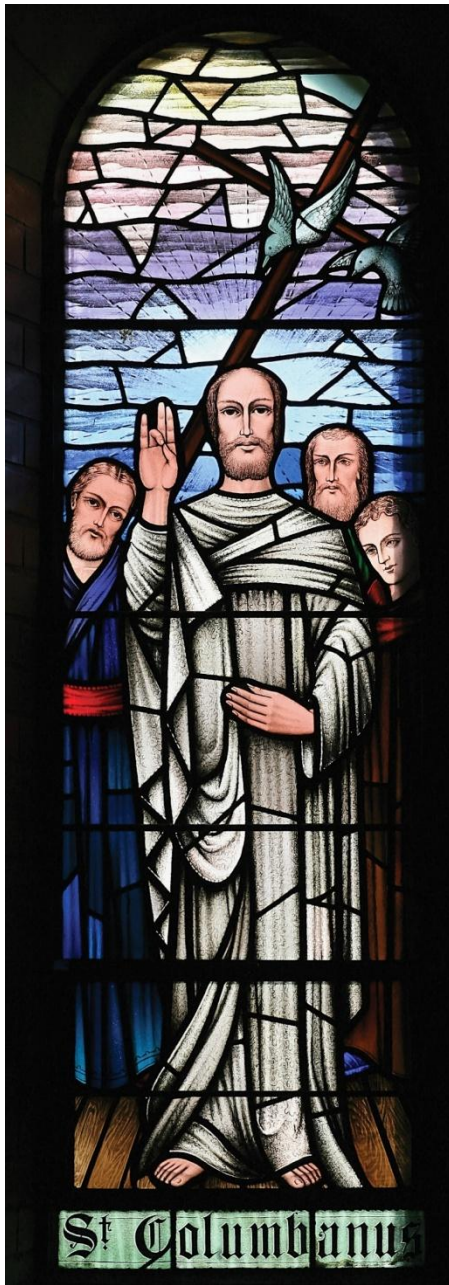


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# Saint Columbanus: the Strangford connection

Andrew Totten

Honorary Research Fellow  
Durham University



# Saint Columbanus

From Carlow or Wexford,  
linked to St Comgall's  
monastery at Bangor, died in  
Bobbio, Italy, in AD615

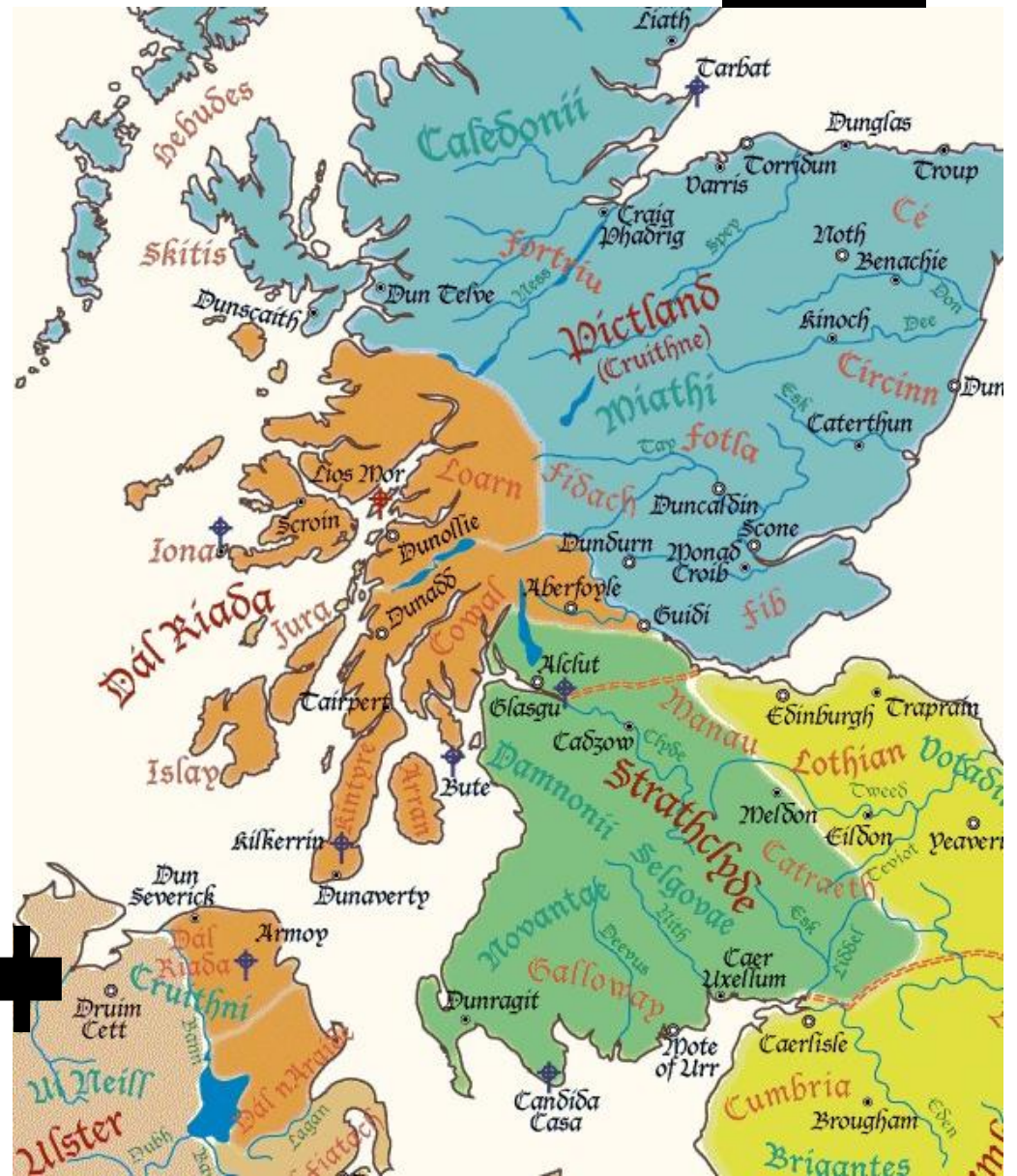
*versus*

# Saint Columba (Columcille)

From Donegal, linked to St  
Finnian's monastery at  
Movilla, died on the Isle of  
Iona, Scotland, in AD597



# Columba – his world



# Columbanus – his world





ur homines credere. non aū  
m. certissima ratione docer  
oro dixi. in quib, tam legis p  
ndatis. quib, nunc xp̄ianos  
le uel sabbatum est uel cir  
ificia. & siquid huiusmodi e

# Influence of Columbanus

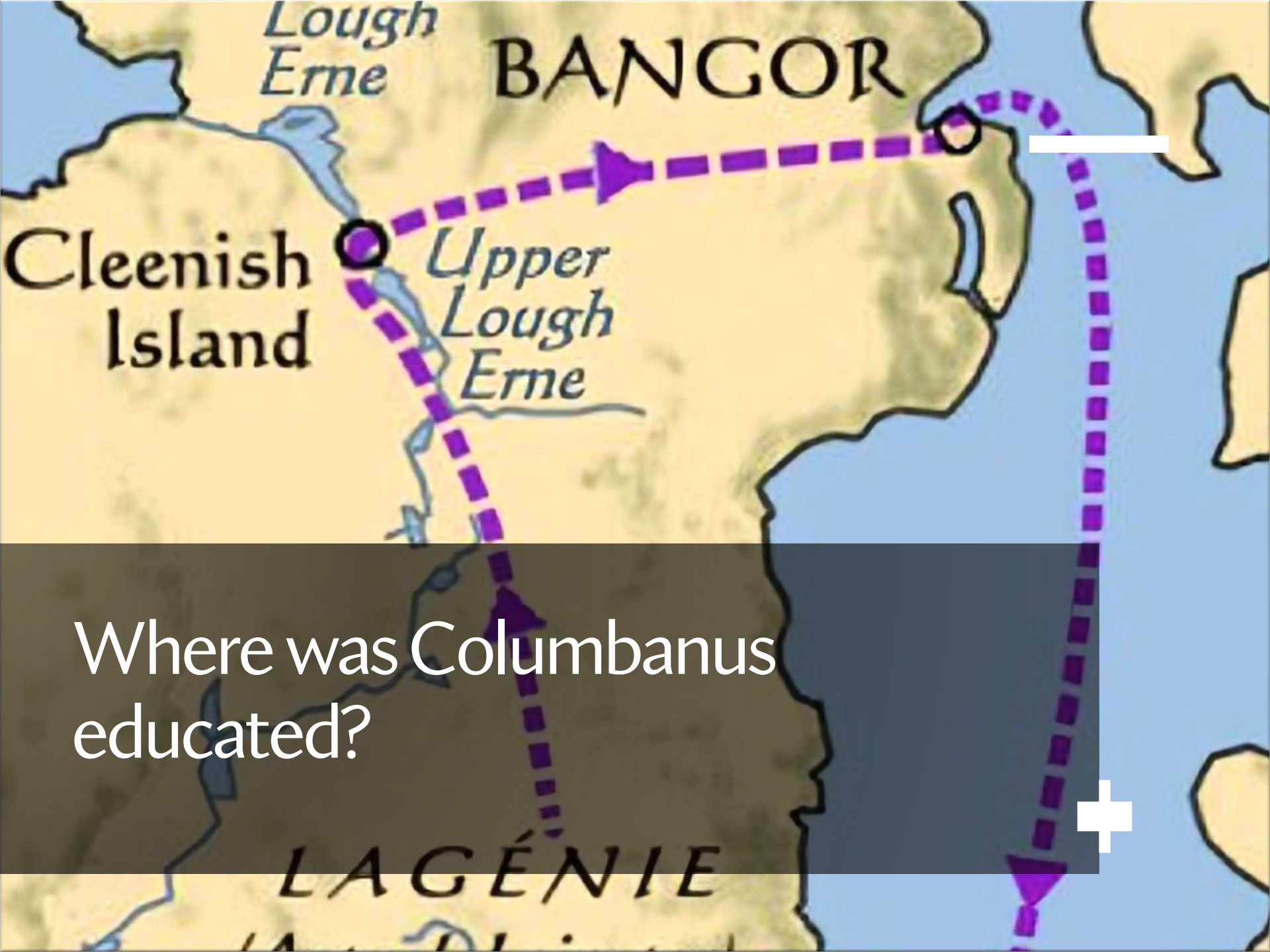




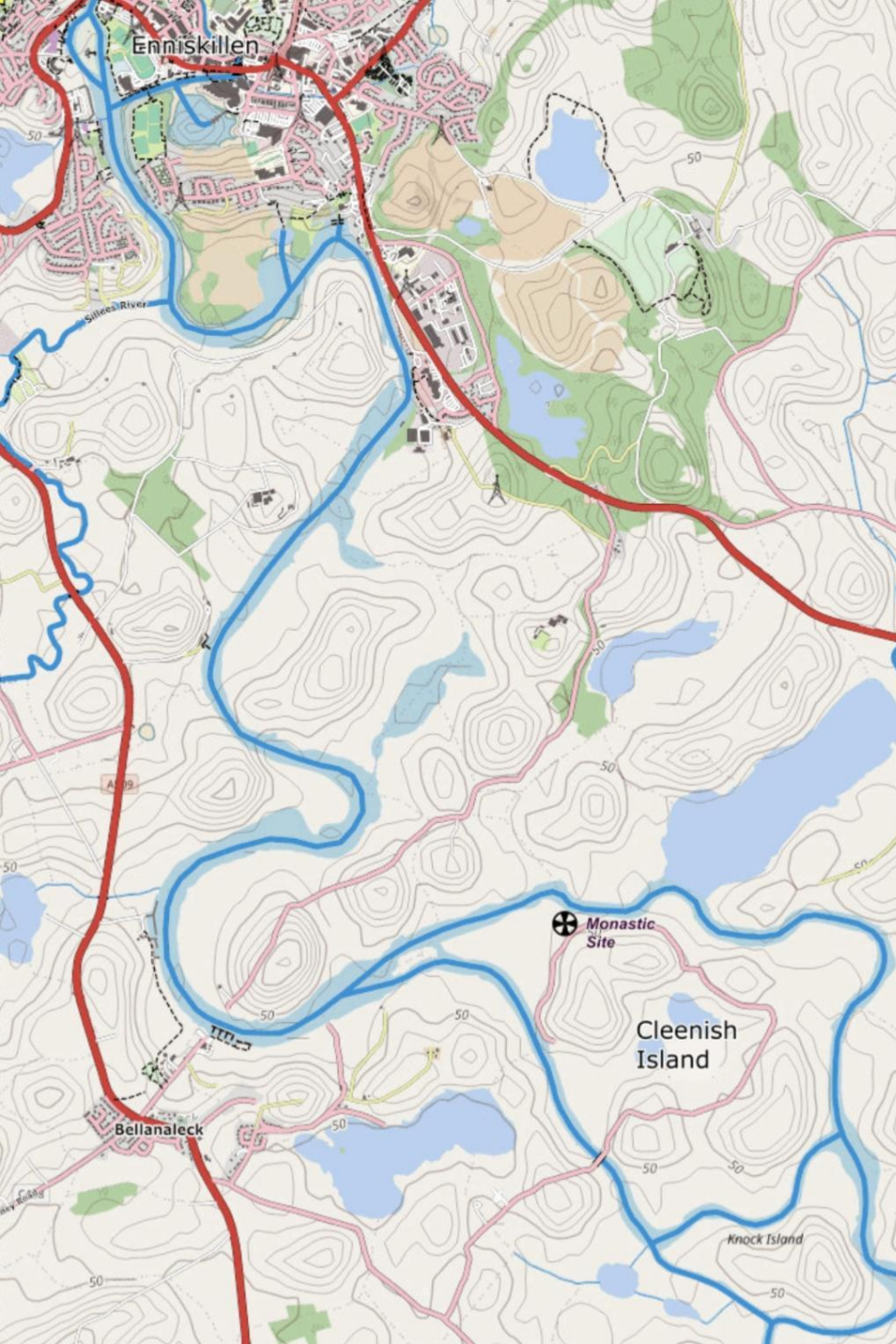
# The Columban Way

FRIENDS OF  
COLUMBANUS  
BANGOR





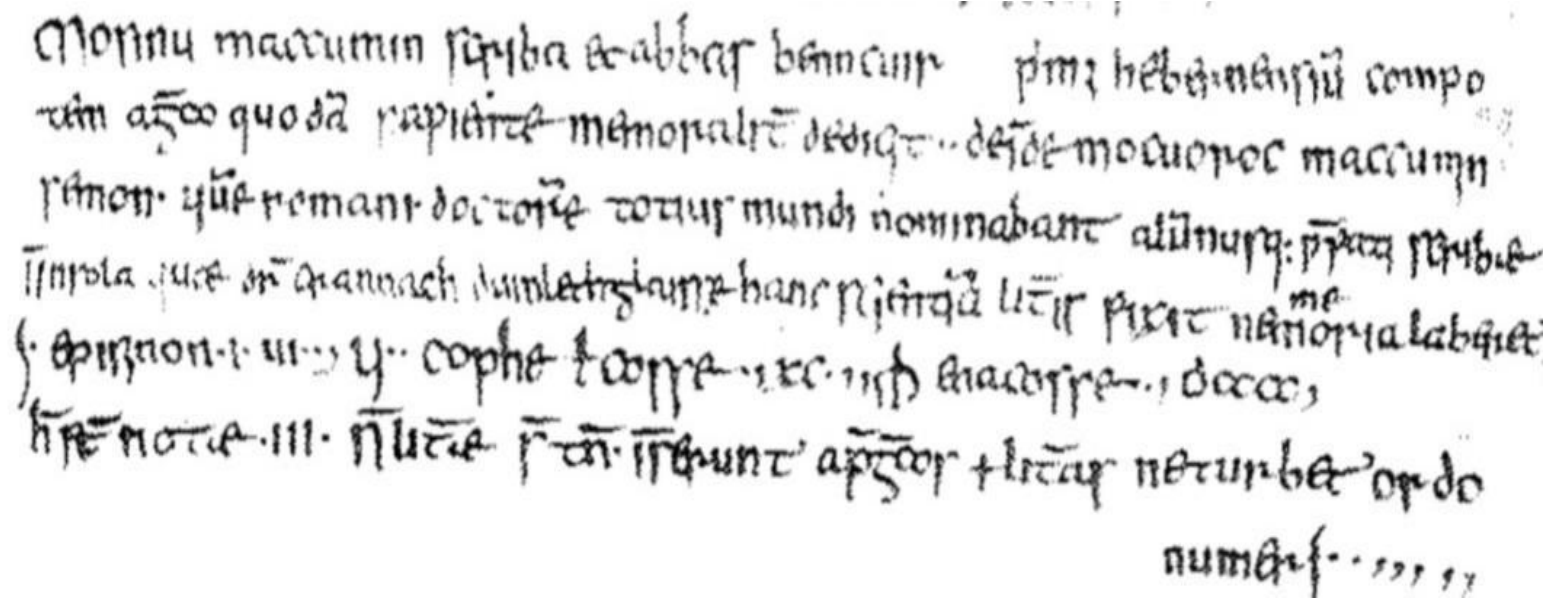
Where was Columbanus educated?



Sinilis taught Columbanus.  
Was he Saint Sinell of  
Cleenish Island?



# Or was Sinilis actually Sinell (or Mo-Sinu) of “Crannach Island”?



Mo-Sinu maccumin scriba & abbas bangor p[ri]m[us] hebraicis compo-  
situm a[nt]e quodam papia[m] memorabil[em] desig[na]t[um] de[st]it[um] mo-chuoroc maccumin  
s[er]mon[em] qu[od] remansit doctor[um] totius mundi nominabant alimurq[ue] p[ro]p[ri]a scriba  
insula quae in crannach dunlethgane hanc p[ro]p[ri]a[m] ut it[er]um p[ro]p[ri]a n[on]na labiet  
ep[iscop]on[em] .i. .ii. .iii. .iiii. .v. .vi. .vii. .viii. .ix. .x. .xi. .xii. .xiii. .xiv. .xv. .xvi. .xvii. .xviii. .xix. .xx.  
h[ic] nota .iii. .iiii. .v. .vi. .vii. .viii. .ix. .x. .xi. .xii. .xiii. .xiv. .xv. .xvi. .xvii. .xviii. .xix. .xx.  
num[er]i . . . . .

Mo-Sinu maccu Min, scholar and abbot of Bangor, was the first of the Irish who learned the computus by heart from a certain learned Greek. Afterwards, Mo-Chuoróc maccu Neth Sémon (*sic leg.*), whom the Romans<sup>1</sup> styled doctor of the whole world, and a pupil of the aforesaid scholar, in the island called Crannach of Downpatrick,<sup>2</sup> committed this knowledge to writing, lest it should fade from memory.




Tinola just in Quannach Dunlethgiana

# Crannach or Wood Island



*Down Patrick, from Wood Island near Hollymount  
ruins of the cathedral.*

 Share

 License image

Title:

Mary Granville Delany,  
British, 1700-1788  
Loughinisland and  
Downpatrick, County  
Down, Seen from Wood  
Island



Down Cathedral overlooking  
“the island called Crannach of  
Downpatrick”





Cleenish  
Island

Upper  
Lough  
Erne

Where did Columbanus  
embark for Europe?

LAGÉNIE

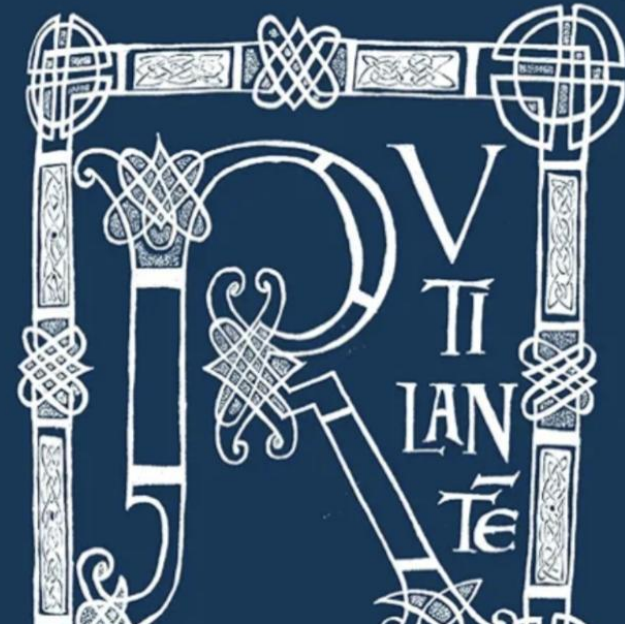


# Jonas of Bobbio

Life of Columbanus, Life of John  
of Réomé, and Life of Vedast

*Translated with introduction and commentary  
by Alexander O'Hara and Ian Wood*

TH





# National Museum of Ireland, “Words on the Wave”, 2025

*“they embark in a boat and set out through  
the straits into the uncertain sea-lanes  
and the calm high seas. With fair winds  
blowing, they quickly reach inlets on the  
coast of Brittany.”*

Jonas, Vita Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius,  
I 4, AD 639-642  
(Wood and O’ Hara 2014, 104)

# How did Columbanus picture the world?

Map of the world as described by Orosius, *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri*, Book 1



“oceanus habet insulas, quas Britanniam et Hiberniam uocant, quae in auersa Galliarum parte ad prospectum Hispaniae sitae sunt .... Hibernia insula inter Britanniam et Hispaniam .... Hi sunt fines totius Europae.”



# Bangor

## BANGOR MARINA



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BANGOR BAY

YACHT CLUB

RESTAURANTS

BALLYHONAN YACHT CLUB

Princetown Rd

Downshire Rd

PICKIE FUNPARK

RNLI

INFO

TOWER HOUSE

High Street

Shandon Dr

College Av

Donaghadee Rd

RESTAURANTS

Hamilton Rd

SUPERMARKET

HOSPITAL

BANGOR GOLF CLUB

Dufferin Av

TOWN HALL

Castle St

WARD PARK

Broadway

Castle Park Rd

NORTH DOWN MUSEUM

CASTLE PARK

Fairfield Rd

WALLED GARDEN

LEISURE CENTRE

Bloomfield Rd

Gransha Rd

Abbay Park

North Down Coastal Path

CARNALEA GOLF CLUB

Isigen Park

CYRILL LAURE

Maxwell Rd



SMELT MILL BAY



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# Sunday Worship

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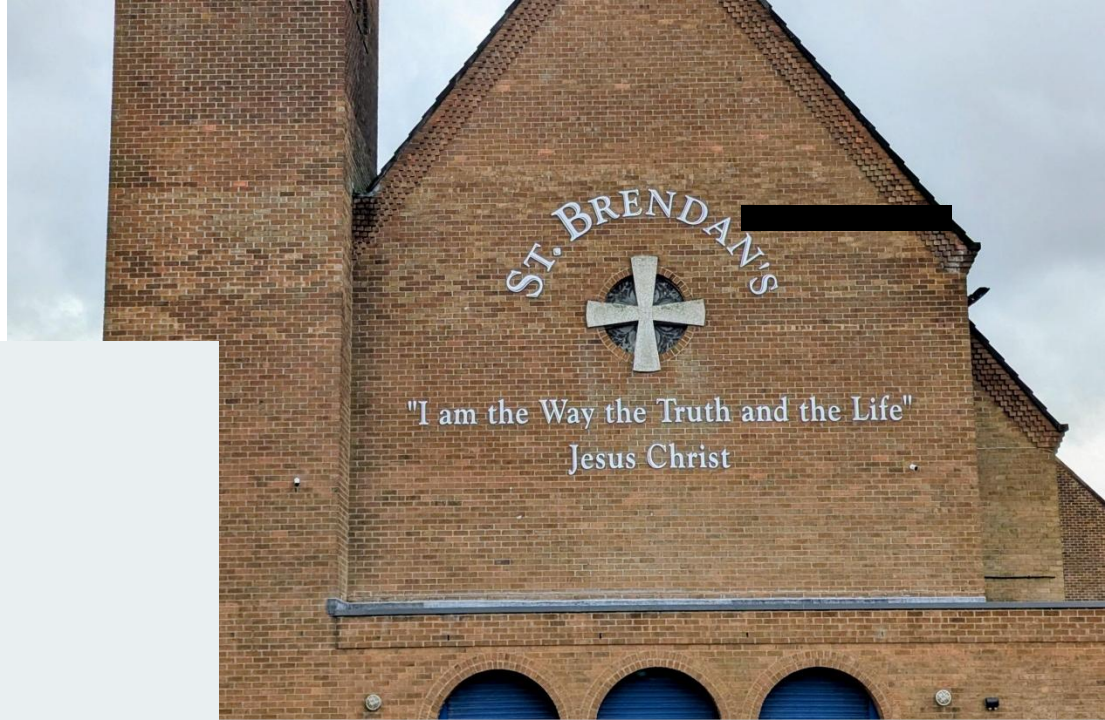
**Released on:** 13 Jul 2025

**Download:** 42 MB



Canon Simon Doogan and Father Martin Magill take to the water at Bangor, Co Down as the monk St Columbanus did in 591 when he left his monastery in Bangor in to go to Europe where he established monastic foundations in France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. They reflect on his journey and on another sea voyage, that of St Paul who was shipwrecked on his way to Rome.

# Saint Brendan






SCRIPTORES  
LATINI  
HIBERNIAE

tempest of the entire element, surging indeed and swollen upon every side, that threatens shipwreck of the mystic vessel; thus do I, a fearful sailor, dare to cry, Watch, for water has now entered the vessel of the Church, and the vessel is in perilous straits. For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of Saint Patrick and Paul, and I should

SANCTI  
COLUMBANI  
OPERA



I should escape. If I am cast into the sea like Jonah, who himself is also called Columba in Hebrew, pray that someone may take the place of the 35 whale to bring me back in safe concealment by a happy voyage, to restore your Jonah to the land he longs for.

WALKER



7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century river boat excavated  
near Bordeaux, 2013-22

# E-ware pottery

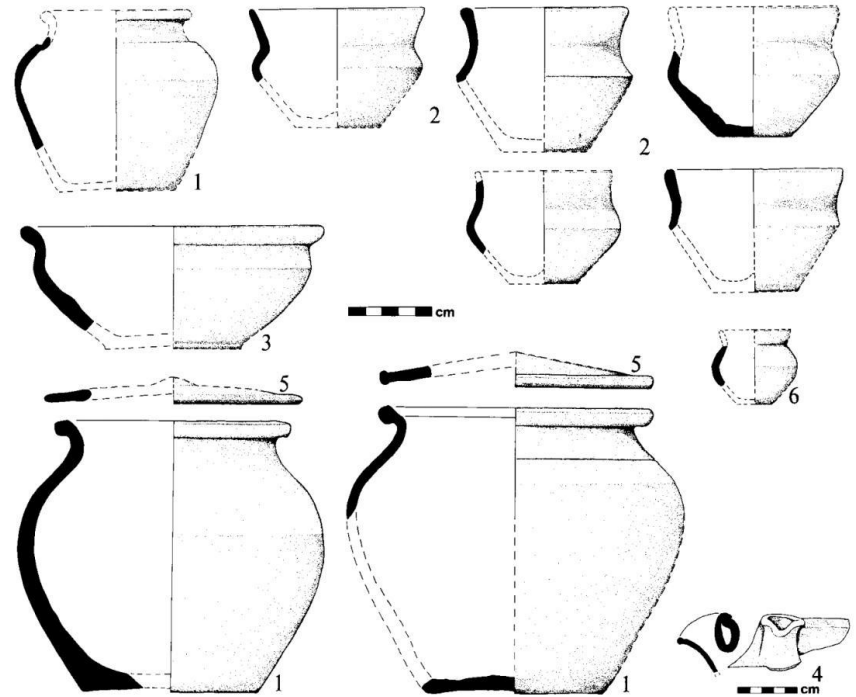
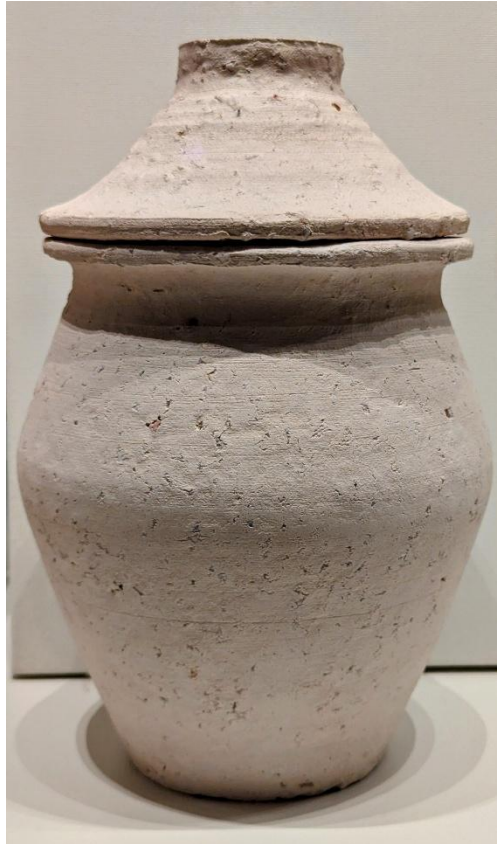
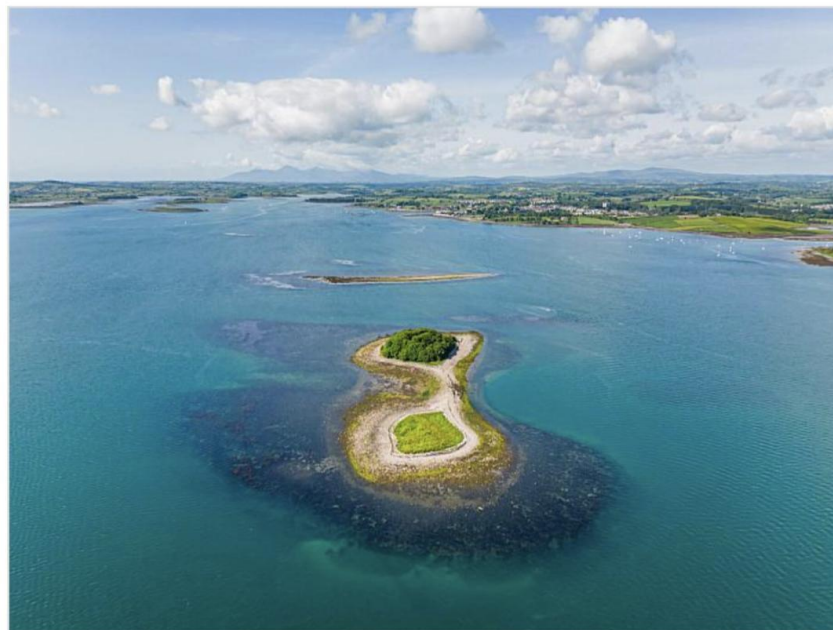


FIG. 1  
Class E ware: numbered forms (replacing illustration in *Medieval Archaeology*, III (1959), fig. 43). 1: jars, large and small. 2: carinated beakers. 3: carinated bowl. 4: detail of spout from handled pitcher (body similar to large E1 jar). 5: conical pot-lids. 6: tiny 'unguent jar'. Drawings, all from Irish finds, by Mary O'Donnell



Tim Martin



Dunnyneil Islands,  
Strangford Lough, Killyleagh

🏠 Land

ASKING PRICE

**£108,000**



# Discoveries of E-ware pottery

Late 6<sup>th</sup> / early 7<sup>th</sup> century

Bangor

Movilla

Nendrum



## Monasteries on the borders of *Dál Fiatach* territory



# Movilla Abbey



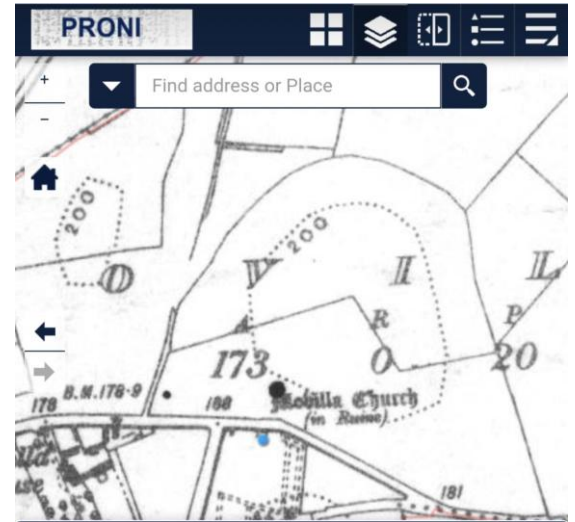
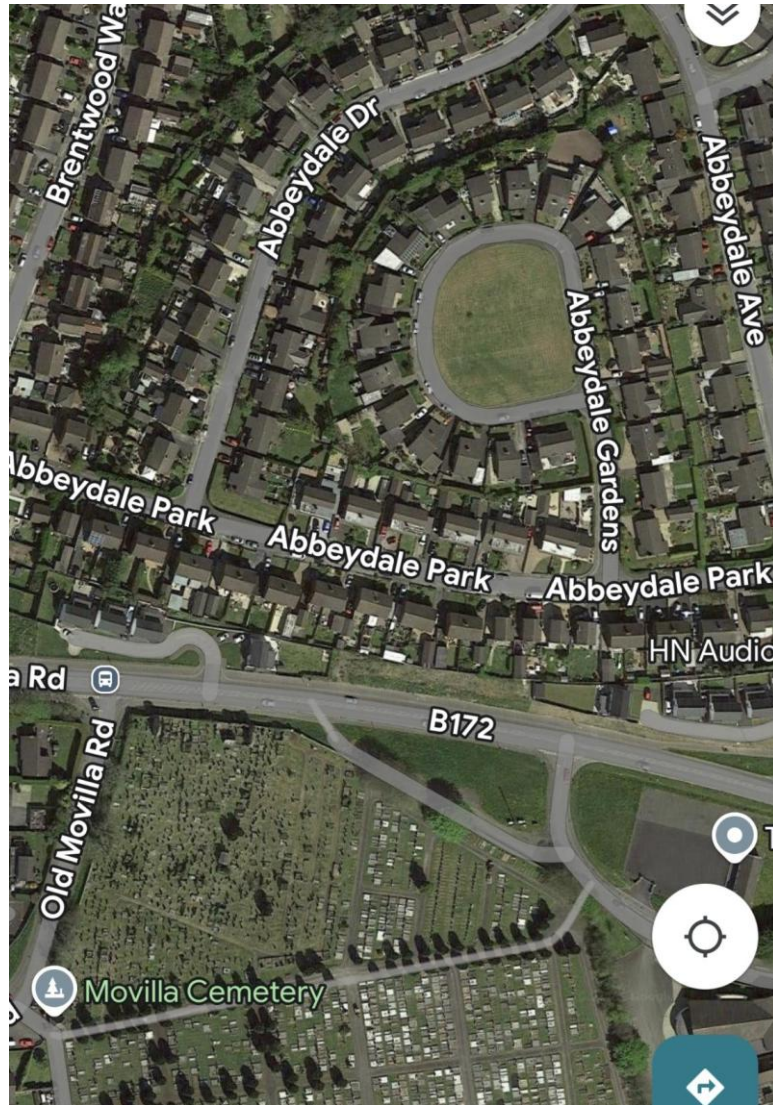


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# Saint Finnian

Came from Britain,  
founder of Movilla,  
teacher of Columba,  
died in AD579







Si quis in corde suo ꝑ cogitatione peccauerit & con  
fessum penituerit . percussit & peccatum suum & ꝑ  
dona & satisfaciatur ut sanus sit . Si autem frequenter  
cogitauerit & dubitauerit facere aut uictor aut uic  
tus fuerit ꝑ illa ad ueniam ꝑ oratione & ieiunium  
dieb; & noctib; donec euanescat maligna cogi  
tatio & sanus sit . Si q cogitauerit & uoluit  
facere sed sua facultas ꝑhibuit eum unum peccatum  
sed n̄ eodem penitentia uerbi gratia si fornicati  
one uoluerit aut homicidium quia effectus non  
expleuit uoluntate . Iam peccauit in corde suo  
sed deinde non potest . adiuuari penitentia

**STRANGFORD REGION**  
c. AD 590



*“they embark in a boat and set out through the straits into the uncertain sea-lanes and the calm high seas. With fair winds blowing, they quickly reach inlets on the coast of Brittany.”*

Jonas, *Vita Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius*,  
I 4, AD 639–642  
(Wood and O’ Hara 2014, 104)

carinamque ingressi dubias  
per **freta** ingrediuntur vias  
mitemque salum

named after him. (3) Then, leaving Brega and the territory of Conaille and that of the Ulaid on his left side, he finally entered the inlet of Bréne. (4) He and those who were with him in the boat landed at Inber Sláne, hid their small craft, and went a short distance inland in order to

usque hodie nominatur, primum nauis conuertit. (3) Tum deinde Brega Conalneosque fines nec non et fines Ulathorum in leuo dimittens ad extremum in quoddam fretum quod est Brene se inmissit. (4) Et discenderunt in terram ad hostium Slain ille et qui cum eo erant in nauis

SCRIPTORES  
LATINI  
HIBERNIAE  
VOLUME X

THE  
PATRICIAN  
TEXTS  
IN THE  
BOOK  
OF  
ARMAGH

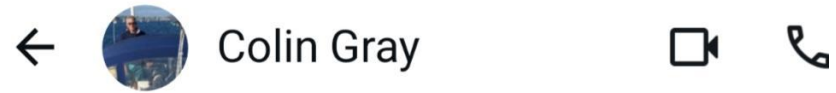
BIELER

*“they embark in a boat and set out through the straits into the uncertain sea-lanes and the calm high seas. With fair winds blowing, they quickly reach inlets on the coast of Brittany.”*

Jonas, *Vita Columbani abbatis discipulorumque eius*,  
I 4, AD 639–642  
(Wood and O’ Hara 2014, 104)

**carinamque ingressi *dubias*  
per freta ingrediuntur *vias*  
mitemque *salum***

Ask a modern yacht skipper where the medieval text is describing ...



Strangford or Portaferry! The Narrows can be hellish in a southerly, and the transition into the Irish Sea can be a blessed relief! I have had solid water over the decks going through the overfalls as you exit the Narrows - scared the living daylights out of my youngest. Made me feel a wee bit nervous too - and that was only 12kts of southerly!

21:29





## The voyage of Columbanus to Continental Europe:

First known export of books from the “Isle of Saints and Scholars”



Columbanus  
probably  
embarked here



# THE VOYAGE OF ST COLUMBANUS—REDRAWING THE MAP

By Andrew Totten

Around AD 590, somewhere along the east coast of Ireland, St Columbanus was waiting to go into exile. On reaching Burgundy—one of the kingdoms of Merovingian Gaul—he would find a series of monasteries to which people would flock. Eventually falling foul of the king, he travelled through France and Germany to Switzerland, where the hermitage of one of his fellow monks gave rise to the city of St Gallen. In 2025, Irish-related manuscripts from that city's Abbey Library were displayed at the National Museum of Ireland's *Words on the Wave* exhibition, which surveyed the cultural contribution of the generations of Irish monks who followed in Columbanus's wake.

Columbanus himself eventually crossed the Alps into Italy. He died in 615 at Bobbio, where another great monastic library emerged. Further north, the numerous monasteries inspired by his foundations became spiritual powerhouses of Charlemagne's empire (albeit under Benedictine rule). Columbanus's approach to penance influenced how Christians across Europe atoned for their sins until the Reformation. The scriptorium at Corbie Abbey in France, a daughter house of his monastery at Luxeuil, developed the Carolingian minuscule script that shaped the look of the lower-case letters you are reading right now. But what was the embarkation point for the sea voyage with which it all began?

## SEAFARING MONKS

Jonas of Bobbio, who wrote an influential life of Columbanus, became a monk at the saint's final foundation in 618. It seems reasonable to assume that he knew people who had travelled with Columbanus on the boat from Ireland. His brief account of the voyage, vividly conveyed in the historic present tense, has been translated as follows:

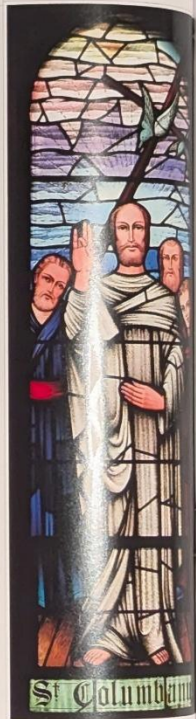
'Columbanus ... sets out on his journey and under the guidance of Christ makes for the seashore with twelve companions. There they wait on the mercies of the Almighty, to see if the intended plan, if it is in accordance with His wishes, might succeed. Knowing that the spirit of the all-merciful Judge was with them, they embark in a boat and set out through the straits into the uncertain sea-lanes and the calm high seas. With fair winds blowing, they quickly reach inlets on the coast of Brittany.'

Columbanus probably lacked a map (for which there was no word in Old Irish), but conceivably he had read about Ireland's geographical setting in a history of the world by Orosius. Written in North Africa in the early fifth century, that work was known to the clerical scholar Gildas in sixth-century Britain. Copies (or quotations) could easily have reached Ireland by the time Columbanus embarked. Jonas almost certainly had access to the text: a copy which is now in Milan was created at Bobbio in the early seventh century. According to Orosius, Ireland was an island in the ocean that encircled the world, situated 'opposite the Gauls'. It belonged to, but was on the boundary of, 'all of Europe' (*totius Europae*), a phrase employed by Columbanus in letters to Pope Gregory I and Pope Boniface IV.

On modern maps, Columbanus is invariably depicted as departing by sea from Bangor, Co. Down, where he had belonged to St Comgall's austere monastery for perhaps twenty years. As popularly imagined, Columbanus and his companions rowed out of Belfast Lough aboard a curragh. That image owes much to stories of Brendan the Navigator venturing out into the Atlantic. Despite hailing from Munster, Brendan even has a church named after him on the shore of Belfast

Lough. St Brendan's at Sydenham was the childhood church of playwright Stewart Parker, whose play *Punt's Fall* recalls Brendan in his curragh. 'No map, no compass, in a shell of stretched cowhide', says a character. 'The boat you can maybe reconstruct

Below: St Columbanus as featured in a stained-glass window in Ballyholme parish church, Bangor. (North Down Museum)



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# Q&A