

Assessment #2

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The Motifs and Messages of the *Bethu Brigitte*: An Analysis of Saint Brigit

The *Bethu Brigitte* offers a unique opportunity to study the character of Saint Brigit and explore her portrayal as an established Christian figure and the influences that shaped her hagiographical development. This paper aims to explore a range of motifs found in the *Bethu Brigitte* and their theological significance, particularly in connection to other texts, saints, Christian themes, and pagan beliefs. While the *Bethu Brigitte* contains multiple motifs worthy of exploration and analysis, this paper will concentrate on four different motifs: divine fire, transformation, provision, and speech.

These selected motifs were chosen to illuminate the miracles attributed to Saint Brigit and the elevation of her authority in the *Bethu Brigitte*. These motifs in the *Bethu Brigitte* reveal how the author may have been influenced by pagan beliefs and figures, and how they structured their prose to solidify Brigit as a deeply Christian figure, one whose miracles and sanctity elevated her above others. Some motifs, such as the motif of transformation and provision, link Brigit closely to Christianity, while the motif of divine fire connects her to both Christian and Celtic beliefs. Whether intentional or not then, the *Bethu Brigitte* acts as a transitional document, showing the shift of Brigit from Celtic goddess to powerful Christian Saint.

Bethu Brigitte in Context

To understand the messaging behind the *Bethu Brigitte*, it is important to understand the context of Brigit herself. When exploring the figure of Saint Brigit, it is crucial to acknowledge that she is not an isolated figure. Over time, hagiographical writings and mythology expanded upon the original figure, creating a network of Brigits that draw from multiple individuals or composite figures. These include the Irish Brigit, the Welsh Sant Ffraid, the Swedish Brigit, and the Celtic goddess Brigit.

In his work “Dictionary of the Irish Saints,” Ó Riain lists more than seven ‘Brighid’s’ originating from various places.¹ Elissa R. Henken, in *Notes from Traditions of the Welsh Saints*, remarks on the complexity of identity when studying Saint Brigit. She acknowledges that even the Welsh

¹ Ó Riain, Pádraig. “A Dictionary of Irish Saints.” Four Courts Press, 2011, pg. 123-126

Saint Brigit is a composite figure of multiple Brigits, highlighting that the ‘identification of figures with the same name is a frequent occurrence in folk tradition’.²

Perhaps, over time, adopting the name ‘Brigit’ came to signify a status or served as a way to honor the Brigits who came before. The figure we recognize today may have evolved from pre-existing figures dating back to pagan Celtic religion, which revered a goddess named Brigit. While this paper primarily focuses on the Brigit in the *Bethu Brigitte*, it is essential to recognize that this figure has undergone modifications and adaptations throughout history.

The *Bethu Brigitte* is a 9th-century Irish prose, emerging after two other significant accounts of Saint Brigit: the Latin *Life of Saint Brigid the Virgin* by Cogitosus and another Latin life commonly referred to as the ‘Vita Prima’.³ Multiple Latin lives and hymns follow, creating an abundance of text for the Irish female saint. Ó Riain emphasizes this point by stating that, apart from Saint Patrick, Brigit has a more ‘extensive biographical dossier than any other Irish Saint.’⁴ The *Bethu Brigitte* exists within a plethora of hagiographical narratives surrounding the saint. This paper aims to investigate the potential intentions and portrayal of this specific iteration of Brigit by examining key motifs that highlight her Christian power and authority. While not an exhaustive list, the key motifs this paper examines are divine fire, the power of transformation, the power of provision, and miraculous speech.

The Motif of Divine Fire

Among the themes associated with Saint Brigit, the motif of fire has the strongest connections to pagan or Celtic beliefs. The very first story in the *Bethu Brigitte* tells of a miracle occurring when the saint was a baby. While the infant was left alone to sleep, the house she was in appeared to be on fire. However, when aid arrived, the girl and the house were miraculously intact and unharmed.⁵ *The Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore* also tells of this incident.⁶

Another story in the *Bethu Brigitte* connecting the saint to fire is when a bishop ordained her to the order of a bishop herself. When the bishop consecrated her, ‘a fiery column ascended from her head.’⁷ This second association with fire is also included in the *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore*.⁸ Early in the story of Saint Brigit, these miracles establish her connection to heaven as well as her sanctity.

² Henken, Elissa R. “Traditions of the Welsh saints.” Brewer, 1987, Pg. 161

³ Kissane, N. (n.d.). “Brigit (Brighid, Bríd, Bride, Bridget”. Dictionary of Irish Biography.

⁴ Ó Riain, Pádraig. “A Dictionary of Irish Saints.” Four Courts Press, 2011, pg. 123

⁵ Ó hAodha, Donncha [ed.], *Bethu Brigitte*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978. §1

⁶ Stokes, Whitley, ed. *Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore*. Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1207

⁷ Ó hAodha, Donncha [ed.], *Bethu Brigitte*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978. §19

⁸ Stokes, Whitley, ed. “Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore.” Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1341

In her article, "Saint Brigit and the Fire From Heaven," Dorothy Ann Bray mentions several other saints who also have similar incidents relating to fire: Ita, Samthann, and Daig.⁹ Other saints who show power over the elements by producing fire include Brendan, Ciaran Saigir, Declan, Mochua, and Patrick.¹⁰ While this is a fairly common motif among saint's lives, Dorothy believes it originated in Irish hagiography with Brigit.¹¹ Whether it began with her or not, Brigit's connection to fire seems to convey a message about her anchor to Christianity, while also connecting her to Celtic mythology.

Fire as Christian Symbolism

In the Old Testament fire is directly linked to God and heaven. Examples include Exodus 13:21 (NRSV) where the Lord goes before the Israelites as a pillar of fire at night and Exodus 3:2 where the Lord appears before Moses as a burning bush, but the flames don't consume the bush. Also important to note is the story of Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:19-30 where they are thrust into the fiery furnace for their faith but emerge unharmed. Likewise, Brigit's ability to escape harm by fire and having pillars of fire rising above her head are symbolic representations of the divine protection and sanctification she receives.

From a Christian viewpoint these miracles show the validity and righteousness of Brigit as a saint and spiritual leader. Further, when she 'takes the veil' and a pillar of fire rises above her head, the bishop ordains her to the office of a bishop. When another leader opposes, the bishop states 'No power have I in this matter. That dignity hath been given by God unto Brigit beyond every other woman.'¹² Her singular experience raises her above others and brings her into a level of authority not traditionally given to women. For Brigit, fire is a heavenly seal of approval and cements her authority on her behalf.

Bray takes this further by likening Brigit unto Moses: 'When Moses descended from Sinai his face was a light with a heavenly glow, as was Brigit's after the fire. And as Moses was able to claim the promised land of Canaan for the Israelites, so Brigit was able to make a claim on her promised land of Leinster.'¹³ The implication is that with heavenly fire, Brigit was able to secure land and offices otherwise not available to her. She is elevated through divine flames. The author of the *Bethu Brigitte* seems to have used this fire motif as a tool of ethos to give unquestionable authority derived from heaven itself to Brigit.

Fire as Celtic Symbolism

⁹ Bray, Dorothy Ann. "Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven." *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg. 106

¹⁰ Bray, Dorothy Ann, "A list of motifs in the Lives of the early Irish saints", Folklore Fellows' Communications, 252, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1992. Pg. 123

¹¹ Bray, Dorothy Ann. "Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven." *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg. 106

¹² Stokes, Whitley, ed. "Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore." Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1341

¹³ Bray, Dorothy Ann. "Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven." *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg. 109

However, the motif of divine fire cements Brigit's authority not only for Christian audiences, but for Celtic pagan groups as well. In §3 of the *Bethu Brigitte*, fire appears a second time above the house where Brigit is residing. In this story, a Druid and a Christian both take note of the flames, and agree that they signify Brigit's holiness. This appears to convey a message of Brigit's sanctity in both the eyes of Christianity, and Celtic pagan beliefs.

While most scholars are able to draw connections between the Christian Saint Brigit, and the Celtic goddess Brigit, the extent of and meaning behind these connections is disputed. In her article titled "Brigit: Goddess, Saint, 'Holy Woman', and bone of Contention", Carole Cusack states, 'The miracles in the Brigit Lives employ imagery such as fire and light, fertility and feasting; these qualities are all connected with the [pan-Celtic] goddess [Brigit].'¹⁴ She further proposes that Brigit may be a term for Celtic goddesses in general.¹⁵ This multi-goddess theory is shared by Cormac mac Cuillennáin in his tenth century *Glossary*. He implies there may be multiple Brigit goddesses for learning, poetry, and smith-work.¹⁶ While smith-work, fire, and light are all potentially connected to divine fire, these writers demonstrate that as the Christian Brigit could be a conglomeration of several figures rather than based on one sole individual, the pagan goddess considered 'Brigit' might also be several figures rolled into one.

Some scholars propose a deeper connection between the Celtic and Christian Brigits. Pádraig Ó Riain explains why he believes the connection is more specific: 'On account of her feast of 1 February, one of the main days in the Celtic calendar, and the tradition of a perpetual fire at her church, as witnessed by Giraldus Cambrensis, the saint is thought to have had dubious origins, probably involving the pre-Christian cult of the Celtic divinity Brigantia.'¹⁷ In the Celtic calendar February 1, Imbolc, honors Brigit as a goddess of fire, water, and inspiration. Her symbol of a woven cross represents the Earth's elements with the sun at the center—another nod to her connection to fire.¹⁸ Whether this Celtic goddess was multiple figures or one, there appears to be several links between the Christian saint and the pagan beliefs predating Christianity.

Other scholars argue that while correlation is there, the direct connection seems fragile at best. Both the Celtic and Christian Brigits have connection to fire and connections to each other, but Elva Johnson in "The 'pagan' and 'Christian' Identities of the Irish Female Saint" explains that while 'It seems indisputable that a goddess named Brigit... was honored among Celtic communities. It is another thing, however, to try to match the characteristics of the goddess with

¹⁴ Cusack, Carole. "Brigit: Goddess, Saint, 'Holy Woman', and Bone of Contention." *Sydney Studies in Religion*, 2007, Pg. 84

¹⁵ Cusack, Carole. "Brigit: Goddess, Saint, 'Holy Woman', and Bone of Contention." *Sydney Studies in Religion*, 2007, Pg. 85

¹⁶ Kenney, James F. III. "The Irish Church in the "Celtic" Period". *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland an Introduction and Guide*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1929, Pg.14.

¹⁷ Ó Riain, Pádraig. "A dictionary of Irish saints." Four Courts Press, 2011. Pg. 123

¹⁸ Gavin, Sophie. "Imbolc and the Goddess Brigid. Embracing Celtic Traditions and Symbolism." *Celtic Fusion ~ Folklore Clothing*, Celtic Fusion ~ Folklore Clothing, 6 Mar. 2024

the saint... While the status of Brigit arguably had pre-Christian roots, this is expressed in Christian terms and her essential identity is a Christian one.’¹⁹ Instead Johnson suggests the cult of Brigit as the saint developed around a divine figure—encouraging new believers while still appealing to old ideas. Whatever the true influence pre-Christian cults had on the now popular saint though, it is likely that the author of the *Bethu Brigte* utilized this connection point of fire to sympathize with both religious audiences, perhaps using the figure of Brigit to bridge Christian and Celtic beliefs.

Bridge Between Christian and Celtic Beliefs

In her article, “Narrative Analysis of *Bethu Brigte*,” Leyla Telli states that the author may have wished ‘the vita to occupy a liminal space between Christianity and paganism by using motifs that are pertinent to both and thereby builds a bridge towards a new concept of religiosity.’²⁰ The use of a motif shared by both the goddess and the saint demonstrates the author’s knowledge of the different identities of Brigit. Perhaps using it to appeal to multiple audiences, the fire motif shows that Brigit herself is a composite figure. The particular acknowledgement of both Christian and Druid recognizing her fire as a sign of sanctity in §3 only adds to her weight of authority as a divine figure.

Bray suggests that Brigit’s fire helped to form the saint: ‘She represents the continuity of Irish cultures (in poetic arts, healing, and smithcraft) within the belief system of Christianity... She provided a new model for women in the ecclesiastical system, one which was not oppressed but played a decisive political part in the context of Church and community.’²¹ The *Bethu Brigte* uses the motif of fire as a tool to bridge Christian and Druid beliefs around this figure as well as establish her unique authority in a system where she is elevated to an unexpectedly higher status.

The Motif of Transformation

A second significant motif in the *Bethu Brigte* is the theme of transformation. In the text, one of the most frequently mentioned transformation miracles is the turning of water into ale. In §8, Brigit draws water from a well that becomes ale, which she uses to heal her foster mother. Similarly, in §28 her maidens bring in water that Brigit transforms into ale for the bishop on Low Sunday. *The Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore* echoes this specific story as well.²² Cogitosus’s *Life of Saint Brigid the Virgin* also depicts the saint turning bath water into ale, this time for a group of lepers. Notably, Cogitosus directly compares this miracle to Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, stating, ‘It was indeed He Who turned water into wine in

¹⁹ Elva Johnston. “The ‘pagan’ and ‘Christian’ Identities of the Irish Female Saint.” *Celts and Christians: new approaches to the religious traditions of Britain and Ireland*. Edited by Atherton, M, University of Wales Press, 2002. pg. 72

²⁰ Telli, Leyla. “Narrative Analysis of *Bethu Brigte*.” S. Conermann und J. Rheingans, eds., *Narrative Pattern and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing. Comparative Perspectives from Asia to Europe*, Berlin (2014): 43-458. (pg 14)

²¹ Bray, Dorothy Ann. “Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven.” *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg.111

²² Stokes, Whitley, ed. “Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore.” Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1377

Cana of Galilee Who turned water into beer here, through this most blessed woman's faith'.²³ Cogitosus emphasizes that although the miracle occurred through Brigit, it is Christ who performed the miracle himself.

According to Bray, other Saints who changed water into wine (or even ale or milk) include; Aed, Ciaran Clonmacnois, Ciaran Saigir, Coemgen, Colman Elo, Columba, Cuimine, Finnian, Heist, Mochuda, Molua, Monenna, Patrick, and Ruadan.²⁴ This common theme shows how oftentimes we see the saints perform miracles that mimic or allude to miracles performed in the Bible. This not only links the saints in a special way to Christian theology, but also proves their worthiness and virtue.

Saint Brigit's worthiness and virtue are evident as she demonstrates her authority and power to effect changes beyond merely turning water into ale. In §24 she takes water from her own mug and blesses it to turn it into milk to heal a maiden. This is also included in *The Book of Lismore*, although the maiden is a nun in the account.²⁵ Unique to the *Bethu Brigitte* are the miracles where she changes meat into bread in §20 and transforms an ash beam into an acacia in §18. The acacia beam highlights Brigit's connection to fire, as it becomes impervious to flame from the moment of its transformation. The text notes that despite the church burning down three times, the altar remained unharmed under the ashes.²⁶ These unique motifs associated with Brigit indicate the author's attempt to elevate her beyond the ordinary and demonstrate her great authority according to Christian standards.

Certainly, the specific transformation of water into ale or milk in the *Bethu Brigitte* resonates with the miracle at Cana in the New Testament. While the *Bethu Brigitte* may not explicitly articulate this connection as Cogitosus's text does, the Christian symbolism remains noticeable and powerful. The inclusion of these types of miracles and motifs in the Irish text likely aimed to solidify Brigit's connection with Christ and affirm the validity of her virtue. Her authority over the elements holds theological significance, as it demonstrates her will and faith exerting dominion over the natural world.

In Bray's book about Irish motifs she states, 'The saints appear in the vitae as heroic examples of Christian living, and it is in accordance with this ideal that the hagiographers depict their "heroes"'.²⁷ The author of the *Bethu Brigitte* portrays an ideal female saint: humble, providing for others, performing miracles that resonate with Christ and his followers, and loyal to her virginity

²³ De Paor, Liam. "Saint Patrick's world : the Christian culture of Ireland's apostolic age" Dublin:Four Courts Press, 1996.Total Pages viii, 335, Pg. 211

²⁴ Bray, Dorothy Ann, "A list of motifs in the Lives of the early Irish saints", Folklore Fellows' Communications, 252, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1992. Pg. 108

²⁵ Stokes, Whitley, ed. "Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore." Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1368

²⁶ Ó hAodha, Donncha [ed.], *Bethu Brigitte*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978. §18

²⁷ Bray, Dorothy Ann, "A list of motifs in the Lives of the early Irish saints", Folklore Fellows' Communications, 252, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1992. Pg. 11

and ‘marriage’ to Christ. While her association with the motif of fire may connect her more closely to pre-Christian beliefs, the instances of miraculous transformation described here align her more closely with Christian ideals as they directly mirror miracles performed by Jesus Christ during his ministry. .

The range of motifs employed by the author indicates a desire to align Brigit with the broader network of Christian saints. The act of turning water into ale serves this purpose, while the unique miracles involving the acacia or transformation of meat into bread serve to distinguish Brigit as unique among her peers. While Bray suggests that Brigit’s numerous healing and provision miracles could be interpreted as both ‘a function of a fertility goddess and a parallel to the miracles of Christ,’²⁸ the motif of transformation contributes more to Brigit’s Christian authority than her pagan attributes as the possible connections of transformation miracles to a fertility goddess are more generalized than the direct connections to the New Testament.

The Motif of Provision

A third motif in the *Bethu Brigitte* that highlights Brigit’s Christian role is the miracle of provision, which she performs many times. Miraculous provision, or providing food or water out of thin air, ranks as the second-most common motif found in the *Bethu Brigitte*—second only to her healing miracles. Excluding instances where she transforms existing water or material, she miraculously provides sustenance over seven times in the *Bethu Brigitte*. This provision category also includes cases where the amount of food remains constant despite natural laws. While the recipients and circumstances vary from one account to another, Saint Brigit’s central focus remains on providing for those in need.

In §7, we find Brigit providing enough bread for whatever number of guests come to visit her foster mother. §10 contains the story of her boiling bacon for a guest and giving two-fifths to a hungry dog. When her father returns to check the food, the number is ‘intact’. This story is also included in Cogitosus’s *Life of Saint Brigid the Virgin* and the *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*.²⁹ Later, in §44 Brigit provides enough food for a surprise guest—St. Patrick himself. Other Irish Saints who multiplied food include Ciarain Clonmacnois, Cronan, Monenna, and Samthann. As for miraculous provision as a whole, accounts can be found in the lives of at least twenty-eight Irish saints listed in Bray’s “List of Motifs”.³⁰ Clearly this motif is anchored strongly in Christian theology, and much like the motif of transformation, Brigit showcases authority over the natural world in the way Christ did.

²⁸ Bray, Dorothy Ann. "Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven." *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg.109

²⁹Stokes, Whitley, ed. “Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore.” Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1250 and De Paor, Liam. *Saint Patrick's world : the Christian culture of Ireland's apostolic age* Dublin :Four Courts Press1996.Total Pages viii, 335 p. (pg. 209)

³⁰Bray, Dorothy Ann, “A list of motifs in the Lives of the early Irish saints”, *Folklore Fellows' Communications*, 252, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1992. Pg.105

Other provision miracles in the *Bethu Brigte* include providing water on dry land in §20—reminiscent of Moses providing water in the wilderness for the Israelites (Exodus 17:6). In §21, Saint Brigit miraculously provides ale on Easter, a major day in the Christian calendar. Saint Brigit has one sack of malt prepared and while it doesn't appear to be enough it miraculously provides 'eighteen vatfuls.' As Bray puts it, her miracle at this time 'exemplifies the overlay of Christian belief which differentiates the saint from the goddess'.³¹ Unlike the connection to fire, which appears to link Brigit to both the Christian and the pagan worlds, her provision miracles anchor her firmly to the Bible and the New Testament much like the motif of transformation. This miracle alludes to the wedding of Cana as did the miracle in §28 where the saint takes water and turns it into ale. In the book of Matthew chapter 14 verses 13-21 we read the story of Jesus feeding the five-thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Exodus 16 describes the account of manna miraculously appearing for the Israelites. Throughout Christian theology, this idea of being fed spiritually as well as physically appears over and over again.

One of Brigit's most popular miracles involves the miraculous multiplication or provision of butter. The miracle of the butter is included in the *Bethu Brigte* as well as Cogitosus's *Life* and the *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*.³² The Christian links are clearly expressed as Brigit divides the butter she churns into thirteen sections, representing Christ and his twelve apostles. The subsequent abundance of butter out of one-and-a-half churnings shocks the guests of those who she is serving. Then, not only is Brigit's mother released from slavery, but the druid decides to convert to Christianity and follow Brigit.

Thus, Brigit's miracles of provision also serve to convert those of different faith. With this theme the author is firmly cementing Brigit as a Christian figure, and pagan connections—at least in this motif—are nowhere to be found. This idea of providing food miraculously is too powerfully tied to Christian theology to connect Brigit to any pre-existing deities or faiths. Katherine Krawjeskit puts it plainly when she says, 'Miraculous though their production may be ...the impression these feedings give is of ordinary food provided to persons in need, exactly the sort of charity that would and should engage a Christian saint.'³³ These particular motifs in the *Bethu Brigte* leave little to no room for pagan influence or allusion. Here, we see Brigit in her purest Christian Saint form.

When examining this recurring motif in the *Bethu Brigte*, the text's intent becomes quite clear. Despite any pagan or pre-Christian influences that may have shaped the Brigit known in the 9th century, the growing influence of Christianity was molding a new Brigit with a fresh Christian

³¹Bray, Dorothy Ann. "Saint Brigit and the fire from heaven." *Études celtiques* 29.1, 1992. Pg.214

³²Stokes, Whitley, ed. "Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore." Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890, §1266-96 and De Paor, Liam. *Saint Patrick's world : the Christian culture of Ireland's apostolic age* Dublin :Four Courts Press1996.Total Pages viii, 335 pg. 209

³³Krajewski, Elizabeth M G. "Fire, Food, Healing and Liberation: An Examination of Pagan and Christian Themes in the 7 Th -9 Th Century Lives of Brigit of Kildare." Academia.Edu, 2008, Pg. 8

perspective. Whether drawing from the narrative of Cogitosus's *Life* and other Latin lives, or solidifying her lore in their own distinct way, the author appears to have allowed certain pre-Christian elements to permeate the text without directly linking Brigit to a Celtic goddess. Krawjeski shares the same sentiment when she states that attributing a 'pagan goddess identity to Brigit because she feeds the hungry is to turn a blind eye to much of Christian teaching as well as to the universal tendency to ritualize the most basic and meaningful of life-giving processes.'³⁴

Those seeking to demonstrate pre-Christian connections to Brigit within this theme of provision are unlikely to find sufficient support. What emerges from this motif is Brigit's authority; her ability to command the physical world directly echoes the miracles depicted in the Bible. It seems that the author is taking the fluid and dynamic figure of Brigit and solidifying her as a Christian figure imbued with authority.

The Motif of Speech

A final, key motif in the *Bethu Brigitte* that is less well-known is the power of miraculous speech. This theme is found in three of the *Bethu Brigitte*'s sections: §4, 37, and 40. Each describes an instance where those who would not or could not normally speak are empowered to do so. In §4 we read of infant Brigit speaking earlier than she was expected to. She is heard speaking in the other room by both the druid and the druid's uncle—a Christian. Similar to the story of when both figures witnessed her divine fire rising above the house, the author appears to be acknowledging both religious audiences, while making it clear that she speaks plainly to the Christian uncle rather than the druid. She addresses the Christian and says 'This will be mine'. He doesn't understand and it is the Druid who explains saying she will own the land. Her preference to speak to the Christian over the Druid seems to be a message from the author. Even though she is heard to be speaking miraculously by both, she doesn't answer the druid. The conversation not only reveals her connection to Christianity but also her unique power and authority as she claims land for herself. In this story, the author foreshadows Brigit's unique authority and power within the Christian community, while not excluding the pagan community entirely as the druid is in agreement with Brigit's sainthood and jurisdiction.

In §37, the power of speech moves from Brigit herself to a boy afflicted with dumbness, who Brigit seemingly cures by accident. Being left alone with the 'dumb boy,' she asks him where the key to the kitchen is. He is then cured and begins to speak. This account is also shared by the *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*. Cogitosus's *Life* also describes a similar instance where Brigit cures a little girl of dumbness with her mother present.³⁵ This healing follows similar

³⁴ Krajewski, Elizabeth M G. "Fire, Food, Healing and Liberation: An Examination of Pagan and Christian Themes in the 7 Th -9 Th Century Lives of Brigit of Kildare." Academia.Edu, 2008, Pg. 10

³⁵ Stokes, Whitley, ed. "Lives of Saints, from the Book of Lismore." Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, 1890. §1442 and De Paor, Liam. *Saint Patrick's world : the Christian culture of Ireland's apostolic age*, Dublin :Four Courts Press1996.Total Pages viii, 335 p. 212

patterns shown by Christ during his ministry as he cured all sorts of ailments, including healing a blind and mute man in Matthew 12:22.

We see Brigit's sanctity and power work even further to elevate her authority in the final account of helping someone to speak. §40 tells of Brigit causing an infant to speak. The story goes that a woman claimed she became pregnant from a certain bishop in Saint Patrick's household. When Saint Brigit arrives she asks the infant directly who their father is and the child speaks, saying it was not the bishop but another man 'in the outermost part of the assembly.'³⁶ What makes this particular miracle so powerful is the case being solved by Brigit in Saint Patrick's own household or area of authority.

Elva Johnson, in her chapter on the identities of the Irish female saint, said the following, 'Brigit's career resembles that of a male saint such as Patrick; she is on par with men.' She states that Brigit saving one of Saint Patrick's bishops from an unfair accusation suggests Brigit is a figure of authority.³⁷ Through the motif of miraculous speech, the author of the *Bethu Brigitte* showcases not only an ideal Christian saint, but one so powerful that she performs miracles in Saint Patrick's own household. This cements her own hagiography as a powerful female Christian leader. Thus, this particular motif holds practically no connection to pagan or Celtic roots and shows Brigit's power and authority in the Christian context.

Conclusion

The author behind the *Bethu Brigitte* is taking a fluid and dynamic character known as Brigit and cementing her as a Christian saint, following the footsteps of other Latin writers like Cogitosus. Her powerful authority is recognized by both pagan and Christian groups. From witnessing her divine fire to listening to her speak at a young age, the author was specific in including both a Druid and a Christian witness to Brigit's authority. The inclusion of druids in her life, as well as the possible shared characteristics of a pagan goddess, acknowledge pre-Christian theology.

Indeed, the divine fire of Brigit acts as a potential bridge between Christian and pagan theology. The pillars of fire evoke Biblical themes, while also linking to pagan beliefs surrounding the goddess Brigit, who is associated with smith-work, the Imbolc festival, and other symbols of light and fire. While connections can be drawn for both groups, in the end the motif of fire serves primarily to solidify Brigit's Christian identity, such as when she becomes consecrated to the rank of a Bishop, something unheard of for female saints.

The motifs of transformation and provision draw Brigit further from the pagan world and directly link her works and miracles to those found in the Old and New Testament. These works provide

³⁶ Ó hAodha, Donncha [ed.], "Bethu Brigitte", Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978. §40

³⁷ Elva Johnston. "The 'pagan' and 'Christian' Identities of the Irish Female Saint." *Celts and Christians: new approaches to the religious traditions of Britain and Ireland*. Edited by Atherton, M, University of Wales Press, 2002. Pg. 68

imagery that show Brigit as a type of Christ, with aspects of his nature including his power over the physical world and ability to provide for physical needs. Her elevated authority as a Christian saint started with her consecrating fire, but is most demonstrated by her miracle of causing the infant to speak and saving a Bishop in St. Patrick's household from an unjust accusation. Brigit moves from a possible pagan Celtic goddess to a Christian figure, and then to a powerful female saint comparable to Saint Patrick.

The *Bethu Brigitte* then is aware of pre-Christian theology, but it uses this tool to forge Brigit the Christian saint. At its heart, the text focuses on praising Brigit as a powerful Christian saint, and the motifs explored in this paper establish that power and authority. The authority which sets her apart may not make her a goddess like the probably pagan Brigit's before, but it ensures that the name of Brigit will continue to be associated with women who exceed society's expectations and limits in miraculous ways.

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