HUNTING THE DEER IN CELTIC AND INDO-EUROPEAN MYTHOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

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Introduction

This chapter explores various mythological concepts concerning the domestication of space and the taming of wild nature, the hunt of the deer as the epitome of the process, including its subject (‘the hunter’) and the object (‘the prey’), the interrelationship between the two and their interdependence on each other for their subsequent survival and success. The data provided by the Irish written sources, as well as by the iconographic depictions of the deer hunt in Continental Celtic and medieval Irish monuments, together with data of a comparative mythological nature, confirms that the domestication of space by a hero of a semi-divine status by way of hunting is a central feature of various Indo-European traditions, in which various religious figures embodying the veneration of wild nature are found.

The deer as primary beast of prey

The earliest attestation of the OIr. word seth ‘deer’ is contained in the saga ‘Scél Tuain meic Cairill’, in which the protagonist speaks about his shape-shifting experiences, one of them being ‘in the form of deer’ (i rricht sétha). This rare word is also attested in RIA MS G 2: tredon seth i. damh ‘[the lifetime of] a deer, i.e. a stag, is three times [that of] a human being’. In a similar list in NLI MS G 1, f. 38 v 4, seth is glossed as seabhac ‘hawk’, whereas in TCD MS H. 3.18, p. 35, seth is spelled as seg. Ó Cianáin glosses seth as damh ‘stag’.

In his study on the ‘Celtic “deer”’, Václav Blažek scrutinised the insular Celtic designations of such zoonyms as ‘deer’, ‘stag’, ‘wild animal’, etc., as well as their cognates. Seeking the ultimate meaning of the OIr. seg ‘deer’, Blažek follows the hypothesis postulated earlier by Joseph Vendryes, who ‘etymologised the zoonym on the basis of Old Irish segais
f. ‘forest’, seeing the semantic motivation in ‘wild’ = “forest animal”.? Vendryes ‘collected several convincing parallels: OIr. fiadmíla ‘wild animals’, where fiad means ‘venison, game’; Mod. Ir. fiadh ‘deer, stag’, OIr. fid ‘forest’, Welsh gwydd ‘wild’: Welsh gwydd ‘forest, trees’, Latin silvāticus ‘wild’: silva ‘forest’. To this Blažek added examples from Old Indic sahya m. ‘name of the seven principal ranges of mountains of India’, sahra- and sahira m. ‘a mountain’. OIr. segais ‘forest’ and Old Indic designations of mountains determine the semantic field ‘wilderness’.

Another study of the collocations in relation to the semantic field ‘wilderness’ in OIr. was carried out by Kim McCone. He proposed that the OIr. word fian(n) ‘the band of roving warriors’ (earlier equated by Meyer ‘with an erstwhile Lat. *vena underlying venari “to hunt”’ ) ultimately derives from < *wēd-nā with the same element as seen in OIr. fiad ‘wild, game’, MW guyd, OBret. guoid ‘wild’ < *wēd(w)-o- (< *uēd-); compare OEng. wāð ‘hunt’ < uoīHd-), evidently related to OIr. fid ‘wood’, OW/Bret. guid ‘trees’ < *wid-u-. fian(n), then, was derived, in all likelihood, from wēd- ‘wild’ by means of a collective suffix *-na.

The semantic range with which the OIr. word denoting the deer is connected is that of ‘hunting’. Thus, segánach ‘wild-deer hunter’, ségduine ‘deer slayer’. Examples are also provided in Gaulish (*segus[t]ios ‘hound, hunting or tracing dog’).12 Blažek also points out that the designations of ‘hound’ motivated by the word ‘deer, stag’ appear for example in Welsh hydd-gi, lit. ‘stag-dog’.13 This semantic chain is confirmed by examples in Sanskrit: mrgā m. ‘stag, deer, fawn, forest animal or beast, game of any kind’, mrgayā f. ‘hunting, chase’, mrgayū ‘hunstman’, mrgayākukkura ‘hunting dog’.14

All in all, the common semantic denominator for ‘deer’ is ‘hunting’. The wild animal, ‘deer’, is hunted by the ‘hunting-dogs’ in the ‘forests’ (out in the ‘wilds’), etymologically interpreted as the ‘hunting grounds’. That the ‘deer’ is the key to research the ‘taming of the wild’ cluster of motifs will become evident in the following discussion.

**The separate spheres of wild and tame**

I now move on to the mythological context of ‘the taming of the wild’ cluster of stories in the early Irish sources. I propose to look at such stories not as embodiments of the pre-Christian mythological tradition, rather seeing in them codes ‘of good conduct in which the mythological
tradition is packaged for a contemporary audience' 15 of the Christian medieval era.

The origins of things described in such narratives do not necessarily imply their sacred character; the interactions between the first inhabitants, and the establishment of the first social institutions ‘represent “founding charters” for society’. 16 The passage below describes the circumstances in which the first hunt in Ireland and the first judgment that followed it had been carried out:

What was the first judgment that was passed in Ireland? And who was the one who passed? And who passed it about whom? Not difficult. Eber, son of Miled and Eremon landed at the river-mouth of Feale and it was not related there was any human in Ireland. Then Eber with his men went to the mountain to hunt and they killed twelve deer. Eremon was still with his people making dwellings and preparing food. The people of Eber said to the people of Eremon that there was not any food for them from the prey that they killed since it was not their work. The judgment of Amargen son of Miled which he had testified [followed]. 17

MS Rawl. B 512 contains another version of the story. It mentions that the dispute originated between the Tuatha Dé Danann, the former inhabitants and masters of Ireland, and the newly arrived settlers, the Sons of Míl, over the division of the cattle or the deer (in breth eter cheithre 7 oisa ‘the judgment concerning cattle and deer’). 18 Although the interpretation of the latter version is difficult, it is clear that the two contending parties in both versions of the legend of the first hunt present two opposing sides of the medieval Irish cosmology: we have the settled society represented by the people of Eremon building houses and cooking food in the first version, and by the Sons of Míl taking over the domesticated cattle in the second version, as opposed to the wild environment epitomised by the hunters of Emer and the Tuatha Dé Danann, who were satisfied with the wild stags. In both versions, the myth of the first hunt drew a sharp distinction between the settled society and the wild one, between the status of the fertile land (and the settled society that cultivates it) and that of the wilderness (and the hunters who keep their abode in the latter).

The rite of passage which allowed a young male to cross from one status/community into another is expressed in the apt and laconic statement of Tecosca Cormaic: fènmid cach co trebad. It is normally translated as ‘everyone is a fian-member until he becomes a property owner’. 19 I am
inclined to propose a more literal understanding of the passage, taking trebad as a verbal noun of trebaid ‘ploughs’, and translate ‘everyone is a fian until [his] ploughing’. In this regard, let us recall the significance of ploughing as a ritual practice associated with starting a new agricultural cycle and symbolising the cosmogonic domestication of the landscape. The importance of ploughing as a marker distinguishing a settled society from an unsettled community is upheld by the legend of the foundation of Rome, when at the point of the city’s foundation Romulus marked its sacred boundary with a plough drawn by a white bull and a white cow.20

The pursuit of the deer as symbol of sovereignty

The connection of the ideal royal hero with a beautiful maiden and the successful hunt that ultimately leads the hero to her has been explored by Celtic scholarship since the study by Risteard A. Breathnach, ‘The Lady and the King: A Theme of Irish Literature’: the hero obtains his sovereignty through ‘a hunt, in which the hero is victorious over a wild animal, a search for water (in a royal cup), the encounter with the puella senilis, the coition, and finally, the metamorphosis of Sovereignty’.21 Rachel Bromwich, examining the Celtic mythology of kingship, extended her research into the Old French and Arthurian literature.22 In literary compilations considered by these scholars, the chase of the White Stag symbolising the sovereignty obtains magical character and is characterised by transformation and metamorphosis of the animal being hunted into the sovereignty figure thus metaphorically described.

Such understanding of the rightful kingship connected via the royal lineage with various zoomorphic characters is put forward in the genealogies of the medieval compilation entitled Cóir Anmann, ‘Fitness of Names’, which contains abundant data relating to the Early Irish prosopography. It is worth noting that the image of the ‘fawn’ is explicitly employed as representing the idea of kingship:

The five sons of Dáire Doimthech, i.e. the five Lugdaig . . . Dáire asked his druid: ‘Which one of my sons will take kingship after me?’ The druid said: ‘A fawn with a golden sheen on it will come into the assembly and the son who captures the fawn will take the kingship after you’. Afterwards a fawn came into the assembly . . . Dáire’s sons followed the fawn . . . And Lugaid Laígde caught the fawn.23
Moving from the Old Irish tradition, I would like to connect the image of the ‘little fawn’ found in the popular etymologies of the Cóir Anmann, with the figure of Oisín (whose name means ‘little deer’), son of Finn. Although necessarily a later story, the legend of the finding of Oisín (similarly to that of Óengus Osairge of Cóir Anmann) among the deer is found in a modern Irish tale collected by Douglas Hyde from John Dempsey (Culleens, Kilglass, Co. Sligo) in June 1901: ‘They set the dogs on Oisín, but when Bran came at the place – she was the hound of the king – she recognised the blood of the king . . . They brought him home, shaved and cleaned him, made a fian of him.’

The hunt scenes of the Irish High Crosses and the continental Celtic iconography of the deities of the wild

The iconographic evidence depicting the fian hunters becomes widespread in insular art in the Old Irish period (especially in the eighth- to ninth-century AD Pictish sculpture and the Irish High crosses). That a distinctive motif of Insular art depicting the hunters with their hunting dogs chasing the wild animals pre-dates the Old Irish period and goes deeper into Celtic antiquity can be proved by looking at the Continental data, the celebrated example of the iconographic evidence being three inner panels of the first century BC Gundestrup Cauldron:

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 fian roaming the mountains.

The Gundestrup cauldron is explicit in presenting a supernatural figure, probably, a deity connected with hunting, surrounded with animals and humans – Cernunnos – (lit. ‘Horn God’) symbolising the wild. Proinsias Mac Cana, referring to the ‘characteristic ‘Buddhic’ posture’ of Cernunnos (see Figure 6.1 below for illustration), points to the numerous Eastern analogues of the motif, and hints at ‘a common source of dissemination in the Near East’.

That such a common source of the depiction of the Stag God could have originated in ancient Anatolia is registered in the Lycian and Hittite linguistic data, as well as in the late eighth-century BC Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions found in south-east Anatolia. These inscriptions present the
figure of the Anatolian pantheon, analogous to Celtic Cernunnos, ‘the iconographically familiar Stag God’.\textsuperscript{33} According to Calvert Watkins, ‘the figure on the Schimmel rhyton standing on a stag and labelled in gold with the hieroglyph for “antler” CERVUS\ldots This god is known in Hieroglyphic Luvian logographically as (DEUS) CERVUS, (DEUS) CERVUS\ldots\textsuperscript{34} Such inscriptions were connected with the belief that the Stag God as the lord of the wild animals provided the royal hunter with prey and guaranteed his authority.\textsuperscript{35}

Besides the cross-legged seated Cernunnos, one finds other depictions of the Stag God venerated by the early Celts. My example is the figure of the forest deity depicted on the stela from the mixed Roman–Celtic third-century AD sanctuary of Donon in the upper Bruche valley in Alsace, containing an additional image of the stag standing behind (Figure 6.2).\textsuperscript{36}
FIGURE 6.2 Strasbourg Archaeological Museum: Stag God. Grandfontaine, Donon, third century AD.
Yet, one cannot be sure that no Roman influence could 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.37

The transformation of St Patrick and his followers into a herd of deer

In the Irish narrative tradition, hunting was also associated with the bands of roving warriors, the fiana. Despite the negative attitude of the clerical compilers to the members of the warrior associations expressed in the injunction of the Aipgitir Chribaid – cetharda fo-[ff]era fiannas do duiniu .i . . . etar-díben sāegul; ar-cuirethar piána, ‘the four things that the participation in the fiana causes to mankind: . . . it cuts off life; [and] it lengthens torments’38 – the association between the fiana and St Patrick’s mission does not present a problem for the Patrician hagiographers, and may well go back to St Patrick’s writings themselves.39 I am inclined to connect the theme of the fiana and that of hunting with the following episode from the Life of St Patrick by Muirchú, in which the saint and his followers are transformed into a herd of deer, followed by a fawn.

Patrick . . . blessed his companions, eight men with a boy, . . . and the king counted them as they went along; and suddenly they disappeared from the king’s eyes; instead, the pagans merely saw eight deer, with a fawn, going, as it were, into the wilds.40

This episode received further attention from Jacqueline Borsje41 and John Carey. Following McCone’s study, who ‘observed that Muirchú’s writing “has many of the dramatic and suggestive qualities of native Irish saga”’,42 Carey proposed to take the theme of transformation by Patrick and his followers to be derived from ‘the repertoire of vernacular narrative in the seventh century’.43

Borsje highlighted the fact that the description of the herd of deer escaping the wrath of King Lóegaire contains not just the mature stags as members of the herd, but also a little fawn.44 Although one finds a clear reference to Benignus, who becomes the successor of the saint after his death, I am also inclined to explain the reference to a fawn not only as a retrospective device characterising the interplay of the hagiographic source with the vernacular Irish narrative tradition (hero’s chase of the fawn symbolises the chase for kingship), but also as a prospective device to
be used by the later compilers of the Patrician texts connecting legends of Patrick with those of Oisín, possibly drawing on the meaning of the name Oisín as ‘little deer’ or simply a ‘fawn’.

Moving further, to disentangle this description as to what was really meant by this passage, the saga ‘Finn and the man in the tree’ contains an intriguing comparandum. In the saga, the main character Derg Corra flees from Finn on account of the latter’s wrath, due to a young girl’s affection to him in preference to Finn. Finn gives him three days and three nights to escape, and ‘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’. When finally Finn finds him in the wood, the fiana do not recognise him: ‘for they did not recognise him on account of the hood of disguise which he wore’. The key word to the understanding of the passage is celtair ‘cover’, translated in the previous sentence as ‘hood’. The H.3.18 Old Irish glossary interprets celtair .i. etach núa .i. ni maith con-tui[tet] cotucar a láth ass ‘c., i.e. a new clothing, i.e. it is not good when they fall down so that his plumage is taken from him’. Kaarina Hollo notes that celtair is not a standard word for a hood; it is something which conceals, often magically or miraculously. She invokes an example from Bethu Phátraic in which Patrick and his companions are saved from King Lóegaire by a dícheltar that causes them to appear as deer. The word can be explained via the OIr. dichleth ‘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 a bit further, I am inclined to argue that in the passage under discussion from the Life of St Patrick by Muirchú, we are not dealing with the transformation of Patrick and his followers, but rather with the putting on of some form of a camouflage so that the followers of the saint can go into hiding in the woods. This camouflage, if we are correct in interpreting this metaphor through a theme of ‘covering’ rather than that of ‘transforming’, helps Patrick with his followers to take the form of the wild creatures, probably putting on 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 which I referred to above (Fig. 2). 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? It is hardly probable, yet taking into account the connection of St Patrick with the fiana which I proposed earlier, 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 that of proper contenders for power, and having overcome Patrick’s counter-protagonist, Lóegaire, who failed to chase his magical fawn of kingship.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, suffice it to say that the hunt as the pivotal happening in the career of the hero attracted a rich store of semiotic codes of a mythological character. These codes include the liminality and the unconquered character of the wild environment; its antithesis to the arable land filled with connotations of fertility and profit; the representation of the figure of the king as the hero hunting for his sovereignty, symbolised in the image of the magical fawn, representing an ideal adversary to be tamed; and the figure of the Stag God – the patron of the hunt and the facilitator of royal foundations and prosperity. All these and many more details have been woven into the tapestry of stories and themes connected with the taming of the wild across centuries, continents and cultures.

**Notes**

1. I would like to thank Emily Lyle for her interest in my contribution, and also for the opportunity to speak at the ‘Thinking about Celtic Mythology in the 21st Century’ conference at the University of Edinburgh, 20 November 2015; I am also indebted to Prof. Victoria Vertogradova of the Institute for Oriental Studies (Moscow) for her invitation to present the talk at the annual Roerikh readings, 2 December 2015, and to Prof. Erich Poppe for his invitation to present the talk at the Celtic Studies research seminar at The Philipp University of Marburg, 19 May 2016, and to Dr Ilya Yakubovich for drawing attention to Luwian and Lydian parallels. I would also like to thank Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for facilitating this research through an award of the Fellowship for Experienced Researchers.


4. The text presents a catalogue of different lengths of life of various elements and creatures, contained in ‘the earliest compilation of traditional material after the Book of Leinster’ ascribed to Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (d. 1374). Its editor remarks that it is ‘a very archaic piece of lore, and was doubtless committed to writing . . . in the Old Irish period’. See James Carney, ‘The Ó Cianáin Miscellany’, *Ériu*, 21 (1969), 122–47 (p. 129).
5 Carney, ‘The Ó Cianáin Miscellany’, p. 130, is unsure of the meaning of the word *seth* (*tredon seth* ‘a hawk (?) three times a human being’), besides ‘it seems impossible to choose between that of *seth* or *seg(ḥ)*’.


7 Blažek, ‘Celtic “deer”’, p. 121.


16 Davies, ‘Venerable Relics’, p. 166.


19 McCone, ‘Celtic Origins’, p. 16; Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Tecosca Cormaic: The Instructions of King Cormaic Mac Airt* (Dublin, 1909), p. 10, § 31, translates ‘every one is a roving warrior till he takes up husbandry’.

20 Ovid, in the fourth book of the *Fasti*, lines 819–26, reports that Romulus marked the boundary (Lat. *pomerium*) of Rome with oxen and plough. See James George Frazer (trans.), *Ovid’s Fasti* (London and New York, 1931), pp. 248–51.

Rachel Bromwich, ‘Celtic Dynastic Themes and Breton Lays’, *Études Celtiques*, 9 (1961), 439–74 (p. 443, n. 4). In referring to the ‘Celtic’ mythology of kingship, I do not necessarily aim at reconstructing pre-Christian beliefs surrounding kingship in pre-Christian Ireland. Rather, the word ‘Celtic’ here is appropriate to designate the commonality of the insular and continental medieval literary traditions of Britain, Ireland and Brittany.

Sharon Arbuthnot (ed.), *Cóir Anmann: A Late Middle Irish Treatise on Personal Names* (London, 2007), pp. 96–7, § 72. The royal dynasty of Osairge, according to the compilation, also claimed their ancestry from the deer – the founder of the dynasty, Óengus Osairge, was originally found among the herd of deer and then introduced to human society (see Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann*, p. 82, § 26).

Douglas Hyde, ‘Scéalta ar Oisín’, *Béaloideas*, 2 (1930), 253–60 (pp. 253, 258). Hyde refers to the story on the Isle of Skye, where the same legend was still current.


The native origin of these scenes is not disputed (see Isabel Henderson, ‘*Primus inter pares*: The St Andrews Sarcophagus and Pictish Sculpture’, in Foster, *The St Andrews Sarcophagus*, pp. 97–167 (p. 134)); they are, however, connected to the so-called David Cycle, and also occur on the sculpture in Dál Riata, Iona. John Soderberg paid attention to the image of the deer on Irish crosses that functions both as a symbol of Christ and as an emblem of immunity, concluding that ‘monasteries and deer were closely associated with each other in a manner that identifies monasteries with a realm beyond royal or secular control’. John Soderberg, ‘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). That the picture is more complicated 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’ (Aleks Pluskowski, ‘Animal Magic’, in Martin Carver, Alex Sanmark and Sarah Semple (eds), *Signals of Belief in Early England* (Oxford and Oakville, 2010), pp. 103–27 (p. 116), citing Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Culture in Early Medieval Pastoral Literature* (Toronto, 2005), p. 144). Although this instance refers to the establishment of the Christian institutions in England, it can be shown that one could speak with caution of similar practice in Irish society, as well as ‘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’ (Pluskowski, ‘Animal Magic’, p. 116). See, for instance, the episode of the church foundation at Armagh by St Patrick, who ‘found there a doe with its little fawn lying in the place where there is now the altar of the northern church at Armagh’ (Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *The
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Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh. Scriptores Latini Hiberniae X (Dublin, 1979), p. 113) which could be interpreted along similar lines.


28 McCone, ‘Celtic Origins’, p. 28.


30 Mac Cana, Celtic Mythology, p. 39. On p. 41 he writes about the analogy ‘between Cernunnos “lord of the animals”’ on the Gundestrup cauldron and the Indian god who appears on the seal from Mohenjodaro: ‘Like Cernunnos he is horned, sits cross-legged, and is flanked by various animals. It has been suggested that he is a prototype of the god Shiva in his aspect as Pashupati, “Lord of Beasts”’. This figure provides another parallel to Celtic Cernunnos and the Luwian K(u)runtiya just mentioned, and attests to a widespread diffusion of this belief, not necessarily of Indo-European provenance.


32 According to Hawkins, ‘the Hier. Stag-God Runzas is known as the late form of Hitt. Empire 6 KAL (= Kurunta), who was already at this date identified with Rešeph, especially in the latter’s Hurrianized form, Iršappa, in the Ugarit god-lists. One would suppose that the epithet sprm attached here to Rešeph was intended to define the god more closely to bring him into line with the established character of the Stag-God as the god of wild beasts’ (John David Hawkins, Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions (Berlin and New York, 2000), vol. I, part 1, § XL, 212, p. 63).

33 Watkins, ‘Celtic Miscellany’, p. 15.

34 Watkins, ‘A Celtic Miscellany’, p. 15; see pp. 16–17 for further iconographic representations of the deity on the seal of Kurunta and the stag god (in human form) at the Yazilikaya.

35 ‘A royal hunt was thus a religiously sanctioned attribute of kingship . . . In later centuries the hunting of deer by the king was a ritual act of great significance, involving sacrifices to earth, mountains, and rivers . . . found in

36 Strasbourg Archaeological Museum, Inventory no. Donon 58.29. I am inclined to explain the iconography of the Donon stele as primarily Celtic with signs of Roman influence. Dr Dagmar Bronner kindly drew my attention to the deer figure from Stuttgart Württemberglandes Museum (‘Hirschfigur aus dem Brunnen der Viereckschanze von Fellbach-Schmiden’, inv. no. V 86.8) 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’ (my trans., original in Heike Schröder (ed), *Kunst im Alten Schloß* (Stuttgart, 1998), p. 36). See also Bernhard Maier, *Die Religion der Kelten: Götter – Mythen – Weltbild* (Munich, 2001), p. 78. 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.

37 See, for example, a votive relief to Diana and Silvanus from Freisenheim dated to AD 100 kept at the Archäologisches Museum Colombischlössle, Freiburg. Compare also altars on the Roman road leading from Strasbourg to Rottweil devoted to Silvanus found at Eigenting (AD 160; Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe) and Diana Abnoba found near Mühlenbach in Kinzigtal (AD 193, Freiburg Archaeological Museum) and near Badenweiler.


39 In his *Confession*, St Patrick speaks about his travels around Ireland when preaching the Gospels, and refers to the payments he made to the kings and their sons: ‘Sometimes I gave presents to kings – over and above the wages I gave their sons who travelled with me – yet they took me and my companions captive. On that day they avidly sought to kill me, but the time had not yet come. Still they looted us, took everything of value, and bound me in iron’ (Thomas O’Loughlin, *St Patrick: The Man and His Works* (London, 1999, p. 83). James Carney (*The Problem of St Patrick* (Dublin, 1973), p. 67), expresses a view that Patrick had an earlier association with members of a *fian* (‘bound together in mutual loyalty under a leader, and admission to whose company involved the Irish pagan rite of breast-sucking’) who brought him back to his fatherland from captivity.

40 *Patricius... benedictis in nomine Iesu Christi sociis suis octo uiris cum puero uenit ad regem ac numeruuit eos rex uenientes statimque nusquam conparuerunt ab oculis regis, sed uiderunt gentiles octo tantum cerus cum hynulo euntes quasi ad disserum.* In Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 90–1.

41 Jacqueline Borsje, ‘Druids, Deer and “Words of Power”: Coming to Terms with Evil in Medieval Ireland’, in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm
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(eds), Approaches to Religion and Mythology in Celtic Studies (Newcastle, 2008), pp. 122–49, p. 126, argued that the image of the herd 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’. Borsje recently presented a more nuanced and balanced solution in ‘Celtic Spells and Counterspells’, in Katja Ritari and Alexandra Bergholm (eds), Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past (Cardiff, 2015), pp. 9–50 (pp. 24–5).


44 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”’.


46 Binchy, Corpus Iuris Hibernici, p. 1071.3a (compare H 3.18, 633.23: lóth gl. clúmh ‘plumage’).


48 Borsje, ‘Deer’, p. 142, interprets the word dicheltair as ‘a covering, concealment, disguise, invisibility, an invisibility spell’.


50 Note that the protection of the saint’s followers was reinforced by the composition of the lorica by the saint on the occasion, which is literally translated as ‘a breast-plate’. See Borsje, ‘Deer’.

51 Suffice it to say that a number of the Pictish cross-slabs contain images of semi-naked deer-hunters wearing some covering on their backs which can be taken to represent short cloaks or possibly animal hides. See Iain Fraser, The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 52–3 (fig. 58, Eassie cross-slab, NO34NE 4, a naked warrior with a small shield and a hide/cloak on his back on the face of the slab), pp. 56–7 (fig. 65.2, a cross-slab from Kirriemuir, NO35SE 20, depicting a man wearing a fur-trimmed cloak on his back on the left and the hounds hunting deer on the right), pp. 92–3 (fig. 128, Shandwick sandstone slab, NH86SE 4 depicting the deer hunt on the reverse with warriors partly naked, partly clad in short cloaks/hides).