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On the Versions and the Possible Sources of 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine'

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Introduction

In his study of 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine', before citing his recent findings of its versions in Conamara, Tomás de Bhaldraithe (1964) resorts to Joseph Szövérfy's clarification of its possible sources. Szövérfy's suggestions give one of those rare opportunities to glimpse the 'hidden' stories behind traditional religious poems meant to be sung or recited as prayers, on which few studies have centered so far.¹⁾ My objective here is first to verify Szövérfy's assertions on them both in his letter cited in de Bhaldraithe's article and in Szövérfy's other studies, which in turn are based on another German scholar G. G. Meersseman, and then to look at a few of its versions with a view to give a perspective on its dissemination among the people of Ireland.

Before verifying Szövérfy's assertions, let us look at one of its modern versions, as an illustration of the living tradition, which the Irish group Cran sang as late as in 1998 in their album *Black Black Black*. The lyrics of 'Seácht Suáilcí na Maighdine Muire' as I transcribed run:

An chéad shuáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
Nár bh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
Gur rugadh é i mbothán cró.
Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
Seinn alleluia.

An dara suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
Nár bh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:

Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
 Gur shiúl Sé léi an ród.
 Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
 Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
 Seinn alleluia.

An tríú suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
 Nárbh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
 Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
 Go ndeachaigh Sé ag léamh A leabhair.
 Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
 Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
 Seinn alleluia.

An ceathrú suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
 Nárbh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
 Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
 Go ndearna Sé den uisce fíon.
 Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
 Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
 Seinn alleluia.

An cúigiú suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
 Nárbh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
 Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
 Go ndearna Sé an marbh beo.
 Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
 Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
 Seinn alleluia.

An séú suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
 Nárbh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
 Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,

Gur shaor Se le n-A fhuil an domhan.
Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
Seinn alleluia.

An seachtú suáilce a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
Nár bh í sin an tsuáilce mhór:
Suáilce a fuair sí óna hAon-Mhac Íosa,
Gur chuir Sé uirthi coróin.
Seinn alleluia, seinn alleluia,
Seinn alliliú, seinn alliliú,
Seinn alleluia.²⁾

The version such as this, complete with seven joys, seems hard to hear either sung or recited as a prayer nowadays. One can guess that it continued to be part of the living tradition until at least the middle of the twentieth century, as a Roman Catholic priest recorded his observation in the 1950s of an old woman singing its counterpart song 'Seacht nDólás na Maighdine Muire' after the Rosary.³⁾ Whether it has ceased to be part of the living tradition or not, Lasairfhiona Ní Chonaola, a traditional singer from Inis Oírr, Oileáin Árann (the Aran Islands), can still say as late as in 1998, 'When these songs [traditional religious songs such as 'Seacht Suáilcí na Maighdine Muire', 'Caoineadh na dTrí Muire' and 'Amhrán na Páise'] are sung by a native Irish singer an unbroken chain connects us to a mystical realm' (2).

I referred to 'Seacht nDólás na Maighdine Muire' as the counterpart of 'Seacht Suáilcí na Maighdine Muire' because they are identical in poetic structure. Only they are different and contrastive in content, but they cannot be said to be opposite, since they more or less deal with the life of Mary and Jesus, the one culminating in the coronation of the Virgin and the other in the Passion of Christ. This pair may be comparable to that of 'Stabat Mater Dolorosa' and 'Stabat Mater Speciosa'.

Szövérfy

Joseph Szövérfy's letter quoted in Tomás de Bhaldraithe's article 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine' (1964) was arguably seminal in the history of the studies of traditional religious songs of Ireland. It was undoubtedly the first in pointing out in Irish publications that the song in question may have been influenced, by way of Latin hymns, by the Byzantine hymns, which claim, however, has not been much heeded in the subsequent researches by the scholars.

Considering the special nature of the periodical in which it was printed, the letter is worth citing at length:

Tá an cineál nó na cineálacha dánta seo le fáil chomh fada siar leis an dara haois déag chomh fada le m'eolas. Iomnaí *Gaude* a thugtar sa Laidin orthu, agus d'fheadfadh sé go dtáinigeadar faoi anáil thraidisiúin na n-iomnaí Biosántacha, mar shampla *Hymnos Akathistos* (ón séú nó ón seachtú haois), iomna a tháinig anoir. Glactar leis gur haistríodh go Laidin é timpeall na bliana ocht gcéad nó ina dhiaidh.

Sa dara haois déag tháinig cineál nua iomna Mháirigh ann— an *Gaude* a luadh thuas agus a raibh an-tóir i Sasana air. Creidtear gurbh é Tomás Chantarbaráí a scríobh ceann amháin ar a laghad de na hiomnaí *Gaude* seo (*Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, iml. 31, lch. 198, uimh. 198) ar teideal dó "De septem gaudiis coelestibus Beatae Mariae Virginis" Tá iomnaí ann a bhaineann leis an tréimhse ón dara haois déag go dtí an séú haois déag, a thráchtann ar sheacht sólás, ar naoi sólás is ar cheithre nó chúig shólás déag, idir neamhaí is thalmhaí, agus dhealródh sé gurbh iad seo na pátrúin ar ar múnlaíodh na hamhráin a luaigh tú

Ní mór dom a chur in iúl go bhfuil beagnach gach aon saintréith de chuid na n-amhrán Gaeilge le fáil sna hiomnaí *Gaude* sa Laidin, taobh amuigh den dath áitiúil Gaelach. Ní gnách gur iomnaí liotúirgeacha iad seo, ach *pia dictamina*.

Maidir leis na hamhráin Ghaeilge, cheapfainn an dara haois déag mar *terminus post*. Ach b'fhéidir gur deireanaí go mór an chuid is mó acu, nó an t-iomlán acu⁴⁾

Szövérfy's clarification here is that the kind of Marian hymns as 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine' in Irish can be traced back to the *Gaude* hymns in Latin which had existed possibly since the twelfth century and that these *Gaude* hymns came under the influence of Byzantine hymns such as the *Akathistos* Hymn in Greek from the sixth or seventh century, which was first translated into Latin around 800 or afterwards.

One of the examples of *Gaude* hymns in the thirteenth century, enumerating the five joys of Mary, begins:

Gaude virgo, mater Christi,
 quae per aurem concepisti
 Gabriele nuntio:
 gaude, quia deo plena
 peperisti sine poena
 cum pudoris lilio.⁵⁾

While, as Szövérfy suggests, the Irish 'Seacht Sólás' most probably comes from the Latin *Gaude* hymns prevalent in England, crossing the Irish Sea some time after the twelfth century, this kind of enumerating hymn, which we might call, to use William J. Phillips' term, 'numeral carol' (90), has its own development in England. In medieval England 'five joys of Mary' was a popular theme: the fourteenth-century alliterative verse *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* refers to the hero's thought 'That alle his fersnes he fong at the fyve joyes / That the hende heven quene had of hir chylde';⁶⁾ another fourteenth-century poem 'Ase Y me rod this ender day' enumerates the five joys of Mary starting with 'The furst joie of that wymman: / When Gabriel from hevenc cam / And seide God shulde bicom man / And of hire be bore / And bringe up of helle pyn / Monkyn that wes forlore'.⁷⁾ 'The Seven Joys of Mary', which may be traced back to the fifteenth to sixteenth century, begins, 'The first good joy that Mary had, it was the joy of one: / To see her own Son, Jesus, to suck at her breastbone;', where the number 'one' and 'breastbone' rime to aid memory;⁸⁾ this original meaning is forgotten after the Reformation

and unbelievably degenerates into such a phrase as ‘The first good joy of Mary Anne’.⁹⁾

The *Gaude* hymns, which presumably moulded the basic numeral nature of the Marian lyrics in England, could have been influenced by the *Akathistos* Hymn, according to Szövérfy. This Byzantine hymn derives its name from how they sang it standing (*akathistos*) all night in 626, when the people of Constantinople thanked the Virgin Mary, patron saint of the capital, after they had been miraculously saved by the sudden storm that drove away the attacking Persian forces. It comprises 24 stanzas, each beginning with the Greek alphabet consecutively, repeating the word *χαίρε* (rejoice, hail) to celebrate the life of Mary, ending with the alleluia. Their sense of gratitude is evident in the 23rd stanza:

χαίρε, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀσάλευτος πύργος·
χαίρε, τῆς βασιλείας τὸ ἀπόρθητον τεῖχος.
χαίρε, δι’ ἧς ἐγείρονται τρόπαια·
χαίρε, δι’ ἧς ἐχθροὶ καταπίπτουσι.¹⁰⁾

Szövérfy, in his own study, refers to the extraordinary influence of this Byzantine Marian hymn, originally pointed out by G. G. Meersseman, upon many of the Marian hymns in the Latin West (1985, 31).¹¹⁾ Therefore, his reply to de Bhaldraithe concerning the Irish Marian hymn derives from the broader implications of the influence. In other words, the impact of the *Akathistos* hymn was so large that the Irish hymn in question was only one of many influenced.

We can go further in tracing back the history of Marian hymns of this type. The number of Marian hymns and prayers began multiplying from the ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431, when they referred to Mary as ‘Theotokos’ (Mother of God), but before the council we find a fourth-century hymn, attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis, repeating the word *χαίρε* to Mary:

χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ. ...

χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ἡ στάμνος ἡ χρυσοῦ, τὸ
οὐρανιον ἔχουσα μάννα...
χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ λαμπρὸς οὐρανὸς.¹²⁾

Around the same time Ephraem the Syrian composed hymns enumerating and celebrating the joyous events of Mary. These hymns eventually derive from the first-century gospel according to St Luke, where the angel Gabriel greets Mary (1.28):

χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ¹³⁾

which, cited by Epiphanius above, forms the basis of Hail Mary to come, along with Elizabeth’s greeting of Mary (Luke 1.42).

This may be the ultimate origin of the ‘Grußhymnus’, to use Meersseman’s term, but we can go still further back: this kind of hymns can in turn be based upon much earlier hymns in the Old Testament period, which is outside the scope of the present paper.¹⁴⁾

A few modern versions

Finally, let us look at a few versions of ‘Seacht Sólás na Maighdine’ from the modern period, which will illustrate how this type of hymns, a distant offspring of the long tradition we have seen in the West and in the East, was widely disseminated in Ireland deep into the twentieth century.

In Ó Muirgheasa’s *Dánta Diadha Uladh* (1936), an anthology of sacred poems collected in Ulster, we find ‘Seacht Sóláis na Maighdine Beannuighthe’, whose third stanza gives a vivid description matching the popular imagination:

An treas sólás na h-óighe, Muire, i stábla bocht gan díon,
Tráth thug sí ’un a’ tsaoghail gan phian Slánuightheóir an chineadh
daonda,
’N-a luighe i mainseir eadar damh is asal, le’r námhaid a chlaoidhe,
Ag úmhluhadh ’s a’ déanamh teasa dó ar fhuacht mhór na h-oidhch’.

(119)¹⁵⁾

Each stanza is accompanied with a refrain:

Is beannuigh' anois í, is beannuigh' go rabh sí
A bhainríoghain ghráidh déan dúinn eadarghuidhe.¹⁶⁾

It is unlikely that Ó Muirgheasa heard this dán, which he found in manuscripts, sung, but de Bhaldraithe certainly heard another version in Conamara sung in the early 1960s, which begins with a description of an unusual screaming of the baby:

An Chéad tsólás a fuair an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe
In aghaidh na céata (sic) dólás,
An t-Aon Mhac Mhuire, nuair a fuair Sé an *power*,
Scread Sé faoi bhroinn a mháthar. (41)¹⁷⁾

One cannot help noticing that this version has a particular Irish twist when it refers to the fifth joy of Mary when Jesus hit three hurling pucks ('Bhuail Sé trí phoc báire').

With or without Irish twists, it is certain that Ireland has retained until quite recently the long tradition of a kind of Marian hymns which has lasted for the past two thousand years or more.¹⁸⁾

Notes

- 1) Noteworthy exceptions include Partridge (1983). I am indebted to the lecture of Dr Ríonach úí Ógáin in the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin, 'Religious Songs of Conamara', delivered on 3 June 2000 in Féile Amhránaíochta an Chlair, for the initial inspiration for my study here. She intends to publish it in the future. John Moulden kindly asked her to send it to me, without which I might not have had the slightest clue as to where to begin.

- 2) Translation (all subsequent translations mine unless otherwise noted): The first joy that the Blessed Virgin found / Wasn't that the great joy: / A joy that she got from the Only Son Jesus, / That he was born in a stable. / Sing alleluia, sing alleluia, / Sing allelu, sing allelu, / Sing alleluia. The second joy ... That He walked the road with her. / Sing alleluia, etc. The third joy ... That He went reading His book. / Sing alleluia, etc. The fourth joy ... That He turned the water into wine. / Sing alleluia, etc. The fifth joy ... That He made the dead live. / Sing alleluia, etc. The sixth joy ... That He saved the world with His blood. / Sing alleluia, etc. The seventh joy ... That He put a crown on her. / Sing alleluia, etc. Grammatically speaking, ‘shuáilce’ of line 1 of stanza 1 should be ‘suáilce’. The singer with Cran, Seán Corcoran, who kindly corrected my transcription of line 4 of stanza 1, prefers this spelling ‘shuáilce’, but, considering the way he sings it, it could be spelled ‘tsuáilce’ following de Bhaldraithe’s version below. He commented, ‘Seacht nDólás (“Seven Sorrows”) is a separate song with the same structure and often sung to the same air in the North. Both of these also occur in versions that were recited as prayers’ (e-mail addressed to the author dated 8 Jan 2001). He further referred me to Hyde’s *Songs of Connacht*, by which he must ultimately have meant the sixth and seventh chapters of it, namely *The Religious Songs of Connacht* (II, 348–353). Dr Kuninao Nashimoto kindly advised me on the form of ‘leabhair’ in line 4 of stanza 3. The closest to this version can be found in Ó Fiannachta (113–115), which Caitlín Nic Gearailt kindly sent to me. Another version of interest, which is in the tradition of the North of Ireland, can be found in Bell and Ó Conchubhair (108–110), which Professor Takako Haruki kindly sent to me.
- 3) An tAthair Diarmuid Ó Laoghaire, *Muire Mór* (Dublin, 1959), 78, qtd. in Ní Riain (201). His Irish text reads: Chuala féin go minic i gCiarrai ‘Seacht nDólás na Maighdine Muire’ á rá ag seanbhean tar éis an Phaidrín agus ba bhreá leat bheith ag éisteacht léi agus an crónán a chuireadh sí leis agus an díograis ina guth.
- 4) *An Sagart*, 7.34 (1964): 41. I am indebted to the librarian, Bernie Gardiner, at the Library, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, who made this rarity available for me. As regards the non-liturgical nature of the *Gaude* hymns in Latin, comparison can again be made with the pair of ‘Stabat Mater’, where ‘Stabat Mater Dolorosa’ is liturgical (as a *sequentia* for the feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary assigned to Friday in Passion Week) and

‘Stabat Mater Speciosa’ is non-liturgical.

Translation:

This kind or these kinds of poems have been extant since as early as the twelfth century as far as I know. They are called *Gaude* hymns in Latin, and it might be that they came under the influence of a tradition of Byzantine hymns, for example *Hymnos Akathistos* (from the sixth or the seventh century), hymns that came from the east. It is accepted that it was translated into Latin around 800 or afterwards.

In the twelfth century a new kind of Marian hymn appeared — the *Gaude* which stirred up interest and which was much sought after in England. It is believed that Thomas of Canterbury wrote at least one account of these *Gaude* hymns (*Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. 31, p. 198, no. 198) under the title “On the Seven Celestial Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary”. ... There are hymns concerning the period from the twelfth century to the sixteenth century which mention seven joys, nine joys and fourteen or fifteen joys, both heavenly and earthly, and it would appear that these were the patterns on which the songs that you [de Bhaldraithe] mentioned were formed. ...

I need to call your attention to the fact that almost every special trait of some of the Gaelic songs [that de Bhaldraithe mentioned in his query to Szövérfy, i.e. ‘Seacht Sólás na Maighdine’ and the like] is to be found in *Gaude* hymns in Latin, apart from the Irish local colour. These are not customarily liturgical hymns, but pious statements.

As for the Gaelic songs [that de Bhaldraithe mentioned], I would regard the twelfth century as a starting-point. However, it was perhaps later that many and more of them, or all of them [were composed] ...

- 5) Karen Saupe, ed., *Middle English Marian Lyrics* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute P, 1998), *Poems in Celebration of Mary*, U of Rochester, 16 Sep. 2002 <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/picof87.htm>>.

Middle English translation in the MS, Trinity College Cambridge 323 (B.14.39) fols. 28b – 29a (c. 1250), edition B13 no. 22 (in the MS the Middle English text alternates stanza by stanza with the Latin): Glade us, maiden, moder milde, / Thurru thin herre thu were wid childe — / Gabriel he seide it thee — / Glad us, ful of gode thine, / Tham thu bere buten pine / With thee, lilie of chasteté.

Translation of the above Middle English text (into Modern English): Make us

glad, maiden, mild mother, / Through your ear you were with child – / Gabriel said it to you – / Make us glad, full of your God, / Whom you bear without pain / With you, lily of chastity. Note that the Middle English text has the similar sounding word ('glade') to begin the hymn.

Translation of the Latin text: Rejoice, virgin, mother of Christ, / Who have conceived with your ear to the angel Gabriel: / Rejoice, for, filled with God, / You have given birth without pain / With a lily of modesty.

- 6) Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes, eds., *Middle English Literature* (New York: Garland, 1990) 397. Translation: That all his power he took from the five joys / That the noble queen of heaven had of her child.
- 7) *Ibid.*, 206. Translation: The first joy of that woman: / When Gabriel from heaven came / And said God should become man / And of her be born / And bring up from hell's suffering / Mankind that was lost.
- 8) John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (London, 1853 – 55), qtd. in Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott, eds., *The New Oxford Book of Carols* (1992; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 456 – 457.
- 9) Douglas Brice, *The Folk-Carol of England* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1967) 78.
- 10) *The Akathist Hymn* (Los Angeles: Greek Orthodox Youth of America, 1954) 81. Translation: Rejoice, the unagitated tower of the Church; / Rejoice, the unsacked wall of the Kingdom. / Rejoice, by whom trophies are raised; / Rejoice, by whom enemies fall down. The Latin translation around 800, as cited by Meersseman, runs: Ave, ecclesie immobilis columna. / Ave, imperii inexpugnabilis murus. / Ave, per quam surgunt tropea. / Ave, per quam hostes corruunt. (126)
- 11) Szövérfy's text reads: Vor mehr als zwanzig Jahren wies G. G. Meersseman auf den außerordentlichen Einfluß des byzantinischen Marienhymnus, des Hymnos Akathistos hin, der Vorbild und Modell für viele Marienhymnen im lateinischen Westen geworden ist.
- 12) J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1959) 489. Translation: Rejoice, favoured-one, the Lord [is] with you. ... Rejoice, favoured-one, the golden pot, holding the heavenly manna. ... Rejoice, favoured-one, the radiant heaven. (Note that the Greek 'manna' here is a neuter substantive. See Bauer, 490 – 491.)
- 13) *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle-Aland), 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche

Bibelgesellschaft, 1979) 152.

- 14) For the use of the term ‘Grußhymnus’ see, for example, Szövérfy (1985), 34, or Meersseman, 188. For the broader scope of Szövérfy’s hymnological studies see Szövérfy (1983). As regards the Old Testament tradition of hymns reflected in the New Testament and afterwards, there can be many approaches. For example, Gabriel’s greeting words, if taken as an expression based on the mode of *midrash*, could be modelled upon, as Horacio Bojorge suggests, the prophetic statement in Zephaniah 3.14–17. Or one could look at joyful hymns, including Mary’s and Zacharias’s (both in the first chapter of Luke), as descendants or variants of the ‘imperativischer Hymnus’, to use Frank Crusemann’s term, as in Psalms 66 and 100, both beginning with the imperative form of the verb ‘shout (for joy), hail’.
- 15) Translation: The third solace of the virgin, Mary, in a poor stable without a roof, / When she brought to life without pain the Saviour of the human race, / Lying down in a manger between an ox and an ass, to defeat your enemies, / Condescending and keeping himself warm in the bitter cold of the night. (I take ‘le’r’ in the third line to be ‘le úr [bhur]’.) Ó Muirgheasa notes, ‘Sgríobhadh i n-aice Shráid Bhaile Dúin Dealgan í [láimhsgríbhinn], sa mbliadhain 1825, le Art Mór Ó Murchaidh. Ní luaidhtear leis ainm ughdair an dáin.’ Although this Dundalk manuscript Ó Muirgheasa found was 100 years old, he refers, as well, to contemporary versions he found in Tyrconell and in Inishowen. Obviously he believes they are part of the living tradition.
- 16) Translation: She is blessed now, and may she be blessed / Queen of love, make intercession for us.
- 17) Translation: The First solace that the Blessed Virgin found / In the agonies of
doulour, / The Only Son of Mary, when He got the power, / He screamed within
his mother’s womb. De Bhaldrathe’s transcription here shows his wish to retain
what he heard, in this case from ‘Áine Seoige, (c. 60), Cuan an Mhuilinn, Leitir
Mealláin’, as faithfully as possible. Thus he has ‘tsólás’ in the first line, which
clearly shows the singer’s pronunciation of the word; likewise ‘céata (sic)’ in the
second line, which de Bhaldrathe must think should read ‘céasta’ (agonies).
- 18) For other modern versions see, for example, Ní Riain, 229–231, 233–235, 240. On the relationship, particularly in the Middle Ages, between the Rosary and the (seven) joys of Mary, which deserves a separate treatise, see, for example, Winston-Allen, 38–43. On the related subject of the history of the

Hail Mary see, for example, Ayo; in particular, on the reading of the word *chaire* see Ayo, 36–37.

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英文要旨 (Abstract of Paper)

On the Versions and the Possible Sources of 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine'

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Joseph Szövérfy's letter quoted in Tomas de Bhaldraithe's article 'Seacht Sólás na Maighdine' (1964) was arguably seminal in the history of the studies of traditional religious songs of Ireland. The present paper aims to verify Szövérfy's points in his context and in a broader context, which includes the Middle English literature and the early Christian writings.

Szövérfy, based on the hymnological studies of Meersseman, points out that this Irish sacred song, which can be classified as a numeral carol of the non-liturgical nature, belongs to the long tradition of *Grußhymnus* that goes back to the seventh-century Byzantine hymn called *Akathistos* by way of *Gaude* hymns in Latin. The present paper shows that the tradition goes further back to the first-century gospel according to St Luke and beyond. The interesting characteristic of this kind of religious discourse is that whenever it is sung or recited as a prayer it invokes an unbroken chain that connects people to the sacred past.

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