

The Chronology of St Colum Cille

**Book of Kells f. 2v – Beginning of Canon II collating Matthew vs. Mark vs. Luke**



## William Reeves' argument for the date of Colum Cille's obit

“In calculating the year of St. Columba's death, it will be granted that he died on the ninth of June: ... In the Feilire of Ængus and the Roman Martyrology, as well as those of Bede and Notker, we have domestic and foreign testimony agreeing with the date ...

We learn, however, from Adamnan the following particulars, which, taken in conjunction with the date of the festival, determine the year with great precision:

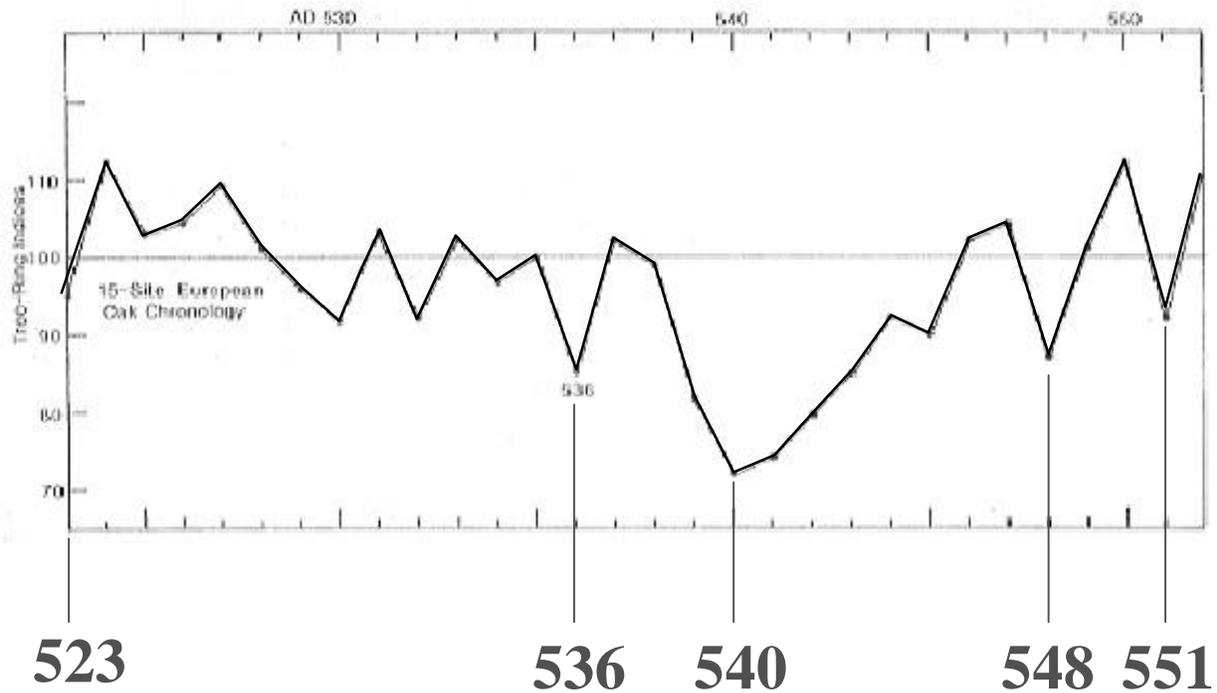
- Saturday was the last day of the saint's life.
- Shortly after midnight he rose for matins.
- That, therefore, he died on Sunday.
- That the ninth of June fell on Sunday.

Now the Regular letter of the ninth of June is F; therefore F was the Sunday letter of the year. But 597 is the only year at this period to which F belongs ... thus giving 597 for his obit.”

W. Reeves – *The Life of St. Columba* ...

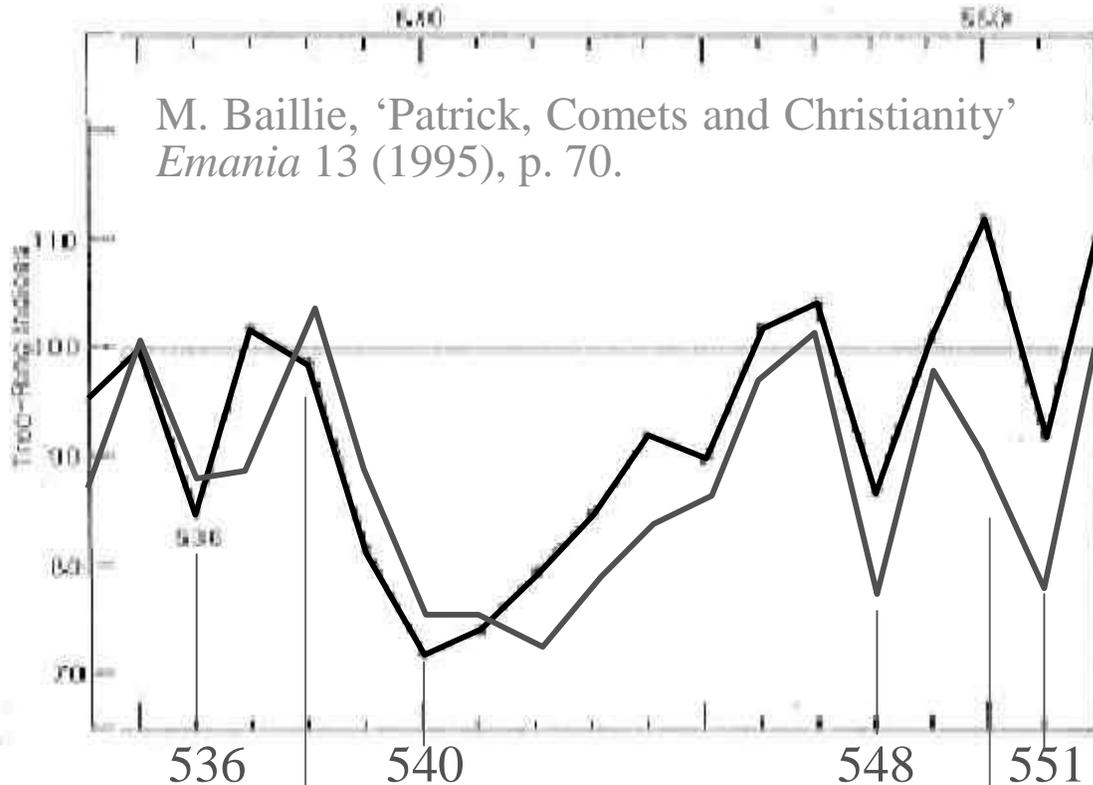
(Dublin, 1857), p. 309-10

## Annual record of the Tree-Ring Index of European oaks from AD 523-52.



M.G.L. Baillie, 'Dendrochronology ... the AD536 dust-veil event' *The Holocene* (1994), fig. 3, p. 215.

## The Tree-Ring Index of European and Irish oaks from AD 534-52.



### Annals

538

540

550

553

[W. Stokes *Annals of Tigernach* pp. 96-7, 100-1.]

**538** Perditió panis.

**540** Mortalitas magna quae blefed dicitur, in qua Mobí Clairineach, cui nomen est Berchan, brecanó poeta, periit.

**550** Mortalitas magna ... in quo isti sancti pauserauerunt .i. Findia & Colum m. Crimthannd & Colam Indse Cealtra & Sineall m. Cenandain & Mac Tail.

**553** Pestis quae uocatur Samtrusc.

## Annalistic *quies* of Colum Cille at AD 593

AT: Quies Coluim cille in nocte dominica pentecostes, quintídh Iuin, anno perigrinacionis sue .xxxu. etatis uero .lxx.uii.

CS: Quies Coluim Cille in nocte Dominica Pentecostes, u. id. Iuin, anno perigrinationis suae .xxx<sup>o</sup>.u<sup>o</sup>., aetatis uero lxx<sup>o</sup>.uii<sup>o</sup>.

AC: Saint Colum Kill Dyed on Whitsunday ieve the 5<sup>th</sup> of the Ides of June in the Island of Hugh in the 35<sup>th</sup> year of his pilgrimage in Scotland, & banished thither & in the 77 yeare of his age

AR: Quies Coluimbe Cille in nocte Dominica Penthecoste, v<sup>o</sup> idus Iunii, anno peregrinationis suae 35, aetatis vero 77.

AI: Quies Coluimb Cille nocte Dominica hi .ú. Íd Iúin anno .xx<sup>o</sup>.x.u<sup>o</sup>. perigrinationis suae, aetate autem .lxxui.

AU: Quies Coluim Cille .u. Id. Iuini anno etatis sue .lxx.ui.

## ***Natus, Navigatio* and *Quies* of Colum Cille by the chronology of AT/CS**

AD 520 – Natus:

Colam Cille natus est.

AD 562 - Navigatio:

Navigatio Coluim Cille ad insulam Iae .xlii<sup>o</sup>. anno aetatis suae.

AD 593 – Quies:

Quies Coluim Cille in nocte Dominica Pentecostes, u. id. Iuin, anno perigrinationis suae .xxx<sup>o</sup>.u<sup>o</sup>., aetatis uero lxx<sup>o</sup>.uii<sup>o</sup>.

W.M. Hennessy *Chronicon Scotorum* (London, 1866), pp. 38, 54, 64.

AD 520 to 593 = 74 years counted inclusively.

AD 562 to 593 = 32 years counted inclusively.

AD 520 to 562 = 43 years counted inclusively.

## The day of Colum Cille's death according to Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, iii.23.

Colum Cille's "prophecy" of the time of his death.

“Et hac sequenti media uenerabili dominica nocte, *secundum eloquia scripturarum, patrum gradiar uiam. Iam enim dominus meus Iesus Christus me inuitare dignatur; ad quem inquam hac mediante nocte ipso me inuitante emigrabo”*

A. Anderson & M. Anderson *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (1991), p. 220

Cf. Evagrius, *Vita Antonii*, c.58:

“Ego quidem, filioli, *secundum eloquia scripturarum, patrum gradior uiam; iam enim Dominus me inuitat*”

G. Brüning *Z.C.P.* (1917), p. 246

## **Adomnán's chronology of Colum Cille's *peregrinatio*.**

### **Lib. iii. C. 22:**

‘... the venerable man thus spoke to them saying:

“Thirty years have been completed of my pilgrimage in Britain, down to this present day.

Meanwhile, for many days past, I have earnestly requested my Lord that in the end of this present thirtieth year he ... would at once call me to the heavenly country.

... the Lord granted me when I asked it with my whole strength that I should pass to him from the world on this day, [but now] he has changed ... answering in preference the prayers of many churches for me.

And so it has been granted by the Lord to the prayers of those churches that ... four more years from this day shall be added to my sojourn in the flesh.

After the end of the four coming years in this life, by God's favour I shall ... joyfully depart to the Lord.”

In accordance with these words ... he remained in the flesh for four years afterwards.’

### **Lib. iii. C. 23:**

‘When the end was drawing near of the four years aforementioned, after the completion of which the foreteller of truth had long ago foreknown that his present life would come to a close, one day in the month of May [the account of Colum Cille's last days and death follow.]’

Anderson & Anderson (1991), p. 217

## Conclusions:

1. Adomnán deliberately chose to place Colum Cille's death on Sunday, apparently for purposes of dramatic effect.

2. To achieve this Adomnán extended Colum Cille's *peregrinatio* by exactly four years.

3. In the annals the words, 'in nocte dominica pentecostes' and the numbers 'lxxvii' and 'xxxv', are corruptions deriving from Adomnán's *Vita*.

4. The original *Iona Chronicle* texts and chronology which emerge are:

### AD 520 - Natus:

Columba natus est.

### AD 562 - Navigatio:

Navigatio Columbae ad insulam Iae .xliiii<sup>o</sup>. anno aetatis suae.

### AD 593 – Quies:

Quies Columbae u. id. Iuin, anno perigrinationis

suae .xxxviii<sup>o</sup>. aetatis uero lxx<sup>o</sup>.iiii<sup>o</sup>.