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Remarks on the Theological Aspect of the Hell-Motif in Síaburcharpat Con Culaind

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◆ Remarks on the theological aspect of
the *hell-motif* in *Síaburcharpát Con Culaind*

Darcy Ireland



<http://ovalscreams.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/cuchulainns-war-chariot.jpg>

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Manuscript Witnesses for *sbCC*

Version I

Lebor na hUidre (LU):

RIA MS 23 E 25, fo. 113a—115b

“Book of the Dun Cow”

12th century.

Version II

British Library Egerton 88:

fo. 14b¹—15a²; Late 16th century.

British Library Additional 33,993: fo. 2b—3b; 16th century.

R.I. Best and O. Bergin (eds.), ‘*Siaburcharpat Con Culaind*’, in *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: RIA, 1929) 278-87. Meyer, K. (ed.), ‘*Siaburcharpat Conculaind: From the British Museum MS. Egerton 88, fo. 14b¹—15a², collated with Additional 33, 993, fo. 2b—3b*’, in O.J. Bergin, R.I. Best, K. Meyer, and J.G. O’Keeffe (eds.), *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* (Dublin, 1910) 3.48-56.

SbCC (LU)

9440	An ro chesusa d'imned a Loegairi for muir ⁊ tír. bá ansa damsa óenadaig la demon <i>co n-ír</i>	That which I suffered of trouble, O Lóegaire, on sea and land; - More severe to me was a single night with the Demon with rage.
9445	Mo chorpan ba crethnaigthe la Lugaid a búaid. roucsat demna m'anmain isin richis rúaid	My small body was pierced with Lugaid his victory. The demons brought my soul into the red ember.
9450	Immárubartsa in clétine gai bolgae do léir. ro bása i comchétbúaid fri demon hi péin	I plied on them the javelin, the <i>gae bolga</i> , assiduously. I was in my complete victory against the Demon in pain.
9455	Bá comnart mo gaiscedsa mo chlaideb ba <i>crúaid</i> . domrimartsa in demon co n-óenmeór isin richis rúaid	My weapons were strong my sword was hard. The Devil pressed me with one finger into the red ember.
9455	Ind ríge consniat a ríge cía beit co mméit a mbrigi. ní cumcat ni la mac nDé acht a cubatt i ndire.	The kings who contend for their sovereignty though they may be with greatness of their might. They achieve nothing with respect to God's son except their own length of arm in the grave.

SbCC

LU

9450 Immárubartsa in clétine
 gai bolgae do léir.
 ro bása i comchétbúaid
 fri demon hi péin[.]

I plied on them the javelin,
the *gae bolga*, assiduously.
I was in my complete victory
against the Demon in pain.

Egerton 88/Add. 33,993

Imrubairt-sa cleitine
gai bolga co leir.
robadhusa a comchétfaid
fri demon a pein[.]

I plied the spearlet
and the *gae bolga* diligently;
I was in concert
with the Demon in suffering.*

*Acknowledgement to Feargal Ó Béarra (NUI Galway) for his reading of Egerton 88/Add. 33,993 here.

Tírechán's *Collectanea* (*Life of Patrick*)

“On his journeys Patrick finds a 120-foot long grave (monument). Patrick’s companions marvel at its length and the saint suggests that he will call back the dead man from the other world. He prays and the dead man is restored to life. He gives his name and says that he was a swineherd murdered a hundred years ago and reports of the torments suffered by him in hell whither he was sent because he was a pagan. When he refuses to return to hell Patrick baptizes him and the man dies again, now finding his way to heaven” (J. Szövérfy, citing “Heroic Tales” in *ZCP*, xxv (1956), 183-210).

Bieler, L. (ed., trans.), ‘Tírechán’s Account of St Patrick’, in L. Bieler and F. Kelly (eds., trans.), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin: DIAS, 1979) 122-67 at 154-55:40. Szövérfy, J., ‘*Siaburcharpat Conculainn*, the Cadoc-legend, and the finding of the Táin’, in *BBCS* 17:2 (1957) 69-77 at 74.

Acallam na Senórach

‘Ocus aiscid rob áil liumsa d’iarraid ort, a naemchleirig,’ ar Cailti. ‘Cá haiscid sin, a m’anam?’ ar Pátraic. ‘Mo deirbtsiur do thabairt a piannaib, uair tarrasa dot muintirus ꝛ dot gráda.’ ‘Do máthair ꝛ t’athair ꝛ do thigerna Find mac Cumail do thabairt a piannaib ortsu,’ ar Pátraic, ‘massa maith lé Dia.’ (4120) Ro altaig Cailte sin don Tailgind, conid hí sin étail is ferr fuair Cailti riam.

I’d like to make a request, holy cleric, said Caílte.

What is it, friend? asked Patrick.

I’d like my sister to be delivered from torment now that I have become one of your followers and favoured ones.

May she, your father and mother and your lord Finn mac Cumail be delivered from torment for your sake if it be God’s will, said Patrick.

Caílte thanked the Táilchenn. It was the best gift Caílte ever got.

Stokes, W.H. (ed.), *Acallamh na Senórach*, in W.H. Stokes and E. Windisch (eds.), *Irische Texte* 4:1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1900) 117: 4116-22. Harmon, M. (trans.), *The Dialogue of the Ancients of Ireland: A New Translation of Acallam na Senórach* (Dublin: Carysfort, 2009) 101.

Reicne Fothaid Canainne

48 *Scarfid* frit cēin mo *chorp* toll, m'anum do pīenadh la donn,
serc bethu cé is miri, ingi adradh Rīgh nimhi.

48 My riddled body must part from thee awhile, my soul to be tortured
by the black demon. Save (for) the worship of Heaven's King, love of
this world is folly.

Dublin, RIA B.IV.2 (1080), f. 133. Meyer, K., *Fianaigecht* (Dublin, 1910, rep. 2006), 17.
Cf. *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, Fasc. XXI-XXV* (Dublin,
1940) 3027.

Irish *Gospel of Nicodemus* (YBL)

XXII

(2) Isand sin do múchastair rí na glóiri in bás foa chosaib ꝛ ro
770 eadarglacastair Satanus, oirchindeach Ifrind, ꝛ da chuibrich hé ꝛ do
theilc i fudomain Ifrind.

(2) Thereupon the King of Glory destroyed death beneath his feet and
seized Satan, Prince of Hell, and bound him and cast him into the depths
of Hell.

Hughes, I. (ed., trans.), *Stair Nicoméid: The Irish Gospel of Nicodemus* (London: The Irish Texts Society, 1991).

Irish *Gospel of Nicodemus* (YBL)

[XXIII opens with Hell receiving Satan and “reproaching him strongly”, and it closes with Christ placing Satan under the command of Hell.]

XXIV

(1) Ocus ro sín a láim uad ꝛ adbert: ‘Ticid chucum a maemu grádacha da neoch agá fuil m’ímáigin ꝛ mo cho(i)smailis fén uair do damnad sib tré chrand ꝛ tré diabul ꝛ do saeradh sib tré chrann ꝛ tromum-sa.’ Ocus ro gab Ádam ara láim deis ꝛ adubairt fris: ‘(Do-rigne mé thú ꝛ) síth
810 duid ꝛ dod (t)huili chlaind fhíreóin.

(1) And he [i.e. Christ] stretched out his hand saying: ‘Come to me beloved saints who have my image and likeness, for you were condemned by a tree and by the devil and you have been liberated by a tree and by me.’ And he took Adam by his right hand and said to him: ‘Peace be with you and all your righteous children. And when I created you, it was not for this place that I made you. Come along with me to my own kingdom for I have bought you with my own flesh and blood.’

Poems of Blathmac and sbCC

113. Sech do-rrochuíni, at-bath,
ní arraid in ndílguthach;
ran-ucsat co Satan serb
druing duib demnae i n-ifernn.

He both despaired and died;
he did not approach the forgiving one.
Black hosts of devils brought
him to Hell to harsh Satan.

Mo chorpan ba crethnaigthe
la Lugaid a búaid.
roucsat demna m'anmain
isin richis rúaid.

My small body was shaken
with Lugaid its victory.
The demons have brought my soul
into the red-white [glowing?] embers.

Carney, J. (ed.), *The Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan* (Dublin: DIAS, 1964) 2-89, at 39.113.

Letter of Boniface

[From *Letter XLVII* [59]. The First Session of the Roman Synod of 745.] “My chief trouble was with two well-known heretics of the worst sort, blasphemers against God and the catholic faith. One, called Aldebert, is a Gaul by birth, the other, called Clemens, is a Scot... *Contrary to the teaching of the holy fathers he contends that Christ, descending to the lower world, set free all who were imprisoned there, believers and unbelievers, those who praised God and the worshipers of idols...*”

Emerton, E. (trans.), *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York: Columbia, 2000) 76-80.

Augustine and Evodius

[From *Letter CLXIII* [163]. From Evodius to Augustine.] “I ask also a fourth question: Who are those spirits in reference to whom the Apostle Peter testifies concerning the Lord in these words: “Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit, in which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison?” giving us to understand that they were in hell, and that Christ descending into hell, preached the gospel to them all, and by grace delivered them all from darkness and punishment, so that from the time of the resurrection of the Lord judgment is expected, hell having then been completely emptied.”

[From *Letter CLXIV* [164]. From Augustine to Evodius.] “It is established beyond question that the Lord, after He had been put to death in the flesh, “descended into hell;” (II.3)... ”

Augustine, ‘Letter 163’, in Sis. W. Parsons (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Letters, Volume III (131-164)* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953) 381. Augustine, ‘Letter 164’, in Sis. W. Parsons (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Letters, Volume III (131-164)* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1953) 383.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiæ* IIIa.52.1-8

article 6. did Christ set some of the damned free from hell?

REPLY: We have already seen that Christ, when he descended into hell, acted by the power of his passion. His descent into hell, then, brought the fruit of liberation to those only who were joined to Christ's passion in faith vivified by love, which takes away sin. But those who were in the inferno of the damned were either wholly without faith in Christ's passion, such as the infidels, or having had that faith, had no likeness in charity to the suffering Christ. These, consequently, were not cleansed of their sins. Christ's descent into hell therefore brought them no deliverance from the guilt of hell's punishment...

3. That some were not delivered from every part of hell, as from every situation in the world, is not to be ascribed to a want of power on Christ's part, but to their different conditions. As long as men draw breath they can be converted to faith and charity, for in this life men are not confirmed in either good or evil; after their departure from this world, however, they are so fixed.

Aquinas, T., *Summa theologiæ*, 3a.52.6. Murphy, R.T.A. (trans.), *St Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiæ, Volume 54: The Passion of Christ (3a.46-52)* (London: Blackfriars, 1965) 172-3.

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