

East Central European Kingdoms

(By: Cheslov Rex as posted in the September '92 Plague)

Saint Patrick

I have been told that much of the East Central European history is built on folklore, handed-down oral histories, and myth. To some degree, we can say this is indeed true. Though western histories are generally better documented, does this in itself mean they contain more of the "truth?" A slice of history can be documented in ten different languages, and have no more of the "truth" to it than a St. Patrick's Day tale of green leprechauns. Just like that well-known story about the snakes leaving the Irish Isle because that greatest Irishman of them all, old St. Paddy his very self, ordered the serpent to leave. And, as most folks will tell you, St. Paddy was Irish you know. Well, St. Patrick was Italian. Say what? No, can't be. Outrageous! A little shocking perhaps, but not outrageous. The man was not even a little bit Irish. Not only that, the good bishop originally was dragged to Ireland against his will. In fact, he was a slave!

St. Patrick's real name was Patricius Magonus Sucatus. He was born in the year 389 a.d. in Bannaven Taberniae, a northern village in the Roman Empire's province of Britain. Patricius was a loyal member of this Roman colony located in Britain's Severn Valley. The colony, of course, was Italian. Patricius was of rather good family. His father, Calpernius, was not only a local Christian deacon, but a Roman citizen and member of the municipal court and council.

There are many sources of information on this subject, but you can get most of the facts straight out of Winston Churchill's book *The Birth of Britain* starting around page 71. There are also references about the subject in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. I have pulled my information from a number of sources, but as Churchill put it, "One day... there descended a band of Irish raiders, burning and slaying. The young Patrick was carried off and sold into slavery in Ireland." And so, for the next six years our future saint and saviour of Hibernia (Ireland) slopped the pigs and otherwise tended the herds of swine. It is reported that the loneliness led him to seek solace in his religion; after all, what else was there?

After six or seven years of slavery, our hero Patricius Sucatus escaped the pig herding job and left Hibernia. St. Patrick wrote that after he'd returned home he had a mystical dream. In this dream he received a letter headed, "The voice of the Irish." Patrick knea, the dream to be a divine calling, but also recognized the shortcomings of his intellectual training. So he studied for 14 years and was ordained a priest. Some time later, Pope Celestine ordained him Bishop Patricius.

Now, many people believe St. Patrick to be the "First Apostle to the Irish." Not true. There were a number of others sent before him. In fact, at the time the name of the Church missionary to Ireland was Palladius. When Palladius died, Patrick was assigned to the post. And so it came to be that in the year of our Lord 432 a.d. Bishop Patricius and his band of priests and assistants landed back in the land of the Irish. At that time the Hibernian High King was Laoghaire and his capital was a place named Tara. With his humble and graceful personality, Patrick was able to win the approval of King Laoghaire. He does not appear (according to the records) to have converted the king, but Laoghaire let him remain alive and tolerated his stay in Ireland. Patrick soon converted the king's poet, who was himself a prince, and also converted two princesses and many others. Patrick brought the Church of Western Europe to Ireland. He also managed to Christianize the pagan Irish Kingdoms (there was more than one kingdom in Ireland at the time).

The ancient law of Ireland is called the Law of the Brehons. We know of it today only because Patrick codified it and wrote the whole of it down in five volumes. This is how the Law of the Brehons was preserved and managed to survive to this day.

In the year 457 a.d. Patrick retired and wrote *Confessio*, a kind of spiritual autobiography and apology for his life's work. He was a humble man and was ashamed that the simple barbaric form of Latin that he used was crude. When he was still alive, many about him viewed Bishop Patrick as a great man, but he did not view himself in that light.

Another interesting point, from all of his writings, is that he thought of himself as a true and loyal Romano Briton. He indicates this on a number of occasions. Though he never pretended to be an intellectual, he was obviously an ingenious preacher of the Lord's message.

As I mentioned, Patrick wrote *Confessio* right after he retired in 457 a.d. and four years after that he died. You need to study the records to gain an appreciation for the true and far reaching work of this great man. As for our "Irish" saint? Well, in some ways his is like the later mythical story of Robin Hood. The truth is there to be found if you are willing to dig for it. As for what he was-Roman, Briton, Italian, Irish-well, can it matter? He is part of Irish history, part of their folklore and culture. He is part of what "Irish" is; what he himself was ethnically does not matter one whit. The historical facts are interesting to read, but those facts do not change anything. For millions of devotees, Saint Patrick lives in their hearts and that is, after all, where such a man of grace and God belongs.

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