

Book reviews

Ritari, K. *Pilgrimage to Heaven: Eschatology and Monastic Spirituality in Early Medieval Ireland*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2016. xi + 223 pages. ISBN 978-2-503-56539-2. €65.

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, eschatology is on the minds of many people, whether they be motivated by religious sentiments or by the threats of global climate change. Within medieval Celtic Studies, eschatological studies have been produced by many scholars associated with University College Cork in Ireland, including work of the present reviewer in an earlier volume of this journal and others that are forthcoming. The successful *De Finibus* project based at UCC published in 2014 an excellent two-volume collection called *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology* (eds. Carey, Nic Cárthaigh & Ó Dochartaigh), to which the author of the present monograph under consideration, Dr. Katja Ritari, contributed. As an exemplary scholar of early Irish ecclesiastical history, sources, and theology, Dr. Ritari is—in full disclosure—a dear friend and colleague and fellow alum of UCC. *Pilgrimage to Heaven* represents an intriguing approach to the subject of eschatology in that it examines this theme in a variety of texts that may not be as obvious as those in *The End and Beyond* in their specific eschatological concerns.

Those elucidating these subjects tend to be aware that there are (at least) two dimensions of eschatology that are intertwined in a Christian context: the cosmic sense of eschatology as the end of the created universe, and the personal sense of eschatology as the final fate of the human soul after the last judgment and its eternal reward in Heaven or punishment in Hell thereafter. As the Christian soteriological schema, the bulk of its sacramental theology, and the entirety of its moral teaching is based upon preparation for this second, personal eschatological dimension, it is fair to say that eschatology colors every aspect of Christian life. This is particularly so with the perpetual life of penance exemplified by those in monastic orders, and thus examining texts of these provenances or with these subjects is entirely appropriate when considering questions of eschatology.

After a brief introduction on life, death, and spirituality in a monastic context, Dr. Ritari proceeds to examine two hagiographical sources from the Columban tradition of Iona to see how their subjects—St. Adomnán and St. Colum Cille/Columba himself—represented the paradigm of post-eschatological existence while still on the earth. The priority given to Adomnán in this study is due to the chronological precedence of his tenth-century Irish life over Colum Cille's twelfth-century Irish

vita that feature in this analysis. While Adomnán's own *Vita Columbae* does come into the discussion, the focus on the Irish text of Iona's founder here is noteworthy. In the case of Colum Cille's life, the Irish text itself is more interested in the sanctity of holy places founded by the saint in Ireland (particularly Derry and Kells), which are both historically relevant to the situation during which the text was written, and which become sites of pilgrimage due to the presence of the saint's relics. Adomnán's *vita* portrays him as being particularly wise and possessed of supernatural insights which make him effective as the leader of his community, in the same fashion that the possession of *fir flathemon* ('truth of rulers') enables an Irish king to be an effective sovereign and just judge. It is this supernatural insight, as well as his other powers to produce miracles, which makes the ninth abbot of Iona an example of the heavenly life on earth.

The next two sections of the discussion focus upon themes of pilgrimage in particular texts as eschatological locales, with sermons of the peregrine St. Columbanus and the popular monastic voyage-tale *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* as the primary subjects. St. Columbanus' writings are examined to see that not only does the idea of perpetual pilgrimage—the *glas* martyrdom spoken of in some Irish ecclesiastical texts—as a kind of exile for spiritual ends emerge, but that the entirety of human life, and especially of monastic life, and its necessity to turn towards otherworldly aims and motivations is in itself a pilgrimage, an inner journey that

may not actually necessitate an outward wandering. 'Columbanus invites his audience to see the world around them as the creation and thereby to learn about the power behind it all—i.e. the Creator. Worldly things thus have significance only to the extent that they bear relation to the true reality of God' (p. 90).

The wonders on the sea and isles found in the narrative of the *Navigatio* are understood as allegories for the monastic search for eternal heavenly salvation, and some of the denizens of these insular locales are understood as hermits and fellow travelers on the way to paradise in the same way that traveling to visit other hermits was a characteristic of the traditions of the Desert Fathers in Egypt at the beginnings of Christian monastic spiritual history. The ways in which the fasting and feasting of Brendan's monks are portrayed demonstrates the ascetic need for penitential purification in order to achieve a suitable state in which the reward of feasting can be enjoyed as a spiritual consolation rather than an occasion for indulgence or gluttony. This process of ascetic and monastic liturgical discipline in their voyage toward the Promised Land of the Saints makes Brendan and his returning monks very much like the travelers in the secular *immráma* tales, as witnesses to the otherworld and its wonders instructing those who are still on the way. 'By telling the tale, they provide examples of ideal monastic life and trust in God's providence and, most importantly, they bear the message of the reality of the heavenly kingdom, which

awaits everyone after death, as well as the way to get there' (p. 143).

The final text examined returns—at least eponymously—to the first, in that it treats the otherworldly geography presented in the *Fís Adomnáin*, a late-tenth-century text surviving in several later manuscripts. Often cited as a precursor to Dante, Dr. Ritari emphasizes that this text should be judged on its own merits as an outstanding example of visionary literature, and one of the finest from the Irish literary tradition's ample instances of such. Rather than beginning with Hell and ending with Paradise as Dante's text, the *Fís* instead presents all souls as passing through the gates and past the guardians of the Seven Heavens, and then (if so doomed) proceeding to the appropriate punishments in the Seven Hells. Adomnán as a visionary possessed of supernatural knowledge is the ideal figure to be attached to such a tradition, Dr. Ritari suggests, and in her concluding section of this chapter, she discusses at some length the later Irish *Visio Tnugdali* in comparison to the structure of the *Fís*. Ending an examination of eschatological themes in ecclesiastical texts with an actual description of the afterlives awaiting humans is an appropriate way to conclude such a discussion before a short summarizing concluding chapter in this volume.

Dr. Ritari's book is enjoyable and utilizes the broadest range of sources on the texts discussed to illuminate the discussion. Though some repetition of material is inevitable in such a treatment where earlier textual parallels are drawn,

the overall content and quality of this work does not suffer from it, and the dialogue between these sources remains vibrant under Dr. Ritari's able hand and mind. For those interested in the topic of eschatology, or general early Irish spirituality and theology, this book will be a boon, and even beyond such a specialist audience, the writing remains clear and accessible so that students at all levels will be able to benefit from the extensive mastery of the material which Dr. Ritari demonstrates in spades herein.

Bibliography

Carey, J., E. Nic Cárthaigh & C. Ó Dochartaigh (eds.) 2014. *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*. Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications.

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Lewis, G. & R. Williams (tr.): *The Book of Taliesin: Poems of Warfare and Praise in an Enchanted Britain*. London: Penguin. 2019. lxxx + 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-241-38113-7. £20.

Two Welsh bards, one of them a former Archbishop of Canterbury, effect magical transformations upon sixty-one poems from the Book of Taliesin, a treasure of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, where it is MS Peniarth 2. Their volume of translations is a triumph. It combines poetic vision with up-to-date scholarship. It is handsomely produced. It will win prizes.

Their achievement is the greater because the Book of Taliesin's contents are far older than the fourteenth-century manuscript in which they survive. Some are described as being from North Britain, praising victories of Urien Rheged, ruler of Cumbria and its borderlands in the 590s. More tranquil is an anonymous (ninth-century or later) eulogy of Tenby in south-west Wales, telling how its king made gifts to poets at his fortress by the sea. War returns with 'The Prophecy of Britain', a bloodthirsty call for liquidation of the English, possibly written in 940 after a humiliating capitulation by the West Saxons to the Vikings at Leicester (if this is the 'Lego' of its text). Events outside Britain, such as the Almoravid invasion of southern Spain in 1086, may be reflected in certain sections. There is also legendary material on Arthur and Alexander the Great, and obscure glimpses of Celtic mythology. It is quite a mix.

In taking on this difficult body of verse, the translators display imagination and resolve. Here are samples of their work. Lauding Urien's martial prowess (p. 16) the purported author, Taliesin, who may have written in the sixth century, speaks of 'An abundance of corpses, / Crows red with warriors' blood'. According to other critics, all the 'Taliesin' poems represent a pseudonymous work from the ninth century onwards. In a mystical spirit are words (p. 65) by the magician Taliesin of legend (not history), 'Who made the penny / From a circle of silver? / Whence comes the quick sea, / As loud as a chariot?' So there is variety galore.

There is also major progress on the interpretation of these archaic texts, often corrupt. Historians may henceforth use the volume for information on Urien and other North British rulers of the years about 600. Students of poetic inspiration may consult it as well for translations more reliable than those quoted by Robert Graves in his contentious *The White Goddess*. A century of editorial endeavour allows a revolutionary new understanding of poetry that had bewildered previous generations. *The Book of Taliesin* can now be offered with confidence to enquirers. Valuable as well is the editors' introduction, explaining how the tradition of Taliesin bestowed a venerable prophetic authority on creative spirits in Wales and even beyond.

The volume at once summarizes research of the past and indicates routes for that of the future. Here are some corrections to help investigators on their way. The borderland 'Fortress of

Caradawg' of Britain's 'heroic age' (pp. ix, 32) may be misplaced. It was not near Shrewsbury, but further south, at present-day Caradog, on the Wye south of Hereford (see Ekwall 1936: 82). Because 'Arechwydd' (p. xxi, 8, 127, 136) means 'by fresh water', it may denote Urien's territory around York, which neighboured the River Ouse's ancient marshlands. Despite 'Echwydd' meaning 'fresh water', there are those who still take it as the Solway Firth, where the water is salty. There is evidence to date the *Mabinogion* story of Branwen to the early twelfth century, not 'the eleventh' (p. xxxii). Some scholars yet hold the older view that the 'Fortress of Gwair' (pp. 109, 122) is an unidentified stronghold on the River Wear, Co. Durham, but the allusion of the Early Welsh (*g*)wair, meaning 'bend', may be to the huge bend of Duncansby Head in Scotland's far north. The 'Spring Song' must allude (pp. 133, 216) to the English victory of Brunanburh in 937, which was not fought in Cheshire (as claimed). It instead took place ten kilometres west of Durham, as indicated in *The Battle of Brunanburh* (Campbell 1938: 61 n. 2).

As for the prophecy 'May God Lift Up the British People' (pp. 141–142), it is hardly of the thirteenth century (as alleged), but may be of the 940s, for the following reasons. The enemies of Gwynedd there vilified are not the English, but those in South Wales. The editors correctly identify its 'Din Clud' as Dumbarton. Its more obscure 'Din Maerud' seems to be 'Din Metcaud' or Lindisfarne, its 'Din Daryfon' may be

'Din Guricon' or Wroxeter, and its 'Din Riedon' is perhaps 'Din Perydon' or Rockfield, near Monmouth. The bard vents his scorn on Gwynedd's foes. Whether they run away to Dumbarton or Holy Island in the North, or Wroxeter on Wales's borders, they will find no security. They will not be safe even at Rockfield, where English overlords collected tribute from the Welsh (an extortion fiercely denounced in 'The Prophecy of Britain').

This is not all as regards toponyms. The Battle of the *Unued* in 655 (p. 149) took place on the River Went, north-west of Doncaster, Yorkshire. 'Cafis' (p. 152) can be taken as Cadiz, Spain, and occurs in lines on the Almoravid invasion of Andalusia, which sent shockwaves throughout Christendom in 1086. They are likely not about the First Crusade ten years later. 'Pen ren Wleth' (p. 205) is probably not Penwith, Cornwall, with which it has been traditionally identified. It is more likely to be 'Penryn Wrach' or the great headland by Gourock on the Firth of Clyde, Scotland. Compare *Wleth* (also corrupt), an allusion to the cape at Gourock in a Latin Life of St Kentigern, Glasgow's patron. Welsh (*g*)wrach means 'hag, old woman', and Gourock's name is a Cumbric one with its origin in Granny Kempock's Stone, a prehistoric monolith on the cliffs there (see Jackson 1958: 311–312). Despite editorial comments to the contrary (p. 209), there is much point in identifying obscure place names associated with Alexander the Great. They (a) refer to places conquered by him and (b) are lifted from Orosius's fifth-century world history, evidently the

poet's source. Comparison with *The Old English Orosius* (ed. Bately 1980) brings this out. 'Ynys Wair' (p. 210) denotes the Orkneys, facing the *Gwair* 'Bend' or promontory at John o' Groats already mentioned. It is nothing do with Lundy in the Bristol Channel.

Readers will see from the above what a Herculean task awaited our two translators of the Book of Taliesin. To make intelligible their 'Poems of Warfare and Praise in an Enchanted Britain' required immense labour and thought. This Penguin Classics volume is hence an essential purchase for all Celticists and libraries of Celtic Studies. By analysis of place names and the like, it casts a swathe of light on the politics of Dark-Age Britain, the sources used by poets, and legends known to the authors of the *Mabinogion* tale of *Culhwch and Olwen*, and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*.

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Sims-Williams, P.: *Buchedd Beuno: The Middle Welsh Life of St Beuno*. Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Medieval and Modern Welsh Series vol. XV. 2018. ix + 234 pp. ISBN: 978-1-85500-236-4. €30.

Patrick Sims-Williams' new edition of *Buchedd Beuno* is a significant contribution to the study and pedagogy of medieval Welsh texts. The volume consists in a substantial introduction, a short grammar of Middle Welsh, the text edited from Oxford, Jesus College MS 119 (the Book of the Anchorite of Llanddewibrefi), a short section of variants and notes, a glossary, and a reproduction of the diplomatic edition of *Buchedd Beuno* (from the same manuscript) published by John Morris-Jones in 1912.

Although this book is explicitly aimed at students at the beginning of their studies, its introduction provides new advances in scholarship. An example is the ingenious suggestion that the unexplained masculine form 'Wenefredi' found in the anonymous Life of Winefride might derive from a misunderstanding of the synod of Llanddewibrefi. *Buchedd Beuno* and the related Latin lives of Winefride have a complex textual history and this edition engages well with the earlier part of this. *Buchedd Beuno* is based on a lost *Vita Sancti Beunoi*, which, as argued by Fiona Winward (1999), was a substantial source for the two lives of Winefride. Robert of Shrewsbury's Life of Winefride was subsequently translated into Middle Welsh as *Buchedd Gwenfrewy*. In discussing dating, a *terminus a quo* of c.

1100 for *Vita Sancti Beuno* is presented perhaps a little too confidently, as is the date-range of 1135 × 1138? for the anonymous Life of Winefride. The list of miracles which follows the anonymous Life may well have been compiled over time and need not be contemporary with the composition of the Life itself.

Sims-Williams' main new argument regarding the relationships of all these texts, is that *Buchedd Beuno* drew on Robert of Shrewsbury's Life of Winefride as well as its main source, the lost *Vita Sancti Beuno* (stemma on p. 31). This is an interesting proposal (first suggested but not treated in detail in Sims-Williams 2001: 124). It is based primarily on correspondences between *Buchedd Beuno* and Robert's Life of Winefride, where they agree against the anonymous Life of Winefride in the section describing Winefride's martyrdom and resurrection. It is true that the passage is far shorter in the anonymous Life, but I would not agree that it is inferior because of that (contra p. 29) and do not believe that the author of the anonymous Life would have seen it in this way either. Rather the shorter passage fits well with the pared-down simple style of the anonymous Life throughout, and could be a deliberate adaptation. Robert of Shrewsbury's verbosity is well known and it is likely that he retained more of his source than the brief anonymous Life. As such, agreement between *Buchedd Beuno* and Robert's Life of Winefride against the anonymous Life is not unexpected and does not require the translator to have read Robert's Life. Nevertheless, in the messy textual world of the Middle Ages, it is quite possible that Robert's Life fed back into

versions of *Vita Sancti Beuno* or was read by the translator who produced *Buchedd Beuno*. The argument, therefore, while not being certain or necessary, in my view, is indeed plausible. This forms just part of a rich and helpful introduction (to students and scholars) and the author's willingness to present exciting new arguments is highly productive.

This edition is based on one medieval manuscript with very few variant readings offered, a decision clearly justified by the need to provide students with a readable text of the medieval material. Nevertheless, as highlighted by the two dissertations cited (Lloyd-Evans 1966; Dahlman 1976), *Buchedd Beuno* has a large and protean later manuscript tradition, further study of which would greatly add to our knowledge of Beuno traditions, particularly in the early modern period. To the (comprehensive) list of manuscripts of *Buchedd Beuno* in n. 26 should now be added New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, Beinecke Library, Osborn fb 229 (s. xvii in.). The publication of a full critical edition of *Buchedd(au) Beuno*, comparing all the manuscripts and indicating how they relate to one another, remains a desideratum.

The short grammar of Middle Welsh the edition includes will be useful for all students beginning their study of the language. It is less formidable than that provided by Simon Evans and presents useful information in a concise format. More tabular descriptions of verb conjugations would be helpful and would complement the glossary which tends simply to list the conjugated forms of

verbs rather than defining them e.g. as 3 sg. pres. subjunctive.

The text itself is divided into chapters and, within these, each sentence is numbered. While this may be a little frustrating for those who wish to read the text fluently, it will be helpful for beginners, and teachers of Middle Welsh will easily be able to pick out practice sentences to test their students. The editor has replaced the incurring v-form <ŭ> with <v> and regularized the use of <u>, <v>, and <w> to represent consistently /ü/, /v/, and /u/ or /w/. This will help students although it may be a little misleading for when they come to read other Middle Welsh texts (including in the Dublin red book series), which are not normally regularized in this manner. More controversially, <d> is replaced by <ð> when it represents fricative /ð/ initially and medially, but not finally. This may help improve students' pronunciation of Middle Welsh, but is more likely to give them a misleading impression of Middle Welsh orthography. The edition's inconsistency in deploying <ð> only initially and medially (and not at all in the glossary) is not helpful in this regard. Students can of course compare the original orthography in the text printed at the end of this volume, but the necessity of reprinting John Morris Jones' diplomatic edition is perhaps questionable, given that both this edition and the manuscript itself have now been digitized.

Overall, this is an excellent addition to the DIAS Medieval and Modern Welsh Series. It is useful to novices and experienced scholars. It makes new critical contributions in its introduction,

while incorporating features such as the numbering of sentences which will be helpful pedagogically. It is certainly an edition I would consider using as an initial set text for students with no previous knowledge of Welsh.

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