

Biblical History in the Book of Ballymote

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1. Texts discussed:
 - i. **The Irish Sex aetates mundi** (3/2ra) – ed. and (English) trans. Ó Cróinín (1983), but not based on Ballymote version; some short passages from the Ballymote version are ed. and (English) trans. Clarke (2012); see also below (point 5)
 - ii. **Prima etas mundi** (9/5ra) – ed. and (English) trans. Mac Carthy (1892) (but use with caution)
 - iii. **Assia ingen Neir** (10/5va) – ed. and (German) trans., Tristram (1985)
 - iv. **Ab Adam usque diluum** (10/5vb) – ed. (no trans.) Tristram (1985) as two separate texts (*Ad Adam usque diluum* and *Prima igitur etas*); for English translation see below (point 3)
 - v. **Sé bliadna .l. 'malle** (10/5vb) – ed. and (German) trans., Tristram (1985); new ed. and (English) trans. Boyle (in progress)
 - vi. **Adam primus pater fuit** (11/6ra) – ed. and (English) trans. Mac Carthy (1892) (but use with caution)
 - vii. **Nin mac Bel** (13/7rb) – ed. and (English) trans. Mac Carthy (1892); new ed. and (English) trans. Boyle (in progress)
 - viii. **Lebor Gabála Érenn** (15/8ra) – ed. and (English) trans. Macalister (1938-56) (as Third Redaction, but use with caution - see Scowcroft, 2009)
 - ix. **Diluum factum est** (67/43ra) – ed. and partial (English) trans. Jaski (2003)
 - x. **Lebor Bretnach** (203/113ra) – ed. and (English) trans. Todd (1848); ed. van Hamel (1932) (but see Dumville, 1976)
 - xi. **Account of the history of the Hebrews** (from *Scél Saltrach na Rann*) (236/130va) – ed. and (English) trans. Dillon (1958), but not based on Ballymote version
2. Significant individuals:
 - a. Abraham – first of the Jewish Patriarchs, reputed (according to biblical chronology) to have lived c. 2000 BCE
 - b. Isaac son of Abraham – second of the Jewish Patriarchs
 - c. Jacob son of Isaac – third of the Jewish Patriarchs
 - d. Ninus son of Belus – mythical Assyrian king, supposed founder of the city of Nineveh; said in the Irish *Sex aetates mundi* to have rebuilt the city of Babylon
 - e. Ninyus – mythical Assyrian king, son of Ninus son of Belus; said to have married his own mother, Semiramis
 - f. Cyrus II ‘the Great’ or ‘the Elder’ of Persia (c. 600 or c. 575 BCE - 530 BCE) – founder of the Achaemenid Empire, reputed to have freed the Jews from their Babylonian exile
 - g. Daniel (late 7th cent. BCE – 6th cent. BCE) – Jewish prophet and visionary, said to have been raised in Babylon during the Babylonian exile

3. **Ab Adam usque ad diluuium** (BB 5 vb: ed. Tristram, pp. 280-1; trans. Boyle)

Ab adam usque ad diluuium anni mille .dc.lui. A diluuio usque ad Abraham anni .dcccc.xlii. Ab Abraham usque ad Moisem anni .dc. A Moisi usque ad Salomonem 7 ad primam edificationem templi anni cccclxxxuii. A Salamone usque ad transmigrationem Babilonis quae sub Dairio rege Persarum facta est anni .dxii. computantur porro a Dario rege usque ad praedictionem Domini nostri Jesu Christi 7 usque ad .x. annum imperii Tiberii imperatoris expletur anni .dxluii. ita simul flunt ab Adam ad praedictionem Christi 7 .x.um annum romanii imperatoris Tiberii .uccxxuii. A passione Christi peradti [sic] sunt anni .dcccc.

Prima igitur etas mundi ab Adam usque ad Noe secunda a Noe usque ad Abraham iii. ab Abraham usque ad Dauid. iii. a Dauid usque ad Danielem .u. etas usque ad Iohannem Baptisnam .u. a Iohanne usque ad iudicium in quo Dominus noster ueniet iudicare uiuos ac mortuos in seculum per ignem. Finit.

From Adam until the Flood: 1656 years; from the Flood to Abraham: 942 years; from Abraham to Moses: 600 years; from Moses to Solomon and the first building of the Temple: 488 years; from Solomon to the transmigration to Babylon which was done under Darius king of the Persians: 512 years are reckoned. Then from King Darius to the preaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the tenth year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius, 548 years are completed. Thus at the same time there are from Adam to the preaching of Christ, and the tenth year of the Roman emperor Tiberius, 5228 years. Since the Passion of Christ, 900 years have passed.

Moreover, the first age of the world was from Adam to Noah; the second from Noah to Abraham; the third from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to Daniel; the fifth age until John the Baptist; the sixth from John until the Judgement when our Lord will come to judge the living and the dead in the world through fire. Finit.

4. **Isaac and Jacob**, from *Scél Saltrach na Rann*

(a) ed. and trans. Dillon, from the Book of Uí Maine:

Dorumalt Ísaac in sére iar sin 7 tuargaib a dá láim i n-ardde 7 atnaig a bennachtain for Íacob 7 dixit 7 atrubairt: “*Det tibi Deus de rore celi 7 de pinguedine terre habundantiam uini et olei.* Co tarda Dia duit do braen in nime 7 do inmairecht in talman immad fina 7 ola”. Comlaithius gach mathiusa eter nem 7 talam, 7 immad int shil fhorbthi ro thairchanad dó and sin iar stair 7 sians.

Then Isaac ate the supper, and raising up his hands, he bestowed his blessing upon Jacob, and said: “*Det tibi Deus de rore coeli et de pinguendine terrae abundantiam vini et olei.* May God give thee of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth abundance of wine and oil”. The lordship of every good thing in both heaven and earth and abundance of perfect seed were foretold for him then according to the literal meaning and the figurative meaning.

(b) from the Book of Ballymote, f. 130vb (ed. and trans. Boyle):

Ro thomail Isac in seiri ar sin 7 tuargaib a da laim aengeala i n-airde 7 atnaidh a bendachtain for Iacob.

Isaac consumed the meal then, and lifted up his pure-white hands and gave his blessing to Jacob.

5. **Cyrus before the attack on Babylon**, from the Ballymote version of the Irish *Sex aetates mundi* (BB 4ra: ed. and trans. Boyle)

Amail ro tharnfir Daniel faidh:

Is amlaidh ticfa cath Cir:
7 laige i llaim gach fhir,
leicfidit na sloigh ar sain

in sruth mor na minsrotaibh.

Et is amlaid ro bui suidiugud in dorais tresa tigeadh in sruth 7 lega do margreg. Is ed ba fordorus doib 7 aigned suigthe fil indti sen 7 gac long 7 gac sluagh da ticed isna dorsibh sin ro suighdis na clocha sin iat co mbidis a lenmain dib. Conidh eadh dognidis lucht na cathrach in tan da shictis na doirsi sin clair do suidiugud osna longaib co suigitis na lega na clair sin co scibdis na longaib seacu sin cathraigh.

Is ed tra foruair do Chir in tairptheadh sin for sruth nEofraite. Sluaigedh abbulmor do comorad la Cir do soigid flaithusa na hIndia gonas tarla co sruth nGanmidi d' ardsrothaib in domain eisiden 7 ro lai Cir foirenn dia muintir dia fhis nar indula doib in sruth. Doluidh comdhalta Cir da mhilidh deg rompo 7 is amlaid rocuadar fora da n-eachaibh dec geala 7 ros farraigh nert int srotha 7 ro baidhedh uili iat.

Ro laig i socht meanma in righ a muintir do badhudh na fhiadnaisi 7 nar chumaing a fhoirthin. Ro badar eadh tri la 7 tri n-aidhche na troscad for bru int srotha 7 nir labair in righ ri neach dia sluaghaibh risin re-sin acht ro bhai ac scrudadh 7 tur aige cid do dhenadh frisin sruth ro baidh a muintir.

Do radhadh [sic.] maithe na Pers 7 na Med ina dhail 7 is ed ro raid: “is cabhais damsá”, ar se, “nach rach ont sruth-sa co ndechsat mna fanda 7 lenib dia chois he”.

As Daniel the Prophet prophesied:

It is thus that the battalion of Cyrus will come:
with a spade in the hand of every man,
the hosts will then release
the great stream into its small streams.

And it is thus was the layout of the gateway through which the river used to come: with stones of pearls. It was daub [??] that the lintel was, and it is a magnetic nature that is in that, and every ship and every host of those that came into those entrances those stones used to attract them, so that they used to be sticking to them. So that what the people of the city used to do when they used to come [?] to those gates [was] to place boards above the ships so that the stones used to attract those boards so that the ships could dart past them into the city.

It is this, then, which caused Cyrus's strong-arm tactics on the River Euphrates. An enormous hosting was ordered by Cyrus to seek the sovereignty of India, so that they happened upon the River Ganges¹ - that is one of the great rivers of the world – and Cyrus sent a group of his company to find out whether the river was traversable by them. Cyrus's foster-brother went ahead in a group of twelve soldiers, and it is thus that they went: on their twelve bright horses. And the strength of the river overwhelmed them and they were all drowned.

His company drowning in his presence, and the fact that he could not help them, put the mind of the king into dejection. They were fasting for a period of three days and three nights on the bank of the river and the king did not speak to anyone of his hosts for that period of time, but he was examining and searching thereat, what he would do to the river that had drowned his company.

The nobles of the Persians and the Medes were brought to meet him and it is this which he said: “I vow”, he said, “that I will not go from this river until weak women and children may go across it on foot”.

6. **Nin mac Bel**, ed. and trans. Boyle

§2-3

Fichi ocus blíadan bladāig
do Nin a gein Abrathāim.
Linn as mebar gan merblad,
na leabair 'ga länderbad.

Twenty-one years of famous valour
for Ninus at the birth of Abraham.
We remember it without deceptive fame,
the books fully verifying it.

¹ The reference to India suggests that the Irish author considered this to be the River Ganges, and I have translated it thus, but the earliest sources for this episode – Herodotus, *Histories*; Seneca, *On Anger* – state that it was the River Gyndes, on the edge of the Assyrian Empire, which makes more geographical sense given that this is a prelude to Cyrus's attack on Babylon.

Tri ficht bliadan bregda
dh'aīs Abrathāim oiregda;
nert i badbroshlōig fa bloid
ag techt Parrthalōin portgloin.

Sixty splendid years
of the age of noble Abraham;
at the coming of Partholón of the bright landing place
the strength of his deadly great host was famous.

§5

Nínias mac Nin, nía go nert,
'na seasedh bliadain bithcert;
fuair ar gart beara is badba,
mac Seara co seanBanba.

Ninyus son of Ninus, a champion with strength,
in his ever-exact sixth year;
The son of Sera got, through the prowess of spearpoint
and warfare, to old Ireland.

§8

O bas Abrāim fuair onōir
gor claidhed clann Partalōin,
nī docht bladh, bladh nac brēg,
a secht, ochtmodha, is aenchēt.

From the death of Abraham who received honour
until the descendants of Partholón were buried,
it is no mean fame, it is no false fame,
seven, eighty, and one hundred.

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(Note: all biblical quotations are from the Vulgate and translations from the Douay-Rheims)

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