ARCHETYPAL NARRATIVES:

TOWARD A THEOLOGICAL APPRECIATION OF EARLY CELTIC HAGIOGRAPHY

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Statement:

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Abstract

This study aims to interpret Lives of Christian saints as examples of religious literature. Hagiography is commonly studied as an historical artefact indicative of the politics or linguistics of the time in which a text was composed, but few theorists have attempted to interpret its religious content. As these texts were composed within monastic environments I argue that the religious content may be illumined by a methodology which identifies an implicit theology of sanctity within the narrative.

The biblical hermeneutic method proposed by Paul Ricoeur in the mid-twentieth century is applied to the earliest Lives of Samson, Cuthbert, and Brigit. These three date from the mid- to late-seventh century, a time of secular and ecclesiastical change, in some cases profound turmoil. Historical context for the composition of each text is presented; texts are analysed for biblical allusions and literary sources, and submitted to structural analysis. Motifs of religious and archetypal significance are derived from the work of theorists in folklore, anthropology, Bible, and the History of Religions. Each text is examined for motifs and patterns that disclose the structural framework used to organize the work. The structural analysis is then used to highlight central themes in the text.

This interpretive process imagines a dynamic encounter between text and reader which combines historical inquiry with biblical hermeneutic, fulfilling Ricoeur's expectation that the encounter would expand the reader's horizon of meaning. Samson's encounters with serpents and sorceress function as an initiatory pattern drawing monastics into a dynamic of spiritual growth. Cuthbert's time on Farne Island includes echoes of the Desert Saints as well as the crucifixion of Christ and results in a brief but powerfully kenotic episcopal ministry. Brigit's Kildare becomes the locus of the New Jerusalem, City of Refuge and Peaceable Kingdom.

85,708 words

DECLARATION:

THERE ARE THOSE

There are those we know
buried
not far beneath this green land
with whom
we have not spoken for a long time
who remember
what we have forgotten.

One day they will speak again
surprised at their own voices
singing the old song,
how the earth is given and taken
how the world will come again.

And we who also listen surprised
will come again to the land of lands.
Our own, the place we've chosen,
after the false start
and the slouching toward
falseness.

And find ourselves on the old roads
but new, walking with Blake, head up,
toward Jerusalem.

David Whyte, *Where Many Rivers Meet*

List of Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum*
BB	Bethu Brigte
C&P	Connolly and Picard, *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*
CCEL	Christian Classics Ethereal Library
JRSAI	Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
VA	*Vita Antonii*
VBC	*Vita Sanctae Brigitae,* by Cogitosus
VCA	*Vita Sancti Cuthberti,* Anonymous
VM	*Vita Martini*
VP	*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*
VS I	*Vita Samsonis,* first text
VS II	*Vita Samsonis,* second text
VSH	*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis will pose a set of theological questions concerning the structure and content of three saints' Lives from the late seventh century. The questions are as follows: Can a hermeneutic approach similar to that of a biblical hermeneutic be attempted with hagiographies? What sources does the hagiographer use to create a unique, yet recognizably Christian, image of his saintly protagonist? Can these texts be read as models of sanctity, in particular for monastic spiritual formation? How does the historical context influence their composition? And ultimately, what impact may these texts be theorized to have upon their audiences?

In addressing these questions particular attention will be paid to the oft-noted mix of biblical precedents, extra-biblical Latin sources (in particular, fourth- and fifth-century saints' Lives), and allegedly pagan elements contained in the chosen narratives. A more general statement of the question might be: how might readers of these seventh-century hagiographies interpret the texts and be impacted in the encounter with them? The reasons why these are theological questions include the observations that the structure as well as the content of the texts are closely related to biblical models, and can be seen to convey models of sanctity based on the life of Christ and his earliest followers. The need for interpretation arises because the texts move beyond simple imitation and take into account such influences as the historical context of the author and the particular charism or character of the religious community within which the hagiographer is writing. Combining elements of narrative theology, historical theology, and a theology of spirituality, and drawing on the long practice of biblical hermeneutics, this project seeks to interpret the meaning of the texts as narratives conveying concerned knowledge to Christian, and particularly monastic, readers.

Biblical and extra-biblical elements in early Latin literature have been thoroughly catalogued by various scholars including Thomas O'Loughlin,[1] Elissa

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[1] Thomas O'Loughlin, *Gildas and the Scriptures: Observing the World Through a Biblical Lens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012); 'Rhygyfarch's *Vita Dauidis:* an *apparatus biblicus*', *Studia Celtica,* 32 (1998), 179-188; 'Patrick's Declaration of the Great Works of God (the *Confessio*) in *Celtic Spirituality,* ed. by Oliver Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

Henken,[2] and Dorothy Ann Bray[3] in the area of Welsh and Irish saints' *Lives,* and François Kerlouégan[4] and Neil Wright[5] in the realm of early Latin sources. To date, however, no one has approached a single text, or small group of texts, to examine its unique combination of motifs with the aim of assessing its theological significance for its originating community and subsequent readers. Previous approaches have examined late antique and early medieval Lives for 'pagan survivals',[6] historiographical evidence,[7] or indications of 'sanctity' in the text.[8] This last approach comes closest to the present project which likewise sees the texts as essentially religious narratives carrying concerned knowledge to particular audiences.[9] Where this project will diverge from previous work is in its application of a hermeneutical approach to the texts, suggesting that these narratives may be interpreted as having a humanizing and meaningful impact on their readers by virtue of their structure and content. By setting the text in its historical context, analysing the structure of the narrative, and identifying the particular mix of biblical, extra-biblical, and folk sources and exemplars incorporated into the text, insight into possible meanings of the text, particularly within a monastic community, may be obtained.

It is expected that a significant percentage of the motifs employed in each Life will be traceable to explicitly Christian sources, specifically the Bible and the Lives of

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[2] Elissa Henken, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1991); 'The Saint as Secular Ruler: aspects of Welsh hagiography', *Folklore,* 98 (1987), 226-23; 'The Saint as Folk Hero: Biographical Patterning in Welsh Hagiography' in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity: Studies in Memory of William W. Heist,* ed. by Patrick K. Ford (Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin Publishers, 1983), 58-74.

[3] Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows, 1992); 'Heroic Tradition in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints: A Study in Hagio-Biographical Patterning' in *Proceedings of the First North American Congress of Celtic Studies,* (1988) 261-71.; 'St Brigit and the Fire from Heaven', *Études Celtiques,* 29 (1992), 105-13.

[4] François Kerlouégan, 'Les citations d'auteurs latins chrétiens dans les vies de saints bretons carolingiennes', *Études Celtiques,* 19 (1982), 215-57.

[5] Neil Wright, 'Knowledge of Christian Latin Poets and Historians in Early Medieval Brittany', *Études Celtiques,* 23:1 (1986), 163-86.

[6] Hippolyte Delehaye, *Legends of the Saints* (Société des Bollandistes, 1955, rpr. with introduction by Thomas O'Loughlin, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: National University of Ireland, 2000), and others.

[7] Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Richard Sowerby, 'The Lives of Saint Samson: Rewriting the Ambitions of an Early Medieval Cult', *Francia,* 38 (2011), 1-32; and many others.

[8] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); Nathalie Stalmans, *Saints d'Irlande: analyse critique des sources hagiographiques (VIIe - Ixe siecles)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003); John Stratton Hawley, *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), and others.

[9] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1982).

fourth- and fifth-century saints. Motifs which cannot be traced to obviously Christian sources will be examined under the category of archetypal motifs, seeking to understand the role those motifs play within an explicitly Christian context. The balance of this chapter will identify the texts selected for analysis and interpretation, and review the concepts and scholarly work relevant to the location of the present study within the literary and theological matrix of narrative theory, biblical hermeneutics, images of religious significance, archetypal psychology, and the notion of sanctity. The final section will describe the method, based on the work in narratology and biblical hermeneutics by twentieth-century philosopher Paul Ricoeur, which will be used for the hermeneutic portion of the project.

1.2   SELECTION OF TEXTS

The present study will consider a limited selection of hagiographical narratives representing the earliest extant Latin Lives from the westernmost regions of Europe: the anonymous *Vita Samsonis I,* the anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti,* and Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*.[10] This selection focuses on texts from the mid- to late-seventh century, bound by common religious and cultural links to the expression of Christian tradition familiarly known as Celtic, but encompassing a range of distinctions including male vs. female saints, insular vs. continental locus of composition, and texts composed at greater or lesser degrees of proximity to the life of the saint portrayed.

The anonymous *Vita Samsonis I* records the life of a sixth-century abbot-bishop of Brittany, allegedly composed at the end of the seventh century. Although the date of composition remains contested, as will be discussed below, if a seventh-century date can be sustained, then it stands as the earliest extant Breton hagiography, and is included in this study for its Welsh protagonist, its relatively close proximity to the life of its protagonist, and its reliance on the archetypal pattern of initiation via separation and liminality.

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[10] Thomas Taylor, *The Life of St Samson of Dol* (reprint Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006, of orig. edn, London: SPCK, 1925); Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: a Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life: texts, translation, and notes* (reprint Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, orig edn, 1940); Seán Connolly and Jean-Michel Picard, trans., 'Cogitosus: *Life of Saint Brigit*' *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* 117 (1987,) 11-27. Editions consulted for this thesis will be discussed in further detail in the relevant chapters below.

The Life of Cuthbert depicts the Anglo-Saxon monk and bishop who took up the position of prior at the Celtic monastery of Lindisfarne just after the departure of Colmán following the council at Whitby in 664. His election as bishop of Lindisfarne seems to have come about as a result of his extreme asceticism, humility, and piety, traits considered to be characteristic of Celtic monastic practice in the sixth and seventh centuries. Cuthbert's anonymous Life, dated to the turn of the eighth century, is the closest in time to its protagonist's life among this group of texts, and while showing clearly Christian traits of compassion and wisdom, Cuthbert also sees a fire which is not real, and receives supernatural assistance with several building projects.

Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, composed 650 x 660, is the most overtly and emphatically biblical of the texts in this grouping. While dates for Brigit's actual life remain vague, Daniel McCarthy has argued that close examination of the annalistic accounts may be read as pointing to the existence of a living abbess by that name in the late fifth to early sixth century,[11] suggesting a period of perhaps 100-150 years between Brigit and Cogitosus. In spite of Cogitosus's clear and consistent preference for biblical precedent, he manages to portray his heroine reversing a pregnancy and hanging her cloak on a sunbeam, motifs which have no obvious biblical aetiology.

1.3   SELECTION OF MOTIFS

1.3.1   OVERVIEW

As it is an aim of this project to identify and account for motifs and images that may be seen to construct certain types of religious understandings, it will be necessary to lay out the parameters which will define the motifs to be selected for examination. Following Mircea Eliade, for the purposes of this study religious content will be defined as language, characters, episodes, or locations which can be observed to carry symbolic weight in relation to a sacred dimension of human experience.[12] Examples of religious content may include (but are not limited to) explicit references to biblical persons, events, or locations, religious rituals, symbolic hierophanies such as appearances of fire or other sources of light, and symbolic references to natural

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[11] Daniel Mc Carthy, 'The Chronology of St Brigit of Kildare', *Peritia,* 14 (2000), 255-81.
[12] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion,* trans. by Rosemary Sheed (reprint with new introduction, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, orig. edn, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), pp. 1-14.

elements such as water which may appear at the saint's request, or become the site or vehicle of healing.[13] Notice will also be taken of allusions to Christian hagiographies of earlier date, as well as archetypal motifs which carry the burden of symbolic resonance with religious concepts, for example, the Light of the World, the Lord of Creation, or the metaphor of life as a voyage or journey.

By this definition, the term 'religious' may, of course, apply to both Christian and pagan usage. This study will proceed from the assumption that the overt intention of the hagiographers was to convey a recognizably Christian message, therefore the majority of the imagery in the texts should be able to be accounted for by reference to biblical, apocryphal, and earlier hagiographical material. Any surplus of religious (per the definition above) language beyond these parameters may be considered 'pagan,' 'folk', or archetypal in nature; its symbolism will be interpreted in terms of the structure of the particular narrative as well as its relationship to the dominant themes and images in the text.

1.3.2   THE BIBLE AS PARADIGMATIC RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE

Hagiographical narratives frequently employ biblical motifs. Births may be announced in a manner reminiscent of the Lukan biblical account; young saints-to-be are often depicted as drawn to local clergy or places of worship and exhibit unusual precocity in speech or behaviour, again allusive of the second chapter of Luke;[14] accounts of miracles frequently follow the gospel precedents of healing and feeding. In addition, readers are repeatedly reminded that the saint's power ultimately derives from God; as a result, secular authority figures are, if not roundly defeated as in the *Vita Samsonis I,* at least put in their place, as in the various accounts of Patrick's encounters with the king of Tara.[15] Saintly victors are distinct in this regard, as they do not typically replace their opponents on a throne, but refer their successes to God's

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[13] Examples of such passages occur in the anonymous *Vita Samsonis I* I.7, 15, 24, *Vita Cuthberti* I.5, II.2, II.4, III.2, *Vita Sanctae Brigitae* chapters 8, 10, 11, 17. Additional examples and discussion appear in the relevant chapters below.
[14] Luke 2.46-49.
[15] Ludwig Bieler and Fergus Kelly, eds. and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 2004, reprint of 1979 edn), pp. 97-99.

intervention (or the hagiographer does so on the saint's behalf), and confine their exercise of power within the monastic or ecclesiastical community.[16]

At the same time, the narratives do not simply present recycled accounts of familiar biblical tales. Brigit, for example, is confronted three times by lepers according to her Life by Cogitosus, yet never heals them of their disease. Instead she consistently provides only for their stated needs, which most often are for sustenance.[17] Brigit's actions deviate from the familiar biblical formulae, revealing particular religious themes and concerns on the part of her hagiographer and his community. Similarly, Samson is observed defeating serpents on a regular basis, perhaps evoking biblical references such as Gen 3.15 in which God tells the serpent that 'her seed' (meaning a descendent of Eve) will 'bruise thy head', or defeat the serpent; or Isaiah 27.1, in which it is predicted that God will punish Leviathan, that 'piercing serpent' that lives in the sea. None of Samson's encounters with serpents, however, appear to contain verbatim biblical quotations; while they doubtless intend to evoke, they do not imitate.

1.3.3   REFERENCES TO TIME AND PLACE

Indications of time and place may also carry religious implications, for example, situating events in proximity to Easter, or noting a journey which encompasses the totality of an area or is oriented toward a particular destination. While scholars often point to geographical and topographical references in the texts as having geo-political or dynastic significance,[18] these episodes are almost exclusively couched in religious terms such as conversions to Christianity, ordinations to diaconate or priesthood, establishment of churches in particular locations, and exaltation of shrines or burial sites of saints as in Cogitosus's praise of Kildare in his epilogue. While the geo-political evidence may be quite useful for historiography, it remains central to the study of the texts to recognize that the terms in which the claims of jurisdiction or obligation are being made are explicitly religious, and therefore grounded in a mutual

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[16] Henken, 'The Saint as Folk Hero' in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, ed. by Ford, pp. 70-72.

[17] 'Cogitosus: Life of Saint Brigit', chapters 8, 15, 27.

[18] See for example, T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints' Cults and their Constituencies', *Ériu,* 54 (2004), 70-102; Seán Connolly, 'Cogitosus's *Life of St Brigit*: Content and Value', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* 117 (1987), 5-10, pp. 5-6; David C. Harvey and Rhys Jones, 'Custom and Habit(us): the meaning of traditions and legends in early medieval western Britain', *Geographiska Annaler,* 81 B (1999), 223-233; Stahlmans, *Saints d'Irlande;* Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 224-225.

acknowledgement of the legitimacy of such religious claims between the composer of the text and the presumed audience.

1.3.4 'PAGAN' MOTIFS IN THE BIBLE

Motifs that are not immediately recognizably Christian appearing in texts of Christian origin may be seen to either support or confront the Christian message of the narrative, depending on how the writer handles them. For example, Ricoeur offered a helpful interpretation of the presence of language expressive of a pre-Yahwist cosmology within the ethical-historical text of the Torah.[19] He pointed out that the earlier cosmic symbolism was challenged, but not entirely overturned by the advent of the iconoclastic message of Israelite monotheism. While effective in overturning cultic practices addressed to 'false gods', the Israelite message also attempted to desacralize the world of nature, a world in which birth and death, food and drink, love and loss became radically separated from the holy. At a human level, however, it is not possible to completely sever the holy from the whole, and traces of the earlier pagan reverence for the cosmos linger in Hebrew scripture, and appear, if indistinctly, in the early Christian *kerygma*: God's creative Word became flesh to dwell in this human plane. Identifying pagan elements in the Hebrew Bible allows the reader to experience a tension that exists in the 'world of the text,' without suggesting that the Hebrew writers had any desire to preserve pagan lore in their writings. Indeed, it opens a horizon of meaning beyond essential Torah principles which may be seen to resolve itself in the form of a Jewish messiah who fully embraces an incarnational mission. Likewise, non-Christian archetypal images in Christian hagiographies may provide narrative tensions which open unexpected horizons of meaning that turn out to be entirely consistent with the religious intent of the texts.

1.3.5 SOURCES OF ARCHETYPAL MOTIFS

Scholars have approached the task of collecting and cataloguing individual motifs or motif complexes from a range of perspectives and for a variety of purposes. This study will gather motifs from across several disciplines, including mythology, folklore, literary

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[19] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination,* ed. by Mark I. Wallace, trans. by David Pellauer, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 60-67.

criticism, biblical studies, archetypal psychology, and the history of religions. Beginning with the standard folklore indices of Stith Thompson and Tom Peete Cross, the project will expand to include the motif indices developed by Dorothy Ann Bray and Elissa Henken specifically for Irish and Welsh hagiography, respectively.[20] These four sources will be supplemented with motifs derived from C. Grant Loomis's work on saints' Lives, Mircea Eliade's work in the history of religions, and Northrop Frye's analysis of literary form and genre, including his work on the Bible.[21] In addition, the study will integrate motifs and archetypes of human psychology from the work of C. G. Jung and subsequent interpreters of Jung's thought. While each of these scholars worked in separate disciplines, each was concerned to identify discrete elements embedded in narrative discourse (or in religious myth and ritual, in the case of Eliade) which bear symbolic value for the composers and receivers of religious texts, and the identification of motifs pertinent to human psychology, sociology and spiritual development is not in itself isolated into any particular genre or discipline. It is anticipated that the breadth and depth of this pool will highlight the variety of archetypal motifs utilized in the hagiographies, as well as permit a more finely focused discussion of the interior landscape of the text itself.

1.3.6 MIRCEA ELIADE AND COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS MOTIFS

Since the religious content and context of hagiography occupy the centre of this project, the work of Mircea Eliade, founder of the History of Religions approach to the study of religious artefacts and mythological elements, is essential. Eliade's main body of work falls into two categories, both of which are relevant to the work at hand. The first is his collection and interpretation of religious symbols, most effectively described in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. By collecting and comparing the appearances of common images in religious or sacred contexts, Eliade was able to construct a wide-

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[20] Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature,* 6 vols., revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1955-59); Tom Peete Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1952); Bray, *A List of Motifs*; Henken, *The Welsh Saints.*

[21] C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic: An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1948); Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, trans. by Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion;* Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (reprint New York: Atheneum, 1966, orig. edn, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Frye, *The Secular Scripture*; Frye, *The Great Code*.

ranging catalogue of symbols which he claimed were indicative of 'the modalities of the sacred'.[22] The second is his understanding of the structure and function of myth, which appeared across a number of his works. In *Patterns* he wrote, 'The main function of myth is to determine the exemplar models of all ritual, and of all significant human acts. …[E]ven apart from actions that are strictly religious, myths are also the models for the other significant human actions, as for instance, navigation and fishing'.[23] Further, Eliade explained the relationship between myths and symbols, or in this instance, 'signs'. '[A] true myth describes an archetypal event in words (in this case the creation of the world), while a "sign" (in this case a green branch or an animal) evokes the event simply by being shown'.[24] Again, taking myth beyond the realm of language or narrative, 'Myth expresses in action and drama what metaphysics and theology define dialectically', as in the *coincidentia oppositorum.*[25] He pointed to 'a mass of myths and legends [which] describe the "difficulties" demi-gods and heroes meet with in entering a "forbidden domain," a transcendent place – a heaven or hell'.[26] These universal human patterns, then, form the basis for myths and rituals of initiation, an observation which may be seen to illumine the role of saints' Lives in the formation of monks and nuns in their religious life. Eliade argued that there has been a 'corruption' of myth in the modern era, claiming that although motifs may persist, their appearance and any conscious connection to a larger, archetypal plane of reality has been lost.[27]

It is necessary to acknowledge that during the era of post-modernist scholarship, theorists such as Eliade have fallen out of scholarly favour. Accused of essentialism and intellectual imperialism, comparative studies are alleged to represent an uncontextualized and unwarranted appropriation of images and ideas from across cultures. The purported result of this act is the construction of a hegemonic world view which, while appearing to offer points of contact between cultural groups, in actuality violates the integrity of the ideas and images so appropriated. Wendy Doniger considered these criticisms to be more politically than religiously

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[22] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion,* p. 5.
[23] Ibid., pp. 410-411.
[24] Ibid*.,* p. 413.
[25] Ibid*.,* pp. 418-9.
[26] Ibid*.,* p. 427.
[27] Ibid*.,* pp. 431-3.

problematic.[28] Robert Segal noted that the process of human learning is inevitably comparative: 'To understand any phenomenon…is to identify it and account for it. To identify something is to place it in a category, and to account for it is to account for the category of which it is a member. Both procedures are thus inescapably comparativist.'[29]

As a project that seeks to understand elements within Christian hagiographies that are not of obviously Christian origin, a comparativist approach, at least at the level of identifying relevant motifs and creating the structural analyses, will be a necessary component of the work at hand. It will be observed, however, that the larger project of exploring the role of early Celtic hagiographies in the spiritual formation of monks and nuns is a manifestly religious enterprise, and as such may be considered separately from the political concerns that have dominated post-modern scholarship. This study addresses the morphology of literary narratives and their purposes in the life of *homo religiosus.* Such narratives may draw their content from a wide range of sources and yet not be 'pagan survivals' so much as testimonies to the power of the sacred to speak locally as well as universally, and in the language of the natural world as well as in the manuscripts of the elite. It is hoped that the attribution of such universal motifs of the sacred in a Christian literary narrative can be seen as an act of hermeneutic, not hegemony, as appreciation, not appropriation.

1.4   HAGIOGRAPHY IN RELATION TO OTHER PROSE GENRES

1.4.1   HAGIOGRAPHY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Modern efforts to collect and publish Lives of Christian saints began in the seventeenth century. The Bollandist project of 1643 called for eighteen volumes to be collected and published as the *Acta Sanctorum*.[30] The collections of Lives were organized by the saints' feast days and published in order of the months of the year. Liturgical commemoration on the designated feast day, usually the date of the saint's death, if

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[28] Wendy Doniger, 'Post-modern and –colonial and –structural Comparisons' in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in a Postmodern Age*, ed. by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), cited in Corinne G. Dempsey, *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth: Adventures in Comparative Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 7.
[29] Robert A. Segal, 'In Defense of the Comparative Method', *Numen,* 48 (2001), cited in Dempsey, *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth,* p. 8.
[30] M. David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963) p. 5.

known, is widely considered to be the 'ultimate touchstone of acceptance' for saints who lived before the twelfth century.[31] The saint's Life was therefore expected to uphold the essential teachings of the Christian faith. With this requirement in mind, the editors of the *Acta* expressed concern over disseminating texts without careful assessment, often severe editing, and extensive commentary. Irish hagiographies were singled out for their 'fabulous' content, and in some cases suppressed, as evidenced by the following comment by Henschenius:

> The *Acta* that we consider fabulous, we have not published any of them. If more authentic *Acta* are lacking, we have not hesitated to publish in full those that seem probable, even if they also contain less likely elements. … We believe, however, that we do not displease if, having regard to the infirmity of the weak, we expurgate from the text some really offensive elements and reproduce them in the commentaries, where they can be safely either read or skipped.[32]

Criteria of authenticity and probability were derived from the then-growing 'scientific' approach to history; elements considered 'less likely', 'fabulous', or 'offensive' included 'prodigious deeds and the like miracles',[33] and 'apocryphal absurdities'.[34] By the middle of the eighteenth century the Bollandists had all but eliminated Irish (as well as Cornish and Breton) Lives from the *Acta,* considering them to consist of 'fables, …fictions and enormous anachronisms…'.[35]

At the same time, John Colgan and the Franciscans of Louvain were collecting Irish Lives in order to publish the documentary history of Ireland.[36] Colgan published the first volume of the *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* in 1645, covering saints with feast

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[31] Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises,* p. 10. The practice of telling the saint's story on the observance of their death-date continues to the present day in Orthodox, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, thus, the record of saints' lives and how they come to be known to modern Christian communities remains a living question, and not wholly contained in the past. See also Peter Brown's discussion of liturgical commemoration in *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 10-12.

[32] *Acta Sanctorum*, Mart. II, 584, cited in Robert Godding, 'Irish hagiography in the *Acta Sanctorum* (1643–1794)', in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars,* ed. by John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001) 289–316, p. 300.

[33] *AASS*, Ian. I, p. xxxiv, in Godding, 'Irish Hagiography', p. 298.

[34] *AASS*, Maii. III, 600, in Godding, 'Irish Hagiography', p. 299.

[35] *AASS*, Sept. IV, 144, in R. Godding, 'Irish Hagiography', p. 302.

[36] Godding, 'Irish Hagiography', p. 290.

days falling in January, February, and March. Two years later the second volume, *Trias Thaumaturga,* appeared covering the dossiers of Patrick, Brigit, and Columba. By 1670 efforts to publish a third volume were abandoned due to lack of funds.[37]

From the nineteenth century onward, study of hagiography came under the increasing influence of the scientific rationalist movement in historiography. The next great project was the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* led by Baron Karl vom Stein and a few hand-chosen associates.[38] The initial plan proposed collecting all of the sources of German history from 500 to 1500 CE, divided into five sections: *Scriptores* (chronicles), *Leges* (laws), *Diplomata* (charters), *Epistolae* (letters), and *Antiquitates,* miscellaneous writings of antiquarian interest.[39] The letters of Gregory the Great, editions of Latin medieval poetry, a series of Merovingian saints' Lives, the Life of Boniface*,* a selection of Lives of Anglo-Saxon saints, and the Letters of Boniface were all eventually collected and published.[40] Knowles credited the MGH with having '… set up for all Western historical scholarship the ideal of the critical text', and having '…made innumerable discoveries of manuscripts in the libraries of Europe… thus enrich[ing] German and European medieval history….'[41] The drawback, however, lay in the positivist tendency to assess the value of texts (and often edit them as well) solely as sources of political, economic, or social detail. This approach led, for example, to the 'mangled' edition of the *Vita Prima Sancti Fursei* by Krusch in 1902 which presented the bare narrative details of the saint's life, and simply deleted the accounts of visionary spiritual experiences.[42]

Twentieth-century Bollandist leader Hippolyte Delehaye introduced several critical concepts into the study of hagiography, including the important observation that hagiography does not provide historical data for the time it purports to depict, but for the time in which it was composed or redacted. He further brought the approach of Form Criticism from biblical scholarship into the study of hagiography, noting its use

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[37] Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives: An Introduction to 'Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press*,* 1991) p. 56.

[38] M. David Knowles, 'Presidential Address: Great Historical Enterprises III: The Monumenta Germaniae Historica', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* Fifth Series, 10 (1960), 129-50, p. 130.

[39] Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises III*, p. 133.

[40] Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises III*, p. 145.

[41] Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises III*, p. 150.

[42] Jonathan Wooding, *St Fursey: Pilgrim and Visionary,* unpublished lecture, 2002.

of a chronological biographical structure after the period of the martyrs.[43] Delehaye limited the scope of the literature he treated in his major work, *The Legends of the Saints,* to '…those conventionalized and dressed-up writings that were set down long after the events alleged and without any observable relation to the past', betraying his conviction that the text ought to provide useful historical information, and unfortunately eliminating those earliest Lives composed by alleged eyewitnesses or whose sources claimed to come from within a generation of their subject.[44] He attempted to establish an historical record for those saints whose existence could be verified and whose cult expressed defensible Christian doctrine. For those saints whose existence was questionable, or whose cult contained heterodox elements, Delehaye posited a pagan source. His concern, as O'Loughlin noted, was to defend the Bollandists from attacks from within the Church concerned with the possible deleterious effects of modern historical scholarship on the faithful, and from outside the Church that Catholicism and its veneration of the saints was no more than thinly-veiled polytheism.[45]

Published at the same time as Delehaye was working, Charles Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* remains a major work in the history of hagiographical study. He acknowledged his debt to Colgan, and asserted that it was his aim in some measure to complete the task of editing and publishing, with commentary, those Lives which had yet not found their way into publication.[46] Considering the Lives in the *Codex Salmanticensis* **(S)** to have been adequately covered by De Smedt and De Backer in 1887, Plummer chose to focus on the Lives collected from the Marsh and Trinity libraries in Dublin, known as the *Kilkenniensis* **(M** and **T)** collection, and those found in the Rawlinson manuscripts at the Bodleian library, the *Insulensis* **(R)** collection.[47] By selecting from two separate collections, Plummer became aware of the possibility of comparing different recensions of the same Life*,* a practice which had not been attempted before. He suggested that the **S** collection was 'more primitive' than the others, that **M** and **T** represented a toning down of potentially scandalous material,

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[43] Delehaye, *Legends*, p. 72.
[44] Delehaye, *Legends, p.* 49.
[45] Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Introduction,' Delehaye, *Legends,* pp. viii-ix.
[46] Charles Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. v.
[47] Plummer, *VSH,* p. x.

and that **R** represented the latest, and a rather 'homiletical', collection.[48] While later scholarship, in particular Sharpe's penetrating analysis of the three seventeenth-century manuscript collections, would both challenge and elaborate upon these suggestions, Plummer's work represents a significant first attempt at a complex task.[49]

In addition, Plummer told his readers, 'I have attempted to determine…what elements in the Lives of Celtic Saints are derived from the mythology and folk-lore of the Celtic Heathenism which preceded the introduction of Christianity.'[50] Influenced by the then-current solar-god theory of Max Müller, Plummer attributed a great deal of the content of the Lives in *VSH* to 'Celtic Heathenism', including assigning events involving fire and light, many of which are highly likely to have had biblical precedents, to '…the pre-eminence of the Celtic Sun and Fire God…'.[51] Similarly, episodes involving other elements of nature such as trees, animals, or water, are treated as *a priori* evidence of the infiltration or preservation of pagan lore in Christian texts. If anything, Plummer's method here resembles a nascent comparative or History of Religions approach, insofar as he ranges broadly and is willing to point to commonalities among religious motifs of divergent sources. His neglect of rather obvious biblical sources for much of what he cites, however, represents a serious defect in his argument.

Working in a similar vein, James Kenney identified 'legend' as a 'main source of hagiography', belonging to a 'folk mind' which 'cannot be trusted' to retain information accurately.[52] Referring specifically to texts composed or redacted from the twelfth century onward, he observed that, 'Irish collections of Latin Lives were produced primarily for devotional purposes in the houses of European religious orders that had taken the place of the old Irish monasteries and themselves in time become Hibernicized…'.[53] Kenney attempted to evaluate the usefulness of Celtic hagiographies for constructing the history of early Christian Ireland and Britain, concluding that these texts did not serve that purpose well, describing them as

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[48] Plummer, *VSH,* p. xxii.
[49] Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 78-80.
[50] Plummer, *VSH,* p. iv.
[51] Plummer, *VSH,* p. cxxxvi.
[52] James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical: An Introduction and Guide* vol. 1 Ecclesiastical (reprint Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1966, orig. edn New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 301.
[53] Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 294.

'unpromising documents' upon which scholars were 'chiefly dependent for what we know of the early relations of Irish and British Christianity.'[54]

Kathleen Hughes's assessment of the value and purposes of hagiography from a historian's perspective effectively summarizes the conclusions reached by late twentieth-century scholars:

> Hagiography is not history. The author is not concerned to establish a correct chronology…. He is rather writing the panegyric of a saint, stressing in particular his holy way of life and the supernatural phenomena which attended it. Sometimes the aim is didactic, sometimes more crudely financial. What he praises will depend on his audience and on the society for which he is writing.[55]

She reviewed the work of Adomnán, Cogitosus, and Muirchú, noting differences in structure and focus, claiming greater historical value for Adomnán and Muirchú and relegating Cogitosus's Brigit to the status of 'mythological figure',[56] with the monastery at Kildare appearing as the sole historically valid character in the *Vita Brigitae*. She identified the Lives of Samthann and Íte, and the Irish Life of Colum Cille as specifically composed 'to build up the spiritual life', presenting as evidence those passages that exhort the reader to prayer and the spiritual life, or take the form of a homily. [57] She identified the ninth-century Tripartite Life of Patrick as the likely source for the tendency of later Lives to focus on claims of territory, privilege, and revenue. She argued, following Delehaye and Kenney, that the later Lives appear to contain a greater proportion of 'pure folk-lore' than the earlier texts, concluding that this indicates 'the secularisation which the Church underwent in the tenth century…'.[58]

Recent studies have focused on particular historical questions that may be resolved by close readings of hagiographies. Under this heading may be included Michael Lapidge's examination of Anglo-Saxon libraries, Jonathan Wooding's volume of essays on Adomnán, Jane Cartwright's collection of essays on Celtic saints' cults and

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[54] Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 173.
[55] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland,* p. 219.
[56] Ibid*.,* p. 227.
[57] Ibid*.,* p. 232.
[58] Ibid*.,* p. 247.

Lives, and many others. While hagiographies can tell us much about the libraries available to their writers, the economic and political issues of the time of composition, and in some cases claims for allegiance between saints or their foundations, historical study does not address questions regarding the meaning that hagiographers and their communities invested in the composition and reception of these narratives. For this, the texts will need to be analysed for content that carries religious significance and structural patterns that suggest reliance on biblical forms or archetypal patterns. Next steps in this form of examination will continue below.

1.4.2 HAGIOGRAPHY AND MYTHOLOGY

Approaches to the study of myth have varied widely over time, from simple equation with fiction in modern common parlance, to more complex and less time-bound definitions.[59] Max Müller was concerned to find in myth the foundational creation or deity tales which function as unifying narratives within a cultural group.[60] Alfred Nutt, writing in the 19th century, offered the following assessment of the relationship between the early monastic writers in Ireland and what he considered to be the pre-existing mythology of their people: 'The annalists of the eighth and succeeding centuries were Christian monks, and they could only conceive mythic tradition as pseudo-history. It was inevitable that they should euhemerise the national mythology'.[61] Nutt's claim assumed that the monks who were engaged in writing the Latin texts of the eighth century (and later) were familiar with what he imagined to be a national secular, or at least non-Christian, mythic tradition. Further, Nutt considered this mythic tradition to be characteristic of a universal primitive stage of cultural evolution. As people at a more advanced, more rational stage of evolution looked back upon the myths of a prior age, they would regard the gods of myth as deifications of local heroes. This understanding locates mythology outside the world of the monastic authors and considers it an extrinsic cultural element self-consciously incorporated into the narratives for antiquarian purposes.

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[59] Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 6; Frye, *The Great Code,* p. 47.
[60] Segal, *Myth*, p. 20
[61] Alfred Nutt, 'Celtic Myth and Saga: Report upon the Progress of Research during the Past Two Years', *Folklore,* 3 (1892), 387-424, p. 396.

To the extent that myths typically involve deities and heroes as their main characters, hagiography may occupy a peripheral place within the broader category of myth. The hero may be the founder of a culture group or community, for example, as are Brigit and Samson in this selection. The accomplishments of the culture hero, including birth and education by an extraordinary personage, early precocity, presence of a faithful attendant, and actions which establish future order and customs, all recognizable hagiographic motifs, have been categorized as Mythological Motifs by Tom Peete Cross, elevating these heroic deeds above simple folk tales to events bearing the weight of cultural formation for the community 'of' the tale.[62] Hagiography, then, may be said to incorporate elements of mythological narrative, but resist the label of genuine myth.

In contrast, Northrop Frye considered myths to be narratives of concerned knowledge which address perennial human concerns rooted in the 'time before time' of creation.[63] While the inclusion of references to God and to the foundation of a monastic tradition might incline hagiographies toward the category of deity- and founder-myths, it will be the contention of this project that an exploration of the texts with Frye's definition of concerned knowledge in the foreground will yield particularly helpful insights into the formative role the hagiographies may have played for members of their respective communities. Bringing to the fore the perennial concerns addressed by the narratives also opens up the hermeneutic possibilities for later readers as their encounter with the texts may be seen to open new horizons of meaning in relation to enduring human questions. This approach locates the mythology of the hagiographies within the texts themselves, as the actual and intentional content of the narratives, and as material which readers will encounter and appropriate, to use terminology from Paul Ricoeur.

1.4.3 HAGIOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE

The boundary between myth and folklore is not completely clear, as illustrated by Cross's inclusion of 'mythological' elements in an index of folklore motifs. The category of mythology tends to comprise narratives which address the distant past,

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[62] Cross, *Motif Index of Early Irish Literature*, section A, pp. 1-47.
[63] Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 47.

describe the decisive acts of creators and other deities, and prescribe exemplary behaviour for members of a community. In so doing, however, myths may contain discrete elements or motifs which occur not only in foundational cultural narratives, but in the simple tales told across cultures, languages, and time periods, the lore of the folk. This widespread use of common motifs has engendered long debate over the sources and spread of motifs and tale-types, rendering clear distinctions between sources, analogues, and routes of transmission nearly impossible.

In contrast to the cross-cultural study of mythology, the study of folklore has concerned itself primarily with secular narrative material, particularly material identified with 'folk' at some distance, either in time ('ancient'), space ('the remote primitive'), or culture ('peasant').[64] Folklore scholars have typically avoided material associated with elites of any sort, and quite consciously eschewed material of ecclesiastical provenance as falling within the category of literature produced by an elite class. While it would be difficult to argue that the Latin-educated monks of seventh- and eighth-century Ireland, England and Brittany were not at least somewhat better off than the peasants surrounding their monasteries, the boundaries were hardly impermeable, and one would be hard-pressed to identify any literary genre which is completely devoid of folkloric content. If a written work is to have an audience, it must be composed with the conscious intention of communicating something to that audience. Even in a learned language, metaphor, character, and analogy must be understandable to the folk who will read or hear the discourse in question.

For these reasons, the relationship between hagiography and folklore may be more robust than that between hagiography and myth. In the 1940s, G. H. Doble went so far as to suggest that the fantastic elements in saints' Lives rendered them nothing more than the 'folklore' of the monks who had need of some harmless entertainment.[65] More recently, scholars including Bray and Henken have developed specialized motif-indexes of Irish and Welsh saints' Lives, following the models of Stith Thompson's and Tom Peete Cross's standard folklore indices.[66]

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[64] Juliette Wood, 'Folklore Studies at the Celtic Dawn: The Role of Alfred Nutt as Publisher and Scholar', *Folklore,* 110 (1999), 3-12, p. 5.

[65] G.H. Doble, 'Hagiography and Folklore', *Folklore,* 54 (1943), 321-33, p. 332.

[66] Bray, *A List of Motifs*; Henken, *The Welsh Saints*.

Similarities between hagiography and folklore are most evident at the level of structural patterning. In his recent discussion of parable as metaphorical narrative, John Dominic Crossan cited Axel Olrik's essay on 'Epic Laws of Folklore' as an indication of parallel structural elements that can be found in both biblical and folk narratives.[67] Olrik's claim was that the structural patterning of folk narratives could be considered 'laws' to the extent that they constrain the freedoms of the composer in predictable and significant ways. These laws include the Law of Opening and Law of Closing, that is, folk narratives begin with some introductory material, and end with some type of closure.[68] Next is the Law of Repetition, with the observation that repetition in folk narrative is almost always found in threes (The Law of Three), an observation that pertains to hagiography as well. The Law of Two to a Scene addresses the number of characters active in any portion of the narrative, related to The Law of Contrast, which describes types of polarization which are commonplace in folk narrative: man and monster, rich and poor, young and old, large and small.[69] Hagiographical examples might include saint and druid, saint and supplicant, or saint and serpent. Pairs may also appear under The Law of Twins, in which characters may duplicate a role, or become oppositional if found in a dominant role. Olrik's final law is The Importance of Initial and Final Position, in which stress is laid upon particular characters depending upon their position in a series: the principal character (particularly in a religious context) will appear first in a series, but the character for whom the tale arouses sympathy will be in a final position.[70] While such patterning may no longer be considered 'epic law', and while all of Olrik's observations may not be equally pertinent to hagiography, there are some notable convergences, including appearances of pairs and triads, the tendency to find opening and closing material appended to the narrative of the saint's exploits, and frequent repetitions and duplications.

Alan Dundes claimed a simpler criterion for recognizing folk elements in written texts: the presence of duplication and variation. As Olrik noted with his laws of

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[67] John Dominic Crossan, *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction About Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), pp. 107-109.
[68] Axel Olrik, 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', in *The Study of Folklore,* ed. by Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 129-41, pp. 131-2.
[69] Olrik, 'Epic Laws', p. 135.
[70] Olrik, 'Epic Laws', p. 136.

duplication and triplication, Dundes characterized any narrative with elements of multiplication and variation as 'written folklore'.[71] His brief but persuasive work on the Bible *as* folklore focused on the replications of stories (two creation stories, two flood narratives, four Gospels) as well as the frequent variations found in names, sequencing, numbers, and similar details, which point to the existence of a lengthy oral tradition behind the composition of Hebrew and Christian Scripture. Biblical scholars, while admitting the necessity of oral precursors to the scriptures, are in the main reluctant to admit the presence of folklore within the biblical text itself.[72] This may be attributable to the previously noted tendency to separate the lore of the folk from the productions of the elite, as well as the desire to elevate sacred scripture above the level of other folklore products such as riddles or intentionally fictional tales. If credence can be granted to Dundes's claims, however, they can clearly be seen to impact an understanding of hagiography as well. Hagiography is notable for its replication of motifs along with variations across iterations of episodes, a pattern which, in addition to the obvious patterning upon the Bible itself, would indicate that saints' Lives qualify, at least broadly, as a form of folklore.   As with the Bible, however, this classification need not debase the Lives themselves, but provide a generic identification which opens up possible interpretative approaches.

1.4.4   HAGIOGRAPHY AND HEROIC BIOGRAPHY

One particular pattern common to folklore and hagiography is the genre of heroic biography. Sometimes referred to as the international biographical pattern, this narrative structure was first described by J. G. von Hahn, and identified as operative in a wide variety of religious and secular tales.[73] The pattern typically addresses the lifespan of a central figure from conception and birth through adulthood to death. Archer Taylor reviewed the better-known variants of the pattern, including studies by von Hahn, Rank, Lord Raglan, Campbell, and Propp.[74] While individual tales will vary

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[71] Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) pp. 2-5.
[72] Dundes, *Holy Writ,* pp. 19-20.
[73] J. G. von Hahn, '*Sagwissenschaftliche Studien',* 8 parts, *Jena,* 1871-1876, cited in Archer Taylor, 'The Biographical Pattern in Traditional Narrative', *Journal of the Folklore Institute,* 1 (1964), 114-29, p. 114.
[74] Taylor, 'The Biographical Pattern', pp. 114-29.

according to the composer or story-teller's concerns and influences, a general form of the pattern follows:

I.   The Begetting of the Hero

II.   The Birth of the Hero

III. The youth of the hero is threatened

IV.   The way in which the hero is brought up

V.   The hero often acquires invulnerability

VI.   The fight with a dragon or other monster

VII. The hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers

VIII. The hero makes an expedition to the underworld

IX.   When the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over enemies. In some cases he is forced to leave the realm he has won with such difficulty.

X.   The death of the hero[75]

While the culture hero of mythology plays the role of founder and establisher of societal norms and practices, the hero of folklore is a more earthy, romantic figure, overcoming obstacles (III), obtaining unusual graces (V), and achieving grand victories (VII – IX). Indeed, the genre of heroic biography itself occupies a liminal narrative space, at once the record of genuinely great human achievements and the product of fantasies and dreams. Its very universality renders its subjects both remote, in the sense that unique details of protagonists' lives are suppressed, and available to the extent that the pattern is familiar and its characters may well be actual historical persons, perhaps even known to the composers and readers of the narrative.

Among the necessary variations within the broad biographical pattern, heroic achievements will be circumscribed by a variety of cultural limiters. In the case of monastic heroes, these limiters will include such considerations as the demands of clerical celibacy and the recognition that the hero/saint's power is not the possession

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[75] Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, *The Heroic Biography of Cormac Mac Airt* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1977), p. 6; Ó Cathasaigh here is using de Vries's formulation found in *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend,* trans. by B. J. Timmer (London, Oxford University Press, 1963).

of the hero him- or herself, but is attributed directly to God.[76] Monks, of necessity, will not 'win the maiden' or ascend to earthly thrones, despite their other heroic achievements. In addition, while a saint or hero is frequently identified as someone to be emulated, this identification raises at least two significant problems. First, and perhaps most obviously, those people who hear the Lives of the saints are not likely to perform miracles as the saints are said to do, just as most Christians do not perform the miracles of Christ, even though they may claim to both follow and imitate him. And second, there are frequent occasions in which a saint acts in a manner that appears unusually cruel, for example cursing a person or topographical feature, or failing to effect a compassionate resolution to a problem. Here again, the monastic hero occupies a liminal role, evidencing miraculous abilities often in explicit imitation of Christ, while at the same time indulging in behaviours that would not be considered acceptable in others within the Christian community.[77]

Alison Elliott examined the relationship of hagiography to heroic biography from a structural perspective, with attention to the Lives of the early Desert Dwellers.[78] Her work provides a particularly helpful model for the present project as she incorporated concepts related to the psychological and spiritual development of Christian monks utilizing saints as exemplars of religious ideals. Elliott described two contrasting structural approaches within the narratives, binary conflict/resolution and initiation/gradation.[79] Binary conflict and resolution derives from the earliest martyrologies in which saints are recognized for their direct confrontation with power and their conquest of secular power via the strength of their faith, even in the face of death.

Gradation/initiation points to the three-fold pattern first described in Arnold van Gennep's sociological study of rites of initiation in primitive societies,[80] a pattern further identified as a religious motif by Eliade and Jung. The three stages consist of separation from the social milieu, experience of a liminal time and space in which a

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[76] Henken, 'The Saint as Folk-Hero', pp. 58-74.

[77] Hawley, *Saints and Virtues*, p. xvi. For examples of the second consideration, see Muirchú's *Vita Sancti Patricii,* I-17, I-18, I-26 in Bieler and Kelley, *The Patrician Texts*.

[78] Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press and University Press of New England, 1987).

[79] Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* pp. 16-58.

[80] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, orig. edn 1908).

major life-transition in enacted, and return and re-integration into the original social group in one's new social role. Accompanying the liminal stage are images of descent and ascent, intensifying and elaborating the images associated with separation and return. The term 'gradation' derives from Charles Altman's consideration of opposition and structure in early Latin Lives in which he noted that while some hagiographies are based on the resolution of internal conflicts as their central narrative principle, as with the martyrs, for others the movement of the plot progresses from attainment to ever greater attainment, a gradational or progressive principle rather than an oppositional one.[81] Gradational progress is facilitated by the three-fold initiation process, which may occur once or more than once in a given narrative. This theme of gradational progress will come up for further discussion as it is particularly evident in the texts concerning Samson and Cuthbert, each of whom has a clearly defined lifespan moving from holy child to novice to professed monk to bishop with a corresponding increase in magnificence of miracles along the way, and episodes of separation and re-integration that exemplify the initiation process.

1.4.5 HAGIOGRAPHY, MYTH, AND THE BIBLE

Known for his construction of an over-arching theory of Western literature in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye took a broad look at myth, folklore, and the Bible, considering 'myth' as the beginning point for understanding all forms of literature. Frye posited myth as primarily a narrative, and secondarily a narrative with the specific purpose of 'tell[ing] a society what is important for it to know'.[82] Myth is distinguishable from folktale not structurally but functionally, since folktales were told for entertainment and were by nature more mobile or 'nomadic' than myths.[83] In Frye's view, myths exist to convey 'concerned knowledge', not unlike theologian Paul Tillich's 'ultimate concern',[84] knowledge that will promote primary human goals of

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[81] Charles F. Altman, 'Two Types of Opposition and the Structure of Latin Saints' Lives', in *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 6, ed. by Paul Maurice Clogan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 1-11.
[82] Frye, *The Great Code,* p. 33.
[83] Frye, *The Great Code,* p. 33.
[84] Northrop Frye, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of 'The Bible and Literature',* ed. by Michael Dolzani, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 264.

identity, freedom, and life.[85]   Such fundamental goals are not pursued in isolation; myths serve the further purpose of providing a foundation for the development of community. Frye described this function as, 'draw[ing] a circumference around a human community and look[ing] inward toward that community'.[86]

Given the important social function of myth within a community, myths came to be sequestered off from other stories in recognition that the knowledge contained within them is crucial to the existence of the community. They are sacred to the extent that they convey information that is 'charged with special seriousness and importance',[87] the very opposite of the more common modern interpretation of myth as mere fiction. These particular stories are sacrosanct, addressing the very heart of what matters to those who compose and consume them. The concept of concerned knowledge will be critical to the interpretive approach taken in this study as it provides a key element in the framing of the structural analysis of each text.

In his earlier, more general work on literature, Frye described the genre, or mode, of romance.[88] The heroes of myth are vastly superior to ordinary men and to their environment, recognizably divine beings. In romance, however, heroes begin to acquire a degree of ambiguity, still clearly superior to others, perhaps enjoying divine influence or favour, but decidedly human in their behaviour and concerns.[89]   Frye pinpointed the hero's adventure as the quintessential plot of a romance, and identified its typical characters, subplots, and conflicts.[90]   Many of these elements, including a sequential or 'processional' form, absence of indications of character development or aging on the part of the protagonist, and a focus on a major event or quest among a sequence of minor adventures, hold true for hagiographies in greater or lesser measure. The romance, then, as a type of folk literature, may be considered a generic category which embraces hagiography, while not accounting for its full range of meaning.

In a unique approach to biblical interpretation Frye categorized what he called typologies, comparable to themes or motifs, across the Hebrew Bible and the Christian

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[85] Frye, *Words with Power,* pp. 51-2.
[86] Frye, *The Great Code,* p. 37.
[87] Frye, *The Great Code,* p. 33.
[88] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 186-205.
[89] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 33.
[90] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism,* pp. 186-7.

Canon illustrating ways in which motifs appeared, altered or intact, across the Bible taken as a narrative whole.[91] Many of these motifs appear in saints' Lives as well, and in similar combinations of historical or pseudo-historical language side-by-side with poetic or archetypal imagery. Frye argued that the combination of artistic language and the language of fact or logic presses the reader to appropriate the meaning of a text in radically new ways. Similar to Ricoeur's understanding of the act of encountering a text, Frye argued that a journey through particular texts may be experienced as both an external and an internal exploration, and that the inner journey may lead to a metamorphosis or transformational experience for the reader.[92] The literary associations between hagiography, the Bible, and romance in Frye's typological analysis provide further support for the application of a similar interpretive approach to the hagiographies under examination here.

1.4.6 Hagiography and parable

The genre of parable has a rich and nuanced history within the field of biblical studies. The term is most frequently used to indicate stories told by Jesus and recorded in the Gospels, although parables appear in the Hebrew Bible as well. The Greek term *parabollein* identifies a metaphorical literary form: *para,* 'with', and *bollein,* 'to put' or 'to throw', that is, something put alongside something else. The critical dimension in parabolic composition is its use of contrasting elements for the purpose of drawing the reader or listener out of ordinary patterns of thinking and into a new awareness. The inherent tension in parabolic form transcends simple metaphor and demands an act of interpretation on the part of the hearer or reader. This tension and its attendant resolution has been variously described as startling, shocking, and even subversive, and has led to a wide range of interpretations of the parables themselves.

Patristic commentators observed three levels of meaning in parables, literal, moral, and spiritual; early medieval writers added a fourth, the 'heavenly'. These were largely based on allegorical interpretations either of parables *in toto* or of particular elements in the longer parabolic narratives.[93] Later approaches attempted to interpret

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[91] Frye, *The Great Code,* pp. 105-199.
[92] Frye, *Words with Power,* p. 85.
[93] Robert H. Stein, 'Parables', in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible,* ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 567-70.

the parables of Jesus divorced from their narrative context, treating them as evidence of oral tradition pre-dating the composition of the Gospels, or as products of the hand of the redactor, and therefore evidence for the overriding theology of the particular gospel narrative in which it was found. Examples of these two approaches include the work of C. H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias who considered the parables of Jesus to be a form of 'dramatic realism' which utilized images from ordinary life to point to an eschatological reality,[94] and scholars such as Paolo Friere who focused on parables as narratives of advocacy for the poor and oppressed.[95]

John Dominic Crossan's discussion of parable as metaphorical narrative provides an extremely useful point of entry into the early Celtic hagiographies. According to Crossan, parable differs from other forms of narrative in that its purpose is not to draw the hearer into the *content* of the story, but to apply its content outward, to something other than itself.[96] For example, the parable of the Sower and the Seed in Mark's Gospel[97] is not intended to draw the listener into a deeper understanding of agriculture; Crossan argued that it is designed to illustrate metaphorically the encounter of the hearer with the Word of God in Christ which may or may not mysteriously produce fruit. The listener is paradoxically pushed out of the immediate context of the tale, while those hearers who follow the metaphor and encounter the hidden Word within the narrative are drawn inward into a community of followers.

Crossan went on to apply this theory of the structure and function of parable to the divergent depictions of Jesus across the Gospels and Revelation. Over time, the teller of parables became the subject of parabolic, or metaphorical, representations designed to confront later generations of listeners with a demand for conversion, action, or revolution.[98] Likewise, this thesis will argue that the hagiographies to be examined herein may be seen to function in much the same way as biblical parables do, 'throwing together' disparate elements from history, folklore, and the Bible to

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[94] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom,* rev. edn (Glasgow: Collins, 1961), p. 20.
[95] See, for example, William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Luise Schottroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).
[96] Crossan, *The Power of Parable,* pp. 8-9.
[97] Mark 4.3-9.
[98] Crossan, *The Power of Parable,* p. 194.

generate a new consciousness on the part of their readers. The hypothesis that hagiographical texts may be read as parabolic texts is defensible in large measure on literary grounds, noting the anecdotal structure of the hagiographical narratives, as well as on the basis of the amount of biblical material identifiable within the narratives. It is quite reasonable to suppose that monastic hagiographers would utilize a literary form that Jesus used for teaching,[99] and which allowed them to present their protagonists as metaphorical, larger-than-life persons following Jesus's example.

1.5   THE ROLE OF ARCHETYPAL PSYCHOLOGY

Allison Elliott's essential claim for the Desert Lives was that the earliest hagiographical narratives presupposed readers or hearers for whom the narratives became both normative and formative. They become normative in the sense that the life of the saint, as with the life of Christ, is intended as a model to be emulated, a pattern to be followed. They become formative to the extent that neither the saint nor the monk-reader arrives at spiritual perfection without great effort, and the narrative functions, among other ways, as a road map or guide to the process of spiritual development. It is not, however a literal map or behavioural text-book; its guidance is couched in the form of archetypal motifs which may be read as indicative of psychological elements in religious life.

Archetypal motifs or images were examined by Carl Jung from the perspective of analytical psychology. While definitions of such terms as 'archetype', 'archetypal image', and 'mythological archetype' are somewhat fluid as they appear in Jung's writing, later interpreters including Steven Walker have endeavoured to bring some degree of clarity to these terms. For the purposes of the present project, an archetype will be considered an inherited structure embedded within the human personality. In itself an archetype is not directly knowable but is experienced via 'archetypal images', characters, events, or other symbolic contents which allow the conscious mind to identify the underlying structure or significance of a life event.[100] Such images or motifs, while culturally conditioned to a degree, also appear across cultures, and have

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[99] Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8, and others.
[100] Steven F. Walker, *Jung and the Jungians on Myth: An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 12-15.

been collected and analysed by Eliade and others, as noted earlier.[101] They appear in a variety of narrative genres, including mythology, folktale, parable, and hagiography.

Central among the archetypal images generated from within the human personality is the archetype of the Self, a motif pointing to an 'unconscious inner core of an individual's being…the ultimate principle of harmony and unity'.[102] Jung claimed a universal and religious dimension to this symbol, connecting it with the *Atman* of Hinduism, the *Buddha* of Buddhism, the *Tifereth* in Kabbalistic Judaism, and with Christ in Christianity.[103] In considering the Christian archetype in particular, Jung wrote, 'The drama of the archetypal life of Christ describes in symbolic images the events in the conscious life – as well as in the life that transcends consciousness – of a man who has been transformed by his higher destiny.'[104]

Edward Edinger developed a Jungian interpretation of the events in the life of Christ expressed in the Gospels and extra-biblical materials to illustrate the process of psycho-spiritual development available to those who seek such a path of transformation.[105] Common elements found in the Gospels, heroic biography and hagiography alike such as annunciations of impending birth, threats to the life of a child, confrontation with secular authorities, and resurrection and ascension are seen to represent steps in a process of psycho-spiritual development toward expression of Christ as the universal and individual Self. Images of light or water, persons such as Wise Men or Women, actions such as journeys and healings, or events such as posthumous miracles provide symbolic content for formative religious narratives. In addition, Marie-Louise von Franz argued that a range of folk motifs including bathing, burning, beating, and identification or disidentification with animals may represent motifs of redemption from possession by archetypes of the personality which temporarily impede psychological growth.[106] She suggested that the Church may be

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[101] Eliade, *Patterns*, see also, Bray, *A List of Motifs*, and Henken, *The Welsh Saints*.

[102] Walker, *Jung and the Jungians,* p. 84.

[103] Walker, *Jung and the Jungians,* p. 85.

[104] C. G. Jung, 'A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity', *Psychology and Western Religion*, trans. by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8-96.

[105] Edward F. Edinger, *The Christian Archetype: A Jungian Commentary on the Life of Christ* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1987).

[106] Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980).

seen to function as a vessel in which the work of individuation and redemption is undertaken,[107] an identification which may logically apply to monastic life in particular.

The location of the archetypal image of the Self on the borderline between psychological universality and religious particularity supports an analysis of texts which utilize archetypal motifs from the perspective of psycho-spiritual growth, or religious formation. It will be argued that narratives utilizing these symbolic representations intend to move the psyche toward a particular psycho-spiritual goal. As motifs of the Self and its development appear in the hagiographies in this study, they will be examined for their potential to elicit religious responses on the part of the reader, responses which may be consonant with the goal of religious formation, maturity, or, to use Jung's term, wholeness.

In addition, while the central focus of a heroic biographical tale is, of course, the hero him- or herself, a significant number of ancillary characters and character types appear more or less regularly across the genre, providing a wider scope of consideration and identification for the reader. These may include, but not be limited to, family members, disciples, wise or foolish elders and secular authorities, characters with whom members of the monastic community might easily identify. Locating these characters in relation to the hero, as well as determining their roles in the development of the plot of the narrative, may provide a useful vantage point from which to approach the texts.

1.6 HAGIOGRAPHY AND THE NATURE OF SANCTITY

Related to the topic of the narratives as expressions of particular patterns of psycho-spiritual development is the question of the nature of sanctity. While no single definition of sanctity has achieved scholarly consensus, the term seems to indicate a quality of religious exceptionalism located in a particular person. Scholars have identified a range of possible markers of sanctity. Peter Brown emphasized displays of power or charismatic authority as the defining attribute of the holy man or saint.[108]

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[107] von Franz, *Redemption Motifs,* p. 24.

[108] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints;* Peter Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity' in *Saints and Virtues,* ed. by Hawley, pp. 3-14; Stephen Wilson, 'Introduction', in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History,* ed. by Stephen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-54.

Ascetic achievement may be seen as a variation on the theme of power or charism, as evidenced in the earliest generation of Desert Dwellers.[109] Lynda Coon grounded her discussion of female sanctity in biblical *topoi* including the harlot/saint, the wealthy philanthropist, and the virgin.[110] Thomas Heffernan, however, included the term 'sacred' in the title of his study of hagiography, and came up with no particular definition at all; for him the term apparently covers any action which is committed in the service of ecclesiastical agendas.[111]

Stephen Wilson produced an historical trajectory for sanctity in continental Christianity, beginning with the stories of the martyrs, the holy dead whose tombs were the *loci* for divine power, but who were pointedly not worshipped in themselves.[112] Over time, relics began to be translated to new locations, eventually becoming completely mobile in the form of pilgrim souvenirs such as *ampullae* and badges.[113] The tension between locality and mobility was addressed in various ways over time, including the establishment of shrines, churches, and cathedrals over the tombs of the saints in the early Middle Ages, and the adoption of ideals of sanctity and their emblematic saints by religious orders in the Later Middle Ages and Early Modern period.[114] Asceticism and missionary zeal followed martyrdom as the marks of sainthood after the time of the persecutions. Sanctity began to be recognized in living persons, mostly in the form of 'heroic virtues and the accomplishment of miracles' although Wilson did not enumerate the particular virtues he considered relevant.[115] Liturgy, literature, and calendrical observance eventually rounded out the forms of recognition of a saint, again with the written Lives arising quite specifically in the service of the cult and its promotion. 'Lives were written to stimulate devotion and provide examples of piety; they were written to boost particular cults, to promote

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[109] For a brief discussion of the significance of asceticism, see Thomas Head, 'The Holy Person in Comparative Perspective', The ORB: On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies (1999) <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/compare.htm> [accessed 3 July 2013].

[110] Linda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. xxii.

[111] Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3, 5, 72-3, 88-9.

[112] Wilson, 'Introduction', *Saints and their Cults*, p. 3.

[113] Wilson, 'Introduction', *Saints and their Cults*, p. 4; see also Virginia Reinberg, 'Remembering the Saints', in *Memory and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Nancy Netzer and Virginia Reinberg (Boston: Boston College Museum of Art, 1995), pp. 18-33.

[114] Wilson, 'Introduction', *Saints and their Cults*, p. 5.

[115] Wilson, 'Introduction', *Saints and their Cults*, p. 9.

canonizations, and thus to further the interests of particular groups or institutions'.[116] According to Wilson, the functions of the saints themselves were aid, patronage, and political backing, an approach which reveals his concern with more worldly aspects of the relationship between saints and their followers, as opposed to the functions of education and formation in religious faith.[117]

Martyrs of the early Church were memorialized in *passiones,* texts which related their final encounters with secular rulers bent upon destroying them and their faith. Neither the *passiones* nor the early *actae* and *vitae* were intended to convey historical fact as it has come to be understood since the eighteenth century. Rather, they were testimonies, oral and then written witnesses to the courage and Christian virtues of the protagonist. Every *passio* had behind it the account of the death of the proto-martyr, Stephen, in Acts 6-7, and behind that, the Gospel accounts of the death of Christ. Behind every *vita,* however, there may be a broad collection of tales of exemplary lives of faithful men and women, including the canonical texts of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Canon, apocryphal accounts of the lives of prophets and patriarchs, classical forms of biography and history, and the common tales that came to be known as heroic biography.

Peter Brown explored the importance of the saints' tombs and relics in the development of the cult, suggesting that the literature attached to the saint was created primarily to promote the tomb-cult,[118] and secondarily to promote the saint as intercessor and 'friend' or spiritual guide.[119] The graves became shrines at which miraculous cures of individual human bodies were enacted as embodiments of the perfection of the Body of Christ into which all were now made equal members. Brown's discussion of the effects of the public reading of a *passio* emphasized the importance of religious narrative to the experience of disintegration and reintegration which he claimed were central to the Late Antique psyche.[120]

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[116] Ibid., p. 16.
[117] Ibid., p. 16.
[118] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* p. 9.
[119] Ibid., pp. 55, 65.
[120] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* pp. 69-85.

In addition he discussed the role of the saint as *paidagogos* or instructive exemplar,[121] a construct which addresses the didactic function of hagiography, and nuances it in the direction of formation*,* that is, the conscious patterning of one's life on a spiritual model.[122] In this instance the exemplar was far more than an instructor, he inspired a quality of personal devotion that transferred over to the cult of the saints quite easily.   This pattern of relationship endured well into the medieval period; as late as the sixteenth century Manus O'Donnell dedicated his work on Columba with these words, 'in love and friendship for his illustrious Saint, Relative, and Patron, to whom he [Manus] was devoutly attached.'[123]

The critical place of late antique – early medieval hagiography within the context of the cultural interchange between Roman and Germanic peoples as the Visigoths and Ostrogoths conquered and then assimilated Roman culture was examined by Thomas Head and Thomas Noble.[124] The images of Christian sanctity most relevant in their study were saints as 'soldiers of Christ' and members of the nobility, now dead, but resident in the divine court.[125] Occupying this exalted position, saints could be sought by ordinary folk as patrons, mediators and advisors. In this context, sanctity became synonymous with power, specifically divine power, which was recognizable expressly because it transcended human political power. At the same time, the authors of the Lives claimed that their own purpose was to encourage their readers to follow the example set out in the texts, indicating that the formative and didactic influences were present even as the political and secular agendas were enacted.[126]

In a separate article Head placed particular emphasis on the Church's official recognition of saints as those who had posthumously entered the realm of heaven, and suggested that 'the very composition and use of a hagiographic text implied that

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[121] Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar', pp. 3-14.
[122] Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar', pp. 5, 13.
[123] William Reeves, ed., *The Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy, written by Adomnán* (Edinburg: Edmonston & Douglas, 1874), Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/lifestcolumbafo00reevgoog> [accessed 7 November 2011], p. xxx.
[124] Thomas Noble and Thomas Head, 'Introduction' in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages,* ed. by Thomas Noble and Thomas Head (University Park, PA: The Penn State University Press, 1995), p. xiii.
[125] Noble and Head, 'Introduction', p. xiv.
[126] Noble and Head, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

its subject [had] received institutional recognition'.[127] Such recognition carried with it the expectation that the saint would be regarded as an example, in the sense of a model for imitation. Head cited Gregory's classic expression of the multivalence of this idea of saint as exemplar: 'Gregory of Tours wrote that he decided to name a work the Life of the Fathers rather than the Lives of the Fathers because he deemed most important the "merits and virtues" common to a single ideal of sanctity, rather than the diverse singularities of the individual lives of his many subjects'.[128] This multivalence is seen in the recurring motifs and archetypes used in hagiography, including their use by writers with first-hand knowledge of their subjects. 'But even these authors modelled their portraits on existing ideals of sanctity and drew upon a large body of traditional and somewhat standardized stories about the saints'.[129] The hagiographer did not intend to present an individualistic biography, but a model person who in turn had modelled him or herself upon prior models, particularly the life of Christ.[130]

The role of the saint as example was further examined by John Hawley, who made a distinction between two types of example, one as illustration or case in point, and one as paradigm or model.[131] The ambiguity between these two meanings is significant. As was observed earlier, the saint may display the typical Christian virtues of generosity, forgiveness or obedience, instantiating those moral principles that are well known within the tradition. On the other hand, the saint may engage in cursing, rebelling against authority, or performing miracles well beyond the apparent abilities of ordinary Christians, behaviours which distance the saint from the common people and their daily moral challenges. According to Hawley's construction, this ambiguity undermines efforts to reduce Lives to simple biographies or lessons in Christian virtue.

In his discussion of specifically Irish saints, James Kenney considered 'saintship' to be based not in moral goodness but in magical and miraculous power.[132] He claimed that the saint's legendary powers 'neither arose from habitual virtue nor

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[127] Head, 'Hagiography', The ORB: On-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies (1999) <http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/hagio.htm> [accessed 3 July 2013].
[128] Head, 'Hagiography'.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Hawley, 'Introduction' p. xiii.
[132] Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 303.

resulted primarily in holiness; it was the Christianised counterpart of the magic potency of the druid'.[133] This observation appears within his discussion of the saints of the Monastic Churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, related in texts from the seventh century forward, precisely the time period covered in the present study. While saintly attributes may well derive from, or exist in direct contrast to, non-Christian sources, it will be seen that the elements of virtue and holiness are by no means absent from the accounts of their lives.

Derek Krueger argued that the act of composing a hagiography was in itself the embodiment of the virtues claimed for the saint, as narratives that simultaneously present a portrait of sanctity, call readers to lives of sanctity, and 'participate in this world [of sanctity] through their own observance of ascetic conventions in the production of texts.'[134] Prologues in which the hagiographer claims for himself the virtues of obedience, dependence upon the prayers of his monastic comrades, and above all humility, present the text as an embodiment of the virtues of the saint, and the writer as both witness to and participant in the development of monastic sanctity following the model of his protagonist.[135]

Within the hagiographies themselves it is not uncommon to encounter claims, and even lists, of Christian virtues exhibited by the saintly protagonist, at any time from childhood onward. Such lists can often, although not always, be traced back to biblical passages or hagiographical precedents, thereby underscoring the religious lineage, one might say, being claimed for the saint. From a theological perspective sanctity is an indication of an individual's closeness to, and imitation of, God as known in Christ. *Sanctus,* the Latin equivalent of the Greek 'αγιος (*hagios*, holy), is the innermost nature of God. It is what Christians become as a result of belief in, or appropriation of, Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross.[136] Members of monastic communities would have taken quite seriously the descriptions of the 'holy ones' who were their founders or early exemplars, seeking indications in the narratives of their lives of how an exemplary Christian life was to be lived.

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[133] Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 303.
[134] Derek Krueger, 'Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice in the Early Christian East', *The Journal of Religion,* 79 (1999), 216-32, p. 217.
[135] Krueger, 'Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice', p. 220.
[136] 'Hagios', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume,* ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 14-17.

Returning to the earlier claim that these texts communicate to their readers knowledge that is critical for integration into the life of the community, this knowledge may specifically address what is necessary to live a new religious life, a life regenerated by baptism and concentrated by means of profession into a Christian monastic community. The concerned knowledge or meaning of the narrative may be communicated via the actions of the saintly protagonist, the interactions with family members and development of a community of followers, the sequence of events which forms the plot of the narrative, and/or the locations and descriptors which surround the plot. In other words, the narrative may be said to embody particular claims being made for Christian monastic life. To support this claim, one might cite the fundamental notion of incarnation and its relationship to language within the essential framework of Christian faith. In brief, the work of creation in Genesis 1 is accomplished by God's spoken Word. Christ is proclaimed as the Word made flesh in John 1, a conscious evocation of the Genesis narrative. The central ritual of the Christian faith, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, is depicted in the Gospels as the sharing of Christ's Body among the faithful. The metaphor is extended in 1 Corinthians 12, describing the community of believers as themselves the Body of Christ, suggesting that all Christians are embodiments of God's original Word of Creation, a creation which God declared to be *tov meod,* very good. Interlocking concepts of Word and Incarnation, then, can be seen to construct a fundamental aspect of the Christian *kerygma*, or proclamation of salvation, critically important knowledge for Christians in any community, and the more so for Christian monks and nuns. All would be called to hear, read, embrace and become Incarnate Words, and the religious texts produced for their use, particularly narratives concerning previous exemplars of God's Word and Power in the human universe, can be seen as integral elements in the process of religious growth and formation.

1.7   METHOD

1.7.1 OVERVIEW

This project accepts as axiomatic the idea that all religious texts, either primary or secondary, are intended to convey concerned knowledge, expand the reader's horizon of meaning, and call forth psycho-spiritual growth within the reader. The task at hand,

then, is to examine the selected texts to determine the means by which those ends are addressed. The method used to interrogate the texts will be taken from Paul Ricoeur's approach to biblical hermeneutics, recognizing that while hagiographies are not canonical texts, the three under examination in this study were composed in explicitly religious environments for presumably religious reasons (indeed, the hagiographers present themselves as writing in a spirit of prayer, obedience and humility, all important monastic virtues). Given the explicitly Christian provenance of the texts in question, then, along with the narrative genre and parabolic nature of many episodes contained in the Lives, applying a hermeneutic sensibility to the texts may place them in a logical continuum of resources for proclaiming the essential Christian *kerygma* of faith in the on-going presence of Christ working in and through individuals of exceptional sanctity.

1.7.2 PAUL RICOEUR AND NARRATOLOGY

The approach which will be utilized herein was first proposed by twentieth-century French philosopher Paul Ricoeur for use in interpreting originary religious texts, i.e., biblical hermeneutics. Building on theories of linguistics and semiotics, Ricoeur presented his hermeneutical theory beginning with an understanding of discourse as a function of dialogue which intends to convey a message from a speaker to a hearer.[137] This dialogue may be understood dialectically as consisting of event and meaning, that is, the speech-event and the content of the message. In his collection of essays on biblical interpretation, Ricoeur addressed various genres of discourse which appear in the Bible: prophecy, hymn, prescription or 'law', wisdom, and narrative, all of which carry 'revealed truth' in unique ways.[138] This thesis is concerned with the interpretation of narratives of a religious nature, and therefore follows Ricoeur's claims for the function of religious narratives, including their ability to structure a religious history, describe God as '*actant*' within that history, and found a community

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[137] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 9.

[138] Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation' in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980) <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1941& C= 1772> [accessed on 2 January 2015].

which identifies itself as bearers of that history.[139] While his claim is that these are necessary traits of biblical discourse, they may also be seen to be effective within the narrative genre of hagiography.

The interpretation of narrative discourse involves recognizing that stories tell 'the universal aspects of the human condition;' that 'narrative intelligence' is the human capacity to reflect on random events and construct them in sequential and symbolic ways that allow human consciousness to inhabit a 'horizon of meaning' which conveys a sense of personhood beyond mere biological existence.[140] Our human subjectivity is neither a static entity carried through the years of our existence, nor an incoherent series of events without structure or meaning. While we cannot claim to be the authors of our own lives, we are indeed the narrators of our own stories.[141] The construction of narrative, then, takes its place within the human experience as a way of connecting the horizons of meaning between individuals and the lives of others, living or dead, present or absent.

Ricoeur went on to describe the steps by which written narrative moves from spoken discourse through 'semantic autonomy' to hermeneutic encounter. First, the initial 'event of language', either in speech or in writing, grounds the message in a particular historical context which may be seen to influence the selection of motifs used to express and shape the kind of knowledge the author is concerned to convey. Ricoeur passed quickly from the question of context to his more pressing concerns involving 'explanation' and 'understanding', the further steps which he considered essential to 'identifying the discourse of the text'.[142] The present project will place a somewhat stronger emphasis on the historical context for the composition of the texts at hand in an effort to identify any contemporary concerns which may be seen to influence the mode of composition.

Ricoeur then argued that the movement from speech to writing exteriorizes the event, that is, it removes the linguistic event from the immediacy of dialogue and

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[139] Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation'.

[140] Paul Ricoeur, 'Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator' in *Facts and Values*, trans. and ed. by M. C. Doeser and J. N. Kraay (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), pp. 123, 127.

[141] Ricoeur, 'Life: A Story', p. 131.

[142] Paul Ricoeur, 'Philosophical hermeneutics and theological hermeneutics', *Sciences Religieuses,* 5 (1975), 14-33, p. 22.

separates it from the subjective psyche of the author.[143] In addition, the act of writing

assumes a dimension of craft in the use of language, revealing the author as a creator

and the text as a work of human production. This act of exteriorization, which Ricoeur

referred to as 'distanciation', does not eliminate the author's intention from the body

of the text, but rather incorporates the authorial presence as a dimension within the

text. The process of distanciation also results in what Ricoeur called the 'semantic

autonomy' of the text, an indication of its ability to be interpreted apart from the limits

of situational reference characteristic of the dialogic event.[144] In other words, while

the text was unquestionably produced within a specific historical context, the

immediate circumstances of composition are not definitive of the meaning of the text

in any absolute way.

Once the reference of a text is freed from the immediacy of the dialogic

situation and shaped by the crafting of language it becomes literature, and as such is

capable of projecting a world, a universe of understandings contained within the text

itself. This is accomplished by the effacement of the descriptive elements of dialogue

which then 'liberates a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that

cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to, thanks to the referential

values of metaphoric and, in general, symbolic expressions'.[145] It is this valuation of

the symbolic and metaphorical content of literature which will be brought to bear on

the hagiographies under consideration. While their hyper-realistic content is often the

object of modern critique, it may be seen to function more successfully as

metaphorical expression than as factual statement.

The act of distanciation itself exists in dialectical relationship with the act of

appropriation, that is, the ultimate response of a reader to the text. As the act of

writing separates the writer from the content of the text, it opens plural and

ambiguous avenues of interpretation for the reader, with the eventual goal being the

appropriation or adoption of the meaning of the text and the resultant expansion of

the 'horizon of understanding' on the part of the reader.[146]

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[143] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory,* p. 29.
[144] Ibid.*,* p. 30.
[145] Ibid.*,* p. 37.
[146] Ibid.*,* pp. 72-74.

The process of appropriation takes place in stages, beginning with a naïve understanding of the text as a whole, at the level of its outward narrative identity. This naïve understanding must then be validated, and for this purpose Ricoeur recommends a process of structural analysis which treats elements within the texts in a similar fashion to linguistic analysis, citing Lévi-Strauss in the realm of anthropology and Propp in folklore as exemplars. Appropriate elements for structural analysis include characters and their relationships, actions and sequences of actions, and 'narrative signs', or indications of the narrator's role and presence within the text. This process of analysis is referred to as 'explanation', an approach to the text which moves the reader from a surface understanding of the text as a whole, to a 'depth semantics' which recognizes the constituent elements within the text and arranges them in thematic relationship with one another. This thesis will submit each text to a structural analysis aimed at identifying the conceptual framework undergirding that particular Life. This step will address each text as an individual whole, uniquely structured by its author and employing a unique array of biblical and archetypal motifs. This unique construction may be seen to point in two directions: to particular concerns of the author, as well as to a distinctive range of possible interpretations or understandings of the text by its readers.

The final phase of interpretation is 'understanding', an act in which the reader 'seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text'.[147] Ricoeur's claim here is that interpretation takes the reader beyond an analytical approach to the text into an encounter with the text that indicates the existence of 'horizons of meaning' which describe more than a simple situation, but indeed a whole world. Explanation and understanding, then, constitute two distinct and complementary phases of the hermeneutical process.

1.7.3   EMPLOYING THE METHOD: FIRST STEP, 'THE WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT'

Following Ricoeur's pattern, the first section in each chapter will set the text in the historical context of its time of composition, to the extent that the date has been established and the socio-historical context known. For Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* and the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, dating is fairly clear and well-established. The *Vita*

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[147] Ibid., p. 87.

Samsonis I has been the subject of greater controversy, but recent scholarship seems to be coming to consensus on a date of c. 700 CE, placing it within five to ten years of the *Vita Cuthberti,* both of which are predated by the *Vita Brigitae* by about 50 years. One goal of the historical section will be to examine the surrounding socio-cultural environment so as to imagine the challenges to new monastics as they would have been moving into religious life. Influences from ecclesiastical developments as well as secular history will be noted, in so far as they are known.

1.7.4   SECOND STEP: 'THE WORLD OF THE TEXT'

Next, a structural analysis will be undertaken to identify and discuss pertinent themes and patterns within the text. Referring to the catalogues and sources of motifs discussed above, biblical, extra-biblical, and archetypal motifs will be identified, noting any patterns of dependence on particular models, characters, or events, or particular emphases in the motifs employed. While all of the hagiographical narratives may be considered variations on the heroic biography, each of the three texts under consideration here will be analysed according to Ricoeur's contention that the true structure of a narrative may be seen to emerge from within the text itself. That is to say, while heroic biographies may be seen to share certain common motifs, those motifs may be structured in unique ways by individual authors wishing to cast a heroic protagonist in a particular light. Such will be seen to be the case, in particular for Cogitosus as the question of presenting his chapters on Brigit in 'inverse order' is critical to an interpretation of the meaning of the narrative.

1.7.5   THIRD STEP: 'THE WORLD BEFORE THE TEXT'

For the third stage, the hermeneutic act, Ricoeur argued that the reader's 'horizon of meaning' is expanded in the encounter with the text, and thereby restores a meaningful referential reality to the text which is lost in the act of structural analysis. This interpretive act Ricoeur called 'understanding', and it constitutes the core of his claim for the need to interpret religious texts beyond their literal, or naïve, meaning. The act of interpretation reveals a 'world before the text' which is understood to be a world of possibilities, a 'projected world' which stands apart from the historical context of the time of composition, and even apart from the conscious intentions of

the author.[148] Psychological approaches to interpretation are not used to imagine what the author was thinking at the time of writing, but are more appropriately used to illumine the dynamics of encounter between the text and the reader.

The present project will utilize archetypal psychology in just this fashion, incorporating the theories of C.G. Jung and later theorists such as Edinger and Walker who have applied Jung's work to a range of biblical and mythological narratives. It is additionally worth noting that the *Conferences* of John Cassian, likely familiar to insular monastic writers, was directly concerned with the mental and spiritual health and development of monks. Elliott's investigation of the Lives of the Desert Saints, some of which are models for the Lives in the present study, addresses its subject in terms of psychological themes of liminal experience, initiation, and spiritual ascent. It would only be natural to expect these or similar themes to be echoed in later Lives as well. I contend that this interpretive method will provide the necessary tools to move from analysis to hermeneutic, opening up a new appreciation of the role of these early Christian narratives both within their original communities as well as for subsequent readers.

1.8   OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The first chapter has reviewed the present state of knowledge about early medieval Christian hagiography, with particular emphasis on texts from the late-seventh century. The three texts to be examined have been introduced, and their common background in Celtic culture touched upon. The chapter went on to examine the types of motifs that will be encountered in the various texts, and the theorists whose investigations of biblical and archetypal motifs will be relevant to the analysis and interpretation of the texts. Hagiography was then discussed in relationship to several other genres, including historiography, myth, folklore, and parable. Each of these genres may be seen to shed light on the essential task of the hagiographer, as well as on the readers of hagiographies. Parable in particular was seen to point the way to a hermeneutic approach, as parabolic writing is itself a metaphoric genre which requires interpretation in order to be comprehended.

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[148] Ricoeur, 'Philosophical hermeneutics', p. 27.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the method by which the narratives will be interrogated, the narrative hermeneutic approach developed by Paul Ricoeur. Recognizing the need for human beings to construct their lives by means of narrative intelligence, and the importance of religious narrative in the process of conveying concerned knowledge to those who choose to interpret their own lives within a religious framework, the steps involved in a Ricoeurian hermeneutic process were set out in detail.

Chapter Two will examine Book One of the anonymous *Vita Samsonis I* according to the described method. The historical context for the composition will be explicated to the extent possible, the dominant motifs within the narrative in Book One will be identified along with their likely sources, and the text subjected to a structural analysis. The final section will examine the text for concerned knowledge that may be seen to stimulate the experience of appropriation on the part of a reader, and interpret the expanded horizon of meaning in the world before the text.

Chapter three will examine the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* in the same way, and chapter four will do the same for Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae.* As was noted above, the motifs and structural analysis will be unique to each text under consideration. While each one will be seen to be heavily influenced by the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian canons, the variety of material within the Scriptures is itself so varied that hagiographies, derivative though they may be, are capable of a wide variety of constructions and reconstructions of their source material.

The fifth and final chapter will offer conclusions concerning the narratives that have been examined, and the method used. Questions for further research will be identified, and the usefulness of the method for further examination of religious narratives will be assessed.

CHAPTER TWO: VITA SAMSONIS I

2.1   WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT

2.1.1   INTRODUCTION

The first text to be examined is the *Vita Samsonis I* (hereafter *VS I*), widely regarded as the earliest Breton hagiography, and in that capacity frequently mined as a source for the history of early medieval Brittany. The Life was included in Mabillon's collection of the Lives of Benedictine saints,[1] and the Bollandist edition, based on Mabillon, appears in *Acta Sanctorum Julii* volume vi, pages 568-593.[2] Modern editions of the text include Fawtier's French edition of 1912, Taylor's English edition of 1925, and Flobert's French edition, published in 1997.[3] Emendations to Taylor were made by Karen Jankulak based on Flobert, and posted online through the University of Wales, Lampeter's Celtic Christianity e-Library in 2001 and 2003. Jankulak's version was accessed in 2007 for a previous paper by this author; while no longer available online, the present study will continue to consult Jankulak's notations in comparison with Taylor's edition.

Saint Samson himself was a native of Western Britain, now Wales, having reportedly begun his life as the son of noble parents from the regions of Demetia and Gwent. The foundation which claims the Life, however, is in the Breton parish of Dol, for a time in the ninth century an episcopal see. Samson's travels through Wales, Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany and Francia ('Romania' in the text) cast him in the role of *peregrinus,* a wanderer without the benefit of an explicit missionary or penitential purpose to his travels. A second Life is dated to the ninth century, in part because of its claims of episcopal status for Dol reflected in its discussion of hereditary rights for the monastery at Dol vis-à-vis a nearby monastery.[4]

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[1] Jean Mabillon, *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti,* 9 vols (Paris: 1668-1701) 1, pp. 165–185.
[2] *Vita Samsonis I,* Acta Sanctorum, Julii tomus vi, ed. by A. J. B. Sollerio, J. Pinio, G. Cupero, P. Boschio (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1868), pp. 568-93, <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:acta-us&rft_dat=xri:acta:ft:all:Z500030095>.
[3] Robert Fawtier, *La vie de Saint Samson: essai de critique hagiographique* (Paris: *Librarie Ancienne Honoré Champion*, 1912), Pierre Flobert, *La vie ancienne de Saint Samson de Dol* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1997), Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol*.
[4] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson' p. 9.

2.1.2 DATING AND PURPOSES OF THE TEXT

Dating this text has been challenging, with proposed dates ranging from 610 x 615 (Loth, Merdrignac) to the early ninth century (Fawtier), with Flobert recommending a compromise date of 730 x 770,[5] although these claims remain open to argument. The saint's death is considered to have occurred sometime c. 565, following Mabillon, due to the signature of one Samson, present at the Third Council of Paris in 552,[6] but absent from the Council of Tours in 567, although his death would, of course, not be the only possible reason for his absence. The claim of an early seventh-century date for the text was initially based upon a literal reading of the prologue in which the hagiographer asserted that he had obtained some of his information from living relatives of Samson's at perhaps two generations' remove. Merdrignac argued that the list of bishops contained within the *VS I* [7] corresponds closely with the plausible lifetimes of the hagiographer's sources, indicating support for a seventh-century date.[8] Sowerby noted the claim in the prologue that the Life was composed at the request of one Tigernomalus, bishop of Dol, and identified this bishop as the *Tigermal* whose death in 707 is recorded in the Annals of Lorsch.[9] This would suggest composition of the Life close to 700. Charles-Edwards argued for a seventh-century date based on the use of the term *Romania* to designate the area between Brittany and Francia in which the monastery at Pental was founded (I.60).[10] Such a term would no longer have been in use by the eighth century. The seventh century in Brittany was also a time in which the identity of the Christian community as Roman versus British or otherwise aligned with the Celtic Irish church was coming into focus.[11] While the *VS I* does not overtly engage issues of Roman orthodoxy, the passing mention of 'catholic' churches in the final chapter of the narrative may be read as evidence of a conflict which had been resolved by the time of composition.

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[5] Fawtier, *La Vie de Saint Samson,* pp. 74-78, Flobert, *La Vie Ancienne*, pp. 102-110, Joseph Loth, *L'Émigration bretonne en Armorique* (Rennes: Alphonse Picard, 1883), Bernard Merdrignac, 'La Premier Vie de Saint Samson: Étude Chronologique', *Studia Monastica,* 30 (1988), 243-88.
[6] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', p. 22.
[7] *Vita Samsonis I*, prologue 1, II.1, II.2, II.15.
[8] Merdrignac, '*La Première Vie*', p. 265.
[9] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', p. 20.
[10] T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 238-9.
[11] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 241.

As noted above, Fawtier's argument for a ninth-century date has been competently refuted based on comparison to the second Life of Samson.[12] Sowerby's examination of the two texts noted that concerns involving ecclesiastical power relationships appear quite clearly in the *VS II*, including assertions regarding rights of tribute from subsidiary monasteries, emphasis on Samson as 'bishop of Dol', and an expanded account of the founding of the monastery at Dol, all of which are absent from *VS I*.[13] In addition, while *VS I* includes an extended narrative concerning Samson's confrontation with King Childebert and his queen (I.53-59), this passage does not appear to make political claims either for the Breton church in general, or for Dol in particular.[14]

The recent colloquy in Sydney took up the question of dating without coming to any firm conclusions. Poulin reportedly advocated for a late eighth-century date given internal references to recent bishops of Dol, and the lack of independent evidence for an established see at Dol any earlier than the mid-eighth century.[15] Others present, including Brett and Mews, argued that likely literary models for the *VS I* included fifth-century Gaulish texts concerned with indicating the appropriate degree of asceticism for monastic life.[16] Brett focused in particular on the sixth-century Life of St Paternus as a possible model, which could easily support a seventh-century date for the *VS I*. On the strength of these most recent investigations, then, a date of c. 700 seems the most supportable.

Charles-Edwards argued that the Life had two purposes: to designate Samson as the champion behind Judual's victory, and to claim the monastery at Pental as a gift to Samson from Childebert.[17] These events receive only slight attention in the text, however, and are mentioned only at the end of the narrative. Fawtier questioned the likelihood of Childebert's involvement in a question of succession in Dumnonia, and

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[12] Flobert, *La Vie Ancienne,* pp. 105-108.

[13] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', pp. 8-11.

[14] Charles-Edwards noted the gift of Pental from King Childebert and Judual's victory over Commorus in chapter 59, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 66; these are only mentioned in passing at the conclusion of the section.

[15] Caroline Brett, 'St Samson Colloquy Report', *Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic,* 16 July 2013, <http://anglosaxonnorseandceltic.blogspot.com/2013/07/st-samson-colloquy-report.html> [accessed 9 October 2014].

[16] Brett, 'St Samson Colloquy Report'.

[17] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 66.

further evidence refutes the account of a vicious queen and reluctant king in *VS I*;[18] Charles-Edwards considered this a common Frankish political trope.[19] As *VS I* makes such little claim to property or authority rights, especially in comparison to *VS II*, Sowerby was forced to conclude that the earlier hagiographer was more concerned with Samson's life and conduct than with his or his monasteries' political fortunes. The narrative appears to be primarily concerned with Samson's early formative years, perhaps as a commemoration for the saint's feast day, as the homily which forms Book II suggests. The present study will focus primarily on Book I, the narrative portion of the work, arguing that a senior monk in the community at Dol was assigned the task of creating a Life for the spiritual benefit of the Breton monks. As there was a monk in residence who had some first-hand contact with persons and places in Wales and Cornwall and who was apparently aging, it may simply have been time to compose an account of their founder's life for the Breton community.[20] The absence of political argument in the text, or even accurate portrayals of regional royalty living a century and a half earlier, supports the claim that the impetus for its composition would have been internal to the community, and that the monastic residents were the intended beneficiaries. Such a view of the purposes behind the composition of the text at c. 700 might account for the preponderance of insular material in the narrative, as well as the hagiographer's anxiety over his brothers' possible skepticism, since this material may have been previously unknown to them. It could also account for the tension between the older material, which appears to set Samson's episcopal ordination as the climax of the narrative, versus the later Breton incidents, including the exaltation of the confrontation with Childebert and his queen, a culmination which, though highly stylized, would have suited the intended audience.[21]

The following section will set the text within its historical context, to the degree that it can be determined. The structural analysis will identify the dominant motifs in the narrative, followed by the hermeneutic section which will expand upon the impact the text may be understood to have had upon its readers.

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[18] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', p. 16.
[19] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 66.
[20] F. C. Burkitt, 'St Samson of Dol', *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXVII (1925), 42-57, pp. 48-9.
[21] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', p. 28.

2.1.3 SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

2.1.3.1 MIGRATION OF BRITONS TO ARMORICA

Saint Samson was, without question, a man on the move, a *peregrinus* in the mold of a Patrick, Columba, or Columbanus, but without an explicit mission either to atone or to convert. The motif of motion is intrinsic to this *Life*, and setting the concept of mobility into its historical context may be seen to illumine both the actions in the narrative and the meanings that may be attributed to them. Merdrignac identified Briton service in the Roman army in defence of the western peninsula of Gaul (Armorica) as the 'bridgehead' which eased later migrations. The half-century between the Roman evacuation from Britain and Samson's birth witnessed pressure from Picts, Scotti, and in-coming Saxons, as well as invasions of Visigoths into Gaul.[22] Military service, in the Roman army and the Gaulish troops which succeeded it, mobilized Briton men on both sides of the Channel, in many cases leading to long-term assignment. Assimilation in Gaul would have been further assisted by similarities in language and in Christian orthodoxy, in contrast to Arian Goths and Burgundians.[23]

By the sixth century, migration appears to have taken on a more pronounced ecclesiastical identity, although the major witness in this regard comes from the hagiographies.[24] This phase of settlement took place during and beyond the reign of Childebert I (511-558), a convergence which Merdrignac suggested may account for the frequent depiction of Childebert as the 'typical Frankish king' in later hagiographical sources[25]. Charles-Edwards noted occasional outbreaks of hostility on the part of Franks toward the Breton settlements after Childebert's death, suggesting both that Childebert's relationship with the Breton communities was better than that of later rulers, and that migration in the latter half of the sixth century would have been directed toward established Breton areas, strengthening and expanding them.[26]

During this same time the 'double kingdoms' of Cornouaille/Cornwall and Domnonea/ Dumnonea developed across the Channel from one another,

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[22] Bernard Merdrignac, 'Breton Christianity from its origins to the end of the fifth century', in *The British Settlement of Brittany: The first Bretons in Armorica*, ed. by Pierre-Roland Giot, Philippe Guigon, and Bernard Merdrignac (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 97-118, pp. 106-7, 118.

[23] Merdrignac, 'Breton Christianity', p. 107.

[24] Bernard Merdrignac, 'The Saints and the "Second British Migration"', in *The British Settlement of Brittany*, ed. by Giot, et al., 119-54, p. 119.

[25] Merdrignac, 'The Saints and the "Second British Migration"', p. 121.

[26] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 73.

corresponding to two of the best attested seaways in the region.[27] These may be seen as 'territorial monarchies' embracing populations originating in Britain located now in Gaul as well, with the Continental populations supported by Frankish alliances. Merdrignac further argued that the existence of the *Vita Samsonis I* was sufficient evidence to conclude that the parallel settlements in Cornwall and Armorica represented a single unit whose political and religious identity was actively developing throughout the early sixth century.[28]

The sixth and seventh centuries attest to a general picture of frequent movement among the territories of Ireland, Western Britain, and north-eastern Brittany. The *VS I* depicts Samson visiting Ireland after the death of Piro and before his journeys to Cornwall and Brittany. Similarly, the Irish monk Columbanus left Bangor c. 590, bound for Francia via Brittany, aided by an abbot in Burgundy with a British name, Carantoc.[29] By c. 700, however, a certain stability seems to have evolved. Ethnic and linguistic sub-groups were to be found within larger political entities, witness the arrival of more settled European monastic orders and Bede's description of eighth-century England as heir to four language groups.[30] If the *VS I* can be dated to this time period, then the hagiographer may be seen either to recount the actual movements of Samson which would have been in keeping with known conditions for the sixth century, or to create a kind of verisimilitude with the inherited accounts of the Breton saints who had arrived in Armorica during that time. In either case, the motif of *peregrinatio* places the figure of Samson within the period of early British settlement in Brittany, different from the more settled times in which the Life itself was composed. This difference from the circumstances of monastic life in which the text was first read may account for some of the resistance the hagiographer anticipates in his prologue. It may also indicate that the narrative was expected to function as both history and metaphor – a history of the founder of the community, and a metaphor for

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[27] Merdrignac, 'The Saints and the "Second British Migration"', p. 122, see also Charles-Edwards's discussion of Breton *Tricorii*, in *Wales and the Britons,* p. 74.
[28] Merdrignac, 'The Saints and the "Second British Migration"', p. 128.
[29] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 186.
[30] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 189; Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price, rev. by R. E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1990), I.1, p. 45.

the spiritual life, since the monks of the eighth century would not expect to travel as their founder, or indeed the author of the Life, did.

2.1.2.2 SAMSON, CHILDEBERT, AND 'COMMORUS'

The first 52 chapters of the *VS I* address events attributed to Samson's early life in Wales and his travels in Ireland and Cornwall. Chapters 53 to 57 cover the hostile encounter between Samson and the Frankish king, 'Hiltbert' in Taylor, known to historians as Childebert I (524-558), and his queen, Ultragotha, unnamed in the Life. According to the *VS I*, the purpose of Samson's visit to Childebert's court is to sue for the liberation of Judual, son of Jonas, whom the residents of 'all the districts' thereabouts considered their rightful ruler. Judual's captivity was allegedly arranged with *inique* bribes to the king and queen on behalf of an 'unprincipled stranger', Commorus, who is not named in the Life until chapter 59. The events of Samson's campaign at court closely follow the pattern of miraculous defeats of violent enemies established earlier in the narrative, and his success results in Judual's freedom, Commorus's defeat, and the free gifts of 'estates and privileges' to Samson by the king.

The name 'Commorus' has suggested to historians the possibility of identifying this character with similarly-named characters appearing in Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*, completed in 594. This text may have been available to the hagiographer at Dol, however, the hagiographical account of the political situation on the ground at the time of Samson's arrival in the region bears little resemblance to Gregory's account. Charles-Edwards, following Gregory, argued that Commorus may be identified with either or both of two figures: one Chonoober, a Breton ruler allied with Childebert and killed in battle in 560, as well as one Chonomor, a Breton count and protector of Macliaw.[31] While the *VS I* claims that 'Commorus' was an outsider to the area he ruled, and was supported by Childebert by devious means, Charles-Edwards claimed that 'Chonomor' was the apparently legitimate ruler of Domnonia from 546 to 560, and that the dynasty founded by Jonas and Judual was only established after the death of Childebert. Merdrignac further suggested that

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[31] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 67. Merdrignac states that he came from Armorica: 'Breton Christianity', p. 98.

'Conomor' may be equated with Aurelius Caninus, a British king denounced by Gildas, indicating a more disreputable figure than the persons appearing in Gregory's *Historia*.

While the names are in some cases identical and others merely suggestive, the relationships among them are markedly different in the *VS I* from those reported by Gregory. The task of sorting through the political history of Merovingian Gaul is beyond the scope of this study. It would appear, however, that the composer of the *VS I* was using known characters from Samson's approximate lifetime to present what Charles-Edwards called a stylized depiction of Samson's relationship with the Frankish court.[32] The single mention of the usurper's name, along with his near-absence from the narrative flow, suggest that for the hagiographer, he is merely a tool, an excuse to present one final round of miraculous accomplishments by the saint, this time on Continental soil. The structural and hermeneutic sections of the present study will argue that the characters and events in the narrative of the *Vita Samsonis I* are consciously utilized by the hagiographer to depict the saint's rise from glory to glory by means of defeating ever more deadly enemies over the course of his life.

2.1.3.3   SAMSON, GERMANUS, AND GILDAS

In addition to the various political figures included in the *VS I*, the hagiographer refers to ecclesiastical figures, including Illtud, Dubricius, Piro, and Germanus. The other critical figure who does not appear, but who is the only other voice for the Christian community in western Britain in Samson's lifetime, is Gildas. While Illtud, Dubricius and Piro all have parts to play in the development of Samson's ecclesiastical career, Germanus and Gildas may each be seen as off-stage players whose theological presence or absence pose intriguing questions for this text.

St Germanus of Auxerre was a Gallic bishop from the aristocracy, and his Life by Constantius, c. 470s, emphasizes his work in Gaul and Britain over his pastoral activity in Auxerre.[33] Fully three-quarters of the Life consists of a series of journeys: to Britain, Arles, Britain again, and Ravenna, ending with the posthumous return of his body to Auxerre. He is also well known for his campaign against the Pelagians of Britain, and deeply concerned with upholding Augustinian orthodoxy. In one episode, Constantius

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[32] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 68.
[33] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 50.

models his hero on the figure of Joshua, leading the Britons in victory over the Saxons. In the *VS I* Germanus appears as the bishop who ordained Samson's first teacher, Illtud (I.7). Later Samson is appointed abbot of a monastery founded by Germanus, although he declines the honour (I.43).

Between the two Lives may be seen parallels in the form of modelling on Hebrew Bible heroes, movement as a part of one's Christian labour, and the theme of orthodoxy and teaching as essential to the life of a bishop. Aligning the two figures together at a distance of two generations suggests that Samson's hagiographer intended his readers to associate the two saints in terms of their broad travels, their victorious encounters with enemies, and their shared orthodox Christian faith.

Gildas, composer of *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, along with several letters and a monastic penitential, was a near-contemporary of Samson, and so may represent the British Christianity of Samson's early years. Sharpe suggested some areas of commonality between the *VS I* and Gildas's concerns expressed in the *De Excidio,* including emphasis on monastic asceticism, strong episcopal leadership, and deeply biblical influences on their composition, with particular emphasis on Hebrew texts.[34] Merdrignac speculated that Gildas's education may, like Samson's, have taken place at Illtud's monastery, which in turn was said to have been founded by Germanus, perhaps the very monastery to which Samson was appointed, but never ruled as abbot.[35] Gildas, like Samson, is reported to have ended his life in Brittany, and may have composed the *De Excidio* there.[36]

Theological study of a particular saint's Life can benefit from a broad sense of the historical setting primarily for the time of composition, and to a lesser extent for the time of the saint's life. In the case of the *Vita Samsonis I*, the consonance regarding themes of mobility, orthodoxy, and asceticism among figures such as Germanus, Gildas and Samson increase appreciation for the hagiographer's theological purposes in composing the Life, whereas the stylized, almost metaphorical use of historical figures heightens awareness of the literary nature of the work.

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[34] Richard Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father of the Church' in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984), pp. 199-201; see also Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 204.
[35] Merdrignac, 'Breton Christianity', p. 98.
[36] Merdrignac, 'Breton Christianity', p. 98.

2.2 THE WORLD OF THE TEXT: SAMSON AS BIBLICAL AND ARCHETYPAL HERO

2.2.1 SOURCES AND ANALOGUES

In the prologue the hagiographer reports that he has travelled to some of the important sites in Samson's early career, that he has spoken with a 'religious and venerable old man' with family ties to Samson himself, and that a previous text was known to him which forms the basis of his work. In hagiographies, the claim to have eyewitness verification of miraculous events serves two purposes, to establish the reliability of the writer, and to create a temporal link between the subject, the writer, and the readers. In the present instance, establishing the reliability of the writer would appear to be the dominant concern.

The primitive Life appears to represent a tradition from Britain rather than Brittany, as the hagiographer saw it and heard it read '*ultra mare*', across the sea.[37] Burkitt regarded it as 'Henoc's memoir',[38] that is, the personal recollection of a close family member of Samson's, identified as a venerable old man at the time the hagiographer met him (I.2), highlighting its significance as a source for Samson's activities in Wales and Cornwall. Claims of an earlier text are not uncommon in hagiographies, witness Adomnán's claim to have seen an earlier Life of Columba.[39] Samson's hagiographer appears to have relied heavily on his written source in combination with his personal travels to Samsonian sites.

Beyond the sources claimed in the text, Duine and Kerlouégan produced detailed studies of the Latin Christian sources of the *VS I*.[40] Wright updated Kerlouégan's catalogue noting an additional correspondence between the *VS I* and Rufinus's *Historica Monachorum*.[41] Rather than reproducing their work here, some of which identifies 'sources' at the level of individual words, this study will examine two of the more significant works that may be seen to represent sources for images and

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[37] See Merdrignac's extensive discussion of 'ultra mare' and 'citra mare' in '*La Première Vie de Saint Samson*', p. 246.
[38] Burkitt, 'St Samson of Dol', pp. 49 ff.
[39] Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St. Columba,* trans. by Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 230.
[40] The original studies are found in François Duine, *Questions d'hagiographie et vie de S. Samson* (Paris, E. Champion, 1914), pp. 43-45, and François Kerlouégan, 'Les citations d'auteurs latins chrétiens'. These studies are subsequently cited by Taylor, Flobert, Burkitt, and others.
[41] Neil Wright, 'Knowledge of Christian Latin Poets and Historians in Early Medieval Brittany', *Études Celtiques,* 23:1 (1986), 163-186.

ideas contained in *VS I*. Sulpicius's Life of St Martin and Gregory the Great's Dialogues represent major hagiographical influences upon this text.

2.2.2 HAGIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

The first of these to be discussed is the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Sulpicius Severus (hereafter referred to as *VM*), written close to the time of Martin's death in 397. The proximity of the see of Tours to Dol makes this a likely text to have been known to the hagiographer. Parallels between the *VM* and the *VS I* may indicate common sources such as biblical tales or commonalities in monastic life. Like Samson, Martin showed evidence of great religious devotion in his youth, and both fathers objected to their sons' religious vocations.[42] A list of virtues attributed to Martin includes kindness, patience, humility and self-denial; later, Martin is described as 'not puffed up with human glory';[43] Samson is similarly gifted, and concerned to avoid pride. It is perhaps worth noting that the term 'Elect of God,' so favoured by Samson's hagiographer, appears in Colossians 3.12-14 which goes on to list such virtues as mercy, kindness, humility, meekness and forbearance, suggesting a possible common source for both texts.

A curious parallel occurs early in the *VM* in which Martin is 'warned in a dream' to visit his parents who are still heathens.[44] Like Samson, Martin is reluctant to go and foresees trials along the way; like Samson he is urged to undertake the journey by his religious superior (I.24). The outcomes of the two journeys are quite different, but in each case the hagiographer uses the journey to establish a suite of characteristic accomplishments.[45]

In two places, Martin employs the full-body healing prayer of Elijah as Samson did for the deacon who had been attacked by the sorceress.[46] In Martin's cases, the men were dead, and would have been denied entrance into heaven after death, as the first had not yet been baptized, and the second had hanged himself. Samson's only

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[42] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini,* chapter 2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* series II, vol. XI, ed. by Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892 ; Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf211.html> [accessed 25 November 2011].
[43] *VM*, chapters 4-5.
[44] *VM,* chapters 5-6.
[45] *VM,* chapter 6.
[46] *VM,* chapter 7, 8; *VS I* I.28.

use of the method from 1 Kings involved resuscitating his young companion, the deacon, who was nearly, but not completely, dead. Samson's hagiographer later recounts a single example of a boy raised from the dead in Cornwall (I.49), as well as the deliverance of the deacon Morin from purgatory (II.8-9), both of whom would likewise have been denied entrance into heaven, one as a pagan, the other possessed by a demon. The parallels here operate at the level of themes and ideas rather than direct borrowings.

Like Samson, and indeed many other saints, Martin has a vexed encounter with local royalty, and in both cases the central act takes place at the banquet table, focused on a cup of wine.   When Samson is given a cup with poison in it, he blesses it, watches it break and cut the hand of the servant who holds it, notes the contents are not fit to drink, and calmly heals the wound (I.55). Martin takes the proffered cup and rather than returning it to the king as a sign of honour, passes it to a presbyter beside him, indicating that the royal entourage does not hold higher honour in God's sight than a simple priest.[47] Martin's behaviour was met with approval by the emperor, rather than the rage and embarrassment depicted on the part of the queen in *VS I*. What may be seen to connect these two incidents is the motif of the encounter between the saint and a king, a possible echo of the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate concerning the question, 'What is Truth?'[48] In each case the superiority of the holy man is expressed as the ability to see the truth of the situation at hand: for Martin, the truth of essential human equality, for Samson, the truth of the attempted poisoning.

The Life of St Benedict in the Dialogues of Gregory the Great (d. 604) contains several similarities with the *VS I* that bear notice, among them the motif of poisoning including attempts on the saint's life by members of his own monastic community.[49] Both Lives include a second attempted poisoning, for Benedict by a local priest, and for Samson by the Frankish queen.   In several episodes Benedict is reported to have intimate knowledge, perhaps divinely provided, of the activities and sanctity of his monks. One account of a young monk distracted from his prayers by a 'little black boy'

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[47] *VM,* chapter 20.
[48] John 18.38.
[49] Gregory I, *Second Dialogue (Life of St. Benedict)*, chapter three, trans. by 'P.W.', ed. by St. Pachomius Orthodox Library, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/g1-benedict1.asp> [accessed 11/4/2011].

recalls the 'blackamoor' who corrupts the deacon Morin in Book II of the *VS I*.[50]

Elsewhere, Benedict knows that a monk serving him at table is thinking prideful thoughts, and commands him to 'sign [his] heart' to cleanse his sin,[51] as Samson was aware of the thoughts of the brothers who conspired against him at Illtud's school (I.14).

As Samson healed those close to death and resuscitated a dead boy, so does Benedict, on two occasions, raise up someone already dead. In one case a young boy is crushed under falling stone and Benedict prays for the boy's restoration.[52] The second account involves a father who brings the corpse of his son to Benedict for healing. Here Benedict performs the healing in the sight of his monks, using the method from 1 Kings 17 of lying on top of the child.[53] Samson's use of this method in I.28 has been previously noted.

Another parallel occurs between the account of the absolution Benedict offers two nuns after their death and Samson's absolution of the deacon Morin after his death, related in Book Two (II.29).[54] Benedict had rebuked the nuns for prideful speech, and threatened them with excommunication. After their death and burial in the church, their former nurse, in a vision, saw them rise from their graves and depart the church at the moment when the Deacon of the Mass dismissed all those not eligible for communion. Although Benedict had not formally imposed the sentence, it was seen to have taken effect in spirit. Benedict released the women from their fate, and Gregory explains that he has the authority to do so based on Matthew 16.19 in which Jesus gives his apostles authority to loose or retain sins. The text of the Dialogue reports that Benedict offered an 'oblation' which has the effect of absolving the nuns. The reader is not told what the offering is - it may well have been the celebration of the Mass - and no specific reference is made to prayer, in contrast to the three days and nights of prayer that are required for Samson to achieve the salvation of the sinful deacon. If the oblation is an offering of the Mass, however, the parallel

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[50] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 4.
[51] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 20.
[52] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 11.
[53] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 32.
[54] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 23.

would be continued as Samson offered Masses for Morin's soul 'for a long time' until the announcement of salvation is made.

Smaller parallels with Benedict include water from a rock,[55] a kitchen fire,[56] miraculous preservation and production of oil akin to Samson's provision of honey,[57] references to the devil as a serpent or snake,[58] and an episode in which Benedict released a poor man from bondage.[59] While Benedict's gaze is sufficient to bring down the captor and release the captive, the story may represent a shared value with Samson's hagiographer, derived from biblical promises to release captives.[60]

While direct borrowings from neither the *Vita Martini* nor the Life of Benedict can be claimed for the *Vita Samsonis I,* the parallel episodes highlight shared concerns among the three writers, and may indicate likely common sources of inspiration, rather than verbatim copying. Such a literary method fits well with the Breton hagiographer's approach to historical figures as well, since he appears to employ a strong structural pattern into which he fits Samson's accomplishments, and the surrounding characters appear to exist in support of the saint, rather than as individuals in their own right.

2.2.3 BIBLICAL SOURCES AND ANALOGUES

Discussion of the biblical background to the *VS I* may begin with Taylor's list of quoted passages that appear in the Life.[61] Taylor identified twelve direct quotations from Scripture flagged by the hagiographer in the text, and noted that these did not always correlate to the Vulgate version. Of the twelve, half appear in the narrative portion of the Life and half in the sermon which forms Book Two. Taylor additionally suggested an allusion to Matthew 12.46 in I.23 in which messengers come to call Samson home to attend to his sick father. Closer inspection, however, would challenge this correlation: the persons seeking to speak with Samson are quite different ('mother and brothers' in Matthew, unknown persons sent by 'his father and mother and all the

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[55] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 5, *VS I,* I.41, 51.
[56] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 10, *VS I,* 2.15.
[57] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 28, 29, *VS I,* I.35.
[58] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 11, 18.
[59] *Second Dialogue,* chapter 31.
[60] Isaiah 45.13, 61.1, Jeremiah 28.4, Luke 4.18.
[61] Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson*, p. xviii.

neighbours' in the *vita*), the purpose for which he is summoned is quite different, and the 'Scriptural expression' in Samson's response to which Taylor adverts in his footnote does not appear in the Gospel text at this point.

VS I	Bible
I.7: 'I have no Father except Him of whom it is spoken by the prophet, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me"?'	Job 10.8
I.14: Samson is described as diligent in study, 'mindful of the Apostle's words when he says, "the sufferings of this present time…"'	Romans 8.18
I.17: The repentant monk chastises his brother, citing the words of 'the prophet, "through envy of the devil came death into the world…"'	Wisdom 2.24
I.32: Samson advises his companions, 'Put your trust in Him who said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed…."'	Matthew 17.20
I.32: Samson approaches the serpent singing, 'The Lord is my Light and my Salvation…'	Psalm 27
I.32: Samson further sings, 'O give thanks unto the God of gods…'	Psalm 136.2
II.4: Twice the hagiographer cites Scripture in support of the idea that God does not hear the prayers of unworthy people	Jeremiah 10.2 Luke 6.46
II.5: The hagiographer urges his listeners to repentance	Ezekiel 33.11-15
II.11: The hagiographer promises judgment based on one's own measure	Matthew 7.2
II.14: The hagiographer uses 'gird the loins' as a metaphor for recommitting to 'chastity of body and purity of mind'	Exodus 12.11
II. 14: The hagiographer urges self-examination based on Gospel	Matthew 7.21

While these biblical citations alone set the account in a Christian framework, they represent only a small percentage of the biblical material in the text.[62] The following discussion of the full range of biblical material in the Life is arranged

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[62] O'Loughlin has undertaken a similar study of Rhygyfarch's *Life of David,* beginning with recognizable biblical quotations and identifying further allusions to biblical material. See Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Rhygyfarch's *Vita Dauidis:* an *apparatus biblicus', Studia Celtica,* 32 (1998), 179-188.

thematically as follows: conception and childhood, ascetic practice and signs of

sanctity, healing and blessing, and serpents and evil, followed by a short examination

of Judges 14, concerning the Samson of the Hebrew Bible.

2.2.3.1 CONCEPTION AND CHILDHOOD

The narrative begins with an account of Samson's birth to a previously barren mother

after an annunciation-like scene accompanied by an angelic vision, a common trope

establishing the protagonist as *imitatio Christi.* Samson's name is inspired by the figure

in Judges; his parents' names are also found in Scripture. Three Amons appear in the

Hebrew Bible,[63] the second of which is referenced in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.[64]

Anna, Samson's mother, may be named either for Hannah, the barren mother of

Samuel,[65] or perhaps the prophetess Anna in Luke's gospel.[66] Davies pointed out that,

while there does not appear to be widespread evidence in Wales of cults of saints from

the Hebrew Bible, Brittonic-speaking people of the early middle ages appear to have

favoured the use of Hebrew names, at least as persons entered religious life.[67] He

attributed this trend to Gildas's use of Hebrew Bible references for the British people,

as well as his list of models for bishops and priests, itself drawn from the Christian

Canon, Hebrews 11.[68]

Anna's initial difficulty conceiving along with her sister Afrella's early success

recalls the rivalry between Rachel and Leah in Genesis 29. The motif of the barren (or

virginal) mother includes Sarai,[69] Leah,[70] the unnamed mother of the biblical

Samson,[71] Mary of Nazareth,[72] and a reference in a late Isaian prophecy.[73] In each of

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[63] 1 Kings 22.26, 2 Kings 21.18, and Nehemiah 7.59.
[64] Matthew 1.10.
[65] 1 Samuel 1.2.
[66] Luke 1.36. The *Infancy Gospel of James*, chapter 145, names the mother of Mary of Nazareth as Anna as well.   See Ehrman's discussion of this text in Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 207-210.
[67] John Reuben Davies, 'Old Testament Personal Names among the Britons: their occurrence and significance before the twelfth century', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* 43 (2012), 175-92.
[68] Davies, 'Old Testament Names', p. 186.
[69] Genesis 11.29.
[70] Genesis 29.31.
[71] Judges 13.2.
[72] Luke 1.7.
[73] Isaiah 54.1.

these cases, the impossibility of conception is the prelude to a miraculous birth, an indication of later greatness for the offspring.

A few additional lines in the conception-and-birth narrative in chapter six recall passages from Scripture. The angel who announces to Anna the news of her impending pregnancy says, Fear not (*Ne timeas)* and the person described as a *librarius* freely quotes from Elizabeth's greeting to Mary, *beatusque uterus tuus **beatiorque fructus uentris tui,***[74] compared to, *Benedicta tu inter mulieres, et **benedictus fructus ventris tui**.*[75] The *librarius* goes on to prophesy regarding the child's future greatness, reminiscent of the prophecies of Zechariah and Simeon.[76] The joy of the child's birth is shared with the parents and their neighbours (*vicini).*[77] The child is baptized by the name that was foretold to the mother,[78] as Mary was told what her son's name would be. Like the mother of the biblical Samson, Anna was concerned for her son's purity,[79] and the hagiographer credits divine providence with keeping him safe throughout his childhood.[80]

Here the text shifts from a predominantly Lukan influence to the Matthean birth narrative in order to illuminate the role of Amon, Samson's father. During Samson's childhood Amon objects to his son's preordained future as a priest (I.6). He is at this point in a 'changed mood', led by 'wicked counsellors' who may recall the courtiers surrounding Herod at the time of Jesus's birth.[81] Amon's objections concern his family's position as secular leaders, echoing Herod's concerns to retain power in the face of the predicted messiah. Samson fulfils his destiny, however, thanks to the intervention of an angelic messenger (I.7), parallel with the angel who alerts Joseph to the threats from Herod.

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[74] *VS* I, I.5.
[75] Luke 1:42. Biblical Latin quotations are taken from the *Latin-English Study Bible,* trans. Ronald L. Conte, Jr., <www.sacredbible.org> acknowledging that the Vulgate is known not to be the Bible from which this hagiographer was quoting. For the purposes of this study, suggestions of parallelism will be sufficient to demonstrate allusions that would have been recognizable to the readers and hearers of the narrative. This site was accessed daily from 2013 through 2015.
[76] Luke 1.76, 2.34.
[77] Luke 1.58.
[78] Luke 1.31.
[79] Judges 13.14.
[80] Psalm 90(91).12.
[81] Matthew 2.4-5.

Chapters seven through ten form a transition between Samson's short childhood at home and his arrival at school, and include Anna's prayer in which she 'magnified the Lord for all His benefits which He had mercifully shown to them', a reference to Luke 1.47-55. I.8 is an excursus on Illtud's visionary gifts which appears to be out of chronological order as it takes place at the time of Illtud's death, but which leads directly to the opening of I.9 in which he declares that Samson will become 'the noble chief of us all' (I.9). The language attributed to Illtud in this section is strongly reminiscent of Simeon's greeting to Joseph and Mary at the Temple in Luke 2: '**Lumen ad revelationem gentium**' vs. '*Deo qui **luminare** hoc* […] *accendere dignatus*', followed by, '*summus **multis*** […]*profuturus*', compare, '*et in resurrectionem **multorum** in Israel*'.[82] Simeon interprets the appearance of the Christ child as a sign that he may now depart this life, an observation which supports the appropriateness of the placement of an episode concerning Illtud's death in close proximity to Samson's arrival.

2.2.3.2 ASCETIC PRACTICE AND SIGNS OF SANCTITY

Immediately upon arriving at Illtud's school Samson engages in 'very frequent fasts and longer vigils' (I.10). The combination of fasting and vigil appears in Matthew 17.21, as Jesus instructs the disciples on how to perform an exorcism, and Acts 14.23, as Paul is laying hands on local church leaders. In I.11 Samson undertakes a fast and vigil in pursuit of 'deeper meanings of the Scriptures,' and on the third night of his vigil is rewarded with heavenly light and a sweet voice assuring him that 'whatsoever things thou shalt ask of God in prayer and fasting thou shalt obtain as thy good deserts demand.'[83] Not only are the signs of heavenly light and a voice from the light familiar biblical images, but the message itself is an echo of Mark 11.24, 'Whatsoever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them'.[84]

Prayer and fasting appear as marks of Samson's early monastic life: in his search for biblical understanding, as a response to the jealous nephews of Illtud, and in

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[82] Illtud proclaims Samson a light to the Britons to the profit of many, as Simeon declares Jesus a light to the nations, and a force for the rising and falling of many in Israel.
[83] '*sed **quaecumque petieris** a Deo **per orationem** et ieiunium, exigentibus tuis bonis meritis, adepturus es*'.
[84] '***omnia quæcumque orantes petitis***'.

considering his future at Illtud's school (I.11, 14, 20). The combination appears again as he inhabits the two caves (I.41 and 51). Each cave is provided with water as a result of Samson's prayers, recalling Moses in the desert, and in the first of these episodes Samson uses a staff to bring forth the spring, again recalling Moses.[85]

Shortly after his consecration as a bishop, Samson passes the night in prayer, having eaten 'only […] the blessed bread', that is, Holy Communion, and he receives a vision which conveys to him his true vocation, 'thou art ordained to be a pilgrim' (I.45). At the time of the consecration no indication had been given as to the nature of his episcopate. Once again he is praying and fasting as a means of discernment, of gaining needed information. Praying and fasting are used differently later in the text. In I.58 Samson employs these methods to defeat the serpent King Childebert has asked him to drive away, while in the following chapter Samson fasts and prays for Judual's victory over Commorus. It would appear that while prayer and fasting remain essential elements of the religious life, once an elevated level of spiritual wisdom is achieved their purpose may be directed toward an outward goal rather than an inward process of discernment or understanding. Prayer alone is also used in the process of healing, a topic which will be addressed below.

Another recurring theme in Samson's prayer life is his desire for solitude.[86] Twice, in I.40-41, and again in I.50-51, Samson seeks out a cave in which to engage in solitary prayer. This practice recalls episodes in which Jesus prayed alone,[87] as well as Elijah's encounter with God.[88] Samson's capacity for prayer is likened to the ideal set by St Paul, to 'pray without ceasing' (I.14). His ability to persist in ascetic practice is described I.21, in which Samson arrives on Piro's island to lead a 'wonderful, isolated and above all a heavenly life' consisting of prayer and work during the day, and 'mystical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures' throughout the night, to the point of denying himself a normal allotment of sleep. His determination to pray even extends to the *theomacha*, the sorceress of chapters 26-27, as he begins his command that she desist in her evil life with the words, 'I implore God…'.

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[85] Exodus 17.6, Numbers 20.11; for further references to springs and wells as divine locations and revelations, see Numbers 21.16-18, Deuteronomy 8.7, Isaiah 58.11, Psalms 1 and 23, and John 4.10.
[86] I.11, 12, 40, 41, 45, 50.
[87] Matthew 14.23, Luke 5.16, 9.18.
[88] 1 Kings 19.11-12.

The accounts of his ordinations to the offices of deacon, priest, and bishop, are elaborated with various signs of sanctity (I.13, 15, 44). At all three a dove hovers over him, reminiscent of Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River.[89] In his visionary episcopal consecration Samson is clothed in white, suggestive of the faithful in Revelation 3.4-5 and 4.4. Peter, James, and John appear in the vision to effect Samson's consecration. They are described as wearing 'golden crowns', an image that may suggest the tongues of flame above the heads of the apostles at Pentecost,[90] as modern-day mitres intentionally do.[91] They are the three companions of Jesus at the Transfiguration,[92] suggesting a similar endorsement of Samson's God-given vocation as was the voice of God at Jesus's Transfiguration. Reference to the Transfiguration also indirectly references Elijah and Moses as both were seen with Christ at the mountaintop. The account of his consecration concludes with an extraordinary image of Samson's sanctity, as Bishop Dubricius sees flames, 'that there proceeded from his mouth and nostrils as it had been fire' (I.44). Fire from the nose and mouth recalls both the cleansing coal at Isaiah's lips,[93] and a reference in Revelation to two witnesses from whose mouths fire will proceed if they are harmed.[94] This passage also recalls Elijah, who called down fire from heaven against the messengers of King Ahaziah,[95] because of which it is said in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) that he 'arose like a fire, and his word burned like a torch'.[96]

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[89] Matthew 3.16, Mark 1.10, Luke 3.22.

[90] Acts 2.3.

[91] An interesting story connecting a fifth-century bishop with a golden crown is that of St Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna, whose episcopal ordination was also irregular. Peter was a deacon in the company of the bishop of Imola who was travelling to Rome as the delegation from Ravenna was bringing their candidate for consecration. St Peter appeared to the Pope in a vision the night before the consecration, advising him that the Deacon Peter should be consecrated instead. At the end of Peter's life he travelled to the church of St John Cassian, placed there a golden crown, and died on the spot. The spiritual and regnal significance of a golden crown is more likely to have influenced both of these stories than any alleged 'Celtic' practice of having bishops routinely wear such headgear as suggested by Warren in *Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church,* cited by Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson,* p. 44.

[92] Matthew 17. 1-2, Mark 9.1, Luke 9.28.

[93] Isaiah 6.6.

[94] Revelation 11.3-6. For discussion of this passage, see Martin Rist, 'Revelation' in *The Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), pp. 445-6.

[95] 2 Kings 1.9-16.

[96] Ecclesiasticus 48.1.

2.2.3.3 HEALING AND BLESSING

References to Elijah also link several episodes of healing and blessing that occur in *VS I*, as does the pattern of taking only one or two trusted associates to the scene of a significant event. The first half of Book I contains only five healings: the monk bitten by a serpent (I.12), the neutralizing of poison and healing of the perpetrator of the poisoning (I.16-17), the healing of the wounded deacon (I.28), and the implicit healing via an act of forgiveness in the encounter with his father (I.29). Eight healings appear in the second half, including references to healings in great numbers in Ireland, and Wales (I.37 and 49).

Table of Healings

Ch.	Incident	Method	Separated from crowd?
12	monk is bitten by snake	3 hrs prayer, oil + water	yes
17	Samson is offered poison	blessed the cup	no
18	jealous monk taken ill	3 hrs prayer, oil + water	no
28	deacon wounded by the sorceress	1 Kings 17	N/A
29	father recovers on his deathbed	confession	yes
37	S. heals blind, lepers, casts out devils	"'he did all things"	N/A
38	possessed Irish abbot is healed	prayer	no
45	Samson 'set many free from disease'	blessing	N/A
49	boy in Cornwall is resuscitated	2 hours prayer	yes
52	mother and daughter in Brittany	"pouring forth prayer"	no
54	captive chief 'harassed by demon'	anointed with oil	no
55	servant's hand cut by poisoned glass	sign of cross	no

In reviewing these events, no consistent method of healing can be ascribed to Samson. Two episodes appear as general claims of healing many persons, and Samson's father is the only named victim. Prayer is a reasonably consistent element, although it is not explicit in every instance. As previously noted, the wounded deacon is healed by Samson actively imitating Elijah.[97] Later, Samson is reported to have

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[97] 1 Kings 17.17-22. Note the parallel in 2 Kings 4.32-37 in which Elisha does the same for the son of the Shunnamite woman.

raised the dead boy in Cornwall by praying for two hours (I.49).[98]   The account of

Amon's miraculous recovery is notable for its brevity (I.29). Samson does virtually

nothing but arrive at his father's house, remain in the room with his mother and the

deacon, and hear his father's confession. Such an example of forgiveness and healing

recalls Jesus's claim that to heal and to forgive are not only equivalent but identical.[99]

The theme of forgiveness as an expression of healing appears in two other

cases, the repentance of the 'bad priest' in I.19, and in II.9, in which Samson prays for

the soul of the deacon Morin who was under the influence of a devil. In the first

instance, the priest was jealous of Samson whom he saw as a rival for the inheritance

of Illtud's monastery. At first he tried to poison Samson, then later reacted as though

poisoned himself upon receiving communion from Samson. He is finally described as

possessed by a demon or devil, constructing an equation of devil, evil, and poison, and

once healed by Samson's prayers begs forgiveness for his murderous plot. In the

second example, Samson saw a devil appearing as a 'blackamoor' sitting on the

deacon's shoulder, sent the deacon away, and began to pray that his wickedness

would be exposed. The deacon fell sick with a fever, showed signs of possession,

confessed his sins to Samson, and died the following night. Despite his having made a

public confession and, one assumes, receiving absolution, his body was buried outside

the gate, unfit for burial within monastery grounds. Samson prayed for three more

days and nights, said Masses for the young man, and eventually the deacon's soul was

freed. While this episode cannot be considered a physical healing, it represents an act

of repentance which, paired with Samson's considerable powers of intercession, may

be seen in tandem with the confession and healing of Amon as examples of linked

repentance and healing, signs that healing is at least as much a spiritual process as a

physical one.

The pattern of separating the crowd (large or small) from the victim and a small

group of trusted companions at the time of a healing appears once in the gospel

miracle of the raising of a dead young girl.[100] *VS I* makes use of this pattern three

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[98] Note the biblical parallels in Luke 7.14-15 in which Jesus raised a dead man, and John 11.43, the
raising of Lazarus. Likewise, Peter restored a young man to life who had fallen from a window and died,
Acts 20.9-10.
[99] Matthew 9.2-6, Mark 2.9.
[100] Mark 5.38-42.

times for healings, including the monk bitten by a snake, Samson's father's recovery, and the resuscitation of the dead boy in Cornwall (I.12, 29, 49), and employs similar patterns as Samson seeks his 'desert' or confronts the serpents (I.32, 40, 50, 58). As presented in the table above, the frequency of this motif of separation from the crowd suggests a broader biblical pattern referencing similar episodes in the life of Christ including his nights in solitary prayer, his desire to take the disciples away from the crowds for teaching and rest, and the events at both the Transfiguration and Gethsemane. Such utilization of a pattern with a range of biblical associations, all of which were likely to be conscious allusions for the hagiographer and the audience, may be seen to reinforce a characterization of monastic life as one set apart from the crowd for learning, prayer, and when necessary, healing of body and soul.

There are two additional references to general healings accomplished in areas where Samson is travelling, Ireland and Wales (I.37, 45), which clearly imitate biblical precedents. In Ireland, 'God, by him [Samson], gave sight to many who were blind, and cleansed many who were leprous, and cast out devils, and saved very many from the error of their way'. And on his way out of Wales Samson 'set free from disease many among them who are sick whether in body or in mind'. Among the many references to healing in the gospels are found similar comments in Matthew 11.5, Mark 1.34, and Luke 7.21. Each of these in turn recalls the earlier prophecy from Isaiah 61.1 that the Messiah would inaugurate a time of renewed liberty and freedom from bondage and grief.

Blessings appear in the *VS I* in two different forms, with and without the Sign of the Cross. Acts of blessing may be simple verbal statements, and as such are consistent with biblical usage derived from the Greek 'eulogia', ευλογια.[101] Declaring something to be blessed would conform to Hebrew and early Christian understandings of blessing as praising God for good fortune and joy. Such verbal statements of blessing appear in I.5, as the *librarius* blesses Anna and Amon after their consultation and annunciation, I.9, as Illtud welcomes Samson to school, and I.26, as Samson prepares to leave Piro's island to visit his father. Verbal statements of blessing are combined with healing acts twice, when Samson performs healings and benedictions

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[101] Bromiley, *TDNT,* pp. 275-6.

upon the people of Wales (I.45), and when he blesses oil with which to anoint the chief at Childebert's court (I.54).

Very quickly, though, the Sign of the Cross appears independently with a range of meanings which incorporate both blessing and healing. Samson uses it to heal a snake bite (I.12), as a shield as he approaches the sorceress (I.26), and in a somewhat ambiguous moment in I.5 he uses the sign to ensure that the jars of honey in the monastic store-room are 'full and untouched' when the bishop arrives to investigate accusations of theft against Samson. It is not stated whether the jars were full or empty upon Samson's arrival, only that they are full after they have been blessed. The Sign of the Cross is his protection against the first of the serpents he defeats (I.32), although it does not appear in any of the subsequent confrontations with serpents. It does, however, appear several times in the protracted confrontation with the 'wicked queen', including revealing the presence of poison, healing the hand of a servant, and subduing a wild horse (I.55-57). While these uses of a sign of blessing depart from strict biblical precedent, which nowhere aligns healing and blessing as directly derivative or effective of one another, it is certainly indicative of the early church practice of using the Sign of the Cross as a gesture of protection and bestowal of God's grace.[102]

2.2.3.4 SERPENTS AND THE APPEARANCES OF EVIL

The paradigmatic story containing the Christian motif of the serpent as a sign of evil is found in the account of the Fall of Humankind in Genesis 3. Other references may offer additional insight into Samson's confrontations with serpents. In the longer ending to Mark's gospel, the followers of Jesus are promised that, 'They will take up serpents, and, if they drink anything deadly, it will not harm them. They shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they will be well.'[103] This could be considered the underlying motif of Samson's *vita,* as the appearance of serpents, the threat of poison, and the healing of those who are sick and near death are all repeated themes in the narrative.

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[102] Herbert Thurston, 'Sign of the Cross' *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13785a.htm> [accessed 20 April 2013]. See also Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: from Paganism to Christianity 371-1386 AD* (New York: Harper Press, 1997), Kindle edition, in which references to the Sign of the Cross as protection against dragons and a cup containing a snake are traced to Gregory of Tours' *Life of the Fathers.*
[103] Mark 16.18.

The middle section of this verse, 'if they drink anything deadly it will not harm them' is quoted in I.6, the first poisoning. There is an additional passage in Luke in which seventy disciples are sent out to preach and heal, and are promised 'power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.'[104]

     The serpent material may be grouped according to the appearance of the serpents themselves, and the methods by which Samson dispatches them. The table below identifies the language used to describe each appearance of a serpent, the methods used to defeat the serpent, and whether Samson chose to separate himself from the surrounding crowd to accomplish the conquest. Laying out these characteristics in table form will serve to illustrate that, as with the healings, while some recurring motifs may be noted, the hagiographer does not simply repeat identical language at each parallel incident, but varies the Scriptural references, behaviours of the serpents, and gestures employed by the saint on each occasion.

Table of Serpents

Ch	Incident	Description	Methods	Separate from crowd?
12	reptile bite	unknown	Sign of the Cross 3 hrs prayer water and oil	yes
32	First Serpent, Wales	burnt track spitting fire hissing, foaming, biting tail biting & spitting earth	Psalms, circle Sign of Cross teaching companions circle, Sign of Cross command to die	yes
50	Second Serpent, Cornwall	Poisonous Destroyed 2 villages Biting tail	Scripture Linen girdle around neck Drag, drop from height Command to die	yes
58	Third Serpent, Francia	Vile, destructive	fast, watch, pray call serpent out mantle around neck Psalm, command across river Command under stone	yes

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[104] Luke 10.19. This verse is alluded to in I.57 in Samson's confrontation with the lion.

60	Last Serpent, Pental	not less mischief	dragged forth cast into sea commanded to die	unknown

The motif of the serpent is introduced in I.12 when Samson offers to heal a monk bitten by a *hilider,* later in the chapter called *serpentino.*[105] Taylor translates *hilider* as reptile, and Flobert uses *vipère,* indicating that the creature is poisonous. Samson's offer is at first rebuffed by Illtud who accuses him of wanting to practice *Pythonis arte,* the arts of Python, perhaps a reference to the Oracle at Delphi,[106] but perhaps as well the hagiographer's way of indicating the upcoming thematic object. Samson's response, 'I have no Father except Him of whom it is spoken…', is suggestive of Jesus's response to his parents in Luke's Gospel when he has been found as a child in the Temple, Luke 2.49, although the hagiographer in fact invokes Job 10.8 at this point.

The episode in I.32 in which the first confrontation with an actual serpent takes place yields a long list of biblical analogues, among them Moses's staff (Exodus 4.3 and 7.10-12), the fiery serpents of Numbers 21.6, 9 and Deuteronomy 8.15, Job's attribution of the creation of the 'crooked serpent' to the hand of God,[107] the several references to Leviathan, a 'piercing' and 'crooked' serpent,[108] and the threatening dragon/serpent of Revelation 12.9-18 and 20.2. This first serpent leaves a burnt trail, spits fire, hisses, foams at the mouth, bites his own tail, and at one point flings a chunk of earth at Samson with his mouth, a composite of attributes collected from Genesis 3.1-14, Numbers 21.6-9, and Revelation 12.9-15. The serpent begins boldly, as does the serpent of Genesis 3, but ends by creeping on the ground in defeat.

While the first serpent is not explicitly described as poisonous, the next one is (I.50). The introduction of poison as an attribute of the second serpent establishes a further group of connections. Poison is attributed to serpents in Deuteronomy 32.33, Psalms 139.4, and Romans 3.13 and appears as a metaphor for lies, deceit and general

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[105] The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources* identifies *hilider* with *chelydrus,* a type of snake named in Latin classical writers including Ovid and Virgil <http://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/dmlcs/frameset_letter_H.html> [accessed 1 May 2013].
[106] For a detailed discussion of the mythos surrounding Python, see Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959, 1980).
[107] Job 26.13.
[108] Job 41.1, Psalm 74.14, Psalm 104.26, Isaiah 27.1.

evil as well, underscoring the value of the motif of poison as a sign of the presence of malign intent.[109] In addition to the serpents, poison also appears as an agent of harm to Samson at the hands of the jealous monks at Illtud's school (I.16) and the wicked queen (I.55). The serpents, the monks, and the queen become equivalent threats to Samson, his brothers, and the surrounding lands.

Samson's responses to the several serpents also call upon a range of biblical analogues. Most obviously, the repeated invocation of Psalm 27 with its theme of deliverance from enemies, and Psalm 136 with its refrain of thanksgiving, place the focus on God as the actual agent who defeats the serpent, and Samson as one who is courageous enough to trust God. The theme of trust appears again in I.32 in which Samson advises his father and uncle to have faith at least as of a mustard seed,[110] and again as Samson's uncle repeats the angelic message, Fear not.[111] Flobert identified the garment which is flung around the neck of the serpent in I.50 with a belt or cinture,[112] and the garment in I.58 which performs the same function, *palliolo,* is identified as a mantle or cape.[113] The reference to a mantle again recalls Elijah as he casts his mantle over Elisha, making him his successor in 1 Kings 19.19. The mantle may be seen as an instrument of divine authority when wielded by Elijah, and later by Samson, a sign of God's presence and determinative power.

Beyond the serpents, other expressions of evil in the narrative include the jealous monks in I.16-18, the *theomacha* of I.26-27, the wicked queen of I.55-57, and to a lesser extent, Samson's unnamed younger sister in I.29, 45. The jealous brothers may recall Joseph's brothers who conspire to dispose of him out of jealousy in Genesis 37. They may also represent the reality that all brothers in a monastic setting will not be warm and filled with love, but may regard their brethren with competitive eyes.

The female characters present a varied and interesting group. No actual female in the Bible resembles Samson's unnamed younger sister, described as 'given to earthly desires' (*mundanas uoluntates*) and 'adulterous embraces' (*adulterino coitu*).

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[109] Job 20.12-16, Psalm 58.4.

[110] Matthew 17.20, Luke 17.6.

[111] Luke 1.20, 2.10, 5.10, 8.50, and many others. In *VS I*, the phrase appears in I.4, in the vision to Samson's mother; and I.45, twice on the lips of the angel who announces his vocation as pilgrim, as well as the present occurrence.

[112] Flobert, *La Vie Ancienne,* p. 221.

[113] Flobert, *La Vie Ancienne,* p. 230.

She rather resembles the treacherous, unfaithful Judah, 'sister' to backsliding Israel in Jeremiah 3.6-11, or Sodom and Samaria, the faithless 'sisters' of Jerusalem, feminine metaphors in the Hebrew Bible that describe the corruption of Israel and its surrounding nations in contrast to Yahweh's fidelity.[114]

The evil queen bears a strong resemblance to Jezebel, the wife of Ahab. The relevant biblical tale is told in 1 Kings 21, in which King Ahab is denied the chance to purchase a desirable vineyard. While he sulks, his wife acts, fabricating a confrontation which causes the vineyard owner to be stoned to death on false charges. Historians are unanimous in concluding that the actual Queen Ultragotha bore no resemblance to this biblical character, but was merely a foil for Samson's victorious encounter with the royal pair.[115] Like Jezebel, the fictionalized queen takes the lead in planning the attacks upon Samson. Unlike Jezebel, she repents along with her husband at the conclusion of the tale in I.57. The motifs used to describe her include a hardened heart, recalling Pharaoh in Exodus; the use of vile language (*procaciter clamitante*), perhaps a human equivalent to the serpents' spitting fire or venom; deception, the quintessential device of the serpent in Genesis; and a cup of poison, emblematic of assaults on Samson or others throughout the narrative. Her next two weapons are an 'unbroken and furious horse' and a 'fierce and angry lion'. This last Samson vanquishes with an invocation of the name of Christ and a reference to Luke 10.19, 'I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy…', clearly equating the lion and its human keeper with the serpents he has already defeated. The hagiographer may have also had in mind the verse from Psalm 90.13, used in modern forms of Compline, 'You will walk over the asp and the king serpent, and you will trample the lion and the dragon', as well as the brief passage from 1 Peter 5.8, also used at Compline, 'Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour'. In this final episode, then, we may observe the hagiographer piling on every imaginable element to reinforce the archetypal identity of the queen as an agent of evil.

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[114] Ezekiel 16.46-56 and Hosea 2.

[115] Charles-Edwards regards the motif of the evil queen to be a 'standard element of Frankish political rhetoric', *Wales and the Britons*, p. 66.

In between the sister and the queen lies the encounter with the sorceress (*theomacha*)*,* a character who is most frequently treated as a folk-tale element rather than a character with biblical analogues.[116] At the beginning of I.26, Samson and the young deacon hear a 'shrieking cry' which causes the deacon to 'fling away the mantle he was wearing' (*et pallium quo indutus erat iactans in velocem fugam*). While the match is not verbatim, the visual image of a young man running from danger and leaving behind his cloak suggests the brief reference in Mark 14.51 to the young man seen running from the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus's betrayal. Samson's chiding response, 'Be of good courage,' recalls Moses' words in Deuteronomy 31.6 to the nation of Israel, 'Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee.' And his preparation for the encounter with the as-yet unknown threat comes directly from the Epistles: the spiritual armour and shield of faith.[117] His further act of shielding himself with the cross of Christ derives from Galatians 6.14. The creature turns out to be a woman, a *theomacham hyrsutam,* old, shaggy, garbed in red, holding a trident, in pursuit of the young deacon. The term *theomachos* is associated in Strong's Concordance with Acts 5.39, meaning 'one who fights against God.'[118] In the Vulgate this passage reads, '*Deo repugnare inveniamini*', suggesting that the hagiographer was using an Old Latin Bible.[119] Strong's cross-references *theomacha* with Job 26.5, Proverbs 9.19, and Proverbs 21.16, each of which alludes to giant and threatening creatures. The term may be understood to suggest threat or combat, at least as far as its biblical context indicates. Burkitt noted the occurrence of *theomachia* in Rufinus's translation of Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, in which Rufinus describes the life of

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[116] Bernard Merdrignac, '*Une course en char dans l'hagiographie bretonne? Saint Samson contre la Theomach*a' in *Saints and Scholars*, ed. by Carey, et al, pp. 140-158. Alaric Hall considers this episode 'convincing evidence that beliefs in armed, dangerous magic-working females circulated in Wales' at the time of composition of the narrative, and 'must have roots in non-Christian insular belief.' Alaric Hall, 'The Meanings of Elf and Elves in Medieval England' (doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2004), p. 179, <http://www.alarichall.org.uk/ahphdful.pdf> [accessed 19 February 2013].

[117] Romans 13.12, 2 Corinthians 6.7, Ephesians 6.11, 16.

[118] 'Strong's Number **G2314** matches the Greek θεομάχος (*theomachos*), which occurs a single time in a single verse in the Greek concordance of the KJV', <http://www.blueletterbible.org> [accessed 30 April 2013].

[119] Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson*, p. xviii.

early fallen Man taking place in a wild wood, suggesting that this text may have been familiar to the Breton hagiographer.[120]

At the end of I.7, the woman is described as *malefica illa mulier*. The term *malefica* is commonly translated 'witch', and may then direct the reader to Exodus 22.18 where it is declared, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (*Maleficos non patieris vivere*). This may be taken as Samson's mandate to command her death. One further possible analogue may be the so-called witch of Endor passage in 1 Samuel 28, in which Saul sends his aides to locate a woman with skills in divination, a *mulierem habentem pythonem*. Here is the same terminology for the dubious magical arts which Illtud accused Samson of practicing in I.12, and which recalls the association with Python. There is no suggestion in the *VS I* however, that the *theomacha* engages in divination, or that she could have been considered wise in any way. Her presentation is unequivocally threatening, associated with all that is in conflict with the pure, devout religious life that Samson embraces. The biblical analogues, though thin, are present, and a further account of her significance in the narrative will be undertaken below.

2.2.3.5 SAMSON FROM THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Judges 13 recounts the announcement of impending birth to a barren mother. Parallel to the tale of Anna and Amon, the mother is quick to accept the miraculous birth, and the father is less trusting and compliant. Both births, while miraculous, are completely human, restricted to reversing the wife's barrenness. The mother determines the child's name, although in Judges the name is not foretold by the visiting angel, and the mother is responsible for providing the optimal circumstances for the child's health by abstaining from wine or strong drink during pregnancy. The decree in Judges that the child will be a Nazirite derives from the description in Numbers 6 of a ceremonial process in which an adult takes a vow to be consecrated or separated from the community and dedicated completely to God. It is unclear whether the time of consecration was originally intended to be lifelong, but Numbers 6.13 refers to a time in which 'the days of his separation are fulfilled', suggesting that the intention may have been to separate off a time of dedication toward a particular question, concern,

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[120] Burkitt, 'St Samson of Dol', p. 46-7.

or event. It is possible to read the Nazirite vow as a precursor to the dedication and separation that is expected of a Christian monastic, enacted with ritual vows and a profound offering of oneself to God, as well as a justification of the medieval Samson's ascetic life.

The occasion of the biblical Samson's marriage involves a fierce lion and a provision of honey, both of which appear in the *VS I*.[121] While marriage is obviously not an option for the monk Samson, it is interesting to note that, like his later namesake, the Samson of Judges encounters three negative female characters: a Philistine bride who betrays him, a Gazite prostitute, and the famous Delilah. In addition, Samson is the beneficiary of a miraculous provision of water, as happens for the medieval Samson in his caves.[122] While the later Samson is clearly not patterned in every respect on the biblical character, the notions of great strength as evidenced in the latter Samson's ascetic prowess and dedication under vows to God represent strong bonds between the two narratives. Further, with the exception of the mother who is devoted to her son, female characters are generally depicted as negative or seductive. The additional motifs such as the lion, the honey, or the water lend a sense of familiarity to the later narrative, and tie the two together as works of parallel religious story-telling.

2.2.4   ARCHETYPAL MOTIFS

Side by side with this immersion in biblical images, motifs, and ideas, *Vita Samsonis I* is also deeply imbued with archetypal images and motifs. These motifs may be seen to operate on two levels, first at the level of discrete elements in the narrative such as names, events, locations, or descriptors. Of perhaps more interest are those archetypal elements that engage complexes of ideas such as pairs and opposites, mobility and sanctuary, and initiation and liminality. This section will begin by noting several discrete archetypal motifs that arise frequently enough to merit mention, then move to the three archetypal complexes just stated. In addition, the motifs of the serpents and the sorceress as complex expressions of evil will be revisited from the standpoint of folklore and archetype.

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[121] Judges 14, *VS* I.35, 57.
[122] Judges 15.19, *VS* I.41, 51.

The theme of acquisition of wisdom or knowledge (Thompson J 0-199) appears throughout the *VS I*. The prologue is notable for the common trope of self-deprecation of the hagiographer, although he is perhaps a bit more heavy-handed in this case than other writers. He makes frequent reference to his source, a 'pious and venerable old man', whose testimony is to be trusted above the hagiographer's own witness. The hagiographer, however, does reference his own experiences, evidently at or near the Samsonian monastery in Cornwall, as evidence for his own truthfulness (I.7, 20, 41, 48).

Descriptions of Samson's acquisition and use of wisdom or knowledge are notable for the division that occurs before and after his first major adventure, I.26-33. Prior to these events, Samson seeks knowledge via the practice of prayer and study of Scripture. He is a dedicated student and learns quickly (I.10), devoting his late nights to deep study (I.11). After moving to Piro's island he continues to spend his time in prayer and Scriptural interpretation. Beginning in I.38 Samson shows evidence of having, rather than seeking, divinely bestowed knowledge. When his ship departs from Ireland without him, Samson '[knows] the matter was from God'. In the following chapter Samson is 'enlightened by God' regarding the return of the ship. In the next chapter he is described as 'farsighted in spirit' (*praeuidens in spiritu*) as he declares his uncle's vocation. This pattern suggests that Samson begins his religious life on a quest for spiritual knowledge, and once he passes through the first initiation he is able to speak from an internal source of divine knowledge. Indeed, in I.35 Samson is observed to be 'full of the Holy Spirit' as he manages the episode of the jars of honey. The goal of attaining spiritual wisdom has been achieved.

2.2.4.2 MOTIF OF THREE

The appearance of triples in archetypal and religious literature (Thompson Z 71, formulistic number 3) is widespread, complex and vexed. Dundes summarized recent scholarship establishing a predominance of triplism in Greek, Roman, Celtic, Indo-European, American, modern European, Hebrew, Christian, and Hindu thought.[123] The motif of three appears in the most transcendent of images as in the Christian Trinity,

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[123] Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 134-59.

and in the most pedestrian of formulae as in the 'three brothers' whose adventures form the basis of simple fairy tales. For writers and readers who swim in the cultural waters of triplism, it can provide a useful organizing framework for assembling characters, structuring plot lines, creating emphasis, and indicating relationships of parity or superiority/inferiority. Olrik's 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative' include the Law of Three, indicating the prevalence of this particular form of patterning.[124] Examples of threes in the *VS I* include the reference to three silver rods in payment to the *librarius* (I.3), the ordination ceremonies (deacon, priest and bishop) involving three ordinands on each occasion, as well as the number of witnesses to the appearance of the dove hovering over Samson at each ordination (I.13, 15, 43), the triple blade of the sorceress's weapon (I.26), the number of attempts it takes Samson to gain audience with the king and queen in Francia (I.55), the number of attacks launched by the queen (I.55-57), and frequent references to time, including three hours, three days, and three nights.

The conquest of serpents forms an interesting variation on the motif of three, with three major, dramatic conquests taking place in chapters 32, 50, and 58, each one tied to a different location and acting as the climax to a narrative complex which establishes Samson at increasingly elevated heights of spiritual power. The encounters are not limited to these three, however, but include two additional episodes which may be considered 'bookends' to these three insofar as they do not command the narrative attention and drama of the three central conflicts. The first is the healing of the reptile bite in I.12, in which Samson does not confront the animal itself, only heals the effects of its attack. The last is a glancing reference in I.60 to a serpent he'd heard of while in *Romania*, presumably near the monastery at Pental. This one has no herald, no victims, and not much of a confrontation, but is noted and dispatched in two quick sentences.

2.2.4.3 PAIRS AND OPPOSITES: LIFE AND DEATH, LIGHT AND DARK

Both triplism and dualism may be used to orient the reader within the structure of a narrative, and *VS I* employs both methods. For example, characters may appear in pairs, as do Samson's parents with their siblings, as well as the jealous brothers at

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[124] Olrik, 'Epic Laws', p. 131.

Illtud's school. The dualism of life and death is a constant theme in the text, including episodes of healings in which the hagiographer emphasizes the death or near-death of the victim, the inclusion of Illtud's death-scene at the time of Samson's arrival as a child, and the attacks on Samson's life at the hands of the queen.

Images of light and dark appear as well, with images of darkness including the forest in which the sorceress lives, the dark night of Piro's death and the dark pit into which he falls, and the long nights of prayer, vigil and study that Samson frequently undertakes. The light motif is evidenced in several events that take place at dawn, including Anna's conversation with Amon recounting her angelic vision, Amon's decision to have Samson brought to school, Samson's return voyage from Ireland, the approach to the cave of the serpent in Cornwall, and the approach of the brothers after Samson's vision concerning his vocation as a pilgrim. The name Samson itself derives from the Hebrew *šamaš,* sun.[125] Northrop Frye noted that literary images of the dawn always contain within them a sense of resurrection, a representation of the arrival of new life out of the darkness of death, and so may embody the same archetype as the life and death pairs under an altered guise. He also pointed to the dialectical nature of the relationship between darkness and light, chaos and creation, death and life; while traditional Christianity favours the light over the darkness and resurrection over crucifixion, the truth that there is not one without the other is stated clearly in Isaiah 45.7, 'I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.'[126]

2.2.4.4 MOBILITY AND SANCTUARY: MOVEMENT FROM SACRED SPACE TO SACRED SPACE

Elissa Henken noted that Welsh saints tend to follow the heroic biographical pattern in terms of leaving home and encountering various kinds of opposition, but they do not tend to return home at either the mid-point or the end of their lives, nor, obviously, do they settle down to marry.[127] She also noted three possible types of journey for saints: pilgrimage, missionary travels, or 'into the wilderness', perhaps in a quest for solitude. These last she correlated to a secular hero's journey to an Otherworld or magical

[125] M. O'Connor, 'Judges' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 132-144, p. 141.

[126] Frye, *The Great Code*, p. 111.

[127] Henken, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 2.

location. She highlighted the significance of the saint's death as the climax of the heroic life, not so much in imitation of Christ's crucifixion as an opportunity for exaltation of the saintliness of the Christian hero.[128]

In Samson's case, he travelled widely and frequently, including his relocation from Illtud's school to Piro's island monastery (I.21), his journey to his father's house, with side trips to confront the sorceress and the first serpent (I.26-33), his exploratory trip to Ireland (I.37,) his initial journey in search of 'a suitable desert' (I.39), followed by his attendance at a local synod (I.42), his consecration to the episcopacy and his eventual vocation 'beyond the sea' (I.45). Four trips before the major journey of his adult life through Cornwall to Brittany is, perhaps, an indication that for this saint, the motif of heroic journey is a critical element in understanding the nature of the life the hagiographer wishes to convey. Samson's journeys varied in purpose, invitation, motivation, and duration, thus resisting a simplified assessment of their functions in the text, an observation which is essential since many scholars attempt to place saintly journeys in a somewhat limited range of categories.[129] Samson's journeys cannot be narrowly interpreted as missionary, although in his later voyages he is concerned for the quality of the faith that is expressed around him. In his earlier life, however, the travels are for his own personal advancement, as in his departure to school, to Piro's monastery, and to his first cave. This particular text may best be served by aligning Samson's movements with the notion of the quest as the endeavour to understand and embody the psychological journey to wholeness in religious terms.[130] The *peregrinatio* of the saint may be seen as an externalization of the inward quest in narrative form, thus resisting an easy categorization of his individual journeys.

His places of rest are of equal interest. The hagiographer describes Illtud's school as a splendid monastery, as indeed it must have been to his eye at the time. But Samson later considers it 'turbulent and wasteful' (*tumultuosum et expendiosum*), a sign that it is time to move on. His next place of sanctuary is Piro's island, the locus of Samson's deepest training in manual labour, prayer, study, and contemplation (I.21). He is loath to leave it, even at the summons of his dying father, and only goes at

[128] Henken, *The Welsh Saints,* p. 4.
[129] See, for example, Kathleen Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 11 (1960), 143-51.
[130] Following Eliade, *The Quest*.

Piro's insistence. In addition to Illtud's and Piro's establishments, Samson and his immediate family establish monasteries to honour his father's healing.   Samson visits the monastery in Ireland in order to heal the abbot (I.38). After defeating the second serpent, Samson establishes a monastery near the serpent's cave (I.50), to which he later appoints his father as abbot. His arrival in Brittany is marked by the establishment of the monastery at Dol, followed by that observation that he established many monasteries whose good works are well known (I.52).

Of all Samson's many sanctuaries and settlements, however, the most interesting are the two caves which he chooses for solitude and prayer (I.41, 50). Allison Elliott discussed the motif of the cave as an image of both womb and tomb, a locus both of death and rebirth.[131] Antony of Egypt was reported to have been shut up in a tomb in the desert for twenty years, an extreme example of the same motif.[132] As a symbol of the path of descent, entry into a cave may be seen to symbolize the need to regress from a social stance, leaving behind all human companionship and entering the place of maximal spiritual concentration. Retreat to the cave is a form of escape from the world of culture toward the world of primitive nature, and symbolizes a process of purification, either in preparation for or confirmation of a rite of passage in the saint's life. It is from this place of burial and gestation that a new creation will come forth, as Samson does in the sequence of events which follows his time in the first cave.

The first cave appears after the first transformational journey to Samson's father's house. Up to this point, Samson has lived in community and travelled with others. The search for a cave is presented as the desire for the solitude of the desert (*desertum desideratum peti uoluit*). He takes three companions whom he settles in a castle near a fresh spring. Like Antony, Samson is supplied with a morsel of dry bread, but on the seventh day he notices that the earth is wet, and with the end of his staff produces a spring of sweet water (I.41).   After an undisclosed amount of time a synod is convened and Samson summoned to attend. He responds reluctantly, but it is this

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[131] Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* pp. 104-116.
[132] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii,* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, v. 4, ed. by Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892 ; Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.asp> [accessed 7 February 2012].

coming forth from the cave-tomb which sets the stage for his consecration as a bishop, and the vision which declares his true vocation.

The second cave was originally the home of the serpent in Cornwall, whom Samson defeats at the request of the local residents. Again he settles his companions in a nearby monastery while he devotes himself to prayer and fasting inside the serpent's cave. And again he emerges from the cave to enter into a new phase of his career, this time leaving the island of Great Britain and setting out for Brittany. It is clear in each instance that Samson is undergoing what Eliade called the *regressus ad uterum,* or return to the origin, in preparation for a rebirth into the world.[133] His retreat into solitude, like that of the Desert Dwellers, is an expression of the desire to meet God directly, without the mediation of the community which has formed and prepared him for this moment. His emergence from solitude is the recognition that even in mortal life there are births and rebirths, and our hagiographer has used this insight with skill.

2.2.4.5 SERPENTS AND POISONS

Already reviewed in the section on biblical allusions, the persistence of this particular motif suggests that there may be more at stake for Samson than simply revisiting the defeat of the enemy in Genesis 3. 'The hero who fights with a dragon', Aarne-Thompson Tale Type 300,[134] appears in, among others, Saint George,[135] Beowulf,[136] Ovid[137] and Homer.[138] While Samson's serpents are not referred to as *draco/draconem* at any point, 'dragon' is one possible definition for the word *serpens*, the most frequent usage in the narrative. Furthermore, Samson's serpents share several characteristics with the dragons of folklore and myth, including the trait of spitting fire, the destruction of the land, and the tendency to live in caves located in

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[133] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) pp. 79-81.
[134] Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1961).
[135] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* vol. 1, trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 238-242.
[136] *Beowulf*, trans. by Burton Raffel (New York: Penguin, 1963).
[137] *The Metamorphoses of Ovid,* trans. by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), Bk III:50-94, pp. 78-80.
[138] Homeric 'Hymn to Apollo', lines 350-365, in Diane J. Raynor, *The Homeric Hymns: a translation, with introduction and notes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 35-53.

wasteland areas.[139] Eliade noted analogues among a range of archetypes including [serpent – woman – death -- regeneration] in particular myths and cultures, and Samson's hagiographer uses images of poison and spitting venom to describe the Frankish queen which may be read as setting up a parallel between woman and serpent.[140] Drawing upon Genesis, Eliade also saw the serpent as a guardian of the Trees of Knowledge and of Life, and noted that in non-Christian mythologies the serpent is frequently the guardian of a treasure trove or source of life-giving water, making defeat of the serpent in combat a necessary task in order to replenish the needs of the community.[141] The combat between the hero and the serpent/dragon may be read as a form of initiation in so far as the hero obtains that which the serpent guards or has stolen; in mythological accounts the prize is often immortality.[142]

While Samson's initial confrontation with a serpent bears all the marks of a heroic adventure, the subsequent serpents appear far less threatening, a sign of Samson's increasing spiritual power. The second serpent is introduced with some colourful details: it is vicious, poisonous, has destroyed two villages, lives in an inapproachable cave, and the reader is informed that 'no man can live nearby'. Despite its reputation, it puts up no great opposition, and the saint dispatches him with ease. The last two serpents, in I.58 and I.60, receive little to no description, and are dispatched with equal if not greater ease. Samson chooses the lair of the serpent in I.50 as his own cave of solitude; the serpent in I.58 is killed and pinned under a rock, and the final one cast into the sea. Cave, rock and sea together recall the primordial chaotic elements which the serpent archetype represents, and in which it is enclosed at its defeat.

The *theomacha* or sorceress represents another manifestation of evil. From a folklore standpoint, the sorceress may accord with Thompson's category of witches, G200 – G299, with additional identification with the witch 'pursued in a wild hunt', E501.5.1.3. One possible analogue to this sorceress with eight sisters may be found in the tale of Peredur in the Mabinogion, a collection of Welsh tales whose earliest manuscripts date to the fourteenth century, although scholars suggest the tales

[139] Fontenrose, *Python,* pp. 14-16, 515-519.
[140] Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 170-171.
[141] Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 287-291.
[142] Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 288-289.

themselves draw from much older material.[143] Peredur encounters a single sorceress known to be one of nine sisters. Her presence is announced by a 'dreadful outcry'. Peredur sees the sorceress attack one of the castle guardsmen, as Samson sees the *theomacha* attack the deacon. Here the similarities end, however, as Peredur eventually accompanies the sorceress to study chivalry and the use of arms.[144] While no direct connection can be established between the *Vita Samsonis I* and the Peredur tale which post-dates the *VS I*, like Samson, Peredur encounters a range of characters and locations whose function appears to be better understood symbolically rather than literally, including a threatening lion, a serpent guarding a golden ring, and a beast called an 'Addanc' which lives in a cave. An examination of the sources and analogues of the Peredur tale may prove to be quite fruitful; it is, however, beyond the scope of the present study.[145] The points of contact between it and the *VS I* noted here may be taken as indications of local folk traditions that accrued to tales of heroes of both religious and secular realms in and around medieval Wales and Brittany.

2.2.5 WORLD OF THE TEXT: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

2.2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

A range of possible structural frameworks might be considered for this text, including the heroic biographical pattern, a binary structure utilizing a dialectic of conflict and resolution following Lévi-Strauss, or a pattern of initiation/gradation such as Elliott used to examine the Lives of the Desert Dwellers. After due consideration, the present study will utilize the motif of rites of initiation as the organizing principle. The selection of this particular motif allows the reader to examine whether the *VS I* may be read as a map for the initiation of new monks into the religious life of a Samsonian monastery. Should the narrative as a whole fit this particular structural framework, the implications for the hermeneutical process in the following section will be significant.

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[143] *The Mabinogion*, trans. and ed. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. x.
[144] *The Mabinogion*, p. 79.
[145] For example, Peredur may be seen as a Welsh version of Perceval, the young hero in Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century *Conte du Graal,* who is devoted to King Arthur and desires to serve at his court; according to Geoffrey of Monmouth Arthur was crowned by Bishop Dubricius who appears in the *VS* I; the potential intertwinings may suggest further examination in an independent study.

The ritual of initiation, or *rites de passage,* has been examined by theorists across a wide range of disciplines, including ethnologist Arnold van Gennep, linguist Jan de Vries, folklorist Vladimir Propp, historian of religions Mircea Eliade, literary critic Northrop Frye and historian Alison Elliott.[146] Following van Gennep's original analysis, initiation involves three stages: separation from the community and one's established identity; a quest, ordeal, or visionary experience which takes place in a threshold or liminal environment; and the return of the individual to the community, now with a new identity, role and relationship with the community.[147] Eliade further identified three types of initiations: the transition from adolescence to adulthood, initiation into a secret society or confraternity, and what he called 'shamanic initiation' or initiation via personal ecstatic or visionary experience which is interpreted to indicate a mystical vocation.[148] In addition, McCone identified the experience of immobilizing illness as an occurrence of liminal transition; the individual who recovers from such an episode is usually changed by it.[149] Several elements of these initiatory patterns are immediately recognizable in the *VS I.* Not only does Samson himself undergo periods of withdrawal at crucial moments in the development of his religious identity, but other characters do as well, most notably the wounded brother in I.12, the jealous monk/priest in I.19, the young deacon in I.28, Samson's father (and, secondarily, his mother) in I.29, the Irish abbot in I.38, and the young boy in Cornwall, I.49. All experience liminal illnesses that transform them from one identity to another. This process is most explicit in the latter two episodes, as the narrator reports that each one follows a radically different path after the healing event. In addition, the jealous monk expresses penitence for his crimes after he is healed, and while the outcome of the former two healings is not given in the text, in the larger context of the narrative we may at least conjecture that a similar change would have taken place.

Hagiographical writing tends to employ both a stock collection of characters and events as well as an apparently infinite range of variations on familiar themes. Submitting each text to a structural analysis provides a method for determining which

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[146] For relevant discussions, see Eliade, *The Quest* and *Patterns*, Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. by Louis A. Wagner, 2nd edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*.
[147] Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 75ff.
[148] Eliade, *The Quest,* pp. 112-113.
[149] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present,* pp. 197-8.

patterns or elements of concerned knowledge are of primary importance to the hagiographer and his immediate audience. In the case of the *Vita Samsonis I,* the prevalence of the archetypal pattern of liminality as a form of transformation suggests its centrality to the message of the text. Not only does the saint himself embody this process, no fewer than six other persons in the story undergo the same process. Repetitions of this sort become the framework for the structural analysis, allowing the meaning of the text, in Ricoeurian terms, to become available for interpretation. The following table lays out the structure of the narrative in Book I using the motif of initiation as the organizing principle.

Structure of *Vita Samsonis I*

1 – 21		**Introductory collection of separations**
	1-7	visit to Librarius
	8	Illtud's liminal experience
	9	Samson goes to Illtud
	16-19	jealous brothers identified and punished
	20-21	Samson leaves Illtud for Piro's island
22 – 32		**First Initiatory Complex**
	22-25	Invitation and departure
	26-28	encounter with theomacha, healing of deacon
	29-31	healing and conversion of Amon
	32	encounter with first serpent
33 – 39		**Central collection of separations**
	33-34	Dubricius on retreat
	35	incident with honey jars
	36	Piro's death; Samson's election as abbot
	37-39	Samson's journey in Ireland
40 – 45		**Second Initiatory Complex**
	40-41	First sojourn in a cave
	42	summons to synod
	43	visionary consecration
	44	physical consecration
	45	visionary call to pilgrimage

49 – 52   Consequences of Initiation and Vocation

    46-52   Journey through Cornwall

        46-47   meeting with Juniavus

        48-49   conversion of pagans

        50-51   second serpent, cave, water

        52   departure from Cornwall, arrival at Docco, healing at harbour

    53-59   Encounter with Secular Power

        53-54   encounters with captives

        55-57   defeat of queen and her proxies

        58   third serpent, cave, river

        59   release and victory of Judual, Samson goes sailing

60 – 61   Conclusions

    60   final serpent and perverse priests

    61   happy death of the saint

2.2.5.2 SHORT EXAMPLES OF SEPARATION EPISODES

The table above illustrates the episodes in which movement from one phase of life into a new phase takes place, with two major clusters of separation-liminal transformation-(re)integration motifs. These clusters, occurring in chapters 25-32 and 40-45, indicate periods of intense separation and confrontation for Samson, each culminating in a profound psycho-spiritual and social transformation. At the beginning of the narrative (I.1 and I.20), in between the two major clusters (I.33 and I.37), and at the end of the narrative (I.48, I.52 and I.59) smaller individual separation episodes take place. These smaller episodes may be seen as a form of patterning which announces, links, illustrates and concludes the tale of Samson's transformation from non-being (the child who could not be conceived) to spiritual person (monk and priest) to exalted being (bishop, leader, healer, pilgrim, founder, saint). The initial collection of episodes includes the parents' journey to the *librarius*, Samson's two journeys in his youth, first to Illtud's school, and then to Piro's island, and the midnight vigil in which Samson is assured of being granted whatever he will ask of God. Each of these episodes presents the foundational metaphor for the spiritual life as a journey of both external and internal discovery, illustrating the idea that such a process of discovery requires movement and change, courage and perseverance, motifs that occur throughout the

narrative, and to which the preacher of the sermon which forms Book Two of the Life exhorts his listeners explicitly.[150]

2.2.5.3 FIRST EPISODE OF SEPARATION AND LIMINALITY: ANNUNCIATION AND CONCEPTION

At the outset of the narrative, Samson's parents must leave their home in order to fulfil their vocation as parents. At the time of departure they are thought by their neighbours to be barren and desperate, while they are away Anna experiences an angelic vision that announces the reversal of her fortunes. They return home confident and joyful, and immediately conceive, to the general celebration of those same neighbours (I.2-6). Biblical allusions are plentiful in this section, and it is significant that the story of Samson's conception, as well as both Gospel birth-narratives, require a journey on the part of the parents to a location far from home in order for the child of promise to be born.[151]

2.2.5.4 FIRST INITIATORY COMPLEX

The first of the two major initiatory complexes takes place in I.22-32. Samson has been summoned to the home of his father, and along the way he confronts the *theomacha*, heals the young deacon, witnesses his father's healing and his family's conversion to monastic life, and defeats the first of his several serpents. Each of these elements contributes to the initiatory nature of the complex.

The summons reaches Samson at the monastery on Piro's island. The critical issue of identity is raised when Samson denies his identity to the messengers. After admitting his true identity, but before beginning this critical journey, he is supplied with a companion, a deacon who is described as 'yet in the flower of the age of youth'. In psychological terms the deacon is a *puer,* an untried youth who Samson foresees will not withstand the challenges ahead. Up to this point, Samson has fulfilled the archetype of a child-hero according to Jungian theory.[152] Born under miraculous circumstances, opposed briefly by the father, precocious and obviously destined for greatness, Samson shows all the signs of the nascent hero. At this moment, however,

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[150] See in particular II.4, 5, 6.
[151] Matthew 2.14, Luke 2.4.
[152] C. G. Jung, 'The Special Phenomenology of the Child Archetype' in *Psyche and Symbol: a selection from the writings of C. G. Jung*, ed. by Violet S. de Laszlo (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 132-47, pp. 129-130.

a second figure appears who is nameless, faceless, and devoid of any sign of independent development. Jung addressed the appearance of a plurality in the child archetype, describing it as, '…the representation of an as yet incomplete synthesis of personality.'[153] It may be argued that the presence of this unnamed and ill-equipped figure at the beginning of this critical initiatory episode heralds the on-coming process of synthesis which is the purpose of the journey.

Equipped with horse and cart, the two begin their descent into the dark wood. They hear a shrieking sound and immediately the deacon panics, resulting in the release of the horse, symbolic of his inability to exert control over his emotions, and the loss of his mantle, the cover which one could read as a symbol for his civilized humanity.[154] Frye described the descent of the hero into darkness as one of increasing isolation, often in the company of a single companion who is weak, mute or otherwise incapacitated, as is the case here.[155] In the midst of the chaotic pursuit, Samson sees both the fleeing brother and his pursuer, the *theomacha*. Frye also noted the frequency with which the motif of a place of deep darkness, often a wooded location, is inhabited by a threatening female personage.[156] In contrast to the young deacon's self-abandonment, Samson's first gesture is to cover the horse with the younger man's mantle, indicating his total control over the fear and wildness that has laid the young monk low.

The *theomacha* is revealed as a paired opposite to Samson in almost every way. She is female to his male, hoary and old to his relative youth and comeliness, her garments are the colour of blood, as is her weapon, while Samson is modest and unarmed. She confesses herself 'morally perverse,' given to wickedness since childhood, in contrast to Samson's lifelong dedication to sanctity. She resists his call to stop and speak, as he resisted the call to come on this adventure; while he eventually consented, however, she continues to flee until he commands her to stay in place,

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[153] Jung, 'Child Archetype', p. 129.

[154] For a discussion of the symbolic significance of clothing, see Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* p. 98; and on wild animals in hagiography, Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* pp. 144-156, bearing in mind that her discussion is focused on the saint; the inverse applies to the deacon as he occupies an inverted role in the narrative.

[155] Frye, *Secular Scripture*, pp. 115-117.

[156] Frye, *Secular Scripture*, pp. 104, 114.

forcing her into the condition of 'liminal immobilization'.[157] McCone argued that this condition is an indication of an inability to complete a rite of passage into full moral responsibility, as in the case of Lot's wife and the pillar of salt to which she is turned.[158] In the face of total opposition, Samson calls on the name of God, and so renders the sorceress's immobilization permanent – she falls down dead at his feet. He succeeds in his rite of passage precisely at the point at which she fails, completing the first phase of his initiation in the very act which decisively condemns her to death.

Once this female representation of evil is conquered, the young monk must be healed of his nearly-mortal wound. As was noted earlier, the healing is effected using the process related in 1 Kings, the only time this method is used in the *vita*. Frye argued that the overarching theme of the path of descent and return is the archetype of death-and-resurrection, and the healing of the young deacon at this point in the narrative underscores that theme.[159] The healing of the deacon may be read as a parable of the integration of Self that Samson has accomplished in his confrontation with the *theomacha*. In addition to bringing this phase of the downward journey to completion, the healing echoes Samson's first healing of the young monk bitten by a reptile (I.12). The hagiographer is pointing both forward and back, illustrating Samson's increasing spiritual power, and preparing the reader for the greater threat yet to come. Before Samson can confront the first serpent, however, he must confront his first antagonist, his father.

The next phase of this initiatory process takes place at Samson's father's home, presumably his own childhood home (I.25). Amon is almost the sole actor in this episode, with all of the movement being activated by the father's call and Samson's response. The father embodies a dual identity here, at one and the same time the 'Father' whose call summons Samson to increased spiritual power and greatness, and the 'Antagonist' who has threatened Samson's vocation in childhood and more recently disturbed his idyllic monastic life. Samson also embodies a dual role as both catalyst and witness to his father's healing. Neither the nature of Amon's illness, nor the content of the sin he wishes to confess, nor any act of healing or absolution that

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[157] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present,* p. 188.
[158] Genesis 19.26.
[159] Frye, *Secular Scripture*, p. 114.

Samson may have undertaken are revealed in the text. The message of the episode, then, does not concern the content of the acts but the process and outcome of them: the father calls, the son responds, the healing is effected, and upon the conversion of his family members, Samson emerges with the core of his future community.

The final phase of this first initiatory complex comprises the encounter with the first serpent (I.32). The return to Piro's island requires a second pass through the dark wood, this time infested with a serpent whose primeval nature is suggested by Amon's observation that it had been known to his own parents. The evidence for its presence consists of a path which resembles the track of 'a slender tree […] dragged through burnt grass'. Thus far Samson has condemned the *theomacha*, redeemed his father from death and hell, and is returning to his monastery a conquering hero with his band of brothers (*quattuor in uno uirorum felici comitatu*) (I.30)*,* seeking only to return to his monastery in peace. The function of this final encounter is to depict Samson as a *Christus victor,* emerging from the darkness in triumph, bringing both the young deacon and his own father out of death into renewed life.

Evidence for resonance with an all-knowing and all-conquering Christ appears several times in the chapter. First, Samson overhears the conversation between Amon and Umbraphel, and inquires into their concern, as Jesus heard his disciples' confusion and fear after a particularly dramatic healing.[160] His uncle has already quoted the angelic announcement, *Noli timere,* indicating that a marvel is about to occur. Samson instructs them as to the necessary conditions for the miracle: *si habueritis fidem, sicut granum sinapis, dicetis monti huic, Transi hinc, et transibit, et nihil impossibile uobis erit.* 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed…'.[161] He further invokes the image of Christ as he instructs his companions to remain behind while he goes forth to meet the serpent, as at Gethsemane.

The hagiographer communicates the movement up from darkness into the light of victory at this point, placing on Samson's lips the statements, 'I [will] return to you in triumph' (*uictoria*), and the opening verse of Psalm 27, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation'. The completion of this verse, undoubtedly known to the first readers, is, 'of whom shall I be afraid?' By now Samson is afraid of nothing. He approaches the

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[160] Luke 9.46.
[161] Matthew 17.19.

serpent, mimics its circular shape with a gesture of his own, and marks within the circle the Sign of the Cross. This is all that is needed to assert his power over the serpent; he invites his companions to witness its final destruction. Samson is in such control of the situation that he spends the remainder of the day instructing his companions in the faith, and only effects the serpent's demise when evening approaches. The command is given, the serpent is shown to be *inepte*, and falls down dead. No gesture accompanies the command; the serpent is immobilized, the companions move on.

While the motif of the threatening serpent is repeated several times, only in this first initiatory complex does the seminal archetype of descent into darkness, fear and death appear, and it is associated with the encounter with the *theomacha,* not the serpent. The confrontation with this first serpent is, in fact, the signal that Samson has conquered fear and death, and his initiation from uncertain monk to leader of men is complete. He now returns to the monastery on Piro's island, bringing with him the unanticipated 'spoils' of his journey – several faithful men to join the community.

2.2.5.5 TWO BRIEF EPISODES OF SEPARATION

The central pair of separations, I.33 and I.37, illustrates the internal/external dialectic of separation. In I.33 Bishop Dubricius has arrived on Piro's island to observe the full forty days of Lent. Such a practice of withdrawing from community for a substantial period of time represents the importance of the inward journey, and shows Dubricius as a role model for Samson as he comes to desire his own experience of solitude. By contrast, Samson's excursion to Ireland in I.37 appears as an extraverted sojourn taking place immediately after he became abbot of his home monastery after Piro's death. Meeting the *peritissimi Scotti* he accompanies them to their country where he performs many miraculous healings. This trip serves to expand Samson's horizons, and show him imitating Christ in his ability to perform more effective and accepted healings abroad than in his home territory.[162] It is a test of his abilities, a time to stretch his boundaries just when he could have settled down. The hagiographer is signalling to the readers the core message that will be declared openly in the second initiatory complex: that Samson is ordained to be a pilgrim.

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[162] Compare with Luke 7.21, also Luke 4.24 and parallels.

2.2.5.6 SECOND INITIATORY COMPLEX: SHAMANIC INITIATION

Recalling Eliade's designation of certain liminal experiences as characterized by visions that direct the subject's future, the complex of episodes covered in I.40 – 45 may be read as a shamanic-type initiation. Shamanic initiations differ from rites of passage at puberty, for example, in that they are uniquely individual, characterized by dreams, visions, or trance states, and typically accompanied by ritual acknowledgement of the initiate's new life.[163] All of these are true for Samson's second initiatory experience. It begins with his first expression of a desire for solitude, the *desertum desideratum*. He specifically seeks out an underground cave in which to become buried, dead to the world. A spring of water is provided to Samson in his cave, in theory permitting him to remain there indefinitely. Eventually Samson is called to attend a local synod, and appointed abbot to a monastery, a role he has previously rejected. Before he can assume the abbacy Samson receives the first of two extraordinary visions that will determine his authentic calling.

In I.43 it is reported that Samson received a vision in the night, so perhaps a dream, though it is not called that in the text. He sees himself clothed in white, surrounded by 'crowds of delightful beings', approached by three distinguished bishops with golden crowns. The consecration is carried out within the vision itself, leaving the living bishops the conundrum of how to affirm the vision without invalidating the supernaturally-bestowed sacrament. Sowerby suggested that this scene was the climax of the primitive Life that the hagiographer saw or heard while in Britain.[164] It has all the earmarks of a climactic life episode, and would have formed a fitting end to a British Life of the saint. The Breton hagiographer, however, knew that this was not the end of Samson's story. No sooner has Samson's elevation to the episcopacy been accomplished than a second vision occurs which declares Samson's life vocation. Taking place again at night -- and Eliade noted that the dark of night, illumined only by the moon, is quintessentially the time for initiations[165] – Samson sees 'a mighty man shining in great splendour'. Unlike any previous vision, this one terrifies Samson, and he must be told not to fear, to 'be of good cheer […] and play the

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[163] Eliade, *The Quest,* pp. 115-116.
[164] Sowerby, 'The Lives of St Samson', p. 28.
[165] Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 174-178.

man'. The divine messenger proclaims the life-changing news: 'thou art ordained to be a pilgrim' (*peregrinus enim destinatus*), the same vocation to which he had previously assigned his own uncle. It is reported that this vision lasts the whole of the night, and that the man, later called *angelus*, departed peacefully in the morning. That morning is Easter Sunday, and Samson had dedicated the night to his vigil, now crowned with an overwhelming message. The obvious implication is that this new life is the resurrection life for which Samson has prepared with years of discipline, solitude, and prayer.

The balance of this chapter gives the barest account of Samson's departure from Wales and arrival in Cornwall. He consecrates the churches his mother and aunt had asked him about many chapters previously, excommunicates his sister as a final act of rejection, sends blessings and healings freely to the populace as he makes his way to the port from which he will sail. From this point forward the account addresses Samson's life in an almost work-a-day fashion. His initiatory process is complete; what we see following this point is the effect the process has on him, and by extension on those whom he meets along his path of *peregrinatio*.

2.2.5.7 AFTEREFFECTS AND SECONDARY INITIATES

The immediate consequence of Samson's second initiation is his departure from Wales and arrival in Cornwall. Chapters I.46 - 60 comprise the closing 20% of the narrative section, much of which is concerned with Samson's encounter with King Childebert and the evil queen. Two episodes of liminality and reintegration take place between Samson's departure from Britain and the confrontation with Childebert. Chapters I.46 through 52 concern Samson's time in Cornwall, in which initiatory elements such as separation, vision, immobilization, instruction, reintegration, and resurrection no longer happen to Samson, he causes them to happen to others.

After the local abbot, Juniavus, confirms Samson's vocation as a pilgrim Samson is free to move through Cornwall. Chapters I.47 to 49 form a unit in which the hagiographer may be seen to recapitulate the main themes of Samson's life, applying them to others so that the reader may begin to appropriate the lessons of the narrative.   Samson arrives in his chariot, a conquering hero, paradoxically described as

both 'alone' and having 'God as his companion', the victorious leader of a band of brothers.

The encounter with the pagan worshippers in I.48-9 is remarkable. Samson instructs his own followers to be still and silent and his approach is described as 'quiet' and 'gentle'. The objectors are 'furious', 'mocking', and 'strongly urge' him to leave, but his response is shocking – he takes no action as a boy on horseback riding at full speed falls to the ground, breaks his neck and dies. The calm of the saint in the midst of surrounding chaos is externalized in the complete immobilization of the boy at his feet. Samson's promise to restore the boy to life with God's help transforms the pagans into Christians and the dead boy to a living follower.[166] The central act in this scene is the restoration of the boy, again following the Gethsemane/Transfiguration pattern of separation resulting in the prostration of the local crowd and destruction of the idol. Everything that opposes Samson has been flung to the ground, and Samson is left standing quietly and triumphantly in the centre.

As in the first initiatory complex, the triumphant conquest is followed by a confrontation with a serpent. Samson approaches without hesitation, accompanied by the newly-resurrected boy whom Samson advises to 'play the man', and the boy quotes back to Samson the second half of Psalm 27.1, Samson's own verse of protection against the first serpent. Showing no hesitation, Samson uses his linen girdle to bind the serpent, fling it down from the heights, and command it to die in the name of Jesus Christ. No patient waiting, no hours of prayer, not even any time spent in instructing the monks and other followers, simply the destruction of the symbolic enemy followed by occupation of the serpent's cave as a demonstration of total domination. The occupation is affirmed by the appearance of another miraculous spring of water, and the place remains a monument to Samson's triumph to the time of the hagiographer. Samson's sanctity has become a force that emanates from him, touching those around him with the very effects which he has experienced in his difficult journey to holiness: immobilization, illumination, and transformation follow in his wake.

Samson is still on the move, and within a few sentences the hagiographer has placed Amon at the head of the monastery in Cornwall, brought the cousin last

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[166] By I.50 he has 'promised to become a clerk'.

mentioned in the prologue back into the narrative, and deposited Samson on the shore of Brittany. The next liminal event is the encounter with the man on the threshold of a hut, lamenting the ills of his leprous wife and demoniac daughter. Thresholds are quintessential signs of liminality, neither indoors nor outside, and the man has been in this in-between state for three days. The narrative brushes past the actual healing of the man's wife and daughter so quickly that the healing itself can hardly be the thrust of the story. It is, rather, the presence of yet another person in a visibly liminal state whose salvation, in this case in the form of a reintegrated family life, is effected by Samson's promised arrival.

2.2.5.8 AFTEREFFECTS AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH POWER

The section concerning the encounter with Childebert and the unnamed queen (I.53-59) employs motifs of liminality in a range of ways. It begins with the discovery of the death of the rightful ruler, Jonas, and captivity – also a liminal state – of his son Judual, a state from which he is delivered only at the close of the section. Within this framework of captivity and release comes a series of confrontations beginning with the deliverance of a demon-possessed 'chief' at the palace; his possession may be read as a metaphor or duplication of the unlawful 'possession' of Judual by the king. After an angry encounter, presumably with representatives of the royal couple, Samson is invited to a meal with the king and queen. The queen is described as acting 'at the devil's bidding', indicating a state of impaired freedom parallel to that of her captive. She mounts three assassination attempts at Samson, using poison, an unbroken horse, and a fierce lion. He neutralizes each in turn, transforming that which is 'wicked', 'furious', 'wild', 'unruly', 'fierce', and 'angry', into something 'gentle', 'timid', and in the case of the lion, dead. In contrast to the more common hagiographical image of a local ruler dispensing favours to a resident holy man, the cumulative effect of this series of encounters is the establishment of Samson as the preeminent power in the scene, and the king and queen as ineffectual and completely overpowered. They agree to release Judual, making themselves the surety for his safe conduct. The king is subsequently described as 'humble' and 'desirous of pleasing' Samson as he asks for one more serpent to be destroyed.

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Again the encounter with the serpent is the aftereffect of the real conquest, the coda to the more involved and challenging achievement of the defeat of the queen and the liberation of Judual. Samson once more sets out with only a few companions, has them wait while he fasts, watches and prays, and this time from a position of power calls the serpent to himself. The serpent is 'full of fear', dragged and thrown across the river, and pinned under a rock. Each dispatch of a serpent is more and more casual, Samson is in greater command of each encounter, demonstrating a pattern of gradation from each episode to the next.

In I.59 Samson takes his leave of the king, sends Judual back to Brittany to defeat his usurper, arranges for a new monastery to be built once again over the serpent's cave, and goes travelling among the islands of Lesial and Angia.[167] There is yet one more serpent to dispatch; this is done in I.60 with a wave of a hand and a single sentence, combined in the same chapter with the reference to 'perverse priests' and other spiritual challenges. The narrative concludes with Samson's 'happy death' and burial at Dol, a fact surely well-known to the monks in residence, and therefore requiring and receiving no elaboration.

2.3   THE WORLD BEFORE THE TEXT

2.3.1   INTERPRETATION OF THE NARRATIVE

Having enumerated the various biblical and archetypal elements within the text, and proposed the motif of initiation as the organizing principle of the narrative, it remains now to explore the world opened up before the text. The encounter with the text engages the reader in a process of repeated transitions and transformations from ordinary to extraordinary states of being. While at one level Samson himself may appear to be one of many saints and heroes who conquer dragons and heal the sick, from the very beginning of his story he is uniquely conceived, educated and trained in the Christian faith, and set upon a course of healing and liberation which evokes the life of Christ and the vocation to heroic feats of ascetic practice at every turn. It is the repeated archetype of initiation into ever higher levels of sanctity and spiritual power that creates the world of ever-unfolding transformations before this text.

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[167] According to Taylor, these islands are identified with Channel Islands Jersey and Guernsey by de la Borderie, Taylor, *The Life of St. Samson of Dol,* p. 75n.

Transition and movement are critical elements of the world before the text, and are employed in service to the archetype of transformative initiation. The motif of *peregrinatio* functions as an externalization of the archetype of inner transformation enacted in the repeated and serially deepened process of initiation. From before his conception Samson is depicted ranging through the countryside accompanied by family members and monastic colleagues. Those who are in motion are 'saved'; they are freed from illness, suffering, and the power of the devil. Those who remain in place, who are irreparably immobilized in some way, are liable to lose what limited freedom they have and fall victim to evil. Had Amon and Anna not left their home to seek out the *librarius*, we are left to conclude they would not have conceived Samson. The two brothers who are so bound to their uncle's school that they would kill to protect their inheritance end up consumed by the poison of their own evil. The *theomacha* is likewise bound to her forest and is destroyed there. Even wise Piro, as a stationary abbot, dies in the dark of night, falling into a deep pit. Conversely, Samson is called to become *peregrinus*, one who by definition must be on the move. Among his closest companions are men who were once immobilized – his father, the Irish abbot, the boy from Cornwall – and recover to become his devoted followers. To encounter a narrative which embodies a sense of movement of this magnitude is to experience a call to a profoundly different life than, for example, a Benedictine vocation to stability. There is very little stability in Samson's life, and the element of dynamic movement demands a particular kind of surrender in order to participate. Stability is comforting; *peregrinatio* is not. Samson is not a comforting model of Christian virtue, he is demanding of himself and everyone around him. He is an energized leader, and will demand equally energized followers.

At a deeper level, Samson does not engage in movement for its own sake. His shifts of location are purposeful, and occasionally resisted, as in the call to visit his sick father, and the call to attend the synod. Each movement is meaningful, and may be read as calling the reader into the all-encompassing meaning of Christian monastic life. To live this life is to be set apart, to seek diligently, even passionately, for the meaning of Scripture and its constant presence in one's life. This kind of peripatetic existence is modelled on Christ's own self-description: Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man cannot lay down his head in any one place for too long, and

those who follow in Samson's footsteps will find in him a deeply challenging embodiment of the Gospel message.[168]

The structural analysis demonstrated the centrality of initiation as the major motif for interpreting this text. To explore the significance of this motif in depth it will be useful to take the First Initiatory Complex, I.22-32, and examine its interlocking levels of meaning. Interpretation of this paradigmatic example of initiation may be seen to model a means of interpreting the entire narrative, as well as validating the hermeneutic approach.

In I.22 the reader learns of Samson's father's illness. The illness is life-threatening, and Amon is urged to receive Holy Communion, the *viaticum* which is intended to nourish the soul for its final journey. The reader is prepared for a *terminus,* an ending of one man's life, but the reference to *viaticum* indicates that a journey is intended, that we are not at an end but a beginning. Amon declares that he is not going to receive the sacrament and die, but he must see his son, and through this encounter he will be healed. Samson, therefore, becomes a Christ figure, one whom merely to see would restore full health and well-being. Messengers arrive by night and encounter 'some brothers' in the light of day. Samson participates in the conversation, treating it as a game, and concealing his identity. The depiction of the saint playing the role of a hidden healer may be a reminder that believers often are in contact with Christ in a hidden aspect, and that offering oneself openly is the best way to gain what is sought.

Here the first obstacle is encountered – and it is Samson himself. He rejects the call to return home, describing it as the place where he was 'carnally born', an Egypt that he perceives would confine his spirit and restrict his growth.[169] This reference to his birth calls to mind the need for rebirth such as was described in the Gospel of John, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'.[170] The process of rebirth, in a psychological sense, is the *regressus ad uterum,* the moment at which the psyche encounters the creative energies within the

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[168] Matthew 8.20.

[169] The Deuteronomic writer equates Egypt with 'house of bondage' or slavery. See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. 8, ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 521.

[170] John 3.3.

unconscious for the purpose of bringing them to consciousness and thus attaining wholeness.[171] Significantly, Piro's reproach to Samson does not address the moral obligation to heed the request for healing, as might be expected. Rather, he underscores the theme of fertility and rebirth, saying, 'thy reward will be great in the sight of God what time *spiritual things are sown by thee in the place where carnal things have grown* (italics added).' In other words, Samson's years of ascetic discipline are about to bear fruit, but cannot do so if he remains in the sterile isolation of the monastery.

As was noted in the analysis, this young deacon may be read as representing the undeveloped aspects of Samson's own psyche. From this perspective, he is the *puer*, the eternal youth who does not achieve independent adulthood. The deacon is essentially a shadow following Samson through the woods and back to the monastery, providing no action or speech of his own beyond gratitude for his healing. His role in the narrative is not as an independent character, but a representation of the undeveloped and therefore unconscious contents of the psyche which are the constant companions of anyone who undertakes the process of transformation and rebirth. He symbolizes the psychological shadow which Samson must integrate in order for his initiation to take place.[172]

The journey itself involves encounters with three adversaries: the sorceress, the father, and the serpent. In narrative form, Samson encounters each of these adversaries as external threats; for the reader, however, they may be read as stages in the process of internal spiritual growth and development. The encounter with the adversaries has the effect of activating the psyche's ability to conquer the darkness of unconsciousness and elevate the individual into the light of wholeness.[173] The first adversary, the sorceress, appears immediately upon Samson's departure from the monastery. The structural analysis pointed to the explicit contrasts between the *theomacha* and the saint, underscoring the oppositional nature of the encounter. Each of them is heading directly for the unconscious deacon, she to wound, he to rescue,

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[171] For a detailed discussion of the themes of *regressus* and dual birth, see C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation: an analysis of the prelude to a case of schizophrenia*, 2 vols, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (New York: Harper, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 321-30.

[172] For more on the shadow, see C.G. Jung, 'The Shadow' in *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 8-10.

[173] Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, pp. 329-330.

and she arrives first. By the time Samson has reached the deacon he is mortally wounded, and the sorceress is already 'a long way distant', 'descending into the valley'. The visual effect of this description is to place the reader at Samson's elevated perspective, seeing in the mind's eye the shadowy victim fallen to the ground and therefore below, and the *theomacha* a long way off, almost shrunken in the distance. Samson's command over the situation is emphasized by the implied perspective in the text.

Samson approaches the *theomacha*, 'steadfast' and 'unshaken', speaking her into immobility. The conversation between the two consists of Samson's demand to know who and of what kind she is, and her description of the utter helplessness of her situation. Samson offers her one final chance, them condemns her to death only if she is 'utterly abandoned'.   On a theological level, this passage may be read as suggesting that evil is the complete and total absence of good, a *privatio boni,* as first theorized by Augustine of Hippo in *The Enchiridion.*[174] On an archetypal level, Samson succeeds in defeating her because he draws upon his training in Scripture and his previous life of virtue. The first fruits of his early years of discipline are produced in the encounter with darkness and abandonment. Embodied in the sorceress, evil cannot now defeat the saint in his conscious, disciplined presence. She has, however, succeeded in harming the *puer*-deacon, that is, the undeveloped unconscious dimension which accompanies Samson, and this he must heal before he can go on to his father's house. This youthful archetype generally enjoys only a brief lifespan and is tragically killed in his only encounter with the world. So it is with the deacon, for in his encounter with the *theomacha* he is left 'half dead', 'almost dead,' with but a last 'remnant of the breath of life in him'. Were this episode to conform completely to the archetype, the *puer* would have been left to die, but as the reader already knows that Samson has the power to heal, such an outcome would be unthinkable. Utilizing the full-body prayer of Elijah, Samson enacts his own redemption in the form of the complete integration of the unconscious, youthful, fearful dimension of the psyche into his own self, now healed of its mortal wound in the confrontation with the sorceress. Jung described the integration of the shadow in terms of gazing 'into the face of absolute evil', a

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[174] Augustine, *The Enchiridion,* in NPNF, 1-03, ed. by Philip Schaff, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.iv.ii.xiii.html> [accessed 4 July 2013].

description which may be seen to fit Samson's confrontation with the *theomacha* and subsequent healing of the deacon. The integration of unconscious contents is underscored by the final sentence in I.28, in which the deacon is said to 'rise up whole *as if he had been asleep'* (italics added).

Now that Samson has met the pure void of evil and asserted his ability to conquer it by his own virtue and the power of God's word, he is ready to meet his father. As was noted in the analysis, the father was Samson's first opponent in his childhood, and in the episode which takes place in I.29-30 he is virtually the sole actor, instigating and resolving the encounter between himself and his son. As Samson arrives Amon is again surrounded by his neighbours, as he and Anna were accompanied by the 'many people' of their church on the visit to the *librarius*, as 'their kinsmen' rejoiced at Samson's birth, and as Amon was once influenced by the 'friends' and 'counsellors' to impede Samson's vocation. The crowd is dismissed; here the hagiographer uses a passive voice leaving it unclear as to who actually sent them out. We are only told that Samson and the deacon and his father and mother remain. Amon continues to takes the initiative, making his confession and declaring his intent to 'serve God with all his heart'. Anna follows suit, and offers their other children as well.

In terms of the reader's experience of a world before the text, this section forms the heart of the first initiation into the religious life that Samson undergoes. He has trained from his youth, he has confronted evil in the form of the *theomacha* and integrated the shadow-*puer* of his own unconscious into his conscious spiritual identity. Returning to home, father, mother, and family requires Samson to demonstrate the full scope of his spiritual maturity. Rather than limiting himself to the isolated life of Piro's island, Samson must 'go back', and the physical journey home symbolizes the journey of the psyche 'back' to its earliest influences, to offer forgiveness, healing, and acceptance to those who represent one's earliest psychological experiences. Without this inner work of redeeming the father, Samson would not have access to the spiritual power which his future growth and development would require, a truth which Piro had foreseen. Jung argued that the

father archetype forms the basis of the God-image in many religions.[175] Hence it is the father who activates the initiation by calling Samson to his side, while Samson's responsibility is to respond and return to the father. Symbolically this sequence of events is a recapitulation of Samson's original call as a child, the opposition from Amon (we may imagine this to be the sin of which he repents, although this must remain speculation), and the achievement of conscious spiritual life, now magnified by the inclusion of Samson's relatives. The reader is drawn into the process of returning to the roots of his or her own personal experience to confront and integrate the source of the vocation to the religious life. This pivotal experience forms the centre of the first genuine initiation into a mature religious vocation of one's own.

After a brief conversation between Samson and his mother, the narrative moves on to the final confrontation with evil in this complex, the appearance of the serpent in the same wood that the sorceress inhabited. The travellers go back into the dark wood where Amon notices a burnt path in the grass indicating the presence of the serpent. Amon and his brother exhibit opposite reactions to the perceived threat – Amon trembles in fear, Umbraphael responds with joy and the angelic command, 'Fear not'. Samson overhears them, reassuring them that faith as of a mustard seed is all that is required to overcome this challenge. They are bidden, not so much to test their faith in God at this juncture, as to have a seed's worth of faith in Samson. This last stage of his initiation is no longer for himself, it is directed at his new followers; once his elders they are now his novices and students. Where the first stage of the initiation was done alone, with a single companion who functioned as a symbol of Samson's own psyche, this last stage is accomplished in the sight of many witnesses, symbols now of the community which physically follows Samson in his lifetime, and spiritually followed him in his monasteries a century and a half later.

While Samson has already encountered the effects of a serpent in the form of the reptile bite (I.12) and attempted poisoning (I.16), he is now prepared to publically confront the first actual serpent. In imitation of the Transfiguration/ Gethsemane pattern, Samson has his followers sit down nearby while he pursues the serpent alone. The reader, however, is allowed to observe the encounter at close hand. Armed with Scripture and his newly-affirmed sanctity, Samson approaches the serpent and 'fences

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[175] Jung, *Aion,* p. 195.

him round' with a circle and the Sign of the Cross. In the presence of the serpent, Samson continues to educate his companions in matters of faith. The reader becomes, in effect, a member of the community of witnesses to Samson's abilities, and a virtual participant in the conquest of the serpent.   In this text each serpent is an expression of the biblical prototype, the cunning, destructive, and ultimately cursed beast who caused humanity's fall from grace. Further, Jung considered the snake or serpent to symbolize unconscious contents, making this episode an effective parallel to the first stage of the initiatory process, in which the unconscious is symbolized by the *puer*-deacon who himself is nearly destroyed, but in the end assimilated. The destruction of the serpent is effected by Samson's command, at which the serpent makes an arc, or bow, in imitation of God's promise to Noah never to destroy the earth by flood again.[176]

2.3.2   EFFECT OF APPROPRIATION ON THE READER

While the structural analysis of the *VS I* addressed the whole of the narrative, the hermeneutic section has focused on the First Initiatory Complex, using it as a paradigm for interpreting the text as a whole. According to Ricoeur, the effect of appropriation of the world before the text would be to enlarge the horizon of the reader, a process that both challenges and affirms the reader in her or his efforts to become more fully human. The Life of Saint Samson can be seen to have the effect of enlarging the horizons of its readers in a manner which is consistent with its structural framework of initiation via liminality leading to integration.   The hagiographer depicts Samson inhabiting nearly every religious vocation imaginable over the course of his life, including monk, abbot, deacon, priest, bishop, hermit and pilgrim, his final destiny. One way of reading this excess of monastic occupations may be as an attempt to make a connection with members of the monastic community at any and every level of participation. Whatever role the reader occupies, it is both affirmed and enlarged by the literary encounter with Samson.

The life story of the saint, child of nobility and fearless wonder-worker, may at first appear distancing and alienating. For the text to overcome the gulf between its protagonist and its readers, it must make use of tools that are familiar enough to the

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[176] Genesis 9.13.

reader to touch their imaginative horizons. In this case, it may be argued that the biblical material goes some way to establishing that connection, and that the archetypal material completes the link. From the outset, the reader encounters strong indications that the main character in this tale is a Christ-figure, with all of the attendant dimensions of miracle, sacrifice and redemption that such a figure entails. Just as Moses and Elijah and Christ himself were called away from the crowds to experience trials and initiations into their full salvific roles, Samson follows the pattern of being separated, initiated, and reintegrated into his various communities. And just as none of his biblical precursors experienced universal approval and loyalty, neither did Samson, good as he was, win over the loyalty and affection of all his monastic brothers. His life, in many respects, is a thoroughly biblical Christian endeavour.

In addition to the biblical background, however, the hagiographer introduces archetypal expressions of light and dark, land and sea, barrenness and fertility, wise men and fools, heroism and evil, serpents and sorceresses. A simple re-writing of an essentially biblical story would not be sufficient to bridge the gap between saint and reader – Moses and Elijah and Christ are still too distant, too remote, too obviously touched by God to be appropriated in a meaningful way. The saint exists as the fulcrum, with one hand in the world of the sacred, and the other reaching out to the reader to bring him or her into sacred fellowship. This task is accomplished by the combination of biblical and archetypal material, for it is of these humble, universal images that storytellers have woven the tales of Everyman and woman through time. Both types of motifs reinforce the notion of participation in an initiation process which draws the reader or follower out of their daily existence into a larger, wiser, more conscious human life. The narrative becomes an encounter between a paradigmatic Christian saint, his first generation of followers, and those persons in later generations who have begun a transformative journey of their own. Whether readers are actual or virtual *peregrini*, Samson becomes the leader who walks in the midst of the community, directing them through trials and initiations to the goal of becoming Christ-like themselves.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

The three-part process of examining the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world before the text has put the Life of Samson through a literary and theological analysis and interpretation. Underlying patterns of movement and initiation were seen to function as the symbolic representations of the concerned knowledge most critical to the hagiographer.

Accepting that the Life was composed c. 700, the historical contents in the narrative are either deliberately misleading or, in Charles-Edwards's word, stylized to the point of deliberate exaggeration. The episodes involving Commorus, Childebert, and Ultragotha cannot be read successfully as historiography, but must be seen as allegories or parables concerning Samson's spiritual power and his ability to defeat any enemy. Samson's defeat of the royal couple's malice and ineptitude for the sake of liberation and justice stands as his capstone achievement, accomplishing on continental soil what he had done so often *ultra mare.* The motif of *peregrinatio*, however, rings true to the mid-sixth century as a time of migration from Britain to Brittany, as well as travels from Britain to Ireland and back. The hagiographer succeeds in creating a convincing literary backdrop against which to convey his concerned knowledge, in this case regarding the challenges and victories of monastic life.

The Lives of saints Martin and Benedict have been seen to reflect similar concerns for sanctity, liberation, and healing. Like Martin, Samson employs the full-body healing prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings; the list of virtues attributed to both of them may have been drawn from Colossians 3. Like Benedict, Samson is concerned to set captives free, both in their earthly life and in the afterlife, a theme that is traceable to Exodus, Psalms, and Isaiah.[177] As these examples demonstrate, however, the primary source for this text is unquestionably the Bible. From the moment of his miraculous conception and naming for a Hebrew Bible hero of extraordinary strength, the hagiographer shapes Samson in the image of a Biblical warrior-hero. Descended from biblically-named parents, Samson's own name evokes both the light of the sun and the motif of being set apart for special service to God. His namesake was declared a Nazirite, one who is separated from the world and dedicated to a religious life. Samson

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[177] Exodus 3.8ff, Psalms 85, 126, and others, Isaiah 61.1.

seeks out times of solitude in imitation of Elijah in the desert, and of Jesus in his times of withdrawal. He experiences the gift of water in imitation of Moses, and employs methods from both Hebrew Bible (full-body healing from 1 Kings) and the Gospels (separation from the crowd) in his healing works. And the enemies he defeats with ever-increasing confidence follow biblical patterns as well: the serpents, the *theomacha,* and the evil queen. Indeed, the hagiographer may be seen to use the figure of the queen in particular to depart from historical accounts, casting her in the role of Jezebel. In sum, Samson is the Christian hero *par excellence*, one whose destiny is determined at birth and who marches inexorably toward his destiny as a pilgrim for Christ.

The analysis of key patterns and motifs led to the adoption of the motif of initiation as the crux of the structural framework of this Life. The three-part process of separation, liminal experience, and reintegration into community was played out at three critical points in the narrative, with lesser examples of separation, liminality, and integration appearing in the lives of those who surround Samson. His travels across southern Britain into Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany are not merely evidence of some Celtic trait of restlessness, but are purposeful movements that take him to ever more glorified stages of spiritual development within and beyond the monastic community.

The centrality of the motif of initiation indicates the point at which readers are invited into the process of appropriation as the anticipated outcome of their encounter with the text. The theological interpretation of the narrative argued that Samson's separations from community occurred in the service of the transitions and transformations of his life in religion; so too would the readers of this text understand that movement from life in community to times of solitude and back would be the means by which they moved 'from glory to glory', ever growing in their spiritual consciousness, understanding, and power. No matter what role in the religious life they occupied, Samson was their guide, leader, and model.   The absence of any indication of political purpose or intention behind the composition of this text, as well as the combination of narrative and homily in Book One and Book Two, signals the intended audience for this text as the monastic community at Dol. The message of concerned knowledge that they may appropriate by their encounter with this text is that their founder and model, Samson, was able to defeat any form of captivity or

limitation, be it in the form of a lax community, a fire-spitting serpent, or an evil queen. So, too, would the monks expect to be confronted by elements in their own world that required transcendence by means of prayer and fasting, by times of solitude, and by courage in the face of torment. Their goal was the higher life of Christ, 'shining in the breast' of those who dedicated themselves to him. Their means was imitation of their saint and founder, Samson.

CHAPTER THREE: *VITA CUTHBERTI*

3.1 WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT

3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* (hereafter referred to as *VCA*, to distinguish it from Bede's Prose and Metrical Lives of the same saint) is the second example in this exploration of the use of a three-fold hermeneutic approach to the genre of hagiography in the seventh century. A *vita* of Anglo-Saxon provenance, this text has been assessed as standing within the broad tradition of Irish hagiography,[1] and will be read in the context of the history of Northumbria and the relationship between Lindisfarne and its parent monastery of Iona. Its author, however, was an Anglo-Saxon monk in residence at Lindisfarne after the Synod of Whitby, making it necessary to read the text as a balance between Ionan and other influences. Like the Life of Samson, this Life presents an example of biblical and archetypal motifs woven together to form a complex religious narrative. It will be argued that the concerned knowledge that the hagiographer sought to convey was shaped by motifs which include the reconciliation of opposites, discernment of spirits, and release from bondage, along with spiritual models including St Antony, St Martin, the Gospel of Matthew, and traditions concerning St Columba.

3.1.2 DATING, MANUSCRIPT TRADITION, AND EDITION USED FOR THIS STUDY

The Anonymous Life of Saint Cuthbert was written between 699 and 705. The dating is determined by the content of the text itself, in which miracles are reported to have taken place in the same year as the translation of Cuthbert's relics on Lindisfarne, 698, while other miracles related in the same chapter did not take place in the 'same year', suggesting that some additional amount of time had passed.[2] The text also refers to the 'present' reign of King Aldfrith whose death took place in 705, setting the *terminus ad quem*. References to 'our bishop', 'our island', and 'our monastery' point to a

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[1] Clare Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary' in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. by Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989), 21-44, p. 25.
[2] *Vita Sancti Cuthberti,* IV.17, in Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940, repr. 2007), pp. 13, 137.

monastic resident of Lindisfarne as the anonymous hagiographer. Composition of the

Life just after the Translation may indicate that the work was conceived as a response

to that event, perhaps as a form of devotional reflection, rather than a preparation for

its celebration. The hagiographer tells us only that Bishop Eadfrith has 'commanded'

it, in words borrowed from the *Epistola Victorii*, a text which accompanies the Roman

system for computing the date of Easter prior to 525.[3] Consideration of the

significance of this particular borrowing will be considered below.

Modern editions of the text include Colgrave's, published in 1940 and the

primary source for this project;[4] a Bollandist edition in *Acta Sanctorum Martii* volume

iii, pages 117-124, J. A. Giles, *Venerabilis Bedae Opera*, volume vi, (London, 1843),

pages 357–82, and Joseph Stevenson, *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Historica Minora*,

(English Historical Society, London, 1851), pages 259–84. Colgrave reported seven

known extant manuscripts of the Anonymous Life, all of which he claimed to have

'almost certainly' been written on the Continent.[5] **O$_1$** and **O$_2$** appear to derive from the

library of the Abbey of Saint-Bertin, a seventh century Benedictine abbey. **O$_1$** is written

in an insular hand of late ninth to early tenth centuries. **O$_2$** is contained within a

twelfth-century legendary.[6] **A** is a late tenth-century MS from the Benedictine

monastery of St. Vaast at Arras; the text is incomplete, missing nine chapters, with the

remaining chapters appearing out of order.[7] **H** is in the British Museum, Harleian MS

2800, c. 1200, from Arnstein Abbey in south-western Germany. **B** is in the Royal

Library of Brussels, 207-208, pages 135 and following, written in a thirteenth-century

hand. **T** is in the Trier Public Library, possibly composed at, or for the monks of, the

Benedictine monastery of St Maximin of Trier, c. 1235.[8] **P** is at the Bibliothèque

Nationale in Paris, Fonds Latin 5289, written in a fourteenth-century hand; Colgrave

described its contents as carelessly written and wrongly bound. The Bollandist version

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[3] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 60-61.
[4] Ibid., pp. vii-139, 310-340.
[5] Ibid., pp. 17-20.
[6] *Analecta Bollandiana* XLVII (Brussels, 1929) p. 246 and pp. 254ff., respectively.
[7] *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publique de France*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie
nationale, 1872), p. 322.
[8] *Analecta Bollandiana* LII (Brussels, 1934), pp. 193ff.

was based on **O₁** and Giles's edition was a reprint of the Bollandist version. Stevenson's version, too, was a reprint of the Bollandist version, with some corrections brought in.[9]

Bullough reported an additional, older manuscript at Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 15817, and offered a range of corrections to Colgrave based on this text.[10] The greater part of his corrections serve to clarify fine points in the Latin of the Lindisfarne text, as well as in Colgrave's translation, but do not change the critical images or biblical references that characterize the narrative.

3.1.3 SOURCES

Colgrave suggested the following sources for the Lindisfarne hagiographer: *Epistola Victorii Aquitani ad Hilarium,* Evagrius's translation of Athanasius's Life of Antony*,* Sulpicius's Life of St Martin, the *Actus Silvestri,* 'probably with Gregory's *Dialogues,* and above all with the Scriptures.'[11] To Colgrave's list, Lapidge added Ambrose, *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam,* Rufinus's translation of Eusebius's *Historia ecclesiastica,* and Isidore's *De ecclesiasticus officiis*, concluding that these would therefore have been housed in the library at Lindisfarne.[12]

The structural analysis below will illustrate the extent of the Lindisfarne hagiographer's dependence upon biblical material, in particular the synoptic gospels, most especially the Gospel of Matthew. Dependence upon the *Vita Martini* has been widely acknowledged, raising the possibility that the hagiographer intended to compare the personal attributes of St Cuthbert with those of St Martin.[13] The structural analysis will address the literary model which may have been borrowed from the *VM,* as well as the verbal borrowings and thematic parallels between two texts, most notable in Book IV. The sections on Cuthbert's ascetic practices, in particular his time in solitude in Book III, draw upon the Life of Antony as the earliest model of monastic asceticism. These borrowings and parallels will be discussed in greater detail in the structural analysis of Book III.

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[9] Ibid., pp. 17-20.
[10] Donald A. Bullough, 'A neglected early-ninth-century manuscript of the Lindisfarne *Vita S. Cuthberti*', *Anglo-Saxon England,* 27 (1998), 105-137.
[11] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 12.
[12] Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 58.
[13] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 26.

Consistent with the genre of hagiography, the author appeals to eyewitnesses known to his community to be trustworthy, particularly in the cases of miraculous events.[14] Plecgils, a priest of the monastery at Melrose; Tydi (twice), a priest still living at the time of composition of the text; Beta, another priest reported to be 'still alive'; Aethilwald, prior of Melrose; one Penna, otherwise unidentified; a living monk of Lindisfarne named Wahlstod; and the Abbess Aelfflaed herself are all cited as the sources of episodes that took place during Cuthbert's lifetime. In the case of this particular narrative, such a practice may be seen to tie the reader closer to the saint himself as the chain of witnesses is short, while its breadth is wide. This may also account for the subdued tone of the narrative, which, while it includes miraculous healings and visionary experiences, does not include some of the more fabulous anecdotes that are often found in hagiographies composed at a more distant point in time from their protagonists' lives – for example, there is no mention of serpents.

Marsden reviewed the problems for scholars concerning available versions of the Bible in seventh-century Anglo-Saxon England, and noted that the Vulgate only attained universal acceptance in the late eighth century.[15] Not until the ninth century were efforts made to establish pandects of internally consistent and high-quality biblical texts.[16] Colgrave's notes to the Lives of Cuthbert refer to 'a text of the Celtic type' as a source for both Bede and the *VCA,*[17] but provide no further information on what that text may have been. Bullough noted the use of a Gallican Psalter in his discussion of the earliest manuscript.[18] This then leaves unresolved the question of which version of the Bible was available to the Lindisfarne hagiographer.

The Lindisfarne Life of Cuthbert bears a strong resemblance to the *Vita Columbae,* a text dated to the same time period, within a few years.[19] Aldfrith was visited twice by Adomnán, once bearing a copy of his *De Locis Sanctis.*[20] Stancliffe claimed that the Lindisfarne Life 'stood in the tradition of Irish hagiography', noting the

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[14] Stancliffe associates this with the Irish hagiographical tradition: Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 25.

[15] Richard Marsden, 'Wrestling with the Bible: Textual Problems for the Scholar and Student' in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: approaches to current scholarship and teaching*, ed. by Paul Cavill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 72.

[16] Marsden, 'Wrestling with the Bible', p. 72.

[17] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 56-7.

[18] Bullough, 'A neglected manuscript', p. 116, n.39.

[19] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 22.

[20] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.15, p. 294.

wealth of shared stories of the 'Prophecies, Visions, Telepathy' type.[21] While no verbal

parallels have been noted between the two texts, no other Irish sources have been

identified for the *VCA,* beyond Bullough's suggestion of a common ancestor in

Cogitosus's Life of Brigit.[22] Thacker also noted 'especially close links' between the Lives

of Cuthbert and Columba, identifying the account of the spying monk as the most

striking parallel.[23] He suggested the possibility that an early draft of the *Vita Columbae*

may have been sent to Melrose, and available to Lindisfarne from there. Without

stronger evidence, dependence upon Adomnán's text cannot be established beyond

doubt. Perhaps Stancliffe's suggestion of access to the earlier but no longer extant

account of Columba's Life attributed to Cummian the White[24] is our best hope for

resolution.

3.1.4   Secular and ecclesiastical history

The history of Anglo-Saxon England prior to the eighth century is most widely known

through the writing of the Venerable Bede (672-735), and while other sources exist,

they are few and incomplete. What is reasonably well known will be reviewed here for

its relevance both for the time of Cuthbert's life and ministry, and for the short time

between his death and the composition of the Lindisfarne Life. It will be seen that the

region of Bernicia/Northumbria in which Cuthbert lived and worked was subject to

dynamic political upheavals in both secular and ecclesiastical arenas, and the

Lindisfarne narrative should be read against that tumultuous background.

The history of the early Anglo-Saxon period is pieced together primarily from

Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* composed in the 540s, and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*

gentis Anglorum, completed in 731*.* While historians continue to debate various views

on the process of Germanic settlement in the northeast, it is agreed that Anglian,

Saxon, and Jutish mercenaries arrived in Britain at the request of local Romano-British

leaders in order to protect them from raids by Pictish tribes along the eastern coast in

the wake of the Emperor Honorius's abandonment of the defence of Britain in 410.

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[21] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 22.
[22] Donald A. Bullough, 'Columba, Adomnán and the Achievement of Iona; Part II', *The Scottish Historical Review,* 44 (1965), 17-33, p. 27.
[23] Alan Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert' in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, ed. by Bonner, et al, 103-22, p. 112.
[24] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 23 n.11.

Gildas's account claims that three 'boatloads' of Saxons were given land in exchange for protection sometime in the middle of the fifth century.[25] Rollason evaluated the evidence for the nature of the transition of control over the northwest region of England, concluding that the testimony of Gildas to the bitter revolt of the native British population against the Saxons was most likely corroborated by the *Historia Brittonum*.[26]

Bede reported the establishment of two kingdoms: Bernicia, north of the River Tees, ruled by one Ida in 547, and Deira to the south, ruled by Aelle. King Æthelfrith of Deira displaced Edwin of Bernicia and ruled the two kingdoms as a united Northumbria.[27] Upon Æthelfrith's death in 616, the dispossessed Edwin returned and ruled the united kingdom until 633 when he died in battle. Oswald of Bernicia ruled a peacefully united Northumbria from 634-642, although sub-kingships existed in Deira after Oswald's death until 655.[28]

Edwin, a pagan, was married to a Christian princess of Kent, Ethelberga, herself the daughter of a pagan king, Æthelbehrt, and a Christian Frankish princess, Bertha. Edwin permitted his wife to bring her bishop, Paulinus, a monk of Rome, to Northumbria in 625; it is understood that Edwin's conversion to Christianity was part of the arrangement.[29] During Edwin's reign members of the Bernician royal family sought refuge further north and west, in Pictish and Dalriadan (Irish) territory.[30] Bernician rule was re-established by Oswald after the death of Edwin in 633.[31] Oswald was defeated by the Mercian Penda in 642; Penda extended his territory into East Anglia in 653-4. Oswiu, Oswald's brother, defeated the Mercians and killed Penda in 655, thereby establishing dominance over both Northumbria and Mercia. The Christian Oswiu later married the daughter of Edwin, recreating the domestic conflict of previous generations of Northumbrian kings, this time between Iona-trained king

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[25] Gildas, *On the Ruin of Britain,* trans. by J. A. Giles, II.23, in Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1949/pg1949.html> [accessed 4 June 2014].

[26] David Rollason, *Northumbria, 500-1100: Creation and Destruction of a Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 103.

[27] Rollason, *Northumbria,* p. 6.

[28] Ibid., p. 7.

[29] Ibid., p. 77.

[30] Michelle Ziegler, 'Oswald and the Irish', *The Heroic Age,* 4 (2001), <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/4/ziegler.html> [accessed 5 March 2014].

[31] Rollason, *Northumbria,* p. 6.

and Roman-educated queen.[32] Oswiu's daughter married the pagan Mercian Peada, son of Penda, on the promise that he would be baptized, and Oswiu's son Ahlfrith married Peada's sister Cyneburgh, presumably under a similar agreement.[33] Richter argued that these alliances among the royalty and nobility of Anglo-Saxon families were crucial to the voluntary and peaceful nature of the Christian conversion of England.[34] There is little evidence, however, for deep penetration of the Christian faith beyond the elite classes in the first half of the seventh century; indeed, it may be that these arrangements among the ruling families represented the extent of conversions until late in the century.

Ecgfrith succeeded Oswiu in 670, ruling Deira and then Northumbria during a period of increasing instability which ended in Ecgfrith's death, foretold by Cuthbert, in 685.[35] Ecgfrith was succeeded by his illegitimate son, Aldfrith, who had been in Dalriadan territory, possibly Iona, through his youth. Rollason pointed to discrepancies in Bede's dating of Aldfrith's accession to indicate a possible interregnum in which other sons of Ecgfrith's perhaps contended for the throne.[36]   If the date of 686 is settled for Aldfrith's accession, there then followed nearly twenty years of relative peace for Northumbria. After Aldfrith's death in 705, an unknown claimant, Eadwulf, took the throne briefly, only to be followed by Aldfrith's dissolute son, Osred.[37] The composition of the Lindisfarne *Vita Cuthberti* took place within the fragile peace of Aldfrith's reign, close on the heels of three centuries of near-constant disruption.

Oswald's time in exile among the Dalriada (616-630) and its subsequent implications for relations between the Irish ruling dynasties and the politics of Northumbria have been examined in detail by Michelle Ziegler. She noted Oswald's age at the time of his exile, twelve, and the likelihood that his time would have been spent in close proximity to the Dalriadan royal family, perhaps in a quasi-fosterage.[38] Ziegler theorized that Oswald may have been married into the Dalriadan dynasty in his

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[32] Rollason, *Northumbria,* p. 88.

[33] Michael Richter, 'Practical aspects of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons' in *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission*, ed. by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987) 362-76, p. 366.

[34] Richter, 'Practical aspects', p. 367.

[35] Rollason, *Northumbria,* p. 191.

[36] Ibid., p. 191.

[37] Ibid., pp. 191-3.

[38] Ziegler, 'Oswald'.

youth, and that the mother to his only known son, Oethelwald, may have been kin to Domnall Brecc, king of Dalriada. The *VCA* refers to the Abbess Æbbe, sister of Oswald, as a *uidua,* widow, a title Bede does not use. Zeigler speculated that Æbbe may have been widowed by Domnall Brecc himself, and waited until any children of that marriage were grown before taking the veil.[39] Ziegler credited much of Oswald's success in the early years of his kingship to the possibility of mentoring from Domnall Brecc.[40] James Campbell, drawing on Moisl, made a similar argument regarding the possibility of Northumbrian 'overlordship' over Iona, suggesting that English participation in Irish battles, the reported burial of Ecgfrith at Iona, and the suggestion that Iona paid tribute to Northumbria all point toward such a possibility.[41] While this line of argument cannot be proven, there were clearly interconnections between Irish and Northumbrian leading families which constituted the milieu within which Aidan and the Ionan monks who accompanied him to Lindisfarne in 634 operated, a time within living memory of the community which produced the *VCA.*

Aidan's arrival at Lindisfarne appears to have taken place in the same year as Cuthbert's birth. At Aidan's death in 651 the hagiographer reports that Cuthbert, then approximately seventeen years old, experienced a vision of 'the soul of a most holy bishop' carried to heaven in the hands of angels, later revealed to be Aidan himself.[42] Upon Aidan's death a new abbot-bishop was supplied by Iona, Fínán, who led the community for the next ten years. According to Bede, Fínán's successor, Colmán, was also Irish-born and Iona-trained. It was only after Colmán's departure following the Synod of Whitby in 664 that the first native-born abbot took over the leadership of Lindisfarne; thus, the bishopric of Northumbria was controlled by the Columban community at Iona for nearly its first three decades.

Cuthbert's entry into monastic life is reported by Bede to have taken place at the Columban monastery of Melrose. The anonymous Life, however, reports him receiving the Petrine tonsure and vows at Ripon, then over the course of Book II subtly shifts Cuthbert's sphere of operation north to Melrose, with visits to Coldingham and

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[39] Ziegler, 'Oswald'.
[40] Ziegler, 'Oswald'.
[41] James Campbell, 'The debt of the early English Church to Ireland', in *Irland und die Christenheit*, ed. by Ní Chatháin and Richter, 332-346, pp. 335-6.
[42] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 69-71.

Pictland. Only at the outset of Book III are readers informed that Cuthbert has in fact been the prior of Melrose, and presumably resident there for the majority of his early monastic years. Bede reports that Ripon was originally given to Eata, who brought Cuthbert there with him to serve as guestmaster, but the two of them returned to Melrose when Ripon was given to Wilfrid two years later.[43] Such rapid shifts in assignment may be seen to signal times of unrest and conflict in the church. A note of conflict, or at least comparison, may be seen in the *VCA* in IV.1 in which Cuthbert's continued modesty of appearance even after his election to the episcopacy is praised, a possible criticism of Wilfrid's enjoyment of Anglo-Saxon and Roman forms of adornment.

Evidence for Cuthbert's involvement with the Bernician royal family first appears in the *VCA* in II.3, his visit to Æbbe, in which the motherly abbess herself plays only a minor part. Not until late in Book III, as Cuthbert visits the royal abbess Aelfflaed, does the Lindisfarne hagiographer show him in direct contact with the political activities of the royal family. The single reference in the *VCA* to Cuthbert's journey on horseback at the end of Book I has led some to claim a noble lineage for him.[44] In contrast, however, the vision of Aidan's soul comes to him while he is praying all night outdoors as a shepherd, a more humble occupation. The Lindisfarne author is, at best, uninterested in Cuthbert's actual personal background, and may more positively be seen as using a lack of information, or deleting known information, to create a blank screen upon which to project Cuthbert's divine calling.

A final area of observation regarding the time of composition of the *VCA* concerns the Synod of Whitby, its ecclesiastical aftermath, and the continuing controversies involving episcopal sees after the death of Cuthbert. Thacker outlined the sources of tension in the latter third of the seventh century.[45] Wilfrid, a cleric most likely from Deiran territory, studied briefly at Lindisfarne in his youth, and made a pilgrimage to Rome between 653 and 658.[46] As noted, he was granted oversight at

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[43] Alan Thacker, 'Wilfrid [St Wilfrid] (*c.*634–709/10)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29409> [accessed 14 March 2014].
[44] Stancliffe acknowledged the tenuousness of this claim in 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary', p. 29.
[45] Thacker, 'Origins', pp. 116-118.
[46] Thacker, 'Wilfrid' in ODNB.

Ripon in 660, whereupon Eata and Cuthbert returned to Melrose.[47] Wilfrid was

ordained by the Frankish bishop Agilbert in 663, and successfully represented the

Roman party at Whitby in 664. With the break between Continental and Irish

influences in Northumbria, and the departure of Colmán and the Irish monks from

Lindisfarne, a period of intensified unrest began at Lindisfarne. Eata was sent to

Lindisfarne to be abbot at Colmán's request, and Cuthbert came to be prior. There

was, however, no bishop at Lindisfarne for the years 664 to 678, during which time

Wilfrid oversaw the Northumbrian church from the see at York, nearly one hundred

and fifty miles to the south.[48] Wilfrid's banishment in 678 provided the opportunity to

restore smaller divisions within Northumbria, with sees at York, Hexham, and Lindsey.

Eata initially took Hexham; Lindisfarne was restored three years later. Cuthbert was

consecrated bishop of Lindisfarne in March of 685, serving in that capacity for two

years only, before returning to his hermitage on Farne Island to die. Wilfrid's return to

Northumbria in 686, with Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, appointing him to

Hexham on Eata's death, and deposing Bosa in York and Eadhade in Ripon,

represented an attempt to restore Wilfrid's former glory, but portions of the Bernician

diocese had fallen away as regional boundaries shifted. His return was short-lived, and

in 691 he was exiled from Northumbria again. His later sphere of influence was

confined to the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[49] While tensions were reduced with

Wilfrid's second exile in 691, they may have been renewed upon his return to Hexham

in 705.[50] This period of relative calm represents the exact period of likely composition

of the anonymous Life. Kirby maintained that Bede's Prose Life of Cuthbert shows

signs of continued tension through and after the episcopacy of Eadfrith, the bishop at

whose request the anonymous Life was composed. It is remarkable, then, that the

Lindisfarne Life shows so little direct evidence of its surrounding politics, both secular

and ecclesiastical, and such regard for Cuthbert's calm, pastoral manner. Thacker

summarized the period surrounding the composition of the *VCA* thus:

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[47] Thacker, 'Wilfrid' in ODNB.
[48] Thacker, 'Origins', p. 115.
[49] Rollason, *Northumbria,* p. 44.
[50] D. P. Kirby, 'The Genesis of a Cult: Cuthbert of Farne and Ecclesiastical Politics in Northumbria in the Late Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 46 (1995), 383-97, p. 396.

'[T]he situation presumably remained unstable, since Wilfrid retained many supporters… Any prospect of his return must have been viewed with alarm at Lindisfarne and elsewhere. That this was still a major issue is shown by Aldfrith's need in 703 to summon a fresh council at Austerfield, which ended acrimoniously with the excommunication of Wilfrid and his followers. The translation of Cuthbert's remains, and all the associated activities enhancing the cult, have to be seen against this background of uncertainty'.[51]

Against the backdrop of tension, uncertainty, political and ecclesiastical power-brokerage and upheaval, the *VCA* presents a strikingly serene protagonist. One may imagine, with Campbell, some of the motivations for entering monastic life in late-seventh-century Northumbria. Citing the annalistic references to Alric, *dux* then *clericus,* and Edwin, *dux* then *abbas,* he surmised that some entered the monastery to avoid the miseries of political life.[52] One companion of the king was installed at Lindisfarne because of illness, and was served by Wilfrid during his time there.[53] Female members of the royal family may have chosen religious life as much to appeal to God for the survival of their loved ones in battle as to practise religious devotion. And those who simply wished for a peaceful united realm in which to live may have been inspired both by the gospel message of the Prince of Peace, and by the irenic, pastoral reputation of Cuthbert. His involvement with the royal family was played down and his provision of food and care to the people in surrounding towns and villages was emphasized by the Lindisfarne hagiographer, perhaps to reassure those who had come to the monastery that they could abide there in peace. Not without cause, then, would the reader notice motifs of abundance, healing, forgiveness, and above all encounter with the Other and reconciliation of opposites in the Lindisfarne Life. Given the *sitz im leben* of this text, this may be read as a message of concerned knowledge for its author, the creation of a realm of peace in which all could live: rich and poor, royal and common, old and young, male and female. All were fed, all were healed, all were welcome. Where Bede may have been more concerned to portray the

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[51] Thacker, 'Origins' pp. 116-7.
[52] James Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert and his Early Cult', in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, ed. by Bonner, et al, 3-19, p. 14.
[53] Campbell, 'Elements in the Background' p. 14, citing *Vita Wilfridi.*

building up of a Northumbrian Church, the earlier hagiographer chose his motifs to convey inclusivity and peace. This concern may also account for the dearth of obvious 'folk' material, which might have risked appealing to particular ethnic groups at the expense of others. While Cuthbert may have been cast in an Irish mode, the Lindisfarne hagiographer manages to combine his sources in such a way as to present his protagonist as an ascetic like Antony, an Irish monastic like Columba, and a bishop like Martin, without reducing Cuthbert to a mere imitation of any of these.

3.2   WORLD OF THE TEXT

3.2.1   MAJOR BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS AND PRECEDENTS

Major biblical themes in *VCA* include healing, feeding, prophecy, and visions (including angels). In Book I, as a youth, Cuthbert is the recipient of each of these miracles; in Book II, as a novice in Melrose, miracles of this same range seem to occur almost incidentally while he is going about his responsibilities. Mid-way through Book II Cuthbert begins to emerge as a leader, going about on missionary journeys, visiting women religious, receiving miraculous provisions of food, and offering prophetic statements as the opportunity occurs. The climax of Book II is his first healing act, portrayed in a passive manner, with the (female) victim rising to greet him on arrival, and being healed as she touches the bridle of his horse.

Book III is concerned with his time on Farne Island, and the challenge of balancing active with contemplative life. Miracles in this section, in particular chapters two through five, deal with the natural world, and again seem to be passively bestowed upon Cuthbert rather than enacted by him, events that surround Cuthbert rather than acts he engages in. Among these are a stone which has moved without obvious human effort, as did the rock at Christ's grave at Easter; water flowing from a rock, as in the wilderness wanderings of Exodus; a timber that rises from the sea to provide a foundation for his use, a sign that the sea itself obeys his needs; and in III.5, two ravens tear away at a roof on the island, and after being rebuked return to the island and make themselves useful to Cuthbert, presumably reminding the reader of the ravens who brought provisions to Elijah in 1 Kings 17. Sandra Duncan argued for an interpretation of these miracles as symbols of Cuthbert's episcopal career as a 'church-

builder'.[54] If so, this would show the anonymous writer skilfully using Cuthbert's time of solitude as necessary preparation for his brief service as bishop of Lindisfarne. There may also be other better ways to read this section, to be discussed below.

Book IV addresses Cuthbert's time as bishop, and is nearly two-and-a-half times the length of any of the earlier sections of the Life. The earlier themes of healing, prophecy, and visions are revisited in this chapter, as if to suggest that the time on Farne was about storing up the spiritual power that would be spent generously in the two short years of Cuthbert's episcopacy. Episodes of healing and prophecy dominate this section, there is another vision of a soul taken to heaven, and the final chapter includes reference to bread Cuthbert had blessed, a slight allusion to the earlier theme of miraculous feedings, manna, and the Eucharist.

The practise of prayer is a constant thread throughout the Life, appearing in fifteen separate chapters in the text.[55] In community, in private, in praise or in need, in ecstasy or desperation, prayer is a steady element of the religious life, and one that the hagiographer clearly wishes the reader to understand is the source of Cuthbert's spiritual power. Prayer emerges from Cuthbert's soul as the sweet water springs up from the rock of his solitary cell. He is the heir of the entire Judeo-Christian heritage, from Moses through Elijah to Christ.

Healings appear to be patterned on pericopes from Matthew, Mark and Luke, with only a rare allusion to the Fourth Gospel. Conditions that receive healing from Cuthbert include lameness or paralysis, on occasion explicitly healed in conjunction with the offer of forgiveness; demonic possession, sometimes equated with insanity; and illness at the point of death resulting in a near-resurrection or resuscitation in two cases. On some occasions healings are delegated to others, although in one case Cuthbert changes his mind and proceeds himself, perhaps reminiscent of an episode from Matthew in which Jesus accomplishes an exorcism which his disciples failed to accomplish.[56] No healings of blindness or leprosy occur in this narrative, in contrast to their frequency in the gospels.

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[54] Sandra Duncan, '*Signa de Caelo* in the Lives of St Cuthbert: the impact of biblical images and exegesis on early medieval hagiography', *Heythrop Journal,* XLI (2000), 399-412.
[55] *VCA* I.1, I.2, I.5, I.6, I.7, II.1, II.3, II.4, III.3, III.4, IV.1, IV.5, IV.9, IV.15, IV.16.
[56] Matthew 17.17; *VCA* II.8.

Feeding miracles occur throughout the *vita*, and always recall Exodus and Eucharist as fundamental biblical archetypes. There are additional miraculous provisions of food in the Bible, including 1 Kings 19.4-6, 1 Samuel 10.3-4, and the miraculous feedings in the Gospels, including John 6.9 in which a young boy provides the necessary fragment which catalyses the larger event. In the *VCA* these occur almost exclusively in Books I and II, suggesting that feeding is a beginning or preliminary miracle, nourishment for something greater, but not of ultimate value compared to the healings and life-and-death prophecies which take place in later chapters. Feedings include such substances as bread, which appears in conjunction with references to angels, as well as in healing stories; a dolphin, in which tale Cuthbert progresses from being fed to being an agent of feeding others, although God is always the source; and a more conventional fish which was provided by an eagle, the symbol of John's gospel.

Cuthbert is the recipient of several visions, the majority of which are explicitly about life and death, and follow the pattern in Luke 16.22, the parable of Dives and Lazarus, in which a soul is described as ascending to heaven in the hands of angels, even though the hagiographer cites the story of Jacob at Bethel, Genesis 28.12, in I.5, the first such instance. The visions include the sight of Aidan's soul raised to heaven while Cuthbert is out shepherding, explicitly binding Cuthbert to the founder of the community at Lindisfarne which he will eventually lead; the soul of a reeve or secular leader in the region, briefly alluded to in I.7, and the soul of a monk of the monastery at Whitby, told in IV.10. An additional vision involves the ability to see clearly the nature of a fire which is an illusion cast by the devil, found in II.6.

Related to visions, Cuthbert speaks prophetically, and his prophecies often address issues of life and death, although not exclusively. Prophecy is an obvious biblical motif deriving initially from the Hebrew Bible, and carried into the Christian Canon in, for example, Jesus's lament and prophecy over Jerusalem's impending destruction, and in his predictions of his own death. In the *VCA* prophecies are spoken both by and about Cuthbert, beginning in Book I in which a young boy prophesies that Cuthbert will become a bishop, Book II in which he foresees food, security, healing, and the episode of illusory fire, Book III in which Aelfflaed, abbess of Whitby and sister to the king, asks three questions regarding the future, including her brother, King

Ecgfrith's life span, and Book IV, in which prophecies include the fulfilment of the prediction of Ecgfrith's death, and the deaths of a hermit, a monk of Aelfflaed's community, and Cuthbert himself.

Some of the hagiographer's allusions to biblical passages are problematic, as in the reference in Book I.4 to God healing Tobias of blindness through the ministration of an angel, where in the Vulgate, the angel Raphael instructs Tobias in the proper method for healing his father's blindness. The role of the angel in offering instruction for healing may be the intended reference, but the confusion regarding who in fact is healed is perplexing, and may be either an indication of the use of an unknown translation, or a sign of the habit of quoting Scripture from memory, attested to within the text itself at IV.1.[57] Later on, the hagiographer claims that the lions 'ministered' to Daniel while he was in the lions' den (II.3), and further claims that Saint Paul 'foresaw' a tempest and subsequent calm in Acts, neither of which matches available translations (II.4). In addition, Colgrave appears to misidentify a quotation from Acts in IV.9 in which Cuthbert tells the hermit Herebehrt that they will never see each other again. The pertinent passage in *VCA* reads thus: '*Iam enim ab hac hora numquam iterum in hoc seaculo sicut Paulus Effesis promiserat, **nos inuicem erimus uisuri**'* (IV.9). Colgrave associates the passage with Acts 18.21, '*sed valefaciens, et dicens, Iterum revertar ad vos Deo volente, profectus est ab Epheso',* while the closer match appears two chapters later, in Acts 20.25, '*Et nunc ecce ego scio quia amplius **non videbitis faciem meam** vos omnes, per quos transivi prædicans regnum Dei'*, and 20.38, '*dolentes maxime in verbo, quod dixerat, quoniam **amplius faciem eius non essent visuri.***'[58]

Identification of images and sayings derived from the four gospels reveals a predominant pattern of references to material from the synoptics: twenty allusions refer to material that appears in two or more of the synoptics, six to material that appears in Luke alone, none to material solely from Mark, and seven to material that is unique to Matthew. Four allusions appear to derive from the Fourth Gospel, most notably the story of the eagle who provides Cuthbert with fish (II.5), and the

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[57] A similar attribution of having memorized Scripture is made of Antony in *VA* ch.3.
[58] Latin Vulgate Edition, ed. and trans. by Ronald L. Cote, Jr. (2009) <http://www.sacredbible.org/studybible/index.htm> [accessed on 20 March 2014].

references to 'living water' in Book III.[59] The material that comes solely from the Gospel of Matthew appears to focus on the attributes of active ministry, including 'teaching and baptizing',[60] binding and loosing of sins,[61] feeding the hungry,[62] and healing of persons 'according to [their] faith'.[63] In addition, while other gospels describe Jesus as seeking solitude at various times, only Matthew describes him as departing by boat to seek 'a desert place.'[64] The parallel to Cuthbert's time of solitude on Farne will be discussed below.

The Gospel of Matthew also provides a broad structural framework for the Life. The Gospel is arranged around five discourses, each followed by a series of 'mighty acts', many of which are miracles which are used as models in the Life of Cuthbert.[65] While the Life does not follow the Gospel in every respect, there are beginnings and endings of broad sections where parallels between the two texts may be observed. The table below shows the relevant correlations.

Structural Correlations between *VCA* and Gospel of Matthew

	Life of Cuthbert		Gospel of Matthew
	Book I		*Chapters 1-4*
I.1	early childhood and calling	Ch 1	genealogy, annunciation and birth
I.5	vision of heaven and Aidan's soul	Ch 3	baptism and vision of heaven open
	Book II		*Chapters 5-13*
II.1	announcement of virtue and beginning of monastic life	Ch 5-7	Sermon on the Mount: the beginning of public ministry
	Book III		*Chapters 14-18*
III.1	withdraws to Farne for solitude; surrounded by water	Ch 14	Jesus retires to a solitary place by boat
III.6	prophecies re: life & death, including his own	Ch 16-18	Jesus predicts his own death

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[59] Others from John are a reference to washing feet, *VCA* II.2 and John 13.4-5, and the miracle at Cana, *VCA* II.4 and John 2.1-10.
[60] Matthew 28.19.
[61] Matthew 16.19 and 18.18.
[62] Matthew 25.34-45.
[63] Matthew 9.29.
[64] Matthew 14.13.
[65] Robert H. Smith, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), pp. 13-16; see also Benedict T. Viviano, 'The Gospel According to Matthew', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* ed. by Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1990), pp. 633-4.

	Book IV			*Chapters 19-28*
IV.1	election as bishop, begins final stage of Cuthbert's life		Ch 19	Jesus crosses the Jordan to approach Jerusalem to die
IV.8-11	prophecies fulfilled: king's death, hermit's death, abbess's, monk's, his own death		Ch 24	final prophecies regarding his own death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and signs of the last days
IV.13	death and burial		Ch 27	crucifixion and burial
IV.14-15	found incorrupt; healings occur at burial site		Ch 28	resurrection and continuation of ministry via the disciples

3.2.2 HAGIOGRAPHICAL MODELS

As noted above, evidence of dependence upon several fourth- and fifth-century texts appears across the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti.* The hagiographer has imported several substantial passages from other Lives*,* most notably in the first two chapters of Book I in which the common tropes of humility and obedience on the part of the author, reliability of the sources used, and the selection of 'few out of many' possible anecdotes are presented. Passages from Evagrius's translation of Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* and Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini* appear in Books III and IV, associated with Cuthbert's time in solitude and later as a monk-bishop. These two texts, like the *VCA,* were composed against the backdrop of instability in the church. Athanasius portrayed Antony as a vigorous opponent of the Melitians and the Arians, issues that engaged Athanasius deeply, and caused him to go into exile in the desert himself, abandoning his episcopal seat in Alexandria.[66] Sulpicius, likewise, recounted the development of the Priscillianist controversy in which Martin attempted to moderate a death sentence that was decreed by the emperor in a heresy case.[67] It may be that times of great turmoil in the Christian community were most likely to call for accounts of heroes who could fulfil the decree of Christ, 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' as recorded in Matthew, chapter five.[68] The significance of each of the particular borrowings will be discussed within the relevant section of the structural analysis.

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[66] William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 58, 94-96.

[67] Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 278-289.

[68] Mt 5.9, from the Sermon on the Mount, which will come up for further discussion in the present chapter.

3.2.3 FOLK MOTIFS

The hagiographer appears to have exercised marked restraint in his use of folk material. He has incorporated a few folktale-type anecdotes along the way: the two small sea animals who warm and dry Cuthbert's feet in II.3 (Thompson B-256, Animal as servant of saint), the repentant ravens in III.5 (Thompson B-256.5, Feathered creatures obey saint), and perhaps the prescription of wheat flour and milk to heal Cuthbert's lame knee[69] (Angel of healing – Raphael – Thompson A-454.0.1, Magic healing salve, D1500.1.19; Magic healing milk, D1500.1.33.1). A search for analogues to the combination of milk and wheat or flour reveals no references to their use for a muscle or joint disorder. The few folk motifs that appear are tightly integrated into an overall structure which appears to combine openings and closings from Matthew with a biographical structure from the *Vita Martini.* There is, in addition, a strong reliance upon the tradition of the Desert Dwellers, in particular the *Vita Antonii*. The relationships among these influences will be examined *inter alia* in the structural analysis.

3.2.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES

The figure of Cuthbert can be read as a reconciler who encounters and integrates opposites in such a way as to permit a new synthesis to emerge. He comes from no one and nowhere, so is not overtly identified with any nation or party. The Lindisfarne hagiographer portrays him entering at Ripon and receiving the Petrine tonsure, items that are factually untrue, and may have been known to be so by at least some of the living members of the Lindisfarne community at the time of composition. This claim may perhaps be read as one way of acknowledging Cuthbert's role in bridging the gap between Ionan and Roman parties in the Christian councils and controversies of the day. Cuthbert bridged active and contemplative life, prayer and missionary life, isolation and social life, and Irish and Anglo-Saxon practices. He offered preaching, healing and baptism to rich and poor, male and female, young and old. While historians indicate that the spread of Christianity in Northumbria was heavily influenced by the royalty and nobility, this hagiographer makes it clear that Cuthbert

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[69] *VCA* I.4.

was no partisan, even of King Ecgfrith, and spent a significant amount of time preaching and healing among 'the people'.

The hagiographer also introduces a complementary motif to the integration of opposites in the form of the pattern of liminal immobilization and restoration of mobility, a motif which appeared in the Life of Samson, and which McCone discussed at length.[70] While the integration of opposites addresses the process of growth via conflict and resolution, the motif of liminal immobilization addresses the moments in which growth has become inhibited, and intervention is required to restore freedom of movement. The exemplar for this motif would be the act of raising someone from death, the paradigmatic example being the resurrection of Christ. The *VCA* exhibits several lesser examples beginning with Cuthbert's healing in Book I, through the healings of the nearly-dead women, to the two healings of paralyzed young men. In each case, illness, madness, or sin hold the individual hostage, and salvation in the form of forgiveness results in healing, mobility, and liberty.   This motif carries through to the conclusion of the narrative in the record of Cuthbert's incorrupt corpse and posthumous healings.

3.2.5   STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

3.2.5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the structural analysis is to highlight elements of the text which frame the narrative and indicate the nature of the concerned knowledge which may be seen to govern the hagiographer's choices of motifs. In this section the analysis of the *VCA* will follow the four-book structure established by the hagiographer, identifying key motifs and discussing likely sources for those motifs. Notice will be taken of patterns traceable to the synoptic Gospels, Matthew in particular, as well as the Lives of St Martin and St Antony, and traditions associated with St Columba. Discussion of potential interpretations of the motifs will be taken up in the third section of this chapter.

The four books of the Life follow a chronological pattern, with the exception of II.8, the healing of Hildmer's wife, which the hagiographer locates at the end of Cuthbert's time at Melrose, while telling the reader it took place while the saint was

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[70] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 184-190, referencing van Gennep and Lévi-Strauss.

prior of 'our church', Lindisfarne. This placement alerts the reader that the structure of the Life, though broadly chronological, will bend to accommodate the hagiographer's intentions. Nor does it follow the structure of the typical heroic biography, even allowing for the usual variations necessary to accommodate Christian saints.[71] The *VCA* is missing even the most rudimentary information on Cuthbert's conception, birth, and upbringing, elements so essential to the heroic biographical pattern that whole studies have been directed to that phase of the hero's life.[72]

The closest model for the structure of the *VCA* may be Sulpicius's *Vita Martini.* Stancliffe described the structure of the *VM* as fitting the schema of Suetonian biography, following analytical work by Kemper.[73] In this model, the first part of the work follows a chronological account until the peak of the subject's career is reached. From that point forward, episodes illustrating personality traits and achievements are grouped *per species*. This model seems to fit the *VCA* insofar as all four books progress more or less chronologically, with the one exception noted above, and the material in Book IV is organized in clusters around healings, then prophecies, then Cuthbert's death and posthumous miracles, all of which again are healings. Following this schema, Book III may be considered a transitional section in that it begins the shift away from strict chronology with its neglect of material from Cuthbert's time among the community members at Lindisfarne and its preference for material that favours a thematic development of his time in solitude. While Stancliffe claimed not to find evidence in the Lindisfarne Life of development of Cuthbert as a spiritual person,[74] the progression of his ability to comprehend the visions and visitations that he receives may be read developmentally; the discussion of this pattern will be undertaken below.

In summary, no single formula accounts for all of the hagiographer's structural choices for this text. Several independent structural influences are present in the text. The structural analysis will focus on identifying and connecting motifs that characterize the saint and align him with the broader Christian tradition within which he stands, emphasizing the parallels with the structure of the Gospel of Matthew.

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[71] Henken, 'The Saint as Folk Hero', p. 59.
[72] See, for example, Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, and other writings*, ed. by Philip Freund (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), Joseph Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1985).
[73] Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer*, p. 89.
[74] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert, Pastor and Solitary' p. 25.

3.2.5.2 Book One

The first two chapters of the Life of Cuthbert comprise a dual prologue and preface, an opening strategy similar to that found in the *Vita Martini* as well as in the *Vita Columbae*. The prologue asserts the author's undertaking of the project as an act of obedience to his bishop, Eadfrith, and is modelled on the prefaces to the *Vita Antonii* and the *Vita Martini*. Colgrave identified direct borrowings in I.1 which derive from the *Epistola Victorii Aquitani ad Hilarum,* an introduction to the Easter computation which was published by Victorius c. 457,[75] and suggested that they may be read as an implied endorsement of Roman practice in the Paschal controversy that continued into the eighth century. According to Bede, however, the actual Roman practice adopted by the Synod of Whitby was not the Victorian computus, but the method developed by Dionysius Exiguus.[76] Details of the Easter dating controversy lie beyond the scope of this thesis; however, the absence of a direct connection between the document used by the Lindisfarne hagiographer and the computational method used at Lindisfarne either before or after Whitby may be interpreted as weakening the argument that the choice is significant for what it says in regard to that particular debate and its outcome. The borrowing may, rather, have been a direct and relatively easy method by which to express the hagiographer's initial concerns regarding obedience and devotion to his bishop, and his desire to fulfil his duty toward his superior. The balance of chapter one is taken from the preface to the *Vita Antonii,* in which the writer expresses his faith, joy, and great gain derived from undertaking his task.[77] The hagiographer returns to the *Vita Antonii* in Book III in which Cuthbert pursues an eremitical spiritual life similar to Antony's. At this juncture, however, there seems to be no obvious thematic point to be made, only a convenient model for covering some basic introductory material.

Chapter two derives almost completely from Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini.* Again, this is a text which will appear later, specifically in Book IV in which the monk Cuthbert is called to become a bishop, as Martin was. The selection at this point, however, addresses the common themes of choosing a few from among the many

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[75] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 310, 60-62.
[76] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica,* V.21, pp. 310-317.
[77] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 62.

known stories about the hero, a claim which itself may be traced to the Gospel of John,[78] and asserts the veracity of both the hagiographer and his chosen sources. Once again, rather than comparing Cuthbert to Martin at this early stage of the text, the motivation for borrowing from this source may have been a simple matter of convenience.

The balance of Book I addresses the time of Cuthbert's childhood, youth, and early adult life previous to his entry into monastic life. Cuthbert is introduced with no parentage or lineage, and no location of birth, rendering him a person with no predetermined identity or loyalty. As this text was composed so close to the saint's life, it is unlikely that nothing whatsoever was known about Cuthbert's parentage (particularly if he was nobly born, as has been suggested), leading to the conclusion, or at least speculation, that the omission of this information was a deliberate decision on the hagiographer's part. Unusually, he did not attribute any extraordinary circumstances to the saint's conception or birth, but chose to present Cuthbert simply as the recipient of God's abundant grace. Cuthbert is proclaimed a future bishop at an early age, he is healed and nourished by the intervention of an angel, and he sees the soul of St Aidan carried to heaven by angels upon his death, a visionary dream which serves as a catalyst to his monastic vocation.

The childhood calling, an odd sort of 'annunciation' by a younger contemporary during playtime, is explicitly compared to God's call to several biblical characters in their youth: Jacob, Samuel, David and Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible, and John the Baptizer from the Gospels. This list of youthful heroes of the Bible may be compared to the genealogies commonly found in the Bible. While Mark and John show no interest in Jesus' conception, birth, or ancestry, and Luke's genealogy is oddly located and heavily embroidered,[79] Matthew's genealogy appears at the outset of his Gospel, and is clearly constructed with a theological purpose. In examining Matthew's genealogy, Smith noted the presence of the names of scandalous women, the trajectory to Abraham, and the division into three sections as signs that Matthew used the format of a genealogy to introduce thematic elements into his presentation of

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[78] John 21.25.
[79] Luke 3.22-38.

Jesus at the beginning of his life.[80] Significantly, while Cuthbert is not given biological parents, the hagiographer uses references to figures from the Hebrew Bible, including Jacob and Esau, Samuel and David, and Jeremiah to establish what might be considered a spiritual genealogy for his protagonist. His purpose is made explicit in I.3, that God calls certain exceptional servants in their youth and infancy, and Cuthbert is to be understood as one of these. Early in the narrative, then, the hagiographer may be seen to be using a strategy similar to that of Matthew's gospel to signal the importance of his protagonist by providing him with a thematic genealogy that places him among the great figures of biblical history.

Just as Cuthbert's parents are unreported, his early years likewise have few locally identifiable markers. No place names are mentioned until chapter five in which he is shepherding in the hills 'near the River Leader'. The geography around Melrose and Lindisfarne would have been familiar to eighth-century readers, but the hagiographer did not hesitate to include descriptions of the 'tempestuous sea', of hills as the site of an angelic vision while shepherding, of mountains as the setting for preaching and baptism, and of islands as secluded, 'completely surrounded by water,' or nearly uninhabitable. Here the hagiographer may be seen to have imbued the settings with a 'surplus of meaning', to use Ricoeur's phrase,[81] exploiting associations with biblical scenes familiar to readers and hearers of the text such as those concerning David the shepherd-king, or the shepherds who hear of Jesus' birth, which may lie behind rather than explicitly within the text.

The last episode concerning Cuthbert's childhood is related in I.4. Here Cuthbert as a boy undergoes the experience of liminal immobilization in the form of the unexplained infirmity located in his knee which renders him lame. Such a condition would have rendered him ineligible for the priesthood according to Hebrew Bible standards.[82] The good news of the Gospel, however, was embodied in the healing ministry of Jesus, and underscored by Matthew and Luke in Jesus's message to the followers of John the Baptizer, 'The blind receive their sight and the lame walk'.[83] In this way, Cuthbert embodied the transition from disfigured and immobile to healed,

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[80] Smith, *Matthew,* pp. 30-35.
[81] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 55.
[82] Leviticus 21.18-21.
[83] Matthew 11.4-5, Luke 7.22.

freed, and mobilized for ministry. As an aside, the formula for Cuthbert's healing in this chapter, milk and wheat, may represent a subtle entrée onto the theme of opposites insofar as the two elements derive from opposite sides of the agricultural process, vegetation and husbandry.[84] This episode is the first instance in which an angel appears to offer Cuthbert assistance. Angels appear in both the *Vita Martini* and the *Vita Antonii,* and in the *VM* angels heal Martin after he is injured in a fall.[85] The parallel to Martin's healing extends to the inclusion of the mention of healing salves applied to the wounds. The assistance of angels, however, may be traced to the Bible, in particular Psalm 91:11, ʹFor he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways'.

The balance of Book I covers two episodes in Cuthbert's pre-monastic life, and a short chapter listing miracles which the hagiographer omitted, but wished to include in brief. The two larger episodes include a miraculous feeding and the vision of a soul taken to heaven. The feeding story takes place within the context of a stormy night and a river crossing. These three motifs – feeding, storm, and river -- recall images from the life of Christ as well as the wilderness wanderings of Exodus, and form a motif complex that underscores Cuthbert's virtues and disciplines at an early stage of life. Lost and alone against the elements, Cuthbert is portrayed as calm, patient, and devoted to his prayers, even finishing them before inspecting the gift his horse has discovered. The feeding here is significant as it sets the stage for several more feeding miracles in Cuthbert's earlier years in monastic life, and underscores the act of the angel who protects and provides for the saint. The language used to describe Cuthbert's reception of the meat and bread is significant: he is said to have given thanks to God, blessed the food, and eaten (*gratias agens Deo, benedixit et manducauit*)*.*[86] Such language describes the actions of the celebrant at the Eucharist, and may be intended to suggest that, although Cuthbert had not yet entered religious life, he acted in a manner consistent with that of a priest.

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[84] The significance of this contrast, following the arguments of Northrop Frye, will be discussed in the following section.
[85] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini ,* ch. 19, in NPNF, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf211.html> [accessed 1 June 2013].
[86] *VCA* I.6.

The visionary experience in the next chapter involving Aidan's soul being carried to heaven at his death also incorporates angels, and serves to connect Cuthbert to Aidan spiritually, as the year of Cuthbert's birth connects the two saints historically.[87] The model for seeing souls carried to heaven can be traced to the parable of Dives and Lazarus,[88] although the image of the heavens opening occurs across the Hebrew Bible and Christian Canon.[89] Even though this episode takes place on a hill at night while Cuthbert is tending sheep, the hagiographer does not choose to explicitly invoke the Lukan image of the angels announcing the birth of Christ, but rather refers to Jacob at Bethel seeing angels going up and down a ladder connecting heaven and earth.[90] It may be that the image of vertical mobility was better suited to the hagiographer's purposes at this point than that of a verbal announcement. The identity of the soul ascending was not made clear until a few days later.

Two occupations are ascribed to Cuthbert' early life, shepherding, as noted above, and military service, which is only referred to in passing in the final chapter of Book I. Neither of these occupations is accompanied by any identifying detail or context, and both of them have deep biblical resonances. Shepherding, of course, recalls both David and Christ, the Good Shepherd, and military service recalls both the long history of Israel, and Paul's call to 'put on the full armour of God'.[91] In addition, military service may again recall the career of St Martin of Tours, but whether the motif here is intended to underscore a connection with the earlier saint is difficult to determine. In both cases, taking a life, even in military service, would have been at odds with Christian values, therefore presenting some degree of difficulty for a monastic writer to include in the Life of a saint. Sulpicius appears to have created a somewhat stylized story to account for Martin's enlistment, baptism, continued service, and subsequent dramatic separation from the army.[92] The Lindisfarne hagiographer preferred to say nothing at all about Cuthbert's time of service, simply

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[87] As observed above, Cuthbert appears to have been born the same year that Aidan arrived at Lindisfarne.
[88] Luke 16.22.
[89] Genesis 7.11, Psalms 78.23, Ezekiel 1.1, Malachi 3.10, Matthew 3.16, Mark 1.10, Luke 3.21, John 1.51, Acts 7.56 and 10.11, Revelation 4:1.
[90] *VCA* I.5, Luke 2.8-14, Genesis 28.10-22.
[91] Ephesians 6.10-18.
[92] Sulpicius, *Vita Martini* chapters II-IV; Stancliffe, *St Martin and his Hagiographer*, pp. 140-5.

relating the 'divine aid' which allowed him to flourish on 'meagre rations', comparing him to Daniel at the court of Nebuchadnezzar.[93]

3.2.5.3 Book Two

Book Two may best be described as Cuthbert's time in monastic formation. He is presented as being in possession of exemplary religious characteristics and habits in the first chapter, and the initial group of miracles surrounding him happen more or less as he is fulfilling his ordinary duties: welcoming a visitor to the monastery, saying his night-time vigils, visiting his foster-mother. Cuthbert is described by a second excerpt from the *Actus Silvestri* as 'angelic in appearance, refined in conversation, holy in works, unblemished in body, noble in nature, mighty in counsel, orthodox in faith, patient in hope, wide in charity.' (Evidently the reader is meant to infer that the previous leg injury is so thoroughly healed that it leaves no trace.) Colgrave noted that Adomnán and others used this same list of virtues in their hagiographical writings. Such borrowings will, of necessity, reduce the reader's ability to rely on the factual accuracy of the content. Noting the location within the narrative where such a list appears, however, is useful. The effect of this passage at the outset of Book II is to herald the period of Cuthbert's life in which his role as a conduit of God's power is taken up.

The significant parallel with Matthew occurs at chapter five, the Sermon on the Mount. The purpose of the Sermon is the announcement of the in-breaking Realm of God which the Gospel claims will be experienced within the context of poverty, mercy, righteousness, and peace-making. While the terminology differs, structurally the Sermon and the list of virtues each serve to announce the essential agenda for what will follow, and in each case the announcement is followed by a series of miraculous events. The Sermon is followed by a series of healings and exorcisms, including the Centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, the two Gadarene demoniacs, and the paralyzed young man. Several of these serve as models for healings that will be attributed to Cuthbert later in his career, for the most part during his ministry as

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[93] *VCA* 1.7, Daniel 1.10-15.

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bishop.[94] The parallel section in Book II of the *VCA* also lays out the full range of acts and themes which present Cuthbert as prophet, priest, and healer for his community. Although the particular events differ, the Lindisfarne hagiographer utilizes direct quotes from Matthew's Gospel to anchor his account of this stage of Cuthbert's life. For example, Book II.5, the story of the eagle and the fish, incorporates the statement, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness…,' from Matthew 6.33; the reference to 'teaching and baptizing' in II.5 comes from Matthew 28.19; and the description of Hildmer's wife as *dæmonio vexabatur,* 'vexed by a devil' comes from Matthew 15.22, the story of the Canaanite woman's daughter. Chapters five and six are also set *inter montana,* in the mountains where Cuthbert is preaching to the *rusticanos,* the local people, an image that again recalls the Sermon on the Mount.

Three of the eight chapters in this section of *VCA* involve miraculous feedings, a paradigmatic Christian act grounded in the miraculous feedings of the Gospels,[95] which themselves have roots in the provision of water, manna, and meat during the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites,[96] as well as in activities surrounding the prophet Elijah.[97] In contrast to the feeding episodes in the gospels, the feedings in this section of the *VCA* are not accomplished by any act on Cuthbert's part, but rather are provided by God, sometimes without Cuthbert's prior knowledge, bringing them into closer alignment with the Hebrew Bible events. In some respects, while the circumstances surrounding the provision of food in each of the three episodes are unquestionably marvellous, the emphasis in each account seems to be on Cuthbert's growing awareness of what is possible when he cooperates with God's plan. For example, in the first feeding account in this section, Cuthbert is new in monastic life, and struggling to provide hospitality to a visitor to the monastery, a virtue that is of highest import both in Irish and Anglo-Saxon secular society, and a signal Christian virtue as well. He himself, however, is unable to provide the needed bread, and it is only provided for him after the guest has departed. The guest is then recognized to have been an angel. Not only would the reader be reminded of the passage in

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[94] Note here: the healing of the Centurion's servant, Matthew 8.5-13 parallels *VCA* IV.7; forgiveness and healing of a paralytic young man, found in Matthew 9.2, is paralleled twice in *VCA* IV.5 and IV.17.
[95] Matthew 14.21, 15.34-38, Mark 6.44, 8.4-9, Luke 9.14-17, John 6.10-11.
[96] Exodus 16.35, 17.6
[97] 1 Kings 17.6, 14, 19.6, 2 Kings 4.2-6, 42-44.

Hebrews on 'entertaining angels,'[98] but the provision of three loaves would have served as a reminder of the three visitors to the tent of Abram in Genesis 18.1-5, to whom the patriarch offers a 'morsel of bread'.

The next feeding takes place during a three-day delay on a missionary trip to Pictland related in chapter four. This miracle is enveloped in the mystical symbolism of threes: three monks, three portions of dolphin flesh sufficient for three days, on the triple feast day of Epiphany (the hagiographer spells out all three dimensions of the feast). Such an emphasis on the number three will of course carry Trinitarian connotations. This miracle is placed both away from the monastery and in the midst of a 'fierce tempest' (*ualida tempestate*), a term reflecting back to an episode in Acts 27, in which Paul attempts to calm his shipmates in the midst of a terrible storm. The hagiographer explicitly refers to this passage at the conclusion of this chapter, as well as to the provision of food to Elijah, and avoids any of the obvious Gospel parallels. One may imagine a possible didactic purpose in this approach insofar as the monks may have been expected to know of the Gospel and Exodus feedings, as well as Jesus's appearances on or near water, either stormy or calm. The references to Elijah and Acts may be construed as somewhat more obscure, and intended to invite the monks into deeper reflection on the breadth of God's reach in times of need.

The third feeding follows in II.5. Again, Cuthbert does nothing to provide the food himself, but instead assures a young boy that 'God will provide food for those who hope in him.'[99] In this episode, Cuthbert initiates a conversation with an unnamed young boy, and tells him that God has instructed an eagle to provide their mid-day meal. When the boy finds the eagle by a river bank with a large fish, he eagerly brings the whole fish to the saint. He is then reproved for not sharing the fish with 'our fisherman' (*piscatori nostro*). The reader may be reminded of the account in John (whose symbol is the eagle) of the young boy whose lunch provides the material for the feeding of five thousand,[100] one of the few instances in which an allusion to John's gospel occurs in this narrative. The hagiographer also notes that while half of the fish fed the eagle, the other half fed Cuthbert, the boy, and the men who

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[98] Hebrews 13.2.
[99] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 87.
[100] John 6.9.

accompanied them, a modest but welcome miracle which receives no fanfare in the text.

The effect of these three feedings at this stage of the narrative may be seen as the promise of God's provision for those in need or peril. And while Cuthbert's role in these episodes is more prophetic than causal, his prayers and his vision are central to the well-being of those around him. Grounded in Hebrew Bible and Christian precedents, followers of Cuthbert may have heard these episodes as assurances that they would not go hungry, physically or spiritually, if they remained faithful followers of their leader, Cuthbert, and their Lord, Jesus Christ. They may also have noted that Cuthbert's awareness of and sensitivity to God's miraculous provision is becoming more acute over time, and so be encouraged to increase their own perception and faith.

Tucked among the three feeding stories is a charming folk-type story through which the hagiographer depicts Cuthbert maintaining his ascetic practice of all-night prayer and immersion in the sea while visiting the monastery at Coldingham. On his return to shore, two 'little sea animals' (*pusilla animalia maritima*; Bede identifies them as otters) warm and dry his feet, returning to the sea after receiving a blessing. This motif falls under Thompson B256, Animals as servants of a saint. Colgrave noted that the practice of praying while immersed is widely associated with monastics of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brittany, as well as a few Anglo-Saxon saints including Wilfrid and Aldhelm.[101] The practice of immersion, however, is also a baptismal image, and as such, a reminder of the symbolic death and resurrection that is the central *kerygma* of the Christian community.

As the hagiographer relates it, however, the core of the story is neither the prayer in the sea nor the ministrations of the sea creatures, but the presence of a spying monk, one who has followed Cuthbert from the monastery out of sheer curiosity. Adomnán tells a similar story in his Life of St Columba, among the collection of angelic appearance stories.[102] In each case, the unnamed spy is struck with terror at the sight he observes, and confesses his sin to the saint. And in both cases, the saint offers forgiveness on the condition that the offender keeps the story secret until after

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[101] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 319.
[102] Adomnán, *Life of St Columba,* III-16, pp. 217-219.

the saint's death. Such a command, Colgrave suggested, derives from Christ's command to the three who were present at the Transfiguration, to keep secret what they had seen.[103] While this attribution is appealing, it does not address the element of transgression on the part of the observers that is so pronounced in the examples from Columba and Cuthbert.

One may return here to the question of the relationship between the Lindisfarne Life and Adomnán's Life of Columba, since a number of episodes resemble each other, as has been noted. Episodes in Cuthbert's Life, however, consistently exhibit less drama than those in Columba's. Like Columba, Cuthbert is visited by and ministered to by angels. They both see the souls of faithful Christians taken to heaven by angels upon their death. Each sees fires, both real and illusory. Each is known for the gifts of prophecy and healing. (The reader may even have been meant to associate the 'sea creatures' with the story of the horse that was so fond of Columba that it wept upon the saint's breast just before Columba's death.)[104] In each case, however, Columba is portrayed as a commander of great power, while Cuthbert maintains a more modest demeanour and scope of accomplishment. Taking together the elements of ascetic prayer, the appealing actions of the sea creatures, and the presence and confrontation with the spy, this chapter may represent the hagiographer's attempt to express a sense of identification with the Irish heritage of Lindisfarne, Melrose, and Iona.

Just prior to the healing at the end of Book II, Cuthbert is involved with two miracles involving fire. Chapter six resembles an account in the Life of St Benedict in which a bronze idol appears to create a fire in the abbey kitchen.[105] In both cases, the listeners are deceived by the appearance of fire and attempt to quench it, but the saint is not deceived, and is able to disabuse the others of their error.[106] In chapter seven, the home of Cuthbert's former nurse is threatened by a real fire which he diverts with prayer. This episode bears some resemblance to a story in the *Vita Martini* in which

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[103] Matthew 17.9, Mark 9.9; Luke's account, 9.36, omits the command but retains the silence on the part of the disciples.

[104] This story comes very shortly after the story of the spying monk, Adomnán, *Life of St Columba,* III-23, p. 227.

[105] Gregory I, *Second Dialogue,* chapter 10, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/g1-benedict1.asp> [accessed 1 April 2011].

[106] A similar episode appears in Book Two of the *Vita Samsonis I.* Visions of fire, either divine or malign, appear in many saints' Lives*.*

Martin controls the scope and direction of a fire by his personal presence. In the *VM,* however, Martin himself had set the fire to destroy a pagan temple, something Cuthbert never does, and there is no mention of concern for any persons nearby, let alone a person in close relationship to Martin himself.

Appearances of fire have particular resonance within the Christian community. God's commanding presence is represented by the Burning Bush and the guiding Pillar of Fire in Exodus. Fire is also a sign of punishment and great anger, as at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.[107] A similarly ambiguous use of the image of fire occurs in Matthew chapter three in which John the Baptizer announces Jesus's intention to baptize the children of Abraham with fire, and on the other hand will gather the wheat and send the chaff into the fire.[108] Just as for Matthew the fire could be a baptism or a punishment, so for the anonymous writer, the fires in Book II could be either real or imaginary, and therefore required different responses. This pair again demonstrates Cuthbert's growing spiritual abilities, the significance of which will be discussed in the interpretive section below.

The culmination of Book II is the healing of Hildmer's wife, in which Cuthbert is presented as an agent of healing for the first time. The victim in this case embodies a range of significant themes – this first healing is for a woman, she is 'vexed by a devil' (*dæmonio vexabatur*), the phrase which appears in Matthew as the Canaanite woman describes her daughter. The wife is also 'sick' or 'weak to the point of death' (*pene usque ad mortem infirmantem*), that is, immobilized by her illness, captive to the force of the demon who possesses her. This healing is significant in that it presents Cuthbert as one who was once immobilized now liberating another. The devils who can deceive others not only cannot deceive the saint, but are cast out by his mere presence. No gesture or command of healing is recorded; the woman rises (which she formerly could not do) at Cuthbert's arrival and sets her hand to his horse's bridle, and the reader is told she returned to her senses. Whether the bridle then qualifies as a healing relic is open for question; the text does not report any further healings associated with it. The recipient of the healing, while a faithful woman, is nonetheless a female, and not a religious, but a married woman. She, like Peter's mother-in-law

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[107] Genesis 19.24.
[108] Matthew 3.11-12.

whose healing is related in Matthew 8.14-15, is at one remove from the inner circle of those closest to the central figure, indicating a movement outward from the monastic confines into the wider world of lay Christians and potential converts. As her husband is identified as a *gesith*, a wellborn attendant to the king, this woman's social status is among the elites who would have been first to be converted, rather than the people of the hills and woods whom Cuthbert will encounter later.

3.2.5.4 BOOK THREE

The key theme of Book III is Cuthbert's time of withdrawal into solitude, and the parallel with Matthew takes place after the death of John the Baptizer, at which point Jesus 'departed thence by ship into a deserted place apart'.[109] In each of the two narratives, a crossroad is reached and the protagonist must prepare himself for the final act in his life's drama, an act which in each case will demand great sacrifice. And in each case the writer employs motifs of withdrawal, liminality, and death, drawing readers into an increased intensity as the 'end' of the story begins to take shape. In addition, just as this section in Matthew began with Jesus's withdrawal from active ministry for a time of prayer and renewal, so does it close with his first prediction of his own death, as does Book III.

Book III covers the period between two active stages of Cuthbert's ministry, his time at Melrose and his time as a bishop. Cuthbert is reported to have left Melrose to avoid worldly glory, leaving 'privately and secretly'. His initial destination is either unknown or simply left unstated. The reader then learns that Cuthbert was called by Eata to become prior of the community on Lindisfarne during which time he established their rule of life. His time at Lindisfarne, most likely on the order of ten to twelve years, is covered in a few brief sentences. Since the testimony of the community is the writer's greatest source for most of the material he relates in the narrative, it is curious that the text gives virtually no description of Cuthbert's time with them. Either this part of his life is so well-known the writer feels it unnecessary to include it, or no miracles took place during that time in contrast to even his early youth (which seems unlikely), or the hagiographer has displayed the quality and activities of

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[109] Matthew 14.13.

Cuthbert's life in community well enough in the previous section. As always, the argument from silence is impossible to prove.

After some years, then, he goes to the island of Farne to live as a solitary.[110] Here the miracles involve earth, sea, and sky – the natural elements do God's bidding to provide for Cuthbert's needs, with no need for command, or even request in most cases. This is not, however, a time of silence. Speech is explicitly included in the description of Cuthbert's years on Farne, as the hagiographer tells the reader that whenever monks come to visit, Cuthbert preaches, or prays with them first, before any other work is done. In addition, III.6 relates his prophetic conversation with Abbess Aelfflaed.

Chapter one announces most directly the pairs of opposites which come to the fore from this point in the narrative to its close: he leaves community life, then returns out of obedience; he heals those who are both present and absent, he is said to embody both active and contemplative life, his cell is constructed by both digging down and building up. The hagiographer even pairs the rule established by Cuthbert with the Benedictine rule, claiming that the community follows them both in his own lifetime. This motif of pairs and opposites which are reconciled and united in Cuthbert's presence has been hinted at previously, but here it becomes a major pronouncement just as he begins the intense preparation necessary for the concluding portion of his life in ministry.

The image of the sea is central to both the *VCA* and Matthew at this point. Previously in the *VCA* the hagiographer recorded Cuthbert's actions in praying all night by and in the sea and leading the voyage to the Niduari. Now he is on an island that is surrounded on every side by water (*undique in medio mari fluctibus circumcinctam*). In spite of the appearance of monastic visitors in chapters two, three and four, and his visit to the abbess in chapter six, the hagiographer claims that Cuthbert was 'cut off from the sight of men'. This period in the development of Cuthbert's religious life is emphasized, knowing that the subsequent stage will be regrettably brief, and in its intensity will exhaust the saint's energies almost to the point of death. So, too, does Matthew place Jesus's desire for solitude and his confrontation with the sea and the

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[110] Bede records two moves (*VCP*, XVII, in Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 215), the Lindisfarne hagiographer only one.

waves tossed by a contrary wind just before his Transfiguration and final preparation before going to Jerusalem.[111] For Cuthbert as for Christ, the period of time just prior to the most demanding aspects of ministry, the time in which each of them will sacrifice himself for others, must be prepared for in a liminal time and space, away from crowds, and to a great extent, even from friends and disciples.

Sandra Duncan offered an analysis of the miracles in Book III, advocating for 'discernment of the metaphorical and symbolic language of the hagiographer' in an effort to do justice to the genre.[112] She argued that the time in solitude was itself a form of martyrdom and a necessary step in order for Cuthbert to contribute to the building up of the church in Northumbria.[113] She interpreted the miracles on Farne involving natural substances -- rock, living water, the twelve-foot beam of wood, and birds -- in reference to appearances of the same elements in Scripture, and claimed that the Lindisfarne Life portrays Cuthbert in the role of a builder of the Church.

Not all of Duncan's claims are persuasive, however. She argued, for example, that the Anonymous Life placed greater emphasis than Bede on Cuthbert's building of a cell of rock, however, Bede in fact makes very similar claims for Cuthbert's skill with rock and stone.[114] She noted that the Lindisfarne hagiographer explicitly chose to equate the water produced in the rocky cell with Moses[115] and Samson,[116] and extended the image to include Jesus's self-description as the source of living water in John 4:10.[117] She included a reference to 1 Corinthians 10.1-4 as well, in which the Rock and source of living water is Christ. She went on to argue that the reference to rock (*petra*) in the *VCA,* was intended as an allusion not to Christ but to Peter, the rock upon which the universal church was to be built, and an indication of solidarity with Rome. The jump from rock as Christ to rock as Peter is not completely logical, however, and requires firmer justification than she offered. Further, the assumption that images of rock and stone in the *VCA* can be read as endorsements of Roman authority seems too far a stretch to be persuasive. In the time of Cuthbert's

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[111] Matthew 15.24.
[112] Duncan, '*Signa de Caelo*', pp. 399-412.
[113] Duncan, '*Signa de Caelo*', p. 401.
[114] Bede, in Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 217.
[115] Exodus 17.6.
[116] Judges 15.19.
[117] See also Song of Solomon 4.15, Jeremiah 2.13 and 17.13, Zechariah 14.8, John 7.38.

withdrawal from active ministry, issues of loyalty to one or another side in an ecclesiastical dispute would be far less compelling for readers than concerns for Cuthbert's, and by extension the reader's, personal spiritual development.

Finally, Duncan examined the story of the two ravens who at first undermined Cuthbert's building efforts, and then repented and brought him grease for his boots, noting that Bede had added an account of birds stealing from Cuthbert's crop of barley, an incident taken from the Life of St Antony. She equated the ravens in the earlier narrative with symbols of sin and guilt as found in Ambrose and Jerome,[118] suggesting that the emphasis was on Cuthbert's role 'loosing and binding' sins, which comes up explicitly in Book IV. Bede's account appears to focus on the repentance of the ravens, thus shifting the picture of Cuthbert from inheritor of Petrine authority to compassionate pastor.

While the individual allusions may have merit, Duncan's picture of Cuthbert's miracles on Farne prefiguring a career as the powerful builder of the Northumbrian church does not compare harmoniously with the whole of Book III, nor with the rest of the Lindisfarne Life. Book II records three episodes in which Cuthbert is engaged in missionary work: the sea voyage to Pictland in chapter four, and references to teaching and baptizing in chapters five and six, presumably journeying on foot. During almost all of Book III Cuthbert is on Farne, and small groups of brothers come to visit him, no more than four at any one time. Then in Book IV, in which Cuthbert takes on the role of bishop with his see at Lindisfarne, out of a full eighteen chapters, only four include references to preaching or to gatherings of people who come to see and hear him. The balance of Book IV shows Cuthbert doing much as he had done in Book II, healing and prophesying. If Cuthbert's time on Farne were intended as illustration of a great and powerful church builder, one might expect to see greater emphasis throughout the text on locations where churches had been built, or named clergy who were staffing those churches in subsequent chapters. The particulars of Book IV will be addressed below; it will suffice at this point to observe that locations mentioned in chapters three through seven, the missionary section, include the district of Kintis, the village of *Bedesfeld*, the region of *Ahse*, and the village called *Medilwong*, all unidentified according to Colgrave, as well as the city of Carlisle where the queen is in

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[118] Ambrose, *De mysteriis;* Jerome, *Dialogus contra Luciferianos;* in Duncan, '*Signa de Caelo*', p. 404.

residence and so unlikely to be a newly-built church site.[119] Named clergy are limited

to the priest Aethilwald, prior of Melrose, and Tydi, priest of Melrose and Lindisfarne

and source for the Life, both of whom appear to be associated with existing monastic

communities, not rural churches. Both observations argue against an intention to

portray Cuthbert as a builder of churches. In contrast to Duncan's reading of Book III, it

would be more consistent with the overall plan of the Life to see Cuthbert's time of

solitude as a time of intense spiritual preparation for the exhausting work of being a

bishop, and the setting in which the central archetypal motif for the saint's life will

emerge, at least in the conception of the Lindisfarne hagiographer. The arguments for

such a hermeneutical approach will be considered below; suffice at this juncture to

observe that Cuthbert's time on Farne is more effectively described as soul-building

rather than church-building.

A major influence on this section of the VCA is the cluster of motifs found in

Exodus, chapters fourteen through twenty, the wilderness wanderings of the Israelite

people. Allusions to the wilderness of Exodus have already occurred in Books I and II,

but appear in higher concentration in Book III. As the Israelites must cross the Red Sea

at the beginning and the Jordan River at the end of their wanderings, so must Cuthbert

cross over water to reach his island refuge, and again as he leaves it to be consecrated

a bishop. Further, such elements as rock, wood and water figure strongly in this

section of Exodus, including Moses' position sitting on a rock as the Israelites battle the

Amalekites,[120] the production of water from rock,[121] and the casting of a tree into the

waters of 'Marah' to turn the water sweet where it had previously been bitter.[122]

While none of the anecdotes are exactly duplicated in the VCA, the hagiographer avails

himself of the same suite of images during the time in Cuthbert's life in which he has

taken himself to a similar wilderness, in this case his deserted island.

This same suite of images also appears in the Vita Antonii.[123] The movement to

the desert in search of solitude and spiritual growth began in the third century with

Antony of Egypt, and Cuthbert's hagiographer clearly knew of this influence in

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[119] Bullough argued for identification of 'Ahse' with the wall-station 'Aesica', or Great Chesters, based on his examination of the M manuscript, in Bullough, 'A Neglected early-ninth-century manuscript', p. 118.
[120] Exodus 17.12.
[121] Exodus 17.6.
[122] Exodus 15.22-25.
[123] Athanasius, Vita Antonii, in NPNF, second series, v.4, ed. by Schaff.

Christian life. Colgrave noted such parallel incidents as the visions of souls, ascetic manner of life, the gift of prophecy, the production of water from within the rocky cell on Farne, Cuthbert's engagement in manual labour to build his cell, and his foreknowledge of his own death between the *VCA* and the *VA*.[124] The sole extended borrowing from the *VA* occurs at the close of Book III in which the Lindisfarne hagiographer summarizes Cuthbert's life in solitude. Given the length and placement of this particular borrowing, it seems reasonable to conclude that the hagiographer intended readers to understand Cuthbert's retreat into solitude to be inspired by, and perhaps equally as holy as, Antony's life in the desert.

As happened in Book II, a particularly significant story is placed toward the end of Book III. In contrast to Cuthbert's time of solitude and prayer, Book III includes a visit to Coquet Island to visit the royal abbess Aelfflaed.[125] In this chapter Cuthbert makes three prophecies, an act which he had performed several times previously, but which does not appear elsewhere in Book III. Two of the prophecies deal directly with the royal dynasty, and demonstrate Cuthbert's gift of knowledge of the future of the royal family. The third prophecy addresses Cuthbert's own future; here he predicts both his acceptance of a bishopric and the brevity of his service. It would appear to be a deliberate choice on the hagiographer's part to locate this chapter here to inform the reader that the time for which Cuthbert is being prepared is finally coming up. In this context Cuthbert includes a warning to the abbess, *nulli hoc indicaveris*, 'give', or 'tell, this to no one', a command the synoptic Gospels frequently place on the lips of Jesus.[126] In these Gospels it is attached to various healings, to the Transfiguration of Christ, and to the conversation in which Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, with the implication that Jesus's identity as Messiah is not ripe to be revealed. The Lindisfarne hagiographer uses this statement only here and in II.3, with the spying monk. These should perhaps not be read as intended to shield some deep secret about Cuthbert's spiritual gifts, since he is frequently willing to offer his gifts publically. These two episodes may simply describe the trope of personal modesty, particularly

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[124] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 312-3, 315, 321, 327, 328, 335.
[125] *VCA* III.6.
[126] Matthew 8.4, 16.20, 17.9, Mark 7.36, 8.30, 9.9, Luke 5.14, 8.56, 9.21.

appropriate as they involve his prayer life and his election as bishop, both of which could be interpreted as signs of pride or ambition if shared unwisely.

Overall, then, Book III stands out as the time in which Cuthbert has withdrawn from active ministry to receive from God's grace all he needs for a solitary and ascetic existence. Similarly to Book I Cuthbert receives miraculous provisions of various sorts rather than actively making them happen. The active stages of his ministry are just behind, and just ahead. And those who encounter him during this time are reminded of his commitment to modesty and humility, his voluntary movement into a wilderness space, his desire to avoid worldly glory and recognition, and his devotion to prayer. The anonymous writer compares him explicitly with St Antony of the Desert at the end of chapter seven, neither too sad nor too elated, and emphasizes Cuthbert's personal devotion to the love of Christ and the mercy of God, which are the source of salvation. The conclusion is drawn from allusions to Romans 8.32, which Colgrave noted, and Ephesians 3.19, which he did not. The line from Romans states that God is gracious enough to give his Son for salvation, so can be counted on to give freely whatever else is needed. The line from Ephesians embellishes this idea, that the one who knows the love of Christ will be 'filled with all the fullness of God.' Cuthbert, in this stage of his life, is a model of devotion to God's love, cared for and filled with all that is needed, storing up, as it were, the grace that he will need to draw on in the last stage of his earthly life.

3.2.5.5 BOOK FOUR
The period of time covered in this final section includes Cuthbert's election as bishop, followed by a brief and intense period of public ministry, moving rapidly to his death and the posthumous miracles that take place at the site of his interment. It is by far the longest part of the work, and presents the final stage of Cuthbert's life as an outpouring of healing power and grace for which all his previous experience has prepared him. Prayer, spiritual and physical nourishment, missionary journeys and prophetic visions – all of these elements have contributed to Cuthbert's preparation for his life's greatest challenge. The hagiographer arranges the events of this period by type: a series of five healings is followed by four prophecies, all of which concern life and death, including Cuthbert's own impending death. These are followed by

Cuthbert's return to Farne during which time he continues to offer healing, both before and eventually after his death. His body is found incorrupt when the monks disinter it for a more exalted burial, a lesser sign of resurrection and the fullness of life which was granted to Cuthbert, and through him to others. The ending is remarkably abrupt, in contrast to the models which appear to have influenced the writer. There is no reminder to the reader to take the example of the saint to heart, for example, such as those that appear at the conclusions of the *Vita Martini* or the *Vita Antonii.* For whatever reason, this writer is finished and offers no stylistic prose, even from known models, at the end of the narrative.

In Book IV Cuthbert is presented as finally becoming a monk-bishop as was foretold in I.3. In this he is following in the steps of St Martin of Tours, and the hagiographer signals this correlation at the outset. Book IV.1 opens with the second extensive quotation from the *VM.* Borrowing two full sentences, the Lindisfarne author reminds his readers that his own skills are inadequate to the task of presenting all of Cuthbert's attributes, and then demonstrates the same by repeating Sulpicius's description of Martin's determination to remain a humble monk while also maintaining the full dignity of a bishop.[127] These two statements, however, form perhaps 16% of the introductory chapter to Book IV, and represent a borrowing of less than 20% of Sulpicius's chapter.[128] So, while the amount of borrowed material may appear significant, it is perhaps less demonstrative of ideological dependence on the figure of Martin, and as in the prologue, more likely a demonstration of the Lindisfarne hagiographer's willingness to use another's words when they have already said just the right thing. Book IV.1 in fact begins with several lines of original, if stereotypical, writing describing Cuthbert's reluctance to accept the bishopric, and continues after the *VM* section to include borrowings from the Letter to Titus and the First Letter to Timothy, classic descriptions of the qualifications for a bishop.[129] The chapter concludes with a signal verse from Matthew 25, 'He cared for the poor, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, took in strangers, redeemed captives, and protected widows and

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[127]Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 111, vs. Sulpicius, *Vita Martini,* ch. X.

[128] Calculations were made by identifying the number of lines of borrowed material and dividing by the total number of lines in the chapter.

[129] The text references Titus; Colgrave correctly identified Titus 1.7-9 and 1 Timothy 3.3 as the hagiographer's actual sources. Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 110.

orphans...' to indicate that at this pinnacle of his career Cuthbert was the exemplar of the Christian mandate to love and care for those in need.

Parallels between Cuthbert and Martin are easy enough to name: each apparently engaged in military service, each was a monk and a bishop, each was able to see and drive out demons, and each was visited by, and healed by, angels. The differences between them, though, are equally significant. Martin's military service receives far more attention, and is depicted by Sulpicius as culminating in a dramatic confrontation with Julian Caesar.[130] The Lindisfarne hagiographer only mentions Cuthbert's service in passing, and his only achievement is the ability to thrive on slim rations.[131] Bede reduces the mention further to a brief reference to a horse and a spear,[132] further evidence that if Cuthbert did indeed take up arms, it was in no way considered an identifying mark of his career. Lastly, while Martin and Cuthbert share the desire for solitude along with the burdens of episcopal ministry, they balance those demands very differently. The *Vita Martini* shows Martin attached to Bishop Hilarius, established at the monastery of Ligugé temporarily, but Sulpicius never shows Martin actively seeking solitude until after his consecration, in marked contrast to Cuthbert who knows he is destined to become a bishop, however reluctant he may have been to take on that burden, and who is determined to pursue a desert for himself before taking on episcopal responsibilities.

Further, while both Martin and Cuthbert engaged in missionary work during their time of service, Cuthbert's relationship with the population of Northumbria in no way resembles Martin's aggressive campaign of destruction of temples and casual interference with rustic observances, his first two official acts after his consecration.[133] In contrast, Cuthbert's missionary work consists predominantly of travelling among the people, as evidenced in II.4, II.5, and IV.5. The text never refers to his listeners as pagans, only as people (*populo*) to whom he offers the sacraments in the form of preaching, healing, baptism, and forgiveness. Carver argued that the archaeological evidence for the seventh century in north-western England points to a hybrid religious culture in which Christian and non-Christian practices continued together until the

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[130] Sulpicius, *Vita Martini,* chapter IV.
[131] *VCA* I.7.
[132] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 173.
[133] Sulpicius, *VM,* chapters XI, XII.

eighth century when Christian political dominance became the norm,[134] and the tone of the *VCA* would support this picture for the time of Cuthbert's ministry. While the *Vita Martini* may be seen to have contributed to the anonymous author's structural schema for the text, as well as a few apt sentences introducing the narrative at the beginning, and as Cuthbert becomes a bishop, the comparison between the two as monk-bishop figures should not be pressed too far. Since both texts were composed at relatively close proximity to the lifetimes of their protagonists, one must conclude that the authentic personalities of the two saints, in addition to the situation on the ground and the intentions of their respective hagiographers, in some measure shaped the portrait that comes through in each individual narrative.

As the longest and most developed section of the text, Book IV presents the greatest amount of parallel material to Matthew's gospel. The final section of the Gospel begins with Jesus crossing the Jordan River, a significant symbolic step in his progress toward Jerusalem and his eventual death, just as Cuthbert must cross back over the sea surrounding Farne Island to take up his episcopal ministry. Where the evangelist has Jesus describe the signs of the end times, the hagiographer has Cuthbert predict the end of his own life, his friend Herebhert's, and King Ecgfrith's. Each dies and is buried, and each burial is followed by miraculous and life-giving events. There is, of course, the matter of degree here; no saint is ever exalted in the same way as the Saviour. And while Cuthbert's death is certainly peaceful enough in contrast to the two loud cries reported from Jesus on the cross by Matthew, Cuthbert is still called a martyr in the Lindisfarne Life in IV.15, 16, and 17, in reference to healings accomplished by means of his relics. The arc of Cuthbert's life, with its long periods of time in community at Melrose and Lindisfarne and in solitude on Farne, culminating in such a short time of 'public ministry', two years as bishop not unlike Jesus's three short years of ministry before his death, lends credibility to the idea that his time as bishop was a kind of kenosis, an outpouring of self that left him drained and ready to die when the end came.

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[134] Martin Carver, 'Agency, Intellect and the Archeological Agenda' in *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited*, ed. by Martin Carver, Alex Sanmark and Sarah Semple (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010), pp. 12-15.

In this section, there is strong use of the archetypal motif of liminal immobilization, the condition of being paralyzed, either physically or spiritually. This motif appears in chapter three, the woman on the point of death, chapter five, the young paralytic, and chapter seventeen, another paralytic male. In addition, two other chapters raise the concept of liminality as an existential condition: the liminal character of the hermit in chapter nine, and the return to the liminal space of Farne Island in chapter eleven. The accumulation of these images can be seen as an indication that in the Christian vision, death itself is a liminal state. The opposite of the end of life in which all possibility of effective action or devotion is ended, death becomes a liberated state in which God now effects all healing, all restoration, all forgiveness, all release, simply through the existence of, and devotion toward, the relics of the deceased saint. This is, of course, no new idea, either in Christian teaching or in hagiography. It is only noteworthy in this instance for the variety of examples which the anonymous hagiographer has chosen to assemble in a single section of the text to bring this point across. As well as being a natural association in the section which addresses the death and posthumous developments for the protagonist, the emphasis on this motif refers back to the first book in the *VCA* in which the lame Cuthbert receives a miraculous healing. Not only was he the agent of healing in his own lifetime, but the one who was immobilized in life, and immobilized again in death, is freed in Christ to effect healing and liberation of others after his own death. The incorruption of his body is sign and symbol of his ability to affirm life in the midst of death, a central concern of the Christian message.

Structurally, then, the Lindisfarne hagiographer may be seen to use elements from the *Vita Martini* as well as the Gospel of Matthew to form a template upon which to craft a portrait of Cuthbert as a figure whose identity is ambiguously positioned between Irish and Anglo-Saxon Christian communities, and whose greatness is, in fact, somewhat less fabulous than that of many of his saintly counterparts. From his unknown origins to his self-sacrifice in solitude and in service, Cuthbert's life is patterned on the life of Christ, but without being merely imitative. The choice to combine the narrative structure of Roman biography found in the *VM* with the critical junctures from the Gospel of Matthew at beginnings and endings of chapters, itself a form of integration of disparate elements, indicates a relatively sophisticated literary

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sense on the part of the Lindisfarne hagiographer, a characteristic which itself may have contributed to Cuthbert's later popularity.

3.3   WORLD BEFORE THE TEXT

Examination of the world before the text of the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* will address the structural pattern, archetypal images, and biblical allusions that arise within the narrative, and the horizon of meaning toward which they may be seen to point. Interpretation of these elements consists of opening up the meaningful content of the text for the express purpose of making that meaning understood to its readers and hearers.   These motifs and images will be examined for their consistency with Christian teaching and the elements of concerned knowledge that may have been of particular import to the community at Lindisfarne circa 700.

The first archetypal image to appear in the *VCA*, not unexpectedly, is that of the child. As was observed at the beginning of the structural analysis, Cuthbert is given no parentage, genealogy, location of birth, or indication of social status. As the Life was composed at such close proximity to the saint's lifetime, it is unlikely that this information was not available to the hagiographer. It is, however, highly unusual for hagiographical narratives to omit such information completely, the more common approach being the creation of a narrative involving such elements as angelic annunciation, barren mother, or noble lineage.[135] If such a void in Cuthbert's case was purposeful it calls for examination in terms of its archetypal significance.

In contrast to the unnamed young deacon in the *Vita Samsonis I,* this use of the child archetype applies to the protagonist of the narrative, and in this context will function quite differently. Here, the child symbolizes the two contrasting energies of potentiality and vulnerability. The young child may grow to accomplish much, or may be abandoned or otherwise prevented from developing into an adult. On an archetypal level the child represents all of what may be but is not yet, and as such functions as a symbol of wholeness.[136] Cuthbert, curiously, is not abandoned, but neither does he have any parents. His early world is peopled entirely by children, as though in some kind of fictitious nursery. The reader does not learn until II.7 that he

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[135] As noted earlier, the closest thing to a lineage this hagiographer provides for Cuthbert is the list of biblical prophets called by God in their youth.

[136] Jung, 'Phenomenology of the Child Archetype', pp. 132-147.

was fostered to a nun when he was eight years old. The hagiographer has presented his readers with a kind of Edenic beginning, in which the world is young and everyone in it is at play.

Into this children's corner comes Cuthbert's annunciation, an odd sort of call narrative in which an unnamed three-year-old child reproves Cuthbert for his foolishness and insists that he will become a bishop. There is a folk motif of a child who speaks prophetically *ex utero,* Stith Thompson motif number T575.1; an unborn child may reveal its paternity, or the identity of a criminal, or may confer magical abilities to its mother. This motif occurs in Irish and Welsh Lives*,* including Elian of Wales, and Bairre and Findchua of Ireland.[137] Consistent with the generally modest tone of this narrative, the child who speaks in the *VCA* has been born, but is too young to be genuinely cognizant of the import of his words. This prophecy may be intended to remind the reader of the line in Psalm 8, 'Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have perfected praise',[138] along with its parallel in Matthew 21.16, in which Jesus is said to quote the Psalm during the cleansing of the temple. The child archetype in this incident is focused in the figure of the younger boy who is 'a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of [one's] conscious mind',[139] the source of the call to religious life which is most often an inchoate experience which issues from somewhere deep within the unconscious. The conversation between the young Cuthbert and his younger interrogator may be read as an expression of the internal conversation which takes place as a candidate for religious life encounters an embryonic image of his future life, an expression of the concerned knowledge that entry into the monastic life is a response to an ineffable summons.

The child archetype is repeated in the motif of the healings of young people. The first healing recorded in the text is that of Cuthbert himself, healed by an angel of his infirmity revealed as lameness, (*infirmitate* [...] *claudicans*).[140] Later, in the ten healings recorded in Book IV, fully half of the persons healed are described in the text as of a young age. The female in chapter four, called *sancta moniale uirgine* in the title of the chapter, is described as *puella* in the body of the text. The paralytic in chapter

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[137] Bray, 'A List of Motifs', pp. 33, 60; Henken, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 138.
[138] Psalms 8.2.
[139] Jung, 'The Child Archetype', p. 135.
[140] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 67-69.

five is a youth (*iuuenem*). The child healed of plague in chapter six is an infant (*infantem*), the youngest of the saint's cures. The demoniac in chapter fifteen, brought by his father to the saint's burial site, is a boy (*puero*) and the second paralytic, appearing in chapter eighteen, is *adolescens*.[141] The remainder of the recipients of Cuthbert's healing powers are two women (II. 8 and IV.3), a servant (IV.7), and two monastics (IV.12 and 16; here we may wish to include the healing of the spying monk in II.3, a healing which could only be of the spirit since there is no indication of physical compromise in this individual). All of these, then, are persons of lower class, stature, or power, persons whose healing may be interpreted as deeply empowering acts, acts which call forth a response of reverence beyond amazement at the act in itself, but also for the transformation involved in raising up persons whose lives may have seemed insignificant in the world's eyes and freely spending God's grace on their reclamation, their salvation.

It is notable that the first and last miracles recorded in the *VCA* are healings of young men, an expression of C.G. Jung's understanding of the symbol of the child as 'the all-embracing nature of psychic wholeness'.[142] The reader has been brought into the narrative of a child who is unaffiliated with any personal history but still called and healed, taken through the journey of the hero's spiritual growth and development, and finally released from the narrative into his own life journey with the image of a posthumous healing of yet another young man, one who, like himself perhaps, sought to walk in the shoes of the saint.[143] The significance of healing as a restoration to wholeness is underscored by the use of the child archetype as the recipient of healing at the beginning and end of the narrative. The address to the reader is an unmistakable call to pursue the path of spiritual wholeness for himself, to become child-like in the sense of abandonment of ambition apart from the desire to imitate Cuthbert, and in so doing, imitate Christ.

The next major archetypal complex concerns the range of visionary experiences attributed to Cuthbert, some clearly divine in origin, others not, all requiring a degree of interpretation in order to be integrated into an understanding of the narrative as a

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[141] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* pp. 117, 119, 133, 137.
[142] Jung, 'The Child Archetype', p. 144.
[143] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 137.

whole. Visions are catalogued as a folk motif in Stith Thompson at V 510 – 515, with frequent occurrence in Irish religious literature.[144] Comment has already been made regarding the similarities between the *VCA* and the Life of Columba in regards to visions of souls ascending to heaven, visions of angels, and visions of fire. In addition, four of the eight chapters in Book II are located in liminal spaces, that is, threshold or borderline places that indicate the potential for a shift in consciousness. The Bible makes a clear connection between dreams and visions and God's use of both visions and dreams to convey messages of great personal or political importance. One need only note the convergence of 'dream' and 'vision' in the passage from Joel, 'your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions',[145] paralleled in Acts 2.17.

Cuthbert's ability to interpret his visions develops over the course of the narrative. His initial visions involve the two souls carried to heaven by angels in I.5 and I.7. The ability to see angels fulfilling this duty suggests that the saint, and perhaps others whom God has chosen, may be granted the gift of vision into the spiritual realm. Comprehension of what is seen, however, must be developed over time. The angel who heals Cuthbert's knee in I.4, for example, is not recognized as such until long after his departure, and the same is true of the angel in II.2 who appears at the monastery to test Cuthbert's hospitality. Like Jesus's companions at the supper at Emmaus, Cuthbert only recognized his guest after he had disappeared.[146] The true significance of the visionary experience, however, is not the miraculous vision itself, but the ability to interpret its meaning. Like the text itself, if the vision remains uninterpreted or unrealized, it cannot influence the mind and heart. It is in the waking from the dream that its meaning is realized. The challenge of spiritual development is to bring the two states of consciousness, dream and waking, together, recognizing the nature of the vision as it takes place, a challenge Cuthbert meets successfully later in Book II.

The story of the spying monk and the sea creatures reveals the first instance in which Cuthbert attains a higher level of realization. This is a more complex tale of

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[144] Bray, 'List of Motifs', Cross, *Motif Index,* pp. 521-23.
[145] Joel 2.28.
[146] Luke 24.31-32.

seeing and being seen, and Cuthbert and the monk each see very differently. While Cuthbert calmly keeps to his discipline, the monk who has followed him is reported to be following secretly, spending the night hidden among the rocks, trembling at what he has seen. Significantly, however, *videre* is only attributed to the anonymous monk once in this episode, and that only in a passive manner: he trembles with fear and anguish at the sight (*visu*) of Cuthbert's nocturnal activity.[147] Otherwise he is described as following, testing, and hiding. In fact, while he may have attempted to spy upon Cuthbert, he did not genuinely see. One meaning to be derived from this encounter is that one does not come into the presence of the holy for egocentric reasons. The ego, represented by the spying monk, cannot comprehend what arises from the depths of the unconscious, here represented by the ocean into which Cuthbert calmly and willingly immerses himself. The monk remains on rocky ground (*scopulosis locis*) trapped in his own anxiety. Cuthbert, however, without turning his head or acknowledging the intruder, is said to have seen him with 'spiritual eyes' (*spiritalibus oculis*). His vision is improving; he can see what is and is not there, as a prophet can see and read the signs of the times both in his immediate surroundings and afar. This visionary transaction may be read as both punishment and promise: the guarantee of punishment if one attempts to appropriate the vision of holiness for personal gain, and the promise of spiritual increase if one remains dedicated to the inner life as illustrated in Cuthbert's ascetic practice.

Book II.4 and 5 introduce Cuthbert's ability to foretell future events, each having to do with feedings for himself and his immediate companions. While prophecy is in general a biblical calling and a miraculous action, Cuthbert (along with his reader-followers) has been well prepared for these two particular episodes, since he himself has been the recipient of miraculous provisions and reportedly can thrive on slender rations. God's grace provides abundantly, as illustrated in the meat and bread in I.6, and the loaves which appear after the angel departs in II.2. While they may have been experienced as marvels, each of the prophecies in II.4-5 represents Cuthbert's calm assurance of being cared for in need, an assurance that he conveys to his companions as the Lindisfarne hagiographer conveys the same to his readers. He knows God so well that he can 'see' the future event of apparently miraculous provision, a form of

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[147] Colgrave, *Two Lives,* p. 81.

knowing in which his followers are graciously invited to share. It is, perhaps, worth noting that in both of these cases, the food is provided in the form of fish, also a customary symbol for Christ. With this interpretive step, each meal becomes a form of Eucharist, underscoring its sacred significance for monastic readers.

Book II introduces another form of visionary experience, involving illusory and real appearances of fire. The image of fire here may be seen as a counterbalance to the previous three chapters which have all taken place near the sea or by a river. Water imagery indicates the presence of unconscious contents needing to be plumbed; fire imagery indicates the need for the conscious mind to be actively engaged in the process of individuation, or psycho-spiritual growth.[148] The two fires are further paired by their contrasting natures, one illusory, the other a real threat to safety. Cuthbert perceives each of them correctly, in the first case warning his companions not to be deceived by the appearance of a fire intended to distract them from spiritual learning, and in the second case laying his own life on the line to protect his foster-mother. One may read this passage as an indication of concerned knowledge regarding the need to energize the unconscious in order to release whatever is necessary for growth. It is equally critical to develop the skill of discernment of spirits, the ability to see the spiritual world clearly and respond appropriately. This ability is identified as a gift from God by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12.10, and appears among Cassian's *Conferences* as a critical capacity to be developed in monastic life.[149] Failure to develop this ability could result in complete destruction of the most disciplined ascetic, while its cultivation 'would lead the fearless monk on a steady ascent to God'.[150] The ability to experience visions and dreams may be perfectly ordinary human behaviour, and indeed someone who followed a religious vocation may be expected to be open to spiritual phenomena. The trajectory of Book II in particular indicates that more is required of the monk, and that the gifts of prophecy and visions must be accompanied by the work of discernment, lest the ego

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[148] Edward Edinger, *The Bible and the Psyche: Individuation Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1986), p. 48.
[149] *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. and annot. by Boniface Ramsey (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1997), pp. 83-112.
[150] *The Conferences,* p. 87.

lay claim to unwarranted special status, and the gifts fail to be put to their proper use in the service of the Body of Christ.

Book III, situated almost entirely on Farne Island, introduces more pairs and paired opposites. The first chapter reports that Cuthbert established the rule for the monks on Lindisfarne, and that at the time of writing they followed it along with the Rule of Benedict. It also relates that he lived among them both an active and a contemplative life, and that he was able to heal others both present and absent. His arrival at Lindisfarne required him to embody yet another pair of opposites, obedience and leadership, taking on the role of prior for a time at Bishop Eata's behest.   After some years of living in the crux of these opposites, Cuthbert separated himself from life in community to undertake the solitary life. Even though he was apparently able to integrate the opposites successfully for some period of time, he eventually chose solitude over life in community, a conflict which can be understood as a fundamental opposition in religious life.

The balance of the first chapter reads very much like the Lives of the Desert Dwellers in whose image the Lindisfarne hagiographer seeks to cast his hero. Cuthbert casts out devils, digs himself a cell in the rock, and builds walls that shut out all sight of the world around him. This form of shelter symbolizes a consciously-chosen death, a symbolic martyrdom in which the saint voluntarily gives up all, or nearly all, forms of outward recognition. As was argued in the previous section, this period of time in Cuthbert's life has much in common with the wilderness wanderings in Exodus, and clearly represents a time away from community life in order to be purified for service. The images of digging and building with rock and earth, of seeing only heaven and earth, and of being surrounded on every side with water, give some indication of the psychological significance of this time, for Cuthbert, for his hagiographer, and for his readers. Taking a cue from Elliott's discussion of the Desert Dwellers and their migrations into solitary places, and similar to the cave episodes in the Life of Samson, this period in Cuthbert's life may be understood as the 'downward journey', the symbolic death and burial which is at the same time the *regressus ad uterum*, a return to the womb from which a man may indeed be 'born again', as John has Jesus say.[151] Cuthbert chooses this isolated environment, welcoming only whatever assistance is

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[151] Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* pp. 103-10; John 3.3.

offered, by man or bird, completely serene in knowing that his needs will be met by God. He lets go of all in order to receive all, and receive he does, from the sea, from the rock which moves apparently of itself, and from the birds of the air.   Such abundance can only be given when complete dependence is acknowledged and accepted. This is the critical course of action which must be undertaken in order for a person to realize their highest spiritual abilities. And, while up to this point Cuthbert was a faithful and virtuous, even exemplary monk, he had not as yet fulfilled the vocation prophesied for him when he was a child. He has not yet become a bishop, nor is he yet prepared for how costly that vocation will be.

The need for solitude is also an indication that the inner life is ready to become known. The work of the outer life, even a religious life, can take one away from the deep inner core which must be integrated into conscious identity. After years of public life, Cuthbert crosses the turbulent sea of the unconscious to confront the devils who may or may not inhabit Farne Island so much as his own psyche. He will dig down and build up, creating and inhabiting the tomb which is also womb, finding within it the living water which will bring him to new birth. In the depths of his isolation, Cuthbert will encounter the symbol which Jung argued will crystallize the transcendent movement from conflicted opposites to a reunited whole.[152] Rising up from the sea, the quintessential symbol of the fertile unconscious, is the twelve-foot timber which is both crossbeam and foundation, two deeply biblical symbols for Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3.11 Paul declares Christ to be the true and only foundation upon which the lives of Christian believers may be built. And the cross, of course, is the sign and symbol of Christ's kenotic self-offering, the emblem of the willing sacrifice which Cuthbert will embody in his brief tenure as bishop.[153] Just as the quintessential message of concerned knowledge for all Christians is the centrality of the cross for the redemption of humanity, so is the timber that appears on the island in response to Cuthbert's need an embodiment of the cross as God's redeeming presence at the core of the saint's spiritual being. So, too, would the cross be seen by the readers as the

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[152] Jeffrey C. Miller, *The Transcendent Function: Jung's Model of Psychological Growth Through Dialogue with the Unconscious* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p. 16.
[153] If the author may be forgiven a small anachronism here, the text of the following hymn was hauntingly present during the composition of this section: "The Church's one foundation/ is Jesus Christ her Lord/ She is His new creation/ By water and the Word./ From heaven He came and sought her /To be His holy bride/ With His own blood He bought her/ And for her life He died." Samuel Stone, 1866.

symbol of the essential process at the core of their own religious experience, a process of embracing solitude, community, obedience, leadership, conscious intentions and unconscious movements of the Spirit, and allowing God's movement to bring them to the fulfilment of their calling.

Following the appearance of the crossbeam is the story of the two ravens who caused damage to the roof of Cuthbert's guesthouse, but were forgiven when one expressed repentance, presumably on behalf of both. The parallel to Elijah was noted in the structural analysis; the episode may also be read as an archetypal motif representing themes of opposition (the ravens to Cuthbert), separation and confrontation (the one raven realizes his sin and repents), and reconciliation (the two ravens return with a sacrificial offering). In the place of a human person experiencing opposition and reconciliation, the birds play the role of penitents. From the standpoint of a hermeneutic of appropriation, the encounter with this anecdote at this juncture in the narrative may be experienced as the reassurance that not only do the great saints and solitaries go through the deeply challenging process of confronting the depths of the psyche, so do the simplest and commonest of creatures, and they, too, experience forgiveness and restoration.

Book III concludes with the encounter between Cuthbert and the royal abbess of Whitby, Aelfflaed. Once again, Cuthbert is called upon to cross the sea and stand upon an island. And once again pairs of opposites are brought into play: male and female, royal and common, seeking insight into the life and death of the king and the identity of his successor. While the conversation regarding Ecgfrith and Aldfrith forms the centre of the text, the climax, at least for a religious reader, is Cuthbert's admission that he will indeed be made a bishop, and serve for a brief two years before his death. This may account for the hagiographer's decision to place this anecdote toward the conclusion of Book III – to present to the reader a man who has embraced solitude, confronted his demons, dug deeply into the earth to stake his place and await his transcendent revelation, and who now can declare in the presence of royalty his readiness to take on the mantle of episcopacy which was foretold in his youth.

It is a truism in hagiography that the saint is portrayed in the image of Christ, and in this respect Cuthbert is no different from many other Christian saints. Book IV picks up the theme of the reconciled opposites from Book III and presents a picture of

Bishop Cuthbert as both reluctant and obedient, dignified and humble, utterly constant and completely transformed. He is the fulfilment of the New Testament prescriptions for the episcopacy: not self-willed or given to anger, but sober, just, holy, and temperate.[154] He maintains his ascetic practices of fasting, prayers and vigils, as well as embracing the apostolic command to feed the hungry, care for the poor, and protect widows and orphans, returning the reader to the central message of Matthew's gospel.[155] Cuthbert has met the opposites and does not choose between them; according to his hagiographer, he has integrated all aspects of his calling and made them his own. He is the living embodiment of the 'dignity and authority' of the office of bishop, performing 'signs and wonders' and fulfilling the command to bind and loose whatever constrains human persons, in body or in soul.

This abundance of spiritual power is made manifest in three series of miracles, first of healing, then of prophecy, then of posthumous displays of power. In each of the five healings, the victim is either immobilized or at the point of death, in a liminal condition between living and dying. In each case Cuthbert restores them to life, including a nun with an incapacitating pain in her head, a paralytic boy who is healed without reference to forgiveness of sin, the wife of a *gesith* who appears to be nearly dead when Cuthbert arrives, an infant infected with the plague, and a servant whose cousin is a priest of Lindisfarne. While the writer claims that there are more episodes he could relate, this selection seems designed to illustrate that there are no limits now to what God can do through Cuthbert. He has become the perfect vessel for God's healing grace to be poured out to the people.

The healings are followed by four prophecies, again all involving life and death. Just as God did not spare His Son but gave him up as a sacrifice for our salvation, a statement that is made at the very end of Book III, so the reader begins to understand that Cuthbert will not be spared the consequence of his kenotic outpouring of healing grace. First he foretells the death of King Ecgfrith, then promises the hermit Hereberht that God will allow the two, bishop and hermit, to die together. Abbess Aelfflaed appears next just before Cuthbert retires from active ministry to return to Farne. The episode in IV.10 contains somewhat more detail than most episodes related in the rest

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[154] Titus 1.7-9, and 1 Timothy 3.3.
[155] Matthew 25.35-36.

of the Life, suggesting that this may have been a story that was in current circulation at the time of composition. The critical features are the death of a monk of Aelfflaed's monastery, and Cuthbert's vision of his soul carried to heaven by angels, both motifs which function in two directions: as a recapitulation of the initial vision of Aidan's soul, and as a premonition of Cuthbert's own impending death.

He returns to Farne in the next chapter, and immediately heals the monk who is caring for him. Life and death are now inseparable, for those around him as well as for Cuthbert, and his own death is as humble and simple and faithful as his life has been. Again, the opposites are reconciled and transcended, and the reader is taught to hope for as valiant a life and as sweet a death as was granted to the saint. It is no real surprise that his body is exhumed and found to be incorrupt, since death has now been transformed into simply another phase or dimension of life, not its utter end. Edinger related an apocryphal legend concerning the bodies of Saul and Jonathan found by David years after their deaths and returned to Israel so that the people could do them honour.[156] Even those who were not completely faithful deserve to be remembered whole and unsullied. So, too, is Cuthbert to be remembered as one who was completely faithful to his vocation and his God. For a devoted Christian, death is revealed as a state in which one's physical remains are vessels for God's grace, and no fear or pain can harm the individual any longer. Four more healings take place at the site of Cuthbert's relics, signs and wonders that are further indications of the reconciling power of God. An exorcism, a 'grave infirmity' (*grauis infirmitatis*), and another paralytic each merit a chapter of their own. The healing elements are Cuthbert's shoes, water blessed with an admixture of soil from the trench in which Cuthbert's body had been washed, and simple proximity to the saint's effects. Deeply incapacitating illness is met with mere remnants of Cuthbert's physical presence, but God's power acting through these slim remains is enough to defeat evil and restore life for those who make their heartfelt appeal.

3.4   CONCLUSIONS

The three-part analytical and interpretive process has allowed the anonymous Life of Cuthbert to be set in its historical context, its sources and how they were utilized

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[156] Edinger, *The Bible and the Psyche,* p. 83.

examined, and a structural analysis developed for purposes of identifying dominant motifs and patterns across the text, all of which contribute to a theological interpretation of the text. This Life was composed during the reign of Aldfrith, king of Northumbria from 685/6 to 705, a short time of peace after nearly three centuries of political strife. Ecclesiastical structures were also in flux at this time, as evidenced by the departure of many of the Irish monks of Lindisfarne subsequent to the Synod of Whitby, the elimination and re-establishment of various diocesan sees across Northumbria, and the particular controversies involving Bishop Wilfrid resulting in his eventual exile from the kingdom. Against this background of political and ecclesiastical turmoil, the figure of Cuthbert emerges as the embodiment of peace and healing, one who is able to integrate opposites by grounding himself in prayer and solitude.

The anonymous hagiographer has made use of a range of sources, including the Bible, the Lives of St Martin and St Antony, and the oral tradition of the community at Lindisfarne. In some instances it would appear that he simply borrowed passages that convey a conventional message such as his use of the trope of modesty and obedience in the prologue, taken from the *Epistola Victorii*. In other sections he utilized passages that describe the saint in ways that suggest an intentional comparison with an earlier hero of the church, as is the case at the close of Book III where Cuthbert is described as another St Antony. Further, the hagiographer appears to have adopted a structure similar to that used for the Life of St Martin, and borrowed from that text to illustrate Cuthbert's ability to remain both a humble monk and a dignified bishop, an image which, however stereotyped, is also part of the hagiographer's core message concerning the religious life.

The structural analysis revealed a suite of motifs, many of which derive from the synoptic gospels, which were seen to highlight a particular view of St Cuthbert, and by extension, the qualities of sanctity most highly regarded by the hagiographer. Development of specific symbolic content occurs across the text, including the ability to see and comprehend what is seen, the experience of liminal immobilization and the liberation effected by physical healing, and the challenge of reconciling and integrating opposites through devotion to the cross as the sign of the kenotic love of Christ. The importance of discernment of spirits was demonstrated in the many references to visitation by angels, and in Cuthbert's increasing ability to recognize the presence of

beneficial or malevolent spirits. Evidence for the motif of liminality and liberation was found in the repeated use of healing stories that involve not just passing illnesses but crises at the point of death, or that resolve a situation of paralysis. Pairs and opposites occur throughout the text, with explicit references to absence and presence, fire and water, community and solitude, and humility and dignity. And the motif of kenosis and the cross was most clearly indicated by the image of the foundational crossbeam which appeared from the sea while Cuthbert was in solitude, followed by the concentrated out-pouring of healing and prophecy concerning life and death which characterized the final book. Undergirding all of these manifestations of sanctity was the constant discipline of prayer which Cuthbert engaged at every stage of his spiritual development.

This form of analysis, then, leads to a theological interpretation of the particular set of values that the hagiographer emphasized in the narrative, and which readers may encounter as concerned knowledge. The message of the text may be read as a guide for religious and spiritual development, embodied in the narrative of a life rather than in a doctrinal statement or community rule.[157] The portrait which emerges from this particular matrix of influences is of a child of no one and nowhere, called from his youth, supported by grace, and mobilized for service. Connected to the royal family through a combination of faith and social position, he can be seen to transcend the turbulent secular and ecclesiastical politics which surround him by the power of his identification with Christ and his willingness to be poured out in service to the people he encounters. Willing to open himself to the test of solitude, Cuthbert receives tangible confirmation of the nature of his call, a physical sign of the cross of Christ. With this to encourage him, he is able to fulfil the vocation predicted for him in childhood and become a bishop, if only for a short time. Cuthbert's Life is a demonstration of the power of spiritual formation and development to embrace conflict, internalize disparate symbolic energies, and emerge as an ascetic bishop, a wounded healer, and an icon for future followers. At its pinnacle, the saint's identity becomes fully integrated with God's grace, the ability to see and to heal pouring out of him without limit. Readers, then, are challenged to set their own spiritual lives within

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[157] Harmless made a similar claim for the *Via Antonii* referencing Gregory of Nazianzus in *Desert Christians,* p. 85.

the context of Cuthbert's example, opening themselves to see the spiritual world within the natural world, to embrace the contradictions that life presents, to pour themselves out in service to God and to the world, and to support all of this with devotion to prayer and the cross of Christ.

While such a description may seem generically Christian at first glance, the value of such an approach lies in its ability to deepen scholarly appreciation for the unique relationship that may be seen to exist between individual texts and the communities within which they were composed. Close attention to the motif patterns in a given text may be expected to reveal particular patterns of concerned knowledge and theological understandings unique to each hagiographer and his community. For example, while many of Cuthbert's healings imitate biblical models, and while the notion of vision is important to the Lindisfarne author, he never shows Cuthbert healing someone who is blind. This may suggest that the motif of blindness was not considered a compelling theological theme for this hagiographer or for his community. In contrast, Samson's short, frequent times of respite in caves, while similar in some respects to Cuthbert's time on Farne, carry a more marked association with transitory initiatory rites than with the Desert Dwellers, suggesting that members of Samson's seventh-century community were being warned against taking a longer period of time away from the community.

Comparison of texts and their theological interpretations may also reveal shifts of emphasis over time, as well as differences or commonalities across cultural regions. Evidence of differing theological concerns developed in the text may be indicated by differences of location, gender, biblical allusions, or incorporation of folk material. In summary, theological investigation of the Anonymous Life of Cuthbert reveals particular concerns with reconciliation, discernment, and liberation, Christian values which open the horizon of meaning for the reader, and indicate the unique value of this singular text.

CHAPTER FOUR: COGITOSUS, *VITA SANCTAE BRIGITAE*

4.1.   Wᴏʀʟᴅ ʙᴇʜɪɴᴅ ᴛʜᴇ ᴛᴇxᴛ

4.1.1   Iɴᴛʀᴏᴅᴜᴄᴛɪᴏɴ

Cogitosus's *Vita Sanctae Brigitae* (hereafter referred to as *VBC*) is the third text to be examined using the three-part hermeneutic approach. The earliest extant Latin *vita* written in Ireland, this text will be read in the context of the dynastic conflicts of the sixth and seventh centuries, as well as the ecclesiastical and monastic developments of the time period. Certainty regarding the abbess Brigit's dates of birth and death is elusive, with multiple listings in the annals for both her birth (439, 452, 456) and death (523, 524, 526), and further claims that she is a Christianised pagan goddess or mythological figure. Accepting the annalistic witness for the existence of a Christian abbess by this name, and her death within the first quarter of the sixth century, the differences in dates do not impact this study greatly. The text is dated to 650 x 680, leaving a gap between the time of the saint and composition of the text of some 150 years, more or less. The author appears to have been a well-educated resident of Brigit's monastery at Kildare, and has been interpreted as making claims of supremacy over all of Ireland for his saint and his monastery. The degree to which his descriptions of the monastic *civitas* can be seen to be derived from descriptions of cities in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Canon may serve to reduce the political significance of these passages, and instead cast them in a more theological light.

While a few scholars have openly sought to affirm the thoroughly Christian identity of Saint Brigit, the full extent of the biblical influence over the entire text remains underappreciated.[1] This Life has been described as a series of saintly wonder works, 'based ultimately in part on popular legends, myths and folklore',[2] a collection of predominantly folklore-type miracles,[3] and an 'unconscious blending of saga themes

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[1] See, for example, Katja Ritari, *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral Theology in the Lives of Saints Brigit and Columba* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), and Dorothy Ann Bray, 'Ireland's Other Apostle: Cogitosus's St Brigit', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies,* 59 (2010), 55-70.

[2] Kenney, *The Sources*, p. 357.

[3] Clare Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories in seventh-century Irish Saints' Lives' in *Le Septième Siècle: changements et continuités: actes du colloque bilatéral Franco-britannique tenu au Warburg Institute les 8-9 Juillet 1988,* ed. by Jacques Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (London: The Warburg Institute, 1992), 87-112, p. 94.

and hagiographical themes.[4] The individual chapters have an undeniable sense of having been crafted by a consummate story-teller, which may have contributed to the association of Brigit's deeds with native Irish saga tradition. It is useful, however, to remember that Jesus was presented in the Christian Canon as a story-teller making use of the images of the agricultural context of his own time, and that the content of his stories was often the nature of the Realm of God present and active in the world around him; Cogitosus may be making similar claims for Brigit, and for Kildare. New Testament scholars have long pointed to the importance of parable in Jesus's teaching, and to the later development of parables about Jesus which account for some of the divergences among the four gospels.[5] As has been observed in previous chapters, parabolic interpretation has not been applied to hagiographical stories prior to this point, and it will be demonstrated below that doing so can provide a new means by which to interpret the text and the possible purposes for which it was intended, including consideration of the Life as a vehicle for conveying such concerned knowledge as would have been relevant to its initial generation of readers.

4.1.2   THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION, PRINT EDITIONS, AND DISCUSSION OF PRIORITY

No internal evidence for dating Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae* has been identified. The writer states that he has been 'commanded' and 'compelled' by his brethren to compose this Life, and he undertakes the task out of the monastic virtue of obedience. Unhappily for the modern reader, he offers the name of no bishop or abbot under whose authority he was living, nor is there any indication of an event or influence in the community to account for his endeavour, for example, a translation of relics, as in the Life of Cuthbert. The sole external indicator is found in the preface to the *Vita Patricii* by Muirchú maccu Machtheni.[6] Here Muirchú describes Cogitosus as *patris mei Coguitosi,* 'my father', a description which led Esposito to consider the older man

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[4] Ludwig Bieler, 'Hagiography and Romance in Medieval Ireland', *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture,* 6 (1975), 13-24, p. 14.
[5] Crossan, *The Power of Parable*, p. 3. See also, John R. Donahue, 'The Parables of Jesus' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Brown, et al, 1364 – 69, and Robert H. Stein, 'Parables' in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Metzger and Coogan, pp. 567-570.
[6] Bieler and Kelly, *The Patrician Texts,* p. 62.

to be the biological father of the younger.[7] Bieler edited his translation to say '(spiritual) father',[8] but this type of relationship would most likely have taken place within a given monastic community, making such a claim dubious in this case, particularly in view of the perceived rivalry between Armagh and Kildare in the seventh century. Connolly may have said as much as can be defended when he stated that regardless of the nature of the relationship, Muirchú was most likely referring to a known person writing approximately a generation earlier than he.[9] Since Muirchú's composition is dated to 680 x 700, the generally accepted date for the *VBC* is 650 x 680.

Manuscript evidence for this Life is abundant, with 56 manuscripts reported by Esposito in his review of the sources in 1912, and expanded to over 80 by Bieler in 1965, although many of these latter finds consist of fragments or brief lections for liturgical use.[10] None of these are found in Ireland, however, and the bulk of the corpus was discovered in Continental monastic libraries. Esposito stated that the best of the print editions was that done by the Bollandists, published in 1658. That edition was based on a collection of five earlier editions: Canisius's edition of 1604, Colgan's edition of 1647 in his *Trias Thaumaturga,* and manuscripts found in libraries in Trier, Swabia, and Westphalia.[11] The Acta Sanctorum edition is now available on the internet, and forms the basis for the Latin references in this study.[12] English translations are few, and Connolly and Picard's 1987 translation forms the basis for the present study.[13] While Connolly and Picard promised a critical edition at the time of

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[7] Mario Esposito, 'On the Early Latin Lives of St. Brigit of Kildare', *Hermathena,* 24 (1935), 120-165, pp. 121-123.

[8] Bieler and Kelly, *The Patrician Texts,* p. 63.

[9] Connolly, 'Cogitosus's *Life of Brigit'*, p. 5.

[10] Richard Sharpe, '*Vitae S Brigitae*: The Oldest Texts', *Peritia,* 1 (1982), 81-106, p. 82.

[11] Mario Esposito, 'On the Earliest Latin Life of St. Brigid of Kildare', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* (1912) in *Latin Learning in Mediaeval Ireland*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), 307-326, pp. 307-8.

[12] Acta Sanctorum, Februarii tomus i, ed. by Joannes Bollandus and Godfrides Henschenius (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1863) <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:acta-us&rft_dat=xri:acta:ft:all:Z100063401> pp. 135-141, [accessed 30 July 2013].

[13] Connolly and Picard, 'Cogitosus: *Life of Saint Brigit',* 11-27. The translation found in Liam de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) is admittedly directed to 'the non-specialist reader', p. vii.

the publication of the translation, no such edition has been published, although it would be immensely helpful.[14]

The aspect of the *VBC* which has engaged commentators in the greatest depth has been the debate concerning priority among the three early Lives of Brigit, the *VBC,* the *Vita Prima* (VP)*,* so called because of its appearance in the Acta Sanctorum just prior to Cogitosus's Life*,* and the Irish Life known as the *Bethu Brigte* (BB)*,* as well as the presumed Primitive Life which is believed to lie behind the *Bethu Brigte,* and possibly the *Vita Prima* as well. Major studies of the *Vita Prima* have been carried out by Seán Connolly,[15] Dorothy Ann Bray,[16] and David Howlett.[17] The debate concerning its use as a source by Cogitosus, or vice versa, is essentially the same as the dating debate. Either Cogitosus used it, as Howlett and Esposito believe, or its compiler borrowed from the *VBC,* as Connolly and McCone have argued.[18] *Bethu Brigte* is an anonymous eighth-century text extant in a single manuscript, one quarter in Latin and the remainder in Old Irish.[19] Close examination of the *VP* and *BB* reveals lengthy segments of parallel miracles, although direct borrowing is doubtful.[20] *VP* and *VBC* also share a number of miracles in common, although a different collection than those shared between *VP* and *BB,* leaving scholars a puzzle as to which hagiographer borrowed from whom, and when. One possible solution involves identifying the Latin original behind the *BB* as a possible source for all three extant texts, a proposal which is appealing in so far as it accounts for both the similarities as well as the differences among the three. On its own, however, it does not assist with dating any of the three relative to each other.

Further possible evidence for relationships among the three extant texts has been suggested in the poem dedicated to Brigit and printed by Mabillon, known as the

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[14] Connolly and Picard have varied from the AASS paragraph and chapter numbers. While much of the present discussion of the text will follow Connolly and Picard (C&P), the AASS numbering will become significant in the structural analysis. Therefore chapters or paragraphs will be identified by source and number where clarification seems most useful.

[15] Seán Connolly, '*Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value' *JRSAI* 119 (1989), 5-49.

[16] Dorothy Ann Bray, 'The *Vita Prima* of St. Brigit: A Preliminary Analysis of Its Composition' in *Narrative in Celtic Tradition: Essays in Honor of Edgar M. Slotkin, CSANA Yearbook 8-9*, ed. by Joseph F. Eska (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University Press, 2011,) 1-15.

[17] David Howlett, 'Vita I Sanctae Brigitae' *Chronicon* (Cork: University College Cork, 1997), pp. 1-31 <http://www.ucc.ie/chronicon/howfra.htm> [accessed 9 July 2014].

[18] Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: a saint with three Lives?', *Peritia,* 1 (1982), 107-145.

[19] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', p. 108.

[20] Sharpe, 'Vitae S Brigitae', p. 95.

Rheims prologue, and dated by Sharpe to the first third of the ninth century.[21] The author of the poem claimed to know of three prose Lives of Brigit, and proposed to outdo them all with a complete metrical Life in her honour. He attributes the three texts to Ultán, Ailerán, and Cogitosus, a claim that has proved irresistible to modern scholars who have examined what is known about Ultán and Ailerán to discover whether either one can be associated with either the *VP* or the Primitive Life behind the *BB*. Esposito argued that Cogitosus drew his material largely from the *VP,* along with one additional source, and claimed these two were written by Ultán and Ailerán, per the Rheims poem. Further, since the Rheims writer suggested that Ailerán had extracted his miracles from a prior source, and the *VP* makes a similar statement toward the end, Esposito concluded that Ultán was the writer of the Primitive Life, and Ailerán the author of the *Vita Prima.*[22]

Making the opposite claim for dependence of the *VP* upon the *VBC,* McCone noted the linguistic connections between *VP* and *VBC,* arguing that the Latin of the *VP* is generally poor except where it contains miracles which also occur in the *VBC,* where it appears to use Cogitosus's language verbatim. This would naturally lead to the conclusion that *VP* as it presently exists utilized *VBC* as a source, and thus should be dated to the later seventh or early eighth century. Further noting the sharp difference in geographical concern between *VP* and *BB* (or their source) on the one hand, and the obvious Kildare-centric interests of Cogitosus on the other, McCone related the geographic concerns reflected in the texts to the so-called 'pact' which appears in the *Liber Angeli* explaining that Patrick and Brigit had agreed to limit her territorial supremacy (counter to Cogitosus's apparent claims) and allow Patrick rights to all of Ireland except Leinster.[23] At the conclusion of some complex argumentation, McCone placed the *VP,* the Rheims poem, and the paragraph from the *Liber Angeli* delineating the pact between Armagh and Kildare all within the middle of the eighth century, leaving Ultán and Ailerán responsible for two separate source texts lying behind our three extant texts.[24]

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[21] Sharpe, 'Vitae S Brigitae', pp. 96-97.
[22] Esposito, 'On the Early Latin Lives', p. 137.
[23] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', p. 122.
[24] McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', p. 133.

In addition to competing claims regarding primacy, there is the ongoing debate over the alleged identity of Brigit as a pagan goddess, perhaps presiding over fire and light, as McCone suggested,[25] or as a 'mythological figure', as Hughes claimed.[26] The earliest sources for the goddess Brigit, or Bríg, are the ninth-century *Sanas Cormaic* and the twelfth-century account of Gerald of Wales's tour of Ireland.[27] The claim of a pre-Christian triple-goddess goes no further back than Bishop Cormaic, however, and John Brannigan did a thorough job of discrediting Gerald's reliability as an unbiased source for the lives of common Irish people in his day.[28] Lisa Bitel and Carole Cusack represent two of the more well-known recent scholars arguing for a syncretic figure in Brigit, or a progression from goddess to saint reflected in the textual and material evidence from the seventh through ninth centuries.[29] The most compelling work on the subject in recent years, however, is Catherine McKenna's masterful argument for the modern introduction of a pagan identity for Brigit rooted in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interest in recovering 'primeval mythologies' lying behind the already ancient Christian stories.[30] Crediting Whitley Stokes and James Kenney with the earliest claims of transition, euhemerisation, or simple conflation, McKenna traced the use of both Christian and pagan images of Brigit through the Irish cultural resurgence of the early twentieth century, arguing that repetition of the claim of euhemerisation in fact led to a process of apotheosis, in which the historical Christian abbess came to be exalted as a pagan goddess who may or may not have existed and been worshipped in Ireland before the arrival of Christianity.

It is unclear after all of these discussions whether the issues involved in dating the three extant Lives and their likely precursors has been, or indeed can be, settled.

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[25] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present,* pp. 161-78.

[26] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland,* p. 227.

[27] Whitley Stokes, ed., Cormac's Glossary, in *Three Irish Glossaries* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862) <https://archive.org/details/threeirishglossa00cormuoft> [accessed 25 June 2008]; Giraldus Cambrensis, *The History and Topography of Ireland* (reprint, with trans. by John J. O'Meara, 1951, Mountrath: Dundalgan Press, rev. ed. 1982).

[28] John Brannigan, '"A Particular Vice of that People": Giraldus Cambrensis and the Discourse of English Colonialism', *Irish Studies Review,* 6 (1998), 121-30.

[29] Lisa M. Bitel, 'Body of a Saint, Story of a Goddess: origins of the Brigidine tradition', *Textual Practice,* 16 (2002), 209-228, Carole M. Cusack, 'Brigit: Goddess, Saint, "Holy Woman," and Bone of Contention' in *On a Panegyrical Note: Studies in Honour of Garry W. Trampf*, ed. by Victoria Barker and Frances di Lauro (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2007), 75-97 <www.academia.edu> [accessed 20 May, 2014].

[30] Catherine McKenna, 'Apotheosis and Evanescence: the fortunes of Saint Brigit in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' in *CSANA Yearbook* 1 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 74-97.

Comparative analysis using the structural and hermeneutical approach utilized in the present study may shed further light on the similarities and differences among the three. The question of Brigit's alleged pagan identity may also potentially benefit from a hermeneutical approach to the *Vita Prima* and *Bethu Brigte.* Lastly, as the connection between Brigit and Patrick and their respective *paruchiae* is involved in the dating of the texts, and as Muirchú is evidently aware of Cogitosus's work, and as Ultán is in some fashion connected to the hagiographical accounts of both saints, a comparative hermeneutical examination of Muirchú's text with Cogitosus's text (perhaps including Tírechán's as well) may uncover some useful insights into the received traditions and concerned knowledge pertinent to the two cults.

4.1.3   SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

4.1.3.1 SEVENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

Kathleen Hughes's introduction to the sources for early Irish history named hagiography as one among a range of documentary sources for this period, including secular and ecclesiastical law codes, annals, grammars, sagas, and exegetical work.[31] Since parchment literacy arrived in Ireland with the coming of Latin Christian culture in the fifth century, however, it is clear that all of these genres would have been influenced by the ecclesiastical environment within which they were composed, and none of these texts can be considered 'uncontaminated' by Christian thought.[32] Hughes noted, for example, that the annals reveal their ecclesiastical and dynastic affiliations by what they contain and what they omit, and that some show signs of reliance on other, missing documents, as late as the mid-eighth century.[33] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín pointed out the mix of biblical influences along with genealogical traditions and political aspirations that combined to form the *Lebor Gebála Érenn*.[34] With such mixed influences behind the documentary evidence for the seventh century, then, we are left with a complex task of examination and interpretation for each and every document available, and years of painstaking work have gone into this endeavour.

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[31] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*.
[32] Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories', p. 92.
[33] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 104-105.
[34] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800' in *A New History of Ireland,* vol. 1*,* Prehistoric and Early Ireland, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 182.

For the purposes of the present project, historical attestation for sixth- and seventh-century Ireland will be drawn primarily from Ó Cróinín's work in *A New History of Ireland, vol 1*, and Wendy Davies's and Clare Stancliffe's contributions to *The New Cambridge Medieval History,* vol 1, both published in 2005. Doing so will permit the construction of a reasonably coherent understanding of the political and ecclesiastical realities on the ground pertinent to life in Kildare in the mid-seventh century, and allow the text of the *VBC* to take its place within that milieu.

The political structure of early medieval Ireland consisted of many small kinship groups called *tuátha* which existed in overlapping layers of dynasties and kings, sub-kings and overlords. Territorial competition was fierce. Davies described the political machinations of the century from 560 – 660 as 'bewilderingly complex,' noting the several dynasties claiming descent from Niall of the Nine Hostages and their many attempts at conquest of territory across the north of Ireland.[35] It would appear that they desired not only to dominate rival dynasties in their local territories, but to subjugate each other as well. It was not until the 730s that a single Uí Néill overkingship was established, and even that arrangement involved alternation between northern and southern dynasties.[36] The Ulaid formed their chief rivals in the north, and the conflict between these two dynasties played itself out over several centuries. In addition, the Uí Néill came into direct conflict with the Laigin, the people of southeast Ireland (Leinster), Brigit's territory. The Laigin consisted of two dominant dynasties, the Uí Cheinnselaig toward the south, and the Uí Dúnlainge who shared a border in the northwest of Leinster with the Uí Néill. The two Laigin dynasties contested for supremacy in Leinster throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, only establishing a lasting overkingship in the mid-eighth century.[37] The Life of the founder of the Kildare monastery, then, was composed against a background of ongoing internal strife between the Leinster dynasties, as well as external battles with the ambitious Uí Néill.

The arrival of Christianity with Palladius and Patrick in the fifth century occurred within a similarly fragmented and contentious environment, presenting both

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[35] Wendy Davies, 'The Celtic kingdoms' in *The New Cambridge Medieval History,* vol 1: c. 500-c. 700 AD, ed. by Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 232-62, pp. 240-241.
[36] Davies, 'The Celtic kingdoms', p. 241.
[37] Davies, 'The Celtic kingdoms', p. 245.

challenges and opportunities. Stancliffe suggested that Patrick's work, given the social and political structure of the time, was slow and painstaking, going *tuáth* by *tuáth* across the northern half of the island.[38] She concluded that it was not until the second half of the sixth century that Christianity was generally accepted as the religion of Ireland, and that the pre-existing professions of poet and lawyer continued on for some time. Evidence for the coexistence of Christian clergy and secular professionals is seen as late as the law codes of the seventh and eighth centuries.[39] Therefore, while Christianity as a majority religion could be assumed by the time the *VBC* was composed, the political situation in Cogitosus's time appears not to be all that different from the circumstances in Brigit's lifetime.

Debate over the structure and organization of the church in Ireland has focused on the degree to which bishops exercised administrative and sacerdotal authority in tandem with the monastic houses which flourished in the sixth and seventh centuries. Earlier theories assumed Patrick unsuccessfully attempted to establish a Roman-style diocesan structure in Ireland.[40] Kenney considered the Irish church in the sixth century to be thoroughly monastic, in which the great saints were the founders and leaders of major monastic federations, variously described as *familia* or *paruchiae*.[41] Explanations for the perceived shift in favour of monastic organization included the rural nature of Irish economic life, the absence of any cities of the size suitable for episcopal sees, and the 'tribal' nature of the social structure which would have resisted territorial boundaries which did not conform to their dynastic holdings. Richard Sharpe offered a useful analysis which demonstrated that monastic and diocesan structures could easily have coexisted in patterns that grew organically from within Irish social life, with bishops and secular clergy attending to the pastoral needs of a growing population of lay Christians, and monastic communities taking a variety of forms, some more and some less isolated and remote, with their primary concern to

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[38] Clare Stancliffe, 'Religion and Society in Ireland' in *The New Cambridge Medieval History,* vol. 1*,* ed. by Fouracre, 397-425, pp. 400-401.
[39] Stancliffe, 'Religion and Society', p. 401.
[40] Richard Sharpe, 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia,* 3 (1984), 230-70, p. 239.
[41] Kenney, *Sources,* pp. 291-2.

protect and develop those professed Christians who were interested in leading a more dedicated religious life.[42]

Two potential sources of conflict between Kildare and Armagh may be noted in the ecclesiastical history of the region. Stancliffe suggested that the Palladian mission may have been based in and around Leinster,[43] raising the possibility that Brigit, presumably a Leinster native, may have been a convert loyal to Palladius or to his mission. In addition, Charles-Edwards suggested the possibility that the composition of the *VBC* took place between the time in which the church at Kildare would have adopted the Roman Easter computus and the time half a century later when Armagh may have followed suit.[44] This raises the further possibility that Kildare saw itself as aligned with a larger vision of the church, and perhaps the leader of what was called the *Romani* party in Ireland. If this is the case, Kildare and Armagh may have been on opposite sides of the controversy which involved Christians in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England at just this point in history.

4.1.3.2 WAS KILDARE A *CIVITAS*? ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR ECCLESIASTICAL SETTLEMENT IN SEVENTH-CENTURY IRELAND.

It must first be noted that very little archaeological work has been done in the city of Kildare, and that any conclusions regarding the seventh-century 'monastic town' surrounding the church and monastery of which Cogitosus was writing must be both speculative and comparative in nature, based upon excavations of ecclesiastical settlements in other parts of Ireland. Modern methods such as radiocarbon and dendrochronological dating have supplemented the study of existing documentary evidence, allowing a more richly critical understanding of the aims and methods of seventh-century writers to emerge. In terms of the present study, Cogitosus's claims for the Kildare of his own day as 'a vast and metropolitan city' (*maxima hæc civitas et metropolitana est*)[45] may be compared with present-day archaeological evidence for larger seventh-century ecclesiastical settlements such as Armagh and Clonmacnoise.

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[42] Sharpe, 'Some Problems', pp. 263-267, see also Stancliffe, 'Religion and Society', pp. 409-415.
[43] Stancliffe, 'Religion and Society', p. 399.
[44] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Early Irish Saints' Cults and their Constituencies', *Ériu,* 54 (2004), 79-102, p. 90.
[45] Connolly and Picard, 'Cogitosus: *Life of Saint Brigit'*, p. 26.

Absent the opportunity to examine Kildare itself, these may be the closest comparable sites available to modern scholars.

Settlement areas identified for fifth- to seventh-century Ireland appear to fall almost exclusively in the category of *ráth,* or 'ringfort'.[46] These were not necessarily used for defence, nor do they appear to be uniformly ring-shaped, leading some current scholars to prefer the native term to the English term in common use.[47] Houses within the *ráth* were round, built of wood, and insulated with straw, moss, or other organic material.[48] Round houses were commonly attached in pairs resulting in a figure-eight shape. Rectangular houses do not appear until sometime after 800, and were built either of turf or stone.[49] Archaeological evidence supports the narrative accounts of economic and dietary reliance on dairy cattle, with lesser numbers of pigs and sheep, and widespread cereal cultivation.[50] Episodes in the *Vita Brigitae* which include discussion of sheep and cattle, milk and butter, and the manufacture and use of a grindstone appear to provide accurate evidence of seventh-century agricultural activity. Edwards pointed to such technological advances as watermills which were introduced in the early seventh century, and which would appear to be the nature of the mill in *VBC* (C&P 31), as supporting the possibility of production of large amounts of food to sustain a growing population, a factor which may be read in support of Cogitosus's claims for a sizable and thriving community in residence at Kildare.[51]

In contrast to the prevailing view among archaeologists, Ó Corráin argued that by the seventh century monasteries could have grown quite large, and indeed become

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[46] For detailed discussion of settlement patterns in early medieval Ireland, see Nancy Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland, c. 400-1169: settlement and economy' in *A New History of Ireland,* vol. 1, ed. by Ó Cróinín, 235-96; Aidan O'Sullivan, Finbar McCormick, Thomas R. Kerr, Lorcan Harney, *Early Medieval Ireland AD 400-1100: the evidence from archaeological excavations* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013), and Aidan O'Sullivan, Finbar McCormick, Lorcan Harney, Jonathan Kinsella, and Thomas Kerr, *Early Medieval Dwellings and Settlements in Ireland, AD 400-1100,* vol. I: Text (Dublin: University College Dublin School of Archaeology, 2010).

[47] O'Sullivan, et al, *Early Medieval Dwellings,* pp. 52-53.

[48] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', p. 245.

[49] Aidan O'Sullivan and Tríona Nicholl, 'Early medieval settlement enclosures in Ireland: dwellings, daily life and social identity', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* 111C (2010), 59-90, p. 72 <www.academia.edu> [accessed 16 July, 2014].

[50] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', p. 265, see also Edel Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World AD 400-1000: Landscape, kingship and religion* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014) 15.

[51] Edwards, 'The archaeology of early medieval Ireland', p. 298.

'towns'.[52] Relying on the hagiographical witnesses of Cogitosus and the early Life of St Munnu, along with eleventh-century annals which mention streets, houses and workshops within 'monastic towns', Ó Corráin attributed the presumed wealth of Kildare to its 'extensive lands […], the offerings of the faithful, bequests, burial dues, and income from relic circuits'.[53] He did admit, however, that his conclusions were reached by extrapolating back from evidence of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and from the 'uncertain data' of the ninth and tenth-century annals.[54] Apart from identifying a small number of ecclesiastical sites that encompass somewhat larger areas than known secular settlements, evidence for the kind of production and trade of goods, concentration of population, and volume of travellers which might indicate an urban ecclesiastical centre are uniformly lacking in the known archaeological evidence for seventh-century Ireland.[55] Bhreathnach took a middle view, arguing that the documentary references to Jerusalem as an ideal city constitute a genuine 'sense of urbanization', while evidence on the ground supports recognition that Irish settlements were smaller and less economically active than British or Continental models.[56] She pointed to Armagh, described in the *Liber Angeli* as *urbis,* as a possible site where a large enough population and diverse enough economic activity might have taken place, at least at festival times, though most likely not on a year-round basis.[57] The relative size and wealth of Armagh 'city' versus Kildare may have represented some cause for competition in the seventh century, apart from the question of legitimacy of archiepiscopal claims made for either one.

In addition, relevant to popular perceptions of a pagan identity for Kildare and St Brigit, archaeological evidence for continuity between pre-historic pagan sites and early Christian ecclesiastical sites appears slim and unconvincing. 'Many excavated early medieval ecclesiastical sites indicate evidence for prehistoric settlement but

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[52] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Ireland c.800: aspects of society' in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. by Ó Cróinín, 549-607, p. 599. See also Charles Doherty, 'Exchange and trade in early medieval Ireland', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* 110 (1980), 67–89, and Charles Doherty, 'The monastic towns in early medieval Ireland' in *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe: Ireland, Wales, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Russia From the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Howard B. Clarke and Anngret Simms (Oxford: B.A.R., 1985), pp. 45–75.
[53] Ó Corráin, 'Ireland c.800', p. 598.
[54] Ó Corráin, 'Ireland c.800', p. 599.
[55] O'Sullivan, et al, *Early Medieval Dwellings and Settlements,* p. 71.
[56] Bhreathnach, *Ireland and the Medieval World,* p. 27.
[57] Bhreathnach, *Ireland and the Medieval World,* p. 29.

there is relatively little archaeological evidence for definitive continuity of settlement or the citing [sic] of church sites at prehistoric cult sites.'[58] Kildare's location five miles from the royal hill of Dún Ailinne has been cited in support of arguments that Brigit's previous identity as a pan-Celtic goddess was incorporated into her seventh-century Lives.[59] However, the seventh-century see of St Patrick at Armagh is sited directly upon *Ard Macha*, a hill dedicated to the goddess Macha, whereas there is no such association with the hill at Knockaulin.[60] Further, churches themselves were generally small and built of wood from the fifth to the ninth centuries, suggesting that the church at Kildare might simply have been *built of* oak, not the allegedly pagan 'Church of the Oak' inherited from a presumed druid past.[61] In short, indications of the metropolitan scope and urban nature of Kildare in the *Vita Brigitae* may more profitably be considered as narrative techniques on the part of the author than as indications of the historical conditions at the site of Brigit's foundation, either in the fifth or the seventh centuries. Possible intentions and effects of an encounter with the text in its original setting will be examined in the sections on structural analysis and interpretation of the text later in this chapter.

Set against the archaeological and historical evidence, the *Vita Brigitae* does not provide compelling evidence for urban life in Kildare in the mid-seventh century. Given the many levels of division and contention across Ireland from the sixth through the eighth centuries, it is difficult to imagine that Cogitosus seriously intended his *civitas* to be seen as a political or ecclesiastical capital city. He may rather have used the narrative of its founder's life to present it as an idealized city of sanctuary, a refuge from the battles that surrounded it and a light to those who wondered, not about the past of Christian Ireland, but its future.

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[58] O'Sullivan, et al, *Early Medieval Dwellings and Settlements,* p. 75, in contrast to Hughes's suggestion that Kildare is strategically located close to the pagan site at Knockaulin, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 32.
[59] Cusack, 'Brigit: Goddess, Saint, Bone of Contention' in *On a Panegyrical Note*, ed. by Barker and di Lauro, p. 90. See also Donal Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Cult of Brigid: A Study in Pagan-Christian Syncretism in Ireland' in *Mother Worship: Themes and Variations*, ed. by James J. Preston (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 75-94, p. 82.
[60] Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 169.
[61] O'Sullivan, et al, *Early Medieval Dwellings and Settlements*, p. 76, and C. Harrington, *Women in a Celtic Church, Ireland 450-1150* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 66, vs. Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 356, E. G. Bowen, 'The Cult of St. Brigit,' *Studia Celtica,* 8/9 (1973-4), 33-47, p. 34. Note also Bede's description of the church on Lindisfarne built of 'hewn oak', referenced in Roger Stalley, 'Ecclesiastical architecture before 1169' in *A New History of Ireland*, ed. by Ó Cróinín, 714-43, p. 721.

4.1.4 SOURCES FOR THE *VITA BRIGITAE*

Cogitosus provided little indication of his own sources for compiling the *VBC.* In the prologue he mentions briefly passing on the traditions handed down by their most experienced, or well-informed, elders (*a maioribus ac peritissimis tradita*). Setting aside claims made for the text by Esposito, Sharpe, McCone and others, it is unclear from the text itself whether these traditions were oral accounts from prior generations, or whether Cogitosus himself had a written text from which he culled his selection of tales. In the last few chapters (C&P 30-32) he offers his own eyewitness attestation for the dry riverbed, the millstone, and the church door, providing evidence for conditions at Kildare in the seventh century.

Ó Cróinín described the *VBC*, along with the other seventh-century hagiographies, as an 'occasional piece', an idiosyncratic exercise whose contemporary value lay in its role vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical politics of the day.[62] He observed that the greater volume of literary production before and after the appearance of these prose narratives fell in the categories of grammar, computus, and exegesis, as well as a flowering forth of verse compositions, some of which were themselves dedicated or attributed to the saints of Ireland.[63] While Latin sources for the grammars, calendars and exegetical works were discussed in great detail, little attention was given to possible sources for this spontaneous eruption of hagiographical narrative. It may be that the strong interest in exegesis contributed to the preponderance of biblical influence in the *Vita Brigitae.*

Bieler pointed to the transition from accounts of the acts of the martyrs and sayings and Lives of the Desert Dwellers to more developed biographies, Lives*,* and aretalogies as the genesis for the development of hagiographical form in early Christian Ireland.[64] He noted verbatim use of language from the preface of the *Vita Samsonis* in the preface of the *VBC,* rejecting the possibility of direct borrowing and suggesting instead a common source such as a grammar or phrase-book.[65] Apart from

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[62] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin literature to 1169' in *A New History of Ireland,* ed. by Ó Cróinín, 371-403, pp. 385-387.

[63] Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin literature', pp. 385-387.

[64] Ludwig Bieler, 'The Celtic Hagiographer', *Studia Patristica,* 5 (1962), 243-265, p. 243.

[65] Bieler, 'Celtic Hagiographer', p. 245.

this single reference, Bieler identified no other source for the *VBC* outside of Ireland, and instead waded into the vexed question of priority among the various extant early Lives of Brigit.

Picard emphasized the importance of the *Vita Martini* as a model for early Irish hagiography, arguing that the three-part structure used by Sulpicius to present the early deeds, manifestations of power or *dunamis* (δυναμις), and holy way of life provided the essential structure used later by Cogitosus, Muirchú, and to greatest effect, Adomnán.[66] The third section of this classical structure came to be modified to suit Christian hagiographical needs by including a focus on the death of the saint and his or her posthumous miracles.[67] Picard argued that Cogitosus's famous statement concerning the structure of his narrative, *licet præpostero ordine* (C&P prologue, paragraph seven), announced an intention to provide a collection of miracles only, and withhold any biographical information.[68] Indeed, the text reflects only a slender chronology of Brigit's life, and her spiritual powers do not develop over the course of the narrative, as would be in keeping with an Aristotelian notion of *ethos,* or personal disposition. Picard considered the occasional groupings of similar episodes in the *VBC* to represent an attempt at classification, similar to Sulpicius's collection of miracles by theme in the *VM.*[69] There may be other forms of development detectable within the text, however, and while the *Vita Martini* was most likely available to Cogitosus as a precursor in the genre of hagiography, its use as a structural model may not be as clear as Picard suggested.

Walter Berschin claimed a possible connection to hagiography emanating from Gaul, citing Venantius's sixth-century Life of Radegundis as a possible model, noting its similar use of strings of miraculous events rather than a developed biographical approach, as well as the absence of any narrative concerning the death of the saint, choosing instead to emphasize each saint's on-going presence as reflected in miraculous events in proximity to the burial site.[70]

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[66] J-M. Picard, 'Structural Patterns in Early Hiberno-Latin Hagiography', *Peritia,* 4 (1985), 67-82, pp. 69-71.

[67] Picard, 'Structural Patterns', p. 72.

[68] Ibid., p. 73.

[69] Ibid., p. 74.

[70] Walter Berschin, 'Radegundis and Brigit' in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, ed. by John Carey, Máire Hebert, Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin, 2001), 72-76.

Stancliffe assumed, without elaboration, that Cogitosus would have been familiar with the *Vita Martini* as well as with Jerome's *Vita Pauli.* She additionally pointed to the Dialogues of Gregory the Great and the stories included there which suggest stories found in *VBC*, for example, wine that did not run out, a tame bear that herded sheep, and a river whose course was changed by prayer.[71] Closer examination of the *Dialogues* reveals several additional parallel stories, suggesting that this text may have been quite influential in the composition of the *VBC.* In addition to Stancliffe's examples, Gregory reports Saint Scholastica's miraculous control over the rain, II.33, just as Brigit is able to control the rain at harvest time in C&P chapter four.[72] Large stones are reported moved, or prevented from falling, by the power of prayer in I.1 and I.7; Brigit's miracles of plenty, while also found in the Bible, find possible models in the *Dialogi* at I.7, I.9, II.20, 21, and 29; concern for the poor was expressed by Benedict in II.27, 28, and 30; there is an additional episode in I.9 in which a bishop in his youth was known to give away his own clothing, comparable to Brigit's gift of Conleth's vestments to a poor man. While Cogitosus offers a lengthy series of anecdotes in which Brigit's presence tames wild creatures, Gregory presents a single instance of an analogous act in I.10 in which a soldier's mad horse is tamed. Similarly, a bear refuses to attack a bishop in III.11, behaving in a somewhat similar fashion to the tamed boar in *VBC* chapter eighteen.

Themes from the *Dialogi* can be recognized in at least two of the more developed chapters in the *VBC*, even though the particulars of the tales vary. For example, the story in *VBC* chapter twenty (C&P) in which a man is imprisoned for killing the king's trained fox and liberated by virtue of a wild fox performing for the king in the first fox's place, may be read against the story in the *Dialogi* I.9 in which a wild fox returns a stolen hen, as well as II.31 in which a man held captive is released by virtue of a saint's stern look, and III.1 in which Paulinus offers himself in servitude to redeem a widow's son. While none of the chapters in the *Dialogi* are close matches for the fox-and-king story, they represent similar concerns for liberation for those unjustly imprisoned, as well as the folklore motif of the fox as a particularly clever

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[71] Gregory I, *Second Dialogue (Life of St. Benedict),* ed. by St Pachomius Orthodox Library, trans. by 'P.W.' (St Pachomius Orthodox Library, 1608, re-edited 1995) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/g1-benedict1.asp> [accessed 1 April 2011]; wine: *Dialogi* I.9, bear: *Dialogi* III.14, river, *Dialogi* III.9.
[72] Another similar rain miracle appears in *Dialogi,* III.12.

animal. Concern for justice is also at the heart of the *VBC* chapter twenty-five in the account of the chaste woman and the hidden brooch. Often associated with the Ring of Polycrates story,[73] alternatively this tale may have been modelled on the biblical episode of Jesus and Peter finding the coin for their temple tax in the mouth of a fish.[74] In all, some sixteen episodes in the *Vita Brigitae* bear at least thematic resemblances to material in Gregory's *Dialogues*, representing 47% of the text. While a fair number of these individual episodes may in fact share a common biblical tradition, particularly around variations on the theme of providing for the poor, other commonalities such as moving large rocks and trees, taming of wild beasts, and control of the weather may at least suggest the possibility that the *Dialogi* had come to Kildare by the time Cogitosus was composing his text.

One other possible source for material in the *VBC* is the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas, a text variously dated from the second to the fifth century, purporting to present events from the first twelve years of Jesus' life. Among the stories contained in this text are reports of Jesus riding on a sunbeam (IX), carrying water in his cloak (XI), and assisting Joseph with adjustments to various carpentry projects by lengthening the wood to be used or the final product, in one case the throne for the king of Jerusalem (XIII).[75] These gnostic folk-tale type episodes may have inspired Cogitosus's account of Brigit's wet cloak hung on a sunbeam, and the lengthening of the church door. Further, Gero pointed to the frequent use of a closing refrain after many of the miracle stories in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, most of them to the effect that the crowd was impressed and publicly praised Jesus for his actions, a motif that Cogitosus employs at the conclusions of chapters one, three, six, seven, and nineteen (C&P). While not overwhelming, these correlations may point to a previously unidentified source for Cogitosus.

Without doubt, however, the primary source for the *Vita Brigitae* is the Bible itself. Dorothy Ann Bray argued that the christological focus for many of the miracles of feeding and aid to the poor made Brigit into an apostolic leader and vehicle of

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[73] Bray, 'Ireland's Other Apostle', p. 61.
[74] Matthew 17.27.
[75] Stephen Gero, 'The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: a study of the textual and literary problems', *Novum Testamentum,* 13 (1971), 46-80.

salvation for her followers.[76] Scriptural references abound in the text, and Bray took note of the preponderance of overt allusions to gospel references to support her christological argument. Connolly went further in the Introduction to his translation of the *VBC,* identifying the theological virtues of faith and charity along with the monastic virtues of purity, virginity, obedience, and willingness to preach the gospel in all circumstances as manifest concerns of the hagiographer. Both of them noted a latent eschatological element in the narrative, connecting Cogitosus's description of Brigit's death as 'follow[ing] the lamb of God into the heavenly mansions' (32.10) with Revelation 14.4, a reference to (male) virgins following the Lamb 'whithersoever he goeth'. While these few suggestions are certainly useful, there are many more detailed allusions to Revelation, and to Kildare as the New Jerusalem and City of God evident in the Life*,* strengthening the argument for the Bible as the primary source for the text. Each of these will be discussed in the structural analysis section of this chapter. At this point it will suffice to observe that of thirty-four chapters (thirty-two chapters plus prologue and epilogue, C&P), some twenty chapters contain explicit references to scripture, some as commonplace as 'all things are possible', or 'prayer without ceasing', others as particular as the tossing of a millstone (Judges 9.53) or clothing beggars as though they were Christ (Matthew 25.40). Over 58% of the chapters fall into this category; adding an additional eleven examples of more subtle biblical allusions such as dividing public works projects by kinship groups as in Joshua 18, or comparisons between Brigit's *civitas* and the New Jerusalem or a City of Refuge, brings the total to 31 of 34, better than 90% of the text recognizably drawing from biblical material. The significance of the particular biblical materials chosen for inclusion in Brigit's Life will be discussed within the structural analysis.

4.2   WORLD OF THE TEXT: COGITOSUS'S VISION OF KILDARE AND ITS SAINT

4.2.1   COGITOSUS'S SELECTION OF EPISODES

Cogitosus, while calling his document a *vita*, announces in his first sentence his intention to convey the 'miracles and deeds' of the holy virgin, Brigit, but not to provide a chronology of her life. He closes the preface with a warning that the order is significant, however, and not what might be expected, by describing it as *præpostero,*

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[76] Bray, 'Ireland's Other Apostle', p. 60.

'inverse'. This chapter will examine what that order is, and how it may be understood as 'inverse'. Identification of common themes and groupings of episodes by theme will be seen to indicate a strong underlying biblical vision guiding the composition and arrangement of chapters in this text.

The selection of miracles and deeds Cogitosus presents are described as 'few from the many', which, while a common hagiographical trope, in this case may be literally true. The *Vita Prima* and *Bethu Brigte* contain nearly three times as many episodes as the *VBC,* and as indicated in the previous discussion of priority among the three texts, may all depend on a source document which could have been in circulation at the time Cogitosus was writing. If indeed many more stories concerning the saint were known than were recorded by Cogitosus, then some rationale for his selection should be discernible.

4.2.2 BIBLICAL THEMES AND THEIR SOURCES

It has been noted that the city of Kildare stands out as the major figure in this Life*,* to the point where its prominence nearly overshadows the presence of its founder in the narrative, and this strong emphasis may inadvertently have contributed to speculation that Brigit herself was a fiction. This assumption, however, radically misunderstands the relationship between the foundation and its saint. Cogitosus may be seen to have built his account of both figures on the basis of several interconnected biblical themes: the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2, before the Fall of Humankind; the Cities of Refuge described in Numbers and Deuteronomy, the vision of a Peaceable Kingdom promised to the Israelites in exile in Isaiah 2.2-4 and 11.6-9, and the image of the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21. This chapter will argue that Cogitosus wished to locate Kildare as both a City of Refuge and a New Jerusalem, and portrayed Brigit as the agent responsible for establishing the realm of peace for any and all who sought her aid. It will further argue that Cogitosus's method in presenting Kildare and Brigit in this light consisted of composing a collection of parables modelled on biblical precedents in order to illumine the nature of his *civitas* and its founder, and that the arrangement of the chapters supports a reading of the text as a chiasm, a formal structure used widely in the Bible.

4.2.2.1 EDENIC HARMONY WITH NATURE, GENESIS 1 AND 2

The first two chapters of the Bible consist of two rather different accounts of the creation of the world. Genesis 1 is quite formal and orderly, while chapter two takes the tone of a folktale. In both accounts, however, the natural elements of earth, sea and sky are given their proper places and functions, the world of vegetation and animate life appears, and human persons are granted dominion over, and responsibility to care for, the garden in which God has placed them.

Throughout the Life, Cogitosus presents Brigit as someone completely in harmony with her surroundings, a bit fearful of her mother in the beginning, but filled with faith and charity, able to tame the wild creatures around her and protect those who seek her aid. He begins in the first sentence of the first chapter to tell readers that Brigit was predestined 'in his image' (*ad suam imaginem*)*,* a clear reference to Genesis 1.27 in which male and female persons are created in the image of God. The initial chapters, one through six (C&P), taken together, present a picture of Brigit as the centre of a flourishing pastoral and agricultural enterprise: milk and butter are abundant, a wooden altar blossoms, cooked bacon is plentiful, the harvest is undisturbed by rain, even the sun holds up her wet cloak. While challenge and conflict will enter her happy world very soon, Cogitosus presents his saint with a kind of winsome innocence in these initial chapters, appropriate to a time in paradise.

4.2.2.2 CITIES OF REFUGE, NUMBERS 35 AND DEUTERONOMY 19

The establishment of cities of refuge takes place as the Israelites begin to occupy the Promised Land, and they exist so that those who have accidentally caused a death may take refuge for a time to prevent hasty revenge on the part of relatives of the deceased. In those cities, accusations will be heard, defendants tried, and justice done. Murder is defined as premeditated killing, and will be punished by death. In cases of accidental death, the defendant is offered permanent residence in the city of refuge, a form of exile.[77]

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[77] Timothy M. Willis, 'Cities of Refuge' in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Metzger and Coogan, p. 125.

References to safety and refuge occur in the *VBC* late in the text, in chapter 25 (C&P) when the chaste woman flees to Brigit for safety from her unwanted suitor when his silver brooch goes missing, and again in chapter 32 in which Cogitosus claims metropolitan status for Kildare, declaring it the 'safest city of refuge' in all Ireland. While the claim for Kildare is entirely in keeping with Cogitosus's clear intention to present the city as admirable in every way, it is interesting that he extends the metaphor to Brigit herself; 'the chaste woman fled for safety to saint Brigit as to the safest city of refuge' (25.4). This image of Brigit as the site of refuge situates her as the source of the protective power that her city later claims.

Brigit goes on in this episode to render judgment between the woman and her suitor. The reader has already been told that the suitor gave and then stole the brooch as a means to obtain the woman's sexual favours without her consent, so his act, while not murder, is clearly a case of premeditated harm. The resolution appears when the brooch is found inside a fish which had just been caught. Confronted with the evidence, the man confesses and Brigit returns home. This portion of the story has been compared to the Greek tale, the Ring of Polycrates.[78] In that tale, however, King Polycrates, the owner of the ring, is the focus of the story, and he freely released the ring with no intention to victimize anyone. The retrieval of the ring inside a fish increased his own suffering only, and no good or harm is done to any other person as a result. The better parallel is to Matthew 17.24-27, in which representatives of the Temple approach Peter asking whether his Master, Jesus, has paid his Temple tax. On the hook for payment, Jesus notes that those in power do not collect taxes from their own children, but willingly victimize others. He then sends Peter out to catch a fish and retrieve a coin sufficient to cover the tax for both of them, an act of abundance and liberation much closer to Brigit's liberation of the chaste woman who was victimized by the wealthy man.

4.2.2.3 Peaceable Kingdom, Isaiah 2 and 11

The fulfilment of God's promise of peace is described in Isaiah, chapters two and eleven. Chapter two depicts a mountain, 'exalted above the hills' to which 'all nations flow'. Here the people shall 'beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into

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[78] Bray, 'Ireland's Other Apostle', p. 61.

pruninghooks', here they 'shall learn war no more'.[79] Those of the house of Jacob are

bidden to 'come […] walk in the light of the Lord'.   In chapter eleven the images of

peace are extended to all of the created order, beginning with God's holy mountain,

and including the famous passage in which 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the

leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling

together; and a little child shall lead them.'[80] This portrait of perfect peace throughout

the created order is introduced by the prophecy of a 'rod out of the stem of Jesse'

upon whom the Spirit of wisdom and understanding shall rest.[81] Through the work of

this 'root of Jesse' God will call the remnant of his people together to live in peace on

the holy mountain, presumably, though not explicitly, Jerusalem.

Here one may see the inspiration behind Cogitosus's many chapters in which

Brigit exercises what folklorists call 'power over nature'.[82] Her alleged 'power over'

birds, animals, and topographical elements, however, is never manipulative or punitive

as it is sometimes portrayed in Lives of the male saints.[83] In her presence, or for her

sake, animals relate to her and to each other in perfect peace. The prime example of

this is chapter 19 in which wolves voluntarily escort a herd of pigs to Brigit on behalf of

a benefactor who wished to give them to her. Brigit herself offers no command or

direction in the affair, the animals simply relate to each other as though already in the

presence of the peaceable one.

4.2.2.4 NEW JERUSALEM, REVELATION 21

The preface of the *VBC* begins with the common tropes of obedience, humility, and the

outstanding virtue of the protagonist. By the third paragraph, Cogitosus has

introduced Brigit's monastery, built on the plains of Mag Liffe 'on the firm foundation

of faith'. He claims for his community a supremacy over 'almost all the Irish Churches'

and all the monasteries, its influence covering Ireland 'from sea to sea'. In this place

Brigit had exercised wise administration, providing for the souls of the people under

her care, including calling a bishop to assist her in leading the community. The result is

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[79] Isaiah 2.1-4.
[80] Isaiah 11.6-8.
[81] Isaiah 11.1-2.
[82] See, e.g., Bray, *A List of Motifs.*
[83] See, e.g., Cuthbert reprimanding the ravens, *VCA* III.5.

compared to a fruitful vine, with deep roots and branches spreading all across Ireland, under a perpetually happy succession of abbesses and archbishops.

Compare this account, then, to the Revelation of the New Heaven and New Earth, in which God comes to dwell among the people, wiping away every tear, taking away all sorrow, making all things new.[84] A few verses later, the writer is taken to the top of a high mountain from which he can see 'that great city' descending from the heavens with its great walls, foundations, and twelve gates, all adorned with precious stones, its light provided not by sun or moon, but by the presence of God. Within the city is a 'pure river of water of life' by which rose a Tree of Life, with leaves for the healing of the nations. The just and the holy will live here, but those who are unjust will not be allowed in.[85] Some of these images appear later in the *VBC,* but the preface specifically mentions Brigit's monastery, its location, its vast influence, and its joyful continuance of Brigit's legacy of leadership. The metaphor of the vine and branches in the *VBC* parallels the image of the tree at the centre of the city in Revelation, while also calling on the gospel image of Christ as the vine and his believers as his branches in the world.[86]

The final chapters return the focus to the church and city of Kildare. Here Cogitosus relates events to which he claims to have been an eyewitness, describing the renovation of the church, the liturgical practice of the community, and the presence of the relics of Brigit and Conleth on either side of the altar (C&P 32.1-9). Here the reader is told that the tombs of the saints are 'adorned with a refined profusion of gold, silver, gems and precious stones', reminiscent of the gates of the new Jerusalem in Revelation. Within the church is space for the male and female religious in residence at the monastery, as well as 'a large congregation of people of varying status, rank, sex, and local origin' (32.3). Revelation 7.9 tells of the 'great multitude of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues' who are gathered at the throne of the Lamb. No doubt Cogitosus wants his readers to be impressed with the magnificence of his monastery, but presumably the first readers or hearers of the narrative, as residents of the community would already have known exactly what the church looked like. What

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[84] Revelation 21.3-5.
[85] Revelation 21.8-22.12.
[86] John 15.5.

may be behind this depiction is a comparison of Kildare with the New Jerusalem of peace and beauty and holiness, a city whose coming was foretold in Scripture and fulfilled in the 'end times' of the conversion of Ireland to Christianity.

4.2.3 STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

4.2.3.1 MIRACLES AS PARABLES

Given the preponderance of biblical influence on this text, and the minimal influence of other models, it seems reasonable to seek the organizing structural principle for this text from among the various genres in the Bible. Clearly not a history, this text appears to utilize a mix of short and somewhat longer anecdotes as illustrations of two main concerns, the holiness of Saint Brigit and the magnificence of Kildare. If read in a literal fashion, the claims for Brigit have led some commentators to claim that she was some form of pan-Celtic solar deity, either conflated with an actual Christian abbess at some point in the development of her cult, or indeed having never actually existed in human form at all.[87] In addition, taking the claims for Kildare at face value has led to possibly exaggerated conclusions about the existence of monastic towns in seventh-century Ireland, as well as complex theories regarding ecclesiastical political rivalries with Armagh.

The genre of parable, particularly as it is used in the gospels, offers a fresh lens through which Cogitosus's collection of miracles and deeds may be read. As was noted previously, parables are short, anecdotal stories which convey a message of concerned knowledge that lies outside the actual content of the story. Characteristic elements of parables include references to common daily activities and experiences: planting and harvesting, sheep (in Israel/Palestine) or cattle (Ireland), milking and grinding and sharing meals. In addition, parables are equally characterized by the appearance of novel or unexpected elements, or twists in the plot: a Samaritan who cares for a wounded Jew, or a dog who steals but does not eat purloined bacon.[88] The function of

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[87] From among many, see Kenney, *The Sources,* p. 357; Esposito, 'On the early Latin lives of St. Brigid of Kildare' p. 127; Stancliffe, 'The Miracle Stories' in *Le Septième Siècle: changements et continuités*, ed. by Fontaine and Hillgarth; de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World*, p. 47; McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century', pp. 110-111; Proisias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1970), pp. 34-5.

[88] Stein, 'Parables' in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Metzger and Coogan, pp. 567-570; see also, Donahue, 'The Parables of Jesus' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Brown, et al, pp. 1364-69.

the plot twist is often to direct the attention of the hearer or reader to the 'more-than-literal' meaning of the story, the concerned knowledge which lies simultaneously within and beyond the activities of daily life. For example, Jesus's parable of the mustard seed is not about what to plant in your garden if you want birds to nest nearby, it is an image of the expansiveness of the Realm of Heaven.[89] And, as Crossan pointed out, Jesus the parable-teller became a parabolic image himself, standing for the unity of humanity and divinity to which all believers are called.[90] So, too, might we imagine Brigit the abbess becoming Brigit the saint and focus of parabolic stories that place her at the centre of a most blessed 'kingdom on earth.'

Building from the approach of identifying the miracle stories in the *VBC* as parables rather than attempts at recounting Brigit's historical achievements, the arrangement of the chapters may be seen to coalesce around common themes or images, much the way Matthew, Mark and Luke present the parables of Jesus. Parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son are collected together in Luke 15.4-32. Here two shorter stories are followed by a more developed examination of the same theme, the restoration of something valuable that was lost. Mark's Gospel presents three parables about seeds and sowing in chapter four, and Matthew's Gospel presents seven parables concerning the *parousia* in chapters 24-25. So also will the structural analysis show Cogitosus presenting his stories in thematic groupings which draw from the various biblical accounts of times and places of peace and plenty.

If the parabolic nature of the individual chapters is accepted, and the groupings of chapters around biblical themes identified, a further structural element may be uncovered. It may be seen that the groupings reflect back and forth upon each other in a manner consistent with the structural method known as a chiasm. Found in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Canon, chiastic structuring is a literary device in which the author builds up to a central point by steps, and once the centre is complete, backs down in a series of reverse steps.[91] Howlett has analysed the Latin preface of the *VBC* and revealed its tight chiastic form on the micro level of individual

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[89] Mark 4.30-32.
[90] Crossan, *The Power of Parable*, p. 3.
[91] James M. Gibbs, 'An Introduction to Chiastic Structuring' <http://newtestamentresearch.com/NT%20Research-Mk%202/chiastic_structuring.htm> [accessed 12 August 2014].

words and syllables.[92] The structural analysis may therefore proceed with the understanding that this method was familiar to Cogitosus and could have been employed on a macro level as well. Indeed, by grouping the parables in the *VBC* by thematic content, it is possible to see a chiastic structure underlying the overall framework of the text. The chiastic 'mirroring' is evident in the emphasis on Kildare at the beginning and the end, in the tendency of chapters 24-29 (C&P) to recapitulate themes and images presented originally in chapters one through nine, and in the repeated themes of transformations, chapters eight through twelve, and tamings – a form of transformation – in chapters 18 through 23.

The following section will present the chapters in the proposed groupings and discuss the thematic bonds that undergird each grouping. It will be argued that the themes of Kildare as the New Jerusalem on earth and locus of the Peaceable Kingdom of Isaiah, with Brigit as the centre and source of that divine peace, are the central concerns behind the composition of the text, and that reading the accounts of Brigit's actions as well as the attributes of her foundation at Kildare as parables of sanctity and magnificence will provide the key to interpreting the value of the text as a Christian document.

A note on the numbering of the chapters: while the translation by Connolly and Picard has been a major resource for this project, it is easier to see the chiasm by using the numbering from the Acta Sanctorum in which the total number of paragraphs is 40, and the central section in the chiasm is complete at paragraph 20, the middle of the text. In addition, in AASS the later chapters concerning the millstone and the church door are broken up into separate paragraphs giving a truer sense of their length and composition. The tables will include chapter and paragraph numbers for both editions; the discussion will reference the AASS paragraph numbers only.

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[92] David Howlett, *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995), pp. 243-248.

Thematic Groupings in the *Vita Brigitae*

sec	theme	C&P	AASS	episode	function
A.	Preface: on Kildare		1-2	monastery established	key themes: God's power, Brigit's virtue
B.	Eden	1	3-4	milk and butter	innocent beginnings
		2	5	altar blossoms	
		3, 5	6, 8	sharing food	
		4	7	harvest	
		6	9	sunbeam	
		7	10	mischievous boy and 7 sheep	trouble in paradise
C.	Transformations	8	11	water to ale	healing and changing
		9	12	fallen (pregnant) to restored	
		10	13	stone to salt	
		11	14	blind to seeing	
		12	15	mute to speaking	
D.	Reversals of Expectations:	13	16	dog did not eat bacon	looks back to dog in par 6
	The Peaceable Kingdom	14	17	meat did not stain cloak	looks back to purity, par 5
		15	18	*unpleasant leper gets cow*	leper is not cured
		16	19	cattle not stolen	
		17	20	horse in yoke not disturbed	
E. (C')	Tamings:	18	21	wild boar	18-23 all depict 'wild'
	Peaceable Kingdom, cont.	19	22	wolves herd pigs	persons or animals that will become 'tamed'
		20	23	*fox and king*	
		21	24	duck	variation on the theme of
		22	25	nine wicked men	'transformation', section C
		23	26	Lugaid's appetite	
F. (B')	City of Refuge/ Promised Land				Recapitulations
		24	27	big tree moved	looks back to altar, par 5, faith moves mountains
	City of Refuge	25	28	*chaste woman and brooch*	looks back to nun, par 12

	Broken/Given and Replaced	26	29	loom and calf	looks back to par 3
		27	30	chalice broken in three pieces	
		28	31	bishop's vestments	
	Promised Land	29	32	honey in the floor	looks back to milk miracles, par 3, 8
G. (A')	New Jerusalem	30	33	river diverted	points to Revelation
		31	34-36	millstone	returns attention to
		32	37-39	church door	Kildare
	Epilogue		40		

A. Preface: on Kildare

C&P	AASS	episode	function
prologue	1-2	established monastery	establish themes: God's power, Brigit's virtue, chief monastery

The seven paragraphs of the preface lay out Cogitosus's purposes, biases and primary concerns. He wishes to satisfy the demands of his brothers who have apparently requested this document, he hopes to bring the 'greatness and worth' of Brigit and her radiant virtue to the public eye, and he affirms her monastery – his own community – as the centre of the church for all Ireland. In laying out his agenda he utilizes several biblical images, including the widow whose flour and oil are increased by God's grace,[93] the firm foundation of faith upon which the monastery is built,[94] the assertion that he is only sharing a few of many possible stories,[95] and the vine and the branches.[96] Brigit and Conleth are presented as an equal pair, ruling over their 'episcopal and conventual see' with all virtue and happiness. The stage is set, as it were, for the unfolding of Brigit's story, and by extension, Kildare's.

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[93] 1 Kings 17.
[94] Galatians 6.10.
[95] John 21.25.
[96] John 15.1-5.

<u>B. Time in Eden</u>

C&P	AASS	Episode	function
1	3-4	milk (twice) and butter	pastoral innocence
2	5	altar blossoms	and abundance
3, 5	6, 8	sharing food	
4	7	Harvest	
6	9	Sunbeam	
7	10	mischievous boy and 7 sheep	(trouble in paradise)

In section B the story proper begins. The first several paragraphs present a youthful and innocent Brigit in a domestic pastoral setting in which she begins to express the divine calling which marked her from childhood. In paragraph four there is a brief suggestion of a shadow in the garden, her passing fear of her mother (*timor pavida*), which prompts her to pray. As a result of her piety, the necessary butter and milk are provided, and Brigit's reputation begins to spread. Read as a miracle of food production, this introductory anecdote introduces the theme of abundance and generosity, characteristic of both Christian and secular Irish social practice.[97] Read as a parable of Brigit and the realm of peace and plenty promised by God, the concerned knowledge here addresses Brigit's purity of heart, humility before the authority of her mother, and her faith in God as expressed by prayer which is immediately rewarded.

Since Cogitosus is not concerned to tell us the story of Brigit's life outside of her monastic vocation, he immediately moves on to the moment in which she accepts her religious calling and receives the veil from Bishop Mac Caille. Unlike other accounts of her life, Cogitosus relates no conflict with her parents, although they naturally expected her to marry, and no attempt is made at self-mutilation to discourage unwanted suitors.[98] In this parabolic setting, we are still in paradise, the Edenic stage of Brigit's life, and pain and suffering do not belong here. The altar itself embodies the fresh green state of Brigit's soul as it grows or flourishes perpetually (*perpetuo virescat*), some hundred and more years after the event.

The next story again involves food production and generosity. This time Brigit is cooking bacon and gives some to a begging dog. When the time comes to serve the

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[97] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 170-171.
[98] See, for example, *Vita Prima* chapter 19.

food, nothing is missing, the amount in the pot is as full as if nothing had gone missing (*acsi non esset demptum, plenissime repertum est*). This anecdote, placed after Brigit has become a nun, contains no indication of her religious or familial status at the time. She might still have been at home, or may have been cooking for guests of a community in which she was resident, or she could already be the abbess, setting an example of service for her community. Here may be seen one example of Cogitosus's non-chronological order. He is not concerned with the chronological development of Brigit's life; this miracle of replacement, similar to the biblical parables of the lost coin or the lost sheep, belongs to the time of innocence and simple generosity, the 'Eden' of the narrative. Whenever it happened, by its nature it belongs at the beginning of the story he is telling.

The paradisiacal imagery continues in the next three paragraphs, in which Brigit's fields are dry for the harvest, her cow produces superabundant amounts of milk, and a sunbeam supports her wet cloak. Rain, which could have been a disaster at harvest time, is treated simply as an inconvenience to Brigit and her community. This incident may recall the episode in the *Dialogi* in which Bishop Fulgentius was interrogated by Goths standing in a circle about him. A storm came up to harass the Goths, but Fulgentius was spared even a drop of rain.[99] This episode is most certainly misplaced chronologically. Had it taken place in Brigit's lifetime, it would have had to occur later in her life since here she has the power to summon workers for the harvest. But as a parabolic expression of her faithful care of the 'garden' she has been given to tend, as Adam and Eve were charged with tilling and tending the Garden of Eden, the story belongs at this early stage.

Unlike either the male or female Desert Dwellers whose Lives might have been available to be used as models for this text, Brigit is never portrayed as an ascetic saint. In paragraph eight she has no food to offer guests when they arrive, but this is neither lifted up for praise, nor treated as an occasion for shame or embarrassment. It is simply an opportunity to display her trust in God's unlimited power to supply her needs, and the single cow is milked a third time. Read as additional food or abundance miracles, these episodes may seem to indicate the kind of goddess-like fertility

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[99] Gregory, *Dialogi,* III.12.

characteristics so often claimed for Brigit.[100] Read as parables of her virtues of faith and generosity, they suggest a willingness on God's part to cooperate fully in supplying human needs when the request in made in a spirit of simplicity, purity and generosity. Taken in the larger context of Cogitosus's narrative, these stories may be read as parables of paradise, the early stages of faith in which someone starting out in the religious life is recognized by the goodness of their intentions and the diligence of their labours.

The theme of abundance which characterizes these early groupings disappears after paragraph eighteen and does not reappear until paragraph thirty when Brigit replaces the calf of the poor woman who provided a meal for her. Such a gap suggests that this theme is best understood as a function of the early stages of the narrative, and part and parcel of Brigit's care of the poor, which as a form of Christian charity will also include provision of clothing, employment (the harvest), justice, and healing.

Toward the end of this section comes the famous story of the wet cloak hung on a sunbeam. This episode was picked up and utilized in the Lives of several other Irish saints, although Cogitosus's use of it appears to be the earliest Irish occurrence, perhaps indicating the popularity of his text in later decades.[101] It may, however, derive from the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas, as discussed earlier. Again this episode raises the temptation to read Brigit as a solar deity, but if it derives from a gnostic Christian text, then the stronger claim is for use of the imagery of light (the sunbeam) and lightness (the virtual weightlessness of the soaking wet cloak) as indications of Brigit's pure mind and sweet innocence. This story is also the first of two in which Brigit is portrayed as a shepherdess, a familiar biblical image linking King David, Jesus, and Psalm 23 together as signs of the arrival of God's realm of perfect peace.

Into Brigit's paradisiacal existence comes the first sign of trouble: the mischievous boy (*nequam adolescens*) and his accomplices who test her generosity to the poor by carrying off her sheep, paragraph ten. Again, and for the last time in the text, Brigit is presented as a shepherdess, a device which links this paragraph to the previous one, and sets the parameter for this section. This time, however, it is not a

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[100] See, for example, McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present,* pp. 170-171.
[101] Phillips Barry, 'The Bridge of Sunbeams', *The Journal of American Folklore,* 27 (1914), 79-89, p. 85.

simple case of Brigit being approached by someone in need, and being kindly met in return. *Nequam* indicates someone who is vile, good-for-nothing, not to be trusted. The number seven here recalls references in Matthew and Luke to the number of times one is to forgive someone who offends.[102] In the end, however, the number of the sheep remains unchanged, *nec plus nec minus*. This young one, in testing Brigit's virtue, may represent the serpent in Genesis 2, the tempter who tests her virtue, discernment, and generosity. But the end of this story is not a Fall. It is more like the parable of the Lost Sheep in which that which was lost is restored by God's intervention.

C. Transformations

C&P	AASS	episode	function
8	11	water to ale	
9	12	fallen (pregnant) to restored	power to effect change
10	13	stone to salt	
11	14	blind to seeing	power to heal
12	15	mute to speaking	

Unlike Eve, Brigit has passed the test, revealing her superior virtue and purity of heart. From this point forward, the parables will depict Brigit as the vessel through which God's power effects miraculous and unexpected events. Based closely on biblical precedents, paragraphs eleven, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen present miracles of transformation. Cogitosus begins with the transformation of water to ale, explicitly based on Jesus's transformation of water to wine at the wedding in Cana,[103] and follows it with the transformation of stone to salt, a common mineral associated with preserving and flavouring foods, and mentioned in the Bible as characteristic of true Christian life.[104] The healings of a man born blind and a mute girl both reflect well-known biblical healings and fit in with the theme of transformation in this section. The more challenging story is in paragraph twelve, the disappearing pregnancy. Read in isolation, this anecdote may be read as running counter to common Christian moral guidelines for pregnancy and termination, and consequently either deeply troubling

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[102] Matthew 18.22, Luke 17.4
[103] John 2.1-11.
[104] Matthew 5.13; see also Smith, *Augsburg Commentary: Matthew*, p. 87.

for some readers or quite liberating for others. Set among the miracles of transformation, however, the options for interpreting this incident are not limited to a feminist freedom-of-choice agenda or a goddess who manipulates female fertility. It may, rather, be an opportunity for Brigit to assist a young woman whose physical and spiritual health are in jeopardy, relieving her of the consequences of her lapse of judgment and transforming her body from its state of compromise to a state of health and wholeness. By doing so, her spiritual life is likewise transformed from concupiscence to penitence, which may be seen as the essence of the story.

As individual episodes, these paragraphs place Brigit in the position of imitating Christ in the role of healer and provider. As parables of transformation, however, they form a distinct grouping in the *VBC* which serves to illustrate the possibility that under Brigit's care and attention, the most commonplace of objects like a stone, or the most lost of causes, like a pregnant nun, can be transformed into either useful objects or whole and healed servants of Christ.

D. Reversals of Expectations

C&P	AASS	Episode	function
13	16	dog did not eat bacon	Looks back to dog in par 6
14	17	meat did not stain cloak	Looks back to purity in par 5
15	18	*unpleasant leper gets cow*	Things that *don't* happen…
16	19	cattle not stolen	
17	20	horse in yoke not disturbed	

Section D represents the central point in the chiastic structure of the text, and consists of a collection of nature miracles which take an unusual form. Up to now the groupings have concerned Brigit's early 'Edenic' life, characterized by relatively simple miracles based largely on biblical precedents. This central section, however, takes on a more complex character, consisting for the most part of expectations reversed, things that might have been expected to happen that did not. Several take the form of miracles involving the common animals of Irish agricultural life – dogs, horses, pigs, cattle – and contrast the behaviour of animals in their natural environment with their behaviour in the presence of Brigit and the signs of her purity of mind, intention, and prayer.   The first two stories contain echoes of images that appeared at the very

beginning of the Life, an early indication that we are at the climax of the chiasm. The begging dog in paragraph six was given bacon and ate it. The miracle there had to do with the bacon, not the dog. The dog in paragraph sixteen initially behaves badly, an undisciplined thief of a dog, and appears to get away with his crime. Later it is revealed that although he stole the bacon, he did not eat it, an act Cogitosus notes is 'contrary to his habitual instinct'.

The next story is about a most stupid servant (*stolidissimus famulus*), who throws uncooked meat into Brigit's white cloak. The reference to her white garment looks back to her vocation as a nun in the initial section in which Bishop Mac Caille clothed her in a white veil and white 'garment' (*pallium album et uestem candidam*), demonstrating her purity. In the later story, even though the servant acts like an animal, the unexpected outcome is that he cannot soil the purity of her garment, an observation Cogitosus underscores by telling the reader twice that the mantle is 'unstained' and 'retains its white colour'. No form of brutish behaviour will detain Brigit's mission to provide for the poor, nor will it stain the outward evidence of her purity and favour with God.

The next two animal stories concern cattle who turn out not to be stolen, and a horse who is not shaken by the absence of its yoke-mate. Paragraph nineteen appears to describe a cattle raid, an event known from the secular tales of Ireland, including the Táin Bó Cúalnge.[105] Brigit's cattle, though evidently not defended by any type of fence or structure, are defended by a river which rises up 'like a wall' (*instar muri erectum*) reminiscent of the *aqua quasi murus* on either side of the Israelites as they walked to freedom through the Red Sea.[106] As the Israelites were led to freedom through the walled water, Brigit's cattle are freed from the thieves and return to the peace of their home with the saint.

In the case of the horses, two are yoked to pull Brigit's chariot, one escapes and the other remains undisturbed. There is no indication that the first horse was wild or unbroken, it is not given away or stolen, it simply becomes restive and runs away. What does not happen is that the second horse does not experience any fear or

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[105] *Táin Bó Cúailnge Recension 1,* trans. by Cecile O'Rahilly, (Dublin, 1976) <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/T301012/index.html> [accessed 13 August 2014].
[106] Exodus 14.22.

anxiety, and the unoccupied side of the yoke does not fall to the ground, disrupting Brigit's travel. All this time she is engaged in prayer and meditation, and there is no mention of a second person travelling with her, a charioteer for example. Cogitosus then tells us at the end of the story that this act served to 'confirm her teaching by signs and miracles' (*signis et uirtutibus suam confirmans doctrinam*). He does not, however, report what that teaching was. The reader may associate the story of the horse and yoke with the famous gospel invitation from Jesus to take on his yoke which is easy and light.[107] A parabolic reading of the story would suggest that the horses each represent contrasting responses to Jesus's invitation. To refuse the yoke is to be left fearful and alone in the world. To take on his yoke is to have all that is needed to be peaceful and productive.

In the midst of these miracles of things that don't happen as expected, Cogitosus places the story of the unpleasant leper who demands Brigit's best cow and calf, paragraph eighteen. The story is set up by informing the readers that pilgrims and the poor were flocking to Brigit from all sides, drawn by her excessive generosity (*nimiæ largitatis*). Among the crowd comes an unpleasant leper, a sick man who is described as ungrateful (*ingratus*). He demands the best cow and calf she had, and Cogitosus relates that not only did she give them to him, but the cow took to the calf as if it were its own. This is not the only miracle in the story, however. Set among a series of stories of things that didn't happen as expected, the reader is prompted to look again at the leper. Should he have been healed instead of given what he requested? Should he have been given anything at all since he did not come to Brigit with a grateful heart as so many of her other supplicants did? Here we may see Brigit behaving somewhat as the father did in the parable of the Prodigal Son.[108] Rude and ungrateful, the younger son demands his inheritance from his father, and squanders it. The father, however, does not begrudge the son his share, however prematurely it is demanded, and in the end the son is won back in humility. Cogitosus does not provide a happy ending to the leper's story, but he does show Brigit behaving with the father's unquestioning generosity. In this respect Brigit fulfils Jesus' command to 'Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And then your reward will be great, and you

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107 Matthew 11.29-30.
108 Luke 15:10-32.

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will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful (*ingratos*) and to the wicked'.[109]

Taken simply as a further collection of gifts to the poor and power over nature, this grouping does not contribute much that is new to the text at this point. Brigit is apparently doing more of the same as she has done for the previous several paragraphs. Read as indications of Brigit's character, they underscore the theme of her power over animal nature in its worst aspects, including that of humans operating out of their animal instincts of stupidity and greed, and her ability to embody the highest and most difficult of Jesus's teachings. The resonance between the unpleasant leper and the prodigal son serves to alert readers once again to the parabolic nature of the stories, pointing beyond their own content to the unexpected ways in which God's peace and justice may be accomplished in the world. Read as the central section in the chiasm, this grouping collects together episodes that address both humans and animals whose lives are fallen from paradise, out of control, and by coming under the influence of Brigit begin to live in a 'peaceable kingdom', a community where neither ordinary ill manners nor outright theft can mar the brilliance of Brigit's purity, and restive beasts cannot disturb the perfection of her prayers. By extension, then, those who come to Kildare to become part of her community may expect to participate in this realm of peace, plenty, and perfection.

E: Tamings

C&P	AASS	episode	function
18	21	wild boar	variation on section C: Transformations
19	22	wolves herd pigs	'wild' persons or animals become 'tamed'
20	23	*fox and king*	
21	24	duck	
22	25	nine wicked men	
23	26	Lugaid's appetite	

Section E follows the collection of Reversals with additional 'power over nature' miracles, but with a different emphasis. Mirroring the pattern in section C, these are

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[109] Luke 6:35.

Transformations with a particular twist. Paragraphs 21, 22, and 24 depict wild animals behaving as though they are tame in Brigit's presence. Paragraphs 25 and 26 apply that same ability to human beings whose behaviour is wild and untamed, and who Brigit is able to bring under control. As in sections C and D, in the middle of a selection of short and relatively straightforward accounts falls a longer story which is not obviously related, in this case the story of the king with two foxes. Each of the anecdotes in this section will be discussed below.

Paragraph 21 picks up the refrain concerning brute beasts and how they are held in check, 'contrary to their nature', by Brigit's virtue, a comment which first appeared in paragraph sixteen. This observation appears in paragraphs 16, 18, (Section D), 21, 22, and 24, (Section E), suggesting that while Cogitosus found it a useful motif, it does not by itself constitute a structural linkage among these paragraphs. Rather, it is a thematic element that reinforces the image of the Peaceable Kingdom, the portions of Isaiah in which the return to the Promised Land after the Exile is foretold to include years of peace and prosperity, in which 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid'.[110] By interspersing these nature miracles with other stories that group together around more specific themes, Cogitosus is able to convey his concerned knowledge about Brigit's *virtutes* and the nature of life in Kildare as a form of sanctuary for humans as well as non-sentient animals.

Paragraphs 21, 22, and 24 are relatively straightforward examples of wild animals behaving contrary to their nature. The wild boar is blessed by Brigit, the duck is welcomed into her arms, and the wolves voluntarily herd the pigs that are given to Brigit by an admirer. This third story, in addition to illustrating the virtue of tameness and cooperation, points to Brigit's influence being felt from afar, and underscores the image of people who are 'flocking' to her from across all of Ireland, just as all nations would stream to Jerusalem when the Israelites are restored to their homeland, Isaiah 2.2. An incident from the *Dialogi* may also lay behind these stories. Bishop Cerbonius was cast to the bears in an act of persecution by the Gothic tyrant Totila. The bear, to

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[110] Isaiah 11.6.

everyone's surprise, was released into the ring, and proceeded to approach the bishop docilely and lick his feet.[111]

Paragraphs 25 and 26 extend this vision of the Peaceable Kingdom to the human realm by taming Lugaid's ferocious appetite, and converting the nine wicked men intent on doing murder. The taming of Lugaid's appetite is accomplished quickly and easily – he asked for help, she blessed him and prayed to God, and his appetite was reduced with no reported difficulty. The opposite occurs in the story of the nine wicked men. They do not ask Brigit to relieve them of their compulsion to commit murder. They are resistant to her preaching, which has been effective in earlier episodes, and in spite of her prayers and pleas they persist in their crimes. Her only recourse is to offer them an apparition (*imaginem instar uiri*), the image of a man whom they proceed to assault. It was only later, upon discovering that no one was missing from the area, that they repented of their actions and were converted to Christianity, away from the 'godless and diabolical superstition' (*vanæ et diabolicæ superstitionis*) which had led them into their sins in the first place. While Sharpe and Bhreathnach have suggested that this episode is an indication of pre-christian initiation practices,[112] if taken as the crowning episode in a series of 'tamings', it takes its place as a parable of Brigit's ability to bring even the most flagrant of sinners to repentance and conversion. Merely to be approached by her sanctity is sufficient to effect a complete change of heart. Whether or not Cogitosus ever knew of actual demonic superstitions that drove people to vicious crimes, he was convinced that Brigit was a sufficient conduit of grace that she could indeed effect such a transformation. It can certainly not be read as in any way endorsing pagan practice, and should make clear that Cogitosus, at least, did not consider his saint to have any latent pagan leanings.

This leaves paragraph 23, on the king and the two foxes. One of two episodes to address the issue of justice, this story recalls similar themes in the *Dialogi.* In III.1 Bishop Paulinus places himself in servitude in order to free the only son of a poor widow. Not only is the motif of involuntary servitude shared between the two texts, but the possibility of substitution for the indentured individual, and the eventual release of all who are enslaved. It is consistent with Cogitosus's approach that the

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[111] Gregory, *Dialogi,* III.11.
[112] Bhreathnach, *Ireland and the Medieval World AD 400-1000,* p. 142.

story of slavery and liberation is told of an animal, however, as it neatly fits the parabolic style that has been built up throughout the text. Falling in the middle of the taming stories, this parable raises questions about who is tame, who is wild, and how do tame and wild characters behave.   The king in question, never identified, has a fox at the court, described as gentle, tame, agile, and intelligent. A visitor to the court is described as without sufficient education or understanding (*nulla suffultus scientia*), and seeing what he takes to be a wild animal, the visitor kills the king's fox. In response, the king is enraged (*iratus*), and orders the man be killed for his crime. His wife and sons are reduced to slavery, and his possessions seized. As among these three characters, the man, the fox, and the king, it would appear that the king is the one who is wild, and the fox, though an unusual creature to find at court, was tame. The visitor's only crime lay in his stupidity, failing to discern the true nature of the tamed animal and the untamed king.

Brigit hears of the man's unjust sentence and decides to intervene. Riding in her chariot to the court, one of the few times in this text Brigit is seen travelling anywhere, she is joined by a wild fox which runs across the plains and nestles under her cloak. When she confronts the angry king and pleads for justice, the king demands that his fox be replaced with one as clever as the one he lost, so Brigit presents her substitute. The new fox performs all the tricks its predecessor did, and charms the king into releasing his prisoner. As Brigit takes the man home, the second fox cunningly slips out of the court, for he was never tame in the first place, and returns to the 'wild and desert places' (*loca deserta et silvestria*) which are his true home. Just as the visitor mistook the tame fox for a wild animal, so does the king mistake the wild fox for a tame pet. Brigit's interest in the affair is on the side of justice, so she makes sure that the unschooled visitor is freed; the wily fox is on his own. Her own being becomes a mobile 'city of refuge', providing justice for the man unjustly punished for the crime of killing an animal. One is left at the end of the story wondering if the king, perhaps, has been tamed by this incident since his overwrought anger and harsh sentence has cost him the second fox as well as the prisoner and his family and possessions.

Told in the form of a charming folktale (one can imagine the beginning: once upon a time there was a king with a trained fox….), this parabolic story of tame animals

and wild men serves as a warning to readers and hearers lest they think that they are safe only because they are human, or because they are monks, and that the only creatures God tames through Brigit are pigs and wolves. The two stories in this grouping that follow this one deal directly with humans in need of taming, Lugaid and his appetite, and the nine wicked men. To enter the Peaceable Kingdom of God and Brigit, persons in need of education and taming will be shown their need, and may trust Brigit to supply the necessary lessons.

Overall, then, the thematic resemblances to Section C, the series of Transformations, reinforces the reading of the text as a chiasm. The earlier Transformations are simpler and more light-hearted, and the later ones show a more dramatic and developed sensibility. Where earlier Brigit was transforming stone to salt and performing relatively straightforward healings patterned on obvious biblical precedents, the wildness of characters such as the nine wicked men, or even the charging boar in section E involve greater danger, and therefore bring greater weight and drama to the stories in this section.

F: Recapitulations

C&P	AASS	episode	function
24	27	big tree moved	looks back to altar, par 5
25	28	chaste woman and brooch	looks back to fallen nun, par 12
26	29	loom and calf	
27	30	chalice broken in 3 pieces	things broken are replaced
28	31	bishop's vestments	
29	32	honey in the floor	looks back to milk miracles

Section F contains a series of anecdotes that look back to themes that were first introduced at the beginning of the Life, serving as a mirror to section B. This grouping presents Brigit at the height of her powers, acting in the fullness of her trust in God and her ability to provide what is needed or requested by those who come to her. Each story looks back to an earlier episode to provide a kind of complement to or commentary on the theme under discussion, demonstrating Cogitosus's skill at creating a narrative with a sense of balance, wholeness, and completion to it.

In paragraph 27 Brigit provides 'the divine assistance of angelic power' (*angelica virtute per Divina mysteria*) to assist a team of men and oxen unable to move a large tree. Where this tree was living and needed to be cut down, it looks back in contrast to the wooden altar which became green and flourishing at Brigit's touch when she first became a nun. It may be considered a parable of reversal, as it were, indicating that indeed that which was living may be cut down and moved, and that which appears to be dead may be brought to life, all through faith 'like the grain of a mustard seed,' a parable from Matthew and Luke which Cogitosus makes a point of quoting here.[113] Presenting a reversal here also serves to connect this story, and thus the section, to the central section of Reversals of Expectations, section D.

Details of the story of the chaste woman and the missing brooch were discussed earlier. In the context of this grouping, it may be seen to look back to the story of the pregnant nun in chapter nine. Both cases address women and their sexual integrity, but in opposite and interesting ways. There is no indication in the case of the nun that she was an unwilling participant in the act that caused her pregnancy; her consensual behaviour represented a lapse in her vow of chastity. In contrast, the chaste woman in paragraph 28 does not consent to her suitor's overtures, and runs the grave risk of being enslaved for her sexual favours. In both cases, Brigit seeks to affirm each woman's right to choose her destiny and be released from the bonds of sin, whether her own or another's, which prevent that destiny from being realized. In paragraph 28 Brigit not only finds the brooch and releases the woman, but accepts the suitor's repentance, freeing him from his cruelty and tyranny as well.

The next three paragraphs, 29, 30, and 31, may be read as a sub-unit of stories involving things that are destroyed in some fashion – burned, or smashed, or given away – and restored in some way to usefulness. These three look back to the early miracles in which butter or bacon was given away, or sheep gone missing, and yet the total amount was unchanged. Each of these three has its unique twist on the theme, however, and its own biblical allusions at work.

The loom burned and restored and the calf killed and replaced in paragraph 29 strongly recall Elijah's miracles in 1 Kings 17 in which a widow's last bit of oil and meal, and last few sticks of wood, are given to feed the prophet, and miraculously restored

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[113] Matthew 17.20, Luke 17.6.

day after day. Conleth's vestments are given to the beggars in whom Brigit sees Christ, as in Matthew 25.40, and she receives replacements from the Christ she sees in the poor. As she freely offers, so will she receive, Matthew 10.8, and her demonstration of faith makes her a 'most blessed member attached to the supreme head' of the Body of Christ, as stated in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 5.23. In Brigit's domain, even the 'chief prelate' cannot hold back the imported vestments for high holy days; all is to be given to those in need. Cogitosus does not tell us, but for all we know, the beggars sold the vestments to obtain food, and the vestments were recognized and returned just when they were needed, which would have been miracle enough. There may also be a recollection here of the incident in which Bonifacius was said to give his own clothes away to the poor when he was a child,[114] and perhaps even the story of Martin of Tours dividing his cloak and sharing it with a beggar.[115]

The middle paragraph of this sub-group of three, the silver vessel divided in three equal parts, is the hardest to fit into the grouping. Like the loom and calf, it must be destroyed in order to be useful. Like the vestments, it may have been an item of use in the church, perhaps a communion chalice. The task of dividing it was beyond even expert skill, as was the taking down and moving of the large tree in paragraph 27, and this is the third time she has been asked to assist lepers, although never to heal them. There is a curious passage in Revelation which may have prompted this particular episode, Revelation 16.19, which states, 'And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath,' but the connection is thin, and does not contribute much to an understanding of the text. Perhaps it is best understood as a parable concerning Brigit's willingness to part with any valuable thing, and her commitment to justice, demonstrated previously in her determination to liberate unlucky victims, is brought down to the level of the simplest item.

The final story in this grouping is a brief anecdote that would seem to have wandered out of the first section, the stories of Eden: the story of a man in need of honey. Indeed, it may be argued that this story is placed here close to the end for the

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[114] Gregory, *Dialogi,* I.9.
[115] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini,* ch. 3.

express purpose of underscoring the chiasmic function of the present section, a reminder of the 'land of milk and honey', the Promised Land, which is another form of the Peaceable Kingdom, City of Refuge, and New Jerusalem which Cogitosus claims for his monastery. Brigit produced an abundance of milk at the beginning of the Life; she provides honey at the end.

G: Kildare, the New Jerusalem

C&P	AASS	episode	function
30	33	river diverted	point to description of
31	34-36	millstone	New Jerusalem and
32	37-39	church door	return attention to Kildare
epilogue	40		

While it is tempting to separate paragraph 33, in which a living Brigit causes the river to change its course, from 34 through 39 which clearly convey posthumous miracles, these three extended stories form a more satisfactory sub-group if they are read as parables of the New Jerusalem, indications that for Cogitosus, Kildare is the centre of the New Heaven and New Earth, first predicted in Isaiah 65, and fulfilled in Revelation 21.

Paragraph 33 may be seen as a bridge connecting the previous grouping of Recapitulations with the seventh and final grouping depicting Kildare in its glory. It recalls the themes of justice and care for the poor and oppressed that have been brought forward in paragraphs 23 and 28, and in all of the feedings and gifts to poor people. Her *tuáth* is represented as weak and downtrodden, forced to do labour that was not rightfully theirs, reminiscent of the Israelites in Egypt at the beginning of Exodus. It is of some interest that Cogitosus is willing for Brigit's *tuáth* to appear small and weak, since that image would run counter to a secular claim for dominance, but would fulfil the biblical promise that 'the weakness of God is stronger than men.'[116] And yet, as the river takes its new course, it recalls the rivers of Eden, the river Jordan, and the River of Life, signs of God's mercy and justice to God's people.

Paragraphs 34 through 36 inaugurate the collection of posthumous miracles for which Cogitosus claims eyewitness testimony. While insistence on eyewitnesses and

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[116] 1 Corinthians 1.25b.

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other reliable sources forms a regular trope in some later Irish hagiographies,[117] Cogitosus does not appeal to others as witnesses, but simply reports what 'we' have seen with 'our own eyes', leading to the conjecture that his accounts are not so much intended to be persuasive for their factual nature, but persuasive on the theological grounds that Brigit was, and Kildare is, the embodiment of the realm of peace and grace which he describes so eloquently. He begins with a three-part tale concerning the monastery's millstone, its creation, operation in the mill, and retirement to a place of honour near the doorway of the cashel surrounding the monastic church. The first portion, paragraph 34, resembles the story of the large tree which was successfully cut down but impossible to move. Only by invoking Brigit's blessing on the wheel, as she herself had blessed the tree, are they able to move it to the mill. Along the way, they invoke Mark 9.23, 'all things are possible to those who believe,' a refrain that appeared in paragraph 27, the story of the tree, as well as in the story of the pregnant nun. To get the stone moving they propose to throw it off the top of the 'very high mountain' where it was cut. This story also recalls II.9 in the *Dialogi* in which Benedict moves an immovable stone by means of prayer.

Once in place at the mill, the stone performs another miracle, 'so that it [the millstone] […] might become better known to all', presumably as a way of enhancing Brigit's already impressive reputation. In this case, grain is brought to the mill under false pretences. A man variously described as *paganus, gentilis,* and *magi* sends a simpleton (*simplicem virum*) to the mill with his grain to have it ground. The stone stops as the grain is introduced, and cannot be turned by any force. While the presenting issue is ascribed to the grain owner's pagan beliefs, the deception involved in the transaction presents an additional layer of complication. Unlike the *Vita Prima* which introduces Brigit's father as a pagan and her foster father as a druid, Cogitosus addresses the question of Brigit's relations with a druid late in the text, long after her lifetime.   The largely irenic tone of this episode contrasts sharply with Patrick's violent confrontations with druids in the account of his life by Muirchú, a writer who explicitly called Cogitosus his *pater* or spiritual father.[118] Nor does this story fit the usual pattern for posthumous miracles, which are most frequently healing miracles told to promote

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[117] Adomnán's *Life of Columba* is a particularly good example.

[118] Bieler, *The Patrician Lives*, pp. 91, 97.

pilgrimage. The best account of this particular episode may be as an attempt to imagine a time when Christians and pagans would still have been in conflict, after Brigit's death, but before Cogitosus's own time.

In the third millstone episode, paragraph 36, the millstone has been installed in the cashel wall after the rest of the mill was destroyed by fire. Here Cogitosus may be drawing from Gregory's *Dialogues* III.18 in which Benedict is unharmed by Goths who set fire to his cell, and which in turn references the three young men in Daniel 3. Cogitosus's comment that people who come to the church may touch the stone for healings has a ring of truth to it, and may reflect seventh-century practice. As a whole, this section serves to direct the attention of the reader from the world outside to the heart of the monastic community, to the door of the church itself which is the focus of the following paragraph. By weaving earlier motifs of power over the natural world, purity, and healing into a single longer tale Cogitosus has set the stage to bring readers back into the realm of peace and blessedness that Kildare is for him.[119]

The final section, paragraphs 37 through 39, describes the process of renovating the monastic church for the purpose of accommodating the ever-growing crowds of worshippers who flock to Brigit's monastic *civitas.* The details of the walls and decoration have been discussed by archaeologists and historians, with conflicting conclusions about their accuracy. Bhreathnach and de Vegvar point to Continental basilicas as possible seventh-century precedents for the Kildare church, although Bhreathnach admits that the model may be literary rather than physical.[120] If the church was built of wood, as is most likely for this time period, then it is highly unlikely that evidence either for or against a church of Cogitosus's description will ever be found. It may, however, be possible to locate some literary precedents for the church he describes, and so illumine at least the prototype which he held in mind. The tale of the lengthening of the church door may, as was noted earlier, derive from the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas, in which Jesus was reported to have assisted his

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[119] A passing reference in 2 Samuel 24.18 to the altar of the Lord being raised up on 'the threshingfloor of Araunah' may have suggested to Cogitosus the possibility of connecting the millstone stories with the story of the church door.
[120] Bhreathnach, *Ireland in the Medieval World,* p. 174.

father in his carpentry work by lengthening various beams of wood too short for their intended use.[121]

In the Life, the central focus of the church is the altar where Brigit and Conleth were buried, among a profusion of gold, silver, and precious gems. Its adornments may have been intended to evoke the splendour of the tabernacle of Exodus, as well as the Temple of Solomon in 1 Kings. The tabernacle held the Ark of the Covenant, and was constructed of wooden walls and tapestries with gold and bronze adornments.[122] The breastplate of Aaron, worn on solemn occasions of public worship, was made of gold and adorned with gems and bright colours.[123] Solomon's Temple consisted of a porch, several chambers, windows, and carvings in the walls of cedar wood.[124] It was outfitted with vessels of silver, gold and bronze.[125] While none of these are verbatim matches for the description in the *VBC*, the elements of gold and silver, precious gems, divided chambers, wall-hangings, and courts to which various classes of people in the community were admitted may have either inspired the construction and decoration of the actual church, or been Cogitosus's literary inspirations.

The separation of the church into spaces for the women, the men, and the priests saying Mass may be a reflection of the traditional understanding of the Jerusalem Temple having been divided into courts for gentiles, women, men, and the holy of holies where the priests offered the sacrifices.[126] And yet, under a single roof (*una basilica maxima*) come people of all sorts and conditions, *populus grandis in ordine et gradibus et sexu et locis diversis.* Here, it may be argued, is Cogitosus's greatest, if implicit, claim for Kildare, that it has fulfilled the conditions to be truly the Body of Christ, male and female, Jew and Gentile, bond or free, all baptized into the one body.[127] And to this place people of every 'nation and kindred and tongue' will be called in the last days.[128]

Taken as a grouping, the episodes concerning the river, the millstone, and the church at Kildare in all its magnificence may be read as parabolic meditations on the

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[121] Gero, 'The Infancy Gospel of Thomas', pp. 46-80.
[122] Exodus 35.
[123] Exodus 28.
[124] 1 Kings 6.
[125] 1 Kings 7.51.
[126] W. LaSor, 'Temple' in *The Oxford Companion to the* Bible, ed. by Metzger and Coogan, pp. 729-730.
[127] I Corinthians 12.13, Ephesians 4.4, Galatians 3.28.
[128] Revelations 14.6.

final chapters in Revelation. The New Heaven and New Earth are viewed from the top of a high mountain from which the viewer sees a crystal clear river by which trees grow with healing properties in their leaves. It will be a place of light and joy, peace and justice, a place to which the people of God will go, as people throughout the *VBC* go to Brigit. Cogitosus presents his monastic city as filled with faithful people celebrating Brigit's feast and worshipping in her church. Outside the town is a river whose original bed can still be seen, and a mountain whose peak produced the millstone at the door. Inside the church are the bones of the saint herself along with her bishop and colleague, lit with silver chandeliers and adorned with precious gems.   Those who lived in Kildare in Cogitosus's time would have known whether his descriptions were literal or literary. One suspects that his enthusiasm, given its deep roots in biblical imagery, is more a function of his theological and spiritual convictions, and less a matter of reporting the physical landscape and interior decorations that surrounded him. Accepting that Cogitosus is conveying some form of concerned knowledge may lead to the conclusion that he was concerned very deeply with portraying Kildare as the locus of the New Jerusalem, God's realm of peace and blessing on earth, and Brigit as the founder and agent of conversion, healing, and transformation who made the city both possible and holy.

4.2.3.2 CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF THE NARRATIVE

If it is accepted that the overarching structure of the text is a chiasm, with the individual components consisting of shorter and longer parables concerning Brigit's holiness and Kildare as the locus of the New Jerusalem, we may return to the question of what Cogitosus meant when he referred to the order of his work as 'inverse' (*licet præpostero ordine*). First, it will be useful to present a condensed diagram of the entire work in chiastic form. Identifying the contents of each section by paragraphs assigned in the Acta Sanctorum version of the text will make the balance and symmetry of the composition easier to see.

A. Primacy of Brigit and Kildare (Prologue, par. 1-2)

    B. Eden (par.3-10)

        C. Transformations (par. 11-15)

            D. Reversals of Expectations (par. 16-20)

            Inauguration of the Peaceable Kingdom

        E. (C') Tamings (par. 21-26)

          The Peaceable Kingdom, continued

    F. (B') City of Refuge/Promised Land (par. 27-32)

G. (A') Kildare: the New Jerusalem (par. 33-39)

(The epilogue functions as a very short addendum, only providing the author's signature at the close of the work.)

In its biblical form, a chiasm employs verbatim repetitions to link lines or verses within a segment of text, the object being to lead the reader to the point of highest emphasis, the centre point of the chiasm. In the present case the parallels operate on a macro level, indicated by pairing and mirroring of whole scenes involving themes and images in highly suggestive ways, for example, creating an Edenic setting at the beginning of the text, and a vision of the New Jerusalem of Revelation at the end. Another pair is the collection of Transformations played off against the collection of Tamings. At the centre of the chiasm sits a fairly disparate collection of stories which may be read collectively as reversals of expectations, and here Cogitosus may have played a real trick on his readers, the clue being the suggestion of an inverse order. Instead of fulfilling the reader's expectations and presenting his strongest case for Brigit and Kildare in the centre of the chiasm, he has reversed the structure and placed his strongest material at the outsides of the structure, the beginning and the end.

Commentators uniformly observe that Kildare is the strongest presence in the text, and that the entire Life from AASS paragraph three through 40 appears to consist of a weak, somewhat random, and rather repetitive collection of nature miracles. From a certain viewpoint, this may be the case. Without recognizing the thematic groupings and chiastic structure, the accumulation of miracles seems only to reinforce an image of Brigit as a generous but rather bland pious woman. Reading the miracles as parables of Brigit's holiness and the Peaceable Kingdom, however, reveals the groupings that hold the structure of the text together. Once the chiastic structure is

identified, the emphases line up exactly where Cogitosus meant to put them. The clearest area of emphasis, Kildare, appears not at the centre, but at the outer levels of the chiasm. The centre section lacks the clear, strong literary emphasis of the surrounding units, thereby inverting the expectations of a reader schooled in biblical interpretation. The parallels and repetitions, particularly noticeable in Section F: City of Refuge/Promised Land where nearly every episode looks back to an earlier paragraph, are the keys to unlocking the intentionality behind the structure of the piece.[129]

In addition, the emphasis on innocence and simplicity in the early episodes, suggestive of an Edenic beginning to Brigit's story, paired with the imagery of the New Jerusalem from Revelation in the final section suggests that Cogitosus constructed his narrative to present a biblical miniature, a sweeping thumbnail narrative in which Brigit represents the conduit of grace which establishes God's holy realm on earth. Rather than selecting from his many available episodes stories of healings of lepers, or miraculous births, Cogitosus chose and arranged stories that emphasized the locations where God's holiness could be experienced: garden, city of refuge, holy mountain, temple, New Jerusalem. Brigit is the grounding element, the conduit of grace, light, and virtue. While she does not develop as a character, the complexity and subtlety of the parables does develop over the course of the narrative, another indication that the parabolic form is the heart of the text.

The three-fold hermeneutic method employed in this thesis examines both the historical background and the structure of a text before attempting the task of interpretation. In the case of the *Vita Brigitae* it is clear that interpreting the concerned knowledge encountered in the text rests squarely on the recognition of the thorough-going biblical influence embodied within the narrative, both for the author and for the reader. In spite of allegations of folklore-type miracles and attributes of a pagan goddess, Cogitosus has presented his readers with a deeply Christian biblical model -- of his saint, of his monastery, and of the text itself -- and the interpretive encounter must be understood as taking place within that three-fold Christian context.

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[129] Gibbs, 'Chiastic Structuring'.

4.3 World Before the Text

As has been described previously, the interpretation of religious texts undertaken in the present project is rooted in the biblical hermeneutical theory proposed by Paul Ricoeur and developed by Sandra Schneiders, with additional reliance on Northrop Frye's literary theory. For each of these theorists, narratives of religious import seek to convey concerned knowledge, that is, knowledge that illumines the meaningful nature of human life, and the way in which a particular community chooses to live their collective and individual lives. In the cases of the Lives of Samson and Cuthbert an admixture of folk or 'pagan' material was identified within the narratives, and interpretation was in some measure engaged in accounting for the presence of such motifs and images in overtly Christian texts. In the case of the *Vita Brigitae,* however, the structural analysis has indicated how strongly influenced the text is by biblical forms and structures, and how little material in the text can be ascribed to folk or pagan sources. Indeed, if a case for Brigit as a pagan figure of any kind is sustainable, it would need to be done using source material found outside of Cogitosus's Life*.*

4.3.1 Encountering biblical models: saint, city, and text

Using the AASS paragraph numbering, the first paragraph consists of tropes of obedience and humility, both of which are genuine monastic virtues as well as hagiographical conventions. At the beginning of paragraph two Cogitosus introduces his saint as a form of *imitatio Christi*, modelling his introduction with words that echo Luke's description of the young boy Jesus.[130] As Jesus grew and developed in wisdom and grace, so did Brigit increase in excellent virtues. That same sentence in paragraph two goes on to introduce Brigit's monastery, built on the plains of Mag Liffe, on the firm foundation of faith (*fundamentū fidei firmum*), which is Christ himself. As representatives of Christ, then, the monastery and its founder are the supreme heads of all the churches and monasteries in Ireland, whose influence reaches from sea to sea. While many have read these claims as essentially political, directed toward the rising influence of Armagh and the Uí Neill, they may also be read as theological claims for the saint and her foundation, explaining why people from all over Ireland come to Kildare, and echoing the passage in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus declares that he

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[130] Luke 2.40, 52.

will draw all people to himself.[131] And, as those who have been most decisively drawn to Christ via devotion to Brigit and residence in Kildare, themes of concerned knowledge directed toward those in monastic life may be perceived in the text, in particular the emphasis on the theological and monastic virtues of faith, charity, purity and obedience.

Thus the initial encounter as presented in the prologue (section A) engages the reader in a compelling set of assertions concerning the centrality of Brigit and Kildare as representations of Christ on earth. The author then goes on to walk the reader through a tightly condensed version of sacred history, from Genesis to Revelation, in the form of parables relating Brigit's miraculous acts and virtues. Within the biblical chronology rests a tenuous chronology of the saint's birth, childhood, adult life, and death, but this is downplayed so that the reader only encounters her human life in its broadest form. She engages in, and thereby sanctifies, the ordinary work of the women of her time, dairying, cooking, and herding. She is modest and kind, but does not obey her parents' wish that she marry. Her dedication to God permeates every aspect of her life, to the point of obliterating the details that historians and other readers long for. In theological terms, however, Brigit is the embodiment of St Paul's plea, 'not I but Christ in me'.[132] The encounter with a saintly figure as fully imbued with Christ-like attributes as Brigit acts as an invitation to the reader to engage as fully as possible in imitating Brigit, and thereby imitating Christ.

The next section, paragraphs three through ten, may be called 'Brigit in Eden'. In these stories the reader encounters the beginning of the biblical journey, the idealized existence which may mirror the beginning years in monastic life, when candidates are enamoured of their vocation and their community. Work is simple, food is provided, prayer is spontaneous and easy, and the praise of God is one's daily occupation. In this early phase the reader encounters Brigit herself taking on the mantle of virginity, and even the dead wood beneath the altar of her consecration is blessed in this sacred moment. None of the usual tribulations of earthly life are of concern in this early, paradisiacal phase. Begging dogs and soaking rain are shrugged off with a smile and a prayer, and the sunbeams themselves provide for simple daily

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[131] John 12.32
[132] Galatians 2.20.

needs. There is an almost saccharine sweetness to this section of the text, curbed only by the early shadow of the mother's potential wrath, and the later encounter with the mischievous boy. Just as the conditions in the Garden were not permitted to persist, so too must the narrative move out of this simplistic view of religious life and take on some greater challenges.

Section C, paragraphs eleven through fifteen, bears witness to the need for the initial rosy glow to wear off, and for Christians to be about the critical work of transforming the world around them, and themselves, into the Realm of God and its representatives. Thus far the needs of the poor have not been of great concern, as they would not have been in Eden. Now, however, Brigit must provide ale for lepers, salt for a poor man, healing for one who is blind and another who is mute. In the midst of these, readers would confront the plight of the fallen nun, whose pregnancy is the outward and visible sign of her failure to observe her vows. If sexual activity was the conduit of original sin, as Augustine maintained, then this woman's sin had followed her into the monastery, and must be repented and forgiven. By coming to Brigit, the nun demonstrated the one thing that could release her burden, admission of her fault in all humility, and genuine penitence for her actions. For new members in the community, particularly those just past the idealism of Eden and now addressing the hard work of inner transformation, this brief episode would have been a reassurance that nothing would stand between Christ and the monk or nun who approached him with honest penitence. 'Come unto me, all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest',[133] Christ assured his followers, and Brigit would do no less.

Sections D and E (C'), paragraphs sixteen to twenty-six, encompass the series of nature miracles for which this Life is well known. Contrary to Cogitosus's claim to live in a bustling metropolis, this section of the text reveals a writer deeply familiar with the realities of rural agricultural life, a familiarity his readers would likely have shared. While the chiastic structure separates this collection of miracle stories into two sections, they share a common theme of embodiment of the Peaceable Kingdom of Isaiah. At the centre of the narrative is Brigit, her mind so absorbed in heavenly things that she does not even give bacon to a dog, he simply takes it away. His nature is so

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[133] Matthew 11.28.

transformed by this passing contact with her that he does not behave as expected, but guards what has been entrusted to him by the saint.

The reader who has been schooled in biblical exegesis may, by this point, recognize the chiastic pattern at work in the text, and realize that paragraphs sixteen through twenty represent the central point of the narrative. If so, they would be both puzzled and challenged by the contents of this section, for it neither makes the critical and glorious nature of religious life in Kildare its point, nor is it so weak that it performs no useful function in the text. Rather, it is the introduction of the theme of life in the Realm of God, a life that requires constant prayer[134] and willingness to give the best that one has, even to those who do not appear to be deserving.[135] The terrestrial benefits, however, include the return of any missing cattle,[136] such peace of mind that wild horses cannot disturb one's prayers,[137] and a shining mantle of purity that cannot be stained by anyone else's stupidity,[138] symbols of the constant blessings to be found even within the challenges of human life. The collection of tales is relatively weak, less coherent and less well-developed than the surrounding sections. Situated at the centre of the chiasm, this section not only presents 'reversals of expectations' for readers of the individual parables, but reverses the expectations for the chiastic structure itself, turning the reader from the particular stories collected here back to the beginning and forward to the conclusion of the narrative. So, too, may someone in the religious life recognize themselves as weak compared to Brigit, but by referring back to the beginning of their foundation, and forward to their end in Christ, members of the monastic community may see themselves as the blessed recipients of Brigit's legacy, and heirs with her of Christ's promises in faith.

The second half of the Peaceable Kingdom series, section E (C'), comprises a set of tamings of both animals and humans, wild creatures whose proximity to Brigit renders them tame enough to compare to the lion who will lie down with the lamb. Here the chiasm has turned the corner, and the pattern of looking back has begun. Taming is a form of transformation, located primarily in the animal world, but also in

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[134] *VBC* 16, 20 (AASS numbering).
[135] *VBC* 17, 18.
[136] *VBC* 19.
[137] *VBC* 20.
[138] *VBC* 17.

the animalistic nature that persists in humanity, and so reflects back on the earlier collection of transformations in section C. Readers prepared to see this structural turn in the text may recognize the biblical injunction of *metanoia,* a turning of mind from worldly ways to the repentance that makes one a true citizen of God's Realm. This is no longer the entry into religious life, however, it is the hard work of taming one's own passions and appetites, a challenge that is both infinitely demanding and infinitely rewarding. Recognizing the presence of murderous rage within or the desire to consume twelve people's worth of goods is the task of a mature spiritual mind, and again the monk and nun are counselled by the story to turn to Brigit, sister and companion. Even the most selfish, recalcitrant king can be transformed and tamed if he allows Brigit's wisdom to show him that his possessions are nothing more than temporary gifts from God.[139]

From the Peaceable Kingdom and its nature miracles, the chiasm turns back to miracles of provision, parables of justice, and tales of strength. Like its earlier model, section B (Brigit in Eden), section F (B', paragraphs 27-32) presents a biblical view of life in God's realm, only this time Cogitosus invites the reader into a deeper vision of that realm. Drawing imagery from the Cities of Refuge in Numbers and Deuteronomy, and from the Promised Land in Exodus, Cogitosus reminds his readers that encountering the realm of God does not consist of a simple life with the birds and animals in paradise. Life with God is often costly; your last bit of food or fuel might be required of you,[140] your reputation may be severely compromised,[141] and you may be asked to give something you neither have nor know how or where to obtain.[142] Even the vestments and vessels of the church may have to be given away.[143] The biblical Cities of Refuge were established to provide sanctuary for persons in danger of their lives, and the land of milk and honey had been promised to Moses while he was still a fugitive accused of murder.[144] *Metanoia* meant being ready to give your all, whenever it was required, and to trust that if it was meant to return, like the loom, the calf, and

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[139] *VBC* 23.
[140] *VBC* 29.
[141] *VBC* 28.
[142] *VBC* 32.
[143] *VBC* 30, 31.
[144] Exodus 3.8.

the vestments, it would return. If not, like the chalice, then it was understood to be going where it was most needed.

The final section, G (A'), presents Kildare openly as the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation. All of the imagery is there, the reader has moved through the history of the Hebrew people in the company of Brigit, the representative of Christ, and the chiasm is complete. Here again, the inverse structure becomes clear, as the most wonderful miracles are there to be seen and admired in Cogitosus's own day. His readers would have nodded their heads, having walked past the dry river bed, the millstone at the gate, and the door of the church. Its marvels may not have come anywhere near the glory described in the text, but that is not the chief concern. The concern, rather, is to teach the monks and nuns to see their monastery and its founder as the fulfilment of God's promises in the new heaven and new earth.

4.4   CONCLUSIONS

Cogitosus's account of Brigit's piety and accomplishments, and claims for the status of Kildare in his lifetime, may be read against the dual background of Uí Neill dynastic pressures against Leinster and Armagh's claims to ecclesiastical primacy. As the archetypal city of refuge and renewal, Cogitosus's Kildare would have appeared immensely desirable to any who were wounded and worn down by decades of on-going dynastic conflict. As a place of some distinction in the area, whether properly considered 'urban' or not, it would have attracted people of all ranks and opportunities, and perhaps the church was as splendid as described. If not, then perhaps it was simply lit with the devotion of its founder and her community, as any house of God should be.

Taken alone, the *Vita Brigitae* may be read as a collection of parables intended to portray Kildare as a monastic city of refuge and safety, the locus of the splendid New Jerusalem where Christians from all over Ireland may come in imitation of the tribes of Israel who came to the Temple for celebration of the Holy Days. Brigit, local saint of the Leinstermen, was conceived as the source of their peace, joy, healing, and prosperity. Her presence was said to have inaugurated a time reminiscent of the Peaceable Kingdom of Isaiah, and the garden of Genesis. Read against the seventh-century backdrop of continued rivalry amongst dynasties and peoples, archetypal

motifs of peace and refuge would have spoken deeply to those who were tired of battle and ready to declare their loyalty to a God above earthly rulers.

Against this utopian vision, Muirchú and Tírechán present another saint and another city. Patrick is everything that Brigit is not: male, a Briton, a traveller, one who challenges and curses and judges, whose many foundations come to be centered at the heart of Uí Neill territory, in Armagh. Brigit is female, native-born, grounded at Kildare in spite of the many other places across Ireland that are dedicated to her, one who blesses and forgives and welcomes. Political visions of conquest and forced unification may stand behind the seventh-century Patrician texts, so very different in tone from Patrick's *Confessio* and *Epistola.* Whether Cogitosus intended to fire the first volley in an ecclesiastical feud, as is so often claimed for him, or whether he was offering a religious vision of a place where followers of Jesus – and of Brigit – could come to live in peace may never be truly known or knowable. The likelihood, however, that Kildare was never actually in a position to believably assert magnificent political claims places the *VBC* in a very different light than is commonly granted. The rivalry between the two cities may have had at least as much to do with typology and temperament as with politics or prominence.

Stancliffe's observation that the early mission of Bishop Palladius may have been centred in Leinster raises the possibility that Brigit might have been a convert during the Palladian mission, representing that population in Ireland which was not dependent upon Patrick for its Christian identity. As a female, she could not be ordained, so could not rise to the prominence of a missionary bishop. As an abbess she resided in one place, receiving those who flocked to her city, and in this account she is not depicted as leaving it often, or for trivial reasons, and certainly not on missionary journeys. As a member of the Fothairt, she was patron of a politically marginal *tuáth;* her power was not political but spiritual. As both female and native Irish, she could be conflated with the many Brigits in the landscape; rivers, wells, and fields were 'hers', whether Abbess Brigit had any connection with them at all. The many variations of the name Bríg in the Irish language are claimed to point to a single, though yet somehow dual, personage, when it could be a simple case of an early Christian convert who had a name common to her place and time. Is every Mary, Marie, Maria, Marian, and Marietta an incarnation of the Virgin Mother of Jesus? Of

course not. Neither is every Brigit an expression of the attributes of a pagan deity. Patrick's church at Armagh was located in a place dedicated to a pagan goddess, Macha, but he is not confused with any pagan deity himself. Male saints including St Daig and St Aed have names that derive from words for 'light' or 'fire', yet only McCone alleges that they were pagan fire gods, an opinion that has not found further support.[145]

The deep biblical influence behind Cogitosus's narrative, as well as its sources in apocryphal stories about Jesus and in Gregory's *Dialogi* suggest a deeply Christian sensibility at the heart of the text, indeed, so much so that the question of euhemerisation or conflation with a pagan Celtic solar goddess is nearly unthinkable, at least for the Cogitosus Life. While a few scholars have offered cogent assessments of the Christian content of the Brigitine Lives, the scholarly community has yet to fully appreciate the depth of the Christian vision that lies behind Cogitosus's composition. An encounter with the *Vita Brigitae* would have been an invitation to paradise, an archetypal paradise expressed in terms of every biblical location equated with peace, healing, and abundance, a paradise for the created order as much as for the human community. Although Cogitosus does not use this verse, his vision of Kildare may perhaps be summed up with this passage from Proverbs 11:11, 'By the blessing of the just the city shall be exalted.' Brigit, the exalted one, the bringer of justice, was certainly, in her hagiographer's eyes, the source of blessing for her *civitas.*

Further research may then be indicated in the form of a comparative examination of Cogitosus's Life of Brigit with Muirchú's Life of Patrick. If Muirchú saw Cogitosus as a personal predecessor, or a model of some kind, then might a structural and hermeneutic analysis of the *Vita Patricii* offer any insight into how Muirchú was inspired by the earlier work? Was the later composition a response to a perceived political threat, or a theological response-in-kind to Cogitosus's depiction of Kildare? Was the alleged pact in the *Liber Angeli* a later construction intended to concretize in synecdochal form some kind of ecclesiastical arrangement between eighth- or even ninth-century bishops? O'Loughlin has analysed portions of Muirchú's text in terms of

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[145] McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 164-5.

eighth-century missiology;[146] further examination of the range of influences on the Life of Patrick may answer some of these additional questions.

An additional project growing directly from the examination of the *VBC* would be a comparative study of it alongside the *Vita Prima*. The *VP* contains a more varied collection of tales about Brigit with a greater proportion of folklore motifs, and a hermeneutic approach may assist in illuminating such questions as the allegedly pagan identity of St Brigit, and the priority of composition between these two earliest Brigitine Lives. Such a study may also contribute to the understanding of the relationship between Kildare and Armagh as the *VP* includes episodes in which Brigit and Patrick interact.

As with the previous chapters, this form of analysis permits a theological interpretation of the values Cogitosus emphasized in his narrative, and which his readers may encounter as concerned knowledge. The message of this text may also be read as a guide for religious and spiritual development, embodied in the narrative of a life rather than in a doctrinal statement or community rule.[147] The portrait of Brigit which emerges from this particular matrix of influences is of a woman whose devotion to God permeates everything she does, from her childhood days learning women's work to her foundation of a monastic community, to the flourishing of that community around her final place of rest. Both she and the monastery stand as archetypal signs of the New Jerusalem to which all Christians aspire, and which her hagiographer clearly wished his readers to experience either upon reading or hearing the narrative, or perhaps upon being motivated to visit Kildare on pilgrimage.

While the *Vita Brigitae* contains nothing that would challenge an essentially Christian reading of the text, the value of the three-fold hermeneutical approach lies in its ability to deepen appreciation for the unique relationship that may be seen to exist between the particular text and the community within which it was composed. For example, while the location and appearance of Brigit's monastic church would have been well-known to Cogitosus's original readers, his insistence on its brilliance and his

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[146] Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Muirchú's Theology of Conversion in his *Vita Patricii*' in *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Mark Atherton (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), 124-45.

[147] A similar claim was made for the *Via Antonii* referencing Gregory of Nazianzus in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, p. 85.

detailed description may be read as literary embellishment based on biblical descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple intended to inspire his first readers to experience their place of worship as the locus of God's eternal presence on earth. Alternatively, the same technique of describing the church at Kildare as the New Jerusalem may have been intended to attract pilgrims from elsewhere, across Ireland or abroad, to come be blessed by the saint and her community.

In addition, close structural analysis of this text has revealed a an even samller allotment of folklore motifs than the previous two texts examined in this thesis. While the structural unity of the *Vita Samsonis* was seen to lie in its use of the tripartite theme of separation-initiation-reintegration, its use of such folklore motifs as the serpent and the sorceress functions largely within recognizably Christian parameters, with the serpents unvaryingly evil, and the sorceress identified with a Greek term from Acts. The *Vita Cuthberti* was characterized by its psychological use of a mix of sources from the Bible and the Desert Dwellers to convey knowledge of the radical transformation of the mind and soul when one is brought before the cross of Christ. Cogitosus used the biblical structural form of the chiasm to illustrate both the virtues of his saint and the glory of his community, invitations to 'come and see' how the promised land of peace and safety was being lived out in his own time and place. The final chapter of this thesis will examine further conclusions concerning the texts and the value of the method which has been attempted herein.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

5.1   OVERVIEW

The following chapter will review and synthesize the findings of the previous three
chapters, setting those findings against the research questions posed in the
introductory chapter. Key insights will be highlighted along with possibilities for future
application of the method. The interdisciplinary nature of the research will be
discussed, and the theological sub-categories to which this project is most applicable
will be identified.

5.1.1   RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHOD

The research question driving this thesis was: how might readers of these seventh-
century hagiographies interpret the texts and be impacted in the encounter with
them? Related questions addressed the historical context of the narratives,
identification of sources, accounting for the presence of 'folk' or archetypal motifs
within Christian religious narratives, and the question of whether these Lives may be
read as models of sanctity, in particular for monastic spiritual formation.

I have argued that these are theological questions since both structure and
content of the texts are closely related to biblical models, and can be seen to convey
models of sanctity based on the life of Christ and later followers. The need for
interpretation arises because the texts move beyond simple imitation and take into
account such influences as the historical context of the author and the particular
location or character of the religious community within which the hagiographer is
writing. The presence of folk or archetypal material was largely accounted for by
noting the frequency with which allegedly folk motifs were seen to have occurred in
the Bible itself as well. Dundes's concise analysis of the Bible as itself grounded in the
folklore of its generative communities illumines the broad area of overlap between the
two. The recognition that motifs which appear to be either 'folklore' or 'pagan' in
origin may indeed derive from the Bible supports the need for a thorough-going
apparatus biblicus as an integral part of the discussion of any Christian saint's Life.
Archetypal material was additionally seen to inform the message of concerned

knowledge which addressed the development of monastic spirituality in the particular community within which the narrative was composed.

Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, originally applied to the text of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Canon, provided the lens through which the Lives of Samson, Cuthbert and Brigit were examined. The study was limited to these three in order to establish a scope of study within a relatively close time frame (approximately 50 years), and within a somewhat related cultural provenance, the late-seventh-century Celtic expression of Christianity. Each was set in its historical context, analysed for biblical content, and non-biblical sources identified and examined. The framework for a structural analysis was proposed based on the major themes identified in each text. Each Life followed its own unique structure, and each was interpreted in terms of the impact the text may be expected to have on readers who encounter it within the context of Christian religious, and particularly monastic, life.

A particularly fruitful aspect of the interpretive method appeared in the investigation of hagiography in relationship with other genres of writing, in particular parable and heroic biography. While Brigit's Life appeared to show little concern for biographical detail, reading her Life as a series of parables based on biblical locations opened up the possibility of seeing the structure of the Life as a chiasm. In contrast, the Lives of Samson and Cuthbert, while also utilizing metaphorical imagery, were seen to conform more closely to the heroic biographical model, a structure which contains elements of conquest and sovereignty which may make it a better fit for male rather than female saints. Their variations from the heroic biography illustrate the limitations of applying an essentially secular structure from the field of folklore to a religious figure, while at the same time demonstrating that heroic narratives concerning saints inhabit a liminal generic space. They are something more than folklore, and incorporate some aspects of mythology, address historical conditions from a particular religious viewpoint, and essentially stand as a genre all their own.

5.2 The Theological Encounter with Hagiography

I have argued that the hagiographies under discussion are primarily theological and literary documents. Given this claim, then, a home within the study of theology should be found for them. The following section will examine four theological sub-disciplines

which were seen to be relevant to this study, identifying findings from each of the Lives which fall within each sub-discipline. Given that the method involves applying a biblical hermeneutic to non-biblical texts and so is in itself cross-disciplinary, no single category will accommodate all needs, and a combination of the four subject areas may be necessary to create a theological 'home base' within which the present form of study may reside.

5.2.1 MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF SANCTITY

The texts under consideration in this project were composed within a monastic environment, in a language, Latin, that would have been known almost exclusively to the residents of the monastery. The same cannot be said for all hagiographies, but where this is the case, and to the extent that the concerned knowledge expressed within the text can be identified as Christian, hagiographical narratives may be read as road maps for the spiritual development of the monks and nuns in each community.

Scholars have proposed a variety of standards by which sanctity may be measured, from supernatural power to exceptional moral achievement. Within a monastic context, however, sanctity would be less likely to be understood as exceptional, and, within limits, would be understood to lie within the reach of each monk or nun, as he or she was gifted and led. Remembering Krueger's article discussed above, the very act of inscribing the Life of a saint was an exercise in sanctity for the monk. The on-going Life of the Body of Christ as expressed in the monastic community was the vehicle by which each individual connected his or her personal life to the larger life, the singular 'life' that Gregory described, of the saints who lived and died for Christ. Composition of hagiographical narratives then becomes an embodiment of sanctity as the archetypal life of Christ comes to be enacted in the life of the saint, inscribed in the narrative of the Life, and encountered and appropriated in the lives of readers and hearers. Likewise, the creative Word of God, and Jesus the Word made Flesh, are the archetypes of the word inscribed as the type of life embraced and expressed by monastic followers. The layers of meaning which obscure historical detail point rather to a unity of purpose, which is to live, as Paul says, 'no longer for myself but for Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2.20).

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One essential mark of sanctity which arose in all three Lives was the theme of transformation, expressed in the *VS I* in terms of Samson's passages through his rites of initiation and the similar transformations experienced by his followers, in the *VBC* as whole sections of the text dealt with Brigit's miracles of transformation and tamings, and in *VCA* in the emergence of Cuthbert from his place of solitude to his ministry as bishop, embodying all polarities within himself. Images of transformative holiness create a dynamic dimension within the texts, and push definitions of sanctity beyond particular acts, in the direction of symbolic transitions which may be accessible both to the intended readers as well as to subsequent generations.

Ascetic practice was a pronounced feature of the Lives of Samson and Cuthbert, although not so of Brigit. While all three were agents of healing and abundant life for others, Samson and Cuthbert were portrayed as engaging in the severe forms of ascetic practice often associated with early Celtic Christian practice. This may be due to the strong influence of the Lives of the Desert Dwellers observed in these two texts, absent from Cogitosus. In contrast, Brigit's miracles often involved the production of foodstuffs in response to various needs, including those of bishops and nuns, and so did not present Kildare as a locus of the rigorous practice of the desert. Even within a close time frame, then, ascetic practice may be seen to either vary with the particular community, or recede in emphasis according to the interests of the hagiographer.

5.2.2 Psychological Hermeneutic and Archetypal Psychology

Whether derived from the Bible or from folk materials, I have argued that the motifs within the hagiographies confront readers with personal, moral, and spiritual demands. For the time of composition, and for later generations as well, initiation, transformation, liberation, and healing all presume states of consciousness that are dynamic and evolving in human persons. Following Alison Elliott's discussion of the archetypal imagery in the Lives of the Desert Saints, the archetypal motifs identified in the Lives of Samson, Cuthbert, and Brigit illustrate states of mind, heart, and soul that the early monastic writers and readers may have understood to speak directly to them. The hermeneutic of appropriation points to a process of intellectual and spiritual growth and development embedded in the experience of reading religious narrative.

Traces of psychological archetypes were seen in the Life of Samson in the character of the young deacon, *puer* and shadow whose near-death signalled the significance of the initial initiation scene. I argue that Samson's first initiation is set in the context of a return to the house of his father, himself on the edge of death, underscoring the significance of integrating one's past as a necessary part of gaining spiritual maturity. His periodic times of solitude in the caves once inhabited by the defeated serpents were also argued to be understood as a process of *regressus ad uterum,* a retreat to the tomb/womb from which a renewed person will be born. In the latter part of his narrative, those around him experience liminal immobilization and liberation, which may be read as a sign that those who follow Samson may expect to be affected by the power of God as they were. Such an interpretation illumines a purpose on the part of the hagiographer which has not previously been noted, beyond simply documenting the life of the saint, but challenging the monastic follower to an inward imitation, rather than a mere copying of discrete acts.

Likewise, I have proposed that the Life of Cuthbert has its psychological centre in the time of retreat to Farne Island. Here Cuthbert imitates the Desert Dwellers, digging a cell the size of a tomb, shutting out the sky, living on very little, completely dependent on God and the visiting brothers or birds to supply his needs. Into this spare environment rises up from the sea the symbol of Cuthbert's vocation, the crossbeam which measures twelve feet long, and is the measure of his kenotic self-emptying, as it was the measure of Christ's own sacrifice. So, too, the monastic reader may be counselled to examine his inward conscience for signs of the presence of Christ and his sacrifice so that he, too, may become an embodiment of Christ as Cuthbert did.

Cogitosus grounds his Life of Brigit in the biblical locations which, for him, exemplify the liberating, healing, saving power of Christ mediated through the saint in her monastic city. I have proposed that each of the locations suggested by the hagiographical narrative, Eden, the Peaceable Kingdom, the Promised Land and Cities of Refuge, and the New Jerusalem, function as archetypes of peace and safety, qualities that Brigit embodies both in life and in death, and which continued to be embodied in the city of Kildare. While Cogitosus appears to prefer biblical imagery over non-biblical motifs, there are still psychological connections to be made between the repeated emphasis on harmony with nature and liberation from bondage or harm,

the human task of developing a harmonious relationship with the created order, and the need to provide for the freedom and safety of victims of violence. The depiction of Brigit, and of Kildare, in these roles is also the call to take on these tasks in the name of Brigit, and of Christ.

A psychological hermeneutic, then, may be employed in the service of identifying the concerned knowledge that each text conveys, as well as developing an appreciation for the impact of the encounter between the text and the reader of any generation. The quest for wholeness, to use Jung's term, is a perennial one, and hagiographies may function to support that process not only for the time in which they were composed, but for later readers as well.

5.2.3 NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

Paul Ricoeur identified hermeneutics as the foundational challenge of human life. To construct the narrative of one's own life, to hear and locate the stories of others, and to build the necessary bridges between them are the essential tasks of living. For those who follow a religious path, the individual's story will find its authentic meaning within the larger religious story; for Christians, this will be the Bible. The movement to establish the centrality of Narrative Theology within Anglo-American theology in the 1980s and 1990s was primarily concerned with explicitly interpreting and embodying biblical narratives in the corporate lived experience of Christian congregations. While such an emphasis was a helpful corrective to the highly individualized and propositional form of Christianity which dominated many churches at the time, the movement suffered because it failed to build a link between individual personal narratives and congregational expressions of the biblical narrative.

Nonetheless, narrative theology recognizes that before there can be propositions there are stories, and therefore remains a useful approach to interpreting religious narratives of any era. To compose the story of the saint was to tell the story of the community, to describe its beginnings and its leadership, to convey the essential knowledge that would enable integration of new members into the community, to prescribe the manner of life that faith and followership demanded, and to encourage spiritual growth and development. I have argued that to encounter the world that opens out before these narratives was to open one's own horizons to the faith and

achievements of the saint him or herself. As both saint and reader are meant to consciously imitate Christ, so the reader may encounter in the saint both proof and path for the Christian way of living.

Such an encounter is best served by a narrative rather than a dogmatic approach. Narrative permits the use of multivalent symbolism, as I argued for the use of references to Elijah in the *VS I.* Samson is portrayed as a prophet in the likeness of Elijah as he heals the deacon, covers him with a mantle, assures a full measure of honey in the jars, and works certain miracles within sight of only a few close followers. The multiplicity of associations underscores the importance of the identification of the saint with the prophet, and creates a variety of openings through which the reader may enter into the text.

In Cogitosus's Life of Brigit, the narrative of the saint becomes the narrative of the city, and the narrative of the two encapsulated the biblical trajectory from Genesis to Revelation. Such layered story-telling may invite even modern readers to examine their own location in light of the virtues of healing, refuge, and liberation that Cogitosus claimed for Kildare. And in the Life of Cuthbert the hagiographer's use of symbols of liminal immobilization and healing for mobility address both physical and spiritual needs, as was illustrated in the boyhood healing of Cuthbert himself, the two paralyzed young men, and the man who is liberated by the healing of his wife and daughter. Again, the repetition and variation in the symbolic representations of paralysis and mobility create multiple opportunities for appropriation of the concerned knowledge within the narrative.

For twenty-first-century readers, approaching hagiography through the lens of narrative theology may assist in deepening appreciation of the depth and complexity of these texts. One may read the text seeking verification of historical fact, or to fulfil a romanticized vision of what early Celtic Christianity may have been about. But a narrative theology approach presses the reader toward a recognition that these texts represent a form of Christian teaching which demands a response of faith, not simply a recitation of fact or fiction.

5.2.4 HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

Following on the study of hagiography as narrative theology, this thesis may likewise be seen as a work of historical theology insofar as it attempts to identify the theological understandings which inform the composition of this selection of seventh-century hagiographies. Setting each text in its historical context and observing either the contrast between the political and ecclesiastical world surrounding the area of provenance or the unity of world and narrative, a hermeneutic reading of these hagiographies offers a fresh lens onto the religious world of the seventh century. The historical work of identifying sources for the texts, aligning texts with the version of the Bible best known to the hagiographer, and correlating interpretations of theological viewpoint expressed in saints' Lives with other religious genres constitute some of the ways in which a hermeneutic approach to hagiography may assist the work of historical theologians.

For example, certain themes and techniques appear in these three texts which may indicate areas of theological concern for seventh-century religious life. The Lives of Samson and Cuthbert both employ themes of mobility and liminal immobilization. In each of these narratives, mobility is prized and celebrated, immobility is equated with illness or other compromise, and its relief is cast as a form of liberation. Historically, this motif may speak to both secular and ecclesiastical conditions. It may present a realistic account of the nature of travel and migration across Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and Anglo-Saxon England for either or both the fifth and the seventh centuries. Alternatively, it may represent a form of counterbalance against the more settled monastic pattern introduced into Britain at about this time by European Benedictine communities.

Similarly, the Lives of Cuthbert and Brigit both showed evidence of structural patterning based upon biblical precedent. Selection of a particular book (Matthew) or theme (locations of grace) may indicate the breadth and depth of biblical learning characteristic of a given monastic community. Where scholarly work has identified the presence of biblical quotations or allusions, a hermeneutic approach can illumine the ends toward which the hagiographer has employed his scriptural selections. Such use may, as was noted in the chapter on Brigit, also challenge prevailing assumptions about the factual data in the texts, suggesting that Kildare was never the urban centre

it was thought to be, but a typical seventh-century monastic town no more magnificent than any other.

The anonymous Life of Cuthbert may also indicate a particular theological understanding of the relationship between the Ionan tradition passed on to the community at Lindisfarne and the Roman tradition which prevailed after Whitby. Written close to the saint's lifetime, it may be seen as a witness to the process of rebuilding the community which would have followed the departure of Colmán and the other Irish monks. In addition, while historical evidence supports a view of seventh-century Christian conversion within the elites of Anglo-Saxon England, Cuthbert's Life may be seen as an indication of his role, and that of his monks, in spreading the faith among the common people of Northumbria. In the hands of his hagiographer Cuthbert functions as a reconciling figure, one who embodies the social, political, and theological opposites of his time in order to carry the Christian faith into the countryside.

5.3   DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As indicated, the model employed herein has the potential to provide a means of identifying a wider range of common motifs and structural frameworks among hagiographies than has been attempted previously. Establishing such a broad pool may shed additional light on the ways in which hagiographers are seen to borrow from one another, leading beyond theories of literary sources to encompass theological trajectories between and among religious and cultural communities. For example, further examination of Lives of Irish, Breton, Cornish, Welsh, or early Anglo-Saxon origin, particularly in the area of identifying biblical allusions and motifs within the narratives, may assist the on-going study of the process of Christianisation in these areas.

Each of the particular Lives in this study may also illumine other related Lives: the ninth-century Life of Samson may benefit from comparison with the seventh-century text; Bede's work on Cuthbert might be compared to the Lindisfarne narrative; and the Brigit dossier may profitably be examined in conversation with the seventh-century Patrician Lives. In each case, methods of structure, selections of biblical references, incorporation of folk material, and patterns of concerned knowledge

evident in the texts may contribute to a deeper understanding of the monastic spirituality and theological education of the community within which each text was composed, as well as wider development of the cult of each saint.

5.1.2 RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question, then, has concerned the interpretation of these three hagiographies as religious narratives. The search for an interpretive method appropriate to the genre at hand, a task which had not been attempted prior to this project, led to the decision to adopt Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutic approach and the three-step method of presenting historical context, structural analysis, and interpretation of the world before the text.

Application of the method resulted, first of all, in a broad catalogue of biblical and archetypal references within each of the texts. The scope and range of biblical influence on the texts was seen to exceed previously identified lists of quotations such as the twelve in Samson's Life identified by Taylor, and include names of characters, gender stereotypes, prototypical models of feeding, healing and liberation, episodes involving dreams, visions, and angels, and metaphorical genealogies, as well as the presence of structural frameworks based on biblical precedents, specifically in Cuthbert's Life and its parallels in the Gospel of Matthew, and Brigit's Life in parables, arguably built in chiastic form. This breadth and depth of biblical precedent turned the attention from accounting for the presence of 'folk' or 'pagan' motifs to a deeper appreciation of the Christian nature of the concerned knowledge contained within the texts.

I have argued that the possibility of reading chapters in the hagiographies as parables opens up the interpretive approach by allowing characters, places, and events in the narratives to operate symbolically rather than factually, and in some cases in addition to their known historicity. Individual nature miracles in Cogitosus's Life of Brigit were seen to function parabolically rather than as indications of a pagan-derived power over nature. Read in this fashion, the nature miracles serve to connect Kildare with the Garden of Eden and the Peaceable Kingdom of the Hebrew Bible. I further argued that the events on Farne Island during Cuthbert's time in solitude may best be read as parabolic expressions of the impact of deep asceticism and *imitatio Christi,* as

well as the necessary spiritual preparation for his service to the people of Northumbria as their bishop. Similarly, the *theomacha* who nearly kills Samson's young companion may be seen as more than a folkloric adversary, but as the psychological opposite to the saint, the one who provides the crisis through which he integrates the youthful shadow travelling by his side. Reading these and other episodes as parabolic narratives opens up their potential symbolic meanings for Christian life, and particularly for monastic spirituality.

Development in monastic spirituality appeared across the three texts in different ways according to the materials available to the hagiographer and the concerned knowledge that was important to him. In the Life of Cuthbert the hagiographer portrays Cuthbert's unknown origins, his humble service and growth in religious life, and the marked lack of ornamentation associated with his brief time as bishop. His true vocation is announced by the appearance of the crossbeam which facilitates his time in solitude, but also points the way back out into radically self-giving service. The theme of kenotic service may be read as the key to monastic spirituality for the Lindisfarne community at the end of the seventh century.

I proposed that the Life of Samson was structured around the framework of initiations and transitions, suggesting that for this community the monastic life was to be one of constant challenge, growth, and movement.   In Cogitosus's Life of Brigit, thematic development was observed in the increasing complexity of the individual parabolic stories in which later chapters mirror, interpret, and deepen themes introduced in earlier episodes. In place of a sense of biographical development of Brigit as a person who grows, ages, and dies, the Christian life itself is seen as one in which an increasingly multivalent appreciation of Christ embodied in the saint, her monastic city, and the congregation of worshipers develops over time. So, too, would the monk or nun be expected to develop a deeper and more nuanced expression of the presence of Christ within self and community.

The historical context of the composition of each of the texts was examined. Generally speaking, the Lives of Brigit and Cuthbert were composed against a background of political and ecclesiastical upheaval, including dynastic rivalries, rapid changes in secular and ecclesiastical leadership, and battles nearly on the doorstep of the monasteries. It is significant, then, to note that both of these narratives employ

archetypes of peace, reconciliation, and paradise. The labour of life remains challenging, but Brigit and Cuthbert each embody types of the Prince of Peace, whose realm was not of this world, but made manifest in those who acknowledged his reign. For Samson's hagiographer, the salient historical stimulus may have been his own advanced age, and the need for the Breton community to have a document of the life of their founder. His attempt at developing a Breton component to the narrative skews the portrait of the king and queen in the direction of biblical prototypes, obscuring their historical character in favour of illustrating Samson's absolute dominance.

Hughes was correct, hagiography in and of itself is not history. It is a product of particular concerns expressed in particular ways. This thesis has argued that the encounter with the texts points the reader to an appreciation of the process of psycho-spiritual development embodied in the narratives relating the lives of these three saints, in conjunction with an understanding of the historical context of their composition. Such an encounter with history and sanctity combined may yet yield rich resources for scholarship and religious life alike.

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