

# SAINT PATRICK IN ORMOND

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In the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick there occurs a passage dealing with St. Patrick's journey through Ormond. It appears also in the Book of Ballymote in a somewhat different form and is discussed by Dr. Eoin MacNeill in *Eriu*<sup>(1)</sup>. It reads "ocus osin sair tuaidh tar thaiscert Slebe Eblinde co Gaethigh i. abann edir Araib ocus Muscraige Thire co hairm ad(t)eid a nDergdhere" (i.e. "from the north eastward over the north of Slieve Eblinne to Gaethech i.e. the river between Arai and Muscraige Thire, to the place where it enters Dergdeirc").

This is an interesting passage and valuable for our local place-name story. Let us therefore first identify the localities enumerated. Slieve Eblinne is the range of hills bounding Ormond on the south and stretching between the Devil's Bit (Bearna nEli) and Ciamaltha (Keeper Hill). On the Elizabethan maps and elsewhere they are called "the 12 great hills of Phelim". They are mentioned very widely in many of our most venerable texts such as the Book of Leinster, the Book of Lecan, the Book of Lismore, etc.<sup>(2)</sup> It may be of interest to give the names of the hills as they were taught to the children in Killeen school in Templederry parish now about half a century ago, viz., Knockacraheen, Knockadageen, Ballincara, Cooneen, Comanebeg, Comanemore, Gurtahuma, Rathanure, Islandtane, Fantane, Mountkinane, Cullohill<sup>(3)</sup>. "Gaethech" is the "river of Gaegh" so often referred to in the Cromwellian Civil Survey of 1654 both in Upper and Lower Ormond. It rises in Curreeney and proceeds by Poll an Easa and Cloghinch to Latteragh, Ballinaclough, Tyone, and Nenagh and, having joined the Ollatrim river below the town, flows on to Lough Derg which it enters just north of Dromineer castle<sup>(4)</sup>. It is the abann Ua Cathbada of the Topographical Poem of O'Heerin and of O'Donovan's supplement to O'Reilly's Dictionary. This name derives from a family who inhabited the mountain areas of Upper Ormond in pre-Dalcassian times. "Derghdeirc" is of course Lough Derg, the "red hollow" or depression which derives its name from a tale related about a king of Muscraige who gave one of his eyes as an offering to a Druid leaving "a Red Hollow"<sup>(5)</sup>. In the Supplement to O'Brien's dictionary as well as on some of the medieval maps have it however as "Derghart"<sup>(6)</sup>.

"Muscraige Thire" is the most ancient name for the two Ormond baronies and derives from the pre-Dalcassian inhabitation by the pre-Celtic Muscraige who had seven other territories in Munster<sup>(7)</sup>. Aradh or Aradh Thire represents another pre-Dalcassian territory still preserved as Duithche Aradh or Duharra.

## NOTES

- p.1 1. *Eriu* xi. pp.35-6 from *Ballymote* 174 a 18.  
2. The references are set out by Hogan in *Onomasticon* p.608.  
3. *Ex relatione* Mr. Martin Gleeson, Curraghaneddy.  
4. *Civil Survey Co. Tipperary* Vol. 2 (ed. Simington for the Irish Mss. Commission); and cf. Hogan *Onomasticon* p.3.  
5. The references will be found in Hogan *ubi cit.* p.342.  
p.2 6. O'Sullivan l.i.5. has 'Dergertus Lacus.'  
7. The many textual references are collected by Hogan *ubi cit.* p.553; and cf. Butler (W.F.) "Clan and Settler in Ormond" in *Journal Cork Arch. Soc.* (1915).



This family also had other territories in Munster of which Aradh Cliach round Tipperary town is one; indeed the county place-name derives from them<sup>(8)</sup>. The place where the river enters Derg is not named but is clearly "Druim inbhir in Muscraige Tire" to give the form from the Book of Ballymote<sup>(9)</sup>.

There is one other point of note. The text describes the river of Gaethech as "the river between Arai and Muscraige Thire." Now in modern times this is not so—the Nenagh river is not now the bounds between Ormond and Aradh. One might be tempted to take the textual reference as an approximation only but the ancients were more exact than that and it would be a mistake to do so. For there is a large body of evidence that—certainly up to the 12th or 13th centuries—the Book of Ballymote evidence is correct. I have gone into this at some length in a forthcoming work. Let us point out only here that the parish of Kilmore, now in Upper Ormond, was once clearly in Aradh. Its lands up to 1654 remained in possession of the Aradh family of O'Glesáin who appear in the Aradh genealogies. Kilmore itself is called "Cill Mor Aradh Thire" by Colgan and in other sources<sup>(10)</sup>.

Therefore St. Patrick came into Muscraige Thire or Ormond "from the north eastward over the north of Slieve Eblinne" and proceeded via the Nenagh river to where it enters Lough Derg at Dromineer. The expression "from the north east over the north" is confusing as if one takes it literally it means that the saint came from the north east and returned north east again since all Muscraige or Ormond lies north of the hills. We have one other ancient source for his travels in Ormond. This is the Book of Lismore<sup>(11)</sup>. This describes the welcome given to the saint by the people at "Brosnacha Ele" i.e. the river of Brosna in Eli Ui Cearbhaill or rather on the bounds between Eli and Muscraige; for the Brosna river, now as always, is the northern bound of Ormond.

Can we add anything to these extracts to show where St. Patrick travelled in the Ormond country? We can do so only from such evidence as may be derived from place-name or tradition. There are at least three places in Ormond which strongly suggest themselves in this connection. The first of these is Tobar Phadraig or St. Patrick's well in Ballycahill beside the old ruined parish church of the 'lost' parish of Donemona now amalgamated with Kilmore. Here is quite an interesting monument, little known. The church has gone, but in O'Donovan's time some portions of it remained in Mr. Ryan's haggard at Ballycahill and O'Donovan writes that, though there was then no graveyard (i.e. about 1840) human bones "were to be found on the surface of the ground". To this he adds, "Patrick's Well or Tobar Phadraig is situate in the same townland (Ballycahill) about 30 perches west of the old church and about a mile and a half north of the old church of Kilmore. This was formerly reputed a holy well but devotions at it have been long since discontinued." As a small boy the writer often was taken to see this site which, in addition to a fine running spring of water, had two adjoining stones on which were pointed out the marks of St. Patrick's knees and of the point of his staff. O'Donovan's surveyor (O'Keeffe) does not mention these in his description. It will be noted that this site would be on or very near the line of the saint's journey 'northward' from Ciamaltha to Dromineer<sup>(12)</sup>.

Somewhat northward of Ballycahill and in the parish of Burgess adjoining

8. See Butler (W.F.) *ubi cit* N.7.

9. BB. f. 141 b. The other references will be found in Hogan *ubi cit.* p. 355.

10. e.g. in Vita S. Senani, in *Cathreim Toirdhealbhaigh* and in the early Ormond Deeds Calendar it is also placed in Aradh.

p.3 11. Tripartite Life 214; Bk. Lismore 6 a. ; Hogan *ubi cit.* p. 129.

12. Ord. Survey Letters Tipperary III Psh. Kilmore p. 352.



is another Tobar Phadraig at Patrickswell, Carrigatoher. Of this O'Keeffe writes in the Survey Letters, "Patrick's Well, a holy well which gives name to a townland in this parish, is still visited on Saturdays for the cure of diseases, etc."<sup>13</sup>.

A third site, this time in Lower Ormond, will take us further north still and nearer to the Brosna river. This is in the parish of Ardcrone and adjoining the road between Nenagh and Borrisokane and quite near the ruined church and conjoined castle of Ardcrone itself. The site is known locally as "Monin na dha Iascaraigh" or the little bog of the two fishermen. Tradition states that when St. Patrick passed here on his missionary journey he was short of food. There was then on the site a small lake or pond in which he found two men fishing whom he asked for bread. They refused him and the saint, being angry, turned them into two blocks of stone which are still to be seen there. This is a typical example of a place where a tradition of the Christian era is fastened on to a pagan site. For there is no doubt that the stone remains are those of a typical megalithic tomb of the Bronze Age or earlier. Indeed Ardcrone is one of the few places in Ormond where there remains evidence of inhabitation in this early period; quite apart from this megalith one of the early Bronze Age gold gorgets which came to the National Museum from the Sirr collection is noted as having been found in Ardcrone.

From the foregoing therefore can we make at least a conjectural reconstruction of the 'turas' of the saint in the area known as Ormond. To return to the expression "from the north eastward over the north of Slieve Eblinne," if we put a comma between 'north' and 'eastward' we may read the passage as meaning that he came 'eastward' from the Limerick side and via the south bank of the Shannon—thus bearing southward towards Newport and Curreeny to the headwaters of the Gaethech in the latter place. This accords with the preceding passages in the Tripartite Life which describe his visiting Finnine in Limerick from which he blessed Thomond and foretold the coming of St. Senan to Iniscathaigh. He never visited Clare. From Curreeny he went northward again via Kilmore and Ballycahill to Carrigatoher and thence by Dromineer and Ardcrone to the Brosna river where he entered Eli Ui Cearbhaill. Yet another trace of the saint is to be found in Uskane where the Civil Survey of 1654 indicates (Tipperary, Vol. II, p. 327) that one of the parish bounds is "by a ditch to a well called Tobberpatrick in the parish of Ballingarry." I am told that no trace of this well now survives. The only other tradition of the saint I know of in the Ormond area concerns not himself but his cow. This is the "Rinne Bó Phadruig" or track of St. Patrick's cow at Grenanstown in Toomevara. On the ancient road, part of which still remains, between Latteragh and Tyone and just after it passes across the road from Ballinamona cross to Grawn, is found a large stone by the roadside with a depression in it said to have been made by the knee of the saint's cow when she fell while running from the devil<sup>14</sup>. This is an ancient folk tale found in various parts of Ireland and notably in Waterford and south Tipperary. I have not met it elsewhere in the Ormond country. St. Patrick himself does not appear in it—only his cow—and, therefore, it may be neglected in our search for his footsteps in the area of the ancient Muscraige.

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13. Ibid. Psh. Burgessbeg p. 341.

14. The old road leaves the main Nenagh/Thurles road at Sallypark and proceeds via Kilnafinch, Carrick Maunsell, and Carrick Peacocke, to cross the Ballinamona to Toomevara road a little east of Ballinamona cross.