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## INTRAMUNDANE ASCETICISM AS A BASIS FOR ORGANIZING IRISH MONASTERY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

### Abstract

The work aims to study the features of the organization of the early medieval Christian society based on the development of intramundane asceticism as the basis of worldly activities with the aim of the natural arrangement of the world under the commitment to the conceptual vocation. The need to update the research study on this issue of inciting contradictions in ideas about the essence of Irish Christian culture. The chronological scope of the study is limited to the period of the 5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The lower limit of distribution with the birth of the Irish Christian mission and the appearance of the first missionary monks. The upper one is limited to the 11<sup>th</sup> century - a period of weakening of the Irish Church, rains of Viking raids, and later - the Anglo-Normans.

The paper reflects the main features of the formation of Christian culture in the territory during the early Middle Ages, traces the evolution and reveals the characteristic features of the dynamics of the culture of Irish monasteries, and reveals the role of Irish monasteries in the development of modern culture. The article uses general scientific methods and methods of historical analysis.

*Keywords:* monastery, Ireland, intramundane asceticism, European culture, Christianity, early Middle Ages.

### Literature Review

The question of the development of Irish monasticism based on inner-worldly asceticism has been little developed in the works of modern scholars.

Scientific interest in the culture of Ireland in the Russian public church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This topic was included in the work at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, performed by the authors: L. P. Karsavin, O. A. Dobiash-Rozhdestvenskaya, M. E. Shaitan, G. E. Afanasiev. In the Russian scientific literature of the Soviet period, issues related to mythology, poetics, and the study of Celtic languages are broadly disclosed. In the years described above, issues related to the pagan heritage of the ancient Celts, Celtic mythology, and the purpose of the

Celtic peoples are considered more. This circle of questions was replaced, for example, in the works of S. V. Shkunaev.

In the Russian-language scientific publication devoted to Ireland, we have come across the work by G. V. Bondarenko, where much attention is paid to the Celts' mythology and pagan cultural heritage.

A fascinating attempt in the study of early medieval Ireland is studying the theme of the pilgrimage of Irish monks. This topic is reflected in the dissertation work of F. S. Corandea.

Works by T. A. Mikhailova are devoted to the semantics and features of the Old Irish language, issues of mythology and folklore and Irish culture and history. The works of V. P. Kalygin and A. A. Queen.

Other Russian-speaking Celtologists also

work in work by O. A. Zotova, A. R. Muradova, N.Yu. Zhivlova (Chekhonadskaya), N. A. O'Shea (Nikolaeva) and others.

Although the issues of the Celtic, particularly Irish heritage research, aimed at religious research, in particular, have been covered, the task of a holistic reconstruction of the cultural characteristics of the early medieval Irish monasteries, identifying their characteristics in the centres of medieval Christian culture, has not been set yet.

### Main Part

It is assumed that the emergence of Irish monasticism is associated with asceticism, namely with one of its types – “intramundane asceticism”. This type of asceticism is intended for worldly activities to rationally arrange the world based on a religiously understood vocation (Donini, 1989). Here, the central place is occupied by the individual's way of life and the ways of salvation, which are purely individual. This means of saving and changing the world was chosen in early medieval Ireland.

The organization and hagiographic dispensation of an ordinary life necessitated the obedient execution of the rule and obedience to the abbot, the introduction of discipline and uniformity (a visible expression is in the uniformity of clothing and the daily routine).

Religious philosopher Lev Karsavin noted that the rank of abbot was often inherited (through numerous cousins) within the dominant, patronizing (endowed) family of the monastery. As the head of his monastery, the abbot led the entire Christian life of the clan, which made it possible to form original monastic churches independent of one another and of Rome (Karsavin, 1912).

According to the charter, life in the monastery was an “ordinary” life, without extremes, excesses, fasting, vigils and prayers with daily two meals a day and sufficient time for sleep. At the same time, the satisfaction of basic needs (in housing, clothing, food) was carried out at the expense of common funds belonging to all. This

was the realization of the idea of the community of property. Physical labour was not considered a necessary tool of asceticism or a means of maintaining life support but was an element of spiritual ethics arising from the departure of a Christian from worldly life. Furthermore, obedience to the abbot was seen not so much as an ascetic feat of overcoming one's own will but from the standpoint of the functionality of the community (Exle, 2000). Through preaching, illuminating books, the feat of medicine, night vigils, simplicity in food, and short-term fasting, “intramundane asceticism” was realized as a personal way to save the individual within society with a change in society itself based on religious unity. The cenobitic way of life also established the limits of asceticism (Elanskaya, 2001).

The origin of monasticism in Western Europe takes place under the strong influence of the previously established Eastern monasticism, which received a warm response in the hearts of Christians. However, this influence is not exclusive. Persecution and persecution force some of the eastern monasteries of Syria and Palestine to flee to Romanesque Gaul.

However, the monasteries themselves in Western Europe appear much later due to different rates of Christianization (Donini, 1989). Subsequently, the origins and forms of monasticism will impact the church's way of life and organization, both in Europe, Ireland, and Russia.

The uniqueness of the development of Christianity in Ireland lies in the fact that the Romans never conquered Ireland: after the Romans left Britain and the pagan Jutes, Angles and Saxons invaded the island, the Christian Church of Ireland found itself in complete isolation from the rest of the Christian world. It was forced to seek other ways of development. This period gives rise to a particular development of Irish Christianity, bringing it closer to the beliefs of the Druids. The spread of Christianity throughout Ireland was facilitated by the development of monasticism (a conceptual diagram of the development of Irish monasticism is shown in Fig. 1).

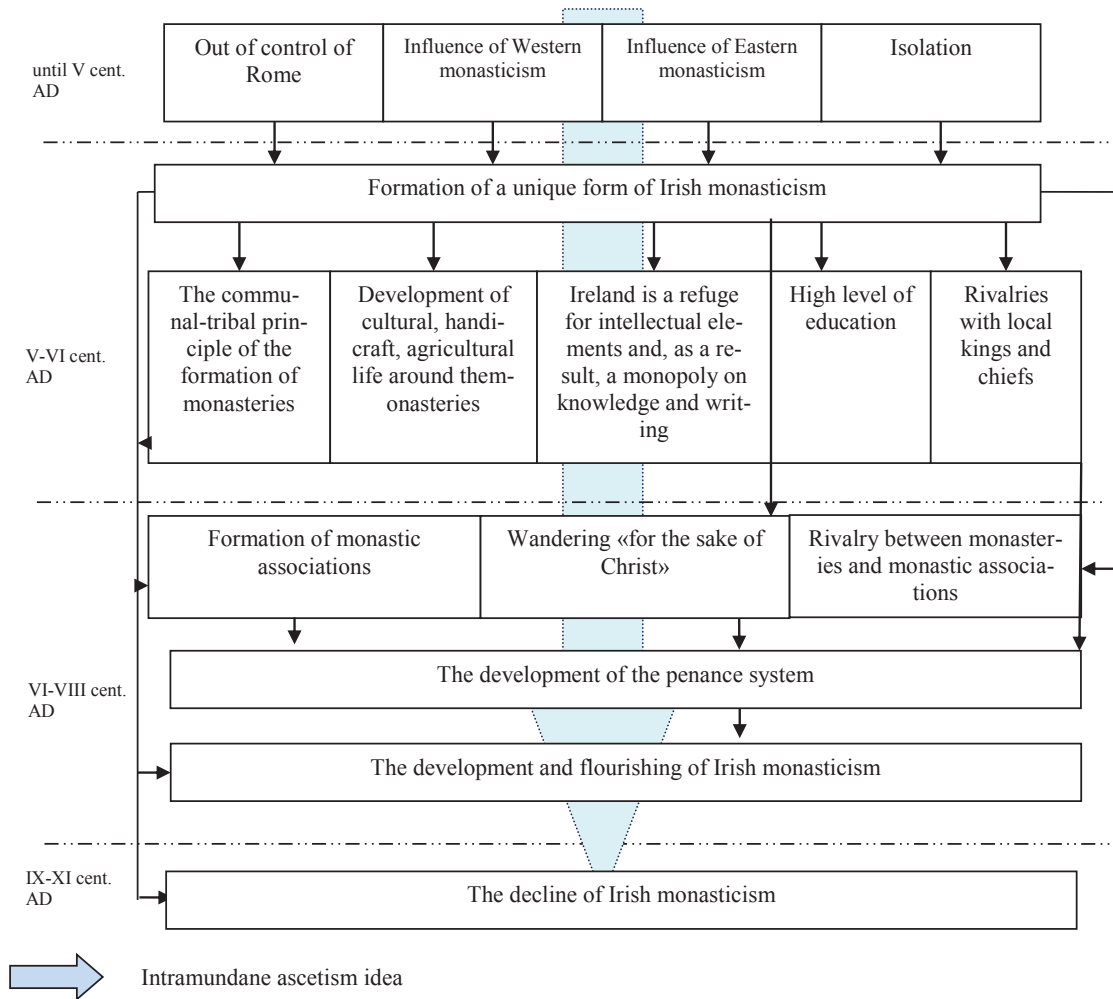


Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of the Development of Irish Monasticism.

The composition of the monastic brethren is most often found in the habitat of the territory in which the monastery was located. Therefore, many members of the monastic community were tribesmen and relations with each other were built on a family basis managed by the entire head of the clan or clan, who converted to Christianity, secured the consent and support of the genealogies, allowed the monk-missionary to found a monastery and build a church on the territory of his homeland. Part of the communal-tribal lands was transferred to the ownership of the monastery. Such a monastic community was called the “tribe of the saint” (Uskov, 2001).

By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Irish monasteries already covered large social centres around

which the districts’ entire cultural, craft, and agricultural life was built. It is essential to note that there were no cities in Ireland. The whole life of the islands rested on a system of farms and small villages. Therefore, the first Irish monasteries became something like proto-cities. In ancient Irish texts, many abodes directly refer to “civitas”, from the Latin word for “city”. Moreover, the abbots of such monasteries refer to themselves as “princeps” - a Roman term for criminal prosecution against a senator, proconsul or even an emperor (hence the word “prince”).

A unique precedent in the history of the Middle Ages. In the conditions of unrest on the continent, during the period of the Great Migration, many intellectual elements found their refuge in

Irish monasteries, remote from the bubbling European cauldron. By the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the usual Roman administration, the institution of state advisers and other state structures collapsed on the continent. Under such conditions, the virtual monopoly on knowledge and the desk of the Irish abbots are indispensable advisers at the courts of leaders both on the island and on the continent.

The Irish abbots were well aware of what they treated in Europe. Collecting the remnants of ancient culture in their cloisters, assimilating the church name of the Roman polis to the monastery, attaching the title of Roman magistrates to themselves and turning the robes of consuls into a cassock, they naturally acquired the Roman Empire virtually. For this reason, they will play a vital role in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Carolinas began to “restore” the Roman Empire, collecting the ancient heritage literally bit by bit (Dobiash-Rozhdestvenskaya, 1917).

On the one hand, this state of affairs allowed the Irish monastery to increase its spiritual potential, influence the political climate, organize missions, and maintain a high level of education. By the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, many royal offspring from the continent went to study in Irish monastic schools, known throughout Europe for their good manners and education. On the other hand, the abbots of the Irish monasteries, having acquired the title of Princeps and leading large, by the standards of their time, industrial and financial centres, began to compete with the “flaith” – local kings and leaders. Soon the process of turning monastic settlements into cities, and abbots into princes, begins to be reflected in the internal monastic order.

An interesting feature of the Irish Christian tradition is the involvement of entire monastic groups in non-territorial associations subordinate to the jurisdiction, confederation or parousia of their founder and his successors. Monasteries established strong allied relations among themselves, forming the basis for creating church federations, similar to federations of tribes and clans. Often the nature of these relationships

takes the form of subordination or dependence (Moroshkin, 1872).

Bishops who lived in them or wandered around the country, who did not have church authority, were subordinate to the monasteries (Dostopochteniy Beda, 2001). The clan’s territory usually determined the bishop’s diocese, and he himself was in kinship with members of the clans. That spiritual positions became the monopoly of particular families. It should be noted that the Irish Christian tradition often involves the combination of the office of abbot and bishop in the person of one person (Sokolsky, 1882).

Competition between monasteries, which by the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries acquired a colossal influence not only on the spiritual but also on the political life of society, sometimes went beyond the acceptable. We meet repeated examples of merciless battles between monasteries for the right to possess a high status or a revered shrine.

Monasteries played a significant role in the politics of the kings. In this regard, their exclusivity claims had unfortunate consequences. Many Irish kings, protecting and guarding the abbeys on their territory, easily crushed and devastated the same monasteries on the territory of a defeated neighbour. They were not against Christianity as such but against a rival monastery that had become the stronghold and symbol of their enemy.

In addition to conferring an exclusive status, the ambitions of large monasteries also served another purely spiritual purpose. As already noted, city life inevitably influenced the monastery. The strictness of rules and regulations weakened. In such conditions, the assignment of great saints to the abbeys was intended to preserve the old ideals. It is not in vain that in many statutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, one can find complaints of abbots that the high requirements bequeathed by the founding fathers are no longer observed.

All these prevailing conditions contributed to the formation and development of the ancient Irish penitential system. It was characterized by the absence of the influence of bishops as representatives and custodians of ancient ecclesiastical

law. Irish bishops and presbyters could not significantly influence the punitive system of the church since they belonged to a well-known monastery and were subordinate to its abbot (Sokol-sky, 1882).

The organization of monastic discipline and its rules are also of particular importance. The Irish Church provides for excommunication in extremely rare cases, while public penance is not applied at all. A special place is occupied by private, personal repentance. It represents the performance of individual pious deeds, the composition of which was determined and imposed on the penitent by the priest after a secret confession. The ancient Irish sacred canons, collections of penitential rules, the so-called penitentials and synodiks (Pashuto, 1968). These works contained an accurate quantitative and qualitative idea of the measure of atonement for a specific sin. At the heart of the penitential system lies a punitive principle, where individual penitential deeds of piety have an independent significance in relation to all categories of sinful deeds, both grave and light.

In contrast, in the universal church, pious penitential deeds have acquired independent significance only concerning the lightest sins. The punishment system extended to monks and lay people in the Old Irish Church. In secular law, a system of retribution also operated - the offender must compensate the violated right to the offended or his relatives.

Moreover, sin is presented in terms of the rights inherent in God in relation to people; therefore, their violation should give God a certain recompense so as not to have retribution in the afterlife (Philip, 1961). Subsequently, both punitive systems - secular and ecclesiastical - begin to be replenished and supplemented by one another. Often secular and ecclesiastical courts were held by the same bodies. Such a close merger resulted in the frequent replacement of pious deeds with a monetary contribution.

In addition to monetary fines, pilgrimage to holy places as a form of punishment is widely used. Thus begins the active movement of the

Irish to the holy places in Europe, in the holy land and Syria. The Irish wander in a large group, which is confirmed by the large hospices of Europe, which arose around the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The Irish white clergy were family, and the church positions themselves could be inherited (Moroshkin, 1872). The “disciples” were also not subjected to rupture of family relations. Rome condemned this fact because the monks lived in monasteries with families. However, according to the charter, the monks took the family to the monastery in compliance with the rupture of marital relations. Archaeological findings of presbyteries confirm this: temples without four rafters in the nave. Inside the building, there is a wall separating the female and male halves of the monastery - this feature is typical only for Celtic Christianity (Kuzmin, 1988).

Literature remains the main eyewitness of all the events that took place. Its sources help us imagine the Celts’ life and way of life before the invasion of the Vikings and later - the Normans. In the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, Irish monks made records and memoirs of their early saints (Shabanov, 2016). Often, the images of saints were epic by nature and imbued with antiquity’s spirit. This is evidenced by the surviving records in the manuscripts of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and later lists (Celtic Monasticism. Statutes of the Old Irish Church, 2016).

The lives of the saints are filled with information about the construction of monasteries and chapels in oak groves, near springs, along the shores of deaf lakes or on foggy islands far in the ocean. Each monastery built its own small church (usually built of logs). With the number of monks, new small-sized temples were erected, and more spacious ones were not built since the ascetic lifestyle was valued. This was uncharacteristic of the continental Churches with their growing material support. According to the Eastern model, many monasteries arranged secluded places for solitude: a retreat, a desert, where a monk or nun could remain alone for prayer.

The “Life of the Monk Karantok” (XII century) says that the saint, before building a new

Church, threw a portable wooden throne into the sea from a boat, and the temple was laid in the place where the waves carried the throne ashore (Shabanov, 2018).

For the Celts, who did not know the cities, monasteries turned not only into arks of spiritual salvation but also into shelters, where there was a place for both handicrafts and literary work. In a short time, the monasteries grew throughout the Green Isle: Clonmacnoise (Clonmacnoise, founded in 545), Derry (Derry, founded in 546), Durrow (Durrow, founded in 553), Bangor (Bangor, founded in 525), Nendrum (founded between 490 and 497), Glendalough (founded in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century) and many others.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most unusual thing in the history of Irish Christianity is the “wandering for Christ’s sake.” Even in the time of St. Patrick, wandering monks - peregrines - chose for the sake of Christ precisely such a path of “white martyrdom”, in which the need for eternal self-exile was combined with a sense of high religious duty. Sailing off the coast of Ireland, the monks hurried to meet holy places and people unlike them, and, most importantly, they hurried to get closer to God.

The culture of the Orthodox East greatly influenced Irish monasticism. An indirect confirmation of this seems to be the architectural similarity between the Syrian and Irish temples of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. S. S. Averintsev writes that the Celts perceived themselves as bearers of the Orthodox or “Syro-Coptic tradition” (Elanskaya, 2001).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, travelling Irish saints became a fairly common activity. The most famous were the journeys of St. Columba (Colmcille) to Iona and Scotland, St. Aidan to Lindisfarne and Northumbria, St. Columban and St. Gallus to Luxey, to Lake Constance (Switzerland) and Lombardy.

J. Le Goff calculated that during the 200 years of the Irish mission, about 115 holy men ended up in Germany, 45 - in France, 44 - in Britain, 36 - in the territory of modern Belgium, 25 - in Scotland and 13 - in Italy. If most of the saints

are legendary personalities coming out of folklore, then this confirms even better, as Bernard Guillemin noted, what a deep imprint the Irish monasticism left on the mentality and feelings of the Western world. Moreover, this Celtic wandering was a real salvation for Europe, which almost died from barbarian invasions. Europe needed missionaries (Karsavin, 1932).

The monasteries founded by the Irish soon turned into education centres and shelters for wanderers. The Peregrines themselves called themselves “Christian cheering”. Their “jubilation” was associated with the triumph of faith, culture and knowledge.

However, from the 730s, Irish missionary work began to be suppressed, and itinerant preachers fell out of favour. They are showered with insults for “wordy deceit” and “cunning deceit”. Anglo-Saxon missionaries under the rule of St. Benedict appear on European roads. The Benedictine Rule, ceasing to be one of the forms of monasticism, becomes a way of life (Par excellence) of the emerging church.

Irish monasticism and the Peregrine movement may have directly influenced the monastic orders that arose on the continent in the early thirteenth century. The Dominicans, especially the Franciscans, consciously imitated Ireland’s travelling missionaries and preachers in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.

However, after the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Ireland began to rethink its attitude towards missionary travellers. Furthermore, the ascetic ideals of “white martyrdom” outside of Ireland have become impossible to realize. “White martyrdom” was replaced by “green”. The new monks closed themselves in their cells (as prescribed by the Charter). Some began to search for solitude in their homeland, outside the monastery walls, far from trade routes and, most importantly, away from worldly life. Thus, intramundane asceticism gave way to strict asceticism. Moreover, the invasion of the Vikings led to the final destruction of the practice of peregrines and the disappearance of the traditional early medieval Irish monasticism.

## Discussion

The scientific novelty developed by the authors is due to the study of the early medieval Christian culture of Ireland as a holistic phenomenon based on the development of the inner-worldly asceticism that forms it. In contrast, earlier researchers focused only on its individual aspects. The expansion of the scope of the study made it possible to avoid fragmentation in consideration of the topic.

The study contains qualitatively new information about the Christian culture of Ireland, which was achieved through the analysis of a large number of sources, as well as the study of monuments of the artistic culture of the designated period. Appeal to such little-studied aspects of Irish early medieval culture as the interaction of Celtic, Mediterranean and Anglo-Saxon types of culture within the culture of Irish monasteries made it possible to identify new factors that led to the phenomenon of the flourishing of Irish monasteries in the 5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Conclusion

Summing up, it should be noted that both the Catholic and Orthodox churches venerate many early medieval saints, most of whom were monks. It was the monastic cloisters that, at a particular stage, became the centres of concentration and development of spirituality, education and culture in the east and west of the Christian world. The early medieval monasteries of Ireland harmoniously combined the cultural traditions of the west (primarily Celtic) and the east, initially emerging under the strong influence of Egyptian and Syrian monasticism.

Irish monasticism filled the socio-cultural niche in Irish society, occupied by the Druid class before the Christianization of Ireland.

The following features characterized Irish monasticism:

- intramundane type of asceticism;

- the desire for education (intensive training of monks at monasteries);
- missionary activity (the foundation of monasteries outside of Ireland and the conversion of pagans to Christianity);
- the emergence of a patriarchal system of management of the monastery with the abbot at the head as a result of the rootedness of family traditions;
- remnants of matriarchy (abbesses headed mixed monasteries; high social and cultural level of abbesses; women's cults, such as the fire of St. Brigid);
- conservatism and the preservation of national traditions, the result of which was a liturgical practice different from the Roman one ("Celtic rite");
- development of penitential practice (transformation of ancient church repentance into private confession).

In Ireland, one can see an example of the synthesis of intellectual culture and religious Christian asceticism, which is of great interest in studying the history and culture of the Middle Ages.

All this served as fertile ground for forming a wonderful, multifaceted and original cultural Christian tradition, which, despite its extinction by the period of the mature Middle Ages, left a noticeable mark in the culture of many European countries.

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