FOLKLORE IN ST. BRIGIT’S HAGIOGRAPHIES:
THE HERO, THE SAINT AND THE BEAN FEASA

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Introduction
In academia, students of theology learn early in their academic journey that disciplines often influence and impact each other, and the study of folklore is an example of how true this is. By studying folklore, academics can necessarily incorporate areas such as history and anthropology. This is because folklore, which is defined in *The New International Webster’s Student Dictionary* as “The traditions, beliefs, customs, sayings, stories, preserved among the common people”, is, as the definition indicates, all about the common people. When studied vigorously, folklore allows scholars to learn about the people who preserved the folklore, through the people themselves.¹ The study of hagiography is linked to the study of folklore. This link is clearly shown when examining the female founding saint of Ireland, St. Brigit of Kildare. In her hagiographies, Brigit is cast in two traditional Irish folkloric roles; that of the hero and the wise-woman, also known in Irish as the *Bean Feasa*. This paper will examine the link between folklore and hagiography, how this link is illustrated in Brigit’s *vita* – in particular Cogitosus’ “Life of St. Brigit” and “Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae” – and finally it will analyze how folklore in Brigit’s hagiographies influence Brigidine scholarship. Before any examination can begin, it is necessary to explain all the terms and concepts involved. Folklore is the preservation of the customs of the common people and consequently information about the people who preserved it can be gained. The oral tradition, from which folklore emerges, survived because it serves the interest of the people preserving it² and the reasons for preserving folklore varied. Often it was for either personal reasons – something to tell the children and grandchildren around the fire – or professional reasons, in other words preserving the genealogies of kings and heroes because this was the job the person had been assigned.³ Since the folkloric tradition was maintained by people, contemporary events that affected the people also affected the folklore.⁴ Apart from being reflective of the people involved in its preservation, folklore also helped to accomplish such tasks as ensuring stability, strengthening cultural traditions and helping to educate the next generation.⁵ Many of the aspects of folklore that are listed above are shared by the second discipline, hagiography.

Hagiography can be defined in many ways, depending on whether one is dealing with hagiography in the medieval sense or in the modern sense. However one decides to explain it, hagiography deals with the writings about saints, their

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Moutray Read, 284.
⁵ Davidson, 91.
vita sancti, that is, their biography. Very much like folklore, the stories of saints’ lives were written down and preserved by a community of people. In this case however, the people in question were the monks and religious figures at cathedrals and monasteries who wrote about saints who were important to them. The fact that it is monks writing the hagiographies shows that vitae were written to fulfill part of the role in life that the monks had been given, similar to the people who chronicled the genealogies of kings and heroes as that was their role in life. Another point of similarity between folklore and hagiographies is that the writing of hagiography reflects the characteristics and values of the place it was written in.

As with the study of folklore, scholars learn more about the people preserving the material, than about the subject of material itself.

The Cult of the Hero and the Cult of the Saints
For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the presence of the many Irish folkloric elements – stories, practices, beliefs – that are present in the lives of Celtic saints, such as Brigit. One such element is the Hero Cult or Hero Worship. The Hero Cult – a practice of offering worship to exceptional dead people - was a practice that was common in Hellenistic and Roman times. In the cult of heroes, the human heroes and immortal gods were kept apart for the main reason that human heroes had been tainted by death, something that the immortals would never experience.

Since the Hero was a figure central and commonly used in most folklore, including Celtic traditions, there is a pattern that was used when writing these tales and this is present in many hero tales in Indo-European cultures. The Heroic Biographical Pattern, as scholar Dorothy Bray describes it, has four sections. The four sections and their breakdown are: 1 - Conception and Birth (unusual in nature), 2 - Upbringing (foreshadows heroic future), 3 - Career in marvelous deeds, including major conflict in which the hero wins, and finally 4 - Death (unusual and miraculous). This pattern, which was active in the Irish narratives and was applied often to kings and lawgivers as well, has some structural crossover in the analysis of hagiography.

Before this can be examined however, an explanation of the cult of saints must be given. The cult of saints, though similar in many ways to the Hero cult, is distinct. According to historian Peter Brown, the worship of saints had many implications in the world of early Christianity. This is because the cult of saints is the joining of Heaven and Earth at the grave of a dead person, and as such it functioned to break many barriers.

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7 G.H. Doble, “Hagiography and Folklore,” Folklore 54:3 (1943): 323.
8 Ibid., 325.
9 Doble, 327.
11 Brown, 5.
13 Bray, Early Irish Saints, 14.
14 Ibid.
15 Brown, 1-2.
16 Ibid.
Heaven and Earth were contrasted and opposed, not brought together. The tombs of saints were, as Brown writes: “privileged places, where the contrasted poles of Heaven and Earth met” because it was believed that the saint, who was in heaven, was also “present” at their tomb on earth. The saints were serving as a bridge for those who were still alive, in order to access the divine, or the unknown. Thus the worship of saints, in spite of similarities to the worship of a dead hero, familiar to early Christians nonetheless resulted in many problems.

According to Brown, this was due mainly to the fact that the worship of saints changed the views about the connections between the living and the dead and between God(s) and humans. In contrast to hero worship, where the hero – who was tainted by death – was kept apart from the immortals, the saints enjoyed an intimacy with God. This bond thus went against prevailing worldviews held concerning God(s) and humans when the relationship between the living and the dead was added. This person, who was once alive and is now dead, shared a personal relationship with God thus he/she was a “friend of God” and as such was able to intercede for and protect the faithful who were still alive. This ability to intercede – something that wasn’t available to the hero – is one of the most important differences between the hero and the saint and will be examined later.

Narrative Pattern of Hero and Saint
Now that the cult of saints has been examined and some of the differences between hero worship and saint worship have been highlighted, it is possible to examine the similarities between the narrative patterns found in tales from both traditions. As was mentioned, the Heroic Biographical Pattern – or Universal Pattern – has many structural similarities to that of a hagiography. The pattern for the hero (conception/birth, upbringing, career, death) finds an almost mirror image in the breakdown of the pattern found in saints’ lives. The pattern is as follows: 1 - Conception and Birth (often unusual in nature, accompanied by a heavenly phenomena), 2 - Education and upbringing in religious life (sanctity often recognized early), 3 - Career as a pastor and miracle worker and finally 4 - Death (often miraculous) Many similarities between the two are clearly visible.

Firstly, the four sections of each pattern are essentially the same: Conception, Upbringing, Career and Death. The second overt similarity consists of the subsections within each section. For example, in the Conception and Birth sections, the circumstances often unusual in nature, and in the Death sections, both the saint and the hero are depicted as experiencing a miraculous death. Upon a more in depth comparison of these two patterns, another similarity emerges. In the second section of a hero tale, – Upbringing – there is often a foreshadowing of the heroic future the hero will live. This is similar to the Upbringing component in hagiography wherein the saint’s sanctity is often recognized early, which can be interpreted as a form of foreshadowing. In

17 Ibid.
18 Brown, 3.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Brown, 6-7.
22 Brown, 5-6.
23 Ibid.
24 Bray, Early Irish Saints, 14.
order to accomplish the goals of their career, namely being a pastor and miracle worker, a saint by definition must exemplify a certain level of sanctity. Thus in the cases when the sanctity of the saint in question is recognized at an early stage in their upbringing, it is similar to the foreshadowing of a heroic future that happens during the hero’s upbringing.

Cogitosus and the Hero as Saint

As the examination of both the hero tale and the saint’s life has shown, the saint in a way became the ‘hero’ of Christian lore. St. Brigit and her hagiographies are an example of how the two melded together, as folklore and hagiography melded together. Indeed, there are times when Brigit is more hero than saint and an examination of the following passages will highlight how Brigit’s hagiographers made her a perfect blend of hero/saint while at times stressing one aspect more than the other.

In Cogitosus’ “Life of St. Brigit,” Brigit is cast as a saintly hero figure. At the beginning of the hagiography, Cogitosus conforms to the first section of the pattern: Conception and Birth. However, he keeps both the conception and the birth part short: “Now, saint Brigit, whom God foreknew and predestined according to his own image, was born in Ireland of Christian and noble parents belonging to the good and most wise sept of Echtech.” Cogitosus ties conception and birth together when he writes: “born in Ireland of Christian and noble parents”. Despite the brevity with which this section was handled, Cogitosus makes Brigit more saint than hero because he assigns a heavenly phenomenon to her birth. He writes that Brigit was both foreknown by God and had been “predestined according to his own image” thus making her very birth a heavenly phenomenon. One could argue that all humans are made in God’s image as Genesis indicates, making her just one of many. Genesis does not state, however that all humans were known by God beforehand. According to the Christian tradition, one other was known by God and this man stood as the exemplar of Christianity and Christian living. It is stated at the beginning of the Gospel of John, in particular 1:1 – 1:2, that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” This passage of course refers to Jesus, the son of God, the son of man, the example of perfect Christian living and as some would venture to say, the hero of Christianity.

What is so interesting about this allusion to Christ in Cogitosus’ version of Brigit’s conception and birth is that by aligning her with Christ, Cogitosus is illustrating one of the conventions of writing hagiography – the use of Scripture and Christian lore – in order to place saints in the same tradition as the saints from the Roman Church. The allusion made would cause the reader to think of Christ and in so doing, create a link between Brigit and the mother Church, which is something else that Irish hagiography strove to achieve. Another important convention of hagiography and saints in general that Cogitosus illustrates is the fact that according to Bray, saints were chosen for their role

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27 Ibid.
before birth.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, stating that Brigit was known by God before her birth, Cogitosus not only creates a link between Brigit and Christ, but he also ascribes to her an ultimate saintly characteristic and as such casts Brigit as a saintly hero, not a hero saint.

The tendency to underline saintliness continues in Cogitosus. Right after the brief opening narratives of Brigit’s conception and birth were breezed over, Cogitosus provides the reader with a story about her upbringing. In this much longer passage, stretching from chapter 1, verse 3 till verse 7, Brigit’s early life including such tasks as churning butter is described. This particular story relates that while churning butter for the household Brigit “preferring to obey God rather than men, distributed the milk and butter liberally to the poor and the guests.”\textsuperscript{29} Brigit’s charity – linking her to one of the three Christian theological virtues – is significant because when it is her time to show the yield of her work for the day, she had nothing to show.

So in fear of her mother, Brigit “inflamed with an ardour of faith so intense and unquenchable, she turned to the Lord and prayed. Without delay the Lord heard the maiden’s voice and prayers. And, being a helper in the hour of need, he came to her assistance with the generous bestowal of divine gift and lavishly restored the butter for the maiden who had confidence in him.”\textsuperscript{30} The scene from which this passage is taken shows Brigit’s sanctity in a number of ways: Firstly, Brigit is shown displaying the virtue of charity thus illustrating her virtuous character. Being invested with the Christian cardinal virtues – such as charity – is one of the defining features of a saint.\textsuperscript{31} The second sign of sanctity that is illustrated in this scene is when Brigit prays. In Christian tradition, prayer is understood in relation to a notion taken from scripture, which says ‘ask and you shall receive’. It is first found in the Gospel of Luke, specifically Luke 11:9-10 when Jesus says “So I say to you, Ask and it shall be given to you, search and you will find, knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Accordingly, if a person is faithful and asks something of God, he/she will receive it. Brigit had faith, asked for help from God and received what she needed. This is extremely important for showcasing Brigit’s sanctity because saints were supposed to be examples of perfect Christians and serve as guides in how to live the perfect Christian life. The third point of importance regarding Brigit’s sanctity at a young age is that after she demonstrated charity and was granted what she prayed for, she was recognized for her sanctity. The end of the story, found in chapter 1, verse 8 it says that: “And when the miracle of this great gift was fully discovered and came to the public notice, everyone praised God who had brought it and they marvelled that there was such power of faith in a maiden’s heart.”\textsuperscript{32} By having Brigit’s sanctity recognized during her years as a girl, and by incorporating many Christian motifs, Cogitosus set Brigit up as more importantly a saint rather than a hero.

The \textit{Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae} and the \textit{Saint as Hero}

In contrast one of her other hagiographies – the \textit{Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae},

\textsuperscript{28} Bray, \textit{Early Irish Saints}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{29} Cogitosus, 13.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{31} Bray, \textit{Early Irish Saints}, 10.
\textsuperscript{32} Cogitosus, 14.
(VP) known from this point on as the VP – portrays Brigit to be much more of a hero. The VP starts the story of Brigit’s life with a detailed description of both her conception and birth. The story of Brigit’s parents opens the vita and is followed immediately by the story of her conception: “Her master Dubthach desired her and slept with her and she became pregnant by him.”33 This passage clearly outlines Brigit’s conception much more concretely than Cogitosus’ version. Even though there is nothing unusual about Brigit’s conception – one of the markers for the conception/birth of both hero and saint – her birth, in the VP does have an unusual aspect to it.

The retelling of the day Brigit was born starts off simply enough with her mother – Brioicsech – going about her daily chores of milking.34 As she goes to enter the house, “… when she had one foot across the threshold of the house and the other foot outside, she fell astride the threshold and gave birth to a daughter.”35 What is crucial about this birth tale is that by giving birth to Brigit over the threshold, Brioicsech was fulfilling a prophecy that had been made about Brigit’s birth. The prophecy is detailed in the next verse: “… this bondmaid would give birth, neither in the house nor outside the house, (…)”36 That there was a prophecy about how Brigit would be born, and the nature of the prophecy are both unusual. Even though the conception and birth scenes do not cast Brigit as more of a hero, since an unusual birth and a prophecy could easily be applied to either hero or saint, it is what follows that illustrates how the VP cast Brigit as a hero first and foremost.

The sections of the VP that deal with Brigit’s education and upbringing, casts Brigit as both hero and saint, similar to the way her conception and birth did. In the parts that deal with her career, she performs many holy miracles, often similar to those of Jesus and the apostles, which is another trait of hagiographies.37 However, not all of her miracles are purely saintly. Closer to the end of the vita, while Brigit is performing a miracle of charity and saving a man from death, she is forced to bargain with the king who is holding the man captive.38 In order to secure this man’s freedom, the king asks Brigit to grant him two favors, which she grants him: first that he will live a long life and second that he will have victory in every battle.39 The next verse illustrates how Brigit fulfilled one of these favors, and it is here that she is shown to be more of a hero. At the beginning of a battle, the king, Mag Breg, sees that the enemy outnumbers his men so he says: “Call on Brigit for help that the saint might fulfill her promises.”40 In response to this cry for help, “(…) the king immediately saw saint Brigit going before him into battle with her staff in her right hand and a column of fire was blazing skywards from her head. Then the enemy were routed (…)”41 This passage illustrates Brigit going into battle very much like a hero would have done, and coming out victorious, a trait of being a good hero.

34 Ibid., 15.
35 Ibid.
36 Connolly, 15.
The recounting of Brigit’s death in the VP is another example of Brigit being displayed as a hero. Brigit’s death is described as such: after her victory saint Brigit departed from this life amid choirs of patriarchs and prophets and apostles and martyrs and all the holy men and virgins and amid the ranks of angels and archangels to the eternal diadems of the heavenly kingdom, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the kingdom without end where everlasting rewards are bestowed through Our Lord Jesus Christ together with the Father and Holy Spirit through endless ages. This passage starts with claiming that Brigit won victory, offering a sign of a good hero. Her death is also miraculous in nature. While there are overt Christian aspects, namely the large heavenly choir announcing her arrival to heaven nonetheless she is cited as having won the victory first. This passage, along with the other examples provided from the VP, make Brigit a hero saint.

**Brigit as Bean Feasa**

The hero isn’t the only folkloric character to find its’ way into Brigit’s hagiographies. Brigit is also often cast as a wise woman. The *Bean Feasa* – wise woman – and their legends, of which there were many, were part of the Irish lore repertoire. The character of the *bean feasa* was a central figure in the Irish oral tradition and her legends provide an expression of popular religious tradition, similar to tales of piety in Christian tradition. The wise woman was addressed in her legends either by her title or by her first name and the title was implied. She has many titles and they all meant something similar. For example there is *bean feasa* (“woman of knowledge”), *bean leighis* (“woman of healing”), *bean siubhail* (“travelling woman”), *seanbhean* (“old woman”), *caileach* (“old woman, hag”), *bean chumhachtach* (“powerful woman, woman of supernatural power”), *bean chrosach* (“fortune-telling woman”) or one of the English terms – a *strange woman* and *an old woman*. Many of these titles could be used to describe Brigit, as she is presented in hagiographies/legends as a knowledgeable, powerful woman who travelled, performed wonders and could heal. This will be examined in more depth in a later section of this essay.

In the Irish tradition, there were two main types of encounters one could have with a *bean feasa*. The first involves a person forced to resort to her for possible help, and the second was that the people who were seeking her were afflicted by a misfortune that was obscure and mysterious in nature that could not be cured in any other way. Apart from the powers that can be inferred from the list of titles for the wise woman character, she was also gifted with the second sight and thus could foresee events or find the root of a person’s aliment. The wise woman also had a status as a shifting, multi-locational presence and this was shown in three ways. There was first the travelling woman – an itinerant, second there was the woman who was settled in the community but traveled often with

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42 Connolly, 49.
43 Gearoid O Crualaoich. “Reading the *Bean Feasa*”, *Folklore* 116 (2005), 37.
44 Ibid., 38.
fairy hosts and was present at many places at many times and finally there was the wise woman who was present in one way or another at different far away locations, also described as the multi-locational omnipresent territorial Sovereignty Queen. The Sovereignty Queen, which was a character from medieval literature, was thought to personify territories and kingdoms. In wise woman legends, there were two types of crisis that would cause people to seek out a wise woman. First there were the small crises, such as an animal that had been lost, stolen or strayed, or a shortage of substances like butter or tobacco, second there was the need to cure the mysterious illness of a human or animal. Following this explanation of the character and meaning of the bean feasa, an analysis of passages from Brigit’s hagiographies where she is cast as a wise woman will be given.

One of the first examples of Brigit being cast as a wise woman is found towards the beginning of Cogitosus’ vita. The episode in question casts Brigit as a wise woman because it deals with the second type of crisis a wise woman would deal with, the curing of an ailment. This scene shows Brigit healing a young girl “who was dumb from birth.” What is interesting about this passage is that not only does it show Brigit as a bean leighs (“woman of healing”), it also strongly reflects a bean feasa legend. At the beginning of his article, “Reading the Bean Feasa”, Gearoid O Crualaoich cites a legend according to which a “woman (...) who used to be giving out knowledge” cure a girl who had lost her speech. This legend, which is taken from the archive of the Irish Folklore Commission, is one of many of this sort from the archive and thus can be seen to be representative of the genre. By having Brigit perform an act of healing that was among the stock stories of the wise woman legends, a clear connection between the two and casting of Brigit as a wise woman is realized.

This role casting is found also in the VP. In one particular section of the VP, Brigit is asked to help when a calf has strayed. The story states that while on their way to bring a cow and her calf to Brigit, a mother and daughter lost the calf. When they arrived, Brigit told them not to worry, that the calf would come back, which it did. This passage illustrates Brigit being a wise woman in two ways. First, even though they were on their way to see Brigit already, the mother and daughter did seek her aide in the case of the strayed calf. Seeking out a wise woman in the crisis of a strayed animal is classified as a small crisis, one of two types of crises that would cause people to seek out a wise woman. Secondly, Brigit is cast as a wise woman in this passage because it is illustrated that Brigit has the gift of second sight because she knew that the calf would return.

The gift of second sight is found in another scene in the VP. In chapter 33, Brigit who was travelling – another bean feasa trait which will be examined – stops by the roadside and stays there while instructing her nuns: “Dig under the sod nearby so that water may gush forth. For there are people coming along

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 O Crualaoich, 42.
53 Cogitosus, 16.
who have food but are thirsty since they have nothing to drink.”57 After the nuns dug up the sod and accessed the water, disciples of Patrick’s arrive and state that they have food but no water58, exactly as Brigit predicted.

The scene quoted above shows Brigit being cast as a wise woman because she displayed the gift of second sight, foreknowledge. It also touches upon another wise woman trait which Brigit possesses, that of travelling. To reiterate, the three types of status of a wise woman are: the travelling woman/an itinerant, the settled wise woman who travels often with a fairy host and finally the Sovereignty Queen figure who is multi locational.59 Brigit has something of all three in her. Firstly, she is often shown moving around Ireland and this is illustrated in her vitae, in particular the VP where she is shown travelling more then she is stationary. An example of this is found in chapters 33 – 41 of the VP where throughout these chapters Brigit “was travelling along”, “went to another church in the Tethbae area” and travelled with bishops Mel and Melchu to see Patrick.60 All of these examples clearly show Brigit being an itinerant.

Cogitosus casts her more as having the second type of wise woman status, having a base but travelling often. This is reflected in the passages where Cogitosus details all the “poor people and pilgrims (…) flocking to her from all sides(…)” and then passages where he describes Brigit travelling to go and save people who needed her help.61 These examples illustrate how Brigit was settled in a community but also travelled. Of course it is not a comprehensive representation corresponding exactly to the character of the bean feasa because Brigit did not travel with a fairy host but nonetheless the people hearing this vita, who would’ve been familiar with the wise woman legends, would have seen the connection.

Brigit as Sovereignty Queen

The third type of status a wise woman could have, that of Sovereignty Queen is also illustrated in Brigit’s hagiographies. In the VP, there is one section in particular that promotes Brigit as an example of this figure. We return to the scene referred to earlier in this paper, in which Brigit comes to the aid of a king in battle. This passage shows Brigit appearing out of nowhere, riding into battle and protecting a king, his kingdom and his territory.62 Brigit is cast as a Sovereignty Queen in this excerpt for two reasons. Firstly, there is the allusion that Brigit is in two places at once. Since she appears, fights, she is shown as multi-locational and omnipresent. She is present in one way at this battlefield while she was probably present in another way somewhere else, somewhere far away. This gives Brigit the status of a Sovereignty Queen. The second way in which Brigit is seen as a wise woman with the status of a Sovereignty Queen is in the way that Brigit personifies the kingdom by being the protector and winning the battle.

The importance of Brigit being cast in her hagiographies as central folkloric figures – namely a hero and a wise woman – impacts Brigidine scholarship in many ways. Firstly it makes Brigit’s

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57 Connolly, 21.
58 Ibid.
59 O Crualaoich, 41.
60 Connolly, 21-22.
61 Connolly, 17,19.
62 Connolly, 41.
hagiographies an important tool to be used in the disciplines of history and anthropology, because the hagiography itself reflects the people and culture in which it was written and this reflective element is strengthened when mixed with the folkloric aspects, because it provides an even more comprehensive view of the people and the period. Rather than only reflecting the monastic community in which it was written, as one might assume, since hagiographies are a religious text, the folklore that is incorporated also reflects the worldview of common people, people who due to their lack of literate capabilities in that period, are often a mystery to scholars.

Apart from helping increase the knowledge of historians and anthropologists, the use of folklore in Brigit’s vitae also helps widen the understanding of gender and sexuality in this period. As a hero figure, Brigit undergoes transformations, which may be more indicative of the audience coding Brigit as having male characteristics. For example when Brigit goes into battle, she is undertaking a role that was usually dominated by men. This scene thus recodes Brigit as a man because she is not only a hero but she is also a warrior. Especially interesting about the recoding of Brigit as a masculine hero is that it mirrors gender transformations attributed to other religious women, such as Perpetua, a 3rd century Christian martyr of Carthage. Perpetua, like Brigit, becomes a warrior. Perpetua however tells her readers this, since she wrote her own story, and explicitly states she became a man. For Brigit, the reader is forced to rely on what the hagiographer supplies them with as well as their own knowledge of legend and their imagination. While Brigit as a folkloric hero is as masculine, Brigit as a folkloric bean feasa is underlined as utterly feminine. However she is made a woman above all others because of her knowledge and power. Thus while establishing an essence of femaleness, Brigit as a wise woman is subverting the Christian ideals of a meek submissive creature. This maze of recoding, strengthening and subversion all illustrate the important folkloric elements in Brigit’s hagiographies.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be said that folklore and hagiography are sister disciplines. Both reflect the beliefs, traditions and practices of the people that preserved them. Folklore is the representative of the common people and hagiography of the monastic communities. Both are essential to disciplines like history because they provide information about common people that might otherwise be missed, and this information is pivotal to a comprehensive knowledge of the period. When paired together, as they are in Brigit’s hagiographies, folklore and hagiography transmit more information and also show scholars how these two seemingly opposites – the pre-Christian beliefs of the common people and the beliefs of religious communities – can and did coexist. The case of Brigit being cast as a hero and a wise woman in her vitae, serves as an example of how smoothly Christianity spread over Ireland and did so in a way that didn’t ensure the death of the pre-Christian culture.

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