



TREASURES OF  
*Irish Christianity*

VOLUME III

TO THE ENDS  
OF THE EARTH

*Edited by*  
SALVADOR RYAN

VERITAS



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now lost to us. These anecdotes are formulaic and humorous, and they do not provide us with historical information about any real individuals who travelled to the continent in the early Middle Ages; rather, they are indicative of an attitude, perhaps prevalent among certain groups of Irish ecclesiastics, that physical journeys, even to the most significant Christian sites, were less a guarantee of salvation than the arduous metaphorical journey of faith itself.

#### FURTHER READING

Elizabeth Boyle, 'Lay Morality, Clerical Immorality, and Pilgrimage in Tenth-Century Ireland: *Cethrur macclérech* and *Epscop do Gáedelaib*', *Studia Hibernica* 39 (2013), pp. 9–48.

Giles Constable, 'Opposition to Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages', *Mélanges G. Fransen*, Stephan Kuttner, et al. ed., *Studia Gratiana* 19 (1976), pp. 126–46.



## *Excellentissimi Sanctorum Hibernie:* Irish Saints' Lives in Austrian Legendaries

DIARMUID Ó RIAIN

AS A RESULT OF the sixteenth-century Reformation largely passing Austria by, the country is dotted with monasteries and canonries that have enjoyed close to a millennium of unbroken existence and whose magnificent libraries still house shelf after shelf of medieval manuscripts. Among the holdings of the Benedictine monasteries of Admont and Melk and the Cistercian houses at Heiligenkreuz, Lilienfeld and Zwettl are copies of the largest hagiographical collection surviving from the High Middle Ages, the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum* (MLA). A further exemplar in the Austrian National Library in Vienna probably belonged once to the Augustinian canonry at St Pölten.

This four-volume collection was compiled somewhere in Austria between the years 1181 and 1200, and boasts among its over five hundred saints a small but significant Irish contingent. This includes the 'usual suspects' such as Patrick, Brigid, Columbanus and Brendan, but more importantly, from the perspective of Irish hagiographical studies, it also encompasses a range of relatively obscure saints, whose cults would have been next to unknown outside of Ireland. In question are the Clare saints: Mochuille of Tulla; Flannán of Killaloe; and Seanán (Senan) of Scattery Island; as well as Íde of Killeedy, County Limerick; Caoimhghin of Glendalough; and Rónán of Dromiskin, County Louth. Notably, some of these saints also appear in other late-twelfth-century Austrian manuscripts, Caoimhghin and Rónán in Cod. 51 of the library of the Cistercian monastery at Rein, and the *Vita Flannani* in a manuscript

fragment from the Benedictine monastery at Göttweig (Cod. 9, Nr. 33. XII. 1). The existence of another since-lost manuscript at Heiligenkreuz, containing a collection of Irish lives very similar but not identical to Cod. 51, is known from later medieval catalogues. In the case of all six saints, save Caoimhghin, these Austrian witnesses are the earliest surviving copies of the saint's Latin life, which otherwise first appear in collections dating to the fourteenth century or later. The unabridged *Vita Ronani* (Life of Rónán) and the prose *Vita Senani* (Life of Seanán) are unknown outside of the Austrian codices, while the *MLA* lives of Mochuille and Flannán are the most complete witnesses to survive.

How, then, did Austrian monastic libraries come to be such a treasure-trove of rare Irish hagiographical material? The answer almost certainly lies with the *Schottenklöster*, those Irish Benedictine monasteries founded in Germany and Austria between the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. Among the texts in the *MLA* are three produced at the motherhouse of the *Schottenklöster* at Regensburg (Ratisbon), namely the *Vita Mariani Scoti* (Life of Muiredach mac Robartaig), the *Vita Albari archiepiscopi Casellensis* and the *Visio Tnugdali*. The latter is also present in the Rein codex. Furthermore, it appears that the lives of Flannán and Mochuille were written or rewritten at Regensburg in the late-twelfth century, possibly by the author of the *Vita Mariani*. Moreover, a legendary of Regensburg provenance now in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 2928) contains in sequence abridged versions of many of the Irish saints' lives included in the Austrian manuscripts, which invites the conclusion that the original collection was compiled at the Irish monastery in Regensburg and was still available to copy there in the fifteenth century.

That the lesser-known saints in the *MLA* hail mostly from Munster is also consistent with a *Schottenklöster* provenance, given that these monasteries were dominated by monks from that province from the early twelfth century onwards. The transmission of the collection to Austria probably occurred in one of two ways: the Regensburg *Schottenklöster* was in contact with numerous Austrian monasteries, either through confraternities or other means, and the collection may have arrived there through these channels; alternatively, a copy of the collection may have arrived at the *Schottenklöster* daughterhouse at Vienna and been distributed from there, the Irish monastery being itself well integrated into local

monastic networks and demonstrably involved in manuscript exchange. The collection had already been in circulation within the region before it came into the hands of the compiler of the *MLA*, as is clear from the superior quality of the texts in the Rein manuscript and the fact that, unlike at Rein, the template of the *MLA* copy of the *Vita Patricii* (Life of Patrick) was incomplete and with its chapter sequence askew, a state attributable to folio loss and subsequent disarrangement.

The interest in the more obscure Irish saints' lives does not appear to have been sustained in Austria after this initial flourish – subsequent transcription of the lives being limited to a single witness of the *Vita Mochullei*, which was included in a now-lost legendary from the Carthusian monastery at Gaming, itself preserved in part in a seventeenth-century manuscript in Trier (Stadtbibliothek, Cod. 1176). The Irish lives did stoke the interest of at least one later medieval reader at Heiligenkreuz, who added copious remarks to the margins of many of them, such as 'ecce propheta terribilis et admirabilis' (Cod. 11, fol. 165v) in relation to an episode in the *Vita Itae* and 'vere iocundum et magnum miraculum' (Cod. 13, fol. 3r) in regard to a bell-miracle in the *Vita Senani*. Such was his knowledge of Irish hagiography by the end of this reading that he was in a position to declare Flannán, Columba and Brigid to be the three best Irish saints: 'Sanctus Flannanus et sanctus Columba et sancta Brigida isti sunt excellentissimi sanctorum Hibernie' (Cod. 13, fol. IVv). And who would argue with him?

#### FURTHER READING

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- Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Vita sancti Coemgeni: An Edition of the Earliest Manuscript Version', *Glendalough: City of God*, Charles Doherty, Linda Doran and Mary Kelly, eds (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), pp. 145–64.

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