

BELARUS AND IRELAND THROUGH THE AGES

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Summary. The article highlights modern Ireland, outlines similarity between Belarus and Ireland, covers aspects of Irish history, literature, music and Celtic art. The connections between Belarus and Ireland will be described in detail in the next article «Belarus and Ireland. Contacts. Cultural and Humanitarian Relations».

Резюме. В статье рассматривается современная Ирландия, очерчивается сходство между Беларусью и Ирландией, затрагиваются аспекты ирландской истории, литературы, музыки и кельтского искусства. Связи между Беларусью и Ирландией будут детально рассмотрены в следующей статье «Беларусь и Ирландия». Культурные и гуманитарные контакты.

For many Belarusian people Ireland is a far away country, which is situated at the opposite part of Western Europe. These countries are very different, for example, in their position. Ireland is surrounded by seas and the impressive Cliffs of Moher rise to a height of 700 feet above the wild Atlantic waves. Belarus is situated in the middle of the continent and its landscape is flat. But still there is much in common between these two countries. We can easily find a typological similarity and a symbolic common character between Belarus and Ireland. Some scholars even talk about “Ireland as a looking-glass of the Belarusian history”.

This work will help us to learn more about Ireland, its history and culture. Besides, it will prove that the culture, as well as the historical fates, of Belarus and Ireland are absolutely intertwined. It also will help us to understand why Ireland became closer to many Belarusian families and why St. Patrick's Day, an Irish national holiday, is celebrated in Belarus.

Ireland. Land and People

Ireland (Eire) is a small, independent country in northwestern Europe. It is often called the Republic of Ireland. It occupies about five-sixth of the island of Ireland in the British Isles. The remaining one-sixth is occupied by Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The territory of the country is 70 283 square kilometres. The west coast of Ireland is washed by the wild Atlantic, the south corner is warmed by the tropical Gulf Stream. Dublin is the capital and the largest city of the country. Other big cities of Ireland are Cork and Limerick. The population is over 3.5 million people, 98 % of the population are Irish. The majority of the believers are Christians. The roots of Christianity in Ireland can be traced to the arrival of St. Patrick in the year 432. The previously pagan Irish people threw themselves into the new religion. St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is commemorated by a giant statue on the hills of Tara. Since the coming of St. Patrick Ireland has been a Christian and a Catholic nation. All the attempts made down the ages to force it from this allegiance have not shaken its faith. It remains a Catholic nation.

Gaelic and English are the country's two official languages. Gaelic is a part of a family of Celtic languages that includes the Gaulish languages which died out in the early Christian period, the Brittonic forms from which came Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Ireland's flag dates from the 1800's. Green represents the country's Roman Catholics; orange, the Protestants of Ulster; and white, unity.

Brief History of the Country

Ireland's first crop-growers and livestock-breeders were Neolithic peoples who arrived by sea from Britain or the continent about 6.000 years ago. It was they who made the first real impact on Ireland's landscape, building more substantial houses and stone boundary walls. They also constructed numerous megalithic monuments such as passage-tombs and dolmens, used for burial and for ritualistic purposes. These are among the earliest examples of true architecture known anywhere in the world and many survive in the Irish landscape today, some preserving examples of advanced mural art.

During the Bronze age Ireland's first metal-workers exploited the island's rich copper deposits to produce copper and bronze axe- and spear-heads, and later, shields, cauldrons, sickles and craftsmen's tools. Their legacy includes beautiful personal ornaments, mainly in gold, such as earrings and other jewellery. Later they produced a great variety of highly accomplished neck, arm and waist ornaments. In fact, more gold-crafted objects survive from this period in Ireland than in any other country in western or northwestern Europe.

By about 600 BC iron had come to replace bronze as the main source-material for weapons and tools, and it was during the ensuing Iron Age that the first Celtic peoples appeared in Ireland. They have left them the Irish language and art work in the La Tene style associated with the Celts of central Europe. [1].

The Roman invasion of Britain affected Ireland to the extent that trading contacts with the Empire were enhanced, and Ireland may have provided a haven for refugees from the conquest, and a base from which to raid western Britain. As the Roman Empire declined, unrelated Irish colonies took root in what are now Wales and Cornwall and in western Scotland, the last being ultimately of greatest influence.

In the 7-8th centuries Ireland become a hierarchical country. On the highest rungs of the ladder stood the kings, around whom society revolved. Ireland was the land of many kings, the tracts defining three grades: kings of petty local kingdoms, over-kings ruling several of these, and 'kings of over-kings' who effectively ruled a whole province. Although the laws rarely refer to high-kings of all Ireland, it is clear that for much of the early historic period the leading dynasty, the Ui Neill who were based in the northwestern half of the country with their ceremonial capital at Tara, did claim, and were occasionally able to enforce, supremacy throughout the island. Their primacy was shattered in the early 11th century, and power then revolved around a half-dozen or so leading province-kings, each of whom sought to force his rivals into submission and make himself high-king.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which these changes were the result of the Vikings incursions, which for a time in the 9th century appeared to

overwhelm the country. The Vikings certainly increased the intensity of warfare in an already violent society, and by developing towns at Dublin, Waterford, Limerick, Wexford and Cork, and trading networks overseas, they added to the wealth of what was otherwise a largely pastoral economy. In time, the Viking enclaves were assimilated into a political superstructure, and those Irish kings who succeeded in dominating them, in some cases established the Vikings town as their capital. This was especially true in the case of Dublin which by the mid-11th century was directly ruled by Irish kings, effectively becoming the country's capital.

In October 1171 the king of England, Henry II, landed at Waterford with a large force. Soon he conquered a big territory of Ireland including its capital, Dublin. At a stroke Ireland had been added to the lands of the king of England, lands which stretched from the Scottish border to the Pyrenees. As a result of this colonial movement the landscape of much of Ireland was dramatically transformed in the space of a few generations. New towns such as Drogheda, Dundalk, Carrickfergus, Sligo, Athenry, Nenagh, New Ross, Kilkenny and Trim sprang up, the city walls and impressive castles a reminder that this was a land of conquest. But of course Irish kings didn't want to live under England. In 1258 the most important native rulers challenged the English by recognizing Brian O'Neill as high-king of Ireland. Two years later O'Neill's forces were defeated by the colonists at the battle of Down, and his severed head was sent to England for public display at the Tower of London. But it wasn't the only attempt to fight for freedom. Irish resistance, in the century after the English arrived, was generally speaking, uncoordinated and prompted by local rather than national concerns, but it did ensure the survival of the most important native dynasties and guaranteed that the English settlers could never rest easy in Ireland.

In the 14th century the English crown devoted an unusual amount of time and money to Ireland in an effort to shore up the position of the colonists there. By the end of the 15th century Ireland became a zone of English colonial intervention. The Protestant Reformation was introduced into the Irish church. [2].

For many centuries Ireland struggled for independence. Now we can see the result – Ireland is an independent country. All Irish people love their country and their national culture. They preserve unique qualities of their culture and its link with old traditions.

At the turn of the new Millennium Ireland emerged as a more complex and rapidly changing society than at any time in its modern history. The Age of the Celtic Tiger had truly arrived. The population is now one of the most youthful in Europe, emigration has been reversed, new industries are daily established. Social and economic changes are also evident at the political level, with the emergence

of a new cross-party economic consensus. Perhaps no other event highlighted this process of changes more than the election in 1990 of Mary Robinson as President of Ireland. Female, an avowed liberal, youthful — she personified the challenge to the inherited patterns of power and authority in the country. The challenge posed by President Mary Robinson was maintained by her equally vibrant successor Mary McAleese. [1].

Irish Culture

Literature

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, in the period of the great population migrations, before either the Teutons or the Slavs possessed a written culture, in Ireland monastic scribes copied books, created beautiful illuminated manuscripts and collected ancient myths and sagas. It is also interesting to note that rhyme was born here in the 5th century A.D. Only Arabia can boast of rhyming (Bedouin) verse at such an early stage of development. Irish poetry from the Middle Ages is beautiful and varied — love and nature poetry, narrative poems and religious verse. Bards' and druids' status was comparable to that of monarchy.

Poetry is still one of the strongholds in the fight for a better future. In the nineteenth century the Irish language was almost displaced by English. The most famous Irish writers of 19-20 centuries wrote in English.

Probably the best known Irish writer is Oscar Wilde, who was the second son of very gifted parents. His father was a well-known eye-surgeon, a noted Irish antiquarian; and his mother was a society hostess and writer of verse in the Irish national paper «The Nation».

Another famous writer was William Butler Yeats. He began his literary work translating Gaelic tales and compilations of Irish folklore. His early original verse was strongly influenced by Irish myth. Later poems explored Irish politics and love for Maud Gonne, the Irish actress and patriot, who was a founder of Sinn Fein. The breadth of association of his writings is daunting from Irish legend to eastern philosophy, mysticism and magic.

James Joyce was no less famous as an Irish writer. He was the first of ten children born to Mary and John Joyce. The young Joyce was educated at Clongowes Wood College and later at Belvedere, a Jesuit secondary school. After graduating from University College, Dublin, he emigrated to Paris to study medicine while supporting himself by writing and reviewing books for Dublin and London literary magazines. Prompted by his mother's failing health, he returned to Dublin. During this short stay, lodging in the Martello tower with Oliver St John Gogarty, he completed his first collection of short stories, «Dubliners».

While living in Paris, Joyce began his great creation of the Dublin of his youth in such works as

“Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” (1916) and “Ulysses” (1922), which were to establish his reputation as one of the foremost writers of the modern period. Ulysses was distinctive for its novel literary devices - the “stream of consciousness” being the most famous - its varied levels of meaning, its verisimilitude of language. His last great work was “Finnegans Wake”. The completed work appeared in 1939, two years before his death. [3].

“Ulysses”, the story of one day in the life of Dublin one hundred years ago, is celebrated around the world as “Bloomsday” on 16 of June — perhaps the only international feast-day dedicated to a work of art.

We know Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, Sean O'Casey, Frank O'Connor, Mave Maron, Thomas Moore, Sean O'Faolain and many other wonderful writers to be Irish. Six Irish contemporary poets took part in the Irish Poetry Festival in Moscow in 1999: Thomas Mc.Carthy, John Montague, Paul Muldoon, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Frank Ormsby, Tom Paulin. Five of them write in English and the sixth, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, writes in Irish. [4].

Music

From the early days of Gaelic society to the present, music has played a major role in Irish life; and while the cities and towns of Ireland may now resound to the universal sounds of mass popular culture and music, there is nevertheless a genuine awareness among Irish people of the strength and importance of Irish traditional music and song. The music of Ireland represents a deep repository of a shared culture, created by the common people over the centuries. Its richness and subtlety reflect the spirit of an ancient people, and the poetry and imagery of the songs reflect the hopes and aspirations and disappointments of a country whose history has often been troubled and tragic. One of the best ways to get to know Ireland is to attend one of the music sessions which are frequently held in pubs and bars. In some of the cities and towns there are music sessions put on for the benefit of tourists, but these tend to be either stage-Irish or schmaltzy and should be avoided.

Just as Ireland's history has been greatly influenced by its geographical position on the western extremities of Europe, so too has its music. Numerous invaders and migrants arrived from Europe to this last outpost and stayed there with their cultures, thereby influencing and changing Ireland's development. Yet Ireland was outside the mainstream of European development and was less influenced by developments on the continent than other countries. Geographical remoteness, combined with the general cultural attitudes engendered by Ireland's social and political history, have meant the survival of a music which might otherwise have been lost, of a musical tradition which can be traced back to the medieval period.

The advance of industrialization in the 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to the virtual disappearance of traditional music in many parts of the world. Yet this process largely bypassed Ireland, which retained much of its traditional rural culture.

The music of the harp was an integral part of Irish life and of that Gaelic civilization which had given so much to Europe. Sir Francis Bacon wrote in 1627: "no harp have the sound so melting and prolonged as the Irish harp". The oldest known Irish harp is the so-called "Brian Boru Harp" preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, which dates from the fourteenth century; it is one of the few musical instruments which have survived intact from medieval Europe.

Irish music flourished for four hundred years under the patronage of the aristocracy and noble families, and indeed of the Norman conquerors, many of whom became "more Irish than the Irish themselves". Since that music depended on an elaborate form of aristocratic patronage, and was by all accounts refined and decorous, and rarely danced to, it cannot be called folk music. Nor, indeed, was the harp at this time a folk instrument. The court poets, like the harpers, occupied an honoured place in Gaelic life and were accorded a high social status. The poems were composed for the members of noble families, in praise of kings and chiefs, and were written in a highly stylized manner; they were sung or recited to the accompaniment of the harp. While much of the poetry was written down and preserved, virtually no written evidence of the music remains; nor have any of the melodies survived orally.

The beginning of the 17th century marked a vital turning point in Irish history. The Battle of Kinsale in 1601 gave the English forces of Queen Elizabeth a decisive victory over the Irish, a victory which signalled the beginning of the end for the old Gaelic society. English administration, laws and practices were effectively applied to the whole of Ireland for the first time. The Cromwellian conquest some 50 years later brought about the final collapse of Gaelic Ireland. [3].

As part of the process of destroying the Gaelic way of life and securing the English subjection of Ireland, the harpers and poets were outlawed. Queen Elizabeth herself gave orders "to hang the harpers wherever found", and though the law was frequently not carried out to the letter, during the 17th century they were

proscribed and persecuted; they risked the death sentence and there were severe penalties for anyone harbouring them. During the Cromwellian rule of the mid-17th century, all harpers, pipers and wandering musicians had to obtain identity cards in the form of government permits before being allowed to travel through the country. It became common official practice to burn harps wherever they were found. In the early 19th century Thomas Moore wrote a song which became famous in Ireland, lamenting the loss of the music. Now, when Ireland is independent and nobody can forbid Irish people to play their national music, you can hear almost in every Irish pub people who dance, sing and play their national music.

Celtic Art

Ireland is a country where Celtic artistic traditions remained mostly unshaken. Celtic deities were many and varied but principally concerned with herd and harvest. Art was basically decorative, and cannot be separated from the religion and magic that underline many of the most typical motifs. Such sacred symbols as the human head, the heads of birds and beasts, trees and flowers were used to decorate weapons and jewellery, as well as pots and vases. [6].

The mythical, abstract art of a pagan world might seem irreconcilable with the teaching of Christianity; but in the illuminated manuscripts of the monasteries inspiration was drawn from Celtic patterns. The Book of Kells is the most famous example of Celtic designs. The gospel is considered to be the most beautiful eighth-century book in the world. It is safely housed in Trinity College in Dublin. [5].

The art on the famous entrance stone at Newgrange is the finest integrated design in megalithic ornament. The plastic quality of the design, a superlative work of art, makes the stone look deceptively rotund.

The most arresting of all the monuments situated in the Irish countryside are the high crosses. They are the most typically Irish among the most attractive and skillful pieces of sculpture to survive from the so-called "Dark Ages", a time when the art of stone carving was not widely practiced on the continent of Europe. Indeed the very shape of the Celtic or ringed cross, silhouetted against the sky, has come to be identified with Ireland. The most famous high cross that reach a height of six or seven metres, is the South cross in Monasterboice, Co.Louth. [7].

A List of Reference Books

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