



## The Sanskrit Legacy of Whitley Stokes'

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# The Tripartite Life of Whitley Stokes (1830–1909)

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Elizabeth Boyle & Paul Russell

EDITORS



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## The Sanskrit legacy of Whitley Stokes

MAXIM FOMIN

### INTRODUCTION

On 2 February 1786, Sir William Jones, a British judge active in India and the president of the Asiatick Society, delivered his third address to the society in Calcutta, in which is contained what is believed to be the first systematic statement of the correspondence between Sanskrit and the European languages of Latin and Greek.<sup>1</sup> Jones was not the first to comment on this, but he was the first to carry the argument forward for Germanic (which he referred to as ‘*Gothick*’) and, what is more, for Celtic.

The genuine connection between Indian and European languages was noticed as early as 1583 by the English Jesuit Thomas Stephens (1549–1619), who reported to his brother in a private letter that ‘lingu[a]e harum regionum sunt permultae. Pronunciationem habent non invenustam et compositione latine graecaeque similem; phrasae et constructiones plane mirabiles’.<sup>2</sup> The correspondence between Sanskrit, on the one hand, and Latin and Greek, on the other, was noticed in the year 1586 by the Italian merchant Filippo Sassetti (1540–88) in his private correspondence. The Jesuit missionary Heinrich Roth in Agra

1 This work is a part of a bigger project which involves, on the one hand, research into parallels between early Irish and early Indian linguistic, cultural and narrative traditions, and, on the other, the history of Celtic scholarship with specific reference to Celto-Sanskrit matters; see, for example, Maxim Fomin, ‘Russian and Western Celticists on similarities between Early Irish and Early Indian traditions’ in S. Mac Mathúna & M. Fomin (eds), *Parallels between Celtic and Slavic: proceedings of the first international colloquium of Societas Celto-Slavica held at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, 19–21 June 2005. Studia Celto-Slavica*, 1 (Coleraine, 2006), pp 217–38; Maxim Fomin, Séamus Mac Mathúna and Victoria Vertogradova, *Sacred topology in early Ireland and ancient India: religious paradigm shift*, Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph series, 57 (Washington, DC, 2010). I am grateful to Dr Paul Russell for suggestions and criticisms expressed in relation to the earlier versions of this paper, and both to him and Dr Elizabeth Boyle for earlier discussions and enthusiasm in relation to my interest in Stokes’ Celto-Sanskrit research, as well as for their kind invitation and facilitation of financial support received towards my attendance at the conference. Thanks are also due to Dr Christophe Vielle for providing some useful references. All errors and misunderstandings are my sole responsibility. 2 Cited from Jean-Claude Müller, ‘Early stages of language comparison from Sassetti to Sir William Jones (1786)’ *Kratylos*, 31 (1986), 1–31 at 5–6, who translates: ‘the languages of these regions are numerous. They have pronunciation which is not unattractive and they are similar in their structure to Latin and Greek; clearly, they contain marvellous constructions and phrases’.

(c.1660) left some specimens of writing on Sanskrit grammar and Johann-Ernest Hanxleden was the author of the first printed grammar of Sanskrit in Europe (published in Rome in 1790). The Latin account of the French Jesuit Pons, active in the first half of the eighteenth century in Bengal and Pondicherry, should also be mentioned together with his 'lettre édifiante' to the Jesuit du Halde: 'la langue samskrète ou samskroutan ... si admirable par son harmonie, son abondance et son énergie'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, all of the above accounts were quite dispersed and did not exert any substantial influence in Europe. In his pronouncement of 1786, Jones seemed to aggregate the evidence known to him from the accounts that were already in circulation as well as on the basis of his own observations and to present his hypothesis in a lucid manner to a degree that the ideas presented below have been variously referred to as the foundation of a new science:

The *Sanskrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanskrit*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1868, eighty years later, and, again, in Calcutta, another British judge active in India – the editor and compiler of the *Anglo-Indian codes*, published in two volumes between 1887 and 1888, with two supplements published in 1889 and 1891 – Whitley Stokes, 'living', as he was, 'in the bookless India',<sup>5</sup> had collected, arranged and edited various papers, consisting of 'over three thousand fragments, of all sizes, written in many characters and languages',<sup>6</sup> of his deceased teacher and friend, R.T. Siegfried, 'professor of Sanskrit and comparative philology in the Irish University'.<sup>7</sup> This publication was the first academic attempt to analyze and bring together a comprehensive array of Celto-Sanskrit

3 Ibid., p. 7. 4 Ibid., pp 1–2. For more detail on Jones, see Michael J. Franklin, 'Jones, Sir William (1746–1794)', *ODNB*, xxx, pp 665–74, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15105>, accessed 15 Jan. 2011, and Satya S. Pachori, *Sir William Jones: a reader* (Delhi, 1993). 5 Whitley Stokes, 'Miscellanea Celtica, by the late R.T. Siegfried. Collected, arranged and edited by Whitley Stokes', *TPhS* (1867), 252–304 at 41 n. 1. 6 Ibid., p. 1. 7 Ibid. I am grateful to Prof. P. Ó Dochartaigh for drawing this article to my attention; for further discussion, see Pól Ó Dochartaigh, ch. 2.

parallels in the fields of mythology, prosopography, lexicography, etymology, phonetics and grammar (including noun declensions, degrees of comparison, numerals, pronouns, verbs and verbal particles, prefixes and suffixes) which Dr Siegfried was collecting during his life, nothing of which he published in his own name.

In what follows, I shall consider the intriguing parallels existing between Early Irish and Sanskrit linguistic, literary and cultural traditions, noted by Stokes on various occasions in his numerous publications. Stokes was not at all convinced by the idea of preparing a compendium of such parallels,<sup>8</sup> instead, in line with what he had said about his teacher Siegfried, 'he felt a fear, not altogether groundless, that the self-confidence of some of the members of the new school of philology would bring back their science into the contempt from which it was rescued'.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, such warnings from Siegfried were a milestone in establishing his approach in dealing with Indo-European (IE), and especially Celto-Sanskrit linguistic parallels: "'Take care", he wrote to me once, "that we are not acting like the older men, but without their excuse of ignorance – butchering words and forms, only with sharper knives"'.<sup>10</sup>

It is in this context that one has to look at Stokes' publications in such journals as *Revue celtique*, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* and others. They are to be taken as tender sprouts of a then new branch of scholarship – comparative linguistics – which he was afraid of destroying in its germ.<sup>11</sup> The publication of 'Miscellanea Celtica' provided Stokes with the foundation upon which he based his own attempts in the field of Celto-Sanskrit research. Moreover, it is true to say that Stokes did not deviate a great deal from the methodology laid down by Siegfried: his etymological findings on most of such occasions contained a mere list of lexemes from a handful of IE languages, these most frequently being Latin, Greek, Sanskrit and the cognate Celtic ones of Irish, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. From 1868 onwards, Stokes published a range of articles,<sup>12</sup> which did not lead to the publication of the *magnum opus* on the subject, but were quite important in establishing a separate field of scholarship later to be developed in the works of

8 See his critique of Bopp's work in his 'On the Celtic comparisons in Bopp's *Comparative grammar*', *RC*, 3 (1876–8), 31–9, and that of Fitzgerald in his 'Remarks on Fitzgerald's *Early Celtic history and mythology*', *RC*, 6 (1885), 358–70. 9 Stokes, 'Miscellanea Celtica', p. 3. 10 Ibid. 11 I would also like to point out that I will avoid citing from his etymological undertakings in the *Urkeltsische Sprachschatz* collection published in 1894 as they are better known than the ones which will be the focus of this contribution. 12 W. Stokes, 'Mythological notes. III. Names for "God"', *RC*, 1 (1870–72), 256–62; id., 'Mythological notes. VIII. Cred's pregnancy', *RC*, 2 (1873–75), 197–203, 507; id., 'Mythological notes. Addenda', *RC*, 2 (1874), 197–203; id., 'Irish folklore', *RC*, 5 (1883), 391–2; id., 'Another parallel', *RC*, 5 (1883), 393–4; id., 'Mythological notes. XIII *Magonia*', *RC*, 6 (1883–85), 267–9; id., 'Sitting Dharna', *The Academy*, 28 (1885), 169 (12 Sept.); id., 'The legend of Paraçurāma', *The Academy*, 44 (1893), 439 (18 Nov.).



eminent Celticists, such as Joseph Vendryes, Myles Dillon and Proinsias Mac Cana.<sup>13</sup>

The parallels exhibited in Stokes' publications fall mainly into the three categories:

- (a) linguistic parallels observed between early Irish and Sanskrit languages;
- (b) literary motifs and themes cropping up in compositions of a mythological character in both traditions and, finally;
- (c) cultural (religious, legal and everyday) practices existing in nineteenth-century India and echoed by some customs recorded in early Irish documents.

In the course of my contribution, I will be glancing at each one of them in turn. However, there are only a few examples that I am going to present: the rich tapestry of such detail has been (for various reasons) left for a different occasion.

#### CELTO-SANSKRIT ETYMOLOGIES AND GRAMMATICAL CONGRUENCES NOTED BY STOKES

Stokes' preface to his publication of *Three Irish glossaries* abounds with interesting observations in regard to Celto-Sanskrit philological congruencies.<sup>14</sup> Commenting upon 'the philological value of the results of Cormac's labours',<sup>15</sup> he expounds a list (in alphabetical order) of 'the wildest of his derivations', which, Stokes admits, 'are valuable as preserving to us words which are ... interesting philologically' one of which runs as follows:

OIr. *Aigean* 'ocean', cognate with Welsh *eigiawn* and derived from Greek *okeanos* 'the ocean' which has been equated with a S[ans]kr[it] *âçayâna perikeimenos*.<sup>16</sup>

To provide some explanation as to what Stokes probably had in mind when alluding to the lexemes above, let me point out that the meaning of the Greek word, *perikeimenos*, derives from the prefix *peri* 'around', and a present participle

13 Joseph Vendryes, 'Les correspondances de vocabulaire entre l'indo-iranien et l'italo-celtique', *Mémoires de la société de linguistique de Paris*, 20 (1918), 265–85; Myles Dillon, 'The Hindu act of truth in Celtic tradition', *Modern Philology*, 44 (1947), 137–40; id., 'The archaism of Irish tradition', *PBA*, 37 (1948), 245–90; id., 'Celt and Hindu', *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, 1 (1963), 203–23; id., *Celt and Hindu* (Dublin, 1973); id., *Celts and Aryans* (Simla, 1975); Proinsias Mac Cana, 'An archaism in Irish poetic tradition', *Celtica*, 8 (1968), 174–81; id., 'Regnum and sacerdotium: notes on Irish tradition', *PBA*, 65 (1979), 443–75; id., 'The poet as spouse of his patron', *Ériu*, 39 (1988), 79–86. 14 Whitley Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries: Cormac's glossary, codex A ..., O'Davoren's glossary ... and a glossary to the Calendar of Oingus the Culdee ... with a preface and index* (London, 1862, repr. Felinfach, 2000). In direct citations from Stokes, I have left his system of transliteration of Sanskrit words unchanged. Otherwise, in transliteration of Sanskrit words, I have followed the guidelines established in *SED*. 15 Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxvii. 16 *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

*keimenos* of the verb *keimai* ‘to lie’; similarly, the Sanskrit word *āśāyāna* has a meaning of ‘lying around, surrounding’ (already attested in the texts of *RV* I.21, 11 etc.) and is applied as an epithet of *Ṛtra*, who surrounds the waters, similarly to the Greek concept of the ocean (*ōkeanos*).

Here and elsewhere, we should not be confused by a Greek word appearing next to its Sanskrit equivalent: in his early years, Stokes learned Sanskrit with Prof. Siegfried. I have examined Stokes’ notes taken by him during his Sanskrit classes in collection of Stokes’ papers that are stored in the archive of University College London, and it appears that Stokes studied Sanskrit through the medium of Classical Greek.<sup>17</sup> No wonder then that his Celto-Sanskrit etymologies are explained using Greek cognates or concepts throughout his work. Also, the stock of Stokes’ (and ultimately, Siegfried’s) Sanskrit examples comes from the *Ṛg-Veda*.<sup>18</sup> It was reasonable to expect comparative philologists to be using this source as the store of detail given the interest of European scholars in Vedic mythology boosted by the *Sacred books of the East* series edited by the German Orientalist Max Müller between 1879 and 1894.

An interesting case is his etymological study of Old Irish *imb* ‘butter’, linked with Old Welsh *emmeni*, Cornish *amenen*, Breton *amann*, which, as Stokes points out, Dr Siegfried compared with Sanskrit *añji* ‘ointment’, *ājya* ‘butter’, root *añj*, Latin *unguo*, German *anke*, ‘butter’.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Sanskrit–English dictionary* (*SED*), the verbal root *añj-* means ‘to apply an ointment or pigment, smear with, anoint’; hence, the verbal noun *añji* obtains a meaning ‘applying an ointment or pigment’, and, consequently, a gerundive, which is also treated as a noun, *ājya* is a ‘melted or clarified butter’ used for oblations or for pouring into the holy fire at the sacrifice or anointing anything sacrificed or offered as contained in the texts on the rules for Vedic domestic ceremonies (the *grihya sutras*). In this way, the ritual significance of ‘clarified butter’ in India had its own influence on the subsequent interpretation of the significance of butter in early Irish everyday practices.

Our next example, along with a noted parallel for the lexeme *im* ‘butter’, also comes from the farming vocabulary of the Irish: ‘*melg* “milk” root *malg* (*domalg* gl. *mulxi*), cf. *mulgere*, *amelgein*, Sanskrit *mṛj*, “*omorgnyimi*”’.<sup>20</sup> According to *SED*, the root *mṛj* means ‘to wipe, rub, cleanse, embellish, stroke’, whereas *LSLD* provides Sanskrit *māṛj* ‘wipe away’ as the appropriate comparanda to the word *mulgere* ‘milk’, which, however, is a causative formation from the initial *mṛj* root. The stock of cross-linguistic examples provided by Stokes fully coincides with those provided by Monier-Williams in *SED* published in 1899, and it

17 I am grateful to staff at the Special Collections, University College London Archives, especially to Anne Chesher and Susan Stead, for facilitating access to MS add. 300 (Stokes Papers), and useful discussions in relation to Stokes’ manuscripts collection. 18 N.S. Sontakke (ed.), *Ṛgveda Saṃhita with the commentary of Sayana* (Poona, 1933–51), is a modern edition. 19 Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxx (s.v. *Ur*). 20 Ibid.

would be surprising if the latter had not been aware of Stokes' etymological endeavours. Monier-Williams' list is more exhaustive, however, and includes Slavic *mľěsti*, Lithuanian *mľsti*, German *melken* (*SED* 829–3, s.v. *mľij*). Another verb for milking which is more commonly used in Sanskrit texts is *duhati* (orig. *dighati*) 'to milk, squeeze out a soma or milk' (*RV*), whence *duhitṛ* 'a milk-maid', with its subsequent change of meaning to 'daughter', and its cognates in Greek (*thygatēr*), Lithuanian (*duktė*), and Slavic (*dusht*); let us also mention that the Old Irish *der*, 'girl, daughter' and 𐌇 *dar-* (*DIL* s.vv.) both contain a reflex of this word.

In terms of parallels in grammar of the two languages, Stokes, following advice received from Siegfried,<sup>21</sup> pointed out such correspondences between Old Irish and Sanskrit as the personal pronouns, numerals, the formation of the comparative degree of adjectives, of the sigmatic aorist and of the secondary future.<sup>22</sup>

MYTHOLOGICAL PARALLELS IN MYTHOLOGY,  
PROSOPOGRAHY, TOPOGRAPHY AND TOPONYMY

Leaving the subject of 'the philologically interesting words' and phrases, Stokes notes that 'the glossary contains various notes on the mythology and legends of Ireland, some of which are perhaps of Old-Celtic antiquity'.<sup>23</sup> He looks at various mythological figures, such as Art,<sup>24</sup> Brigit, Dagda,<sup>25</sup> Ériu,<sup>26</sup> Nuadu,<sup>27</sup> Lug,<sup>28</sup> and notes some prominent parallels between Early Irish and Sanskrit, presumably Vedic, traditions as, for example, in the following:

In *Brigit*, Dr Siegfried has recognized, with much probability, the Old-Celtic goddess *Brigantia*, whose name is doubtless radically connected with that of the *Brigantes* = S[ans]kr[it] *bṛihantas*, the root whereof is also found in the Vedic *brahman* n. 'prayer' which the Hindus (according to Roth), in the later periods of their theology, deified as their supreme god Brahman.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Stokes, 'Miscellanea Celtica', p. 4, admits: 'there is scarcely an article in my Irish Glosses which is not indebted to Siegfried for some addition or correction. The acknowledgment of his help at p. 132 is no mere complimentary expression'. <sup>22</sup> Pronouns: W. Stokes (ed.), *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore*, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Mediaeval and Modern Series 5 (Oxford, 1890), pp. lxiv–v; numerals: id., *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxix, s.v. *Doss*; adjectives: ibid., p. xxx, s.v. *Lelap*, *croicenn*, *emuin*; sigmatic aorist: Stokes, *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore*, pp. lxxv–vi; secondary future: ibid. lxxii. <sup>23</sup> Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxxii. <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. xxxiii. <sup>25</sup> Stokes, 'Remarks on Fitzgerald's *Early Celtic history and mythology*', p. 369. <sup>26</sup> Id., *Three Irish glossaries*, p. lxiii n. †. <sup>27</sup> Id., 'The prose tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*', *RC*, 15 (1894), 272–336, 418–284; 16 (1895), 231–83, 135–267, 269–312 (at vol. 15, p. 325). <sup>28</sup> Id., 'The second battle of Moytura', *RC*, 12 (1891), 52–130, 306–8 at 123. <sup>29</sup> Id., *Three Irish*

*Bṛihantas*, alias *bṛihat*, is a past participle of the verb *bṛihati* ‘grows great or strong, increases; expands’ and is applied as an epithet to princes in the *Mahābhārata*, as an epithet of the gods and soma in the *RV*, and can metonymically represent speech, heaven, metrical Vedic compositions or a particular metre containing thirty-six syllables or a sacrificial altar containing thirty-six bricks. This type of Vedic composition is identified with its supposed author, the figure of *Bṛihas-pati* who is a male lord of prayer and devotion, personifying religion and piety. *Bṛihas-pati* is the son of *Angiras* – a more venerable type of Vedic hymn, and is therefore not, *pace* Stokes and Siegfried, to be seen as a primary religious figure of devotion.

A parallel to the theme of appropriating land from sea in Irish topography featured in a place-name legend can be found, according to Stokes, in the Hindu legend of Paraśurama, published in *The Academy* journal in 1893.<sup>30</sup> Such references hint at Stokes’ interest in Indian legends and stories while he was already residing in India – an interest he pursued long after he finished his education with Siegfried.

In his edition of *Féilire Oengusso*, Stokes noted a parallel between the early Irish source and the Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata* in relation to a theme of the extraordinary transformation of a human into a fish contained in the story of Cred’s pregnancy.<sup>31</sup> Cred, the daughter of a king of Leinster, became pregnant after having eaten a sprig that contained semen of a man who left it there by accident. Stokes pointed out a similarity with the legend of the nymph Adrikā and king Uparicharas from the first book of the epic (*Adi-parva*, 2371–92) which exhibits his acquaintance with the great Indian epic. In the Indian story, the king, longing for his wife, spills his semen while hunting. He sends a bird with a leaf containing the semen to his wife. The bird drops the leaf, and Adrikā, a beautiful *apsara* transformed into a fish, swallows the semen, gives birth to human twins and thus is freed from a curse.

A similar transformation is found in an Early Middle Irish tale ‘The Death of Echaid son of Mairid’ (*Aided Echach maic Mairedo*), where Li Ban, Echaid’s daughter, is changed into a salmon. The most curious Middle Irish fish-legend is that of S. Finan’s mother Becnait (*Lebar Brecc*), who while bathing after sunset was impregnated by a salmon of red gold: *Eigne dergoir tarlustar lais tiar iar fuined gréni, rabroind becnaité baine, combahesium aceli*.<sup>32</sup>

*glossaries*, p. xxxiii. 30 The legend was cited from H.H. Wilson, *Catalogue of the Mackenzie collection* (Madras, 1882). 31 The full version of the story is contained in Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Féilire Oengusso Céili Dé: the martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, HBS XXIX (London, 1905), pp 135–6. 32 Id., ‘Mythological notes. VIII. Cred’s pregnancy’, p. 200 n. 1.

Thus, a motif of a magical conception in/near water found in two traditions is exemplified, according to Stokes, in an array of various plots contained not only in the instances of a magical transformation of a maiden into a fish with her subsequent impregnation, but also in such narrative details as semen left on an item of vegetative character (in Ireland, the sprig, in India, the leaf) found near water that causes such impregnation. However, Stokes was very much impressed by the story from the *Leabhar Breac* whose 'salmon of red gold' presumably invokes the image of 'the golden egg', the womb of all creation, floating in the World ocean (Sanskrit *hiranyagarbha*, RV X.121).

In the same publication,<sup>33</sup> Stokes notes a parallel between Early Irish and Indian beliefs in relation to beings of demonic character whose feet were described as backward-turned in both traditions. In the story of St Moling and the devil, the saint meets the devil in the shape of a beautiful youth wearing a royal tunic who is asking for a blessing. Failing to receive the blessing and, indeed, to deceive Mo Ling, the devil beseeches the saint that he wanted to earn the blessing. This, however, turns out to be another impossible task for the devil. Being asked to perform the genuflexion, devil answers: 'I cannot bend down forward, for backwards are my knees (*siar atait mo gluine*)'. Stokes refers to the belief attested in northern India, in Bihar, of the creature called the *churél*, or else *kuchin*, a kind of *bhút* or ghost, that has its feet turned backwards.

Finally, it would not be far-fetched to say that the most important correspondence that Stokes established was the one in relation to the rules governing compositions of metrical narratives in Early Irish and Sanskrit poetic traditions. This observation proved to be quite influential in the subsequent Celtic scholarship with regard to the so-called 'prose-and-verse form in narrative', that is, that the metrical narratives both in Ireland and in India were generally preceded by a story told in prose: 'this arrangement ... reminds one of the Buddhist literature, where we also find the same story told twice, once in metre (*gáthá*) and once in prose prose-poetry relationship'.<sup>34</sup> In a note, Stokes refers to a proverbial phrase, found in O'Clery's glossary: *Ris gan a dhuain 'na dheachair* 'a story without its song following it', which he thinks refers to the Irish practice just mentioned.<sup>35</sup>

33 Id., *Féilire Óengusso*, p. 155. 34 Stokes, 'On the Calendar of Oengus', p. 364; see Dillon, *Celts and Aryans*, p. 144. 35 This theory was examined by Kim McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature* (Maynooth, 1990), p. 37, who rather referred to 'earlier work by Windisch' than by Stokes when criticizing Myles Dillon's 'theory of Indian parallels and Indo-European origins' as regard the origin of 'certain types of early Irish narrative [that] are quite prone to intersperse prose narrative and dialogue with verse'; see now Proinsias Mac Cana, 'Prosimetrum in insular Celtic literature' in J. Harris and K. Reichl (eds), *Prosimetrum: cross-cultural perspectives on narrative in prose and verse* (Cambridge, 1997), pp 99–130, who provides an alternative view. Notably, it was Dillon who attributed the origin of the theory to Windisch and Oldenberg, rather than to Stokes. In his 'Celt and Hindu', p. 209 n. 10, he indicated various scholars who either concurred with or dismissed the theory as improbable. Dillon ultimately

## RELIGIOUS, LEGAL AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES

We may now turn to various cultural (religious, legal and everyday) practices existing in nineteenth-century India and echoed by some customs recorded in the early Irish documents. Our first example is drawn from the superstitious rituals connected with the movement of the sun. Drawing on the evidence of *Cormac's glossary*, Stokes pointed out 'the practice of walking *dessiul*, to the right, or sun-ways, *epi ta dexia* ... So in S[ans]kr[it] we have *dakshinam kar* "to turn persons or things right so as to place them on one's right"<sup>36</sup>

A note, explaining the significance of the ritual, will suffice. The ritual moving to the right (in Sanskrit, *pra-dakshina*; in Latin, *dextratio*; and in Russian, *posolon'*) is a circumambulation from left to right so that the right side of the one who is moving is turned towards the person or the object around whom the movement is taking place. It was a token of respect and was considered as an auspicious and favourable movement. In Vedic, and in the later Hindu ritual practice, this movement mirrored the macrocosmic progression of the constellations, the Moon and the Sun that move right-hand-wise around the sacred centre of Hindu mythology – the mountain Meru. The *pradakshina* is attested in the Hindu marriage ceremony, during the everyday libations and sacrifices to gods and ancestors, during the royal circuit of the domesticated territory and also in such everyday practices such as approaching the cows for milking, collecting honey, crossing the road or approaching a hill or a mound. The inauspicious movement from left to right which had a malicious effect and was called *prasavyam* or *apasavyam* was only carried out in bad or malignant circumstances; for example, during a funeral procession or during the performance of evil magic and was cosmologically correlated with the polar axis of the Hindu demons, the *asuras*.

Similar astrological practices connected with cosmology of the universe, were, as Stokes attempted to claim, known to the early Irish. Stokes makes an argument that although the term of the science of astrology was borrowed (for example, *astrolaice*), he admits that all other 'Irish words, with the exception of *sechtmain*, are native, and point to some knowledge of astronomy':<sup>37</sup>

The autumnal equinox seems to have been known, the term for this being, apparently, *desebar na gréine*, where *des* is cognate with the *dakshina* of the S[ans]kr[it] synonym *dakshinâyana*, 'the going (of the sun) to the south'.<sup>38</sup>

pointed to Ernst Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und Indischen Altertumskunde*, 2 vols (Strasbourg, 1917–20), i, p. 405, as the source where the theory was originally proposed. 36 Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxxvi. 37 Id., *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore*, p. ciii. 38 Ibid., p. ciii.

Stokes continued his preface to *Lives of saints from the Book of Lismore* with a few observations in relation to the names used for God, divine beings and deities in early Ireland:

For the Supreme Being we have two words *dia* and *fiadu*, gen. *fiadat*, both survivals from heathenism, the former being cognate with S[ans]kr[it] *deva*, the latter with Gr[ee]k *eidōs*, Goth[ic] *Veitvōds*.<sup>39</sup>

In his *Preface* to *Félire hUí Gormáin*, Stokes compares the Christian God of a poem ascribed to St Brigit, beginning: *Ropadh maith lem cormlind mor | do righ na righ* ('I should like a great ale-pool for the king of the kings') with a 'soma-quaffing Indra'.<sup>40</sup> He further elaborates his thoughts on appellations of a Supreme Being in Celtic and Sanskrit elsewhere:

In a glossary called *Dúil Laithne* ... preserved in the library of TCD (H.2.15, 116) appears the following entry: *Teo no tiamud no daur .i. dia*. *Teo* seems formed like S[ans]kr[it] *tavas* 'strong', by gunation from the root TU 'to be powerful', whence by vriddhi the Irish *tuath* 'people'. *Tiamud* has perhaps lost initial *s* and may be connected with S[ans]kr[it] *stimita* 'immovable'. *Daur* is possibly, as Siegfried thought, borrowed from Old-Norse *Thórr*. But I should prefer to regard it as a derivative from the root *Dhar*, whence S[ans]kr[it] *dharaṇa* 'reserving', *dhartri*, *dharatṛī* 'supporter'.<sup>41</sup>

Another Irish God name, according to Stokes, was *Dess*, which he cited from the *Tochmarc Emire* (LU 122b):

*Dess imriada duib orsi* "'may Dess ("god") make smooth [the way] for you!" quoth she' ... Irish phonetics will allow *dess* to be equated either with the Indian *Daksha* or with the Greek *thestos* (Lat. *festus*) in *polythestos*.<sup>42</sup>

And, perhaps, the wildest of his derivations were the ones attributed to *Ésus*,<sup>43</sup> having attributed its origin, following d'Arbois de Jubainville, to the (presumably IE) root *\*is* 'wish'.

The name *Ésus* would thus be cognate with S[ans]kr[it] *eshā*, Zend *aêscha*, Gr[ee]k *aîsa* 'wish', Sabine *aiso-s* 'prayer' and other words

39 Ibid., p. cv. 40 Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Félire hUí Gormáin: the martyrology of Gorman* (London, 1895), p. xi. 41 Id., 'Mythological notes. III. Names for "God"', p. 256. 42 Id., 'Mythological notes. Addenda', p. 203. 43 Ibid. It is not clear from the context of Stokes' argument whether he was referring to a Gaulish divine figure who bore such name or pretended not to have recognised *Ésus* to be the Old Irish transliteration of a Biblical n. pr. of Jesus.

cited by Fick, *vergl. Wörterbuch*, 26. The primary meaning of the word would seem to be simply ‘a wish’ (cf. *tar-u* ‘arbor’, *dâr-u* ‘lignum’ etc.) That a god should be called by a word meaning ‘wish’ will not surprise anyone who remembers the following passage from the *Deutsche Mythologie* 126 ‘Hiermit zusammenhängend, also Überreste altheidnischen Glaubens, scheint mir nun, dass unsere Dichter des 13 Jhs. den *Wunsch* personificieren und als ein gewaltiges, schöpferisches Wesen darstellen’. Related to this, in other words to the vestiges of ancient pagan faith, it now seems to me that our thirteenth-century poets personify the *wish* and present it as a mighty creative being. And see Muir, *Sanskrit Texts*, V, 403, as to the process by which *Kâma* (‘Desire’) came to be regarded as a deity. But possibly *Ēsus* may, like *Osci* (one of the Eddaic names for Odin) mean ‘der die Menschen des Wunsches, der höchsten Gabe theilhaftig machende’.<sup>44</sup>

Speaking about various religious practices observed in the early Irish documents, he remarks that ‘by the austerities which they are said to have practised, Irish saints remind one of Hindu *yogis*, and, like the *yogis*, they seem to have believed that it was possible to wrest from God some portion of the Divine power’.<sup>45</sup> With this, one can connect a famous legal practice of ‘fasting against’, an observation regarding which Stokes published in *The Academy* (September 1885), in a note entitled ‘Sitting *dharna*’:

One of the most curious practices in India, is that still followed in native states (it has been stopped in British India, since 1861, by a section of the penal code) by a Braham creditor to compel payment of his debt, and called in Hindî *dharna* ‘detention’, and in Sanskrit *ācharita* ‘customary proceeding’, or *prāyopaveçana* ‘sitting down to die by hunger’. This procedure has long since been identified with the practice of ‘fasting upon’ (*troscud for*) a debtor to God or man, which is so frequently mentioned in the Irish so-called Brehon Laws and which seems to have been imitated by the Irish ecclesiastics ... As to what jurists call the ‘sanction’ of this practice – that is, the evil probably incurred in case of disobedience to the command implied in it – the theory now current in India, and adopted by Sir Henry Maine,

<sup>44</sup> ‘The one who allows people to participate in the wish, as the highest gift’ (my trans.), *ibid.* Some of his notes contain observations in relation to Gaulish gods and parallels to various figures from Vedic mythology. Discussing a Gaulish place name *Magonia* (‘the region ruled by a Gaulish sky-god *Magounos* or *Mogounos*, who may possibly have resembled, in some respects, Indra and, in others, Apollo’) attested in the ninth-century record of Agobard, bishop of Lyon, Stokes compares the appellation of the divine figure *Mogounus* with Sanskrit *maghavan* (*id.*, ‘Mythological notes. XIII. *Magonia*’). <sup>45</sup> *Id.*, ‘Sitting *dharna*’.



in his *Early History of Institutions*, is that the person fasted upon incurs divine displeasure if he lets the faster die. But in India, according to Lord Teignmouth ..., 'by the rigour of the etiquette, the unfortunate object of his [the Brahman's] arrest ought to fast also, and thus they both remain till the institutor of the *dharna* obtains satisfaction' ... It thus appears probable that in India, as well as in Ireland, the primeval 'sanction' of the practice in question was not divine displeasure, but suicide by starvation.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that Stokes, referring to Sir Henry Maine's highly influential work *Lectures on the early history of institutions* (1875),<sup>47</sup> was not original in his observation.<sup>48</sup> His contribution included a reference to a Middle Irish legend about St Patrick that he came upon 'in a MS in the Bodleian, Rawl. B. 512, fo. 108a2 ... which tells how St Patrick "fasted upon" Loegaire, the unbelieving overking of Ireland'.<sup>49</sup> It is worth pointing out that the French translation of Maine's work was published in 1880 with the introduction by d'Arbois de Jubainville, which, in its turn, provoked further discussion of this Hiberno-Indian parallel by L. de La Vallée Poussin,<sup>50</sup> who, starting off with the Middle-Irish legend of St Patrick, went on to expand the list of various Indian legal practices to do with fasting to include *prāya*, *trāgā* and *takāzā*, mainly drawing on examples provided by Hopkins and Stokes.<sup>51</sup>

46 Ibid.; see Dillon, 'Celt and Hindu', p. 222, for further discussion of the Irish *troscud* and of the Indian *dharana*. 47 Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: a literary and intellectual history* (Syracuse, NY, 2004), pp 196–203, amply discusses the custom, its justification from Maine's point of view ('its very supposed necessity in those ancient societies', *ibid.*, p. 199), down to the parallel's enactment during the hunger-strikes of Terence MacSweeney in Cork and Jatindranath Das in Bengal by Irish and Indian nationalists respectively. 48 To be fair to Stokes, Maine was cited from Lord Teignmouth's description from the end of the eighteenth century (cit. from James Forbes, *Oriental memoirs: selected and abridged from a series of familiar letters written during seventeen years residence in India, including observations on parts of Africa and South America, and a narrative of occurrences in four India provinces*, 2 vols (London, 1813), ii, p. 25). Teignmouth notes that the practice was very infrequent since 1793. It is no wonder that when we have asked our Indian colleagues from the Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University of New Delhi whether they were aware of the institution in contemporary day India, they failed to recall the existence of such practice. 49 Stokes, 'Sitting dharna'. Of other legal practices, he refers to the instances of matrilineal habit of naming ('On the *Calendar of Oengus*', p. 362 n. 3), of fathers, giving their daughters in marriage to strangers (*Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore*, p. 41). On the other hand, I do not wish to give a reader such an impression that every correspondence found between the two traditions was due to Stokes' labours; for instance, it was Daniel A. Binchy, 'VI. The legal capacity of women in regard to contracts' in R. Thurneysen et al. (eds), *Studies in early Irish law* (Dublin, 1936), pp 207–34, who first drew attention to an oft-cited parallel between the *Laws of Manu* and the Old Irish *Bandire*-tract on the legal status of women in two early societies. 50 'Note sur le dharna', *Bulletin de la classe des lettres of the Académie Royale de Belgique*, 116 (Brussels, 1921), 71–80. 51 Edward Washburn Hopkins, 'On the Hindu customs of dying to redress a grievance', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 21 (1900), 146–59.

## STOKES' CONCLUSIONS (PARTLY) VERIFIED

In the course of this chapter, we have looked at the range of the following of Stokes' findings in the field of Celto-Sanskrit research, having grouped them in three categories: linguistic parallels; literary figures and motifs; and then the etymologizing of possibly cognate mythological figures.

From a modern perspective, it is striking that there is only a small number of etymologies that, at a closer look, turn out to be incorrect or far off the mark. Instances where Stokes followed Siegfried and yet failed to prove a reliable linguistic connection from the point of view of a modern-day scholarship are few and far between. Basing my assessment on the work carried out by Vendryes, Lambert and Matasović,<sup>52</sup> I have noted only five such examples: linking Old Irish *aigean* with Sanskrit *āsayāna*; n.pr. *Art* with *ṛta* 'just'; *béscna*, taking the word in its meaning 'language, nation' with *bhanati* 'says'; *céile* 'servant' with *carati* 'moves about'; and *sáim* 'pleasant' with *svādu* 'sweet, pleasant'. Otherwise, in the majority of other instances (thirty in all), Stokes' (and, ultimately, Siegfried's) remarks on Celto-Sanskrit etymologies were far ahead of its time, and pre-empted the development of comparative Celtic linguistics.

Stokes' mythological reconstructions, intriguing and thought-provoking as they were, should be regarded as a totally different issue, and it is far from certain whether they have had stood the test of time. Furthermore, some of his conclusions as regards the 'prose-and-verse form in narrative' have been criticized, and yet, his valuable observation regarding the legal practice of 'fasting against' crops up now and again in various works dedicated to the early Irish law.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Vendryes et al., *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien* (Paris, 1959–); Ranko Matasović, *Etymological dictionary of Proto-Celtic* (Leiden, 2009). <sup>53</sup> See Daniel A. Binchy, 'Irish history and Irish law', *Studia Hibernica*, 15 (1975), 7–36 at 24–6, and the most recent discussion in Fergus Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin, 1988; repr. with revised bibliog., 2009), p. 241, with some bibliographic details provided on p. 182 n. 29.