

The Archaeology and History of Saint Patrick: a Review Article

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Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *LIBRI EPISTOLARUM SANCTI PATRICII EPISCOPI: INTRODUCTION, TEXT AND COMMENTARY*, Royal Irish Academy Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources, Ancillary Publications IV, Dublin, 1993; 2 vols in 1; pp. 288; ISBN I-874045-11-9. PRICE: £15 (hbk).

Cormac Bourke, *PATRICK: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A SAINT*, HMSO, Belfast, 1993; pp x+62; ISBN 0-337-083113. PRICE: £7.95 stg. (pbk).

Daniel Conneely, *ST. PATRICK'S LETTERS: A STUDY OF THEIR THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION* (Edited and presented by Patrick Bastable together with Thomas Finan, Maurice Hogan, Thomas Norris and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta), An Sagart, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1993; pp. 249; ISBN I-870684-31-1. PRICE: £15 (hbk).

Liam de Paor, *SAINT PATRICK'S WORLD: THE CHRISTIAN CULTURE OF IRELAND'S APOSTOLIC AGE*, Four Courts Press, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1993; pp x+335; ISBN I-85182-118-X. PRICE: £25 (hbk).

David N. Dumville *et al.*, *SAINT PATRICK, A.D. 493-1993*, Studies in Celtic History 13, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 1993; pp. ix+ 334; ISBN 0-85115-332-1. PRICE: £39.50 stg. (hbk).

D. R. Howlett (ed.), *LIBER EPISTOLARUM SANCTI PATRICII EPISCOPI: THE BOOK OF LETTERS OF SAINT PATRICK THE BISHOP*, Four Courts Press, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, 1994; pp 134; ISBN I-85182-136-8. PRICE: £27.50 (hbk).

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Let me begin with a confession. I was baptized, raised and schooled in a parish dedicated to St. Patrick, none other, indeed, than the *aeclessia hirRoigniu Martorthige* mentioned by Tírechán and clearly linked with Armagh before the end of the seventh century.¹ Today, it is absorbed within the city of Kilkenny and, apart from a curvilinear boundary and the possible presence of a souterrain, there are few reminders of its ancient status. On the reredos behind the altar of the parish church, however, there is a depiction which caught my youthful attention, especially in those moments when the celebrant's intonation was less than rivetting. It shows the confrontation between the saint and Loeguire mac Néill, King of Tara. Painted in the early years of this century, the style is something of a blend between the Celtic

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¹L. Bieler (ed.) *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, Dublin 1979, pp. 162-163.

Revival and Art Nouveau. The king, flanked by his advisors and druids, is seated, but looks rather insecure, while in the foreground stands Patrick, tall, venerable, robed in green vestments, and raising the shamrock as he explains the mystery of the Trinity: three in one, one in three. It is a version of an image, with or without the addition of snakes, familiar to generations of Irish people since it was first engraved in 1624 by Thomas Messingham (Illus. 1 - see also Illus. 3). It typifies the saint as the father figure of Irish Christianity, an all-powerful miracle-worker who raised the dead, banished snakes and fried druids. The reality, of course, was very different.

As the historians got to work, the real Saint Patrick gradually began to emerge from behind the legendary one. First to go was the shamrock—the traditional story is no older than the seventeenth century.² Next went the rôle of national apostle—in so far as Patrick's mission can be traced, it was confined to parts of Ulster and Connacht. Out, too, went the story of the Roman origin of Patrick's mission—it was developed by later supporters who wished to give Patrick the imprimatur of Rome. Then the tradition of Patrick's education in Gaul was ditched—his Latin was judged to be too provincial. In due course the places customarily associated with Patrick—the boyhood as a slave at Slemish, the lighting of the paschal fire at Slane, the foundation of Armagh, and even Patrick's burial at Downpatrick—were demonstrated to rest on spurious foundations. And finally, out went the dates beloved of every schoolchild—the traditional arrival in 432 and death in 461 were unreliable calculations arrived at in the seventh or eighth centuries as were the alternative dates of arrival around 461 and death in 491 or 493. The process of deconstruction left non-specialists bewildered. Was anything left? Was Patrick a fiction as Zimmer, and Ledwich before him, had argued?³ The scholars' success at dismantling the old orthodoxies may well account for the absence in 1993 of any official celebration similar to those which accompanied the anniversaries in 1932 and 1961. No commemorative stamps were issued, no congress was convened, no public ceremonies were held. Yet all that the historians had done was to expose the realities. It was almost as if, having discovered the truth about Santa Claus, Christmas had been cancelled.

The foundation stone of modern Patrician scholarship is a paper published by Daniel Binchy in 1962.⁴ It was a wide-ranging, witty, and, at times, withering assessment of the ancient and modern sources for St. Patrick. It touched on almost every aspect of the problem and it is probably fair to say that everything it touched could never be viewed in quite the same way again. Binchy's conclusion was that the only reliable information we have on Patrick is contained in his two surviving writings, the *Confessio* and the *Letter to Coroticus*. Since 1962 at least four editions and /or translations of these documents have appeared⁵ but it is fortunate that the Royal Irish Academy has chosen to reprint the late Ludwig Bieler's definitive text as its contribution to the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of the alternative date of Patrick's death, 493. Published originally in Denmark and then reprinted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission in 1952, the edition has long been out of print. Most of the original print-run seems to have been bought up by libraries and it has been unavailable on the second-hand market. In twenty years of book-searching I have seen one copy offered for sale—and that was at the auction of Ludwig

²The most up to date account is by E. C. Nelson, *Shamrock: Botany and History of an Irish Myth*, (Aberystwyth 1991).

³H. Zimmer, *The Celtic Church in Britain and Ireland*, London 1902, pp. 9–13 and 35–41; E. Ledwich, *The Antiquities of Ireland*, Dublin 1790, pp. 368–378.

⁴D. A. Binchy, "Patrick and His Biographers: ancient and modern", *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), 7–173.

⁵A. B. E. Hood (ed.), *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchú's Life*, London 1978; R. P. C. Hanson and C. Blanc (eds.), *Saint Patrick: Confession et Lettre à Coroticus*, Paris 1978; R. P. C. Hanson (ed.), *The Life and Writings of the Historical Saint Patrick*, New York, 1983; E. Malaspina, *Gli Scritti di San Patrizio*, Rome 1985.



Illus. 1 St. Patrick (above) and the Patron Saints of Ireland (below), both from *Florilegium Insulae Sanctorum seu vitae et acta sanctorum Hiberniae*, by Thomas Messingham, Paris 1624.

Bieler's books. The Royal Irish Academy is to be congratulated on making this edition available once more and for issuing it at such a reasonable price.

With the fundamental edition back in print we might be excused for asking do we need two more? Conneely's and Howlett's approaches, however, are very different from anything that has gone before. Research has tended to concentrate on the autobiographical information and the historical sidelights on fifth-century Ireland which Patrick's letters contain. The late Fr. Conneely's interest, however, lay in Patrick's use of scripture and his knowledge of the Church Fathers. The great value of his edition is that it publishes an extensive array of biblical, Patristic and conciliar allusions which will keep scholars busy for decades to come. Unfortunately Fr. Conneely died before completing his commentary and the text was assembled and put through the press by a group of friends. In places the commentary reads more like lecture notes than a finished publication, and it lacks the thorough cross-references and detailed argument that one would like.

It has often been said that Patrick was "a man of one book", and his heavy use of the Bible for quotations and images is well known. In all, Patrick refers to fifty-four of the books that make up the Bible, quite an extraordinary depth of citation given that the surviving correspondence consists of just two letters. As Bieler demonstrated, the biblical text used by Patrick is one which seems to have taken shape at the point of transition from Old Latin to the Vulgate.⁶ The Psalms are his favourite source and its text is derived from an Old Latin Gallic original. On the other hand, his quotations from the Acts of the Apostles clearly indicate the use of the Vulgate.

The real value of this edition, however, consists of the allusions to Patristic writings and the decrees of church councils or synods. Conneely makes comparisons with the works of over twenty Church Fathers and eight councils. The authors include Ambrose, Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, and Prosper of Aquitaine. Direct quotations are rarely present but, following Dronke,⁷ Conneely contends that distinctive modes of expression, or trains of thought, or even imagery may reflect the writings of the Church Fathers. The lack of direct quotation is explained on the grounds that Patrick did not have the texts in front of him but was writing, or dictating, from memory. In the absence of a detailed commentary by Conneely it is difficult to know whether these allusions demonstrate influences on Patrick's literary formation or whether Patrick was simply using words and images which were current during the fourth and fifth century. The Patristic apparatus, although extensive, is not exhaustive. Peter Dronke's analogies with the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Cyprian's *De Mortalitate* (among others) are not included, and one wonders if Kenney's suggestion that "in a few phrases his [Patrick's] work recalls that of Irenaeus of Lyons" might be worth pursuing further.⁸

To Fr. Conneely, Patrick's writings are pastoral letters and this has implications for how their content should be viewed. He suggests that the *Letter to Coroticus* should be called the 'Letter excommunicating Coroticus'. He points out that it is linked, textually, thematically and structurally with the practice of excommunication at Rome as shown in a surviving letter from Pope Innocent I (d.417).⁹ The *Confessio* should be called the 'Confession of Grace', and he views it as part of the tradition initiated by Augustine's *Confession*, having, as it does, confession of sin, confession of praise, confession of faith as well as auto-biographical elements. In this he follows both Bieler and Dronke who have also noted that Patrick may

⁶L. Bieler, "Der Bibeltext des Heiligen Patrick", *Biblica*, 28 (1947), 31-58 and 236-263.

⁷P. Dronke, "St. Patrick's Reading", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 1 (Summer 1981), pp. 21-38.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 36-38; J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, Dublin 1979, p. 168, fn. 52.

⁹The point was first made by D. S. Nerney, "A study of St. Patrick's sources ii", *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 72 (1949), 14-26.

well have read Augustine's *Confession*.¹⁰ Overall, the picture that emerges from Fr. Conneely's work is of a man more familiar with the ecclesiastical culture of the Late Roman world than Patrick is usually given credit for.

I have always been unconvinced by scholars who have taken at face value Patrick's declarations that he was *indoctus* ("unlearned" or "untaught"), *rusticus* ("rustic") or *rusticissimus* ("most rustic"). In the part of the country that I come from such utterances would immediately raise an eyebrow and be coupled with the question "who is this guy trying to fool?". Yet, among recent Patrician scholars, only Nora Chadwick has regarded Patrick's statements as a conventional cliché indicating literary polish rather than a lack of sophistication.¹¹ Now, David Howlett has finally exploded the myth of Patrick the rustic. Patrick, he argues, has been "grotesquely misrepresented" by scholars because they have not paid sufficient attention to his vocabulary. Howlett, developing a concept published in an earlier paper,¹² breaks down the texts, *per cola et commata* ("by clauses and phrases"), to reveal the units of Patrick's thought. Once these elements are exposed it is clear that the letters were constructed within a mechanical structure which involved statement, restatement, echo and response. Howlett identifies four sections within the *Letter to Coroticus* and five within the *Confessio*. In the *Confessio*, for instance, he discovers that the themes of part V re-echo those of part I (truthfulness, unworthiness, reasons for writing); the themes of part IV are a response to those of part II (God's providence, defence of his vocation and mission), while part III is internally divided, with Patrick's elevation to the episcopate as its central theme. This balanced pattern of statement and restatement is not only confined to ideas but is also reflected, sometimes astonishingly so, in the numbers of words and letters used. For instance, the six opening chapters of Howlett's part I contain ninety-six lines of text while the final six chapters, bringing part V to an end, also contain ninety-six lines of text.

Another example is provided by Patrick's apology which takes up the concluding eighty-five lines of Howlett's part I. The climax of the argument comes at the central line, *et rusticationem ab altissimo creatam*, ("even rustic work [was] created by the most high"), which is exactly forty-three lines from the beginning and forty-three lines from the end. The last word of the preceeding line, *et iterum spiritus testatur* ("and again the spirit testifies"), is precisely 245 words from the beginning while the first word of the succeeding line, *unde ego primus rusticus* ("whence I the supreme rustic"), is exactly 245 words from the end. Furthermore, the passage contains 2724 letters of which the central examples fall exactly in the middle of *et iterum spiritus testatur*!

Several previously unnoticed numerical patterns are identified. Patrick survives twelve perils and has seven visions while the fivefold division of the *Confessio* is modelled on the five books of the Pentateuch. Howlett's analysis is densely written and even the most dedicated reader will have to surface periodically for air.¹³ Some may quibble with what exactly constitutes "a line of Patrick's text" but it is impossible not to be impressed by the sheer quantity of evidence presented. Howlett provides hundreds of examples of the arithmetical balance of words and letters and it comes as no surprise to discover that he is a lexicographer by profession. The Bible is the inspiration for this mathematical style of

¹⁰Dronke, "St. Patrick's Reading", pp. 27-34; L. Bieler, "The place of St. Patrick in Latin language and literature", *Vigiliae Christianae*, 6 (1952), 65-98; *idem.*, *Libri Epistolarum*, ii, p. 86.

¹¹N. K. Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, (London 1963), pp. 25-26.

¹²D. Howlett, "Ex saliva scripturae meae" in D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach and K. McCone (eds.), *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, Maynooth 1989, pp. 86-101.

¹³For those who find themselves suffocating, relief can be obtained by using K. Devine, *A Computer-Generated Concordance to the Libri Epistolarum of Saint Patrick*, Dublin 1989.



composition. Its patterns of declaration and response (or antiphonal statement) were inculcated at a very early age. The literary structure seems incredibly complicated to our eyes, but Howlett suggests that it is an intellectual attempt to imitate God's order in the world. These revelations are nothing short of revolutionary and they will come as a shock to those who imagined that Patrick was simple-minded and inarticulate. For the rest of us, who regarded Patrick as self-assured, learned, and wordly-wise, the extent of the literary discipline discovered by Howlett is still surprising. The reaction will doubtless be one of disbelief in some quarters. Why should this be so? Anyone whose memory stretches back to the days before Vatican II will recall how the structured rhythms and cadences of the Latin Mass could implant themselves in an unlettered congregation. For the effects of a daily biblical diet on a trained mind one has only to look at the various traditions of Christian preaching. While, at the opposite extreme, if one was told that a precisely ordered formula of words was necessary for a wizard's spell, it would be accepted without question. David Howlett is to be congratulated on unlocking a somewhat abstruse, if erudite, method of Late Latin composition. He has opened up a whole new way of reading Patrick and proved the benefit of a close textual reading. Now that Patrick has a place on the literary agenda let us only hope we will be spared the worst excesses of literary theorists.

It has long been axiomatic to regard the fifth century as a "lost" century. Today, when a historian is asked about the date of St Patrick's mission, or the location of that mission, or the date of Patrick's death, the answer is "we do not know". There is only one secure date in the whole of the fifth century, the year 431, when Pope Celestine ordained Palladius and sent him as the first bishop to the Irish believing in Christ. Similarly, for the archaeologist the fifth century is a dark age. There are no settlement sites of this period nor is there any certainly known material culture. Despite the researches of H. E. Kilbride-Jones¹⁴, no pins or brooches can be dated with confidence to the fifth century. Indeed, with the exception of the hoard of Roman silver from Ballinrees, near Coleraine, (dated by coins to c.423)¹⁵ and, perhaps, the similar hoard from Balline, Co. Limerick, there are no definitely known artifacts of fifth century date from Ireland. Yet the fifth century was one of crucial importance to later developments. The adoption of Christianity, the emergence of the Uí Néill kingship, and the mission of St. Patrick, are key features of this century with lasting implications for the next five hundred years. Must our knowledge of how these events came about remain unclear?

The greater part of Liam de Paor's book consists of an edition and translation of key texts relating to the history of early Christianity in Ireland. The translations are fluidly and stylishly written with the emphasis placed on conveying the sense rather than a literal word-by-word account. The selection of texts is wide-ranging and the result is a pleasure to read. The old chestnuts, Patrick's *Confessio* and his *Letter to Coroticus*, as well as Muirchú's *Life of Patrick*, are all here but there is also a translation of Bishop Tírechán's account of Patrick's travels and of Cogitosus's *Life of Brigid*, the first time that these sources have been extracted from scholarly tomes and placed before a popular audience. There is a decent collection of extracts from the Irish annals and, most importantly, a series of excerpts from fifth-century Gaulish councils as well as the section of Prosper of Aquitaine's chronicle dealing with the period from 379 to 455. The latter makes it possible to place the appointment of Palladius in its broader European context and it provides an insight into Prosper's interests in contemporary secular and ecclesiastical affairs. Finally, the volume concludes with translations of the lives of Ailbhe, Declan of Ardmore, Ciaran of Saigir and Darerca or Moninna the Abbess.

¹⁴H.E. Kilbride-Jones, *Zoomorphic Penannular Brooches*, London 1980.

¹⁵J. D. Bateson, "Roman Material from Ireland: a re-consideration", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 73, C (1973), 42-43 and 63-64.

The translation of these texts makes them available to a wider audience than ever before, and for that alone Liam de Paor would merit our thanks. The real achievement of his book, however, is the introduction, which shows that we can begin to understand events in fifth century Ireland by deft handling of the sources, by the use of comparanda, and by asking the right questions. The resulting essay is one of the most stimulating contributions to Patrician scholarship in a generation.

De Paor begins by outlining the spread of Christianity in Western Europe and the organization of the church in Gaul and Britain before moving on to consider Ireland in the fifth century. The decline (or "transformation" as the non-Gibbonists would have us say) of the Roman Empire in the West afforded spectacular opportunities of accumulating wealth and prestige to ruthless individuals and to bands of warfaring men. In Gaul the Franks emerged from the coming together of groups of mercenaries who were bound not by tribal or family bonds, but by loyalty and a common interest in plunder and extortion. The Anglo-Saxons almost certainly gained power in Britain in the same way. It is reasonable to assume that the Irish also took advantage of the collapsing Roman administration in Britain. Combining archaeological and documentary evidence, de Paor envisages the presence of at least two powerful kingships, one centred in eastern Ulster, the other west of the Shannon in the Roscommon area, a reflection (although he does not say this) of the power groups found in the Táin Bó Cuailnge. There is also the possibility of a third group operating in the south, the Déisi, or perhaps the ancestors of the Eoganachta themselves. As a result of raids carried out on Britain, Christian Britons were brought back to Ireland in captivity. In due course the Christian message would have expanded beyond this group to the native Irish and it was to this Christian community that Palladius was sent as their first bishop in 431. De Paor makes the point that it was not the task of bishops to proselytize or convert unbelievers. In fact there were prohibitions on such activities. A bishop's job was to administer his diocese and look after the interests of the faithful.

The immediate reason for Palladius' nomination to Ireland was the spread of the Pelagian heresy to Britain. In 429 Pope Celestine sent Germanus of Auxerre across the English Channel to counter the arguments of the Pelagian [Bishop] Agricola. The individual who negotiated this mission, and the intermediary between Auxerre and Rome, was Palladius. So far this is well trodden ground. De Paor's new insight, however, is that, according to rules propounded by Pope Celestine himself, a bishop had to have the consent of the clergy, laity and people to whom he was appointed. This means that Palladius must have visited Ireland sometime in 429 or 430 before his return to Rome and assignment to Ireland. In turn, this suggests closer ties between Gaul and Ireland during the early fifth century than has previously been considered possible.¹⁶ The duration of Palladius' episcopate is not known, but de Paor points out that a Bishop Palladius, from an unnamed diocese, attended the Synod of Gaulish bishops, probably held at Arles, in 451. Although the name Palladius is not unknown in Late Roman Gaul, it is possible, considering he first came to prominence at Auxerre and may well have been a son of the *stirps Palladiorum* at nearby Bourges,¹⁷ that this is the Irish Palladius. Following T. F. O'Rahilly, de Paor makes a convincing case that the stories linking Patrick with Gaul, in particular with Germanus of Auxerre, result from a very early confusion of Patrick with Palladius.¹⁸

¹⁶One may note in passing the Gaulish nature of much of the non-numismatic material in the Ballinrees Hoard, Bateson, "Roman Material", p. 63. Some of the pieces bear a striking resemblance to the well known objects from Vermand, see. E. James, *The Franks*, Oxford 1988, pp. 49-51.

¹⁷J. B. Bury, *The Life of St. Patrick and His Place in History*, London 1905, p. 343, fn. 3.

¹⁸T. F. O'Rahilly, *The Two Patricks: a Lecture on the History of Christianity in Fifth Century Ireland*, Dublin 1942.

As to Patrick's chronology, there are problems no matter how one tries to calculate it. Everybody agrees, on the basis of Patrick's Latinity and his reference to the ransoming of Christian captives from the Franks, that Patrick is a fifth century figure. Problems arise when one tries to determine his likely *floruit* and the year of Patrick's death. De Paor argues that he was born about 415 and died in his late seventies in or around 493;¹⁹ Howlett, however, suggests a birth about 390 and a death in 461, aged seventy-one, or alternatively, in 491, aged over a hundred. Who is right? Apart entirely from the fact that centenarians are a rarity even in modern times, the balance of evidence tilts, I think, in favour of de Paor.

Patrick clearly grew up in a Romano-British culture. He tells us that his father was Calpornius, a deacon and a decurion, and that his home was a *villula* or "little villa". As a decurion, Calpornius would have been a member of the local *Ordo* or civilian council among whose responsibilities was the collection of taxes.²⁰ Deficiencies in the revenue raised were made good from the private property of decurions and it is possible that Calpornius may have entered holy orders and become a deacon in an attempt to elude confiscation.²¹ This could explain Patrick's statement that the religion of this childhood was less than fervent. One may even speculate that the declining revenues of Late Roman Britain may have made such an action necessary for decurions. Where Howlett goes wrong, however, is in assuming that such a society could only have existed prior to 410 when the Roman legions were withdrawn and the position of governor of Britain was left unfilled. It is unlikely that on January 1st, A.D. 411, Romano-British culture collapsed. All the signs are otherwise. Prosper of Aquitaine, in his *Contra Collatorem*, written c. 434, describes Britain as the "Roman island" (*Romanan insulam*),²² while the famous letter to Aetius, written between 446 and 452, shows that there was still a population on the island which regarded itself as Roman as late as the middle of the fifth century.²³ If Patrick was a native of Western Britain it seems that he could have been born at any time prior to 430 and still have had the experience of growing up in a Romanised society. One is tempted to remark, however, that the attractions of becoming a deacon would have faded for Calpornius after 410. Given that a decurion needed to have reached the age of thirty before being elected, this may indicate that Patrick was born before 410 or shortly thereafter. The archaeological evidence for coinage in Late Roman Britain suggests that it fades out around the year 430, but one has to be careful in using Patrick's two references as indicating that he had spent most of his life in a coin-using society. One usage relates to Gaul while the other is an assertion that Patrick did not gain as much as half a scruple from baptizing converts, a reference which could be simply literary. Indeed, Dolley's analysis of the numismatic evidence, which is not referred to by Howlett, pointed out that "there is something *prime facie* unlikely about a Patrician captivity beginning in the early 400s"²⁴ and concluded that a date in the 420s, tying in with the Ballinrees Hoard, was more likely. This would again suggest a birth date for Patrick c. 410–415.

Following Thompson,²⁵ de Paor suggests that Patrick was appointed as a bishop to East Ulster, probably to a community which had commenced as Christian captives. From there he

¹⁹A similar conclusion was reached by Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to A. D. 500*, London 1981, p. 319.

²⁰J. Wachter, *The Towns of Roman Britain*, 2nd ed. London 1993, p. 36.

²¹Howlett, *Book of Letters*, p. 117.

²²The text is given by T. M. Charles-Edwards in Dumville, *St. Patrick*, p. 1.

²³M. Winterbottom (ed.), *Gildas: the Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, Phillimore 1978, pp. 23–24, 95 and 149.

²⁴M. Dolley, "Roman Coins from Ireland and the Date of St. Patrick", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 76 C (1976), 189.

²⁵E. A. Thompson, *Who was St. Patrick?*, Woodbridge 1985.

headed west to Roscommon and Mayo where, breaking with convention, he established a mission to convert unbelievers. The *Confessio* appears to be written in response to accusations that this activity was out of order, that he lacked authority for it, and that he was acting for profit.

In addition to the important light which the author sheds on the Gaulish background to the christianization of Ireland, de Paor also has an interesting suggestion for the origins of monasticism. The early Irish church was governed by bishops who, in accordance with canon law, were all men. Yet Patrick refers to the presence of "virgins of Christ" and the earliest known monastery appears to have been at Kildare, traditionally founded by "Brigid". Could it be, he asks, that monasticism may have been promoted initially by women simply because they had no other way of achieving prominence in the early Irish church? It might be said that this suggestion tells us more about the impact of feminist theory on modern scholarship than it does about Irish society in the fifth century. It is, however, a new perception and one which is well worth pursuing. Liam de Paor has given scholars much to think about in this handsomely produced book but, in truth, he wears his learning lightly. The writing style is elegant and he has perfected the art of presenting complex ideas simply. His book deserves a wide readership.

In 1931–32, when the first Patrician Year was celebrated, sixteen books and thirty-five learned papers were published. During 1961–62, when the alleged 1500th anniversary of the saint's death was commemorated, five books and thirty-seven academic articles appeared, in addition to thirteen books and 115 booklets or features aimed at the general public.²⁶ The outpouring of learning led inevitably to controversies, many of them acrimonious, and epitomized by the witty observation that Patrician studies was a field in which scholars had left no stone unthrown.²⁷ This productive period, however, was succeeded by a fallow phase in which academics, with some notable exceptions,²⁸ appeared to regard the Patrician debate as exhausted. David Dumville returns to several of the topics disputed in the 1950s and 1960s, and endeavours to provide a fair summary of the current state of knowledge and interpretation. His book consists of thirty-four essays in which various difficult issues, both large and small, are reassessed.

The essays revolve around three main themes: Palladius and the events of the early fifth century; Patrick's life and times; and the development of the legend. The volume opens with an important essay by Thomas Charles-Edwards on Palladius, Prosper and Leo the Great. He argues that during the 450s missionary activity among the barbarians, and the right to consecrate a bishop to care for barbarian christians, was a matter of concern in the highest circles of Christendom. This interest was reflected in a sermon preached by Pope Leo at Rome on the feastday of SS Peter and Paul in 441 and also in the writings of Prosper of Aquitaine who was Leo's friend and, perhaps, his adviser. The major themes of Leo's pontificate (440–461) were the streamlining of government within the church, the assertion

²⁶The figures are cited from A. J. R. Harvey's forthcoming bibliography of Patrician Studies, by Alannah Hopkin, *The Living Legend of Saint Patrick*, New York 1989, p. 150.

²⁷Dolley, "Roman Coins from Ireland", p. 182.

²⁸Among the major publications one may note R. P. C. Hanson, *St. Patrick: His Origins and Career*, Oxford 1968; L. de Paor, "The aggrandisement of Armagh", in T. D. Williams (ed.), *Historical Studies*, 8 (Dublin 1971), 95–110; P. A. Wilson, "St Patrick and Irish Christian Origins", *Studia Celtica*, 14–15 (1979–80), 344–379. C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to A.D. 500*, London 1981, pp. 295–346; R. Sharpe, "St. Patrick and the See of Armagh", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 4 (Winter 1982), 35–59; *idem.*, "Armagh and Rome in the Seventh Century", in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), *Ireland and Europe: the Early Church*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 58–72; *idem.*, "Some problems concerning the organization of the Church in early medieval Ireland", *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 230–270; E. A. Thompson, *Who was St. Patrick?*, (Woodbridge 1985); C. Doherty, "The Cult of St. Patrick and the Politics of Armagh in the Seventh Century", in J.-M. Picard (ed.), *Ireland and Northern France A.D. 600–850*, Blackrock 1991, pp. 53–94.

of the Bishop of Rome's primacy as the successor of St. Peter, and countering the spread of heresy among the barbarians. In such a context it is plausible to conclude that Roman concern with the Irish mission of Palladius did not end in 431. There was, as de Paor and others have argued, a strong Gaulish element associated with the mission of Palladius, but later in the fifth century the guiding influence appears to have been British. This switch in control is thought to be related to the collapse of Roman power in Northern Gaul largely as a result of Frankish inroads after c.450. It is probably this phase of Frankish activity (or the expansion under Clovis in the 480s?) that Patrick alludes to when he mentions the Gaulish practice of ransoming Christian captives from the Franks. Developing Charles-Edwards' theme it seems reasonable to note that this transfer of missionary responsibility from Gaul to Britain is unlikely to have been carried out on anything other than an initiative of Rome. The expansion of the Franks, which occurred mostly after the death of Childeric (481/2), did not isolate Britain and Ireland from Roman developments. This is precisely the period (from c.475 to c.525) of our best archaeological evidence for contacts between the Mediterranean, Ireland and Western Britain.²⁹ Indeed, it is likely that it was as a response to the rise of pagan Frankish power and the subsequent difficulty of travelling through Central and Northern Gaul that the Atlantic routeway between the Mediterranean and Ireland was opened up c.475. Again, it cannot be without significance that this routeway declines in importance shortly after the conversion of the Frankish royal family to Christianity.

In an interesting piece on Auxilius, Iserninus, Secundinus and Benignus, Dumville wonders momentarily if the names might be a scholarly joke: Auxilius as Patrick's helper; Secundinus, his second in command; Benignus, the kindly face of the mission; and Iserninus, its stern (iarn-) or hard man! The thought, I confess, had also crossed my mind but Dumville's analysis indicates that there is nothing improbable about Auxilius, Iserninus and Secundinus as fifth century names. Auxilius and Iserninus are likely to be of Gaulish origin, Secundinus could be British or Gaulish, but some doubt surrounds the use of Benignus as a fifth century name. Since the time of Todd it has been recognised that Patrician hagiographers probably grafted elements from the career of Palladius onto that of Patrick.³⁰ The visits to Auxerre and Rome certainly seem to form part of this transfer and in a chapter which will be a starting point for future students, Dumville has performed the useful exercise of extracting the potential "acta Paladii" from the later lives of Patrick.

Several essays examine the date of St Patrick, and Dumville argues convincingly, in my view, for a *floruit* in the second half of the fifth century. Perhaps the most important evidence in this regard is the testimony of the Irish annals regarding the bishops who are described as Patrick's companions and disciples. With the exception of Secundinus, Auxilius, Benignus and Iserninus, long regarded as probable companions or successors of Palladius, all of the others (including Ailbhe of Emly) died between 487 and 549. Dumville cites the instance of the Briton Maucteus (Mochta) who is described in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, written c.697, as *discipulus Patricii*. According to the *Annals of Ulster* Mochta died in 535, and there is no obvious reason to doubt either Adomnán or the date. This plausible linkage of Patrick with a person who died in or around 535 suggests that Patrick himself could hardly have died much more than a generation before. From the story recounted by Adomnán one concludes that there was a monastery of Mochta's separated from one of Columba's "by the width of one small hedge". Although Dumville is correct in saying that the identification of this site

²⁹M. G. Fulford, "Byzantium and Britain: a Mediterranean perspective on Post-Roman Mediterranean imports in Western Britain and Ireland", *Medieval Archaeol.*, 33 (1989), 1-5.

³⁰J. H. Todd, *St. Patrick: Apostle of Ireland*, Dublin 1864, pp. 265-345 and 393-399.

has proved elusive, it is almost certainly Louth where there is still a church site within its own enclosure immediately adjoining the main monastic complex.³¹

The choice of Armagh as a church-site and its foundation date are the subject of an essay on Emain Macha and Ard Macha. It was long assumed that Armagh's location was dictated by its proximity to Emain Macha (Navan Fort), a christian counter to the ancient ritual site. Archaeological excavation, however, has shown that the heyday of Emain Macha was well over by the fifth century A.D. It now seems unlikely that Armagh was established as a counter to Emain Macha. More than twenty years ago, Etienne Rynne stated that "Cathedral Hill, the ancient Ard Macha, is the only Irish pagan Celtic sanctuary-site which we can identify with any degree of certainty".³² Excavation of the site has yielded evidence for an enclosure with an external bank, typical of Iron Age ritual sites.³³ From this one may conclude that the initial christians were attracted to Armagh by the presence of a ritual site on the immediate summit. They positioned themselves at the foot of the hill in the spot subsequently known as *Fertae Martyrum*, where excavations have uncovered a cemetery dating from the fifth century.³⁴ There is a possibility that the earliest graves in this cemetery are pagan but its continued use enables us to postulate Christians at Armagh from the fifth century. The evidence linking Patrick with Armagh is slight but, as Doherty has pointed out, that is not to say a great deal.³⁵ Evidence linking him with anywhere is scarce, but what there is suggests Saul and Downpatrick more than Armagh. As for Armagh's foundation date of 444, it was arrived at in the eighth century and it has an obvious numerological feel which seems to have passed unnoticed in most of the literature.

There was a time when historians endeavoured to calculate the chronology of Patrick by means of dating Coroticus who was equated with either Ceredig of Strathclyde or Ceredig of Cardigan(shire). Dumville shows, however, that neither identification is reliable and Coroticus cannot be used as a means of dating Patrick's mission. He follows Thompson in suggesting that Coroticus was operating from within Ireland rather than from Britain. The volume concludes with several essays devoted to the development of the Patrick legend. The topics covered include the hymn *Audite omnes amantes*, the form of the *Confessio* in the *Book of Armagh*, St. Patrick in the *Historia Brittonum*, the edition of a poem from *Lebor na gCert* on Patrick and the Scandinavians of Dublin, and an edition (different from Bieler's) of Muirchú's *Life of Patrick* from the *Book of Armagh*. All in all, this book is a useful reference work (the bibliography alone is almost thirty pages long) and it is an important contribution to Patrician scholarship.

Before leaving Dumville's book, however, mention should be made of another essay, the only archaeological contribution in the volume. This is a consideration by K. R. Dark of St. Patrick's *villula* and the occupation of Romano-British buildings during the fifth century. The word *villula* may simply mean a farm or an estate, but since Patrick tells us (*Ep.* 10) that there were slaves and handmaids in his father's house, interest has understandably concentrated on the possibility that this was a villa in the modern archaeological sense of the term. In the current state of knowledge, occupation of such villas seems to cease c.430.

³¹First identified by L. P. Murray, "Monasteries of Louth I: the Pre-Norman Monasteries", *Co. Louth Archaeol. J.*, 1:1(1904), 28. For other references, see J. Bradley, "The Medieval Borough of Louth: an archaeological study", *Co. Louth Archaeol. & Hist. J.*, 21:1 (1985), 12-15.

³²E. Rynne, "Celtic Stone Idols in Ireland", in C. Thomas (ed.), *The Iron Age in the Irish Sea Province*, London 1972, p. 80.

³³C. Gaskell-Brown and A. E. T. Harper, "Excavations at Cathedral Hill, Armagh, 1968", in *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 47 (1984), 109-61.

³⁴C. Lynn, "Excavations at 46-48 Scotch Street, Armagh", *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 51 (1988), 69-84.

³⁵Doherty, "The Cult of St. Patrick", p. 72.

Evidence for fifth-century activity usually consists of what archaeologists refer to as "squatter occupation". This is small scale domestic use involving the repair of a few rooms or their alteration in such a way as to pre-suppose the absence of Romanised building techniques. It is a characteristic of such occupation that, instead of laying down new mosaics, hearths were built upon and postholes cut through mosaic floors. Baths and hypocaust systems fell into disuse and sometimes simple timber buildings were erected in the courtyards of, or near, fourth-century villa sites.

Patrick tells us that his *villula* was near a *vicus*, i.e. a small town or village. Dark, however, considers a *vicus* too small to have warranted the *Ordo* implied by Calpurnius' status as a decurion. The places governed by an *Ordo* were *civitas* capitals and, by implication, Patrick was reared near one. The combination of *civitas* capital, small town and villa necessitates, according to Dark, a lowland, civilian zone, almost certainly in the West Country, with the Cotswolds and Southern Dorset as his preferred locations. Dark's reasoning is impeccable but he overlooks an important exception to his distribution pattern. Carlisle was a *civitas* capital and excavations have revealed occupation evidence of fifth century date.³⁶ There is also a famous reference in the *Life of St. Cuthbert* to a fountain, in use at Carlisle during the seventh century.³⁷ If this was the result of upkeep rather than a natural spring then it suggests an element of settlement continuity from the fifth century into the seventh. Evidence for fifth-century urban activity in the north-east of Britain is important because Thomas has already identified the likely location of Patrick's birthplace, *Bannaventa Berniae* (Howlett's reading, incidentally), as near Birdoswald (*Banna*), some fifteen miles east of Carlisle.³⁸ Muirchú, writing in the late seventh century says that it was then called *Ventre*, and was "a place not far from our sea", a description which would appear to rule out both the Cotswolds and Southern Dorset.

The archaeology in the title of Cormac Bourke's book is not that of the fifth century but rather the archaeology of Patrick the saint. His book is a study of Patrick's relics and it was published in association with a major exhibition mounted by the Ulster Museum.³⁹ The earliest container for relics recovered from Ireland is a stone box, which enclosed a smaller wooden casket, from Dromiskin, Co. Louth. This a Mediterranean type of reliquary and it dates to the sixth or seventh century. The earliest native shrine is made of tinned bronze plates and was found in the River Blackwater at Clonmore, Co. Armagh. It is a gabled (or "tomb-shaped") reliquary, decorated in a late Celtic style showing no sign of the Germanic influence apparent in the Book of Durrow. It is very similar to the shrine that survives at Bobbio which may have been brought there by Columbanus (d.615) himself.⁴⁰ Bourke suggests a date of c.600 for the Clonmore shrine, and although this may evoke quibbles, stylistically there can be little doubt but that it was made in the initial decades of the seventh century.

³⁶B. C. Burnham and J. S. Wachter, *The Small Towns of Roman Britain*, London 1990, p. 58; M. McCarthy, "Carlisle", *Current Archaeology*, 68 (1979), 268-272.

³⁷M. R. McCarthy, "Thomas, Chadwick and post-Roman Carlisle", in S. M. Pearce (ed.) *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, Oxford 1982, pp. 241-256.

³⁸Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 312-314.

³⁹The most important previous study of Patrician relics is M. de Paor, "The Relics of Saint Patrick", *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 4, no. 2 (1961-62), 87-91; I am grateful to our Hon. Editor, Professor Etienne Rynne, for this reference.

⁴⁰M. Ryan, "Decorated metalwork in the Museo dell'Abbazia, Bobbio, Italy", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 120 (1990), 102-111.

The cult of relics expanded significantly in the course of the seventh century, particularly after the 630s when Armagh acquired the Roman relics of SS. Peter, Paul, Stephen and Lawrence.⁴¹ Armagh was not Patrick's place of burial and it lacked corporeal remains. The possession of Roman relics, however, was a compensation but, interestingly, there were other Roman relics in Ireland. The *Vita Tripartita*, written c.900 but based on earlier materials, claims that Palladius left his books, his casket with the relics of Peter and Paul, and his writing board at Cell Fine in Leinster. The fact that these relics were associated with an obscure Leinster church, subsequently taken over by Armagh, tends to suggest that the tradition is genuine. If it had lacked foundation, the Armagh propagandists are unlikely to have volunteered this information so freely. Cell Fine, in fact, is so obscure that its site is uncertain. Bourke and others⁴² have identified it with Killeen Cormac, Co. Kildare, but the basis is a shaky etymology by Shearman who thought that Killeen might be a rendering of Cell Fine.⁴³ Nicholls, however, has shown that Killeen Cormac is probably derived from Cell Ingen Cormaic and has proposed the interesting suggestion that Cell Fine is to be equated with Kilpoole (named after St. Paul), south of Wicklow town.⁴⁴ This places a question mark over Bourke's interesting suggestion of a relationship between the incised figure at Killeen Cormac and the image of St. Paul on a bronze cross-arm, probably from Armagh. Bourke may well be right, however, in suggesting that the casket which held the Cell Fine relics may have given rise to the Irish tradition reflected in the manufacture of the Bobbio and Clonmore shrines.

Armagh was the focus of Patrick's cult but, particularly in the eighth and ninth centuries, it was also an important centre for the manufacture of fine metalwork. Much light has been shed on the nature of that metalworking by the recovery of a hoard from Shanmullagh, on the River Blackwater. Unfortunately the pieces were not removed in controlled circumstances and many objects are still privately held. Much of the hoard consists of broken pieces destined for recycling but it is clear, nonetheless, that it derived from an ecclesiastical milieu. Fragments of several gabled reliquaries and book-shrines are present, as well as a bronze strainer of the type used to purify wine, and a cross-arm bearing the image and name of St. Paul (SCS PAULUS). Evidently a major church treasury was the source, and the evidence points towards Armagh. This is likely, not only because of geographical proximity but also on account of the presence of millefiori which is matched in the excavated material from Armagh town. The hoard appears to have been lost by a Hiberno-Viking metalworker who met with a mishap on the Blackwater towards the end of the ninth century.

Cormac Bourke is an acknowledged expert on early Irish hand-bells and he gives an admirable account of the several bells associated with St. Patrick. He concludes, nevertheless, that none can be attributed confidently to the saint. Coming from the edge of the Roman Empire, Patrick may never have possessed a bell, whereas Palladius, with his

⁴¹C. Doherty, "The Use of Relics in Early Ireland", in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richeter (eds.), *Ireland and Europe: the Early Church*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 89–101.

⁴²W. Stokes (ed.), *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, 1 vol. in 2, London 1887, p. 621; E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum*, Dublin 1910, p. 192; A. P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, Dublin 1982, pp. 20 and 47; L. de Paor, *St. Patrick's World*, p. 126; Bourke, *Patrick*, pp. 17 and 38.

⁴³J. F. Shearman, *Loca Patriciana*, Dublin 1879, pp. 1–15 and 34–37. Note how the placename Cill-Fine-Cormaic is invented, *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁴K. Nicholls, "The Land of the Leinstermen", *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 547–548.

Gaulish if not Mediterranean background, almost certainly came equipped with one. The Irish tradition of using hand-bells may descend from the early part of the fifth century. The interest in enshrining Patrick's relics continued into the late Middle Ages and some of the finest reliquaries, including the shrine of St. Patrick's tooth and the shrine of St. Patrick's hand, belong to this period. Another reliquary of this date is the shrine of St. Patrick's head now preserved in the Hunt Museum, Limerick (Illus. 2). The bronze head of the shrine is almost certainly continental in origin and probably of fourteenth century date; the base, on the other hand, is Irish, and the inscription records that it was made in honour of St. Patrick for James Butler, the fourth Earl of Ormond, who died in 1452. The base is raised on feet in the form of three-dimensional cast lions, a treatment which is unique in Ireland but which has a long continental ancestry. One can only assume that the head was obtained outside of Ireland and then fused to the base so that it might be exposed for display and veneration.

* * * *

At the end of this review it is perhaps fair to ask if a new consensus has emerged regarding the problem of St. Patrick. Perhaps a consensus is too much to ask for in Patrician studies, but a general picture is certainly emerging. From this it would seem that Christianity became a potent force in Ireland during the first third of the fifth century as a result of two factors. Firstly, the capture of Christians from Britain and their sale into slavery, and, secondly, a growing body of Irish converts.⁴⁵ These had contact with Britain, and perhaps the continent, and so in 431 Palladius was sent as their first bishop. There followed a period of activity characterised by Gaulish personnel. Among these may be mentioned Auxilius (associated with Killashee, Co. Kildare), Iserninus (probably associated with Aghade, Co. Carlow), and Secundinus (associated with Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath), and in Connacht figures such as Sachellus and Caetiachus.⁴⁶ The collapse of Gallo-Roman society caused, or certainly contributed to, a change of control in the Irish Church. British personalities now began to play a more important rôle, and among these was Patrick. Patrick was probably a native of northern Britain, appointed initially as bishop to a population comprised substantially of British captives, perhaps in Ulster. From here he extended his brief into areas where he was a missionary converting non-believers, and the *Confessio* was probably written in response to charges that this activity was out of order. In terms of chronology Patrick's episcopal career fits better into the second half of the fifth century, rather than the first, and a date of death in or around 493 is probably not far out.

In the course of reading David Howlett's commentary I was introduced to the idea of *chiasmus*, a rhetorical or literary device which can be defined as the use of parallelism in reverse order. All of which is just a fancy way of saying that I want to finish, like Patrick, where I began. As a child growing up in Kilkenny, it puzzled me that if my parish was dedicated to St. Patrick why was the city not called Kilpatrick? Surely Patrick was more important than Canice? The answer, of course, was that, in the seventh century, the *aeclessia hirRoigniu Martorthige* was an example of a church which was richer in antiquity than in

⁴⁵It was, after all, to the Irish (*ad Scottos*) that Palladius was sent.

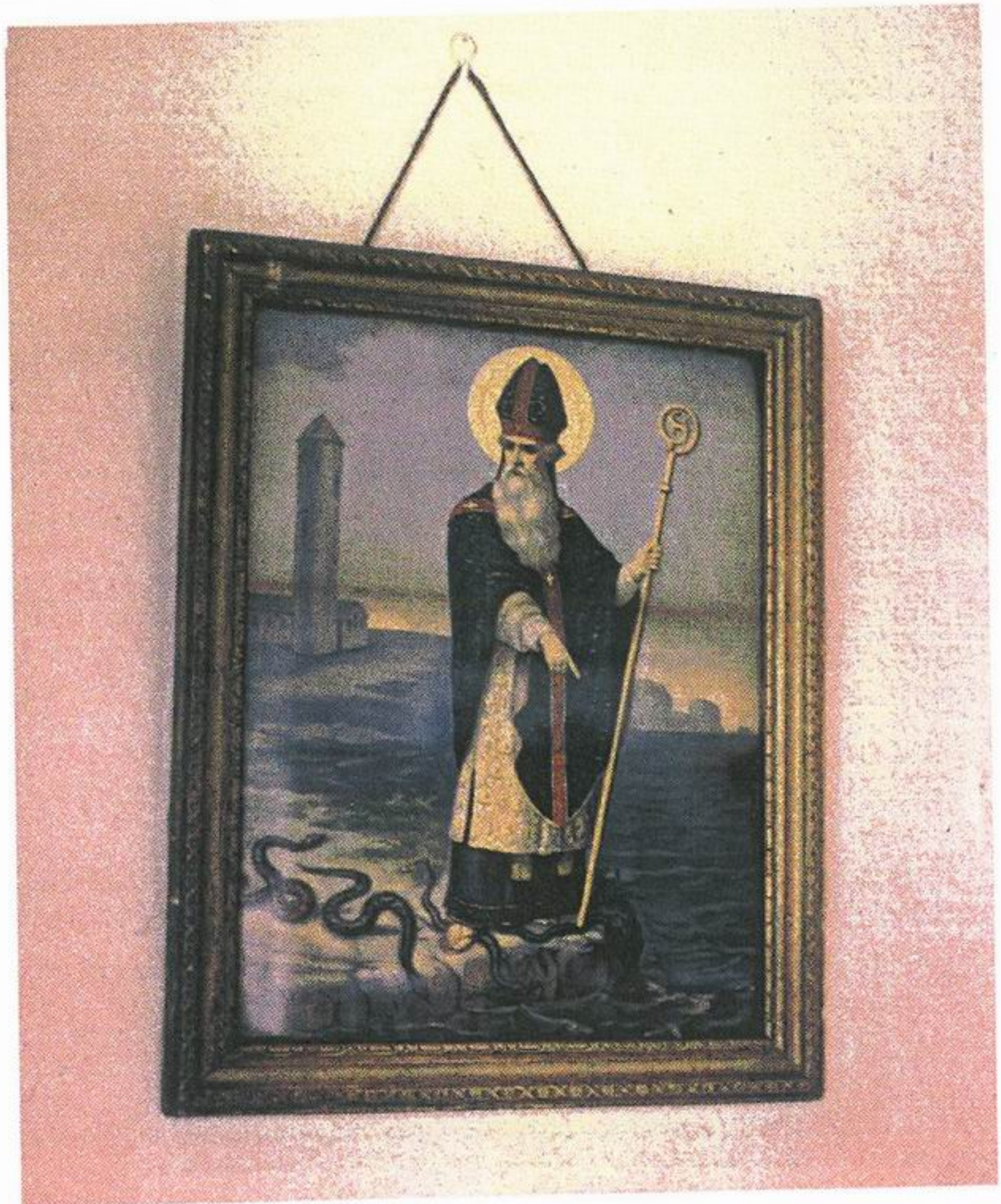
⁴⁶Doherty, "The Use of Relics", p. 92.

⁴⁷Doherty, "The Cult of St. Patrick", pp. 74-79.



Illus. 2 Late Medieval Bronze Reliquary Head of St. Patrick. (*Photo: Courtesy of The Hunt Museum, Limerick*).

influence. The newly established, energetic and heavily patronised church of Canice was in danger of pushing it out of existence. Like Sletty and other churches,⁴⁷ the Martorteach survived because it placed itself under Armagh's umbrella and swallowed the Patrician pill. Today, in the city of Kilkenny, St. Patrick's parish has more parishioners than St. Canice's. Its survival and growth is, in its way, as striking a testimonial as any to the skill and acumen of those seventh century ecclesiastical politicians who created the legend of St. Patrick.



Illus. 3 Undoubtedly the best-known and best loved representation of St. Patrick, copies being widely distributed throughout Ireland and in Irish homes abroad. (Photo: E. Rynne)