Phoenician Ireland: Charles Vallancey (1725–1812) and the Oriental Roots of Celtic Culture

Bernd Roling

1 Introduction: Charles Vallancey and His Time

In the eighteenth century Ireland was not the centre of the world.¹ It was a land dominated and exploited by England, with a rural population who were regarded as barbarians at best by the gentlemen at home in the clubs and coffee houses of England's cities. For them, the native language of the Irish was no more than an incomprehensible squawking that needn't be accorded any further significance. Would it not, then, be a magnificent surprise, almost a humbling of Anglophile arrogance, if the Irish turned out to be the descendants of the ancient Chaldees, Phoenicians, Scythians and Indians, the crowning jewel in a chain of heroic acts reaching back into a prehistory, which was able to supersede any other chain of historical events? Would it not be a wonder if the Land of Saints and Scholars, with its ancient monuments, poetry and songs, were the final record of a primordial European people whose wisdom united the learning of the whole ancient East? The history of the early modern period is full of examples of national idealisation, of phantasmagoric constructions that raised one's own people to the skies.² In Ireland's case, in the late eighteenth century this eulogy would be sung by a man of whom one would perhaps have expected it least, namely a general in the British army, whose natural habitat was the aforementioned coffee houses. I will here present this scholar, Charles Vallancey, and his works: I will try to outline the basic elements of his decidedly idiosyncratic construction of history and in so doing set it in the wider context of the history of European antiquarianism, a field not short of eccentrics. A few examples, at least, will be given to illustrate Vallancey's intellectual world, working habits and method; in particular I wish to show that

1 The translations of this paper has been prepared by Orla Mulholland. For helpful discussions I'd like to thank Kristoffer Neville, Koen Ottenheyn, Dorothee Huff and Carmen d'Ambrosio.

2 As basic introductory study see Hobsbawm E.J., "Introduction. The Invention of Tradition", in: Hobsbawm E.J. – Ranger T. (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: 2012 [first ed. 1983]) 1–14.

Vallancey's approach to Ireland was in spirit still beholden to an earlier era, the baroque, whose approach to antiquities will be of special interest to us here.

Charles Vallancey was born in 1725 in Westminster into a wealthy family of French Huguenot origin and had embarked on a military career at an early age. After a posting to Gibraltar, he was transferred to Ireland in the late 1760s, where he was commissioned by the crown to work as a military engineer. After 1770 he would rarely leave Ireland again. As a Royal Field Engineer his sphere of responsibilities primarily involved Ireland's waterways, to which he devoted monographs early in his career. Especially useful was his 1763 handbook, *A Treatise on Inland Navigation*, which summarised and commented upon older works on the topic.³ Vallancey was also responsible for the city defences of Dublin, which proved to be very robust during the great Irish rising of 1798. His work was evidently valued very highly by the crown, for in 1803 he reached the position of general.

Perhaps it was his enthusiasm for technology and the continuous journeys through Ireland required by his work that led Vallancey to find there the great love of his life, namely Ireland herself. At the start of the 1770s he began to take an interest in the history of Ireland and its antiquities and he developed an unrivalled enthusiasm for the Irish language. Thus was launched a research project which over the next forty years – Vallancey lived in fine intellectual fettle to the age of 87 – would launch a veritable battery of publications. The goal was a wide-ranging documentation of the language, culture and antiquities of Ireland, with the aim of doing justice to their exceptional standing. In 1772 Vallancey had set up a commission to assist him in fieldwork and publications. The following years brought him memberships in various learned societies, including the Royal Society in London, though a chair of Irish in Dublin, which he had perhaps hoped for as the pinnacle of his scholarly life, eluded him. Outstanding among his numerous books, which were accompanied by a whole catalogue of essays, are the six volumes of the *Collectanea de rebus hibernicis*, which alone amount to almost 5000 pages; in addition he published seven large monographs, at an average of 500 pages each.⁴

3 Vallancey Charles, *A Treatise on Inland Navigation, or The Art of making Rivers navigable, of making Canals in all sorts of Soil, and of constructing Locks and Sluices* (Dublin, George and Alexander Ewing: 1763), and idem, *A report on the Grand Canal, or Southern Line* (Dublin, Timothy Dyton: 1771). In addition Vallancey published other treatises on the field work of an engineer, see idem, *A practical treatise on stone-cutting* (Dublin, Thomas Ewing: 1766), and idem., *The Art of tanning and currying leather, with an account of all the different processes made use of in Europe and Asia, for dyeing leather red and yellow* (Dublin, John Nourse: 1780).

4 *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* (6 vols.), ed. Charles Vallancey (Dublin, Luke White: 1786–1804).

To understand the English general's system, one must bear in mind some of the basic parameters of his vision of history. In 1723 the first English translation of Geoffrey Keating's seventeenth-century *History of Ireland* had been published.⁵ Keating's history consisted in essence of a reworking of a high-medieval historiography, the *Leabhar Gabhála*, the 'Book of Invasions', the information in which was adopted almost completely by the Irish priest Keating.⁶ Parts of the manuscript transmission of the 'Book of Invasions' itself would soon come into Vallancey's possession.⁷ The *Leabhar Gabhála* was able to provide him with motifs which, while not unfamiliar from other medieval histories, offered an Irish variant on the Biblical Table of Nations which was intended to guarantee for Ireland the first rank in history as recounted in Scripture: After the Deluge the descendants of Noah, the heirs of Japheth and Magog who had set off for the west, had become the ancestors of the Europeans and had founded the people of the Scythians. This nation had migrated first to Egypt and then, in further contingents, to the Holy Land, to Crete and finally to Italy and Spain. As the *Scoti* the Scythians had then become the mother-people of the Irish. These descendants of Noah, so it was reported in the 'Book of Invasions', had reached Ireland in several different waves. A first band of them had made their way there via the Atlantic straight after the Flood; 300 years later a second contingent, which had come through Greece and Spain, had arrived under the leadership of the hero Panthólon; then, according to the *Leabhar Gabhála*, there followed the armies of Nemed, the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann, the clan to which most of the gods belonged, and finally the Mil Espan, the fabled Milesians, whose Spanish origin was evident already in their name and who would become the ancestors of the present-day Gaels.⁸ Condensed versions of this narrative had already been included

5 Keating Geoffrey, *The general History of Ireland, containing a full and impartial account of the first inhabitants of that kingdom, with the Lives and Reigns of an hundred and seventy four succeeding monarchs of the Milesian Race* [...] (London, James Bettenham: 1723). Already 1713 an abridged version appeared, see Keating Godfrey, *History of Ireland*, translated by Dermod O'Connor (Dublin, Abraham Thiboust: 1713). As a bilingual edition see later Citinn Seathrn – Keating Geoffrey, *Foras feasa ar irinn – The History of Ireland* (3 vols.), edited and translated by D. Comyn – P.S. Dineen (Dublin: 1902–1908).

6 As masterly study for the historical setting of Keating, his sources and his influences see Cunningham B., *The World of Geoffrey Keating. History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: 2000), there on his historical writing esp. 105–172, on his use of *Leabhar Gabhála* 136–139.

7 Cunningham, *Keating*, 198–199.

8 Lebor Gabla renn, ed. and translated by R.A.S. Macalister (5 vols.) (Dublin: 1938–1956), see there on the deluge, the dispersal of nations and the heirs of Noah e.g. vol. I, 16–167.

in other classical works of Irish historiography.⁹ Keating had in essence reproduced this history, making the Scythians and the oriental-biblical origin of the Irish had become the key theme of his history.

When Vallancey came across Keating's work, he saw no reason to question its reliability or to regard its medieval authorities with distrust. Previous Irish historians had not done so, either.¹⁰ For Vallancey, however, it was of central importance that it was possible to bring the information in Keating into harmony with 17th and 18th century oriental studies, both with the long-flourishing study of Semitic, but also with the still novel study of Indian languages. Ever since the monumental *Kanaan et Phaleg*, the *Geographia sacra* of the Huguenot Samuel Bochart, the search had been on for the oriental roots of Europe, as well as for an ethnographic legitimation of the Biblical Table of Nations; this had been found above all in a people, the Phoenicians, whose influence, Bochart believed, could be identified throughout Europe.¹¹ According to Bochart, a scholar in the service of Queen Christina, the Phoenicians had become the key bearers of civilisation.¹² Profiting from the new field of Oriental Studies promoted in England by Edward Pococke, John Selden and Thomas Hyde, in Germany by Johann Heinrich Hottinger and in the Netherlands by Jacob Golius and Albert Schultens,¹³ philo-semites like Edward Dickinson and Zachary Bogan¹⁴ and, after them, the very much better known Pierre

9 Cunningham B., *The Annals of the Four Masters. Irish History, Kingship and Society in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: 2010) 78–80.

10 As example before Vallancey: MacCurtin Hugh, *A brief discourse in vindication of the antiquity of Ireland* (Dublin, Stephen Powell: 1717), there on the biblical and Scythian pre-history of Ireland, according to Keating pp. 1–31, and one century earlier MacFhirbighg Dubhaltach, *Chronicon Scotorum*, ed. W.M. Hennessy (London: 1866) 1–15.

11 For a good introduction into Bochart's antiquarian geography and its influence see Shalev Z., *Sacred Words and Worlds. Geography, Religion and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Leiden: 2012), here on the role of the Phoenicians esp. 141–205.

12 Bochart Samuel, *Geographia sacra cuius pars prior Phaleg de dispersione gentium et terrarum divisione facta in aedificatione turris Babel, pars posterior Chanaan de coloniis et sermone Phoenicium agit* (2 vols.) (Frankfurt, Johannes David Zunner: 1681 [first ed. 1646]), there vol. 2, Liber I –II, 361–864.

13 On Edward Pococke's key role in the history of Islamic studies see e.g. Holt P.M., "The Study of Arabic Historians in Seventeenth Century England: The Background and the Work of Edward Pococke", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19 (1957) 444–455, and Toomer G.J., *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: 1996) 116–147, 155–166, 271–279, on Selden in special the exhausting study of Toomer G.J., *John Selden. A life in scholarship* (2 vols.) (Oxford: 2009) passim, on Hottinger Loop J., *Johann Heinrich Hottinger. Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: 2013) passim.

14 Bogan Zachary, *Homerus ἐβραϊζων, sive Comparatio Homeri cum Scriptoribus Sacris quoad normam loquendi, subnectitur Hesiodus ὁμηρίζων*, (Oxford, Henry Hall: 1658).

Huet had begun to trace Greek mythology back to its oriental or biblical substrate. In England already in the seventeenth century scholars like Edward Dickinson, Thomas Smith and Aylett Sammes had been open to investigating even the caste of druids and elements of Celtic religion for possible Oriental foundations.¹⁵ In the eighteenth century this undertaking was superseded by far larger projects and much more ambitious syntheses: these tried to generate grand genealogies of knowledge and chains of filiation that would show that this east-west transfer of knowledge occurred back in the obscure eras of prehistory; or else they worked to devise grand keys to mythology that would reduce all mythologemes and all cultures to a common matrix. The first of these two goals was pursued in monumental and controversial works such as the histories of astronomy and science by Jean Sylvain Bailly, who had relocated the origin of all erudition to the northern regions,¹⁶ and by Pierre d'Ancarville and Antoine Goguet; on the other hand, Antoine Court de Gébelin's *Monde primitif* and Jacob Bryant's *Ancient Mythology* were committed to the latter aim.¹⁷ With almost every one of these works the claims to exhaustiveness and the universal erudition of the authors had grown exponentially.¹⁸

- 15 Smith Thomas, *Syntagma de Druidum moribus ac institutis, in quo miscellanea quaedam sacro-profana inseruntur* (London, Thomas Roycroft: 1664) cap. 6, 69–82; Dickinson Edmund, *Delphi phoenicizantes sive Tractatus in quo Graecos, quicquid apud Delphos celebre erat, [...] e Josuae historia, scriptisque sacris effinxisse, rationibus haud inconcinis ostenditur* (Frankfurt, Johann Conrad Emmerich: 1669) Appendix, 32–40, Sammes Aylett, *Britannia antiqua illustrata, or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain, derived from the Phoenicians* (London, Thomas Roycroft: 1676) cap. 5–6, 38–73.
- 16 In between his many books see esp. Bailly Jean-Sylvain, *Histoire de l'astronomie ancienne depuis son origine jusqu'à l'établissement de l'école d'Alexandrie* (Paris, Debure: 1775), and in German idem, *Geschichte der Sternkunde des Alterthums bis auf die Errichtung der Schule zu Alexandrien* (2 vols.) (Leipzig, Engelbert Benjami Schwickert: 1777), and see against Bailly e.g. Rabaut de Saint-Etienne Jean-Paul, *Lettres à Monsieur Bailly sur l'histoire primitive de la Grèce* (Paris, Debure: 1787), there esp. Lettre IV, 206–259.
- 17 Court de Gébelin Antoine, *Monde primitif analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne* (9 vols.) (Paris, Antoine-Chrétien Boudet: 1776–1783), and Bryant Jacob, *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (3 vols.) (London, Thomas Payne: 1775–1776) (reprint New York: 1979).
- 18 For a still useful and masterly survey of 18th century antiquarianism, regarding mythology see e.g. Manuel F., *The Eighteenth Century confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1959) passim. For an exhaustive survey of the English antiquarianism in the 18th century see Sweet R., *Antiquaries. The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: 2004) passim, there see on Vallancey 143–146, and Heringman N., *Sciences of Antiquity. Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History and Knowledge Work* (Oxford: 2013) 221–308, for the 17th century see in addition Hanson C.A., *The English Virtuoso. Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago: 2009) 126–156.

The whole movement had reached a new level of sophistication through a second factor, which was crucial for Vallancey, namely the study of India and Iran. The advances of the British Empire had already enabled figures such as Alexander Dow, John Holwell, thanks to missionaries such as Paulinus a Bartholomae and his *Systema brahmanicum* Antonio Giorgi and his writings on Tibet, to produce an enormous expansion in European knowledge of India and Tibet. This situation changed fundamentally again with William Jones' *Asiatic Researches* and the work of Charles Wilkins, Francis Wilford, William Ouseley and Thomas Maurice, men who were themselves certainly prepared to indulge in wild speculations. Sanskrit literature had arrived in Europe.¹⁹ In addition to these advances in the study of India, the interior of Asia had been opened up for European study by Russian colonisation, the work of the Petersburg academy and figures such as Philipp von Strahlenberg and Peter Simon Pallas;²⁰ as a result, the Finno-Ugric and Mongolian languages of Central Asia met with almost the same level of interest. That all wisdom and learning, all mythology and religion, had reached the Mediterranean area from the east, and that their essential foundation lay in Indian models of the cosmos, was henceforth not in doubt.

The English general in Dublin made it his life's work to harmonise these barely manageable and at times deeply contradictory master-narratives, whose approaches belonged in part to the seventeenth century, in part to the eighteenth. At the same time, it was also his goal to read them with Ireland in mind, as the most dazzling jewel of human history, and to cite them like a set of scholarly annotations to Keating's essentially pre-modern history of Ireland. The result was a monumental, rambling and overflowing narrative which no one to date has made a serious attempt to reconstruct. Aside from the articles and the magnificent dissertation of Clare O'Halloran,²¹ which devotes a

19 The research on 18th century English Indology has grown, see e.g. the good introduction of App U., *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: 2010) passim; Teltscher K., *India inscribed. European and British Writings on India, 1600–1800* (New Dehli: 1999) passim, and the classical studies of Schwab R., *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: 1984); and Windisch E., *Geschichte der Sanskritphilologie und Indischen Altertumskunde* (Strasbourg: 1917) passim.

20 Tabbert von Strahlenberg Philipp Johann, *Das Nord – und Ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia* (Stockholm, self-published: 1730) (reprint Szeged: 1975). On Strahlenberg's importance for Oriental and Finno-Ugrian Studies in general see Novlyanskaya M.G., Филипп Иоганн Страленберг. Его работы по исследованию Сибири [*Philipp Johann Strahlenberg. His Works on the Exploration of Siberia*] (Moscow: 1966), there 25–91.

21 O'Halloran C., *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations. Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750–1800* (Cork: 2004) 41–56, eadem, "An English Orientalist in Ireland: Charles Vallancey (1726–1812)", in: Lerssen J.Th. – van der Weel A.H. – Westerweel B. (eds.),

chapter to Vallancey, the wideranging and erudite book of Joseph Lennon on 'Irish orientalism',²² and an insightful study of Joseph Lerssen,²³ the only research literature is a 2009 Irish-language work of popular science.²⁴ One reason for this relative neglect may be the fact that Vallancey's work covers thousands of pages. Furthermore, while Vallancey was a euphoric enthusiast for his subject, he was not a great prose stylist, nor, unfortunately, an especially systematic thinker; he often stays in the memory through repetition rather than internal coherence. While the Irish valued him, and perhaps still do, his reputation outside the country was dubious, though he did succeed in getting his theses published as papers in well-known scholarly journals.²⁵ William Jones, who was Vallancey's great role model all his life, wrote him a few lines in recognition of his achievements. In a letter to one of his friends, admittedly, Jones said of him that one should pick up his works and then skim them rapidly, for thus they were funny; alternatively, one could read them right through, in which case they were very boring.²⁶ However, Vallancey's project in Ireland

Forging in the Smithy. National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History (Amsterdam: 1995) 161–174, and eadem, "Negotiating Progress and Degeneracy: Irish Antiquaries and the Discovery of the 'Folk', 1770–1844", in: Baycroft T. – Hopkin D. (eds.), *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: 2012) 193–206, here 198–199.

- 22 Lennon J.A., *Irish Orientalism. A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: 2004), there on Vallancey 88–102, and in addition the article idem, "Antiquarianism and abduction: Charles Vallancey as Harbinger of Indo-European Linguistics", *The European Legacy* 10 (2005) 5–20.
- 23 Leerssen J.Th., "On the Edge of Europe: Ireland in Search of Oriental Roots, 1650–1850", *Comparative criticism* 8 (1986) 91–112, there on Vallancey 99–103.
- 24 Ó Bréartúin M., *Charles Vallancey 1725–1812. Ginearál, Innealtóir agus 'Scoláire Gaelige'* (*Charles Vallancey 1725–1812. General, Engineer and 'Celtic Scholar'*) (Tigh Bhride: 2009), there a survey of Vallancey's antiquarian writings 39–85.
- 25 As example see Vallancey Charles, "Memoir of the Language, Manners and Customs of an Anglo-Saxon Colony Settled in the Baronies of Forth and Bargie, in the County of Wexford, Ireland, in 1167, 1168 and 1169", *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 2 (1788) 19–41, idem, "On the Silver Medal Lately Dug up in the Park of Dunganon, County of Tyrone, the Seat of the Right Honorable Lord Welles", *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 2 (1788) 69–73, or as even more striking example see idem, "Observations on the American Inscription", *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts, relating to Antiquity* 8 (1787) 302–306, commenting on Lort Michael, "Account of an antient Inscription in North America", ibidem 290–301. Using an undecipherable inscription at the 'Dighton rock' at Taunton River close to Boston, Vallancey demonstrated that America was settled by Irishmen in the past.
- 26 Jones William, *The Letters*, ed. G. Cannon (2 vols.) (Oxford: 1970), on Vallancey No. 467 (to Earl Spencer) (1. September 1787), vol. 2, 768–769. On Jones and Vallancey see Lennon, "Antiquarianism and abduction", 12–16.

was by some distance the most ambitious at the end of the eighteenth century and, in its way, perhaps also the most successful.

2 Language Doesn't Lie: Irish as a Linguistic Key to a Glorious Past

Vallancey's key insight was stated by him in 1772 in his first publication, a treatise on the antiquity of the Irish language.²⁷ Here already Vallancey revealed the method to which he would remain committed. Myths could be matched to each other, languages could be grouped in long family trees and in lines of filiation, in order to work back step by step to their archaic substance. The artefacts and historic monuments of the five ancient provinces of Ireland had to be viewed in the context of these quasi-religious hypotheses and philological arguments and so seen in the right light: this would reveal their true nature. In parallel, it was also possible for the traditional knowledge of the long chain of cultural transfers which had arrived in Ireland to be put into the right – namely oriental – setting. As if through an archaic, emerald-tinted, magnifying glass, one could look at Ireland and see back into a thousand-year-old prehistory, the key to which, as Keating had made clear, was to be found in the Scythians, Indians, Phoenicians and the Bible.

In the comedy *Poenulus* by Plautus, one of the main characters, the eponymous Carthaginian Hanno, is allowed to speak in his native language, which at first sight looks like an incomprehensible cant but which Plautus then translates into Latin.²⁸ The question of which language Hanno had used when supposedly speaking Punic had been the subject of much debate. Since Bochart, scholars had been sure that Plautus had given voice to a phonetically written variant of Phoenician, perhaps with some additional elements from a Berber language like Libyan.²⁹ Subsequently some of his editors had attempted to interpret the Latin and Punic textual variants, in some cases with the help of parallels from Maltese, another Semitic language.³⁰ Vallancey, too, offered a

27 Vallancey Charles, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language, being a Collation of the Irish with the Punic Language, with a Preface, proving Ireland to be the Thule of the Ancients* (Dublin, Samuel. Powell: 1772). The text was reprinted 1807, 1818, and 1822 and was obviously quite popular.

28 For modern edition see Plautus, *Comoediae*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, vol. II, Oxford 1953, *Poenulus*, Actus v, Scena 1, verses 930–954.

29 Bochart, *Geographia sacra*, vol. 2, Liber II, cap. 6, 800–805.

30 As example Gronovius Johann Friedrich, *Plauti Comoediae* (Cornelius Hackius: 1669), *Poenulus*, verses 893–895. On the relationship between Maltese and Punic see Maius Johannes Heinrich, *Specimen linguae Punicae in hodierna Melitensium superstitis* (Marburg, Philipp Casimir Müller: 1718) passim.

detailed commented translation of the much cited passage,³¹ and also an answer to the question of which language Hanno had spoken when sojourning in Rome, namely Irish.³² No European language was closer to the Phoenician origins and no surviving language reflected more fully the primordial basis of all languages, the language spoken by the Japhetites immediately after the building of the Tower of Babel, so he insisted in 1772. The Phoenicians had colonised Ireland in archaic prehistory: When their explorers had searched for Thule, Vallancey affirmed, they had come to Ireland; the word *Thule* was identical to the Irish word *thua*, which meant simply 'north'. Had there not recently been found on the coast of Essex an inscription dedicated to Hercules of Tyre? Had not Keating and the 'Book of Invasions' reported the new arrivals from the south, whose outstanding skills had been trade, shipbuilding and knowledge of the stars?³³ A mere glance at the gods worshipped by the Phoenicians and Irish, Vallancey continued, was enough to show how revealing the parallels were. Baal, the god of the Phoenicians, corresponded to the Irish Bel; the first of May, Beal-tine had been a festival of the light god Baal.³⁴ The name of Aesculap, whom the Phoenicians had worshipped on a cliff, could be traced to the Irish words *aisa* and *scealp*, the 'cliff'. The moon goddess Ceres, who, as could be read in Strabo and others, had had a similar significance among the Phoenicians, owed her name to the word *ce* for 'cloud' and *re* for 'moon'; she was, at the same time, the 'queen of the night' worshipped by the Israelites, the *regina coelestis* of whom the prophet Jeremiah had spoken. Did not the women of Ireland even today bake cakes for St Brigid of Kildare, just as the women of Israel had once upon a time done for Jeremiah's 'queen of heaven'?³⁵ Vallancey himself may not have quite grasped that there was a certain logic to identifying the colonised and oppressed Irish people with the Carthaginians, given that British imperialism sought its role models in ancient Rome: it was almost natural to project Ireland's situation onto Rome's eternal opponent, Carthage, and so to ennoble Ireland's marginalisation.³⁶

What reading of history emerged from this striking identity of the Irish and the Phoenicians? In almost all his works, Vallancey programmatically repeats

31 See here esp. O'Halloran, "An English Orientalist in Ireland", 162–164.

32 Vallancey, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language* (1772) 31–59.

33 Ibidem 1–6.

34 Ibidem. 19–20.

35 Ibidem. 21–23.

36 See on this point O'Halloran, "An English Orientalist in Ireland", 164–166, Lerssen, "On the edge of Europe", 100–102, and already Vance N., "Celts, Carthaginians and Constitutions: Anglo-Irish Literary Relations", 1780–1820, *Irish Historical Studies* 22 (1981) 216–238, here 224–226.

his model of a Biblical-Irish history in all his prefaces as well as at strategic points in various individual treatises, in order to set the new findings in the right context.³⁷ The Ark had come to rest in Armenia, as had been shown already by Bochart. After the Deluge the first descendants of Noah, whom Vallancey calls *Mago-Scythae* or just *Coti*, had at first stayed in Armenia for a long period, and had then migrated to the Euphrates region, where they had mingled with the Chaldaeans, scholars of the stars, and on into the Holy Land. In Canaan they had allied with the Dadanites (Dedanites), and together with them formed the people of the Phoenicians and founded the first great city, Tyre. The subsequent stops in the travels of the mother-people of the Irish had at first led them eastwards to Iran and then India, where in the form of Brahmans they were able to gather up yet more knowledge, and from there onwards to Siberia, China and Japan. In possession of the secret knowledge of the Chaldees, of Indo-Aryan mythology and of Indian philosophy in its many branches (of which, however, Europeans of the late eighteenth century had at best only a vague notion), and also able to draw on the nautical-mercantile abilities of the Phoenicians, the nation of the Phoenicio-Scythians had then finally turned westwards, first to Crete and Greece, then to Italy (primarily to its Alpine north, where their echo could be detected most clearly in the Wallis region, Vallancey believed), and then finally, after an excursion to Spain and North Africa, at last – long, long before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the settlement of England – to Ireland, where they had been able to preserve in its purest form the heritage they had gathered over a thousand years. It is hardly by chance that one gets the impression of a caravan of peoples which, at every stop, had been able to load more cultural capital onto their donkeys' backs.

Vallancey's evidence, which was designed to confirm this basic framework and bring it to life, is presented on three levels which cannot be separated from each other, namely language, mythology and finally the actual archaeological remains. At the same time, Vallancey was aware that there were competing models, not least in England, which did not grant to the Irish or Scytho-Celts primacy and a primordial-constitutive role among all western peoples, or which proposed alternative hierarchies. The most striking alternative model was Gothicism, popular above all in Scandinavia, with Danish and North-German variants, which had inscribed not the Goths but the *Cimbri* via Magog

37 A good summary is given e.g. in Vallancey Charles, *An Essay towards illustrating the Ancient History of the Britannic Isles, containing an explanation of the Names Belgae, Scythae, Celtae, Britanni, Albanich, Eirinnich, Caledonii, Siluri, etc., intended as a Preface to a Work, entitled A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* (London, J. Nichols: 1786), and idem, *A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* (Dublin, Luke White: 1786) Introduction 1–62, there esp. 8–12, 22–26, 29–32.

and Gomer into scriptural history. Gothicist models were represented in the English baroque above all by Sheringham and Langhorne;³⁸ contemporaries of Vallancey like John Pinkerton had been able to popularise similar models in the wake of the Ossian debates in Scotland.³⁹ Vallancey was of course familiar with these theses.⁴⁰ Jean-Sylvain Bailly, whom too Vallancey had read with enthusiasm, had proposed a similar kind of approach, but with a Siberian Atlantis.⁴¹ But Vallancey stressed, that the North had been uninhabited before the Scytho-Irish Iranians found their way there from India: all their beautiful theoretical structures had by then already been developed long before, in India. Would the Gothicists themselves not concede that, as reported in the *Edda*, no military leader had found the way to Sweden before Odin at around the time of Christ? Even the name of this ruler of the *Æsir*, the great war-leader and principal god of the *Edda*, was derived not from *Adonai*, the Hebrew name of God, as had been claimed, but from the Irish word *adon*, a word for 'war-leader'.⁴² So the Nordic heroes, too, had, in their essence, originally been part of the Irish people and, according to Vallancey, Scandinavia was populated by its first inhabitants hundreds of years after Ireland.

Arguments like these show that, for Vallancey, comparative analysis of language, the mere identity of words within certain semantic fields, was the key element on which to base all ethnographic determinations. All languages were traced back to Hebrew as the ultimate and elementary substrate, to which Phoenician and Arabic were very close. If the Irish had been of equal standing to the Israelites from the very beginning, then, as we have already seen, it ought to be possible to match up Irish with both Phoenician and the much more accessible Hebrew. Yet the ur-Scythians themselves, over the long course of their formation, must have left their own mark on the relevant languages. 'Language doesn't lie' was one of Vallancey's favourite slogans. His own

38 Sheringham Robert, *De Anglorum gentis origine disceptatio* (Cambridge, John Hayes: 1670) cap. 3, 45–63, and Langhorne Daniel, *Elenchus antiquitatum Albionensium Britannorum, Scotorum, Danorum, Anglosaxonum* (London, Benjamin Tooke: 1675) there esp. 336–341.

39 Pinkerton John, *A Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths, being an Introduction into the Ancient and Modern History of Europe* (London, John Nichols: 1787) Part I, cap. 2–3, 15–41.

40 On Vallancey's reaction to Pinkerton and the related debates see also O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, 57–60.

41 Bailly Jean-Sylvain, *Lettres sur l'Atlantide de Platon et sur l'ancienne histoire de l'Asie, pour faire servir de suite aux Lettres sur l'origine des Sciences* (London, Peter Elmesly: 1779) passim.

42 Vallancey Charles, *An Essay on the Primitive Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland, proving from History, Language, and Mythology, that they were Persians or Indo-Scythae, composed of Scythians, Chaldaeans, and Indians* (Dublin: 1807) cap. 4, 77–83.

grammar of the Irish language, of Ibero-Celtic as he called it, a work reprinted into the nineteenth century, begins with a eulogy of the Irish language, knowledge of which could provide a key to almost all other languages and, Vallancey stressed, really ought to be indispensable, especially, for orientalists.⁴³ It was on this claim that Vallancey thereafter attempted to make good, for the Scythians had reached the furthest regions of the earth. Their language had parallels not only in Ancient Italic, in Oscan, but, as Vallancey is able to show using recent reports from various regions, also in the speech of the Algonkin Indians in Canada, the language of the Berbers in the Niger region, but also the even more exotic languages in the Ural region and beyond, such as Kalmyk and Yakut. The fact that there were tribes among the Tungus or Ostyaks called Kelatec or Kuellen was evidence enough that the proto-Celts had reached these territories.⁴⁴

2.1 *The Irish Inheriting Phoenicia, India, Kanaan and Greece: Vallancey's Great Synthesis*

In 1802 Vallancey brought out a prospect of a whole dictionary of Irish, designed throughout as an etymological dictionary. This work, too, has a long introduction which takes its starting point from the arguments of Vallancey's colleague and, in a sense, kindred spirit, the Sanskritist Francis Wilford.⁴⁵ Wilford believed he could demonstrate that Britain and Ireland had been mentioned in the Puranas, the cosmological writings of India; *suvarna*, the Sanskrit word for 'gold', corresponded to *Hibernia*, the name of Ireland, and even the name of St Patrick had not been unknown to the ancient Indian writers.⁴⁶ Vallancey gratefully adopted Wilford's suggestions and, building on them, he provided an Irish equivalent for almost *every* term in Sanskrit. In passing, as it were, he also shows how the fleur-de-lis, the lily standard of the French, could have had its model not only in the Arabian victory sceptre, the *shar al-az*, and in the sign of the Indian elephant god Ganesha, but also in the first letters of the old Irish

43 Vallancey Charles, *A Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic, or Irish Language, to which is prefixed an Essay on the Celtic Language, shewing the Importance of the Ibero-Celtic or Irish Dialect, to Students in History, Antiquity, and the Greek and Roman Classics* (Dublin, Robert Marchbank: 1782) (first 1773) 1–4.

44 Ebd. 4–14, 33–35.

45 Vallancey Charles, *Prospectus of a Dictionary of the Language of the Aire Coti, or, Ancient Irish, compared with the Language of the Cuti, or Ancient Persians, with the Hindostanee, the Arabic, and Chaldean Languages* (Dublin: 1802) 2–29.

46 Wilford Francis, "An Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West with other Essays connected with that Work", *Asiatick Researches* 8 (1805), 245–368, 10 (1811), 27–157, 11 (1812), 11–152. On Wilford's influence on Vallancey see also O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, 50–51.

line-script, the ogham alphabet.⁴⁷ Vallancey's dictionary is thus not a simple reference work, but is enriched by continuous references not only to Sanskrit and Persian, some of which were indeed fully justified, but also to Hebrew, Arabic and Coptic-Egyptian. Separate treatises gave Vallancey the further option of incorporating even Japanese and Chinese into his nation.⁴⁸

Perhaps the most important instrument used by Vallancey was the analysis of semantic fields. He deployed long commentaries on rubrics that collected terms linked by content to show that the great achievements of the Phoenicians, their most striking qualities – trade and navigation –, had left traces throughout the Irish language. The words for tin or glasswork, examples of which had been collected by men such as John Smith in his *Galic Antiquities* and William Stukeley, had Semitic analogies or were wholly identical and had spread from Ireland to all other European languages, as was demonstrated by the term *gliunn* for glass;⁴⁹ the same applied to milk products, units of measurement and almost all available terms from the sphere of trade, and even for the names of months and terms for time. The latter in Irish, as Vallancey again demonstrated at deadly length, had even more significant parallels to Egyptian. Already in the Ural region the Scythians had mastered wool and linen production, as was known from Herodotus; for Vallancey, the story of the Argonauts, at the heart of which, after all, is the Golden Fleece, must therefore be read as in essence the report of an economic ouster: the Greeks had occupied Scythian Colchis, one of the stops on the long journey of the Irish, in order to take possession of the export goods of the Irish; this had caused the Scythians to migrate onwards into the west.⁵⁰

There was a similarly archaic dimension to script, which in Ireland was represented by the ogham alphabet, an alphabetic script often written vertically, primarily on standing stones. As we may expect, Vallancey managed to incorporate the peculiarities of this type of script, too, into his system: The parallels were only too clear between the Ogham alphabet and the Old Persian Cuneiform in Persepolis, which had just been discovered; its relation

47 Vallancey, *A Prospectus of a Dictionary*, 32–36, and idem, *Rroof* [sic] *of the Ancient History of Ireland* (Dublin, Daniel Graisberry: 1797) 8–24.

48 Vallancey Charles, "The Chinese Language collated with the Irish", *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 3 (1786), 127–160, and idem, "The Japanese Language collated with the Irish", ibidem 161–189.

49 Vallancey, *A Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic* 107–109, idem, *An Essay towards illustrating the Ancient History*, 20–25, and see Smith John, *Galic Antiquities, consisting of a History of the Druids, particular of those of Caledonia, a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, and a Collection of Ancient Poems* (Edinburgh, Charles Elliot: 1780) 113–114.

50 Vallancey, *An Essay on the Primitive Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*, cap. 5, 86–136.

to the Orient, too, was thus too strong to ignore. Its letters were like twigs that could be set in ever new formations.⁵¹ The scriptural Tree of Knowledge and of Paradise had been the eternal symbol of knowledge and its branches were manifested in the strokes that shaped the old Irish script. It was the same tree, so Vallancey continued creatively, which had formed the *sefirot*, the divine attributes of the Kabbalah, and their tree-structure, and, as was known from Athanasius Kircher, the tree that in the myths of the Egyptians had been reconstructed out of the fragments of the dismembered Osiris – the symbol of the universal transfer of knowledge. Every Arabic and Hebrew term for an individual scholarly discipline, the ‘branches’ of this universal knowledge, whether it be dialectic, grammar or rhetoric, must therefore have an almost identical-sounding phonetic equivalent in Irish.⁵²

This gives us an idea of just how far Vallancey was prepared to push his systematic approach. At the heart of the language must stand not only seafaring and trade but also, of course, religion and its objects, a sphere that, as might be expected, had been wholly in the hands of the caste of druids. Their trans-cultural context could be identified primarily in an astral cult, as had been shown to Vallancey’s satisfaction by Bryant, D’Ancarville and Gerhard Voss in his *Theologia gentilis*.⁵³ Vallancey believed this had been founded by the Chaldaeans, but he was able to detect it also in its branches spread throughout Europe. By incorporating the Phoenicians into this astral religion, he succeeded in elevating it into a veritable universal matrix of all religions. Against this background every fragment of Irish folk custom even of Vallancey’s own times became charged with near-universal significance and was raised in dignity. Already in his grammar Vallancey had shown that astronomy, the domain of the Chaldaeans, must also have been one of the core disciplines of the Irish.

- 51 Vallancey Charles, “Observations on the Alphabet of the Pagan Irish and of the Age in which Finn and Ossian Lived”, *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts, Relating to Antiquity* 7 (1785) 276–285, idem, “The Ogham Writings of the ancient Irish explained”, *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 5 (1790) 5–104, idem, “An Essay on the Ogham tree Alphabet of the ancient Irish”, *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 6 (1804), 157–195, 219–236, idem, *An Essay towards illustrating the Ancient History of the Britannic Isles*, 56–62, and idem, *An Essay on the Primitive Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*, cap. 7, 149–159, idem, *A Vindication of the Antient History of Ireland*, 75–78, and see also Ó Bréartúin, *Charles Vallancey*, 50–55.
- 52 Vallancey, Charles, “The Tree, the Symbol of Knowledge, of Numerals and of Literary Characters”, *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 5 (1790), 105–146.
- 53 Bryant, *A New System*, vol. 1, 235–282, or e.g. Dupuis Charles François, *Origine de tous les cultes ou religion universelle* (4 vols.) (Paris, Henri Agasse: 1794–1795), vol. 1, Preface, XI–XIII, and Vossius Gerardus, *De theologia gentili et physiologia christiana, sive de origine ac progressu Idolatriae* (Amsterdam, Johan Blaeu: 1668), lib. 1, cap. 35, 131–136. On Bryant’s influence on Vallancey see also O’Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations* 47–48.

Had men of the early Middle Ages such as Virgil of Salzburg and Dungalus Reclusus not been famed for their astronomical knowledge and even earned the hostility of the Curia?⁵⁴ Was it not true, as Vallancey is able to show by a further analysis of a semantic field, that the ancient Indian Rishi had never doubted that the world was round? Again Vallancey can demonstrate via a comment on the Book of Job that the text of Scripture and its colourful Hebrew terms can be made comprehensible by reference to the Irish language. The otherwise baffling Hebrew terms for the Pleiades and the constellation of Scorpio could be explained via their Irish parallels.⁵⁵

But the Irish-Phoenician-Indian synthesis went even further than that. Thomas Maurice and John Barrett had already shown that most of the terms in the zodiac and the other constellations went back to very old, oriental traditions and must be among the oldest terms in human history.⁵⁶ Vallancey demonstrates, further, that the Arabic word for a constellation, *anwa*, is of Irish origin and corresponds to the word-sequence *ain-bhi*, meaning 'approaching rain'. Apollonius had maintained in his *Argonautica* that the Greeks had sailed to Colchis before the constellations got their names. So where would the stars have been classified, if not in Scythia? Why would a constellation be called the Great Bear, when in Egypt, the apparent home of the zodiac, there are no bears? How would the Greeks have acquired a constellation called Argo when the main star of this constellation, Canopus, cannot even be seen from Greece?⁵⁷ The stars must have been set in their order by the primordial Irish using a linguistic amalgam which also did justice to the Chaldaean elements in their blood. If the constellation of the Great Bear was read from right to left, Vallancey believed, it produced the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *resh* and *tau*, a combination that spelled the word *art*, the Irish for 'bear', which already hinted at the Greek word derived from it, *arktos*. The Little Wain, on the other hand, consisted of two letters, an *aleph* and a *shin*, and the Irish for 'wagon' was *aish*. That Vallancey had dozens of similar examples need not be any surprise: in the end, the whole sky had once spoken a Celtic-Semitic language.⁵⁸

54 Vallancey, *A Grammar of the Ibero-Celtic* 108–111.

55 Ibidem 112–129.

56 Maurice Thomas *The History of Hindostan, its arts, and its sciences, as connected with the history of the other great empires of Asia, during the most ancient periods of the world* (2 vols.) (London, William Bulmer: 1795–1798), vol. 1, Book 1, Part 1, 45–80, and Barrett J., *An enquiry into the origin of the constellations that compose the Zodiac, and the uses they were intended to promote* (Dublin: 1800) passim.

57 Vallancey, *An Essay on the Primitive Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*, cap. 5, 125–139.

58 Vallancey Charles, "Of the Use and Application of the Celestial Alphabet, as an Astronomical Character, and of the Origin of the Figures of the Celestial Globe", *Collectanea*

At the heart of the Hiberno-Phoenician astral cult had lain, as already suggested, the worship of light and the sun, a quality that distinguished both Chaldaic ritual and the religion of the Brahmans. Baal and the Irish Bel were one and the same. The Indian pantheon, too, could be derived without difficulty from its Irish variant, Vallancey believed. Krishna, for Vallancey a version of Apollo, had his counterpart in the god Crishen, son of the sun god Bel, and Arun in the god of light Aruth. In Ishvara, a secondary name of many Indian gods, was concealed the word for fire, *aos*. Buddha, too, Vallancey added, had been honoured in Ireland, in the form of the god Buttavant whose temple had long stood near Cork. When, as was the custom at the winter solstice, the druid had offered a cockerel to the goddess Nargal, he was in essence honouring the Indian moon-goddess Chandri, as well as the risen Mithras, and ultimately also the reborn Babylonian-Chaldaean Tammuz.⁵⁹

The festivals of the Irish calendar were likewise witnesses to an archaic and ultimately Indian-oriental cult of light which celebrated the solstices. Samhain on the First of November, Hallows' Eve or Halloween, was the festival at which the druids honoured the realm of the dead and offered black sheep to those who had died. In Persia the same month bore the name Adur, like the angel who presided over fire. What the druids, priests of the fire, had to ritually undergo in November, Vallancey concluded, was the eternal struggle against the powers of darkness. Samhain stood for *summus manium*, the foremost of the *manes* ('shades') and spirits of the underworld, the Latin *Summanus* and Lord of the Underworld, i.e. Pluto and Beelzebub, Ahriman, the Persian prince of darkness, and Samael, the Satan in Judaism and Lord of the Demons, whom the Zohar had described with such insistence. At this time Murdad, the Angel of Death, as the Persians had called him, was to be banished. The Christian festival of All Souls, but also the feast that was dedicated to the Holy Innocents massacred in Bethlehem, must have been a superficial echo of this salvation mystery; indeed, even the Hallowe'en festival was the result of an ancient rite that went back to the origins of the Deluge. Had there not been dances in the churchyards on the First of November, right into the high Middle Ages,

de rebus Hibernicis 5 (1790), 188–200, and again idem, "On the Oriental Emigration of the Ancient Inhabitants of Britain and Ireland", *The Oriental Collections* 1 (1797), 301–317, and extensively with more additional material idem, "The Oriental Emigration of the Hibernian Druids proved from their Knowledge in Astronomy, collated with that of the Indians and Chaldeans – from Fragments of Irish manuscripts", *The Oriental Collection* 2 (1798), 1–20, 101–121, 201–227, 321–348. The serial was edited by the famous Indologist William Ouseley.

59 Vallancey, *An Essay on the Primitive Inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland*, cap. 1–2, 20–63.

Vallancey notes, until the Cistercians had banned the practice in Ireland? Did young girls in country communities even in his own day not go from house to house and ask for cakes, which had previously been offered to Samael to placate the powers of winter darkness?⁶⁰ The second great festival of the Irish year, 'Lughnasa', was dedicated to the power of light, too. *Lug-nasad*, the 'killing of Lugh' on the First of August, Vallancey continued, had had a secondary name, 'Gul of August'; but *gul* meant 'circle' or 'wheel', i.e. the solar wagon and also the circle of the seasons. Equally, it recalled the Swedish Yule festival, the winter solstice, which had simply been copied in Scandinavia from the Irish festival. It had been a Chaldaic rite which the Phoenicians, the Mago-Scythians, had brought to Ireland along with the caste of the druids.⁶¹

3 Irish Monuments Calling Back All Ages

The solar cult brings us to the final element in Vallancey's presentation of evidence, namely the surviving ancient monuments. Here too we must limit ourselves to just a few examples.⁶² The word *cul* for the circle, so Vallancey explained in the same section of his monumental *Collectanea de hibernicis*, had a counterpart in the Persian *kulleh*, meaning 'tower'. And did Ireland not abound in mysterious round towers, which for the most part stood apart from the churches and appeared to be unique in Europe? They must have served as observatories for the astral cult and the observation of the heavens. Earlier antiquaries, above all Edward Ledwich and Richard Gough, had devoted many considerations to these towers, Vallancey noted, but they could only be explained if one bore in mind the oriental roots of Irish culture, and the long wanderings of the Phoenician Irish. In the Volga area Peter Simon Pallas had found similar buildings in the area formerly settled by the Bulgars, which were called by the local inhabitants *misgir*, or 'fire towers'. In Persian the word *mudskir* stood for a man of special piety. If one believed Geoffrey Keating, during the third invasion by the followers of Nemed, already some time after the

60 Vallancey Charles, "An Essay on the Irish Festival Oidchhe Shamha, the All-Hallow-Eve of the Modern Irish", *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 3 (1786), 443–467.

61 Vallancey Charles, "On the Gule of August, called La Tat, the Lammas Day of the Modern Irish", *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 3 (1786), 468–511.

62 In addition see e.g. Vallancey Charles, "Description of an Ancient Monument in the Church of Lusk in the County of Dublin", *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 2 (1788), 57–68, and idem, *Account of the ancient stone amphitheatre lately discovered in the county of Kerry, with fragments of Irish history relating thereto* (Dublin: 1812), and see also Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 93–94.

Deluge, a druid called Midghe had taught the Irish the use of fire. The towers must thus have been a special feature of the Scytho-Phoenician settlement of Ireland and its archaic Chaldaean religion.⁶³ We now know that the round towers were built only in the early Middle Ages, but we may note in passing that they prompted wild speculations right up to the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁴ It's worth to mention just the attempt by Henry O'Brien in 1834, following close in the footsteps of Vallancey, to elevate the round towers of Ireland to evidence of an Indian-oriental phallus cult.⁶⁵

Another monument interpreted by Vallancey is of interest. Near Dundalk there was a probably neolithic formation of ritual stones arranged in the form of a ship. It had already been described by Vallancey's contemporaries. Why did this cult site take the form of a ship? Was it a monument that had been set up by the nautically skilled Danes, the Vikings, to commemorate their many journeys? Was the ship of the gods from the *Edda*, Skidbladnir, perhaps worshipped here? No, wrote Vallancey, the Phoenician ur-druids had here venerated a cult of the world beyond which had used the ship merely as a symbol. After all, already Tacitus had recorded that the ancient Germans had worshipped the goddess Isis in the form of ships. The first settlers in Ireland, taught by the Chaldaeans, must have brought the cult with them to Ireland.⁶⁶

63 Vallancey Charles, "Of the Round Towers", *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 3 (1786), 191–196, and see Ledwich Edward – Grose Francis, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (2 vols.) (London, Hooper and Wigstead: 1791–94), e.g. vol. 1, 12–13, and the separately published small paper of Gough Richard, *Observations on the Round Towers in Ireland and Scotland* (s.p. 1779) passim.

64 For a wonderful survey on the 'Round-tower-controversy' see Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 102–114.

65 O'Brien Henry, *The round towers of Ireland, or the mysteries of freemasonry, of sabaism, and of budhism, for the first time unveiled* (London: 1834) passim. The essay won the prize of the Royal Irish Academy. Although O'Brien, ebd. 19, is distancing himself from Vallancey, he nevertheless quotes him permanently. The debate on the towers was flourishing afterwards, see in addition Petril George, "The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion, comprising an Essay on the Origin and Use of the Round Towers of Ireland", *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 20 (1845), 1–452, here 1–120, and Weaver R.L., *Monumenta antiqua, or the Stone Monuments of Antiquity yet remaining in the British Isles, particularly as illustrated by Scripture, also a Dissertation on Stonehenge, together with a compendious Account of the Druids* (London: 1840) cap. 1–2, 1–75.

66 Vallancey Charles – Pownall Thomas, "An Account of the Ship-Temple near Dundalk", *Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis* 3 (1786), 197–210, and see on this temple for Vallancey already Wright Thomas, *Louthiana, or An Introduction to the Antiquities of Ireland* (London, Thomas Payne: 1758) 15–16.

3.1 *Conclusion: Speculative Ideas, National Romanticism and an Early Modern Heritage*

It is easy today to laugh at Vallancey's crazed speculations and to be put off by the maelstrom of invented myths and 'facts' that it produced. Many of his linguistic parallels and schemas were entirely correct; his achievements in the study of the Irish language are incontestable. In contrast to many of his contemporaries Vallancey did not forge either manuscripts or artefacts in support of his theses. In the study of Indian culture, the excitement of discovery had not yet been tamed by Indo-European linguistics and the humourless editorial practices of German philology. Despite long study of the Irish language and the inclusion, since Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn in the seventeenth century, of Gaelic among the Celtic-Germanic languages, Indoeuropeanists would only really turn their attention to Irish from 1840 onwards.⁶⁷ Nor were the other Celtic languages proof against fantasies of primordially and the ur-language.⁶⁸ At the same time Welsh scholars such as Edward Davies, defender of the great Bardic Councils of the late eighteenth century, outdid each other in the attempt to link their language to the scriptural revelation, the figure of Noah or the legendary Hyperboreans and to elevate it to the position of Europe's mother tongue.⁶⁹ Similar endeavours had won a very warm reception in Wales already in the seventeenth century.⁷⁰

Vallancey seems to be important for a different reason. His project shows what a massive integratory power and energy was still held by the great orientalisising models of the seventeenth century – deeply baroque in character and

67 As early speculative 'Celtologists' see e.g. Boxhorn Marcus Zuerius, *Originum Gallicarum liber, in quo veteris et nobilissimae Gallorum gentis origines, antiquitates, mores, lingua et alia eruuntur et illustrantur* (Amsterdam, Johannes Jansson: 1654) there the comparative dictionary 1–75, Pezron Pierre, *Antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes, autrement appelez Gaulois* (Paris, Marchand et Martin: 1703), there on the languages 180–331.

68 On followers of Vallancey like William Betham, Henry O'Brien and Roger O'Connor see esp. Lerssen, "On the edge of Europe", 103–107, 111–112.

69 Davies Edward, *Celtic Researches, on the origin, tradition and language of the ancient Britons, with some introductory sketches on primitive society* (London: 1804), there e.g. Appendix, 555–561, and see earlier and more general also Parsons James, *The Remains of Japhet: Being Historical Enquiries into the Affinity and Origin of the European Languages* (London, Davies and Reymers: 1767), there with the *Leabhar Gabhála* as authority cap. 6, 145–184, or Jones Rowland, *The Origin of Language and Nations, hieroglyphically, etymologically, and topographically defined and fixed, after the method of an English, Celtic, Latin, Greek and Latin English Lexicon* (London, John Hughes: 1764) Preface, 23–29.

70 Edwards Charles, *Hebraismorum Cambro-Britannicorum Specimen, honorandis antiquae Britannicae gentis primoribus, aliisque ei benignis maeccenatibus eudaimonia* (s.p. 1675) passim.

committed to the Bible – for antiquarianism as late as the early nineteenth century. It was hardly chance that for Vallancey, not only Bochart but also Athanasius Kircher could be relied on as an authority. Reading these works was no anachronism; to the contrary, Vallancey is an emphatic testament to how much life was still in these paradigms. The will to represent and rebuild a past as glorious as imaginable was guiding him back to the great authorities of the 17th century. Contrary to what is sometimes maintained, there was no epochal shift in philological or antiquarian studies within the first two decades of Sanskrit studies in Europe. It would be a long time before the first representatives of the European study of India, the generation after Jones or Wilford, would succeed in creating the breach between Semitists and Indo-Iranian studies, that is so often asserted in history of science. To the contrary, the baroque Semitists' realia, texts and methods could be adopted without any major discontinuity. The 'baroque' idea of unity was revealed as still capable of bearing intellectual weight. The celtophiles were not alone in this achievement. Vallancey's rivals the Gothicists and their competing Scandinavian model had succeeded, at least in Sweden, in integrating Sanskrit studies and Finno-Ugric into their universalist, Sweden-centric designs, even if, admittedly, not every antiquarian in the early nineteenth century would still have accepted their model in its then current transformations. Orientalism, Philosemitism, enthusiasm for India and Scandinavophilia were not mutually exclusive. In his own way Vallancey too, despite his swift marginalisation in organised scholarship, was thus perhaps more modern than he may seem at first sight.

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