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THE INSTANTANEOUS HARVEST

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Of all the legends linked with the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, the one most familiar to Celticists is that of the Instantaneous Harvest, thanks to its early appearance in Welsh and Irish poetry. The legend tells how, on their flight, the Holy Family pass a labourer ploughing a field, and the Virgin begs him to tell Herod's men the truth if they come that way. When Herod's men arrive shortly after, the labourer tells them correctly that the fugitives passed while he was ploughing the field for sowing. But by now he is harvesting the crop, which has miraculously been sown, grown, and ripened, and the soldiers turn back in the belief that the Holy Family passed by months before. In some versions the ploughman is replaced by a sower, or the Christ Child speaks instead of the Virgin, but the outline of the tale remains the same.[1]

This story, well known to folklorists, has been reported in modern times from countries as far apart as Scotland, Romania, Portugal and Russia. It has also been recorded in modern Aramaic of a Muslim holy woman fleeing an unwelcome marriage. However, versions of the story in medieval literature are much rarer. Kenneth Jackson refers to four only: an anonymous Welsh poem 'which presumably dates from the twelfth century'; an Irish poem of uncertain authorship which he dates to the thirteenth century; a fifteenth-century French miracle play; and some fifteenth-century Flemish carols. However, although the Welsh and Irish texts of the story have been considered its oldest literary versions, it is argued below not only that Jackson dates the Celtic texts too early but that some evidence suggests they actually derive from a source featuring in a thirteenth-century French poem. Jackson also mentions that representations of the theme 'are sometimes seen in medieval religious paintings'.[2]

The present article has been written with four objectives: to provide a fresh survey of the material in the Celtic languages; to set out data for the tale from medieval England; to indicate the nature of early medieval Continental evidence for the legend, including material from art and literary texts unknown to Jackson; and to discuss whether, in the light of

[1] Kenneth Jackson, 'A note on the Miracle of the Instantaneous Harvest', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 10 (1939–41), 203–7, and 'Some fresh light on the Miracle of the Instantaneous Harvest', *Folklore* 51 (1940), 203–10; and Joseph Vendryes, 'Le Miracle de la moisson en Galles', *Académie des Inscriptions: Comptes rendus* (1948), 64–76.

[2] Kenneth Jackson, *The international popular tale and early Welsh tradition* (Cardiff 1961), 120–2.

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these, Jackson's views on the origin and diffusion of the story are still acceptable.

The Welsh version of the story forms the last part (lines 53–84) of a religious poem in the early manuscript of Welsh poetry, Aberystwyth, Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, MS Peniarth 1, the 'Black Book of Carmarthen'. The poem is usually dated to the twelfth century, from linguistic evidence rather than from any doctrinal or narrative feature. This evidence consists of a detail of Old Welsh orthography presumed to be no later than *c.* 1150, and the loanword *pilio* from Middle English *pilien*, *pillen*; 'dichon mai bregus fyddai unrhyw awgrym am ddyddiad ar sail y ffurfiau hyn' is A. O. H. Jarman's comment on these. The sole evidence for *early* dating is the orthographical one, the spelling *per* for *peir*, 'lord', on which it would be risky to base much, as the poem has many spelling blunders (e.g. *dwin* for *diwin*, *guenglad* for *guengulad*, *y win* for *y owin*, *hnni* for *hinni*).[3]

There are thus no convincing linguistic reasons why the poem should not be dated closer to its *terminus ante quem*, the date of the Black Book itself, *c.* 1250. French poetry and art also provide grounds for dating the poem to the thirteenth century, and in fact it is possible that the legend reached Wales from France. We shall return to this point below.

Ac eil guirth a wnaeth ehalaeth Argluit,
A ergliw y voli,
Ban winnvis gochel y deli—
Sew fort y ffoes iti,
In yt oet aradur in eredic tir,
Herwit guir in gueini,
Y diwaud y Trindaud Keli,
Ew a'e mam dinam daun owri:
'A gur guin, turr guir gwydi ny a dav
Y geissaw in guesti,
Ar owris y win iti
A gueleist-e gureic a mab genti.
A diwed tithev ir olev guironet,
Ny'th omet in gweti,
In gueled in myned hebti,
Y randir a rad Duv erni.'
Ar hnni y doeth digiwoeth gwerin,
Llin Kain kadeithi,
Toriw anwar enwir ev hinni,
Turr keisseid y keissav Keli.
Y diwod vn gurthwn gurtharab
Vrth y gvr a weli:

[3] *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, ed. A. O. H. Jarman (Caerdydd 1982), xxiv, liii; T. H. Parry-Williams, *The English element in Welsh* (London 1923), 141.

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'A gueleist-e dinion, din gowri,
In myned hebod heb drossi?'
'Gueleis ban llyuneis y llentir deguch
A weluch y medi.'
Sew a wnaethant plant Kai,
Y vrth y medel ymchueli,
Druy eiroled Meir Mari o'e gvybod,
Guybv Duv oheni,
Yt oet in y diffrid y gid a hi,
Ysprid Glan a gleindid indi.[4]

'And the generous Lord, who hears himself praised, performed a second miracle when he wished to avoid capture. This is the way he fled: while a labourer was ploughing the land, working as was right, the Trinity of heaven said, he and his immaculate mother of noble blessing, "Friend, a crowd of men will come after us to look for our resting-place, in haste to ask you if you have seen a woman with a child. Tell the plain truth—you will not be rejected in our prayer—that you saw us pass the field, and God's grace on it." At that there came a base rabble, descendants of wrathful Cain, a savage ill-natured mob, a crowd of pursuers hunting down the Lord. One, odious and churlish, said to the man he saw, "Good fellow, have you seen anyone pass by you without turning aside?" "I did when I harrowed the fair open land you see being reaped." What the children of Cain did was to turn back from the reaper, through the intercession of Mary because she knew that God cared for her; for the Holy Spirit and the purity that were within her were her protection.'

Three points may be made about the theological background of the poet. The epithet *dinam*, 'immaculate', alludes to the then controversial issue of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, though unfortunately this helps little to date the poem. Eclipsed at the Conquest, the devotion reappeared in England after 1100; while Osbert of Clare (d. after 1139) at Westminster and Eadmer (d. 1141) at Canterbury defended it, by 1140 St Bernard of Clairvaux was opposing it, and about 1178 Peter of Celle was describing it as an islanders' fantasy (the water surrounding Britain had demented English brains). The devotion was later championed by Duns

[4] *Hen gerddi crefyddol*, ed. Henry Lewis (Caerdydd 1931), 10, but reading *geissaw* in line 10 of the above passage after Jarman, 21.

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Scotus (d. 1308). In Wales, Einion Wann calls the Virgin *dinam* in his *marwnad* for Llywelyn the Great (d. 1240).[5]

Secondly, the poet refers twice to Herod's men as 'children of Cain'. This is a medieval commonplace for evil men, and appears in the Red Book of Hergest, *Piers Plowman*, the *Towneley Plays*, and the writings of Robert Rypon (active at Durham before *c.* 1400). Distantly related to the early Irish tradition that monsters, like Grendel in *Beowulf*, descended from Cain, it is minor evidence for the Welsh poet's ecclesiastical learning.[6]

Much more important is the poem's account in lines 27–36 of Job's scabs turning to gold, a legend shedding light on the poem's Continental links. Though this apocryphon was known in fifteenth-century France, Germany and England, the earliest evidence for it is a sculpture (now in the Museo de Navarra, Pamplona) on a column capital of 1130/40 from Pamplona Cathedral. It seems likely that in his reference to Job's Gold the Black Book poet used an oriental source reaching him via Spain and France.[7]

The last point is a crucial one. It is worth emphasizing, *pace* Jackson, that there is no reason to regard the particular 'apocryphal tale of the marvellous' concerning Job as early, or to suggest that it had been preserved for centuries by Celtic Christians in isolation. All the evidence indicates that it was a recent arrival in Wales via the new pilgrim routes between northern Europe and Santiago. The movement of legend across France at this date in the opposite direction is, in fact, neatly proved by twelfth-century sculptures of Sigurd, the dragon Fáfnir, and the smith Regin at Sangüesa, 25 miles south-east of Pamplona. These derive from Norwegian and Swedish art, though they also have links with *Beowulf* 875–902 and Norse saga, as well as with pre-Norman sculpture in England and the Isle of Man.[8] The Sangüesa sculptures may have been commissioned by the Knights Hospitallers or Knights of St John, who had strong links with Scandinavia; if so, this would strengthen the case argued below that the Black Book poet owed his material to an international

[5] John Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa barddoniaeth gynnar Gymraeg* (Caerdydd 1931–63), 360; *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, ed. John Morris-Jones and T. H. Parry-Williams (Caerdydd 1933), 186; Rosemary Woolf, *The English religious lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1968), 116–17; R. W. Southern, *Medieval humanism* (Oxford 1970), 146; and D. Myrddin Lloyd, *Rhai agweddau ar ddysg y Gogynfeirdd* (Caerdydd 1977), 25. Cf. also Mary Clayton, *The cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1990).

[6] Lloyd-Jones, 97; G. R. Owst, *Literature and pulpit in medieval England* (Cambridge 1933), 463; Dorothy Whitelock, *The audience of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford 1951), 5, 79–80; William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. Derek Pearsall (London 1978), 189; William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London 1978), 329.

[7] Andrew Breeze, 'Job's Gold in medieval England, Wales and Navarre', *Notes and Queries* 235 (1990), 275–8.

[8] Andrew Breeze, '*Beowulf* 875–902 and the sculptures at Sangüesa, Spain', forthcoming in *Notes and Queries*.

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religious order, either the Augustinian canons at Carmarthen itself or one of the other orders established by the Normans in south Wales.[9]

Another Welsh instance for the legend of the harvest comes from the poem *Y forwyn o fwy arail* by Hywel ap Dafydd ab Ieuan ap Rhys (*floruit* 1450/80), household bard to the Herbert earls of Pembroke at Rhaglan, Gwent. Glanmor Williams has described this poem as a love-poem to the Virgin, 'describing the beauty of her form and features', its author 'having doubtless been deeply influenced by contemporary paintings of her'.[10] However, the poem does not actually describe the Virgin's appearance but rather the Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany, and some of Christ's miracles; it adds certain apocryphal details to the scriptural account. (Professor Williams must be thinking of Hywel's poem *Gwr wyf nid rhaid gwarafun*, which his description fits exactly; cf. the present writer's forthcoming note in *Llên Cymru* 16 on the poem.)

pan oyddyd hen vyd yw hyn
athalon gynt ythilyn
yr yd oedd yn yr edic
oy vlayn vry yn velyn yfric
yn yd ayddfed yw vedi
nyth welyd oedd yth ol di[11]

'When you were once long ago being pursued by your enemies, the corn that was being ploughed had, from its first-fruits upwards, ears of yellow—corn ripe for harvesting after you, and you were nowhere to be seen.'

The legend also appears in the Irish bardic poem *Fuigheall beannacht brú Mhuire*.

Ga iarraidh ar muin Muire
do-rinne an mac míorbhuile,
an taobh fhíorbhán fa fhearta
'n-a míonghrán chaomh chruithneachta.

Innisidh is é gá ar
fear a faicsin tre achadh
an lásain tre lorg a mbonn
fásaidh an colg 's an connall.

[9] Cf. Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff 1962), 18–21.

[10] Williams, 483.

[11] *Llanstephan MS 6*, ed. E. Stanton Roberts (Cardiff 1918), 159.

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Tig an uairsin tres an ar
muintear Ioruaith [ga] n-adhradh
gér phrap soin do bás ga bhuain
ar bhfás an oir re haonuair.

'While being carried by Mary, her Son being pursued performed a miracle; the white hill-side by his power changed into fine smooth wheat. A man says that he saw her going through the field while he was ploughing it, that from the earth trodden by their feet rises the wheat, awns and stalks. Herod's folk advance through the field closely following them [?]; though it was sudden, the corn was being cut after it had grown up immediately.'[12]

The attribution and date of the poem pose problems. In the oldest manuscript, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS D ii 1, the 'Book of Uí Maine' written about 1394 for Muircheartach Ó Ceallaigh, bishop of Clonfert in what is now County Galway, the poem is attributed to *Gilla Bridi*. This must refer either to Giolla Brighde Albanach ('the Scotsman'), active *c.* 1220, or to the Ulster poet Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (*c.* 1210–*c.* 1272), born near Ardstraw, six miles south of Strabane. Of other attributions, those to fifteenth-century poets are clearly worthless, while that to Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh (presumably the poet who died in 1244 rather than his namesake of *c.* 1400) was described by McKenna as 'of little value'.[13]

The ascription to Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe has been described by his recent editor as 'highly dubious', while that to Giolla Brighde Albanach remains unproven (though worth investigation by those with access to his authentic poems). However, the uncertainty of scribes as to who wrote *Fuigheall beannacht brú Mhuire* suggests that the identity of its author was unknown to them, and that we should treat the poem as anonymous. Yet if it is anonymous, the case for dating it to the thirteenth century and not the fourteenth falls to the ground. The only sure *terminus ante quem* for its composition is that of the compilation of the Book of Uí Maine. Since we can prove that the legend of the harvest was known before 1300 in England, France, Italy and Sweden, but cannot prove that the Irish poem pre-dates 1300, the Irish poem, far from representing a Celtic 'archaism', may well be no more than further testimony for the diffusion of the legend throughout western Europe from northern France.

[12] Based on *Aithdioghluim dána*, ed. Lambert McKenna, S.J. (Dublin 1939–40), i, 193, and ii, 114. I am greatly indebted to the editors for suggesting the readings *a faicsin* and *gér* here (both after Uí Maine), and also for advice on McKenna's translation and the Black Book poem. They are not responsible for any errors in my translation of the last.

[13] McKenna, xxxii; J. E. C. Williams and Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa, *Traidisiún liteartha na nGael* (Baile Átha Cliath 1979), 113; *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe*, ed. N. J. A. Williams (London 1980), 10–11; Peter O'Dwyer, O.C., *Mary: a history of devotion in Ireland* (Dublin 1988), 92.

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Nonetheless the number of surviving manuscripts containing the poem, including the Book of the Dean of Lismore, implies its popularity in Ireland and Scotland during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Poems by Tadhg óg Ó hUiginn (d. 1448) must also refer to our legend, as no other tale of the Flight into Egypt alludes to an escape from pursuers. His source may have been the Irish poem cited above.

> 'The Jews ever following her —'twas no fit treatment for that Queen!—she had to flee as a deer into the desert while nursing God! Her tracker pursued her, yet—as the story goes—could not find her; God allowed her to be tracked, but a flood of his favour kept her safe.'
>
> 'He fled before Herod's folk; he and the Virgin had to flee afar; their miracles were their only resource.'[14]

The story has remained popular in Irish folklore into the twentieth century. Ó Caithnia, in listing various studies, notes one version from Kerry in which the corn is replaced by potatoes. He also mentions that in Irish the story is often linked with curses against pests damaging crops.[15]

When we turn from the Celtic countries to medieval England, we find scanty but widespread evidence for the legend, suggesting that it was known in London, Oxford, York and East Anglia. That the legend was known in thirteenth-century England is proved by the Anagni Cope, of English origin (from a London workshop?), though it has long been in the cathedral treasury at Anagni, 35 miles east of Rome. It seems that the cope was donated to the cathedral *c.* 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII, a native of the town. A panel on the cope shows two soldiers in chain mail interrogating the labourer as he stands by a field of ripe corn. Given the evidence for the legend in French literature and art, it is tempting to link the cope with the French culture of thirteenth-century England, even if the needlewomen were English.[16]

The miracle is also represented on f. 14v of London, British Library, MS Add. 47682 (the 'Holkham Bible Picture Book' of 1325/35), and on some very heavily restored fifteenth-century wall-paintings (mounted on linen) found a few years ago in Norfolk, and dubiously linked with Bury St Edmunds Abbey. The story also featured at Headington, now part of Oxford, in fourteenth-century wall-paintings discovered by Victorian

[14] *Dán Dé*, ed. Lambert McKenna, S.J. (Dublin 1922), 71, 87, and cf. xv.

[15] Liam P. Ó Caithnia, *Apalóga na bhfilí 1200–1650* (Baile Átha Cliath 1984), 142.

[16] A. G. I. Christie, *English medieval embroidery* (Oxford 1938), 101 and pl. LI. I thank Adelaide Bennett of the Index of Christian Art, Princeton, for drawing the Anagni Cope and Dädesjö painting to my attention.

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restorers, who destroyed them, though fortunately not before a local antiquary had drawn copies.[17]

Besides examples from art, there is evidence for the legend in English miracle plays. Rosemary Woolf has pointed out that certain scenes in the Holkham Book can be related to medieval drama, and has argued that if this manuscript was produced in London, we can deduce that a play on the Instantaneous Harvest formed part of the London cycle, even though these plays have long been lost. However, as some evidence suggests an East Anglian provenance for the Holkham manuscript, the play cycle may actually have been an East Anglian one from a town where the Blackfriars were established (since the manuscript probably came from a Dominican *milieu*). There is also evidence that the legend was known (and performed?) in northern England from the York play of Christ's entry into Jerusalem (written perhaps before 1376, but rewritten in the earlier fifteenth century), where a character declares of Christ, 'He garte corne growe withouten plogh, / Wher are was none'.[18]

When we turn from Britain and Ireland to the rest of Europe, we find three literary instances of the story to add to the four cited by Jackson: in a thirteenth-century French poem in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 1533; a prose version in a French incunable of 29 folios, *De quelques miracles que l'Enfant Jésus fit en sa Jeunesse* (Lyon, n.d.), also in the Bibliothèque nationale; and in a Danish verse found with a fifteenth-century wall-painting of the miracle at Jetsmark, in the far north of Denmark.[19]

The Old French poem is edited in a German edition of 1879 which has reached few libraries in other countries (though the British Library has a copy). However, its importance as a thirteenth-century analogue of the Black Book poem is vital, and investigation of its dating, provenance, sources and circulation would help Celticists to chart the early history of the present legend in more detail. The French poem tallies with the Black Book poem (but not the Irish poem) in giving the Blessed Virgin a speech in which she addresses the labourer; this agreement between France and Wales, but not Wales and Ireland, weakens the argument that the legend spread from the Celtic countries rather than France. The passage follow-

[17] *The Holkham Bible Picture Book*, ed. W. O. Hassall (London 1954), and John Edwards, 'The medieval wall-paintings formerly at St Andrew's Church, Headington, Oxford', *The Archaeological Journal* 145 (1988), 263–71. For information here I thank John Edwards, Nicholas Rogers and Lynda Dennison.

[18] Rosemary Woolf, *The English mystery plays* (London 1972), 390, n. 55, 396, n. 49; *York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London 1982).

[19] Robert Reinsch, *Die Pseudo-Evangelien von Jesu und Maria's Kindheit in der romanischen und germanischen Literatur* (Halle 1879), 60 ff; R. Broby-Johansen, *Den Danske Billedbibel* (Copenhagen 1947), 84–5; Leopold Schmidt, *Die Volkerzählung: Märchen, Sage, Legende* (Berlin 1957), 261–2; Émile Mâle, *The Gothic image* (London 1961), 219; *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum, S.J., ii (Rome 1970), cols 44–5; and Knud Banning, *A catalogue of wall-paintings in the churches of medieval Denmark 1100–1600* (Copenhagen 1976–).

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ing, from page 64 of Reinsch's edition, shows close parallels with the Black Book poem. Both give the speech of the Holy Family, the challenge of one of their pursuers, and the labourer's reply; both mention the labourer's plough; both emphasize the telling of the truth. In the Welsh poem Herod's man addresses the labourer as *din gowri*, where *gofri* means 'respectable, worthy'; in the French poem the seneschal or steward calls him *predons*, 'prudhomme, worthy man'. If the Welsh expression, which is not common, translates the French one, we could regard the French poem as the source of the Welsh one. (Note: *enfes* = 'child'; *ocis*, 'killed'; *trestot*, 'completely'; *trespasser*, 'pass by'; *forment*, 'wheat'; *charue*, 'plough'.)

La mere et son petit enfant,
Que ses enfes ne soit ocis.
Il diront: Jes aure trais.
Sire prenne nos en ta pitie
Par la vostre sa.nte amistie.
Es vos le senechal venu
Trestot arme et fer vestu
En haut comença a crier
Et le predomes a apeler:
Predons, or ne me mentir mie,
Si chier come tu as ta vie,
Si tu veis par ci passer
.I. viel home ne trespasser
Et une fame et .I. enfant
Sor une mule chevauchant.
Et li predons li respondi:
Si m'ait diex, qu'i ne menti,
Ne par la foi, que je vos doi
N'a trestouz ceus de nostre loi,
Ainz puis que mon forment semai
Ne ma charue i atelai,
Dedenz mon champ mis por arer,
Ne vi ci home trespasser,
Ne puis se di, que je vin ça,
Fame a enfant n'i trespassa.

For further light on the history of the legend we turn to the lists of art historians, particularly that of Réau (who points out in passing how our tale was later borrowed for hagiographical accounts of St Radegund of Poitiers).[20] The list below, of thirteenth-century works only, complements the literary evidence for the origins of the legend in northern France. A remark of Karen Gould's in her *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of*

[20] Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, ii/2 (Paris 1957), 277.

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Soissons is worth quoting here; she notes that since the theme of the Instantaneous Harvest appeared in art and literature only in the thirteenth century, its representation as a full-page miniature on f. 289v. of that manuscript 'reflects a knowledge of the most current traditions'.[21] This comment also suggests something of the fashionable background in thirteenth-century England and Italy of the Anagni Cope. As it has not been possible to date exactly all the works mentioned below, despite enquiries to certain French cultural institutions, the earliest examples of this theme in art would repay study by anyone with access to an appropriate library. Most obviously, although some of the French evidence cited here may pre-date the Black Book of Carmarthen, it has been impossible to prove this. Until that can be done, one cannot rule out totally the possibility that the legend reached France from the Celtic countries rather than *vice versa*.

A tympanum at Rougemont, some 50 miles north-west of Dijon.

A wall-painting of before 1270, discovered in the 1950s, from the church at Asnières-sur-Vègre, about 16 miles west of Le Mans.[22]

A stained-glass window from Saint-Julien du Sault, situated some 80 miles south-east of Paris, between Sens and Auxerre.

An illustration in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 729, the Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons, produced at Amiens *c.* 1275/85.

A wall-painting, of the last quarter of the thirteenth century, at Saint-Maurice-sur-Loire, to the west of Lyon.[23]

A panel in Châlons-sur-Marne Cathedral.

A ceiling painting of *c.* 1280 in the old church at Dädesjö, near the cathedral town of Växjö in central southern Sweden.[24]

[21] *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, ed. Karen Gould (Cambridge, Mass. 1978), 73.

[22] Paul Deschamps and Marc Thibout, *La peinture murale en France au début de l'époque gothique* (Paris 1963), 103–4, pl. 9.

[23] Deschamps and Thibout, 143, pl. 75.

[24] Peter Anker, *L'art scandinave*, ii (Paris 1968), 285, pl. 177. Note, however, that the Requena de Campos cross, once thought to be thirteenth-century French work, was made at Burgos *c.* 1490: J. C. Brasas Egido, *La platería palentina* (Palencia 1982), 24–5. (I thank Clara Fernández-Ladreda for help on this point.) Cf. also Stephen Beissel, S.J., *Geschichte der Verehrung Marias in Deutschland während des Mittelalters* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1909), 624; Yrjö Hirn, *The sacred shrine* (London 1958), 270 and 389, n. 19; Kirschbaum, cols 49–50; Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian art*, i (London 1970), 122; *Iconclass*, ed. H. van de Waal (Amsterdam, 1981–), ref. 73 B 64 22; Pamela Berger, *Transformation of the Grain Protectress from goddess to saint* (Boston 1985); Edwards, op. cit.; and *Marienlexikon*, ed. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, ii (St Ottilien 1989), 481.

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The list above has several functions. It shows that Gertrud Schiller's belief that the legend 'became a theme of art, especially in Netherlandish painting, during the fifteenth–sixteenth century—although only for a short period' is unfounded. It also shows that the theme in art, appearing in glass, embroidery, and sculpture in stone, as well as painting on wood, plaster and vellum, is found more extensively than Kenneth Jackson's reference to 'medieval religious paintings' suggests.

More important for Celticists is the light it sheds on the origins of this tale. The American scholar T. P. Cross considered the story an 'Irish myth'; while D. Simon Evans has recently repeated the suggestion that the legend originated in the 'Celtic church'.[25] Against this one can say:

(a) the Black Book poem's account of Job's Gold, an apocryphon known in twelfth-century Pamplona, strongly suggests that this part at least of the Welsh poet's material came from the Continent;
(b) the Black Book poem cannot be proved to be substantially older than the manuscript of about 1250 containing it; there is ample evidence for the legend in thirteenth-century France; and the Anagni Cope and Dädesjö roof-painting prove that within the thirteenth century the legend had spread to England, Sweden, and Italy. It is easier to reconcile the geographical distribution of this evidence with a story diffusing from France rather than from the Celtic countries, especially as nothing proves that our Irish text must pre-date the fourteenth century.

If the immediate sources of the tale are French, can we say how it reached the Celtic countries? The most obvious answer would be that it arrived in Wales first, with the religious orders settling in Glamorgan and Dyfed after the Norman Conquest. These orders were largely French-speaking, and a thirteenth-century French religious poem from the Augustinian Priory of St John at Carmarthen, where the Black Book seems to have been written, still survives in an Oxford manuscript.[26] The precision of the Welsh poem's theological allusions, its delicate emphasis on the Virgin, and the very fact that it uses verse to tell a story, may even suggest that its author was a cleric familiar with French verse. (On the other hand, the use of verse to tell exemplary stories is frequent in post-Norman classical verse in Irish.) As noted, the Welsh poem resembles the French one in giving a speech to the Blessed Virgin, but the Irish poem does not; if the legend began in France, reached Wales at an early date, and Ireland later and less directly, this would not be surprising.

Finally, is it possible to say anything about earlier forms of the legend?

[25] Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of folk literature* (Copenhagen 1955–8), motif V211.1.8.3, and cf. D2157.2; D. Simon Evans, *Writers of Wales: medieval religious literature* (Cardiff 1986), 17.

[26] M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the cloisters* (Edinburgh 1950), 68–9.

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Kenneth Jackson has given a lucid account of the background he envisages for such stories: 'The mass of the more bizarre apocryphal religious lore which grew up in the early Church, and especially the Eastern Church, seems to have had a very special attraction for the Celtic monks, and whereas this material largely disappeared from the religious literature of Europe at an early period it remained and flourished in the Celtic countries for centuries. Hence a considerable number of apocryphal legends which occur in Irish, and to some extent Welsh, literature are otherwise known almost exclusively in eastern sources like Coptic and Syriac texts, as well as in continental European folklore and representations in medieval art, but very little in regular European religious literature.' He then goes on to mention the Instantaneous Harvest amongst such themes, saying that there is little doubt that its source 'must have been some early Apocryphal Gospel text now lost, and that its dissemination was in the first place through religious written literature; that it appears in early religious sources in Wales and Ireland because the Celtic Church was particularly fond of apocryphal tales of the marvellous; and that it eventually found its way into the folklore of the Near East and Europe'.[27]

One can say against this, however, that no evidence has ever been produced for an ancient or Eastern origin for the present tale; and that since its presence in Welsh and Irish can be explained by influence from France, there is no reason to assume it went through any process of being preserved for centuries by 'Celtic monks'.

The arguments put forward in the present paper challenge a point of view which has been received by Celticists for many years. Although it is not claimed that the legend of the Instantaneous Harvest has been here proved to be of thirteenth-century French origin, it can be shown that this is a strong possibility. If specialists in medieval French literature and art could prove the legend was known in France before 1250, this case would be strengthened. At risk of seeming repetitious, it may be said that anyone who wishes to argue that the legend diffused from the Celtic countries in the Middle Ages should take into account the following points.

1. The analogy of the legend of Job's Gold. This is a legend well known in late medieval Europe, of which the Black Book poem provides the oldest known written version. This might seem a classic instance of the 'bizarre apocryphal religious lore' alleged to be so attractive to the Celts; and given the dearth of early evidence for it other than parallels in Irish hagiography, it might have been considered a tale of Celtic origin. But the sculpture of Job from Pamplona Cathedral shows that it must in fact have reached Britain from the Continent, perhaps in the twelfth century, and that there is no need to assume the Celts had known the tale for many centuries previous to this.

[27] Jackson, *The international popular tale*, 119–22.

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2. The amount of evidence from northern France for the legend of the Harvest shows its popularity there in the thirteenth century. Those who argue from Welsh and Irish that the legend of the Harvest was known in the Celtic countries before it was known in France would have to argue that after its appearance amongst the Celts the lost source of the legend was brought to France, presumably from Wales or Ireland; that it there achieved the sensational success attested by French art and vernacular literature; and that before the end of the century the legend had also spread to elevated social circles in Sweden, England, and Italy. But such a history is difficult to reconcile with the dominant influence of France on literature, art and religion in western Europe by the thirteenth century. The bulk of early evidence for the legend comes from France, not the Celtic countries; why assume that the Celts influenced France and not *vice versa*?

3. One should beware of the tendency to assume that unfamiliar religious traditions in medieval Welsh or Irish are of native origin or archaic. Such themes can often be shown to be neither, as I have tried to prove in various papers: 'The Number of Christ's Wounds', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 32 (1985), 84–91 (a theme from thirteenth-century Germany, and nothing to do with the Coptic Church or Ethiopia, despite Robin Flower's opinion); 'The Girdle of Prato and its rivals', ibid. 33 (1986), 95–100 (eleventh-century, Italian); 'The Charter of Christ in English, Welsh and Irish', *Celtica* 19 (1987), 111–20 (fourteenth-century, English); 'The Virgin's Tears of Blood', ibid. 20 (1988), 110–22 (thirteenth-century, German–Italian and not 'Celtic' in origin); and 'The "Leaps" that Christ made', *Ériu* 40 (1989), 190–3 (twelfth-century, English).

It is submitted here, therefore, that there is no evidence to suggest that the legend of the Instantaneous Harvest was an archaic survival in the Celtic countries from early Christian times, and however brilliant and stimulating Jackson's thesis of oriental origins and preservation in the Celtic West may be, the history of this legend cannot be regarded as a proof of it. What evidence we have is consistent with its arriving from France by 1250 in Wales and somewhat later in Ireland. Nevertheless, a really satisfactory account of the legend and its origins will be impossible without proper dating of the evidence for it in thirteenth-century French poetry and art.

It is hoped that the present study will prompt research into three particular points: whether or not it is possible to date *Fuigheall beannacht brú Mhuire* to about 1220 on the basis of parallels with the work of Giolla Brighde Albanach; what the sources of the thirteenth-century French poem on the childhood of Christ were, and whether there are any signs of Celtic influence in them; and, finally, whether any of our French evidence can be shown to pre-date our written sources in Welsh and Irish. Only when we have secure information on these points will it be possible to say whether the legend of the Instantaneous Harvest has its origins in the Celtic countries or in France.

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