

Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

presents

St. Patrick and the Legend of Caorthánnach

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Since this module is a combination of facts (as much as we know them) and legend, there will be some blank leader notes. Feel free to add some of your own.

Slides that are legends are notated with a Celtic Knot “L” in the upper left corner.

Beginning of Time

Long ago before Ireland was formed, before there were rivers and oceans, plants and animals, the planet was just a vaporous swirl of mist and dust.



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Birth of Caorthánnach

The earth cooled and the crust formed. In the deep core of the earth Caorthánnach (pron. Queer-ha-nock) was born. She was the angry mother of all demons and sent her offspring into the world of man.



Man Moves In

The ice melted and the ocean rose. Mankind moved up from the valleys to high and dry land. Ireland became inhabited but life was difficult with tribal wars, illness, and disease.



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When did they move to the dryland of Ireland?

About 8,200 years ago a catastrophic release of water from a North American glacial lake combined with a tsunami from an underwater landslide off of Norway caused the waters to rise close to present day levels. This was a 400' increase from the end of the last ice age.

<http://education.nationalgeographic.org/maps/doggerland/>

A recent discovery evidences human occupation in Ireland as early as 12,500 years ago.

<http://irisharchaeology.ie/2016/03/new-discovery-pushes-back-date-of-human-existence-in-ireland-by-2500-years/>

Artwork based on photograph in The Burren, West Ireland



Dark Legends

The Irish had to be on constant guard from all sorts of dark mythical and magical creatures and spirits. They seemed poised and ready to strike at any moment.



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Left: A Banshee, meaning "faerie-woman", is a female spirit that warns of the imminent death of a family member by wailing near the family's residence.

Right: The Dullahan – calls the soul of a person to death. Only gold can stop the Dullahan, or at least delay it.

<https://www.celticlifelandheritage.org/suits-dark.html>



More Dark Legends



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Life continued as a constant struggle for the people of Ireland, until the day a man came to save them and banish Caorthánnach.



Left: Dearg-Dur, Ireland's Vampire, only attacks men. Hers is a story of tragedy and she seeks revenge for a life of suffering caused by an unloving father and an abusing husband. Only by stacking rocks on her grave can Dearg-Dur be kept at bay.

Right: Part of the faery family, Púkas are shape-shifters. Most often they appear as a black horse that runs at night, tearing down fences, scattering live stock. They may even lure a human and run away with them. The black rabbit and black goat are two other recurring shapes of the Púka.

<https://www.celticlifeandheritage.org/suits-dark.html>

Enter St. Patrick

Although we now know him as Saint Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland, he was born Maewyn Succat, son of Calpornius a Roman-British army officer and later a deacon.



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He was born around the end of the 4th Century in what we now know of as either Wales or Scotland.

Scotland
Wales
England
Ireland
N Ireland



Why Roman?

In the mid First Century, Rome invaded Britain and began 350 years of Roman occupation. Some local gentry converted themselves from Celtic warriors and druids into Romanized gentlemen.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/overview_roman_01.shtml

St. Patrick's birthdate is contested and ranges from 385 AD – 415 AD

<https://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/history-of-st-patrick.html>

Saint Patrick's writing: https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01 – Section One

Captured

When St. Patrick was sixteen, he was captured by Irish Pirates, taken back to Ireland, and sold as a slave.



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My father was Calpornius. He was a deacon; his father was Potitus, a priest, who lived at Bannavem Taburniae. His home was near there, and that is where I was taken prisoner. I was about sixteen at the time. At that time, I did not know the true God. I was taken into captivity in Ireland, along with thousands of others.

https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01 Section 1

It is believed that St. Patrick was kidnapped by Niall of the Nine Hostages who was King of Ireland from 379 to 405 AD.

DNA research, from Trinity College Dublin, estimates the Irish King has up to 3 million modern day descendants.

<https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/niall-took-no-hostages-43038522-237784201>

Slave & Shepherd

For six years Patrick shepherded sheep for his master on Mt. Slemish. He had plenty of alone time which he spent in prayer and reflection.



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“After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realise now, the spirit was burning in me at that time.”

slave/herder: https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01 Section 16

Where is Mt. Slemish?

Mt. Slemish is the NW corner of Northern Ireland.

<https://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/history-of-st-patrick.html>

St Patrick escapes

But one day, Patrick escaped from slavery. In a dream he was told his ship was ready. Patrick travelled 200 miles to a place he had never been in order to escape.

When he arrived, the captain told Patrick he could not join them but miraculously changed his mind and Patrick was able to escape.



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It was there one night in my sleep that I heard a voice saying to me: "You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country." Again after a short while, I heard a someone saying to me: "Look – your ship is ready." It was not nearby, but a good two hundred miles away. I had never been to the place, nor did I know anyone there. So I ran away then, and left the man with whom I had been for six years...

The day I arrived, the ship was about to leave the place. I said I needed to set sail with them, but the captain was not at all pleased. He replied unpleasantly and angrily: "Don't you dare try to come with us." When I heard that, I left them and went back to the hut where I had lodgings. I began to pray while I was going; and before I even finished the prayer, I heard one of them shout aloud at me: "Come quickly – those men are calling you!" I turned back right away, and they began to say to me: "Come – we'll trust you. Prove you're our friend in any way you wish." That day, I refused to suck their breasts, because of my reverence for God. They were pagans, and I hoped they might come to faith in Jesus Christ. This is how I got to go with them, and we set sail right away.

https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01 Section 17, 18

Travel from Ireland

It took three days of sailing to reach land, and another 28 days in the wilderness before they saw another human.



It would be another few years until Patrick was able to make his way back to his family.

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After three days we made it to land, and then for twenty eight days we travelled through a wilderness. Food ran out, and great hunger came over them. The captain turned to me and said: “What about this, Christian? You tell us that your God is great and all-powerful – why can’t you pray for us, since we’re in a bad state with hunger? There’s no sign of us finding a human being anywhere!” Then I said to them with some confidence: “Turn in faith with all your hearts to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible for him[Nota], so that he may put food in your way – even enough to make you fully satisfied! He has an abundance everywhere.” With the help of God, this is actually what happened! A herd of pigs appeared in the way before our eyes! They killed many of them and there they remained for two nights, and were fully restored, and the dogs too were filled. Many of them had grown weak and left half-alive by the way. After this, they gave the greatest of thanks to God, and I was honoured in their eyes. From this day on, they had plenty of food. They also found some wild honey, and offered some of it to me. However, one of them said: “This honey must have been offered in sacrifice to a god.” Thanks be to God, from then on I tasted none of it.

Called to Ireland

One night, after Patrick was home with his family, he had a dream. A man was walking towards him holding so many letters they could not be counted. Patrick began to read a letter from the Irish and heard a voice saying:

“We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.”



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... I saw, in a vision in the night, a man whose name was Victoricus coming as it were from Ireland with so many letters they could not be counted. He gave me one of these, and I read the beginning of the letter, the voice of the Irish people. While I was reading out the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard at that moment the voice of those who were beside the wood of Voclut, near the western sea. They called out as it were with one voice: “We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.” This touched my heart deeply, and I could not read any further; I woke up then. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord granted them what they were calling for.

https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#01 Section 23

Priesthood

Patrick knew he had to prepare himself before returning to Ireland.

He studied hard in France where he became a priest and then later a bishop.

He never forgot his dream and returned to Ireland many years later.





Mission to rid snakes



After having lived in Ireland for six years in his youth, St. Patrick knew of Caorthánnach and her demonic children (who took the form of snakes). He was determined to rid Ireland of them.

St. Patrick prayed for guidance and was shown exactly what to do.

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pron. queer-ha-nock

Thus begins the legend portion of our tale....



Climbs Croagh Patrick

St. Patrick climbed the steep slope of Ox Mountain (now known as Croagh Patrick).



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Ox Mountain is now known as Croagh Patrick in honor of St. Patrick.

This mountain has had a tradition of pilgrimage for over 5,000 years, dating back to the Stone Age where it is believed pagan people climbed to the top to celebrate the harvest season. It has transitioned to a pilgrimage in honor of St. Patrick.

<http://www.croagh-patrick.com/visitorcentre/holy-mountain>



Banishes Snakes



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Through the grace and power God had granted him, St. Patrick called forth a powerful whirlwind.

It caught up all the snakes, including Caorthánach in her serpent form. The power flung them to the sea, ridding Ireland of them once and for all.

Are there really no snakes in Ireland?

In reality there have never been any snakes in Ireland. Snakes crossed the land bridge between Europe and Britain before that bridge was covered by water about 6500 years ago. By that time, Ireland and England had no bridge for the snakes to cross having been covered by water some 2,000 years prior.

https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/03/080313-snakes-ireland_2.html



Battle Atop Ox Mountain

The lesser beings were banished. Only Caorthánnach was able to free herself from the whirlwind. She dropped out of the sky and landed on the peak of Ox Mountain face to face with St. Patrick. There they battled for two days and two nights.



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(pron. queer-ha-nock)

Caorthánnach images throughout the module were inspired by and based on "Sea Serpent" by metal sculptor, Ricardo Breceda. The sculpture is located in the desert within Anza-Borrego State Park, California.

L Caorthánnach Slithers Away

Suddenly, Caorthánnach slithered off the mountain and made a run for her home. St. Patrick knew where she was going: to a cave in Lough Derg which was a portal to hell.



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(pron. queer-ha-nock)

Artwork based on actual view from top of Croagh Patrick over the bay to Inishgort.



St Patrick Gives Chase

St. Patrick found the fastest horse in Ireland and gave chase.



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Poisoned Water

But Caorthánnach
would not be caught.
To slow Patrick down,
she poisoned all the
water in her path.

She hoped St. Patrick
might die of thirst
before he could catch
up.



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(pron. queer-ha-nock)



Prays for water

St. Patrick made it all the way to where the town of Tullaghan is now. He began to despair, wondering if he would die of thirst after all.



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Artwork based on view from the Coast of Tullaghan looking out to sea.



Well at Tullaghan

St Patrick prayed for water. Just then, his horse stumbled on a rock and St. Patrick was thrown to ground. A well of fresh water sprung up and he was able to quench his thirst. Now on to Lough Derg and after Caorthánnach!



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There is an actual well thought to be associated with St. Patrick in Tullaghan.
<http://www.earlychristianireland.net/Counties/sligo/tullaghanhill/>

(pron. queer-ha-nock)



Battle at Lough Derg

The two adversaries met at Lough Derg and another battle raged.



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There are two Lough Derg's in Ireland. This Lough Derg is the one in County Donegal, on the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland



Patrick is Swallowed Whole



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Some say St. Patrick jumped on her back and they battled until Caorthánnach swallowed him whole, taking him down into the deep abyss.

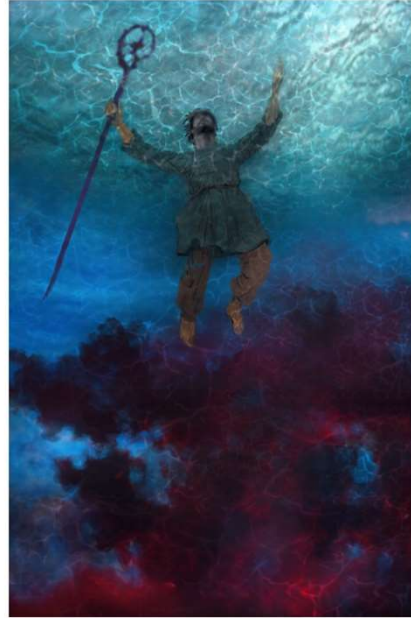
(pron. queer-ha-nock)



Patrick Escapes

But even inside the serpent, St. Patrick continued to fight. Using his crosier, he tore through her belly.

Caorthánnach's dark red blood spilled into the lake giving the lake its name: Lough Derg or Dark Lake.



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(pron. queer-ha-nock)



Banishes Caorthánnach

Others say St. Patrick stayed on shore. Using the power God granted him, he banished Caorthánnach to a cave on Station Island. This caused a wave to flood the land for a decade.



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(pron. queer-ha-nock)

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Banished to a Cave



Legend has it, although Caorthánnach was defeated by St. Patrick, she did not die. Instead she bides her time until once again she can roam the earth. For now, she must rely on her offspring to influence mankind.

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(pron. queer-ha-nock)

Cave is Sealed

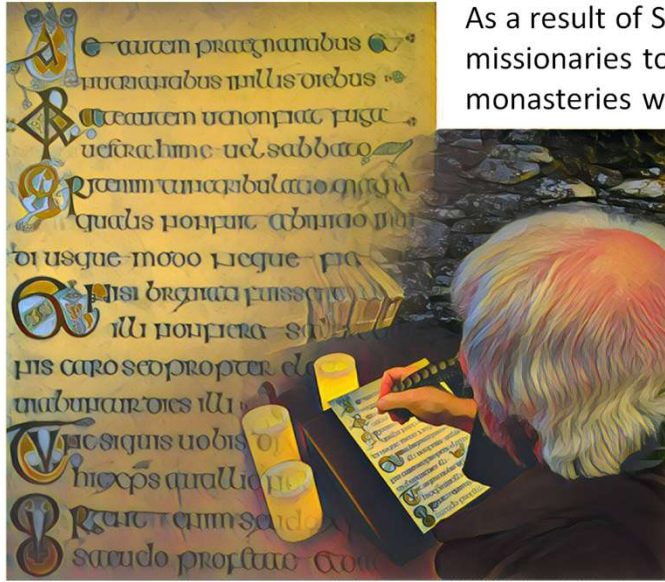
Never fear. A monastery was built on the site and the cave she was banished to was sealed in the 17th Century.



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The caption reads: From: Thomas Carve, *Lyra; sive Anacephalaeosis Hibernica* (Sulzbach 1666). According to the acknowledgements on p. 4 this picture has been taken from a copy at the University College Dublin Library., Public Domain, Link

Monastic Ireland



As a result of St. Patrick and other missionaries to Ireland, many monasteries were built.

Monasteries, along with the druid lay schools, became the universities of early Ireland.

Some even say, Ireland's monasteries saved Western Civilization!

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In pagan times the Druids taught education mostly in oral tradition. Not all children went to school. Some learned skillsets from their families. Written language does not appear to have occurred until Ireland was Christianized with the coming of the monks. Much schooling was done by apprenticeship and were learned in the homes of the master, typically hereditary.

Subject taught - Monasteries: Religion, mathematics, sciences, literature, language (Latin and Greek), philosophy

Lay: poetry, history, Irish literature, law, and other vocations

The Irish were well known for their literacy throughout Europe both from an Ecclesiastical (monasteries) and lay (Druids, Ovates, and Bards) perspective. Such was the literary acclaim of Ireland that foreign students were sent to Ireland to finish their education.

<http://www.libraryireland.com/SocialHistoryAncientIreland/II-VII-1.php>

<https://irishhistoryandgenealogy.wordpress.com/category/druid/>

The monasteries valued the ancient documents and made multiple copies. These volumes were protected from the destruction the European the dark ages, saving Western Civilization in the process.

<http://thomascahill.com/books/how-the-irish-saved-civilization-tr>

St. Patrick Today



Today, St. Patrick is honored as the Patron Saint of Ireland. There are many cathedrals named after him. It is thought St. Patrick died on March 17. His life is celebrated every year on that day, all over the world.

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Artwork based on:

Sculpture of St. Patrick at the foot of Croagh Patrick

Front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin

Croagh Patrick