

Patrick (Patricius, Pátraic, Pádraig)

by Cormac Bourke

Patrick (Patricius, Pátraic, Pádraig) (c.420–490?), patron saint of Ireland, was born into a Christian family of fifth-century Roman Britain, son of Calpornius, *decurio* and deacon, and grandson of Potitus, a priest. Nothing is known of his mother.

**Chronology and career** Patrick is the most important figure in Irish Christian history. All that can be said about his life must be weighed against the testimony of the two brief surviving texts which he personally wrote. These are the 'Confessio' and the 'Epistola' (or 'Letter to the soldiers of Coroticus'), both as noteworthy for what they do not tell us as for what they do. Writing the 'Confessio' in his old age, Patrick defends the work of a lifetime against the allegations of detractors. The 'Epistola', probably the earlier text, is an open letter of excommunication to the soldiers of one Coroticus who have killed some of Patrick's Irish converts and enslaved others. Neither document contains any reference to absolute chronology, and Patrick's dates are a matter of inference, although no one seriously doubts the correctness of inferring a fifth-century floruit. This much is suggested by Patrick's several references to a background in Britain which can be characterised as late Roman, and by his reference to the ransoming of captives from pagan Franks – a people progressively Christianised following the conversion of Clovis c.496. It is further suggested by Patrick's dependence for some of his biblical citations on the late fourth-century Vulgate. Despite consensus on these points there has been much debate about the chronology of Patrick's Irish mission and specifically about the date of his death. The annals preserve two traditions, though neither can reflect a contemporary record: one places his death c.460, the other c.493. The latter is that of the 'Chronicle of Ireland', the lost ancestor of the Annals of Ulster, and has some claim to potential accuracy. Lending credibility to the later obit is that the obits of saints associated by tradition with Patrick tend to fall in the first half of the sixth century – an unlikely circumstance if the patron had died c.460. This case was made by D. A. Binchy (qv) ((1962), 29, 111–12) but dismissed by Edward Thomson ((1985), 166–7), whose dismissal has had some endorsement. It was Binchy's view that, despite their non-contemporary nature, the concentration of these obits is significant. Thomson's objection, invoking 'higher mathematics', was that the sixth-century obits, if individually worthless, are also cumulatively worthless. But Binchy's argument (and he avoided the term 'worthless'), is not to be quantified in mathematical terms and merely requires to be rephrased: the obit of one associate of Patrick in the sixth century would carry little weight, but the obits of several cannot be discounted.

We are dealing, then, with a fifth-century figure who died, probably, in the 490s; if he lived the biblical three-score-and-ten or thereabouts he might have been born c.420. Such a date allows for the survival in Britain of the Roman office of *decurio*, that of

a civil official in the governing body of a town, which Patrick's father held. His father was additionally a deacon and his grandfather a priest; naming himself as Patricius, he names them respectively as Calpornius and Potitus and tells that the former had an estate near the *vicus* or village of *Bannavem Taburniae* ('Confessio', 1). Or so the place-name has been read by Patrick's principal modern editor, Ludwig Bieler (qv), and by other commentators. But Charles Thomas differs, reading *Banna Venta Berniae* and equating the name with the topography and toponymy of the western end of Hadrian's wall ((1981), 312–13). The suggestion is predicated, however, on the perceived need to locate Patrick's home within striking distance of the Irish Sea coast, given Patrick's own testimony that Irish people enslaved him and that he was kidnapped from his father's estate and 'led to Ireland in captivity' ('Confessio', 1). But his kidnapping need not have been effected by means of a raid launched from the coast; Patrick, characteristically, supplies no such circumstantial detail. South-west Wales was intensively settled during the fourth and fifth centuries by Irish people, largely from the modern counties of Waterford and Cork, and their presence in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire is attested by ogham inscriptions (Thomas (1994)). Such people, whether or not they first arrived as *foederati* of the late Roman administration, must have held their land by force of arms, and it is entirely feasible that their economy included the practice of slave-raiding into neighbouring and more romanised parts of Britain. The Roman fort of *Burrium* (modern Usk) lies in the Severn valley east of the ogham-stone distribution, and F. J. Byrne has suggested that its name is preserved in that of Patrick's *vicus*, proposing the reading *Bannaventa Burriae* (Byrne & Francis (1994), 72). The analogy of the viking age suggests itself, and one might cite the events of 895, when Dublin-based vikings raided Armagh and, according to the Annals of Ulster, carried off some 700 captives, presumably for recirculation overseas as slaves. Patrick might have been a native of the Severn valley, a victim of the Irish slaving network who found himself traded on to Irish soil and conveyed, perhaps, over relatively long distances.

Patrick tells us that he was kidnapped at the age of 16 and taken into captivity in Ireland 'with many thousands of people' ('Confessio', 1), attributing his misfortune to his neglect of his faith. He spent six years in captivity during which, he says, 'the Lord opened the sense of my unbelief' (ibid., 2). Then, guided by a dream, he took flight from his owner, travelled 200 miles and found a ship which carried him to an unknown destination. It may have been Britain or Gaul. Thereafter, he spent some time with his parents and they begged him not to leave again. But guided by a further 'vision of the night', in which he heard 'the voice of the Irish' calling him back (ibid., 23), Patrick resolved upon his evangelical mission. That mission might have been initiated c.460. He refers to attaining the rank of deacon and professes himself simply to be a bishop in Ireland. But the years of his training are unaccounted for. Because Patrick expresses a desire to go to Gaul 'to visit the brothers and to see the faces of the saints of my Lord' (ibid., 43), it may be that Gaul was where he spent his 'missing years' (Dumville (1993), 25–8). On the other hand, he may have trained in Britain and returned to Ireland initially as a missionary priest, only afterwards attaining the rank of bishop. The latter view would be consistent with

Patrick's statement that he was not in Britain when, it seems, his nomination as bishop was challenged, although his further statement that a challenge was made to his 'laborious episcopate' ('Confessio', 26) suggests an office long occupied, and the two challenges may have been one and the same. Patrick was said in the seventh century to have died at Saul (in modern Co. Down) and to have been buried in nearby Downpatrick. That no alternative claim is documented lends some authority to this tradition.

**Ireland and Roman Britain** Patrick was a product of the upper echelons of late Roman Britain and as such a Christian and a speaker of Latin. A knowledge of the Latin language and the systems of grammarians had already inspired the invention in Ireland of the ogham alphabet, which was applied *more Romano* (in the Roman manner) to stone markers and memorials. This development took place in Munster, apparently in a Christian context, and there is abundant evidence for earlier contacts. The Roman historian Tacitus referred at the end of the first century to a familiarity with Ireland's harbours on the part of visiting merchants, and information about Ireland was available to the second-century Alexandrine geographer Ptolemy. Romano-British people in Ireland, though anonymous, are known to archaeology through burial evidence, notably a single grave of first-century date at Stoneyford, Co. Kilkenny – inclusive of glass vessels which had survived the vicissitudes of transportation – and a second-century cemetery at Bray Head, Co. Wicklow (Warner (1976)). Religious exchange or influence is attested by the deposition of Roman and Romano-British artefacts at Newgrange, Co. Meath, and by votive practices revealed by archaeology at Freestone Hill, Co. Kilkenny (Ó Floinn (2000)), and at a number of holy wells (Kelly (2002)). Hoards of Roman silver are known from Balline, Co. Limerick (fourth century), and from Ballinrees, Co. Derry (fifth century), and numerous incidental finds, although divorced from archaeological contexts, are distributionally and cumulatively significant (Bateson (1973, 1976)). Patrick terms his home country *Brittanniae* ('Confessio', 23, 32, 43), literally 'the Britains', with reference to the provinces into which Roman-administered Britain was divided; its four provinces became five following a reorganisation in 368. Given that *Caiseil* (modern Cashel), the capital of early Munster, takes its name from Latin *castellum*, and that there is evidence for the wholesale invention of elements of the Irish tradition (specifically genealogical), it may be more than coincidence that Ireland too was divided into provinces and that their number stood ambiguously at four or five. Whatever the precise degree of Ireland's indebtedness to late Roman Britain, there can be no doubt that the country was receptive to influences from the east before the fifth century and that to this, albeit limited, extent Patrick in his work of evangelism was pushing an open door.

**Patrick's mission** But Patrick gives no indication that his work was easy and refers often in the 'Confessio' to the burden of his commission. He says nothing of Palladius (qv), the continental deacon, perhaps from Poitiers (Ó Cróinín (2000)), who in 431 was appointed 'to the Irish believing in Christ' by Pope Celestine, 'as their first bishop', as the chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine records (Kenney (1929)),

164–5). This carries the crucial implication that there were Christians in Ireland before Palladius (or Patrick) arrived, as indeed the evidence of ogham suggests. What happened to Palladius is not recorded, but Muirchú (qv), writing a life of Patrick in the seventh century, maintains that he failed in his endeavours and soon left the country to return to Rome, dying in Britain en route. Accordingly, the Irish annals retrospectively place Patrick's arrival at 432. But there is evidence in a further observation by Prosper and in a sermon delivered by Pope Leo the Great in 441 that Palladius's mission had been a success and had included some element of evangelism (Charles-Edwards (1993)). If so, his sphere of operations was presumably Leinster, where later tradition places his few foundations. There is much to recommend the thesis, first advanced by J. H. Todd (qv) (1864) and elaborated by T. F. O'Rahilly (qv) (1942), that the *acta* of Palladius were absorbed by the cult of Patrick. The same process may have given rise to the inordinately long or Mosaic life-span with which Patrick was sometimes credited, and to the tradition of his training at Auxerre (a place with which Palladius was associated). The debt of Irish Christianity to Rome was acknowledged in the 590s by Columbanus (qv) in a letter to the pope in which he probably had Palladius in mind.

Patrick's appointment cannot have been papal, or he would surely have said so, and by his own testimony his mission was to the unconverted. This motivation would have met with little official sympathy, given that organised missions to evangelise non-Christians formed no part of the fifth-century papal agenda, although conversions were welcomed when otherwise achieved. Patrick emerges as an innovator, even a radical, driven by a desire to take the gospel 'as far as where there is no one beyond' ('Confessio', 34) and to bring to fulfilment in his own person biblical prophecies of the Last Days. Patrick embodies, or exemplifies by implication, the prophecy of Joel that in the Last Days 'your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams' (Acts 2:17), for he himself in both youth and maturity was guided by visions and dreams. His purpose in invoking their authority in the 'Confessio' is to defend his life's work against a series of accusations emanating, it seems, from the seniors of the church in Roman Britain.

The nature of the charges against Patrick can be inferred. Chief among them must have been that Patrick had been motivated by a desire for personal profit in pursuing his mission, and that he had operated outside his brief and/or without sufficient authority. In rebutting the first charge he tells of expending his personal wealth – perhaps part of his inheritance – in funding his mission and in paying third parties. He tells of returning items of jewellery (*ornamenta*), which were thrown on the altar by his women converts ('Confessio', 49). We can imagine among fifth-century women's *ornamenta* the zoomorphic penannular brooches which at this period were developing in Ireland on the basis of models borrowed from late Roman Britain. Indeed, the corresponding term *síbal* (brooch), from Latin *fibula*, one of a series of Latin loan-words in Old Irish, could be an equally early borrowing. On distributional grounds the source of the brooches is likely to have been the lower Severn valley, where Patrick's home may have been; one example was deposited as an offering

to the local deity at Bath and several others, in both Britain and Ireland, may also have been votive deposits (Ó Floinn (2001)). In consequence, it is not too much to imagine that among Patrick's reasons for rejecting such offerings was that his converts' actions recalled or perpetuated pagan practice. His testimony, incidentally, hints at the material advancement of Irish Christianity: by then the altar could have been a fixed liturgical accessory in a dedicated space rather than a surface consecrated ad hoc in a peripatetic ministry. On the other hand, Patrick's ministry was evidently itinerant in some of its stages. Later tradition has him using a tent in his travels, and it is by no means implausible that this son of Roman Britain should have followed the example of the Roman army on campaign. The 'Vita Secunda' and 'Vita Quarta', which reproduce an eighth-century original, interpret *Banavem Taburniae* as *Campus Tabernaculorum* (plain of tents) 'because the Roman army once encamped there' (Bieler (1971), 51–2), and a tent association will have reinforced a well established parallelism between Patrick and St Paul (warranted by Patrick himself in 'Confessio', 11, and elsewhere), for Paul was by profession a tent-maker (Acts 18:3). In emphasising that his motive is to profit others, Patrick tells that in his itinerancy he paid from his own resources the sons of kings (*reges*), who, he says, 'walk with me' ('Confessio', 52), no doubt to guarantee his security. The latter reference, and his further references to Irish *reguli* (*ibid.*, 41; 'Epistola', 12), bear out the consensus among historians that the early Irish polity was characterised by petty kingdoms. The high-kingship was a later development and there is no hint from Patrick that he met even provincial kings. But his encounters with kings in plurality show that Patrick enjoyed immunity and/or authority across political boundaries, despite his outsider status (Charles-Edwards (1976), 47, 55) and despite having suffered imprisonment and fearing for his life. Such authority and immunity were characteristic of the *áes dána* of early Irish society, and Patrick might well have been reckoned by the Irish a 'man of art'.

Patrick's reputation transcended boundaries and even in his own lifetime can fairly be termed international: his role in Ireland was discussed in British circles and from a position of authority in Ireland he addressed the 'Confessio' and 'Epistola' to a diverse audience – the former to seniors in Britain and to British Christians resident (it seems) in Ireland, the latter to British wrongdoers, to British Christians whom he petitions for support, and to his captive Irish converts. The wrongdoers are condemned by Patrick as unworthy to be called his fellow-citizens or fellow-citizens of the 'holy Romans' ('Epistola', 2) and were presumably inhabitants of Britain. On the other hand, Thomson has suggested that Coroticus and his men were Romano-British immigrants in Ireland ((1985), 125–43), and one might cite in comparison the Irish-based viking leaders who were known to their victims by name.

The second and equally serious charge of having exceeded his remit might be explained if Patrick was appointed bishop to a Christian community (perhaps including Romano-British slaves) but took it on himself to convert non-Christians (de Paor (1993), 92). It may also be the case that his excommunication of Coroticus and his men was deemed to be *ultra vires* by his British seniors. Patrick answers these,

or similar, objections by reference to his divine commission. He has God's authority and is the agent of evangelism as it inevitably unfolds. That inevitability hinges on his geographical location at the edge of the world and on his certainty that the Last Days are at hand. Rome had been sacked in 410, and Patrick evidently believed the end of the world was nigh.

Patrick's converts included slaves and 'the sons and daughters of kings', and he says of the latter that they are 'monks and virgins of Christ' ('Confessio', 41; 'Epistola', 12). Monasticism was a new trend in the western church in Patrick's lifetime and he may have been a monk himself or at least have promoted monasticism (Hanson (1968), 140–58). Patrick cannot have been more than a contributor – if a major one – to the almost organic process of Ireland's Christianisation. By his own criteria, however, his mission had been a success and he writes in his old age as one satisfied with his life's achievement. The 'Confessio', although a defence, merely expounds for mortal eyes and ears what is self-evident to God and Patrick.

Patrick's experience on the ground is only vaguely defined in his surviving texts but included his expressed readiness to suffer martyrdom if necessary. History does not record the incidence of martyrs in the Irish church prior to the viking age, but the possibility must have been real in Patrick's eyes. What he experienced and how he felt might be imagined by reference to the better-documented lives of latter-day evangelists. This was suggested by Charles Thomas in the 1999 Rhind Lectures, and he singled out for purposes of comparison the career of Edmund Peck, representative of the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England, who set out to evangelise the Inuit of north-eastern Canada in 1876 (Lewis (1904)). The comparison is illuminating, not least because Peck's work followed the opening of the region to trade by the Hudson Bay Company and because his communication with the Inuit people was at first mediated through a young native understudy whom he eventually ordained. Irish tradition tells of Benignus/Benén (qv) as Patrick's *daltae*, his pupil or fosterling, and in the 'Epistola' the saint himself refers to a presbyter whom he had taught from boyhood. Likewise parallel to Patrick's experience was Peck's preoccupation with the impression made by his mission on his sponsors at home, as was his reluctance to leave the field in case his work should be undone.

**Patrick's learning** Patrick declares himself 'untaught' and lacking in fluency ('Confessio', 12, 62; 'Epistola', 1) and scholarship has traditionally acquiesced. But this orthodoxy has been challenged by Howlett (1994), who argues that Patrick has so constructed the 'Confessio' (using, among other devices, chiasmus and division by extreme and mean ratio) as simultaneously to damn his detractors with faint praise, display the scope of his Latinity, and ensure the accurate transmission of his text. An analogous case is made in respect of the 'Epistola', a composition (in Howlett's edition) of exactly 1,300 words. Wide implications also attend the biblical, patristic, and magisterial apparatus published by Conneely (1993). Far from being a

man *unius libri*, as many previous commentators believed, it is clear that Patrick was acquainted with the work of Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and other Church Fathers. This tends, perhaps, to support the thesis that Patrick spent some time in training in Gaul.

Patrick, given his background, must be understood as having been bilingual in Latin and in British/Primitive Welsh, the former being the language of learning and liturgy in late Roman Britain, the latter that of daily conversation. His acquisition of Old Irish during his period of enslavement rendered him trilingual and equipped him uniquely for his Irish mission, which points incidentally to the linguistic disadvantage under which Palladius must have worked. The case advanced by Howlett notwithstanding, there is perhaps a nuance in Patrick's solitary reference by name to the Latin language, when he speaks of the words of God and the apostles and prophets 'which I have set out in Latin' (*quod ego Latinum exposui* ('Epistola', 20)), as though to suggest that Latin was no everyday medium. He displays, moreover, if indeed a literary man, a marked preoccupation with the voice, the tongue and the spoken word. Despite his reference to 'the savour of my writing' ('Confessio', 9) and other references to the written word, it is perhaps characteristic that the letter brought from Ireland in Patrick's dream or vision contains the 'voice of the Irish' and that when Patrick was reading it aloud *recitabam* – as was the practice of late antiquity – he imagined 'hearing . . . the voice of those . . . beside *Silva Vocluti*' who 'shouted out as if from one mouth' (ibid., 23).

The interpretation of what Patrick wrote depends fundamentally on editorial discrimination, and there has been debate in relation not just to the reading of the place-name *Banavem Taburniae* ('Confessio', 1) but also to that of individual words and clauses. When captured as a youth Patrick was *paene . . . inverbis* ('almost wordless'), or *paene . . . imberbis* ('almost beardless') (ibid., 10); those to whom he directs his *Confessio* include *dominicali rhetorici* ('learned churchmen'), or *dominicali rhetorici* ('lords, clever rhetoricians') (ibid., 13); in Ireland, he had occasion to pay those *qui iudicabant* ('who judged'), or those *qui indicabant* ('who guided') (ibid., 53); and the soldiers of Coroticus are affronted because, he declares, *Hiberionaci sumus* ('we are Irish'), or *Hiberia/ Hiberione nati sumus* ('we were born in Ireland') ('Epistola', 16). Most, but not all, such debates have been resolved by the efforts of Bieler to establish canonical texts.

**Remembering St Patrick** The hagiography of Patrick shows a knowledge of the 'Confessio' and 'Epistola' but leaves hanging the question of where and how the saint's writings were preserved. All the weight of tradition would place the field of Patrick's operations in the northern half of Ireland, and what is now Co. Mayo must be identified as one theatre of his activity. In his sole reference to an Irish place by name, Patrick tells of having heard the voice of those beside *Silva Vocluti* 'which is beside the western sea' ('Confessio', 23), and he is surely referring to the Atlantic. In his seventh-century memoir of Patrick, Tírechán (qv) writes of the saint encountering the sons of Amolngid from *Silva Vocluti* and locates it – presumably

on the basis of personal knowledge – in his own home territory of Tirawley around Killala Bay. This finds some endorsement in the 'Vita Tertia', which (although it omits Tírechán's story) describes the voice of those at *Silva Vocluti* as coming 'from the regions of the Connachta' (Bieler (1971), 129). The preservation of Patrick's texts is, however, more plausibly attributable to a church in the east of the country. Mochtae (qv) of Louth, himself a Briton, is termed 'disciple of Patrick' in his death-notice in the Annals of Ulster (s.a. 535), and Ultán (qv) of Ardraccan, Co. Meath, who was Tírechán's patron (and owner of a lost book about Patrick, which both Tírechán and Muirchú used), was himself reputedly an abbot of Louth. The monk Fursa (qv), who is associated with Louth by a note in the Martyrology of Óengus, founded Péronne in Picardy c.630 and probably brought Patrick's writings to the Continent; the French and English tradition of both texts is taken to derive from a seventh-century Péronne original (Bieler (1993), i, 17–18). The Patrician 'dossier' in the Book of Armagh was probably assembled by Torbach (qv), the abbot of Armagh who commissioned the manuscript in 807 and whose father and son were abbots of Louth. Moreover, the ninth-century Tripartite Life of Patrick records the finding by Dicuil (qv), sometime abbot of Louth, of an iron bell which was attributed to the saint. These hints are sufficient to point to Louth as one of the places in which Patrick's memory and his autograph writings might have been preserved.

Patrick's memory was subject to inflation, and not only in a northern milieu. A Latin hymn in his praise beginning 'Audite omnes amantes Deum' ('Listen all who love God') is attributed to Colmán Elo (qv) of Lynally, Co. Offaly; it dates to c.600 and is the earliest known testimony to Patrick's cult (Orchard (1993)). And in the course of the Easter controversy in the 630s a spokesman of the southern (largely Munster) churches had occasion to call Patrick *papa*, as though to suggest his patriarchal status (Kenney (1929), 220–21; cf. Ó Cróinín (1986), 282). But neither author describes the saint's career. The earliest extant presentation of that career was written in the late seventh century by Muirchú of the maccu (moccu) Macthéni at the behest of Áed (qv), bishop of Sleaty, Co. Laois. The latter was a devotee of Armagh although living in Leinster, and this association exemplifies a process, that of the aggrandisement of Armagh (in the phrase of Liam de Paor (qv)) by its cultivation of satellite or dependent churches, including the episcopal foundations and 'primitive churches' to which another late seventh-century text, the charter-like 'Liber Angeli' in the Book of Armagh, refers. The identification of such places was the chief purpose of Muirchú's contemporary Tírechán in his memoir of Patrick – a reconstruction of the saint's itinerary in Ireland rather than of his life – although the promotion of Armagh may not have been among his motives (Kenney (1929), 328–9; Swift (1994)). The parallel texts, the 'Vita Secunda' and 'Vita Quarta', together with the 'Vita Tertia', as Byrne has shown, are eighth-century in origin and take the narrative to a developed and fuller stage. The originals of these Lives, and the seventh-century documents, provided the basis for the ninth-century Tripartite Life or 'Bethu Phátraic', the oldest (extant) Life in the vernacular. This presents the full-blown legend and brings Patrick for the first time to evangelise Munster. Another Irish text of about the same period is 'Fiacc's hymn', a condensed biography attributed to

Fiacc (qv) of Sleaty which, like the Tripartite Life, claims primacy for Armagh under Patrick's patronage. Armagh, however, cannot be shown to have been founded by Patrick, despite the claims of his hagiographers, and was never said to have his grave; that honour was accorded by Muirchú to Downpatrick and never seriously challenged. By the eighth century, however, Armagh had built its claim to the primacy of Ireland on a monopoly of Patrick's cult. This was done in collaboration with the Uí Néill, who achieved, at least in the north, a parallel monopoly of kingship (Lacey (2006), 297–8). Whereas the 'high-kingship' of Ireland was to be eclipsed in the twelfth century, the primacy of Armagh was acknowledged in the presence of a papal legate at the synod of Ráith Breasail in 1111 and has been maintained ever since in the catholic and anglican communions.

The hagiographical tradition was thus firmly established by the eighth century and perfected by the ninth. The tenth-century life by Probus (Bieler (1971)) and the twelfth-century life by Jocelin of Furness (Denis (1668); Swift (1809)) are testimony, respectively, to an English interest in Patrick – notably at Glastonbury – and to the Anglo-Norman espousal of his cult. Jocelin, anachronistically, brings Patrick to Dublin and records the tribute payable to Armagh by its citizens; this included shoes, gloves, knives and combs, products of Dublin's twelfth-century industries. Jocelin and his contemporary, Gerald of Wales (qv), are our earliest sources for the tradition that Patrick rid Ireland of snakes.

**Writings attributed to Patrick** Meanwhile, Patrick was reputed to have been the author of several texts. The 'Dicta Patricii' ('Sayings of Patrick') are three short statements and one longer passage prefixed (in that order) to the work of Tírechán in the Book of Armagh (Bieler (1979)). The first refers to travel in 'Gaul and Italy and the islands of the Tyrrhene Sea' and cannot be shown to be authentic, although often used to support the case that Patrick had Continental experience; the second is genuine as it repeats with slight adjustment a line from the 'Epistola' (17), and the third and fourth are factually uninformative.

The collection of canons termed the 'First synod of Patrick' or the 'Circular letter' (Bieler (1963)) is now held to be later than Patrick's time, although an injunction that the alms of excommunicates are not to be received agrees with Patrick's sentiments ('Epistola', 7). Further canons, termed the 'Second synod of Patrick' (ibid.), are probably of the seventh century. The (lost) *Cáin* or 'Law of Patrick' is referred to in the annals for the first time in 734 and was evidently contemporary legislation connected with the protection of clergy; it doubtless involved levying tribute for Armagh and relics were the quasi-legal basis for its enforcement. 'St Patrick's breastplate' or 'Lorica' (Stokes (1887)) dates to the eighth century. This is a morning hymn or prayer in Old Irish invoking God's protection which Patrick is said to have sung when escaping from King Lóegaire (qv) near Tara.

It is a further dimension of Patrick's cult that he functioned as a broker of pre-Christian culture for Christian Ireland – instrumental in recasting pagan law in the prologue to the 'Senchas Már' (ninth century), conjuring Cú-Chulainn (qv) from hell in 'Síaburcharpat Con Culainn' (eleventh century), and interviewing the ancient Fenian Caoilte in 'Acallam na Senórach' (twelfth century) (McCone (1990); Nagy (1997)). It is in keeping with this role as go-between that Patrick is the hero of the Lughnasa legend at Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, and elsewhere, perhaps in succession to the pre-Christian deity Lug (MacNeill (1962)).

**Non-literary aspects of the cult** But the manifestations of Patrick's cult are more than literary and oral, and there are archaeological and onomastic dimensions. We cannot yet map the cult of Patrick in Ireland, much less apply chronological controls or refinements. It is worth noting, nevertheless, that of twenty-two townlands called Kilpatrick, *Cill Phádraig* (church of Patrick), the majority are in Munster and Leinster and must reflect the diffusion of dedications outside the area of Patrick's own experience. A body of relevant monuments, if they can be so termed, are holy wells with Patrician dedications. In the seventh century Patrick was said to have baptised in wells, and some, potentially, have been deemed holy since the fifth century or before (Whitfield (2006)). Wells are of interest not least because they are often divorced (ostensibly) from church buildings and are thus potentially representative of a less formal register and more reflective of the vernacular cult. The latter is best manifested in the tradition of pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, a site associated with the saint by Tírechán in the seventh century and not far removed from the probable site of *Silva Vocluti*. Patrick's association with the mountain recalls that of Moses with Mount Sinai and Mount Nebo.

The analogy between Patrick and Moses is a commonplace of the tradition, and the saint's sojourn on Croagh Patrick for forty days and forty nights occasions an explicit comparison in the Tripartite Life with Moses' sojourn on Mount Sinai when the ten commandments were received (Deut. 10:10). The fourth-century Spanish woman Egeria had travelled as a pilgrim to the Holy Places, Mount Sinai included, and visited a mountain-top church maintained by a community of monks. Her account of her travels was widely read, was presumably available in Ireland, and is written in a style of Latin that has affinities with that of Patrick himself. Egeria also visited Mount Nebo, whence Moses viewed the Promised Land (Deut. 32:49), and saw another church which was located, significantly, just off the summit and which contained a memorial to Moses. One might suggest by way of analogy the small stone church just off the summit of Croagh Patrick which was recognised for the first time in the 1990s (Gibbons & Walsh (2005), 38); it dates to the second half of the first millennium and might have been built with the Mount Nebo precedent in mind. The Annals of the Four Masters record the 'plundering' of Croagh Patrick in 1079; the Annals of Loch Cé record that thirty pilgrims were struck by lightning on the mountain on St Patrick's day 1113.

**The insignia of a saint** The other chief manifestations of, or accessories to, the cult of Patrick in the middle ages were the Staff of Jesus (*Bachall Ísu*), the Bell of the Testament (*Cloc ind Aidechta*) and the Book of Armagh (*Canóin Phádraic*), all of which became the subject of hereditary keeperships. The *Bachall Ísu* is first mentioned in the paired 'Vita Secunda' and 'Vita Quarta', a reference which in origin could predate by about a century its appearance at 868 in the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland. A metal-mounted wooden crosier is to be envisaged, and it may well have been prototypical of the standard Irish form. Conceivably, it incorporated a relic deemed to derive from the staff of Christ and need not, when first obtained or created, have been specific to Patrick's cult. The association of the *Bachall Ísu* with the saint might well have been secondary to its role as a relic of Christ; Armagh claimed a relic of Christ's blood in the seventh century, and the annalistic reference at 868 says nothing of Patrick but couples the *Bachall Ísu* with 'the Lord's cross', which was doubtless a True Cross relic. Whatever about its initial role, the crosier was both the chief symbol of the Armagh abbacy until its twelfth-century removal to Dublin and the pre-eminent accessory of Patrick's cult until its destruction in the city as an object of superstition in 1538 (Ronan (1943)). The Book of Armagh was famed in its own right, and in 937 a shrine (now lost) was made to contain it. The manuscript is unique in its combination of 'Patrician documents' (specifically the works of Muirchú and Tírechán, the 'Liber Angeli' and an abbreviated 'Confessio') with a complete New Testament and the Life of St Martin by Sulpicius Severus. The latter is no accidental association, for Patrick in his hagiography is repeatedly brought into association with the famous monk and bishop of Tours.

The third item of Patrician insignia, the *Cloc ind Aidechta*, was so called presumably because Patrick was believed to have willed the bell to his successors. It was lavishly enshrined c.1100 by the abbot of Armagh, Domnall (qv) (d. 1105), and the high-king, Domnall Ua Lochlainn (qv). There may be some allusion in the name to Patrick's stated wish to leave *exagalliae* (pl.), a legacy (of faith) to the 'brothers and sons' whom he had 'baptised in the Lord' ('Confessio', 14). The bell is first referred to by name at 1044 in the Annals of Ulster but might conceivably be identical with a bell mentioned in the 'Vita Quarta' (Bieler (1971), 101); this is said to have been broken when used as a missile by the saint on Croagh Patrick and to have afterwards been repaired by an angel. The Bell of the Testament, uniquely, is made from two sheets of iron rather than one, has a conspicuous riveted joint across one face, and so might match the hagiographer's description. But certainty is impossible on this score, and the atypical construction of 'St Patrick's bell' remains a puzzle in archaeological terms.

**The late-medieval and post-medieval saint** The late medieval cult of Patrick opened with the *inventio* and *translatio* of the remains of Patrick, Brigit (qv), and Columba (qv) at Downpatrick in 1185. This was stage-managed by John de Courcy (qv) – Anglo-Norman earl of Ulster and patron of Jocelin of Furness – and made available for the first time what were held to be Patrick's bones. The same event facilitated, ultimately, the creation of an arm-reliquary c.1400. Now empty, and

popularly termed the 'shrine of St Patrick's hand', this is an uninscribed piece in the international Gothic style but was certainly made in Ireland, was long preserved in Co. Down, and was presumably commissioned for Downpatrick. A post-medieval reflex of the same phenomenon is the shrine of St Patrick's jaw, a seventeenth-century container in which a human lower jawbone is preserved. A seventh-century interest in Patrick's teeth is attested in Tírechán, although in this instance the relic is obtained in life, when the saint loses a tooth which he bestows on Bishop Brón. That relic, or another, gave rise to the making in the twelfth century of the shrine of St Patrick's tooth, a purse-shaped shrine which was remodelled in the fourteenth century.

Such pieces as the shrines of Patrick's arm and tooth survived the reformation by their dispersal into the care of the unreformed, although the crosier, as already noted, did not escape the flames. The vernacular cult was maintained with reference to such pieces and to the sites and monuments of long-standing association. Although functioning churches and cathedrals became sooner or later part of the established system, there were notable exceptions to the rule. Chief among these were Croagh Patrick and the cognate site at Lough Derg, Co. Donegal. The latter, first mentioned as the site of St Patrick's purgatory in the twelfth century by Jocelin of Furness and Gerald of Wales, soon achieved European fame (Leslie (1932); Haren & de Pontfarcy (1988)). Pilgrims, by entering a cave, experienced the pains of purgatory through physical and sensory deprivation. Despite the efforts of the civil authorities and of the reformation bishops of Clogher (in whose diocese it lay) to suppress the pilgrimage, the institution survived. And it continues, although no trace of the cave remains; continues to be a place of resort for pilgrims and (in common with the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage) shows no signs of declining.

The iconography of Patrick is unknown before the fourteenth century but may have had prior existence (Harbison (2004)). Its late medieval manifestations include conventional images in metalwork, tomb-frontals and manuscript art. A mid-fourteenth-century fresco at Todi in Umbria shows the saint presiding over the entrance to purgatory and is testimony to the international reputation of Lough Derg. The seventeenth century saw the inclusion of Patrick's feast-day, 17 March, in the Roman breviary (1631) and in the revised Roman calendar (1632), although it was first identified by Muirchú in the seventh century and first appeared in continental calendars of eighth-century date (Gougaud (1936), 147; Ó Riain (2006), 8–9, 225–6). The seventeenth century also saw the establishment of an unhistorical but still-familiar image, that of a patriarchal Patrick in the baroque vestments of a Tridentine bishop. In some instances he holds a trefoil, but the earliest documentary reference to his using the shamrock to expound the Trinity dates to 1727.

The seventeenth century saw too the rediscovery of Patrick by a new breed of hagiographer and the publication of Patrician lives. In 1639 James Ussher (qv), Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh, published the first critical account of Patrick and was the first to take note of the Patrician documents in the Book of

Armagh. He was followed by the Franciscan priest John Colgan (qv), who in 1647 published three Latin lives (his *Secunda*, *Tertia*, and *Quarta*) from continental manuscripts as well as other Patrician texts. In 1656 Sir James Ware (qv) drew on English manuscripts to publish the first complete edition of the 'Confessio' and 'Epistola', although this was superseded by that of the Bollandists in 1668. Their work was not pursued in the eighteenth century but was taken up in the nineteenth by John Lanigan (qv) (1825) and J. H. Todd (1864); the latter, in his *St Patrick, apostle of Ireland*, provided the first real history of the saint. Todd followed Ussher in his over-emphasis on the non-Roman character of Patrick's mission, betraying a preoccupation which the saint himself would not have recognised. The parallel view of Patrick as father of what has been seen as the distinctively Roman catholicism of Ireland reached its apogee in *The life and writings of St Patrick* (1905) by Archbishop John Healy (qv). Despite the development in the intervening century of a vast critical literature, both views have found modern promoters. Both are anachronistic, although interesting as phenomena. But Patrick belongs to the fifth century and must be understood in fifth-century terms.

---

J. Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates* (1639); J. Colgan, *Triadis thaumaturgae seu diuorum Patricii, Columbae et Brigidae, trium veteris et maioris Scotiae, seu Hiberniae sanctorum insulae, communium patronorum acta* (1647); J. Ware, *S. Patricio adscripta opuscula* (1656); A. Denis (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum, Martius*, ii (1668); E. L. Swift, *The life and acts of Saint Patrick, the archbishop, primate and apostle of Ireland* (1809); J. Lanigan, *Ecclesiastical history of Ireland*, i (1822); J. H. Todd, *St Patrick, apostle of Ireland* (1864); J. F. Dimock (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, v (1867); W. Stokes (ed. and trans.), *The tripartite Life of Patrick, with other documents relating to that saint* (2 pts, 1887); A. Lewis, *The life and work of the Rev. E. J. Peck among the Eskimos* (1904); J. B. Bury, *The life of St Patrick and his place in history* (1905); J. Healy, *The life and writings of St Patrick* (1905); W. Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé: the martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (1905; repr. 1884); N. J. D. White, 'Libri Sancti Patricii: the Latin writings of Saint Patrick', *RIA Proc.*, xxv C (1905), 201–326; E. Gwynn (ed.), *Liber Ardmachanus: the Book of Armagh* (1913); J. F. Kenney, *The sources for the early history of Ireland: ecclesiastical, an introduction and guide* (1929; repr. 1968, 1979); S. Leslie, *Saint Patrick's purgatory: a record from history and literature* (1932); E. MacNeill, *St Patrick, apostle of Ireland* (1934); L. Gougaud, *Les saints irlandais hors d'Irlande: étudiés dans le culte et dans la dévotion traditionnelle* (1936); K. Mulchrone (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic: the tripartite Life of Patrick* (1939); T. F. O'Rahilly, *The two Patricks: a lecture on the history of Christianity in fifth-century Ireland* (1942; repr. 1957); M. V. Ronan, 'St Patrick's staff and Christ Church', *Dublin Historical Record*, v (1942–3), 121–9; L. Bieler, *The life and legend of St Patrick: problems of modern scholarship* (1949); L. Bieler (trans.), *The works of St Patrick: St Secundinus Hymn on St Patrick* (1953); G. S. M. Walker (ed. and trans.), *Sancti Columbani opera*

(1957); J. Ryan (ed.), *Saint Patrick* (1958); J. Carney, *The problem of St Patrick* (1961); C. Mohrmann, *The Latin of Saint Patrick* (1961); D. A. Binchy, 'Patrick and his biographers, ancient and modern', *Studia Hib.*, ii (1962), 7–173; M. MacNeill, *The festival of Lughnasa* (1962); T. Ó Fiaich, review of L. Mac Philibín, *Mise Pádraig*, *Studia Hib.*, ii (1962), 236–7; T. Ó Raifeartaigh, 'Leasú eagarthóra sa litir faoi Choroticus', *Studia Hib.*, ii (1962), 174–81; L. Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The Irish penitentials* (1963); id., *St Patrick and the coming of Christianity* (A History of Irish Catholicism. i. fasc. 1) (1967); id., 'St Patrick and the British church', M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (ed.), *Christianity in Britain, 300–700* (1968), 123–30; R. P. C. Hanson, *Saint Patrick, his origins and career* (1968); L. Bieler (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St Patrick: Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta* (1971); L. de Paor, 'The aggrandisement of Armagh', T. D. Williams (ed.), *Historical Studies VIII: papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians* (1971), 95–110; J. D. Bateson, 'Roman material from Ireland, a re-consideration', *RIA Proc.*, lxxiii C (1973), 21–97; id., 'Further finds of Roman material from Ireland', *RIA Proc.*, lxxvi C (1976), 171–80; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The social background to Irish *peregrinatio*', *Celtica*, xi (1976), 43–59; R. Warner, 'Some observations on the context and importation of exotic material in Ireland, from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D.', *RIA Proc.*, lxxvi C (1976), 267–92; L. Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (1979); A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The place-names of Roman Britain* (1979); C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to A.D. 500* (1981); B. de Breffny, *In the steps of St Patrick* (1982); J. J. O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales: the history and topography of Ireland* (1982); R. P. C. Hanson, *The life and writings of the historical Saint Patrick* (1983); J. Duffy, *Patrick in his own words* (2nd ed., 1985); J.-M. Picard and Y. de Pontfarcy, *Saint Patrick's purgatory: a twelfth-century tale of a journey to the Other World* (1985); E. A. Thomson, *Who was Saint Patrick?* (1985; repr. 1999); D. Ó Cróinín, 'New light on Palladius', *Peritia*, v (1986), 276–83; M. Haren and Y. de Pontfarcy (ed.), *The medieval pilgrimage to St Patrick's purgatory Lough Derg and the European tradition* (1988); K. Devine, *A computer-generated concordance to the Libri Epistolarum of Saint Patrick* (Clavis Patricii I, 1989); A. Hopkin, *The living legend of St Patrick* (1989); K. McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature* (1990); P. Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland* (1991); C. Doherty, 'The cult of St Patrick and the politics of Armagh in the seventh century', J.-M. Picard (ed.), *Ireland and northern France, AD 600–850* (1991), 53–94; D. Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, legend and romance: an encyclopædia of the Irish folk tradition* (1991), 355–61; D. McManus, *A guide to ogam* (1991); L. Bieler, *Libri epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi: introduction, text and commentary* (Clavis Patricii II, 1993); C. Bourke, *Patrick: the archaeology of a saint* (1993); D. Conneely, *St Patrick's letters: a study of their theological dimension* (1993); L. de Paor, *Saint Patrick's world* (1993); D. Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (1993); T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: mission and primatial authority', D. Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (1993), 1–12; A. Orchard, "'Audite omnes amantes": a hymn in Patrick's praise', D. Dumville (ed.), *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (1993), 153–73; F. J. Byrne and P. Francis, 'Two lives of Saint Patrick: *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*', *RSAL Jn.*, cxxiv (1994), 5–117; C.

Swift, 'Tírechán's motives in compiling the *Collectanea*: an alternative interpretation', *Ériu*, xlv (1994), 53–82; C. Thomas, *And shall these mute stones speak? Post-Roman inscriptions in western Britain* (1994); B. Cunningham and R. Gillespie, '“The most adaptable of saints”: the cult of St Patrick in the seventeenth century', *Archiv. Hib.*, xlix (1995), 82–104; J. F. Nagy, *Conversing with angels and ancients: literary myths of medieval Ireland* (1997); M. B. de Paor, *Patrick: the pilgrim apostle of Ireland* (1998); T. O'Loughlin, *St Patrick: the man and his works* (1999); D. Ó Cróinín, 'Who was Palladius, “first bishop of the Irish”?', *Peritia*, xiv (2000), 205–37; D. R. Howlett (ed. and trans.), *Liber epistolarum Sancti Patricii episcopi: the book of letters of Saint Patrick the bishop* (1994); B. McCormack, *Perceptions of St Patrick in eighteenth-century Ireland* (2000); R. Ó Floinn, 'Freestone Hill, Co. Kilkenny: a reassessment', A. P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (2000), 12–29; R. Ó Floinn, 'Patrons and politics: art, artefact and methodology', M. Redknap and others (ed.), *Pattern and purpose in insular art* (2001), 1–14; C. Bourke, 'Patrick (Patricius)', S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., 2002), 456–7; E. P. Kelly, 'Antiquities from Irish holy wells and their wider context', *Archaeology Ireland*, xvi (2002), 24–8; P. Harbison, 'Representation of St Patrick', A. Mac Shamhráin (ed.), *The island of St Patrick: church and ruling dynasties in Fingal and Meath, 400–1148* (2004), 89–105; C. Stancliffe, 'Patrick', *ODNB* (2004); D. R. Howlett, 'Patrick', S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Ireland: an encyclopedia* (2005), 368–71; M. Gibbons and G. Walsh, 'Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, in the archaeology and history of Ireland', H. Hughes (ed.), *Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain* (2005), 28–50; T. O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick* (2005); D. Howlett (ed. and trans.), *Muirchú Moccu Maethéni's 'Vita Sancti Patricii': life of Saint Patrick* (2006); B. Lacey, *Cenél Conaill and the Donegal kingdoms, AD 500–800* (2006); P. Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the saints: a history of Irish martyrologies* (2006); N. Whitfield, 'A suggested function for the holy well?', A. Minnis and J. Roberts (ed.), *Text, image, interpretation: studies in Anglo-Saxon literature and its insular context in honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin* (2007), 495–513