
Irish-German collaboration to restore damaged biography of Ireland's St Patrick in Berlin

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs together with Trinity College Dublin and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities are collaborating to fund the restoration of a previously unpublished biography of St Patrick, one of Ireland's patron saints. This biography was compiled by one of Germany's foremost Celticists, Heinrich Zimmer.

Heinrich Zimmer (1851-1910) was Germany's first professor of Celtic Studies and an Ordinary Member of the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences. His thus far unpublished biography of St Patrick is regarded as a foundation document for modern scientific research on Ireland's national saint.

Zimmer completed a 575-page study of St Patrick in 1894, but it was never published. When Zimmer's private library burned down in 1903, the manuscript survived but with significant fire-damage. Subsequently it has been stored in the archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, unseen by scholars in decades due to its fragile state.

Given the historical relevance of the damaged manuscript, the three partners have decided to fund its restoration.

Speaking about the restoration project, Ireland's Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) Micheál Martin said:

"I am delighted to announce this partnership with Trinity College Dublin and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities to restore what is an historic document about St. Patrick.

I am sure that this ambitious restoration will shine a new light on Ireland's patron saint, contributing to the increasing popularity Irish studies has been enjoying across Germany in recent years."

Maeve Collins, Ireland's Ambassador to Germany, remarked:

"This Irish-German collaboration will see a significant piece of Patrician scholarship being restored and made readily available for research again, after more than a century stored in the Academy's archives.

We greatly look forward to the insight this manuscript will provide into the study of St. Patrick."

Provost of Trinity College Dublin, Dr Linda Doyle, said:

“It is wonderful that this manuscript is now being restored and will be more widely available as the subject of academic scholarship.

We are delighted to support Dr Immo Warntjes’ research in this fascinating field. I also welcome this opportunity to further deepen our research ties with Germany via the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, and I thank the Irish government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, for their generosity in facilitating this work.”

The President of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Prof. Dr Dr h.c. mult. Christoph Marksches emphasised:

“The Archive of the Academy of Sciences possesses a tremendous treasure in the manuscript of the biography of the Irish national saint St Patrick. We are grateful that this treasure is now being restored with the generous support of the Embassy of Ireland and Trinity College Dublin and will therefore be made available to all interested researchers in the future- also in digital form. Our late member Heinrich Zimmer would certainly have been just as pleased about this news as we were.”

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Notes for Editors

The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs provides a range of services to Irish citizens and works to serve the Irish people, promote their values and advance their prosperity and interests abroad, and to provide the government with the capabilities, analysis and influence to ensure that Ireland derives the maximum benefit from all areas of its external engagement.

Trinity College Dublin, founded in 1592, is ranked 1st in Ireland, with a strong research tradition in Irish history.

Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities is an interdisciplinary association of scholars, and collaborates with scientists worldwide. It is currently the largest non-university research institution dedicated to the humanities in the Berlin-Brandenburg region.

Additional Information

Heinrich Zimmer was born in 1851 into a farming family in Castellaun in the Rhineland.

He spent time studying in Strasbourg, Tübingen and Berlin, before being appointed Professor of Sanskrit and Philology in Greifswald at the age of thirty.

In 1901, Zimmer was appointed Professor for Celtic Languages at Berlin University, the first such position created anywhere in the world. He died in 1910.

All 575 pages of the manuscript are being restored: of these, 175 pages are in great need of restoration. The aim is to complete this restoration in 2025.

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