

CHRIST FORTY HOURS IN THE TOMB AND THE FORTY HOURS DEVOTION

SOME of the many tasks facing present-day Hiberno-Latin studies are the identification of sources (ascribed or otherwise), and then tracing the original setting and the later transmission of a text or an individual item within a text.

A text of the Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae

These tasks can be illustrated by a very small item within the work known as the *Collectanea* ascribed to Bede. No manuscript of this work is known. It was first published as part of the complete works of Bede in 1563, and has recently been critically edited under the direction of M. Bayless and M. Lapidge.¹ The topic in question is on the number of hours Christ was ‘in death’ and in the tomb. It is numbered as item 179 in the recent critical edition, and comes after items on the six days of creation (§ 166), the six things which the Lord hates (§ 169), the eight principal vices (§ 172), the three silent things (§ 175), the twelve abuses of the world (§ 176) and the seven things which are not found in this world (§ 177). The text that interests us (§ 179) is as follows (in Migne’s orthography and punctuation):²

Quaeritur qua hora Dominus surrexerit, cum quadraginta horis in morte fuisset? Juxta Augustinum describitur: id est de die qua crucifixus est Dominus, quattuor remanent horae: duodecim horae noctis sabbati, duodecim ipsius sabbati: duodecim noctis dominicae: in sepulchro uero triginta horis fuit.

The question is asked as to what time (lit.: hour) Christ arose, since he was forty hours in death? According to Augustine it (i.e. the matter) is thus described: of the day on which the Lord was crucified four hours remain, twelve hours of Saturday night, twelve hours of Saturday itself, twelve hours of Sunday night. He was indeed in the tomb for thirty hours.

It is clear that the ending of this text is erroneous. The length of time Christ was in the tomb, according to the text’s own computation, was thirty-six rather than thirty hours. We would have expected the piece to

¹J. Heerwagen (ed.), *Opera Bedae Venerabilis presbyteri Anglosaxonis* iii (Basel 1563); reproduced in PL (ed. 1862) 94, 539–560 (in another edition, 647–674). The work has been re-edited: M. Bayless and M. Lapidge (ed.), *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, SLH 14, (Dublin 1998).

²Ed. Heerwagen, col. 654, ll. 40–46; PL 94 (1862 ed.), 545D–546A; ed. Bayless and Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, 142–143.

end: *in sepulchro uero triginta sex horis fuit; et quadraginta in morte* (as in the text of the *Reference Bible* to be cited below). The text may have been corrupted in transmission, or may have been badly transcribed into his composition by the original compiler. We may presume that the item had an independent existence before being incorporated into the work now known as the *Collectanea*.

Text of Augustine

The contents of the piece are ascribed to Augustine — presumably Augustine of Hippo. Given the nature of the contents, this ascription could easily be taken as erroneous. In fact it is genuine. The piece does derive from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, book 4, chapter 6. In the work itself this particular chapter is introduced as treating of: '*De triduo quo impleto dominus resurrexit.*' ('On the three days on the completion of which the Lord arose'). In the context, Augustine is interested in certain numbers, particularly the number six in its single and multiple forms, which explains the easy transition from the numbers forty and thirty-six (the ones that interest us) to other considerations. Augustine is quite aware of the problems arising from the various times mentioned with regard to the crucifixion and death of Christ in the Gospels (*hora tertia*, Mk 15:25; *hora sexta*, Jn 19:14; *hora nona*, Mt 27:46). Despite this, Augustine can speak of forty hours between Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection, and of his being thirty-six hours in the tomb. These two points are clear from the text, even though Augustine introduces extraneous elements associated with them. Augustine's text is as follows (italics in the Latin and in the English translation are by the present author to note the relationship with the shortened Hiberno-Latin texts):³

Ab hora ergo mortis usque ad diluculum resurrectionis horae quadraginta ut et ipsa nona connumeretur, cui numero congruit etiam uita eius super terram post resurrectionem in quadraginta diebus. Et est ipse numerus in scripturis ad insinuandum frequentissimus mysterium perfectionis in quadripartito mundo; habent enim quandam perfectionem decem, et ea quater multiplicata faciunt quadraginta. *A uespere enim sepulturae usque a d diluculum resurrectionis triginta sex horae sunt, qui est quadratus senarius.* Refertur autem ad illam rationem simpli ad duplum ubi est coaptationis maxima consonantia. Duodecim enim ad uiginti quattuor simpli ad duplum conueniunt et fiunt triginta sex, nox tota cum die toto et nocte tota, neque hoc sine illo sacramenti quod supra memorauit. Non absurde quippe spiritum diei comparamus, corpus autem nocti; dominicum enim corpus in morte ac resurrectione et spiritus nostri figuram et corporis gerebat

³Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4, vi (10), PL 42, 894–895; *De Trinitate*, W. J. Mountain auxiliante Fr. Glorie (ed.), 2 vols., vol. 1 (CCSL 50A; Turnhout 1968), 174.23–175.41: In the Chapter headings to *De Trinitate*, IV, vi (10) is described as: '*De triduo quo impleto dominus resurrexit*' (CCSL, 50, p. 7.)

exemplum. Etiam sic ergo appareat illa ratio simpli ad duplum in horis triginta sex cum duodecim ad uiginta quattuor conferuntur. *So from the hour of his death to the dawn of the resurrection there are 40 hours, counting in the ninth hour. This number corresponds to the 40 days of his life on earth after his resurrection.* The number 40 is of very frequent occurrence in the scriptures, to suggest the mystery of perfection in a quadripartite world. There is a certain perfection about 10, and multiplied by 4 it makes 40. *But from his burial in the evening to the dawn of the resurrection 36 hours elapsed, which is 6 squared.* This can also be reduced to that proportion of single to double in which is to be found the most complete harmony of the ‘interlock’. For 12 to 24 has the proportion of single to double, and together make 36, a whole night with a whole day and another whole night; this too is not without the kind of symbolic significance I mentioned above [*in Book IV, 2–23 (4–6)*]. Thus it is not unreasonable to compare the spirit with the day and the body with the night. Now as we have seen, the Lord’s body, in his death and resurrection, has the function of a type for our spirit and a model for our body. So here too, the proportion of single to double shows through in the 36 hours, which you get by adding 12 to 24.⁴

Augustine does not expect all his readers to agree with his treatment of these numbers and he goes on to say that he has gathered them from the authority of the ecclesiastical tradition received from the elders (*a maioribus*), from scripture or from reason. We shall see below that the duration of forty hours in the tomb may be one of these traditions inherited by Augustine.

A text of the Reference Bible

The *Reference Bible* has a lengthy exposition of the resurrection narrative of Mark’s Gospel (Mark 16:2, *Ualde mane*) — on the differences between the narratives of the four evangelists, on the number of angels present, on the number of Marys and on the Old Testament texts prophesying the resurrection of Christ. It then goes on to give Augustine’s position on the length of time Christ is ‘in death’ and in the tomb. The text is as follows:⁵

Nota quod (corr. to quot) horas habuit Dominus in morte. AGUSTINUS DICIT XL horas. Nam iiii horae de vi feria remanserunt post exitum spiritus eius et xii horae noctis sabbati et duodecim diei sabbati et xii dominicae noctis; xxxvi uero horas in sepulchro et xl in morte fuit.

⁴St Augustine, *The Trinity*, translated by E. Hill (Brooklyn, New York 1991) 160.

⁵I cite the text of MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale latin 11561, fol. 158rb–158va.

Ideo xl dies inter Pascha et ascensionem Domini ut consolaret xl dies apostolis (corr. interl. to –los) quod (corr. to quot) horas in merore (MS memore) fuerunt.

Item conueniens erat ut xxxvi horas Dominus in sepulchro iaceret quia ille numerus in vi sexies diuiditur; qui numerus deprehenditur in numero dierum quibus in utero conceptus est Christus ab viii Kal. Aprl. usque viii [MS has uiuii] Kal. Ian. Nam si multiplicatur ille numerus sexies xl sibi et vi inuenies cclxxvi dies quibus fuit Christus in utero.

Nota quod talis numerus in iiii litteris nominis Ade figuratus est. Nam A unum, D iiii, A iterum i, M xl. Sic intellegitur quod per sextum numerum mundus reaedificatur per Christum sicut per vi numerum dierum initio factus.

Take note of on the number of hours the Lord had in death. Augustine says forty hours. Because 4 hours of Friday remained after his spirit had departed, and 12 hours of Saturday night and 12 of the day of Saturday and 12 of Sunday night. He was, then, 36 hours in the tomb and 40 hours in death. *For this reason there are 40 days between Easter and the Lord's Ascension that the forty days might console [or: that during forty days he might console] the apostles for the number of hours they were in mourning.*

Again, it was fitting that the Lord should lie in the tomb for 36 hours, because that number is divided (divisible?) by 6, which number is found in the number of days in which Christ was conceived in the womb from the 8 kalends of April (= 25 March) to the 8 (v.l. 9) kalends of January (= 25 December). Because if that number 40 and 6 is multiplied by six you will find the 276 days in which Christ was in the womb.

Take note that this number is figured in the 4 letters of Adam's name. Indeed A is one, D 4, A once again 1, M 40. In this manner we can understand that by the number six the world was rebuilt by Christ, as it was made by the number six in the beginning of the days.

(In the *Reference Bible* this is a separate item after the scripture texts prophesying the resurrection of Christ. It is followed by an invitation to recall that (*nota quod*) the new burial place was in a garden, of which the text gives the moral signification.

This text is clearly dependent on Augustine. The first part on the length of time Christ spent 'in death' and in the tomb practically reproduces Augustine's text. The following section on the link between the forty hours in the tomb and the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension depends on Augustine, but expands on what he says. The third section is a further reflection on the thirty-six and forty hours

of Christ's death and burial and seems to depend on the section of Augustine's *De Trinitate* IV, v (9), that immediately preceding the passage cited above.⁶ The last section seems quite independent of Augustine.

A text of the Catechesis Celtica

We have a further text on the same subject, ascribed to Augustine, in the work now commonly referred to as the *Catechesis Celtica* which is preserved in the tenth-century manuscript of the Vatican Library, Codex Reginensis Latinus 49 (fol. 22r). In the *Catechesis Celtica* the text occurs as part of a lengthy treatment of the Resurrection narrative of Matthew (Mat 28:1–15)⁷, which is in the form of a threefold exposition of the text in the historical, spiritual and moral senses. The historical and spiritual exposition is heavily dependent on the eighth-century Hiberno-Latin commentary *Liber questionum in euangeliis*, or on the source of this, the commentary on Matthew by Frigulus. The source or sources of the moral exposition have yet to be determined. Together with the chief source, the section with the first, that is the historical, interpretation draws on a number of other works, sometimes by name: Virgilius Maro, Manch(i)anus, Arculf (Adomnán, *De locis sanctis*). It then goes through the text of Matthew lemma by lemma, and has a number of reflections on individual texts, for example — why did the (two) Marys come to the sepulchre by day? This reflection ends by noting that they came in the day-time since it was fitting that the faithful of Adam's seed come to know their Lord. This leads to seven questions on why this should be so. After further reflections on individual phrases of the biblical passage ('Come and see', 'proclaim'), we reach the text 'Because he has arisen from the dead'. Here texts of five appropriate Psalms are cited. Immediately after this comes the text on the length of time Christ was 'in death' and in the tomb.

Notandum quod XL horis in morte fuit (Iesus) et XXXVI in sepulchro, secundum Augustinum. Ideo XL diebus <mansi?> — et XL dies resurrectionis adoramus a Pascha usque ad ascensionem —

⁶ *Octauo enim kalendas apriles conceptus creditur quo et passus. ... Natus autem traditur octauo kalendas ianuarias; ab illo ergo die usque ad istum computati ducenti septuaginta sex reperiuntur dies, qui senarium numerum quadragies sexies habet;* ed. Mountain and Glorie, *De Trinitate*, 172–173. ('He (i.e. Christ) is believed to have been conceived on 25 March, and also to have suffered on that day. ... Tradition has it that he was born on 25 December; count from that day to this [25 March?] and you will get 276 days, which contain the number 6 forty-six times ...', St Augustine, *The Trinity*, translation E. Hill, p. 159.)

⁷ On this catechesis or homily of the *Catechesis Celtica* see M. McNamara, 'The Irish affiliations of the *Catechesis Celtica*', *Celtica* 21 (1990) 290–334, at 318–322; M. McNamara, 'Sources and affiliations of the *Catechesis Celtica* (MS Vat. Reg. lat. 49)', *Sacris Erudiri* 34 (1994) 185–237, at 210–211 (no. 27); J. Ritmüller, 'MS Vat. Reg. 49 reviewed: a new description and a table of textual parallels: with the *Liber questionum in euangeliis*', *Sacris Erudiri* 33 (1992–1993) 259–305, at 280–83 (no. 25). The opening section of this homily, with the historical interpretation, has been edited: M. McNamara, 'Catechesis Celtica Homily on the Resurrection (Matt 28:1–15): Some new evidence', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 23 (2000) 67–87.

ut consolaret apostolos (apos[–]) tot diebus quot <horas> in merore fuerant.

It is to be noted that, according to Augustine, (Jesus) was forty hours in death and thirty-six in the tomb. Therefore for forty days: and we worship the forty days of the resurrection from Easter to the Ascension — so that he might console the apostles for as many <hours> as they were in mourning.

The text then proceeds with the exposition of the remainder of the passage.

It appears that for this passage the *Catechesis Celtica* is drawing on the *Reference Bible*, and citing the text of Augustine through it, rather than drawing directly on Augustine's work. The first sentence gives a succinct summary of Augustine as in the *Reference Bible*. The second sentence also appears to depend on the *Reference Bible* rather than directly on Augustine, and furthermore not to have reproduced its text altogether coherently.

A text of the Verona Homilies

The *Catechesis Veronensis*, or the Verona Homily Collection, is a collection of eleven pieces or homilies preserved in the manuscript Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, Codex LXVII (64), fols. 33r–81v. The manuscript is from the early ninth century. The homilies are only on the portion of the liturgical year from Christmas to Pentecost. The homilies have certain matters in common with other Hiberno-Latin works. The collection has been edited by L. T. Martin⁸ who is of the view that 'while it is not possible to say with certainty that the author of the Verona Homily Collection was Irish, his cast of mind shows clearly and unmistakably the dominance of the Irish element in his intellectual formation'.⁹ Homily no. 6 of the collection is a lengthy piece on the resurrection of Christ, with opening comments on John 20:1, 6: *Una autem sabbati*. The opening section (lines 3–58 of Martin's edition) draws on Augustine, *De consensu euangelistarum*, and treats of the usual introductory questions: on the triduum itself and on each of the three days of the triduum, ending with the third, in which the first part, that is the night, is taken with the day-time period (*tertius uero a parte sua prima, id est, a nocte, totus cum suo diurno tempore accipitur*). Without any reference to Augustine by name, the text changes from *De consensu* and continues:¹⁰

Ab hora ergo mortis usque ad diluculum quo Domini resurrectio declarata est, XL horae sunt. Cui numero congruit uita ipsius super terram post resurrectionem in XL diebus. Queritur qua hora noctis

⁸L. T. Martin (ed.), *Catechesis Veronensis* (Scriptores Cetiligenae 4; CCCM 186) (Turnhout 2000).

⁹Martin, *Catechesis Veronensi*, p. xxiii.

¹⁰Martin, *Catechesis Veronensi*, p. 66, lines 59–64.

Dominus resurrexit a mortuis? Quidam media nocte resurrexisse dicunt, ut in psalmo: *Media nocte surgebam ad confitendum tibi* (Psalm 118.62).

From the time (lit. 'hour') of his death, therefore, until the dawn in which the resurrection of the Lord was proclaimed, there are forty hours. With this number corresponds his life on earth <after> the resurrection for forty days. A question is asked with regard to the hour of the night at which the Lord arose from the dead. Some say that he arose at midnight, as in the psalm: 'At midnight I arose to give praise to you' (Psalm 118.62).

Although no source ascription is given, this text is verbatim from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, cited above. There is no evidence of dependence of any intermediate source, such as the Hiberno-Latin *Reference Bible* or any other. The author or compiler may well have been drawing directly on Augustine's *De Trinitate* as he was on *De consensu euangelistarum* for the section immediately preceding.

The forty hours devotion to Christ's death and burial

The question can be posed whether these texts originated and were transmitted, in Irish and earlier tradition, merely through idle curiosity or whether there was some other motive. *Curiositas* alone may not have been the reason. It would appear that behind the computation of the forty hours, even in the text of Augustine, stands an early Christian devotion to Christ's death and burial, one which continued in a somewhat different way in the later Roman Catholic devotion of the Forty Hours, or *Quarant' Ore*.

The modern Catholic devotion known as the Forty Hours consists of a period of forty hours prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed. It is generally believed that this devotion began, in the modern age, in 1527 when Gian Antonio Belotti, preaching in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Milan, asked the faithful to remain forty hours before the Blessed Sacrament to pray for peace in a time of war. From the Church of the Holy Sepulchre the devotion spread to the Milan cathedral, and later throughout the Catholic Church in the West. H. Thurston and others have been able to trace this devotion back further to the thirteenth century in the form of devotion to the resting of our Lord in the tomb, without direct connection with the Blessed Sacrament.¹¹ J. A. Jungmann traced it back to the first centuries AD. In his book *Pastoral Liturgy* he writes:¹²

It was not the high Middle Ages which first had the idea of keeping vigil for forty hours by the grave of our Lord,

¹¹See H. Thurston, *Lent and Holy Week* (London 1904) 110–148. The fullest exploration of the history of the devotion is in J. A. Jungmann, *Pastoral liturgy* (London 1962) 223–238 (with bibliography on history of research, p. 223, n. 1).

¹²Jungmann, *Pastoral liturgy*, 224–225.

even if it did receive an impetus during the time of the crusades. Behind the veneration of the forty hours of our Lord's resting in the grave lay a tradition reaching back to the 2nd century. In a letter to Pope Victor, Irenaeus speaks of the custom of fasting before Easter: some consider it proper 'to fast for one day, others for two, others for longer still; others, again, reckon their day as forty hours — a day and a night.'¹³ That by forty hours was meant the time our Lord spent in the grave or more exactly, the time during which He was under the sway of death, is clearly apparent from Augustine:¹⁴ *Ab hora ergo mortis usque ad diluculum resurrectionis horae sunt quadaginta*. Somehow, the number forty had already become a traditional holy number. It was arrived at by a rough estimate of the number of hours which was not exactly known.¹⁵

The devotion of forty hours in honour of the time Jesus was believed to have lain in the tomb continued from the second century and through the High Middle Ages down to the sixteenth, at least in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Milan, when it gave rise to a new form of Forty Hours devotion. This early veneration of the forty hours may have influenced Augustine in his treatment of the question in *De Trinitate*. In this work of Augustine we have a literary text which was to influence an entire line of tradition now becoming increasingly accepted as associated with the Irish on the Continent and probably also in their homeland. One may legitimately ask whether a form of a Forty Hours devotion was also present in the Irish circles which preserved and transmitted this little item on the duration of Christ's stay 'in death' and in the tomb.

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¹³In a note to this Jungmann says: 'In Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* IV, 24, 12'; cf. O. Casel, 'Art und Sinn altchristlichen Osterfeiern', in *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 14 (1934) 1–78, esp. 11, 16, 31.

¹⁴With reference to Augustine, *De Trinitate* IV, 6 (PL 42, 849f.).

¹⁵Augustine, loc. cit., puts the question whether the time ought to be reckoned from the *hora tertia* (Mark 15.25), or from the *hora sexta* (John 19.14) when the Lord was crucified, or from the *hora nona* (Matthew 27.46). From the hour of laying in the grave until the *diluculum resurrectionis* Augustine reckons 36 hours.