John Carey
'Angelology in Saltair na Rann'


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IT is the aim of the present article to discuss the sources and structure
of the third canto of Saltair na Rann (SR). It is intended as a
sequel to ‘Cosmology in Saltair na Rann’ (Celtica xxvii. 33-52) and ‘The
Heavenly City in Saltair na Rann’ (ib. xviii. 87-104): taken together, the
three papers treat the section of SR preceding that edited by David
Greene and Fergus Kelly, and analysed by Brian Murdoch.¹

The canto falls into several sections. First the sequence and
characteristics of the angelic orders are specified (657-704). A brief allu-
sion to a group of twenty-four archangels (705-12) is then followed by
the poet’s assertion that God has revealed the number of the angels to
him; a list of their admirable qualities begins in the same quatrain as this
statement, and continues as far as line 732. The enumeration proper
comes next (733-88). The poem then returns to the twenty-four
archangels mentioned earlier, whose names are now listed (789-804). The
concluding quatrains of the canto enjoin devotion to the angels (805-12),
put the number of the fallen angels at one third of the total (813-6), and
praise the Creator (817-32).

The honour of founding Christian angelology unquestionably belongs
to the enigmatic figure known as pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a
mystical theologian believed to have lived in Syria around the year 500.
In his De coelesti hierarchia, pseudo-Dionysius for the first time estab-
lished nine as the canonical number of the angelic orders, and devised
elaborate arguments to justify his placement of those orders relative to
one another. His system and that of SR are given below; it will be noticed
that they differ as to the positions of the virtues and principalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ps.-Dionysius</th>
<th>SR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Seraphim</td>
<td>1. Seraphim</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Cherubim</td>
<td>2. Cherubim</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Thrones</td>
<td>3. Thrones</td>
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<td>4. Dominations</td>
<td>4. Dominations</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Virtues</td>
<td>5. Principalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Principalities</td>
<td>7. Virtues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Archangels</td>
<td>8. Archangels</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann (Dublin 1976); Volume I: Text
and Translation by David Greene and Fergus Kelly, Volume II: Commentary by Brian O.
Murdoch.
SR groups the nine orders into three divisions of three orders each: a lower division of angels, archangels and virtues; a middle division of powers, principalities and dominations; and an upper division of thrones, cherubim and seraphim (661-72). This partition is not found in Gregory, nor (to the best of my knowledge) in any Irish text except SR; but it is one of the principal features of the original Dionysian system. What significance this may have I hesitate to say. It is tempting to imagine that some of the doctrines of De coelesti hierarchia may have reached Ireland independently of Gregory, but it would be hard to point to other evidence in support of this hypothesis; all indications are that Erigena, for instance, had no acquaintance with pseudo-Dionysius before he attached himself to the Carolingian cathedral school at Laon. An unimaginative but not implausible explanation would be that the tripartite grouping in SR is coincidental, an example of the notorious Irish pre-dilection for triads.

_lines 673-6 state that the descendants of Adam are ‘the tenth order’ (in dechmad grád), existing ‘in the flesh’ (i cri) by contrast with the nine heavenly orders. Brian Murdoch cites this quatrain as ‘making clear that the poet is familiar with the replacement doctrine’, i.e. the widespread belief that humanity was created to replace a tenth order of angels which had fallen from Heaven when Lucifer led it in a rebellion against God.' On the next page Murdoch discusses the question at greater length:

Lucifer is traditionally the chief of the angels, and ruler over all the choirs. He is, however, most often chief of a choir of his own. In SR he is not linked with a specific choir, but rules them all, and draws his followers from all choirs. He falls in fact with a third of all the angels (SR1837-40). The poet knows too of only nine orders – he was presumably familiar with only nine names (less Lucifer’s choir, which was to be replaced by man).

I am not quite certain how these statements are to be squared with one another, and am in any case not conversant with the continental texts in which the ‘replacement doctrine’ is attested; I shall accordingly confine myself to considering the evidence available to me.

SR’s source for the idea of man as tenth order was, it seems to me, almost certainly Gregory, who presents it in the course of expounding the parable of the woman and the silver pieces (Luke 15: 8-10):

13 Op. cit. 44.
The woman had ten drachmas, because there are nine orders of angels (*novem sunt ordines angelorum*). But, so that the number of the chosen might be completed, man was created as the tenth (*homo decimus est creatus*) . . . .

The idea of a tenth order runs throughout medieval Irish literature, applied always to the human race, a ‘tenth earthly grade’ (*dechmad grád talmán*) contrasted with the nine heavenly orders of the angels. I know of no early Irish reference to a tenth *angelic* choir, and we may note (with Murdoch) that in *SR* itself Lucifer’s followers are stated to have been drawn from various of the nine orders (*eter angle is archangle 1838*). Where Lucifer is said to be jealous of Adam (1105-8), it is because he feels supplanted personally; there is no suggestion that humanity replaces any specific group of angels.

It may be arguable that some version of the ‘replacement doctrine’ lay behind Gregory’s exegesis of the parable; so far as the Irish material itself is concerned, however, I see no reason to look farther for an explanation of the *dechmad grád*.

The section on the number of the angels has all the appearance of an insertion, made by the original poet or by some later redactor. The statement that God has revealed to the speaker ‘something of the proportions’ (*ní do thoimsib*) of the heavenly hosts immediately follows a brief allusion to twenty-four beings who lead the heavenly choir; and the end of the enumeration section immediately precedes a list of their twenty-four names. If, in other words, we were to excise lines 713-88 from the canto, the text which remained would have a tighter, more logical structure.

After his catalogue of angelic qualities, the poet begins to run...
through the number-system, first counting to ten, then by tens to a hundred, then noting that ten hundreds are a thousand. At this point the Irish numerical lexicon fails him; in order to express the far higher quantity which he has in mind, he resorts to an unfamiliar reckoning which may be set out as follows:

\[
10 \times 1000 = 1 \text{ legio} \\
10 \text{ legiones} = 1 \text{ cunea} \\
10 \text{ cuneae} = 1 \text{ marés (= myrias)} \\
10 \text{ marés} = 1 \text{ caterva} \\
10 \text{ catervae} = 1 \text{ exercitus} \\
10 \text{ exercitus} = 1 \text{ turba} \\
10 \text{ turbae} = 1 \text{ agmen} \\
10 \text{ agmina} \text{ attend upon each archangel}
\]

Since there are seven archangels (in contrast to the twenty-four mentioned in the main body of the poem) there are accordingly seventy agmina, or seven hundred billion angels.

The counting system employs Latin terms, but I have so far discovered no trace of it outside Ireland. Irish sources provide two further instances: a marginal paragraph in Laud Misc. 610, attributed to the Saltair Caisil supposedly compiled by Cormac mac Cuilennán (ob. 908); and one of the glosses to the poem Duan in choicat cest, answering the question ‘Cia lín d’agmnuiib aingel/maroen la cach n-Árcaingel?’ In neither text is there other evidence of influence from SR, so that the two passages may safely be taken to indicate the system’s existence independent of the poem.

It is difficult to say more, save by way of speculation; one might for instance note that all of the terms (except for myrias, a word whose use to designate large numbers would surely be familiar to any Latin-speaker) refer to bodies of soldiery, and are listed in the relevant chapter of Isidore’s Etymologiae (9. 3). But it is scarcely necessary to seek any derivation so clear-cut: all of the terms were current in medieval Latin, and had already become vague and often interchangeable in classical usage.

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20 Thus Thurneysen (RC vi. 373): ‘Für so grosse Zahlen hat der Ire keine Wörter; er drückt sie aus durch fortwährende Multiplikation mit Zehn.’

21 Celtica vi. 148, where the sum is said to comprise the lín na n-archangil; curio appears for cunea, and muries for marés.

22 ZCP iv. 235. Cuma (leg. cunia) appears for cunea.

23 The statement that Lucifer has ‘the shape of a monster named Prothimeon, i.e. it has a hundred heads and a hundred teeth in each head’ (loc. cit.) recalls SR 881-8, 1129-32; as I hope to show elsewhere, both texts reflect a version of the apocryphal Visio Sancti Pauli.
The doctrine of seven archangels goes back apparently to a list of ‘angels of the powers’ in 1 Enoch 20. The seven are very much a part of the insular apocryphal tradition, and many lists of their names could be cited. M. R. James has noted such lists on St. Cuthbert’s coffin (A.D. 698), in a lorica in the Book of Cerne (early ninth century), in the pseudo-Badan Collectanea, in the Antiphony of Bangor, and in an English MS of the early twelfth century. To these sources may be added Duan in choicat cest, the pseudo-Isidorian Liber de numeris, and two poems on the tutelary angels of the days of the week; while clearly related names appear in the Leiden Lorica and a charm in TCD MS H.3.17.

Thurneysen recognized that many of the names of the twenty-four archangels could also be traced to 1 Enoch; it may in fact be argued that the catalogue in SR is a reflex (however severely garbled) of purely Enochian material. Some of the names (and the duplication of Sarachel) are presumably due to the attempt to generate twenty-four items from a fragmentary source: the number twenty-four itself is that of the white-robed elders of Revelation 4:4, on whom the archangels are clearly based.

It is evident on comparing the versions of 1 Enoch (chaps. 6 and 20) that the Greek text is for the most part closer to SR than is the Ethiopic; while of the Greek versions containing the relevant passages, the text of the Byzantine historian Georgius Syncellus (c. 800) is generally closer than is the Codex Panopolitanus (eighth century or later). I give below

24 Only six names (Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel) occur in the Greek versions, as in several of the insular lists here cited; the increase to seven was probably motivated by the desire to have an angel for each day of the week. The seventh angel in the insular tradition (Painiel, Painital, Phanuithel, Panchiheil, etc.) is Phanuel, drawn from sections of 1 Enoch not surviving in Greek (40:9, 54:6, 71:13).
21 ‘Names of angels in Anglo-Saxon and other documents’, Journal of Theological Studies xi. 569-71. The continental parallels which he cites are interesting, but evidently reflect a different system or systems.
22 Loc. cit.
27 R. E. McNally, Der irische Liber de numeris (Munich diss., 1957), 126.
28 Ériu ii. 92-4, v.112; KMMisc. 253-7.
29 ZCP ii. 65.
30 Ériu xvi. 31.
31 RC vi. 372-3.
32 Note that they are specifically called ‘elders’ (sen) at 708; and cf. 581-8, where they are mentioned with other figures from Revelation.
33 For the Greek I have followed M. Black, Apocalypsis Henochi Graece (Leiden 1970) 21, 23, 32; for the Ethiopic I have used E. Isaac’s translation in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Garden City 1983) 1. 15-6, 23-4, 32, 38, 50.
a tabular presentation (slightly modified and extended) of Thurneysen’s suggested identifications. It represents barely more than two-thirds of the names in the SR list; but the reader who examines the variants in the versions of 1 Enoch itself will appreciate the drastic distortions and substitutions to which the original catalogue (by now irrecoverable) has been subject in its passage through many centuries and widely divergent cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SR</th>
<th>Syncellus</th>
<th>Codex Pan.</th>
<th>Ethiopian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Γαβριήλ</td>
<td>Γαβριήλ</td>
<td>Gabriel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michél</td>
<td>Μιχαήλ</td>
<td>Μιχαήλ</td>
<td>Michael</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raphiel</td>
<td>'Ραφαήλ</td>
<td>Ραφαήλ</td>
<td>Raphael</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panachel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phanuel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babichél</td>
<td>Χωβαβήλ</td>
<td>Χωχαρήλ</td>
<td>Kobabiel</td>
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<td>Raguel</td>
<td>'Ραγούηλ</td>
<td>'Ραγούηλ</td>
<td>Raguel</td>
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<td>Rumel</td>
<td>'Ραμήλ</td>
<td>'Ραμήλ</td>
<td>Rame‘el</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sumsagial</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Samsape‘el</td>
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<td>Sarmichiel</td>
<td>Σαμήλ</td>
<td>Σεμήλ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarachel (bis)</td>
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<td>Σαρήλ</td>
<td>Sarqa‘el</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urel</td>
<td>'Ουρήλ</td>
<td>'Ουρήλ</td>
<td>Uriel</td>
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<td>'Οραμμαμή</td>
<td>'Αρεαρός</td>
<td>Armaros</td>
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<td>Baraqyal</td>
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<td>Sariel</td>
<td>Σαρήλ,16</td>
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<td>'Αραθάκ</td>
<td>Arakeb</td>
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<td>Ζακίηλ</td>
<td>'Εζεκίηλ</td>
<td>Ezeqel</td>
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</table>

Since the series in 1 Enoch 6, from which most of the names derive, is specifically said to enumerate the fallen angels, our catalogue of twenty-four ‘archangels’ would appear to be the work of someone indifferent to or ignorant of the significance of the work from which he was scavenging. The exemplar probably reached Ireland already corrupt, very possibly torn from its original context.

The statement in one of the concluding quatrains that one-third of the angels fell with Lucifer recurs at 1837-40, as well as in Lebar

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14 Cf. note 24 above.
15 Cf. Heremiel in the Antiphony of Bangor (James, 570).
16 From the Greek of 1 Enoch 6; the name Σαρήλ/Saraqa‘el cited above occurs in chap. 20.
17 This would have confirmed the suspicions of a synod convened by Pope Zacharias in 745, which condemned a list of angels containing the names Uriel and Ragull: ‘Nos autem . . . non plus quam trium angelorum nomina cognoscimus, id est Michael, Gabriel, Raphael: siquidem iste, sub obitum angelorum, daemonum nomina introduxist’ (Sancti Bonifacii . . . opera quae extant omnia, ed. J. A. Giles, London 1844, 2. 45-6; cf. Thurneysen, RC vii, 373 n.1).
Gabāla.\textsuperscript{38} The idea was inspired by the description in Revelation 12:4 of a diabolical dragon which knocks a third of the stars from heaven with its tail. This analogy appeared first in the writings of Victorinus of Pettau, and was upheld by Cassian, Primasius and Cassiodorus;\textsuperscript{39} in Ireland it is explicitly invoked in the early hymn Altus prosator, ascribed to Colum Cille (ob. 597).\textsuperscript{40}

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\textsuperscript{38} ITS Vol. XXXIV. 16, 26.
\textsuperscript{39} Details in Turmel, 303-9; the doctrine was subsequently abandoned by most medieval theologians in favour of an interpretation of the fallen stars as apostatized Christians.
\textsuperscript{40} Lib. Hymn. 1. 69: ‘Draco magnus \ldots tertiam partem siderum traxit secum in barathrum’. ‘Tertiam’ is glossed ‘i. de omnibus angelis uel de consentientibus’.