



Celtic Sanctity, Spirituality and Hagiography

COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE LIVES OF ST IA AND ST PIRAN

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Contrasting and comparing the Lives of Saint Ia and Saint Piran

Introduction

Hagiographies, translated as “writing about saints” (Angelovska-Panova, 2022, p.301), worshipful and idealising biographies, are written with the purpose of commemorating the individual saints and used to continue the missionary intentions of their lives by converting readers and listeners from paganism to the Christian faith, also to reaffirm existing beliefs in Christianity. They were composed to be read out in monasteries and dedicated churches to commemorate the saint on their feast day as a missionary tool.

These Lives contain many motifs within their texts, contrasted in this piece will be the Lives of St Ia and St Piran. The content of the Lives varies, the reason for these differences will be looked at and to what extent these are split on gender lines and can be construed as bias against females in general.

How male and female saints are written about can be compared, as is carried out in this essay through looking at St Piran and St Ia. The spread of Christianity by the Celtic saints can be researched through the saints’ Lives in old manuscripts, like those found at St Méen and Gotha and in existing Irish Lives (Sharpe, 1991), and by the retelling of legends. These Lives are taken not as literal tales but as stories based on truths, embellishments and repetitions, as Medieval hagiographers were not in the habit of recording events unless they demonstrated miraculous power (Baring-Gould and

Fisher, 2005, p.6), including Biblically reminiscent miracles. Not many Lives survived Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and destruction of all items related to Catholicism. He gave the order in 1549-50 to first deface and then burn the Catholic church's service books, followed by the Breviaries, service books recited by Monks, and Legendae, I translate to mean 'readings' (Smith & Lockwood, 2020). It was the Legendae that held the accounts of the local saints, these would have been read aloud in their dedicated churches on their respective feast days and, also, as homilies during otherwise silent mealtimes in monasteries (C-Borlase, 1878, p.9). John Leland travelled to Kernow during the reign of Henry VIII and made notes from the Lives that were in existence at that time, this provides some detail (Baring-Gould, 1923, p.9). In modern times, Doble, vicar of Wendron (Rogers, 1961, p.49), gathered and published works on the Kernewek saints (1960, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1970, 1997).

St Piran, also written as Perran (John, 2001, p.68), Pieranus and maybe Pierguin (Olson, 1989, p.88), is the patron saint of Kernow (Cornwall), although the most well-known, interestingly, he is not the most written about. St Ia, also written as Ive, Hya, Hye, Hia (Russian True Orthodox Church, 2024) or Ya (Orme, 1996, p.88) is one of the more well known of the female saints of Kernow. This, however, is not much of an accolade as there is hardly anything written at all about any of the female saints of Kernow (Fish, 2012, p.2). Both of Irish origin they settled in the Southwest of Kernow, whereas saints of Welsh origin generally seemed to settle in the North and East of the Celtic country (Appendix 1;2).

Many of the Celtic saints originated from the northern, western and southern fringes of Britain where they retreated to and held their ground against the invading Roman

armies in the first century AD. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fourth century AD the Celtic saints began travelling amongst their nations, learning from one another and then spreading abroad proclaiming and practicing their brand of Christianity. Many, like the Welsh St Petroc, embarked on their missionary work and spread their cult from Padstow and Bodmin through Brittany, England and Wales (Orme, 2007, p.165).

Comparison

The two Lives, of St Piran and St Ia, are in some ways similar but are quite contrastingly different in others, however, whether they were actual historical figures is not being debated here. The main difficulty with any putative comparison arises with the lack of original sources and the destruction of all Catholic books and manuscripts by Henry VIII and his issue. Copeland-Borlase spoke of the destruction of written documents in Kernow by the rulers of England quite profusely and as to how the Kernewek Celtic saints' Lives were reconstructed:

No other Keltic country is so devoid of materials from which to reconstruct her Hagiology as is Cornwall. The hand of ruin has been unsparingly laid upon her ancient literature. The Danes destroyed everything down to the 10th Century, and Henry the Eighth and his two Protestant children completed the work down to their own time, by burning all that came after, - almost the only exceptions being the Bodmin manumissions, the Leofric Missal, the Exeter Domesday and the Episcopal documents and Registers preserved at Exeter. (C-Borlase, 1878, p8)

This gives a problem from the very start by having nothing much to work with, however, the Breton and Gotha manuscripts are of great historical value in this respect. In addition the works of historians Borlase, Copeland-Borlase, Doble, William Worcester

and John Leland have contributed greatly to the scant knowledge held of these fifth and sixth century saints. These writers have an agenda when they write, as all do, to be relevant to listeners and readership, they were described as not setting out to deceive but of painting an impression using facts and adornments:

And yet, making due allowance for the mentality of those who wrote and those who read them, there is no sufficient reason for impugning the veracity of the writers, much less for despising them. They were neither deceivers nor deceived. The hagiographer had probably as great a regard for truth as his modern critics, but he knew nothing of the canons of literary excellence ... he strove to portray them in colours which might make them interesting to a generation whose intelligence, so far as religion was concerned, had been chiefly moulded by Holy Scripture. He recognised analogies and emphasised them. He was conversant with the main facts and knew how impressive had been the personality and the life of his hero, but he had not, like Boswell, followed him about with a note-book. He was himself an impressionist and by no means sparing of his paint, one whose work doubtless won the approval of the age in which he lived. He had no message for succeeding ages.

At the same time only ignorance or prejudice will place all hagiographers on the same level or refuse to take account of alleged facts, even when they are concealed underneath an intolerable deal of fanciful adornment.

In some cases the Lives of the saints, as presented by their authors, possess real historical value. Those of Sampson, Paul Aurelian, Winwaloe, Tutwal and Malo (Machutus) fall within this category. (Taylor, 1916, pp. 96-97).

Purpose

Hagiographical texts, like these Lives of St Piran and St Ia, are composed with one aim in mind, that of the glorification of the saint to facilitate evangelism. Lives include acts of martyrs' lives, accounts of translations of relics and miracles, hymnography, and some historical events (Angelovska-Panova, 2022, p.302). Often written to elevate the saint to legendary status, the Lives contain embellishments and exaggeration to appeal to the audience. Facts were included and excluded by the decision of the author, but the purpose remained the same, that of spreading the word of Christianity. The writing of these hagiographical texts was with the purpose "of perpetuating the historical memory of people by representing their life as holy" (Brook, 2011, abstract).

Motifs

Irish descent

The motifs of both saints being Irish are shared facts. Legends of St Piran differ in the following content, but most have him being born around AD 480 or 490 (Clinnick, 1954, p.6). One source, Plummer, has him as Welsh, identifying him with St Ciaran of Clonmacnoise (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.105) with a Father being Domuel from Kernow. It has him founding a church in Caer-Teim, Cardiff, while studying under the monks at St Cadog monastery, Llancarfon (Ford, 2001). Other sources, Capgrave, who wrote his collection of the 'Lives of the Saints' in his *Nova Legenda Angli* which was printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1516, most of the information elsewhere is drawn from this collection (Doble, 1965, p.3-4) and John of Tynemouth (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.105), have him as St Ciaran of Saighir, of Irish descent, placing him near the County Cork coastline on an island named Cape Clear from parents Lughaidh and Liedania (Cornwall Calling, 2024) or Lugneus and Liadain (Doble, 1965, p.7). This source, Cornwall Calling (2024), however, wholly contradicts the previous by stating clearly that St Piran is not St Kieran of Clonmacnoise who passed away at the age of thirty-two and is buried at the monastery he founded in Ireland. This source does, however, acknowledge that "virtually nothing exists in literature about him, so most written today is conjecture" (Cornwall Calling, 2024). He is alternatively recorded as most likely being from Kernow (Rees, 2012, p.132).

St Piran is recorded at an elderly age to have travelled to Kernow of his own accord to spread Celtic Christianity there. Reading the different versions of St Piran's Life, it can be hard to extract definitives as all the versions differ from each other and appear to borrow passages just changing the name, the P in the Brythonic Celtic dialect is the

equivalent of a C in the Goidelic Celtic dialect (Open University, 2.4; Brown, 2021, p.14). Misidentification of saints in different Lives due to spelling heralds difficulties for scholars comparing and contrasting specific saints.

St Piran is also well known in Wales and Brittany, casting doubt that an Irish saint could have had so much influence in so many different countries. Some appendices in the Gotha manuscript refer a lot more to Kernow and have the saint buried here rather than in the Irish monastery at Saghir he founded in the Irish *Incipit Sancti Kyrani episcopi et confessors Vita* (Doble, 1965, p.13). It is known that John of Tynemouth copied and summarised Lives of saints which became apparent in 1937 when the fuller Gotha manuscript, a sixteenth century compilation, was discovered in the Ducal Library there (Doble, 1965, p.20). Further information is then read, of saintly exploits in Kernow, that John of Tynemouth had omitted. Seeing the latter tying of St Piran with St Kieran, Doble wrote, "In the older version the entry for March 5 reads: "Also on the same day Saint Kieran, Bishop and Confessor, whose life was resplendent with miracles." In the later copy this has been altered to: "In Cornwall, Saint Pyran, Bishop and Confessor." The change is most significant; the identification with the Irish Saint had been made in the interval." (Doble, 1965, p.21). These Lives will have been written centuries later, around the thirteenth or fourteenth century, when corruption of fact may have occurred in the meantime. The version where St Piran left Ireland as a very old man and came to Kernow seems a copying of the Life of St Ciaran and the name throughout being changed from Kyranus to Piranus with the addition of the voyage to Kernow as the last few lines (Doble, 1965, p.13). The sixteenth century *The Survey of Cornwall* by Carew

(1602) does mention St Piran so his legacy was carried on. Haslam is quite outspoken on the rewriting of British history by invaders saying:

Civilisation and the arts, we have great reason to believe, came first to the Saxons from the ancient *Irish*, from whom the few unconquered Britons that remained received the same; and, as to the establishment of the Church, no one now is so bold as to deny that it was planted here long before the time of St. Augustine. Here is the mistake; the Saxons, unnationally [contrary to a nation or its policies], have been made to supersede the original inhabitants of the island. (Haslam, 1844, p.vi-vii).

Whilst away from Ireland most of the Irish Lives recorded of St Piran are generally quite sparse in detail. That said, his Lives do converge on certain points, though it cannot be assumed that St Piran was Irish, as sources do not agree and have him as Irish or Welsh due to the lost chapel in Cardiff (Ford, 2001; Doble, 1965, p.20). It is said in the Irish versions that he lived a holy life for thirty years in Ireland unbaptised but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was drawn to Rome to be baptised and learn the Catholic faith and Holy Scriptures (Doble, 1965, p.7). After twenty years of study St Piran was ordained a bishop and sent back to Ireland to found a monastery at Saighir Kieran in County Ossary. On his travels St Piran met with St Patrick, who was the archbishop of Ireland, in Italy. More evidence abounds for St Piran being Irish and visiting Kernow with St Kewe being dedicated to Cuach or Ciwa, who was the nurse of the saint from Saighir, also, the local St Buryan being dedicated to the Saighir saint's disciple St Bruinach (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.105). The feast days of St Piran and St Ciaran of Saighir also give weight to the argument that this is the same saint being recorded. "Whytford merely says on March 5, "In Cornwall ye feest of Saynt Pyrane called also Saynt Keren borne of the nobles of yrelonde in the tyme of Saynt Patryke."" (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.105). Although not specifically stated here as St Keran of Saighir it is explicitly implied by placing him in the same time frame as St Patrick.

St Ila, variously written as St Ive, St Ives, St Eia, St Hya and St Hia, is also generally accepted to have hailed from Ireland (Doble, 1960, p.89). That she was an Irish princess in the fifth century who sailed to Kernow and settled in what is now called St Ives is the most accepted Life, however, an enticing Byzantine alternative follows.

Dr Caitlin Green (2018) has been looking at the movement of the saints from a wholly different angle. Her research has been considering whether St Ila was a Byzantine saint who travelled to Kernow. This idea has gained traction as the Bronze Age tin trade routes with the Mediterranean are well known, as are the Roman trade and supply routes; the Byzantine coin discovered on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly in 1989 (Appendix 3) proves there was Byzantine movement around this area too. Other Byzantine pottery finds have been discovered around Tintagel and other parts of Kernow. There is a St Ila from the late Roman / early Byzantine period who is venerated in Constantinople. She is reported to have been martyred in the fourth century AD by Emperor Shapur II. A Greek version of this St Ila's Life was known at the time and a large cult was already well established around that area:

given both that her shrine was located right by the main imperial ceremonial entrance to the city, the Golden Gate, and that it was apparently extensively and lavishly renovated by the Emperor Justinian (527–65), as Procopius in the mid-sixth century notes:

And on the left as one enters the gate which is known as the Golden Gate, this Emperor found a martyr's shrine of St. Ila, fallen in ruins, which he restored with all sumptuousness. Such were the labours accomplished by the Emperor Justinian in connection with the holy places in Byzantium... (Procopius, *Buildings*, L.ix.16-17; the text of St Ila's passion is printed in H. Delehay, *Les versions grecques des actes des martyrs Persans sous Sapor II* (Paris, 1907), vol. II, pp. 453–73.) (Green, 2018)

Whether this St Ia is the same St Ia who travelled to Kernow is unknown, but, well-established trade routes, Byzantine pottery in Kernow (Fulford, 1989) and the same name and sainthood raises the possibility of it being the same person.

After writing about the Lives of these Irish saints Doble reached his own conclusion:

It is not likely that these saints really came from Ireland ... In my *Saint Meriadoc* I have shown that there is good reason for believing that Gwinear and Meriadoc were a pair of Welsh missionaries working together, who, starting from Connerton, evangelized the district which now forms the parishes of Gwinear and Camborne, and afterwards went on to Brittany, where their cult is found side by side, as it is in Cornwall. Derwa and Ia seem to have shared with them in the work of building churches in the valley of Conner. It was a fancy of the middle ages that many of the Cornish saints came from Ireland. (Doble, 1960, p.110).

Both Lives are written apologetically with the same overall script and intention to venerate the saint, exaggerating their Lives into more miraculous than they probably were, and, not necessarily containing historical facts about the saints, not even their place of birth (Orme, 2000, p.215). Irish saints, like St Piran and St Ia, settled in the south and west of Kernow, whereas the Welsh saints, like St Petroc, settled in the north and east (Baring-Gould, 1893, maps). Whether this pattern is due to the travel routes from the other Celtic countries, the currents from Ireland pushing the boats to the tip of Kernow and the Welsh moving overland or a short crossing to the top of Kernow, is not known, however, it seems a reasonable hypothesis. A proposed saints' route, drawn by Dexter, shows sea crossings from Wexford in Ireland to St Davids in Wales, then south Wales to Padstow in Kernow, and on from Mousehole and Penryn to Brittany (Tomlin, 1982, p.38; Appendix 4).

Transportation method

The miraculous means of transportation for these two saints floating over from Ireland and settling in Kernow are a shared similar motif. Kernewek legends have St Piran being tied with a mill stone around his neck and thrown into the sea by the Irish who were jealous of his miraculous powers or by King Aengus who condemned him to death (Cornish Heritage Trust, 2024). Rather than sinking, the Life tells that St Piran floated across and landed near Newquay in a parish named Perranzabuloe (Piran in the sands). This mimics another Saint's Life, that of St Petroc whose story in turn mirrors St Brendan's, as drawn out by Jankulak:

St Petroc's journey, aside from the question of a boat made from glass, shows many elements of otherworld journeys such as are found in St Brendan's tradition ... in language reminiscent of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*. (2000, p.6)

The account of St Ia's arrival is looked at with modern scepticism in other writings, not here, although there could be an underlying, if embellished, strand of truth in it (Taylor, 1916, p.48,86); a vessel may have been used to sail from Ireland, though not necessarily transportation by a leaf. Along with her siblings St Ia was to sail across to Kernow but thinking that their sister was too young to make such a trip they all left early without her, though due to a miraculous wind she is said to have landed in Kernow before them (Doble, 1939, p.9). When the stricken St Ia saw they had left her behind she broke down on the seashore and wept. Other accounts record that she was late and that was why they had left without her. One account records:

Sobbing bitterly, she sat down on the sand to pray. A tiny leaf on the water caught her eye and she touched it with her staff in order to make it sink. Instead, however, the leaf grew and grew. Soon it was so large and thick, that Ia was able to climb aboard and use it as a raft. She thus floated across the Irish Sea and arrived at Penwith in Kernow even before those who had left her on the beach. (Ford, 2006).

This resembles St Piran floating across on a millstone from Ireland on an article not known for buoyancy, and St Petroc touching and growing a bowl into a means of sea transportation when he went to an island off India. Most of the Irish saints settled in the south and west of Kernow as shown by the maps, St Ia and her sainted fraternal siblings, Euny and Erth, being no exception. St Ia became associated with St Ives, St Euny with Lelant and Redruth and St Erth with the still named St Erth, they are all sited around the southwestern tip of Kernow from the St Ives peninsular around the bay to Hayle, where they landed. The Life of St Gwinear notes “They [St Ia’s brothers] in turn arrived safely in Cornwall, at the port which is called Heul [Hayle], whither Hya had preceded them” (Doble, 1960, p.102).

Three further Irish saints are recorded as sailing across to Kernow in 891 (Roscarrock, 1992, p.29), they are said to have come in a boat without oars (Whitelock et al. (Transl.), 1961, p.53), possibly a coracle.

Geographical positioning

With the positioning of the Irish saints settling in the far west of Kernow, mapped from the references in their Lives, it is unsurprising to find both St Piran and St Ia here. Male saints, however, are found distributed throughout Kernow, whilst the female saints are predominantly found in the far west of the county; the survival of their traditions may be due to the geographical remoteness of the area (Fish, 2012, p.4-5). Whether this had any effect on the lack of female saints Lives surviving is unknown.

Founding of religious sites

The founding of churches and monasteries is a comparative motif in the written Lives of these two Kernewek saints, though the quantity and nature of dedications is a notable

difference. St Piran built the Oratory at Perran-Zabulo, has dedications of churches at Perran-Uthno, also named Little Piran (Jones, 1988, p.219) and Perran-Arworthal, a lost chapel possibly sited in the parish of Tintagel, and a holy well in Perranwell and maybe another in Venton-Perran in Probus (Doble, 1965, p.27). Whereas St Ia is commemorated similarly at the holy well dedicated to her at Venton Ia (Fish, 2012, Appendix 1 Figures 1-3; Appendix 5), differently by statues in the alabaster reredos above the high altar in the church she founded in St Ives (St Ives Church; Appendix 6) and in the Lady Chapel (Fish, 2012, Appendix 4 Figure 7; Appendix 6), and, more strikingly, in the stained-glass windows in her founded church of St Ives, and in Zennor and Lelant churches (Fish, 2012, Appendix 3 Figures 2,5,17,18; Appendix 7); only foundations survive of her dedicated chapel at Troon. St Piran's statue, contrastingly, does not reside in a building but, in 2018, was carved out of granite at Trenoweth Quarry, Kernow, where a short service was held before the statue was taken by steam engine to Falmouth where it boarded a boat and set sail for Brittany on the sixth of May. The statue was placed in La Vallée des Saints in Carnoët, Brittany, amongst others in their hilltop museum (Ertach Kernow, 2024; Appendix 8).

St Piran's Oratory, otherwise known as a praying place or house of prayer (Haslam, 1844, viii), located in the sand dunes at what is now called Perranporth from where he prayed and meditated in solitude, is known as the oldest Christian church in Britain (Cornish Heritage Trust, 2024). He preached and spread Celtic Christianity throughout Kernow to the inhabitants who, up until then, were thought to have worshipped with Druidic practices and deified the sun and the rain. Founding the Abbey of Lanpiran with fellow converts, St Piran also founded churches at Perranuthno and Perranarworthal as

well as a chapel at Tintagel, which has since been lost, and a holy well, Venton Barren, is dedicated to him at Probus, he is also recorded as visiting Brittany enjoying dedications at Trézélidé, Loperan in Saint-Malo and Port-Louis, Paimpont, and as Saint-Perran at Pledran, Paule, Glomel and possibly Trébéran.

Alternatively, St Ila came under the protection of a local overlord, Dinan, and was allowed by him to found the church at St Ives that is dedicated to her (Doble, 1960, p.90). St Ila built herself a cell where she would retreat for solitude to pray. She is known as one of the female evangelists in Kernow and the first female martyred Saint in Britain (Lapa, 2018) by King Tewdwr Mawr who was well known to oppose all Christian missionaries (Ford, 2006), however, St Ila's martyrdom was around one hundred years after his reign (Lapa, 2018). The new church, built over her grave, did survive the English Reformation, and is dated to the early 1400s (Appendix 9;10) but no evidence of St Ila's shrine remains. Troon chapel, near Camborne, dedicated to St Ila, was recorded by W Borlase in his unpublished *Parochial Memoranda* from 1750, held on microfilm at the British Museum. From this record, archaeologist Charles Thomas rediscovered the lost chapel, dating the current foundational remains, potentially positioned atop an earlier structure, to after AD 900 (Thomas, 1963, p.78; Appendix 10). The holy well dedicated to St Ila, called "Venton Ila Well" is close to a newer local cemetery and did supply the town with fresh water; as well as the local churches and this holy well, there is also a church in Plouyé in Brittany that was likely dedicated to St Ila. Thomas discusses the possibility of the Saints Ila, Uny, Dennis, Allen, Paul and Berrian being originally known in Kernow and then travelling to Armorica or, if in fact, they travelled from there to Kernow (Thomas, 1916, p.52,53).

Far fewer sites are dedicated to St Ia than to St Piran.

Pilgrimage

Male saints are often seen going on pilgrimage to Rome, like St Piran (Orme, 2000, p.221), St Petroc (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.97), St Cadoc (Baring-Gould, 1908, p.23), St Ffinan (Baring-Gould, 1911, p.15) and St Ailbe (Baring-Gould, 1907, p.131) for instance, but not the female saints. Whether this was not recorded because they were female, they did not undertake such arduous pilgrimages, the audience had no appetite to hear of a woman travelling, or, dismissed as unbelievable that a woman could have managed to do such a journey, is not known.

Biblical imagery

Lives often drew on Biblical passages and stories for inspiration in their composition.

Doble's account records for St Piran:

Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a dream a star fall into her mouth. She related the dream to the *magi*, who told her that it signified that she was to bear a son whose fame would remain in Ireland till the end of the world. The child was born, and brought up on the island of Clera. (Doble, 1965, p.7)

Apart for the spelling of the island Clera and Cape Clear these sources agree, and very clear parallels can be seen with the Biblical passages to Abraham, Zechariah, Mary and Joseph where messages come to them regarding their unborn offspring (The Holy Bible: Genesis. 17:15-19; Luke. 1:11-15; Luke. 1:26-33; Matthew. 1:19-21; Appendix 11). With a lack of historical record to draw on the Lives were often written to a set pattern or to refer back to Biblical accounts. This appears to be what is happening here with the informing of the upcoming birth of St Piran and that he would be a great man. There is no such Biblical prophecy in relation to St Ia.

Virginity and sexual assault

A motif in saints' Lives is that of the female saints mirroring that of the Virgin Mary in the Holy Bible. A miracle recorded in the Kernewek Lives of St Piran includes one where a local chieftain kidnapped a favourite nun of St Piran's from a local convent to wed her against her will. The chieftain only agreed to release the nun unharmed if he was awoken the next morning by the call of a cuckoo, knowing that to be unlikely as it was November. St Piran interceded all night and miraculously the chieftain indeed woke to the sound of a cuckoo calling the next morning and kept his promise, returning the young nun unharmed to the convent (Cornwall Heritage Trust, 2024). Female saints were to imitate the Virgin Mary with their virginity, and this is attacked by males in most of their recorded Lives, which include sexual assault, rape, persecution and / or murder (Wogan-Browne, 1991, p.315). The Welsh patron Saint, David, being conceived by the rape of St Non (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.22; Cartwright, 2008, p.112). St Ia, in her Life, was murdered (Doble, 1960, p.93) though no mention is made of her being sexually assaulted herself. No accounts of sexual assault or rape are found in the male saints' Lives.

A degree of piety and self-restraint is seen as necessary particularly for female saints, like St Ia, though not so for male saints. Most saints in their Lives are also noted for their fasting, self-deprivation and solitude, not so with St Piran. The stories in Kernow have him as enjoying a feast, joining local celebrations and liking alcohol. It has brought about the Kernewek phrase "as drunk as a Perraner" (Visit Cornwall, 2024).

Martyrdom

Martyrdom is common to both genders with pagan rulers and others, as previously seen with King Tewdwr Mawr, attacking and martyring the portrayers of the faith, the

Christian missionaries (Lapa, 2018). Most Irish saints who came over at that time and settled in that area of Kernow met the same fate at the hands of the local pagan ruler, they were systematically thrown into a pit of reptiles and became martyred (Lapa, 2018). Many of the saints met this fate soon after their arrival and it is not recorded how only St Ia of all her siblings was spared for as long as she was, she became the first British female martyr.

The passing of St Piran is also debated, one version has him too being beheaded by Teudar the King of Kernow in AD 480, however, the more popular held belief is that aged over two hundred years old he was a little too unsteady on his feet from alcohol and simply fell to his death down a well (BBC, 2024).

Disciples

The first converts and disciples, even monks, of St Piran are recorded as a wild boar, a fox, a badger, a wolf, and a doe (Doble, 1965, p.8), a story still portrayed today (Visit Cornwall, 2024), reminiscent of the account in one of the Irish Lives. They lived with St Piran and followed all orders the bishop gave. This again mimics another Saint's Life, that of St Petroc who had a tame wolf from India and a deer he saved from being hunted by King Constantine, (Lapa, 2014); the motif of befriending animals is echoed by the later thirteenth century St Francis of Assisi. This motif is not present in the Life of St Ia.

Miracles

Many miracles are recorded in the Lives. In St Piran's Life a multitude are written, subsequently lost, some of bringing deceased soldiers back to life (Doble, 1965, p.9). This motif again is not present in the Life of the female saint being studied here.

Feast Days

The feast days of both the saints being compared in this essay are recorded in the old calendars, St Piran's being the fifth of March and St Ila remembered on February the third each year, being commemorated on the nearest Sunday (Doble, 1960, p.89). A difference is seen between these two saints in the manner of commemoration, a civic procession is held every year from the Guildhall to St Ila's holy well (Appendix 12), led by the local Mayor where a silver hurling ball is blessed before being thrown into a crowd of children, passing amongst them until at noon when the child handling the hurling ball wins, the sport of *hyrlîan*, hurling, is uniquely a Kernewek tradition being only played as well in St Columb Major and Bodmin now; whereas St Piran's Day is subject to ongoing petitioning to Parliament for it to be made a national holiday. His feast day is celebrated more fully (Appendix 13) with marches, festivals, plays, and a pilgrimage over the sand dunes to his Oratory (Appendix 14), these are just some of the many activities put on to commemorate the patron saint of Kernow. Until 1764 processions of tin miners marched through Breage and Germoe on St Piran's Day, alongside their commemorations of local saints Breaca and Germoe (James, 2007, p.30).

Gender Bias

Gender bias in antiquity can be seen as we read accounts by male authors:

We need to be aware of the individual writer's relationship to the period he is treating (and it should go without saying that our sources are invariably male). We should also be sensitive to the influences at work on him and the prejudices to which he is prone. (Keegan, 2004, p.132).

Just as history is written by victors, it is also generally written by literate males (Free, 2024, p.11). As Celtic women are written about with biases, both xenophobic and sexist

(Free, 2024, p.54), these cannot be discounted when looking at the writings on female Celtic saints.

There are many similarities but also many differences between the Lives of St Piran and St Ia, many of these can be put down to gender bias. The first example of this could be shown in the lack of St Ia's own Life, she is only recorded in the Lives of her siblings and contemporaries. A lack of any Lives of female saints at all is most likely to be gender bias from the time (Head, 1999), and, hopefully, is less prevalent now. The female saints are read of through their saintly brothers and hardly anything in their own entries. It was still present in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* where the entry written by David Farmer on St Bueno acknowledges some true facts but where St Gwenfrewy, his niece, was mentioned, he referred to it as a 'tissue of improbabilities' with no explanation (Cartwright, 2008, p.69). This, Cartwright takes to be gender bias as the two Lives are describing the same event and the female Saint's version is seemingly written off for no other apparent reason.

With little or no written manuscripts surviving of the Kernewek saints (Baring-Gould, 1914, p.657) there is little evidence to look at except for later Lives compiled some hundreds of years later. This has already been touched upon, however, amongst those surviving documents far fewer relate to female saints than to male saints. This leads to looking at the Lives of male saints which make mention of female saints, relatives and otherwise, also to the names of the dedicated churches and holy wells. St Ia is mentioned under the entry for the male Saint Euny merely as his sister (Baring-Gould, 1908, p.470). The Irish princess, daughter of a chieftain of Munster (Berresford Ellis, 1992, p.15), born around AD 480, is recorded as the sister of St Euny, also written as

Vny, and St Erth, who was also known as St Erc, St Urith and St Herygh (Baring-Gould, 1908, p.459). One of the main sources of information found about her comes from the *Vita Guigneri*, Life of St Gwinear, a male saint, which was written around AD 1300 in Brittany by Anselm, a Breton clerk not the twelfth century saint. Reference to a man named Gur led to Grand Bard Henry Jenner's conclusion that this was based on an earlier, written or spoken, Life in Kernewek, 'gur' being Kernewek for 'a man' (Doble, 1960, p.104) where it is 'den' in Breton. William of Worcester visited Kernow in 1478 and wrote of the siblings:

Saint Herygh, the brother of Saint Vny, a bishop, lies in a certain church situated under the cross of the church of Saint Paul in London; his day is kept on the vigil of All Saints, that is, the last day of October.

Saint Vny, the brother of Saint Herygh, lies in the parish church of Saint Vny near the town of Lallant, on the northern sea three miles from Mont-Myghell, his day is kept on the first day of February.

Saint Hya, that is Seynt Hy, the sister of Saint Herygh and sister of Saint Vny, virgin, lies in the parish church of the town of Seynt Hy, on the northern sea, about 12 miles from the extreme end of the western kingdom of England and her day is kept on the third day of February. (Doble, 1960, p.79).

In 1538 John Leland travelled to Kernow and, as this was in the reign of Henry VIII but before the destruction of all the Catholic books, he read the Life of St Ia as was written at the time.

He found a Latin Life of the patron Saint in St Ives church, which was no doubt read at the feast of the Saint. He noted in his diary that:
The paroch chirch is of Ia, a nobleman's daughter of Ireland, and disciple of S. Barricus. Ia and Elwine, with many other, cam into Cornewaul, and landed at Pendinas. This Pendinas is the peninsula and stony rok wher now the toun of S. Ie's stondith. One Dinan, a great Lord in Cornewaul, made a chirch at Pendinas, at the request of Ia, as it is written yn S. Ie's legende. (Doble, 1960, p.90,107).

It is only through looking at these other Lives or people's writings from having seen the originals that anything can be learnt about these female saints such as St Ia. Travelling

over from Ireland at the same time were St Gwinear, also known as Fingar, and his sister Piala, Phiala; more is written in the male St Gwinear's Life about St Ia, also in the Life of St Breaca (Doble, 1960, p.90).

After the anti-Christian and anti-Catholic attacks there is still a very definite gender bias to the writings with more female saint's Lives not surviving. Geographical proximity is unlikely to have been the cause for these missing Lives as male saints around St Ia, including St Piran, have their own surviving Lives, however, the Lives of her brothers, St Erth and Euny, have not survived either; it appears only to be gender bias that has led to there being far fewer, if any, Kernewek female saints being written about in their own Lives and not just as relations of male saints.

The number of dedicated sites to St Piran exceeding those to St Ia may be a case of gender bias with the thought that female saints would not have been capable of travelling far. Also, the sites themselves may have been rededicated to a male saint, replacing the female saint, and being seen as superior.

Fewer writings of female saints making pilgrimage to Rome may be gender bias.

Dismissal may have been the reason for St Wenefred's Roman pilgrimage, recorded in *Vita S. Wenefredae*, being left out of *Vita et translation S. Wenefredae* with the author, Prior Robert of Shrewsbury, stating "that he is not prepared to recount the episode not having found it 'in libris' [I translate to be 'in ancient texts' (Smith & Lockwood, 2020)]" (Winward, 1999, p.91); potential gender bias. St Ursula, a fourth century Romano-British Saint whose feast day is October the twenty first, is an exception. She is recorded as avoiding a demanded marriage from a foreign pagan king who threatened to invade Britain and raze it to the ground, by travelling around Europe to Cologne with

eleven thousand virgins (Baring-Gould, 1913, p.321). No details of the eleven thousand women are recorded, this again could be an example of gender bias.

In the Lives of these two saints only the male St Piran enjoys the Biblical motif of prophecy regarding his birth, St Ia does not. This has the possibility of being due to gender bias, implying she is not worthy of such a prophecy.

Lack of male saints being held to a Biblical example of virginity and being sexually assaulted could be due to gender bias. Females may have been seen differently, mirroring the Virgin Mary in these hagiographies. They are frequently subjected to sexual assault and rape, unlike male saints.

St Piran is recorded as having converts and disciples of animals, like St Petroc and, the much later, St Francis of Assisi. St Ia, on the other hand, does not and this may be gender bias through the thinking that females would not possess such a status.

Miracles are recorded in the Lives of St Piran but not in St Ia's, which could again be due to gender bias on behalf of the author and reader, neither wishing to believe a female capable of these things.

With these two saints, the more prolific feast day celebrations of St Piran may be due to his status as Kernow's patron saint rather than being gender bias, though this cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor.

Conclusion

It is clear to see that there is a problem with a lack of original manuscripts from which to draw upon when comparing the Lives of saints such as Ia and Piran and indeed any of these fourth, fifth and sixth century saints due to Henry VIII, and others, destruction of them. Surviving documentation is of a much later origin, written with a clear agenda to a specific audience or congregation; not recording female saints could be down to the audience not wanting to hear of their exploits due to gender bias or the author not wishing to record it for the same reason. These hagiographical texts were written to venerate the saints and used for evangelistic purposes. This does not mean that there are no historical facts held within these Lives but that the facts may be embellished, exaggerated and, in some cases, inserted from a script; some of the Lives were merely rewritten with names and places changed. Others have copied miraculous feats performed by other saints, St Petroc drawing water out of a stone as did St Patrick. One of the main places that texts were lifted from and events copied out of was the Holy Bible, as seen with St Piran. These Celtic missionaries were evangelising and spreading their Celtic Christianity, so it is understandable that they would use a familiar Bible story to communicate a story of a local Saint.

The geographical location of the saints cannot be the reason for the lack of written record, as seen by the neighbouring St Piran and St Ia in the far west of Kernow, along with the other saints of Irish extraction. He is recorded in the Irish Lives, whereas, contrastingly, there is nothing on the female St Ia, giving rise again to the reason being one of simple gender bias rather than one of remoteness of geography. It seems most likely to be gender bias as the cause for there being less Lives of Kernowek female

saints themselves rather than their mentions only as relations in male saints' Lives. The more prolific surviving writings on St Piran, and celebrations of him, may be due also to the fact of his status as patron saint of Kernow itself.

The Lives of St Piran and St Ia began with similar roots in Ireland and then both floated over to Kernow on miraculous craft, the millstone and the leaf respectively. Likewise, both founded Oratories and Churches in Kernow. The main differences found are in the recording and survival of their Lives due to prejudice against Catholicism and ongoing perceived gender bias in the variety of motifs and themes covered in this comparison.

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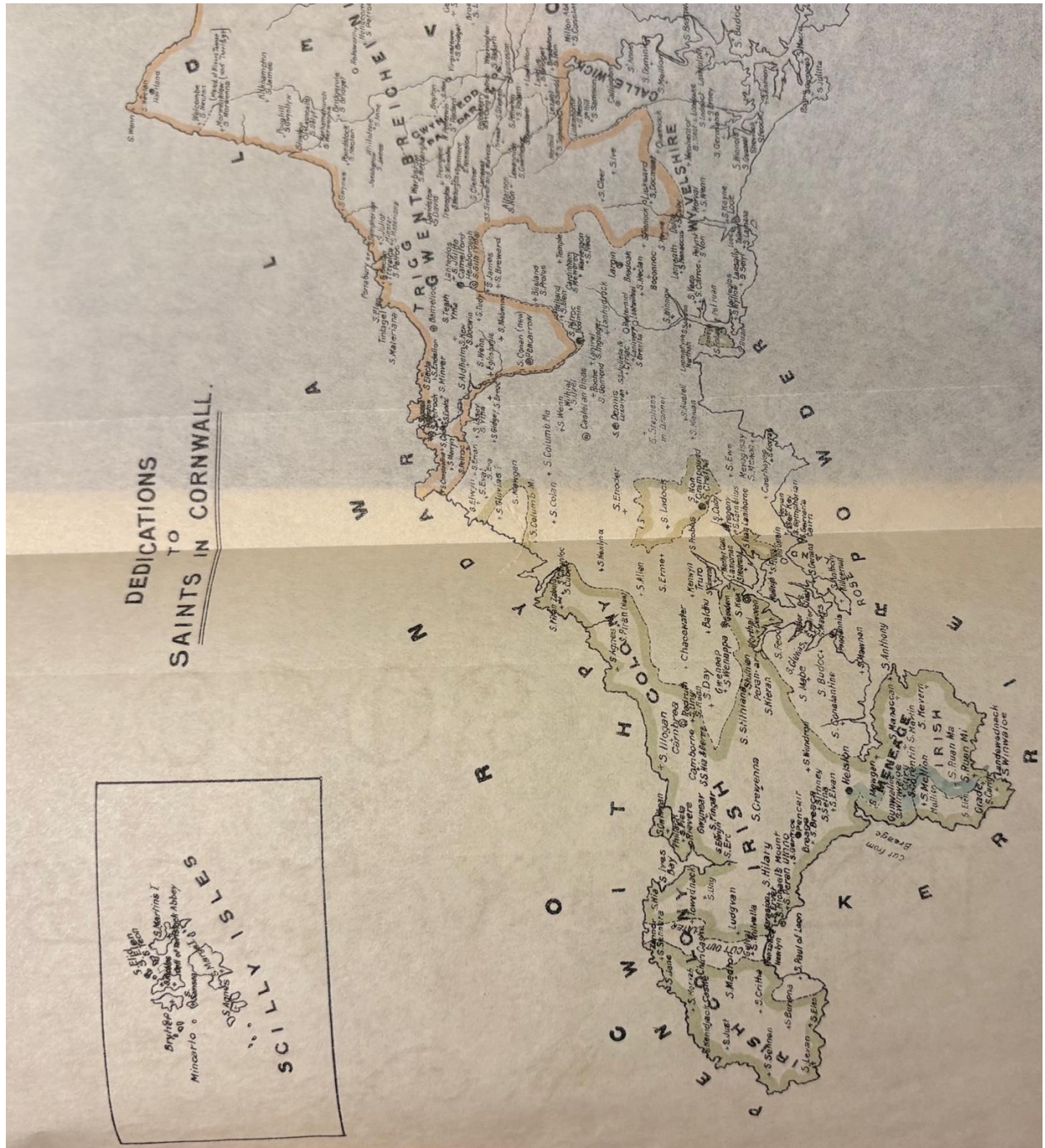
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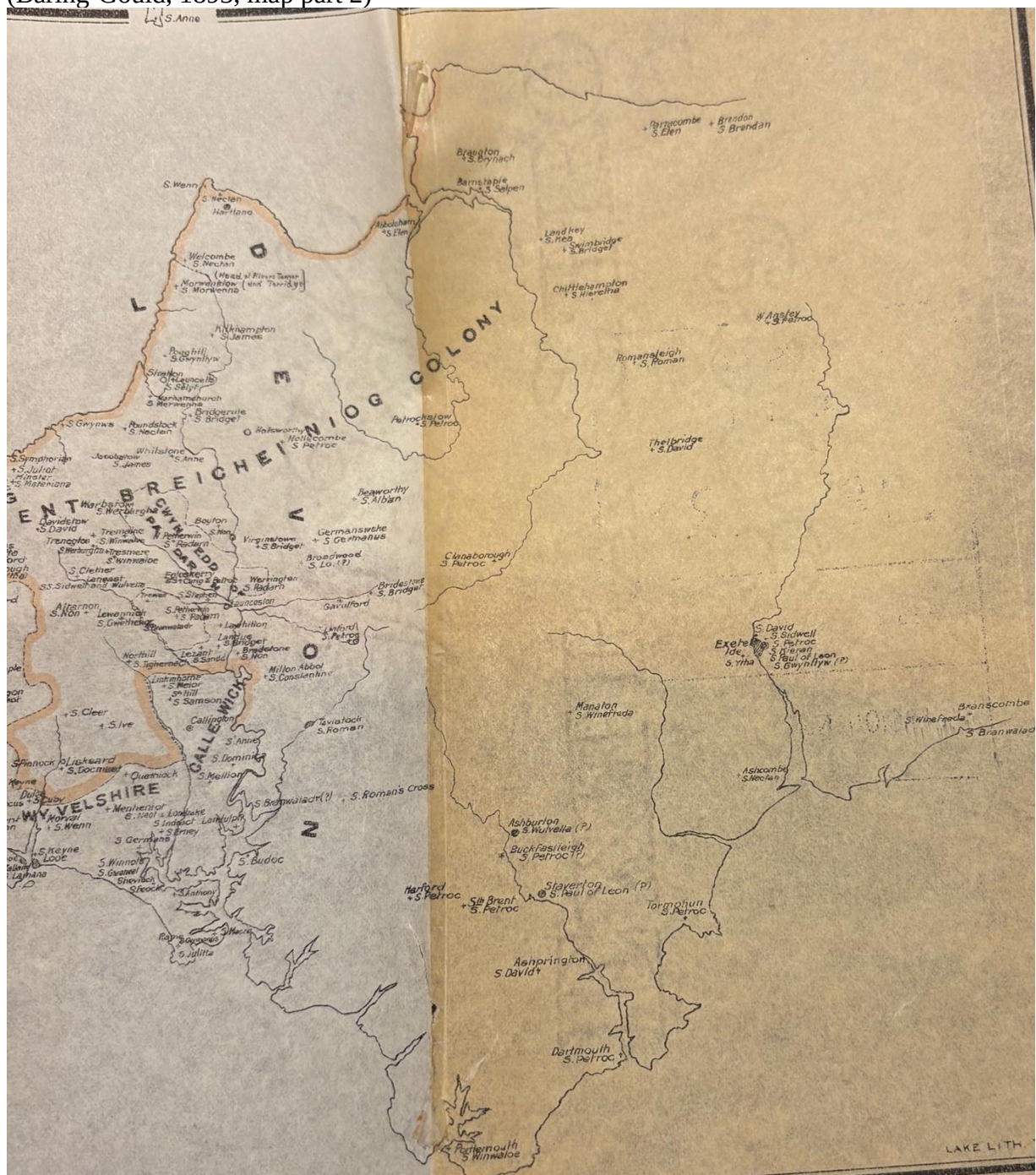
Appendices

Appendix 1: Irish and Welsh saints settled in Kernow

(Baring-Gould, 1893, map part one)



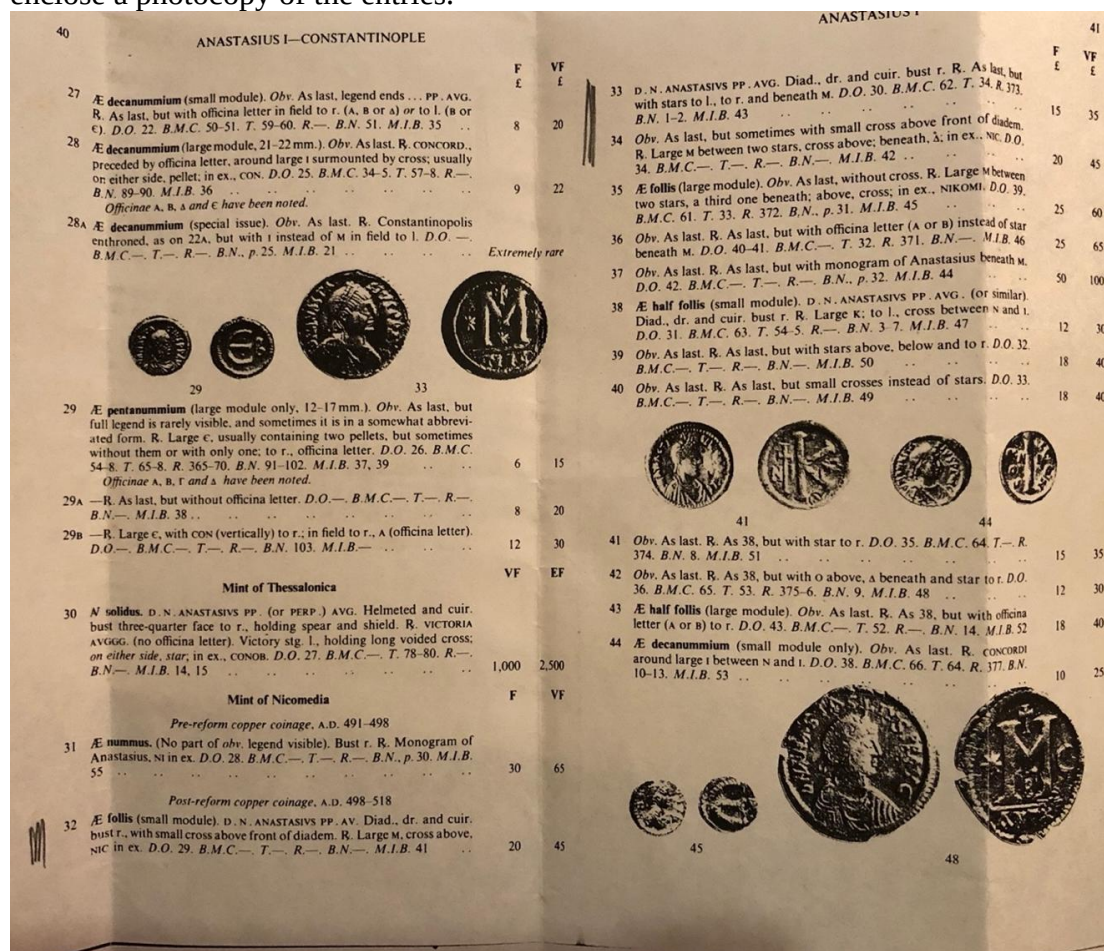
(Baring-Gould, 1893, map part 2)



Appendix 3: Byzantine coin, Bants Carn, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly

(Penhallurick, 1989, personal letter)

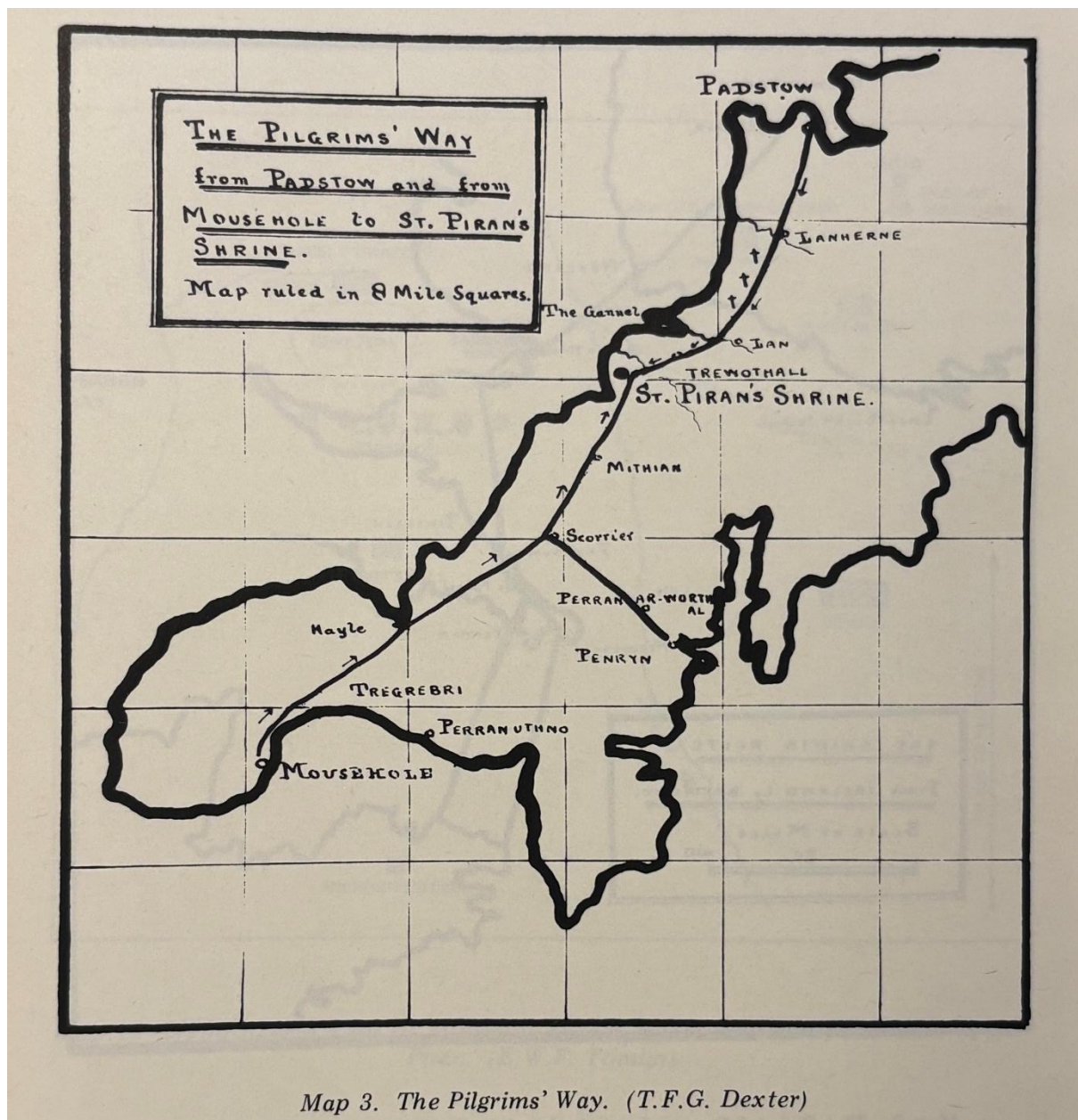
“R.D. Penhallurick the Curator of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, County Museum recorded his analysis “When I looked more closely at your coin, I could see it was more interesting than I first supposed. What looked like figures on the reverse is a large letter M. This immediately identifies it as a 40 nummi piece or ‘follis’, and early Byzantine. It resembled some of Anastasius I (AD 491-518) described as a small moule follis – i.e. the coin is small, unworn its diameter would have been about 24 mm. I know of only one other Byzantine coin from this part of the world, and that was found on St Martin’s. As Byzantine coins, especially when worn, are difficult to identify, I sent it to the British Museum, and was delighted to have it returned this morning confirming my tentative identification. It is indeed Anastasius I, Cat. No.s 32 to 34 in David R. Seer’s “Byzantine Coins”, Seaby, 1987. I enclose a photocopy of the entries.



The anon person who wrote to me from the British Museum suggests the coin “probably reached Cornwall in more modern times”. This is certainly the accepted view, and one would regard any Byzantine coin in the south west with some scepticism. However, in view of the close links through the tin trade with the eastern mediterranean in immediate post Roman times, I would not want to be too dogmatic about that interpretation at present. Rather than send you the coin through the post, I will leave it here for you to collect. If you ever feel you do not need the coin for yourself, I would be very pleased to add it to our collection. We have very few Byzantine coins, and none from Cornwall. The one from St Martin’s is still in private hands on the island.” The more current interpretation is that this does indeed show trade in the Isles of Scilly in the Byzantine period.”

Appendix 4: Route of Irish saints

Proposed route of the saints from Ireland to Wales, Kernow and Brittany (Tomlin, 1982, map 3, p.38)



Appendix 5: Images of Venton Ia holy well

(Fish, 2012, Appendix 1 Figures 1-3)



“Figure 1 Venton Ia, Saint Ives. Location of the holy well”



“Figure 2 Venton Ia, Saint Ives. Inscription above the well”



“Figure 3 Venton Ia, Saint Ives. The holy well”

Appendix 6: Statues of St Ia, St Ives church



Statue in the alabaster reredos above the high altar, to the right of the crucifix
(St. Ives, 2024 Available at: <https://www.stiveschurch.org.uk/st-ia-1>)



“Figure 7 St Ives – St Ia” (Fish, 2012, Appendix 4 Figure 7)

Appendix 7: Images of stained-glass windows to St Ia

(Fish, 2012, Appendix 3 Figures 2,5,17,18)



“Figure 2 Detail of window at Lelant, showing St Anta and St Ia”



“Figure 5 Stained glass window at Zennor, showing St Senara ‘Patron of this Church’ and St Ia ‘Virgin and Martyr’”



“Figure 17 Stained glass window at St Ives, showing St Sennen, St Ila and St Levan”



“Figure 18 Detail of the window at St Ives, showing St Ila”

Appendix 8: Statue of St Piran

(The fifth of May 2018, personal photographs)



St Piran statue with former Chair of Parish Council and Twinning Committee Roger Phillips



Vicar of Mabe blessing the statue



Traditional pipers



Steam Engine pulling trailer with statue

(The ninth of September 2018, personal photographs)



Boat in Falmouth to sail to Brittany



Statue of St Piran in La Vallées des Saints with former Chair of Mabe Parish Council and Twinning Committee R. Phillips and Henri Simon former Mayor of Primelin, Finistère and Chair of Twinning Committee



La Vallée des Saints, Carnoët

Cultural events will mark departure of granite statue

A UNIQUE series of cultural events spanning several days will start next week in Falmouth to celebrate the departure of the St Piran sculpture, commissioned by La Vallée des Saints, from Cornwall to Brittany.

The St Piran statue will be the 100th to be placed in La Vallée des Saints to mark its tenth anniversary, and will be the only one carved outside of Brittany. It weighs 11 tonnes and has an inscription on its base reading: "Oh my god, my boat is so small and the ocean so big," from the Breton fisherman's prayer.

The massive St Piran statue was carved by hand in one of Cornwall's remaining traditional granite quarries, the Trenoweth Quarry in Mabe, by sculptors David Paton from Cornwall, and Stéphane Rouget from Brittany.

In imitation of the legend that tells of St Piran having a millstone placed around his shoulders before being thrown into the sea by Irish pagans, where he then floated across the sea before landing at Perranporth, the statue



The classic French fishing vessel Nebuleuse

Picture: Louise Jones

has a ring around St Piran's neck which is made of Irish granite.

The main event starts on Saturday, May 5, at 10am when a Cornish/Breton market will open on Custom House Quay. On sale will be ales and organic wines from Brittany.

Visitors will be able to buy Breton jumpers and memorabilia and sample Breton and Cornish foodstuffs.

At 11am the statue will leave

the quarry in Mabe on a trailer towed by the 1911 built Burrell steam engine Clinker to start the trip down to Falmouth via Penryn.

The procession will arrive at the Prince of Wales pier at 3pm before heading to North Quay where the St Piran will be of floated onto the quayside for the night.

The classic French fishing vessel Nebuleuse, which paid a fleet-

ing visit to Falmouth last summer, will arrive in port to load the St Piran.

The former tuna boat, which is based in Paimpol but registered in Camaret, will load the St Piran at North Quay on Sunday May 6, at 10am before she moves off into the harbour over the low water periods. She will return at every daylight high water for visitors to inspect the vessel.

FalRiver cruise boats carrying passengers and artists on-board will join a flotilla in the harbour where the Nebuleuse and her precious cargo will be blessed by a pint from the Granite Rock brewery.

Organisers have yet to confirm if the Nebuleuse will spend the day in St Mawes from 1pm to 4pm on Tuesday, May 8. Weather permitting, the Nebuleuse will depart from Falmouth for Paimpol on Friday, May 11.

West Briton the thirtieth of April 2018 (Jones, L., 2018)

Appendix 9: Icon of St Ia

(Lapa, 2018, Available at: <https://orthochristian.com/116654.html>)



Appendix 10: Churches of St Ia, St Ives and Troon



St Ives (Lapa, 2018, Available at: <https://orthochristian.com/116654.html>)

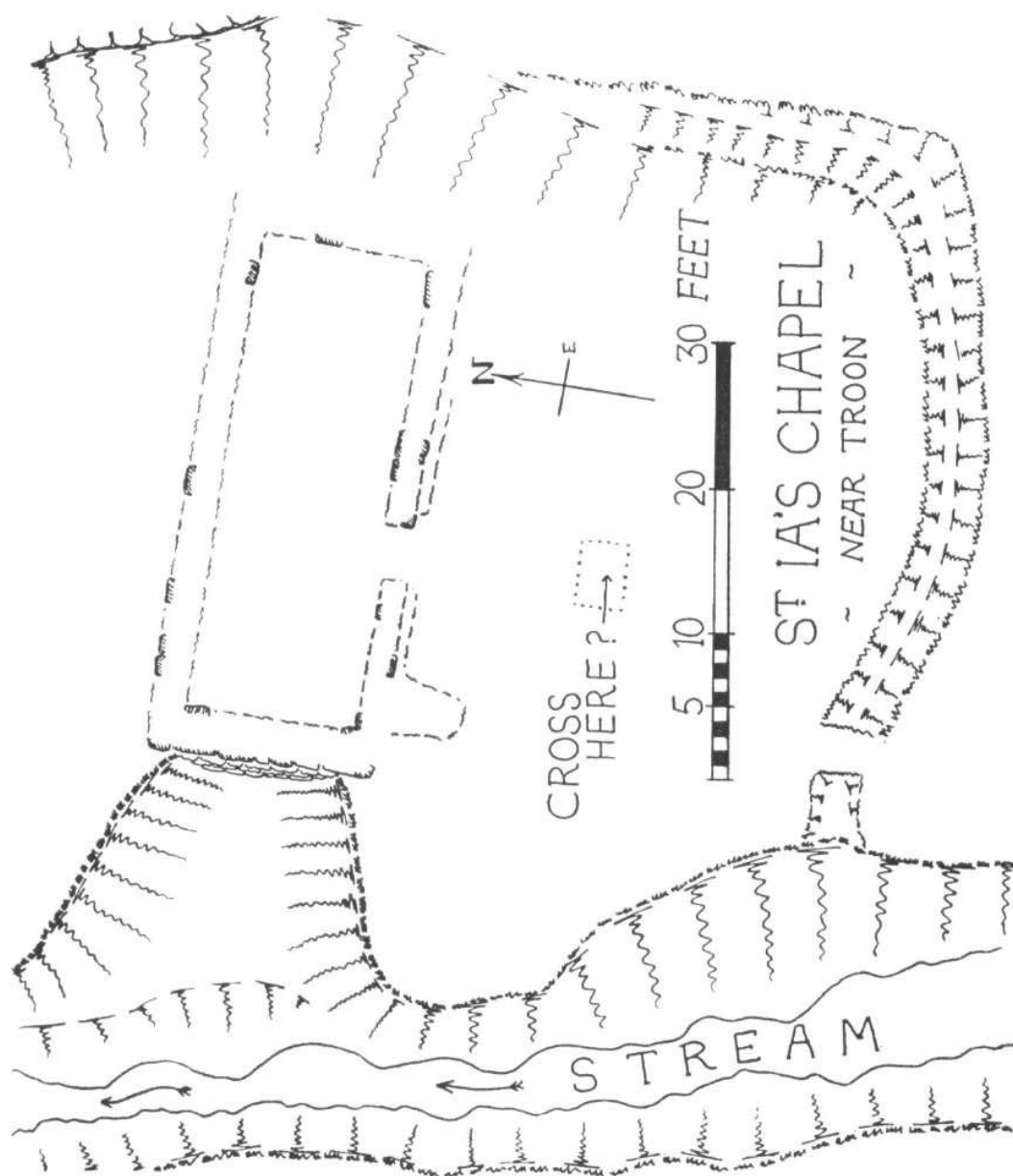


Fig. 23 St. Ia's chapel, Troon, Camborne: sketch plan

Troon (Thomas, 1963, p.78)

Appendix 11: Biblical prophecies of birth

(The Holy Bible: Genesis. 17:15-19; Luke. 1:11-15; Luke. 1:26-33; Matthew. 1:19-21)

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ... God said, “No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac [I translate from the Hebrew *Yitzvah* to mean ‘he who laughs’ (Duke, 2024)]. I will establish my covenant for his offspring after him. (The Holy Bible: Genesis. 17:15-19)

Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John [Ἰωάννην I translate into the Greek (Aland, B., et al. (eds), 1993; Perschbacher, W., (ed) 1992)]. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. (The Holy Bible: Luke. 1:11-15)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus [Ἰησοῦς, I translate into the Greek (Aland, B., et al. (eds), 1993; Perschbacher, W., (ed) 1992)]. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (The Holy Bible: Luke. 1:26-33)

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus [I translate from the Hebrew Yeshua meaning ‘to deliver’ or ‘rescue’], for he will save people from their sins. (The Holy Bible: Matthew. 1:19-21.)

Appendix 12: Holy well of St Ia

(Lapa, 2018, Available at: <https://orthochristian.com/116654.html>)



Appendix 13: St Piran's Day celebrations

(BBC, 2024, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-68406096>)



(Visit Cornwall, 2024, Available at <https://www.visitcornwall.com/things-to-do/insider-recommendations/st-piran-s-story>)



Appendix 14: St Piran's Oratory excavated at Perranporth

(BBC, 2024, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-68406096>)

