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THE HUNT SCENES OF THE IRISH HIGH CROSSES AND THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CONTINENTAL CELTIC STAG DEITY

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Сцени полювання на ірландських Великих Хрестах й іконографія континентального кельтського Бога-Оленя

Фрагмент хреста з Банагер, який нині перебуває в Національному музеї в Дубліні, містить зображення фігури святого, який тримає єпископський жезл, а також оленя у пастці. Схоже зображення міститься також на північній стороні хреста з Бейлінн. Незважаючи на те, що сцени полювання доволі широко представлені в острівному мистецтві, лише деякі з них містять зображення святих. Автор статті звертається до текстів середньовічної ірландської традиції, в сюжетах яких наявні зв'язки між образом оленя та образом святого, порівнює їх з зображеннями на Великих Хрестах, а також проводить паралелі з пам'ятками іконографії континентальних кельтів та інших народів стародавнього світу. Автор доходить висновку, що мотив перетворення на оленя в творах ірландської агіографії мав на меті підкреслення лімінального характеру образу святого та його супутників, а також їхні зв'язки з надприродними явищами. Мотив полювання на оленя, який простежується в іконографії Великих Хрестів, відповідав одному з найважливіших уявлень ірландців про королівську владу, а саме уявленню про благочестивого короля, який полює на священного оленя.

Ключові слова: Ірландія, Великі Хрести, іконографія, Св. Патрик, полювання на оленя, перевтілення, континентальні кельти, лувійські написи.

Introduction

A cross-shaft originally found in Banagher (co. Offaly, fig. 1, Dublin National Museum inventory no. 1929: 1497) contains an image of a religious figure carrying a crozier and riding a horse (top) and a trapped deer (bottom). The north side of the Bealin Cross (Co. Westmeath)[1] contains an iconographically similar image (fig. 2), although this time the deer is at the top of the shaft, snatched by the biting hound, and the travelling saint is at the bottom. Although the scenes of hunt in Insular Art are quite numerous, images of hunting stags accompanied by religious figures are not so distinct. How one is to explain the significance of these images? What motifs one finds when looking at similar imagery across centuries, traditions and cultures of the Celtic world?

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[1] Here and elsewhere the references are to the edition and commentary to the Irish High crosses from Harbinson, P. *The High Crosses of Ireland. An Iconographical and Photographic Survey* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1992, 3 vols., Fig. 73).

Literary depictions of saints and deer in the Irish medieval tradition

The following episode from the *Life of St. Patrick* by Muirchú contains a description in which St. Patrick and his followers are transformed into the herd of deer, followed by a fawn.

> And the king counted them as they came; and of a sudden they vanished from the king's eyes. But the pagans saw only eight stags, with a fawn, who seemed to go into the wilderness.[1]

Interpreting this episode, J. F. Nagy connects the metamorphosis of St. Patrick and his followers choosing to appear in front of the king in the form of the deer with

> a misleading non-verbal sign… The choice of sign has an especially pointed ideological dimension. In the Celtic mythology of sovereignty, sometimes the hero wins the kingship through success in a deer hunt. His prey, according to some tellings of this tale, is actually a supernatural being in disguise.[2]

This episode received further attention from J. Borsje[3] and J. Carey. Following McCone's study who 'observed that Muirchú's writing 'has many of the dramatic and suggestive qualities of native Irish saga','[4] Carey proposed to take the theme of transformation by Patrick and his followers into stag figures to be derived from 'the repertoire of vernacular narrative in the seventh century'.[5]

J. Borsje highlighted the fact that the description of the herd of deer escaping the king's wrath contains not just the mature stags as members of the herd, but also a figure of the little fawn.[6] Although this is clearly meant that it is Benignus, Patrick's disciple, who becomes successor of the saint after his death, I am also inclined to explain this reference to a fawn as a retrospective reference characterising the interplay of the hagiographic source with the vernacular Irish narrative tradition (hero's chase of the fawn symbolises the chase for kingship).[7]

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[1] Bieler, L., (ed.) *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae X*. (Dublin: DIAS, 1979), p. 90.

[2] Nagy, J. F., *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 87–8.

[3] Borsje, J., 'Druids, Deer and 'Words of Power': Coming to Terms with Evil in Medieval Ireland', in Ritari and Bergholm, *Approaches to Religion*, 122–49, p. 126, argued that the image of the flock of deer into which the saint and his followers are transformed may be interpreted as 'often the transformed supernatural beings... the *áes síde*, "the people of the hollow hills", sometimes called fairies or elves. It is possible that these were the ancient Gods of pre-Christian times… It is fascinating that Saint Patrick is associated with this specific image, just as the elves and the druids are.' I find it difficult to agree with her interpretation – that Patrick should be taking the guise of the *aes side* is highly improbable in the context of hagiographic genre. The scholar recently revisited her interpretation of the passage and has come to a more nuanced and balanced solution in Borsje, J. 'Celtic Spells and Counterspells', in Ritari and Bergholm, *Understanding the Celtic Religion*, 9–50, at pp. 24–5.

[4] Carey, J., 'Muirchú and the Ulster Cycle', in Toner, G., and Mac Mathúna, S., *Ulidia 3* (2013), 121–6, p. 121, cit. McCone, K., 'An Introduction to Early Irish Saints' Lives', *The Maynooth Review* 11 (1984), 26–59, p. 33.

[5] Carey, 'Muirchú, p. 214. He listed such literary characters as Tuan mac Cairill (see note 2 above), the supernatural youth in the *Imaccalamh Cholm Cille ₇ Óclaig* (ed. Carey, J., 'The Lough Foyle colloquy texts: *Immacaldam Choluim Chille ₇ ind Óclaig oc Carraic Eolairg* and *Immacaldam in Druad Brain ₇ inna Banfátho Febuil ós Loch Ḟebuil*', Ériu 52 (2002), 53–87), the swineherds of the *De Chopur in Dá Muccida* as all having spent some part of their existence in the form of the stags. The only instance which he refers to where the protagonists resort to such shape to escape their enemies is cited from the *Táin* in which the harpers of Cainbíle come to spy on the Ulstermen and escape them in the form of the stags (O'Rahilly, C., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I* (Dublin: DIAS, 1976), ll. 942–5).

[6] Borsje, 'Druids', p. 142: 'The motif of the fawn strengthens the idea of transformation: it would refer to Patrick's young pupil Benignus. His name in Irish, *Benén*, moreover, hints at *bennán*, the Irish word for "fawn, calf"'.

[7] See Bromwich, R., 'Celtic Dynastic Themes and Breton Lays', *Études Celtiques*, 9 (1961), 439–74.

Moving further, to disentangle this description as to what was really meant by this passage, the saga 'Finn and the man in the tree'[1] contains an intriguing comparanda. In the saga, the main character Derg Corra flees from Finn on account of the latter's wrath due to a young girl affection to him in preference to Finn. Finn gives him three days and three nights to escape, and this is how it is carried out by Derg Corra:

> Then Derg Corra went into exile and took up his abode in a wood and used to go about on shanks of deer (*si uerum est*) for his lightness.[2]

When finally Finn finds him in the wood, the *fíanna* do not recognise him: 'for they did not recognise him on account of the hood of disguise which he wore'.[3] The key word to the understanding of the passage is *celtair* 'cover'. An Old Irish glossary of the manuscript H. 3.18 in which the saga is also recoreded interprets *cealtair* as *etach núa .i. ni maith con-tui[tet] co tucar a lóth ass* 'it is not good when they fall down so that his plumage is taken from him'.[4] K. Hollo notes that *celtair* is not a standard word for a hood; it is, more generally, something which conceals, often magically or miraculously. She invokes an example from *Bethu Phátraic* relevant for us here that Patrick and his companions are saved from king Lóegaire by a *dícheltair*[5] that causes them to appear as deer.[6] Thus, it is appropriate to explain the word as based on the OIr. *díchleth* 'concealment', in which case one can interpret the phrase *celtair díclithe* as some sort of cover to conceal Derg Corra from the eyes of Finn.

Taking this line of thought a bit further, I am prone to argue that in fact, we are not dealing with the transformation here at all, as was previously proposed by other scholars, but some form of a camouflage that Patrick had miraculously put on his followers in order for them to go into hiding into the woods. This camouflage, if we are correct in interpreting this metaphor as a 'covering' rather than 'transforming' narrative device, helps Patrick with his followers to take the form of the wild creatures, probably putting on the deer skins (in the shape of Derg Corra) to look like these animals. That such skins were the necessary attribute of the Stag God of the Celtic mythology, is visible on the iconographical depiction of a forest deity from the Donon sanctuary (Fig. 3). The deity is depicted as clearly wearing an animal skin as an item of clothing, as his 'cover'. Could it be that Muirchú drew on the common pool of iconographic representation of the supernatural figure of the wild, the Stag God, in order to endow the aspect of the saint's depiction in this compilation with an elevated status?

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[1] Recent discussion of dating and compilation in Murray, K., 'Dating the Early *Fianaigecht* Corpus', in Arbuthnot and Parsons, *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*, 31–49, pp. 41–2, dating to the first half of the 8th c. AD. For a nuanced and inspiring interpretation of the saga 'in light of the powerful associations between the Cross/tree and the Eucharist', see K. Hollo, '"Finn and the Man in the Tree' as Verbal Icon', in Arbuthnot and Parsons, *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*, 50–61, p. 55.

[2] Meyer, K., 'Finn and the Man in the Tree', *Revue celtique* 25 (1904) 344–9, p. 348–9: *Luid didiu Derc Corra for loinges ⁊ arfoét caill ⁊ imtighed for luirgnib oss n-allta (si uerum est) ar a étrumai*, Hollo, '"Finn and the Man in the Tree"', p. 57, interprets this passage on the basis of the biblical imagery of 'Habakkuk 3:19, Samuel 22:34 and Psalm 18:33, God is said to make the persecuted speaker's feet like those of the deer and to enable him to walk in high places'.

[3] OIr. original reads: '*ar ní:n:ath-géntar-som dáigh celtair díclithe búi imbe*, Meyer, 'Finn', pp. 348-9. A. Ross links Derg Corra with the deity of Cernunnos (Ross, A., *Pagan Celtic Britain*: *Studies in Iconography and Tradition* (London, 1967), but it does not seem likely to follow such interpretation.

[4] Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. 1071.3a (cf. H 3.18, 633.23: *lóth* gl. *clúmh* 'plumage').

[5] Borsje, 'Deer', p. 142, interprets the word *dícheltair* as "a covering, concealment, disguise, invisibility, an invisibility spell".

[6] Mulchrone, K. (ed.), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin: RIA, 1939), p. 31, cit. from Hollo, 'Finn and the Man in the Tree', p. 51.

The scenes of hunting on the Irish High crosses

In order to answer this question, first let us survey the evidence of the Insular art in the Old Irish period which would have been slightly postdating the compilation of St. Patrick's Life by Muirchú circa the seventh century AD. The iconographic evidence depicting the hunting scenes is widespread in the 8th-9th cc. AD Pictish sculpture and the Irish High crosses[1]:

Hunting scenes are a characteristic of many of the Irish crosses, where they are usually carved on the base, though occasionally they are found on the shaft or horizontal cross-arms. Sometimes huntsmen are depicted on foot… but more often they are shown on horseback… The style of depiction is similar to hunting scenes on Pictish sculpture in general and hounds pursuing deer are found on both.

For the purpose of this contribution, let me draw your attention to such example as the hunting scene of the Cross of Patrick and Columba at Kells (fig. 4):

Base: Hunting scene… A man on the right, holding a spear in his left hand and a shield with boss in extended right hand, hunts some animals towards the left, with the aid of two dogs in front of him. From right to left the animals are: an upright hare, a bird, a quadruped (another dog?) with a boar above it, and a stag.[2]

The pillar at Clonmacnois (co. Offaly, fig. 5, fig. 167; see Harbison 1992, fig. 167) also contains a scene of the hunt, iconographically similar to the cross-shaft from Banagher (fig. 1): we can see the four-legged animal at the bottom, the rider, and the hound attacking the stag at the very top.

The native origin of these scenes on the Pictish stones is not disputed,[3] they are interpreted as being connected to the so-called David Cycle, and also occur on the sculpture in Dál Riata, Iona. In relation to the image of the deer on Irish High crosses, one has to take into account the study by J. Soderberg. In his view, the deer functions both as a symbol of Christ and as an emblem of the immunity. He concludes that 'monasteries and deer were closely associated with each other in a manner that identifies monasteries with a realm beyond royal or secular control'.[4] That the picture is more complicated, than an artistic usage of the symbol of the deer as an emblem of immunity, is confirmed by 'a letter written by Aldhelm of Sherbourne (d. 709) that mentions shrines which had been converted to Christian uses, where previously *ermuli cervulique* had been worshipped, perhaps referring to an image of a stag or hybrid stag-deity'.[5]

Although this instance refers to the establishment of the Christian institutions in England, I think we can be safe when speaking with caution of similar practice in the Irish society as well as

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[1] Edwards, N., 'The Irish Connection', in Foster, *The St Andrews Sarcophaghus*, 227–39, pp. 236-7, refers to such examples as the Market Cross at Kells, the Cross of Patrick and Columba at Kells, the South Cross at Castledermot, the South Cross at Ahenny, the shaft panel on Bealin and the left cross-arm of the east face of Dromiskin.

[2] Harbinson, P. *The High Crosses of Ireland. An Iconographical and Photographic Survey* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1992, 3 vols.), vol. 2, p. 108. For the illustration, see fig. 347 of the vol. 1.

[3] See Henderson, I., '*Primus inter pares*: The St Andrews Sarcophagus and Pictish Sculpture', in S. M. Foster (ed), *The St Andrews Sarcophaghus. A Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections* (Dublin: The Four Courts Press, 1998), 97–167, p. 134.

[4] See Soderberg, J. 'Wild Cattle: Red Deer in the Religious Texts, Iconography and Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 8 (2004), 167–83, p. 181.

[5] Pluskowski, A., 'Animal Magic', in Carver, M., Sanmark, A., and Semple, S. (eds), *Signals of Belief in Early England. Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited* (Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2010), 103–27, p. 116, cit. Filotas, B., *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Culture in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), p. 144.

in other parts of Northern Europe... In all of these regions, the centrality of zoomorphic ornament, the incorporation of totemic functions such as their use in personal names, all point to a paradigm where boundary between human and animal was mutable.[1]

It is important to point to the depiction of the horned figure surrounded by wild animals found on the Market Cross at Kells on its east side (fig. 6).[2] Its origin is debatable, however, it is presented in the vicinity of to the scene of the hunt, where the stag is hunted by a rider with the hunting dog standing on top of the stag (fig. 7), and is clearly connected with the iconographic cluster depicting the theme of the wild.[3]

The Stag God of the continental Celts

That a distinctive motif of Insular art depicting the hunters with their hunting dogs chasing the deer pre-dates the Old Irish period and goes deeper into the Celtic antiquity can be proved by looking at the continental data, the celebrated example of the iconographic evidence being three inner panels of the 1st c. BC Gundestrup Cauldron:[4]

> The panel of interest is the well-known 'Cernunnos' panel... He has horns on his head... a deer flanks him on the left and a wolf on the right... The implication is that he partakes of the attributes of both animals, which we have seen juxtaposed with young warriors of the *fían* roaming the mountains.[5]

The Gundestrup cauldron is explicit in presenting a supernatural figure, probably, a deity connected with hunting, surrounded with animals and humans (fig. 8).[6] I now draw the readers' attention to the iconography of the depiction of other forest deities venerated by the early Celts.

My next example is the figure of the forest deity depicted on the stela from the mixed Roman-Celtic sanctuary of Donon in the upper Bruche valley, containing an additional image of the stag standing behind.[7] The figure is identified as the Deer God, one of the deities worshipped in the sanctuary and is dated to 3rd c. AD (Fig. 3). One cannot be sure that no Roman influence can be detected in the depiction of the Forest God of the Donon sanctuary, when taking into account the images of the Roman goddess Diana accompanied by the fawn and of the Forest God Silvanus depicted together, e.g. a votive relief to Diana and Silvanus from Freisenheim, dated to 100 AD (Archäologisches Museum Colombischlössle, Freiburg (fig. 9).[8] Yet, I am inclined to explain the iconography of the Donon stele as Celtic. Dr Dagmar Bronner kindly drew my attention to the deer

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[1] Pluskowski, 'Animal Magic', p. 116.

[2] Harbinson, *High Crosses of Ireland*, vol. 1, fig. 971.

[3] Harbinson, *High Crosses of Ireland*, vol. 1, fig. 970.

[4] The Thracian origins or at least the influence have been reported in relation to the Gundestrup Cauldron (e.g. Bergquist, A., and Taylor, T., 'The Origin of the Gundestrup Cauldron', *Antiquity*, 61/231 (1987), 10-24; most recently, Kaul, F., 'Gundestrup Cauldron: Thracian Art, Celtic Motifs', *Études Celtiques* 37 (2011), 81-110), but I will not discuss this question here.

[5] McCone, 'Celtic Origins', p. 28.

[6] As an example of the Cernunnos image, see fig. 11 – a votive miniature statuette of the deity, dated to 200 AD (Mainz State Roman German Museum, no. 26).

[7] Strasbourg Archaeological Museum, Inventory no. Donon 58.29. One can also refer to the visual representations of horned figures in Ireland, such as the Tandragee idol, the Boa Island figure and the figure on the Carndonagh pillar, as well as the uppermost panel on the east side of the Market Cross at Kells, although any interpretation of their divine or supernatural status should be treated with caution.

[8] Cf. also altars on the Roman road leading from Strasbourg to Rottweil devoted to Silvanus found at Eigeltingen (160 AD; Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe) and Diana Abnoba found near Mühlenbach in the Kinzigtal (193 AD, Freiburg Archaeological Museum) and near Badenweiler.

figure from the Stuttgart Württemberglandes Museum (*Hirschfigur aus dem Brunnen der Viereckschanze von Fellbach-Schmiden*, inv. no. V 86.8, fig. 10) which, together with the two other carved oak goats was once a part of a larger late Celtic religious image.

> The figures masterfully combine Celtic and naturalistic Hellenistic style elements… It is possible that we are dealing here with the representation of the deer of the god Cernunnos of the Gallo-Roman period.[1]

The image of the Celtic forest deity has been also observed 'on a Paris relief found near that of Esus… it alone preserves the name of the god in question, [C]ernunnos, 'The Horned (or Peaked) One'.[2]

That Cernunnos was the ancient Celtic deity (lit. 'Horn God') symbolising the wild, and could be traced down to the shared Indo-European religious mythological archetype, is confirmed by the analogous figure of the Anatolian pantheon, 'the iconographically familiar Stag God',[3] the Lycian linguistic data[4] and the late 8th c. BC Hieroglyphic Luvian inscriptions found in south-east Anatolia (Cilicia). Watkins refers to 'the figure on the Schimmel rhyton standing on a stag and labelled in gold with the hieroglyph for 'antler' CERVUS$_2$… This god is known in Hieroglyphic Luvian logographically as (DEUS) CERVUS, (DEUS) CERVUS$_2$'.[5]

The building inscription of the ruler Katuwas, dated to the early 9th c. BC, Karkamiš A11b (CLHI II.11), 6§18a-b confirms the high status of the deity – he comes first in the list of gods to whom the sacrifice is made, and the sacrifice assigned to him is more substantial than that assigned to the rest: 'The *sacrifice* (is) this for them: with the gods, annual bread; for Karhuhas, one ox and a sheep'.[6] The Bohça inscription (CLHI X.17, §§ 2-5), dated to c. 718-713 BC, contains the dedication by the ruler Kurtis to the Storm- and Stag-Gods. 'The stele does appear to have been set up where it was, in the open country, as a claim to hunting rights over the "territories"':[7]

> Here I am good to Tarhunzas, he grants to me to take over the territories; and here… I am good to Runtiyas, here he grants to me the beasts SAMAYA (for shooting?).[8]

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[1] My trans., original in Schröder, H. (ed), *Kunst im Alten Schloß* (Stuttgart: Württembergisches Landesmuseum, 1998), p. 36). See also Maier, B., *Die Religion der Kelten: Götter – Mythen - Weltbild*, München, 2001, p. 78, for the interpretation of the iconography of deer in the continental Celtic data.

[2] Mac Cana, P., *Celtic Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1970 [1996]), p. 39 (for illustration of the relief of Cernunnos at Musee de Cluny, Paris, refer to p. 41, fig. top left). See Watkins, C., 'A Celtic Miscellany', in Jones-Bley, K. (ed), *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, May 21-23, 1998*, Washington: JIES Monograph Series, 1998, 2-35, p. 19, on the etymology of the words **kornu-/*kerno-* 'horn' in Italo-Celtic.

[3] Watkins, 'Celtic Miscellany', p. 15.

[4] See Neumann, G., *Glossar des Lykischen*, *Dresdner Beiträge zur Hethitologie 21* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2007), p. 165, s.v. *kerut*[*i*], subst. 'appellation of an animal' < Luvian *karawanti* 'a horned animal, deer or ram', related to Germ. **heruta* > NHG Hirsch 'deer'. Equally important is the Luvian *Kruntiya* < **kru-nt* 'horned' as a possible Hittite reading of the Sumerogram dLAMMA (Hawkins, J. D., 'Commentaries on the Readings', in Herbordt, S., *Die Prinzen- und Beamtensiegel der hethitischen Grossreichszeit auf Tonbullen aus dem Nişantepe-Archiv in Hattusa* (Mainz: von Zabernp, 2005), 248–313, p. 290.

[5] Watkins, 'A Celtic Miscellany', p. 15, see pp. 16-7 for further iconographic representations of the deity on the seal of Kurunta and the stag god (in human form) at the YAZILIKAYA.

[6] *á-sa-ha+ra/i-mi-sà-pa-wa/i-ma-za* |*za-´* DEUS-*ní-za* |CUM-*ni* ANNUS-*sa-li-za-sa* |("PANIS")*tú+ra/i-pi-sa* | (DEUS)CERVUS$_2$+*ra/i-hu-ha-ia* 1 BOS(ANIMAL)-*sa* OVIS-*saha* (Hawkins, *Corpus*, I.1, pp. 106-7).

[7] Hawkins, *Corpus,* I.2, p. 478.

[8] |*wa/i-ta* |(DEUS)TONITRUS-*hu-ti* | *za-ri+i* |(BONUS)*wa/i-suwa/i-i* | *wa/i-mu* |TERRA-REL+*ra/i-zi* |SUPER+*ra/i* |"!CAPERE"(-)*la/i/u-na-´* |*pi-pa-sa-i*|(DEUS)CERVUS$_2$-*ti-pa-wa/i-ta-´* | *za-ri+i*(-)*ia*(-)*pa-´* | (BONUS)*wa/i-su-wa/i* | *wa/i-mu* | *za-ri+i* |*sà-ma-ia* || ("ANIMAL.BESTIA")*HWI-sa$_5$+ra/i* |*pi-pa-sa-ia* (cit. from Hawkins, *Corpus,* I.2, p. 479). Hawkins further comments that '("ANIMAL.BESTIA") HWI-sa$_5$+ra/i: elucidated… as *hwisara,* = Hitt.-Luw. *huitar,* "wild animals", occurring in Hier. inscriptions particularly as gifts of the Stag-God". Hawkins (*Corpus,* I.2, p. 480) also proposes to treat

He points to the Maraş 1 inscription (CLHI IV.4), §11 for further detail. Dated to the 9th c. BC, it is a commemorative inscription of Halparuntiyas III, king of Gurdum, carried out on a portal orthostat carved in the form of a lion, probably posthumous, and mentions that the Stag-God Runtiya provided the ruler with wild animals.[1] Another epithet of the Stag-God, *i-pá? -si* 'of the countryside' (cf. Hitt. *gimras*, Luv. *Imrassi-*), is contained in the Bulgarmaden (CLHI X.45) donation inscription, dated to the 9th c. BC, §7.[2] The Luvian data elucidated above is important from the following perspective: the Celtic figure of Cernunnos is not only the deity of the wild that takes the shape of the horned deity (Stag God), rather, one needs to point out that the age of the religious belief in the Stag God among the Celts obtains a venerable ancestry, and its mythological origin and high status among other deities goes deep into the common Indo-European heritage.[3]

Conclusion

Returning to the passage on St. Patrick with his followers transforming into the herd of deer to avoid the king's wrath, it is highly unlikely that the imagery connected with the Stag God of the Celtic past was invoked. We have seen that some Irish High crosses contain figures whose provenance could be interpreted as indirect references to the deity or a supernatural figure of a semi-divine status living in the wild. As far as the *Vita Sancti Patricii* is concerned, it is more likely that Muirchú was hinting at the liminal status of the saint and his followers – they did not belong to the society depicted in the *Vita* as yet; escaping into the wild, the saint and his followers were simultaneously taming it, having thus elevated their status to the proper contenders for power, and thus having overcome Patrick's counter protagonist, Loegaire, who at that instance failed to chase his magical fawn of kingship. The choice of the topic, however, was important for the compiler in view of the native Irish ideology of kingship that contained the theme of the hunt. From this perspective, one cannot but explain the provenance of the hunting scenes on the Irish High crosses due to the importance of depicting the Heavenly King in accordance with one of the major stratagems of the Irish paradigm of kingship – the righteous king is the king hunting the sacred deer.

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sà-ma-ia following Neumann (pers. Comm.) as verbal substantive from the stem *sa-* 'shoot' (Hitt. *sai-/siya*), dat. sg. "for shooting" or as acc. plur. N of the participle, thus "shot beasts".

[1] |*i-pá?-si-pa-wa/i-mu-i* (DEUS)CERVUS$_2$-*ti-ia-sá* |… |(BESTIA)*HWI-tara/i* |*pi-pa-sa-ta*, 'But Runtiyas … what wild animals he gave to me' (Hawkins, *Corpus*, I.1, p. 263).

[2] Explained by Hawkins, *Corpus*, I.2, p. 524.

[3] P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, p. 39, referring to the 'characteristic 'Buddhic' posture' of Cernunos (see fig. 11), points to the numerous eastern analogues of the motif, and hints at 'a common source of dissemination in the Near East'. This provides another parallel between Celtic Cernunos and the Luvian *K(u)runtiya* just mentioned.

Fig. 1. Banagher cross-shaft

Fig. 2. Bealin Cross, north side

Fig. 3. The Stag God from the Donon
Sanctuary (Strasbourg Museum)

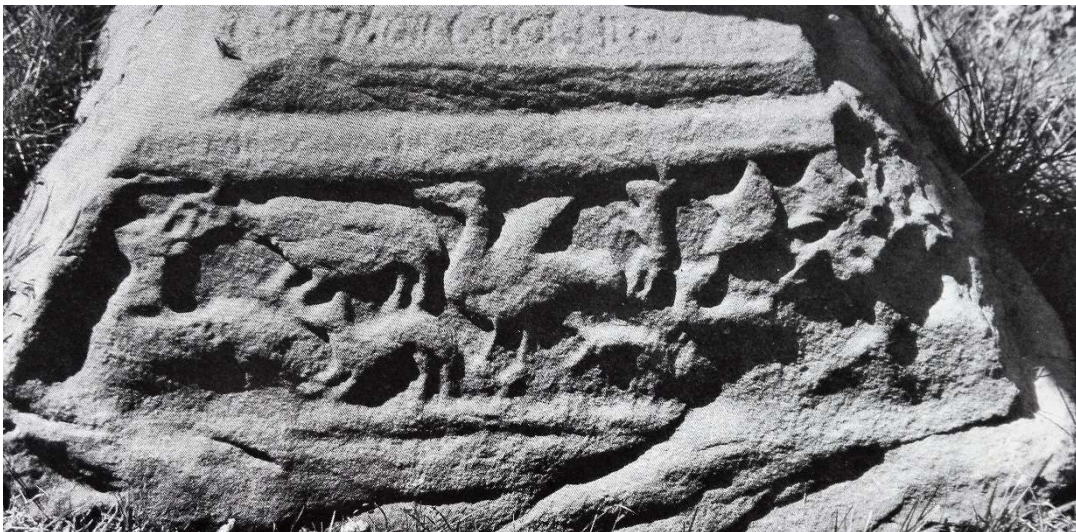Fig. 5. The Clonmacnoise pillar
(Co. Offaly)

Fig. 4. The hunting scene of the Cross of SS. Patrick and Columba at Kells

Fig. 6. The horned figure surrounded by wild
animals (Market Cross, Kells)

Fig. 7. The scene of the hunt
(Market Cross, Kells)

Fig. 8. Gundestrup cauldron (Denmark) –
Cernunnos plate

*Fig. 9. Votive relief to Diana Abnoba and Silvanus from Freisenheim
(Freiburg Archaelogical Museum, 100 AD)*

*Fig. 10. The Deer-figure from Fellbach-
Schmiden, inv. no. V 86.8, Stuttgart
Badenwürtemberg Museum (127 BC)*

*Fig. 11. Cernunnos (Mainz Roman-German
Museum, no. 26, 200AD)*

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The Hunt Scenes of the Irish High Crosses and the Iconography of the Continental Celtic Stag Deity

The article is dedicated to the iconographic depictions of the hunt found on the Irish High crosses, in particular, the Banagher cross-shaft (Co. Offaly) and the Bealin High Cross (Co. Westmeath) involving a religious figure holding a crozier and a trapped stag. The author looks at further iconographic and literary evidence that can provide the basis of these scenes. Iconography and prosopography of the early Anatolian, Gallo-Roman and Celtic deities are also compared with the early Irish data from a typological religious perspective.

Key words: Ireland, High crosses, iconography, St. Patrick, deer hunt, transformation, continental Celts, Luwian inscriptions.