
Theology & Religious Studies

1981

Review of The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh, by L. Bieler

Joseph F. Kelly

John Carroll University, kelly@jcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://collected.jcu.edu/theo_rels-facpub



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Joseph F., "Review of The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh, by L. Bieler" (1981). *Theology & Religious Studies*. 41.

https://collected.jcu.edu/theo_rels-facpub/41

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Carroll Collected. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology & Religious Studies by an authorized administrator of Carroll Collected. For more information, please contact mchercourt@jcu.edu.

intertwined with the discussion of the issues, all put together as a note to a text. While he may achieve familiarity with one major polemical work and with many of the basic themes of the Jewish-Christian disagreement, he will probably miss exposure to the whole scope of the debate. In addition, many of the concerns of the later polemics, for example, the philosophical arguments of the Spanish school of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fall outside the purview of this work. One might add, however, that Berger's edition of *Nizzahon Yashan* would certainly provide an excellent textbook for teaching medieval Jewish-Christian polemics.

Though the edition is, on the whole, very well conceived and executed, there is one area in which one would have wished for a different procedure. While both the Hebrew text and English translation are arranged by numbered pericopes, the notes are according to the pagination of the translation only. Hence, someone who wishes to consult the notes while using the Hebrew text must first ascertain the correct location by reference to the translation. In addition, the translation is provided with new line numbers on each page while the text has line numbers which run the length of full chapters. A greater coordination between text, translation, and notes would have been easier for the reader.

In his introduction, Berger argues that Jewish polemic "reflects some of the most important social, economic, and intellectual changes that were taking place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries." By providing such an illuminating edition of *Nizzahon Yashan*, David Berger has opened a window onto that area of the medieval world and is, therefore, deserving of our gratitude.

DANIEL J. LASKER

Ben Gurion University of the Negev

LUDWIG BIELER, ed. and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 10.) Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979. Pp. vii, 288. £15.

FOR four decades Ludwig Bieler has been attempting to solve the many mysteries surrounding the career of Saint Patrick, and for that long scholars engaged in Patrician studies have been in his debt. Prof. Bieler has dealt with the Patrician problem as editor, translator, cataloguer, biographer, and historian, and he has been an aid and sympathetic critic to others. This current volume is the latest in a long series of distinguished contributions.

The Book of Armagh plays a crucial role in Patrician studies. It contains the only complete manuscript of a Latin New Testament from an Irish source and the *Martiniana* of Sulpicius Severus. The rest of the book is *Patriciana*: the earliest version of the *Confessio* and *Epistola* of Patrick himself; two *vitae Patricii*, by Muirchú and by Tírechán; and related shorter works. This material has been published in whole or in part several times, most notably in John Gwynn's magisterial *Liber Ardmachanus* (Dublin, 1913).

Bieler first studied the Book of Armagh in *Codices Patriciani Latini* (Dublin, 1942), his first publication on Saint Patrick. He returned to it in 1950 in his critical edition of Patrick's works, for which he favored the longer version contained in other manuscripts to the abbreviated version in the Book of Armagh. He did not, however, explain the status of the abbreviated form, which omits several passages that attest to

the saint's weaknesses. When, in 1969, Douglas Powell argued for the genuineness of the Armagh version (*Analecta Bollandiana* 87, 387–409), Bieler did not reply to him, nor to R. P. C. Hanson, who defended Bieler's position against Powell (*Studia Patristica* 12, 91–95).

By that time Bieler's interest in the Book of Armagh was focusing on its later *Patriciana*, which are edited and translated here: the *vita* of Muirchú, a seventh-century ecclesiastic; the *vita*, or rather *collectanea*, of Tírechán, a seventh-century bishop; *Additamenta* to Tírechán; *Notulae*, an index to some *Patriciana*; and the *Liber Angeli*, "a statement of the claims of [the see of] Armagh as to both territory and ecclesiastical supremacy in a hagiographical setting" (p. 52). Except for Muirchú's *vita*, all these works are known only from the Book of Armagh, although parts of Tírechán's work survive in an Irish translation.

The discussion of Muirchú's *vita* is the longest and most demanding section of the present book. Bieler designates the Armagh text of Muirchú as A, which he thinks represents a separate tradition from that of the other two principal manuscripts, one of which, Vienna Nationalbibliothek Ser. nov. 3642, saec. viii² (designated C by Bieler), consists of only two fragments in an Anglo-Saxon hand, but it antedates the Book of Armagh, which was transcribed in the opening decade of the ninth century. Other witnesses to the text derive from the Book of Armagh. Bieler specifies that when A stands alone against the other important witnesses, "our decision must rest on assessing the respective merit of the readings in question" (p. 32). Consulting the critical apparatus, however, one finds that in general the editor favored A, even over C. No one can fault Bieler for giving primacy to location over chronological precedence; C is not that much earlier than A, and Muirchú dedicated his work to Aed, bishop of Sléibte (Sletty in County Leix), who had visited Armagh before 688 to incorporate his church into the *paruchia Patricii*, thus giving Muirchú's work an early connection with Armagh.

Any scholar working with early Irish material knows of the many lacunae in almost every branch of the literature. This situation prevails in the textual tradition to Muirchú. While one can accept Bieler's basic division of the manuscripts into two traditions, the elaborate *stemma* (p. 30) seems to include too many hypothetical, non-extant manuscripts. The editor has provided examples of how the extant manuscripts disagree, but one may wonder if these disagreements are sufficient to posit derivations from now lost codices. On the other hand, Bieler has always been a cautious scholar, and his conclusions must be taken seriously.

Bieler's conservative approach to the text appears not only in the choice of manuscript readings but also in the establishment of the text. His expertise in late Latin and Hiberno-Latin has encouraged him to keep down the number of emendations in the text and to refer questions to the *indices Latinitatis* and *orthographicus* or to the very extensive commentary. The reader is thus enabled to get the flavor of the original and an idea of the nature of the texts with which Bieler has worked. Supplementing Bieler's indices and commentary is a brief (seven pages) appendix, "Notes on the Irish Words," by Fergus Kelly.

The commentary deals primarily with problems of Latinity. Bieler carefully explains his readings and emendations. He also provides full footnotes to the interpretations of other scholars, and the reader is occasionally treated to a small debate. For example, on Tírechán c. 19 (2) (p. 222), Bieler cites the argument of E. Hogan and then of J. Gwynn, only to align himself with that of W. Stokes, on the meaning of *inaurinas*. This thoroughness extends to the Latinized forms of Irish names, the

decipherment of which enables Bieler to chart Muirchú's and Tírechán's itineraries for Patrick.

One note is of great value. The suggestion that the famous reference in the *Additamenta* to Palladius "qui Patricius alio nomine appellabatur" (pp. 164–66) is nothing more than an interpolation based on a misunderstanding of *Patricius secundus* (*secundus* thus meaning the second bishop, not the second Patrick) is both ingenious and plausible.

The translations are as carefully done as the text, although some readers will be surprised at the frequent criticisms of the late Kathleen Hughes's translation of the *Liber Angeli* (pp. 239–40, nos. 14, 19, 21, 22, and 26).

The Patrician scholars who have disagreed with him have not disagreed with Bieler the palaeographer or editor or translator but with Bieler the historian. The same will be true for this book. Bieler has long maintained the positive historical value of these texts for Patrick's life, and his views are well known from his other writings. Perhaps that is why he did not think it necessary to include an account of the texts' historicity here. This might have been acceptable, but Bieler has references in the commentary that presume the texts' historicity, thus necessitating a discussion. More importantly, there is no discussion of the Book of Armagh itself. Why was it composed in the first place? Why were these materials chosen for inclusion and in this order? What relation do these *Patriciana*, which glorify Patrick, bear to the abbreviated, probably expurgated, text of the saint's own works? What relation does the composition of the Book of Armagh bear to the rise of the See of Armagh and the Romanization movement in Ireland? These are serious questions that simply go untreated.

This lack of interest in historical questions appears several times in the commentary. For example, Tírechán c. 38 (p. 152) tells of Patrick's forty-day stay on Mons Aigli, during which troublesome birds obscured his view of the sky, the land, and the sea. This curious event is not mentioned in the commentary, but obviously Tírechán regarded the birds as a negative force of some kind.

Finally, all Patrician scholars will be surprised and disappointed to find not a single reference to R. P. C. Hanson, who is author of a biography of Patrick (London, 1968) and the most recent editor of Patrick's works (*Sources Chrétienne*s 249, 1978).

Even with these shortcomings, this is a book of immense value, if not for Patrick himself, then for the development of his legend and for the history of Irish Christianity in the early Middle Ages as well as for Hiberno-Latin studies. It is a work of painstaking scholarship, and Prof. Bieler, the dean of Hiberno-Latin studies, is owed both our gratitude and our congratulations.

JOSEPH F. KELLY
John Carroll University

SAINT BONAVENTURE, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. (Works of St. Bonaventure, 3.) St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 1979. Paper. Pp. 273.

THIS VOLUME reopens the series of Bonaventuran translations begun forty years ago by Philotheus Boehner. It is encouraging to see that, after a considerable lapse of time, the Franciscan Institute is continuing the series, entitled Works of Saint Bonaventure — and with such a felicitous choice. This is an excellent volume in