MAXIM FOMIN

Instructions for Kings

Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India

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Jadranka Gvozdanović

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relief from Jagayapeta (Southern India), 2nd century BC
(after Vertogradova 1975: 336; discussed on pp. 309-311)

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Acknowledgments

Ekaṃ cakraṃ na vartate
'One wheel [on its own] does not turn'
Kauṭilyā *Arthaśāstra* vii.3

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[1] All of the above are, of course, not to be claimed responsible for any errors and mistakes and those that remain are my sole responsibility.

Introduction

1 Kingship and polity

In addressing the task of linking the secular and clerical images of ideal kingship presented in early Christian Irish documents, the word 'polity' may serve as a focusing notion. I take 'polity' to denote the notional framework describing the political culture of a society, as distinguished from politics, which means the political process *per se*. Polity is an ideal construct, encompassing a realm of ideas concerning what the proper ruler should look like, how he should behave, what morality he should personify, etc. It is thus different from 'politics' as such, which is a realistic concept and stands for the ruler's political activity in a given historical period.

Polity can be seen as the essence of social power in its transcendental dimension, and politics as the essence of social power in its pragmatic perspective. In early societies, polity was always closely related to the theological vision of power: the perception of ideal rule which is reflected in the sources was to a great extent dominated by the religious archetype current in society. This archetype served as a basis for the subsequent development of political thought.[1]

1.1 Representations of ideal kingship

The subject of ideal kingship includes many topics which all point in different directions. The early Greek philosopher Aristotle sought to establish the ideal relationship between a king and his subjects as the one between a father and his children:

[1] A fuller treatment of the notion 'polity' and of related problems is contained in Anderson 1972; Bloch 1962; Geertz 1973: 311-315; Tambiah 1976.

> One may find resemblances to the constitutions and, as it were, patterns of them even in households. For the association (κοινονια) of a father with his sons bears the form (σχεμα) of monarchy, since the father cares for his children; and this is why Homer calls Zeus 'father'; it is the ideal of monarchy to be paternal rule (πατρική αρχή) (*Ethica Nicomachea* VIII (10) 1160 b 1-25, transl. by Ross 1915: 378).

For the early Persians, their king Darius was a righteous king on account of his numerous invasions and conquests of foreign lands; he claimed to destroy those lands and enemies who went against him and to extol those who were friendly to him:

> I have ruled according to righteousness. Neither to the weak nor to the powerful did I do wrong. Whosoever helped my house, him I favoured; he who was hostile, him I destroyed (Behistun Inscription of Darius, trans. by Rawlinson, King and Thompson 1907, col. I, §63).

The representation of the secular power in the early Christian writings mainly followed the Old Testament models (Burns 1988: 1-20; Snyder 1998: 86). The focal point of early Christian political doctrine is the following passage from Pauline epistle to the Romans:

> Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established […] For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong […] Do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer (Romans, 13:1-4).

According to the above, the secular power is a transcendental entity, implicitly belonging to God and explicitly mediated through a figure of a righteous ruler who brings the punishment to the wicked and praises the morally upright ones.[2]

[2] It was in the first centuries of Christianity when the religious archetype of secular power was dominated by the Pauline epistles – the notion of power was treated as a spiritual entity, implicitly belonging to God. Later, a new religious archetype of secular power was created in early medieval Europe by St. Augus-

The sources for early Christian Ireland and early medieval India afford strikingly similar depictions of ideal kingship, based not only on the universal topics of justice and punishment which are usually connected with kingship, but also on moral themes.

1.2 Early medieval Irish polity

There has been some substantial discussion regarding early Irish political theory. On the basis of extensive comparative evidence, James G. Frazer (1933: 10, 89, 171, esp. 262-263), Georges Dumézil (1973: 98) and Emile Benvenist (1973: 307-312) postulated a thesis that the society of early Ireland retained a mixture of extremely archaic and conservative features inherited from their common Indo-European background.

The ideas of J. G. Frazer *et alii* were supported and developed by various Celtic scholars, among them M. Dillon (1973, 1975), A. and B. Rees (1961), P. Mac Cana (1979, 1988, 2011) and D. A. Binchy (1970) who all tried to find the strong support to their argument in the Indian evidence. Binchy put forward the theory of a do-nothing king, a *roi fainéant*, in his *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*,[3] and his ideas were extremely popular at the time, and had a great impact on other Irish scholars working on the subject.

The theory of a do-nothing king has been challenged by D. Ó Corráin (1978: 1-35), P. Wormald (1986: 151-83), and B. Jaski (2000:

tine in his *De civitate Dei* that depicted human society as divided into two realms or 'cities', the City of God and the worldly City. Augustine connected secular power with the latter; therefore, the opinion that human power was a necessary evil prevailed. See Burns 1988 for further discussion.

[3] Binchy's picture of a do-nothing king is based on the earlier findings of Frazer. The king is a tabooed figure, who "lives hedged in by a ceremonious etiquette […] immeshed in [taboos] like a fly in the toils of a spider, that[…] bound him fast within a network of observances from which death or deposition alone could release him" (Frazer 1933: 171, 263). According to Binchy, the initiatives of the Irish king were strait-jacketed by the demands of immemorial custom and the power of the hereditary learned classes, the poets and druids, who were supposed to interpret and enforce that custom. For a detailed discussion of Binchy's views see the relevant section of chapter 1.

75-77, 80-81, 87-88) who argued that Binchy's picture of early Irish kingship can neither be sustained by the accounts of royal power in Irish annals and sagas, nor by comparison with other Indo-European societies.

I will discuss the scholarship relating to Celtic kingship in the first chapter; for the moment, I will limit myself to considering the background to the controversy.

Binchy, Dillon and Mac Cana were mainly preoccupied with the sources of prescriptive character: laws, sagas and wisdom-texts. In terms of the introductory distinction between polity and politics, the prescriptive texts in question dealt with such concepts that conveyed the essence of the early Irish polity. Ó Corráin, Wormald and others have sought to distinguish the historical reality from the learned constructs: in this respect, their goal was an analysis of the rationale of early Irish politics. Both parties were accordingly aiming at different sides of the subject and it is not surprising that they came to different conclusions.

In his highly influential *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (1990), K. McCone challenged and criticised both views. Explaining his argument more fully in 'The Cyclops in Celtic, Germanic and Indo-European Myth', he says

> The evidence assembled by the scholars so far suggests that the answer to the 'central question' about the origins of medieval Irish literature is that it[…] contains some things old, some things borrowed and some things new as a predictable result of 'the two-way assimilatory process involved'[…] This is a conclusion of such numbing banality that it should be obvious that the main task and interest lies in the detailed analysis and discussion of the actual evidence of the sources themselves in the context of such comparative data as can be brought to bear upon it, whether from Christian sources or from the extant output of other Celtic and Indo-European peoples.
>
> McCone (1996: 92)

1.3 Preliminaries on the purpose of research: Irish data

In this work I shall be mainly dealing with literary sources of a didactic character: therefore, the different visions of kingship presented in the sources will be idealised and theoretical, rather than historical,

constructs. Furthermore, I will be analysing texts concerned with the concept of ideal kingship, rather than the concept itself. My approach to the sources, therefore, can be seen as being more influenced by McCone's view that "the main task (*of a Celtic scholar*) lies in the detailed analysis of the sources" than by that of Binchy, who sought to discuss the data of the Irish sources on the basis of their Indo-European ancestry.

The early medieval Irish polity was far from being archaic. Moreover, its rationale was employed to create the normative medieval European political doctrine; and the early Irish documents presenting with a depiction of kings and royalty should be looked at from this point of view. This can be seen by looking at the earliest surviving specimen of Irish political thought, written in Latin in the early seventh century.[4] This extremely important passage is contained in the treatise *De duodecim abusivis saeculi,* 'Concerning the twelve abuses of the world' (hereinafter *De duodecim*), under the rubric *Nonus abusionis gradus est rex iniquus*, 'The ninth abuse of the world is an unjust king' (Hellmann 1909: 51.3). This passage will be considered in the second chapter. Before analysing the relevant section of *De duodecim*, however, I will survey the modern Celtic scholarship devoted to the different aspects of vernacular and Hiberno-Latin gnomic literature in the first chapter. These opening chapters will be followed by two more, concerned with the vernacular Irish wisdom-texts *Audacht Morainn* and *Tecosca Cormaic*. Chapter 5 will compare the evidence of the wisdom-texts under discussion.

1.4 Early Indian sources on polity and ideal kingship

There has also been disagreement concerning the interpretation of the Indian sources. Until recently Indologists have never made any distinctions between the depictions of ideal kingship in Vedic, epic, puranic, Buddhist, and classical Sanskrit sources, analysing them as a homogeneous body of evidence. Jan Gonda, in his highly influential *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (1969),

[4] A. Breen (1988: 229) proposed a tentative interpretation of the author as Mo-Chúaróc maccu Neth Sémon (Cronanus *sapiens*), a pupil of Sinlán of Bangor.

brought the data of these sources together in order to argue that the sacred character of the institution of kingship had never been absent in Indian society. However, it is crucial to argue for the heterogeneity of the Vedic, puranic, and legal sources by contrast with the Buddhist and also epic sources. The pioneering work of S. Tambiah in his book *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (1976) has heightened awareness of the oppositions between Brahminic and Buddhist thought. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in order to produce not only a synchronic, but also a diachronic stratification of Indian political thought. All of these questions will be carefully considered in chapter 6, in a discussion of the state of scholarship on the subject of ideal kingship in early India. In chapter 7, the Buddhist sutra *Chakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*, 'The Sutra of the Lion's Roar of the Universal Monarch', will be discussed in the light of other early Indic documents on kingship: not only other Buddhist sutras, but also the early political treatise *Arthaśāstra* and the rock edicts of king Ashoka (*floruit* 248 BC). This chapter will be furnished with an appendix containing a new translation of the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-sutta*, based on the Pāli text from the *Dīgha-Nikāya* collection.

Comparative analysis of the sources will be carried out in chapter 8, dealing with a cluster of beliefs from early Irish and Indian traditions that includes such important ideas as cosmos, social order and justice. The etymologies of kingship will be of central interest here; these, contained in Hiberno-Latin and vernacular Early Irish sources, on the one hand, and in Pāli and Sanskrit Indian sources, on the other, will be in the centre of my attention. On the basis of pseudo-etymological explanations of the word 'king' contained in the sources, I will try to explain in what way 'the words' denoting 'a king' had their power over the depictions of social and cosmic order in early Irish and early Indian narrative traditions.

In the conclusion, I shall attempt to summarise the findings of this study and to indicate possible perspectives for further research in the field.

2 Philological analysis of similarities between the Irish and Indian polities

In steering away from the approach to the subject adopted in contemporary Indo-European and comparative studies,[5] it is necessary to replace it with a different one, grounded in other principles and defined from another angle.

I will try to consider the similarities between the Irish and Indian polities from a philological point of view. I shall argue, further, that many of the parallels noted are to be understood in terms of analogies in the development of the two learned traditions that drew upon a similar approach to text and to its epitomic intricate features, such as alliteration and paronomasia. I shall also contend that the texts dealing with kingship in early Christian Ireland and in early Buddhist India once served to bridge the old and the new learned traditions.

2.1 Brahmanism and druidism

What is known is that before the advent of Buddhism and Christianity the religious institutions of Brahmanism and (with some reservations, of) druidism – described by Benveniste (1973: 308) as "powerful colleges of priests who were repositories of sacred traditions, which they maintained with a formalist vigour" – were exercising their authority in early Indian and early Celtic societies.

Brahmanism, as the early Indian legal codes (*dharmaśāstra*s) inform, was primarily concerned with the ritual and practice of religious rites in everyday life. Each member of society was given a position in society

[5] Discussion of similarities between India and Ireland has a long history and it is impossible to cover this subject here. Suffice it to say that it was T. Siegfried (discussed in Ó Dochartaigh 2011) and his student W. Stokes (see Fomin 2011) who took up the subject in the mid-19th c. from a comparative philological perspective. Their work was complemented by the findings of J. Vendryes in the early 20th century (1918, useful discussion in Mac Cana 2011: 228-40). More reading on the subject of Indo-Irish comparative dimension is contained in Lennon 2004, and aspects of the historiography of Celto-Indic academic research are covered in Fomin 2005, Mac Mathúna 2010, and Boyle and Russell 2011.

according to his age (Skt. *aśrāma)* and his rank (Skt. *varṇa*).[6] This constituted the essence of personal existence, governed by the fundamental notion of *dharma*. In contrast to Brahmanism, the religion of Buddhism looked at public life from another angle. For Buddhists, *dharma* signified a universal concept, meaning the proper way of behaviour according to Buddhist morality (Tambiah 1976: 54-5; Vigasin 1999). Performance of a ritual as the socially prescribed norm of human existence was not as important for Buddhists as the practising of certain rules of moral conduct.

We do not have any direct evidence for the pre-Christian religious institution of druidism in Ireland. However, as comparisons between druids and brahmins are a commonplace in the comparative studies, one may consider this subject in passing. What do the primary sources tell us?

Firstly, there are references to the druids in the works of classical ethnographers, who present them as moral philosophers and theologians, who 'search into secret and sublime things', or as the legal experts and mentors of the young; and also as priests, performing human sacrifices and practices of divination.[7] But the classical accounts cannot be solely regarded as being based on first-hand experience, but rather as drawing on the literary models for describing primitive barbaric peoples and their customs, including their religion (e.g. Tierney 1960; Maier 2000). Furthermore, the classical authors tell nothing about Irish religion. Therefore, one cannot be sure that the picture obtained from the Greek historiographers is applicable to pre-Christian Ireland.

Secondly, there are references to druids in Irish hagiography, where they are mainly presented as magicians, idol-worshippers and sorcerers, in ways largely derived from Old Testament models (e.g. McCone 1990: 35).

[6] See Appendix 5 for an interpretation and discussion of the Indic terms relevant to the present discussion.

[7] The Gaulish mythological beliefs and ritual practices, their presentation in Classical sources, and the range of interpretations existing in modern academia in relation to passages cited from ancient texts, are studied in A. Hofeneder (2005) fundamental study. For further information on Celtic religion in the works of Classical authors after Caesar, see Hofeneder 2008 and 2011.

With such scant and uncertain evidence, it does not seem possible to make a meaningful comparison between druidism and brahmanism.[8] The temptation to attempt such comparisons, on the basis of superficial similarities, goes back beyond Dumézil and Benveniste as far as the classical authors themselves;[9] but it should be resisted.

2.2 Religious-cultural development of 3rd c. BC India and 5-8th cc. AD Ireland

Nevertheless, it is tempting to draw a parallel between the early societies of Ireland and India in terms of their cultural development: Buddhism replaced brahmanism in the Northern Indian kingdom of Magadha during the rule of the first royal Buddhist convert Ashoka (*floruit* 248 BC), and Christianity replaced druidism in Ireland owing largely to the activity of missionaries. The overall transfer from one belief system to another can be described as a socio-religious transformation, in which a religious movement which emphasised moral teaching replaced a religious institution of ritual and sacrifice.

Our interest here is to establish a correspondence between the Buddhist and Christian polities, as these appear in Indian and Irish sources. It is necessary to point out two things in this regard. First, both religions "encouraged the formation of a *new two-class society*" (Küng *et al.* 1987: 350), creating a religious hierarchy of elite and masses, clergy and laity, as opposed to the primitive threefold division of the society

[8] See, however, argument in Mac Cana 2011: 45-159 who draws parallels between Celtic Gaul and early Ireland, on the one hand, and between Vedic India and South Asian countries, on the other, in regard to this and other matters. From a careful reading of Mac Cana's discussion, one can infer that the Gaulish and Indian traditions generated some form of a cultural matrix to be employed by the Irish and South Asian traditions, in which the druids, in Gaul (opp. cit., 146-55), and Brahmins, in India (opp. cit., 69-72), played the central, cohesive and unifying, role.

[9] 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" (translation is by Philip Freeman and J. T. Koch in Koch and Carey 1995: 24).

into priests, warriors and cultivators (Dumézil 1968-73). Second, they also have associated themselves with monarchical government: it has been observed that "together with a monk as the supreme religious ideal, the 'just king' was a guiding figure for the Buddhist society" (Küng *et al.* 1987: 352), and the same can also be said of the Christian polity. However, the origin of the concept of the 'just king' – or, to use the term which I shall be employing below, 'the righteous ruler' – still raises many questions for historians of Christian and Buddhist political thought.

Comparison between Ireland and India is very promising in this regard, as the depictions of ideal kingship in both cultures played a crucial role in the formation of the socio-political doctrines of Christianity and Buddhism. As far as the Irish evidence is concerned, the doctrine of a pious Christian king that prevailed in medieval Europe from Charlemagne to Louis IX owed much to the teachings of early Irish scholars (e.g. Breen 2002). As regards early medieval India, the concept of the Universal Monarch, still current in the Buddhist states of Sri-Lanka and South-East Asia, owed much to the teaching of the *Arthaśāstra*, an ancient Indian treatise on politics (Tambiah 1976: 19ff.; Gonda 1969: 126-8).

This work will seek to determine what kind of ethical texts both the Irish and Buddhist monks produced when they addressed the topic of ideal kingship. This is a question of considerable significance: for both Ireland and India, kingship was the central institution which structured the whole society. Of course, my object is not to say the last word on the subject, nor will it be possible to present all of the relevant data here. Rather, I shall seek to put the subject matter on a broader and firmer basis, from which, as I continue to investigate the institutions of righteous kingship in early Ireland and India, further progress can be made.

I Overview of the Celtic scholarship on the subject of righteous kingship

1 *Fír flathemon* in the corpus of gnomic texts

The power of judgement always illuminated the imagination of the ancient Irish, as well as the idea of ever-true utterance from the lips of a chief, which was considered as the ultimate recourse for all the disputes and arguments among his people. This is why the idea of verbal righteousness or *fír flathemon* has been beautifully portrayed in the corpus of gnomic texts related to kingship from the ideological point of view. Failure to live up to the moral standards enshrined in such texts was seen as entailing the loss of legitimacy, and of the right to rule. One can only guess as to the reality of this mechanism, but vivid descriptions of the consequences of iniquitous rule abound in medieval Irish narrative. My task here is to describe what principles the king was to observe, and how he was to behave in order not to bring any harm to the land for which he was responsible. I shall be dealing with the literature that has been described as "the genre […] concerned with lists of characteristics and duties of a good king" (McCone 1980: 157), a class of texts well represented in Irish manuscripts.

To provide the reader with a broader outlook on the subject of proper kingship, I need to examine the evidence of the secondary literature to date. At present the topic is definitely a controversial one, but until the last decade nothing had been written to contradict the main trend of thought established in dealing with it. The deliberately archaic view of the concept of 'ruler's truth' (Henry 1982: 35-8), which took etymological affinities with cognate words in other cultures (Wagner 1971: 1-45) to prove the preservation of Indo-European character of the semantic content (Watkins 1979; McCone 1980), used to be a magnetic approach for many outstanding Celticists during the twentieth century. In this chapter – before proceeding to the main, descriptive part of the work – I will confine myself to a basic overview of the scholarly discussion on

the nature, origin, functions, semantic structure, diction and message of the *speculum principis* genre.

2 First editions of early Irish wisdom-texts

Early Irish wisdom-literature first became generally available to scholars with the edition of two gnomic texts: *Tecosca Cormaic*, 'The Instructions of King Cormac mac Airt' (hereinafter *TC*), published by Kuno Meyer in 1909; and *Audacht Moraind*, 'The Testament of Morand' (hereinafter *AM*) edited and discussed by Rudolf Thurneysen in 1917. In his preface to the former edition, Meyer provided a list of all the gnomic texts known to him: he noted the early date of their compilation, the basic rules of their grammatical structure, and also divided the corpus of gnomic literature into different types, among which the instructions attributed to the famous kings and poets to their heirs or foster-sons loom large. Thurneysen speculated at greater length:

> The author (*of AM*, *F.M.*) was probably a *fili*, who was a *brithem* at the same time. He advises the king always to base his decision on previously enacted judgements (19), concerning which of course only the *brithem* was professionally qualified to inform him. On the other hand, he is entirely unwarlike (32); his ideal is peace and pleasant tranquillity (13), and there is no mention of king's duties to care for his armies and be prepared to attack, even though he is promised victory as a reward for his righteousness (52, *cf.* 11). So only one side of Old Irish kingship is presented.[1]

Thurneysen's argument on the authorship and professional skills of the author of *AM* seems essentially undebatable. Various aspects of Thurneysen's analysis have been developed by Thomás Ó Cathasaigh and

[1] "Der Verfasser dürfte ein fili sein, der zugleich brithem war; er empfiehlt dem König seine Entscheidung immer auf früher gefällte Urteile zu stützen (19); die kann ihm natürlich nur der brithem von Beruf liefern. Dagegen ist er ganz unkriegerisch (32); sein Ideal ist Friede und behagliche Ruhe (13), und von den Pflichten des Königs, für sein Heer zu sorgen und schlagfertig zu sein, ist nirgends die Rede, wenn ihm auch als Lohn für seine Gerechtigkeit Sieghaftigkeit versprochen wird (52, vgl. 11). Es ist also nur die eine Seite des altirischen Königtums herausgehoben" (Thurneysen 1917: 78).

Kim McCone (see 4.8, 4.10 and 5.5 below). In his further discussion of *AM* and its authorship, Thurneysen remarks: "One could almost think that the author was a cleric, if the drunkenness permitted at festive assemblies and in the king's drinking-hall did not go against this".[2] The question whether the authors belonged to the clerical circle stirred a lot of debate and will also be discussed below.

3 Hiberno-Latin texts on ideal kingship

Along with the vernacular gnomic texts written down in the period between c. 700 AD and the seventeenth century (Kelly 1976: xiv), there exists a corpus of Hiberno-Latin texts that deal with the same subject. The major texts that would fall within the scope of my consideration in the next chapter are *De duodecim* (Hellmann 1909: 51-3) and *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (Wasserschleben 1885) whose twenty-fifth chapter is devoted to matters of secular power.

3.1 *De duodecim abusiuis*

In the words of James Kenney, the first text represents "a discussion of public morals under the headings of the […] twelve evils" (Kenney 1929: 281), including the king, who is unjust. Its editor advanced the idea that it may derive partly from Irish tradition. "Hellmann believed this tract to have been written in Ireland between AD 650 and 700 and saw Irish features in its language and content" (Kelly 1976: xv). Kenney too sees the influence of the "secular gnomic literature of the Irish language" in its compilation, but puts it in an earlier date:

> The treatise shows the use of the Vulgate version of the Bible, of the Rule of St. Benedict, and of the *Etymologiae* of Isidore, or, perhaps, some source adopted by Isidore. This indicates that it cannot have been written much before AD 600, probably not before AD 630. On the other hand, a long extract is taken from it in the *Hibernensis* collection of

[2] "Man könnte fast an einen Geistlichen als Verfasser denken, wenn dem nicht doch wohl die erlaubte Trunkenheit bei Festversammlungen und in des Königs Zechhalle entgegenstände (26)." (ibid.)