

## Arvosteluja–Reviews

**Katja Ritari: *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral Theology in the Lives of Saint Brigit and Columba. Studia traditionis theologiae 3. Turnhout: Brepols 2009. xiv + 202 pages. Price €55.00. ISBN 9782503533155.***

*Studia traditionis theologiae: Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology*, a new series of monographs from Brepols produced under the direction of Prof. Thomas O’Loughlin, is dedicated to the publication of ‘volumes ... concerned with how the past evolved in the past, and the interplay of theology, culture and tradition’ (as the Brepols website and the volumes’ dust-jackets inform us). The advent of this series is certainly to be welcomed by Celticists: already-published volumes include a study of the sacred topography of early Irish religious sites (D. Jenkins: vol. 4) and the proceedings of the First International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, held in Galway in 2006 (Ed. I. Warntjes & D. Ó Cróinín: vol. 5), while future monographs are promised on the sources of the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* (L. Davies), Gildas and the scriptures (T. O’Loughlin) and the christology of Theodore of Tarsus (J. Siemens). Katja Ritari’s study of the moral theology underlying early Irish hagiography, *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland*, is the first monograph in the series dedicated to a consideration of the theology of the Celtic lands, and it sets a high standard for the volumes which will follow.

Ritari’s study stands at the intersection of a number of significant trends in contemporary scholarship: the rediscovery of hagiography as a rich source for the history of society, capable of providing illuminating insights into the lives of that great mass of ordinary people who have left little to no trace in the historical record; the growing awareness of the need to investigate seriously the theological foundations of much early Irish literature; and a new understanding of hagiographical works as significant theological texts. However, while numerous scholars have begun to examine hagiography as theology in a range of published articles, Ritari’s study is one of the few monographs I have encountered which is dedicated to this new and promising approach.

Ritari’s work provides an in-depth study of three of the earliest saints’ *Lives* produced in medieval Ireland: Cogitosus’ *Vita Brigitae*, Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae*, and the so-called *Vita prima* of St Brigit. Ritari focuses her attention, however, not on the two great saints who are the subjects of these *Lives*, but on the minor characters which populate their pages. Her aim is to examine ‘the question of what it means to be a good Christian’ according to these early medieval *Vitae* (p. 173), and she demonstrates that close study of the saint’s interactions with virtuous and sinful laypeople and clerics can uncover a consistent moral paradigm underlying the varied narratives in the *Lives*: in effect, Ritari reveals the operative moral theology

which informed the work of Adomnán and the authors of the Brigidine *Lives*.

This is an important development in the study of medieval hagiography, which builds on the approach of Le Goff, Schmitt and many other scholars in reading hagiographies against the grain in order to gain insights into the lives of ordinary men and women; Ritari's innovative contribution lies in realizing that much of the grain may have been sown deliberately and consciously, and therefore in reading the saint's *Life* as a text which also reflects on the holiness of the not-quite-so-perfect members of the Christian community. Of course, as Ritari acknowledges, this still confines us to the realm of the ideal rather than the actual: the *Lives* do not tell us of the actual lives of ordinary Christian women and men, but instead present an ideal of the ordinary Christian life as it ought to be, according to the views of the various authors. Nonetheless, the same limitation applies in many ways to more traditional sources of operative moral theology, such as the Penitentials and the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, and Ritari's study has important consequences for our understanding of ecclesiastical attitudes towards the laity in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland. Incidentally, this also explains why Ritari excludes the Patrician hagiography of Tírechán and Muirchú from her consideration, for both authors place their protagonist in what they imagine to be a pagan society undergoing conversion. Brigit and Columba, in contrast, are pictured in the midst of a society which is already Christian, and incidental encounters may thus reveal what the hagiographers expected of the ordinary members of Christian society.

*Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland* opens with an introduction which places the study within its broader historical and theological context and introduces readers to Cogitosus' *Vitae Brigitae* (*VBC*), Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (*VC*) and the anonymous *Vita prima* of St Brigit (*VPB*). The second chapter examines the saint as the paradigm of holiness to be admired and imitated, focusing on heavenly apparitions of light and angels (which are particularly prevalent in Book iii of *VC*) and the presentation of the saint as already living a heavenly life on earth.

Chapters 3 and 4 represent the core of Ritari's work, examining the presentation of the virtues of good Christians and the antithesis of the good Christian life as revealed in the three *Lives* (the treatment of sinners in chapter 4 including an important discussion of brigands / *dibergaig* and their putative pagan associations). Ritari divides her consideration into three distinct categories, examining the virtues and vices of ecclesiastics (here referring specifically to male clerics and monastics), of laymen, and of women (including female monastics). Ritari's division of the *Vitae*'s minor character along such gendered lines could be challenged, but to my mind it makes good sense, both because of the undoubtedly patriarchal nature of early Irish society and of the nature of Ritari's sources. These are distressingly lop-sided in their treatment of women (as detailed in a comprehensive series of tables on pp. 82-87), with *VPB* containing an impressive and varied number of female characters, whereas the two other *Lives* are notable for the paucity of their references to women.

One notable aspect which emerges from Ritari's discussion of this point is the impact of the saint's own gender on the inclusion of women in their *Vitae* (see pp. 87-88). Given that Columba is a male ecclesiastic, he is generally kept clear of women in the course of his *Life*, presumably to avoid any hint of tarnish to his celibacy and virginity; indeed, of the three women actually brought into the physical presence of Columba in *VC* (see Table 3.3), one is his mother (and even then Columba is safely ensconced within her womb) and a second is immediately murdered on the spot.

Chapter 5 turns to a consideration of the consequences of moral and immoral actions in this life, including a significant treatment of the role of penance in the *Lives*, and a consideration of the miraculous punishments meted out to evildoers. Here Ritari detects an intriguing gradation in *VC*, where the harshest punishments are inflicted on laypeople, with ecclesiastics receiving more lenient treatment, while members of the monastic community of Iona often escape from punishment altogether.

Finally, chapter 6 examines the posthumous consequences of actions, incorporating an important section discussing Adomnán's vision of the destiny of souls. Building on the earlier work of Stalmans and O'Loughlin, Ritari provides a detailed analysis of Adomnán's depictions of the posthumous fate of the soul which suggests that the abbot of Iona may have shared the Augustinian conception of a threefold division between (1) the saints in heaven, (2) the damned in hell, and (3) the not quite so good / not quite so bad in an interim state (which will eventually evolve into purga-

tory). Ritari also draws some illuminating parallels between episodes in *VC* and Athanasius' *Life of Antony* and the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, as well as the apocryphal *Visio sancti Pauli*. Such connections between Adomnán's accounts of angels and demons battling over souls and similar episodes in the *Visio Pauli* (and dependent text such as the Three Utterances Apocryphon and the Dialogue between the Soul and the Body) may provide a fruitful area for future investigations.

Ritari's conclusion provides an admirable summary of her work, briefly addresses the question of the intended audience(s) of the three *Vitae*, and outlines the implication of her study for our understanding of ecclesiastical attitudes towards the laity in early medieval Ireland, engaging some of the important earlier treatments of this debated topic. She concludes that the three *Vitae* generally display a positive attitude towards the laity, who are depicted as belonging within the spectrum represented by the Christian community as a whole; they are also understood as being able to make their way to the kingdom of heaven through their own virtues and by doing penance for their sins.

Ritari furthermore suggests (intriguingly) that Cogitosus may have aimed his work at a lay audience, whereas the *Vita prima* may have been written with ecclesiastics (probably female religious) in mind. Ritari even detects a generally favourable attitude to the laity in the *Vita Columbae*, whose primary audience was undoubtedly the monastic community of Iona, and concludes that lay people too are likely to have been amongst the intended audiences of this work.

Ritari's study therefore challenges the notion that the clerical elite in early Ireland were unconcerned or dismissive of the lay population in general, and reveals the hagiographers as possessing a very definite moral agenda and expectations regarding layperson and cleric alike. While this should come as no surprise in the case of Adomnán (given his legislative endeavours to protect the innocent), it is noteworthy that Cogitosus and the anonymous author of *VPB* also share this view. Indeed, it is significant that the same virtues (such as prudence) and the same vices (such as pride) are praised or condemned in both ecclesiastics and laypeople, and that 'generosity, charity and compassion ... are taken to be the virtues on which an ideal Christian society should be based' (p. 101), and are demanded of all Christians depicted in the *Lives*, regardless of their social or ecclesiastical status.

Ritari's work is to be welcomed as marking a major step forward in the theological understanding of these *Lives*, which she brings into dialogue with the broader Latin theological tradition, represented in particular by a wide-ranging engagement with the corpus of Augustine of Hippo (it may be noted, however, that texts are often cited from Migne's *Patrologia latina* even when preferable editions are available in series such as CCSL and CSEL). Another strength of her study lies in the comparative considerations of episodes in relation to the hagiographical productions of Athanasius, Sulpicius Severus and Gregory the Great, and particularly in her serious engagement with the monastic theology of John Cassian. *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland* makes a significant contribution to our

growing understanding of Cassian's foundational influence on theology produced in early medieval Ireland, an influence which (in fact) ought to be expected in a church so heavily influenced by monasticism, and which is already alluded to in the *Amra Choluimb Chille*. Indeed, on occasion Ritari is able to discern the differing influence of the varying strands of patristic thought on the various *Lives*, as in her observation at the close of chapter 2 that Adomnán's emphasis on spiritual seeing is in close harmony with Augustine's thought, whereas Brigit's contemplation finds a parallel in Cassian's conception of the monastic life.

It is to be regretted, however, that Ritari did not make more use of the work of Jerome: only his *Vita* of Paul of Thebes is referenced in her study, and she makes no use of his major exegetical works. Although this is somewhat compensated for by the breadth of her interaction with Augustine, it also reflects an occasionally patchy engagement with exegesis in her considerations of various hagiographical narratives. Although there are many fine examples of analyses which are sensitive to the broader theological and exegetical issues (such as her discussion of *VC* ii.41 on pp. 89-92, of *VPB* 35/36 on p. 129, and of *VPB* 97/99 on pp. 131-34),<sup>1</sup> there are also instances in which greater attention to exegesis could

1 I follow Ritari's convention (see p. 22) of providing two enumerative identifiers of the episodes in *VPB*, the first referring to the English translation of Connolly, the second to the Latin edition in Colgan's *Trias thaumaturga*. Thus, *VPB* 97/99 refers to the episode in which Darlugdach overcomes her struggle with lust by burning her feet with coals.

have significantly illuminated the episodes under discussion.

For example, in her discussion of the famous miracle in which Brigit seizes the foot of the altar during her consecration as a virgin, which is thereafter transformed into fresh and living wood (see p. 51), Ritari rightly highlights the connection with the miraculous flowering of Aaron's staff in Numbers 17. However, she makes no reference to the interpretation of this episode as symbolically prefiguring the virginal conception of Christ, which is surely relevant given that the miracle occurs at the very moment when Brigit is dedicating herself to virginity; indeed, it is significant that this very connection between Mary's and Brigit's virginity was explicitly elaborated by Lawrence of Durham in his own account of the miracle, found in his twelfth-century *Life* of the saint which was incorporated into the *Codex Salmanticensis* (§42).

In a similar manner, Ritari's discussion of the sin of pride in the miracles involving lepers in *VPB* 76/77 and 78/79 (see p. 72) could have benefitted from a consideration of exegetical treatments of the stories of Naaman and Gehazi (2 Kings 5) and the ten lepers healed by Christ (Luke 17.11-19). Again, in her consideration (on p. 127) of the jealousy of Dubthach's wife regarding the bond-maid Broicsech, Brigit's mother (*VPB* 1/1-4/4), Ritari correctly observes the influence of the story of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 21.8-14, and points out that 'the Genesis story is inverted' in the *Vita prima*, since the child of the promise (Brigit) is, in this case, the child of the bondmaid, corresponding to the biblical Ishmael, not Isaac. It is regrettable that Ritari did not delve deeper

in the symbolic significance of the story of Sarah and Hagar, which is also inverted (in a different manner) within the New Testament itself, in Paul's allegorical interpretation in Galatians 4.21-5.1. This Pauline allegory was adopted and further developed by patristic and early medieval exegetes, for example, in Augustine's *City of God* 15.2 and in the Irish commentary on the Catholic Epistles attributed to Hilary (CCSL 108B, p. 67). Such exegesis may help to explain why the author of the *Vita prima* has deliberately inverted the scriptural paradigm, creatively drawing on the Pauline allegory in order to stress that Brigit, although nothing more than the child of a bondmaid and *adaltrach* according to the flesh, should be recognized as a child of the promise according to the spirit.

Finally, it should be noted that in the quotation from *VC* i.1 discussed on p. 40 (*quia quamuis absens corpore praesens tamen in spiritu*) Adomnán is in fact himself quoting 1 Corinthians 5.3 (*ego quidem absens corpore, praesens autem spiritu*), although I believe Ritari is correct in suggesting that the use of this scriptural verse was inspired by Gregory's *Dialogues* ii.12. Similarly, the phrase quoted from *De locis sanctis* iii.4.9 on p. 116 (*Deus ... qui non uult peccatoris mortem sed ut conuertatur et uiuat*) is a variant of Ezekiel 18.23/33.11, which is encountered frequently in patristic and medieval texts.

These, however, are minor quibbles. The overall quality of Ritari's work is clear, and she has done sterling work in situating Cogitosus' *Vitae Brigitae*, Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, and the *Vita prima* of St Brigit within the mainstream of early Christian

hagiography and the traditions of Western theological thought. *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland* provides a fresh demonstration of the creative manner in which early Irish intellectuals engaged these inherited theological traditions and offers significant insights into an important area of early Irish society and theology: ecclesiastical attitudes and expectations regarding the laity. As such, it opens a major new window into the moral theology which was operative in the seventh- and eighth-century Irish church, and needs to be consulted by all those interested in studying this topic. I would advise scholars to have a copy of Ritari's book at their elbows, ready for consultation, whenever they open Bieler's *Irish Penitentials* or Wassersleben's *Irische Kanonensammlung* (or the superior edition which, we may hope, will soon supersede it); in my own future engagements with these works, I shall certainly practise what I preach.

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**Nicholas Evans: *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2010. 289 pages. Price £57. ISBN 978-1-84383-549-3.**

In his book, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, Nicholas Evans takes a very important look at how the primary Irish chronicles are related to each other, as well as the clues to where each chronicle may have been compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In order to do this

Evans makes as his main focus sections in the 'Annals of Ulster', 'Annals of Tigernach' and *Chronicum Scotorum* that record the tenth and eleventh centuries. He notes that his purpose in writing the book is to complete 'basic source work' in order to provide academics with a foundation on which to build continuing research on the Irish chronicles (p. 225). Evans rightly acknowledges that historians, who pull desired information from the chronicles, often do so 'with little or no evaluation of when or where the items under discussion were written, or whether the item represents a particular viewpoint' (p. 7). This book is a great tool for academics who wish to correct this practice in their own work by showing its reader ways in which to consider the information given by the chroniclers.

The book is divided into eight chapters and three useful appendices. The chapters consist of (1) The 'Annals of Ulster', 912-1100, (2) The characteristics of the 'Annals of Tigernach' and *Chronicum Scotorum*, (3) The Clonmacnoise group 912-1100 and its relationship with the 'Chronicle of Ireland', (4) Shared items in the 'Annals of Ulster' and the Clonmacnoise group, A.D. 912-1100, (5) The restructuring of the past in the 'Chronicle of Ireland', (6) The chronology of the 'Chronicle of Ireland', 431-730, (7) The original chronology of the Irish chronicles, ca 550-730, and (8) The Clonmacnoise-group redaction of medieval history A.D. 431-730 in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The order of the chapters' subjects is well thought out, with each following chapter complementing the progression of Evans's careful consideration of the chronicles.

In the introduction, Evans gives a clear and concise description of each of the main chronicles and their possible origins, along with an account of what can be called the ‘hallmark’ studies on the chronicles to date. Both in the introduction and throughout the book, Evans does a nice job of discussing other academic works on the Irish chronicles, giving a well-measured account of how each scholar’s work contributes to the shared knowledge of the chronicles. He particularly gives a fair and thorough critique of Daniel P. Mc Carthy’s recent hypotheses concerning the Irish chronicles.

Chapter one starts out with Evans’s consideration of the chronicles by looking at the ‘Annals of Ulster’ during the time period A.D. 912-1100. By taking a close look at what was recorded for the time period, Evans is able to distinguish several key features that point toward where the chronicle was located, as well as what interests the chroniclers had in the events, people and places they wrote about. Through a careful consideration of the chronicle, Evans points toward the ‘Annals of Ulster,’ from 912 to 938, being kept by individuals in Conaille or Brega who had connections to others in the Patrician community’ (p. 43). He points out that the chroniclers seem to have had a keen interest in the Uí Néill and the locations they were active in, as well as the Vikings. Evans notes that written communications within the Patrician *paruchia* were perhaps a main source of information for the chroniclers. He points out the uncertainty of where the ‘Annals of Ulster’ were kept after A.D. 938, until evidence in the 980s points towards the use of an ‘Armagh Chronicle’ up until 1100.

In chapter two, Evans takes a preliminary look at both the connections and distinctive features of the ‘Annals of Tigernach’ and the *Chronicum Scotorum*. Evans’s work shows that even though the two chronicles shared a common source, their respective chroniclers chose to modify the information gleaned from that common source. After giving a detailed account of both shared and un-shared items between the two chronicles, he concludes the likelihood that in the mid-twelfth century the ancestor of the ‘Annals of Tigernach’ and the *Chronicum Scotorum*, was kept at both Clonmacnoise and another location. This in turn leading to the birth of the *Chronicum Scotorum* at Clonmacnoise and another chronicle based on more secular interests.

The evidence presented in chapter three, confirms the belief held by many who have worked on the Irish chronicles that both the ‘Annals of Ulster’ and the Clonmacnoise group shared the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’ as a common source up until A.D. 911. During his argument, Evans shows that the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’ was copied after 912 and used to keep a chronicle in Clonard during the tenth century. In the chapter, Evans agrees with David Dumville that the ‘Clonmacnoise-group texts’ consisted of two chronicles being kept, but disagrees on how this was done. Evans envisions that the first Clonmacnoise-group text was a continuation of the ‘Chronicle of Ireland’ at Clonard before being moved to Clonmacnoise *ca* 1060, while the second could have been compiled since the eighth century.

In chapter four, Evans considers the shared items in the ‘Annals of Ulster’ and the Clonmacnoise group, by comparing the use

of vocabulary and phraseology in both texts. Evans concedes that the shared items between the 'Annals of Ulster' and the Clonmacnoise group make up a minority of the overall records. He does however point towards the evidence demonstrating that there was an association between chroniclers of the 'Annals of Ulster' and the Clonmacnoise group 'to the mid-eleventh century' (p. 114).

Chapter five gives a very interesting look into the use of written sources from outside Ireland and how these texts were used by the chroniclers in a careful manner to 'restructure' the past and place Ireland within the wider context of Christian history. Evans shows how this rewriting was used to advance Patrick's, Armagh's and other Patrician communities' claims to dominance within the Irish Church. The author shows how outside sources by Bede, Eusebius, Isidore, Marcellinus and the *Liber Pontificalis* were used in the 'Chronicle of Ireland.'

Chapter six gives a very detailed and well-discussed account of what can be gleaned from the chronology of the 'Chronicle of Ireland.' Through a discussion of the chronology, Evans shows that papal and imperial entries were added to the annals at an early date before 911. His discussion of the chronology of the 'Annals of Ulster' and the Clonmacnoise group shows that both of them move away from their common source. This in turn makes each of these texts equal in reliability as sources. After a discussion of ferials and their dating, Evans concludes that those found in the 'Annals of Tigernach' and the *Chronicum Scotorum* 'cannot be used to reconstruct the original chronology of the Irish chronicles' (p. 170).

In chapter seven, Evans considers what can be learned about the original chronology of the Irish chronicles during the period *ca* 550-730. He acknowledges that the sections found before the date of 664 cannot be relied on to form an understanding of the chronicles' chronology, as well as those found after 664. Evans is confident though that a clear picture can be formed of the original chronology from A.D. 664 to 730.

Chapter eight is used to examine the information on secular history found in the Clonmacnoise-group texts in order to comprehend how the chroniclers viewed the past. Evans does this in order to provide those individuals working with the chronicles, information on the reliability of the information that can only be found within the Clonmacnoise group. The information on kingship found in the chronicles for the period A.D. 431-700 is often an important source or information for scholars and their understanding of Irish kingship. Evans does a nice job of considering what can be extracted from the Clonmacnoise group's redaction of history and Irish kingship during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

In his conclusion, Evans argues that the chronicles were possibly used in three ways. The first is the use of the chronicles in conjunction with other texts. One example given is the use of the chronicles with Patrician texts. The second is the use of the chronicles as a source for other works and the third is the use of the chronicles to show continuity with the past by the use of vocabulary.

The author has added three appendices with his monograph. These contain (1) A concordance of A.D. 431-730 including dates and a summary of lost and added ka-



lends, (2) Items shared by AU and AT or CS which are possibly- or definitely-derived from a shared source, and (3) Diagrams of identified textual relationships, developments and sources. The appendices are well structured and are helpful visual aids for the reader.

This book is a must read for individuals interested in the use of the Irish chronicles as a source for understanding ‘medieval society,’ as well as how the chroniclers themselves understood the history of Ireland and its place within the Christian world. Evans does a superb job of taking the reader step by step through his argument for the Irish chronicles to be seen as a collective group that were not just compiled as a simple chronicling of facts or lists, but instead a collected, written and revised erudite group of sources.

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**Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin: *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature*. Dublin: The Four Courts press. 2009. 210 pages. Price 22.45€ (paperback), 45.00€ (hardback). ISBN 978-1-84682-177-6.**

Varhaisirlantilaisesta kirjallisuudesta kiinnostuneille on perinteisesti ollut tarjolla varsin rajallinen määrä hyviä perusteoksia, joita lukemalla voisi saada yleiskuvan Irlannin keskiaikaisesta kertomusperinteestä. Muireann Ní Bhrolcháinin kirja pyrkii osaltaan paikkaamaan tätä puutetta. Takakannen teksti lupaa kirjan soveltuvan sekä Irlannin

keskiajan kulttuuria opiskeleville että tavallisille lukijoille, jotka haluavat tietää enemmän varhaisirlantilaisen kirjallisuuden tarinoista ja runoista. Teos on jaettu yksittäisiin lukuihin selkeän temaattisesti: kertomusperinteen neljän syklin lisäksi oman lukunsa ovat saaneet tuonpuoleiseen liittyvät kertomukset (luku 6), kuninkuus ja jumalattaret (luku 7), heerokset (luku 8), sekä runous (luku 9).

Johdantoluku taustoittaa kirjan aihepiiriä käsittelemällä yleisesti tarinankerrontaa ja kertomusperinnettä, sekä oppineiden luokkien roolia esikristillisessä yhteiskunnassa. Kristinuskon saapumista ja sen aiheuttamia kulttuurisia muutoksia sivutaan lähinnä kirjoitustaidon ja kirjallisen perinteen näkökulmasta. Noin yhden sivun mittainen alaluku ‘Oral tradition and written literature’ (s. 19-20) antaa varsin pintapuolisen kuvan tutkijoiden erilaisista näkemyksistä koskien varhaisirlantilaisen aineiston luonnetta; hieman laajempi katsaus tutkimushistoriaan olisi ollut johdannossa paikallaan.

Kertomusperinteen esittelyssä Ní Bhrolcháin seuraa vakiintunutta käytäntöä, jossa tarinat on ryhmitelty sykleihin niissä esiintyvien toimijoiden mukaan. Alun perin Myles Dillonin teoksessaan *Early Irish Literature* (1948) käyttämä jaottelu on osoittautunut hyväksi tutkimuksen apuvälineeksi, ja sopii siten myös tämänkaltaiseen yleisteokseen. Luku 2, ‘Mytologinen sykli’, esittelee myyttiseen aikaan sijoittuvia kertomuksia, joiden päähenkilöinä ovat Tuatha Dé Danannin jumalat ja jumalattaret. Mahdolliset yhtymäkohdat mytologisen syklin kertomusten sekä antiikin kirjoittajien kuvaamien mannerkelttien uskomusperinteen välillä käsitellään luvun alussa ennen siirtymistä

yksittäisiin tarinoihin. Yleisesti ottaen toimivan mannerkeltejä koskevan katsauksen puutteena on viitteiden vähäisyys: lukijoille – niin opiskelijoille kuin muillekin – olisi hyödyllistä tietää, mistä alkuperäislähteistä esimerkiksi Caesarin, Lucanuksen ja Plinius vanhemman tarjoama informaatio on löydettävissä, tai missä nämä viitteet ovat muutoin helposti saatavilla.

Kaikkien kertomussyklejä käsittelevien lukujen pääpaino on niihin kuuluvien kertomusten kuvailevassa esittelyssä pikemmin kuin yksittäisten tekstien analyysissä. Mytologisen syklin kohdalla lukuun on sisällytetty *Cath Maige Tuiredin* ja *Tochmarc Étaínen* myös *Aisling Oengusa* sekä kenties vähemmän tunnettu *Altram Tige dá Medar*. Herooista Ulsterin sykliä käsittelevä luku 3 rakentuu *Táin Bó Cuailngen* siihen kykeytyvien tapahtumien, henkilöhahmojen ja muiden tarinoiden ympärille. Juonikuvausten lisäksi Ní Bhrolcháin pyrkii avaamaan *Táin Bó Cuailngeen* liittyviä tutkimusongelmia alaluvussa ‘Discussion of the *Táin*’, joka tarjoaa hyödyllisen katsauksen tekstin syntyyn ja kehitykseen liittyviin kysymyksiin. Luvut 4 ja 5 esittelevät Finnin syklin sekä kuninkaiden syklin jossain määrin edellisiä lukuja yleisluontoisemmin, johtuen ainakin osaksi siitä, että näiden syklien keskeisiä teemoja käsitellään kirjassa yksityiskohtaisemmin toisaalla. Täten esimerkiksi Finn Mac Cu-

maill esiintyy Cú Chulainnin ohella esimerkiksi heeroksena luvussa 8, ja kuninkaiden syklin Suibhne Geilt luvun 7 alaluvussa ‘Madness in Early Irish Literature’. Yksittäisiä syklejä seuraavien lukujen tarkoituksena on siten yhtäältä laajentaa näkökulmaa sellaisiin aihepiireihin, joiden voidaan katsoa määrittävän varhaisirlantilaisista kertomusperinnettä yleisemmällä tasolla, ja toisaalta esitellä myös teemoja, jotka eivät suoranaisesti lukeudu kertomussykliin piiriin.

Ní Bhrolcháinin kirja sopii hyvin perustekseksi kaikille varhaisirlantilaisesta kertomusperinteestä kiinnostuneille, ja myös esimerkiksi aihetta käsittelevän luento-opetuksen oheislukemistoksi. Aihepiiriin syvemmin vihkiytyneille opiskelijoille tai tutkijoille teoksella on todennäköisesti vähemmän tarjottavaa, vaikka varsin laajaa bibliografiaa voikin pitää hyödyllisenä siinänsä. Kirjaan eksyneet muutamat kirjoitusvirheet ja paikoittain esiintyvä asioiden turha toisto tuskin häiritsevät muita kuin kaikkein tarkkasilmäisimpiä lukijoita. Aika näyttää, pystyykö Ní Bhrolcháinin teos syrjäyttämään Dillonin yli kuusi vuosikymmentä sitten julkaistun *Early Irish Literaturen*; uutena hyvänä yleisesityksenä se on joka tapauksessa tervetullut.

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