Eschatological Justice in \textit{Scéla Lai Brátha}

\textit{Elizabeth Boyle}

St Edmund's College, Cambridge

\textit{Scéla Lai Brátha} is a Middle Irish homily on universal judgment preserved only in \textit{Lebor na hUidre} (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25).\textsuperscript{1} Written in a complex rhythmic and alliterative prose style, the text draws on a wide range of sources, both poetic and homiletic, in Latin and Irish. The purpose of the present study is to analyse the presentation in \textit{Scéla Lai Brátha} of the moment of collective judgment and the descriptions of the eschatological kingdoms which, Christians believe, will exist thereafter. I suggest that the central theme of the text is the role of Christ as the source of ultimate justice, and that the author describes the communities of the elect and the damned in terms of ‘citizenship’ of the \textit{civitas Dei} or the \textit{civitas diaboli}. The extensive use of vocabulary pertaining to kingship, community, and judgment is, I argue, a significant aspect of the literary coherence and theological sophistication of a text which has hitherto been largely overlooked by scholars of medieval Irish literature.\textsuperscript{2}

The homily explicates the so-called ‘Eschatological Discourse’ of Matthew 25, 34–45, in which Christ utters his words concerning ultimate reward and punishment: ‘Veni, benedicti Patris mei ...’ (‘Come, ye blessed of my Father ...’) and ‘Discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum ...’ (‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire ...’). The author's


\textsuperscript{2}Interest in \textit{Scéla Lai Brátha} has been confined primarily to the light it can shed on the compilation of \textit{Lebor na hUidre}: David N. Dunville, “\textit{Scéla Lai Brátha} and the Collation of \textit{Leabhar na hUidre}”, \textit{Éigse}, 16 (1975–76), 24–28. However, the text is currently receiving some scholarly attention: see the forthcoming article by Ultiáin Mac Gearailt, \textit{The Middle Irish Homily \textit{Scéla Lai Brátha}}, \textit{Apocrypha}, 21 (2010). Dr. Mac Gearailt also has a new edition of the text in press as part of the \textit{Apocrypha Hiberniae} series.

\textit{Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies} 59 (Summer 2010)
narrative of the events of Judgment Day begins with Christ returning in glory at the moment of cosmic destruction and resolution, seated on a throne, flanked by angels, and dividing the souls of the righteous and the sinners. This orthodox twofold division, derived from Matthew, is significant, as the author then returns to his initial image — again he outlines the arrival of Christ in judgment — but this time he proceeds to outline a fourfold division of souls: the mali valde and mali non valde, both destined for hell; and the boni valde and boni non valde, both destined for heaven. This fourfold division is followed by a lacuna in the text, which resumes with a lengthy description of hell and a shorter description of heaven. The text concludes with a passage in praise of the hierarchy of heaven, ending with the Trinity. The author’s choice of Matthew’s gospel for this expository sermon is important. David Sim has noted those features of Matthew’s eschatological scheme which are particular to his gospel account alone. The present study will demonstrate that the author of Scèla Lai Brátha draws on many of these uniquely Matthean features. However, before we examine the ways in which the author interprets Matthew’s account, we should be aware that he is not slavishly dependent on it. For example, Matthew accords great significance to the idea of Jesus as the ‘son of man’, rather than the ‘son of God’. The author of Scèla Lai Brátha does not make use of this idea: Jesus is ‘Iis Crist mac Dé’ (‘Jesus Christ, son of God’), and later he uses the Augustinian formulation ‘mac Dé g deini i n-fennersáid’ (‘son of God and man in one person’). This emphasis on Christ’s dual identity is consonant with the text’s concern with his status as the embodiment of both ecclesiastical and temporal justice, but it also highlights the author’s ability to distance himself from some aspects of Matthew’s account. It is useful to bear this in mind as we examine the ways in which the author selects particular themes and elements of the gospel of Matthew in order to articulate his ideas of eschatological justice.

The central theme in Scèla Lai Brátha is that of judgment, and more particularly of the role of Christ, not only as judge but as the source of true justice. Sim has shown that references to the event of judgement are both many and widely distributed throughout [Matthew’s] gospel. The sheer number of allusions testifies to the importance of this theme in the

Evangelist’s theology. Judgment and the terminology of justice are also vital to the eschatology of Scèla Lai Brátha. Throughout the text we see the use of terms such as mes (‘judgment’), smacht (‘rule’, ‘command’), recht (‘law’), riagail (‘rule’), gell (‘pledge’), and mesrúgud (‘moderation’, ‘adjudication’). Of course it is hardly surprising to find terms relating to judgment in a text about Judgment Day; however, the range and repetition of legal vocabulary serves to enforce the central theme of the text, that is, Christ’s return as the moment of ultimate justice. Particular to Matthew’s account of the eschaton is the idea that it is not God who will sit in judgment, but rather Jesus Christ. In the accounts of Judgment Day in the gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus appears in the role of advocate rather than that of judge. The author of Scèla Lai Brátha adopts Matthew’s version of events, and it is of Jesus that he states:

posséd na hul de dina na fíadnais 7 daghá a ndeiltig 7 a term a Iar tair.

He will sit then upon his majestic throne, and upon the seat of his glory, and all the people will be gathered there in his presence, and he will separate and divide them after that.

Another uniquely Matthean aspect of the eschaton is the role of the righteous who, it is said, will participate in judging others. Unfortunately this theme is taken up by the author of Scèla Lai Brátha precisely at the place where the extant text becomes fragmented and the lacuna begins. We cannot know how the author developed this idea, but we can be certain that he did at least address it, as the text breaks off at the point where Christ says to the righteous: ‘is sibsi oc mes in chinuad dōenna ...’ and you judging the human race ...’. Matthew also states that the damned will repent belatedly for their sins once they realise the nature of the fate that awaits them. This a feature used in many medieval Irish texts; the belated repentance of the damned is of


Elizabeth Boyle 41

evangelist’s theology. Judgment and the terminology of justice are also vital to the eschatology of Scèla Lai Brátha. Throughout the text we see the use of terms such as mes (‘judgment’), smacht (‘rule’, ‘command’), recht (‘law’), riagail (‘rule’), gell (‘pledge’), and mesrúgud (‘moderation’, ‘adjudication’). Of course it is hardly surprising to find terms relating to judgment in a text about Judgment Day; however, the range and repetition of legal vocabulary serves to enforce the central theme of the text, that is, Christ’s return as the moment of ultimate justice. Particular to Matthew’s account of the eschaton is the idea that it is not God who will sit in judgment, but rather Jesus Christ. In the accounts of Judgment Day in the gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus appears in the role of advocate rather than that of judge. The author of Scèla Lai Brátha adopts Matthew’s version of events, and it is of Jesus that he states:

suifid in tan sin fora chathair ri 7 os sósaid a miadamla. 7 tinolif sin in na hul dina na fíadnais 7 daghá a ndeiltig 7 a term iar tair.

He will sit then upon his majestic throne, and upon the seat of his glory, and all the people will be gathered there in his presence, and he will separate and divide them after that.

Another uniquely Matthean aspect of the eschaton is the role of the righteous who, it is said, will participate in judging others. Unfortunately this theme is taken up by the author of Scèla Lai Brátha precisely at the place where the extant text becomes fragmented and the lacuna begins. We cannot know how the author developed this idea, but we can be certain that he did at least address it, as the text breaks off at the point where Christ says to the righteous: ‘is sibsi oc mes in chinuad dōenna ...’ (‘and you judging the human race ...’). Matthew also states that the damned will repent belatedly for their sins once they realise the nature of the fate that awaits them. This is a feature used in many medieval Irish texts; the belated repentance of the damned is of

course a useful thematic device for any text with a hortatory function. In accordance with his own hortatory purpose, the author of *Scéala Lai Brátha* is careful to stress that it is not only saints who will merit a place in heaven, but also sinners who repent of their misdeeds and go on to lead a virtuous life, their good deeds serving to hide their bad:

... co ndiubhise na peca dorosant riam. connach cumnim in Comdui doib thall na hulcu dorosin i fud.\(^\text{11}\)

... so that these conceal the sins they have committed before, so that the Lord does not remember them there for the sins they committed here.

It was noted above that the author twice presents the scene of Christ in judgment. At first glance this may seem awkward or repetitive, but I would argue that this repetition serves a vitally important function, not only structural but also thematic, by emphasizing the role of Christ as judge. Robert Dodaro has shown that, in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine is ‘interested in demonstrating the interrelationship between the political and theological implications of true justice’.\(^\text{12}\) I suggest that this is also a central aim of the author of *Scéala Lai Brátha*. The author’s starting point for establishing the theme of *iustitia* is his use of Matthew’s account of the eschaton. This serves to highlight Christ’s position as the source of true justice because, as we have seen, it is Matthew’s account which casts Christ in the role of judge. The repetition of Christ’s moment of judgment emphasizes the importance of that moment within the wider eschatological scheme. The use of repetition in Matthew’s gospel is of profound theological and literary significance; as Luz has argued, Matthew’s ‘repetitions are deliberate, not proof of literary incompetence’.\(^\text{13}\) Likewise, we should not suppose that the repetition of the scene of Christ in judgment in *Scéala Lai Brátha* is the result of a fault in the structure of the text, particularly given its otherwise impressive stylistic and structural coherence. The selection of a Matthean model for the basis for this sermon may have been the result of a conscious decision to highlight Jesus’s ultimate political and judicial authority, in addition to his more obvious divine authority. The idea of royal, ecclesiastical, and judicial powers being united in one person may have had particular potency at a time when the


\(^{12}\)Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 16.

\(^{13}\)Luz, *The Theology*, p. 4.

boundaries between ecclesiastical, secular, and judicial power could be fluid and imprecise.

In his account of the process of judgment, Matthew is concerned solely with universal eschatology and there is no mention of any intermediate state between death and the final judgment as would be necessary in a consideration of individual eschatology. As Sim states, there is ‘no hint in Matthew that the wicked dead or the righteous dead receive a sample of their respective eschatological fates in the intermediate period between death and final judgment ... all emphasis falls on the final judgement and its aftermath’.\(^\text{14}\) The same is true of *Scéala Lai Brátha*. Although some scholars have characterized a fourfold division of souls as being a precursor to the doctrine of purgatory, in the case of *Scéala Lai Brátha* the fourfold division occurs only at the moment of collective judgment, and is not indicative of any interim state for the individual.\(^\text{15}\) In Matthew’s account of the eschaton, there is no possibility of neutrality, no middle ground. This is reflected in the twofold and fourfold divisions of souls in *Scéala Lai Brátha*. Sim has shown that the vocabulary and imagery that Matthew employs emphasizes his vision of the events of the apocalypse as involving the armies of Christ and the devil engaged in cosmic warfare. Our Irish author also emphasizes this aspect of the final judgment. The use of *buiden* (in its widest sense ‘group’, but also with the militaristic sense of ‘troop’, ‘company’) to describe the fourfold division of souls is evidence of this; the author no doubt expected his audience to hear the martial resonances of *buiden*, and exploiting this militaristic aspect of Matthew’s account accrues with the imagery he later employs in his description of hell.

The punishment which Christians expect the soul to experience in hell must by its very nature be indescribable; descriptions of hell can only describe hell as it is experienced by man in life, that is, either the dystopian society, or the savage environment. This concept was acknowledged by a number of medieval Irish authors who stated that the imagery used to convey the idea of hell is only the ‘likeness’ of hell which can be found in this world.\(^\text{17}\) During the Middle Ages there was a common repertoire of imagery


\(^{17}\)Atat dano cosmuliuis *flatha* *nim* *iirfin* *sin* *bías* *cosmuliu* *iirfin* *dano* *and* *chêtasu* *i. gaemrith* *snechta* *sin* 7 *uacht. a* 7 *críne. Galar* *báis* (*There are,
of hell, from which authors selected the motifs that they wished to highlight or emphasize. 18 In Scéla Lai Brátha the images employed to represent hell can be placed in one of two categories: the first is violent conflict and related physical suffering, the second is the threatening environment (physical, animal, and meteorological). Each of these categories reflects a recognizable type of suffering, a suffering which is extreme and yet not outside the limit of possibility. The torturing of hell is thus rendered immediate, comprehensible and, most importantly, plausible. What is most striking about Scéla Lai Brátha is that its hell is overwhelmingly natural — in the modern sense of ‘nature’, that is, the natural world, the landscape, as opposed to humans or human creations — whereas its heaven is entirely urban. Hell is populated with dogs, toads, adders, lions, birds, and cats. 19 Individually, each of these animals may have had a symbolism which we cannot now reconstruct (for example, toads are used elsewhere in medieval literature to represent the souls of demons), 20 but collectively this demonic menagerie serves to recount the natural world in dark and threatening terms. The landscape is one of valleys and lakes, but these too are malevolent: ‘ríg na clainn i nglinn na pian’ (‘the king of perversions in the valley of tortures’); ‘brenlocha ainbencha úara ifernaidé’ (‘stormy, hellish, freezing, fetid lakes’). 21 Indeed, the hostility of the natural landscape and its animal population may reflect the ambivalence toward nature which Giles Constable has identified as a feature of some eleventh- and twelfth-century literature. 22

We should be wary of being too literal in our interpretation, but we may wish to view this imagery in terms of the physical geography of the monastic community. Although the land immediately surrounding the monastery was

moreover, likenesses of the kingdom of heaven and of hell in this world. The likeness of hell therein first, i.e. winter and snow, tempest and cold, age and decay, disease and death’): ‘An Old-Irish Homily’, edited and translated by John Strachan, Êritu, 3 (1907), 1–10 (pp. 5 and 9). The Latin De Tribus Habitaculis Animae, attributed to Gilla Pátraic, bishop of Dublin, also discusses the idea that heaven and hell are incomprehensible and therefore can only be described in terms of their earthly ‘similarities’: The Writings of Bishop Patrick, 1074–1084, edited and translated by Aubrey Gwynn, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 1 (Dublin, 1955), pp. 106–25 (pp. 106–8).


Elizabeth Boyle

likely to have been developed for economic purposes, the unexploited landscape further afield may have been viewed as hostile and dangerous. From the perspective of the monastery, of course, it was from out of that landscape that military attacks would arrive. 23 The imaginative geography of the threatening environment may reveal something of the physical circumstances in which the text was composed. We have seen that the militaristic imagery of Scéla Lai Brátha represents Matthew’s theology of cosmic warfare; this is developed extensively in the text’s description of hell. Hell is ‘claideb do digail’ (‘a sword for vengeance’); 24 it is ‘arm uathmar do guin 7 do letrad’ (‘terrifying weaponry for wounding and mutilating’); 25 there are ‘claibid ic cirriud’ (‘blades bludgeoning’); 26 hell is ‘sraigell do esorigain. is fæbur do arotchumma’ (‘a lash for flogging; it is a blade for lacerating’). 27 The imagery of hell is suffused with militarism. The abode of sinners is also described in military terms: ‘it é beti i scoraib 7 llongphortba Diubühl’ (‘it is they [i.e. the sinners] who will be in the encampments and longphuir of the devil’). 28 The hell of Scéla Lai Brátha depicts a threatening rural environment, out of which military attackers may appear to strike with terrifying ferocity.

Indeed, the author uses stylistic devices with impressive effect in order to emphasize the relentlessness of the punishment of hell; in particular one might suggest that the passages of anaphoric accumulation serve to intensify the depiction of the chaos of battle. For example, the rhythm of the following passage conveys a sense of unyielding privation; the acceleration in the second half of the passage intensifies this effect, before the deceleration at the end of the passage, which signals the change in tone of the subsequent section:

is bré do loscud. is [s]raigell do esorigain. is fæbur do arotchumma. is adag do erardall. is deichth do muchad. is croch do phianad. is claideb do digail. is arm uathmar do guin 7 do letrad. is buriad pian. is rubhe todamar. is bádud; is plágud; is [s]rainodd; is brúd; is línud; is tragud; is dód; is leód; is loscud; is [s]locad; is ard; is isel; is rodar; is rothe; is cumung; is forsiung; is mór breli an brothighail.

It is a fire for burning; it is a lash for flogging; it is a blade for lacerating; it is a night for blinding; it is smoke for suffocating; it is a cross for torturing; it is a sword for vengeance; it is terrifying weaponry for wounding and mutilating; it is

23To give one example, between c. 900–c. 1130, Chronicon Scotorum records Clonmacnoise being raided or plundered in 922, 936 (twice), 942, 953, 959, 1002, 1044, 1050 (four times), 1060, 1065, 1092, 1095, 1111, 1118, and 1129: Chronicon Scotorum, edited and translated by W. M. Hennessy, Rolls Series (London, 1866).

a screaming of pains; it is a multitude of tortures. It is a drowning; a plaguing; a dragging; a pounding; a flooding; an ebbing; a hardship; a hacking; a burning; a swallowing. It is high, low, freezing, burning. It is constricted; it is far-reaching. Great is the staunch of its streaming flesh.

The stylistic sophistication of the text as a whole is outside the scope of the present study, but the passage's depiction of hell as a place under threat from hostile military and environmental forces may reflect the author's view of a very real and immediate dystopia; we should bear this in mind as we explore the exact nature of the infernal 'community' which our author envisages.

Throughout the text there is a repeated use of muinter to describe the communities of the sinners and the righteous. The use of the term muinter (which, as Paul Grosjean noted, is used in Irish to denote Latin familia) in formulations such as muinter níne, muinter talman, or muinter iffren, seems to be peculiar to Irish texts; while the formulation caelestis familia is common in many Latin texts, reference to familiae caeli (or terrae, or inferni) seems to be confined to texts with an Irish connection. We may posit an influence on the author of Scéala Lai Brátha of texts such as those in the Catechesis Celitto which depict Christ as princeps familae caeli. Muinter can be read as secular term, simply the 'household' of Christ or the devil, but the author of Scéala Lai Brátha intends that muinter also be understood in its sense of a monastic familia. This is made explicit when he describes Satan as an ap (‘abbot’ or ‘head of a church’) and sinners as manaig (‘monks’, but also, as Etchingham has shown, ‘monastic tenants’).

The context within which the author develops this image is also interesting. He states that:

Blaid dano and sin maig 7 lachtach. gol 7 egmech. cnef 7 grechach. cach òenboeil.
7 mallacht cne chrumsadna ona pecthaibh foi n-apaid i. For Diabl ar is ed
doisbeirnicus ic fulang phêne cach olc doronsat triana aslachsom. Ocs meallacht
dano ùdsom foi manchta inne i. Forsa pecthaibh ar is mot a plangom òen
ch olc doronsat tnaion aslom foro oc aslach cailc. 35

There will be there, moreover, sorrow and groaning, weeping and wailing, sighs and screaming, from every single mouth. And ceaseless maladiction from the sinners on their abbot, i.e. on the devil, for it is he who allows their punishment for every evil they did through his temptation; and a maladiction, moreover, from him on his monks around him, i.e. on the sinners, because his own pain is greater for every evil that they did through his persuasion, on account of him inducing every evil.

Here, then, we have a motif in which the devil is himself punished for the deeds of sinners. One might be tempted to read this as a lesson to earthly abbes; they bear responsibility for the moral character of those who live within their community and will be punished for the sins of their manaig. We might even interpret this as suggesting disapproval of monastic life; the image is reminiscent of the twelfth-century schoolmaster Theobald of Etampes's description of a monastery as 'a place and prison of the damned, that is, of monks who damn themselves in order to avoid perpetual damnation'. Furthermore, the relationship between ap and manach is a complex legal and economic one, and the use of this terminology to denote the relationship between the devil and sinners complements the secular legal terminology used to characterize the relationship between Christ and the virtuous.

There is great significance accorded in the text to the vocabulary of the laws that govern secular relations. For example, when Jesus welcomes the righteous into heaven he welcomes them not only into his muinter, but also into his comaitheces, which denotes a secular relationship of community. Again, when addressing those sinners who will go straight to hell, the author states that those sinners have had no regard for smachta, recht, or riagail, term 'paramonastics'.

I am aware of only one other Irish example of the devil being called an 'abbot'. In Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p.th.612 (Codex Paulinus Würzburgensis), it is written of the devil that 'grobe iudaie i n-apaid' (the Jews will receive him as abbot): Theasaurus Palaeohibernicus, edited and translated by Stokes and Strachan, I, 665, gloss 26ta. Cited in Constable, Reformation, pp. 134–35. Lines 2377–78. See also Fergus Kelly, A Guide to Early Irish Law (Dublin, 1988), pp. 108–9 and 306. Lines 2377–78. Note Augustine's argument in De Civitate Dei, xxi.21, that nothing can be done lawfully (iure) which is not done justly (iusti): 'quod enim fit iusti, nec iure Eiri
which suggests that the author may be stressing the importance of both secular law and monastic rule. This appropriation of the terminology of the laws governing secular relations for the purpose of describing one's relationship with God has a long history in medieval Ireland: for example, those monks who considered themselves to be celti Dei ("clients of God") used the secular notion of clientship in order to articulate their self-perceived ecclesiastical status. However, it is striking that in Scéla Lai Bráthra the author never uses the term celti to describe the relationship between Jesus and the righteous. In sum, this vocabulary of secular and ecclesiastical law, along with the martial and natural imagery of hell, and the striking representation of the devil as abbot, presents the audience with a dystopia which is characterized by constant and horrific military attacks on a perverted and evil monastic muintir, whose territory is surrounded by a hostile physical landscape populated with ferocious and demonic animals. This is indeed a terrifying, sophisticated, and coherent literary creation, drawing upon a complex textual network of literary hells, but it is a creation which is also rooted in a reality which could be identified with any number of places and periods in the history of medieval Ireland.

In contrast to the image of hell, the heaven of Scéla Lai Bráthra is lacking in any corresponding natural imagery, which could have been utilised in simple opposition to the negative landscape of hell. Positive natural imagery is used, for example, in Saltair na Rann, where we see a heaven which includes ‘mag maith moineach’ (‘a good rich plain’) on which flow

    sruth d’fin, sruth d’ola, dá díl,
    sruth loga lannach lángil,
    sruth maith mela, monar nglan,
    fris sásad na noebanman.

a stream of wine, a stream of oil, dear distribution, a valuable stream of very white milk, a good stream of honey, pure work, to satisfy the blessed animals.24

In the heaven of Eis Adamnain there are birds and horses.25 The ‘Old Irish Homily’ describes heaven as ‘bláth lídigea’ (‘a fair blossom’) and ‘rian

pottest’: Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society, p. 12. This could explain the author’s use here of vocabulary which seeks to emphasize the sinner’s disregard for what is lawfully right.24 Follett, Céli De, p. 214. ‘It must be remembered that the text of Scéla Lai Bráthra is incomplete; the lacuna may have included a lengthy description of heaven to parallel that of hell in lines 2406–54. Thus my conclusions here must remain tentative, based as they are on the extant text.25 The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann, i, Text and Translation, edited and translated by David Greene and Fergus Kelly (Dublin, 1976), line 989.26 Ibid., lines 997–1000. See also John Carey, ‘The Heavenly City in Saltair na Rann’, Celtica, 18 (1986), 87–104.

Elizabeth Boyle

romra’ (‘a course of an ocean’). In Scéla Lai Bráthra, however, the author chooses not to create parallels with, say, the Garden of Eden, or use other natural imagery to describe heaven. Rather, heaven is simply a cathair (‘city’, ‘stone enclosure’, ‘monastic settlement’).26 It is significant that the author specifies cathair; he does not use templ, éamlaic, cell, or any of the other ‘church’ words that could have been used in a narrower sense. It is likely, then, that the author intended to include the whole semantic range of cathair in his explication of heaven: heaven is both the perfect city and the perfect ecclesiastical foundation.27 The cathair is characterized by its cobsaide (‘stability’) and fostacht (‘steadiness’); its sid (‘peace’) and oenta (‘unity’).28 It is an ordered and hierarchical place, ‘i sudifger cafh óendune ara mmid 7 ar digl 7 ara somnig fodén’ (‘in which every person will be placed according to their rank and according to right and according to their own fair deeds’).29 We can perhaps detect the outside world in the use of brug (‘cultivated land, farm-house’) and min (‘smooth, level’, but also with the sense ‘arable, fertile’ in relation to land), but this is not the untamed wilderness of hell; it is land which is subject to man and which forms part of the cathair.30 McDannell and Lang have argued that the ‘urbanisation’ of heaven was a response to a society that was itself becoming increasingly urbanized; the urban heaven of Revelation, as opposed to the

pastoral paradise modelled on the Eden of Genesis, was being used by writers such as Peter Damian as early as the middle of the eleventh century.\(^{51}\)

If the author had wanted to create an image in opposition to that of the ‘encampments and longhairs of the devil’, discussed above, he could have used the biblical image of the ‘tents of the just’ (for example, ‘Videbisc superitas tauri, carens tabernaculis iustorum’, ‘You will see the bitterness of your kind who have abandoned the tents of the just’), which is used by the author of the first of the Hiberno-Latin sermons beginning *In Nomine Dei Summi*.\(^{52}\) Earlier in *Scéla Lai Brátha* the author used *budlenn*, with all its military connotations, to describe the righteous; this was in order to emphasize the theme of cosmic warfare at the eschaton. However, once the author begins his description of heaven the martialistic imagery ceases — after all, there will be no need for troops in a kingdom whose defining features are *cobstain* and *oentun* — and he chooses quite deliberately to rely on the *muinter* and, most frequently, the *cathair* to supply the imagery of the kingdom of heaven.

The role of Christ as the source of justice is emphasized, as we have seen, through the extensive use of legal terminology. The use of legal terminology in medieval Irish religious poetry was discussed with great insight by E. G. Quin in his study of the poem *Iscácn*, which probably dates from the tenth century.\(^{53}\) The author of *Scéla Lai Brátha* would probably have been familiar with the types of legal imagery and metaphor used in such texts. This terminology specifically highlights the overlap and interplay between secular and ecclesiastical justice, which in turn emphasizes the author’s message that Christ’s jurisdiction extends to both. It has been argued above that the imagery of hell contrasts the sinful earthly city with the ‘city of God’. This is also part of the author’s overarching thematic structure. The chaos of the *civitas diaboli*, which is evoked in the staccato rhythm of the passages of anaphoric accumulation, as well as in the imagery used to describe hell, provides diametric opposition to the perfect, ordered *civitas/cathair* which Christ rules. It must be admitted that ideas regarding divine and secular justice in *Scéla Lai Brátha* are not as explicitly stated as they are in the


Elizabeth Boyle

*Sermo ad Reges extant in An Leabhar Breac.*\(^{54}\) This Irish and Latin text, which may be contemporary with *Scéla Lai Brátha*, clearly articulates the nature of kingly justice and the responsibilities of just kings.

Na rig imorro na herathrigit 7 nach ordaig ar-rigig 7 a flathius iar riaiglb in rechta diada, fusa naighiter aire-in 7 a flathius o thebralib 7 do commlaib imada. Uair is [ar] taimech tima Dé do na rigaíus laicier silh 7 comcheathaí i n-a popul, 7 tódúshcharb deibh 7 decéfaide etaru, co mbaí căch díl i n-agaid arail tuindile na rig n-anibhír.\(^{55}\)

The kings, moreover, who do not govern and regulate their kingdom and lordship according to the rules of divine law, their kingdom is disturbed for that reason by many troubles and calamities. For it is [through] transgression of the will of God on the part of kings that peace and concord are broken among their subjects, and troubles and dissension aroused in their midst, so that everyone of them is against the other through the ill-conduct of the unjust kings.

However, the text claims to draw on Augustine for its model of good kingship and *iustitia*, which supports the present argument that the Augustinian influence on *Scéla Lai Brátha* can be read on a political as well as a theological level.\(^{56}\)

The significance of Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* as a philosophical work, and its influence on medieval literature, is well-documented.\(^{57}\) In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine outlines his idea of civic virtue, and he compares the qualities of Roman statesmen with those of Christ, ‘the founder and ruler of the City of God’.\(^{58}\) In *Scéla Lai Brátha* its author tentatively explores notions of civic

54Unfortunately this is only available in Atkinson’s inadequate edition and translation (Atkinson appends the Latin portion of the text to his English translation): *Passions and Homilies*, pp. 151–62 and 401–18. The text is dated to the eleventh century by F. Mac Donncha, ‘Medieval Irish Homilies’, in *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, edited by Martin McNamara, *Proceeedings of the Irish Biblical Association*, 1 (Dublin, 1976), pp. 59–71 (p. 67). 55*Sermo ad Reges*, edited by Atkinson, *Passions and Homilies*, pp. 158–59. 56*Sermo ad Reges*, ibid., p. 416, refers to Augustine *De Iustitia Regis*, although the quotation which follows is actually from the seventh-century text *De Duodecim Abusive Sacelli*. Mac Donncha, however, possibly reads too much into a connection with Sedulius Scottus and his use of *De Duodecim*; the text was popular one in medieval Europe and misattribution of the text to Augustine (or sometimes to Cyprian) was widespread. Mac Donncha (p. 67) does not show evidence of a direct link between Sedulius Scottus and the *Sermo ad Reges*. 57Titled scholarly literature is vast, but key works include van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, *Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society*, *John M. Rist, Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1994), and references therein. 58*Dodaro, Christ and the Just Society*, p. 10. See also Richard J. Dougherty, *Christian and Citizen: The Tension in St Augustine’s De Civitate Dei*, in *Collectanea Augustiniana*, 1, Augustine, *Second Founder of the Faith*, edited by Joseph C. Schaab and Frederick Van Fleteren (New York, 1990), pp. 205–24; R. A. Markus, *De Civitate Dei: Pride and the Common Good*, ibid., pp. 245–59; Donald X. Burt,
Eschatological Justice in ‘Scéala Lai Brátha’

virtue and good rulership — these explorations are embodied in the vocabulary and imagery employed to create the picture of hell as a perverted community, and heaven as an idealized ‘city of God’. Similar ideas are also probed in the imagery of Christ as military commander, judge, and ‘neighbour’ (in the sense that comaithecher is used to describe the community of heaven). The significance of the theme of the ‘city of God’ for Scéala Lai Brátha suggests that the text may have a more coherent manuscript context than has hitherto been recognized. The text which precedes Scéala Lai Brátha in Lebor na hUidre is Fis Adamnán. Not only does this text share certain theological, and particularly eschatological, features with Scéala Lai Brátha, but the concluding section of Fis Adamnán is an extended description of the civitas Dei:

Is amuid iarom atá in chathair sin. i slaith cen Úaill cen diúmsus cen goí cen énteach cen diúpert cen tuaithch cen gres cen ruci cen mbaill cen méalchú cen triúth cen mórdaithe cen teidh cen galár cen bochtair cen nochtair cen dith cen dibdh cen chaisir cen snaith cen saith cen fheasúr cen déalbh cen toradh cen dorche cen lárdaite. slaith Úaall amadar a rí. saothair toil saoith sa mhobhail toil laíf saor eor cee matheus. Finnt aman finnt.

That city, moreover, is thus: i.e. a kingdom without pride, without vanity, without falsehood, without outrage, without deceit, without pretense, without blushing, without shame, without reproach, without insult, without envy, without arrogance, without pestilence, without disease, without poverty, without nakedness, without death, without extinction, without fail, without snow, without wind, without rain, without clamour, without thunder, without darkness, without cold. A noble, wonderful, pleasant kingdom with wisdom, with light, with the scent of a bountiful land, in which is the enjoyment of every good thing. Finnt aman finnt.

This comes after what would be the more obvious conclusion for the text, and is probably unique to the Lebor na hUidre version of the text; certainly it is not found in any of the other extant manuscript copies. In style and in tone the passage bears a close resemblance to Scéala Lai Brátha. That the concept of the heavenly city is afforded this codex to the text of Fis Adamnán

‘Friendship and the State’, in Collectanea Augustiniana, II, Presbyter Factus Sum, edited by Leinhard and others, pp. 249–61; Michael J. Hollerich, ‘Augustine as Civil Theologian’, ibid., pp. 57–69. Lebor na hUidre, edited by Best and Bergin, lines 2294–301. That is, Béartrá innmar taimfainn ní dhaoin ní dhaoin lucht na deire dhaoin ní nrucair for deis Dá do bhith air fhlasa ni mi. i áit i mbrit isin mórghcrú sin cén áes cén urcra cén crích cén forcoed triú bithu sír’ (ibid., lines 2290–93) ‘The blessed and the just, the alms-givers and the merciful, will be borne to the right hand of God, to live forever in the kingdom of heaven, where they will be in great glory, without age or withering, without end or termination forever’ (Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation, translated by Maire Herbert and Martin McNamara (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 147).


Elizabeth Boyle could possibly hint at the interaction between the Lebor na hUidre scribes known as M and H being more coherent than has previously been thought.

It is not only the topography of heaven which reveals concerns particular to the author of Scéala Lai Brátha, but also the nature of those who are chosen to inhabit the civitas Dei. In Scéala Lai Brátha there are two groups who are entitled to enter heaven: the boni valde and the boni non valde. The community of heaven is described as ‘lucht ògí 7 athrigi 7 fedhà iresheach ar dia’ (‘virgins and penitents and widows faithful for the sake of God’).

Charles Wright has argued that it is a feature of Irish texts that the division of the faithful includes not only virgins and continentés, but perhaps also a distinctively Irish group, the poeniantes. What is interesting regarding the use of these categories in Scéala Lai Brátha is that the author uses the term lucht, which carries the sense of ‘occupants of a household’ and which is therefore consonant with the significance of the maintuir throughout the text, rather than the term áes, which seems to be the more common formulation.

It is tempting to look for a specific political context for this emphasis on community, justice, and good leadership. Attempts to identify particular moments of social or political tension which act as triggers for eschatological speculation have long been a feature of scholarship on eschatological literature. However, it must be borne in mind that the ‘city of God’ in Scéala Lai Brátha is always a metaphorical and imagined community, rather than any explicitly named group or kingdom.

Therefore, linking the text to any particular historical moment, in the absence of further evidence, can only be

The coherence of Lebor na hUidre is further illustrated by the text which follows Scéala Lai Brátha, namely Scéala na Er nigri, in the hands of scribe H, which also explores eschatological themes, and also draws extensively on Augustinian motifs. See Elizabeth Boyle, ‘Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: The Evidence of Scéala na Er nigri’, Medium Ævum, 78 (2009), 216–30. A homily on the Epiphany in An Leabhar Breac outlines ‘na tri dása éadaí an eile a dtiocfaidh do Christ i. ògig lucht 7 lucht 7 lámánumn dilutedh’ (the three gifts offered to Christ by the Church, i.e. virgins, penitence and lawful marriage); Passions and Homilies, edited and translated by Atkinson, pp. 238 and 475. Note also a further significant similarity between Scéala Lai Brátha and Fis Adamnán. The latter text includes the following statement: ‘Is ìat lucht ùr, oibre sóird in bòt saí ògig ògig ògig aird sìor ògig ògig dréamhata dorchaíthe do Dha’ (Lebor na hUidre, edited by Best and Bergin, lines 2158–59).

Wright, ‘Bischoff’s Theory’, pp. 154–55. Particularly in conjunction with athrighe: the DIL gives, for example, òs na aithrighe (Thes. PaI., II, 255 9); òs na aithrighe (O’Dav. 3); òs na aithrighe (T. M. 55 11), and other similar examples given to òs. An examination of the uses of lucht in DIL suggests that the primary senses of that term were more secular.


a speculative exercise. The author does not name any specific Irish community, saint, or geographical region. As Johannes van Oort has shown, Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei* states that a *civitas* is 'nothing else but a number of people held together by some communal bond'. The author of *Scéla Lai Brátha*, in outlining the *civitas diabol* and the *civitas Dei*, is not necessarily condemning the morals of an identifiable community, nor asserting a special position among the elect for his own; rather, he shows that all those who are bound by the 'communal bond' of righteousness, as defined by Christian doctrine, will be fellow-citizens in heaven. This fellow-citizenship and the concept of 'neighbourliness' in *Scéla Lai Brátha* is not at odds with the hierarchical nature of heaven as it is emphasized in the text; in accordance with the political structures of Late Antique and early medieval Europe, the ideal society is still conceived of as a hierarchical one. It is not surprising that a member of an ecclesiastical foundation might draw on his own physical surroundings in describing otherworldly landscapes, as I have argued is the case here, but the message of the text may be directed in more general terms to those who misuse their power, to remind them that in a Christian kingdom the ultimate power to dispense true justice lies with Christ.

---

68Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, p. 103, citing Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xv.8: ‘... civitas, quae nihil est alius quam hominum multitudo aliquo societatis vinculo coniigata ...’
70I would like to thank Uaithir Mac Gearailt, Maire Ní Mhaonaigh, Patrick Sims-Williams, and the anonymous reviewer, for their comments and suggestions. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust for supporting my research.