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Barinthus [St Barinthus, Barnitus, Barvitus]

(*supp. fl.* 6th cent.)

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Barinthus [St Barinthus, Barnitus, Barvitus] (*supp. fl.* 6th cent.), legendary navigator, occurs in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* and the various Latin and vernacular lives of St Brendan of Clonfert (d. 573) [see under Connacht, saints of], where it is stated that his account of a journey, undertaken with a disciple called Mernoc, to the so-called 'Promised Land of the Saints' inspired Brendan to make his own 'navigation' in search of that island. These nautical associations no doubt underlie the claim by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Vita Merlini* that a 'Barinthus ... to whom the waters and stars of the heavens were well known' (Geoffrey of Monmouth, 102) guided the ship carrying the wounded King Arthur after the battle of Camlan. Also, the *Vita sancti Davidis* by Rhigyfarch has a St Barre traversing the Irish Sea on a horse and encountering St Brendan *en route*. While it has been argued that this Barinthus is the vestige of some ancient pagan Celtic water-deity, his patronymic 'nepos Neil' ('descendant of Niall') suggests he is to be identified with the Cenél Conaill saint Bairrfhinn ua Néill, patron of Kilbarron (Cell Bairrfhinn, Donegal) and Drumcullen, Offaly, whose feast day is 21 May. According to the Irish saints' genealogies, Bairrfhinn was son of Muiredach mac Echdach of the Cenél Conaill (of the northern Uí Néill kin group) and Didnat ingen Mechair, but it is likely that he is ultimately one of the many manifestations of the 'wandering' cult of St Findbarr [see under Ulster, saints of] which originated in north-east Ulster. In addition, there is also some late evidence of a Scottish cult of Barinthus: for example, a Barnitus (or, in a later variant, Barvitus), associate of St Brendan, was commemorated in Argyll on 5 (or 13) January and his relics were venerated at Dreghorn on 6 August.

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