Magic in Literature and Law:

Depictions of Magic in the Christian Elite Latin Writing Culture of the Insular World as Evidenced in Hagiography, Penitential Literature, and Synod Canons Before c.800

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Summary:

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Title: Magic in Literature and Law: Depictions of Magic in the Christian Elite Latin Writing Culture of the Insular World as Evidenced in Hagiography, Penitential Literature, and Synod Canons Before c.800

Before c. 800 C.E. the Christian elite of the insular world produced two ecclesiastical corpora of Latin texts that each show strong degrees of intertextuality within each corpus and contain within them insights into the authors' thoughts on magic. The first of these is hagiographical literature, comprising nine *vitae* of six saints: two lives of St Brigit, two accounts of St Patrick, one life of St Columba, two of St Cuthbert, a life of Pope Gregory the Great, and an account of St Wilfrid. Not only were these texts each composed within a short time of one another, but they also exist in dialogue together. The second is a collection of related ecclesiastical legal texts, containing a number of records of the canons of synods as well as a plethora of penitential literature. By analysing these texts through close reading of passages containing vocabulary that indicates magic, this thesis synthesises the ideas about and conceptions of magic contained therein, bringing a greater understanding of the thought-world of the authors of the texts.

This thesis has established three strains of thought regarding magic in the hagiographical material. The first of these is one that sees magical beliefs and practices as having been once a proper and ordained part of God's[1] plan that became unnecessary following the arrival of Christianity. The second is one that views all magic as complete and inherently evil and that those who practice it can either: 1) be beyond redemption and deserving of death in order to clear the way for proper practice of Christian religion; or 2) leave their beliefs and practices behind and be converted to join the church. The final strain of thought views magic as being evil, but mostly for its threat to the political position and orthodox teachings of the church, but holds that its practitioners can be converted, redeemed, and possibly coopted into the church as priests and other ecclesiastical leaders.

The legal sources present two concerns with the belief in and practice of magic. The first of these arises out of the paternalistic and pastoral nature of penitential literature, and deals with the danger that magical belief and practice presents to the souls of practitioners and those around them. The second of these is a concern for the socio-political power of the church and its ability to influence the people of the region, the ways in which unorthodox and un-Christian magical practices can subvert the teachings of the

[1] Throughout this thesis, you will see the word 'god' capitalised when being used as a proper noun, and not in all other cases.

church and undermine its position and authority, and focuses on curtailing in the belief in and influence of magical practitioners in the Christian community.

In so doing, this thesis addresses a current hole in the scholarship on magic of the early medieval insular world. Most of the scholarship on early medieval insular magic is focused on either the reconstruction of pre-Christian beliefs and traditions from Christianised myths and Christian accounts of pre-Christian history, on magic as it exists in the vernacular texts of the region, on creating or refining modern philosophical definitions of magic that are then applied to the texts created by the peoples of the past, or on texts that have been deemed inherently magical such as books of charms. While these are worthy academic ventures, they leave a noticeable gap consisting of the Christian ecclesiasts' understandings of, ideas about, and attitudes towards those things which they deemed magical for themselves. This thesis — through its analysis of these two corpora — provides insight that can be used to further scholarly understanding of the way that the Christian elite of the early medieval insular world related to their own mythic past and those people in their present whom they believed to be engaged or believing in practices that they considered to be magical in nature. Finally, it also lays the groundwork for future scholarship on magic following the methodology established in this thesis, whether that be magic in other Latin texts or vernacular texts of the same place and time, or the texts of other cultures.

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Introduction:

This thesis focuses on the depictions and conceptions of magic which can be found in the early medieval insular world. The focus is specifically on Latin-language ecclesiastical texts produced by people from or in Britain and Ireland before about the year 800. Temporally, the end date for this study coincides with the rise of the Carolingian court and a greater degree of unity between continental and insular Christian communities. The rise of Charlemagne and his reforms to the scholastic traditions of the Merovingians, begun in the late eighth century and extended by the advice of Alcuin of York after his appointment to the court, led to an expansion and transformation of the palace school and the foundation of many new scholastic institutions at religious centres on the continent.[2] These schools, merging the teachings of the premier scholar Alcuin and existing continental traditions, facilitated a much greater flow of individuals and ideas between the insular world and the continent, creating a more cohesive and unified Christianity than had existed before this. Taken together, this means that an examination of the texts produced in the insular world before the ninth century gives a greater chance of identifying particularly insular ideas about magic than those produced after the turn of that century.

Geographically, the insular world during the time period described above presents a number of close-knit and strongly interconnected communities producing and sharing texts, including those texts examined in this study. This strongly networked group of communities presents an excellent environment to study the way in which magic is dealt with in the writing culture of the Christian elite of the insular world, both in finding similarities as well as in identifying where differences occur. These constraints combine to provide a solid corpus of texts from which to work, many of which were composed within a few decades of each other. Additionally, as will be discussed further below, most of the scholarship on magic in the insular world focuses on either the extant sources that were written in the vernacular languages, or on attempting to reconstruct pre-Christian magical and religious practices from predominantly Christian sources. There is also scholarship that studies texts that have themselves been deemed to be magical such as the charms and medicinal practices of certain communities, but many of these studies are focused on later time periods than those covered in my work. The existing scholarship on magic will be discussed in the section on the state of research below.

Magic became a topic of interest among people generally with the blossoming of the romantic movement in the late 18th century. The movement, one in which artists and intellectuals looked back to

[2] For more on the educational reforms of the Carolingian Schools see Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, 'Carolingian Monastic Schools and Reform', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, vol. II (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 450–65.

a brighter (imagined) past, led to an examination of the lost customs and practices of the pre-enlightenment past, including a fascination with rituals, rites, and practices, some of which were deemed to be magical, and all of which were interpreted through the romantic lens. The intertwining nature of romanticism and the rise of nationalism (both being reactions to modernization) led to a fascination with (and sometimes invention of) particularly national traditions, often rooted in racialist ideas about specific peoples and their histories. Most pertinent to this thesis, these movements combined to bring about the Celtic Revival, which brought about interest in and study of Celtic languages, religions, and culture in northwestern Europe and especially in Britain and Ireland. The Celtic Revival as a movement would not only spark scholarly study by historians, philologists, linguists, and anthropologists, but would also spark a wider cultural fascination with the romanticised Celtic past, spurring such movements as neo-Druidism — based on imagined and invented Iron Age Druidic practices — and the Irish literary revival as well as other similar linguistic movements from Brittany to Scotland.

It is this fascination with the history of Celtic peoples in which many of the early scholars of magic in the insular world were participating or to which they were reacting. The origin of scholarly study of magic in this context brings with it pertinent questions about the nature of magic. What is the relation between magic and pre-Christian religion and how do modern scholars discuss magic? Many early scholars conceived of magic as being intrinsically related to pre-Christian religion and practice, that magic would best be characterised as superstition that would (and should) lead to 'proper' (i.e. Christian) religion, which would in turn lead to (Protestant) rationalism. This leads many scholars of magic between the Celtic Revival and the late 20th century to deal with magic through a lens that is particularly dismissive and emblematic of a particular strain of humanist ideas concerning the supposed development of people and cultures from 'primitive' to 'developed', which will be examined in the next section of this introduction. While the connection between pagan religion and magic can certainly be seen throughout several of the texts examined in this thesis, it would be more accurate to describe their overall depictions of magic as being un-Christian rather than being non-Christian, fitting the idea of magic as an othering term used to differentiate the proper orthodox practices of the author from the improper, heterodox, and sometimes, but by no means exclusively, non-Christian practices being so described.[3] This idea can be understood more deeply in terms of a struggle for control of culture as Christian institutions and the people within them sought to move in and supplant the traditions and structures of power that had

[3] For more on this see Angela Puca, 'Magic as a Contested Concept in Religion', in *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion: A Critical Exploration*, ed. George D. Chryssides and Amy Whitehead (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

previously existed, and were deemed to no longer fit within the evolving ideals of Christianity as the religion became more entrenched.[4]

Crucial to my study of these texts is that, unlike the aforementioned works, I am not attempting to reconstruct specific practices, but rather using the evidence in these textual sources to attempt to understand the ideas and conceptions regarding magic that the Christian elite of Britain and Ireland held in different contexts. The specific bodies of work examined in this study are the hagiographical literature, the penitential documents, and the synod canons produced in early medieval Britain and Ireland. Also central to this thesis is that rather than formulating a modern definition of magic based on personal sensibilities about religion, science, and magic and applying it to these texts, I am examining the aspects that the texts themselves identify as magical. The specifics of this process of identification will be discussed further below. This is important because while scholars who work towards producing and refining definitions of broad and imprecise categorical terms such as 'magic', 'ritual', 'medicine' and even 'religion' are arguably doing important work to help facilitate our academic discourse about these topics philosophically and categorizing our understanding of them removed from specific examples, the definitions that these scholars arrive at are often ill-fitting and actively contradictory with the ways that specific sources indicate that the historical people who produced those sources thought about and understood these things. This can be an especially vexing problem at the places where magic, religion, and science tend to intersect, such as specific medicinal practices and the rituals of localised or otherwise heterodox Christianities. This often leads to scholars classifying the religious or medicinal practices of various groups as being magical based on their personal, post-enlightenment understanding of the term which is directly contradictory to the way that the people involved in these practices understood them. One prominent case of this is Richard Kieckhefer. In several of his works, this prominent scholar of religious history and magic has described monks preparing a healing salve and saying a prayer over it as a magical practice[5] despite the fact that the monks involved in similar practices would have considered them to be medicinal and closely linked to their religion, but certainly not magical. As the focus of my work is understanding the thought-world of the people whose writings I am studying, it is key that I strive to impose as few of my own pre-conceptions on the texts as possible.

The state of research on the topic:

[4] This is discussed, especially with regards to the intersection of these ideas with gender and women, in: Martha Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender from Late Antiquity to 1000* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).
[5] This occurs in several places throughout: Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Scholarly study of magic began not with historians, but with anthropologists, and had its earliest incarnations in the writings of early anthropologists at the close of the 19th century. Most notable among these was James George Frazer, whose study of comparative religion covering many ancient myths and rites published under the title *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890, but expanded in a second edition in 1900 and even further expanded in its third edition in 1906, was ground-breaking for the way in which it treated magic in a serious and scholarly manner;[6] this opened the topic to further analysis by scholars at the turn of the 20th century. One of those scholars following in Frazer's wake was the historian Lynn Thorndike, whose monumental 1923 series *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* delved deeply into the relationship between science and magic, attempting to catalogue that relationship throughout history, the first volume of which covers the ancient period through the thirteenth century.[7] Frazer's work set some precedents that were followed, for better, and often for worse, by later scholars. Namely, Frazer viewed magic as a more 'primitive' form of what he believed would eventually evolve to become religion and then go on to become pure reason as embodied in science.[8] These beliefs of his became widespread, and were parroted, sometimes with revisions to suit a particular scholar's ideas about what would constitute 'primitive' and 'developed' in terms of religious, magical, and scientific thought. For example, Max Weber, whose works were also extremely influential on twentieth-century scholarship of magic, was of the belief that pure reason is best expressed in the form of a specifically Protestant rationalism, and he expressed these ideas in several works, notably *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*[9] and *The Sociology of Religion*[10], published in 1904 and 1920 respectively. These ideas were further propagated by Keith Thomas, the historian of the Early Modern world whose 1971 work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* remains hugely influential on popular thought about magic, and which remains the focus of critique by some of the most recent scholarship on the subject[11]. One of the main arguments underpinning these works, as well as the writings of many other scholars who wrote between the end of the nineteenth century and the late twentieth, is that magical practice and the belief therein are the result of so-called 'superstitions' held by less 'developed' people, and that those beliefs would eventually be replaced entirely by another entity, rationalism. This line of reasoning is flawed for a variety of reasons — most notably its pejorative views of historical peoples, especially those practicing non-Christian religions, as

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[6] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Comparative Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[7] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970).
[8] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.
[9] Max Weber, Peter R. Baehr, and Gordon C. Wells, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012).
[10] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999).
[11] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin Global, 2012).

well as its dependence on racial and colonial theories of human religion and development that have since been abandoned — and has rightly faced no small amount of criticism in more recent scholarship.

Recent scholarship has been moving away from those views, and there is a great deal of scholarship being done on the topic of magic generally. There is a plethora of books, essay collections, and articles which seek to give an overview of magic, with varying degrees of specificity and therefore relevance to my study, the most notable of which are discussed here. One of the most eminent historians of magic is Richard Kieckhefer, whose influential publications seek to create a unified theory through which scholars can understand and explain magic. His 1989 monograph *Magic in the Middle Ages* sought to present an overview of medieval European thought about magic; however, his scholarship runs into issues because he loses sight of the thoughts of the people he is studying in favour of his own ideas about how magic ought to be understood and defined, as informed by scholarship and ideas which were developed well after the medieval period.[12] This comes up repeatedly throughout his monograph, and can most can notably be seen in his presentation of the practice of medicine by medieval monks, which he classifies as magical in the monograph despite acknowledging that the monks themselves would not have considered themselves to be practicing magic.[13] More recently, he has written a chapter in the *Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, published in 2019, in which he lays out his ideas about the way in which magic ought to be understood, as an ambiguous umbrella term which is too large and ill-defined to bear close academic interest and scrutiny. He views the umbrella term 'magic' as being made up of more concrete, and to his mind more useful, subcategories which are capable of being defined with enough rigorous specificity to be useful to scholarship.[14] As with his earlier monograph, Kieckhefer's later work towards creating a unified vision of magic creates some problems when applied to specific historical texts and practices and additionally often also fails to account for the ideas and understanding of magic held by the subjects of his studies.

Other scholars have also sought to write comprehensive histories of magic, many of which run into similar difficulties as Kieckhefer's work. Brian Copenhaver in 2015 published *Magic in Western Culture from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, which seeks to trace magic from its classical origins through to modern ideas and events such as the assassination of Dr Narendra Dabholkar in 2013. Copenhaver's study is focused centrally on the changes that occurred in ideas about magic during certain specific periods of change, including especially: the time in which early Christian antique theologians were working towards a new and exclusively Christian understanding of religion and magic, and the time during the late medieval

[12] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*.
[13] Ibid, 57-8.
[14] Richard Kieckhefer, 'Rethinking How to Define Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), pp. 15-25.

and early modern period when attitudes towards magic in Europe again underwent another shift.[15] Though he also seeks to present a complete overview of the history of magic at least insofar as it pertains to European culture, Copenhaver acknowledges that the scope of such an aim will inherently limit its application and specificity.[16] He also differs from Kieckhefer in that his work looks more at the thoughts of the people about whom he writes rather than attempting to come up with a universally applicable theory of magic, and indeed has authored another book entitled *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to Enlightenment*, also published in 2015, which presents a key selection of primary source material on magic, from biblical text to the writings of Isaac Newton, which are allowed to mostly speak for themselves with only brief introductory commentary.[17] This focus is the one that is shared by other scholars who have written about magic such as Claire Fanger in her chapter *For Magic: Against Method*,[18] published in 2019 in the *Routledge History of Medieval Magic* and it is a similar approach which I intend to follow in this thesis.

Many other scholars have produced volumes more specific to magic in the medieval world; Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters have co-written the third volume of *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, published in 2002, the focus of which is the Middle Ages and which offers three sections: the first of which examines definitions of magic and medieval beliefs about and practices of magic, the second takes a closer look at a certain category of magic in medieval Scandinavia, and the last examines a variety of views of magic as evidenced in sources produced by authorities, both sacred and secular, at various times and places in the medieval period.[19] Another work in a similar vein, entitled *Magic and Medieval Society*, was co-written by Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas and published in 2014. This monograph offers an overview of magic in medieval Europe between the 11th and 15th centuries and offers a selection of primary sources as well as chapters dedicated to more specific looks at the ways in which magic interacts with several major facets of society such as politics, religion, and medicine.[20] Valerie Flint published a monograph in 1991 entitled *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, which argues that Christian society actively worked to preserve and promote certain forms of magic while fighting against others. She argues that Christians, realizing the importance of ritual in converting and controlling various pagan peoples, specifically Christianized and incorporated certain magical practices to serve their own purposes. Though the work offers important criticism of some of the academic discussions about magic, and indeed brings to light previously overlooked trends and activities in regards to magic in

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[15] Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018).
[16] Ibid, *xiii-xvi*.
[17] Brian P. Copenhaver, *The Book of Magic: from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).
[18] Claire Fanger, 'For Magic: Against Method', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), pp. 26-36.
[19] Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters, *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3 (London: Athlone Press, 2000).
[20] Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Carolina Escobar-Vargas, *Magic and Medieval Society* (London: Routledge, 2014).

early medieval Europe, it suffers from severe oversights in its framing and discussion such that it seems to have been written in order to prove its theory rather than following the evidence to reach a conclusion. In compiling her sources, Flint selected certain specific examples from texts written in various regions, cultures, and languages, and at times dealing with her sources without regard to the ways in which these differences contributed to the sources she cites. Additionally, she omitted other examples which ran contrary to her conclusion and failed to address how her selection ignores evidence that could contradict her argument as she builds her case.[21] Despite these flaws, Flint's work brought important light to the sometimes contradictory ways in which Christian communities approached and dealt with ritual and magical practices, and her examination of which practices were curtailed, which were coopted, and why does lay the groundwork for more specific, thorough, and better-structured examinations of the interplay between magic and Christian institutions in the Middle Ages. More overviews of the subject have been produced recently, such as *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, edited by David J. Collins and published in 2015, which offers a broad look at magic in Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East with chapters written by scholars in various fields and disciplines, and a pertinent chapter of which will be examined in greater depth below.[22] Additionally, Sophie Page and Catherine Rider have edited a collection which gathers many of the views about medieval magic by many eminent scholars in the aforementioned *Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, several of the more relevant chapters of which are referenced in various places within this chapter.[23]

In the aforementioned *Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West* is a chapter by Yitzhak Hen entitled 'The Early Medieval West'. In this chapter, Hen discusses some of the many problems that surround the study of magic, many of which are very pertinent to this thesis and will therefore be summarized here, including 'the scarcity, brevity, and ambiguity'[24] that plague references to magic, as well as the problems posed by the repetitive nature of those same references and the pervasive ecclesiastical lens through which all of these references were (re)produced. He rightly determines that the repetitiousness of these sources is not wholly explained by the thoughtless reproduction of *topoi* nor by the specific practices mentioned being widely present in the various places and times that the sources are penned, but is rather indicative of the shared concern of the compilers and authors of these texts with these sorts of practices.[25] Hen argues that the connection seen throughout many of the sources among magic, superstition, and pagan practice is indicative of the worldview of the Christian elite that produced

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[21] Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
[22] David J. Collins, ed., *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: from Antiquity to the Present* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[23] Sophie Page and Catherine Rider, eds., *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[24] Yitzhak Hen, 'The Early Medieval West', in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J Collins (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 183–206, 185.
[25] Ibid, 185-6.

them, and not necessarily reflective of the actual practices present in the time and place they were produced, and that even some of the authors of these sources knew that the practices about which they wrote were not directly connected to any extant pagan belief. He further notes that as Christianity became more entrenched, there seemed to be a greater rather than a lesser obsession with pagan survivals within Christian society, and that this apparent obsession was likely driven less by actual clashes with pagans and their rituals and more by political manoeuvres and desires to reform localized Christianities into more 'proper' orthodox forms.[26] He also discusses the impossibility of drawing a clean line between religious and magical practice and reiterates that even the same exact acts meant to produce the same exact results could be deemed as either orthodox or forbidden based on the interpretation of sources' authors.[27]

In 2005 Bernadette Filotas published *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures* in which she identifies and analyses instances within pastoral literature wherein ecclesiasts identified superstitions and survivals of pagan religion and culture.[28] In doing so she seeks to systematically examine those writings and identify therein trends with regard to the treatment of these superstitions and pagan survivals by the sources' authors and what that treatment can be said to tell us about popular culture. She frames her study in relation to popular history and looks to these sources for clues about the lived experiences of the people of the time, but she does so without completely losing sight of the many problems that the nature of the extant sources pose for the ability to make such claims, including, but not limited to, the authorship of the sources being comprised of the Christian elite who were producing normative texts hostile to the activity they were describing, the repetitive nature of the sources in terms of language and ideas, and the instances of her evidence being both limited in volume and scattered in sources of various times, places, purposes, and genres.[29] She further identifies that terms such as 'paganism' and 'superstition' face similar difficulties in definition as do 'magic', 'ritual', and, indeed, 'religion', noting that the former two terms are often used seemingly interchangeably alongside 'idolatry' and 'sacrilege' to describe many of the same sorts of practices. She likewise wrestles with the definition of those terms and recognises that they are often applied not to non-Christian beliefs and practices, but rather to what authors deemed to be *incorrect* Christian beliefs and practices and to those who believed themselves to be Christian but whose actions were not in line with the orthodox teachings or political aims of the church.[30] More directly relevant to this study is Filotas's treatment of magic, which she deals with in two chapters concerning beneficial and non-beneficial (including both neutral and actively harmful) magic respectively,[31] though she does admit

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[26] Ibid, 187-93.
[27] Ibid, 198-201.
[28] Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005).
[29] Ibid, 5-10.
[30] Ibid, 13-18.
[31] These are chapters six and seven. Ibid, 219-317.

that despite her sources tending to treat all of these people as sinners, that the distinction between helpful and harmful magic and practitioners is rarely simple or clear-cut.[32] She notes that even if the various terms referencing divination or prophecy did originally denote specific and individual practices, that, to many, over the course of the early Middle Ages, the meanings of the terms seem to have been accidentally or intentionally (and particularly by Caesarius of Arles) obscured such that they eventually became apparently equally vague and synonymous.[33]

Very recently, Martha Rampton has produced the book *Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender from Late Antiquity to 1000*, which examines the evolving attitudes towards and roles of women in ritual activity, especially as Carolingian ideas and reforms drove those changes in the latter portion of the early Middle Ages. This is relevant not only to the intersection of magic and gender as it applies to the topic of this thesis, but also to the control of ritual as a control of culture and the way that this preoccupation with control speaks to the concerns of Christian authorities with the way in which magic could undermine their sociopolitical relevance.[34] Her main focus is the curtailing of women from sacred, ritual, and other public life within the realm of the church's influence as Christian authority became more centralized and the influence of Rome grew, and the way that this both drove and was driven by changing perceptions of magic.[35] She argues that the leaders of Christian institutions had a sophisticated understanding of the power that ritual had to affect beliefs and attitudes beyond the purely religious, and so exercised their authority to take control of ritual practices and use them to shape society towards their own religious and political ends.[36] Further, she recognises that while the prevalent modern opinion is that women were the major, and nearly the sole, practitioners of magic in the medieval world, that even in the pre-Carolingian sources, in the cases where gender can be definitively determined, men are the primary practitioners and that the magic of women is mostly confined to the domestic sphere, and this would become increasingly true throughout the early Middle Ages.[37] However, she also identifies that the main Christian concerns with magic in the early medieval period were 'theological, political, and quintessentially public',[38] and that as such many early Christian authors deal with women practitioners in the same manner as they did men, but as Christianity's political power and influence became more entrenched and widespread that their concerns, and therefore their attitudes, changed.[39] While her examination of her sources is thorough and well-reasoned, the majority of her focus is on texts that fall

[32] Ibid, 222-3.
[33] Ibid, 223-4.
[34] Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons*.
[35] Ibid, 1-4.
[36] Ibid, 4-6.
[37] Ibid, 6-8.
[38] Ibid, 385.
[39] Ibid, 384-7.

outside the geographical and temporal constraints of this thesis. Moreover, her focus on trafficking with demons as the specific avenue for magic constrains her study. She arrives at this definition primarily by way of Augustine's view of magic as being a practice that necessarily relied on pacts with demons and that magical rites and rituals merely served as instructions for demons who would carry out the supernatural acts.[40] While Augustine's ideas were extremely influential, and the connection between demons and magic is prevalent in many sources throughout the period, using that relationship as the sine qua non of magic in her study prevents her from dealing with instances of magical practice that are not clearly linked to the activities of demons which appear in cases where thoughts on magic have drifted from Augustine's strict definitions. In fact, we find that there is little direct reference to Augustine in the sources examined for this thesis, and even where his authority is referenced directly, that reference is often actually to Caesarius of Arles, whose ideas of magic, and especially of divination (as will be discussed below), departed significantly from Augustine's, despite using the name of the saint to provide authority to his views.

In terms of discussion of specific practices that come up in the texts examined in this thesis, the most studied of these practices are those of a divinatory nature. This should not be shocking, as attempts to divine the future are some of the oldest rituals that we have records of, and many of these practices still exist, both in new forms as well as in forms that are nearly identical to their medieval practices. Compounding this is the fact that divination is seen in both Old and New Testaments and is (or, to some authors, before the advent of Christianity, was) an accepted orthodox practice, making the Christian regulation of prognostication a complicated and interesting area of study. Many of these practices are discussed in texts which appear in this chapter, but are not always denoted as being explicitly magical, and therefore not all references to divinatory practice in the texts are discussed in this thesis. Regarding divination, Carine van Rhijn has recently written a review that examines recent scholarship on divinatory practices in the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages in which she highlights the ubiquity of various practices as well as (despite the several important recent publications on the matter) the need for greater study of these practices and the sources that discuss them by scholars. As van Rhijn points out, the tension between proper Christian forms of prophecy and banned pagan forms, as well as the difficulty of cleanly differentiating between the two, are key features of the study of prophecy at every point in history since the rise of Christian religion.[41] William E. Klingshirn has additionally published two chapters on diviners that are pertinent to this study. The first of which is a short chapter in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*

[40] For more on Augustine's definition of magic see Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, *Defining Magic: A Reader* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), esp 33-40.

[41] Carine van Rhijn, 'Review Article: Small Futures. Sortilege, Divination and Prognostication in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', *Early Medieval Europe* 31, no. 2 (March 20, 2023): 297–307, https://doi.org/10.1111/emed.12620. (especially 304-5).

in which he defines *sortilegi* as diviners who see the future by casting lots and briefly discusses the Roman understanding of these people.[42] These Roman ideas and the Roman laws that were made surrounding various divinatory practices would influence the early teachings of ecclesiasts whose writings would be influential in early medieval Ireland and Britain, most notably Augustine. The second of his chapters to be discussed here is the one appearing in *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, in which he discusses Augustine's understanding of, and interest in, various forms of divination.[43] He notes the split in Augustine's writings between certain forms of knowing the future, which he believed could, at least in some instances, be communication from God to the faithful, and other practices of diviners, which he thoroughly condemns in his various works.[44] Klingshirn argues that the distinction in Augustine's mind is one that had existed in previous Christian, and indeed pre-Christian thought, and between those who claim divination through their own skill knowledge and those who obtain foreknowledge through (possibly divine) inspiration.[45] Indeed, Klingshirn writes that while Augustine has no shortage of praise for the Disciplines[46] through which one can be inspired with prophecy, he positions divination as the antithesis of this, as an anti-Discipline[47]. However, despite Augustine's care in singling out which specific divinatory practices ought to be proscribed and which are acceptable, later influential authors, most notably Caesarius of Arles, treated all divinatory practices as synonymous and roundly condemned them all.[48]

In addition to these more general works, more specific monographs, chapters, and articles have been produced which bear closer relevance to my work on early medieval insular magic, such as Ciaran Arthur's 2018 *'Charms', Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England*, which offers a look at a few specific categories of source material from England in the early Middle Ages and challenges some of the assumptions that have been made by scholars who have looked at these sources previously to bring to light

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[42] William E Klingshirn, 'Seers and Sortilegi, Roman World', in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S Bagnall et al., 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 6110–11.

[43] William E Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge According to Augustine', in *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113-40.

[44] Ibid, 115-6.

[45] Ibid, 116-7. Though this distinction is apparent both in and before Augustine's work, they would persist in Christian thought after his death, and will be seen in other texts that are relevant to this thesis, such as Isidore's Etymologies (see also: William E. Klingshirn, 'Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners', Traditio 58, no. 1 (2003): 59–90, https://doi.org/10.1353/trd.2003.0006.)

[46] Capitalisation of this term is included here to keep Klingshirn's distinction between the formally recognized and appropriate practices which Augustine described as being Disciplines from the general term.

[47] Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge According to Augustine', 124-8.

[48] See Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures*, 223-4. For more on Caesarius Of Arles views on magic see Martha Rampton, *European Magic and Witchcraft: A Reader* (University of Toronto Press, 2018), 89; Giselle de Nie, 'Caesarius of Arles and Gregory of Tours Two Sixth-Century Gallic Bishops and 'Christian Magic'', in *Word, Image, and Experience: Dynamics of Miracle and Self-Perception in Sixth-Century Gaul* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); Lilian R.G. Diniz, ''When a Woman Recites an Incantation, a Serpent Recites It,'' *Eventum: A Journal of Medieval Arts & Rituals* 2 (October 1, 2024): 28, https://doi.org/10.54103/2975-0989/2024/22620.

new ideas and conclusions.[49] While this book does have overlap with the area of interest in this thesis, its focus is primarily on the magical practices rather than contemporary ideas about them. John Carey, Ciarán Ó Gealbháin, Ilona Tuomi, and Barbara Hillers have edited the volume *Charms, Charmers, and Charming in Ireland: From the Medieval to the Modern*, which was published in 2019 and takes a series of deeper looks into several aspects of charms and those who practice them.[50] Catherine Rider has in 2012 published the monograph *Religion and Magic in Medieval England*, which gives an overview of magical practices and responses to them in medieval England, though she focuses primarily on the high and late Middle Ages in her study, making it mostly outside the bounds of my focus in this thesis.[51] Another chapter in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (2019) was written by Mark Williams; it focuses on magic in what he describes as 'Celtic Lands'. This chapter examines many of the same regions as I am examining as well as looking at some sources that would fall into the temporal range of my study, however Williams's work focuses primarily on the sources composed in the Celtic languages of these regions rather than the Latin-language sources that will be the focus of my study, and even so he concludes that there is a great deal more work to be done in producing academic work on the magic of the early medieval 'Celtic Lands'.[52] Most recently, John Carey has produced two articles that relate closely to this thesis. The first is a 2022 article in the collected volume *Magie und Literatur* in which he surveyed depictions of magic in medieval Irish sources, describing a change in the nature of those depictions from a focus on effect in early sources to a focus on practices in later sources.[53] The second is a close examination of *magi* in Tírechán's *Collectanea*,[54] published in the same year; the article is discussed below in this chapter and Tírechán's work is examined in Chapter One of this thesis.

Methodology:

The underlying methodology of this thesis is to conduct close readings of the two corpora of texts described above, examining and analysing those passages therein containing reference to magic and its practitioners in order to extract the specific ideas and attitudes they contain concerning magic. The question then becomes how to determine what constitutes magic in the texts. As previously mentioned, many scholars address this problem in their own work by beginning with a definition of magic which they

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[49] Ciaran Arthur, *"Charms", Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018).
[50] Ilona Tuomi et al., *Charms, Charmers, and Charming in Ireland: from the Medieval to the Modern* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019).
[51] Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).
[52] Mark Williams, 'Magic in Celtic Lands', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), pp. 123-135.
[53] John Carey, 'The Performance of Magic in Medieval Irish Narrative', in Andreas Hammer et al., *Magie und Literatur: erzählkulturelle Funktionalisierung magischer Praktiken in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2022), 209–37.
[54] John Carey, 'Tírechán and the Magi', *Studia Hibernica* 48, no. 1 (September 2022): 1–11.

have devised and applying it to historical sources with little regard to how the authors of those sources would have defined magic themselves or whether they would agree to the labeling of certain practices as being magical. This is not the approach used in this thesis. Rather, this thesis reads the texts in question, looking for specific vocabulary that is used by the authors to indicate the practice of magic. This means that for the purposes of this thesis, passages which contain supernatural happenings may or may not be deemed to be magical based on the ways in which they are described. Thus, saintly miracles, even those that would later be deemed to be magical by later authors, are not considered to be magic, nor are the mere existence of legendary or supernatural creatures and beasts. The descriptions of magic are identified by the use of specific terminology as well as through biblical allusion to passages that are themselves indicative of magic. Some of the words that I use to identify magic are uncontroversial in their designation as such, words such as *incantator* (or, in one source *praecantator*) and the Latinized *caragius*, from the Greek *καράγιος*, which is discussed in a note in the passage in which it appears. There is another set of words the magical nature of which is less often entirely clear-clear cut, but which are still generally accepted as regularly, if not always, referring to those who practice magic. Among these words are *maleficus* (which translated literally would have a meaning like 'evildoer', but which is often associated with magic both in these texts specifically as well as in medieval works more generally), *aruspex* (as well as in certain passages *diuinus* and *sortilegus*) the specific practices of whom are often deemed to be magical, and *venefica* (a word often translated as 'sorceress'; however the magical nature of the latter word seems to vary greatly, as the word should more rightly be considered one which references women who produce and administer poisons specifically as well as potions and other concoctions, whether for medical purposes or otherwise). Many of these specific questionable terms receive discussion in the thesis when they appear.

However, the term which will be by far the most contentious in my labeling of it as denoting a practitioner of magic is also the term which presents a plurality — if not an outright majority — of the references to magic examined in this thesis. This word is *magus*. Outside of Irish sources, the magical nature of the term is somewhat less in dispute, but the term *magus* is, when it appears in Irish sources, almost universally translated simply as 'druid' without note or comment. It is well attested that the term *magus* is used by authors in early medieval Ireland to refer to the pre-Christian intellectual, legal, and ecclesiastical druid class and I do not argue that this is not the case nor that it is necessarily a mistake to translate it as such. However, the overwhelming linguistic, literary, and historical evidence points to the inherent magical connotation of the term *magus* and the activities of the *magi* both generally, as well as in specifically Irish sources. Of the words that could have been used to refer to the druid class, including the Latin *druis*, which would also have the advantage of being nearly identical to the Old Irish *druí*, *magus* is one that comes with an extraordinary amount of magical connotation on its own, belief in the magical

powers of the mythologized druid class (which will be discussed below) notwithstanding. Nearly every biblical example of a *magus* is involved in various magical practices, whether they be prophecy or more direct displays of power. These stories include the confrontation between Moses and the Egyptian *magi* in which the staves of the *magi* are turned into snakes[55] and the confrontation between David and King Nebuchadnezzar's *magi* that is referenced in Muirchú's life of Saint Patrick in which the *magi* are involved in prophecy and the interpretation of dreams and visions.[56] While some of these specifically prophetic activities exist on a spectrum of magical-ness that can be perceived in the writings of various churchmen, many of them are forms that are strongly implied (if not explicitly stated) to be magical by influential ecclesiasts.[57] Indeed, there were a number of apocryphal texts and much writing about one particular infamous *magus* who appears in the Acts of the Apostles, the aptly named Simon Magus.[58] Moreover, the people and practices of magic are examined by Isidore of Seville, whose writings were profoundly influential on early medieval Irish ecclesiasts, in the eighth book of his *Etymologiarum sive originum*, the ninth section of which is labeled *De magis*.[59] The section of this text relating to magic offers Isidore's descriptions of various practices and practitioners — among which are nearly all of the less contentious terms discussed above — which fall into more specific categories that all fall under the umbrella of *magi* as practitioners. More specifically, he names Zoroaster as the first *magus* ('*magorum primus Zoroastres rex Bactrianorum*'), calls Homer's Circe a *maga* ('*Fertur et quaedam maga famosissima Circe*'), identifies *malefici* as being a subset of *magi* ('*Magi sunt, qui vulgo malefici ob facinorum magnitudinem nuncupantur*') and discusses the *magi* in the gospel as being interpreters of stars ('*primum autem idem stellarum interpretes magi nuncupabantur*') and states that this sort of activity was only allowed in the times before the gospels.[60] In

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[55] This is Exod. 7:8-13.

[56] The allusion to the court of Babylon and King Nebuchandezzar in relation to the *magi* of King Loíguire are discussed in Chater 1 of this thesis.

[57] See the discussion of divination earlier in this chapter.

[58] This is Acts 8:9-24.

[59] Isidore's taxonomy of magical practitioners, its structure, and its sources is examined in depth by William E. Klingshirn in his article 'Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners'. In his article he identifies that the section of the text, despite its name, is less concerned with magic generally and more concerned with defining and classifying the many types and subcategories of magical practitioners that can be referred to generally as *magi*. He notes that although the inclusion of divination in the chapter *could* be read as defining such activities as being inherently magical, that the structure of the chapter suggests that we *should* not arrive at the conclusion that all of these practices are equally forbidden, or indeed equally magical. He argues that the section begins by discussing *magi* specifically because of the ambiguity of the term that already existed in Isidore's time. This alone is a reasonable conclusion to reach from the structure of the text; however, he also contends that the structure suggests a harder distinction between *magi* and their magical prophetic practices and other diviners and their less apparently magical practices than, I would argue, is supported by the text itself or the structure thereof, especially since the text itself refers to its discussion of *magi* as a whole even after the supposed division between magical and non-magical diviners. Although such distinctions were definitely present in Isidore's time, it is an overstatement of what can be inferred from the text to claim that they can be so clearly demarcated. For Klingshirn's full arguments, see Isidore, *The etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, eds. and trans: Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, and Muriel Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 181-3; Klingshirn, 'Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners'.

[60] The Latin sections of this text are taken from Lindsay's 1911 edition as it appears in the Latin Library website. see Isidorus and Wallace Martin Lindsay, Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum: Libri XX (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911), https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/isidore/8.shtml.

her work on pagan survivals, even with her care in analysis and use of specific terminology, Filotas describes druids, calling them 'reputedly a highly trained professional class, whose members combined the functions of priest, seer, royal advisor, and sorcerer'.[61] More recently, in the work of John Carey, despite describing *magus* simply as 'the Latin term that is used to render the Irish *druid*', Carey goes on to discuss the many supernatural powers of these Irish *magi* as well as the evidence supporting a general belief in their possession of magical powers, concluding that 'Tírechán regarded the *magi* not merely as wizards, but as a pagan priesthood', thus acknowledging the complex, but undeniably magical, nature of the term.[62] The abundance of *magi* within the corpora of this study, and the close association of those people with magic, along with the biblical usage of the word, Isidore's very magical taxonomy of its usage, and the association of the druid class with the practice of magic — as borne out in Carey's 2022 article[63] — combine to make a formidable case for the inclusion of the term in a list of words used to describe the practitioners of magic in these texts, and a closer inquiry of the term would reveal if, as I suspect it would, the same could be said of other texts produced in early medieval Ireland. Due to this evidence, in this thesis *magus* is treated as an explicitly magical term, though that designation does not contest that the term also denotes status as a priest or as a holder of other religious position in non-Christian religions. It is clear that the role of a druid (and thus, in Irish sources, a *magus*) is neither exclusively magical nor exclusively religious (to the extent that they can be said to be separate), but rather a role that blends sacred, magical, and administrative and advisory activities. In addition to their magical duties, a *magus*, as one appears in the sources examined in this thesis, would be expected to hold influential secular status as well, as can be seen in their roles as advisors to various kings (including the High King of Ireland), and as fosterers of important people, including the relatives of kings. In short, this thesis holds that the term *magus* refers to a person deeply involved in non- and un-Christian religion, ritual, and practice, including, but not limited to, magical practices in these texts, and will treat the word as such where it appears.[64]

Throughout this thesis the translations of texts are my own except where otherwise indicated. I have in general refrained from translating certain terms such as *magus* and *maleficius* as the words generally used for their English translations often have both denotated and connotated meanings that unnecessarily colour the ideas about magic that the texts contain. Indeed, the word 'magician' is more likely to bring to mind images of top hats, goatees, and white rabbits than of anything that the authors of the texts would

[61] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals*, 34.
[62] Carey, *Tírechán and the Magi*, 1.
[63] Ibid.
[64] The many nuances of this term, and its uses, as well as other terms of magical and/or prophetic nature are worthy of further study. I note that there has been no systematic and thorough examination of the use of various magical terms in the Early Middle Ages, as Filotas produced with regards to her study of superstition and paganism in pastoral sources. Such a study would be a great boon to scholars interested in various topics during that period. Although Filotas's work does touch on some of these terms, a study of their usage regarding magic specifically and in a wider range of sources is still needed.

have been trying to communicate. Additionally, the secondary literature about many of my sources is vast, and as such much of that scholarship that is of only at most peripheral relevance to this thesis is not discussed directly.

Overview:

The first chapter of this thesis lays out my research into the hagiographies of early medieval Ireland and Britain, finding instances of magic within them, and analysing those instances both in terms of the text itself as well as the historical, literary, and religious contexts surrounding the production and dissemination of those sources. The Irish hagiographies are exceptional for this study because they were all written within a very close time range to one another, and many of them are either explicitly or otherwise clearly in conversation with the others. The British hagiographies are likewise composed in a fairly tight timeframe to each other, and there is also evidence of similar intertextual connections. My corpus of texts for this chapter is comprised of: Two lives of St Brigit, one written by Cogitosus and the other anonymous so-called *Vita Prima* of Brigit; Muirchú's *Vita Sancti Patricii* and Tírechán's *Collectanea*; Adomnan's *Vita Columbae*; two lives of St Cuthbert, one having been written by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne and the other being the venerable Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*; the life of Wilfrid composed by Stephen of Ripon; and, finally the life of Gregory the Great penned by an anonymous monk of Whitby. I will here give a brief overview of my findings, which are borne out from the study done in the chapter to follow.

In the two earliest lives of Brigit there is relatively little direct reference to magic, with only one instance that is potentially a magical act carried out by a *magus* — wherein a *magus* who has not converted sends his grain to be milled at the sacred millstone of Brigit's community, but the millstone locks up and stops working when his grain is added to the mill.[65] Even this solitary example of magic being potentially performed by a practitioner is more likely to be a statement about the posthumous power of the saint to protect her cult from duplicitous and profane influences than an act of magic by the *magus* that is then overcome by the posthumous power of the saint, which is to say it's only relevant to this thesis because it is a *magus*, not because it is a direct depiction of magical practice. There is additionally one incident in the Lives of Brigit that is sometimes interpreted by scholars as being magical, and indeed is specifically stated to be the use of a love charm in a later Middle Irish version of her life, but which is presented in all earlier lives as a miracle, wherein Brigid sprinkles water over and blesses a woman who is not in love with her

[65] Life of Brigit, (Bollandus's *Acta Sanctorum I Februarii*, 140).

husband in order to heal their marriage,[66] though for reasons stated above, this is not treated as a magical occurrence in this thesis. What there is in abundance throughout the lives of Brigid is prophecy made by *magi* about Brigit's birth, life, and future as a Christian holy woman and the actions that those practitioners take to fulfil those prophesies. With the sole exception of the millstone incident, the appearance of *magi* in the accounts of Brigid are about them facilitating the actions of Brigit and the Christian conversion of the region and leaving behind their former practices to follow the Christian example of Brigit.

In the accounts of St Patrick by the monks of Armagh, Muirchú and Tírechán, magic and its practitioners receive a very different treatment than they did in the texts about the patron saint of Kildare. Throughout Murichú's *Vita*, every time that a magus appears or is practicing their magical art, they are without exception explicitly villainous, called out as being wicked, consorting with demons, and being the inventors of every evil craft. In their various appearances throughout the *vita*, the *magi* incite King Loíguire to attempt to murder Patrick and his companions,[67] profane Patrick's Christian faith (an offence for which one is killed outright by one of Patrick's miracles),[68] challenge the saint to a competition of supernatural powers, and eventually end up in a trial of fire against Patrick's *puer* Benignus, in which the remaining *magus* burns to death.[69] According to Muirchu's depictions, practitioners of magic are contemptible and deserving only of death without redemption, which is a statement made stronger by other episodes in the *vita* in which many people, even including one man who is made out to be an absolute villain who, among the list of his various crimes, sins, and faults, takes cruel delight in murdering innocent travelers on the road, are able to repent and become a members of ecclesiastical communities.

However, despite the fact that Tírechán follows many of the same events in his *Collectanea* as Muirchú has in his *vita* and often hews very closely to Muirchú's presentation of these events, there are a few differences between their accounts which are significant to their depictions of magic and its practitioners. Most notably there is one event described by Tírechán that is not found in Muirchu's work in which Patrick converts two young women who die immediately after their conversion. After this takes place a *magus* who was the foster-father of one of the girls is stricken with grief and confronts the saint, but ends up being converted by him instead. Once the brother of the first *magus*, who shares his brother's craft, hears about this he in turn is filled with rage and sets out to defeat Patrick, but is also peaceably converted to Christianity.[70] Furthermore, during a confrontation between Patrick and an army of *magi* which is absent in Muirchú's *vita*, only the leader of the *magi* is killed by Patrick and the saint is described

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[66] This is discussed in some detail in: Jacqueline Borsje, 'Love Magic in Medieval Irish Penitentials, Law and Literature: A Dynamic Perspective', *Studia Neophilologica* 84 (June 2012): 6–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/00393274.2011.646433.
[67] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.15-16 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 84-9)
[68] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.17 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 88-91)
[69] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.20 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 92-7)
[70] Tírechán, *Collectanea* III.19 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 138-141).

as converting many people there after that event, which implies that other *magi* who had confronted Patrick may well have been among his new converts there.[71] These two events in particular illustrate that although Tírechán presents magic and its practitioners as being in the wrong for having those beliefs and practices, he nevertheless views *magi* as a group as not being beyond conversion and therefore redemption. Interestingly, Tírechán is also entirely silent about the source of the *magi*'s power, which is also exceptional given that several of the stories that Muirchú calls out specifically as being powered by demonic forces, Tirechan has remained silent even on demonic involvement in those events. About his reasoning for remaining silent on the source of magic I can only speculate, but it is a notable aspect of his work that Tírechán alone of all of the hagiographic authors doesn't mention magic having a demonic source.

In Adomnán's Life of St Columba, there are several instances where the saint confronts *magi*, *malefici*, and other practitioners of magic. During these confrontations, Adomnán is fairly consistent that magic is evil and the work of demons. The practitioners in Adomnán's work vary wildly in power from one another, with one able to summon tempestuous winds to prevent St Columba from being able to sail,[72] and another only able to change the colour of a bull's blood from red to white to convince gullible onlookers that he was able to magically draw milk from the bull.[73] As in the Life of Brigid discussed above, there is an incident in the life of Columba which is also sometimes interpreted as a use of love magic to bring together an estranged married couple, but just like in the earlier *vita*, it is presented as a miraculous happening rather than a magical one.[74] There are several specific interesting aspects to Adomnán's depiction of magic that set it apart from others: first is that he specifies in his writing that the powers of the magical practitioners can only work because God allows them to. This is a view that would become a widely held interpretation of non-miraculous supernatural powers, but is only explicitly mentioned by Adomnán in this corpus of hagiographies. Additionally, in the *Vita Columbae*, the practitioners of magic are only ever able to do anything by getting demons to do it for them, and in several stories the *magi* become little more than side characters or the audience who are merely watching the true confrontation which takes place between the saint and the demons who are working on their behalf.

This brings us to the Northumbrian texts that contribute to the hagiographical corpus of this thesis. It is worthy of note here that there are fewer and generally less spectacular instances of magic in these sources than in most of the Irish sources discussed above. This fact has traditionally been attributed to a more rational and sober attitude that the Northumbrians were believed to have held as opposed to

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[71] Tírechán, *Collecanea*, III.42(Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 156-7).
[72] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 34 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 404-7).
[73] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 17 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 362-3).
[74] Again, see Borsje, 'Love Magic in Medieval Irish Penitentials'.

the Irish, and this view is still taken uncritically by some scholars and much of the public today. However, this idea has its origins in racialist and sectarian attitudes and falls apart upon closer inspection, as all of the Northumbrian sources I've examined contain instances of astounding miraculous events (even if these events are prefaced by a boilerplate apology for the fact that miracles can strain the credulity of the readers). Furthermore, nearly all of them also contain accounts of magic and its practitioners as well, but their more spectacular actions tend to take place in lands distant from the shores of Britain. It is clear that in all of the hagiographic sources in my corpus, Northumbrian and Irish alike, there is a distance between the most wondrous examples of non-Christian supernatural power and the authors of these sources. In the Irish sources, this distance was temporal, as the hagiographers were writing their works well after the floruit of whichever saint they were writing about. However, as the Northumbrian sources were being composed within living memory of their respective saints, there was far less room for the authors or the local people to mythologise or invent stories about incredible events that happened just up the road without someone coming forward and saying that those things never happened. Additionally, there is a sense in many of the Northumbrian hagiographies that the greatest and most spectacular instances of both miracle and magic are reserved for places where they will have the greatest possible impact in terms of the conversion of non-Christians and the removal of the doubts of less solid converts. According to this line of thinking, since the Northumbrian hagiographies were being written in a fairly solidly Christian place and time, there was little place for such things in the area.

The first of the Northumbrian hagiographies discussed in this thesis are the two lives of St Cuthbert. The short life by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne contains no mention of magic, but Bede's prose life of St Cuthbert, which was initially based on that shorter anonymous life, does contain a reference to magic. According to Bede, the practitioners who Cuthbert had to confront were not wielders of grand and terrifying unnatural powers, but rather were people making charms and spells that were meant to cure or protect the people purchasing them from illness.[75] While Bede refers to the creation of these talismans as a 'demonic art', and while one of his concerns seems to be that these magical remedies would be effective, at least temporarily, his main concern seems to be that the practitioners were pulling people from the orthodox doctrine and practices of the church and into heterodox practices that endangered the functioning of the church (not just through doctrinal threat but also by taking money that would otherwise be given to the church) and jeopardised the future of their souls. This seems to have been a major concern for Bede because he mentions this same issue again in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*,[76] and in both cases his point seems to be that it is the duty of the church and its members to paternalistically

[75] Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* XI (Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 184-7).
[76] This occurs in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* iv 28.

protect the people from these improper practices that he says are too ignorant to know are bad for them and shepherd them towards the proper ones.

Stephen of Ripon's life of Wilfred, while unsurprisingly having quite a lot to say about the Synod of Whitby and its resolution of the Easter controversary, the proper shape of the tonsure, and other disputes, nevertheless still takes the time to describe one magical incident that occurred when Wilfred's boat was blown off course by a storm and stranded in the land of the *Saxones australes*, or south Saxons. Thus stranded, Wilfred and his party were confronted by an army seeking to take their boat, loot their goods, and enslave and slaughter their people. This army was led by a man that Stephen describes as a 'foremost of the priests of idolatry', who attempted to use his magical art against the stranded Christians, but before he could successfully finish his malediction one of Wilfred's party took a stone that 'had been blessed by all the people of God' and slung it at the priest, crushing his skull.[77] There is another passage in the Life of Wilfred that many have interpreted as being magical, due in part to the vocabulary used in the scene. It involves the wife of a king who is turning her husband against Wilfred, and she is described using the term *venefica*.[78] While this term is often translated as 'sorceress', as discussed above, it refers more generally to people who make and use poisons, and because this practice is linked to people who tend to also make other tinctures, salves, and potions in practices that are considered magical, the word has come to be associated with magical practitioners despite the fact that its usage is not so clear-cut. Given those links between people who create poisons and potions and magical practitioners, this is not an unreasonable translation in most cases, but in the context of this *vita* and its use in this chapter of extended metaphor that the queen poisoning the mind of her husband with her words, it is safe to categorise this incident as non-magical. Thus, we can conclude that Stephen of Ripon viewed magic as a distant, though tangible threat that could nevertheless be overcome by devout Christians.

Finally, in the Life of Gregory the Great by an unknown monk at Whitby there is only a single instance of interaction between Gregory and practitioners of magic. During this episode the eponymous saint of the *vita* is attacked by two *magi* who were hired by a malcontent excommunicate who wanted to take revenge upon him. Although the two practitioners accept a large sum of money from this man to attack Gregory and do him whatever harm they could, and indeed although they set demons upon him in an attempt to madden his horse and cause it to throw him while he is riding it, Gregory overcomes the demons and smites the *magi* with blindness. Despite their actions and being struck blind as punishment for them, Gregory speaks with the *magi* and not only causes them to repent and convert, but also ends up

[77] Stephan of Ripon, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, Chapter XIII (Colgrave, *Life of Wilfrid*, 26-9).
[78] Stephan of Ripon, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, Chapter XXIV (Colgrave, *Life of Wilfrid*, 48-9).

entrusting them thereafter with overseeing all of the funds that the church used for charity and alms,[79] showing that not only can *magi* and their ilk be redeemed, they can become important and trusted members of the church when they are.

Despite the various depictions of magic in the hagiographical texts, they can still be grouped into larger categories of views. While very few of these texts present only a single un-nuanced and simplistic view of the practitioners of magic, and many of them have sections that could fall into more than one of these categories, it is still useful to create these categories to aid in the understanding about the ideas presented in the texts. First there are the texts in which magic is shown as a force that had not been historically contrary to God, but that once Christianity had been brought to the region was no longer necessary. The framing of these texts is such that in the time before Christianity magic and its practitioners served a purpose in God's plans, but that those plans were fulfilled by the conversion of the area. Implicit in this view is that now that the area had been brought into the Christian faith, that magic no longer served the purposes of God and that it should no longer be practiced. This view is mostly seen in the lives of Brigit, but there are incidents in other texts that also lean in this direction, especially in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, and there is considerable and interesting overlap between this idea and the ideas about the 'naturally good pagan' that are present in many texts from the period.

The second of these broad categories is that magic is a sometimes powerful and usually demonic force that is directly opposed to the will of God and the work of the saints. These sources tend to depict their saints and the practitioners of magic as engaged in direct confrontations of supernatural power. In these sources the actual power of magical practitioners can range from being a challenge to the saint (albeit a challenge that the saint will inevitably defeat and overcome) to being a paltry trifle dismissed quickly and easily by the saint of the *vita*. Interestingly, many sources will not have consistent depictions of the power of practitioners throughout, instead having the relative strength of magic change depending on how they are needed for the story to unfold. This can sometimes result in individual sources containing tales of *magi* that can darken the sky or control the winds alongside those who can only call upon demons to change the colour of blood and fool credulous onlookers into believing that it is milk. The source of the power of magic is not always explicitly defined in each instance. However, all but one of the sources do call out these powers as either coming from demons or that the practitioners are merely calling upon the demons, and they are the ones who have the actual power to affect the world.

The final broad category into which the depictions of magic in the hagiographical texts can be placed is that magical practice is improper and evil primarily (though not exclusively) because of the way

[79] *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 22 (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 110-5).

it seeks to countermand the church in its teaching and carrying out of the proper orthodox beliefs, rituals, and practices and in so doing endangers the souls of the people that the church is bound to protect and undercuts the role and power of the church in society. This view is seen most strongly in Bede's prose life of St Cuthbert, where it is his primary argument against the practice of magic, and it is this view that will be most prevalently seen in discussion of the penitential handbooks and synodal canons below, which should be unsurprising given the purpose and nature of those sources.

The second chapter of this thesis follows the methodologies of the first chapter into more legal sources: namely, the Latin penitential literature and synod canons produced and compiled by early medieval insular ecclesiasts, and that by continental ecclesiasts working in Britain and Ireland. While pinning down precise authorship, dating, and relation among these texts remains both complex and contentious, there exist clear intertextual relations between many of these works suggesting that many of their authors and compilers were both aware of and reacting to other texts in the genre to copy, adapt, or refute the rulings of their predecessors. The corpus of texts for the second chapter of this thesis is: the so-called First Synod of St Patrick; the *Penitentiale Vinniani*; the *Canones Hibernenses*; the Penitential of Theodore; the *Penitentiale Sancti Columbani*, the Bigotian Penitential, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*; and Ecgbert's penitential. Below is an overview of my findings in the second chapter.

The first mention of something that is very likely magical, or at least directly related to non-Christian practices involving practitioners of magic, in the legal sources discussed in this thesis occurs in the so-called 'First Synod of St Patrick', where it is written that any Christian who swears an oath to an *aurispex*, or with one as witness to the oath, must do penance for a year.[80] This transgression is treated as being of the same severity as murder or extra-marital sex. There is also a section of the Synod that seeks to denounce belief in supernatural creatures (*lamia* or *striga*) at all, and one who is Christian and believes in such monsters is made anathema until they renounce any such beliefs,[81] but study of supernatural creatures falls beyond the remit of this thesis. These are the only mentions of magic in the text, and they suggest that there is a concern within the church about its place as the overseers of rituals and oaths, and that magical practitioners and belief in these ungodly supernatural forces undermine this position of authority.

The Penitential of Finnian states that any cleric, *maleficus*, or '*mulier malefica*' who uses their magic to beguile a person into sin, that they must do six years' penance, three of which must be on bread and water alone. However, the penitential also stipulates that if they have not caused a person to fall into sin

[80] Synodus I S, Patricii, Canon 14 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 56-7).
[81] Synodus I S, Patricii, Canon 16 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 56-7).

but have acted magically towards them for the purpose of enticing lust, that they must still do penance, but only for a year on bread and water.[82] The Penitential of Finnian also stipulates that a woman who uses magic to induce an abortion must do penance for half a year on bread and water and for a further two years without meat or wine.[83] However, this seems to be an unfortunate catch-22 for a woman who has become pregnant from sinful sexual intercourse, because if she gives birth to a child that was conceived in such a way then she has to do penance for six years before being 'joined to the altar' and then her 'crown will be restored' and she would be considered a virgin again.[84] This suggests that the main trouble with magic to the author of this penitential handbook was in its interference with the proper practices love, sex, and reproduction and it is these things that a confessor would expect to deal with.

In the *Canones Hibernenses* it is stated only that the penance for a *magus* (or someone vowed to evil, or bloodthirsty, an auctioneer, a cohabitator, a heretic, or aperson who has had sex outside the confines of marriage, all of whom are grouped together under the same rule) is seven years on bread and water.[85] This leaves very little to go on with regard to the actual concerns about magic being addressed by the authors of these canons, but it remains clear that the practice of magic is to be avoided and condemned.

Theodore's Penitential contains a single canon dealing with magic. This canon is found among others that forbid a variety of idolatrous and un-Christian practices and gives the proper penance for a woman who performs magic as being either one year, three *quadragesimae*, or forty days, depending on the nature of the offense.[86] It is noteworthy that this canon not only deals with women who practice magic as sinners, but also calls out anyone who attempts to use the services of a magical practitioner as having sinned as well, facing punishment in the form of expulsion if the sinner is a member of the clergy or five years' penance if a member of the laity. This suggests a dual attempt to defend the Christian flock from external magical threats as well to prevent the clergy themselves from consorting with practitioners of magic.

The Penitential of St Columbanus makes the same distinctions in terms of sins as that of Finnian, but it has differences in the lengths of penance given and also in that it fails to mention women specifically where Finnian did, seemingly being unconcerned with women specifically or with dealing with their sins and their penances as being different from those of men. It agrees with the penance set in Finnian if the offence is leading someone into sin using magic, but if the offender only intended to induce love and did

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[82] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 18-20 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 78-80).
[83] Ibid.
[84] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 21 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 80-1.)
[85] *Canones Hibernenses* I 4 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 160-1).
[86] Theodore's Penitential, XV 4 (Arthur West Haddan, William Stubbs, and Henry Spelman, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Oxford: Univ. Pr, 1869), 190).

not entice someone to sin then their penance is dependent upon their status within the Christian community. If the person is a lay member of the community, then their penance lasts only half a year, a full year for a cleric, two years for a deacon, and three for a priest. There is also a slight difference for using magic to induce abortion, and if any have committed that offense then they must only serve an additional penance for six forty-day periods (in addition to whatever penance they had to do for the above infractions), and the source pairs the administration of magical abortifacient explicitly with the aforementioned infractions rather than having inducing abortion being a separate offense.[87]

The Bigotian Penetential is rather vague on the topic of magic, and its ideas concerning magic are as sparse as they are lacking in detail. Although it paraphrases a section from the book of Galatians in calling out *veneficia* as one of the sins of the flesh[88] and later enumerates it as one of the sins flowing from the sin of pride[89], it nevertheless gives no specific penance for the practicing of *veneficia* and at no point says anything about *venefica* other than it is a sin, nor does it contain any other potential reference to magic.

The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* is a truly monumental collection of legal material covering not only usual ecclesiastical topics, but also many topics more usually considered in secular law. Within this massive collection of rulings and opinions there exist fewer explicit references to magic than might be expected based on its representation in the other legal sources examined in this thesis. The *Collectio* contains a section on auguries, and it is in this section that the explicit discussion of magical practice takes place, citing Augustine to condemn seeking out or becoming a follower of the power of various magical fortune-tellers[90] as well as the Synod of Ancyra in prescribing five years' penance for those who consult divinations.[91] These specific sections would suggest that the compilers of the *Collectio* were concerned with the prevalence of certain divinatory practices as well as with the influence of those who would practice them.

Finally, Ecgbert's Penitential contains a number of rulings dealing with magic explicitly. The first of these is a ruling in a section entitled *Concerning the Machinations of Women* dealing with a number of sins that are deemed to be particular to women. This ruling gives the penance for a woman practicing magic as one year or three *quadragesimae*, but if she should kill someone with magic, the penance becomes seven years, which can be reduced to four if the woman is poor.[92] Following this section is one dealing with

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[87] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 6 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 100-1).
[88] *Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum* 37 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 204-5).
[89] *Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum* VIII (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 238-9).
[90] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 63.1 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 451).
[91] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 63.5 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 452).
[92] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 5 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, *Anglo-Saxon Canon Law*, 23).

auguries, which contains a number of rulings dealing with magic. The first of these seeks excommunication for Christians who have practiced certain forms of divination or swear an oath before a tree unless they do penance for three years if a cleric, or for half that time if a layperson.[93] The next section cautions against certain practices when the moon is obscured because *malefici* believed that they would be able to subvert the proper practices of the church during these times.[94] The final section of the source dealing with magic is another admonition against some prophetic and other non-Christian practices.[95] Ecgbert's penitential, therefore, gives greater consideration to the circumstances of sinners than any other source examined in this thesis, and through these considerations the source finds a balance between its political and pastoral concerns while nevertheless being condemnatory of magic.

Thus, in the penitential literature and synod canons, magic is dealt with in an overall more pastoral way than is seen in the consequences for performing magic in many of the hagiographical sources. This makes sense given the nature and purpose of penitential literature. Moreover, there are some interestingly gendered dimensions to magic that can be examined in the legal sources that are absent from the literary, though what, if anything, is considered to be a specifically gendered magical sin seems to vary greatly among the sources, with even closely related sources often presenting differences in this regard. Finally, these sources overwhelmingly deal with magic as its practice stands to pose a threat to the greater social order — as in cases of love magic and abortion posing a problem for inheritance and legitimacy — or to the political power of the church — as with going to a *magus* to oversee an oath or practicing and believing in certain prophetic practices.

[93] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 24).
[94] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 25).
[95] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 25).

Chapter 1:

Magic in Hagiographical Sources

Introduction:

In this chapter, I will deal with the representation of magic in hagiographical texts. Hagiographic literature remains a relatively unstudied genre with regards to magic. This is largely due to the nature of these sources and the problems that face historians looking to use them, which will be discussed below. These problems represent greater challenges for scholars seeking to reconstruct specific rituals or practices than those looking into conceptions and depictions, which, given the prevalence of the study of the former, also accounts for the relative unstudied status of magic in these sources.

Hagiographies present many problems for scholars seeking to use them as historical sources, and indeed even the definition and use of the term 'hagiography' has been a matter of no small debate among historians.[96] This discourse surrounding texts about holy figures is robust and important in terms of our understanding of history; it is also, however, not central to this chapter or the discussions contained therein. This thesis agrees with the observation made by Anna Taylor that although the term hagiography is problematic for a number of reasons and is not intellectually rigorous or encompassing enough to be the end point of analysis, it is nonetheless useful in terms of categorisation in that it 'gives us a way of talking about an overwhelming mass of material'.[97] I will, in the introductory matter of this chapter, address some of the more relevant critiques of hagiography and its use as historical source material and address them in relation to the work which follows in my research.

One of the primary criticisms of hagiographies is that their reliability is often dubious at best in terms of the events they are describing. The sources for the writing of hagiographies are often a mix of suspect written records (many of which are no longer extant, assuming that they did indeed exist in the first place) and often even more suspect oral sources (which the authors go to great lengths to assure us are both venerable and consummately reliable) .[98] In addition to this, many details and events described in hagiographies are, where not invented outright, often taken from among a collection of hagiographical *topoi*, or common stories and tropes that are taken from the greater body of biblical, ecclesiastical, and hagiographical texts. These *topoi* serve the function of bringing legitimacy to the claims of the hagiographer

[96] For a brief overview of this discourse, see James T. Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography* (Leeds, UK: Arc Humanities Press, 2018).
[97] Anna Taylor, 'Hagiography and Early Medieval History', *Religion Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013), 2.
[98] Palmer, 22-25.

by connecting their work and the deeds of their saint to a shared tradition of sanctity and to establish a sort of genealogy of holiness beginning with God the Father running through Christ to the saints,[99] who theologians such as Gregory of Tours would argue shared a single life under God.[100] In addition to these elements — which call into question the usefulness of hagiographical texts as sources for establishing historical events without any other factors — it has been called into question whether the authors of hagiographers ever intended their texts to be interpreted as being what empiricists would call the historical 'truth', or if their intent was rather to elucidate sacred or theological truths to their audience[101]. These concerns with the ability of hagiography to be used as a source in ascertaining the factuality of historical events are important for historians to keep in mind when using the texts; however, they present less of a problem for my research than for other historical inquiries. There certainly are problems that must be considered when using hagiographical material in an attempt to find empirical historical truth, to the extent that any such thing can be said to exist. Critiques of strictly empiricist history aside, this chapter does not focus on finding the supposed truth of the events described in various works of insular hagiography, but rather is concerned with the depiction of magic presented in those works. Given the aforementioned nature of much hagiographical writing as being of suspect accuracy, this would give the hagiographers the ability to portray the ideas they intend to communicate with a greater degree of freedom than they would have if they were concerned first and foremost with producing texts that presented factual accounts of history. Nevertheless, there are still restrictions within which a hagiographer had to work in order to have their account be accepted by the ecclesiastical intellectual audience. A hagiography which went too far against the common ideas of sanctity held at the time[102] or against the facts that the audience knew about the subject[103] were likely to be received poorly or even with outright hostility[104]. One example of this is the reception of the would-be saint, Aldebert of Soissons, who in his

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[99] Palmer, 20-1.

[100] In the end matter of Gregory's *Libri Historiarum*, he notes that 'decem libros historiarum septem miraculorum unum de vita patrum scripsi in psalterii tractatu librum unum commentatus sum de cursibus etiam ecclesiasticis unum librum condidi' (text from: Gregory of Tours, 'Gregorii Turonensis Historiarum Liber Decimus', The Latin Library.) 'I have written ten books of histories, seven of miracles, one about the *life* of the fathers; I have prepared one book concerning the psalms, and I have also composed one book about the ecclesiastical lessons' (emphasis mine). More tellingly and straight to the point Gregory commentates in the preface to his *Vita Patrum* about the use of the singular *vita* as opposed to the plural *vitae.* He writes briefly about the grammar of *vita* or *vitae*, and then concludes by saying: '… unde manifestum est melius dici vitam patrum quam vitas quia cum sit diversitas meritorum virtutumque una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo', (text from: Gregory of Tours. *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Miracula Et Opera Minora*. Ed. Bruno Krusch. Momumenta Germaniae Historica, 1885, 212), '… from which it is obvious that it is better to say "the *life* of the fathers" than "the *lives* [of the fathers]", because, although they have a diversity of merits and virtues, nevertheless the one life of the body nourishes all of them in the world'.

[101] See Graus, František. *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger: Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit*. Prague, Czech Republic: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1965.

[102] Palmer, 15-7.

[103] Ibid, 22-3.

[104] This is certainly not to say that saints could not challenge any of the norms of sanctity that existed at the time of the authorship of their lives, in fact it has been noted that hagiographies can be instruments of reform by having their subjects challenge the norms at the times they were penned. For more see (Ibid, 28-9)

attempts at becoming venerated as a saint flew so far in the face of established ecclesiastical ideas of sanctity and whose personal reputation for ill behaviour led to his condemnation by Gaulish nobles, ecclesiasts, and even the pope.[105] Such events show that even in a type of text where authors had a great deal of literary freedom, there were still standards and norms to which they must cleave to in order to gain acceptance.

Having said that, even when using hagiography as a window into the thought-world of the past, there are still problems which must be considered. Primary among these is not related to hagiography specifically but pertains to a greater or lesser degree to all history, but especially with history of the pre-modern world. This problem is that of the survival of sources. Since so few sources have survived from the early Middle Ages it can be difficult to make solid inferences about the world and societies of the past and can therefore be difficult to present depictions and ideas as being representative of the views of anyone other than the author of the source. As will be discussed below, it is not necessarily always the case that sources can be said with certainty to represent even the views of their authors. This is somewhat mitigated where there are multiple sources from a location that are written around the same time and all seem to hold similar views, but even then, we often cannot be certain that these views were ever mainstream in their time or if they were indicative of a group of authors that did not adhere to certain norms of their society unless we have evidence of the reception of these ideas in other sources. In addition to this, part of the problem of being able to rely only on extant sources is that these sources often come from and focus on certain sections of society, namely the political, religious, and intellectual elite, and tend to show an incomplete and one-sided presentation of society, its norms, and its values. In light of these issues, a historian seeking to use hagiographical sources must be careful about the extent of the claims they're making about the ideas in the text. In this chapter, I do not intend to put forward a definitive claim about the common understanding of all Latin-literate members of ecclesiastical institutions in the early medieval insular world, but to show certain depictions which exist in the extant corpus of early medieval insular Latin-language hagiography and to discuss how those depictions relate to one another and to the understanding of magic put forward by influential ecclesiasts that many of these hagiographers may have been familiar with.

The uncertainty as to whose ideas are being presented in historical sources can often be even more complicated in hagiographical material than in other sorts of texts. As was discussed above, hagiographies have a tendency to include *topoi* and allusions that are not the author's original composition; this can call into question to what extent the depictions that appear in these sections reflect even the

[105] Ibid, 15-17.

hagiographer's own ideas about their subject.[106] This critique is very relevant to my work here. After all, to what extent can we discuss the ideas of insular hagiographers if the ideas being presented were written decades or centuries earlier, not to mention in geographically distant locations in western Asia, northern Africa, or continental Europe? The answer, I would argue, is far more than might be apparent at first blush. When writing hagiographies, these authors had access not only to the Bible — both Old and New Testaments — but also to the corpus of the ecclesiastical and hagiographical traditions that had come before them. This was obviously limited by what sources were available to a hagiographer in the libraries to which they had access, whether those libraries were personal or belonged to the centres with which they were associated or which they were visiting; however, even with this limitation, there would be a surfeit of stories which a hagiographer could copy or to which they could allude. Additionally, stories would often be copied in terms of their overall plot or message but have their particulars tailored to meet the ideas and needs of the author using the trope. With this in mind, and with the work done by past scholars in identifying *topoi* in many works, a historian can analyse more closely the allusions present in a work, and the way they are being used to shed light upon the author's intentions in their inclusion in the work as a whole and in its relationship to the greater tradition in which it exists.

In addition to the issues created by traditions of allusion, many works were commissioned and written with very specific intent, which may or may not be made explicit in the text. These goals can vary greatly from text to text; they might be cultic, political, theological, personal, institutional, or any combination of the above.[107] Therefore, in the analysis of these hagiographical sources, care must be taken to identify the purposes of the text, both overt and covert, and how those purposes might colour the depictions of people and events within it. In addition to the meaningful purposes which an author may have while producing a work of hagiography, there is also the influence of the context in which the work was produced which could have both conscious and unconscious effect on the text. For example, an author producing a hagiography about a saint whose life and times were two centuries before they are writing would likely be conscious of the fact that they would need to scrounge and possibly invent material about the saint, but they might not be conscious of the way that the conversion process begun by the saint and finished generations before the author's birth created a situation in which the hagiographer's lack of contemporary concerns about converting non-Christians shaped the text. Another hagiographer, producing their work within living memory of their subject converting the region to the Christian faith, might not consciously think about the fact that they have access to sources simultaneously making it both unnecessary and unwise to invent stories about their saint from whole cloth, but would likely actively be

[106] Ibid, 20-1.
[107] Ibid, 15-36.

thinking about the representation of non-Christians in their text when there was an ongoing process of conversion happening close to their centre. These are just some examples of the ways that the context surrounding a work of hagiography would be important to the interpretation of that work.

In the process of writing this chapter, much thought has been put into the structure that would best facilitate the transmission of the sources and analysis thereof. Should they be presented geographically, and highlight the similarities and differences between the works produced in Ireland and in the Heptarchy? Or perhaps they should be presented chronologically to show whether there may have been a shift in attitudes toward magic over time? In the end, I decided that it would be best to present the texts by author, grouped in terms of their overall presentation of magic. An effect of presenting the texts in this manner is that they proceed in roughly chronological order with the British texts following the Irish ones. This structure will allow me to provide the relevant context for each hagiography as it is being discussed rather than spreading that discussion out over the course of the chapter. Furthermore, by the end of the chapter we will see that presenting the texts in this way also leads to clear geographical distinctions in the way that magic is depicted in hagiographies, and these differences and their possible causes will be discussed below.

Cogitosus and Anonymous Lives of St Brigit:[108]

Very little is known about the authors of the two earliest Latin lives[109] of the patron saint of Kildare. Of one, we do have a name, one Cogitosus, who was very likely a member of a religious community under the auspices of Kildare. Given that Muirchú wrote about Cogitosus as a father in his *Vita S Patricii*[110] and he himself was writing between 661 and 700,[111] it is likely that Cogitosus's floruit was at least a single generation before Muirchú penned the life of Patrick, and therefore he probably wrote no later than c. 650. Cogitosus was clearly writing in support of the cult of Brigid and particularly in defence of the rights of Kildare, its *paruchia*, and its primacy among the churches of Ireland. However, he seems

[108] It is worth noting, before beginning this section, that no proper critical edition has yet been produced for either of these texts. This is as understandable as it is unfortunate given as daunting a task as such an undertaking would no doubt be (Cogitosus's *Vita* exists, either in whole or in part, in over 50 MSS, and the anonymous *Vita I* in more than two dozen). Nevertheless, St Brigid and accounts of her life were important and influential in the medieval insular world and beyond and the creation of such an edition would doubtless be a major boon for medievalists and other scholars with interests in topics related to or touching upon these texts.

[109] There is also extant an Old Irish life of the saint, the *Bethu Brigte*, but it was likely not composed until the 9th century. The relative dating of the two incredibly closely related Latin texts remains a matter of uncertainty and debate among scholars, however current consensus is leaning towards Cogitosus being the first, followed by the *Vita I* in the 8th century.

[110] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, *Prologus* (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 62-3).

[111] See my section on this text below.

to also be strongly concerned with spreading and strengthening Christian virtues, both lay and monastic.[112] For his sources, Cogitosus had a tradition surrounding the saint in which his text would have been the latest instalment. In his *vita*, he acknowledges this tradition in his introduction,[113] but there is little other evidence of his sources in the *vita*. On the dating of the anonymous life, there are two schools of thought; one puts the composition of this text as being completed prior to Cogitosus's writing, and perhaps serving as one of his sources,[114] while the other contends that Cogitosus wrote nearly a century before the anonymous author of the *Vita I*, and that Cogitosus's work served as either a source for the *Vita I* directly or as a source for another now lost account of Brigit's life which was used by the authors of both the *Vita I* as well as the Old Irish *Bethu Brigte* as they were composing their accounts of the saint.[115] Barring new and conclusive evidence coming to light, this will have to remain a matter of debate among scholars, though consensus currently leans towards Cogitosus being the earlier author. Regardless of which Latin *vita* came first, there are clear links between the two, given that they have a number of episodes in common.[116] Of the sources for the *Vita I*, very little can be said. It and the Old Irish life shared a source to which they both seem to have cleaved quite closely, as large portions of the *Bethu Brigte* correlate nearly verbatim with the anonymous life.[117] These specific passages from these hagiographies are rarely studied, and have not to my knowledge been previously examined with regard to magic and its depiction.

Despite the similarities I have discussed between the two Latin accounts of St Brigit's life, in terms of this study on ideas about magic and its practitioners, the differences are more striking. Let us begin with an examination of Cogitosus's work, which has only one story which mentions a *magus* — in which it is unclear whether he is using his powers or (more likely) the saint's posthumous powers are acting against him — and contains only one other instance in it that could be a vague reference to *magi* and their rites. I shall begin with an examination of the latter. This chapter of the tale of Brigit describes

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[112] Sean Connolly, 'Cogitosus's Life of St Brigit: Content and Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987), 5-9.

[113] Cogitosus, *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, Preface (Connolly and Picard [trans], *Cogitosus's Life of St Brigit: Content and Value*, 11).

[114] This view was defended by Mario Esposito (see Mario Esposito, *On the Earliest Latin Life of St. Brigid of Kildare* [Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Company, 1912]; – 'Notes on Latin learning and literature in mediaeval Ireland—I', *Hermathena* 20:45 [1930]: 225–260; – 'Notes on Latin learning and literature in mediaeval Ireland—IV. On the early Latin Lives of St. Brigid of Kildare', *Hermathena* 24:49 [1935]: 120–165) and more recently by the late Richard Sharpe (see Richard Sharpe, '*Vitae S Brigidae*: the oldest texts', *Peritia* 1 [1982]: 81–106). This position was also argued for by Seán Connolly (see Seán Connolly, 'The authorship and manuscript tradition of *Vita I sanctae Brigitae*', *Manuscripta* 16:2 [July, 1972]: 67–82), however he was later convinced of the position argued for the later dating of *Vita I*, see my footnote 115 below.

[115] This position has been supported by Donncha Ó hAodha (see Donncha Ó hAodha, 'The Early Lives of Saint Brigit', *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society* 15 [1976]: 397–405; – *Bethu Brigte*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), Felim Ó Briain (see Felim Ó Briain, 'Brigitana', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 36, no. 1 [1978]: 112–37), Kim McCone (see Kim McCone, 'Brigit in the Seventh Century: A Saint with Three Lives?' *Peritia* 1 [1982]: 107–45), and Seán Connolly in publications after his first (see Connolly, 'Cogitosus's Life of St Brigit'; – 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background and Hstorical Value', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119 [1989]: pp. 5-49).

[116] Over 30 stories are shared between the two *vitae*, but the stories are often in different order and there is not enough evidence in this to show whether one is directly borrowing from the other.

[117] Connolly, *Vita Prima*, 6.

how the saint happened across the path of a group of men, dressed strangely due to their 'godless and diabolical superstition', who were seeking to murder another man because of 'most wicked vows and oaths to the ancient enemy who reigned over them' and, being unable to dissuade them, miraculously tricked them into believing that they had accomplished their goal with no one needing to be murdered, and after being so tricked and shown the error of their ways, they repented their deeds and converted.[118] While the description of these men, and their conversion, makes it very clear that they are non-Christian and are likely meant to be participating in violent pagan rites, they are not called *magi* and there is little in the text to suggest that they are practicing magic. Their weapons are not invocations, demons, and shadows, but rather spears and swords[119], and so on balance it is far more likely that this story is not meant to depict magical practitioners or the product of their crafts[120]. The same cannot be said of the other incident in Cogitosus's *vita*, which he describes thus:

> Et ut plus iste molaris lapis, qui in nomine beatae directus est Brigidae, omnibus adhuc innotesceret, addidit et hoc inauditum antea et praeclarum miraculum. Nam cum quidam paganus et gentilis de molino uicino suo habitaculo dolose per alium simplicem uirum, ignorante molinario, qui opus moliturae excercebat, suum granum ad hoc misissit molinum, cum inter huius molares transiectu et fusum fuisset lapides, illum supradictum lapidem molarem nullus impetus fortis fluminis et directus, et nulla aquarium uis uiolentia, et nulla artificum conamina mouere ac trudere in circuitum uolubilem et solitum ambitum potuerunt. Et dum illi qui hoc uiderunt, de hac re contristarentur, nimio perculsi stupore; tunc granum illud magi esse comperientes, minime dubitabant, quod ille lapis molaris, in quo S Brigida uirtutem operata est diuinam, granum gentilis hominis in sarinam comprimere respuisset. Et in illa hora tollentes foras granum ipsius pagani, et suum granum monasteriale subter molarem illum lapidem ponentes, cursus solitus et quotidianus sine ullis impedimentis repentino reparatus est molae. [121]
>
> And further that this millstone[122], which had been directed in the name of the blessed Brigit, might become known to all, she added also this formerly unheard-of and splendid miracle. For when a certain pagan and gentile man, whose home was nearby to the millstone, cunningly sent his grain there with a simple man to be milled unbeknownst to the miller who was undertaking the work of milling, when it was thrown and poured between those millstones, nothing, not the force of strong direct blows, nor the violent force of the river, nor the effort of the experts could move or push the aforementioned millstone into its circular rotation and usual revolution. And while those who saw this who been made depressed by this affair and were greatly struck with torpor; then learning that it was that *magus*'s grain, there was little doubt that that millstone, upon which S Brigit had performed divine works, refused to grind the pagan man's grain into flour. And in that hour they removed the grain of that pagan, and placed the grain of their own monastery beneath that millstone, without any impediment the usual and everyday course of the mill was restored.

As the story relates, a *magus* sent his grain to be milled at the monastery, but when his grain was added to the mill, it ceased to function until his grain was purged from it. Although the story is almost certainly

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[118] Cogitosus, *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, 22 (Connolly and Picard (trans), *Cogitosus's Life of St Brigit: Content and Value*, 20).
[119] Ibid.
[120] There is another version of this story in the *Vita I* which will be examined below, however in that version of the story it is clearer that there is some magic element involved in the events about which this version is more vague.
[121] This section is transcribed from the Bollandus's *Acta Sanctorum* (see Bolandists, *Acta Sanctorum*, Februarius tomus I [Paris, 1866], 140.)
[122] This story follows another miracle about how the millstone came to be at the monastery through the posthumous action of St Brigit.

not directly an example of magic being used by a practitioner, its depiction of the magus is nevertheless useful in ascertaining Cogitosus's presentation of *magi* as a class of people who were also connected to the practice of magic. The *magus* in this section is shown to be cunning and deceitful, attempting to take advantage of a simple man as well as of the people who ran the monastery's mill in order to have his grain processed there where he would presumably have been turned away had he attempted to bring it there honestly. Thus, the story is less about magic itself than about the character of the *magus* and the proper actions of the monastery in avoiding dealings with him and cleansing themselves of the taint brought on by their unwitting association. This suggests that, to Cogitosus, magical practitioners were not just people to be avoided by Christian communities, but corrupting influences that needed to be guarded against lest they allow his corruption to ender the sacred Christian space.

In contrast to Cogitosus's relative lack of inclusion of *magi* in his *vita*, in the anonymous *Vita I* they not only appear in large portions of the text, but also serve important roles in the prophesying, birth, and raising of the saint. Indeed, it is as early as the second section of the *Vita I* when a *magus* first gives the prophecy of Brigit's future greatness to her father and the enslaved woman who was then pregnant with the saint.[123] Following this, Brigit's father's wife was jealous not only of Brigit's mother, but also of the future greatness of the saint over her own offspring, and orchestrated the sale of Brigit's mother, who was eventually purchased by another *magus*.[124] While with this *magus*, a prophecy was given by yet another *magus* concerning the hour of Brigit's birth and her future of greatness.[125] While she was growing up there, the *magus* saw many signs and visions[126] that further indicated Brigit's coming prominence.[127] Although the *magus* who was involved in raising Brigit saw these things as well as the wondrous things that Brigit did while there and revered her, there is still indication that he was not all good. In the eleventh chapter of the *Vita I*, the young Brigit found herself unable to consume the food that the *magus* was giving her, and the cause was determined to be that he was too impure.[128] In order for her to be able to keep down her food, the *magus* needed to obtain a white cow to obtain milk for Brigit; the milk from this cow was kept for the saint alone and the cow was tended by a Christian woman who became foster mother to her.[129] Later, when Brigit expressed a desire to return to her father, the *magus* sent messages to him, and he took Brigit back along with her foster mother.[130] Some time later, when Brigit was at the house of that *magus*

[123] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 2:1-4 (Connolly, *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*, 14).
[124] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 5 (Connolly. *Vita Prima*, 15).
[125] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 6 (Ibid).
[126] Many of these signs are references to the sections of the books of Acts and Revelation.
[127] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 7-10 (Connolly, *Vita Prima*, 15).
[128] This section contains a reference to Acts 6:5, as the explanation for Brigit's inability to consume the *magus*'s food is not only that he is impure but that she is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'.
[129] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 11 (Connolly, *Vita Prima*, 16).
[130] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 12 (Ibid).

in order to visit her mother, she gave almost all of his stores of butter to the poor, and when this was discovered, she performed a miracle to have a large vat be completely filled with only the little butter that remained. Having witnessed this, the *magus* gave to the saint the entire vat of butter and the cows from whose milk it had been produced — all of which she would give away to the poor before returning to her father — and also freed Brigit's birth mother to return alongside her. Finally, by witnessing this miracle the *magus* was converted to Christianity.[131] After this point, *magi* are only directly mentioned again in the *vita* once near its end, when a certain other *magus* who was near death promised to give an inheritance to Brigit on the promise that she visit him when he was about to die. Brigit did this and just before he died this *magus* was also converted and baptised.[132] Despite these *magi* not being shown to be actively engaged with magical craft (besides, perhaps, prophecy, the magical nature of which is unclear in this text), as was discussed in the introduction the druid class being referred to with the term *magi* was strongly connected to pagan religious and magical practices, and their actions in paving the way for St Brigit and following conversion to Christianity speak to the author's ideas about the place of former practitioners of magic in the new Christian world.

However, the *Vita I* does not only contain depictions of *magi* without discussion of their works, it also contains two related stories concerning the potential works of *magi*, although they themselves are absent from these tales. Both of these stories contain discussion of certain amulets being worn my different groups of men with ill intent. While it is possible that these amulets are only symbols of the people's non-Christian faith, amulets and other such baubles are often considered to be magical and to have been created by *magi* in the practice of their craft.[133] Moreover the depiction of those items in these stories does not describe them as being merely pagan, but as sinister and diabolical. The first of these stories concerns a group of men, led by a man named Conall,[134] who were on their way to kill their enemies while bedecked in sinister amulets, and stopped to receive a blessing from the saint. Brigit asked them to lay aside their amulets in return for her blessing, which they did. After carrying out their task, and doing so miraculously undiscovered, the men renounced those amulets completely in favour of Brigit and her god.[135] The second amulet story, which closely mirrors the story of the murderers in Cogitosus's *vita*, describes some superstitious men who were wearing amulets and sought a blessing from Brigit as they were on their way to murder a man, and they gave the amulets to her on the condition that she keep them from falling to

[131] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 16-17 (Ibid, 17).
[132] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 120 (Ibid, 47).
[133] Elsewhere in this thesis, and indeed later in this chapter, there will be discussion of other instances of bindings and amulets.
[134] This Conall appears earlier in the text and is called the son of Niall (Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 64 [Conolly, *Vita Prima*, 31]). Given that Tírechán discusses a connection between Patrick and Conall Cremthainne, son of Niall of the Nine Hostages, and the *Vita I* presents Brigit as being a student of St Patrick, it is very possible that these stories are either discussing that same Conall or his brother, Conall Gulban. Tírechán's discussion of Conall will be discussed below.
[135] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 65 (Connolly, *Vita Prima*, 32).

the ground. Brigit took the amulets and made the sign of the cross over them as the men went out to commit their murder, and after killing and beheading him they could not find his body and there was no sign of blood on their weapons; they both killed and didn't kill the man.[136]

From the depiction by the anonymous author of *Vita I*, there is much to be gleaned. In the stories which directly mention *magi* and recount their activities, they serve as the heralds of Brigit's birth and future greatness; they are never described as acting cruelly or evilly and they also facilitate the raising of the saint from childhood into adolescence, even taking steps to ease her suffering at their own expense, as with the *magus* who purchases a cow and has it cared for by a Christian woman to produce food for Brigit alone when she is unable to eat the same food as he. There are indications that they are not entirely in the right, as in that same story the reason that she was unable to consume the food is that he is impure and she, being too full of the Holy Spirit to bear his food, cannot keep it down. Moreover, although depicted as preparing the way for her and facilitating her coming into her greatness, they are still non-Christian and therefore must be converted by the saint and be baptised. It is also worth noting that in the two chapters of the *Vita I* which discuss the probable products of the *magi*'s craft in the form of amulets, the *magi* themselves are not mentioned and it is the people who are making use of those amulets who are shown to be in the wrong and needing to amend their ways. This may be an example of what Flint would deem to be purposeful Christian preservation of non-Christian prophetic practice and the promotion of the actions of non-Christian authorities in order to coopt their authority and allow a smooth transition in leadership from the pre-Christian *magi* to the Christian authority of the church and its saints.[137]

What, then, can explain the marked differences between the way in which Cogitosus represents magical practitioners and the way that the anonymous author who penned the *Vita I* does? One explanation may be related to when the texts were produced. If the argument that Cogitosus was writing a century before the author of *Vita I* is correct it may be that he was more reluctant to discuss the positive virtues of non-Christians than an author farther removed from them was. However, if the *Vita I* is indeed the earlier text, it may instead be that its author wanted to relay more stories about the conversion of *magi* in their account in order to better facilitate the Christianisation of Ireland's druid class. However, these are not the only possibilities. As Cogitosus is clearly working to promote the primacy of Kildare over the Irish churches, it is possible that he would seek to downplay the connection between the centre's patron saint and the practitioners of non-Christian magic, and — as the anonymous author of the *Vita I* seems more interested in the propagation of the cult of Brigit and with the politics of the factions of the Uí Néill than with the defence of Kildare's *paruchia* — these concerns may have encouraged the anonymous author

[136] Anonymous, *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*, 67 (Ibid, 33).
[137] Flint's work was discussed in the introduction to this thesis (see Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*.)

to not only relay more spectacular events about Brigit's early life, but also present Brigit as a saint who was brought up by and able to work with and eventually convert the powerful and influential *magi*. It is also possible that regardless of the dating of these texts they merely had access to different, though related, sources which themselves contained different information about the saint.

Tírechán's *Collectanea*:

The text of Tírechán's *Collectanea* has survived solely in the Book of Armagh, where the text was copied alongside an almost complete copy of the New Testament, Muirchú's hagiographical work on St Patrick (which will be discussed below), as well as other Patrician texts and an account of St Martin of Tours[138] in about 807.[139] However, the text itself was written sometime in the second half of the seventh century; various intratextual details and what little we know of Tírechán's life would suggest that it was likely written in 664. at the earliest and 684. at the latest. Analysis has shown that the copy of the text in the Book of Armagh is likely not a copy of the original but has almost certainly come to that manuscript through at least one intermediary.[140] Important to note is that Tírechán does not seem to be intent on producing a *vita* in the same vein as those produced by Cogitosus and Muirchú, but rather seems to be collecting and compiling pieces of information and various local traditions concerning the saint into a single record.[141] Furthermore, Tírechán is not writing this account of Patrick in a vacuum. According to the text he himself has access to an account of Patrick written by his mentor and fosterer Bishop Ultan of Ardbraccan as well as something he calls a *plana historia*, and also appears to have had access to Patrick's *Confessio* as well as possibly other written sources in addition to the legends and oral accounts of Patrick which Tírechán seems to have travelled quite widely in order to collect.[142] Literary inspiration for Tírechán's writing seems to stem largely from linking Patrick to Moses,[143] but the nature of his work means that it has fewer literary characteristics than the other hagiographical sources discussed in the chapter.

Much of what is known about Tírechán himself has been inferred from analysis of his writings. Tírechán implies in the text that he is from northern Connacht, and is a descendant of one Conall son of Énde and grandson of Amolngid, a descendant of Niall of the Nine Hostages who comes up in the text

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[138] *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin, Ireland: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1921), 1.
[139] Richard Sharpe, 'Palaeographical Considerations in the Study of the Patrician Documents in The Book of Armagh', *Scriptorium* 36, no. 1 (1982): 3–28, https://doi.org/10.3406/scrip.1982.1240.
[140] Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 54-56.
[141] Ibid, 36.
[142] Ibid, 39-41.
[143] Ibid, 44.

alongside his father numerous times in relation to Patrick and land grants given to the saint in order to found centres,[144] and his ties to the region are further manifest in his focus on the region in his information gathering.[145] Tírechán's reason for compiling the information for his *Collectanea* is somewhat debated. It has been suggested that he, like his contemporary Muirchú, was writing from a position supporting Armagh in its claims of primacy of Ireland in establishing and expanding the *Paruchia Patricii*, and indeed there are several passages in the text that that can be interpreted to show that that may be the case.[146] However, this idea has been called into question, especially by Catherine Swift, who has pointed out that Tírechán's position and motives would better explain the way that he treats Armagh in the text by assuming a more secular political motive, namely that he is writing in order to seek favour from the king at Tara in order to secure aid from attacks that had affected the Patrician churches in north-western Ireland, likely at the hands of the descendants of the families and Uí Néill branches whom he curses in his text.[147] Moreover, by setting out the families that sponsored and were sponsored by St Patrick in Tírechán's account of the saint, he stands to give precedents to his own region, family, and sponsors — most notably the descendants of Conall, who alone of the Uí Néill dynasty receive good treatment at his hands — which could then be used to bolster their claims for political power on the island, while simultaneously establishing that those families owed dues and protection to the Patrician churches.[148] These goals also, to some extent, colour Tírechán's depictions of magic in his *Collectanea*, in that they shape his interaction with certain key non-Christian figures in Patrick's story, most noticeably King Loíguire and his court. In order to give favour to those families that he does, he must ensure that Loíguire's line falls into a lesser role, and this he does by painting the king as more steadfastly pagan than do other accounts would suggest.

In Tírechán's work, as in the other works which will be discussed below, the depictions of magic can be grouped into a number of broad categories. There are the depictions of overtly magical deeds, the discussion of non-Christian prophecy, and finally the portrayal of the *magi* and their ilk unconnected from direct magical acts. As was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, prophecy will be discussed only briefly, and a greater focus will fall onto the first and last of these categories. I will begin looking at

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[144] Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2004), 35-36.

[145] Terry O'Hagan, 'Tírechán: Biography and Character Study: St. Patrick's Confessio', Tírechán: Biography and Character Study: St. Patrick's Confessio (Royal Irish Academy, 2011), https://www.confessio.ie/more/article_ohagan.

[146] He mentions that Benignus, who we will see more of later, was Patrick's heir and that his seat was at Armagh (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, III.5), and reiterates that sentiment again later in the text (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, III.24) and states while deploring the way that Patrick's domain has been beset that if his domain were to be investigated that nearly the whole of the island would fall under his *peruchia*, given to him by God through an angel (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, III.18). Outside of these references, however, Armagh is mentioned only in passing and is not counted among the great churches of St Patrick by Tírechán.

[147] For the full analysis and argument, see Catherine Swift, 'Tírechán's Motives in Compiling the 'Collectanea': An Alternative Interpretation', Ériu, no. 45 (1994): pp. 53-82, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30007712.

[148] O'Hagan, 'Tírechán: Biography and Character Study: St. Patrick's Confessio'

Tírechán's depictions of magical practitioners and then focus on the way in which he writes about specific acts of magic. The first look Tírechán gives us of a practitioner of magic in his text is in his introduction to Patrick's life, wherein he writes that the saint was bought as a slave by a certain *magus* named Miliuc moccu Bóin, and that Patrick was a slave to that man for seven years'.[149] Another time that Irish *magi* are presented in a less-than-positive light comes when Patrick arrives at a spring which the local non-Christians and their *magi* worshipped. Over the course of the story, the spring — and by extension the *magi* — is shown to be false.[150] On another occasion, Tírechán writes about how Patrick was accosted by a large congregation of *magi* who had gathered with the intent to kill the saint. When they met Patrick, he performed a miracle whereby the leader of the *magi* was consumed in divine fire, and Patrick then converted many people in the area.[151]

Not all instances of *magi* in Tírechán's text are negative, though. One example in which practitioners of magic are mentioned in Tírechán's account but are treated by the author as being redeemable happens during the story of the conversion (and subsequent death) of two of King Loíguire's daughters, Ethne and Fedelm. After they had been converted, given communion, and immediately died, a *magus* named Caplit, who was a foster-father to one of the dead women, came and was mourning the loss of his foster-daughter, whereupon he was converted by Patrick. Following this, the *magus*'s brother came to them and angrily accosted them, trying to get his brother to renounce his new faith and return to his previous ways, but instead was also converted by Patrick, and both of the *magi* became Christian together and were divested of the sign of their status as *magi* in that their hair — which Tírechán says is

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[149] Tírechán, *Collectanea* III.1 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 124-125). On the number of years Patrick was a slave to *magi*, Tírechán would appear to be somewhat confused, because although he tells us that it was after seven years of slavery to Miliuc that Patrick gained his freedom, he also recorded that Patrick was taken as a slave at seventeen and was freed from slavery to the *magi* at the age of 22. This would then be, at most, one day shy of six years spent in slavery. The use of seven years here is perhaps a reference to the Old Testament practice discussed in various sections of the Bible (Exod 21:2, Deut 15:12, Jer 34:14) of keeping Israelite slaves for a period of no more than six years and that they must be freed before the beginning of the seventh year (or, according to some interpretations, before the end of the seventh year). There is also the repetition of the number seven here in this section of Tírechán's account. Patrick was taken at the age of seventeen (ten and **seven**), he was a slave for **seven** years, and he travelled throughout Gaul and parts of the Mediterranean for **seven** more years. The number seven has biblical significance outside of its relation to slavery and appears repeatedly throughout the bible hundreds of times in both Old and New Testaments. Augustine writes in his theological works that seven is a number representing the state of completion or being whole. Patrick himself writes in his *Confessio* that he was taken captive at about sixteen (Patricius, *Confessio* 1) and that he was a slave for six years (Patricius, *Confessio* 17), which may also be where Tírechán figures that Patrick would have been 22 when he achieved his freedom, but does not account for the discrepancy between his account and that in the Confessio in the number of years spent a slave, nor for the discrepancy in the maths within his *Collectanea*. It has also been suggested by Bieler that these numbers are being taken directly from another source, perhaps Constantinus who wrote the life of St Germanus or Irish anchorite Constans Sapiens (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 213). It is, however, also — and perhaps more — likely, that there has at some point been an error in transmission or transcription of the text whereby '*xvi aetatis suae anno*' became '*xvii aetatis suae anno*' and '*vi annis*' became '*vii annis*', though one would also wonder how a scribe would make these transcriptions, but not notice or mark the discrepancy between them and the statement that he was freed '*in xxii anno*'.

[150] Tírechán, *Collectanea* III.39 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 152-155)

[151] Tírechán, *Collecanea*, III.42(Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 156-157).

norma magica — is cut.[152] Although this story seems to be more about a confrontation of religious authorities and the triumph of Christianity over pagan practices, as was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, *magi*, while filling influential roles as religious leaders with strong secular influence (thus explaining why the high king at Tara would entrust his daughter into their fosterage), also held magical roles and have, in Carey's article, been proven to be magical practitioners in this source in particular.[153]

Taken together these stories paint a picture of the types of people Tírechán depicts as practitioners of magic. It can be said with some degree of certainty that Tírechán did not intend us to believe that the majority of *magi* were good (as will be further discussed below in the instances in the text where we can see direct use of magic), and indeed, many of these practitioners were, to him, not worthy of redemption. However, this is not shown to be entirely the case. In the final story two notable *magi* brothers who were associated with the Uí Néill were both converted beside the graves of one of their fosterlings, though not without some grumbling from the second brother. Additionally, even in the story wherein Patrick and his coterie are confronted by a group of *magi* intent on their deaths, Patrick only kills their leader, with the fates of the remaining *magi* left unstated by the author. It could be argued that in this case, given the juxtaposition of the killing of the leader of the *magi* alone with the large number of baptisms performed by Patrick that day, the implication is that many of those converted and baptised may have been members of the army of practitioners who had so recently arrayed themselves against Patrick. This would suggest that although Tírechán depicts magic as a power which is not only non-Christian, but fundamentally anti-Christian and wielded by people who array themselves against Patrick and his cohort, it is not in itself completely damning, as there are several *magi* in the text who are explicitly converted by Patrick and seem to leave their magical practices behind them.

Tírechán's writings are not, however, limited to descriptions of *magi* who are not practicing their craft, but also contains direct depiction of *magi* engaged in supernatural confrontation with Patrick. Tírechán presents two such situations to us. The first of these (which is also recounted by Muirchú and

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[152] Tírechán, *Collectanea* III.26 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 142-145). In regard to hair having a 'magus style', Bieler posits that this is a reference to the dispute over the tonsure shape between the Roman and the Irish styles of tonsure, with Patrick's converts changing from the Irish style to the Roman style (see Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 225-226). While it is not an unreasonable line of argument that he follows to reach this conclusion, hair and its styling is also an important facet of culture and status in many medieval cultures, including that of medieval Ireland (for an in-depth look at hair in early Irish culture, see William Sayers, 'Early Irish Attitudes toward Hair and Beards, Baldness and Tonsure', *Zeitschrift Fur Celtische Philologie* 44, no. 1 [1991]: 154-189), with servants having short-shorn hair and sometimes taking on the name of *mael* to indicate to whom their hair was shorn in devotion (e.g Mael Patrick for someone devoted to the cult of St Patrick) (Sayers, *Early Irish Attitudes toward Hair and Beards*, 177). Additionally there is other literature that would indicate that there was some form of tonsure that was associated with magical practitioners in early medieval Ireland (ibid, 179-80), leading to the inclusion that while this definitely could have been reference to the debate over the proper shape of Christian monastic tonsure, that there is certainly a deeper cultural element at work as well.

[153] Carey, 'Tírechán and the Magi'.

will be discussed further below) recounts the conflict between Patrick and a pair of *magi* in Loíguire's court during Patrick's first Easter after returning to convert Ireland. He recounts the episode as follows:

> quia contraiuerunt illi tres[154] magi fratres ex uno uiro nominibus et genere Cruth Loch Lethlanu de genere Runtir, qui fecerunt conflictionem magnam contra Patricium et Benignum. Cassula autem magi inflammata est circa Benignum et in cinerem finita erat. Sanctus quoque filius sanus effectus est firma fide Dei in conspectu regis et hominum et magorum, cassula autem Benigni filii Patricii infixa est circa magum et inflammatus est magus in medio ac consumptus est, et dixit Patricius: 'in hac hora consumpta est gentilitas Hiberniae tota'. Et eleuauit Patricius manus suas Deo circa magum Lochletheneum et dixit: 'Domine mi, iece a me canem qui oblatrat faciem tuam et me; eat in mortem'. Et intenderunt omnes magum eleuatum per tenebras nocturnales poene usque ad caelum, sed reuersus cadauer illius congluttinatum grandinibus et niuibus, commixtum scintillis igneis in terram ante faciem omnium cecidit; et est lapis illius in oris australibus orientalibusque Temro usque in praesentem diem, et conspexi illum oculis meis[155]
>
> for [Patrick] was opposed by two *magi* brothers, [the sons] of one man, named Cruth and Lochlethlanu, of the Dál Runtir, who started a great debate against Patrick and Benignus. The chasuble of the *magus* was burnt around Benignus and reduced to ashes. The holy boy was saved by his firm faith in God in the face of the king, the people, and the *magi*, but the chasuble of Benignus, Patrick's [ecclesiastical] son, was fastened around the *magus*, and the *magus* was burnt to in it until he was devoured [by the flames], and Patrick said: 'In this hour all paganism in Ireland has been consumed' And Patrick raised his hands to God because of the *magus* Lochletheneus and said: 'My Lord, cast this dog away from me, who barks at your face and at me; let him go to [his] death.' And all saw the *magus* lifted up through the darkness of night almost to the heavens, but when he came down, his body, frozen over with hail and snow mixed with sparks of fire, fell to the ground in sight of all; and his [the *magus*'s] stone is in the south-eastern parts of Tara to the present day, and I have seen it with my own eyes

This passage describes a contest held between Patrick and the *magi* brothers in service to Loíguire (portrayed in greater detail by Muirchú, discussed below). One of the differences between the story as it is told by the two hagiographers is that Tírechán is far more circumspect about the powers of the *magi* in his telling of the event. Their supposed power to contest Patrick's miracles is implied in the fact that they are contending with him and his entourage in a trial of fire. It is implied that they would agree to such a trial because they expected their powers to be able to save them (and their garments) from the fire, while they also expected Benignus and the Christian garment to be consumed. This confrontation between Patrick and the *magi* is the first in a series of such stories which can be considered to be a sort of trial of divinities in which the servants of the Christian god pit themselves against the representatives of the non-Christian deities in order to prove that theirs is the stronger god, and by extension the better religion.[156]

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[154] Bieler, in opposition to Hogan but in agreement with Bury and Gwynn, concludes in the apparatus for his edition that this is a (and perhaps another, see note 149 above) case in which the scribe has made an error (*iii* rather than *ii*) on the basis that only two names are given for these *magi* (those being Cruth and Lochlethlanu, where Hogan gives Cruth, Loch, and Lethlanu as three names). (see Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 217-218). I would tend to agree that this is likely a case of scribal error not only for that reason, but also because if there were three *magi* in this story rather than two, then we would be a missing *magus* at the end who had not been converted, killed, or otherwise explicitly dealt with by Patrick.

[155] Tírechán, Collectanea III.8 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 130-132).

[156] This is discussed at length in: Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Reading Muirchú's Tara-event within Its Background as a Biblical 'trial of Divinities'.' In Jane Cartwright, ed. *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults*, 123-35. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003.

There is in Tírechán's account one other example of *magi* bringing their magic to bear against Patrick, this time with much greater effect. During this incident, Patrick was making his way across the Shannon and heading for Mag Aí, where the Uí Néill Aí had their seat. When two *magi* who were involved in the raising of King Loíguire's daughters (the same daughters mentioned above, but different *magi* than the two converted in that story) heard about Patrick's approach, they decided to take measures to prevent the saint from spreading his religion in those lands. Tírechán writes:

> timentes ne mores sancti uiri acciperent, indignati sunt ualde tenebrasque nocturnales ac densas inaurinas super totum campum Ai fecerunt. Nescimus cuius potestatis hoc fuit, sed scimus quod nox longua trium dierum tot et noctium erat. Arripuitque sanctus ieiunium tribus diebus et tribus noctibus cum<que> centenis oraculis flectenisque assiduis Deum regem regum rogabat, et discessit omnis grauitudo magica tenebrarum a campo Ai, et dixit 'Deo gratias'.[157]
>
> fearing that they [Loíguire's daughters] might accept the customs of the holy man, they became very angry and manifested the darkness of night and thick blackness over all of Mag Aí. We do not know through whose power this thing was done, but we do know that the long night existed for three days and as many nights. The holy man went on a fast of three days and three nights, and with a hundred prayers and constant genuflections begged God, the King of kings, and all of the magical darkness[158] disappeared from Mag Aí, and he said: 'Thanks be to God'.

This story, which is also relayed in Muirchú's account with some variation, is the most vivid depiction of magic that Tírechán leaves us with. Unlike in the previous section, these *magi* are not impotent contenders who are quickly and easily beaten or killed by Patrick with a sign of the cross or a quick prayer from the saint. Rather, they hear of Patrick's approach and take quick, powerful, and sinister action in order to impede his progress. Of course, their power is ultimately exercised in vain, and the power of Patrick's god proves to be superior to their own, though it does take three days and nights of fasting and prayer in order to restore to light what the *magi* had covered in darkness. Also interesting in this story is that Tírechán is unwilling to state the source of the power wielded by the *magi*. Certainly that power did not come from God (although widespread theological belief argue that for it to have happened, God must have allowed it), but Tírechán is unwilling to — as other authors we will be examining in this chapter do[159] — attribute their power to a demon or devil (who somewhat unusually appear nowhere in Tírechán's writing), nor to say that their power is coming from their gods (whom Tírechán references in the story of the conversion of Loíguire's daughters and also in the story about the spring, both discussed above) nor certainly from themselves. His reticence to speak on this issue may represent that he held

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[157] Tírechán, *Collectanea* III.19 (Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 138-139).

[158] Bieler would have *omnis magica tenebrarum* translated as 'all the magical evil', and while I think this translation does fit with the tone and the events of the episode being conveyed as well as with the correlation between evil and shadows/darkness, I also think that in this case that translation is a stretch. There is no need to go looking for metaphorical translation of this darkness when the *magi* invoked *tenebras* (darkness) at the beginning of the section.

[159] In fact, Tírechán alone of the authors of hagiographic sources makes no reference to the source from which practitioners draw their powers, and he also makes no reference to demons or devils — a popular explanation for these supernatural powers — even in cases where Muirchú, recording the same events, calls out the actions of *magi* etc. as being explicitly demonic.

views that were not supported by orthodox theology at the time, but without further information it is impossible to reach a solid conclusion on the reason behind his reticence.

As was the case with the instance of magic and its practitioners in the Brigittine materials discussed above, these instances have not — aside from Carey's examination of Tírechán's use of the term '*magus*' which is discussed in the introduction to this thesis[160] — been previously examined; however, from our examination of magic in Tírechán's *Collectanea*, we can gather some conclusions about the ideas of magic which Tírechán conveyed in his text. *Magi* and those who practice magic are wrong to do so, but the offense is not one which is unforgivable, as at least two *magi* are explicitly converted to Christianity and leave behind their practices. Magic itself is somewhat more of a confusing thing to discuss in the way that Tírechán portrays it. It is neither completely impotent and useless before the power of God wielded by Patrick, nor entirely powerful and difficult to contend with; examples of both are given in the text. The source of the magic is something which Tírechán either considers so obvious as to not bother mentioning, is unwilling to put to writing, or is unwilling to speculate upon, which means that he is one of the few authors who does not explicitly link the practice of magic with demons, devils, or other spirits. That clear acts of magic are being shown to take place without apparent demonic action is further evidence that Rampton's work in defining magic as being inherently the act of trafficking with demons is incomplete.[161] Despite this, he unsurprisingly characterises magic as being a force oppositional to God and God's servants in Ireland (namely, Patrick and Benignus), and it is clearly malevolent, especially in its associations with darkness and bringing the darkness of the night to overshadow the light of the day. It is also interesting that Tírechán, unlike some of our other subjects for this chapter, does not present us with the reactions of the general populace to magic, but is solely concerned with Patrick's response and eventual victory over magic and the *magi* who would seek to bring it to bear against him. Tírechán's writing about magic does not seem to be drawn heavily from either Biblical sources or from other hagiographies (with the exception of Ultan's account of Patrick which has not survived and we are not therefore able to examine it and the influence it may have had upon his writing; it is unlikely, however that he would have produce an account that directly contradicts Ultan's book in ways that are too many or too major). Unlike with the non-Christian prophecy working as a force for good as was seen in the *Vita I* of St Brigit, while there are conversions of *magi* presented in the text, none of their arts are shown to be worthy of positive depiction in the *Collectanea*.

[160] John Carey, 'Tírechán and the Magi'.
[161] Rampton's work was also discussed in the introduction to this thesis (Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons*.)

Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*:

Tírechán is not the only scholar from the *Paruchia Patricii* under the see of Armagh to have produced a hagiography of St Patrick in the timeframe in which we are interested that has survived to the modern day. Another member of that community who would have been Tírechán's near-contemporary and had access to many of the same written sources on Patrick that he did — and also potentially to Tírechán's *Collectanea* itself[162] — was Muirchú. However, Muirchú tells us very little about his sources. He almost certainly had access to Patrick's *Confessio*, and he seems to have access to at least one other written source on Patrick's early life, possibly the same book written by Ultan which Tírechán had access to as his student. Indeed, Muirchú explicitly mentions having read a book that was in Ultan's collection, which very well could have been the same one mentioned above. Muirchú also certainly had access to local Patrician traditions, both written and oral.[163] As sources of inspiration, Muirchú pulls a great deal from the Old Testament, which it has been determined that he had access to in the Vulgate, and there are other references to legends that grew surrounding the figure of Simon Magus.[164] Additionally, given that he refers to Cogitosus as his father and is following the model of a *vita* that Cogitosus produced in his life of Brigit, it is safe to say that inspiration was taken from that source as well. For what little we know of Tírechán's life we know even less of Muirchú's. Muirchú's name would suggest that he is from the Armagh plain and was therefore born and raised under the auspices of the see of Armagh. He is listed as having attended the Synod of Birr alongside Bishop Áed of Sléibte, who was the one who ordered the text to be written. From these facts it can be safely assumed that Muirchú is writing under a framework of reconciling the practices of the Irish churches with those of the Romans, which would explain his focus on Easter, his description of tonsure, and his propagation of Patrick as the patron of all of Ireland, with his church at Armagh being the head of the churches in Ireland. Beyond this, we know nothing of the author, and we lack even a date for his death. On the dating of the text, key information revolves around its commissioner, Bishop Áed, who came to Armagh in 661 and died in the year 700. Therefore, closest we can come to a definite date of authorship of Muirchú's text gives us this range of some thirty-nine years between 661 and 700. Unlike Tírechán's text, Muirchú's has come down to us in parts in three manuscripts, though in none of them is it complete.[165] Also unlike Tírechán, Muirchú is writing primarily from a position of strongly supporting Armagh's primacy over the churches of Ireland; he rushes his narrative to place Patrick in the north and his activities in the text tend to revolve around Armagh.[166]

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[162] Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 1-4.
[163] Ibid, 16-18.
[164] Ibid, 19-20.
[165] These are the Book of Armagh (in which Tírechán is also preserved); Brussels, Bibliothèque royal 64; and Vienna, Nationalbibliothek Ser. nov. 3642.
[166] Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 6, 18,

Outside of this, Muirchú, as an author differs from Tírechán in that he — as Cogitosus, his avowed spiritual father, did before him — presents a coherent literary narrative throughout his *vita*.[167]

We will again begin by examining the places in the text where practitioners of magic are mentioned without performing any acts of magic. Like Tírechán, Muirchú notes that Patrick was a slave to several houses of *magi*, and then to one in particular, a certain Milúch moccu Bóin, for seven years.[168] This man is later referred to as king and a pagan, and we again see similar variance between numbers as on that occasion the time spent a slave is recorded as six years.[169] Upon his return to Ireland to convert the population, he sought out his former slaveowner in order to buy his freedom so as not to be beholden to a non-Christian. When Miliucc[170] heard that Patrick was coming to him, he believed that he would be forced to convert, but he decided (under the influence of a devil) that he would rather die than become Christian and gathered his worldly possessions and immolated himself along with them.[171] Later, after Patrick had kindled his paschal fire in sight of Loíguire and his court, the king was preparing to ride out with his men and kill Patrick, but his *magi* stopped him and advised him instead to judge a contest between the *magi* and Patrick and decide whose faith was better based on the results, on the grounds that King Loíguire might one day come to like Patrick.[172] Upon Patrick coming and meeting Loíguire and his court, the *magi* then urged no one to stand upon the saint's entrance as they believed that anyone who stood for him would be immediately converted — as was the case for the single man who stood at Patrick's arrival, whose name was Ercc — and once Patrick had arrived the *magi* began a debate with him. During the debate one *magus*, whose name was Lochru, said something about Patrick's faith that incited Patrick to call upon God to kill him, and the *magus* was lifted into the air and dashed to pieces against a rock.[173] The next day (Easter day), Patrick went to Tara during the pagan feast to preach to Loíguire and his retinue, and during the festivities, Lucet Máel, the surviving *magus* of the king's court, approached Patrick and added a drop[174] from his flask into Patrick's cup. Patrick responds by blessing the cup and freezing its

[167] Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh,* 2.
[168] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, Incipit II (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 62-63).
[169] Muirchú, *Via Sancti Patricii*, I.1 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 66-67).
[170] The variance in spelling appears within the text, but they are undoubtably referring to the same man mentioned in the *incipit*.
[171] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.11-12 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 76-81).
[172] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.16 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 86-89). This is quite out of character for the way that the *magi* behave in the rest of the *vita*, and is especially confusing given the prophecy which they gave to the King about Patrick needing to be killed on that day or else his faith would spread across Ireland and extinguish their customs (this prophecy will be discussed below). Their urging the king to act this way might be narrative device to allow the confrontations between the *magi* and the saint, and to allow Loíguire to be converted at the end of the incident.
[173] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.17 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 88-91).
[174] The argument in favour of reading this event as an attempted poisoning can be found in Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Muirchú's Poisoned Cup: A Note on Its Sources.' *Ériu* 56 (2006): 157-62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30007055.

contents, with the exception of the drop added by the *magus*, overturned his cup causing the drop to spill out, and then blessed his cup again returning its contents to liquid.[175]

This narrative leaves us with a clear view of *magi* in Muirchú's work, which will reflect upon the magic which they explicitly wield, which will be discussed below. In the *vita*, *magi* are without exception opposed to Patrick and his Christian religion, and they are only seen in context of that opposition. This stands at distinct contradiction to Tírechán's depictions, which contain explicit mention of *magi* converting to the Christian faith. Muirchú's unwillingness to convert any of the *magi* in his text stands out as an especially potent statement, albeit one made by omission, as he takes great pains to enact the conversion of King Loíguire — who had lied to, attacked, and tried to kill the saint before eventually converting out of fear for his own life — on one hand and on the other so-called cyclops Macc Cuill moccu Greccae, who was a bandit called out for his evil thoughts, haughty words, wicked deeds, bitter spirit, angry temper, sinful body, cruel mind, pagan life, and vain conscious, and who met the saint trying to trick and deceive him out of disdain for Patrick's god. Even this man is, to Muirchú, deserving of conversion — indeed we are told that he eventually becomes a bishop and a prelate[176] — but apparently not so for the *magi* who confronted Patrick; for them the sin of magic means that the only fitting thing is apparently death without conversion.[177]

On top of this already fairly bleak view on the practitioners of magic we can superimpose Muirchú's depiction of *magi* in active performance of their craft. The majority of actively used magic in the text revolves around the same stories that we saw in Tírechán above. There is, however, one example not described by Tírechán, and that is the giving of the prophecy to Loíguire regarding Patrick's arrival and conversion of the island. Usually, cases of prophecy would not be discussed as active practice of magic, as was discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, but Muirchu calls out this instance of prophecy as being an expression of their magical craft and relates the incident thus:

> in illis autem diebus quibus haec gesta sunt in praedictis regionibus fuit rex quidam magnus ferox gentilisque imperator barbarorum regans in Temoria quae tunc erat caput regni scotorum loiguire nomine filius neill origo stirpis regiae huius pene insolae hic autem sciuos et magos et aurispices et incantatores et omnis malae artis inuentatores habuerat qui poterant omnia scire et prouidere ex more gentilitatis et idolatriae antequam essent e quibus duo prae caeteris praeferebantur quorum nomina haec sunt lothroch qui et lochru et lucetmael qui et ronal et hii duo ex sua arte magica crebrius profetabant morem quondam exterum futurum in modum regni cum ignota quadam doctrina molesta longinquo trans maria aduectam a paucis dictatum a multis susceptum ad omnibus honorandum regna subuersurum resistentes reges occissurum turbas seducturum omnes eorum deos distructurum et iectis omnibus illorum artis operibus in saecula regnaturum

[175] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.20 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 92-95).
[176] Muirchu, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I.23 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 102-107).
[177] Discussion of the theology of conversion in the Patrician texts can be found in: Elizabeth Dawson, 'Pillars of Conversion in Muirchú and Tírechán: Two Case Studies.' Saint Patrick's Confessio. 2011. https://www.confessio.ie/more/article_dawson#; and Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Muirchú's theology of conversion in his Vita Patricii', In Mark Atherton, ed. *Celts and Christians*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002, 124-145.

> […] 'quando ergo haec omnia fiant regnum nostrum quod est gentile non stabit' quod sic postea euenerat euersis enim in aduentu patricii idulorum culturis fides christi catholica nostra repleuit omnia[178]
>
> There was, in the days when these things happened, in those regions a certain great king, fierce and pagan, an emperor of the barbarians, ruling in Tara, which was then the head of the Irish kingdom, named Loíguire son of Níall, a scion of the family that held the kingship of almost the entire island. He had around him learned men and *magi* and fortune-tellers and *incantatores*, and the authors of every evil craft who were, by their pagan and idolatrous ways, able to know and know everything before it happened. Of these, there were two that he preferred above all the others, the names of whom are Lothroch, who is also [named] Lochru, and Lucet Máel, who is also [named] Ronal; and these two, with their magical craft, repeatedly prophesied that a certain strange custom was about to come to them, a kingdom, as it were, with an unknown and annoying doctrine, brought over from a long way across the sea, prescribed by a few, accepted by many; it would be honoured by everyone, would topple kingdoms, kill the resisting kings, seduce the mobs, destroy all of their gods, throw out all the works of their craft, and reign for ever […] 'When all of this happens, our kingdom, which is pagan, not stand', and afterwards it happened just thus, when Patrick came the worship of idols was swept out and the universal Christian faith spread over our whole country.

This passage carries a great deal of information for us. The way in which Muirchú writes about the *magi* and *incantatores* and their craft is not subtle and tells us what he wants to express in his depictions of magic, namely that it is evil. The practitioners of magic are the authors of every evil craft, their customs are pagan and idolatrous, incompatible with and fundamentally opposed to Patrick, his god, and his religion. Furthermore, the depiction shows that the supernatural powers wielded by these *magi* and their like were not impotent, and it was through the practice of their much-reviled arts that Loíguire's *magi* were able to foresee the arrival of Patrick and his eventual victory in converting the island to Christianity. However, despite the accuracy of their prophecy and their foretelling of Patrick's successes in Ireland, these practices are not deemed acceptable by Muirchú, but are condemned as roundly as the other arts of the *magi*. The events of this section are re-told in brief, keeping the structure and language describing the *magi* et al, later in the *vita*.[179] It is worth noting that these sections of the text are not entirely of Muirchú's own design, but that he alludes heavily here, both directly and indirectly, to the sections of the Bible concerning Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar II. This is a complex and important comparison, as the biblical Nebuchadnezzar was both portrayed as the despotic tyrannical king who attacked and destroyed the Jewish kingdom, forcing the Jews into seventy years of oppression, perhaps the cruelest one which they had faced at that point in the Bible,[180] and also given the epithet of 'my [God's] servant'.[181]

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[178] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I:10 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 74-77).
[179] Muirchu, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I:15 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 84-87).
[180] This portrayal is seen in 2 Kings 24-25,though it is there justified as being in accordance with the will of god for the evils done by the kings of the Jews; 1 Chron. 6:15 (though it is a short note on the events described in 2 Kings); 2 Chron. 36; in various references to what had happened in Ezra 1,2,5,6; Neh. 7; Est. 2; and throughout the story in the Book of Daniel 1-5, from which much of the description of Loíguire, his court, and his *magi* are taken. Many have noted these references, but they are gathered and shown side-by-side very neatly by Thomas O'Loughlin (see Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings* [Continuum, 2005], 98-103).
[181] This appears only in the Book of Jeremiah, and only three times (see Klaas A. D. Smelik, 'My Servant Nebuchadnezzar: The Use of the Epithet 'My Servant' for the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Jeremiah', *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 1 (2014): pp. 109-134, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12301142). It is worth noting that although Jer. and other books give the justification of these events as the Kings having done evil things and offending God, they (even in Jeremiah where Nebuchadnezzar is called the servant of God) still portray the King of Babylon as violent, cruel, and fickle. Even in

Nebuchadnezzar is not, however, the only terrible biblical king from whom Muirchú draws inspiration in the sections of the *vita* that deal with the prophecies of his *magi*; the Irish hagiographer also leans into another biblical figure who is given a prophecy that he isn't fond of and reacts to that news violently. That king is King Herod, who according to the Gospels beheaded John the Baptist,[182] but more relevantly in the Gospel of Matthew — and only in the Gospel of Matthew — there is a section about *magi* following the star to find Jesus, and King Herod attempting to use them to find and kill him, and when that failed, killing all boys two years and younger around Bethlehem.[183] Loíguire, unlike Matthew's Herod but like Daniel's Nebuchadnezzar, will by the end of the story be converted to a new religion by a foreign guest.[184]

The events which lead directly to the conversion of King Loíguire also revolve around the use of magic by his *magi* — or rather his surviving *magus*, as this section takes place after Patrick has killed one of them for speaking in a way that dishonours his religion — in prolonged confrontation with St Patrick. This series of trials begins with the incident of the *magus* adding a drop to Patrick's cup as was described above. The *magus* is not content to sit in defeat and challenges the saint to further contests. Muirchú records it thus:

> Et post paululum ait magus: 'faciamus signa super hunc campum maximum in hoc campo maximo', respondensque Patricius ait: 'Quae?', et dixit magus: 'inducamus niuem super terram', et ait Patricius: 'nolo contraria uoluntati Dei inducere', et dixit magus: 'ego inducam uidentibus cunctis'. Tunc incantationes magicas exorsus induxit niuem super totum campum pertinguentem ferenn et uiderunt omnes et mirati sunt. Et ait sanctus: 'ecce uidemus hoc, depone nunc'. Et dixit: 'Ante istam horam cras non possum deponere'. Et ait sanctus: 'Potes malum et non bonum facere. Non sic ego'. Tunc benedicens per totum circuitum campum dicto citius absque ulla pluia aut nebulis aut uento euanuit nix, et exclamauerunt turbae et mirati sunt ualde et compuncti sunt corde. Et paulo post inuocatis demonibus induxit magus densissimas tenebras super terram in signum et mormurauerunt omnes. Et ait sanctus: 'expelle tenebras'. At ille similiter non poterat. Sanctus autem orans benedixit et reppente expulsae sunt tenebrae et refulsit sol et exclamauerunt omnes et gratias egerunt. […] Et respondens rex ait: 'permitte per ignem'. Et ait Patricius: 'prumptus sum'. At magus nolens […] Et ait sanctus: 'non sic, sed tu ipse ibis et unus ex meis pueris ibit tecum in separatam et conclaussam domum et meum erga te et tuum erga meum puerum erit uestimentum et sic simul incendemini et iudicabimini in conspectu altissimi'. Et hoc consilium insedit et aedificata est eis domus cuius dimedium ex materia uiridi et alterum dimedium ex arida facta est, et missus est magus in illam domum in partem eius uiridem et unus ex pueris sancti Patricii Benineus nomine cum ueste magica in partem domus aridam; conclussa itaque extrinsecus domus coram omni turba incensa est. Et factum est in illa hora orante Patricio ut consumeret flamma ignis magum cum demedia domu uiridi permanente cassula sancti Patricii tantum intacta, quam ignis non tetigit. Felix autem Benineus e contrario cum demedia domu arida, secundum quod de tribus pueris dictum est, non tetigit

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Daniel, where the king converts to Judaism, he is not shown in a positive light. For more on Nebuchadnezzar, see Ronald H Sack, *Images of Nebuchadnezzar: The Emergence of a Legend* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2004).

[182] Matt. 14; Mark 6; Luke 9.

[183] As said above, this event, known as the Massacre of the Innocents, only happens in Matt. 2:1-18, and there is no reference to it in any other extant sources. Despite this, the usefulness of equating Loíguire with these wicked biblical kings in clear, as are the parallels between their stories (again, see Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology*, 102-103).

[184] This is also different than the ending of Loíguire's story as related by Tírechán, who has the king refuse to convert and die following his original religion. Whether this is to suit Muirchú's allusions (or his conversion narrative as discussed above), or whether Tírechán is the one who changed the story to suit his familial and political goals remains a mystery. For two authors coming from the same Patrician tradition who agree in many of the broad strokes as well as in many of the details of the story of St Patrick, their differing on this point does stand out as unusual.

> eum ignis omnino neque contristatus est nec quicquam molestiae intulit cassula tantum magi quae erga eum fuerat non sine Dei nutu exusta[185]
>
> And after a short while the *magus* said, 'Let us make signs above the largest field,' and replying, Patrick said, 'What kind [of signs]'?, and the *magus* said, 'Let us bring forth snow over the land', and Patrick said, 'I don't want to call forth anything against God's will', and the *magus* said, 'I shall invoke [the snow] with everyone watching'. Then, beginning some magic incantations, he called forth snow over the entire field, soaking up to the waist, and everyone saw it and was amazed. And the holy man said, 'Look, we see this. Now remove it'. And [the *magus*] said, 'I'm unable to remove it until this time tomorrow'. And the holy man said, 'You can do evil things and can't do good ones. Not so I'. Then saying blessings all around the field, in no time, without rain or mist or wind, the snow vanished, and the crowds cheered and were greatly amazed and they were touched in their hearts. And after a short time, the *magus*, by invoking demons, called forth the thickest shadows over the land as a sign, and the people murmured. And the holy man said, 'Banish the shadows', but just as before that [*magus*] wasn't able to. The holy man, however, praying, said a blessing and at once the shadows were banished and the sun shone again, and everyone cheered and gave thanks. […] And responding, the king said, 'Agree to [trial] by fire'.[186] And Patrick said: 'I am ready'. But the *magus* didn't want to […] And the holy man said, 'Not so; but you yourself, and one of my boys will go with you into a divided and closed house, and you'll wear my garment and my boy will wear yours, and thus you'll be set on fire at the same time and you'll be judged in the sight of the Highest one'. And this plan was agreed to, and a house was built for them, half of which was made green wood and the other half of dry wood, and the *magus* was sent into the green part of the house and one of holy Patrick's boys, named Benignus, in the magical vestments, [was sent] into the dry part of the house, then the house was closed from outside and in the presence of the whole crowd was set on fire. And in that hour, it happened through Patrick's praying that the fire's flame consumed the *magus* together with the green half of the house, with only the chasuble of the holy Patrick left intact, which the fire did not touch. However, by contrast happy Benignus, and the dry half of the house, following what was said of the three boys,[187] the fire didn't touch him at all, and brought him neither depression nor trouble; only the *magus*'s cloak, which he'd put on, was destroyed by the fire, not without God's will.

In this section as well Muirchú has presented magic in a very explicitly negative way. Not only is the magic produced by the *magus* said to be evil and unnatural (i.e., contradictory to the will of God), but over the course of the contest even the non-Christian crowd who were in attendance at King Loíguire's feast turned against the *magus* and were moved to be in favour of Patrick. Additionally, the source of the *magus*'s power is revealed in this passage to be explicitly demonic, and while this is in contrast to Tírechán (as discussed above), it is in line with many of the other sources discussed in this chapter.

This examination of magic in Muirchú's *Vita sancti Patricii* has, therefore, borne fruit in terms of showing a consistent and identifiable portrayal of magic and those who practice it. To Muirchú, the practitioners of magic are uniformly evil; they are opposed to the will of God as expressed through Saint Patrick, fit for death by Patrick's hand, and apparently beyond redemption or salvation. His views on magic are equally condemnatory. The power of magic comes from consorting with demons, it is an evil

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[185] Muirchú, *Vita Sancti Patricii*, I 20 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 94-97).

[186] The mythological and possible historical traditions of trial by fire in medieval Ireland are discussed fairly recently and in some depth by Chrisptophe Archan; for more on the topic, see Christophe Archan, 'Ordeal by Fire in Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 24-25 (2014): 197–212.

[187] This is a direct reference to David 3, wherein King Nebuchadnezzar is told of certain Jewish slaves refusing to worship his gods or the golden idol he had constructed, and enraged by this he had the three boys tied up and thrown into a furnace, but they were saved from death by an angel, and were then defended and promoted by the amazed king.

art used to do unnatural things, it is a force that is innately opposed to God and God's designs. Magic, while capable of doing some truly powerful things such as covering a field in snow or bringing a vast and impenetrable darkness over the land, is nonetheless a trivial force for Patrick to overcome. With a short blessing or the sign of the cross the saint can undo whatever was wrought by the powers of the *magi* and set the world back to the way it ought to be. While it can be said that there is a strong influence of other sources on Muirchú's depictions of various things, including of magic, as he is strongly drawn to the stories such as those of the Jewish advisors to King Nebuchadnezzar as parallel to Patrick in Loíguire's court, or to the life of Patrick and his work to convert Ireland to Christianity as being a strong echo of the stories of Moses as a former slave turned wise man and exhorted by God into returning to the land of his youth and leading the Jews out of Egyptian domination and into eventual freedom in the Promised Land — the confrontations between Moses and Joshua on one side and the Pharaoh's magicians on the other being of particular interest to this thesis — or to the contest between St Peter and the Samaritan Simon Magus for use as literary inspiration for his work, he has nevertheless shown the way that he wants magic to be depicted over the course of his text.

Despite the referential nature of most of Muirchú's depictions of magic, and the fact that he is depicting the life of a saint who is also written about by another contemporaneous author, he manages to present a view of magic and its practitioners that is unique among the Irish hagiographies: that it is without any redeeming quality and unworthy of even neutral evaluation by good Christians. There is no form of magic, not even accurate prophecy, which is ever deemed to be acceptable even as prelude to conversion and proper Christian practice. His ability to present such a singular depiction speaks to the ability of authors to use available sources and *topoi* to present unique and possibly original narratives and views. It is not, as some historians have suggested of highly derivative medieval sources, that authors are uncritically (or, less charitably, unthinkingly) repeating the words of their seniors with no deviation and no eye toward the applicability of their sources towards their own local and personal pastoral concerns or theological ideas, but rather that medieval authors are able to draw from a wide array of ecclesiastical material and adapt and interpret it to their needs.

Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae*:

The next text that we shall examine, and also the last of the Irish hagiographical material, is the Life of St Columba as recorded by the abbot Adomnán of Iona. Adomnán was writing his *vita* at some point between the years 697 and 700, approximately a century following the death of the subject of his work. He himself is vague about his sources in his introduction to his work, with little to say other than

to say that he has both oral and written sources.[188] He does in certain stories attribute information to specific sources (mostly oral), to a degree that is rarely seen in other works of hagiography.[189] However, there are issues with many of the sources he lists, as not only does he often list the name of a monk who gave him information without recording that source's source, but these claims are also often at odds with the text of those sections, parts of which are drawn from other sources to which the author had access, such as the *Vita Antonii* translated by Evagrius of Antioch and the Dialogues of Pope Gregory the Great.[190] We know that one of his predecessors as abbot, one Cummene, wrote an account of Columba's life, to which Adomnán would have almost certainly had access. However, Cummene would also have been writing approximately sixty years following the death of the saint and would not himself been witness to many (if, indeed, any) of the events he would have been describing. Bede also made reference in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* to accounts that were recorded by the disciples of Columba, but if these existed, and whether they were different than the writings of Cummene, are all in question.[191] If those writings did exist, Adomnán would certainly have been able to use them in the creation of his work.[192] In terms of his literary inspirations and sources of the *topoi* that Adomnán uses in his account, he had access to the Vulgate, as well as Juvencus and other early Christian writings, in addition to the sources mentioned above and several other influential works of hagiography.[193]

Adomnan's *Vita S. Columbae* survives in four manuscripts, which are part of two distinct manuscript traditions. The first of these is the Dorbbene MS, which is Schaffhausen Stadtbibliothek Generalia I, an early eighth century MS written in Irish script, and perhaps produced in Iona itself. It is the sole MS in its lineage. The remaining MSS are all held by the British Library, one written in the latter half of the twelfth century, likely towards its very end, and likely produced at Durham; the second written in the very late twelfth or very early thirteenth century and badly damaged by a fire in 1731, when much of the MS was lost or damaged; and finally MS Royal 8 D IX, a MS of the fifteenth or sixteenth century,

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[188] Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson, eds, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London: T. Nelson, 1961), 18-21.
[189] Adomnán. *Life of St Columba*. trans. Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), 56.
[190] Anderson and Anderson, 18-21.
[191] Given that Bede was writing approximately thirty years after Adomnán, and was not overly familiar with Iona's library or its contents, Bede's recording of these sources that were supposedly preserved there may not be accurate at all, and furthermore may be referring to either the account of Cummene or even that of Adomnán himself. As both men were from Columba's monastery in Iona and both successors to his role as abbot, both could certainly be said to be the disciples of Columba, and therefore the authors of the texts mentioned in the HEGA.
[192] Ibid, 18-19.
[193] Ibid, 22. It is worth noting that the Andersons, who edited the critical edition of Adomnán's text used throughout, write quite disparagingly of Adomnán here, arguing that he 'had too little genuine tradition' from which to compose his text and that 'His value [was] less for the history of Columba than for his own ideas'. These ideas illustrate an attitude towards hagiography that is all too common in the writings of certain mid-20th century historians dealing with hagiographies and is dismissive of the literary traditions of hagiography and misunderstands the intended purpose of hagiographical texts as being (failed) attempts to accurately communicate the facts of historical events. These ideas and the issues that surround them are discussed more in the introduction to this chapter above.

of which a portion of the beginning of the life has been lost. Despite the fact that the manuscripts held by the British Museum were produced at later dates than the one in Schaffhousen, textual evidence including Irish personal and place names suggest that these texts may be more accurately copied from the original text.[194]

Unlike the obscurity of the authors that have been thus far examined, we have a relative glut of information about Adomnán, his life, and his works which is recorded or can be inferred from sources concerning him. He was born in what is now county Donegal in Ireland c. 628. and was a distant cousin of the saint whose life he wrote, being a descendant of Columba's grandfather.[195] This was not remarkable, as many of the abbots of Iona were related to its founder[196]. He was the ninth abbot of Iona, and many of the works and tasks for which he was known were undertaken while he was a person of authority in the Iona monastery. During that time at the monastery, he wrote the book *De Locis sanctis*, which became an important source for Bede when he later wrote his own book on holy sites. Some sources — most notably Bede — indicate implausibly that Adomnán, while visiting the Northumbrian monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, accepted the Roman dating of Easter, but was unable to convince the monks of Iona to convert their practices along with him. During his life, Adomnán was a diplomat and an active force in the creation of a code of laws, the eponymous *Cáin Adomnán*, at the Synod of Birr which was designed to punish those who did harm to women, children, and members of religious orders. Adomnán died in 704.[197]

As for his primary purposes in writing the *Vita Columbae*, there are a number of possibilities. Adomnán himself writes that he wrote at the urging of members of his community, but whether this is a rhetorical device or representative of events as they occurred cannot be determined. While all works of hagiography contain theological and didactic elements — and these exist in abundance in this text, and indeed Adoman seems to be more adroit at working his theological concerns into the narrative than were some of his influences[198] — it is likely that Adomnán's main aims in writing this *vita* were political. Unlike the writings examined above, however, Adomnán does not seem particularly concerned with defending the territorial claims of the Columbian monastic family.[199] Rather, his main concern seems to be the political influence of Iona in the insular world. As Adomnán took over the abbacy of Iona, the influence of the centre had reached its peak and was beginning its descent. While Iona was still a key player in the

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[194] Ibid, 3-5.
[195] Ibid, 92-98.
[196] Adomnán and Sharpe, 39.
[197] Anderson and Anderson, 92-98.
[198] For more on this see T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Structure and Purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*.' In Jonathan M. Wooding, ed. *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker Peacemaker*, 205–18. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010.
[199] Sara E. Ellis Nilsson, 'Miracle Stories and the Primary Purpose of Adomnán's Vita Columbae', *The Heroic Age* 10 (2007), https://www.heroicage.org/issues/10/nilsson.html.

region, especially under the administration of a statesman as skilled as Adomnán, in Ireland the ascent of notable centres in Kildare and Armagh — the latter of which would eventually become the head of the churches in Ireland — coupled with the rise of various thriving Northumbrian centres to Iona's southeast put the latter in a precarious position, especially as Iona and many of its subsidiary religious centres were still reticent to accept the Roman Easter dating practice. It was in this situation that Adomnán entered and produced his account of the life of Iona's founder, replete with stories of the debts which were owed to Iona, from both the ecclesiastical and secular political elite of Ireland and Northumbria.[200]

In his depictions of magic, Adomnán stands distinctly apart from any of his predecessors examined earlier in this chapter in several key ways. First, Adomnán is the only one of the hagiographers examined in this chapter who explicitly states that the powers of those practicing magic only work because God allows them to do so.[201] Additionally, in the *Vita Columbae*, we will see that the practitioners of magic are only ever able to exercise their powers by calling upon demons to effect their will for them, and they are not depicted as having any supernatural powers in their own right. There is only one instance in the *vita* in which *magi* may be using supernatural powers in which their actions are not directly credited to the work of demons, which shall be examined below. This portrayal of practitioners as being reliant on demons to effect their will is so strong that even in chapters in which the saint is confronting supernatural forces, the *magi* and their ilk often become no more than jeering bystanders to the confrontation rather than direct participants in it.

We will again begin our examination of the text by looking at those instances of the appearance of magical practitioners in which they are not involved in carrying out magical actions. In the first of these, the saint has heard that there is a certain spring that non-Christians worshiped as a god because any people who drank from or washed in it were, with the allowance of God, struck with various ailments and infirmities by devils. After hearing of this, Columba went there and, while the magicians — who Adomnán tells us are regularly routed and defeated by the saint — taunt and celebrate at what they believe will be the demise of their nemesis, invokes Christ's name to bless the water and then bathes in and drinks of it. Rather than being struck down by the demonic powers of the spring, Columba purges it of their influence and causes it to become a spring with healing waters rather than harmful.[202] As mentioned above, although there is a confrontation here between Columba and the powers venerated by the *magi*, they take no active role in the conflict, leaving it as a clash between the saintly powers of Columba and the demons that inhabited the spring. It is interesting that in Flint's examination of the life of Columba for pagan

[200] For More on this see J. M. Picard, 'The Purpose of Adomnán's Vita Columbae', *Peritia* 1 (1982): 160–77, https://doi.org/10.1484/j.peri.3.599.
[201] See my footnote on the theology of this idea above.
[202] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 11 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 349-51).

practices appropriated by the church, she finds several instances, but most of them revolve around the Christian use of white garments, which she hastily links to pre-Christian druidic rites,[203] when this passage is a strong example of the church in Northumbria taking what had been non-Christian holy sites and wells and giving them a Christian veneer before allowing them to continue to be used as holy places. In the next episode in which *magi* are described, a young boy from a family which the saint had recently converted fell deathly ill, and the *magi* when they found out about this mocked his family and their new faith, claiming that their gods were greater than the Christian god.[204] Upon hearing about this, Columba went to the family and found that the boy had recently died. The holy man then proved that the Christian faith was superior by resurrecting the boy.[205] Once again, the pagan practitioners in this story are clearly portrayed as malevolent and positioned in opposition to Columba, but are ultimately impotent, able only to insult and malign the saint as he does his work and shows the onlookers the power of his faith in God. The final one of these incidents,[206] directly following the previous story in the text, involves a specific *magus*, who will appear again in other events discussed in this chapter below, named Broichan. Broichan is a *magus* at the court of King Brude — and also foster-father to that same king — whom Columba entreated to release a certain enslaved woman from slavery. Broichan refuses the saint's request and in response the holy man threatens that if he does not release her before Columba left the region, Broichan would be struck down. Broichan still refuses and is subsequently struck by an angel, leaving him on the brink of death. Messengers from the king are then sent to Columba, begging for him to help Broichan, in return for a promise to release the woman, Columba sent the messengers back with a stone which he had blessed

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[203] For flint on what she deems to be interactions with paganism in this life, see Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 186-8; 306-8; 326-7.

[204] This story could also be interpreted through the lens of a trial of divinities, as described in a footnote above. However, despite the story being framed in a similar manner to such a trial, the text neither claims nor implies that it is the power of the pagan's gods that caused the boy's malady and ultimate death, so this would be a poor example of the formula.

[205] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 32 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 396-9). This story is clearly set up to position Columba as having miraculous powers of resurrection comparable to the apostles who also raised the dead, all in reference to the miracles that Jesus performed, and contains textual allusions to the Book of Acts.

[206] There is, in fact, one other story that could potentially be an oblique reference to a *magus* (this being Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, I 41 [Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 294-7],) in which a young boy had taken to thieving from the monastery at Iona in order to survive. He was then admonished by Columba and given the provisions he needed to survive. At a later date, the saint foresaw the boy's death and sent a monk with meat and grain to be served at his funeral. The reason that the connection between this story and practitioners of magic is so tenuous that it is being included in this footnote rather than in the main body of the chapter is that the only link between them is the boy's name, Erc moccu Druidi, which might be translated as 'Erc, son of a druid'. However, this name is odd as it mixes the Irish *moccu*, meaning 'son of' with a Latin genitive, *Druidi*. Moreover, this use of the word *druidus* would be the only example of its use in the sources examined for this thesis, and indeed I have not encountered that term outside of a small handful of classical Latin texts, which would make its inclusion here very strange, as these texts (Adomnán's included) make use of biblical terminology when describing these pagan wielders of magic (*magus*, *maleficus*, etc.). Additionally, the tale otherwise contains no reference to magic, demons, or the supernatural (excepting Columba's own prophecy of the boy's death), and does not explicitly call Erc himself out as being a *magus*, *druidus*, *maleficus*, or anything of the like. Finally, Erc's surname is given only in the introductory blurb of the story, meaning there is a strong possibility that it was not a part of the original text at all and was added later by a scribe as they were copying the text. All of this together makes a strong case against the inclusion of this episode as being a reflection upon magic practitioners in the text.

so that it would float in water and transform any water it was put in into a healing draught. This stone was used to save Broichan and was kept by the king and used to heal his people until his death, at which point the stone vanished.[207] This story fits well with the others, illustrating the *magus* Broichan as being greedy, contrarian, and completely impotent to act against Columba or his wishes. These characterisations of magical practitioners will only be reenforced by the parts of the *vita* which describe *magi* who are involved directly in the practice of their arts.

Magical practitioners in the *Vita Columbae* are first hinted at in the introduction to the *vita*'s first book. The description in this section very briefly describes the second confrontation between Columba and Broichan, which will be discussed in depth below. The first story of powers being brought to bear against the saint is described thus:

> Sed et illud non est tacendum quod aliquando de tali et incomparaibili uocis eius subleuatione iuxta Brudei regis munitionem accedisse traditor. Nam ipse sanctus cum paucis fratribus extra regis munitionem dum uespertinales dei laudes ex more celebraret, quidam magi ad eos propius accedentes in quantum poterant prohibere conabantur, ne de ore ipsorum diuinae laudis sonus inter gentiles audiretur populous. Quo conperto sanctus xl et iiii[208] psalmum decantare coepit. Mirumque in modum ita uox eius in aere eodem momento instar alicuius formidabilis tonitrui eleuata est, ut et rex et populus intolerabili essent pauore perterriti[209]
>
> This also shouldn't be left unsaid, as an instance of so great and incomparable elevation of his voice, which is said to have happened at one time next to the fort of King Brude. While that very saint with a few brothers at vespers was celebrating, according to the custom of the praises of God, outside the fort of the king, certain *magi* came near to them and endeavoured as much as they could[210] to prevent this, lest the sound of divine praise from their mouths be heard among the gentile peoples. Discovering this, the saint began to sing Psalm 44. And then in a marvellous manner, at the same moment his voice was thus raised in the air as if terrifying thunder, that both the king and the people were completely terrified with intolerable fear.

The story confirms again that the practitioners of magic in the *Vita Columbae* are acting impotently against Columba, and in this instance trying to actively interfere with his Christian activities in front of the non-Christian population. Interestingly, this story is also the only one in which the actions of the *magi* are not explicitly called out by Adomnán as being the work of demons. It is also unclear from the text whether these *magi* are acting supernaturally against the saint, or are acting through their natural abilities; these observations together might lead some to conclude that the story relates an incident in which a group of *magi* attempted to, in a mundane way and without using magical means, prevent the saint's Christian worship from influencing their people. However, as the text calls out that the *magi* attempted this '*in quantum poterant*' — in whatever way they were able — and the *magi* elsewhere in the *vita*, including

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[207] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 33 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 398-405).
[208] This psalm, 44 in the Vulgate, is Psalm 45 in most versions of the Bible today.
[209] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, I 37 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 288-9).
[210] Arguably, 'powers' rather than 'abilities'.

Broichan who himself resided at King Brude's court,[211] are shown to be able to call upon demons to affect sometimes significant power, so they would hardly be doing everything in their power without calling upon the power of devils to try and aid them.

The next story of Columba's confrontation with a *maleficus* takes place when the saint is staying with a wealthy man named Foirtgern when he is called upon to settle a dispute between two people who lived nearby. While there, Columba takes time to confront and Adomnán writes of the incident thus:

> Unusque ex eis qui maleficus erat a sancto iusus de boue masculo qui prope erat lac arte diabulica expressit. Quod sanctus non ut illa confirmaret malefica fieri iusit, quod absit[212], sed ut ea coram multitudine distrueret. Uir itaque beatus uas ut uidebatur tali plenum lacte sibi ocius dari poposcit, et hac cum sententia benedixit, dicens: 'Modo probabitur non esse hoc uerum quod putatur lac, sed daemonum fraude ad decipiendos homines decoloratus sanguis'. Et continuo lacteus ille color in naturam uersus est propriam, hoc est in sanguinem[213]
>
> One of them, who was a *maleficus*, by means of a diabolic art drew milk from a bull at the saint's command. The saint commanded this to be done not in order to confirm these *malefica* (God Forbid!), but rather in order to destroy[214] them in front of the crowd. And so the blessed man asked that the vat, which seemed to be full of milk, be given to him, and blessed it with this decree: 'Presently it will be revealed not to be the true blood which it was believed to be, but blood, decoloured by the trickery of demons to deceive people'. And at once that milky colour was changed into its proper nature, that is, into blood.

This chapter of the *vita* is a strong statement about the power (or indeed, lack thereof) of the practitioner being confronted by the saint. Not only did the man need to rely on the power of demons in order to carry out his deception of the people, but this power was insufficient to stand up to a blessing said by the saint, or enough to transform the blood of the bull into milk, only to change its colour to fool credulous onlookers. Flint also comments briefly on this passage, using it as an example of the way in which Christian authors in Britain sought to differentiate the miraculous acts of Christian saints from the magical actions of pagan practitioners.[215]

So far, the depictions of practitioners and the instances of magical confrontation between Columba and the *magi* would suggest that they are entirely impotent to affect the world around them in any real and direct way. However, this final story, which is first alluded to in the introduction to the first book of the *vita* as the saint seeking to confound the *magi* by overcoming their aggression in the form of

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[211] As Richard Sharpe mentions in the notes on his translation of this section, the reason that this story is being presented here instead of with the other stories about Columba's visit to the king and confrontation with Broichan and his *magi* is that the element of the saint's miraculously magnified voice fits thematically amongst the other things being discussed in this section of the *vita* (Adomnán and Sharpe, 299).

[212] This is a turn of phrase that could be translated literally translated as 'let it not be so', but more colloquially has a meaning similar to the phrase 'God forbid'.

[213] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 17 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 362-3).

[214] This is a literal translation, 'disprove' might be a more smooth translation to the modern eye, but I think that something would be lost in the way that Columba would be taking apart the trickery of the *maleficus* to reveal the truth by translating it that way.

[215] Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 326-7.

winds conjured to prevent Columba from being able to sail,[216] casts their powers in a somewhat different light, although the saint still overcomes them in the end. The tale is related thus:

> Post supra memorata peracta quadam die Broichanus ad sanctum proloquens uirum infit: 'Dicto mihi Columba, quo tempore proponis enauigare?' Sanctus 'Tertius' ait, 'die, deo uolente et uita comite, nauigationem proponimus incipere'. Broichanus econtra: 'Non poteris' ait, 'nam ego uentum tibi contrarium facere caliginemque umbrosam superinducere possum'. Sanctus: 'Omnipotentia dei' ait, 'omnium dominator, in cuius nominee nostri omnes motus ipso gubernante deriguntur'. Quid plura? Sanctus die eadem sicut corde proposuit ad lacum Nisae fluminis longum multa prosequente caterua uenit. Magi uero gaudere tum coepere, magnam uidentes superinductam caliginem et contrarium cum tempestate flatum. Nec mirum haec interdum arte daemonum posse fieri, deo permittente, ut etiam uenti et equora in asperius concitentur. Sic enim aliquando daemoniorum legions sancto Germano episcopo de sinu gallico causa humanae salutis ad Brittanniam nauiganti medio in equore occurrerant, et oponentes pericula procellas concitabant; caelum diemque tenebrarum caligine obducebant. Quae tamen omnia sancto orante Germano dicto citius sedata detersa cessarunt caligine. Noster itaque Columba uidens contra se elimenta concitari furentia Christum inuocat dominum; cimbulamque ascendens nautis esitantibus ipse constantior factus uelum contra uentum iubet subregi. Quo facto omni inspecante turba nauigium flatus contra aduersos mira uentum occurrit. Et post haut grande interuallum uenti contrarii ad iteneris ministeria cum omnium ammiratione reueruntur. Et sic per totam illam diem flabris lenibus secundis flantibus beati cimba uiri obatum prouecta ad portum pulsa est[217]
>
> After the events recounted above[218], on a certain day Broichan , speaking to the holy man, began to speak: 'Tell me Columba[219], when do you intend to sail out?' The saint said, 'In three days, God willing and life lasting, we intend to begin our voyage'. Broichan, on the contrary, said: 'You will not be able to, for I am able to create a wind against you and call forth shadowy darkness'. The saint said, 'the omnipotence of God dominates all things, and in his name all of our movements are directed under his guidance'. What more [is there to say]? As he intended, on that day the saint came to the long lake of the river Ness, followed by many crowds. The *magi* then began to truly rejoice, because they saw a great darkness summoned as well as a wind blowing against him. Be not surprised that at times these things are able to be done by demonic art, God permitting, that even winds and the sea can be roughly agitated. Thus legions of demons once attacked the holy bishop Germanus in the middle of the sea when he was sailing with the purpose of the salvation of humanity from the bay of Gaul to Britain and put perils against him and summoned storms, and covered the daytime sky in dark shadows. Yet in an instant at St Germanus's prayer, the darkness was cleared, the storms were calmed and they ceased. And so our Columba, seeing that the elements were roused to fury against him, called upon Christ the Lord; he entered the small boat, and although the sailors were hesitant, he was steadfast, and ordered the sail to be raised against the wind. When this was done, with the whole crowd looking on, the ship moved with extraordinary speed, sailing against the opposing wind. And after only a small interval, to everyone's astonishment, the opposing wind was turned around to aid the voyage. And so throughout that day driven by favorably blowing gentle breezes, the blessed man's boat was carried to the desired harbor.

In this story, the *magus* Broichan is credited with being able to use demonic powers to great effect. Broichan was able to change the weather sufficiently that it would have stopped the ship from sailing without Columba's intervention and even summon a terrible darkness in the daytime, clearly feats of respectable magical might. However, this chapter, unlike the other ones examined above, is following a

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[216] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, I 1 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 194-7).
[217] Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae*, II 34 (Anderson & Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 404-7).
[218] This ttory is situated in the *vita* directly after the previous altercation which Columba had with Broichan, which was discussed above.
[219] Richard Sharpe notes that while Columba is referred to as *santus Columba* or *vir beauts*, etc. by Adomnán throughout, that in this one instance when the *magus* Broichan is addressing the saint, he leaves off any sort of honorific that has been afforded him elsewhere in the text (see Adomnán, ed. Sharpe, 335); this is likely meant to be an insulting form of address for the saint.

topos from another source, specifically a story from Constantius's Life of St Germanus of Auxerre. Adomnán even directly names this in the section. This story would have been included not just as the finale of the confrontation between Columba and Broichan at King Brude's court, but also to show that the saint had the power to confront demonic threats of the same magnitude as those related in the life of Germanus, which were also taken and repeated in the accounts of St Patrick.

Through our examination of magic as Adomnán presents it in his *Vita Sancti Columbae*, several things are evident. Adomnán has a clear and consistent representation of magic and its practitioners that comes through his writings, with only two exceptions. He universally presents *magi* as being cruel, malicious, and actively hostile to St Columba and his intentions; whether deceiving people into believing that they have the power to get milk from a bull or mocking the family of a boy who is sick and on the brink of death, the *magi* and *malefici* are acting in despicable ways. Additionally, in all but one instance, magic and the supernatural events surrounding magical practitioners are explicitly called out as being carried out by demons or otherwise demonic in nature. Furthermore, the only occurrence of a *magus* directly using magic against the saint that is powerful and terrifying is *topos* pulled from another hagiographic source, and even in this instance where the powers of the *magus* Broichan are not directly impotent in the effects he is trying to produce, they are nevertheless impotent in doing more than momentarily delaying the saint in his travels while providing a stage upon which he can prove himself against them in the eyes of the people. Adomnan's ability to reliably show that *magi* are powerless before God even while including a borrowed story of a practitioner with mightier powers further solidifies the ability of hagiographers to look beyond their allusions to form and transmit their own theologies and ideas.

Anonymous and Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*:

It has traditionally been observed that the earliest Northumbrian hagiographies are more sober in tone and less fantastical in nature than many of their Irish counterparts. And indeed, Bede is held up as a paragon of this supposed virtue, made out to be a fount of rationality in what is often depicted as an otherwise irrational world.[220] Judging solely by the way that the texts talk about miracles in their introductions, this may seem to be true. The works of hagiography that follow in this chapter contain noticeably less magic as well as generally fewer (and less spectacular) miracles than the Irish hagiographies that preceded them, and the three lives of St Cuthbert, two by the Venerable Bede himself and the other

[220] There are many problems with this idea, and most are rooted in racialist and anti-Catholic rhetoric and do not bear close inspection.

by an anonymous monk at Lindisfarne, are certainly not an exception to this. The author of the anonymous life shows distaste in the presence of too many miracles in stories about the saints,[221] and their *vita* contains no mention of magical events. Bede's prose life, in contrast, contains more miraculous happenings than appear in the anonymous life by a significant amount (although his telling of Cuthbert's life is also twice as long as the anonymous one) and also contains a single reference to magic, which will be discussed below.

Of the authors of these lives there is a great disparity in what is known. Of the author of the anonymous life, we know very little, not even (somewhat unsurprisingly) their name. It has been intuited that the author was a member of the community at Lindisfarne not only because Bede makes reference to a work that is almost certainly the anonymous life and states that it was authored there, but also because throughout the *vita* the ecclesiastical centre at Lindisfarne and its bishop are called 'ours' by the author. Whether it had a single author or was a collection of stories made communally by the members of that centre is also unknown. Although the first person singular is used throughout the text, this can no more be presented as solid evidence of a single author than can the use of the third person in *De Bello Gallico* or the Journals of Captain John Smith mean that those weren't written by Julius Caesar and John Smith respectively. The sources which were used in the composition of the anonymous *vita* were the records and oral histories of the saint from around Lindisfarne. We can ascertain from evidence within the text that it was written sometime between 699-705.[222] Conversely, Bede's prose life was written by Bede, about whom much is known. Bede came up in Northumbria, being born in 673. He went to the monastery at Jarrow where he was educated sometime shortly after its founding in 681. This was a period of much turmoil in Northumbria, both in secular and in ecclesiastical politics.[223] Bede's main source in the composition of his *vita* would seem to have been the anonymous life, and his writing both adds literary depth to many of the events described in the earlier anonymous life as well as adding other stories to Cuthbert's legend. This is not, however Bede's first work centring in St Cuthbert, as he had previously composed a life of the saint in verse.

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[221] Statements to this effect are made to this in the preface to Book I, where the author says explicitly that too many miracles might create distaste in the reader, and this sentiment is repeated in Chapter VII, where the author justifies leaving several miracles out (although the author slyly uses this as an opportunity to mention several of the miracles that he won't be writing about); finally in the first chapter of Book III the author writes that those whose faith is not strong might disbelieve many of the miracles performed by the saint.

[222] Bertram Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press , 1940), 11-13

[223] Ibid, 5-10.

The sole depiction of magic in Bede's life comes in chapter nine. In the section, Bede is describing the spiritual ministrations that St Cuthbert gave to the community over which he was serving as a prior. Bede writes:

> non solum ipsi monasterio regularis uitae monita, simul et exemplum praeferebat, sed et uulgus circumpositum longe lateque a uita stultae consuetudinis ad coelestium gaudiorum convertere curabat amorem. nam et multi fidem quam habebant, iniquis profanabant operibus, et aliqui etiam tempore mortalitatis neglecto fidei quo imbuti erant sacrimento, ad erratica idolatriae medicamina concurrebant quasi missam a Deo conditore plagam per incantationes uel alligaturas[224], uel alia quaelibet demonicae artis archana cohibere ualerent. ad utrorumque ergo corrigendum errorem crebro ipse de monasterio egressus aliquotiens equo sedens, sed sepius pedes incedens, circumpositas uenibat ad uillas, et uiam ueritatis praedicabat errantibus[225]
>
> [Cuthbert] not only gave advice about, and simultaneously an example of, a life of the [monastic] rule to the monastery itself, but he also cared about converting the common people of the surrounding areas far and wide away from a life of stupid customs to the love of heavenly delights. For many of them held that faith, which they desecrated with hostile works, and also some of them, during that time of death, neglected the sacrament of the faith that they'd been initiated in, and flocked to the erratic medicine of idolatry as if they could curb a plague sent by God the creator through incantations or bindings or whatever other secret of the demonic art. Therefore, he frequently went out from the monastery, sometimes sitting on a horse but more often walking along on [his] feet, to correct each error, and came to the surrounding villages and preached the life of truth to the erring.

Although this passage is shorter than some that have been examined in this chapter, it is still full of information for us. It is first of all interesting that Bede fails to mention in this passage the people who were performing these incantations, making these bindings, and practicing these demonic arts. About the reason for this silence, we can only speculate. What we don't have to speculate, however, is that Bede thought that these practices were contemptible, he speaks of the people who are seeking to benefit from them as stupid and erring and describes the art used to create them as coming from demons. His depiction of magic couldn't be more clear. However, it's also interesting to note that this condemnation does not apply wholly to those people who are seeking to use the methods to avoid the plague. These common people are not evil or vile; if anything it would seem from the text that they are being fooled by the practitioners of magic who would offer them these ways to avoid harm. They were not condemned to immediate death and beyond hope of redemption, but rather were lost and needed to be shepherded back to the correct path by their wise and noble Christian leaders, such as Saint Cuthbert. Bede, perhaps because he in his time coexisted with many other people who held heterodox beliefs and should have been considered as misguided brothers in Christ (such as those following the Easter dating method and tonsure of the Irish churches) wrote with the pastoral role of the church in mind. These were not, after all, non-Christians who were fighting against the will of God, but people who Bede paternalistically considered

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[224] Bede also mentions similar types of magic in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* iv 28. It is likely that Bede is describing practices that he was aware of among the people of Northumbria and condemning in both of these passages as being un-Christian. There are other records of such things among canon law and the penitentials which are discussed in greater depth in another chapter.

[225] Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* XI (Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, 184-187).

not to know better, to be unable to help themselves from making mistakes in troubled times and to need to be led constantly back to what he considered the true word of God. Rampton considers this passage to be an example of 'clerics' front-line in the battle over the proper approach to healing', [226]and frames it as part of a continuous struggle between ecclesiasts and demonic medicines.[227] Meanwhile, Flint engages with this and other examples of condemnation of specific medicinal practices as being a struggle for the church's authority in matters of healing against entrenched pagan practices,[228] although there is no direct indication in the text that this specifically is being perpetrated by non-Christians. Both Rampton and Flint are correct in interpreting this, whether non-Christian or heterodox, as a contest establishing the authority of the church over other potential sources of help to which the Christian flock may turn and by which, in the eyes of Bede, they might be led astray.

Anonymous *Liber beatae Gregorii papae*:

The earliest life of Gregory the Great was penned by an anonymous member of the religious centre at Whitby, of whom all that we know is what can be garnered from the text of this work. First, the author is from the *gens Anglorum*, and further is Northumbrian, and finally, they must be from Whitby.[229] The account of Gregory was written between the years 704 and 714, which can be determined also thanks to the evidence present in the text. While the text itself is nominally focused upon Pope Gregory the Great — the early pope who took special interest in the people of Britain and was the impetus behind the missionary activity which converted to Christianity, by way of a mission to Kent, the peoples who had conquered much of Britain[230] — its author has spent a great deal of ink on King Edwin, whose deeds are recorded and whose bones were eventually laid to rest at an altar dedicated to the veneration of Gregory at a church in Whitby.[231] This is perhaps in part due to the author's paucity of sources on

[226] Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons*, 242.
[227] Ibid, 240-6.
[228] Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 310-1.
[229] Regarding his origin in the *gens Anglorum*, in one section of the work, the author refers to the idea the Gregory would be the one to bring 'us, that is the tribe of the Angles' — in Latin, '*nos ille, id est gentem Anglorum*' — before God on judgement day (see Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 6 [Bertram Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 82-3]). His status as a Northumbrian is shown in several chapters in the work: in Chapter 12 '*gente nostra, que dicitur Humbrenesium*', 'our people, who are called the Humbrians' (Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 12 [Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 94-5]); in Chapter 16 the Northumbrian King Edwin is '*regis nostri christianissimi*' or 'our most Christian king' (Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 16 [Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 98-9]); etc. (see Colgrave, *Life of Gregory the Great*, 46-7 for a more complete list). With regard to his membership in the community at Whitby, the monastery there is referred to as '*coenobium nostrum*' (Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 19 [Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 102-5]).
[230] It is worth noting that the king of Kent, although not himself Christian, was married to a Christian wife who had in her retinue a Christian bishop (Ibid, 3), so Gregory's mission to Kent was not entering a kingdom that was ignorant of and hostile to their faith, but rather one with open ties that was in some senses already primed to be converted.
[231] Ibid, 46.

Gregory, a lack which they write about in several sections of their account.[232] As with the rest of the sources in this chapter, the anonymous author who wrote this hagiography had access to both oral and written sources, about none of which they are specific. In terms of written sources, the author seems to have had access to some written accounts of his subjects, as well as a deep familiarity with scripture both in the Vulgate and in the Old Latin, and knowledge of Jerome, Augustine, the *Liber pontificalis*, and of course to the writings of Gregory himself.[233] The *Liber beati Gregorii papae* comes down to us in only a single MS, St Gall monastery's Codex 567, which was produced on the continent, and most likely in the early ninth century.[234]

In relation to supernatural happenings, the author of the text makes the same boilerplate apology for their inclusion as the other Northumbrian lives do, but in the same sections they also lament the fact that they have access to so few miracle stories to share.[235] There is in the text only a single example of *magi* and magical practice, and this story is framed around a certain rich man whom Gregory excommunicated after they quarreled about the man's divorce from his wife. The story continues thus:

> Quam excommunicationis sententiam non facile ferens, sua adhuc augendo scelera, magorum quesiuit adiumenta duorum, quibus pecuniam promittendo placabilem, illi fecit eos insidiasse. Tum eum nescientes quodam eminenti loco quadam die stare coeperunt. Cum idem uir Dei ad quondam missarum profectus est sollemnitatem, tunc illum sciscitantes quis esset, a quodam didicerunt solum equitem post cuneum et clerum precedentem uel subsequentem. Quem cum uiderunt arte sua demonia excitantes, miserunt ut ei mali aliquid fecissent. Statimque hostes magni equum eius intrantes quem sedebat, cito insanire fecerunt. Quod uir sanctus uidens consueta contra eos, iuxta apostolum, adsumendo armaturam Dei,[236] primum crucis Christi signaculum hostilem ocius effugauit insaniam. Statim quoque circa se quid esset diligentius intuendo, uidit ipsos magos ime mentis eminus stantes altius a ceteris. Quos incircumscriptus Spiritus sanctus perpetua cito sic cecitate percussit, ut cadentes deorsum conlapsi sunt crudeliter, qui se inmundo replentes spiritu ab eo prius reciderunt; cuius confestim dono sanctus uir Gregorius inluminatus agnouit eos uidendo conruentes sibi fuisse adducendos. Quos coram se cum essent, inquisiuit de causa; qui ei dixerunt uirum illum prefatum ab eis per pecuniam inpetrasse ut ei in ultionem sui facerent malum quodcumque potuissent. Quibus ipse ait, 'Ceci esse debetis in perpetuum, qui si lumenoculuorum uestorum habebitis, iterum reuerti uolueritis ad Artem uestram pessimam eamque per demones ut prius excolere'. Hac igitur ex causa postremo dicuntur ad Deum conuersi, Christi baptismate consepulti.[237] Eosque tales uir Domini sanctus Gregorius ecclesiastica stipe quamdiu uiuerent, mandauit, alendos pauperes, perfectos pro Domino medicos animarum[238]
>
> That man not bearing the judgement of excommunication easily, still increased his own sins by seeking the help of two *magi*, whom, by promising them enough money to satisfy them, he caused to lie in wait [for

[232] Ibid, 50.
[233] Ibid, 50-4.
[234] Ibid, 63-9.
[235] Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 3; 4 (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 76-81).
[236] This is a direct quotation of, and reference to, Eph 6:13.
[237] Another biblical quotation and reference, this time Col 2:12.
[238] Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 22 (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 110-5). The end of this passage perhaps references one of Aldhelm's letters, which also speaks of *meicus animarum* (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 154), and this work would have been being composed around the time of Aldhelm's death by someone who very probably would have known of Aldhelm, even if not knowing him personally.

> Gregory]. Not knowing him at that time, on a certain day they began to stand in a high place.[239] Then, when that man of God had set out to a certain solemn observance of mass, they then asking who was [Gregory], they learned from a certain person that he rode alone on a horse after the crowd and either behind or before the clergy. When they saw him, summoning their demons with their art, they released them in order to do some evil to him. And immediately the great enemies, entering the horse on which he was sitting, they quickly made it insane. Seeing this the holy man, according to his custom, like the Apostle, took the whole armour of God against them; at the first sign of the cross of Christ he rapidly drove away the insanity of the enemy. Immediately he also looked around diligently to see what was happening; he saw those lowest-minded *magi* standing in a higher place a way from the rest. The boundless Holy Spirit rapidly smote them with eternal blindness, so that, falling down ,they cruelly collapsed; they, being filled with profane spirit, had earlier cut themselves off from it [the Holy Spirit]. The holy man Gregory, who was illuminated by the gift of that [Holy Spirit], having seen them fallen to the ground, immediately recognised that they had been induced [to take action][240]. So, when they were before him, he asked about the reason. They told him that the aforementioned man had procured them through money, so that they, in revenge [for the excommunication], might do whatever evil they were able. To which he said, 'You are destined to be blind forever because, if you had your sight, you would desire to return to your lowest arts and practice them through demons as before'. For this reason, it is said that they were finally converted to God and buried with Christ in baptism. St Gregory, the man of God, for as long as they lived entrusted them with the church funds for caring for the poor, so that they became healers of souls for the Lord.

This story has a strong and clear message concerning magical arts and those, such as the two *magi* in the story, who practice them. The magicians themselves are mercenary, agreeing to attack an unknown man in return for pay from a rich Roman seeking revenge; beyond their mercenary attitude, the *magi* are '*ime mentis*' and although they repent and convert and end up doing good with the remainder of their lives by managing the church's alms, it is clear that if they had access to their sight that they might be tempted to return to their old ways. In regard to the practice of magic, the two *magi* employ demons in the practice of their arts — described using the word '*pessima*' by Gregory in the story — and their craft is used exclusively for ill in the example. Moreover, their arts are not impotent, but able to cause real harm, albeit harm that is immediately and easily rectified by the actions of Gregory. The conversion of the *magi* is also worth consideration as, despite the fact that they are converted under duress and with the implication that their art may tempt them to revert if they were able, they are nevertheless brought into the Christian fold and given an important appointment in which they are given opportunity to oversee the use of money — the very thing which had initially caused them to practice their arts against the saint — in order to do good for the impoverished people of Rome.[241] To the anonymous author of this account of

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[239] Colgrave in his notes states that this cannot be because they need a vantage point from which to see Gregory but is because being in a high place empowers the spell, but this seems to me a stretch past the simplest explanation of their positioning (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 154).

[240] As in, had been hired by another to do this to him.

[241] The author of this text does not reserve this redemption for the *magi* in the text. Indeed, the solidly non-Christian emperor Trajan is given a positive episode in the tale and even receives posthumous redemption through Gregory's prayer (Anonymous, *Liber Beati Gregorii Papae*, 29 (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 126-9)), showing a belief that, however unusual and unexpected it may be, even a staunch pagan could do good deeds and attain redemption. That said, this story was not presented unapologetically nor was it received without criticism. Johannes Hymonides, writing an account of Gregory's life in the latter half of the 9th century, did include the story in his work, but also notes that it is of British origin rather than Roman (as our anonymous author claims), and changes the story such that it is Gregory's tears alone rather than a prayer that effects an alleviation in the suffering of Trajan, as Gregory himself was clear that one oughtn't to pray for the condemned souls of pagans. For more on this, see Colgrave's lengthy note (Colgrave, *Life of Gregory*, 161-2).

St Gregory, magic is an evil thing that ought not to be practiced, but those who turn aside from the practice of the craft might still be able to be saved and serve a greater Christian purpose with their lives. This life is the first we've seen from Northumbria which frames *magi* and other practitioners as being not primarily a threat to the sociopolitical position of the church; rather that it is their evil magical practices themselves that are at the heart of the problem. In this regard, it has more in common in its depiction of magic with several of the Irish hagiographies than with the accounts of St Cuthbert. However, as we will see below, it is not alone in its depiction of direct confrontation between pagan practitioners and a Christian saint.

Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*:

The last source to be examined in this chapter is the *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* which has been attributed to a churchman by the name of Stephen of Ripon. While there are no other known contenders for the authorship of this text, the evidence of it being written by a certain priest named Stephanus comes from one of the MSs in which the text it is preserved.[242] Based on a section from Bede coupled with a story in the Life of Wilfrid, the text was for many years attributed to a man named Eddius Stephanus, whom Wilfred brought to Northumbria from Kent in or around the year 699,[243] but the scant evidence for this attribution has caused it to fall out of favour among historians, who are more content to attribute the text based on the evidence directly related to the text rather than on conjecture concerning a person mentioned by Bede who has the cognomen Stephanus. Concerning the date of composition of the text, it was almost certainly produced shortly after the death of its subject, almost certainly before 750 and likely around the year 720. The text was almost certainly produced by a member of the centre in Ripon — a centre which had been founded by Wilfred — based on various pieces of evidence from within the text itself. The text was possibly written in order to magnify the cult of St Wilfrid after the creation of an account of the life of St Cuthbert by the anonymous monk of Lindisfarne.[244] The text of the life of Wilfrid survives in two MSS, one at the British Museum and the other at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.[245]

But what does the text contain regarding magic? There is one incident in the text that is explicitly magical, concerning a confrontation between a pagan practitioner and St Wilfrid, and another which could potentially be interpreted as magical due to ambiguity in the words used in the text. I will begin by examining the latter. This story describes how Queen Iurminburg, who would later repent her sins and

[242] Bertram Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, ix.
[243] Ibid, ix-x.
[244] Ibid, x.
[245] Ibid, xiii-xv.

become an abbess, turned her husband King Ecgfrith against St Wilfrid, causing his exile.[246] The reason that a part of this story is arguably magical is because there is an extended metaphor employed in it of the queen poisoning her husband with her words, and the Latin word for a woman who makes and uses poisons is *venefica*, which is often translated as 'sorceress' due to the perceived overlap between magic and the making of poisons. While the term is ambiguous with regard to whether or not it is magical, in the context of the story of Iurminburg and its metaphor of her 'shooting poisoned arrows of speech into the heart of the king' it is fairly safe to say that in this case the term is not being used to describe her as an actual practitioner of magic. The other story is much clearer in the magical nature of its events. This story is set during a voyage as St Wilfrid is returning to his see from Gaul. During this voyage, a storm blows the saint off course and into the lands of the South Saxons,[247] with which the saint and his company were not familiar. Once they had been foundered upon the shore, the tale is presented thus:

> Gentiles autem cum ingenti exercitu uenientes, nauem arripere, praedam sibi pecuniae diuidere, captious subiugatos deducere resistentesque gladio occidere incunctantur proposuerunt. Quibus sanctus pontifex noster copiosam pecuniam promittens, animas redimere cupiens leniter pacificeque loquebatur. Illi uero feroces et indurato corde cum Pharaone[248] populum Dei dimittere nolentes et dicentes superbe, sua esse omnia quasi propria, quae mare ad terras proieccit. Stans quoque princeps sacerdotum idolatriae coram paganis in tumulo excelso, sicut Balaam[249], maledicere populum Dei et suis magicis artibus manus eorum alligare nitebatur. Tunc uero unus ex sodalibus pontifices nostri lapidem ab omni populo Dei benedictum more Dauidico[250] de funda emitten, fronte perforata usque ad cerebrum magi exprobrantis illisit; quem, retrorsum exanimato cadauere cadente, sicut Goliad in harenosis locis mors incerta praeuenit[251]

> The pagans then arrived with a vast army proposing to seize the ship, to divide the money into plunder for themselves, to carry off the subjugated captives and to kill without delay those resisting them. Our holy bishop spoke to them soothingly and peacefully and, by promising to give money, desired to buy the souls [of his companions]. They were very fierce and, hardening their hearts like the Pharaoh, did not wish for the people of God to depart, saying proudly that they took everything which the sea threw out onto the ground as if it was their own. Also, the chief priest of idolatry, standing on a lofty hill before the pagans like Balaam, sought to curse the people of God and to bind their hands with his magical arts. Then truly one of our bishop's companions, in the same fashion as David, shot a stone which had been blessed by all the people of God from a sling. It struck the cursing *magus*'s brow and penetrated into his brain; death arrived for him unawares in the sandy place just as for Goliath, and his dead body fell backwards.

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[246] Stephan of Ripon, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, Chapter XXIV (Colgrave, *Life of Wilfrid*, 48-9).

[247] Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* describes the Kingdom of the South Saxons as stretching from Kent south and west to the Kingdom of the West Saxons and covering an area of 7000 hides, and thus it is almost certain that Stephen is referring here to the Kingdom of Sussex (see Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins [Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994], 192).

[248] This is a reference to the book of Exodus 9:12.

[249] Balaam appears in several places in the Bible, his story is mainly in the book of Numbers, where he was bribed by an enemy of the Israelites to put a curse on them, but following God's instructions, instead blessed them multiple times while standing on various hilltops. Later in the book he is blamed for leading the Israelites into the Peor incident, for which God punished them with death. Balaam is also mentioned in several places in the New Testament, in 2 Peter and Jude where it is said that his avarice led to wrongdoing, and in Revelation where he is again blamed for the temptation of the Israelites with idolatry and promiscuousness.

[250] A reference to the story of Goliath as it appears in 1 Samuel, in which David kills Goliath with a single sling stone.

[251] Stephan of Ripon, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, Chapter XIII (Colgrave, *Life of Wilfrid*, 26-9).

This story, replete with biblical allusions, is a very clear in its depiction of the *magus* and his magical arts. The *magus* himself is leading a horde of violent and avaricious pagans. Over the course of the story he is compared to three separate biblical villains: the Pharaoh against whom Moses brought the plagues, the prophet Balaam who is blamed for the idolatry and promiscuity of the Israelites, and finally Goliath who himself stood at the front of an army challenging the faithful before being felled by a slung stone. His magic is also sinister, he stands atop a hill overlooking the beleaguered and threatened castaways and curses them, trying to bind them so that his army can pillage their belongings, capture slaves, and kill the rest. In the end the *magus* dies before he can complete his goals, so it is uncertain how powerful his magic may have been had it been successfully completed. This passage is referenced in Flint's work, and she declares that 'This was an excellent and well-attested way in which to deal with magi. They were to be humiliated, terrified, robbed of their following, and, if necessary killed'.[252] She then goes on to claim that such confrontations served to highlight the serious and deadly nature of the pagan magic against which the saints battled.[253] However, this particular instance does not seem to represent that argument particularly well, and Flint herself seems to recognize this a few pages later, where she writes 'Wilfrid's followers could kill a magus with impunity'.[254]

Conclusion:

Over the course of this chapter, we have examined the depictions of magic in the Latin-language hagiographical sources of the pre-800 insular world. Most of these texts give very clear depictions of the *magi* and other practitioners of magical arts, as well as the magical crafts themselves. These views are influenced by a number of factors. The first of these is the distance between the subject of a work and its authorship. The texts in which there is a great distance between the floruit of the saint and the production of their *vita* allow for a greater degree of mythologisation and invention in the text, which can lead to more powerful displays of magic and miracle in the text with no living witnesses to gainsay these stories. Conversely, those texts, such as most of the Northumbrian hagiographies, that were produced both relatively shortly following the death of their subjects and in the region in which their subjects were very active and had connections with many people and communities that knew about them, have less latitude for mythologies or invention as there are a plethora of living witnesses to the activities of the saint that would be able to correct overly fantastic narratives. Nevertheless, even in the latter case, authors were able to include more spectacular stories by including them when the saint was traveling and distant from

[252] Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 73.
[253] Ibid, 73-4.
[254] Ibid, 80-1.

their home region, as can be seen in the Life of Wilfred. Another key factor in determining the character of these texts are the authors' sources themselves, both in their of being able to take stories from biblical or hagiographical texts as well as in their access to the written and oral sources of their subjects' lives. The former tend to be greatly influential on the character of the hagiographies being produced by providing an ample supply of events and characters which can be used either as the basis of a story or as a well of commonly known and understood stories that allow for the characterisation of a saint or the people that they interact with through *topos* and symbolic shorthand, such as Patrick being likened to Moses or King Loíguire and his court being equated to the court of Babylon. However, as we have also seen in this chapter, the authors of these hagiographies are clearly not slavishly devoted to the literary sources from which they draw; rather, they are capable of choosing which stories to include and how to interpret those stories such that they can present their own stories, supporting their political, social, and theological goals in writing.

While these influencing factors all play roles in the way in which these hagiographies depict their saints, there is still plentiful room for unique presentations and theological framing of magic within the texts. Each text has nuances which contribute to the individual conception of magic which it presents, and several of the texts even offer different depictions of magic internally. The ways that these texts discuss *magi* and their works, however, can still be sorted into three broad categories which give us a better look into the thought-world of their Christian elite authors. The first of these is the idea that *magi* and their craft are not necessarily evil, but that now that the saints whose lives are being recorded have come to the region and brought Christian religious beliefs and practices with them that there's no longer a place for them. This idea can perhaps best be seen in the anonymous *Vita I* of St Brigit, where the *magi* are nowhere in the life directly related to anything which the text deems as evil, and in fact work to prepare the way for St Brigit before being converted by her. This idea can sometimes be related to the idea of the 'naturally good pagan', as well as other theological ideas about the fact that pagan religions and customs were part of God's plans for the people of the world, and that the fulfilment of those plans came with the Christianisation, after which those who kept those beliefs and customs were then acting in a way contrary to the will of God and needed to be converted or be left behind.

The second, and by far the most common, of these broad categories of views on magic is that magic is inherently evil, that *magi* and their ilk are doing evil, and that there has and will never be any good from their arts. This view is present in stories from many of the *vitae* which we've examined, but is certainly embodied the most strongly in Muirchú's account of St Patrick. There, not only are all of the *magi* in the text dead — usually at Patrick's hand — by the time the story is through with them, but also there are examples of other, truly contemptible, cruel, and murderous people who repent, are converted

and become members of the clergy, suggesting that the *magi*'s offense is worse than theirs. However, the presence of this idea in the *Vita Patricii* doesn't by any means preclude other authors from presenting the idea that *magi* are not beyond redemption, and in fact several of the stories examined in the chapter above show this to be the case by having practitioners of magic — who have been shown the error of their ways by the saint — repent, convert, and sometimes even take up important positions within the church.

The final of these broad categories of depictions of magic is less concerned with the physical danger or theological evil of the magic itself, but is more concerned with the way that *magi* and their works can lead the faithful astray into heretical or un-Christian ideas or practices and thus contest the power and authority of the church and its position as the primary (perhaps even sole) source of aid to which Christians ought to be able to turn. This view is most apparent in Bede's life of St Cuthbert, where the only discussion of magic is the way that it turns people away from the proper teachings of the church and the duty of the clergy in protecting their flocks from these beliefs and leading them back to the orthodox practices when they have been led astray. This idea, however can also be found in the discussion of amulets in the *Vita I* of St Brigit, as well as potentially in the comparison of the *magus* with Balaam in the Life of Wilfrid.

These have been the conclusions reached in this chapter on the hagiographical texts and their depictions of magic and its practitioners. The next chapter will discuss magic as it appears in the *Synodi*, *Penitentiales*, and other canon law of the church, the ways in which it is categorised, the specific magical practices that are discussed within them, and the punishments prescribed for those practices.

Chapter 2:

Magic in Synod Canons and Penitential Literature

Introduction:

The number of penitential handbooks, synod canons, and other works of ecclesiastical law produced in Ireland and Britain (or compiled from texts of insular origin) in the period of my study, and their focus on regulating and controlling the activity of various groups of Christian (and also, perhaps, more questionably Christian) people under their auspices, these sources, come together to present a rich corpus in which to look for the ways in which ecclesiastical authorities categorised magical offenses as well as their believed severity relative to other sorts of sins dealt with in these documents. These document have been examined by various scholars, though mostly with an eye to their importance and impact upon the Christian communities of continental Europe.

Working at the turn of the 20th century, Paul Fournier was the first to prove that the continental handbooks of penance that he was studying were not of Roman origin (as had been previously believed) but were in fact penned in Francia and further were based upon earlier texts from the insular world.[255] Since then, it has been assumed that the practices of so-called private penance found therein also originated on these islands. This narrative has, however, come under scrutiny by scholars recently, most notably by Rob Meens, whose recent monograph on penance argues persuasively that there is no reason to suspect that these forms of penance were unknown to the continent, and that furthermore there is strong evidence to suggest that not only were early influential church figures of the insular world familiar with rituals of penance from the continent, but also that later ecclesiasts moving from the continent to the insular world — despite noting some differences in the practices of penance between the two places — found no differences significant enough to condemn the practices they found there.[256] Regardless, the influence of insular handbooks of penance on those produced later on the continent is beyond any doubt. Perhaps most influential among them were the penitential handbooks compiled from the documents that Saint Columbanus brought to the continent and those produced by the students of Theodore of Tarsus based on his teachings as the Archbishop of Canterbury, both of which were widely referenced by later manuals on penance. This chapter will cover the ways in which magic is handled by the ecclesiastical law, in the form of the canons and rulings of the synods, as well as penitential literature from the insular world. The normative nature of these texts and the prescriptive way in which they treat the remedies for the various

[255] Paul Fournier, *Études sur ses pénitentiels* (Macon: Protat Frères, 1901), 289-317.
[256] Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe: 600-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially 93-4.

sins with which they are concerned[257] — while certainly presenting problems for their use in trying to establish the activities of the historical peoples to whom they pertain — present rare and valuable insight into the thought-world of the powerful and learned Christian elite who created and disseminated them. Despite this, there is one aspect of ecclesiastical law and penitential literature that does present a problem to be considered, namely the fundamentally derivative nature of many of these texts. Seeking to have a strong basis in correct religious teaching and practice, many of these sources look to earlier instances of church law and often mirror the decisions and punishments that are set forth in earlier documents. While this can present something of a problem when trying to ascertain potential authorship and origins of any specific idea in these texts, it does allow for deeper analysis when considering the differences between them.

The exact place and use of these handbooks by ecclesiasts in the early Middle Ages remains a matter of debate among scholars, as there is often little evidence for their use beyond the existence of the texts themselves, the type of manuscripts in which they are found, and the other texts also contained in those manuscripts. However, there are a number of other sources which do describe penitential behaviour, the importance of penance, and occasionally hint at the ways in which the penances prescribed in these sources were carried out. There are sections of several hagiographies which deal with the interactions between saints and penitents, with saints underlining the importance of penance to their flock, or with other references to penance in practice. Most notably in regard to the sources of interest to this study, the *Vita Sancti Columbae*[258] and the *Vita Columbani*[259] have sections from which their respective saints' focus on and ideas about penance can be extrapolated. Additionally, the Life of Brigit contains a chapter which covers her confrontation with a woman who claims that a member of Saint Patrick's party is the father of her child, who is first exposed as a liar by the saint and then saved from the angry crowd by her and brought to do penance under her supervision.[260] This may suggest that women performing penance may have been supervised by women in the church rather than by men, which would begin to explain the general (but by no means complete) absence of women from these texts except as the victims

[257] Although the way that these rulings are presented in penitential literature tends to be very formulaic and prescriptive, there seems to have been considerably more leeway in the application of the texts in penitential practice than the texts themselves would often suggest. As with many of the other topics covered in these sources, it is important to maintain distinction between the limited window into the thought-world of the authors of these sources which their ideas give and the complex reality of the world in which they lived.

[258] In part this is in reference to the authority of the bishop and the relation of that office to specific segments of society (for more on this see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 248). Moreover, there are several passages in the *vita* that deal with penance specifically and the saint's interactions with penitents (*Vita Sancti Columbae* I, 17; I, 40; and III, 21).

[259] *Vita Columbani*: c. 5 and 10.

[260] *Vita Sanctae Brigitae*, c. 40.

of the sins of men.[261] The primary exception to this general tendency consists of references to abortion, a sin which seems to be primarily categorised as a sexual sin, but which is also often explicitly gendered as to make women be the sole parties responsible for the sins associated with abortion.[262] Relating to gender, sin, and magic, especially in legal sources, Martha Rampton has argued persuasively for an ongoing marginalization of women from sacred and ritual life over the course of the first millennium of Christianity, beginning with their removal from the public sphere and confinement to the domestic and ending with a general disbelief in the efficacy of women practitioners generally.[263]

Relating to the use of penitential texts is their intended audience and the ways in which the texts themselves indicate that they should be applied. The earliest canons and other penitential documents from the early medieval insular world deal first and foremost with the proper conduct of members of ecclesiastical communities; some focus on monastic life and others on episcopal.[264] However, many of the texts do make mention of the application of at least certain rules to people outside those religious institutions which are the main focus of the text, especially as we move from the very earliest documents to the later handbooks. Many of the earliest of these texts prescribing penance to members of the laity are Irish and are most likely only referring to tenants residing on monastic lands in Ireland,[265] and these rules and penances only gradually became more and more applied to layfolk. Nevertheless, even those which only mention their application to members of monastic communities or the clergy eventually had impact on the penitential practices of the laity when the rules filtered from these sources into more general handbooks on penance in the insular world and then on the continent. Another question as to the application of these texts is the way in which people were to become penitents. For many of these texts,

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[261] Means, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 67-8. There are, however, several exceptions to this general statement beyond those discussed below.

[262] The relation between abortion and magic brings us back to the connection between religion, medicine, and magic and where the lines between them are to be drawn. As is the case in the rest of this thesis, unless a source makes some reference to magic or its practitioners in relation to abortion, it is not treated as being magical. For a comprehensive overview of the topic of abortion in the period, including discussion of its relation to magic see Zubin Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages: C. 500-900* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2015), especially 138-9 for magic in relation to these texts.

[263] See Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons*.

[264] For the Irish documents specifically, these texts can shed some light onto mysteries surrounding the structure of early medieval churches there. While some stalwarts defend the idea that early medieval Ireland was a place whose churches were overwhelmingly dominated by monastic institutions and authorities which only gradually allowed episcopal authorities to eke out what authority they could (a stance defended most notably by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Thomas M. Charles-Edwards), others have been pointing out that many sources, including these penitential documents, point to a church structure in which there are two concurrent points of authority, those of the Abbot and the Bishop, and that while there are still many questions and uncertainties about how power was divided between these points and to what extent they worked in concert or opposition with one another, any description of society in which one of these authorities exists largely absent the other is at odds with what the historical sources tell us about the situation (as championed by Sharpe and later argued by Etchingham). See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland: 400-1200* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 166-83; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 241-64; Richard Sharpe, 'Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 3 (1984): 230–70; Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland: A.D. 650-1000* (Maynooth: Laigin, 1999).

[265] For more about these tenants, the Irish *manaig*, see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984): 382–438.

the penances seem to be punitive and controlling, handed down by authorities who have discovered the sins of their subordinates;[266] but many of them also focus on the importance of confessing sins in order to develop spiritually and on the pastoral nature of penance in regard to the health of penitents' souls,[267] and still others seem primarily concerned with the supreme importance of establishing that all those coming with intent to become penitents should be both willing and sincere in their desire to do penance for their sins in order for the benefits of penance to manifest. As the nominal theological underpinning of penance is the salvation of the penitents' souls, the sincerity of their penance is of central importance. An insincere penance or a penitent viewing their penance as a transactional method to ameliorate sins without a change in behaviour would therefore prevent salvation and undermine the practice of penance as an institution.

There are also important differences to consider between the penitential literature and the synod canons. Penitential literature is a category of texts that focuses on proper conduct of Christians, especially the clergy and those attached to monastic communities. It sets forth the various sins and improprieties that its subjects might be involved in and lists the proper penance needed to atone for them. As such all penitential literature can be said to be primarily concerned with absolution and the spiritual health and wellbeing of its subjects by providing the means by which forgiveness might be earned, divine punishment avoided, and salvation achieved. Conversely, the synod canons are primarily concerned with the correct operation and practices of the church and its clergy. This means that the synod canons differ from penitential literature in an important way, in that they tend to deal less with the salvation of souls by means of direct action by penitent believers. Rather, canon laws seek to establish orthodox religious teachings and practices by giving guidance on the same to the ecclesiarchs and to the priests who tend to congregations, oversee sacraments and ceremonies, and preach to the faithful. While these textual categories do differ in the aforementioned ways, both types of sources seek to regulate and control the behaviours of Christians in order to keep them in line with prescribed ideas of purity and orthodoxy. This uniting feature of the two categories of sources justifies their being dealt with together in this chapter, as their normative and prescriptive natures and intent to govern and control the activities of their subjects provide a high degree of commonality between them.

There are a number of early medieval insular texts that fit into the geographical, temporal, and thematic brief of this chapter but which nevertheless do not contain direct reference to magic or its practitioners. Such texts include Gildas's Preface on Penance, two early British synods — the *Synodus Aquilonalis Britaniae* and the *Synodus Luci Victoriae* — excerpts from the Book of David, the Penitential of

[266] To some level, this applies to all of these texts, as it is the nature of penitential literature that a church authority be handing down judgement by which sins might be expunged, and that authority and the designation of sins and their punishment are naturally controlling.

[267] This is most evident in the final text to be discussed in this chapter, Ecgbert's Penitential, though it is at least nominally mentioned in many texts and is the theological underpinning and justification for the practice of penance.

Cummean, the *Canones Wallici*, the Canons of Adomnán, Columbanus's *Regula Coenobialis*, the Second Synod of St Patrick, *Tres Canones Hibernici*, the Ambrosian Penitential, and the penitential handbooks (likely falsely) attributed to Bede (with the exception of where the works attached to Bede's name have been combined with Ecgbert's Penitential, which does contain direct reference and will be discussed below).[268] However, despite many texts not mentioning the subject of this thesis, there are nevertheless a significant number of sources that do deal with transgressions of a magical nature and the punishment thereof. It has been noted that there is specific focus among many of these texts, especially in the Irish material, on regulating the use of magic as it pertains to love, sex, and reproduction, and indeed many of the transgressions that will be discussed below are found among the regulation of these topics and often in the sections dealing with these topics specifically.[269] This could be a symptom of the overall focus in many of these texts on the sexual sins which may be committed by clergy and members of monastic communities, but it could also be pointing to a more general interest in regulating and controlling marriage, reproduction, and inheritance writ large; it is doubtlessly related to the categorisation of abortion as a sexual sin and the difficulties in determining whether the methods used to induce abortion are considered magical. The exact reason for the focus of these texts on magic pertaining to these specific topics will not be the focus of this chapter and will be left for other examinations of that topic specifically to determine.

As these texts have a tendency to reference one another and derive their rulings from earlier texts, as briefly discussed above, this chapter's analysis will organise and discuss these texts together in a very rough chronology of authorship. It is worth noting that a large number of these texts were produced around the same time (namely, between the mid-seventh and the mid-eighth centuries) and that without clear and direct textual evidence within these texts, it can be difficult to determine precisely in what order they were produced. However, it is not within the scope of this study to attempt to pin down the chronology of these texts with any final degree of certainty. This study follows scholarship that seeks to establish that chronology to the extent that scholars are able to do so, but in situations where relative time of authorship cannot be specifically determined, it is perhaps more important that the texts are in such clear dialogue with one another on the topic of magic and its practitioners than to determine exactly which text is influencing and which is being inflenced. By organising this chapter in a loose chronology with

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[268] Gildas's Preface, the *Sinodus Aquilonalis Britinaiae*, the *Synodus Luci Victoriae*, excerpts from the Book of David, Cummean's Penitential, *Canones Wallici*, Canons of Adomnán, *Regula Coenobialis*, Second Synod of St Patrick, and *Tres Canones Hibernici* can all be found in Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. School of Celtic Studies, 2011); the Ambrosian Penitential in: Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der Früḧmittelalterlichen Bussbu̇cher* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag Gmbh & Co., 1993), 257-70; Bede in Arthur West Haddan, William Stubbs, and Henry Spelman, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1869), 326-34. For the accuracy (or lack thereof) of the attribution of a penitential to Bede, see Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 96-7.

[269] For more on this, and a study of love magic in texts not covered in this thesis, see Jacqueline Borsje, 'Rules & Legislation on Love Charms in Early Medieval Ireland', *Peritia* 21 (2010): 172–90.

related texts clustered together, the ways in which these texts borrow from and parrot each other can be examined in greater detail, and the ways in which they differ in regard to their treatment of similar (or in many cases identical) sins described.

***Synodus I Sancti Patricii*:**

The First Synod of St Patrick is so named because the text attributes its authorship to three early Irish bishops, the eponymous Patricius, Auxilius, and Iserninus. Despite being attributed to laws decreed at a synod led by those august personages, there is significant and legitimate question as to whether that was the actual circumstance of its authorship or if the names of those fathers of the Irish church were attached to a later document in order to lend it the legitimacy of their names and reputations to the decisions contained therein. Not only the authorship but also the date of the composition of this text is incredibly uncertain. On the later end of the possible date range for its composition, the text was referenced in the creation of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, which was itself created around the year 700, meaning that the text was definitely extant some time before the early eighth century.[270] Ludwig Bieler supported the theory that the claim of the text's authorship is legitimate, and therefore dates it to a time during the activity of Patrick, after the arrival of Auxilius and Isernius, which the Irish Annals place in the year 439, but before their deaths, which are recorded as having taken place in 459 and 468 respectively.[271] The date that Bieler arrives at for this synod is 457.[272] Other scholars have argued for later dates of composition under the assumption that the rulings of the synod were attributed to earlier figures of the church to evoke their prestige and authority. The current consensus of scholarship puts the creation of the *Synodus I Sancti Patricii* at some time during the late sixth or potentially the early seventh century.[273] Another issue facing the First Synod as a source is that of all the sources covered in this chapter, it is the most isolated, with no apparent allusion to other texts and only referenced by one other text, which appears in the same manuscript in which this text survives in its complete form. The *Synodus I Sancti*

[270] This text shall be discussed in more detail below.

[271] Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eds., *The Annals of Ulster, to AD 1131* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), 41; 47; 49.

[272] Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. School of Celtic Studies, 2011), 2.

[273] For more on the dating of this text, see Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (Cornell: University Press, 1972), 68-71; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 245-7; Aidan Breen, 'The Date, Provenance and Authorship of the Pseudo-Patrician Canonical Materials', *Zeitschrift Der Savigny-Stiftung Für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 81, no. 1 (1995); 83-129: 91-6; M. J. Faris, ed., *The Bishops' Synod (The First Synod of St. Patrick): A Symposium with Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1976). See also: Daniel A. Binchy, 'Patrick and His Biographers Ancient and Modern', *Studia Hibernica* 2, no. 1 (1962): 7–173: 45-9; Idem, 'St Patrick's 'First Synod'', *Studia Hibernica* 8, no. 1 (1968): 49–59.

Patricii survives in whole in only a single manuscript, where it appears alongside the *Canones Hibernenses*, and in part in another, where it appears with texts of various other canonical decisions.[274]

The decisions recorded in the *Synodus I Sancti Patricii* deal primarily with regulating the life of the clergy, but the synod also contains a number of canons dealing with layfolk. As such, the primary aim of the text seems to be increasing the authority of the priesthood, but it does cover the procedure of penance (which seems to be primarily a period of fasting) and ways in which a priest can coerce members of his church to accept his ruling and do the required penance, such as barring entrance to the church and withholding access to communion until they agree.[275]

It is in the section of canons dealing with the laity where the rule possibly pertaining to magic is to be found. Between a canon stating that alms offered by non-Christians ought not to be accepted and another outlining the punishment for thieves appears the following:

> christianus qui occideret aut fornicationem fecerit aut more gentilium ad aruspicem iurauerit, per singula cermina annum penitentiae agat; impleto cum testibus ueniat anno penitentiae et postea resoluetur a sacerdote[276]
>
> A Christian who does murder or has extra-marital sex or who, in the way of the pagans, has sworn before an *aruspex*[277], will do penance for one year for each crime; the year of penance completed, [the Christian] will come with witnesses and afterwards be released [from doing penance] by a priest.

While swearing before an *aruspex* is not necessarily an inherently magical act, an *aruspex* themself would, according to several contemporaneous authorities, be involved in the practice of magical activities in order to be able to foretell the future. Augustine places *auruspices* among the illicit and magical sorts of fortune-tellers,[278] and Isidore listed then under the heading of and alongside *magi,*[279] the magical nature of the term is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Moreover, in several of the sources discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the term is found among lists of other magical practitioners, suggesting a stronger cultural conception of *auruspices* as practitioners of magic. To strengthen the idea that *aruspex* is being used here in the same way that *magus* is used throughout sources examined in this thesis, Filotas observes that 'the *haruspex* in the mid fifth-century Synod of St. Patrick was not a soothsayer at all, but a great religious authority, a representative of the divinity, according to Bieler a druid, in front of whom

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[274] This being Cambridge CCC 279 (O.20) saec. IX for the former and Cambridge, CCC 265 (K. 2), saec. X-XI for the latter (see Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 15)

[275] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 44.

[276] *Synodus I S, Patricii*, Canon 14 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 56)

[277] In Bieler's translation of this section, he renders this as 'druid' and given the context of pagan custom and the role of the druid class in secular Irish law, I find this translation to be less objectionable than I found similar translations in the previous chapter, but still believe that a more neutral choice is best and have therefore left the term untranslated here.

[278] See Klingshirn, 'Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge According to Augustine'.

[279] See Isidore, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 181-3. Although Klingshirn argues that *aruspices* ought to be considered to be non-magical diviners according to Isidore, I find (as was discussed in a footnote in the introduction to this thesis) that his argument goes farther than can be discerned from the available evidence, and in part goes against his own argument about the chapter's structure given the multiple places within the chapter that the term appears. (see Klingshirn, 'Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners'.)

people were accustomed to take oaths in "pagan fashion"'.[280] That said, I believe that she goes too far in the other direction in her assessment. While it does seem to be the case, as was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, that there was some blending and synonymising of words relating to divinatory, magical, and non-Christian religious practice, there is no basis for suggesting that the *aruspex* of this passage was not (in addition to overseeing paganistic rites) also participating in some form of fortune-telling, even if the term has become vague enough by this point as to be unable to ascertain their specific practices.

This canon, however, is far less concerned with regulating or punishing the magical activity of the *aruspex*, and more concerned with preventing nominally Christian members of the community from participating in non-Christian practices or using the authority of an *aruspex* in their dealings. More to the point, as the canon is specifically meting out punishment for making oaths before the *aruspex*, which suggests that the true concern with the canon is in cementing and protecting the role of the church and its clergy as the guarantor and authority behind any oaths. Thus, the passage seems to be more concerned with the social and ceremonial power of the church rather than with the magical acts in and of themselves, and the fact that undermining this power is a sin on par with murder or extra-marital sex means that this was enough a matter of concern for the authors of this ruling for it to equate with serious sins. Such a focus in the text would fit well with its apparent overall aim of increasing the clergy's authority. The view of magic as being a problem relating to the authority of the church and the orthodox practices of the churches' Christian flocks is one that was seen in the previous chapter and which will appear again later in this chapter as well, suggesting it to be one of the primary ecclesiastical concerns with magic in the early medieval insular world.

***Penitentiale Vinniani*:**

The *Penitentiale Vinniani*, or Penitential of Finnian, is perhaps the oldest extant insular penitential, with the only other contender for the title being the *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*, although the dating of the latter text is strongly contested by historians working with penitential materials and may have been composed at a much later date. As is the case with many of the texts in this chapter, precise dating of Finnian's Penitential remains beyond our reach. However, if it is true that the text, potentially along with the *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum*, seems to have served as the basis for Cummean's Penitential,[281] it must date to a time before the authorship of that document. Bieler also notes that Columbanus drew heavily from

[280] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular cultures*, 231.

[281] This chapter is inclined to agree with the analysis of Körntgen, which suggests that rather than the Ambrosian penitential having drawn on the earlier texts, the *Ambrosianum* instead served as their source. See Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen Bussbücher* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag Gmbh & Co., 1993), 60-4.

this work in the documents that would become his penitential, which would push the latest date for the composition of the *Penitentiale Vinniani* to the end of the sixth century at the latest (Bieler himself gives the year 591).[282] Much like the precise date of composition, the identity of the author of this text also remains something of a question. If it is of Irish origin, there are multiple saints who could be its author, and the book could also be of less august Irish origin. However, the book may also have been composed in Britain or Brittany, but in either case by someone who was from or spent a great deal of time in Ireland and was both well known to and well regarded by later Irish penitential authors; Columbanus related that Finnian was in close contact with Gildas,[283] which, if true, would also support a date of composition in the early or mid-sixth century.[284] Finnian's Penitential survives in whole in two manuscripts, one of which contains other insular penitential material, and in part in two more manuscripts from Brittany which contain collections of canon law.[285]

The Penitential of Finnian provides separate penances for the laity and for members of the churchwho have sinned, with harsher penalties imposed upon clerics and monks than on members of the laity whom the author considers will receive lighter punishment on earth and gain commensurately less reward in the afterlife.[286] It spends no small amount of ink on providing Biblical references to justify many of its imposed penances and to implore the sinning churchmen to forsake their sins and return to a proper life. This penitential is also interesting in its dealings with magic for several reasons. First, the document deals with three separate magical offenses and the proper penance needed to ameliorate those sins. As shall be seen below, the penitential begins by addressing magic generally,[287] then addresses magic used to elicit love and take part in sex,[288] and finally deals separately with magic as it pertains to its use in abortion.[289] Each of these is considered a unique sin by the author of the penitential and is given its own period of penance. Secondly, the text explicitly mentions women as the people perpetrating the sins in addition to men, something which none of the other texts studied here do. Even Columbanus's penitential (discussed below) in its passage closely mirroring these sections of Finnian's, only explicitly mentions

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[282] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 3-4.
[283] Columbanus, *Epistola* I, 7 (Columbanus, *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. G. S. M. Walker [Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970]).
[284] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 47.
[285] Rob Meens, 'The Penitential of Finnian and the Textual Witness of the *Paenitentiale Vindobonense* 'B'', *Mediaeval Studies* 55 (1993): 243–55, and Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 13-15.
[286] As evidenced in section 6 of the text: *quia homo seculi huius est, culpa leuior in hoc mundo et premium minus in futuro*, ('because he is a man of this secular world, his fault is lighter in this world and his reward less in [the world] to come'), *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 6 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 76-7).
[287] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 18 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 78-9).
[288] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 19 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 78-9).
[289] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 20 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 78-81).

women as being at all involved and even then, only in reference to abortion and not as the sinner who should be seeking penance.[290] This is how the text relates these offenses:

> Si quis clericus uel si qua mulier malifica uel malificus si aliquem maleficio suo deciperat, inmane peccatum est sed per penitentiam redimi potest; sex annis peniteat, tribus cum pane et aqua per mensura et in residuis .iii. annis abstineat a uino et a carnibus. Si autem non deciperat aliquem sed pro inlecebroso amore dederat alicui, annum integrum peniteat cum pane et aqua per mensura.
> Si mulier maleficio suo partum alicuius perdiderit, dimedium anum cum pane et aqua peniteat per mensura et duobus annis abstineat a uino et a carnibus et sex quadragissimas <ieiunet> cum pane et aqua[291]

> If any *maleficus* cleric or malefic[292] woman has led someone astray by use of their *maleficium*, it is a terrible sin but can be atoned for by means of penance; they shall do penance for six years, for three years on a measure of bread and water, and for the remaining three years shall abstain from wine and from meat. If, however, they do not lead anyone astray, but have given [something][293] to someone for enticing love, they shall do penance for an entire year on a measure of bread and water.
> If a woman, through her *maleficum*, destroys someone's foetus, she shall do penance for half a year on a measure of bread and water and abstain from wine and from meat for two years, and [during those two years] will fast for the six *quadrigissimae*.[294]

There are several interesting things that come from an examination of these passages. As noted above, the fact that women are specified as being the expected sinners to do penance for these offenses raises questions about whether their inclusion here indicates a belief in women being more likely to engage in sins of a magical nature than other sins.[295] It is worth noting that women are not only mentioned in discussion of magical sins relating to sex and reproduction, which may be expected if the reason for mentioning them was a relation between women involved in medicine generally and midwifery specifically that is seen in later medieval sources and through to the Early Modern Period,[296] but are also considered for the more general magical sin in the first section of the passage. Also of interest is the fact that attempting to seduce someone by magical means is an offense given a significantly lesser sentence than for the general practice of magic, unless of course this is meant to be added to the intended penance for the first offense, something for which there is no guide in the text. Furthermore, that using an

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[290] See discussion of this text below.

[291] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 18-20 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 78-80.)

[292] I use here 'malefic' not in its common usage, but specifically in reference to a woman who practices *malefica*, another translation might be 'magical woman', but for the reasons discussed in previous sections of this thesis, such a translation would not sit well with me.

[293] Bieler supplies 'potion' here in his translation (see Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 79), however Borsje has rightly pointed out that such an interpretation is both unsupported by the text and unnecessarily limits our understanding of what is being described by the author (see Borsje, 'Rules & Legislation on Love Charms in Early Medieval Ireland', 174-5).

[294] This referring to the forty-day fasting periods that occurred throughout the year.

[295] There was no direct indication of women practicing magic in any of the hagiographical material, so their appearance in the Penitential of Finnian and later in that of Columbanus but otherwise absent from other texts is likely indicative of something. If the idea discussed in the introduction of this chapter that women penitents were usually dealt with by holy women, abbesses, and nuns it may explain their general absence, although if this were the case one would expect them to appear significantly more frequently in the penitential texts associated with Columbanus, since his foundations contained both men and women, and even so still leaves Finnian unexplained, unless he too is writing with a mixed group of men and women penitents in mind.

[296] See e.g. Thomas R. Forbes, 'Midwifery and Witchcraft', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 17, no. 2 (1962): 264–83; Nicola A. Ring et al., 'Healers and Midwives Accused of Witchcraft (1563–1736) - What Secondary Analysis of the Scottish Survey of Witchcraft Can Contribute to the Teaching of Nursing and Midwifery History', *Nurse Education Today* 133 (2024).

abortifacient to end a pregnancy carries the lightest of these sentences is also interesting, again unless the penance for these sins is meant to be cumulative with those of previous sins to which they are related. This is especially true when the following passage indicates that a woman who carries an illegitimate child to term must do penance for six years and in the seventh she must become joined to the altar[297] which means that it was perhaps seen as a significantly worse sin to carry a child conceived in sin to term than to induce abortion, as even if the penances for offenses are added together to determine the full penance, the penance for a woman who had engaged in extra-marital sex, conceived a foetus, and turned to magical means to abort it would be less than one who did the same and gave birth to a child conceived that way. If the penance given for administering an abortifacient refers only to performing an abortion for another and not to performing an abortion for oneself, this may explain the apparent discrepancy in length of penance. Another interpretation of the text is that the person who practices magic and produces *maleficium* is committing the most heinous of the sins, and that those who merely employ these magical methods in their sins but do not themselves practice magic are still sinning, but that theirs is a lesser sin. In her investigation of this passage, Filotas concludes that 'The monstrousness of the sin must derive from the use of magic'.[298] She notes that the word *inmane* is used to describe no other sin in the penitential, even sins that merit greater penance than those in this passage.[299] Unlike the *Synodus I Sancti Patricii*, we do see that the penitential of Finnian is directly concerned with those who practice magic themselves — as covered by the first penance — and not just with the effect such a person has on the legitimacy and authority of the church. Moreover, it is worth noting that the core penance for practicing magic, three years' penance on bread and water followed by three more without wine or meat, is shared in the *Penitentialis Vinniani* by other sins, albeit with other penalties present, which should help us to gauge the severity of the offense, these being: a cleric being in the habit of fornication and hiding it from others;[300] a cleric fathering a child and then killing them (or not killing them, the penance remains the same);[301] a cleric committing murder against a neighbour who had been his friend because of 'the prompting of a devil';[302] and finally, a cleric with a rank of deacon or above — if he used to be a layman and lives with his family — fathering a child with his wife.[303] The sins which share the base penance of performing magic are serious, among the most serious that are covered in the penitential, although there are also some sins which carry greater penances. Several of the sins which share the same periods of fasting have additional

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[297] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 21 (in Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 80-1).
[298] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Culture*, 290.
[299] Ibid, 289-90.
[300] This penance also includes being removed from clerical office (*Penitentialis Vinniani*, 10 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 76-7]).
[301] In addition to the period of penance and the loss of clerical office, this penance also specifies that a penitent who has committed this sin must commit himself to weeping and tears and prayer in day and night and also a period of exile lasting seven years (*Penitentialis Vinniani*, 11 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 76-8]).
[302] This penance also includes exile, but not loss of clerical office (*Penitentialis Vinniani*, 24 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 82-3]).
[303] *Penitentialis Vinniani*, 27 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 82-3).

punishments applied on top of the penance, and the fact that magic does not necessarily entail the loss of clerical office or forced exile, as is seen in some other cases in the penitential, indicate that it is considered by the text to be a lesser offense than secretly and habitually fornicating, conceiving a child out of wedlock (and potentially killing it), or murdering a friend in a fit of passion.

***Canones Hibernenses*:**

These Irish Canons are an under-studied[304] group of six documents of canon law. While they have been edited, translated, and analysed together by those historians who have studied them, all six of the texts do not exist together in any surviving manuscripts,[305] and it is very unlikely that they were authored by a single group of ecclesiastics or ratified as official law by a single synod; some have even argued that the group of texts collected under the heading of *Canones Hibernenses* by Hermann Wasserschleben in 1874 were never before that point delt with together as a single unit, as there is no evidence to show that they were.[306] What does unify the individual sections of this text are that they are all presented and apparently used as instances of canon law — dealing with many of the topics that such texts are wont to do — they all bear hallmarks of being of Irish origin and seem to have been composed no later than the middle of the seventh century. Additionally, sections of them often appear together in manuscripts collecting various canons and penitential literature. The section of the Canons containing reference to magic which will be examined below survives in only a single manuscript,[307] and depending on a very suspect attribution of authorship, may have been produced before the year 665;[308] unfortunately, more precise dating and attribution for the text remains beyond the reach of current scholarship.

The component of the Irish Canons which concerns the topic of this thesis is the first, and it has sections which focus on areas that are commonly covered by other canons and penitential literature that are examined in this chapter, namely: killing, sex, abortion, and dietary practices.[309] While the text does contain a canon referring to abortion,[310] and another giving the life-price for the destruction of an embryo and a woman,[311] unlike in many of the other texts discussed here, there is no specific language or detail

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[304] There is indeed very little that has been written about them, even less of which was produced after the dawn of the 20th century, and they seem to be overshadowed at every turn by the *Collectio Hibernensis* (likely due to the immensity and influence of the *Collectio*), to the extent that at time of writing even the CODECS database connects Bieler's edition of the *Canones Hibernenses* to the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* rather than to these texts. The texts were most recently discussed in: Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'The Church and Secular Society', *L'Irlanda e Gli Irlandesi Nell'alto Medioevo, Settimana Di Studio Della Fondazione Centro Italiano Sull'alto Medioevo* 57 (2010): 261–323: 294–7, 298–321.

[305] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 12-15.

[306] Ibid, 8.

[307] Ibid, 26. This MS is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Lat. 12021 (Brittany, saec. X).

[308] Ibid, 9.

[309] Ibid, 8.

[310] *Canones Hibernenses* I 6 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 160-1).

[311] *Canones Hibernenses* I 8 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 160-1).

to suggest that this is an inherently magical practice, indicating that the processes used to produce abortion may not have been universally considered to be magical in nature. The only canon in the *Canones Hibernenses* explicitly dealing with magic and its practitioners is recorded thus:

> Haec est poenitentia magi uel uotiui mali si<ue> crudelis, iddem ergach, uel praeconis uel cohabitoris uel heretici uel adulteri, id est uii anni in pane et aqua[312].
>
> This is the penance for a *magus*, or devotee of evil or cruelty, or a raider[313], or an itinerant peddler, or a cohabitator, or a heretic, or an adulterer: it is seven years on bread and water.

This canon is in line with most of the others in this chapter in that it deals directly with a practitioner of magic, a *magus*, as being a sinner requiring penance. It differs from the *Penitentialis Vinniani* and the *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani*[314] in that it does not specify that the *magus* need be leading Christians into sin, destroying them, creating and/or administering abortifacients, or any other specific sin, but that being a *magus*, and therefore a magical practitioner, is in and of itself a sin requiring penance. This in turn suggests that to the authors of the *Canones Hibernenses* a *magus* was not necessarily something a person inherently was, but rather was something that a person did, and that by repenting, doing the appropriate penance, and forsaking their practices that they could stop being a *magus* and thus be redeemed. This wording further suggests that, given the various duties performed by *magi* generally, this penitential is likely concerned primarily with the threat to the power and authority of the church that was posed by *magi* as a competing source of supernatural expertise and aid that Christians may seek rather than relying upon the church.

In terms of gender, this text does not present women as being specifically capable of magical sin, as there is no reference to women in this passage. This is not to say that the authors of the text did not consider them to be incapable of magical sin, just that women are not uniquely expected to be committing them. This is further highlighted by the fact that this section of the Irish Canons has several laws that list the sin alone in such a way that it could refer to men or women, including the canon dealing with inducing abortion and several others.[315] Moreover, the section mentions women specifically in a later canon as sinners, giving a penance for a woman who kills her own child,[316] showing that the document also addresses sins that women commit but does not count magic as being particularly among them.

***Paenitentiale Theodori*:**

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[312] *Canones Hibernenses* I 4 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 160-1).

[313] '*Ergach*', which is a shortened form of the word '*díbergach*', which some word lists define as 'pirate' or 'reaver'. The word is Old Irish and refers to a person who engaged in cattle raids or the plundering of other territories. Filotas, however, consideres this word to refer to 'lawless peddlers … and tramps, who wandered about deceiving the population.' (see Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures*, 273-4).

[314] See the section of this chapter dealing with that text below.

[315] These are actually most of the canons, and the ones that specify the gender of the sinner are the outliers in this text.

[316] *Canones Hibernenses* I 11 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 160-1).

The Penitential of Theodore, despite what that name might suggest, was not only not authored by the man himself, but also is not a singular penitential handbook. Rather, what is known as the *Paenitentiale Theodori* consists of various collections of Theodore's teachings and penitential rulings in his role as the Archbishop of Canterbury that were interpreted, recorded, and gathered by his students at Canterbury and widely transmitted after his death. These records survive in several separate manuscript traditions, and both the number of these traditions and their relative dating remain matters of some debate.[317] Determining the exact number of traditions and their exact relative dating are both beyond the remit of this thesis, but a good deal of work has already been done to tease out the different strains of the work. Thomas Charles-Edwards recognises two strains of penitential, the first a collection he calls the *Iudicia Theodori* which was one of the earliest recensions of the text to be created, and the second the collection compiled by the *discipulus Umbrensium* based on information several degrees of separation from Theodore himself.[318] The authorship of the cluster of texts alone would be enough to cast doubt on how strongly these teachings can be said to be Theodore's own thoughts and beliefs, being passed through the filter of his students' understanding (not to mention the potential of their editing his teachings in order to aggrandise their teacher). Moreover, the religious conflicts that were happening during Theodore's time in Rome which preceded his being sent to Canterbury led to him being sent with a minder to ensure that his teachings in Canterbury would not corrupt his flock or lead them away from the orthodox teachings and practices of the church,[319] further adding to the likelihood that the records of what he taught to his students were more reflective of proper practice in Canterbury than what Theodore's Greek origins may suggest. However, despite the potential for doubt created by the recording and transmission of the text, scholarly consensus is that the heart of the work can be said to be predominantly Theodore's.[320]

The rulings recorded in the *Paenitentiale Theodori* reenforce the focus on teaching and the organisation of the church that are evidence in his activity as the Archbishop of Canterbury.[321] Among those rulings, in a section concerning idolatry and addressing such superstitions as putting a child on a roof or in an oven to cure a fever as well as more serious sins such as making sacrifices to demons, we find the section of Theodore's penitential dealing with magic directly. The section is recorded thus:

> Si mulier incantationes uel diuinationes diabolicas fecerit, I. annum, uel III. XLmas., uel XL. juxta qualitatem culpae peniteat. De hoc in canone dicitur; qui auguria, auspicia siue somnia uel diuinationes quaslibet secundum mores gentilium obseruant, aut in domus suas huiusmodi homines introductunt, in

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[317] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 90-3.
[318] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the Indicia Theodor', in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141–74: 141-3.
[319] Ibid, 89-90. More on Theodore's connection to and understanding of the Latin canon law can be found in: Martin Brett, 'Theodore and the Latin Canon Law', in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 120–40.
[320] James Siemens, *The Christology of Theodore of Tarsus: The Laterculus Malalianus and the Person and Work of Christ* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 25-8; 158.
[321] Ibid, 90.

> exquirendis aliquam artem maleficiorum, penitentes isti, si de clero sunt, abiciantur; si uero seculares, quinquennimo peniteant[322].
>
> If a woman makes diabolical incantations or divinations, she shall do penance for one year, or for three quadragesimae, or for forty days, according to the nature of the offense. Concerning this it is said in the canon: those who observes auguries, or auspices, or dreams, or whatever divinations according to pagan customs, or introduce any people of this sort into their houses, in seeking out any *malefic* art, when they are doing penance, if they are of the clergy let them be cast out, but indeed if they are secular, let them do penance for five years.

This passage is unusual because it specifically pertains to women, in its first part, as the people expected to be perpetrating this sin, and the sin is not gendered due to its relation to sex, pregnancy, and childbirth, but rather seems to be gendered only in its expectation that women are the practitioners of the magic that it specifies as being related to devils.[323] Despite the incredible amount which Theodore's Penitential has been studied, this passage receives only cursory attention. It has thus far been discussed in the most general of terms. It is worth noting that the descriptions of magical sins in the passage are themselves incredibly vague. 'Diabolical incantations' could refer to any number of practices. Even if the term had a more specific meaning at the time the penitential was recorded, we do not have enough reference or context to reconstruct what those practices may have been. Additionally, the penitential is so vague about which methods of divination it proscribes that it could also easily be interpreted to be banning all prognostication, were it not for the inclusion of the reference to pagan customs, which implies that there are non-pagan customs that may be used for divination as well, although whether they exist or what the authors of the penitential may believe them to be are unclear. However, it is also possible that the text's condemnation of fortune-telling is complete and that the implication of the text is that all such practices are inherently pagan. It is also noteworthy that the *Paenitentiale Theodori* does not concern itself solely with those practicing magic nor those seeking to benefit from the arts of magical practitioners. This suggests concern not only for defending the social and political power of the church in its pastoral role over the orthodox practices of its flock against *malefici* and *maleficiae* who are outside the Christian community, but also a concern that members of the Christian community itself — those who may be persuaded, coerced, or compelled into penance — are not just an external threat but also an internal problem that needs to be dealt with as a member of the church's paternal duties.

***Penitentiale Sancti Columbani*:**

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[322] Theodore's Penitential, XV 4 (Arthur West Haddan, William Stubbs, and Henry Spelman, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. [Oxford: University Press 1869], 3:190).

[323] It is worth noting here that it has been persuasively argued that many of the gendered aspects of the Penitential of Theodore can be traced back to his Greek education. For more on this and a deeper study of gender in and around Theodore's Penitential see Erik Wade, 'Pater Don't Preach: Byzantine Theology, Female Sexuality, and Histories of Global Encounter in the 'English' Paenitentiale Theodori', *The Medieval Globe* 4, no. 2 (2018): 1–28.

This is the first text discussed in this chapter whose nominal author is both known and well attested to be in accurate accord with its title, at least to a degree. Columbanus was an Irish monk who participated in the Irish tradition of becoming a *peregrinus* sometime around the year 590. His *perigrinatio* led him to Gaul where he founded several monasteries but came into conflict with the bishops there (conflict which he seems to have been able to smooth over) and eventually with the secular authorities of the region, who after some time forced him to leave the area. After this he made his way into northern Italy where he worked with the Lombard king to found his monastery at Bobbio, where he would spend the last few years of his life. Due to his connections and influence a great many of his writings have been preserved, and Jonas of Bobbio, who authored the *vita* of the saint, stressed therein the importance and focus that the saint placed upon penance.[324] While it is unlikely that Columbanus was the final author of the penitential in the forms that they have come to us, they comprise Columbanus's documents which seem to have been largely composed and collected by the saint himself before his journey to the continent and used by him after his arrival there.[325] That said, there is evidence within the text to suggest that sections of it were added or amended based on the particular situations which the saint faced in Gaul and Italy and those faced by monks in his centres in later years.[326] Thus, based on this information paired with the fact that the text relies heavily on the *Penitentiale Vinniani* throughout[327], we can place the composition of the Penitential as being mostly in the late sixth or very early seventh century, with some interpolations from later years added to the text.[328] The Columbanian Penitential survives in two manuscripts, both produced at Bobbio.[329]

In addition to his penitential, Columbanus also produced his *Regula Coenobialis* which deals with minor infractions[330] of monks living in religious community and the proper penances thereof. While that text will not be examined in depth in this chapter due to its lack of content concerning magic, it should be noted that it is unusual among the other insular canon law and penitential literature in that its default form of penance for any given infraction is not a period of fasting, but rather corporal punishment.[331] Moreover, there is a close relation between the *Regula Coenobialis* and the *Penitentiale Sancti Columbani*

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[324] Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius* c. I 10, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. mer. IV, 76.
[325] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 1997), 225.
[326] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 5.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', 235-6.
[329] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 15.
[330] For an example of the minor nature of the offenses that the *regula* concerns itself with, among the sins dealt with by this document are speaking too loudly at dinner, coughing during the singing of a psalm, and contradicting another monk too impolitely (see Columbanus, *Regula Coenobialis* in John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 257-65.)
[331] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 54-5

more generally, and the two texts seem regularly in dialogue with one another.[332] As for the penitential itself, it is a text broken into three sections, one addressing the sins of monks, the second those of secular clerics, and the third those of the laity.[333] The section of Columbanus's penitential dealing with magic appears in the section of the text addressing clerics, and it reads as follows:

> Si quis maleficio suo aliquem perdiderit, iii annis paeniteat cum pane et aqua per mesuram er iii aliis annis abstineat se a uino et carnibus et tunc demum in septimo anno recipiatur in communionem. Si autem pro amore quis maleficus sit et meninem perdiderit, annum integrum cum pane et aqua clericus ille paeniteat, laicus dimidium, diaconus duos, sacerdos tres; maxime, si per hoc mulieris partum quis[que] deceperit, ideo ui quadragesimas unus quisque insuper augeat ne homicidii reus sit[334].
>
> If anyone has destroyed[335] someone by their *maleficium*, they should do penance for three years on a measure of bread and water, and for three other years he should refrain from wine and meat, and then the seventh year he should be restored into communion. But if anyone has used *maleficium* for love, and destroyed no one, he should do penance for a whole year on bread and water if he is a cleric, for half a year if he is a layperson, for two years if he is a deacon, and for three years if he is a priest; chiefly, if anyone has by those means (*maleficium*) has foiled a woman's giving birth, they should therefore each add six *quadragesimae* for each, lest they be guilty of murder.

The reliance of this section on the section of the *Penitentiale Vinniani* discussed above is so overtly obvious as to be impossible to ignore. Not only in structure, but also in wording is the similarity clear (Filotas, in her examination of the text, notes that 'Columban explicitly calls the practitioner a sorcerer, and assumes he is a man, probably in holy orders').[336] and even the prescribed penances echo back to the earlier text. Let us then focus on the differences. Perhaps most notable is the lack of women being specifically mentioned here except as being portrayed as the victim of the sin of producing an abortifacient, or perhaps even as being considered only the incubator of the foetus who is the victim of the sins, neither of which align well with the earlier text's descriptions of women uniquely as being the practitioners of magic and the perpetrators of magical sins. It is also worth noting that Columbanus's penitential separates sinners into categories and gives harsher penances for those members of the ecclesiastical community who have attained higher station and therefore ought to know better and display more virtue, to the extent that a priest is given a period of penance six times longer than that of a layperson for the same offense. Finally, whereas in the earlier penitential the question of application of penances for multiple offenses was not defined by the text, Colmubanus's penitential makes it clear that the penance for inducing abortion is to be added to the penance for destroying someone through *maleficium*. However, despite these differences,

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[332] Ibid, 53-4.

[333] Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Columbanus', 225.

[334] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 6 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 100-1).

[335] *Perdiderit* here may be being used spiritually, i.e., in reference to leading a person into sin and destroying their Christian purity, but it may also be being used literally to refer to killing someone by means of magic. Both interpretations can be supported by examination of the text and its context (see Borsje, 'Rules & Legislation on Love Charms in Early Medieval Ireland', 175). It is my belief that the text is intentionally vague in this regard, especially compared to its source (c.f. the section of the *Penitentialis Vinniani* above), in order to allow for a greater degree of applicability by the person overseeing the penance.

[336] Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures*, 290.

the *Penitentiale Sancti Columbani* is in lockstep with the *Penitentiale Vinniani* in its overall treatment of the practitioners of magic in that they are the focus of the sin described. In terms of the severity of the magical sin, it is somewhat more difficult to determine. Few of the penances in Columbanus's penitential adhere to the two-phase penance that is present in Finnian's and was copied in this section. Sins that rate three years' penance in the Columbanian penitential include: a single instance of fornication by a monk (fornicating repeatedly is given a greater penance) or a monk deserting their monastery and returning after a period of several years;[337] spilling the blood of a fellow monk;[338] a cleric fornicating with women (deacons, priests, and bishops receive longer penances);[339] a cleric committing habitual theft who is unable to make restitution for his crimes;[340] a member of a clerical order committing bestiality;[341] a layperson committing murder;[342] a layman siring a child with another man's wife;[343] a layperson committing perjury due to fear of death who must do penance on bread and water for three years followed by two without meat or wine;[344] and finally, a layperson drinking at non-Christian temples as worship of those gods.[345] From this list we can see that the penances prescribed by Columbanus are generally harsher than those of Finnian, and the fact that harsher penances have not been imposed for the magical offenses could suggest either that they occurred so rarely that Columbanus and his followers never had need to adjust their penances, or that they regarded these sins as being less severe than did Finnian. Without more information about penances in Columbanus's foundations — evidence which, if it exists, remains undiscovered — it remains impossible to determine which of these is the reason for the lighter penance for magic relative to sins such as murder in the *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani*.

***Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum*:**

The Bigotian Penitential has been shown to have close relations to two other penitential texts which will not be examined closely in this chapter. These texts are not being dealt with here because in the first case the text is not a Latin document and in the second the text contains no references to magic.

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[337] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* A 3 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 96-7).
[338] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* A 5 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 96-7).
[339] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 4 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 100-1).
[340] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 7 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 100-1).
[341] *Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 10 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 100-1).
[342] This sin also entails becoming an unarmed exile for the period of penance and then returning to compensate the relatives of the victim (*Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 13 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 102-3]).
[343] The penitent must also abstain from sex with his wife during the period of fasting and pay a sum of money to the cuckolded husband (*Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 14 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 102-3].
[344] The layperson must also free a slave and perform alms in order to fulfil the penance (*Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 20 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 104-5]).
[345] This is likely a later interpolation in the text and could have been added after Columbanus's death (*Penitentialis Sancti Columbani* B 24 [Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 104-5]). Additionally, this practice is the main focus of Filotas's study of this text, seeing the practice of feasting at holy sites as indicative of the author's (or interpolators') ideas of the survival of certain pagan customs. (see Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions, and Popular Cultures*, 56; 87; 115; 200; 210.)

These documents are respectively the Old Irish Penitential and the Cummean Penitential, the work that both of that text and the *Bigotianum* seem to descend from.[346] The *Bigotianum* also has sections which are derived from the *Canones Hibernenses* and Theodore's Penitential, both of which are discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as from a section of the Lives of the Desert Fathers.[347] Bieler argues that the Bigotian Penitential in the form in which it survives is not of purely Irish origin, and that it was at some point changed from being a purely insular document to being a text with distinctly Frankish character,[348] although he does admit that its character is more Irish than other penitential handbooks that have survived from Francia in the seventh and eighth centuries.[349] However, part of the basis of his claims in this regard are his firm belief that the Benedictine rule was unknown to the Irish in the early medieval period,[350] a claim that has been rightly called into question.[351] The Bigotian Penitential was referenced in the Old Irish Penitential, meaning that it must have been written and available before that text was composed,[352] and that text has been dated linguistically to the late eighth century.[353]

The text has two potential references to magic, neither of which can be claimed to be certain in their magical nature due to the use of the ambiguous word *venefica* in both sections and lack of any other words or context to clarify the usage as being either definitely magical or definitely mundane.[354] In the first instance, the word appears in a list of twenty sins of the flesh, where it resides at number seven, between homicide and enmity.[355] Later it appears again as the last of the offspring of the sin of pride, alongside other sins including blasphemy and envy.[356] The term *venefica*, as has been discussed in several places in this thesis, is an ambiguous one, and without further evidence in the text, it is impossible to determine definitively whether the author of Bigotian Penitential considers it to be a magical act. Beyond these scant potentially magical references and without anything else within the text, there is little more that can be determined from the *Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum* with regard to its stance on magic and barring the uncovering of a previously undiscovered version of the text or commentary thereon, we are left with ambiguity in this case.

***Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*:**

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[346] See Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 10; Means, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 69.
[347] Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 10.
[348] Ibid, 10; 22.
[349] Ibid, 10.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Means, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 61.
[352] Ibid, 62.
[353] Binchy 'The Old Irish Penitential' in Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 258.
[354] This word and its ambiguity have been discussed in greater depth earlier in this thesis.
[355] *Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum* 37 (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 204-5).
[356] *Penitentiale quod dicitur Bigotianum* VIII (Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, 238-9).

The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* was penned sometime between the middle of the seventh and eighth centuries, namely between 669 and 748.[357] As the name would suggest, it is an Irish collection of ecclesiastical law, and as such it draws heavily on many sources, including Biblical ones — from both the Old and New Testaments — previous opinions and exegesis from members of the clergy, as well as older instances of canon law and penitential literature. However, unlike most other sources that are often categorised as ecclesiastical law from early medieval Britain and Ireland (and even many continental sources) the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* spends a considerable amount of focus on secular matters. As such a comprehensive and well-sourced document of Christian law, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* found a large readership on the continent, and became widely disseminated, used, and adapted throughout many parts of Europe for centuries after its authorship and collection.[358] The *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* survives in over ninety continental manuscripts, in seven of which it exists complete and without substantial deviation.[359]

Despite, or perhaps because of, the broad foundation of sources from which it draws, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* actually contains scant direct reference to magic within its rulings relative to the total number of rulings it contains. Due to the astounding breadth of the source, however, it still contains a greater number of such references than any other individual text examined in this chapter. It contains references to non-Christians, heretics and schismatics generally in many sections, and the proper ways of dealing with them and their ideas (which is to say, not doing so),[360] as well as several sections dealing with *maledictiones*, which, while arguably supernatural, are dealt with as (mostly) proper ways for Christians to direct God's wrath through prayer rather than being magical practice.[361] Even the sections of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* dealing with abortion, where one may expect more explicit reference to magic based on the contents of previous sources dealing with the subject, contain no explicit references within them to *malefici* nor even to the more ambiguous *veneficae* in the text. The only specific reference within these sections that could even possibly be considered reference to magic are to the *potationes* that certain women would drink to induce abortion,[362] and the Latin, unlike its modern English cognate 'potion', does not have inherently magical or supernatural connotations.[363] What does this leave to study regarding magic in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*? Examined below are the sections of the text dealing with augury and

[357] Roy Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 2019), 59*-61*.
[358] Roy Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 2019), 47*-9*.
[359] Ibid, 50*-1*.
[360] These include 1.10, 10, 39.12, 42.1, 42.3, 42.4, the entirety of book 56, and 59.4. (see Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 11-2; 44-6; 303-4; 335; 336; 337; 431-2; 439)
[361] These are the entirety of book 60 and portion of book 66 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 440-4; 467-8)
[362] These are in 44.3 and 44.4, sections moralising on women and abortion. (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 351-2)
[363] Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages*, 111.

fortune-telling either directly regulating them or making reference to their happening in source material, the practices and rites associated with doing so being strongly denounced in the text.

The sixty-third book in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* focuses entirely on augury and prophecy, and it is in this section where the majority of the discussion on the topic takes place, but the topic appears in two places earlier in the text and those references shall be examined before diving into the text's main thrust against divinatory practices. The first reference to appear is in a very early section and deals with the question of what parts of the Old Testament apply to Christians, and it is related thus:

> Eucherius: Interrogatio: Quae de ueteri testamento relinquereuel obseruare debemus? Responsio: Debemus obseruare mandata, quae corrigendam uitam moresque pertinent, relinquere autem ceremonias ritusque sacrificiorum, que figuras atque umbras futuris tunc rebus pretullerunt
>
> Eucherius: Question: What of the Old Testament ought we to relinquish, and what ought we to observe? Response: We ought to observe the commands that pertain to correction of life and mores; but relinquish the ceremonies and rites of sacrifices, which once conveyed the shades and figures of things to come.[364]

The main focus of this passage is on reckoning what of Old Testament law is appropriate to apply to Christian people and communities, and what of the law does not apply to Christians; the reason that this specific question is being handled relatively early in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* is likely to strengthen and legitimise the sections of its own rulings which draw from the Old Testament as their source.[365] Although it is referenced here only as an example of those things which are to be left behind, the passage calls out specifically sacrifices and rites that have served their purpose in prefiguring the Christian law and therefore no longer need to be followed as those needing to be censured; this indicates that the original author Eucharius (whom Flechner identifies as Eucharius of Lyon in a later book)[366] as well as the authors of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* saw these pre-Christian practices as being of particular concern, a concern which is further evidenced in the section of text dedicated to condemning them that is examined further below. The next section of the text dealing with augury does so very obliquely. It appears in a book dealing with interactions with people who are not in the Christian community, and a specific section dealing with traitors. The text relates:

> In lege: Moabite maledicti sunt quia conduxit Balam filium Beor, ut malediceret populum Dei
>
> In the law: The Moabites are cursed because they led Balaam son of Beor to curse the people of God[367]

Although there is no direct reference here to fortune-telling, soothsaying, or augury using the specific Latin terms one would expect to see relating to those practices, the context of the specific allusion being

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[364] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 11 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 56); Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 517.

[365] Paul wrote that Christians are dead to the law of the Old Testament (Rom. 7:4-6), and elsewhere throughout the same chapter makes it clear that Christians should not follow Jewish law. Therefore, since so many of the rulings of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* are based on the foundation of that same Old Testament Law, the authors need to justify why it should in fact apply to Christians where they are using it (for more, see the lengthy note on this in Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 838)

[366] Roy Flechner, *Making Laws for a Christian Society: The Hibernensis and the Beginnings of Church Law in Ireland and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2023).

[367] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 58 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 436); Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 801.

made is to the story of Balaam, a prophet who was convinced by the wealth of the Moab King Balak to give a prophecy to the King despite it going against God's initial decree to him.[368] Both of these passages appear before the main section on augury in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* and while both of them reference pre-Christian methods of prophecy that made their way into the Christian Bible, neither has explicitly called out these practices as being magical or used any of the language that would be expected if these practices were being considered as inherently magical as opposed to merely un-Christian, and only discuss them as forbidden, either directly or by association.

For the determination that the source considers non-Christian prophecy to be magic, we turn to the 63rd book of the *Collectio*, the entirety of which is concerned with augury. The book examines general admonitions against seeking divination, specific practices to especially be avoided, the Old Testament punishment for divination, a Christian penance for divination, warnings concerning why even those divinations that have proven true should be avoided, and discussion about why demons have the knowledge to give to people practicing augury. None of these sections are positive, nor even neutral, on the practices of prophecy, and they are explicitly labelled as being non-Christian and linked to demons in the text The book begins with these warnings attributed to Augustine, but actually to be found in the Caesarius of Arles's 54th sermon,[369] and it is Caesarius who attributes this to Augustine:

> Augustinus: Admoneo uos partier, ut nullus ex uobis caragios,[370] et diuinos, et sortilegos requerat, quia, quicumque fecerit hoc malum statim perdiderit baptismi sacramentum, et continuo sacrilegus et paganus efficitur, et nisi grandis aelimoisina at prolixa poenitentia subuenerit, in perpetuum peribit.
> Augustinus ait: Similiter et auguria nolite obseruare, nec auiculas cantantes, nex ex illarum cantu diabulicas diuinationes.
>
> Augustine: I warn you in like manner that none of you should seek advice among [καράγιοι, diviners, and sooth-sayers],[371] for anyone who does this evil at once loses the sacrament of baptism, and immediately becomes profane and a pagan, and without considerable alms or a long penance, he shall be lost in perpetuity.
> Augustine said: Similarly, do not become a follower of auguries, nor small birds singing, nor diabolical divinations of their song.[372]

This section of text directly links magical prophetic practices, performed by practitioners of magic (specifically *καράγιοι*, diviners, and sooth-sayers), with non-Christian practices, to the point that even seeking the services of such a person would immediately remove a person from the Christian fold. Additionally, there is a later entry under the same heading of 'auguries' that further confirms this direct link between non-Christians and the magical practices of prophecy being discussed:

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[368] Balaam is also referenced in the Life of St Wilfrid, which may suggest that the story was popular in the early medieval insular world. The story is discussed in a note in the previous chapter (see my earlier note in Chapter 1 of this thesis).
[369] Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 451.
[370] This word is of Greek origin and some might argue should be literally translated as 'juggler', but has been glossed in Rome Vat. Lat. 294 as '*καράγιοι = inter magos*', showing that its usage is definitely linked to magical practitioners rather than mundane street performers (see McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 69).
[371] Bracketed text mine
[372] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 63.1 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 451); Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 813.

> Sinodus Anchiritana: Qui diuinationes expetunt more gentilium V annos poeneteant.
>
> The synod of Ancyra: they who, in the manner of pagans, consult divinations, should do penance for five years.[373]

Moreover, in addition to seeing the practices of those practitioners seeking to know the future as being so antithetical to Christianity that those seeking their aid should be expelled, the practices being discussed are also explicitly linked with devils. The first entry in the section of the text dealing with auguries calls to the ecclesiastical authority of Augustine (although the actual source is Caesarius of Arles, and his versions of Augustine's sermons are not always to be trusted as accurate; indeed all of the references to Augustine's authority in this section can be attributed to Caesarius, and very few of them find direct reference to corresponding extant works of Augustine), and through Augustine's supposed authority and the harsh tone it takes, it establishes the baseline attitude towards these practices for all sections that follow. Such a strong condemnation of any seeking the services of diviners suggests that Christians seeking out these practices represent a real threat to the Christian church, linking them to demons, and as such Caesarius's Augustine may have specific cause to call out these people and their practices as being particularly dangerous to those he would see converted or those who had recently converted and may be tempted away from properly orthodox Christian practice. The next section of the text, also attributed to St Augustine and again coming from the same one of Caesarius's sermons, follows directly from the first and discusses the same sins:

> Augustinus: Peribit qui supradictis malis, id est, caragis, diuinisque, et auruspicibus, uel filacteriis[374], et alis quibuslibet augoris crediderit, etsi ieiunet,etsi oret, etsi largas elimoisinas faciat, etsi corpusculum suum in omni adflictione cruciauerit, nihil ei proderit, quamdiu in illa obseruatione fuerit.
>
> Augustine: Whoever shall believe in the aforesaid evil men—to wit, [*καράγιοι*], and diviners, and fortune-tellers, [either] amulets, [or] other kinds of auguries—will perish, though he may fast, or pray, give alms generously, or torment his body by all sorts of afflictions. Nothing will help him as long as he continues to observe such things[375].

This section adds some further illumination to the previous. Whereas the prior section was unwaveringly negative in its depiction of those seeking the demonic and non-Christian prophesies, it did not neglect to mention that those Christians who had so sinned would be able to be redeemed, albeit after giving 'considerable alms' and 'long penance'. This section further qualifies the requirements for redemption, stating that regardless of the redemption sought by the penitent sinner, that they would be unable to find redemption if they still believed in the powers and practices of the practitioners that performed the prophesies for them in the first place, further cementing these beliefs and practices as being considered a profound threat to orthodox Christian belief and practice.

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[373] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 63.5 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 452); Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 814.

[374] In this case probably not the scripture boxes being used properly in the Jewish faith, but rather amulets/trinkets that are used for divinatory purposes.

[375] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* 63.2 (Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 1, 451); Flechner, *The Hibernensis*, vol. 2, 813.

While the first two sections call upon the authority of Augustine in their condemnation of these prophetic practices, he is not the only authority that is referenced with regards to auguries, as we have already seen with the section that calls upon a ruling of the Synod of Ancyra. The argument could be made that given that all of the rulings in the chapter on auguries come after Augustine's descriptions which connote the inherent magical nature of the practices, all of the rulings in the chapter should be considered to share that assessment. However, none of the other sections in the chapter use vocabulary that would necessarily suggest magic and given that the *Collectio* gives and discusses several rulings in other sections that are directly contradictory, this argument does not hold up to scrutiny. So, while the rest of the chapter discusses (negatively) other topics related to heterodox methods of prophecy, they will not be considered for this thesis. Overall, we can see that the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* considers that non-Christian divinatory practices can be inherently magical, and that the practices (and even belief in the viability of the practices) ought to be condemned. The text's general focus on Christians seeking out practitioners for these services rather than those practicing them further underscores the idea that these practices are seen as primarily an external threat to the souls of the Christian flock as well as to the authority and teachings of the Church.

***Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*:**

The Ecgbert credited with the authorship of this penitential was the first archbishop of York[376] who was active throughout the middle of the eighth century until his death in 766. He was born into a branch of the line of Northumbrian Kings, being nephew to King Eadbert and cousin to King Ceolwulf. He is credited with founding the School of York, which was famous for its teachings and extensive library, and taught a number of students there, most famously Alcuin. A strong focus of his work as Archbishop seems to have been the organisation and reform of the churches in and around Northumbria.[377] The composition or collection of a single penitential handbook which could be disseminated to his suffragan bishops for their use in penitential procedure would fit well with such a focus. However, although the approximate date of the document's composition is within Ecgbert's lifetime and its origin is certainly English, which would lend some weight to the possibility of the accuracy of attributing the text to him, there is insufficient evidence to allow it to be certainly attributed to Ecgbert's authorship.[378]

The preface of the *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti* places a greater focus on the pastoral nature of administering penance than the other sources that have been examined in this chapter, and the need for

[376] Technically speaking, Paulinus was appointed Archbishop of York, but as the appointment didn't reach him until after he fled the region following the defeat and death of King Edwin, he was never able to exercise the authority of that office.
[377]George Hind, 'Egbert, Archbishop of York', The Catholic Encyclopedia vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appelton Company, 1909), s.v. Egbert, Archbishop of York, https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05326a.htm.
[378] MacNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 237-8.

consideration of such matters as a penitent's wealth, age, and status in determining proper penance underlines the importance placed on ensuring that the proper penance is given for the circumstances surrounding a specific person committing any given sin. These considerations, as well as other distinguishing features of the penitential (such as its lack of demand for secular compensation for offenses where other penitential literature would demand them) lead to the characterisation of the text as one that is primarily concerned with the health of the penitents' souls.[379] However, despite the near-certain English origin of text writ large, the preface in which these admonitions appear may have interpolations from later, Frankish, churchmen transcribing the text[380] which calls into question the extent to which such attitudes can be attributed to Ecgbert and his insular students. The most recent edition of this text is an in-progress work written by Michael D. Elliot at the Centre of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto and available on his website, *Anglo-Saxon Canon Law*,[381] and the Latin in this section of the chapter is all taken from that source.

The first section of the *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti* is found in a chapter titled '*De machina mulierum*', or 'Concerning Women's Machinations' and deals with sins that are considered to be particular to women. These include sins primarily, though not exclusively, relating to the marriage and reproductive activities of women. Within this chapter is found the following section dealing with women performing magic:

> Mulier si diuinationes fecerit uel incantationes diabolicas, I annum uel III XLmas uel XL dies iuxta qualitatem culpę. Mulier si aliquem interimit arte malifica sua, id est per poculum aut per artem aliquam, VII annos peniteat. Si paupercula, IIII annos[382]
>
> If a woman should make divinations or diabolical incantations, [she should do penance for] one year or the three quadragesimae or forty days, according to the nature of the offense. If a woman kills anyone though her *malefic* art, that is, with a draught or by means of some other art, she should do penance for seven years. If [she is] poor, for four years.

From the fact that this section finds its place in the penitential in the section on sins specific to women, and by the fact that there is no corresponding section dealing with men who perform these same actions (although men performing other magical actions will be found in another section discussed below), there are certain magical offenses that the author of Ecgbert's Penitential believes to be unique to women. These do not include divinations and incantations, which will be dealt with below, but does seem to include killing people by means of magic, and especially by making some sort of potable that would kill someone. It is worth noting that a woman killing her own children is dealt with separately by the penitential, and that a woman killing her child through murder is the only possible reference to abortion

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[379] Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, 99.
[380] Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 74-5.
[381] Michael D. Elliot, ed., *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, *Anglo-Saxon Canon Law*, 2015.
[382] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 5 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 23).

which one might expect to find discussed in a section on the sins of women.[383] The separation of women's magic in its own section of this relatively late text, coupled with the fact that the vast majority of the magical sins contained therein belong to the domestic sphere, with more public acts of magic such as prophecy appearing nowhere therein, lends further credence to Rampton's theory of the continued marginalisation of women from the public sacred and ritual sphere.[384]

Directly following the chapter covering the specific sins of women in which the sections examined above are included is a section concerning itself with auguries and divinations, which is where the remaining sections of the text dealing with magic are to be found. The section begins with a general admonition against several sins including observing auguries, which is related thus:

> Auguria uel sortes (quę dicuntur falso sanctorum) uel diuinationes obseruare, uel quarumcumque scriptura‹rum› inspectione futura promittunt, uel uotum uouerit in arbore uel in quacumquelibet re excepto ęcclesia: si clerici uel laici, excommunicentur ab ecclesia; uel III annis clerici peniteant, laici II annos uel I et dimedium[385].
>
> Those who observe auguries or the omens (which are falsely called of the saints) or divinations, or utter things to come through any examination of the scriptures, or take an oath on a tree or on anything except in a church, if clerics or laypeople they should be excommunicated from the church, or clerics shall do penance for three years, laypeople for two or one and a half years.

Here, unlike in the previously examined section, the focus is not entirely against those who are practicing magical arts, but also those participating in the other un-Christian activity of making oaths on a tree. This would fit with the focus of other sources discussed in this thesis that have sections mainly dealing with the threat that magical practices pose to the social power of the church. Most notably, the excerpt forbids making oaths anywhere other than at a church, protecting ecclesiastical control of acting as witness and guarantor of such oaths. This is underscored by the section giving penance not to those performing auguries, but to those observing them, showing again the focus of the section on the effect that these practitioners could have on the church and its flock. The next section that we shall be examining shares this concern:

> Nolite exercere quan‹do› luna oscuratur ut clamoribus suis ac maleficis sacrilegio usu se defensare posse confidunt[386]
>
> Do not be agitated when the moon is obscured[387] because they trust that they are able to defend themselves through their cries and through use of sacrilege by *malefici*.[388]

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[383] This is the section directly following the one quoted above, indicating that there may be a connection between the *poculum* discussed above and the killing of the woman's children. The section reads: 'Mulier si occidit filium suum per homicidium, X annos peniteat' (If a woman kills her son through murder, she shall do penance for ten years). (*Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 5 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 23).

[384] See Rampton, *Trafficking With Demons*.

[385] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 24).

[386] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 25).

[387] While it is possible that this could be in reference to the monthly new moon, it is perhaps more likely in reference to the rarer event of a lunar eclipse.

[388] This section seems to be referencing a popular source for the legal sources of this thesis, namely, Caesarius of Arles, who discusses pagan rites and magical practices that are performed when the moon is dark. He discusses this in Sermon 13 Chapter 5. See Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons, volume 1 (1-80)*,Fathers of the Church 31 (1956) 78.

This section again showing the apprehension which the author of this penitential had with the practice of non-Christian magic interfering with proper Christian belief and practice. The author is urging not to let these practices occur, despite the belief of their practitioners that they are effective.

The final section concerning magic that is examined in this chapter is also the final section of the chapter of the *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti* dealing with augury. Rather than addressing believing in un-Christian prophecy or with curtailing certain practices for the defense of the socio-political standing of the church alone, this section does those while it also deals directly with the practices of diviners and other customs that are contrary to Christian teachings. It is recorded thus:

> Caraios et diuinos praecantatores, filacteria[389] etiam diabolica uel herbas uel sucino suis uel sibi inpendere, uel V feriam in honore Iouis, uel kalendas ianuarias secundum paganam causam honorare: s‹i non› di‹sinitis›, V annos peniteat clericus; si laicus, III annos peniteat[390]
>
> *καράγιοι* and those who predict divine things, either hanging diabolical amulets on themselves, whether [made of] herbs or amber, or for a pagan reason honouring Thursday in respect to Jupiter or the Kalends of January, if they do not desist, let a cleric do penance for five years, if a layperson let them do penance for three years.

This final section is concerned not solely with threats to ecclesiastical authority from the non- and un-Christian practices of magical practitioners (although those concerns are by no means entirely absent) but rather on the actions of the practitioners themselves. By focusing on the direct actions of the sinners, those actions which might lead other members of the Christian community into sin, and especially on non-Christian practices that might be most tempting for newly or nominally Christian people, or those living alongside non-Christian neighbours, the text shifts focus from the Christian flock to the un-Christian wolves preying upon it. Which is to say, the celebrations of festivals and the use of certain amulets and talismans which — judging by their appearance in so many of the sources examined in this thesis — were a problem in the minds of many of the authors and compilers of these sources. Thursday was in Rome originally *dies Iouis* (the day of Jove) in Roman pagan tradition and the Kalends of January was traditionally host to a festival in pre-Christian Rome — however it has been argued that despite the festival's pagan past, that it was less a pagan survival and more a collaborative reinvention with Christian participation by the end of the antique period[391] — which suggests that the authors of the penitential were particularly interested in suppressing the influence of Roman pagan religion on their flock.

Overall, the source strikes something of a balance between political and seemingly pastoral concerns, inasmuch as those concerns can truly be separated. The source deals with the seemingly gendered offense of murder by means of magic, with the specific practices of diviners and other

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[389] Again, used in reference to any sort of unchristian amulet rather than specifically the objects used in Jewish worship.
[390] *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 6 (Elliot ed, *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, 25).
[391] Jacob A. Latham, 'The Re-Invention of the Kalends of January in Late Antiquity: A Public Festival Between 'Pagans' and Christians', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 15, no. 1 (2022): 69–110.

practitioners, with the belief in those practices by Christians, and with other specific non-Christian practices that might have pulled Christian individuals away from approved and orthodox beliefs and practices. By focusing on not only on the heterodox beliefs that posed a threat to ecclesiastical authority within the Christian community but also on the specific works of magical practitioners which could bring harm to their flock, the *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti* presents a more comprehensive picture of the dangers of magic in the thought-world of its authors and compilers.

Conclusion:

In examination the perceptions of magic that are recorded in penitential literature and the synod canons of early medieval Britain and Ireland, a few things stand out. Firstly, some practices that were considered magical seem to have been considered specifically feminine in nature. These offenses are often, but not always, related to the use of magic in matters of love, sex, and reproduction, including the production and administering of abortifacients. However, which specific practices are discussed in terms that indicate their magical nature change from source to source, as do some of the specifics that are dealt with along explicit gender lines. Part of the ambiguity of the gendered nature of certain magical offenses may be due to specific penitential practices, namely that penitent women and men may have been dealt with separately by religious women and men overseeing their penances separately where possible. A more thorough examination of women in regards to magic with a focus on normative texts has been produced by Martha Rampton, in which she suggests a transformation in and curtailing of the role of women in the supernatural space of early medieval sources. Although her definition of magic limits what instances she deals with in her study, the evidence seen in this chapter does potentially support her theory.[392]

Secondly, the paternalistic and pastoral nature of these sources shines through and acts as a counterpoint to the generally more final and lethal nature of dealing with magical practitioners seen (though certainly not without exception) in many of the hagiographical sources; the purpose of penance is to give a chance at salvation for the souls of the penitents in the face of their sins. These sources give a pathway to magical practitioners through which they can leave behind their non- and un-Christian beliefs and practices and be accepted into the Christian fold.

The final feature of the literature that comes to light is that many of the texts deal exclusively with magic as it relates to the societal and political power of the church. This is not only borne out in the examination of the texts' focuses, but also closely aligns with one of the more prevalent attitudes towards magic that was evident in many of the hagiographical texts examined in the previous chapter. Taken together, these present strong evidence that one of the major lenses through which magical belief and

[392] Rampton, *Trafficking With Demons*.

practice were considered by early medieval insular ecclesiarchs was as a potential threat to the teachings, practices, and power of the church in the region.

Conclusion:

In this thesis I have examined the depictions of magic in the insular Latin hagiographies, penitential literature, and synod canons composed before about the year 800. This examination can be said to have borne fruit. This thesis begins to fill a notable gap in scholarship of early medieval magic. Thus far studies of medieval magic tend to either focus on later time periods or reconstruction of beliefs and practices (with a specific focus on vernacular texts). Moreover, hagiographical literature is an exceedingly understudied genre of sources with regards to magic which most scholars of magic have avoided entirely. In the course of this study, I have identified not just a singular strain of thought concerning magic and its practitioners, but several complex and often interwoven strands.

In the hagiographical materials three separate attitudes towards magic were able to be drawn from the texts. The first is the idea of magic and its practitioners as having been once necessary parts of God's plans, but with the coming of the Christian faith to the region through missionaries and the conversion of the populace, the magical practices are no longer necessary, and continuing to practice or hold them in esteem was now detrimental to the spiritual health of the Christian flock. The sources that contain this depiction of magic (most notably Tírechán's *Collectanea* and the anonymous *Vita I Sanctae Brigitae*) deal with the *magi* through conversion, bringing them away from their magical practices and into the structure of the Church. The second is the belief that magic in any form is an inherent evil, often punishable by death. This is most strongly seen in Muirchú's *Vita Sancti Patricii* wherein every single *magus* in the text dies (often in a spectacular fashion, and usually by Patrick's hand). The *vita*'s treatment of other contemptible, cruel, and murderous people as being able to be redeemed but not allowing the same for any of the *magi* is particularly telling of the ideas concerning magic that Muirchú presents in his text. However, other texts that suggest that magic is, and always has been, evil still allow room for its practitioners to repent and convert. The final strain of thought concerning magic present within the hagiographical material is concerned more with the threat posed by the practitioners of magic to the legitimate and orthodox teachings of the Church than any dangers that may be posed by magic itself. Though these ideas of magic are sometimes at odds, the texts often present one of the first two strains of magic while also showing concern for the threat pagan practitioners can pose to Christian power and authority. The ability for a single author to present nuanced ideas of magic and its practitioners and the different ways in which it was problematic to the church and its flock show medieval authors engaging in sophisticated thinking about the intersection of religion, magic, and public life, suggesting a deep understanding of the importance of controlling ritual and belief in expanding and maintaining its influence.

It is worth noting that the depictions of magic in the hagiographies are influenced by a number of factors. First, the literary nature of the sources presents opportunity for both exaggeration and invention, opportunity that is moderately tempered by proximity to the living memory of the hagiographical subject such that the most spectacular of supernatural events are greatly removed from their authors in either geographical or temporal distance. Second, the highly referential nature of hagiographic literature, rife with both allusion and the direct use of certain stories and *topoi* of the genre, creates trends that can be followed throughout hagiography as a whole. Despite these constraints, the hagiographers still produced unique texts containing their own theological ideas and framing of magic. Indeed, it has become evident in the examination of the sources for this thesis that no matter how referential and derivative these sources on magic seem to be on the surface, there is a great deal of latitude for authors to choose, adapt, or invent material in order to support their own individual political or theological agendas. This becomes very evident when contrasting two sources composed within the same religious centre within a generation of one another, as was the case with the differences between the two accounts of Patrick's life, the first of which, Tírechán's *Collectanea*, while condemning magic, allows several *magi*, most notably the influential brothers connected to High King Loíguire, to be converted to Christianity, and, judging by the change in tonsure, join monastic community. Perhaps this was in alignment with his political goals relating to the bolstering of certain lines of the Uí Néill dynasty through conversion of influential figures, while diminishing the influence of Loíguire's descendants by having his daughters die immediately following conversion. Meanwhile, Muirchú's Patrick, focused on the (oftentimes violent) conversion of King Loíguire and his court, kills every *magus* he encounters while converting some of the most ruthless criminals in Ireland and leading them to become men of the cloth. Muirchú's treatment of *magi* and other practitioners could relate to his making a case for Armagh to become the head of the churches of Ireland, as a strong message of conversion including the removal of the taint of the *magi* from Ireland, which was perhaps symbolic of particularly Irish practices such as the dating of Easter (a holiday around which the majority of Muirchú's *vita* take place) and the Irish tonsure.

If penitential literature and synod canons can be said to adhere to any of the three aforementioned conceptualisations of magic, it would be the final one. The legal sources examined in this thesis point to two main concerns regarding magic within the texts. One of these is the focus on the spiritual health of the religious community and protecting that health and the souls of the Christian community by both controlling its members' actions through the prohibition of certain beliefs and practices as well as through the remedy of sins through the proper application of penance. The other is more focused on the power held by the church in the political and social landscape of the early medieval insular world and preserving that power against the potential threat and corrupting influence that the practitioners of magic present.

That said, the central thread that does run through these sources is the pastoral care that it espouses for the members of the Christian community, and, as with the ideas of magic found in the hagiographical sources, these ideas can and do appear together in many of the texts. It is most likely that even those sources that are most engaged with the political concerns of the ecclesiastic elite were penned by authors who believed that the growth and defense of their socio-political power was also an inherent good that would protect and nurture the spiritual health of their flock.

The legal sources examined in this thesis share the derivative character that exists in the hagiographical material, but to a much stronger degree. Many of the canons and penitential rulings on magic (or, indeed, on any topic) are clearly taken from earlier works. Sometimes this is seen in the nearly verbatim copying of rulings, and sometimes by hearkening back to an earlier authority, such as Augustine (or, in these sources, Caesarius of Arles). However, there is also evidence that even copies of earlier rulings are being considered and adjusted to more closely hew to the author's or compiler's theological and practical concerns. This is seen perhaps most clearly in an example from derivative penitential material, when the Penitential of Columbanus takes a ruling on magic from the earlier Penitential of Finnian, but adjusts the verbiage to exclude women and the length of the penance for its application in continental, Columbanian, centres.

Worth noting in both the hagiographic and legal sources is that there are inconsistencies between many of the sources in terms of those sins that are explicitly deemed to be magical in nature, with the same sins described in one text as magical not having the same designation in another. Some may argue that this only appears to be the case because this thesis defines magic too narrowly, and that a more lenient definition of magic would show that these inconsistencies may not exist. However before an examination of those cases can be made to determine where, exactly the line between magical and mundane may be in the thought world of the insular Christian elite, a baseline of explicit magic must be established. By establishing that baseline, this thesis lays groundwork for more nuanced study of conceptions of magic in the early medieval insular world. Another series of apparent inconsistencies in these texts is the gendered nature of certain sins. While several of the texts do not consider gender at all, many of them consider specific sins to be explicitly feminine in nature but there is again little consistency among the texts in which sins pertain to women, even among those sins that one may expect to fall along gendered lines such as those relating to pregnancy and abortion. This apparent inconsistency can be explained in a number of ways, and Rampton's theory of the increasing marginalization of women and their ritual and magical expertise can shed light on many of these discrepancies.

Although the ideas found in this thesis — specifically those pertaining to the authority of the church and its concerns with magical practitioners, and especially in those episodes wherein a *magus* or other magical practitioner converts and attains position within the church — may at first blush seem to be confirming Flint's ideas of the purposeful coopting of certain non-Christian practices in order to enhance the authority of the church in response to the outside threat to that authority posed by pagan practitioners offering a rival source of supernatural power, we see only one potential example of that clearly happening within these sources, that being the episode in which Columba blesses a pagan spring and transforms it into a Christian holy site. What examples Flint does find in these texts tend to be in relation to specific items (i.e. white robes, healing stones) that do not hold up to close scrutiny as practices that were taken from the pre-Christian people and folded into the practices of the church. Moreover, excepting the matter of prophecy (a subject that no two contemporaneous Christian sources could seem to agree on between themselves, and which sometimes even a single source will sometimes contradict itself upon), all examples of magical practice being carried out are thoroughly condemned, even in the stories showing an allowance for practitioners to convert and attain position within the church. The practitioners who convert are expected to leave those practices behind and to take up the orthodox teachings and practices of the church in order to find salvation. That said, as noted in the story concerning Columba and the spring, there do exist examples of Christian authorities seeking to add a veneer of Christianity to certain elements of pre-Christian religion and practice in order to ease the conversion of the populace into Christianity and bring them under the umbrella of church authority, and further and more methodologically sound examination of this phenomenon could yield important information about the interactions between religion, politics, and magic at play in the Early Middle Ages.

It is all well and good to have analysed these sources and found the ideas that they contain about magic, but what does any of this mean for historians and our wider knowledge of the early medieval insular world? Firstly, this research on its own has begun to address a hole in the current scholarship on magic, focusing on Latin sources and examines what the depictions of magic mean for the thought-world of the Christian elite rather than applying external definitions of magic upon the texts or searching for pre-Christian practices in Christian sources. Secondly, this thesis lays a groundwork that can be expanded to future research on conceptions of magic in sources in other genres, languages, regions, and time periods, as well as with regards to the potential broadening of what can be deemed magical in these sources. Biblical commentary and exegesis would, to my mind, present the most valuable next step in applying the framework of this thesis to a new body of sources, as biblical reference is replete throughout the sources examined herein, and extracting the ideas that authors had about particularly and potentially magical episodes from the bible (Moses confronting the Pharaoh's practitioners, magic at the court of

Babylon, and Simon Magus being prime contenders) as well as other passages that these sources often reference (such as Balaam and the Moabites, or the story of David and Goliath) would not only expand our understanding of attitudes towards magic into a new genre, but also serve to shed further light on the depiction of magic in the hagiographic and legal sources examined here. Finally, on its own merit this study has brought a greater depth to the way in which we can understand the mindset of the Christian elite of early medieval Ireland and Britain, especially with regard to their own mythologised past, the process of conversion, and their relation with the less firmly or properly Christian people around them.

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