

RUSSIAN AND WESTERN CELTICISTS ON SIMILARITIES
BETWEEN EARLY IRISH AND EARLY INDIAN TRADITIONS

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0. Introduction

The present contribution will not deal specifically with comparative aspects of Celto-Slavic but rather with the contribution of Celtic scholars, in particular Russian Celtic scholars, to the study of similarities between early Irish and early Indian traditions of kingship.¹

1. Western scholars on Celto-Indic correspondences

Attempts to compare the Old Irish and Sanskrit languages have their origins in the eighteenth century.² E. Windisch (1903) and W. Stokes (1893) were the first to note some literary parallels between the traditions, such as the epic in prose form, the preservation of archaic verbal forms in tmesis constructions, and other points. This approach was then developed by J. Vendryes (1915), who, referring to morphological and lexical features which Celtic shares with Sanskrit, inferred that the parallels observed indicate the archaic character of these languages.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the appearance of J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890, 1911-1915) fascinated scholars, particularly those in the field of religious studies. Dealing with the subject of the magical powers of kings, Frazer (1933: 262-263, see also 10, 89) observes:

The belief that kings possess magical or supernatural powers by virtue of which they can fertilise the earth and confer other benefits on their subjects would seem to have been shared by the ancestors of the Aryan races from India to Ireland.

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² The famous passage from Sir William Jones's address to the Asiatick Society (read on 2 February 1786) should be recalled: "The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of wonderful structure... there is a ... reason ... for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*" (Pachori 1993: 175). See Muller 1986 on European research into Old Indic.

With regard to the Indian and Irish data, he illustrated his thesis by examples from *The Laws of Manu*, and the early seventh-century Hiberno-Latin treatise entitled *De duodecim abusiuis saeculi* that he refers to as “a canon attributed to St. Patrick” (Frazer 1933: 171). The main indicators of royal virtue which emerge from these sources are fine weather, calm seas, and abundance of crops.

Later, the French scholars G. Dumézil (1973), E. Benveniste (1973), and D. Dubuisson (1978a, 1978b) extended the parallels noted by Vendryes and Windisch to declare that with regard to the Indo-Iranian and Italo-Celtic societies

we are concerned with societies of the same archaic structure, of an extremely conservative nature where institutions and their vocabulary persisted long after they had been abolished elsewhere (Benveniste 1973: 308).

The main concern of the comparativists who tried to draw links between Ireland and India was to establish the archaic character of the native institutions of kingship, preserved in the eastern and western extremities of the Indo-European world.³ They also noted parallels between the religious structures of Celtic and Indian society. In the words of Dumézil (1973: 98):

On all these divergent points, one may be inclined to think that the Celts have retained in greater purity a system of concepts and images which, in the Indian version, is presented only as it has been domesticated by the Brahmans, who were better casuists and more uncompromising moralists than the Druids.

However, it had been shown that the classical accounts of druidism cannot be regarded as based on first-hand observation, but rather on the literary model used for describing primitive barbaric peoples and their customs, including their religion.⁴ Moreover, we cannot be sure that the picture obtained from the Greek historiographers with regard to the Celtic peoples on the continent is applicable to pre-Christian Ireland. We can refer to the references to druids in Irish hagiography, although one should

³ S. Zimmer (2002: 202) investigated aspects of leadership (‘finding the way, clearing the path’) in Celtic and Indo-European “by means of historical linguistics and a comparison of IE literary formulas, adducing also archeological findings”. He paid special attention to parallels between the Welsh story of *Branwen Uerch Lyr* on the one hand, and early Indian Vedic literature and Middle Indian Jātaka stories on the other. In his investigation of the *hieros gamos* institution in early Ireland and Wales, K. McCone (1980: 160; 1990: 110-3) compared Classical accounts of the Celts of Gaul with the *svayamvara* episode in the Indian epic *Mahābhārata*.

⁴ See Tierney 1960; Maier 2000: 2-3.

be aware that depictions of the druids in this genre often derive from Old Testament models.⁵

With such scant and uncertain evidence, it does not seem possible to make a meaningful comparison between druidism and Brahmanism. The temptation to attempt to undertake such comparisons on the basis of superficial similarities goes back beyond Dumézil and Benveniste as far as the classical authors themselves, but it should be resisted.⁶

At the time, the ideas of the French scholars were willingly accepted by Irish scholarship. Binchy (1970) tried to assess Irish kingship from the point of view of the Indo-European notion of *Rex Sacrorum*, while Dillon (1946, 1948, 1973, 1975) looked for parallels between Indian and Irish legal systems. Later, Mac Cana (1968, 1979, 1988) sought to compare the privileges granted to the Irish poets with those granted to the Indian Brahmins.

Among the most common examples cited throughout scholarly works from 1972 to the present were the following:⁷

- a. The legal correspondences on the position of women in society. They pointed out an almost word-for-word correspondence between *The Laws of Manu*:

Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence;⁸

and the Old Irish *Bandire*-tract on the status of women.⁹

Her father has charge over her when she is a girl, her husband when she is a wife, her sons when she is a widowed woman with children, her kin when she is 'a woman of the kin' (i.e. with no other guardian), the church when she is a woman of the church (i.e. a nun).

⁵ McCone 1990: 230. As J. Borsje pointed out to me, the influence of early Greek apocryphal texts should also be noted.

⁶ See for instance, *Orations* of Dion Chrysostom, XLIX: "the Persians have men known as Magi..., the Egyptians have their holy men..., the Indians have their Brahmins. For their part, the Celts have men called Druids, who deal with prophecy and every division of wisdom" (transl. Phillip Freeman and J. T. Koch in Koch & Carey 1995: 24). I treat this topic in more detail in Fomin 1999: 171-2.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the parallels between early Irish and early Indian societies see Dillon 1975: 95-124.

⁸ Bühler 2001 (1886): 328. This phrase is contained in the ninth chapter of the treatise dedicated to the duties of husband and wife.

⁹ Cited from Kelly 1988: 76, discussed by Thurneysen in Binchy 1936: 183 f. and Dillon 1975: 115.

- b. The royal inauguration ritual known as *tarbfeis*. This procedure was described in two Irish sagas (Dillon 1953: 9; Knott 1936: 5, cf. Gwynn 1912: 131). Some scholars believe that their evidence was indirectly supported by a passage from a twelfth-century text by Giraldus of Wales. It must be pointed out, however, that it is the bull which is in the centre of description in the Irish sagas, whereas the *Topographia Hiberniae* describes a white mare undergoing the ritual cohabitation with the inaugurate – the would-be king.¹⁰ This cohabitation can be taken to symbolise the union between the king and his land and reveals a fecundating aspect of kingship, and is compared to its Indian analogue of the *aśvamedha*.¹¹
- c. The legal institution concerning suretyship and, more precisely, a “curious practice in connection with the collection of debts by a creditor, namely ‘the creditor’s fast’” (Dillon 1975: 118) were common to early Ireland and early India.¹² Moreover, the institution of fasting (OIr. *troscud*) was also used against a person of high status to pressure him into acting justly.¹³ Indian texts record the institution of *prāyōpaveśana*– abstaining from food and awaiting the approach of death in a sitting posture. In both Irish and Indian traditions, fasting takes place in a parallel location. In Ireland, the fast occurs outside the house of a person of a high status who has to

¹⁰ O’Meara 1948-50: 168, section *De nouo et enormi regni et domini confirmationis modo*. For translations of the passage see O’Meara 1951: 93-4; Dillon 1975: 107; McCone 1990: 118.

¹¹ Amply discussed by Schröder 1926-7: 310-2, Puhvel 1970. The doubts as to the authenticity of this description are well-known. As early as Philip O’Sullivan Beare in his *Zoilomastix* (ed. O’Donnell 1960), some scholars have mentioned that Giraldus was simply maligning the Irish. See Mac Cana 1963 for the overview of the controversial writings about seventeenth-century Ireland and their criticism. Some commentary on the point is contained in Lynn & Miller, *fc*. See furthermore de Pontfarcy 1987 who explained the archaic character of the rite in terms of Indo-European and Celtic traditions of kingship. The most recent discussion of the episode is contained in Doherty 2005: 17-20, who suggested further parallels from the text *Geinemain Moling acus a Betha*. His discussion of *aśvamedha* and other Irish-Indic parallels is mostly confined to citations from Gonda 1969 with some reference to McCone 1990: 118 and Bhattacharyya 1975: 3, 13, but with no reference to Dillon 1975: 100-114. Dillon pointed out that further parallels to the Irish royal inauguration descriptions can be found in the Indic royal consecration rites of *abhisheka* (the simplest inauguration ceremony to confer a status of a king on the warrior candidate by sprinkling a special liquid), *daśapeya* (the ceremony of ritual drinking of the *soma* drink symbolising the marriage of king and his people), and *vājapeya* (the royal ritual that establishes the sacrificer in the position of an over-king (Skt. *saṃrāt*)).

¹² For ample discussion see Binchy 1970 and Dillon 1975: 116-120.

¹³ This correspondence was first noted by Stokes 1885: 169.

defend himself either by self-fasting or by appointing a substitute to fast; in India, the plaintiff also fasted outside the defendant's house.¹⁴

- d. The most common linguistic parallels, e.g. a well-known derivation of an Old Irish word meaning 'king', *rí* from an Indo-European reconstructed form *rēk-s*, cognate to Sanskrit *rāja* and Latin *rex*, are not discussed in this paper, as we are concerned here with comparing cultural institutions rather than individual lexemes in isolation.¹⁵

2. Russian scholars on Celto-Indic correspondences

Russian scholars were quite fascinated by the parallels found between early Irish and Indian traditions as well, and carried on the comparative analysis of the evidence from different perspectives.

Vyacheslav V. Ivanov (1999 [1978]: 195) tried to look into the *Topographia Hiberniae* episode concerned with the inauguration ritual in more detail adducing Scythian, classical Greek and early Slavic witnesses. He argued for a common Indo-European background of the horse sacrifice rite during the inauguration ceremony. In his article devoted to the interpretation of a series of early Indian mythological and ritual terms, derived from *aśva*, 'horse', not only did he stress the importance of the genetic connection

¹⁴ The Irish law text on fasting does not say how long it normally lasts, but later commentators take it to be merely from sundown to sunrise (thus expression *aduid in troiscthe*, 'the night of the fasting'. Cited from Kelly 1988: 182). Further reading on existing parallels between early Irish and Indian legal lexis is provided by Hamp 1976. It is intriguing to observe a further parallel here between Irish and Indic phenomena of storing and releasing of the type of energy generated by austere penitential exercises. It is not quite certain whether OIr. 'mysterious vapour' (*dé*) and Skt. 'ascetic heat' (*tapas*) were related, but the evidence of the early texts suggests that both at least resulted from the exercise of fasting. OIr. *téith*, (DIL s.v. *te*, T 93.67) meaning 'heat' is a cognate of Skt. *tapas* (on the loss of intervocalic *p* see Thurneysen 1946: 139 § 226). This topic deserves fuller treatment and is briefly discussed in Wiley 2005: 33 with a reference to Ireland 1997: 56 n. 23. Note also the correspondence between OIr. *broimm* 'fart' and Skt. *Bráhma* 'pious effusion' going back to IE **bhrégh-mṇ* 'emission of air' discussed by McCone 1985.

¹⁵ This etymology was refuted by Scharfe 1985: 547: "Latin *rex* and Old Irish *rí* (Gaulish *-rix*) cannot establish an I.-E. word for 'king'. Sanskrit *rājan-* [and Greek *arēgón*] go back to the I.-E. period, but the word did not mean 'king' at the time". *Contra* Scharfe, McCone 1998: 10 establishes a PIE **(H)rēǵ-(o)n-* that "will have been very much a 'king' in a sense commonly connected with the word". See McCone 1998 for further discussion. Quite recently, J. Uhlich independently examined the origin of Lat. *rēx*, OIr. *rí* etc. and concluded that IE **-rēǵ-* was "originally used at the end of compounds with a regular verbal meaning 'ruling'... In such compounds, the second part ('ruling') could be reinterpreted as a noun 'ruler', and this could lead to the creation of a new independent noun for 'ruler, king'" (Uhlich 2006: 9). The reference is to the page of the handout provided for the lecture.

between Celtic and Indian evidence,¹⁶ but he also noted the existence of the common male and female royal ritual terminology in Celtic, Indian and other Indo-European traditions:

The very name of the *aśvamedha* may have a correspondence to Gaulish *iiPomiiDVos*, which is also the term for the ritual designation of the main acting person of the ritual ... Moreover, the identification of OIr. *airech* ‘concubine’ with early Indian **pālāka* reflected in the reformulated way in early Indian *pālāgalī* ‘the fourth royal wife’ seems significant (cp. another dialect variant in Avestian *pairikā*; Middle Persian *parīk*; New Persian *pari*; Greek *παλλακή*, *παλλακίς*, ‘concubine’, and Arm. *atič*, which can be traced to the same root as the early Indian word). Judging by the description of the *aśvamedha*, *pālāgalī* can be related to the number of ritual terms. The evidence of the Gaulish female deity riding a horse, *Epona*, is interesting, as its name derives from the same common European appellation for a horse as the *aśva*, *Equus October*, etc. Striking analogues to the early Indian, Celtic and Roman rituals can be found amongst the Slavs (my translation, see the original Russian text in Ivanov 1999 [1978]: 195).

Russian scholars Viktor P. Kalygin and Alexander A. Korolyov devoted some attention to the parallels exhibited between early Irish and Indian learned traditions. They argued that some peculiar characteristics of Irish poetic culture may preserve archaic Indo-European traits:

Все основные функции филидов обусловлены тем, что филиды были носителями Знания, которое позволяло им постигать истину... Существительное *coimgne* < **kom-ġen-jo-* первоначально, видимо, имело значение совокупного знания истории царствующих династий. Соположение *coimgne* с др. инд. *saṃjñā-* ‘имя, понимание’ может быть интерпретировано как указание на существование соответствующей индоевропейской традиции (**kom-ġen*) (Kalygin & Korolyov 1989: 114).

All major functions of the *filid* were determined by the fact that the *filid* were the bearers of Knowledge, which allowed them to grasp the truth... Originally, the noun *coimgne* < **kom-ġen-jo-* had a probable meaning of the aggregate knowledge of the genealogies of the ruling dynasties. The correspondence of *coimgne* to Old Indic *saṃjñā-* ‘name, understanding’ may be interpreted as an indication of the existence of the corresponding Indo-European tradition (**kom-ġen*).

Kalygin devoted much attention to the study of the early Irish poetic tradition (see Kalygin 1986). Methodologically he depended upon the works of T. Elizarenkova and V. Toporov (1983), the representatives of the

¹⁶ “The typological coincidence should be excluded by the series of parallels noted between Celtic and Indo-Iranian ritual terminology” (my translation, see Ivanov 1999 [1978]: 194).

Russian school of Oriental studies, revived in the late 1950s by Svyatoslav N. Rerikh.¹⁷

Developing C. Watkins's thesis of the formulaic character of the archaic Irish poetic language,¹⁸ Kalygin draws attention to a number of poetic formulae, as well as to various poetic devices and motifs attested both in archaic Irish as well as in Vedic Sanskrit in his monograph *Yazyk drevnejshej irlandskoj poezii* (*Language of the Earliest Irish Poetry*). These were, for instance, the shared use of alliteration in poetical compositions, as well as the use of repetitions and parallelism, some semantic connections, existing between *verba dicendi* and verbs meaning 'to bring' in *figura etymologica* (cf. OIr. *bertid brith*, 'he brought judgement', and Vedic *vaco ... bharatā brhāt*, 'bearing an elevated judgment') etc. (Kalygin 1986: 86-7).

Korolyov mainly focused his attention on the formulaic correspondences between the early Irish and early Indian learned traditions. The Old Irish poetic formula *co-cloth ní*, 'something was heard', which relates to the idea that the poetic composition is 'seen' in revelation, rather than composed, was scrutinised by Korolyov at the First International Conference on the Ulster cycle.¹⁹ He directly compares the formula with the Vedic term *śrutīh*. He accepts Mac Cana's (1966: 81-82) argument that OIr. *fáith* 'seer, prophet' receives his poetical gift through revelation and is seen as a passive medium in his process of exchange with an outside force and tries to develop it further. In Korolyov's view, the poets centred not only upon 'seeing',²⁰ but upon 'hearing' as well, which "should perhaps be treated as a further step into the realm of the supernatural" (Korolyov 1994: 252). He suggests that the idea can also be found in early Indian compositions:

The idea that the poet first hears something and only after that utters it as his own composition can be traced both in the earlier and the later strata of the same ancient Indian tradition. On the one hand, the oldest texts – all

¹⁷ See, for instance, Kalygin 1992: 247: "La doctrine latine médiévale a déjà dépassé la phase archaïque, tandis qu'en Irlande nous assistons à la décadence de l'époque mytho-poétique, au moins au niveau des érudits. La notion de mystique de la société chrétienne n'est pas identique à celle d'une société archaïque. Les spéculations irlandaises sur le caractère mystique de la parole sont plus proches de l'Inde antique que de la Rome médiévale".

¹⁸ See Watkins 1976; Watkins 1979: 189.

¹⁹ See also Korolyov 1995 for the analysis of the Indo-European isogloss **upo-nedh-*.

²⁰ It has been generally accepted that OIr. *fili* derives from Indo-European **welet-* < **wel-* 'to see'. The new interpretation of the stem **wel-* was suggested by Jacobson 1968, Ivanov & Toporov 1973, and Toporov 1983 who proposed its derivation from a complex of Indo-European mythological beliefs regarding the Otherworld deity who was regarded as the poets' patron (the synopsis is from Kalygin 1986: 18).

the *Vedas*, *Brāhmanas* and *Upanishads* [–] are treated as *śrutīḥ* ‘divine revelation, inspiration’, but literally ‘hearing, audition, the thing heard’, that is both active and passive perception, as distinct from the *smṛti*-part of the tradition which was ‘man-made’ (Korolyov 1994: 252).

Russian scholars did not necessarily confine themselves to Indo-European methodology when dealing with the problem of the comparison of similarities, existing between early Irish and early Indian cultural institutions. The historian Sergej Shkunayev called our attention to the problem of religious transition in fifth-century AD Ireland and third-century BC India: the two civilisations encountered new religions, Christianity and Buddhism respectively. In his opinion, the success of St. Patrick’s mission and the Christian conversion of Ireland could be easily explained by the interest of the ruling classes to get rid of the corporation of the druids in order to obtain an independent authoritative status:

Типологическую параллель такому положению дает противоположная периферия индоевропейского мира – Индия, где в свое время военное сословие кшатриев встало на сторону буддизма, во многом преемственного по отношению к религии жрецов-брахманов, но дававшего гораздо больший простор социальной активности сословий (Shkunayev 1991: 12).

A typological parallel to the [Irish] situation can be sought in the other extreme peripheral tradition of the Indo-European world – in India. There the military class of the *kshatriyas* supported Buddhism which succeeded the religion of the Brahmin-priests in many respects, but provided different classes with more freedom in their social activities.

Shkunayev’s insights into the problem have not yet been acknowledged by Celticists.²¹ Carrying his idea a little bit further, in the next section I shall be dealing with the question of typological comparisons to be made between India and Ireland, as well as with the methodological issues of the justification of the application of the cultural typological methodology to the study of early cultures. From the theoretical point of view, our aim will be to show the character of, and the opportunities provided by, the cultural integration of Christian and Buddhist religious teachings into the ideology of righteous kingship developed before the societies came into contact with the new dynamic religious systems. The subject was recently touched upon by Doherty who argues that

²¹ See the fifth section of the article by Séamus Mac Mathúna in the present volume where he sketches Shkunayev’s work.

ancient Indian kingship was transformed through its contact with Buddhism. There emerged, therefore, two models of kingship – one reflecting the pre-Buddhist model and one that was influenced by the moral and world view of Buddhist teachings ... This process provides a useful analogy for the impact of Christianity upon early Irish kingship (Doherty 2005: 29, 15).

Contra Doherty, I stress that the ethical element common to the pre-Christian Irish and the pre-Buddhist Indian political traditions played an important part in the formation of the doctrine of the righteous king (OIr. *fírflaith*, Pāli *dhammiko dhammarāja*) in early Christian Ireland and early Buddhist India. I hope that my conclusions will allow future Celticists to carry the research forward outside the specific Irish-Indian context and to apply the developed cultural typological methodology to the study of other cultures, both early and modern.

3. Criticism of the Indo-European methodology with regard to comparing Irish and Indian data and the methodology of cultural typology

Quite recently, some scholars have expressed their doubts with regard to the validity of the Indo-European approach of comparing the evidence of Irish and Indian cultures. As McCone (1990: 14) pointed out:

The dates of their earliest adequate documentation vary enormously (e.g. ... Vedic Sanskrit c. 1000 BC ... Old Irish c. 650 AD) and there is no question of mutual comprehension. One can hardly ... apply insights of dialectal geography to two languages and cultures such as those of early Christian Ireland and Vedic India separated from each other spatially by numerous other language areas, some Indo-European and others not, and temporally by over one and a half millennia ... Moreover, the Celts first emerge into the light of history from the cultural melting pot of central Europe and may well not have reached Ireland more than two or three centuries BC.

This new line of criticism points out that the early medieval Irish institution of kingship was far from being archaic, as was argued by Binchy, Dillon and others, but was quite explicable within medieval European political doctrine. The early Irish documents, presenting us with a depiction of kings and royalty, should be looked at from this point of view. Relatively similar things can be said of the religious and learned orders of early Irish society. While not denying the possibilities of the analysis of Irish and Indian data from an Indo-European perspective, for the last number of years the

present author has attempted to approach the subject from another point of view (see Fomin 1999; Fomin 2002: 3-30, 203-216; Fomin 2004).

Being extremely productive in terms of studying the data of early cultures from the comparative perspective, Russian scholars (including V. Toporov, V. V. Ivanov, A. M. Pyatigorsky (1993, esp. 156-7) and others) have also achieved some promising results in the field of historical semiotics. Describing the task of historical semiotics, Y. N. Lotman (1990: 203) writes:

Humanity, immersed in its cultural space, always creates around itself an organised spatial sphere. This sphere includes both ideas and semiotic models and people's recreative activity.

Dealing with socio-cultural models, a researcher can identify models which are of particular interest to him and establish connections with semantically coherent ones. When dealing with archaic cultures, the researcher cannot study them on the basis of direct evidence; he has to acquire his knowledge from the artefacts such as the written sources etc.

In the past historians sometimes drew a distinction between information derived from written sources ... and the irrefutable evidence of material culture, archeological data and iconic depictions. But from the point of view of semiotics these are all texts and all share the consequences of using a text as medium (Lotman 1990: 221).

The major difference between comparative studies and historical semiotics lies on the plane of functionality:

Традиционная компаративистика изучила генетические связи сходных элементов. Типологический подход требует составления сопоставимых таблиц функций и обслуживающих их текстов. Тогда само понятие сопоставимости не будет ограничиваться внешним сходством, а раскроется как диалектическое единство совпадений и несовпадений, причем исследователь должен быть готов к тому, что разительное сходство сочетается с глубоким функциональным различием, а кажущаяся несопоставимость прикрывает функциональную тождественность (Lotman 2000 [1970]: 457).

Traditional comparative studies examine genetic connections existing between similar elements. The typological approach requires the compilation of charts containing corresponding functions and dependent texts. Therefore, the very notion of comparativity shall not be limited by any external similarity, but shall be exhibited as a dialectal unity of congruences and incongruences. The researcher has to be prepared for a striking similarity to coincide with a

deep functional dissimilarity, and that a seeming incongruity conceals a functional equivalence.

As an example, Lotman draws parallels between *The Iliad* and the Russian epic tale (*bylina*) that tells of the quarrel between Il'ya of Murom and Vladimir, the Prince of Kiev. Both can be compared on the narrative plane because their plot can be represented according to the following schema:

“Князь (царь, басилевс) наносит несправедливую обиду богатырю (герою) – богатырь отказывается сражаться с неприятелем – земле (войску) грозит гибель – богатырь соглашается принять участие в бою и побеждает”.

“A prince (a king, a basileus) commits an unfair offence upon a champion (a hero) – the champion refuses to fight the enemy – the [champion's] land (or host) is on the brink of death – the champion agrees to take part in the battle and wins” (Lotman 2000 [1970]: 456).

Continuing in this vein of thought, Lotman argues that different functions can be assigned both to the prince and to the champion: while the first one belongs to the socially organised human world, the second has a divine or magical origin and does not belong to the human world. The prince as a representative of the human world requires the champion as the representative of the supernatural world to commit whatever is needed. Lotman concludes that *The Iliad* and the Russian *bylina* are both similar not only from a comparative, but also from a typological point of view and can be compared with a wide range of texts.²²

Going beyond the written sources to the deciphering of the contents of a culture as such, Lotman proposed a unique approach based upon the methodology of the study of the early cultures as ‘cultural types’. Thus he defined his approach as ‘typological’. Dealing with ancient and medieval texts, he was mainly concerned not with their content, but with the modelling significance of their integral parts which he labelled as ‘semiotic indicators’:

By definition every text has limits. But not all of these limits have a similar modelling weight. Some cultures and texts are oriented towards the beginning and give it semiotic significance; others are oriented towards the end ... The beginning of a text... serves as a semiotic indicator: from it the

²² For a further example of the typological approach to the comparative study of the early Irish sagas and the early Russian *bylinas* see the article by Nina Chekhonadskaya in the present volume.

readership learns what semiotic key the ensuing text is in. It is rather like the mechanism of an organ which has several keyboards and registers (Lotman 1990: 237, 241).

These cultural registers or semiotic indicators exist on different levels, and depending on the level, the researcher is able to decipher the appropriate encoding assigned to a text, whether it is the ideological encoding, “which is hierarchically the highest stage in the construction of the narrative text” (Lotman 1990: 223), or the political, social, religious and philosophical one. The combination of the above encodings provides a text and its various narrative segments with its semantic coherence, organising the data in the system of coordinates inherent to its structure. To illustrate his theory, Lotman provided examples from the early medieval Russian narrative *The Lay of Igor’s Campaign*. According to Lotman, the narrative stresses the opposition between the boundless ambitions of the protagonists of the story, Igor and Vsevolod, and the notion of primordial glory. The composition starts with Igor and Vsevolod’s mutual declaration: ““let us grasp the past glory for ourselves and share the future glory...” And yet the author also contrasts the political wars of the ‘present’ with the ideal times of the ‘first princes’” (Lotman 1990: 240-241). The following passage from *The Lay of Igor’s Campaign* underlines the importance of primordial, pre-ordained glory rather than that of the individual:

Nor do I see any longer/the sway of my strong/and wealthy/
and multi-militant/brother Yaroslav/with his Chernigov *boyars* /...
For they without shields/with knives in the legs of their boots/
vanquish armies with war cries/to the ringing of ancestral glory (Lotman
1990: 238).

Why the author of *The Lay* refers to the exploits of Yaroslav’s warriors as to the resounding to their forefathers’ glory and not to their own? “Great and glorious deeds merely reactivate the ‘first glory’... pre-existing from the time of the ancestral originators...” (Lotman 1990: 239, 241). For Lotman, the answer lies on the ideological plane of the cultural code: the orientation towards the originators (“the ringing of ancestral glory”) rather than towards the warriors themselves is the way early Russian thinking operated.

The operative mechanism of culture received some further attention by a group of Russian Oriental scholars. On the basis of ideas first proposed and set forth in a series of 1997 seminars and subsequently published by

G. A. Tkachenko (2002) and V. N. Romanov (1997, 2003), a new methodology was developed and new thoughts regarding the validity of the comparative evidence itself were formulated.

In his works Romanov interprets the culture as a system of primary notions. These notions define the specific character of the contents of culture.

В более строгом виде... ее можно было бы представить в качестве непрявленного, потенциального текста, в котором понятия благодаря изначально присущим им семантическим связям заранее «ожидают» и «предполагают» друг друга. Актуализация одного из них затрагивает в принципе всю систему отношений, обуславливая... внутреннюю логику повествования – выбор и сцепления тем, понятий, образов и т.п. (Romanov 1997: 119).

In a strict sense, the culture can be represented as a non-manifested, potential text [consisting of primary notions]. Owing to semantic links originally inherent in the primary notions, these notions anticipate and presuppose each other. The actual manifestation of any given primary notion principally affects the whole system of relationships between them, stipulating ... an inner logic of narration – the choice and combination of themes, ideas, images, etc.

Romanov illustrates his methodology by providing the early Indian epic *Mahābhārata* as an example. When dealing with its plot, he argues that the major motivating force of the composition lies in three motifs: an acquisition/a loss by the protagonists of 1) their kingdom, 2) their wife and 3) their physical appearance. All of the three can be drawn into one if one identifies the three (the kingdom, the wife and the physical appearance) with the primary notion of the Indian legal and political tradition – ‘the body (*śarīra*) of the king’. The notion is made obvious in the brahminic tracts (*dharmasāstras*) and the political composition *Arthasāstra*. Morphologically the relation existing between the king and his body is considered by the legal and political authors in the context of their aspiration to describe a king (*rājā*), employing the relation ‘to obtain’ (the ideal king obtains the perfect element of the state), in terms of the relation ‘to consist of’ (the elements of the state are defined as the limbs of his body) (Romanov 1985: 93). Coming back to the *Mahābhārata*, Romanov states that the protagonists of the story could only be described as ideal kings if they obtain a perfect body, consisting of a perfect kingdom, a perfect wife and a perfect physical appearance. Therefore, the acquisition of kingship was seen by the authors of the *Mahābhārata* as the acquisition

of the constituents listed. The paradigmatic interrelation existing between the king's wife and the kingdom from this point of view only provides a formal means for the organisation of the text (Romanov 1985: 100).

Overall, the methodology we are going to employ for our task of comparing early Irish and early Indian kingship can be called typological. We shall address the cultures of early Ireland and early India as two dynamically developing phenomena. We shall also try to decipher the primary notions existing within their cultural domains. These notions are important for our research as they exert their influence on any aspect of the tradition and produce related cultural forms within its domain. Once the primary notions are established, we can proceed to study the inner mechanism of the specific cultural development. The dynamic, rather than the static study of cultures is important, as no given culture can be represented as a unity of strictly organised elements. The notion of a static culture is illusory as no culture exists in isolation. As Lotman points out (2000 [1992]: 116):

Динамика культуры не может быть представлена ни как изолированный процесс, ни в качестве пассивной сферы внешних влияний. Обе эти тенденции реализуются во взаимном напряжении, от которого они не могут быть абстрагированы без искажения самой их сущности.

The dynamics of a culture can be represented neither as an isolated process, nor as a passive sphere absorbing the influences coming from the outside. Both tendencies can be realised in their mutual tension, and they cannot disengage themselves from this tension without their very essence being distorted.

Therefore, we shall try to present early Irish and early Indian cultures in the context of their contact with other traditions (not necessarily foreign). Their cultural development shall be conceived of as the shift in a cultural paradigm. Dealing with the texts relating to kingship, our primary aim shall be the depiction of a socio-religious transformation of a culture (to be distinguished from the transformations of its language, economy, psychology, etc.). The transformation takes place when the notions traditional to a culture ('the potential text of a culture') come into contact with non-traditional ones ('a non-traditional cultural paradigm'). The 'non-traditional paradigm' can be conceived as a 'new' or as an 'alternative' cultural paradigm. In the case of early Ireland, the religious teaching of Christianity coming from abroad can be seen as an intrusive 'new' cultural paradigm. In the

case of early India, the Buddhist doctrine emerging from within the Indian culture can be defined as a growing 'alternative' cultural paradigm. The reader should not be confused by the multiplication of notions: the importance of both the 'new' and the 'alternative' cultural paradigms is in their oppositional nature to the traditional paradigm, the 'potential text' of a culture. Also, the mutual engagement of Christian and Buddhist traditions with the early Irish and the early Indian cultures respectively should not be seen as an obstacle to their compatibility. Therefore, both Irish Christian and Indian Buddhist traditions can be deemed as congruent with each other despite the seeming difference in their origin.

In order to trace the semantic transformation of the cultural primary notions, we shall direct our attention to the relevant literary compositions, and discuss some didactic sources. As representatives of the canonical approach to the ideal of kingship, these literary compositions will be selected in order to demonstrate how this methodology may work with regard to the concept of ideal kingship.

We shall argue that many of the parallels noted between the early Irish and early Indian texts are to be understood as similarities that cropped up in the process of their cultural development. We shall also argue that the institution of kingship served as a bridge between the old (pre-Christian, in the case of early Ireland, and pre-Buddhist, in case of early Indian) and the new (Christian, in the case of early Ireland, and Buddhist, in case of early Indian) traditions, incorporating the elements of both. Of the parallels noted that could be described as typologically similar, the attention of the reader will be directed towards those dealing with the subjects of kingship and religious conversion.

To the reader it may seem bizarre that Ireland and India should be chosen for this mental exercise. However, if we try to focus on the data of other early cultures of Europe (in the case of Christian cultural traditions) and south-eastern Asia (in the case of Buddhist traditions), it is quite difficult to study the transitional stages when there was a transformation to a new form of religion and the consequent changes in political ideology.

Ireland and India are more promising in this regard. We have noted that the depictions of the earlier state of things in both cultures played a crucial role in the formation of a canonical doctrine on the subject of the ideal

society within a subsequent Christian or Buddhist context. In this regard, classical Greek as well as ancient Egyptian and Persian ideas on the subject of just kingship are more archaic: the ideal of kingship propagated in Greek, Egyptian and Persian sources do not depend significantly on the intrusive ‘semiotic indicators’. The Irish and Indian evidence shows a different character and can be treated as reflecting the graduation of the primitive, or archaic, consciousness into an early historical one.²³ The sources of both cultures depend upon an inclusion of such ‘semiotic indicators’ characteristic of Christian and Buddhist traditions, such as the righteousness of the ruler seen as his moral integrity or the observance of certain rules of moral conduct. As we shall see further, the early Irish and Indian sources depict the conduct of the ruler and the well-being of the state as both depending on his observance of moral rules associated with the religious ethics of Christianity or Buddhism.

4. Early Christian Irish and early Buddhist Indian theories of ideal kingship in a typological comparative context

Despite the strong religious message that the most authoritative texts on ideal kingship both in Christian Ireland and Buddhist India bear, we can see a substratum, a pre-Christian and pre-Buddhist political tradition that was retained in the sources. Moreover, we shall see that in order to make their message more effective, the new religions were constantly employing ideological structures inherited from the old tradition. Continuing to direct our attention to the canonical compositions on the subject of ideal kingship, I will discuss the ninth section of the seventh-century document *De duodecim abusiuis*, ‘On the twelve abuses’, devoted to the wicked king (*rex iniquus*), attributed to Ps. Cyprian. This document was written in northeast Ireland, in Bangor, in a Latin exhibiting regional features (Hiberno-Latin).²⁴ I shall set it beside with the canonical Pāli sutra entitled ‘The Lion’s Roar of the World Monarch’ (Pāli *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*).

The first aspect to be compared is the idea that the welfare of the state is dependent on the good moral character of its ruler. Ps. Cyprian recommended every ruler to follow the guidelines of Christian behavior in order to gain peace and prosperity in his country.

²³ See Fomin 1999 (2003): 167, 190-1, n. 1, 5.

²⁴ Breen argues that the author can be identified as Mo-Chúaróc maccu Neth Sémon (Cronanus *sapiens*), a pupil of Sinlán of Bangor (see Breen 1988: 229).

Nomen enim regis intellectualiter hoc retinet, ut subiectis omnibus rectoris officium procuret. Sed qualiter alios corrigere poterit qui proprios mores ne iniqui sint non corrigit? Nam iustitia regis est ... terrae fecunditas ... tutamen patriae ... cura languorum (Hellmann 1909: 51).

The name of a king implies that he ought to perform the function of director for all those who are subject to him. But how will he be able to correct others if he does not correct his own behaviour, lest it be unjust? For the justice of the king is ... the fecundity of the land ... the protection of his native land... the healing of weaknesses.

Similarly, an ideal Buddhist ruler (Pāli *cakkavattin*) will see his country “flourishing and rich, and abundant in towns, cities, and the royal capitals” by practising the principles of Buddhist morality (Pāli *pañca sīla*), correcting the behaviour of his subjects according to them, and observing Buddhist teaching (Pāli *dhmmo*) in general.²⁵ In the course of the sutra, an unrighteous ruler, a royal warrior, introduced the institution of capital punishment, thus violating the first principle of Buddhist *dhmmo* (not to kill living beings) and in consequence saw the collapse of his rule and a resulting state of anarchy in his kingdom.

The second typological parallel between the Irish and Indian sources is contained in the picture of cosmic turbulence that destroys the peace and prosperity in the domains of unrighteous rulers when the moral code is violated. In the Hiberno-Latin composition, the consequences of an unjust rule are described as invasion by foreign enemies, agitated skies, destruction of crops due to bad weather, and other calamities:

Qui vero regnum secundum hanc legem non dispensat, multas nimirum adversitates imperii tolerat. hostium incursus provincias undique vastant, bestiae armentorum et pecorum greges dilacerant, tempestates aeris et hemisperia turbata terrarum fecunditatem et maris ministeria prohibent et aliquando fulminum ictus segetes et arborum flores et pampinos exurunt (Hellmann 1909: 52.9-53.5)

Whoever, indeed, does not rule the kingdom according to this law, without doubt endures many misfortunes of his rule... Attacks of enemies from everywhere devastate the provinces, beasts tear into pieces the droves of the herds and of the flocks, storms of the air and agitated skies keep destroying the fecundity of the land and the supplies of the sea, and at times the blows of lightnings strip bare the crops and the flowers and young leaves of the trees.

²⁵ *Ayam jambudīpo iddho ceva bhavissati phūto ca, kukkuṭasampātikā gāmanigamarājadhāniyo*, ‘India will be flourishing and rich, and abundant in towns, cities, and the royal capitals’ (Carpenter 1992 [1911]: 75 §23).

In the Pāli sutra, the domains of the unjust king lose their fertility;²⁶ thieves and marauders destroy the country.²⁷ In both Hiberno-Latin and Pāli sources scandals are reported concerning the reign of the wicked ruler as his subjects lose confidence in him.

Thirdly, there is the idea of recovery of the cosmos if morality, as the basis of human existence, is restored and supported. The Pāli source insists that once people understand that all their misfortunes happen due to improper behaviour, they will come to terms with each other and increase the productivity of their regions by practising the Buddhist principles of good behaviour (*dasa sīla*). Similarly, in the Irish source the description of *iustitia regis*, ‘the righteousness of a king’, with its emphasis on mildness and tranquillity, follows the antithetical account of the king’s injustice previously mentioned.

Still, the question remains: what specifically ‘archaic’ or specifically Irish and Indian sentiments can be found in those sources, for all the details listed might seem to be commonplaces of Christian and Buddhist political thought?

Firstly, morality and politics are always intertwined in the earliest Irish and early Indian political compositions. The vernacular Irish composition *Audacht Moraind* lists three things that constitute a proper royal rule: rectitude, mercy and righteousness.²⁸ The vernacular Irish sagas and wisdom-texts (written from both Christian and pre-Christian perspectives) are full of sentiments that prescribe mercy for the poor and for the wretched.²⁹ According

²⁶ *Janapadam pasāsato pubbenāparam janapadā na pabbanti*, ‘his lands do not fill constantly [with produce]’ (Carpenter 1992 [1911]: 64 §9).

²⁷ *Te gāmaghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, nigamaghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, nagaraghātampi upakkamimsu kātum, panthaduhanampi upakkamimsu kātum*, ‘They came to the village and pillaged it, then they came to the market town and pillaged it, then they came to the city and pillaged it, then they started killing and robbing [people] on the roads’ (Carpenter 1992 [1911]: 64 §13).

²⁸ *Beir dó búaid n-dírge... Comath fírinni, cotn-ofathar ... ocbath trócairi cotn-uircéba*, ‘Bring him the virtue of rectitude... Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him ... let him exalt mercy, it will exalt him’ (Translations are by Kelly, in Kelly 1976: 2.15, 4.32, 34).

²⁹ For instance, the pagan warrior Fergus makes a following claim in the saga ‘Conception of Cú Chulainn’ (*Compert Con Culainn*): *Am dín cech dochraite. Do-gníu dochur cech triúin, do-gníu sochur cech lobair*, ‘I am a shelter of every misery. I make damage of every strong one; I make profit of every wretch’ (Van Hamel 1933: 8). Characters of this kind seem to be depicted by the authors of the Irish sagas as morally good, therefore it is not surprising to see the overtones of the Christian *Magnificat* in Fergus’s statement. Cf. Luke 1:52, 53 *Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles. Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes*, ‘He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away’. Cited from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate. I thank Dr. D. Ó Mathúna for this observation.

to the evidence of the early Indian political treatise *Arthaśāstra*, legitimate force (Skt. *daṇḍa*) combined with proper morality (Skt. *vinaya*) brings welfare to the kingdom.³⁰ Proper morality supposes that the king seeks what is beneficial for the populace (Skt. *lokapriyatvaṃ*), i.e. increasing its wealth (Skt. *artha*), and he attains one of this by the maintenance of proper moral behaviour (Skt. *saṃyoga*).³¹

Secondly, the picture of fertile abundance that obtained in the domains of the righteous ruler is also common to the vernacular Irish and traditional Indian sources. Generally speaking, the theme of abundance constituted the essence of the archaic Celtic polity. For instance, Livy reports concerning the reign of the ideal Celtic monarch Ambigatus that the king was “so distinguished by his personal virtue and public fortune that in his reign Gaul was so fertile in crops and men that the abundant multitude seemed scarcely able to be ruled”.³²

The evidence of *Audacht Moraind* may be again employed as an apposite illumination. About a third of the text is devoted to the description of different aspects of abundance, such as *mesrada mórfeđa*, lit. ‘tree-fruits of great forest’, *mlechti márbóis*, ‘milk-yields of cattle’, *imbeth etha*, ‘abundance of corn’, *aidble íasc*, ‘abundance of fish’, *clanda caini*, ‘lawful progeny’, etc., presented as the consequences of the ruler’s just rule by the introductory formula *Is tre fír flathemon*, ‘It is through the ruler’s truth’. In the formula of presentation the vernacular collocations noted above are also cognate with the sequences of paired nouns – one of these a dependent genitive – from some versions of the fragment of the Hiberno-Latin text *De duodecim abusiuis* that describes *iustitia regis*, ‘justice of a king’. Its components include *terrae fecunditas ... segetum habundantia, arborum fecunditas*, ‘fecundity of land ... abundance of corn, fecundity of trees’.³³ The common syntactic patterns employed in both compositions reveal a similar cultural background to the ideas propagated in the respective texts.

³⁰ See *Arthaśāstra* 1.5.2: *Vinayamūlo daṇḍaḥ praṇabhṛtām yogakṣemāvahaḥ*, ‘Daṇḍa, having its source in the proper behaviour, produces profit and tranquillity for living beings’ (Kangle 1969: 6).

³¹ See *Arthaśāstra* 1.7.1: *Lokapriyatvamarthasaṃyogena* (Kangle 1969: 8).

³² Livius, Titus, 1887: V.34.2. *Ambigatus is fuit, virtute fortunaque cum sua cum publica praepollens, quod in imperio eius Gallia adeo frugum hominumque fertiles fuit, ut abundans multitudo vix regi videretur posse*. Translated by McCone 1990: 108.

³³ Wasserschleben 1885: 91.

Lastly, the descriptions we have of royal inaugurations in Irish and in Pāli sources bear the marks of a synthesis involving a native tradition. They are based upon the themes and motifs of the vernacular Irish ritual of *tarbfeis* and of the native Indian ritual of *rājasūya*, but they are also filled with moralistic sentiments that on closer inspection turn out to be the expositions of Christian and Buddhist ethical doctrines.

For instance, in the saga *Serlige Con Culainn*, ‘The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn’, the inauguration ritual includes the pronouncement of a wisdom-text by a foster-father to a would-be-king. The injunctions he pronounces contain many Christian sentiments, and are based on earlier ecclesiastical vernacular and Hiberno-Latin material. The sources include Old Irish penitentials, the collection of rules of monastic behaviour *Aipgitir Chrábaid*, ‘Alphabet of Piety’, Christian devotional poetry and others.³⁴

I have argued elsewhere (Fomin 1999: 181-6) that the description of the conquest of the Universe in the Pāli *Cakkavatti-sutta* can be regarded as a literary fabrication, based upon the motives and themes of two native Indian royal rituals in which specifically Buddhist elements were incorporated. These rituals were the inauguration ritual (Skt. *rājasūya*) and the *vājapeya* or the royal ritual that established the sacrificer in the position of an over-king (Skt. *samrāt*). The rite of *abhisheka*, the rite of the raising of arms, the ritual chariot race and the ritual game of dice (constituting the basis of the royal rituals of the *rājasūya* and *vājapeya*) are all alluded to in the Pāli text. The references to them, however, are all made in such a way that the specifically Buddhist elements become all the more appealing. For instance, the jewel of the royal wheel (Pāli *cakka*) embodying the Buddhist teaching (Pāli *dhammo*) is given more prominence in the framework of the story than the figure of the world conqueror (Pāli *cakkavattin*). Secondly, the *cakkavattin*’s address to the subordinate kings who peacefully submitted to him contains the canonical moral guidelines: the *pañca sīlā*, the five rules of good conduct. *Anguttara-nikāya*, a section of the *Sutta-piṭaka*, mentions these precepts in connection with the Pāli formula *saraṇaṃ gata*, literally, “[I am] the one [who] attained a shelter.” This formula (as well as the five precepts - the *pañca sīlā*) was pronounced by a proselyte who was willing to be converted to Buddhism. *Pañca sīlā* stands at the heart of Buddhism, and the instruction of the *cakkavattin* to the subordinate kings

³⁴ I treat this topic in depth in the relevant section in Fomin *fc*.

is in fact simply an exposition of Buddhist doctrine; the *cakkavattin* is presented as a preacher of Buddhism.

5. Conclusion

Our study attempted to step from the traditional comparative approach of historical linguistics to the typological study of kingship. I am not inclined to present the parallels observed between the Irish and Indian texts on kingship as archaic features going back to a common Indo-European tradition of political thinking. Rather, I tried to present the texts as the products of their time when Christian and Buddhist ethics were making their way into their contents. We observed the way Christianity and Buddhism influenced the paradigmatic core of the texts, and how the subject-matter was reorganised accordingly. It appears that the semantics of the primary notions of moral uprightness and fecundity (serving as the key factors of successful rule) were transformed according to the requirements of the new tradition. With the advent of Christianity and Buddhism it was understandable that the depictions of ideal kingship prevailing in pre-Christian Ireland and pre-Buddhist India would change as a result of their exposure to the influence of the new religions, which brought tremendous change to the society as a whole, and, in particular, to the ideology of kingship. However, in order to make their message sound more convincing, the new religions used ideological structures already in place, inherited from the old tradition. In order to put together a new collection of political treatises or texts, their compilers employed an old rationale embracing such ‘semiotic indicators’ of ideal rule as ‘abundance’, ‘moral uprightness’, etc. inherited from pre-Christian or pre-Buddhist traditions of political thought.

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SUMMARY:
МАКСИМ ФОМИН

РУССКИЕ И ЗАПАДНЫЕ КЕЛЬТОЛОГИ О ПАРАЛЛЕЛЯХ
МЕЖДУ ДРЕВНЕИРЛАНДСКОЙ И ДРЕВНЕИНДИЙСКОЙ
ТРАДИЦИЯМИ

Данное исследование посвящено проблеме сопоставления данных древнеирландской и древнеиндийской культур, особое внимание уделено параллелям, выявленным при сопоставлении институтов царской власти в обеих культурах. Автор предлагает типологическую методику сравнения, разработанную на основе работ основоположников русской семиотики (Лотман) и теории истории культуры (Романов, Ткаченко). В XX веке проблема пристально рассматривалась в работах ирландских и русских кельтологов, в связи с чем первый раздел посвящен историографии вопроса.