

Bachal Ísu: the Symbolism of St. Patrick's Crosier in Early-Medieval Irish Hagiography

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Introduction

The image of a saint's staff, or *bachal*, bears significant symbolism in the early medieval Irish hagiographical¹ tradition, which can be seen from the texts of Saints' Lives, and with the help of *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints* by Dorothy Bray (1992). Miraculous staffs appear in Irish hagiography with high regularity and are employed by Irish saints to bless, heal and curse (Bitel 2007). This paper is dedicated to the analysis of the symbolism of one particular pastoral staff—the crosier of St. Patrick, in later lives known as the Staff of Jesus (*Bachal Ísu*).² Acknowledging the complex nature of Irish hagiography, which can be viewed as an amalgam of pre-Christian beliefs, 'popular religion', and the continental hagiographical canon, my intention here is to investigate the symbolism of the *Bachal Ísu* as a literary construct. Dorothy Bray reasonably remarks that the Lives of Irish saints were works created by the literate for the literate (Bray 2001, 270), and, in this paper, I will treat Irish hagiography as such. Thus, I will be viewing the *Bachal Ísu* as a symbol consciously constructed by Irish hagiographers with regard to preceding literary Christian tradition. I will trace the origin of St. Patrick's staff by looking into written Christian sources, which could have directly or indirectly influenced Irish hagiographers (Bray 1992, 17–20). I have analysed the relevant staff-related passages from the texts of the Apocrypha, the Vulgate and *Patrologia Latina*, focusing on keywords such as *virga*, *baculum* and *sceptrum*.³ These passages are compared with selected quotations from the early medieval lives of St. Patrick, which are typologically grouped into six major categories

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- 1 The paper builds on and develops the ideas presented in the proceedings of the Seventh Celto-Slavica Colloquium held at Bangor University, Wales (2014), which are yet to be published in the first half of 2017.
 - 2 In the earliest Irish Lives of the seventh century, the staff of St. Patrick has no name, while, in the later *Vita Tripartita*, the staff is called *Bachal Ísu*, which translates as 'Staff of Jesus'. This is not to be confused with the staff of Jesus in Judeo-Christian tradition that will be discussed in the first part of the paper. The terms 'staff' and 'crosier' are used interchangeably in the paper.
 - 3 The difference between *virga* and *baculum* in the Vulgate is not always evident: very often these two words are interchangeable. However, *virga* is more often associated with the idea of punishment, while *baculum* can be in some instances related to the idea of support. As for *sceptrum*, the meaning is easier to grasp: in most cases it signifies authority.

or motifs according to the function of the saint's staff. Determining the sources, which may have inspired Irish hagiographers, and comparing St. Patrick's crosier with staffs and rods of Judeo-Christian tradition allows me to explicate the unique features of *Bachal Ísu*. This comparison also allows me to distil the ideological messages and references that the readers of the Lives perceived (and the messages and references the hagiographers wanted the readers to perceive) when they read or heard passages associated with the miraculous staff of St. Patrick.

A Staff of Jesus?

While staffs and rods are primarily associated with shepherds and travellers, they have also served as symbols, which identify political and spiritual leaders, as well as messengers and legates. In other words, staffs and staff-like objects often act as symbols of direct or delegated authority. That is why, when we read the words of Jesus, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep' (John 10:11), it is reasonable to assume that a spiritual leader who was in a sense a legate of God and called himself *a shepherd* should possess a staff.

Notwithstanding the fact that nowhere in the New Testament is it mentioned that Jesus actually possessed a shepherd's staff, the earliest Christian authors and artists depicted him with one and reflected upon the significance it could bear. The symbolic functions of the staff in the Christian context were perhaps first explicitly described by Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville. The following lines are cited from *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, an early-medieval Hiberno-Latin text. The source that I have chosen demonstrates that the Irish monks were familiar with the continental tradition of staff symbolism:

Essidorus: ... Huic cum consecratur datur baculus, ut eius indicio subditam plebem uel regat uel corrigat uel infirmitates infirmorum sustineat

Isidore: ... When he is consecrated he is given a staff, so that by its sign he may rule and correct the community subject to him, and sustain the weaknesses of the weak.

Gregorius: Quid per baculum nisi pastoralis cura signatur? Baculus enim sustendat, custodit et regit.

Gregory: What is signified by the staff if not pastoral care? For the staff sustains, defends, and governs. (Flechner 2014, 8, 535–536)⁴

The *imagined* pastoral staff finally emerged as a visible and compulsory iconographic element and found its place in Christian tradition as the episcopal

⁴ See also Bracken 2002.

crosier. But what, indeed, is the origin of the staff of Jesus, and therefore the origin of episcopal crosiers?

In order to make the first approach towards the problem of the staff of Jesus, I now turn to three parallel passages from the Synoptic Gospels, accompanied by a commentary by Augustine of Hippo. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus sends his disciples out to preach and commands: 'take nothing for the way, but a staff only: no scrip, no bread, nor money in their purse, but to be shod with sandals, and that they should not put on two coats' (Mk. 6:8). At the same time, in the parallel passages from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus explicitly forbids his followers to take staffs (Mt. 10:9–10, Lk. 9:3). Augustine of Hippo addressed this problem by stating that in the Bible one word can have different meanings: 'the staff which, according to Mark, was to be taken, bears one sense, and that the staff which, according to Matthew and Luke, was not to be taken with them, is to be interpreted in a different sense' (Salmond 1888).⁵ According to Augustine, there were two staffs: the first symbolizes authority and power (Moses' *virga Dei*, which he used to send the Plagues on Egypt, is a good example); the second symbolizes humility and reliance on God's will (for instance, the *baculus* from Psalm 23, which comforts the believer). The explanation made by St. Augustine was eagerly embraced by Christian literati: the Venerable Bede, Rabanus Maurus and Sedulius Scottus (Hill 2012, 150–154).

The Staff of Jesus in Early Christian Art

In his paper, *The Staff of Jesus in Early Christian Art*, Lee M. Jefferson draws attention to the examples of early Christian catacomb art of the third and fourth centuries which contain 'puzzling images of Jesus performing miracles holding a staff or a wand' (Jefferson 2010, 221). The most common image of this type shows Jesus resurrecting Lazarus by touching him with a rod.

It is noteworthy that in Roman catacombs the resurrection of Lazarus is often placed near the Old Testament image of Moses striking the rock with a rod (Ex. 17:1–7). Moses, according to Jefferson, 'is depicted quite like Jesus in dress and style as he touches the rock with his miracle-working staff, a mirror image of Jesus' instrument' (Jefferson 2010, 228). Jefferson concludes that 'the artistic examples illustrate an insistent desire to connect Jesus and Peter to Moses in paint, in stone, and in the minds of viewers.' (Jefferson 2010, 222)

In these images, the authority and legitimacy of Jesus was being proved through the authority of Moses. Jesus is shown as the New Moses, in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy. Considering the fact that Moses is the most notable miracle-worker of the Old Testament and Jesus is the greatest miracle-worker of the New

5 See also Hill 2012, 151.

Testament, and that the miraculous powers of the former were associated with the staff of the latter, it seems logical that the two were iconographically connected through the depiction of similar instruments in their hands.

Furthermore, let us turn to the role of Peter in early Christian catacomb art. On the image labelled *Anatomy Lesson*, which is found in the catacomb on Via Latina, we can see a figure surrounded by a group of people; one of them is pointing a rod at the recumbent figure that seems to be a corpse (Jefferson 2013, 169). Jefferson proposes that:

...the, painting demonstrates the inherent dominion of the church by rendering the miracle of raising the dead to life, in this case performed by the disciple brandishing the staff-like instrument, a disciple that can be identified as Peter... an image exhibiting apostolic authority over the church on earth (2013, 172).

The logic of iconographic metaphors in these images can be hypothetically reconstructed as follows. Moses had the *virga Dei*, which symbolized his divine authority over Israel and allowed him to work miracles. His authority as a miracle-worker and leader was unmatched until the coming of Jesus. In these early Christian images, Jesus is the symbolic heir of Moses, and one can assume that he symbolically inherited the wondrous *virga Dei*.⁶ Although Jesus is no longer physically present in this world, he has left an heir—St. Peter—and therefore the images of Peter performing miracles with a staff represent apostolic succession.⁷

6 Of course, Jesus is God, and from this angle, Moses' *virga Dei* was, in a sense, given to him by Jesus. To continue this casuistry, according to rabbinical commentaries, Aaron and Moses shared one rod (Yalk. on Ps. ex. § 869). In another legend, God created this rod on the sixth day of Creation and it first belonged to Adam (Ab. v. 9, and Mek., Beshallah, ed. Weiss, iv. 60), see 'staff' and 'Aaron's rod' in Jewish Encyclopedia 1906. These examples cannot be linked with Irish material, for they emerged much later, but they still serve as illustrations of basic recurring patterns of staff symbolism. These patterns may, of course, go beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition; see for instance the 'imperishable rod' of Agamemnon described by Pausanias: 'Of all their objects of worship the people of Chaeronea venerate most the sceptre which Homer says Hephaestos made for Zeus, which Hermes received from Zeus and gave to Pelops, and Pelops left to Atreus, and Atreus to Thyestes, from whom Agamemnon had it. This sceptre they worship, naming it a spear; and that there is something divine about it is proved especially by the distinction it confers on its owners' (Shilleto 1900, 216).

7 The passing of the baton is generally a perpetual process and it is reasonable to assume that St. Peter should have left his staff to the popes of Rome. However, according to the medieval legend, St. Peter gave his staff to his disciple, Eucharius, so the latter could resurrect his colleague, Maternus. St. Eucharius became the first bishop of Trier, and the fact that the staff of St. Peter ended up in Trier was used as an explanation for why the Pope of Rome does not use the crosier; see Pugin 1868, 195.

Jesus—the Rod of Jesse

The final point concerning the staff of Jesus will be made from the perspective of genealogical symbolism. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the Hebrew terms for 'tribe' are *shebbet* or *matteh*, and the same words also signify 'branch', 'rod', 'staff', 'sceptre'. In the Book of Isaiah, there is a passage which was often referenced in the New Testament as a proof of the true messianic nature of Jesus Christ: *et egredietur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet*, 'There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots' (Isaiah 11:1). The Tree of Jesse is a separate and complicated Christian concept, but even this preliminary glimpse into the prophecy of Isaiah and genealogical metaphors gives us one more link between Jesus and staff symbolism, for, in this instance, Jesus himself becomes a staff.

Staffs in Irish Hagiography

After a brief speculation on the symbolism of the staff in Christian tradition, I now turn to Irish hagiographical material. I believe that nowhere in the early-medieval Christian hagiographical tradition did a crooked staff develop into such a prominent symbol as in the Lives of Irish saints. Whereas Irish saints employed their *bachala* when cursing enemies and protecting allies, destroying pagan shrines and founding monasteries, their counterparts from Continental Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East mostly relied on oral formulas to perform miraculous deeds.

St. Patrick's crosier, in later lives known as the *Bachal Ísu*, is the first miraculous staff to be regularly mentioned in early medieval Irish hagiographical literature. The crosier of St. Patrick is an excellent example of an Irish *bachal*: not only did it help the saint to heal and curse, but it was also an essential tool in the baptism of Ireland—arguably the most important episode in the Christian history of the island. To illustrate the symbolic function of St. Patrick's staff, in this part of the paper, I examine the six most prominent staff-associated motifs.

The Sign of Recognition

I will begin with the two Lives of St. Patrick, the first compiled by Muirchú, the second by Tírechán. Both lives were created towards the end of the seventh century and are the earliest known examples of Patrician hagiography except for *Confessio* and *Epistola* where the objects of interest are not mentioned (White 1905).

In Muirchú's work, known as *Vita sancti Patricii*, the staff is mentioned only once in a prophecy which predicts the mission of St. Patrick: *Adueniet ascicaput cum suo ligno curuicapite*, 'There shall arrive Shaven-head, with his stick bent in the head' (Bieler 1979: I.10). The crooked stick is a characteristic element that distinguishes the saint: it is the object that will allow the people of Ireland to recognize him as the legate of the new faith. It is also important to note that the

stick is ‘bent in the head’. A curious analogy can be found in Irish iconography, particularly Irish early medieval stone reliefs: Lisa Bitel writes that the crooked staff is sometimes the only element of the image that makes it possible to identify a figure on a relief as a Christian cleric (Bitel 2007).

The description of the form of the staff in the passage allows us to assume that it is not just any *stick*, but a Christian symbol primarily associated with pastoral care and church authority. Although the staff of St. Patrick does not have a name in Muirchú’s text, the hagiographer explicitly compares the saint with Moses, the most prominent staff-bearer of the Old Testament (Bieler 1979: I.2; II.5).

The Instrument of Resurrection

According to Tírechán’s *Collectanea* St. Patrick and his followers came across a gigantic tomb at some point during their travels. St. Patrick’s disciples doubted that a man of such size ever existed, so the saint raised the body from the grave:

Si uolueris uidebitis eum eidixerunt uolumus et percussit baculo suo lapidem iuxta caput eius et signauit sepulchrum signaculo crucis et dixit aperi domine sepulcrum.

‘If you wish you shall see him,’ and they said: ‘We do,’ and he struck the stone on the side of the head with his staff and signed the grave with the sign of the cross and said: ‘Open, o Lord, the grave.’ (Bieler 1979, 40)

The theme of resurrection is one of the cornerstones of Christian teaching and is explicitly illustrated in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–44). The story of Lazarus and the episode from the *Collectanea* do have some similarities: (1) a spiritual leader and a group of people in doubt or even disbelief, (2) a gravestone, (3) the public raising of the dead person by invoking the power of God. It is important for our case, however, that Jesus uses an oral formula, whereas, in the case of St. Patrick, the oral formula is supported by the employment of the staff. An episode of resurrection where a staff is mentioned can also be found in the Old Testament, in the Second Book of Kings. Prophet Elisha gives his servant, Gehazi, a staff (*baculum*) and sends him to resurrect a dead child (II Kings 4:29). Gehazi fails to fulfil the mission and Elisha raises the child from the dead without the help of the staff. Although the object of interest is presented in the story of Elisha and Gehazi, the biblical episode differs greatly from the one in *Collectanea*. The connection between the theme of resurrection and staff-like objects (rods, sceptres, sticks and branches) can also be typologically reconstructed through the symbolism of the palm branch, which connotes victory over death in Christian tradition (Danielou 1964). Branches of almond, palm tree and other plants (depending on the region) similarly symbolised blossoming and rebirth in the mythologies of Ancient Egypt,

the Middle East and Ancient Greece, but I intend to avoid this avenue of thought and limit the focus to Christian sources.⁸

The Instrument of Divine Creation

All of the following episodes are taken from the *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*, which was compiled in the ninth century and significantly influenced the later lives of St. Patrick. Here the saint's staff is for the first time called *Bachal Ísu*, a circumstance, which not only focuses the reader's attention on the instrument, but also inevitably makes its semantics more complex.

In the first passage of interest, the hagiographer draws a curious picture of a realm around crosiers: *Ticfat tailcind conutsat ruama, / noifit cella, ceoltigi bédacha / ben[n]chopuir ili: fla[i]th himbachla*, 'Adzeheads will come, who will build cities / Who will consecrate (?) churches / pinnacled music-houses / Many conical caps (for belfries), a realm round crosiers' (Stokes 1887, 35). Later, St. Patrick is shown measuring Rath Airthir: *Dororaind Patraic Raith nAirthir abachaiill duantith*, 'Patrick measured Rath Airthir with (?) his crozier' (Stokes 1887, 71). Then the saint symbolically measures the site of the future monastery of Armagh (Stokes 1887, 237).

These episodes indicate a strong connection between the idea of construction of future sacred locations and the image of St. Patrick's staff. Armagh and Rath Airthir have yet to be built, and Ireland has yet to become 'a realm round crosiers'.⁹ St. Patrick acts as a divine architect, employing his staff as a measuring rod. This image closely resembles the episode from the Book of Ezekiel: *et in manu viri calamus mensurae sex cubitorum et palmo: et mensus est latitudinem aedificii calamo uno, altitudinem quoque calamo uno*, 'and in the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits long by the cubit and an hand breadth: so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed' (Ezek. 40:5). A similar image is found in the Revelation: *Et datus est mihi calamus similis virgae, et dictum est mihi: Surge, et metire templum Dei*, 'And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God' (Rev. 11:1).

8 As for Irish saints employing bachala to heal and resurrect, see: Stokes 1890, 179 (St. Columba resurrects a youth who was bitten by a snake); Stokes 1890, 287 (St. Mochua saves Ireland from the Yellow Plague by absorbing the disease into his staff); Bray 1992, 129.

9 It is likely that the idea that Armagh was founded with the use of Bachal Ísu (thus not only according to the will of the saint, but also with the divine sanction of Jesus himself) allows the hagiographer to make an investment in the ideological capital of the monastery; see McCone 1984.

The Instrument of Punishment

St. Patrick is known for destroying pre-Christian places of worship. In *Vita Tripartita*, the saint points *Bachal Ísu* at pagan shrines and idols, which results in their destruction (Stokes 1887, 91). Sometimes, the saint marks pagan flagstones with the sharp tip of his staff (Bray 1992, 102). The action leads to destruction, both physical and ideological. After destroying one pagan shrine, St. Patrick threatens the worshippers, saying that his crosier can easily carve human flesh:

Dofornde Patraic crois isindlice conabachaill, ocus atá and beos dísert for leic Patraic, ocus roben incloich amal bid ere maeth. ‘Manibataimnet,’ ol Patraic, ‘nut scáilfeth nert cumachta Dé amal roscail in bachall in cloich’.

Patrick marked out with his crozier a cross in the flagstone, and cut the stone as if it were soft clay. ‘If I were not patient with thee’ saith Patrick, ‘the might of God’s power would cleave thee as the crozier cleft the stone.’ (Stokes 1887, 79)

The phenomenon of cursing saints in the Irish context is extensively discussed in the works of Lisa Bitel and Dorothy Bray (Bitel 2007; Bray 2003). The employment of staffs as instruments of punishment may have come to Ireland from biblical texts, particularly from the Book of Exodus. The rod of Moses was a necessary tool in bringing all the Plagues to Egypt (Ex. 8:16, 9:23, 10:13). The same instrument served as a miraculous war banner in the battle against the Amalekites (Ex. 17:9, 11). The rod as a symbol of punishment can also be found in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: *si iustitias meas profanaverint, et mandata mea non custodierint: visitabo in virga iniquitates eorum, et in verberibus peccata eorum*, ‘What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?’ (I Cor. 4:21).

The Sign of Protection

The staff can symbolize divine protection and support. In the cornerstone episode of the *Vita Tripartita*, St. Patrick communicates with God on Mount Hermon:

[C]oroáirdraig dó inCoimdiu hi suidiu, ocus conerbairt fris techt doprocédupt do Góedilaib, ocus cotárat bachaill nlsu dó; ocus atrubairt ropad fortachtaighthid do hi cech guasacht ocus hi cech écomnart imbiad.

‘And there the Lord appeared to him and told him to go and preach to the Gael, and gave him the staff of Jesus, and said that it would be a helper to him in every danger and in every unequal conflict in which he should be’. (Stokes 1887, 30)

Although this passage incorporates several staff-related motifs, let us, for now, focus on the metaphor for guidance, support and protection. *Baculum*, in the

Vulgate, can sometimes be translated as ‘support’, such as in the phrase *baculum panis* from the Book of Ezekiel (Ez. 4:16; 5:16; 14:13). Furthermore, in the Book of Psalms, there is a line which bears strong resemblance to the passage from the *Vita Tripartita*: *non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es. Virga tua, et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt*, ‘I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me’ (Ps. 23:4).¹⁰

The episode from *Vita Tripartita* describing St. Patrick receiving the order from God ‘to go and preach to the Gael’ (Stokes 1887, 30) resembles the previously mentioned episode from the Gospel of Mark (Mk. 6:7–12). It seems that the hagiographer took one step further and amplified God’s command by including the symbolic bestowal of the staff. In other words, what was an oral command from Jesus to the Apostles in the Bible transforms into a ceremonial performance centred around a miraculous staff in *Vita Tripartita*.

The Sign of Legacy

The second important motif in the above-mentioned passage is the staff symbolizing legitimized authority. St. Patrick received the staff from God, thus becoming God’s representative and therefore the highest possible authority in Ireland. The clearest biblical parallel is the acquisition of *virga Dei* by Moses (Ex. 4:2–20). In both cases, the motif of deputized authority also contains an idea of a covenant, where the staff becomes a symbolic seal and serves as physical evidence of the divine contract between the giver and the recipient. The idea is illustrated in the Book of Zechariah where the staff serves as a metaphor for a pact (Zech. 11:10). In the *Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, a mysterious child gives St. Matthew a rod with the order to go and preach to the land of the man-eaters and to plant the rod so that it will become a tree (Walker 1870, 374).

After receiving the staff from God, St. Patrick begins deputize his disciples by symbolically giving them his staff. In the following episode, Patrick meets Mochoa, a youth who is herding swine:

Ropritchai Pátraic do, ocus rombaitsi ocus romberr; ocus doratt soiscela ocus menistir dó. Ocus doratt dó, dano, fecht aile bachaill tucad doib oDia acénd inucht Pátriac ocus aross inucht Mochue.

Patrick preached to him and baptized him, and tonsured him, and gave him a gospel and a credence table. And he gave him, also, at another time, a crosier

10 *Hinc David ait: ‘Virga tua et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt’. Virga enim percutimur, baculo sustentamur. Si ergo est districtio virgae quae feriat, sit et consolatio baculi quae sustentet.* ‘Hence David says, “Your rod and your staff, they have comforted me” [Psalm 23:4]. For with a rod we are smitten, with a staff we are supported. If, then, there is the constraint of the rod for striking, there should be also the comfort of the staff for supporting’, Gregory, *Regula pastoralis* 2,6 (PL 77, 38).

that had been bestowed on them by God, to wit, (it fell from heaven with) its head in Patrick's bosom and its foot in Mochae's bosom. (Stokes 1887, 41)

Here I should also note that in the episodes where the staff is acquired the object generally comes from the liminal space. St. Patrick acquired his on a mysterious island or on top of Mount Hermon; Mochua's staff fell from the sky (Bray 1992, 99).

Later St. Patrick symbolically gives his staff as a symbol of protection to Conall Gulbán, who earns the right to have an image of the *bachal* on his shield. This will protect Conall and his descendants in battle; St. Patrick names him *Conald Sciathbachall* 'Conall Crozier-Shield' (Stokes 1887, 197). Afterwards, St. Patrick gives his crozier to Muinis:

Forruim Muinis abachaill for cróib. Nos dermanat and inmbachaill ocus lotar ass. Cóiniss Muinis a bachaill fri Patraic. Fosrecaat aracim forecróib. 'Bad do bachallsa bes limsa,' ol Patraic, 'ocus bith indísín latsa,' ocus dognith saralaid. Oin innam mind fil iForgnaidiu insin laMuinis. Erpais Patraic aili deac Erend dó do baithis.

Muinis set his crozier on a branch. They forget the crozier there and went thence. Muinis lamented to Patrick (the loss of) his crozier. They find it before them on (another) branch. 'Let thy crozier be mine,' saith Patrick, 'and let this be thine,' and so it was done. That is one of the relics which Muinis hath in Forgnáide. Patrick entrusted a twelfth of Ireland to him to baptize. (Stokes 1887, 83)

I believe that, in the metaphorical logic of the *Vita Tripartita*, the loss of the staff was not the fault of Muinis. On the contrary, it was the staff that had left the cleric according to God's (the hagiographer's) plan, so that Muinis could acquire a new *proper* staff, which would fit the cleric's new status. In other words, the loss of the old staff and the acquisition of the new one may symbolize a *rite de passage*, which Muinis went through.

Bachal Ísu

Having observed the imagery of the staff of Jesus in Judeo-Christian tradition and staff-associated motifs from the Lives of St. Patrick, we can now approach the problem of the name of the saint's staff. I propose a hypothesis: by constructing the complex concept called the *Bachal Ísu*, Irish compilers of the *Vita Tripartita* were aiming to achieve several ideological goals, thus legitimizing and elevating not only the figure of St. Patrick, but the whole Irish Christian community (Bray 1992, 11).

Firstly, the hagiographers established a solid connection between the narrative of the Old Testament and the life of the saint. As I have shown, in many instances, the staff of St. Patrick resembles the rod of Moses. The resemblance creates a

link between the story of the Apostle of Ireland and the story of one of the most prominent prophets of the Old Testament. This link is of great importance for Irish monks—for, if St. Patrick is the New Moses, then the Irish Christian community becomes the New Israel, the Chosen People. Although this is rather common for the hagiographical genre (Bray 2001, 274), the uniqueness of the Irish case lies in the *Bachal Ísu*, which functions as a prominent symbol of this connection.

Secondly, the passage from the *Vita Tripartita* that shows St. Patrick receiving the order to go and baptise Ireland can be understood as an inclusion in the narrative from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 6:8), where Jesus sends the Apostles to preach and commands them to take a staff for this journey. In order to be embedded in the line of apostolic succession, the saint is being metaphorically transported to the layer of narration where he can receive orders from God himself. The episode's significance is amplified by adding *Bachal Ísu* to the narrative, which serves as a physical proof of St. Patrick's legitimacy.

I believe that the *Bachal Ísu* can be viewed as a multipurpose ideological tool, which functions on several levels. Intratextually, the staff appears to be a tool, which works for the benefit of the Christian community in Ireland, for it gives St. Patrick the divine sanction to perform miracles and illustrates the power of the new faith. On the extratextual level, however, the *Bachal Ísu* becomes a tool, which may be aimed at the outside Christian world, for it solves the problem of St. Patrick not being sent to baptise Ireland by the Pope by supporting the narrative of St. Patrick being sent to Ireland directly by Jesus. By connecting St. Patrick with Jesus and Moses, the *Bachal Ísu* as a literary construct restores the broken link of apostolic succession and turns an ideological problem into an advantage. From the perspective of Church hierarchy, the concept of *Bachal Ísu* transforms a person who could initially be perceived by The Holy See as an impostor into a figure comparable to the First Apostles.

Conclusion

The staff of St. Patrick, also known as *Bachal Ísu*, appears to be a polysemantic symbol, which functions on multiple levels both within and beyond the Irish hagiographical texts. The extraction and categorization of the motifs associated with St. Patrick's staff and the subsequent comparison of these motifs with the staffs and rods of Judeo-Christian tradition reveals the possible sources, which may have influenced the Irish hagiographers. The idea that the staff functions as a specific symbol that makes its bearer recognizable as a legitimate representative of a higher authority who is fulfilling a certain mission (Motif 1) unites all the six motifs analysed in the paper. Although the association of staff-like objects with authority is common for many cultural traditions and is found in the texts and iconographies of Ancient Greece, the Ancient Middle East and Ancient Egypt, I

believe that Irish hagiographers were indeed inspired by the symbolism of the staff in the Vulgate and the writings of Christian literati (primarily Isidore of Seville and Gregory the Great). The staff as an instrument of resurrection (Motif 2) bears strong Christian connotations and the relevant passage from Tírechán's *Collectanea* resembles the biblical story of Lazarus. The passages in which the staff appears to be an instrument of divine creation (Motif 3), an instrument of punishment (Motif 4) and an instrument of protection (Motif 5) have clear parallels in the Vulgate. The staff as a metaphor for legacy (Motif 6) is both the most evident and the most complicated motif of all, due to its inherent ambiguity. It is not possible to state whether this motif was inspired by an exact line from the Vulgate, as it is also found in the Apocrypha, commentaries of Christian authors and early Christian catacomb art.

Finally, when analysed in the context of the images of the staff of Jesus in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the staff of St. Patrick—the *Bachal Ísu*—can be regarded as a complex ideological concept or as a hagiographical tool, which the creators of the saint's Lives used to advance the spread of Christian teachings inside Ireland and promote St. Patrick's legitimacy to the outside Christian world. In the future I hope to continue work on the symbolism of the Irish *bachal* by focusing on the depictions of clerical staffs in early-medieval Irish stone reliefs, for I strongly believe that the comparison of textual and iconographical evidence will bring a new perspective to the research.

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