Irish Biblical Apocrypha
Selected Texts in Translation

EDITED BY
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20. TEXTS RELATING TO THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

20 A. EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN, THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

1 "Help me, O Creator, O Christ, O mighty Lord, angelic God the Father, without beginning or inception, without end or termination, without weariness or contempt, without fatigue or misfortune, O divine radiance, O son of the Virgin Mary, I cry out clearly and constantly, assist me in this peril, answer me and help me".

2 Thereafter, he signed and blessed himself with the sign of the cross, and he drank what poison was in the beautiful golden cup, and when he had finished drinking he said: "I pray you, O God, almighty Father, assume into faith and belief those for whose sake I have drunk this".

3 The crowds began to observe him silently after he had consumed the poisoned drink, and when they saw no harm or hurt being done to him, they all cried out aloud with piercing sound, praising God the Creator, and saying: "There is no God but the God who is worshipped by John, the splendid apostle".

4 As for Aristodemus, he did not believe, and the people proceeded to reproach him on account of the noble outstanding apostle. And Aristodemus came to the place where John was, and said to him: "I am still doubtful and unsure. If I were to see dead people being revived in the name of your God, then all the uncertainty in my heart would depart". The people responded to this, saying: "Shut your mouth, and cease your speech to the consecrated apostle of Christ, or else you
yourself will be burned, along with your householding and dwellings”.

5 When John heard this conversation he told the crowds to be silent until he himself should explain through the grace of the Holy Spirit and of divine teaching ... concerning healing, curing fully, as do good physicians in the case of galloping diseases which are not relieved without supreme skill in medical science. Then John replied to Aristodemus, giving him his beautiful shining tunic, and saying: “Take this, and put it over the bodies yonder, and say 'The apostle of Christ sent me to you with his own tunic, to say to you: ‘Arise from the dead, in order that all may understand that death and life are in my power, and in the power of the Lord whom I reverence and entreat, Jesus Christ, son of the living God”’ . Aristodemus did this, and when he had placed John’s tunic over the dead bodies before him, and had said over them the words told him by John, swiftly and speedily they rose from the dead, and went joyfully to where John was. They bowed down and prostrated themselves on the ground, and asked him to baptize them. Moreover, they related tidings of the time when they were dead, that is tidings of the bright city of heaven, and tidings of the many monsters and beasts of hell.

6 When Aristodemus heard those stories he hurried to where the mighty proconsul was, and said these words loudly and with nobility:

“Come, powerful consul,
Hurry joyfully with me
to the great heavenly apostle
that we may be baptized.
Let us forewear zealously
gods and base demons.
Let us follow Christ lovingly.
Let us atone for our evil practices.
let us avoid worldly delusions.
Invoke, and again invoke
the heavenly dwelling and its bright reward
Come, consul”

“What are you saying concerning John now, O Aristodemus?”, said
the proconsul. "He is a god in a human body", said Aristodemus, "For the drink which he consumed would have killed worldly men who drank it. Were it not that the power of the true God protected him, he would have died. Moreover, in the case of the two whom the same drink killed, all I did was to place John's tunic over them, and they arose completely well, without any sign of death or distress on them. Let us go and seek his forgiveness for having often reviled, insulted, and shamed him, and barbarously discredited him".

Then the proconsul and Aristodemus came to the fair apostle, John. With their hosts and multitudes they cast themselves down on the ground before the apostle, and they asked forgiveness for their sins. He began to pray for them with faith and mercy. And he gave thanks to God that so many people had been called to God, and detached from the devil. He told them to spend a week meditating on the matter. This they did, and thereafter they returned to John, who baptized them all, women, boys, and children, princes, lords, and leaders, servants and attendants.

Then they hurried swiftly and joyfully to the base unholy temples wherein were their insubstantial unmerciful gods. And they smashed and broke the demonic images, the strange idols, and the great idolatrous representations, reducing them to dust. They built a beautiful lofty church in honour of the eloquent beloved John, where the mighty Lord was honoured and served, and divine worship has continued there to this present day. And archbishops, bishops, priests, and psalmists were appointed throughout the whole Church at that time.

On one occasion, John rose, washed his hands and face, chanted the psalms for the canonical hour, and entered the church for the sacrifice of Mass. A handsome elegantly-attired priest called [S]Eusisp rose, and placed about his neck a very beautiful amice, highly ornamented with golden thread. He put on his body a fine-textured tunic, and on his left wrist a beautiful gold-threaded maniple. He put on also a finely-embroidered embossed silk stole, and, over all, a well-made chasuble, bordered with golden crosses. He proceeded to celebrate Mass. John of the bright blue eyes was paying careful attention to the sacrifice, and he perceived from the beautiful divine host, and the
chalice embellished with golden crosses, which were being held by the priest Seusisp, that the latter had a hidden sin.

10 Thereupon John wept copiously and very sorrowfully, and he bowed down to the ground, saying: "O God who called us together, do not repudiate us. O God who healed our diseases and loved us, do not repudiate us. O God who offered himself for us, do not shun us once more. I beseech you now, O God and Creator, Prince and Lord, that you may cleanse the soul of that tonsured priest, Seusisp, from the darkness of evil thoughts, and from the oppression of great sin which is upon him. For he is as one who is ensnared by the devil's noose, so that he is unworthy to offer sacrifice or to serve the mighty Lord".

11 When the priest heard those holy consecrated words, he abandoned the sacrifice, fled from the temple, and began to bewail his sins before God the Father, the Creator. Then the eloquent John rose and called Birro the deacon, and said to him: "Go to the place where Seuisp the priest is, and tell him to come in". When he came, he cried aloud, lamenting his sins, and said in front of all: "I implore God steadfastly and fervently to wipe out my sins". And he knelt down before them, and said these words:

"Disciple of the Lord,  
ever-angelic John,  
a goodly, handsome-haired man,  
with bright blue eyes,  
red-cheeked and fair of face,  
with gleaming teeth and dark brows,  
red-lipped, white-throated,  
skilful and dexterous,  
with supple lithe fingers,  
fair-sided, light-footed,  
noble, slender, and serene,  
distinguished, bright with holiness,  
friend of Christians,  
expeller of the dark devil,  
God's fine disciple".

God heard the prayer of the priest and acted on his behalf. And John
the noble evangelist took the offering once more, and they sang the office and Mass thereafter with lasting good favour.

12 Now there were very many pious nuns, widows, and such holy persons following John, spending their lives listening to the splendid sermons which he used to deliver to the people. And they had no livelihood or substance, prosperity or riches, save for whatever alms John received from the Christians. They complained constantly, and found fault often with John, because in their eyes, the amount of goods and alms which John got from the people was very ample and substantial, yet their share of it seemed meagre to them. They said: “What does he do with it, since we do not get it for food and clothing? He desires that he himself be rich, but that we should be poor”.

13 John heard this, yet he did not react with an angry outburst or uncontrolled rage, but went on with calmness and composure, until one day he chanced to be on a great wide bridge, where patient asses were drawing home hay. John drew out a good handful of the hay, and said: “O God whom I trust and follow, turn all of this into gold without delay”. And John said to his companions: “Count all the gold”. This was done, and there was found to be a hundred smooth rods of beautiful burnished gold. John said: “Beloved children, take the gold to the smelters”. They took it to the nearest craftsman, and it was put over fire to smelt and refine it. They said that they had never found finer gold. Then the gold was handed to John, who dropped it into the deep waters and swift-flowing stream beneath the bridge. Everyone was astonished at this. John said: “If I had wanted unlimited gold and riches, I would have received them from the Lord himself. But I freely prefer to be poor and lowly, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit, as the Creator has said. And tell the hypocritical widows that the only thing I do with what I receive is to give it to them, and to other poor people. For the garment which I put on when I became an apostle of my Lord is none the worse yet, as far as its sheen and material and border is concerned, nor are the shoes any the worse, nor will they be, as long as I live. Moreover, Christ granted to us a knowledge of the seventy-two existing languages, so that we understand them as well as we do our mother-tongue”.

14 One day as John was travelling, he saw approaching a fully-armed
soldier, ready to kill him. When he was in the presence of the apostle, the soldier said brutally and threateningly: "Very soon you will be under my control and power, and you will be killed with force by me". Thereupon John said: "May God extinguish your barbarous threat, your primed fury, and yourself also". With that, the soldier immediately left the spot and vanished, like smoke vanishes from a red-hot fire, or like dust disappears with the wind. For it was the devil who had come in the form of a soldier to do battle against John, on account of John's conversion to Christianity of many people who willingly served himself.
20. TEXTS RELATING TO THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

20A. EPISODES FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN, THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

20B. FRAGMENT OF AN APOCALYPSE, AND DEATH OF JOHN

McNamara, no. 83;

Text of RIA 23048 (Liber Flavus Fergusiorum) i, ff 32va-33vb (text 20A); 32ra - 32v a (text 20B); transcribed (without translation) by G. Mac Niocaill, Éigse 8(1956[1957]), 248-253 (text 20B); Éigse 8(1956[1957]), 222-230 (text 20A).


These texts have been transcribed in reverse order in the manuscript. A colophon at the end of text 20B describes the work as a “Life of John the Beloved Disciple”, in Irish commonly called Eoin Bruinne, “John of the Breast”, because he reclined on Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper (John 13:25). The colophon also says that this Life of John was translated from Latin into Irish by Uidhisidin Mac Raighein. He was a member of the Canons Regular of St Augustine of Holy Island of Lough Ree on the Shannon and died in 1405. Presumably the order of the texts was different in Mac Raighin’s original translation. Our present texts may represent but portion of this Life of John.

The source of text 20A, par. 1-8 is the Passio Iohannis of Pseudo-Mellitus; par. 9-14 of 20A are closely related to a very old text of the Acts of John found in the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus no. 850; see discussion in Junod and Kaestli, I, 117-136; McNamara, op. cit.

20B, par. 1-9, contains an apocalyptic text. It begins imperfect, the opening section being lost. The source seems to be some otherwise unknown apocryphal apocalypse connected with John; see text no. 27, par. 1 of this collection and M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament,
p. 190 (the Bogomile "Book of John the Evangelist").

Text 20B, par. 10-18 on the burial and last moments of John are from the Passio Iohannis of Pseudo-Mellitus; see Junod and Kaestli, I, 110 and II, 764, n. 3, 827-832. Paragraph 20 of 20B seems dependent on Augustine's Tractatus 124 in Iohannem.

The Life of the Beloved Disciple as translated by Mac Raighin is evidently a composite work. What remains to be determined is whether this is due to Mac Raighin himself or to the author of the Latin composition he rendered into Irish.