–8.
- <sup>120</sup> Cf. Borsje, 'Fate', pp. 229–31.
- <sup>121</sup> G. Mac Eoin, 'On the Irish Legend of the Origin of the Picts', *Studia Hibernica*, 4 (1964), 138–9, dates the poem beginning *Cruithnig cid dosfarclam* on linguistic grounds to the period between the end of the tenth and the middle of the twelfth century, adding that it may also be an eleventh-century redaction of an earlier poem.
- <sup>122</sup> See Todd, *Leabhar Breathnach*, pp. 124–5, 144–5; W. F. Skene, *Chronicles of the Scots, and Other Early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1867), pp. 30–45; A. G. van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish Version of the Historia Britonum Ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin, 1932), pp. 9, 13–14; the same terms occur in the accompanying prose text. More research concerning the variant manuscript readings and a fresh translation are needed.
- <sup>123</sup> See C. O'Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 86, 202, ll. 2835–38; cf. Borsje, 'Omens, Ordeals and Oracles: On Demons and Weapons in Early Irish Texts', *Peritia*, 13 (1999), 234–6 for non-verbal sounds as omens.
- <sup>124</sup> For examples, see my forthcoming *Saints and Spells*.
- <sup>125</sup> A. Toporkov, 'Russian love charms in a comparative light', in J. Roper (ed.), *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic* (Basingstoke/New York, 2009), pp. 121–44.
- <sup>126</sup> Toporkov, 'Russian love charms', p. 128; cf. Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 81–2, on the Greek view of intense desire as illness and the possibly therapeutic function of love charms as treatment by transference and projection. See also D. Martinez, "'May she neither eat nor drink': Love magic and vows of abstinence', in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, 129 (Leiden, New York, Köln, 1995), pp. 335–59.

- <sup>127</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 81.
- <sup>128</sup> For more details and the complete translation of the spell, see Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 101–6, and for an image of the figurines, see *ibid.*, Figure 14.
- <sup>129</sup> Three of these names are discussed in Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 103, n. 67, 266, 268.
- <sup>130</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 103. Gager (p. 103, n. 68) notes that Theôn may already have performed a symbolic binding act before uttering the spell.
- <sup>131</sup> Edition and translation in Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, pp. 90–3; for the date and provenance, see pp. 45–8; on p. 26, Herren mentions the view that the Leiden Lorica is a love charm but he prefers to see it as a *lorica* (protective text) that has a close similarity to exorcisms. See also P. Dronke, ‘Towards the Interpretation of the Leiden Love-spell’, *CMCS*, 16 (1988), 61–75 and cf. R. Kotansky, ‘Greek exorcistic amulets’, in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, pp. 243–77.
- <sup>132</sup> The formula also exists in Middle Dutch incantations which sometimes prescribe the use of wax dolls too. See e.g. W. L. Braekman, *Middeleeuwse witte en zwarte magie in het Nederlands taalgebied* (Gent, 1997), pp. 421–2, 426–7.
- <sup>133</sup> There are four versions, one in Old Irish, another in Middle Irish (D. Ó hAodha (ed.), *Bethu Brigte*, Dublin, 1978, p. 16, §45, 32; W. Stokes (ed.), *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, Oxford, 1890, pp. 44, ll. 1478–1487, 192) and two in Latin (E. Hogan, *The Latin Lives of the Saints as Aids towards the Translation of Irish Texts and the Production of an Irish Dictionary*, Dublin, 1894, pp. 78–9, §72; R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints’ Lives: An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Oxford, 1991, p. 156, §47).
- <sup>134</sup> J. Borsje, ‘Love Magic in Medieval Irish Penitentials, Law and Literature: A Dynamic Perspective’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 84, Supplement 1, Special Issue (2012), 6–23; J. Borsje, ‘The power of words: sacred and forbidden love magic in medieval Ireland’, in A. Berlis, A.-M. and Kune Biezeveld † (eds), *Everyday Life and the Sacred: Re/configuring Gender Studies in Religion* (Leiden–Boston, forthcoming 2015).
- <sup>135</sup> See the important article of J. Carey, ‘Téacsanna draíochta in Éirinn sa mheánaois luath’ (Magical texts in early medieval Ireland), *Breis faoinár nDúchas Spioradálta: Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, 30 (2000), 98–117.
- <sup>136</sup> See also J. Borsje, ‘Medieval Irish spells: “Words of power” as performance’, in E. van den Hemel and A. Szafraniec (eds), *Words: Religious Language Matters* (New York, forthcoming 2015).
- <sup>137</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 103.
- <sup>138</sup> Dublin, Trinity College, 1336 (formerly H.3.17), 15th–16th centuries, col. 672c.
- <sup>139</sup> On law texts that refer to supernatural instruments for causing impotence, see J. Borsje, ‘Rules and Legislation on Love Charms in Early Medieval Ireland’, *Peritia*, 21 (2010), 172–90.
- <sup>140</sup> R. Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 27–32.
- <sup>141</sup> Best commented on the possibly corrupt nature of the text and felt doubtful concerning the true rendering. He translates: ‘A charm for impotence . . . a

mighty stag in a ford. Let the cross of God be put over the loins of the man. Fidula, fadula, etc.’ (Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32).

- <sup>142</sup> John Carey, ‘The Encounter at the Ford: Warriors, Water and Women’, *Éigse*, 34 (2004), 19, also gives a new translation of the first part of the text, emending the Irish slightly: *Eolas do lemad fhir. Fo-rriuig (MS fonriuig) do lúth, fo-rriuig (MS .ii.) do láth, f[o-rriuig] do nert, f[o-rriuig] do thrächt, f[o-rrig] b[en] drúth dam tuli i n-áth*, ‘A charm for rendering a man impotent (or, a charm for [healing] a man’s impotence). I bind your vigour, I bind your passion, I bind your strength, I bind your force. A wanton woman binds a ‘stag of flood’ (*dam tuli*) in a ford’. J. Carey and P. Bernhardt-House, ‘The Old Irish Impotence Spell: The *Dam Dlí*, Fergus, Fertility, and the Mythic Background of an Irish Incantation’, *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic*, 4 (2007), 304–24, explain this text in a mythological context; my reading concentrates on it being rooted in a Late-Antique and medieval context of binding spells. A more extensive discussion was presented as ‘Medieval Irish Impotence Magic’, at *Magic Moments in Maynooth 2: A Symposium on Charms and Magic in Medieval and Modern Ireland*, National University of Ireland at Maynooth, Ireland, 6–7 April 2014.
- <sup>143</sup> *autertert* MS, first *ter* crossed out (Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32).
- <sup>144</sup> Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32. This is followed by some lines on the charm’s use (see below). I adapted the layout of the charm to my reading. Best gives continuous lines, which principle is in agreement with the manuscript, although the line division is different from what Best produces.
- <sup>145</sup> Best (‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32) interpreted *fonriuig* as Old Irish *fa-riuig*, ‘I hinder, delay (etc.) him’, referring for *-n-* in this use to J. Strachan, ‘The Infix Pronoun in Middle Irish’, *Ériu*, 1 (1904), 165–9. *Fo-rig* also means ‘binds’, which is a common verb in impotence spells (see Rider, *Magic and Impotence*, pp. 76–89). My translation is very literal; ‘him’ can be omitted from the translation, giving: I bind your power of movement; I bind your heat; I bind your strength, and so on.
- <sup>146</sup> *Lúth*, ‘act of moving; power of movement, motion; vigour, power, energy’; cf. *lúth lighé*, ‘effective intercourse’ (i.e., leading to offspring) in G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Dublin, 1998, repr. of Oxford, 1956), pp. 96–7, §19.
- <sup>147</sup> Best (‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32) hesitates on the transcription of *.ii.*, suggesting a possible reading of *u* or *n*. In my view, ‘*.ii.*’ means that the phrase must be repeated. Other charms in this manuscript prescribe the uttering of texts for a number of times (e.g. *tri patera* γ *tri have*, ‘three pater noster and three aves’; Charm I). In other manuscripts, we find such prescriptions written in a similar way by using Roman digits between dots: e.g. *Pater noster .iii.*, ‘Our Father, three times’.
- <sup>148</sup> *Láth* means ‘warrior’, or ‘heat, rutting’ of animals (*DIL* s.v.).
- <sup>149</sup> *Nert* means ‘strength, might, power, ability, control’ (*DIL* s.v.).
- <sup>150</sup> *Trächt* means ‘strength, vigour’ (*DIL* s.v. 3. *trächt*).
- <sup>151</sup> This line is obscure. *Tiba* signifies ‘destruction’ (*DIL* s.v.); is the preceding a corruption of something to be repeated three times (Latin *aut*, ‘or’?, *ter*, ‘three times’? or Irish *tert*, ‘a third’?).

- <sup>152</sup> Or is this *n-oenglenda*, ‘of one valley/hollow’, or does this refer to the Céli Dé (see W. Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages*, Woodbridge, 2006)?
- <sup>153</sup> Cf. the tenth-century protective text *Cros Chríst tarsin ngnúisce*, ‘Christ’s cross over this face’, attributed to Muigrón; Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 32–5 (the thighs are mentioned in stanza 4).
- <sup>154</sup> Carey, ‘The Encounter’, p. 19.
- <sup>155</sup> Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 27.
- <sup>156</sup> Paris, Bibl. Nat. suppl. Gr. 574; Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 94–7 (95). The spell is to be written and spoken, and accompanies wax figurines, for which an elaborate ritual is prescribed.
- <sup>157</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, p. 105.
- <sup>158</sup> Gager, *Curse Tablets*, pp. 211–14 (214).
- <sup>159</sup> Durham Cathedral Chapter Library, Hunter MS 100, early twelfth century, fol. 118r. Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 27, drew attention to this text as a possible parallel for our impotence spell. The fever charm was edited and partly translated by R. Thurneysen, ‘Irische und britannische Glossen. A. Irische Glossen’, *ZCP*, 21 (1939), 280–90 (289–90). For a more recent edition, see D. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2006), p. 80. Because the texts in these publications diverge, I checked the readings from an image of the page – with thanks to Professor Phillip Sheldrake and Catherine Turner, Durham Cathedral Library assistant, for making this possible. Thurneysen’s edition appeared to be the correct one. I give a new transcription here. Cf. also A. H. Blom, ‘*Linguae sacrae* in ancient and medieval sources: An anthropological approach to ritual language’, in A. Mullen and P. J. James (eds), *Multilingualism in the Greco-Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 124–40 (136).
- <sup>160</sup> Skemer, *Binding Words*, pp. 79–80.
- <sup>161</sup> Thurneysen (‘Irische und britannische Glossen’, p. 290) reconstructs *Ron-bé furtacht i talmo-<i>n*; with *a* in *ronbea* perhaps as possessive pronoun ‘his’ or ‘their’. He finds this reconstruction in the second Irish sentence unlikely and sees *ronbea* consequently as corruption of *ronbe*.
- <sup>162</sup> Thurneysen (‘Irische und britannische Glossen’, p. 290) emends *beatha* to *bethu* or *beothu*, ‘life’, and interprets *trocor* as *trócar*, ‘merciful’, or *trocare*, ‘mercy’. Because ‘His/Their merciful life’ did not make sense to him, he suggested ‘life and mercy’. He interprets *laruithitt* as *la* (preposition) and emends *ruithitt* to *ruithin* (acc. sg of *ruithen*) or *ruithini*. In my view, the phrase refers to the wish for a future life in heaven, bestowed on the believers thanks to the mercy of God, Jesus or the Trinity.
- <sup>163</sup> My translation, based upon Thurneysen’s insights concerning the Irish phrases.
- <sup>164</sup> Thurneysen (‘Irische und britannische Glossen’, p. 290) refers to the fact that the Irish suffered because it was passed on but not understood. Don Skemer (*Binding Words*, p. 80) concluded from the rhyming of the magical words that the texts were initially recited to patients.
- <sup>165</sup> Could we compare this with the heavens and valley in the impotence text?

- <sup>166</sup> The fever text is closest to the ending of the ‘Deer’s Cry’ or the ‘Lorica of Saint Patrick’, but with two differences. The ‘Deer’s Cry’ repeats *Domini est salus* twice and the final request is that the Lord’s salvation be always with ‘us’, whereas the fever text has ‘me’. The other *lorica*, *Cétnad n-aise*, ‘A chant of long life’, prescribes the repetition of both *Domini est salus* and *Christi est salus* three times, concluding with the final part of Psalm 3:9 (*super populum tuum, Domine, benedictio tua*, ‘On your people, Lord, your blessing’) to which a vocative (*Domine*, ‘Lord’) is added. For both *loricae*, see J. Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 130–8.
- <sup>167</sup> Mt 27:37; John 19:19; partially in Mk 15:26; Lk 23:38.
- <sup>168</sup> Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 24 B 3, copied c.1496, p. 55; J. and M. Carney, ‘A Collection of Irish Charms’, *Saga och Sed*, (1960), 144–52 (151), where the similarity to the *Contra febres* charm is noted. Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha kindly pointed out some errors in these transcriptions. The line on the triple incantation was omitted and its third word should be *tota* instead of Carney’s *tola*. This modern misreading of *l* for *t* illustrates a possible medieval misreading which would result in *til lolab* for the last two words, thereby approaching *tilolob* and *tilalup* even more closely. A charm for safe delivery in MS 24 B 3 shares characteristics with charm V in Best’s collection (Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, 32, Additional note).
- <sup>169</sup> E-mail correspondence in May, 2008.
- <sup>170</sup> Compare stanza 11 in Máel Ísu Úa Brolchán’s (†1086) poem beginning *A Choimdiu, nom-choimét*, ‘Lord, guard me’: ‘Guard my male organ in the matter of pure chastity: may lust never overwhelm me, never approach me, never come to me!’ (Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 54–9 (57)).
- <sup>171</sup> Corthals suggested that *fon-riug*, perhaps to be emended to *fom-riug*, may be a variation on *atom-riug*, used in the above-mentioned ‘Deer’s Cry’ (from *ad-riug*, ‘binds (both in a physical and a legal sense)’; cf. D. A. Binchy, ‘Varia III. 3: *Atomriug*’, *Ériu*, 20 (1966), 232–4).
- <sup>172</sup> Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, p. 25, on the private nature of *loricae*, allowing for the possibility of them to be chanted in groups.
- <sup>173</sup> The numbers II, III, VII and VIII are *lorica*-like; VIII starts with *Gabrial esto mihi lorica capitis mei* (Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 31), ‘Gabriel, be to me a cuirass of my head’. Best’s charm VII probably consists of two circles of protection, which makes the total three.
- <sup>174</sup> The words *a thaisbenad* were added above the line.
- <sup>175</sup> Best’s translation of *a cur* in the sense of ‘putting it’ needs to be complemented with ‘casting it’, for the verb *fo-ceird* may indicate not only placing the piece of parchment somewhere but also uttering the words contained in it.
- <sup>176</sup> Best, ‘Some Irish Charms’, p. 32.
- <sup>177</sup> Toporkov, ‘Russian love charms’, p. 135.
- <sup>178</sup> Compare Coptic Christian impotence charms that sometimes employ the imagery of Christ being bound on the cross in the binding spells (M. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco, 1994), pp. 178–81, 269).