

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.

A saint's relic is a physical object that has a direct association with that saint or with God. A relic can be corporeal, that is, the remains or fragments of the body of the saint like their bone, blood, flesh or hair. The early relics consisted of ashes of the burned bodies of the martyrs, and specimens of their blood. We can also consider secondary relics, that is an item or piece of an item that the saint used whilst they were alive. In this category we can consider clothing, their books, clothing or other personal items associated with the saint.

In Rome, the bodies of SS Peter and Paul and all those who were thought to have died for the Christian faith were interred. Thacker tells us that veneration of the apostles and martyrs began in the third century, and was encouraged by Pope Damasus. The remains of the saints were housed in catacombs, with inscriptions that identified them, and worship took place at these holy tombs.¹ The power and veneration offered to these cult sites grew, with Papal support for secondary relics, even if there was some opposition to contact relics and the worshipping of such.

It is well known that the veneration of saintly relics reflects a belief that the saints in heaven will intercede on behalf of the faithful on earth. Relics also have cures and miracles attributed to them through the closeness of their association with the saint. Reverence for the relic contributes to the honour of the saint. And, following the Second Council of Nicaea in 787², it was expected that every altar should contain a relic. The stories of the miracles associated with relics have been collected in hagiographical works, which in turn contain collections of earlier writings no longer in existence, and details of oral traditions. It is also known that the stories of the saints have attracted additional 'details' over the years as hagiographers have used the works for their own purposes. It is little surprise then that the cults of the saints have spread across the Christian world and been adapted for local use.

¹ A. Thacker, 'Loca Sanctorum: The significance of place in the Study of the Saints' *Local saints and churches in the early medieval West*, ed. By A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp 1-43, (p. 3)

² The council reversed the Iconoclastic approach to the use of images within the church, and reminded the clergy that they were supposed to be living simple lives in line with the teachings of the church

In this essay I will review the cults of three specific Celtic saints. The saints I will look at were missionaries rather than martyrs who travelled to spread the word of God. They founded religious establishments, and their renown spread outside their homelands. I will consider the transmission of the cults via hagiographical works and what role the relics play in this. I will consider the prominence of various types of relics. I will also try to draw comparisons between Ireland, Wales and Brittany in the attitudes towards relics throughout history.

As a Welsh woman, it feels only fitting to start this essay with St David. St David is strongly associated with southwest Wales and is portrayed as both a healer and a military figurehead. He is thought to have lived in the 6th century and was known for being an extremely ascetic man. He was educated by St Paulinus, and became a priest, performing numerous miracles during his life. He was a missionary, and travelled throughout Wales and Britain, founding twelve monasteries. Over 50 churches and chapels across South Wales are dedicated to him. He also made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he was consecrated as a bishop. He died in the late 6th century and was buried in a shrine in the cathedral which bore his name. It was after his death that his influence spread, and there are traces of his cult in Brittany and southwest England. This much we know from both a Latin (12th century) and a Welsh (14th century) *Life* which provides us details of David's life and miracles, and the long Welsh poem *Canu y Dewi* by Gwynfardd Brycheiniog which praises David and provides information about relics associated with him.

Rhygyfarch's *Vita* is based on old manuscripts found chiefly at St Davids.³ In his *Vita*, Rhygyfarch states that David founded a monastery at Mynyw, where present day St Davids is situated, thus stating the continuity and connection between David and that geographical area. It is certain that Rhygyfarch's work had political motivations, looking to uphold the independence of the Welsh Church from the influence of Canterbury, to emphasise that St Davids was the leading diocese in Wales, and that David was the pre-eminent Welsh saint. He wrote his *Vita* in the early 1090s, against a historical background of Norman settlement and great upheaval. Gerald of Wales wrote David's life in the mid-1190s, which was a polished version of Rhygyfarch's *Vita* and the Nero Digby recension of *Vita Sanctae David*, and

³ W. H. Davies, 'Rhygyfarch' <<https://biography.wales/article/s-RHYG-YFA-1056>> [accessed 22nd April 2023]

introduces the Imperfect Gospel, a secondary relic that David had been working on but was completed by angelic intercession. David is also mentioned in texts from the Breton peninsula, such as the *Vita Pauli*, the *Life* of Paul Aurélien. It is worth noting that David's renown was such after his death that Pope Callixtus II agreed to canonise him between 1119 and 1124, and "ordained that two pilgrimages to St David's would equal one to Rome and that three visits would be equivalent to one to Jerusalem itself".⁴

Abbott Bernard was responsible for completing the building and dedication of St Davids' cathedral in 1131. Even though he was a Norman, and a foreigner inserted "in contempt of the clerics of the Britons"⁵ his appointment ended the disruption caused by the widespread conflict. He was unable to locate the bones of David, the possession of which would have been a real boon to the enhancement of the cult, however not having the bones does not appear to be a setback.⁶ Despite the lack of corporeal relics, the cult of David grew and spread thanks to Rhygyfarch and Bernard, Gwynfardd Brycheiniog and even the Anglo Normans and Flemings who used his name in their wars against the Irish.⁷

In the late thirteenth century, John de Gamages, prior of Ewenni, claimed to have discovered David's body after receiving a vision from God as to where it could be found. This was recorded in John's obituary, the only source which mentions it, and the *Annales Cambriae* state that work started on the shrine of St David in 1275. Again, this was during a period of war and disorder, and Cowley feels it plausible that Gloucester Abbey, which John de Gamages was associated with, might have looked to St Davids' for assistance at this time.⁸ The body of David was eventually dismembered, and parts acquired by individuals, including Edward I, and other churches. Although Edward was a devout pilgrim, by taking ownership of the head of David and other parts of his skeleton, he was demonstrating that the "glory of the Welsh had been transferred to the English".⁹

⁴ B. Tanguy, 'The Cults Of SS. Nonne And Divi In Brittany', in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation*, ed. By J. Wyn Evans and J.M. Wooding (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2007) pp 207-219, (p. 213) quoting Bowen

⁵ F.G. Cowley, 'The Relics Of St David: The Historical Evidence', in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation*, ed. By J. Wyn Evans and J.M. Wooding (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2007) pp 274-281, (p. 275) quoting *Brut y Tywysogion*

⁶ J. Wyn Evans, 'St David And St Davids', in *Celtic Hagiography And Saints' Cults*, ed. By J. Cartwright p. 13

⁷ Cowley, p. 276

⁸ Ibid, p. 278

⁹ Ibid, p. 278

The first mention of the secondary relics of David are made in the *Annales Cambriae* during the late 11th century. We learn about the bell, of which more later, and an altar covered in skins which no one could look upon, which was kept at Llangyfelach. This could be the same altar that David gave to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. At Llanddewibrefi, an important cult site, a golden pastoral staff was kept. The relics were widely distributed across the cult area, and Wyn Evans wonders if this was to secure the allegiance of churches such as Llangyfelach which were dedicated to saints other than David.¹⁰ In 1089 the *Brut y Tywysogion* stated that the shrine of David was taken from the church and completely destroyed. This is likely the action of Norman raids, which would have been on the minds of the clergy. Later still, during the Protestant Reformation, William Barlow was appointed to St Davids and he seized the relics, denouncing them as superstitious. The relics that were seized were two heads, likely those of Justinian and Caradog, and a worm-eaten book, which was probably the Imperfect Gospel. Barlow's letter is the last reference we have to David's secondary relics, and it is likely they would have been destroyed. This ended several centuries of pilgrimage to St Davids.

The question of David's relics arose again in the late nineteenth century with the discovery of bones in part of the cathedral which had been built by Bishop de Leia in the late twelfth century. The bones were removed, placed in a chest buried again, where they stayed for 54 years. Speculation grew about the bones, and William Williams, the new Anglo-Catholic dean of St Davids had the chest dug up and the bones put into a new reliquary. In 1925 Dean Williams held an ecumenical service to commemorate the 1600th anniversary of the council of Nicaea. He invited Anglicans, non-conformists and representatives of the eastern orthodox churches including the Patriarch of Jerusalem. By doing this, the first Archbishop of Wales asserted the identity and continuity of the church with the Orthodox East rather than the Latin West.¹¹ As we can see, even in the twentieth century, the relics were being used for political manoeuvres and establishing the place of the church in society. The next year, formal pilgrimages were resumed, and not just for pious purposes. The Act of Disestablishment¹² had

¹⁰ J. Wyn Evans, pp.13-14

¹¹ J. Morgan-Guy, 'Shrine and Counter Shrine', in *St David Of Wales: Cult, Church And Nation*, ed. By J. Wyn Evans and J.M. Wooding (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2007) pp286-295, (p. 293)

¹² Disestablishment meant the end of the church's special legal status, and Welsh bishops were no longer entitled to sit in the House of Lords as Lords Spiritual. As the Church in Wales became independent of the state, tithes were no longer available to the church, leaving it without a major source of income.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_in_Wales#:~:text=Disestablishment%20meant%20the%20end%20of,a%20major%20source%20of%20income> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

been introduced, and there were fears that funding would be a problem for the church. The elevation of the relics was the cause of bitter controversy which raged back and forth for some twenty years. Eventually the bones in the reliquary were carbon dated in the 1990s, and were found to be too late in date to be those of St David, but could possibly be St Justinian.

The next saint I would like to consider is St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. We have two short works written by Patrick himself, the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*, and although they are not dated he is generally thought to have lived in the fifth century. Patrick's hagiographer, Muirchú, opts for a date of 432 as this would place Patrick's arrival in Ireland closely after Palladius in order to pick up the missionary work that Palladius did not complete.¹³ Loughlin prefers a later date for Patrick's death, around 493. We know from Patrick himself that he was taken as a slave to Ireland, where he managed to escape back to his family before finally returning to Ireland to do missionary work for the rest of his life. Patrick is popularly celebrated for converting Ireland to Christianity, however by his own account God wanted him to return there because there were still people on the island who were not yet Christian.¹⁴ As such, he was merely finishing off the work that had already been started. His cult spread rapidly though Ireland and he became associated with places throughout the land, his mission being to wander from place to place. Following his death, the seventh century biographer Tíreachán made a list of the churches which were claimed to have been founded by him, and located his work mainly in northeast, central and western Ireland. Muirchú was attached to the church at Sléibte in Leinster, and portrays Patrick as a heroic figure. Tíreachán was a bishop in Meath and concentrated on his role as a founder of churches. Both men portray Patrick as a national apostle and miracle worker.¹⁵

According to Muirchú, a bitter conflict arose after Patrick died relating to his relics. The Uí Néill and Airthir dynasties went to war with the Ulaid. Fighting was initially prevented due a miraculous flood, but after Patrick was buried the Uí Néill and Airthir went to Downpatrick (Dún Lethglaise) to carry away his body. The annals support the storming of Downpatrick in

¹³ T. O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005) p.45

¹⁴ O'Loughlin, p. 59

¹⁵ I. Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths And Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh Press, 1999) p. 13

496. When they reached the river, the body miraculously disappeared. Muirchú ends his *Life* on this note to emphasise the miraculous disappearance. It is likely that he is trying to explain why Patrick wasn't buried at Armagh, with both Saul and Downpatrick claiming to be the place of burial for Patrick. Muirchú himself was working to support the primacy of Armagh, and as Armagh was closely associated with Patrick it must have been inconvenient not to mention embarrassing that Patrick wasn't buried there.

In 734 some of Patrick's relics were carried from Armagh to other districts to encourage the payment of tribute. This became known as 'Patrick's Pence'.¹⁶ It is not clear which relics these actually were. St Patrick's tooth ended up in the hands of Killaspugbrone Church who enshrined it. The relic passed through many hands before ending up in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. There is also a silver arm and hand shaped container dating to the Middle Ages that reportedly once contained Patrick's arm and hand bones. Today, all that is left is the shrine itself, which is housed in the Ulster Museum of Belfast. There are numerous chair-shaped rocks and boulders out in wild natural spaces where Patrick was reported to have sat down, and numerous shrines associated with him.¹⁷

The best known literary relic is a hymn known as St Patrick's Breastplate, an account of Patrick's encounter with Leagoire, the High King of Ireland, on the eve of Easter, and his subsequent success in besting the pagan High King. It is anachronistic, as there was no such title as High King during Patrick's day, but it does show the triumph of Christianity over paganism.¹⁸

Such was Patrick's cult and fame that he was claimed as the founder of hundreds of monasteries and churches, even though it is likely he never went to some of these places. Muirchú and other scholars have connected both Palladius and Patrick with Pictland (now Scotland), and from there a Scottish legend has been extrapolated for Patrick. There were most assuredly links between Ireland and Pictland, the link between the Gaelic church and

¹⁶ Bradley, Celtic Christianity, p. 16

¹⁷ Relics of St Patrick on Wilderness Ireland, <<https://www.wildernessireland.com/blog/relics-of-st-patrick/#:~:text=The%20Hand%20and%20Arm%20Shrine,left%20is%20the%20shrine%20itself>> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

¹⁸ Bradley, Celtic Christianity p. 13

Dunbarton being well established. It can be seen that he was both locally important, and internationally known.¹⁹

The cult of Patrick has grown to such an extent today that St Patrick is now a secularised and commercialised figure, more likely to be associated with large scale parades and alcoholic beverages than his missionary work. Regardless of where Patrick's remains are now, Down Cathedral commemorates his grave with a locally sourced Mourne granite marker which was erected in 1900. This makes it a popular place for pilgrims today, and a way of celebrating St Patrick's day at the source of where it all began.

St Brigid is an Irish saint with widespread appeal, and is depicted by her hagiographers as a powerful woman, moreso than any other female religious figures with few exceptions. She was responsible for the founding of Kildare Abbey, a double foundation of monks and nuns sometime around 500 and was known for her miracles. There are two Latin *Vitae*, one by Cogitosus of Kildare and the other an anonymous work, known as the *Vita Prima*. These are the earliest known *Vitae* of any Irish saints. There is also a poem dating around 600 which describes her as another Mary, which is where Brigid's ongoing association with the Marian cult stems from.²⁰ Cogitosus was keen to promote Kildare and encourage people to visit as pilgrims, and this would have been one of his motivations in writing the *Vita*. The *Vita Prima* associates Brigid with the cause of the Leinstermen, and portrays her as their fiery Queen. Much like Muirchú and Tíreachán do for Patrick, Brigid's hagiographers push forward the claim of her church to supremacy and associate her with a particular clan within her area.

A great many miracles are described about Brigid, but very little is written about her relics. Cogitosus states in the *Vita* that there is a healing altar that she touched that still cures infirmities and diseases, and that even after she died, "the bounty of the gift of God never ceased working wonders in her monastery, where her venerable body lies."²¹ We know from Cogitosus that Brigid was interred in Kildare Cathedral with a tomb erected over her. This shrine attracted many pilgrims, particularly on her feast day of 1 February. Around 878 her

¹⁹ T. Clancey, 'The Cults Of Saints Patrick And Palladius In Early Medieval Scotland', in *Saints' Cults In The Celtic World*, ed. By S. Boardman, J.R. Davies and E. Williamson (Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press 2007), pp. 18-40

²⁰ Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, p. 9

²¹ L. de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture Of Irelands Apostolic Age* (Four Cours Press, 2007) pp. 207-224, (p. 220)

relics were taken to Downpatrick to keep them safe from Scandinavian raiders, and that they were interred of the tomb of St Patrick and St Columba. In 1185 all three saints were discovered, and in 1186 were solemnly translated to a suitable resting place in Downpatrick Cathedral.²² It is not difficult to see the political interests of Armagh at work here, exhibiting its supremacy over Kildare by housing Kildare's founder and saint, keeping them safe when Kildare could not.

Other corporeal relics are noted spread around the world. In Lumiar, near Lisbon in Portugal, Brigid's skull is housed, where it was taken by Irish knights in the thirteenth century. Fragments of Brigid's skull were returned to Dublin in 1929, and they are kept at St Brigid's church in Killester.²³ There is a tooth that reputedly belongs to Brigid which is held at St Martin's in Cologne. Closer to home, there was an abbey church in Armagh which contained some unnamed relics of the saint, however this was destroyed by William Fitz Aldelm in 1179 during the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland.

Interestingly, St Brigid's Day is still celebrated, with very modern traditions which include leaving a ribbon outside the house the night before her feast day so that the saint could bless it as she passed by, and by visiting holy wells with reputed healing powers. St Brigid has been adopted by various feminist and female-centric movements as a figurehead, showing that her influence and name is still strong in the modern day.²⁴

I would now like to consider some of the Breton saints and their cults and relics. There is a strong similarity between medieval Brittany and the insular Celtic lands with regards to religious expression, and the spread of the cult of the saints either through hagiography or oral tradition, of which we have little evidence other than hints in the written works. We do know that Abbot Guibert of Nogent felt that saints' relics were superstitious and of no value, epitomising "all that was open to scepticism and ridicule about the saints of the earlier Middle Ages."²⁵ This suggests a disdain for oral tradition, and a firm belief in the written word. There are no surviving Breton vernacular texts from before the late Middle Ages, so it is not possible

²² Catholicism <<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/saints/bridgid-of-ireland-507>> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

²³ Killester Parish <<https://www.killesterparish.ie/about/#tab2>> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

²⁴ Epicc HQ <<https://epicchq.com/story/saint-brigid-around-the-world/>> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

²⁵ J.M.H. Smith, 'Oral And Written: Saints, Miracles And Relics In Brittany', *Speculum* 65(2) (1990), pp. 309-343 (p. 309)

to trace the development of the cults of Breton saints. There are Latin lives, which we must rely upon.

Abbot Wrdisten of Landévennec wrote the *Vita* of St Winwaloe, founder of Landévennec Abbey. The prose life is prefaced with a note of the many writers Wrdisten drew upon, and stylistically his *Vita* is similar to the insular Latin traditions rather than the norms of Carolingian hagiography. During his life Winwaloe wished to visit Ireland to see the remains of St Patrick, who had not long died, but during a dream Patrick appeared to him to tell him to remain in Brittany and found an abbey. Winwaloe died in 532, and was buried in his monastery. He was venerated as a saint at Landévennec until the Viking invasions of 914 caused the monks to flee, taking his remains to Montreuil-sur-Mer.²⁶ Wrdisten makes no mention of any miracle working, and had no interest in recording any posthumous saintly powers, however by the mid-11th century Winwaloe had developed a reputation as a healing saint. This is evidenced by a charter which records a grant by Count Budic of Cornouaille who was cured of a fever at Winwaloe's grave. A further miracle is noted in the 12th century of the saint reviving a shepherd boy who had a tree fall on him during a thunderstorm, and the parents of the boy granted land to the abbey.²⁷ By the end of the Middle Ages we can see that his cult had extended to include a vernacular text, the late sixteenth century Middle Breton drama *The Mystery of St Winwaloe*, and that his feast day was celebrated on the first Sunday in June on the island of Tibidy where his first monastery was founded.

Wrdisten's pupil, Wrmonoc, was approached by Bishop Hinworet of Saint-Pol-de-Léon to write a life of Paul Aurélien. The resulting Life was written in a similar Gildasian Latin style to that of Winwaloe's Life, and Smith notes that beneath the scholarly rhetoric you can find a saint remembered in local traditions attached to healing springs and notable landmarks and objects.²⁸ Wrmonoc explains place names and sites associated with Paul Aurélien and provides origin legends of Saint-Pol and the nearby monastery on the Ile de Batz. There are legends relating to the healing springs that welled up from the ground to answer the saint's prayers, the fountain at Saint-Pol had healing abilities, and there were miracle working objects associated with him. He had a bell, and a Gospel book which was preserved as a relic.

²⁶ Winwaloe on Wikipedia <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winwaloe>> [Accessed 24th April 2023]

²⁷ J.M.H. Smith, 'Oral And Written', p. 318, p. 321

²⁸ Ibid, p. 323

The springs and the bell are tangible links between Paul Aurélien's earthly career and his miracle-working power. Paul Aurélien was buried in the cathedral of Saint-Pol, beneath the floor, until his remains were moved to Fleury in 958-60. He was enshrined at Fleury, and remained there for the rest of the Middle Ages where he was visited by Breton pilgrims.²⁹

Although there are other native Breton saints I could, choose, the next saint represents an interesting case. St Petroc, the patron saint of Bodmin in Cornwall, had his relics stolen by one of the canons of Bodmin, who fled to Brittany. He made his way to Saint-Méen where the bones were discovered, and revealed to be the genuine relics of Petroc. The Abbot of Saint-Méen installed them in the abbey church, and the relics of Petroc worked miracles at the abbey from the moment of their arrival, with three cures effected by the water in which the bones had been washed being detailed.³⁰

Many of the Breton *vitae* end with the death of the saint, and there are never more than a handful of postmortem miracles. The *vitae* promoted the cult of the saint and channelled veneration to the churches associated with the saints, much as the Welsh and Irish works did. The Breton lives also acknowledge the link between the land and the saint, and the wide range of practices that were carried out.³¹ Breton lives attach some importance to corporeal relics, which is demonstrated by the amount of times the communities had to unearth their founders and move them to safety when faced with invading armies. However, one gets the feeling that these cults would continue just as easily if the corporeal relics were not present.

The final part of this essay will consist of a quick review of hand bells. Hand bells feature significantly in the lives of the Celtic saints. These bells were accessories to religious ritual and time keeping, and the hand bells owned by numerous saints have come to be identified with these saints so closely that they have taken on the role of cult accessories, or saints relics.³² It is claimed by Pollen that they were among the most valued of the relics of Celtic saints.³³ At least sixty bells, the majority of which are Irish, are still in existence and are reputed to

²⁹ Ibid, p. 324-5

³⁰ Ibid, p. 316

³¹ Ibid, p. 335

³² C. Bourke, 'Early Ecclesiastical Hand-Bells In Ireland And Britain', *Journal Of the Antique Metalware Society*, 16, (2008), pp. 22-28, p. 27

³³ J. H. Pollen, *Relics of Saint Beuno: Being A Study Of The Extant Traces Of That Saint*, Roehampton: James Stanley, Manresa Press (1894) p. 8

have belonged to Irish saints. The *clog-an-edachta*, the bell of Patrick, is preserved in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin and was likely taken from his tomb during some time of upheaval.³⁴ Gerald of Wales tells us that *Bangu*, the bell of David, was kept at Glasgwm in Elfael.³⁵ This bell had unspecified miraculous powers,³⁶ and God's vengeance would be visited upon anyone who treated it with disrespect. Gerald of Wales records a tale that the bell was taken in secret by a local woman and sent to her husband who was being held prisoner in Rhayader Castle. She hoped he would be able to use the bell to secure his release, but the jailers stole the bell for themselves. That night, the whole town was consumed by fire and only the wall that the bell hung on was spared. Patrick's bell survives to this day in the National Museum of Ireland, and the bell is kept safely in a Bell Shrine which was made for it in around 1100AD.³⁷ Beuno had a bell called *Cloch Velen Venno*, the yellow bell of Beuno. It was preserved until the early seventeenth century in Anglesey, when the house it was kept in was demolished. The bell can no longer be found.³⁸ Bells were generally preserved by the same family for successive generations, so the destruction of the house suggests destruction of the bell. Paul Aurélian had a bell called *Hirglas* which had healing powers and had been rescued from the stomach of a fish, giving it exceptional qualities.³⁹ Wrmonoc mentions in his *vita* that Paul was able to resurrect a dead man by ringing the bell.⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that more handbells survive in Brittany than reliquaries, and Gerald of Wales states that handbells and other such relics were so revered by the Celtic people that an oath sworn on such a relic was considered much more fearsome than one sworn on the Gospel.⁴¹ St Berach even uses his bell to curse the army attempting to raid the people who are under his protection.⁴²

It seems very likely that the hand bell gained sacred status by being associated with the saint during his or her missionary activities. The missionary would use the hand bell to gather their

³⁴ Bells on New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia <<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02418b.htm>> [Accessed 18th April 2023]

³⁵ J Wyn Evans, p. 13

³⁶ J Day, Lecture

³⁷ National Museum of Ireland <<https://www.museum.ie/getmedia/5bf10ce6-e1f6-4179-a308-58fa0753023c/St-Patrick-and-his-Relics.pdf>> [Accessed 22nd April 2023]

³⁸ Pollen, Relics of Saint Beuno p.9

³⁹ Ibid, p. 323

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 324

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 338

⁴² D.A. Bray, 'Miracles And Wonders In The Composition Of The Lives Of The Early Irish Saints', in *Celtic Hagiography And Saints' Cults*, ed. By J. Cartwright (Cardiff 2022) pp. 136-147, (p. 144)

congregation in the open air, and this would in turn lead to the belief that no religious service could take place without a bell being rung⁴³. Irish missionaries are known to have travelled widely across the continent, and no doubt would have spread this practice with them. It therefore stands to reason that the bells associated with the saints would take on religious significance both during and after the life of the saints.

The cults of the three main saints I mentioned still have widespread significance today. There have long been calls in Wales for St David's Day to be made a national holiday, linked with a resurgence in interest of Welsh nationalism. St Brigid's popularity is enjoying a growth spurt from feminist groups, revivalist groups and within the church itself. St Patrick's Day celebrations are possibly as far removed from the quiet self-doubting man we read about in the *Confessio* as it's possible to be. The ongoing metamorphosis of the cults is not surprising, and we have read about how the cults of the saints have been adapted throughout time to suit the needs of the moment.

Corporeal remains had significance for the Irish. Muírchu's account of the struggle for Patrick's relics highlights the indignity suffered by Armagh through not physically having possession of them. Cogitosus describes the shrines of Brigid and Bishop of Conlaeth in Kildare in such terms that suggest they were the object of tomb cults. That said, there is little explicit evidence of miracles taking place at Brigid's tomb, and interest in corporeal remains appears sporadic, important only when politically expedient to be.⁴⁴ Thacker makes an excellent point about the Irish concept of the patron, and a saint's role in this. The saint would found the principal church in the cult, and lie in its cemetery, and from there, the patron had other new churches founded by that lineage named after them. Indeed, relics "did not play a major part in this process".⁴⁵ In Wales, David's relics were often to be rediscovered at times when they were most needed.

The majority of our sources for the saints are their hagiographies, and hagiography is not biography. Hagiography is propaganda and publicity, a way of promoting the cult of a person after their death by choosing certain occurrences and showing how divine power supported

⁴³ New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia

⁴⁴ Thacker, p. 36

⁴⁵ Thacker, p. 37

the saint during their times of need. Miracles occur, and good triumphs over evil. These *Vita* would have been read liturgically for pilgrims on the relevant feast days, or used for private contemplation. The *Vita* demonstrates its subject's sanctity and superiority over other saints, promoting the authority of the monastery of which they were the patron⁴⁶, and it is upon these *Vita* that we rely for information about the saints.

The emergence of the *Vitae* in the late 7th and 8th centuries coincided with the development of the cult of relics which further enhanced the miraculous powers of the saints. Bradley goes as far as to state that the *Vitae* were written to accompany and explain the relics.⁴⁷ Secondary relics would have supported the cult of the saint long after the saint was dead, and saints' cults did not exist in a vacuum. Religious orders were in communication with each other, and the lay people who would seek communion with the divine would attend the cult sites associated with 'their' saint. Used in conjunction with the hagiography and the popular perception of the saint, the relics were a way of connecting with the saint and with the divine directly. Anyone could visit and touch the reliquary, and in doing so communicate directly with God, and it was known he would intercede on behalf of his chosen ones. The saints and their relics were merely channels to heaven.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, p. 8

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.9

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