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Abstract

St Patrick is a figure unique in the culture of late antique Britain, because his writings are almost the only British literary texts of the fifth century. Their interpretation has yet been hamstrung by uncertainty on where Patrick was born, and when he lived. But research in the 1990s convincingly showed St Patrick's home of *Bannaventa* to be Banwell, North Somerset, in a region west of Bath and with many Roman villas. Further analysis now offers dates for him, putting his letter to the tyrant Coroticus in the 450s, so that Patrick will have died in (it seems) 461 and not (as claimed by some) 493. His writings are evidence for Britain up to the 450s. They thus tell us nothing about later periods, which were dominated by the Saxon invasions of 449 and later, but are never mentioned by Patrick.

Key words: St Patrick, Somerset, *Bannaventa*, Coroticus

When so much on St Patrick is uncertain, it is good to say that one problem is now solved. The local historian Harry Jelley in the 1990s analysed the famous (and notorious) phrase at the beginning of Patrick's *Confessio*, where he describes his father, *qui fuit vico Bannavem Taburniae, villulam enim prope habuit, ubi ego capturam dedi*: in English: "who lived at *Bannaventa Tabernae*, because he had a small estate nearby, where I was taken prisoner." Jelley identified the saint's home of (emended) *Bannaventa Tabernae* ("market-place by a hill and with an inn") as Banwell, a village near Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset.¹ He later set out the case in a book.² The upshot is clear. Patrick came from a prosperous and thoroughly Romanized part of Britain. It had many villas and was close to the civilized amenities of Bath. Unfortunately for Patrick, the region was (following the decline of Roman power) in his time also open to attack from the sea. By about 400 CE the wealth and low-lying coastlines of the Bristol Channel area were attracting Irish pirates (see below for comments of Leslie Alcock on Cardiff's Roman fort), with permanent consequences for Patrick and Ireland alike. If, then, we can say where Patrick lived, we may now discover when he lived. In this paper, discussion of the matter from the sixteenth century to 2022 is set out, showing how some misconceptions have been long a-dying (others are not dead even now), but also underlining Patrick's letter to Coroticus as crucial evidence. If we can date Coroticus, a prince of the Strathclyde region, we can date Patrick.

¹ Harry Jelley, "The Origins of Saint Patrick," *Irish Studies Review* 12 (1995): 31-36.

² Harry Jelley, *Saint Patrick's Somerset Birthplace* (Somerton, 1998).

We start in Henry VIII's time with his antiquary John Leland (d. 1552), who recorded earlier surmises. From an anonymous Malmesbury chronicle is this: *Anno D. 425. Venit S. Patricius ad Hiberniam* — and from Marian the Scot (1028-82): *Anno D. 394. S. Patricius nascitur in Britannia ex patre Calprun nomine, qui presbyter fuit, filius diaconi nomine Fodit. Mater autem erat Patricii Conches, soror S. Martini de Gallia.*³ But Patrick's uncle was not St Martin of Tours (d. 397). So Leland recorded traditions of Patrick's birth in the fourth century and his missionary work in the earlier fifth; although others now place his career in the later fifth century. The debate continues to this day.

Statements of scribes thereafter obtained the dubious authority of print. Fundamental here were Archbishop Ussher's *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (Dublinii, 1639), spreading the notion that Patrick's home was on the Clyde, and John Colgan's *Acta Sanctorum* (Lovanii, 1645). Ussher specifically located the saint's origins at Kilpatrick, between Glasgow and Dumbarton. It is, like his dating the Creation to 4004 BCE, an opinion still heard (especially from Christians of the Reformed Tradition in Scotland and Northern Ireland). Accounts by Ussher and Colgan on Patrick are neatly summarized in Philip Perry's *Sketch of the Ancient British History*, written in about 1772, but not published until 2009 (see below).

To all this the nineteenth century saw reaction. The year 440, if “not given as more than conjectural and near the truth,” appears as that of Patrick's mission to Ireland, with L.-S. Le Nain de Tillemont (1637-1698) and J. H. Todd (1805-1869) cited on it as being “at a reasonable interval after the certain date of Palladius, AD 431.”⁴ Thereafter came a startling agreement by Charles Plummer (1851-1927), here echoing Edward Ledwich (1738-1823), with those who “have doubted the very existence of St Patrick.”⁵ The phantom Patrick is now (thankfully) exorcized. Ghosts do not write books. Yet difficulties remain. Despite other cogent remarks, Sir John Lloyd (1861-1947) would not discuss Patrick's dates, “their bearing on the history of Wales” being slight. He yet observed that a genealogy listing the Coroticus denounced by Patrick reveals him as king of Strathclyde in about about 450.⁶ The point is crucial and neglected. Few investigate Welsh genealogies. But their evidence for Patrick is decisive. One sees too how an insight offered as long ago as 1911 remains ignored even now. It shows (in a phrase of A. E. Housman from his 1926 edition of Lucan) how scholarship “makes no steady and continuous progress, and relapse accompanies advance.” We shall see a good deal of that “relapse” when we come to books of the present century.

Hugh Williams (1843-1911) made other points. He spoke of Patrick's birth in “about 389” and his youth “during the quiet which the country enjoyed, when the raids of the Picts and Scots following upon the usurpation of Maximus [d. 388] ceased. About 432 he became bishop missionary of Ireland. The most probable date of his death is AD 461.” He cited those who followed Ussher on Patrick's birthplace as “located in North Britain, near

³ *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, 2nd edn (Londini, 1774), I, 301, II, 276.

⁴ A. H. Haddan and William Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1869-78), II, 295.

⁵ *Venerabilis Bedae Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxonii, 1896), II, 25-26.

⁶ J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1911), 107.

Dumbarton on the Clyde,” even though his father “was a deacon and, strange to say, a *decurio* also.”⁷ Williams’s disquiet is evident. How could Patrick be brought up outside the Empire and have a father serving on a Roman municipal institution like the *curia*? The inference is obvious. The family estate was near a city governed by Roman law. That knocks on the head any claim for Strathclyde; or should do.

Further clear reasoning then came from Ireland. After some rhetoric on Patrick as Ireland’s Moses, Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) spoke with precision on chronology. He preferred 461 to 492 as the year when Patrick died, citing Edmund Hogan (1831-1917) on lack of evidence for the saint’s *acta* after 461.⁸ In a schoolbook, John Ryan put the birth in 389, probably “near the Severn mouth” (surely correct), so that his enslaving would be in 405 and his escape in 411; his study at the isle of Lérins (near Cannes) in 412-15; ordination as deacon before 418, followed by 14 years in Auxerre; mission to Ireland in 432; visit to Rome in 440; and death on 17 March 461.⁹ Others were more cautious. Despite a thorough bibliography for the saint’s writings, the Irish-Canadian scholar James Kenney on dating merely cited annals for Patrick’s return to Ireland in 432 and death in 461.¹⁰ Fr Ryan (also with extensive bibliography) thereafter fixed the saint’s departure from Ireland in about 407, his return in 432, his death in 461. Whatever else is obscure on his chronology, he considered that the two latter dates “emerge from it with certainty,” as argued by J. B. Bury.¹¹

Gougaud gave the date of birth as “in the last quarter of the fourth century” and the place as “not far from the sea.” His belief that manuscript “Bannavem Taberniae” refers to an estuary (that of the Clyde) makes no sense; but his remark on the emendation *tabernae* “of a tavern” proposed in 1920 by Newport White is a tremendous breakthrough.¹² We shall come back to it. Elsewhere, Robin Collingwood (1889-1943) placed Patrick’s abduction “about the beginning of the fifth century;” he rejected the Antonine Itinerary’s *Bannaventa* (near Daventry, Northamptonshire) as the locality, taking it instead as “near the western sea; perhaps somewhere not far from the Bristol Channel.” Despite calamities, life went on, so that “when Patrick revisited his home many years later, his family were still there.”¹³ British society was unexpectedly resilient.

Although Patrick’s career in Ireland does not concern us, we note the statement that the saint “nahm (444) seinen bischöflichen Sitz in Armagh (Ulster), der erste Primas von Irland.”¹⁴ Waters of the Patrician question were then stirred by Thomas O’Rahilly, who posited two St Patricks. The elder visited Rome in about 442 and died in 461; the younger (according to O’Rahilly) died in 492.¹⁵ Sensational in its time, the hypothesis remains

⁷ Hugh Williams, *Christianity in Early Britain* (Oxford, 1912), 245, 248-9.

⁸ Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1919), 222.

⁹ John Ryan, *Ireland From the Earliest Times to AD 800* (Dublin, 1928), 50-69.

¹⁰ J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929), 166.

¹¹ John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism* (Dublin, 1931), 60, 75.

¹² Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands* (London, 1932), 31-32.

¹³ R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1937), 305.

¹⁴ Friedrich Worke, *Das Bekenntnis des Heiligen Patrick* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1940), 5.

¹⁵ T. F. O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), 505, 509.

useful, even though attention here is exclusively on the author of the *Confession* and *Letter*. As for Patrick's native villa, a map by William Rees (1887-1978) shows Roman Britain's civil and military zones. West of a line from Scarborough to Sidmouth, villas are almost unknown. In the lowland zone they are frequent. There is a special cluster of them in north Somerset.¹⁶ Archaeologists may have evidence for violent destruction of these, with implications for Patrick.

Kenneth Jackson (1909-91) saw Patrick as a boy of about sixteen enslaved by Irish robbers "at the beginning of the fifth century," when the British Church was strong enough to have produced a heresiarch in the form of Pelagius (who left Britain in about 380). He also cited linguistic analysis by Sarauw and MacNeill. In the earliest Irish, Patrick's name appears as *Cothriche*, because at the time of his mission the Irish language lacked initial *p*, so that his converts used *c* instead. That mission would be "in the middle of the fifth century." Irish changed thereafter, acquiring initial *p*. Hence medieval and modern *Padráig*, borrowed anew from British missionaries.¹⁷ We shall see that Gearóid Mac Eoin of Galway nevertheless thinks the case not so clear-cut.

Making a nod to textbooks by Ryan and others, James Carney (1914-89) spoke of how at school "we all learned as one of the immutable facts of history" that Patrick was sent by Pope Celestine to Ireland in 432, and was spectacularly successful, so that "when he died some thirty years later, the whole country had been converted to Christianity," these comforting assumptions receiving a "rude shock" in 1942 from O'Rahilly's lecture on the Two Patricks. Although Carney disagreed in part with O'Rahilly, he thought him right in attributing success to the missionary work of Palladius, sent in 431, and in putting the author of the *Confession* in the later fifth century, with his death in about 492.¹⁸

Nora Chadwick (1891-1972) poured cold water on several assumptions about Patrick's life, such as his studying in southern France or at Auxerre under St Germanus (bishop there from 418), the latter being doubly remarkable, for Germanus was a "young and noble layman" when Patrick was supposedly his student. Also rejected was Patrick's consecration in Gaul as a bishop. The saint mentions none of these in his own writings. She did, however, accept a date of about 459 for a slave-raid organized by "Coroticus, a ruler of North Britain, probably of Dumbarton in Strathclyde," which Patrick denounced in his letter.¹⁹ Like Lloyd in 1911, she put Coroticus in the 450s.

James Carney, taking on again the "brilliant theory" of O'Rahilly, yet proposed one Patrick only, who came to Ireland in about 457 (not 432) and died in about 490. Carney followed O'Rahilly on the later dating for this reason. Patrick had a disciple called Maucteus, who died in 534. Plainly, he would hardly know a man who passed away in 461. This obit provides "very strong support indeed" for partisans of the later Patrick. Carney believed that the earlier date was invented to eclipse "the embarrassing Palladius," sent by Rome to Ireland in 431, leaving Patrick with the sole glory of Ireland's Apostle.²⁰

¹⁶ William Rees, *An Historical Atlas of Wales* (London, 1951), plate 15.

¹⁷ K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 103, 114, 125-48.

¹⁸ James Carney, "The Impact of Christianity," in *Early Irish Society*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin, 1954), 66-78.

¹⁹ N. K. Chadwick, "Intellectual Contacts Between Britain and Gaul in the Fifth Century," in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1954), 189-253.

²⁰ James Carney, *Studies in Irish History and Literature* (Dublin, 1955), 324-27.

The obvious objection here is that historical association of Maucteus with Patrick is weak. Carney did not comment in detail on Coroticus of Dumbarton, whose connection with Patrick is strong. On him, Jackson observed that Patrick's *Letter* (of "the middle of the fifth century") showed how the king and his henchmen "were regarded and regarded themselves" as "Roman citizens." He remarked too on a unique Welsh genealogy of Coroticus.²¹

The popular writer Geoffrey Ashe gave the birthdate as "between 370 and 390" and the place as Dumbarton, South Wales, or Somerset.²² Principal Burleigh gave the birth-date as 389 and the mission "to the still heathen Scots" as starting in 432, so that in Patrick's writings "the true beginning of the Church of the Scots is revealed."²³ Nora Chadwick was less sure. The subject "bristles with difficulties." Which of 458, 462, or 493 was the saint's obit is a "question into which we cannot enter here."²⁴ Yet Christine Mohrmann saw a new approach. Because Patrick's Latin is colloquial, O'Rahilly's hypothesis that he came in 461 and died 492, and Carney's preference for 457 and 493, can be rejected. For her, the traditional view was valid. Patrick's Latin shows no influence from educated Christian communities. He could not have years of training on the Continent. Nor did he find long-established Continental missions in Ireland. He was a pioneer, working in isolation. Hence his difficulty in expressing himself. "The fact that Patrick's vocabulary is so rudimentary makes the presence of a successful Christian mission" before he arrived "highly improbable, or even impossible."²⁵ Others, however, have more positive views of Patrick's Latinity, as noted below.

In his last years, Fr Ryan conceded that "dates are still slightly in dispute," adding insouciantly that if an obit in 491 or so gave Patrick the six-score years of Moses, the early Irish did not wonder, for he was to them "what Moses was to the Israelites."²⁶ Ludwig Bieler (1906-81) tried another tack. Citing references in the annals to bishops Auxilius (d. 459) and Iserninus (d. 468), he thought that the "First Synod of St Patrick" was an authentic fifth-century document, despite the scepticism of nineteenth-century scholars.²⁷ It probably occurred in 457, thereby falling "within the Irish mission of St Patrick according to Carney's chronology as well as Bury's."²⁸ While the point is interesting, nineteenth-century doubts remain undispelled. Also working in Dublin, Françoise Henry cited Bury, Binchy, and others on chronology, but with no verdict.²⁹

The genealogy of Coroticus may be mentioned here. It gives him as six generations back from Owain ap Beli, who (according to the Irish annals) was alive in 642, and five

²¹ K. H. Jackson, "The Britons in Southern Scotland," *Antiquity* 29 (1955): 77-88.

²² Geoffrey Ashe, *King Arthur's Avalon* (London, 1957), 59.

²³ J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London, 1960), 8.

²⁴ Nora Chadwick, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* (London, 1961), 19.

²⁵ Christine Mohrmann, *The Latin of St Patrick* (Dublin, 1961), 48-54.

²⁶ John Ryan, "The Early Irish Church and the See of Peter," in *Medieval Studies Presented to Aubrey Gwynn, SJ* (Dublin, 1961), 3-18.

²⁷ Ludwig Bieler, "Patrick's Synod: A Revision," in *Mélanges offerts a Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht, 1963), 96-102.

²⁸ *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1963), 2.

²⁹ Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period* (London, 1965), 18-19.

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generations back from Rhydderch the Old, active in the 580s.³⁰ Rhydderch deserves particular notice. Twenty-five years is a generation, putting Coroticus or Ceredig 150 years before Owain (and so about 492), but 125 years before Rhydderch (and so in about 460). The latter evidence is better. We shall return to it. It weighs down the pan for a Patrick active in the 450s and not the 490s. Despite profound knowledge of sources, Kathleen Hughes (1926-77) did no more than cite Binchy on the question of Patrick's date and identity, although she rejected Bieler's 457 for his supposed first synod, finding sixth-century elements in its canons.³¹ Sheppard Frere saw no objection to villas inhabited "at least down to 430," also citing pleas by Calpornius on his son's return for him to "remain at home and undertake *munera*, or public service."³² Implications, then, for archaeologists and experts in Roman administration.

Notwithstanding a flurry of publications in 1961 to mark Patrick's obit in 461, the year 1968 was more influential in Britain. It saw a monograph by Bishop Hanson and conference proceedings on early British Christianity. The first is trenchantly written. It has a complete chapter on Patrick's date, beginning in tones reminiscent of Swift. "Lack of confidence has not hitherto been a characteristic of those who have attempted to supply dates for Patrick's career." Sometimes they have named the very day of some event or other. Hanson gave weight to the genealogy of Coroticus, saying this. Adamnán (d. 704) mentions Rhydderch son of Tudwal as a contemporary of St Columba (d. 597); Rhydderch was fifth in descent from Coroticus or Ceredig; that puts Coroticus between 420 and 470. (Because *Historia Brittonum* contains references to Rhydderch from the 580s which were unnoticed by Hanson, we prefer "420 and 460.") Hanson concluded that Patrick was born about 390, was kidnapped about 405, escaped in 412, returned to Ireland as bishop in 425 or 435, and died about 460, thereby ruling out a career between 450 and 500 as proposed by O'Rahilly and Carney.³³ Hanson's opinions, from which he never shifted, were not generally accepted in Ireland and are out of fashion in Britain. The more reason to look at them again. As for the conference proceedings, they include a paper by Bieler, who styled the evidence as "ambiguous or contradictory" and verdicts on it as "weighing the imponderable." Old certainties had yielded to hesitation and doubt. Bieler nevertheless accepted Patrick's appointment as "head of the Irish mission in or about 429" and "his consecration as successor to Palladius in the early 430s."³⁴

The archaeologist Leslie Alcock had observations on Irish piracy, with forts built at Lancaster, Cardiff, and elsewhere in "the third and fourth centuries" to counter it. He also mentioned "bullion and chopped-up tableware" of silver found in hoards at Balline (near Limerick) and Coleraine (near Londonderry), the result of official Roman bribery or unofficial attacks on "wealthy villas near the exposed western coasts of Britain, perhaps in Somerset or the Cotswolds, in the late fourth or early fifth century."³⁵ Another

³⁰ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. P. C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966), 10, 126-7.

³¹ Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), 31, 44.

³² Sheppard Frere, *Britannia* (London, 1967), 374.

³³ R. P. C. Hanson, *St Patrick* (Oxford, 1968), 171-188.

³⁴ Ludwig Bieler, "St Patrick and the British Church," in *Christianity in Britain, 300-700*, ed. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester, 1968), 123-30.

³⁵ Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (London, 1971), 93, 254.

archaeologist, Charles Thomas (1928-2016), accepted a birth in the late fourth century and obit in 461, before airily presenting no-sense on the meaning of “*Bannaventa Berniae*” and its supposed location near Carlisle.³⁶ What he called a “careful digest of the Patrician literature” made him here “prefer the northern setting and ‘traditional’ chronology” for the saint.³⁷ Some will think it not careful at all. More pertinent is a further archaeologist’s remark on how, “in most of the villas that survived into the fifth century, signs of catastrophic destruction are frequent about 400, but not later, and are often followed by rehabilitation.”³⁸ The comment is pertinent. If its chronology is sound, it points to the saint’s birth in the late fourth century, with inferences for when he died.

In the early 1970s, Mac Niocaill echoed the new revisionism by words on a mission in “the second half of the fifth century” and an obit in 493 as “more or less correct.”³⁹ Professor Byrne had intriguing comments. The year 432 for the Patrician mission he dismissed as an attempt to eclipse the coming of Palladius in 431. He added that medieval scholars anticipated O’Rahilly in referring somewhat vaguely to two Patricks, and accepted Carney as perhaps right in taking the obit of 457 as “meant to record the arrival of Patrick,” if with a warning on how it is “clearly impossible to hope that we shall ever be able to give exact dates for his mission.”⁴⁰ John Morris (d. 1977) still put the *Epistola* in about 450 and the obit ten years later.⁴¹

Working on original sources, Bannerman cited O’Rahilly, Carney, and Binchy for records of Patrick’s contemporaries, including rulers like Fergus Mór and Domangart, as implying his own death “towards the end of the fifth century rather than in 461.”⁴² His case is flawed. Patrick never mentions these people. They are not prime evidence. Coroticus is. Misreading Charles Thomas, who placed him near Carlisle, Archibald Duncan of Glasgow thought that “Strathclyde seems to fit the sources best” for the home of Calpornius and his son. (Suggestions equally out of the question.) Better are his judicious doubts on Patrick’s chronology, whereon “no historian east of Dublin will claim certain knowledge; current fashion favours putting his death c. 485-500.”⁴³ Emrys Bowen’s geographical studies give no help on dating.⁴⁴

Bishop Hanson made an important restatement here.⁴⁵ On the basis of “six or seven points,” he concluded that Patrick’s career could be placed “in the first half of the fifth century, perhaps reaching as far as the middle of it.” The first of them concerns Coroticus. Despite mention of the Ceredig who gave his name to Cardigan, Wales, Hanson rightly

³⁶ Charles Thomas, *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times* (London, 1971), 83-84.

³⁷ Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London, 1971), 18-19.

³⁸ S. Applebaum, “Roman Britain,” in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: AD 43-1042*, ed. H. P. R. Finberg (Cambridge, 1972), 1-277, at 255.

³⁹ Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *Ireland Before the Vikings* (Dublin, 1972), 22.

⁴⁰ F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), 79.

⁴¹ John Morris, *The Age of Arthur* (London, 1973), 347-50.

⁴² John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), 75.

⁴³ A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 38, 42.

⁴⁴ E. G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways, and Settlements*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1977), 117-27.

⁴⁵ R. P. C. Hanson, “The Date of St Patrick,” *The Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 61 (1978): 60-77.

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preferred the ruler of Strathclyde, which puts Patrick “towards the middle but not far beyond the middle” of the fifth century. Second is Patrick’s silence on “internal trouble” in Britain, which saw “great disturbances” following the arrival of the Saxons in the mid-century (surely 449), terminating with the British victory at Mount “Badon” (in 493, at the hillfort of Ringsbury, by *Braydon* Forest, Wiltshire). Patrick speaks of travelling without difficulty in Britain, which “is not easy to reconcile” with his living in the later fifth century. Third is Patrick’s belief that the world would end soon. This accords well with the “widespread eschatological expectation” in the years after 410, when the Goths sacked Rome. Hanson’s fourth point is weaker. Patrick lamented his lack of education; Hanson thought that Roman schools of rhetoric and law could not have survived “as late as the year 440 x 450.” But this is ruled out by Michael Lapidge’s 1984 study of the education of Gildas (493-570), who acquired it in Britain (at Cirencester?) in the very early sixth century. Fifth is what Patrick says on visiting Gaul. Movements of Salian Franks (to which we shall return) and others would indicate 428-54 and 455-61 as when he was writing. Sixth is a reference to *solidi*. These small gold coins were last minted under Constantine III (d. 411). They ceased to circulate as the century went on, again pointing to 428-51, with Patrick’s visits to Gaul “earlier rather than later in that period.” Seventh is his identification of “all Christians as citizens of the Roman Empire,” including the soldiers of Coroticus, an idea “scarcely likely to have lasted beyond the middle of the fifth century.” Finally, Hanson discussed in detail Patrick’s father Calpornius. He was a *decurio* or deacon, and son of Potitus, a presbyter. The position of *decurio* here being secular and relating to collecting of imperial taxes, it hardly survived Britain’s break with Rome in 410. The status of Calpornius makes it “very likely that Patrick was born before the year 410, when the Roman Empire in Britain ended.” Hanson ended by submitting that a society where Vulgar Latin was still spoken by British aristocrats, where clergy and perhaps laity were “still educated in rhetoric and law,” where *decuriones* carried out official duties, villas were extant and had a full staff of servants, *solidi* passed from hand to hand, and where raids on Gaul by Franks were known of, will have been of the earlier fifth century. The Latinity of Gildas modifies some of Hanson’s views on language and education; although one could argue that, in the stability of Celtic Britain between 493 (victory at Mount “Badon”) and 536 (when Gildas wrote), British schools of rhetoric and law might flourish; as they would not in the period of Saxon aggression between 449 and 493. In any case, Hanson’s other points are not easily dismissed. This is especially so for Coroticus.

Hanson thought Patrick badly educated. Citing Bieler, McGrath agreed, except as regards Bible knowledge and evidence from “ecclesiastical legislation of the time” and “customary rules of Latin composition.”⁴⁶ Interposed here is a popular history’s assertion that Patrick “was born probably in the north of England about AD 410” (displaying three separate errors).⁴⁷ On Patrick’s education Dronke was optimistic, especially for links with St Cyprian (d. 258) and St Augustine (d. 430).⁴⁸ Yet there is no question of a rhetorical command like that of Gildas (493-570), who certainly acquired it in British schools.

⁴⁶ Fergal McGrath, *Education in Ancient and Medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 1979), 64-5.

⁴⁷ Stephen Johnson, *Later Roman Britain* (London, 1980), 117.

⁴⁸ Peter Dronke, “St Patrick’s Reading,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 1 (1981): 21-38.

Hanson's supposition that such institutions were defunct by the later fifth century is hence unfounded and in any case irrelevant to Patrick, who was tending sheep in Connacht while contemporaries in Britain were parsing Cicero and Quintilian.

Peter Salway stated that Patrick "was captured in the days when the Irish king Niall was raiding Britain around 405," unaware that Irish scholars had long put Niall nearly fifty years later.⁴⁹ Professor Charles Thomas devoted two characteristic chapters to the subject. He thought that the son of Calpornius "died in 490 x 495, at a fair old age," having been born "say in 415, either in the paternal *villula* or possibly at a town house in Carlisle."⁵⁰ This is romance, not history. James Campbell similarly passed over Hanson's arguments, putting the saint in the decades up to 493 or so, and took seriously Charles Thomas's equating of *Bannaventa* with *Banna* on Hadrian's Wall, so that the *villula* of Calpornius was perhaps "in the neighbourhood of Carlisle."⁵¹ Byrne and Docherty entered traditional dates for mission and death, but noted that 405 for the obit of King Niall of the Nine Hostages is erroneous. He was active in 445 x 453.⁵² He could not, therefore, have raided Britain at the start of the fifth century. The case for Patrick's enslavement by Niall is well and truly demolished.

In an important book on Gildas and secular Roman education, Ian Wood of Leeds has a footnote on the Salian Franks and the letter to Coroticus. He thinks that the allusion hardly predates "Childeric's campaigns in the 460s," so that the saint's career would "extend considerably into the second half of the fifth century."⁵³ Other evidence comes from philologists, who assemble views on *Cothraige*, the oldest Irish form for "Patrick."⁵⁴ As for associations with Glastonbury, where there was an Irish community before the Norman Conquest, historians have been uncertain whether Irish pilgrims came because of stories placing their Apostle there, or "whether their presence itself" spawned legends.⁵⁵ But if Patrick were born in the Mendips and returned there, he might well join a nearby ecclesiastical community at Glastonbury, if there was one. Simon Evans (1921-98), citing Bury, O'Rahilly, Bieler, Grosjean, Carney, Esposito, Binchy, Hanson, and others on dating, also mentioned a paper of 1979-80 by P. A. Wilson for Patrick as a Briton whose mission, of Gallo-Roman origin, occurred in 440 x 470. Evans referred as well to the conversion of large parts of south and east Ireland before Patrick's arrival, and to the letter to Coroticus as older than the *Confessio*.⁵⁶

Wallace-Hadrill at first followed Bieler for Patrick's education by St Germanus of Auxerre, whose death E. A. Thompson of Nottingham put in 437 (Ian Wood thinks 442 a

⁴⁹ Peter Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 463.

⁵⁰ Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Berkeley, 1981), 319.

⁵¹ James Campbell, "The End of Roman Britain," in *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. James Campbell (Oxford, 1982), 8-19.

⁵² F. J. Byrne and Charles Docherty, "Chronology to 1169: 432-1169," in *A New History of Ireland: A Chronology of Irish History to 1976* (Oxford, 1982), 16-71.

⁵³ Ian Wood, "The End of Roman Britain," in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984), 1-25.

⁵⁴ Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien: Lettre C* (Paris, 1987), 219.

⁵⁵ J. P. Carley, *Glastonbury Abbey* (Woodbridge, 1988), 101.

⁵⁶ *The Welsh Life of St David*, ed. D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1988), 23.

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possible alternative), but then recanted, acknowledging Binchy's belief that Patrick never visited Auxerre or anywhere else in Gaul.⁵⁷ One of many substantial essays in a volume for James Carney updates Patrick's bibliography, but has nothing on dates.⁵⁸ A useful collection of Patrician documents, putting his birth in "on the northern frontier of Roman Britain, about 415" (we think both statements wrong), further cites the Marxist historian E. A. Thompson for Coroticus not as a British tyrant but an Irish one, "presumably in east Ulster."⁵⁹ Nobody has taken that up.

There is no lack of information in Dumville's monograph on the saint, published sixteen hundred years after his supposed death in 493.⁶⁰ Naturally, it includes other material, including the supposition that traditions of Patrick at Glastonbury arose from his training there. On Patrick's *floruit*, a subject "obsessive for some scholars," is a tendency to the later fifth century, countering arguments by Hanson. There is comment on how Patrick refers to the Franks as heathen, indicating a date before 496 or so, when Clovis received baptism. Nor did Patrick become a bishop until he was at least fifty. Further, his own words on work in remote areas 'where nobody had ever come to baptize' show that other missionaries preceded him elsewhere. Finally, because "the sudden expansion of Anglo-Saxon power at the expense of the Britons from the 440s onwards" impeded communication with Rome, the British Church might then take on responsibility for the Irish missions. Here we recall Hanson on Patrick's curious silence as regards turmoil in Britain from the 440s onwards.

Ken Dark comments on the growth of British monasticism as indicated by Patrick's writings, and on the prosperity of his father's estate, perhaps due to "the removal of the fourth-century tax-burden."⁶¹ An edition of the *Letter and Confession* lays stress on their supposed verbal intricacy.⁶² A further edition, citing David Dumville, has reference to "scales tipped in favour of the second half of the fifth century as the period of the Irish mission, but the question is still open."⁶³

Then appeared Jelley's book (as noted at the start of this paper) proposing that Patrick's *Bannaventa* was Banwell, a village in the Mendip Hills, North Somerset. Despite much that is wrong-headed, his arguments are here compelling. Nevertheless, coming from outside the academy, they have in effect been ignored. What instead gained ascendancy was Dumville's 1993 book. Thomas Charles-Edwards thus regards the saint's mission as ending in "the late fifth century" on the (dubious) basis of sixth-century clerics linked with Patrick, such as St Mochta (d. 535).⁶⁴ Another puts it more strongly. "The weight of

⁵⁷ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People': A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), 27, 216.

⁵⁸ Michael Herren, "Mission and Monasticism in the Confessio of Patrick," in *Sages, Saints, and Story-tellers*, ed. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth, 1989), 76-85.

⁵⁹ Liam de Paor, *St Patrick's World* (Dublin, 1993), 89, 94.

⁶⁰ D. N. Dumville and others, *Saint Patrick* (Woodbridge, 1993), 13-18, 111.

⁶¹ K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom* (Leicester, 1994), 68.

⁶² *The Book of Letters of St Patrick the Bishop*, ed. D. R. Howlett (Dublin, 1994).

⁶³ Máire B. de Paor, *Patrick, The Pilgrim Apostle of Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), 24-25.

⁶⁴ T. M. Charles-Edwards, "Britons in Ireland, c. 550-800," in *Ildánach, Ildíreach*, ed. John Carey, J. T. Koch, and P.-Y. Lambert (Andover, 1999), 15-26.

opinion has now returned decisively to a later rather than an earlier dating.” Crucial here is the survival of associates into the sixth century, particularly Mochta of Louth (d. 535), a Briton described by Adamnán of Iona (d. 704) as a British “disciple of the holy bishop Patrick.” Nevertheless, the same study contains rare acknowledgement of initial research by Harry Jelley on the estate of Calpornius as near Banwell. His arguments “combine the place-name evidence with recent archaeological work on Roman villas in the area.”⁶⁵ Elsewhere is negativism: little about the authentic Patrician texts “is known or agreed on by scholars.”⁶⁶ Hence some even-handedness from Cardinal Ó Fiaich. The earlier date “fits better into the Continental background and the saint’s associations with Auxerre,” but the later with survival of his disciples into the sixth century.⁶⁷ Alas, the connection with Auxerre (strenuously denied by some) cannot be maintained with conviction. There is nothing in Patrick’s own work to prove it.

In England, Nick Higham cites Dumville but still considers the *Confessio* “arguably early to mid-fifth-century.”⁶⁸ He elsewhere put the mission “most probably in the first half of the fifth century.”⁶⁹ In another context John Koch plots Somerset villas destroyed supposedly by Irish raiders in 367-9.⁷⁰ Patrick is not mentioned. But, if the Irish raided in the fourth century, they could do the same in the fifth. In 2008 the present writer (unaware of work by Harry Jelley) located the estate of Calpornius near Banwell; a place that, after White in 1920 and (as quoted in 1968 by Hanson) Bieler in 1948, will have been *Bannaventa Tabernae* “market-town by a hill and with a tavern.”⁷¹ In the following year Thomas Clancy spoke of Patrick as “in a troubled sea of time that includes most of the fifth century.”⁷² James Fraser referred to Patrick and Coroticus, but without detailed chronology, or comment on E. A. Thompson’s notion of Coroticus as an Irish king, which has gained no currency.⁷³ Karen George, however, cited Richard Sharpe for the two Patrician texts as of 430 x 480.⁷⁴ His authority has weight. In contrast is Mike McCarthy of Bradford, who gives support to Charles Thomas’s “persuasive” arguments for Patrick as from the Hadrian’s Wall region.⁷⁵ He should not. They are not persuasive.

Now for a flashback: a book on Church History written in about 1772 (but not published until 2009) by Philip Perry (1720-74), Rector of the English College, Valladolid. He had

⁶⁵ James Duffy, *Patrick in His Own Words* (Dublin, 2000), 52, 60, 67.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth McLuhan, “The Metaphor and Reality of Slavery in Saint Patrick’s Epistola and Confessio,” in *Studies in Irish Hagiography*, ed. John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin, 2001), 63-71.

⁶⁷ Tomás Ó Fiaich, “The Beginnings of Christianity,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th edn (Cork, 2001), 41-53.

⁶⁸ N. J. Higham, *King Arthur* (London, 2002), 41.

⁶⁹ N. J. Higham, “Historical Narrative as Cultural Politics,” in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), 68-79.

⁷⁰ J. T. Koch, *An Atlas for Celtic Studies* (Oxford, 2007), 160.

⁷¹ A. Breeze, “St Patrick’s Birthplace,” *The Welsh Journal of Religious History* 3 (2008): 58-67.

⁷² T. O. Clancy, “The Cults of St Patrick and St Palladius,” in *Saints’ Cults in the Celtic World*, ed. Steve Boardman, J. R. Davies, and Eila Williamson (Woodbridge, 2009), 18-38.

⁷³ J. E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland* (Edinburgh, 2009), 88-90.

⁷⁴ Karen George, *Gildas’s ‘De Excidio Britonum’ and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge, 2009), 129.

⁷⁵ Mike McCarthy, “Christianity in Northern Britain in the Late Roman Period,” in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. Jane Murray (Oxford, 2009), 57-80.

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no doubts. Following James Ussher on Patrick's birth at Kilpatrick, "betwixt Dunbritton and Glasgow" and hence on the Clyde's north bank, Perry stated that "Patrick was born about the year 386," being "ordained bishop in the forty-fifth year of his age" or 431, and dying in "493, the sixtieth of his glorious mission, and the one hundred and seventh of his age."⁷⁶ Some of these ideas are with us still. One notes with resignation how shifts in scholarly opinion may require centuries to take effect, not years.

Partisans for a Patrick in the earlier sixth century and those of its later half thereafter remained in their separate camps. Thomas Charles-Edwards speaks of the letter to Coroticus as from "the second half of the fifth century."⁷⁷ If this means a document of the 490s, it means that Coroticus was raiding Ireland and killing captives as a man of about 60. Unlikely. More unlikely still is an opinion of Roy Flechner. Far from being enslaved by Irish pirates, Patrick may voluntarily have decided "to set himself up in Ireland" to protect his family's wealth from "the underwriting of taxes or malicious lawsuits." That would be "before 410," when for political reasons the British "land market would have collapsed." It is related to Patrick's need to finance missionary operations in Ireland, which hence predate 410.⁷⁸ Patrick's statements on such matters in his *Confession* will thus be a tissue of deceit. It is hard to see (despite an interesting reference to the Coleraine hoard of silver ingots as postdating 410) how this can be credited.

Other treasure, this time from Scotland, is interpreted negatively in the context of St Patrick. Roman silver found in 1919 has long been related to the Irish pirates who enslaved the saint. Because, however, "the Irish hero Niall of the Nine Hostages and St Patrick" are now "dated to the middle or late fifth century" and not to about 400, the plunder can have no link with Irish marauders.⁷⁹ Logic is here bruised in several places, chiefly is the belief that Patrick was enslaved by Niall. There being no reason to think that he was, the date of one is irrelevant to that of the other. Professor Charles-Edwards refers to the raid of Coroticus as "probably in the second half of the fifth century," and Patrick's assumptions on Romans and barbarians as likewise from "the second half of the fifth century."⁸⁰ On this and the 490s, we say again that Coroticus would hardly be leading piratical raids when old enough to be a grandfather.

The later Patrick was accepted by Professor Mac Eoin of Galway, discussing the ransoming of Gaulish captives from the Franks.⁸¹ He puts this no earlier than 451, when the Huns were defeated at Châlons-sur-Marne, allowing the Salian Franks to leave their territory and seize hostages. But he would prefer to relate such activity on the large scale

⁷⁶ Philip Perry's *Sketch of the Ancient British History*, ed. Anunciación Carrera and M. J. Carrera (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), 97, 106, 115.

⁷⁷ T. M. Charles-Edwards, "Rome and the Britons, 400-664," in *Wales and the Wider World*, ed. T. M. Charles-Edwards and R. J. W. Evans (Donnington, 2010), 9-27.

⁷⁸ Roy Flechner, "Patrick's Reasons for Leaving Britain," in *Tome: Studies in Medieval Celtic History and Law in Honour of Thomas Charles-Edwards*, ed. Fiona Edmonds and Paul Russell (Woodbridge, 2011), 125-33.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Painter, "The Traprain Law Treasure and 'Irish Pirates'," *The Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012): 71-79.

⁸⁰ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350-1064* (Oxford, 2013), 36, 227.

⁸¹ Gearóid Mac Eoin, "St Patrick and the Franks," in *Lochlann: Festschrift til Jan Erik Rekdal*, ed. Cathinka Hambro and L. I. Widerøe (Oslo, 2013), 1-11.

to after 482, when the Franks expanded their domains following the death of Childerich, and before 486, so that “the years 482-6 are the most likely period for the writing of Patrick’s letter to Coroticus.” Frankish hostage-taking “certainly belongs to the second rather than to the first half of the fifth century” and can be located in “the domain of Syagrius lying immediately north of the Loire,” apparently during “the years immediately before 486.” About 492 (and not 461) should thus be accepted as when Patrick died, despite the problems of “accommodating a large number of changes in the Irish language” between then and the earliest “surviving literature in Irish at the end of the sixth century.” The solution to them lies not in predating Patrick, but “in pushing the linguistic changes back towards an earlier period.” Here we say again that, if Coroticus (born in the 430s or so) was committing atrocities on Irish Christians in the 480s, he would have had vigour and survival skills unusual for the period. Elsewhere, in a study based on ideas of Molly Miller, the *floruit* of Coroticus is located between 407 and 469, while it is declared on the obit of Patrick that the “debate is largely settled in favor of 493.”⁸² Is it? The statements seem contradictory. As for 407, with a Coroticus born in the 380s, it implies that Rhydderch’s forefathers were siring their sons at an average age of 180 divided by 5 = 36. Rather elderly fathers, one might think. The idea lacks coherence.

In a volume with much of interest on Patrick, there is yet a comment on his missionary activity in Ireland “certainly before the end of the fifth century and perhaps not earlier than the beginning of that century:” that is, between 400 and 500.⁸³ Such vagueness hardly stands up against Hanson’s arguments of 1978. It is still better than another account of Patrick’s writings, with no dates mentioned at all.⁸⁴ Altogether more impressive is a monumental work published in the same year, with bibliography of Patrick up to 2016.⁸⁵

In a book on Arthur, a North British champion killed near Carlisle in 537, whose life can (like Patrick’s) be elucidated by philological techniques, the saint’s writings are placed “probably in the mid-fifth century.”⁸⁶ Roy Flechner tells his readers that Patrick was from “Bannavem Taburniae” (a corrupt form), and that the “exact whereabouts of the town and villa are [sic] unknown” (an untrue statement).⁸⁷ The genealogy in which Coroticus or Ceredig figures is now re-edited.⁸⁸ Despite the academic phalanx for Patrick as of the late fifth century, another still puts him in the 430s “or perhaps a little later,” with his missionary activity in northern or western Ireland.⁸⁹

⁸² Flint F. Johnson, *Hengest, Gwrtheyrn, and the Chronology of Post-Roman Britain* (Jefferson, 2014), 224, 238.

⁸³ Colmán Etchingham, “Conversion in Ireland,” in *The Introduction of Christianity into the Early Medieval Insular World*, ed. Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (Turnhout, 2016), 181-207.

⁸⁴ Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, “From Story to History,” *Transforming Landscapes of Belief in the Early Medieval Insular World and Beyond*, ed. Nancy Edwards, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Roy Flechner (Turnhout, 2017), 207-31.

⁸⁵ Donnchadh Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium* (Turnhout, 2017), 249-60.

⁸⁶ N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: The Making of the Legend* (New Haven, 2018), 135.

⁸⁷ Roy Flechner, *Saint Patrick Retold* (Princeton, 2019), 31.

⁸⁸ Ben Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy* (Woodbridge, 2020), 334.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Boyle, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (London, 2021), 1.

Finally, three books of 2021 and 2022, all coming to hand after this paper was written and its main conclusions reached. In the first is comment on Patrick as brought up in “western Britain” in a society which “still retained many Roman-period practices,” while Coroticus was “perhaps based at Dumbarton” in what became Strathclyde.⁹⁰ We can be more precise. Patrick belonged to the Bath region of north Somerset. Hence the Romanization. Inferior is acceptance of the “possibility of a northern origin” for Patrick in what is now Scotland, so that the new faith reached Ireland along a channel “stretching from Galloway to Lothian.”⁹¹ This cannot be so. Somerset was thoroughly Romanized. Britain north of the Wall was not. The ghost of Ussher still walks. The myth of a Northern Patrick has not yet gone away.

Finally, Stephen Joyce. His book combines much of interest with some astonishing omissions (as on arguments by David Woods in 2010 for Gildas as writing in 536, implied by reference in chapter 93 of *De Excidio* to that year’s volcanic “cloud” over Britain, but not the famine which followed). Here in any case is nothing on where Patrick came from and inconclusive remarks on when in the fifth century he wrote.⁹²

Now for conclusions. Our dossier is full. What significant data can it provide? One question is fundamental. The sole person mentioned by Patrick and known to historians is Coroticus or Ceredig of Strathclyde. The limits of his reign deserve attention. What can be said of them?

In his 1966 edition of Welsh genealogies, Bartrum edited that of Rhydderch Hen, the “Old”, whom the Welsh styled *Hael* “the Generous”. We know much of him. This Strathclyde ruler, a contemporary of St Columba of Iona (d. 597), was a great-grandson of Dyfnwal the Old, whose own paternal grandfather was Coroticus or Ceredig. Rhydderch is not ignored by Hanson and others. But the implications of his career have lacked scrutiny. Whereas six generations separate Owain of Strathclyde (active in 642) from Coroticus, only five separate Rhydderch (before 597) from Coroticus. This can be refined. The ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* tells how Urien of Rheged, together with Rhydderch (and other British kings), fought campaigns against Theodric, ruler of Anglo-Saxon Bernicia. Urien trapped the Bernicians in Lindisfarne, but was betrayed and killed by his supposed allies. Jackson dated the event to about 590.⁹³ There is more on Rhydderch in the life of Columba by Adamnán (d. 704). Despite enemies of whom the king stood “in daily fear,” Columba assured him that he would die in bed (a prophecy fulfilled).⁹⁴ A late tradition puts it in the same year as the death of Kentigern, Glasgow’s patron saint.⁹⁵ That being 612, Rhydderch’s epithet *Hen* will be apt. Like Mithridates in A. E. Housman’s poem, he died old. He long outlived the murder of Urien, which occurred perhaps in 585 and hardly later than 590.⁹⁶ There is updated discussion of Rhydderch elsewhere.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Rory Naismith, *Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2021), 153, 160.

⁹¹ Oisín Plumb, *Picts and Britons* (Turnhout, 2021), 150.

⁹² S. J. Joyce, *The Legacy of Gildas* (Woodbridge, 2022), 14 n. 2.

⁹³ K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), 9.

⁹⁴ Ifor Williams, *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry* (Cardiff, 1972), 84.

⁹⁵ Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydain*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 1978), 504.

⁹⁶ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba*, tr. Richard Sharpe (London, 1995), 277.

⁹⁷ Tim Clarkson, *Strathclyde and the Anglo-Saxons in the Viking Age* (Edinburgh, 2014), 27-33.

Now, Rhydderch provides substantial evidence for Coroticus, five generations his senior. But what might seem a stepping stone has for some been a stumbling-block, with Professor Dumville in his *Saint Patrick* of 1993 (cited above) discounting the genealogies and commenting that “Rhydderch appears to be placed one or two generations too late.” It is hard to follow his reasoning. He believes that Patrick died in about 493. If, however, the life of Rhydderch implies that his later dating is untenable, go it must; because his genealogy is tantamount to proof for the earlier Patrick, who died in 461 or so. Other testimony is weak in comparison, as we shall see.

If Rhydderch was active in the 580s, implacable foe of the English, twenty-five years for five generations puts Coroticus in about 460. It undermines the case for Patrick’s death in 491 and makes an obit in 461 look strong. Let us put it another way. If Rhydderch was an adult in the 580s (and died in 612 as “the Old”), he would be born in (say) 560. Five generations previous to 560 positions the birth of Coroticus in around 435. Coroticus would be ready for acts of violence and outrage against Patrick’s converts in the 450s. We recall Richard Sharpe’s 430 x 480 for this ruler (quoted in 2009 by Karen George and 2022 by Stephen Joyce). Coroticus might (of course) have committed depredations in the late 470s, as a man in his 40s. Nevertheless, a likelier decade within this range is the 450s: sufficient for Coroticus to be an adult, and five generations before his descendant Rhydderch Hen was campaigning against the English in the 580s.

Against this some will quote other testimony, such as that of Patrick’s disciples who lived well into the sixth century. Yet it cannot stand against what we can gather about Coroticus, for this reason. Our prime evidence is the *Confession* and *Letter*, where Coroticus is the sole person mentioned who figures in other historical sources. Establish his dates and we have compelling evidence for Patrick. For all their interest, statements on sixth-century Irish clerics have lesser weight. We do not know that their Patrick was the author of the authentic Patrician texts.

There is a second check. It is also in the two Patrician documents, in the saint’s allusion to Salian Franks, who (unlike Coroticus) permit the ransoming of Christian captives. It has been variously seen. Hanson in 1978 observed that between 461 and 485 the Salian Franks had a kingdom, “a last, isolated fragment of the Roman Empire,” which was bounded “on the east by the Somme and on the north by the Channel and on the west by Armorica.” But he thought Patrick’s words suited the period before that, either in 428 to 454, when the advance of Salian Franks from the Rhine was being checked first by the Romans and then by involvement with the Huns, or in 455 to 461, when (the Huns now eliminated) they advanced perhaps as far as the River Somme. From 461 to 485 the territory under their rule was “nominally at peace” and unlikely to make raids. Ian Wood in 1984 disagreed, believing that Patrick’s allusion to the Franks hardly predated “Childeric’s campaigns in the 460s,” so that the saint’s career lasted “into the second half of the fifth century.” Dumville in 1993 said no more than that (the Salian Franks being heathens) Patrick must have written before the baptism of Clovis (their king) in 496 or so. As for Professor Mac Eoin in 2013, he rules out a date for the *Letter* of before 451, when defeat of the Huns at Châlons-sur-Marne permitted Salian Franks to make forays in quest of hostages. He prefers 481-6 as the period when they were most active.

With such contrary views, the subject clearly deserves fresh investigation. Yet we may say that 481-6 seems far too late for a Coroticus born in about 430, five generations before Rhydderch's birth in about 560. The normal mayhem and dangers of life in Dark Age Scotland do not imply a Coroticus conducting raids as a man in his fifties. Genealogies give him the epithet *gwledig* "lord, prince," but not *hen* "old" (unlike his grandson Dyfnwal and great-great-grandson Rhydderch, both skilled survivors). We are on firmer ground in pushing back his activities to the 450s. If Mac Eoin's 451 is a *terminus post quem* for the *Letter*, it could be put between then and the traditional obit for Patrick of 461, perhaps late in the period. Contrarywise, it weakens the case for 493.

We end with revisionism. Genealogical calculations and Frankish history let us place Patrick's letter to Coroticus in the 450s and not later. A bishop, perhaps now in his sixties, denounced tyranny. It seems that those who in 1961 commemorated the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of Ireland's national saint were right; views which would have him living thirty years later are out of focus. If the letter is of the 450s, it tends to confirm the old belief on Patrick as born in the later fourth century and enslaved during the chaos of the early fifth.

There are many implications. Here are two for the Bristol Channel region. First, Patrick's *Confession* will be the region's oldest historical source, opening a window on life there as the Roman Empire came to an end. A comfortable and even luxurious existence might end with a terrifying barbarian attack; even so, life went on, as Patrick discovered on his homecoming years later. Second, Patrick's apparent origins at Banwell bring new life to his supposed links with Glastonbury. We cannot prove that Patrick went the thirteen miles from Banwell to a Christian community at Glastonbury so as to prepare himself for the priesthood. But it would be the obvious place to go. If archaeological excavation proved the existence of a fourth-century monastic community at Glastonbury, the case would be stronger. Patrick would then have learnt by heart hundreds of pages from Scripture, thereby preparing for his mission to Ireland. In short, the genealogy of a violent king of Strathclyde unravels difficulties not only for Ireland's national saint, but for secular and monastic life and learning on the shores of the Bristol Channel in the fifth century CE.

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