

Mapping Faith Theologies of Migration and Community

Susanna
Wesley
Foundation



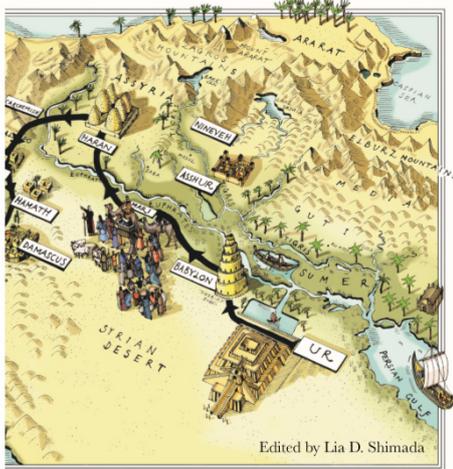
Additional Materials supporting:

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Edited by Lia Shimada

Senior Research Officer
at the Susanna Wesley Foundation

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Womanhood of Brigit

Alison Phipps

The incantation 'The Womanhood of Brigit' is found in Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*. The *Carmina* is an astonishing work of curation and scholarship of the poetry and hymnary of the 'Celtic church'. Whilst much scholarship has been devoted to quests for authenticity in folklore and in the collections of the nineteenth century, and to editorial process, little attention has been paid to the enduring practical theological power of the works.

Brigid – Brìd – Brigit – Bride – St Bridget – is a figure stepped in legend and time. She gives her name to the islands off the west coast of Scotland, the Hebrides. She is associated with hospitality, with welcoming strangers, with her square cross of rushes, and with the Rowan cross placed above a door lintel. She is associated with 'keening' – the action of wailing in grief or in sorrow; and with fostering, including of the Christ child.

My own essay in *Mapping Faith* relates to the holding, tenderly, of stories which are heavy but which cannot just be put aside. They bruise and cut in their holding. Such is their power. Where curation of these stories means that curing is also necessary, these words form a seam of spirituality which emerges from the margins, from home and hearth. They evoke much of what migrant women who survive violence have lost. They have a defiant power which has accompanied my own spiritual practices of curation – as has the watercolour image which contemplates the section of the incantation known as 'The Descent'.

'The Descent' begins with the words 'I shall not be killed.' It is what comes with fostering and after 'keening', as we make hospitality in ourselves.

Womanhood of Brigit

Brigit of flowing cloth
Brigit of peat stacks
Brigit of twining hair
Brigit of the sight; of the foresight;
of the insight.

Brigit of white feet
Brigit of calmness
Brigit of white palms
Brigit of milking

Woman companion
Of the peat stack
Woman helper
Woman mild

Of shared milk
Of tearful hair

Each day and each night

I shall not be killed
I shall not be wounded
I shall not be put in a cell
I shall not be gashed
I shall not be torn in pieces
I shall not be raped
I shall not be stripped naked
In the square
I shall not be torn apart

Nor will all the goodness I carry
The great spirit
The loving earth
The sky
The wave
The seed
The seedling
Brother sun or sister moon
Leave or forget me.

Nor shall the sun burn me
Nor shall fire burn me
Nor shall the embers burn me
Nor shall the moon bleach me
Nor river drown me
Nor salt wave drown me
Nor flood drown me
Nor water drown me.

Nightmare shall not lie on me
Nor the black sleep lie on me
Spell sleep shall not lie on me
And the Rowan shall protect me

I am under the shielding
Of motherhood
I am under the keeping
Of fostership
The beloved companionship of Brigit.



Alison Phipps, 2020

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