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# Review of Who was Saint Patrick, by E.A. Thompson

Joseph F. Kelly

*John Carroll University*, [kelly@jcu.edu](mailto:kelly@jcu.edu)

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A few minor comments which in no way diminish the value of this solid monograph: An hegoumenos of a monastery was more than a spiritual director (p. 22), for he also was the administrator proper. The topic concerning the place of clergymen in secular professions (p. 25) has been treated in my study "Clerics and Secular Professions in the Byzantine Church," *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 375–90. The economic activity of the clergy and church sources of revenue have been examined by W. N. Zeisel, Jr., in "An Economic Survey of the Early Byzantine Church," his Ph.D. thesis submitted to the history department of Rutgers University (1975). On provincial religious and social welfare foundations the important study of Konstantina P. Mentzos, "Eparchiaka Evage Idrymata mehri tou telous tes Eikonomahias," *Byzantina* 11 (1982), deserves to be studied. Because a more detailed account of Justinian's imperial foundations was beyond Thomas's scope of study (pp. 44–45), one may want to consult my *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* for a full treatment of the subject. Considering the multilingual nature of Thomas's sources, there are very few typographical errors (but note "Antolios" on page 20 instead of "Anatolios" and "Koitionos" on pages 46 and 294 instead of "Koitonos"). While most foreign terms have been printed in italics, several have been overlooked, such as "Phronesis," "Megalopsychia," "Eucharistia Technon," and "Pothos tes Philoktistou" on page 24.

In brief this is a valuable contribution to Byzantine studies.

DEMETRIOS J. CONSTANTELOS, Stockton State College

E. A. THOMPSON, *Who Was Saint Patrick?* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. Pp. xv, 190; illustrated. \$21.95.

St. Patrick has long been a point of great scholarly controversy. The sources do not permit us to speak with confidence about many aspects of his life and career, but he is historically so important that something must be said. Thompson, the historian of the *Volkeswanderung*, made his first contribution to Patrician studies in 1980; this is now the most recent biography of the saint.

As just indicated, the problem of St. Patrick is one of sources. Patrick wrote just two short works, a *Confessio* in defense of his apostolate and an *Epistola ad milites Corotici*, this Coroticus being a British princeling who kidnapped some of Patrick's converts and to whose soldiers the saint addressed a plea for their release. These two documents are of astonishing value — the earliest writings from Irish soil and the oldest extant opera of a British bishop. Thompson rates them even higher: "They are the only existing Latin books of the time of the Roman Empire which were written outside the Imperial Roman frontier in one of the lands of the barbarians" (pp. xi–xii). He also claims "that Patrick's own writings contain *all* [his emphasis] the valid evidence about his life and thought which we possess" (p. xiii). He strongly rejects evidence from early-medieval *vitae Patricii*.

This cautious sentiment quickly returns to haunt the author. About Patrick's escape from Irish slavery, he tells us: "The blunt truth is that the story of the march through the vast desert, whether it took place in Gaul or Britain, is impossible as Patrick tells it" (p. 31). Having thus seriously demeaned the only valid source for Patrick's life, Thompson goes on to criticize and even to savage those modern writers who have tried to make sense out of Patrick's account.

There is quite a bit of this in the book. Thompson demolishes much of the current speculation about the identity of Coroticus, that is, attempts to identify him with some known fifth-century prince, only to arrive at a tautology: "So far as we can tell, the Coroticus who outraged the Christians of St Patrick was a person in his own right

and was not identical with anyone except himself" (p. 131). He then resurrects his theory that Coroticus was a British princeling living in Ireland as a sort of resident guerilla.

Thompson concludes with an outrageous eisegesis of Patrick's writings. He criticizes the saint for not mentioning his fellow workers in Ireland and for ignoring his fellow Britons ("They do not seem to have figured in his thoughts," p. 149) as if all Patrick's thoughts during a thirty-year mission in a barbarian land should have appeared in two brief writings. But Patrick is guilty of more than sins of omission: ". . . his mission set out to convert the greatest possible number of Irish people, and he spent decidedly less time on deepening their understanding of that to which they had been converted" (p. 151). This is a major breakthrough; Thompson has now become the first historian to evaluate scientifically the spiritual lives of Patrick's converts.

Thompson is an effective critic, and no one in Patrician studies should ignore his evaluation of other moderns. Regrettably he contributes little to our understanding of Patrick himself.

JOSEPH F. KELLY, John Carroll University

D. A. TROTTER, *Medieval French Literature and the Crusades (1100–1300)*. (Histoire des idées et critique littéraire, 256.) Geneva: Droz, 1988. Paper. Pp. 277.

The somewhat surprising conclusion to this lengthy book analyzing the presence of the historical Crusades in contemporary literary works is that, with the notable exception of the epics of the Old French Crusade Cycle, the Crusades to the Holy Land are very rarely depicted in Old French literature. Even in the chansons de geste, which are generally assumed to be imbued with the crusading spirit, the historical Crusades are almost totally absent. What we have, instead, is an evocation of holy war against the enemies of Christianity, embellished occasionally by the superimposition of propagandistic elements relating to contemporary Crusades. This conclusion becomes somewhat less surprising, however, if one takes into account the very narrow limitations placed upon the study. By "Crusades" Trotter means only the eight Crusades to the Holy Land between 1096 and 1291; by "literature" he means only imaginative literature; and by "medieval French" he means only the literature written in *langue d'oïl* between 1100 and 1300. He oversteps his own barriers only in considering the fifteenth-century redaction of *La Fille du Comte de Ponthieu* and Guilhem Figueira's Occitan poem, "D'un sirventes far." Had the study also treated religiously motivated expeditions to Spain, Italy, and Eastern Europe; had the author considered treatises, homilies, and other textual evidence outside the mainstream; had the corpus been extended to literature in *langue d'oc* or the later *chansons d'aventure*, then the conclusions might require substantial modification. However, that would be to write a quite different book from the one proposed, which is in fact a largely unrevised version of the author's Oxford D.Phil. thesis. It still bears many of the rough edges of that genre, including the bulky transitions, repetitive introductory remarks to each section, rigidly defined focus, and lack of indexing.

Given these caveats, there is still a lot to recommend this study. After an introductory chapter, chapter 2 analyzes "the vocabulary of crusading in Old French." Words relating to the nature of the Crusades as journeys (*voie, outre mer, Terre Sainte*) and pilgrimages (*pelerinage, pelerin*), to the knight's duty to fight for Christianity (*servir*), and to the ubiquitous emblem of the cross (*se croisier, croisement*) are discussed, but notably absent are words relating to the crusader-pilgrim's accoutrements (*targe, espee, bourdon, escharpe, esclavine*, etc.). The conclusion to this chapter anticipates much of