Irish Biblical Apocrypha

Selected Texts in Translation

EDITED BY

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Then Christ sent the divine helper, the splendid holy angel Michael, to fight against arrogant Antichrist as he had fought against Lucifer. And Antichrist came in the form of a dragon to the summit of Mount Garganus to harm and attack the Christians. But Michael killed the dragon, and as a result, God and Michael were greatly glorified in heaven and on earth.

"This is the manner of Michael's appearance as he comes to fight Antichrist. He is radiant, fair of countenance, red-cheeked, with gentle steady long-lashed eyes, with eloquent red lips, and a white throat. He is shining with zeal, light-footed, angry, furious, aggressive, with his beautiful four wings spread around him, with a protecting sharp-edged splendid sharp ornamented slender sword firmly in his strong hand, to smite Antichrist in a manner befitting a noble angelic heavenly personage."

"With harshness, deep anger, bravery and strength, with swiftness and severity, strongly, fearlessly and terribly, he strikes Antichrist on the crown of the head, halving him on the spot in two splendid broad halves from the top of his head down to the ground. And that is the evil strange tale of Antichrist up to the present, as God confirmed to me", said John, the eloquent Beloved Disciple.

"The world will have three years of peace."

"And after all that, there will be a great silence through the whole universe, so that neither the sound of the sea, nor the roar of the wave, nor the cry of the wind, nor bird-song, nor the sound of any created thing in the whole world will be heard for forty days and forty nights. Then the signs of Doomsday will appear, on the fifteen days before the Judgement."
"After these have come, four angels rise up from the four cardinal points of the world, and they call out loudly and impressively: 'Arise! Arise! Arise! Arise!'".

Then the beautiful pure souls of heaven and the many evil souls from hell will go jointly with their bodies from the earthly graves in which they were buried to the judgement of Doomsday.

"And that is a brief account of the end of this bad world, as was narrated to me by the Creator, the good Lord", said John, the beloved apostle.

Thereafter John said to his disciples: "Go and make a burial-place for me in front of the altar. Cast out the earth far away from it, and make it very deep". This was done, and he himself went into it and lay readily down on the ground, and stretched up his two hands towards the Creator, saying:

"I thank you, O Creator, Christ, the mighty Lord, great Heavenly Father, gentle soft-spoken brother, excellent noble teacher, who gently and lovingly calls me to your banquet, who well understands that I desire to go to be with you in your kingdom. You perceive, O divine kinsman, how my heart has loved your truth and your word, loved to contemplate and look on you totally, I give you thanks".

"Thus am I", says John, "like one being revived from death, or being set free from imprisonment or from illness, in my delight at seeing your radiant countenance. For your appearance is fairer than every other, your words are sweeter than delicate honey-combs, and your
speech more eloquent than the speech of majestic angels. From early times I have prayed to you to bring me from this world to you, and you told me: 'Wait awhile, until you succour the people, and until they believe devoutly in me'. I thank you O heavenly Father, for you have saved my body from every defilement, and saved my soul from the seven sins, and you did not abandon me when I was being denounced and banished, and in every other difficulty besides".

"You granted that my lips uttered holy and true words in eloquent sermons, and you filled my body with the seven-fold Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, fortitude, resolution, knowledge, love, and fear. And I assumed unto myself the seven virtues".

"I wrote all the gospel teachings concerning your wisdom and grace for your acquaintances and for your Church, and I looked after and protected your people up to the present time".

"Now I entrust and hand over your people believing in Christ, who have obtained wisdom, true knowledge, and sagacity, and have been blessed and baptized. Take me to you, as you promised me in the company of my brethren, Paul, Peter, Matthew, and Thomas, and the other apostles, so that I may partake of the great feast which you created from the beginning, and which has no end. Open the divine gates and beautifully-draped windows, and the path which is undarkened by the devil, without opposition, without hostile onset. Send your splendid angelic messenger to cherish and protect [me], for you are the almighty Christ, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who lives and flourishes for all eternity". And all the people answered: "Amen".

Then a great brightness came upon the people for the space of one hour of the day. Such was the extent of the illumination that it could not be looked on. Everyone threw themselves on the ground. Then there came to them a beautiful fragrance, and perfume of angelic incense.

Thereafter they raised their heads, and looked at the burial-place. They found nothing there in place of the valiant priest, the eloquent judge, the devout helper, the wise preacher, the splendid confessor, the merciful dispenser of forgiveness, red-cheeked and blue-eyed, namely, John, the beloved apostle... And thus John parted from the
final things of this world.

18 The suffering and afflicted of the nearby district gathered to that place, and they were cured of all their ills.

19 As for the body of John, it is in a beautiful golden tomb, and at the end of each year, the best youth, who is without defilement or sin, is chosen, and he goes to cut John’s hair and pare his nails, and when he has completed that task, he partakes of the body and sacrifice of Christ, and he himself ascends to heaven on that day. Thus John’s body remains without putrefaction or corruption. Indeed, it is as if it were in a deep sleep, and it will be thus until Doomsday.
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, Êigse 8(1956[1957]), 248-253 (text 20B); Êigse 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 Uidhsdin Mac Raighin. 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.