

(3) Analyse the role and function of saintly relics in the cult of several Welsh or Celtic saints. In your answer you can refer to corporeal as well as secondary relics. (5000 words)

Relics fulfilled multiple roles and functions with the cults of the saints they belonged to. This essay shall examine such roles within the cults of several Celtic saints. For the purposes of this essay, 'Celtic' shall refer to areas that spoke a Celtic language, more specifically Ireland and Brittany. The term 'relic' can be used to describe both the bodily remains of a saint, or items which had belonged to them in life, and so become important to their cults.^{1 2} A saint's body did not have to remain in one piece in order to be classified as a relic – many were divided into pieces and distributed across wide geographical areas.³ Items that had come into contact with a relic could also become relics themselves, though these tertiary relics will not be the focus of this essay.⁴ Regardless of what form a relic took, they were physical manifestations of the saint, holding both their sacred power and representing their continued presence with the community.^{5 6} As such, their use was a key component of the cult itself.⁷ The saints that shall be discussed in this essay will be St. Patrick of Ireland, as well as Paul Aurelian, Coretin and Ronan from Brittany. Their relics and cults shall be examined through three main topics areas. The first area shall focus upon the relationship between relics and the communities they belonged to, starting with a discussion of the powers Celtic relics were believed to hold, and then their role as objects to both revere and protect. The movement of relics will then be discussed, with an initial focus on pilgrimages, before analysing how moving the relics themselves affected their role. The final section shall focus upon relics as a means of legitimising the saint, as well the wider community that the saint and their cult belonged to.

The relics of the saints had a symbiotic relationship with their worshippers. They both provided miracles that aided the community, whilst requiring the protection of their

¹ Wilfrid Bonser, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', *Folklore*, vol. 73, (1962), pp.234-256, [p.234].

² Thomas Head, 'The Cult of the Saints and Their Relics', (New York: Hunter College and the Graduate Centre, 1999) pp.3-4.

³ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.3.

⁴ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.4.

⁵ Ellen Shortell, 'Dismembering Saint Quentin: Gothic Architecture and the Display of Relics', *Gesta*, vol 36, (1997), pp.32-47. [p.44]

⁶ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.3

⁷ Niamh Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics – an Irish Perspective' in *Making the Medieval Relevant*, ed. by Jones, Chris, Kostick, Connor, and Oschem, Klaus, (Farnborough, De Gruyter, 2020) pp.239-254, [p.240].

parishioners. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson argue that by the late third century, the fragments of martyrs had become 'loci of power and of special access to the divine'.⁸ As such, through relics, people could seek the help of a now dead saint, either via patronage or by petitioning the saint in question for aid.⁹ This concept of saintly patronage was based upon the 'social practices of lordship, feud, and gift exchange'.¹⁰ This meant that Christians could gain protection and other forms of aid from deceased saints by providing them with services and gifts.¹¹ The resulting aid could range from interceding on the person's behalf in the divine court, offering protection from earthly enemies, curing diseases, bring about changes in the weather and ensuring victory in battle.¹² ¹³ The use of Celtic relics for warfare is attested in 1166 when Tyrone was invaded by Ó Ruairc, and 'the clerics of the Bell of the Bequest were killed... and the Hui Briuin carried off the bell'.¹⁴ Here, A. T. Lucas argues that it seems Patrick's bell had been brought to the battle in order to ensure victory for Cinél Eoghain.¹⁵

Healing the sick in particular was an important function of relics. Indeed, Bosner argues that this was their original use.¹⁶ Such miracles were particularly important for St. Ronan's cult in Quimper. It is unknown exactly when the saint was moved from Locronan to Quimper, but his translation appears to have damaged 'the affinity of saint and place',¹⁷ which resulted in a need for him to develop a new identity. As a result, the final three chapters of his Life are focused upon his post mortem miracles which 'demonstrate the range and effectiveness of the saint's power to the *lector vel auditor* of the life'.¹⁸ The first miracle his relics performed featured a dumb man being healed after praying at the altar where Ronan's relics were kept, and spending a night beneath his relics was said to have effectively exorcised another man.¹⁹ ²⁰ The last miracle detailed was not a healing miracle, though it did demonstrate the saint's power to protect the community. In this instance, his relics were used

⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson 'Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages', *Gesta*, vol 36, (1997), pp.3-7. [p.3]

⁹ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.1.

¹⁰ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.6.

¹¹ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.6.

¹² Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.6.

¹³ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.240

¹⁴ A. T. Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics and Reliquaries in Ancient Ireland', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol.116, (1986), pp.5-3, [p.18].

¹⁵ Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p.18.

¹⁶ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p.235.

¹⁷ Julia, M. H. Smith, 'Oral and Written: Saints, Miracles, and Relics in Brittany, c. 850-1250', *Speculum*, vol. 65, (1990), pp.309-343, [p.330].

¹⁸ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.330.

¹⁹ Bollandists, 'Vita S. Ronani,' *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum Latinorum in Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensi*, vol. 1. (Apud Editores: Brussels, 1889-93) pp.457-458.

²⁰ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.330.

to save Quimper from a fire by placing them in the fire's path, which diverted it away and prevented further destruction.^{21 22} The power of the saint's relics were vital in proving his usefulness, and therefore his worthiness of being worshipped and becoming a part of the community his body now resided in. As such, the power of Ronan's relics was not only a method of protecting and healing the worshippers of his saint cult, but also a way of demonstrating why he deserved their patronage to begin with.

Furthermore, Bosner argues that relics held a secondary purpose of enabling contact between the worshipper and the saint, which was thought to allow the saint's intervention to work more effectively.²³ This was particularly important in the long term as there 'was no better ally to have on the final day of judgment than someone already living in heaven.'²⁴ Wycherley argues that this underlines an issue within the cult of relics, in that relics did not have any worth or meaning on their own.²⁵ Their value as based upon acceptance that it belonged to an individual connected to a higher power, and who's connection to such relics continued after death.^{26 27} As such, power of the relics came from the people and their faith in these objects, though it was believed that the relics themselves were a link between the people and the saint themselves.²⁸ This meant that in order for a saint to continue to be worshipped, Christians needed to believe in their intercessory power.²⁹ As a result, the relics created a reciprocal relationship between the saint and their followers. In the case of Paul Aurelian, this was a simple relationship, though it depended more heavily upon his secondary relics, rather than his corporal relics. For Paul Aurelian, springs and bells were 'the tangible links between the saint's earthly career and his continuing miracle-working power'³⁰. These secondary relics formed the basis of much of the worship of this saint, and it has been noted that his Breton hagiography gives little importance to his corporeal relics.³¹ Julia Smith argues that this was not unique to him – other Brittonic saints cults functioned in near to or total absence of corporeal relics.³² These traditions were 'fluid and responded to local

²¹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.330.

²² 'Vita S. Ronani', pp.457-458.

²³ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', pp.235-236.

²⁴ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.1

²⁵ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

²⁶ Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp.205-206.

²⁷ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.242.

²⁸ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', pp.242-243.

²⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', pp.249-250.

³⁰ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

³¹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', pp.335-336.

³² Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.336.

needs³³ as they were only remembered as long as the saint proved useful and relied on oral memory. Smith argues that this was particularly important as oral societies had a tendency to do away with memories that no longer had any relevancy for the community.³⁴ As such, Paul Aurelian's secondary relics functioned as proof of his continued usefulness for his cult, offering both legitimacy and the ability to maintain itself. However, this particular relationship should not be automatically applied to all saints and their cults. Quimper provides of an exception to this in the form of Coretin: Smith argues that in the relationship between Coretin and Quimper, his arm reliquary was totally irrelevant, and most of his body was missing from the area.³⁵ Despite this, the community still felt his 'effect presence and powerful protection'³⁶, and as such, at least in the case of his cult at Quimper, the existence of his arm relic was almost entirely divorced from the miracles that he performed. Possibly, this is a consequence of his cult being more focused upon oral traditions surrounding his miracles.³⁷ This is especially notable when compared to Ronan, another saint whose cult could be found in Quimper. Ronan's cult was more reliant upon a written tradition and the miracles his relics performed in gaining the worship of Quimper's people.³⁸ As a result, it appears that for Quimper at least, the importance placed upon a relic, and therefore the relationship it had with the community, was entirely dependent upon which cult is being analysed. This in turn suggests that the role of relics within cults is not uniform, and local variation must be taken into consideration.

The community also had a duty to protect and ensure proper devotion to the relics. As symbols of the saint themselves, any disrespect shown to a relic was tantamount to personally insulting the saint, which in turn demanded retribution.³⁹ Therefore, a tomb or reliquary held more than just bones – to pray to a relic was the same as praying directly to a living member of the divine court.⁴⁰ This can be seen in 809, when Dúnchú ap Tullyish was murdered next to the shrine of St. Patrick within the abbot's house.⁴¹ ⁴² Niamh Wycherly argues that as a

³³ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

³⁴ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

³⁵ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.329.

³⁶ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.329.

³⁷ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

³⁸ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.331.

³⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

⁴⁰ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.4.

⁴¹ Batholomew MacCarthy, *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: a chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540*, vol.4, (Thomas and Company Ltd: Dublin, 1901) p.137.

⁴² Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

consequence of this death, an attack was carried out by Áed son of Niall.⁴³ The issue was not that someone had simply been murdered, but that Dúnchú had been slain next to Patrick's shrine.⁴⁴ This was a 'gross violation'⁴⁵ of a sacred place, demonstrating contempt not only for Patrick but the Church of Armagh. As a result of this, and also due to his position of a political patron of Armagh, Áed was honour bond to retaliate.⁴⁶ The *Annals of Ulster* detail that during the same year as Dúnchú's death, 'Patrick's shrine,[was] avenged by Aedh'⁴⁷ Furthermore, in the year 1357, the *Annals of Ulster* mention the 'naming punishment (pillaging of Ulidia) for profaning shrine of Patrick'⁴⁸. As such, whilst relics were objects of power and protection towards those who worshipped them, there was also an element of what was and was not appropriate behaviour. As extensions and representations of the saints, the relics themselves were deserving of proper devotion, and anyone who did not perform due reverence was to be punished, if not by the saint, then by the community itself. In this respect, St. Patrick's relics were not just an object of power, or a way for the community around his relics to connect themselves to him. His relics were also valuable objects which the Church of Armagh and its patrons had a duty to protect.

The movement of pilgrims and the relics themselves also had an impact upon the role and function the relics played within their cults. Part of the appeal of relics for pilgrims was their ability to transcend the boundaries of space and time between the deceased saint and the person who had travelled to meet them.⁴⁹ As a result, relics were objects of interest for people both within their local community and outside of it.⁵⁰ This interest was such that many early Christian monasteries were designed to accommodate and further entice pilgrims towards them, who themselves sought to either venerate the church's saint, seek miraculous intervention, or to otherwise satisfy their 'hopes and aspirations'⁵¹.⁵² However, pilgrimages also had an economic motivation for the churches that housed the relics, and Tomasz Boroski and Christopher Gerrard comment that 'gifts from pilgrims could be of substantial value' to a

⁴³ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

⁴⁴ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

⁴⁵ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

⁴⁶ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.249.

⁴⁷ MacCarthy, *Annals of Ulster*, p.302.

⁴⁸ MacCarthy, *Annals of Ulster*, p.304.

⁴⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.240.

⁵⁰ Martin Locker, *Landscapes of Pilgrimage in Medieval Britain*, (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015) p.10.

⁵¹ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p.256.

⁵² Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.245.

cult.⁵³ Pádraig Ó Riain argues that the memory of St. Patrick is centred around three events, one of which being a pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick on the last Sunday of July.⁵⁴ This particular pilgrimage was centred around the Black Bell of Saint Patrick, believed to have driven demon birds from Croagh Patrick during his vigil there.⁵⁵ Every person who made this pilgrimage was supposed to kiss a cross engraved upon the bell and move it around his body three times in the direction the sun travels across the sky.⁵⁶ In addition to this, it was expected that every pilgrim would give Patrick's cult a small monetary offering, and during a good season, the keeper of the bell could make 'no less than £10'⁵⁷ from pilgrims, which was a significant amount of money.⁵⁸ As such, pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick were more than an act of religious worship and reverence to the saint. They were also a means by which his cult could make money and, in this respect, relics offered the cult a level of financial security, being a method through which a regular annual income could be made. This practice was not unique to St. Patrick's cult, and the financial benefits were such that for poor monasteries, securing relics was a great temptation due to their potential as a source of wealth via pilgrims.⁵⁹ For Irish saint cults, relics and pilgrimages were an important opportunity for a community to achieve 'economic prosperity'.⁶⁰ Bosner argues that acquiring relics and pilgrims was one of the major activities of the medieval Church and as a result, pilgrimages were both an instance of genuine devotion on the part of the pilgrim, and worldly greed on the part of the church.⁶¹

It was not only the movement of worshippers that was important. The movement of the relics themselves had an important effect upon the function of relics. Whilst shrines were built over the tombs of saints, they were also constructed in places where saintly relics had been moved to at a later date.⁶² These shrines themselves attracted pilgrims, although such construction also had the effect of promoting the cult of the saint.⁶³ ⁶⁴ Taking relics on a

⁵³ Tomasz Boroski and Christopher Gerrard, 'Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, vol. 92, (2017), pp.1056-1100, [p.1062].

⁵⁴ Pádraig Ó Riain, *A dictionary of Irish saints*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), p.531.

⁵⁵ Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p.23.

⁵⁶ Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p.23.

⁵⁷ Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p.23.

⁵⁸ Lucas, 'The Social Role of Relics', p.23.

⁵⁹ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p.236.

⁶⁰ Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: New York, 1994), pp.205–206.

⁶¹ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p.235.

⁶² Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.4.

⁶³ Head, 'The Cult of the Saints', p.4.

⁶⁴ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.245.

circuit could have the same effect.⁶⁵ As such, particularly in the case of Irish saints, which are Wycherley's focus, the movement of relics was a method of raising awareness for a particular saint. This could in itself translate to, as in the case with pilgrimages, further economic benefits to the saint's cult. So great were the economic incentives, in Ireland at least, that Wycherley states there is a debate to be had over whether money was the prime objective behind these circuits, rather than genuine concern for the population during times of hardship, such as famines.⁶⁶ Indeed, *Cóic Conara Fugil* and Berrad Airechta both refer to the earnings of a reliquary in relation to such circuits.^{67 68 69 70} However, it should be noted that Breton saints were rarely moved prior to Viking attacks making such moves a necessity in order to protect relics from being destroyed. As such, Smith argues, there are no records of a Brittonic saint being dismembered into several smaller relics prior to the tenth century, and that when this did happen it was for the sole purpose of sending the saint's corporeal relics to French churches for safekeeping during Viking invasions.⁷¹ Possibly as a result of this, Brittonic churches were generally not particularly concerned with having such relics returned as soon as possible.⁷² For example, the relics of Coretin, patron saint of Quimper, were removed during an attack and sent to Paris, and were then dispersed across France. Therefore, the movement of relics was also a method of protecting them from destruction, not merely a method of generating income. For saint cults, this may have ultimately been done with the aim of protecting the saint and their cult, not only their relics. It should also be noted that worship of Coretin continued in Quimper after his most of his corporeal relics were removed, possibly supporting the concept that his relics were removed for the saint's protection. However, too much focus should not be placed upon corporeal relics in the particular case of Coretin, as whilst his corporeal relics were largely removed from Quimper, his secondary relics remained there and were able to maintain his cult in the absence of the saint's earthly remains.

⁶⁵ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.245.

⁶⁶ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.250.

⁶⁷ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.250.

⁶⁸ Rudolf Thurneysen, *Cóic Conara Fugil: Die fünf Wege zum Urteil*, (Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Berlin, 1926), p.21, p.55.

⁶⁹ Daniel, A. Binchy, *Corpus Luris Hibernici*, (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies: Dublin, 1978), p.591.

⁷⁰ Robin Chapman Stacey, 'Berrad Airechta: an Old Irish tract on suretyship' in *Lawyers and Laymen: Studies in the History of Law, presented to Professor Dafydd Jenkins on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Morfydd E. Owen, T. M. Charles-Edwards, and D. B. Walters, (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1986), pp.210-233, [p.210].

⁷¹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.336-372.

⁷² Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.336.

Quimper also provides an example of an originally foreign saint who had a cult that originated in Quimper.⁷³ Ronan's relics were transported to Quimper, but interest in his cult was dependant on the production of a Vita being written about him.⁷⁴ Prior to the Vita being written, the community within Quimper demonstrated little interest towards his relics and any potential miracles they might have been capable of. As such, in the case of Ronan, the movement of his remains created an initially uncertain situation, which was improved only through a combination of written documentation of his life, and his relics proving their usefulness to the community. Quimper therefore is an example of an area where transportation and preservation of relics successfully preserved the cult the relics belonged to. Additionally, it was also the home of a cult for a saint whose existence, whilst tied to Quimper in particular, was not a native saint and whose position was made less certain because of this.

By contrast, Irish relics were moved from their churches so that they could be present at the swearing of oaths and making agreements.⁷⁵ The Annals of Ulster detail how in 734, the relics of St Peter, Paul and Patrick were 'carried around to enforce law...'⁷⁶ Wycherley argues that instances such as this were carried out as the circuit of relics was a method bridging distances and differences between territories in Ireland, as well to 'smooth relations between princes',⁷⁷ and aided in the creation of military networks.⁷⁸ As such, the movement of his relics allowed Patrick to maintain a level of political influence in Ireland after his death, being a tool of reconciliation and peacekeeping during political talks. Furthermore, in Quimper, Coretin's arm was taken out for only two occasions, one of which was settling a property dispute between Quimper's bishop and a local in 1241.⁷⁹ Said dispute was settled with both parties swearing an oath on the Gospels and the arm of Coretin.⁸⁰ Though this was a dispute between a member of the clergy and laity, rather than warfare, it does appear that Brittonic relics were also used to settle disputes between factions. This demonstrates that the movement of relics enabled them to function as peace keeping items in disputes, which also suggest that relics were a source of political as well as religious authority in the Celtic world.

⁷³ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.336.

⁷⁴ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.331.

⁷⁵ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.250.

⁷⁶ MacCarthy, *Annals of Ulster*, p.307.

⁷⁷ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.240.

⁷⁸ David Rollason, 'Relic-Cults as an Instrument of Royal Policy c. 900-c.1050', *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 15. (1986), pp.91-103, [pp.93-96].

⁷⁹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p. 238.

⁸⁰ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p. 328.

Relics played a key role in the legitimacy of a saint's cult. This was not only for the saints themselves, but also the places connected to them. In 787 The Second Council of Nicaea decreed that relics were a requirement for an altar to be consecrated and so no church could be officially dedicated without a saint's relic.^{81 82} This was prior to when the procedures for canonisation under the papacy was developed, and said process would develop until the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁸³ As a result, it was 'the translation of the holy person's remains into the altar, or into a reliquary that rested on the altar, that often constituted the making of a saint'⁸⁴. This encouraged churches to fake relics when a genuine one could not be found, although luckily the same papal decree made note that relics had a tendency to miraculously generate valid copies.⁸⁵ In the case of St. Patrick, Tírechán claimed that Patrick ordained Olcán and gave him Roman relics.^{86 87} Wycherley argues that when making this statement Tírechán was concerned with establishing which Irish churches belonged to St. Patrick.⁸⁸ In doing so, Tírechán created an Ireland that was scattered with relics bestowed by Patrick and his disciples, which Tírechán in turn used as tool in establishing St. Patrick as not only the founding saint of Ireland, but also the most important.⁸⁹ This, Wycherley argues, reflects that strategic function of relics in authenticating claims and jurisdictions over churches, as whilst such relics did not belong to Patrick specifically, they were still used to legitimise his position as the head of the Irish saints.⁹⁰ As such, in the cult of saint Patrick, relics were a tool used by his followers to establish his pedigree, though this would have also authenticated the churches who claimed their own relics were gifts from him.

By contrast, much more difficulty was experienced in using Brittonic relics to establish the legitimacy of their saints. Guibert of Nogent conducted an inquiry into the value of saints' relics, which began with 'a scathing attack on the cults of Breton saints'⁹¹. For Guibert, the only acceptable sign of a saint was the written word, whilst relics were the epitome of

⁸¹ Bynum and Gerson, 'Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts', p.3-4.

⁸² Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages' p.236.

⁸³ Bynum and Gerson, 'Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts', p.3-4.

⁸⁴ Bynum and Gerson, 'Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts', p.3-4.

⁸⁵ Bosner, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', p.236.

⁸⁶ Tírechán, 'Collectanea' in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. by Ludwig Bieler (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae: Dublin, 1979), p.122-167, [pp.160-161].

⁸⁷ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

⁸⁸ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

⁸⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

⁹⁰ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

⁹¹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.309.

uncertainty and this would have presented a problem in his assessment of Brittonic saints.⁹² This was in no small part because Breton saint cults largely lacked written evidence, instead relying upon oral traditions to spread stories on the miracles their saints had performed.⁹³ As a result, Guibert would have struggled to find a Breton saint who met his strict criteria, resulting, in his eyes at least, there being relatively few legitimate Brittonic saints, regardless of whether or not their cults possessed a relic.⁹⁴ Memory of Paul Aurelian, for instance, focused largely on local oral traditions attached to healing springs, geographical landmarks, and his secondary relics, as oppose to a hagiography.⁹⁵ Therefore, it appears that for Saint-Pol-de-Léon, the region where Paul Aurelian's cult was situated, relics and their own local stories of Paul Aurelian were more important in determining his legitimacy than the written documentation that members of the church, such as Guibert, demanded. Possibly, this was because his springs and secondary relics were 'tangible links between the saint's earthly career and his continuing miracle-working power'⁹⁶. This was as his springs and one of his secondary relics, a bell called *Hirglas*, were associated with healing, which resulted in the memory of Paul Aurelian still being useful for Saint-Pol-De-Léon, and so retaining an oral tradition.^{97 98} As such, Saint-Pol-De-Léon had no need for a written tradition focused specifically upon Paul Aurelian. Here, as in the case of St. Patrick, relics were an important factor in marking a person a saint, though Patrick's relics were enough to give him official sainthood, whilst Aurelian had less official support from his worshippers. This in turn could suggest that there was a difference in opinion between the of Saint-Pol-de-Léon laity and clergy over the exact criteria a saint must fulfil in order to be deemed legitimate.

Relics were not only vital in legitimising saints, but also the areas such saints were connected to. The role of relics in devotional activity resulted in them also being used in the 'operations and framework of the church'⁹⁹. This is especially well attested in the use of relics in church consecration, for which they were essential in the eighth century.¹⁰⁰ This was because the Council of Nicaea forbade the consecration of a church without relics, with the

⁹² Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.309.

⁹³ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.309.

⁹⁴ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.309.

⁹⁵ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.323.

⁹⁶ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

⁹⁷ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.324.

⁹⁸ Vurmonocus, *Vita Pauli Aureliani*, (Turnhout: Brepols Publisher, 2011), p.446.

⁹⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.247.

¹⁰⁰ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', pp.247-248.

threat that any bishop caught consecrating such a church would 'be deposed'.¹⁰¹ Evidence from Ireland indicates that the country was not an exception to this rule, with relics being a requirement for the founding of a church in early Ireland.¹⁰² In turn, after a church had been consecrated, relics could be used to bolster its reputation. Tírechán claimed that Patrick had given Sachellus the relics of Peter and Paul, as well as Stephan and Lawrence, to be kept in Armagh.^{103 104} Whilst these relics were not the bodily remains of St. Patrick, they were still connected to him, and the Church of Armagh used to them to strengthen their political position in the late seventh century.¹⁰⁵ Using relics in this way was not unique to Armagh, as many monasteries, towns and royalty used relics to establish their own authority and boundaries.¹⁰⁶ However, the corporeal relics of St. Patrick were of particular importance, to the point that following his death a conflict arose between the Uí Néill and the Airthir over who would possess his remains.¹⁰⁷ It is said that after his body was carried to the river Cabenne it disappeared, a miracle believed to be aimed at maintaining peace between the two tribes.¹⁰⁸ Another, albeit less violent, conflict later arose that regarded Patrick and the status of places claiming a connection to him. In the seventh century, Armagh, which claimed to have been established by Patrick two centuries earlier, was aiming to be recognised as the leading Irish church.¹⁰⁹ The biggest threat to Armagh's plans was Kildare, which Cogitosus had previously claimed was the head of most Irish churches.^{110 111} Cogitosus evidence for the primacy of Kildare were the relics of saint Brigit, the church's founder, and her bishop Conláed.¹¹² Conversely, Armagh argues that their possession of the relics of St. Paul, Peter, Stephen and Lawrence demonstrated that they were the superior church, and moreover these

¹⁰¹ Henry Robert Percival, 'The Canons of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council' in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils Of The Undivided Church: Their Canons And Dogmatic Decrees, Together With The Canons Of All The Local Synods Which Have Received Ecumenical Acceptance*, (Scribners, Parker: New York, 1900), pp.555-570, [p.560].

¹⁰² Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.248.

¹⁰³ Tírechán, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, p.122.

¹⁰⁴ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

¹⁰⁵ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

¹⁰⁶ Bynum and Gerson, 'Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts' p.4.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick McDonagh, *History Ireland*, (2018) < <https://www.historyireland.com/muirchus-life-of-st-patrick-and-the-history-of-fifth-century-ulster/> > [accessed 15 March 2023].

¹⁰⁸ McDonagh, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244.

¹¹⁰ Cogitosus, *Vita S. Brigitae*, ed Jean Bolland and others, (Acta Sanctorum: Paris, 1863), pp.235-141, [p.135].

¹¹¹ Sean Connolly and Jean-Miche Picard 'Cogitosus, Life of Saint Brigit', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol 117, (1987) pp.5-27, [p.11].

¹¹² Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.244-245.

relics were gifts to them from St. Patrick himself.^{113 114} Based upon this dispute, and the manner in which the combatants used their possession of saintly relics in order to prove their side was the superior church, it appears that within medieval Ireland relics had the ability to legitimise a church, but also demonstrate its power and status over others.

Brittonic saints were very localised, and so became heavily associated with the place of their cult, to the point that Brittonic communities were resistant to the intrusion of new saints into their religious life, which in turn meant that Brittonic saints did not enjoy wide worship.¹¹⁵ In the case of Paul Aurelian, he was so heavily interconnected with his community that the need for written propaganda in his name was eliminated, as he was able to effectively perform his post mortem miracles regardless.¹¹⁶ The importance of his corporeal relics in this should not be overstated, as sometime between 958 and 960, his corporeal relics were moved to Fleury for the Bishop Mabbo of Saint-Pol's retirement.¹¹⁷ Smith argues that the removal of said relics had little impact upon Paul Aurelian's cult, possibly as they were not the most tangible link between him and the community that he founded.¹¹⁸ Instead, the *Vita Golveni*, published much later, suggests that the cult flourished based entirely upon the worship of places associated with him as well as his secondary relics.¹¹⁹ As such, whilst relics offered legitimacy to an area, corporeal relics should not be emphasised over secondary relics. In the case of Paul Aurelian at least, secondary relics were able to legitimise his cult and its place within the local community in the absence of any bodily remains. Furthermore, Coretin's shrine at Quimper is another example of a Brittonic saint's cult which survived the loss of most of his corporeal relics.¹²⁰ This suggests that whilst relics were important in establishing a Brittonic church and saint cult, such organisations were able to survive their corporeal relics being distributed elsewhere at a later date.

Relics had many roles and functions within Celtic saint's cults they belonged to. They were believed to have the power to protect and heal worshippers of the saint, yet were also items

¹¹³ 'Liber Angeli' in *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. by Ludwig Bieler (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae: Dublin, 1979), pp.184-191 [p.186].

¹¹⁴ Wycherley, 'The Enduring Power of the Cult of Relics', p.245.

¹¹⁵ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.337.

¹¹⁶ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.337.

¹¹⁷ Smith, 'Oral and Written', pp.324-325.

¹¹⁸ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.325.

¹¹⁹ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.325.

¹²⁰ Smith, 'Oral and Written', p.327.

demanding respect and protection from said community. If a relic was disrespected, it was up to the community to bring about appropriate retribution. As a result, the relationship between a relic and the saint it belonged to, as well as the wider community, was one of mutual benefit. The dual role of the relic created a reciprocal relationship. This was not limited to corporeal relics – secondary relics could accomplish this just as well, as seen in the case of Coretin's cult. Movement was another key aspect in the function of Celtic relics, in that pilgrimage could be both an act of worship, as well as a method that the saint's cult could earn money. Economic motivations also affected the movement of the relics themselves, particularly in the case of circuits of relics. However, relics were also used to settle disagreements and bring about a favourable outcome in warfare. It should also be noted that moving Brittonic relics was a method of protecting them from being damaged or destroyed in Viking attacks. In the case of Coretin, this resulted in a higher level of prominence being attributed to his secondary relics, whilst for Ronan this resulted in a need to prove his usefulness to Quimper. Relics could also offer a saint's cult legitimacy, particularly prior to the development of the canonisation process. Yet the way relics did this was not the same for each Celtic saint. For St. Patrick, his relics were used to establish him as the leading saint of Ireland, whilst the removal of Paul Aurelian's corporeal relics had little impact upon his cult, in part as his cult still had access to his secondary relics. Relics also legitimised the places associated with their saint's cult. Patrick's corporeal relics, both those associated personally with him and those he was said to have gifted to Armagh, were used by Armagh to argue that they were the leading church of Ireland as oppose to Kildare. By contrast, Brittonic cults were heavily localised and so did not experience wide worship, though secondary relics were able to support local worship.

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