

**ISCKMC 2020**  
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**ABOUT MYTHOLOGICAL AND FOLKLORE CONVERGENCE**  
**OF CELTS AND OSSETIANS**

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**Abstract**

Historical events of distant times are reflected in the bizarre refraction of the traditions and legends of the Celts and the legends about the Narts of Ossetians. Any legend, each saga is based in one way or another on the real life of the people, depicts folk life and knowledge, religious ideas, social, moral relations, and philosophical views. The article attempts to determine the ethno-cultural influence of the Ossetians ancestors on the formation of mythological, epic and cultural systems of the peoples of Europe; to reveal the correspondences that arose in the era of the Indo-European cultural community, in Celtic and Scytho-Ossetian mythology. Based on the archaic nature of the Ossetian "Nartiada" and Celtic fables and legends, the author of the article identifies common elements in the culture of the unified Indo-European society, as well as a set of common motives in two legends – Celtic and Ossetian. The publication supplements the elaboration of the issue of Celtic-Scythian-Ossetian mythological and folklore convergence by G. Dumézil, J. Grisvard and a number of other scientists. The idea is expressed that the religious ideas of the peoples of the Indo-European language family contained similar provisions, attitudes and preconditions that originated in a common source of mythological concepts and were based on the same mythological base. The legends about the Ossetian Narts and the legends and traditions of the Celts united their inclusion in parallel and identical systems, systems of organizing a homogeneous epic world that contributed to the preservation of ancient elements.

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## 1. Introduction

The epic heritage of the Ossetians, as well as that of the Celts, came down to descendants only in the oral tradition.

The legends of the Ossetians about mythological Narts, their religious ideas, passed down from generation to generation, had a huge impact on the entire North Caucasian world.

Researchers have long shown that the origins of the "Nartiada" go back to the depths of antiquity; that many peoples of the Caucasus have their own, national, versions of the Nart legends, moreover, "each of them has bright and unique features", and these "national versions of the heroic epic are of a rather solid age" (Guriev, 1982, p. 21).

The extensive corpus of legends and beliefs of Gaels and Britons has been a source of inspiration for poets, writers, scientists since ancient times, and has a great influence on English ideas and ideals.

Legends about gods, heroes, legends about the exploits of the epic valiant Cúchulainn are designated as "the creations of some prehistoric, and therefore immemorial past."

This is confirmed by the originality and properties of the legends themselves, their ancient core and prehistoric roots (Celtic Mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002; Irish Sagas, 1961;).

## 2. Problem Statement

Works of oral folklore, as you know, are a storehouse of wisdom, containing the ethical ideals of different peoples of different times; they are full of searches for truth, goodness and beauty; they are characterized by improvisation, compositional and stylistic techniques developed by tradition, and the general tone of the narrative.

They contain fiction, recognition of the world through pictures, the establishment and accuracy of the fact, the combination of the past and the present; interest in the history of people, society, allowing through knowledge of the past to better understand and evaluate the ways of human development (Guriev, 1991).

Epicologists wrote that, despite the identified Alan-Ossetian core and the described numerous Scythian-Nart parallels, the North Caucasian national versions of legends about the Narts raised a number of questions about the cultural influence of the Iranian-speaking tribes on the Aborigines and later on the Iranians who migrated to the Caucasus; the role of contacts between different peoples in the dissemination of Narts legends; determination of the conditions and time of a single Caucasian substrate emergence in the "Nartiada", the relativity of the Scythian-Alan-Ossetian folklore continuity, etc.

These problems, as well as descriptions of the similarities between these national versions, are the subject of a series of studies in which the issues raised are thoroughly analyzed.

A number of problems discussed in this paper are touched upon to varying degrees in other studies, too (Adiyeva et al., 2014; Berk, 2016; Bell, 1997; Berezkin, 2012; Kim-Maloney et al., 2014; Kovtun & Marochkin, 2014).

But we believed that the available researches do not exclude new hypotheses, new scientific discoveries.

In connection with this idea our attention was drawn to Georges Dumézil's observation of some Celtic-Scythian-Alan-Ossetian analogies, resulting from the striking similarity between the two legends, which cannot be explained by typological coincidences or a game of chance (Dumézil, 1990)..

### 3. Research Questions

The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology reports that Charles Elton was the first to attempt to reconstruct the ancient mythological views of the British Isles inhabitants.

The reconstructed Gaelic mythology contained in its archaic texts a lot of legends about the Old Irish gods and heroes.

It has become possible to get acquainted with the full text of the epic saga “The Cattle Raid of Cooley”, describing the glorious deeds of the legendary hero Cúchulainn, with the earliest version of the legend in the “Book of the Dun Cow”, "the core and center of the ancient Gaelic heroic cycle", the key figure of which was also the bravest son of Scotland (Celtic Mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

According to the encyclopaedia the Celts (the Romans called them Gauls) belonged to one of the branches of the Aryan race.

The Celtic language was a part of the oldest Indo-European family of languages. Latin, Greek, Slavic, Germanic languages, as well as "Persian and other Asian dialects dating back to the ancient Zend language, and countless languages of the peoples of India, frolicking on the basis of Sanskrit" were related to it (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

The ancestral home <...> were the lands in the upper reaches of the Danube or the Alps region.

The round mounds in which they buried their dead or ashes were sharply different in shape from the long ones of the aborigines.

They stood at a higher stage of cultural development, <...> it was thanks to them that bronze and silver appeared on the British Isles, <...> some species of domestic animals (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

The Celtic epic has a lot in common with the Ossetian one: in both there is a bizarre and mysterious world of folk poetic fiction, delighting with strength, valor, greatness and wisdom.

They retained archaic features that give the epics uniqueness and originality.

It is also worth noting the similarity of the world perception and views on the world of the living people and the otherworld; high social position and respect of women ; the custom of handing over a child for upbringing to another family, etc.

When getting acquainted with the epics texts, one can reveal that both the Iranians, and the Celts mythologies are based on the same mythological principles and basis: the forces of nature are personified and embodied in similar anthropomorphic images and characters, often differing only in names.

In the mentioned epics, some higher and powerful forces rule both Heaven (the sun, the moon, the earth and the kingdom of darkness), and mountains, rivers and forests.

Both epics have information that any craft, whether it is music or blacksmithing, has its patron god. Let us give some illustrations.

In the mythology of the Irish Celts, Goibniu was a blacksmith god, one of the triad of gods—patrons of crafts; Luchteín was the carpenter god; Lear - the god of arts and crafts, and Manannan mac

Lear was the sea god, and associated with sea voyages to the Otherworld; the goddess Maha was the patron of wars, horses, fertility and prosperity of Ireland, and she was revered as a mother goddess, etc.

In Ossetian mythology Kurdalagon is the patron saint of blacksmiths; Afsati is the patron saint of forest game; Uastyrdzhi is the Old Ossetian solar deity; Barastyr is the patron saint of the Land of the Dead; Falvara is one of the main deities, the owner of small livestock; Alardy is the deity of smallpox, measles and eye diseases; Tutyr is one of the main deities, the Lord of wolves, etc.

It should be noted that Abaev (1949) drew his attention to the fact that the Celts, like the Ossetians, did not retain the common Indo-European name of the wolf: its name fell under the taboo, *geis*, because the wolf was a totem for both communities.

In some legends of the rich Celts mythology you can find the name of Midhir, the god of the underworld.

A lot of interesting things are connected with him, and with Celtic belief that a soul simply migrates from one body to another after death. That was the very concept that inspired men to overcome the fear of death, to show the supreme valor, to believe in the role, influence and power of immortal gods on mortals.

Both in the religious views of the Ossetians and in the Nartiada, ideas of the afterlife could not arise without ideas of an immortal soul, for which the body is just a shell from which it separates and can leave it.

The afterlife world is represented by Barastyr, the ruler of the Earth of the Dead, who who sends people to heaven or hell depending on their lifestyle on earth.

The cult of the Celts, like that of the Ossetians' ancestors was solar. All major holidays of this cult were associated with the solar cycle phases. Moreover, it should be noted that the spring and autumn equinox days were considered to be more important than the days of the solstice.

The same personifications of the forces of nature have the same attributes in different places, but they appear under different names. In addition to the great gods, there were many small deities that were worshiped within a single tribe community, considering them their patrons.

They never came into conflict with the great Celtic gods, the personifications of the nature forces.

In Nartiada too, in addition to the Great God (Iunæg Kadjyn Styr Hutsau), there were many celestials (*zædtæ*, *daujytæ*), with permanent residences. They became the objects of special worship, since they assumed the functions of the certain places protection (Bessolova, 2008).

Deities, heavenly patrons and spirits created by the imagination of the ancient Celts and Ossetians were the carriers and embodiments of some kind of impersonal internal energy. They had specific locations and their habitats were mountains, rivers, springs, sky, trees, groves, hills, piles of stones, etc..

Probably, that energy provided them the ability to move freely in space; it possessed potentially dangerous sacred power and was inherent in some places, objects, beings; it was detected in the places where orgiastic and sacred dances were performed (Grinzer, 1974).

For example, the ritual dance “Simd” in the Nart epic of the Ossetians: Being multiplied by the inhuman power and temperament of the Nart titans, it, according to legends, shook the earth and mountains and presented an extraordinary spectacle.

Even the gods from heaven looked at the heroic dance with amazement, mixed with a fair amount of fear (Abaev, 1990).

Religious acts of an orgiastic nature, the purpose of which is to propitiate with frenzied singing and shouts, ritual dances and human sacrifices during ritual festivals in honor of the gods, were common among the Celts (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

According to legend, one of the four main treasures of the clan of Gaelic gods is the Lia Fáil, better known as the Stone of Destiny. It comes from the mythical city of Falias, where poetry and magic were studied, later this stone fell into the hands of the first kings of Ireland.

According to legend, Lia Fáil possessed a magical ability to calm down crying and grief when touched (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

The legend about the Stone of Oblivion of Grief, fydrohgænæn tsæh dur, can also be found in the legends about Nart Uryzmag and his nameless son of the Nartiada of Ossetians.

There was a Gray stone on the Nart nihas – a stone of grief oblivion.

The one who laid down on this stone would forget about his grief.

Nart Uryzmag laid on the stone of oblivion when he could not restrain his grief after the death of his nameless son.

The grief of Uryzmag, the leader of the Narts, was inconsolable: it turned out that the boy he accidentally killed was his own unnamed son (Legends of the Narts, 1978).

The magic world of objects is a specific symbolic code of the universe, in which every element of this code has a fixed semantics and its own symbolism. Let us explain.

It is believed that the most ancient myths and legends about the gods of the Britons are dedicated to the deities of the Pwill's family.

Let us take the episode from "Mabinogi Pwill, Prince Difed": "When the feast was in full swing, he (Pwill. – EB) entered the hall, dressed in the coarsest torn clothes, rattling worn-out shoes and with an old leather bag on his shoulder.

This bag was truly magical <...>. The magic property of the bag was that, no matter how much of any goods was put into it, it was never filled to the top. <...>

Gwawl ordered his servants to fill the bag with meat, but the more they threw pieces of ham and gammon into it, the more space remained in the bag" (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

We find a similar episode in "Nartiada", in the legend "Meeting of Narts"

"We went looking for a water source. On the way, one of us kicked a small pouch with his foot. We picked it up and took it with us. Suddenly we noticed the water as clear as a tear flowing down from the mountain. We put the pouch under jet of water. We held it long there, but it did not fill up in any way, it just stretched more.

We brought water so our friends could quench their thirst. We asked them, "What kind of pouch is it that stretches like this?"

Those who lived a lot [in the world], who knew everything, [finally] said: "This is a human stomach, and nothing else. Only the stomach cannot be filled. No one in the world has ever been able to know its full capacity" (Narty, 1989, p. 12).

As you can see, from the standpoint of preserving the ancient way of life, moral and ethical norms, both the Celtic and Ossetian epics are unique. Some more evidence of this statement is presented to your attention.

From the legend about the “Miracul Tooth of Nart Khamyts ” we learn that Nart Khamyts was gifted with a tooth that had a magical property to seduce women. The “tooth of love” in the Ossetian Nart legends has the following names: Ækh'yzy dandag – “tooth of Arkyz”; Ænkhyryzy dandag – "tooth of Ankyryz"; bolat dandag – "damask tooth"; hjohhh-dændag – "chipped tooth"; syzgurin dandag – "golden tooth".

“This is such a tooth that not a single woman to whom you show it, who sees it in your mouth, will not be able to resist you or say “no” to you” (Narty, 1989, p. 12). The property of the tooth was transferred to Nart Khamyts, thus becoming his own attribute.

Note that a fairly stable, traditional motive is associated with this tooth, which has a plot-forming meaning in the cycle "Khamyts and Batraz".

The motive, like the very image of Khamyts, the seducer of the beauties, gained an ethical appraisal and interpretation in the epic, condemnation.

Possession of such a tooth, according to some legends, weakened Nart Khamyts: he stopped taking part in military and hunting campaigns, turned into a "sylvaz" – a libertine and a voluptuous.

A parallel to the Nart motive "the tooth of love" is found in the chapter "Finn and the Fians" of the Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology.

In the main hall of the palace in Tara, a solemn feast was held in honor of Finn, the groom of King Cormac's daughter, at which Graine, Finn's bride, drew attention to one of her groom's companions.

Diarmayd, Finn's nephew, the Celtic Adonis, had an amazing mole on his cheek, seeing which none of the women could remain indifferent and immediately inflamed with love for the hero.

Princess Graine, who suddenly flared up with passion for him, was not an exception. She confessed to Diarmaid in her ardent love and demanded reciprocity of feelings from him.

For refusing to love the betrothed bride of his lord, Princess Graine put “geis” on him, she demanded to kidnap and take her away (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

In the mythology and folklore of the Celts and Ossetians, there is one of the most ancient motives: the motif of golden apples. Gold, the image of the sun on earth, is the embodiment of sunlight in most ancient cultures and, therefore, divined knowledge, and red symbolizes wisdom, immortality, exaltation and higher spiritual predestination (Kirlo, 2010).

In Celtic mythology we deal with three apples from the Hesperid garden each the size of the head of a month-old baby. Apples have a deep golden color and taste the same as honey. The one who tastes them is healed of all diseases and wounds. No matter how much they eat, there are no fewer apples. The inhabitants of the land of immortals vigilantly guard them and quench their hunger with apples (Celtic mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

According to Irish belief, an apple is a fruit that ensures immortality: if you cut it in two, you can see a five-pointed star – a pentagram symbolizing the five states from birth to death, and then a new birth. The spherical shape and red or golden color symbolize two concepts: perfection and the possession of cognition. Golden apples are a guarantee of rejuvenation, a key and a guarantee of immortality. The deep

golden color and honey taste of these apples is “the embodiment of blood, the most precious gift of all” (Kirlo, 2010). Apples were the food of the gods: they made them immortal.

A similar story can be found in the legends of Narts. The apple tree grew in the garden of Narts. Its flowers shone with heavenly azure, but only one apple ripened on it in a day. That apple was golden, and it glittered like fire. The apple possessed life-giving power and it healed any wounds and from any disease. Only it did not save from death. The apple would ripened all day, sparkling on the top of the tree, and at night someone would stole it. The Narts took turns guarding their apple, but none of them had ever seen the thief, and the apple kept disappearing every night (Legends of the Narts, 1978).

In Nartiada, golden apples are apples of discord, symbolizing the idea of a destructive force that can manifest itself through beauty: And at the hour when night gives way to day, as if some bird flew into the garden. Suddenly the apple tree became illuminated, and Ahsartag saw a dove near the wonderful apple. And as soon as it picked the apple, Akhsartag shot an arrow, and half of the dove's wing fell to the ground. The bleeding bird flew unevenly and low over the earth and the apple fell to the ground (Legends of the Narts, 1978).

The golden apples brought the twin brothers to conflict and caused their death: Akhsartag was jealous of his wife Dzerass for his brother Akhsar and killed him. In a fit of remorse, Ahsartag pierced himself with a sword when he learnt of his brother's innocence. Dovewing, daughter of the lord of the underwater world, Dzerassa, was already pregnant by Akhsartag and soon gave birth to twins, Uryzmag and Khamyts. They grew up and found their grandfather, the Nart Uarhag.

The blood of a dove, a bird that, according to legend, plays the role of mediator between God and man, symbolizes not only the future kinship of the Narts and representatives of the Donbettyrs' underwater world, but also of the destructive female forces.

We can see the Celts' motive for taking revenge for the father's blood in the legend "The Fate of the Sons of Tuireann", in the episode which the authors consider "the Argonautics of Gaelic mythology" (Celtic Mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

Tuireann's sons "knocked down and began throwing stones" at Kian, the father of Lug, Shooting far, God of Sun – the new god of the Gaelic pantheon. They threw stones until his body turned into a shapeless mass. When his father did not come back home, Lug decided to go in search of him. He found his father's footprints on the Muirtemn Plain, but Kian was nowhere to be seen. And then the eternal land, which had witnessed the murder, spoke to Lug and told him the whole truth. Lug dug up his father's body and saw what kind of death he had to accept. Then he mourned for his father, buried him back in the ground, poured a high mound and placed a stone pillar on it with a commemorative inscription in the Oham language.

Tuireann's sons were seized with fear and horror when they learned what payment Lug demanded from them for the murder of his father (Celtic Mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

In Nartiada the theme of blood feud is presented in different versions of the legends entitled "Batraz's Revenge for the Father's Blood" (Narty, 1989).

In one legend, Khamyts was killed by the malik of Tynty-grad, in others, the Narts themselves are called the killers of Batraz's father; in others the killers were Sainag-aldar, Burafarnig, Chelakhsartag;

there is also a variant in which Khamyts was “stoned” (ækhsæny duræy), apparently because of the violation of ethical norms.

Batraz's revenge is cruel and merciless. He asks Sainag-aldar to show him his wonderful sword. Batraz asks where the notch on it comes from. Sainag-aldar replies that the notch was made when the sword hit Hamits in the teeth. In a rage, Batraz cuts off Sainag-aldar's head and right hand and brings them home.

Batraz challenges the seven sons of Burafarnig to a competition and kills them; then turns his rage against the Narts who participated in the murder of his father. The Narts offer Batraz any ransom for his father's blood. The cruelty of Batraz's humiliating and unfeasible demands for the murder of his father terrifies the Narts.

It should be noted that these parallels reflect the most ancient legal norms, and this gives grounds to conclude that the motive for revenge is clearly archaic by nature.

In the spatial picture of the world of Celtic mythology, the world tree plays the main role, its analogue is the central pillar in the Midquart interior of the house in “The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel”, which is a ritual picture of the Celtic world. Compliance with this vertical division of the worlds is also found in the Nart epic of the Ossetians, where both the world tree and the central pillar tsæjyndz are presented as objects of worship, personified with the guardian angel of the house.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Dumézil (1977, 2003) expressed great scientific interest in the problem of common elements in the culture of Indo-Europeans even before the Aryans, the ancestors of Indo-Iranians. The scientist gave strong arguments in his works to confirm the consistency of Scythian-Alano-Ossetian cultural traditions.

Famous scientists Abaev (1949, 1990), Dumézil (2003) and Grisvar (2003) noted the most striking Celtic-Alan-Ossetian folklore similarities due to the ancient pagan world of myths.

According to Abaev (1990), it was an ideal era in the past life of the ancestors of the Ossetians. It was characterized by the great intimacy, simplicity and closeness of relations between the worlds of people and gods. In the Epos these relations are represented as exceptionally patriarchal and simple.

And in the earliest versions of the archaic texts of the Gaels and Britons, the gods were eternal, immortal and able to change their appearance. But, as the Celtic encyclopedia testifies, “by the time the legends about them were recorded, turned into mere mortals” (Celtic Mythology: An Encyclopedia, 2002).

It is quite natural that the study of this issue requires detailed research, therefore we bring the first article from the planned cycle to the attention of the readers.

The goal of the article is to make an attempt to identify common places in the Celtic and Ossetian epics in order to supplement the convergence already identified by researchers.

#### **5. Research Methods**

When carrying out the research, we used the comparative - historical method, which is especially productive in such works. Outstanding scientists G. Dumézil, V.I. Abaev, J. Grisvar, A. Kristol,



A. Yosida and others proved the perspective of the comparative-historical method in the study of national epics. Its application, in our opinion, will make it possible to reconstruct the mythological systems of the Celts and Ossetians, and to reveal the number of common elements when comparing them.

## 6. Findings

The perspicacious Dumézil (1990) noted that “the first meeting of Ossetians and Celts about on important epic characters and in connection with rare themes is enough to raise more complex question: are we dealing with a common heritage or are they just borrowings? And if they are borrowing, then who was the intermediary and in what era it happened?” (p. 102). The thoughts of a major Nart expert puzzled us and formed the basis of this publication, which pursued the goal of comparing Celtic and Ossetian Narts legends in order to identify those detailed correspondences that had not been verified by previous researchers.

## 7. Conclusion

In the result of the research, we made the following conclusions:

The preservation of the ancient epic culture and mythological traditions by the Celts and Ossetians is motivated by the archaic way of life of the carriers of these traditions.

Religious representations of the peoples belonging to the Indo-European language family contain similar statements, attitudes and preconditions, originating in a common source of mythological concepts and based on the same mythological base.

Comparison at the level of sets of motives and the similarity of situations allows establishing a kinship, motivated by a homogeneous epic world.

The legends about the Ossetian Narts and the fables of the Celts are united by their inclusion in parallel and identical systems, the systems of a homogeneous epic world organization, that contributed to the preservation of more ancient elements.

The Scythian culture was the most western variant of the cultural community of the nomads of the Eurasian steppes. This fact testifies to the cultural influence of the Scythians on the Celts, especially since the “Danubian Celtia” was “an intermediate link in the spread of the influence of the Scythian taste on other Celtic countries” (Grisvar, 2003, p. 8). For example, the images of animals, including fantastic ones, in the culture of the Celts became popular under the influence of the Scythians (Bray & Trump, 1990).

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