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A Lost Insular Version of the Romance of *Octavian*

In 1911, Carl Marstrander edited and translated an Irish prose text that he dubbed *Sechrán na Banimpire* ('The Wanderings of the Empress', henceforth *SB*)[1]. The text is a translation of the popular medieval romance, *Octavian*, which exists in various versions across numerous languages. Marstrander, however, failed to recognise the Irish text's origins in this romance and it was another decade before the connection was finally made by T. F. O'Rahilly.[2] Despite the availability of Marstrander's edition and translation, the text has been almost completely ignored within Irish studies and it is the Irish translation of a foreign romance that is least familiar to medieval scholars working in other fields. This is an unfortunate state of affairs because *SB* is a text of considerable interest, both to Irish specialists and to scholars of romance in other languages. Although the narrative it presents is very recognisably that of *Octavian*, it gives us a distinctive form of the romance, witnessed in no other known

[1] Carl Marstrander, ed. and trans., 'Sechrān Na Banimpire', *Ériu* 5 (1911), 161-199. The title is derived from the explicit to the text, 'Conadh é sin sechrán na bainimpiri 7 oilemhain a deise mac connige sin' (So far the Wandering of the Empress and the Rearing of her two Sons; lines 645-6).

[2] T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Miscellanea', *Ériu* 9 (1921-1923), 12-26 (p. 26). In 1889, Max Nettlau noted the existence of this text and gave it the title 'Octavian' in 'Irish Texts in Dublin and London Manuscripts', *Révue Celtique*, 10 (1889), 456-62 (p. 461), but he made no link with the popular romance and appears to have merely derived his title from the appearance of the emperor's name in the opening line of the Irish text.

version of the story. It owes this distinctiveness, in part, to the creative interventions of its Irish translator; however, there is also evidence that many such features of the text are derived from its exemplar. *SB* may, therefore, be our only witness to a version of *Octavian* that once circulated in the insular world, but which has since been lost from every other literary corpus.

Manuscript and Date of *Sechrán na Banimpire*

The sole copy of *SB* is preserved in an early-modern manuscript, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS Stowe B iv 1 (also known as MS 236a).[3] From the evidence of the marginalia, this manuscript can be dated with relative certainty to between 1671 and 1674 and appears to have been chiefly written in the Shancoe district of Co. Sligo, in the north west of Ireland.[4] The sole scribe signs himself 'David Duiginanus' at no fewer than twenty nine points in the volume.[5] This is Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáin (David O'Duigeanan, *fl.* 1651-1696), a member of the learned family of Ó Duibhgeannáin who is also responsible for two other manuscripts now held in the Royal Irish Academy.[6] Ó Duibhgeannáin was a disciple of the seventeenth-century annalists known as the 'Four Masters' and his work reflects similar antiquarian interests; his manuscripts preserve much medieval material that would otherwise have been lost in the political and social tumult of early-modern Ireland.[7] The material preserved alongside *SB* is overwhelmingly medieval in origin and includes texts of *Cath Muighe Rath* ('The Battle of Magh Rath'), *Buile Shuibhne* ('Sweeney's Frenzy'), *Táin Bó Flidhais* ('The Raid of Flidais's Cattle'), *Leighes Coise Chéin* ('The Healing of Cian's Leg') and *Tochmarc Becfhola* ('The Wooing of Becfola'). *SB* is preserved towards the end of the manuscript, over ff. 240r – 248r.

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[3] Described in *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, ed. Mary E. Byrne et al, 10 vols (Dublin, 1926-1970), I, pp. 586-593.

[4] Paul Walsh, 'David O Duigenan, Scribe', in *Irish Men of Learning: Studies by Father Paul Walsh*, ed. Colm Ó Lochlainn (Dublin, 1947), pp. 25-33 (p. 27).

[5] *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts*, ed. Byrne et al, p. 586.

[6] Paul Walsh, 'The Learned Family of O Duigenan', in *Irish Men of Learning*, ed. Ó Lochlainn, pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

[7] Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances: A Study of the Early Modern Irish 'Romantic Tales' and their Oral Derivatives* (Dublin, 1969), p. 47.

Dating a text that survives in such a late manuscript is obviously problematic, but the available evidence points to a medieval origin for *SB*. The broad body of late medieval romances from the Irish tradition (or 'romantic tales', as they are more usually termed), present the same sort of challenges. In the most complete study of Irish romantic tales, Alan Bruford observes that more than half of the medieval narratives in this mode do not survive in copies from that period.[8] The interventions of scribes and the cultivation of conscious archaism in Irish writing, make the linguistic features of such texts of little or no value for dating works.[9] In the case of *SB*, the most helpful indicators on a textual level are the various mistranscriptions in the manuscript copy that, as Marstrander observed, strongly suggest that the scribe was working from a much older exemplar.[10] Beyond this, we must rely on the rather less satisfying contextual evidence, but this also suggests medieval origins for *SB*. As we shall see, this text is translated from a version of *Octavian* that belongs to the insular, as opposed to the continental, tradition of the narrative. The latest surviving text of *Octavian* from this tradition is a print from the press of Wynkyn De Worde dating from the first years of the sixteenth century.[11] Furthermore, the manuscript in which *SB* is preserved is a compendium of largely medieval texts, produced by a scribe who had a pronounced interest in preserving older material. What is known about the broader context of the translation of romance in Ireland may allow an even more exact dating. The years between *c*. 1450 and *c*. 1510 would be a particularly good fit. There seems to have been a considerable upsurge in interest in reading and translating foreign material in Ireland at this time and most medieval Irish translations of foreign material have been dated to a period inside this relatively confined window.[12] This period gives us Irish translations of several saints lives and religious texts, the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, Mandeville's *Travels*, the *Book of Marco Polo* as

[8] Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-tales*, p. 47

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *SB*, p. 161

[11] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2004), p. 424.

[12] This translation 'trend' has never received extensive study. The most authoritative accounts are still the preliminary surveys in Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 120-141; James Carney, 'Literature in Irish, 1169-1534', in *A New History of Ireland*: *Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford, 1987), pp. 688-707 and, more recently, Nessa Ní Shéaghdha, 'Translations and adaptations into Irish', *Celtica,* 16 (1984), 107-24.

well as the only medieval Irish translations of foreign romances: *Sir Bevis of Hampton, Sir Guy of Warwick,* the *Queste del Saint Graal*, *Fierabras*, *William of Palerne,* the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troie* and the *Seven Sages of Rome*.[13] With its crusading themes, its emphasis on exotic travel and chivalric ideals, *Octavian* would certainly not look out of place in this company.

Octavian and its Textual History

The central plot of *Octavian* is more-or-less the same in all versions and features a particularly high number of motifs familiar from other romances. When the Emperor Octavian's wife gives birth to twin sons, her mother-in-law accuses the empress of adultery and tells her son that the boys are not his children. She persuades a male servant to slip into bed with the sleeping empress and when the emperor comes upon the scene it appears to prove his wife's guilt. The empress is exiled with her two children who are both abducted by animals in quick succession. Outlaws recover the first child and then sell him to a merchant called Clement. He gives the boy the name Florent and raises him in Paris. In the meantime, the empress boards a ship bound for Jerusalem and is reunited with her second son when the ship's crew takes a trip ashore and comes upon the boy suckling a lioness. They then continue their journey and the boy, named Octavian after this father, is raised in the King of Jerusalem's household. Meanwhile Paris is besieged by Saracens and the Emperor Octavian is among those who come to its aid. Florent defeats a giant in single combat and wins the love of the sultan's daughter. However, the Christians, including the Emperor Octavian and Florent, are subsequently captured by the sultan. News of this reaches Jerusalem and the young Octavian travels to Paris, defeats the Saracen forces and rescues the prisoners. The narrative ends with family being reunited and reconciled.

The earliest versions of the *Octavian* narrative are in French. The first is a 5371 line version in octosyllabic couplets (*FO*) now represented by Oxford, Bodleian MS Hatton 100,

[13] All but one of these Irish texts have been edited with English translations: 'The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton', ed. F. N. Robinson, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie,* 6 (1908), pp. 9-180, 273-338, 556. *Lorgaireacht an tSoidigh Naomhtha: an Early Modern Irish translation of the Quest of the Holy Grail*, ed. Sheila Falconer, (Dublin, 1953). 'The Irish version of *Fierabras*', ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique,* 19 (1898), 14–57, 118–67, 252–91, 364–93; *Eachtra Uilliam* ed. Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1949); *Stair Ercuil ocus a Bás: The Life and Death of Hercules*, ed. Gordon Quin, Irish Texts Society 38 (Dublin, 1939); The *Seven Sages* has been edited without a translation by David Greene: 'A Gaelic Version of *The Seven Wise Masters*', *Béaloideas,* 14 (1944), 219-236.

an early fourteenth-century manuscript.[14] The second, usually called *Florent et Octavian* (*F&O*), is a much longer version in monorhymed alexandrines, running to 16000-18576 lines in the surviving manuscripts which all date from the fifteenth century.[15] Both these texts are generally supposed to have derived from a lost twelfth-century *chanson de geste*.[16] *F&O* is adapted into a prose romance in the late medieval period and printed at a relatively early date. This version, in turn, forms the basis for a German *Volksbuch*, first printed in 1537, which itself is the source for Danish, Dutch, Icelandic and Polish versions of the narrative.[17] There are also two Italian versions of the story that appear to be derived from a third French offshoot of this tradition that has since been lost.[18]

The two Middle English versions of *Octavian* are related to *FO*, rather than to *F&O*.[19] This is unsurprising, given that the sole manuscript of *FO* is Anglo-Norman in origin, while the remaining manuscripts of *F&O* all appear to come from France itself. The Middle English texts present two distinct versions of the narrative. The Northern *Octavian* (*NO*) and the Southern *Octavian* (*SO*), both appear to date from the mid-fourteenth century. The text of *NO* survives in two fifteenth-century manuscripts that differ in minor details: Lincoln, Dean and Chapter Library, MS 91 (*NO*(L)) and Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38 (*NO*(C)). There is also the print of *NO* by De Worde which now survives in only one fragment (San Marino, Huntington Library 14615; STC 18779) and which is usually dated to

[14] *Octavian*, ed. Frances McSparran, EETS o.s. 289 (London, 1986), p. 38. This is an edition of the Middle English Northern *Octavian*. The standard edition of *FO* is *Octavian*, ed. Karl Vollmöller, Altfranzösische Bibliothek, 3 (Heilbronn, 1883). The romance is complete in its surviving manuscript; the odd number of total lines in this couplet romance arises from the fact that the final line of the romance is not rhymed.

[15] None of these manuscripts have yet been edited, but there is a synopsis with excerpts in P. Paris, 'Florent et Octavian de Rome', in *Historie Littéraire de la France*, XXVI (Paris, 1873), 303-35.

[16] *Octovian Imperator*, ed. Frances McSparran, Middle English Texts 11 (Heidelberg, 1979), p. 29. This is the only edition of the Middle English Southern *Octavian*.

[17] *NO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 340-41. On these translations, see further, Margaret Schlauch, 'A Polish Analogue of the Man of Law's Tale', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), pp. 372-80.

[18] *SO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 28-9. For the Italian versions, see *Libro delle Storie di Fiorovante*, ed. P. Rajna (Bologna, 1872), cpts 17-21 and *I Reali di Francia*, ed. G. Vandelli (Bologna, 1892), bk II, cpts 42-52.

[19] *NO*, ed. McSparran, p. 42

around 1505.[20] This print is recognisably of the northern version of the romance, but differs from the two manuscript copies in various small details. In general, it is closer to *NO*(C) than to *NO*(L) and its surviving pages cover the narrative up to line 742 in *NO*(C). *SO* survives in a single mid-fifteenth century manuscript, London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.II.[21] *NO* and *SO* differ from each other in various key respects which their editor, Frances McSparran, has detailed exhaustively.[22] The most notable general difference is that '*SO* lacks the focus and detail of *NO*, and has generally the character of an outline or synopsis'.[23] Allusions to the narrative in other works suggest that *Octavian* enjoyed considerable popularity in medieval England.[24]

The source of the Middle English versions is difficult to pin down precisely. Although they seem to be far closer to *FO* than to *F&O*, the correspondence is by no means exact and the existence of at least one further lost source version for these translations seems likely. In her 1986 edition of *NO*, McSparran asserted that there was a case for supposing that its source was not *FO*, but another text very closely related to it, which she dubbed *A.[25] Although they differ in numerous respects, there is considerable linguistic overlap between *NO* and *SO*, much of it in vocabulary, particularly in rhyme words, and usually occurring in clusters in the same episodes.[26] This, as McSparran acknowledges, opens the possibility of a lost anterior source in English rather than in French:

> I believe that these correspondences […] go far beyond the range of verbal parallels and rhymes found commonly in Middle English romance, and that they prove a special connection between *SO* and *NO* […] Two possibilities deserve serious consideration: (a) that both English versions are reworkings of an earlier Middle English version, itself a redaction of *FO* or a similar source; (b) that the author of one of the English versions, in his redaction of his French source, drew on the other English version.[27]

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[20] This has been edited by McSparran as an appendix to *NO*, (pp. 223-244).

[21] *NO*, ed. McSparran, p. 41. For a fuller account of the manuscript, see *SO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 10-13

[22] *NO*, ed. McSparran, p. 42-53; *SO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 26-38.

[23] *NO* ed. McSparran, p. 45

[24] *SO*, ed. McSparran, p. 26

[25] *NO* ed. McSparran, p. 47

[26] *SO*, ed. McSparran, p. 33

[27] *SO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 37-8.

Option (b) is obviously the more complicated, since it requires the author of one of the Middle English versions to have had both a French text of *A and the other English version to hand. The principal argument against hypothesis (a) is the apparent evidence that *A was in French, not in English. This evidence comes in the form of a few French names that appear in *NO*, though not in *FO*.[28] However, as McSparran observes, the evidence for a French *A is all refutable since 'the French place and proper names may […] have been derived from one or more sources, ultimately or immediately French, and not necessarily another version of the *Octavian* story'.[29] The argument for an English *A lying behind both *NO* and *SO* seems more convincing.

Sechrán na Banimpire in the *Octavian* Tradition

SB seems to belong firmly within the insular tradition represented by *FO* and the Middle English versions, rather than to the group of texts derived from *F&O*. It lacks any of the elaborations and extra episodes featured in *F&O*. In *SB* the second child is abducted twice, first by a lioness and then by griffin who flies away to an island with both the child and the lioness in its grip. This particular sequence of events is characteristic of the *FO* tradition and is lacking in all continental versions of the tale.[30] Within the tradition of *FO*, *SB* is particularly close to the two Middle English redactions. Most notably, *SB* holds several features in common with the northern and southern English versions that are lacking in *FO*. The most significant are the following:

A) The boy tricked by the emperor's mother into getting into bed with the empress is described in the Irish as 'fer nighte mías na cistionach' (a dishwasher in the great kitchen; line 26). This appears to reflect the textual tradition only attested in the two Middle English texts which call him a 'kokes knaue' (*NO*, line 116;[31] *SO*, lines 122 and 157); in the French version the description is no more specific than 'garcons' (*FO*, line 193).

[28] *SO*, ed. McSparran, pp. 30-31.

[29] *SO*, ed. McSparran, p. 31

[30] *SO*, ed. McSparran, p. 42.

[31] Unless otherwise stated, all line numbers given for *NO* refer to the Cambridge manuscript of the text.

B) In the Middle English versions, in *SB*, but not in *FO*, the emperor cuts off the man's head as soon as he discovers him in bed with the empress, then he throws it at his wife (*NO*, 172-175; *SO*, 206-210; *SB*, 65-67).

C) In *NO*, *SO* and *SB*, the sailors voyaging to Jerusalem go ashore for water and come upon the lioness suckling the infant Octavian (*NO*, 412-432; *SO*, 511-558; *SB*, 407-416). In contrast, *FO* neither mentions the sea journey nor the motivation for coming to the island.

D) Both *SO* and *NO* give accounts of the empress's life in Jerusalem, stating that she was summoned by the king there and made a part of his household. *FO* merely has her arrive there, take up lodgings, and then disappear from the narrative until the concluding scenes. *SB* also gives an account of her dealings with the king of Jerusalem at this point that broadly corresponds to that in *NO* and *SO* (439-449).

SB, then, seems to have a particularly close relationship with the two surviving English versions of *Octavian*. The Irish text does not give any hint as to the language from which it was translated, but its closeness to *SO* and *NO*, particularly in small verbal details such as that in example A (above) and some further instances detailed below, suggest a Middle English text is more likely than a French one.

An English source for *SB* would also fit readily within the broader context of Irish translations of romance in this period. There is evidence of some translation from French, most notably the Irish version of the *Queste del Saint Graal*,[32] but significantly more texts seem to have been adapted from Middle English, for instance, the Irish translations of *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton* and Caxton's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye.* English texts in manuscript or in print do not appear to have been particularly hard to come by in late medieval Ireland[33] and a popular text like *Octavian*, which was also circulating in print in this period, would seem an obvious candidate for translation. However, aligning the Irish

[32] Falconer suggests a Middle English source for this translation; but, as Rachel Bromwich argued in her review of the edition, the evidence for a French exemplar is much more convincing: Bromwich, 'Review of *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*, ed. Sheila Falconer', *Medium Aevum*, 25 (1956), 92-5.

[33] For instance, late medieval inventories show that the Earl of Kildare's library at Maynooth contained a large number of titles in English, many of them prints.[33] For an analysis of the library lists with suggested identifications for the listed items see, Aisling Byrne. 'The Earls of Kildare and their Books at the End of the Middle Ages', *The Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 14 (2013), 129-153

translation with any surviving version of the *Octavian* narrative in Middle English is very problematic. *SB* is certainly not made from De Worde's print of *NO*, since it contains a good deal of material that exists only in *SO*. If we look again at the episode where the emperor throws the head of the kitchen boy at the queen, it is clear that *SB* is particularly close to *SO* at this point. The text of *SO* gives:

> The emperour hente by de here
> The knaue, & smot atwo hys swere,
> And also warm
> He drew þat hedde, wyth lowryng
> chere,
> Into þe lady barm
>
> (*SO*, 206-210)

SB describes the incident thus:

> 'tuc buille brioghmhar borrfadhach don bháothladrann gur thesg a chenn da c[h]olainn 7 dochuir eidir dá c[h]ich na rioghna é 7 í ina coladh.'
>
> (he gave the stupid churl a mighty fierce blow, so that he shore his head from his body and tossed it between the breasts of the queen, who was asleep; 65-67)

Notably, *FO* and *NO* lack the detail shared by *SO* and *SB* of the head landing on the lady's breast. Another detail that aligns *SB* with *SO*, is the more positive account given of Florent's adoptive father, Clement. In *NO* his buffoonish antics are described at much greater length than in *SO*, while in *SB* they are omitted altogether.[34] *SB* also follows *SO* and *FO* in postponing the revelation of Florent's true identity until the conclusion of the text. In *NO* it occurs at a much earlier point, after the youth's defeat of the giant (1125-60).

Yet, *SB* cannot be a direct translation from a version of *SO* either, since the Irish text is closer to *NO* at other points. For instance, *SB* includes the empress's suggestion that she and her husband should build a church dedicated to the Virgin (8-12), a detail otherwise only found in *NO* (74-84). In the episode where the servant is found in bed with the empress, *SB* tracks *NO*, rather than *SO*, in stating that the empress remained asleep throughout (*NO*,

[34] For an analysis of the motivations behind *NO*'s depiction of Clement, see John Simons, 'Northern *Octavian* and the Question of Class,' in *Romance in Medieval England*, eds. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 105-111.

170-80; *SB*, 65-6).[35] Further on in the narrative, Florent's presentation of the giant's head to the sultan's daughter does not appear in *FO* or *SO*, but features in both *NO* (1003-08) and *SB* (356-8). There is a particularly close correspondence between *SB* and *NO*(C) in the section where Florent's appropriation of the sultan's daughter's sleeve is described. In the Irish text, the sleeve is described as being made of 'srollderg' (375). Marstrander translates this as 'purple satin'; however, it is more typical for *derg* to denote 'red' and a closer rendering would be 'red satin'. In the Cambridge manuscript of *NO*, the sleeve is described as being 'skarlet' (1027), while in Lincoln manuscript it is a 'surkotte sleue' (939) and *SO* has the same reading (1180). The French simply gives 'manche' (*FO*, 2694). If *SB* is left out of the picture, 'skarlet' in the Cambridge text looks a lot like a misreading of Lincoln and *SO*'s 'surkotte', but the evidence of *SB* suggests this reading was already established within the textual tradition of *Octavian*.

SB, it seems, cannot be directly derived from either *NO* or *SO* in the forms that we now have them; rather, it seems to derive from a version of *Octavian* that lies somewhere between these two. Might *SB* attest to *A, the lost source for the Middle English versions posited by McSparran and others? Although this possibility is a very attractive one, certain unique features of *SB* complicate matters. Most notably, *SB* orders the interlaced episodes of the narrative in a manner that is entirely unique, cutting between the fortunes of the twin sons of the Emperor Octavian at points in the narrative that differ from those in all other known versions. While such restructuring is certainly not beyond the Irish translators of the late Middle Ages, it is not characteristic of their approach,[36] and it seems very plausible that this structure derives from *SB*'s source. The interlace structures of *SO*, *NO* and *SB* can be compared as follows:

SO: *SO* follows *FO* in its division of the narrative. The narrative begins with the exile of the empress and the abduction of Florent by the ape. It then follows Florent's fortunes up to the point where Clement arrives in Paris with the child. At this point,

[35] In the Lincoln text the queen wakes up (*NO*(L), 172 ff.)

[36] The most extensive work on the techniques of the Irish translators has been undertaken by Erich Poppe and principally focuses on the *Guy*, *Bevis* and the *Recuyell* translations. Most relevant here is Poppe, 'Narrative Structure of Medieval Irish Adaptations: the Case of *Guy* and *Beues*', in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Dublin, 2005), pp. 205-229.

it returns to the empress and details the abduction of the infant Octavian, the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the recovery of the boy from the lioness and follows the mother and child until they come to Jerusalem and the court of the king there. The narrative then returns to Florent and recounts his exploits up to the point where he is captured by the sultan along with the King of France and the Emperor Octavian. Finally, the narrative moves back to Jerusalem where these tidings reach the young Octavian who goes to fight against the sultan.

NO: This text presents a different structure to *FO* and *SO*. The narrative follows that of *SO* until the abduction of Florent, but it then describes the abduction of Octavian and relates how he is taken to an island and raised by the lioness. It then returns to the empress and narrates her journey to Jerusalem and her recovery of Octavian. At this point, for the first time, *NO* turns to Florent's fortunes after his abduction and follows his story right through to his imprisonment by the sultan. The narrative then shifts its attention to Jerusalem where, as in *SO*, the young Octavian hears of the sultan's victory and goes to help the Christians.

SB: Like *NO*, *SB* recounts both abductions one after the other near the beginning of the narrative. However it diverges from *NO* in recounting Florent's fortunes up to the point where he returns to Paris after defeating the giant and meeting the Sultan's daughter. It follows this with an account of the empress's pilgrimage to Jerusalem and her recovery of Octavian, before cutting back to Florent and outlining his activities up to the point where he is imprisoned by the sultan. From this point onwards, *SB* broadly follows the outline of the remainder of *NO* and *SO*.

Structurally, *SB* seems somewhat closer to *NO* than to *SO*. The only difference is that it splits the account of Florent's rearing and adventures mid-way through to insert the account of the empress's journey to the Holy Land, which in *NO* only comes after all of Florent's exploits have been recounted. It is not hard to see why the structure represented by *SB* might have seemed appealing. In all versions of the romance, far more time is devoted to Florent's life and adventures than to his twin brother and the uninterrupted account that *NO* gives of Florent's career makes this effect even more pronounced, since nothing is heard of the young Octavian until very close to the end of the narrative. *SB*'s rendering of the narrative certainly makes the text rather more balanced. The uniqueness of *SB*'s structure complicates

the question of its relation to *NO* and *SO* and diminishes the likelihood that it is a translation of *A. Since *SO* has the same structure as *FO*, it seems highly unlikely that *A could have been a version of the text that diverged from that pattern. If the Irish translator is not responsible for the unique ordering of *SB*, then this translation appears to witness to a lost version of *Octavian* that stands in close relation to *SO* and *NO*, but is not their direct source *A.

There are several other details unique to the Irish text that may, plausibly, derive from its exemplar. *SB* gives an explanation of the logic behind Florent's name occurs in no other version of the romance. The Irish text links his name to the fact Clement buys him for a sum of florins (122-130). In *NO* and *SO*, Clement also pays for the baby in florins (*NO*, 576; *SO*, 396), but no clear link is made with the child's name in either of these versions. This detail seems unlikely to be the Irish translator's own addition, particularly since the text's Gaelicised version of 'florins', *pluirens*, does not appear to be attested elsewhere in the medieval Irish corpus.[37] *SB* also gives a unique name for the pagan princess who marries Florent, calling her 'Feilisda' (353, 374). In *NO*, by contrast, she is called 'Marsabelle' and in *SO* the author does not give her a name at all. 'Feilisda' is not a native Irish name, but it is just possible that this is a detail added by the Irish translator. The similarity of the name to that of 'Felice', the heroine of *Guy of Warwick*, which was also translated into Irish in the late medieval period, may be significant. The Irish name in *SB* is very close to the rendering of 'Felice' as *Feilis* in the Irish translation of *Guy*.[38] Some details in the concluding lines of *SB* also diverge from the mainstream *Octavian* tradition. The Irish text provides no account of the proposed punishment and death of the Emperor's mother that occurs in other versions. Both Florent and Octavian are married at the end of the Irish narrative, while in other versions it is only Florent who marries at the end of the story. Charlemagne says:

> 'Ata inghen aluinn aóntomha agum, ar sé, 7 así as oighre orn 7 dobhér mar mhnaói dOctauin Óg í ó atá inghen an tShamhdáin na mnaói ag Plurens'
>
> (I have a charming marriageable daughter who is my heiress and I will give her as a wife to Octavian the Young, since Florens has the Sultan's daughter to wife; 638-40).

[37] It is the only instance given in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language, Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials*, ed. Ernest Gordon Quin (Dublin, 1983).

[38] *Irish Lives*, ed. Robinson, p. 24 ff.

The marriage of both brothers provides a satisfying symmetry to the romance's conclusion and goes some way towards redressing the narrative's emphasis on Florent at his twin's expense. It also recalls romances like the *Lay Le Freine* and, as such, seems a convincing candidate for a detail that was carried over from *SB*'s exemplar.

Charlemagne and the Irish *Octavian*

Many of the core motifs of *Octavian* have parallels in tales of Charlemagne,[39] but *SB* is remarkable for placing the action of the narrative in a Carolingian setting. In the Irish text Charlemagne occupies the role usually given to Dagobert in the other versions of *Octavian*. Charlemagne is first mentioned in the narrative at line 192 where 'Sérlus mor imper na nAlmáinneach' (Charles the Great, the Alemanian Emperor) is identified as the target of the giant's attack on the Christians, substituting straightforwardly for Dagobert in other versions. On several occasions, other characters from the Charlemagne legend appear in the narrative; for instance, Roland, Oliver, Ogier and Gui de Bourgogne refuse combat with the giant (227) and Florent has a long dialogue with Roland (286-304). The handling of this material has all the characteristics of rather rudimentary interpolation and substitution. The Carolingian elements tend to concentrate in certain sections of the tale and Charlemagne himself carries out few actions that are not performed by Dagobert in the other versions of the text.

A striking feature of *SB* is its insistence on giving the names of most of the characters from the Charlemagne cycle in Latin form. For instance, we have 'Rolandus Oliuerus Nemerus […] Ogerus' (227). Roland's name is given as 'Rolandus' at all of the ten or so points at which he is named in *SB* and Oliver is always 'Oliuerus'. There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that *SB* is translated from a Latin intermediary, rather than directly from an exemplar in French or in English, placing *SB* at a future remove from our surviving versions of *Octavian*. Although there is no known Latin version of *Octavian*, such a line of transmission is not at all implausible in the Irish context; there are other Irish translations of the late Middle Ages that appear to have been made from Latin intermediaries, rather than from vernacular versions of texts.[40] The second possibility is that

[39] *Four Middle English Romances*, ed. Harriet Hudson, (Kalamazoo, MI, 1997), p.45.

[40] Flower, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 137-8.

the interpolated Charlemagne material was brought over from another Latin source or a text that preserved Latinised names, rather than from a full text of *Octavian* in Latin.

Close analysis of *SB* suggests that the second explanation is more likely. The only words in the Irish text evincing a Latin form are the names of characters derived from the Charlemagne cycle. These occur in lists of Carolingian heroes given at three points in the text and analysis of them sheds some light on their origins (my emphasis):

1. Dotairg an timper maóine 7 morflaithius dontí dorachadh do chomhrac ris 7 ni bfuair aóinnech do chomhrac risin bfomhóir bfiorghranna sin 7 dodhiultadar na rideridhi uile an comhrac sin .i. **Rolandus Oliuerus Nemerus Denis Ogerus 7 diúice na Burgundi** 7 na rideridhi uile archena rodiultsat comhrac an athaigh

   (The Emperor proffered treasures and princely rank to whomsoever would meet him in combat, but he found none to encounter that hideous giant, for all the knights, even **Roland, Oliver, Nemer, Denis, Oger and the Duke of Burgundy** and all the others refused the combat with the giant; 224-229)

2. Agus ni ruc orra gan brised o cheile an lá sin or dobuadhaighedh an cath leisan tsamdán an tan sin 7 dogabhadh maithe na bFranccach leis isin cath sin .i. Serlus Mór agus Octauian Mor impiri na Romhánach 7 righ Franc 7 **Rolandus 7 Oliuerus 7 Ogeus 7 Serguida diuce na Burguinne** 7 forgla maitheadh na ccriosdaigheadh uile maraon ríu.

   (He completely routed them on that day, for the battle was then won by the Sultan, and the nobles of the Franks were taken prisoners by him in the battle, to wit, Charles the Great, Octavian the Great, the Roman Emperor, and the King of the Franks, and **Roland, Oliver, Ogier, SirGuido, the Duke of Burgundy**, and the chief nobles of the Christians along with them; 520-525).

3. "As maith ar sgéla," ar siad "ór dobhrisiomar cath ar imper na criostaighthedh 7 doghabhamar an drong as ferr dhiobh .i. Serlus Mor 7 Octauin Mór imper na Rómhanach 7 rig Franc .i. Serlus Óg 7 **Serguido diúice na Burgundiae 7 Rolandus Oliuerus 7 Dennis .i. righ Lochlann** 7 maithe na ccriosdaidhthedh uile airchena"

   ("We have good news," said they "we have gained a battle over the Emperor of the Christians and captured the noblest of them, to wit, Charles the Great, Octavian the Great, the Emperor of the Romans, and the King of the Franks-that is, Charles the Young, **Sir Guido, Duke of Burgundy, Roland, Oliver and Denis King of Norway** and all the other Christian nobles"; 565-570)

The names have not been treated with complete consistency. The second and third quotations both list what purports to be the same set of captives; however, Ogier is included

in the second extract, but not in the third which features instead a 'Denis, King of Norway', an entirely unique character who appears in no other text from Ireland or elsewhere. 'Denis' also crops up in the first of these lists. On the face of it, this detail may be a misinterpretation of St Denis, named so often in Charlemagne material. It seems fair to surmise that the addition of Charlemagne material to the Irish version of *Octavian* was the work of a redactor who was not entirely conversant with the Charlemagne legend. Linking Denis to the realm of *Lochlann* in the final list is more curious, but may reflect the fact that Denis seems to have displaced Ogier le Danois in this section. The Irish term *Lochlann*, which Marstrander translated as 'Norway', typically refers to any of the Viking territories and could readily be translated as 'Denmark'.[41] As Marstrander notes, Ogier is given this title 'Othgherus ri Lochlann' (Ogier, King of Lochlann) in the Irish translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*.[42]

It is not necessary to look very far to find the probable source of these Latin names. The most prominent instance of a Latin text mediating between vernacular versions of a romance in the Irish context is *Fierabras*. Its Irish translation, *Stair Fortibrais* ('The Story of Fierabras'), is translated from a Latin text that was close in character to a unique version now preserved in Dublin, Trinity College MS 667 (also known as MS F. 5. 3), which in turn seems to have been made from French.[43] The precise forms of the names in *SB* make it highly probable that their source was a copy of this Irish *Fierabras*. *Stair Fortibrais* also gives Roland's name as 'Rolandus', Oliver as 'Oliuerus' and Ogier as 'Ogerus'. The forms given to

[41] The various significations of the placename *Lochlann* in literary contexts are discussed in Prionsias MacCana, 'The Influence of the Vikings on Gaelic Literature', in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies*, Dublin 6-10 July 1959, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1962), pp. 78-118; Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Literary Lochlann', in *Cànan & Cultar/Language and Culture*, eds. Wilson McLeod, James E. Fraser and Anja Gunderloch, Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig, 3 (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 25-37; Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Vikings and the Viking Wars in Irish and Gaelic Tradition* (Oslo, 1931).

[42] *Gabháltais Shearluis Mhóir - The Conquests of Charlemagne*, ed. Douglas Hyde, Irish Texts Society 19 (London, 1917), p. 30. This translates 'Ogerius rex Daciae' in the Latin *Pseudo-Turpin* text, (*Conquests*, ed. Hyde, p. 31n).

[43] The Latin source of the Irish translation was first identified by Thomas F. O'Rahilly in his review of Douglas Hyde's edition of the Irish *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* in *Studies*, 8 (1919), pp. 668-670. The only edition of this Latin *Fierabras* is an unpublished thesis: Michael Howard Davies, '*Fierabras* in Ireland: The Transmission and Cultural Setting of a French Epic in the Medieval Irish Literary Tradition' (unpub. Ph.D diss. University of Edinburgh, 1995). There is a brief description and analysis in Mario Esposito, 'Une version latine du roman de Fierabras; notice du ms. F. 5. 3 de Trinity College à Dublin', *Romania*, 62 (1936), 534-41.

the names of Renier de Gennes and Gui de Bourgogne in both *Stair Fortibrais* and in *SB* are particularly telling. In the *Stair Fortibrais*, Renier's name is given in what appears to be a very corrupt form as 'Nemerus', and *SB* follows suit.[44] By far the most frequent form taken by Gui's name in the Irish *Fierabras* is 'serGido', running a transliteration of the English title *Sir* into his forename[45] and *SB* gives a similar rendering: 'Serguido'. There can be little doubt that the translator of *Octavian* drew directly on the Irish version of *Fierabras* in producing this work.[46] A copy would certainly not have been difficult to come by. If the rates of manuscript survival are anything to go by, this was by far the most popular of the foreign romances translated in fifteenth-century Ireland, surviving in full or fragmentary form in eight late-medieval manuscripts.[47]

SB's apparent connection to the *Stair Fortibrais* may allow some further suggestions, albeit very tentative ones, about the possible historical and cultural backdrop to this translation of *Octavian*. The earliest *Fierabras* narrative surviving from medieval Ireland is the unique Latin text in Trinity MS 667. This manuscript appears to have Franciscan origins and seems to have been compiled largely in the 1450s.[48] Its contents are very miscellaneous, but it contains a large number of exempla, some short notes on the nature of preachers and notes on the roles of masters and students. It has been suggested that this manuscript might

[44] There can be no question of 'Nemerus' denoting any other character. He is explicitly identified as Oliver's father and given the title 'diuice na Eg[e]ne', close to 'Duke of Gennes' (*Fierabras*, ed. Stokes, p. 26). He also undertakes all the actions attributed to Renier in other versions of the romance.

[45] See for a representative sample the form of Guy's name: *Fierabras*, ed. Stokes, pp. 154, 158, 160 etc. It is worth noting that the presence of this English loan word 'ser' does not provide proof that the ultimate source for the Latin and Irish texts of *Fierabras* was in English. The word was used quite commonly in texts from late medieval Ireland that are entirely native in origin.

[46] Despite the link in naming Ogier's kingdom, the source is unlikely to have been the closely-associated Irish translation of *Pseudo-Turpin*, since neither Gui nor Renier feature in this text, whereas all the Carolingian characters named in *SB* appear repeatedly in *Fierabras.*

[47] With the sole exception of the translation of the *Queste,* which survives in three manuscripts, all other Irish translations of foreign romance now survive in only a single manuscript copy.

[48] The fullest description of the manuscript is in *Trinity College Library Dublin: Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Latin Manuscripts*, ed. M. L. Colker, 2 vols (Dublin, 1991), II, pp. 1123-64.

have been used in the formation of Franciscan novices.[49] At any rate, this manuscript, or one very like it, seems to have played a central role in the dissemination of translated material in late medieval Ireland and a strikingly high number of texts that are featured in the codex appear in Irish translation in this period. [50] The Latin *Fierabras* occurs over pp. 85-100 and a distinctive Latin version of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, which was also translated into Irish in this period, takes up pp. 107-130.[51] This Irish translation of *Fierabras* is prefaced in the surviving manuscripts by an account of the finding of the True Cross that also occurs in Latin form, albeit separated from the main text of *Fierabras*, in Trinity MS 667 (pp. 68-71).[52] No other texts of the *Fierabras* tradition include this account. This addition may provide the firmest evidence for why the Franciscans might have been interested in *Fierabras*. In his history of the order, Colmán Ó Clabaigh has noted that the Franciscan emphasis on preaching the cross and promoting the crusades was particularly pronounced in late medieval Ireland.[53] The Charlemagne material in the Franciscan manuscript, Trinity MS 667, may possibly be located within this contemporary context and it seems plausible that the translation and apparently wide dissemination of *Stair Fortibrais* in the following decades reflects similar interests. The romance of *Octavian*, with its emphasis on overcoming Islamic enemies, fits readily within this context.

One further piece of potential context for *SB* is worth mentioning. From 1477 to 1513, the Archbishop of Armagh and Papal Nuncio in Ireland was a Florentine named Octavian de Palatio.[54] There is nothing more than the name to suggest any link between this man and

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[49] For further analysis of this manuscript as a preaching resource, see Alan Fletcher, 'Preaching in Late Medieval Ireland: the English and Latin Tradition', in *Irish Preaching 700-1700*, ed. Alan Fletcher and Raymond Gillespie, (Dublin, 2001), pp. 56-80 and Colmán Ó Clabaigh, 'Preaching in Late Medieval Ireland: The Franciscan Contribution', in *Irish Preaching*, ed. Fletcher and Gillespie, pp. 81-93.

[50] Ó Clabaigh, 'Preaching', p. 90; Flower, *Irish Tradition*, pp. 122-4.

[51] For an analysis of the textual tradition of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* in Ireland see, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, eds. Standish H. O'Grady and Robin Flower, 3 vols. (London, 1926-53), II, pp. 528-9.

[52] *Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, eds. O'Grady and Flower, p. 527. This prefatory material is not edited in Stokes' edition of the Irish *Fierabras*.

[53] Colmán Ó Clabaigh, *The Franciscans in Ireland, 1400-1534* (Dublin, 2002), p. 143.

[54] For a brief overview of this man's life see *Registrum Octaviani, alias Liber Niger – The Register of Octavian de Palatio, Archbishop of Armagh*, ed. Mario Alberto Sughi, 2 vols. (Dublin 1999), I, pp. lxiii-lxv. On the specifics of his

the translation of the romance of *Octavian*; however, it is known that he was active in preaching the crusade in the 1470s.[55]

The *Octavian* Tradition Revisited

Despite its neglect, *SB* is a text of some interest, yielding information that is new, both to scholars of medieval Irish literature and to scholars of the literature of medieval England. From the Irish perspective, *SB* can now be considered alongside the Irish translation of *Fierabras* on which it drew so directly and within the broader context of interest in Charlemagne narratives in late-medieval Ireland. For scholars of medieval romance beyond Ireland, this transformation of *Octavian* into a tale from Charlemagne legend is also of note, since no other version of the narrative has been so striking re-contextualised. Most significantly, *SB* provides the only evidence we have of a now-lost variant version of *Octavian*. *SB*'s exemplar is clearly from the insular tradition of the romance, rather than the continental one, and stands in closer relation to the Middle English versions than it does to *FO*. Although it is not possible to be completely certain if its exemplar was in English or in French, *SB*'s close connection to *NO* and *SO* and the tendency of late medieval Irish translators to work from English texts, rather than from French ones, make the former more likely. The mixing of features otherwise unique to *NO* or *SO* in *SB* raises the possibility that their common exemplar *A was *SB*'s source, but the fact that *SB*'s treatment of the narrative's interlaced structure differs from both Middle English versions and from *FO* renders this unlikely.

SB appears to bear out an observation made as long ago as the 1920s by the scholar and writer Robin Flower. In a short survey of fifteenth-century Irish translation culture, he suggested that 'texts of an unusual kind were current in Ireland, and it may be that interesting discoveries are to be made here'.[56] Regrettably, research in this area has not advanced all that far since Flower's day and many late-medieval Irish translations of foreign

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appointment to the See of Armagh see, Sughi, 'The Appointment of Octavian de Palatio as Archbishop of Armagh, 1477-8', *Irish Historical Studies*, 31 (1998), 145-164.

[55] *Register*, ed. Sughi, p. lxiii.

[56] Flower, *Irish Tradition*, p. 136. This 1947 publication reprints the lecture where Flower first made this observation some two decades earlier: 'Ireland and Medieval Europe', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 13 (1927), 271-303.

texts remain neglected. Even by those standards, the neglect of *SB* has been particularly pronounced, but analysis of its place within the *Octavian* tradition highlights the extent to which the Irish context represents an untapped resource for expanding our knowledge of the versions of literary texts circulating in England and beyond in the later Middle Ages.

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