Irish Biblical Apocrypha

Selected Texts in Translation

EDITED BY

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23. THE EVERNEW TONGUE

1 In principio fecit Deus caelum et terram, et reliqua. The High-King of the world, stronger than any king, higher than any power, fiercer than any dragon, gentler than any child, brighter than suns, holier than any ancient, more vengeful than all men, more affectionate than any mother, the only son of God the Father, he it was who gave this account of the formation and creation of the world to the many peoples on earth, because it was not known to anyone except God what any visible thing in the world was like, for it was as if the race of Adam had its head in a bag, or existed in a dark dwelling. For this reason, then, that there was no knowledge of the form of the world, or of who made it, this account came from heaven to open the mind and intellect of all, so that souls might find the way of life and salvation.

2 Now everything was obscure to the eyes of Adam’s race except for their seeing the motion of the constellations, the moon, sun, and stars, which circulated each day without ever ceasing. They saw, moreover, that the springs and rivers of the world never stopped flowing at any time. They observed the depression on the earth, the debility and sleep afflicting light and crops at the coming of winter. They saw also the revival of the earth with heat and light, flowers and fruit, at the reawakening of summer.

3 Yet they did not know who was responsible for this until there came, as God arranged, the account of the creation of the world, its forms and motion. All of this was obscure until the story was related, until the Evernew Tongue revealed it, speaking from the height of heaven above the assembly of Mount Sion. For the hosts of the eastern world were gathered, those from the mountains of Abian as far as the shores of the Red Sea, and from the Dead Sea as far as the island of Sabarn. This was the number congregated, three thousand four hundred and eighty-five bishops, and fifty-four thousand nine hundred and sixty-nine kings of the world.
That assembly lasted for a year and four months, summer, winter, spring, and autumn, under nine hundred white linen awnings decorated with golden insignia, on the summit of Mount Sion. There were five thousand nine hundred and fifty pillared lights and precious stones which lit up to illuminate the gathering, in such a way that no bad weather could hinder it at any time. There were two hundred and fifty bishops, five hundred priests, three thousand in ecclesiastical orders, one hundred and fifty sinless youths, and five hundred high-kings with their retinues there before them. At midnight their voices would reach Jerusalem, as at each nocturns they came to sing the greetings sung in the holy heavens, *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et reliqua*.

Then the hosts of the assembly would come up between two plains, as the moving hosts and concourse returned to Mount Sion, with the music of their joyful greeting mingling with angelic music from the just ranks of the High-King.

Thereafter, suddenly, at the end of the eve of Easter, there was heard in the clouds a noise like thunder, or like the crackle of fire. There was a thunderous blast meanwhile, whereby suddenly a solar mass, like a bright sun, was seen in the midst of the tumult. That radiant solar mass revolved around in such a way that eyes could not look on it, for it was seven times brighter than the sun.

Immediately afterwards, as the eyes of the host awaited the crash, for they thought that it was a sign of Doomsday, there was heard a clear voice which spoke in angelic language "Haeli habia felebe fae niteia temnibisse salis sal", that is, "Hear this account, sons of men. I have been sent from God to speak to you".

Then sudden weakness and fear came upon the crowds, and their fright was not unfounded. The sound of the voice came forth like the shout of a crowd, yet at the same time it was clearer and plainer than human voices. It resounded over the encampment like the call of a mighty wind, yet did not appear louder to each individual than the voice of a friend in the ear, and it was more melodious than music.

The Hebrew wise men responded, and said "Let us know your name, your status, and your message". The Evernew Tongue was heard,
speaking in an angelic voice: "Nathire uimbae o lebiæ ua un nimisse tiron Tibia am biase sau fimblia febe ab le febia fuam", that is, "I was born among the peoples of earth, conceived by procreation of man and woman. My name is Philip the Apostle. The Lord sent me to preach to heathen peoples. Nine times my tongue was cut out of my head by heathens, and nine times I was able to go on preaching again. For this reason I am called the Evernew Tongue by the company of heaven".

The Hebrew savants said: "Let us know what language you speak to us". He replied: "I speak to you in the speech of angels, and of all the heavenly orders. Even the creatures of the sea, beasts, quadrupeds, birds, serpents, and demons know it. It is the language which all will speak at Judgement".

"It is this which has made me come to you, to elucidate to you the wonderful story which the Holy Spirit related through Moses son of Amram concerning the creation of earth and heaven and all visible thereon. For the narrative tells of the making of heaven and earth. Likewise, it concerns the creation of the world brought about by the resurrection of Christ from the dead on this Easter eve. For every substance, every element, and every essence visible in the world were all bound together in the body in which Christ arose, that is, in the body of every human".

"In the first place, there is material from wind and air. From it comes the capacity to breathe in human bodies. Then there is heat and burning fiery matter. This forms the red heat of blood in bodies. There is material from the sun, and from the stars of heaven besides. This makes the lustre and light in people's eyes. There is material made of bitter and salty elements, which forms the bitterness of tears, the gall of the liver, and much anger in human hearts. There is, moreover, material from stones and the clay of the earth, which causes the fusion of flesh and bones and limbs in people. There is material from flowers and coloured things of the earth, which engenders the variegation and paleness of faces, and the colour in cheeks".

"All the world rose with him because the essence of all the elements was in the body which Jesus assumed. For if the Lord had not been crucified on behalf of the race of Adam, and if he had not arisen after
death, the whole world and the descendants of Adam would be destroyed when Doomsday came. No creature of sea or earth would be regenerated, but the skies would blaze as far as the third heaven. All but three heavens of the great Heavenly Kingdom would remain unburnt. There would be neither land nor people, alive or dead, in the world, only hell and heaven, if the Lord had not come to redeem them. All would thus perish without restoration”.

14 “For this I have come to you”, said Philip, “to give you the information, for the formation of the shape of the world, as has been related from of old, is dim and obscure to you”. “Well then”, said the Hebrew sages, “tell us about the innumerable marvels which happened then, for the matter is eclipsed from us unless we have it clearly set forth”.

15 The Evernew Tongue was heard speaking in angelic language: “Lae uide fodea tabo abelia albe fab”, quod latine dicitur: “in principio fecit Deus caelum et terram”, and he said: “Ambile bane bea fabne fa libera salese inbila tibon ale siboma fuan”. It would be tedious to recount in Hebrew all that was related there: that there was no order nor brightness, no earth with mountains and territories, no sea with islands, no hell with tortures before it was said “Let there be elements”. The circuits of the seven heavens did not exist, nor clouds to water the earth, nor sparks, nor outbreaks of bad weather. There were no lands on which it might pour, for there was neither rain nor snow. There was no lightning, nor blast of wind, nor thunder. The course of the sun did not exist, nor the alternations of the moon, nor the variegation of the stars. There were no sea-monsters, nor sea in which they would swim. There were no streams, herds, beasts, birds, dragons or serpents”.

16 Responderunt sapientes Ebreorum: “We ask what existed at that time when none of the things mentioned up to now existed?” The Evernew Tongue answered: “The marvel of all elements existed, that is, God, who is without beginning or end, without sorrow, age or decay. There was not a time or occasion or era when he did not exist. He is neither younger nor older than at first. Nothing was impossible for him to do. He reflected, and had a thought. This thought had no beginning. He contemplated the existence of a more splendid thing whereby his power and his unutterable dignity might be seen, for these did not exist in any other things apart from himself”.
"Finally, with these thoughts, he immediately created light. The light which he created was the circuit of the heavens with the nine orders of angels. There were seventy lands with six hundred and twenty four sunny dwellings, with melodies and colours in the seven forms of heaven. In a single day he made the circuit of those forms, giving the basis in which the world was made, for it is in the shape of a round circle that God first fashioned the world’.

Then the Hebrew sages said: ‘Tell us now the manner of arrangements in the world, for we are uninformed and ignorant of any of them’.

The Evernew Tongue answered: ‘Though you do not see it, every element happens to be round, in accordance with the shapes of the world. For the heavens were rounded, as were the seven seas surrounding them, and thus also the earth was made. And in circular motion the stars encircle the round wheel of the earth. It is as circular shapes that souls appear after going forth from bodies. It is as a circle that the circuit of majestic heaven is seen, and the circuit of sun and moon is rounded. All of this is fitting, for the Lord is as a circle, without beginning or end, he who always was, and always will be, he who created all of this. That is the reason why the world was formed as a round shape’.

Dixit pleps Ebreica: ‘A question: What was in the round multiform circuit which was the basis of the world?’

The Evernew Tongue replied: ‘In the orbital circuit forming the matter of the world were cold and heat, light and dark, heaviness and lightness, wet and dry, high and low, bitter and mild, strong and weak, the roar of the sea and the sound of thunder, the scent of flowers, the chant of angels, and pillars of fire’.

‘All of these were in the round multiform mass which was formed from the matter of the universe’, said he. ‘There the makings of hell were generated also, for hell was not created in the first place until the archangel transgressed and evaded the law of the King who had created him along with the innumerable host of angels. Up to then hell was not created’, he said, ‘but the material for it existed in genesis in the circular multiform mass out of which was fashioned the earth, and
all the races of the world. And if the angels who sinned had maintained
the nature in which they were created, and their angelic brightness, the
material of hell would have been converted into a beautiful brilliant
kingdom, like the kingdom of the holy angels".

23 This, then, is the work of the first day on which God began the creation
of the world, *licit scriptum est: Qui uivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul*.

24 *Artibilon alma sea sabne e belioa flules elbiae limbae lasfania lire: quod latine
dicitur: Fecit quoque Deus firmamentum inter aquas et diuisit aquas quae
erant super firmamentum ab his quae erant sub firmamento*.

25 On the second day God made the surrounding vault of the seven
heavens, and the heavenly waters. For the Lord knew at the time he
created the world that Man would transgress the precept given him.
Thus a screen for heaven was placed so that men should not face
directly or look at the beatitude of heaven and the throne of God.

26 *Interrogauerunt plebes Ebreorum: "Indica nobis naturas absconditas et
misteria septem caelorum et quinque zonas quae circuerunt caelos".*

27 The Evernew Tongue replied: "The seven heavens around the world
about which you enquire are these: In the first place, the bright radiant
heaven with clouds which is nearest to you, from which shines the
moon and the scattering of stars. There are two gleaming sparkling
heavens above this, containing an abundance of angels, and the
spreading winds. Above these is a cold icy heaven, bluer than every
bright colour, seven times colder than snow. From this the sun shines.
Above that are two further beautiful bright heavens from which shine
the fiery constellations which bring fruitfulness to the sea. There is a
fiery great heaven over these, the highest of them all, on which the
heavenly orbit is set. It is a sunny blazing heaven, in which work
consists of musical harmony and choral singing of angels".

28 "In the zones of the seven heavens are hidden the twelve quivering
animals, in their heavenly bodies, topped with fiery heads, which
blow twelve winds around the world. In the same zones sleep the
dragons with fiery breath, towering-headed dragons with diseased
sides, which set in motion the rumbling of thunder, and emit flashes
of lightning from the pupils of their eyes. Zones circle around heaven", he told them," and heaven has seven orbits around the earth".

"In the first place, there is a cold icy zone where seas are assumed under the surface of the northerly part of heaven. There is another cold icy zone which links together the beasts under the sea and those under the southern side of the world, in the place where were set the nine fiery pillars to the south of heaven. There is a splendid noble zone of the world which nourishes the many fruits of the earth until they rise up around the world from its depths in the west. There are two other beautiful mild zones in which is the foment which produces heat and cold, and causes many afflictions on the surface of the earth on all sides".

"Aibne fisen asbae fribae flanis lia sieth: On the third day God created lakes and many seas, various kinds of waters, and many forms of salt sea, as well as the circumference of the earth, with its level lands and mountains, its woodlands, its precious stones, and its varied trees".

Interrogauerunt sapientes Ebriorum: "Indica nobis multa genera et misteria maris". The Evernew Tongue replied: "There are three oceans of sea around the world. In the first place is a sea with seven forms under the sides of the earth, against which hell rumbles, and raises a noise around the valley. A limpid blue salt sea surrounds the world on all sides, which sets flood and ebb in motion, and casts up many fruit. The third ocean is a flaming sea. From the heavens are sent forth nine winds which arouse it from its slumber. Its waves sing four hundred and seventy melodies after it has been awakened. In its wave-call it resounds like thunder. From the beginning of the world it does not cease from flooding, yet it is never at full tide except on Sunday. On Sunday it falls asleep, until the sound of the winds awake with the coming on Sunday of God from heaven, and with the harmony of the angels above it. ..".

The Evernew Tongue was heard to say: "Alea fas vide nistien alme ama faus elobi reba : On the fourth day God created the seventy-two kinds of stars which traverse heaven, along with the fiery orbit of the sun, which heats the world with the swiftness of the wind, and with the skill and splendour of angels. It illuminates twelve plains along the
earth’s sides. Its light every night makes a circuit by which the fiery sea is warmed, and at which hosts of angels rejoice...”.

33 *Interrogauerunt sapientes Ebreorum*: “Tell us about the twelve plains beneath the earth’s sides, for which the sun shines to give light every night, for we are ignorant of this knowledge”.

34 The Evernew Tongue replied: “This is where the sun goes at sun-set every night: In the first place it illuminates the transmarine river and the eastern part of the oceans. Then it lights up the great fiery sea at night, and the sulphurous seas around the red lands. Then it shines on the hosts of youths in the playing fields, who cry out to heaven in fear of the beast which kills many thousands of people under the waves to the south. Thereafter it illuminates the mountain with streams of fire which traverse the earthen plains with their accompanying hosts. Then it shines on the lair of the whale whom the twenty-four champions oppose, responding [from] the valley of pain.

35 After that it shines in front of the fearsome fence enclosing the host of hell in the north. It shines in the dark valleys with the plaintive streams on their surfaces. Then it illuminates the lair of the beast which conveys the many seas around the sides of the earth in every direction, and which sucks in the seas again, leaving dry shores on every side. It shines, moreover, on the fiery mountain formed from the fire of doom for the destruction of every created thing. It shines on the many thousands who, from the beginning of the world, sleep the sad sleep in the valley of the flowers. It illuminates the sorrowful tearful plain with the dragons placed in its gloom. Then it lights up the flocks of birds which sing together the many melodies in the valleys of the flowers. It shines on the radiant plains with the bright flowers which illuminate the valley. Finally it shines in the direction of Adam’s Paradise until it rises again from the east in the morning...”.

36 “Alimbea fones arife aste. boia fiten salmibia libe lib ebile nab lea fabe: On the fifth day God created the seventy-two kinds of bird-flocks, and the seventy-two kinds of beasts of the sea. Each species had its own particular form, habits, and nature.

37 Firstly, there are the birds of the island of Naboth. There has not shone
on earth a colour or radiance which does not shine from their wings. They shed tears in cold and snow. They rejoice in the heat and brightness of summer. They awaken always at midnight, and sing melodies sweet as harpstrings.

As for the birds of Sabetes, their wings shine at night-time like lighted candles. Any affliction which is touched by their wings or by their shadow when in flight is cured. They assume a torpid inertia in the season of winter and cold, and they awaken at May-day. In their slumbers they sing gentle music like the sound of wind.

There are the birds of Abuad, in the islands between the east of Africa and the heavens. There has not appeared on earth a beautiful colour which has not radiated from their wings, and no feather or plumage has fallen from them since the beginning of the world, yet the amount of their plumage has not increased. The fragrance and scent of flowers, and the taste of the seven rivers of wine which traverse the bright plains is what suffices them for food since the creation. They do not cease from singing in harmony, and they are not wearied until midnight brings the chant of the angels from a cloud.

The three bird-flocks are distributed thus, seventy thousand and seventy-two birds in each flock. At midnight the first flock raises its cry. It praises God by means of its song, and tells of the wonderful innumerable mysteries created by the Lord from the beginning of the world to Doomsday.

At the end of the night comes the final bird-flock. With sevenfold melody it tells of the din to descend on the world with the fear of Doomsday. Then it will relate the seventy-fold division of punishment to those who merit it, and will describe the seventy-two seats in the heavenly mansions for all who deserve them.

Et diresir alba sibe alea me lis: If the race of Adam should hear the music of those birds, they would not be parted from the sound gladly or with pleasure, but rather with grief, longing, and sadness, until they die from weeping.

Efi lia lasien ferosa filera leus dissia nimbile nue bua faune intoria tebnae, id
Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et ad similitudinem nostram, et praesit piscibus mariss et volatilibus celi et bestis uniuersae terrae.

44 Such is the bountiful power of the Lord that, after the trespass, there were twenty-four types among Adam's descendants."
23. THE EVERNEW TONGUE

McNamara, no. 94;

Previous edition by Whitley Stokes, "The Evernew Tongue", Ériu 2(1905), 96-147.

There are three recensions of this work; that translated here is the First Recension. This is probably from the tenth century.

Opinions differ as to the nature of the work and the sources used. Robin Flower (Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum, 2, London, 1926, 557) thinks it probably represents a translation or adaptation of a lost Latin Apocalypse of Philip; the fragments of Latin embedded in the Irish text seem to point to a Latin source. M. R. James
(JThS 20, 1919, 9-13) suggests that the author has borrowed in part from Lapidaries and Bestiaries of the Middle Ages, and is also of the opinion that the text follows the Greek, as against the Latin Acts of Philip, in the record of the Saint's martyrdom. More recently, Peter Kitson (“The Jewels and Bird Hiruath of the ‘Ever-New Tongue’”, Ériu 35, 1984, 113-136) has studied the texts of the apocryphon concerning four magical jewels declared to possess a mystic likeness to human beings (par. 43-47 of Recension I) and concerning the monstrous bird hiruath (par. 58 of Recension I), and examines the presumed sources in lapidary texts and travellers’ tales. He also notes the existence of the same traditions in the Latin MS BL Royal 6.A.xi (f 146v), a fourteenth-century text, and regards this Latin text as a hitherto unrecognized derivative of the Irish passages in question.

Much painstaking literary and source analysis is required before any really informed judgement can be passed on this interesting composition. Par. 58 has a tradition of the exotic bird hiruath (hirodius of Ps 103:17) which in substance is found already in the Hiberno-Latin commentary on this psalm in Codex Pal. Lat. 68; (ed. M. McNamara, Glossa in Psalms. Gloss on the Psalms of Codex Vaticanus Palatino-Latinus 68, Studi e Testi 310, Vatican Library, 1986, 213); see M. McNamara in Ériu 39(1988), 87-94. The cosmological or cosmographical views of the texts should now be compared with such newly-identified commentaries on the Creation Narratives of Genesis; they will be found to have much in common; see M. McNamara, “Celtic Christianity, Creation and Apocalypse, Christ and Antichrist”, Milltown Studies no.23 (Spring 1989), 7, 12f. The work might conceivably be better described as a theological treatise than an apocryphon, even though in the climate of ideas with which we are dealing the differences between one and the other may not be too clearcut.