

Ranko Matasović

Odsjek za lingvistiku

Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu

Ivana Lučića 3, HR-10000 Zagreb

*rmatasov@ffzg.hr*

## LATIN *CLIĒNS* AND OLD IRISH *CÉILE*: AN ITALO-CELTIC SOCIAL INSTITUTION

In this paper, we derive both Lat. *cliēns* 'client' and OIr. *céile* 'id.' from the PIE root *\*k'ley-* 'lean, support'. MW *cilydd* and its Brittonic cognates are interpreted as early Goidelic loanwords rather than inherited words, but it is argued that MW *arglwydd* 'lord' is derived from the same root as the word for 'client', and that its original meaning was 'he who is with clients'. It is further shown that there are significant parallels in the clientship systems in medieval Ireland and in early Rome, so that it is plausible to assume that the social institution of clientship has common Italo-Celtic origins.

Latin *cliēns* is plausibly interpreted as the active aorist participle of the PIE verbal root *\*k'ley-* 'lean, support' (de Vaan 2007:120, cf. also WH I:233, EM 127, IEW 600ff.). In Latin, this root is preserved in the verbs compounded with *-clinō*, e.g. *inclinō* 'cause to lean, bend downwards', *reclinō* 'to cause to lie back', etc., and in other IE languages we find its reflexes in OHG *hlinēn* 'lean', Lith. *šlīeti* 'lean, rest (against)', and Skt. *śrayate* 'to lean' (cf. also OIr. *cleth* 'pillar, post', from the fem. participle *\*k'liteh<sub>2</sub>*, EDPC 208). The original meaning of *cliēns* was thus, presumably, 'supporter', which fits well what we know about the traditional relationship between clients and their patrons (Lat. *patrōnus*, a derivative of *patēr* 'father' < PIE *\*ph<sub>2</sub>tēr*) in Roman society. The clients 'supported' their patrons who, in turn 'leaned' on their clients.

In this paper we shall argue that the relationship between *cliēns* and *patrōnus* in Rome has a close parallel in early Celtic societies, where the term for the notion 'client' is, moreover, derived from the same PIE root

\**k'ley-* and can likewise be interpreted as 'supporter', or 'he who leans' (on his patron); supporting one's patron or leaning on him are essentially two different aspects of the same situation. We will also show the original term for 'patron' in Celtic was probably likewise a derivative of the PIE noun for 'father', PIE \**ph<sub>2</sub>tēr*).

The Old Irish word for 'client' is *céile* [io m], Ogham Irish *CELI* (Gen. sg.). It can sometimes be translated as 'companion', or even as 'friend', but it originally denoted a person who is in a socially subordinate position with respect to his superior (his patron or lord).

Formally, *céile* can be derived from the reduplicated stem \**k'ek'liyo-*. The reduplication can either be from the perfect (the reduplicated perfect of this PIE root is attested in Skt. *śísṛāya*, Gr. *kéklitai*, LIV s. v. \**k'lei-*), or we are dealing with an instance of a noun formed by reduplication (like PIE \**k<sup>w</sup>ek<sup>w</sup>lo-* 'circle' > Gr. *kýklos*, Skt. *cakrá-*). In any case, the loss of \**k* > \**k* before \**l* with the compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel is regular in Old Irish, cf. OIr. fut. *célaid* 'will conceal' from PCelt. \**kiklāseti* (McCone 1996:122), from the PIE root \**k'el-* 'hide' (Lat. *celō*, OIr. *ceilid*, Germ. *ver-hehlen*, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

In Welsh, a cognate of OIr. *céile* and its almost exact semantic equivalent is the noun MW *cilydd* 'client, follower', attested in this sense since the 13<sup>th</sup> century (it also means 'companion' and 'the other, adversary', cf. Co. *y-gyla* 'other' and Bret. *e-gile* 'other'). The suffix *-ydd* in this word developed from \**-iyo-* by a regular phonetic change (as in W *nefydd* 'new' from \**nowiyo-*, cf. OIr. *núae* 'new'). However, a major problem is presented by its vocalism, which does not match *-é-* in OIr., which is from PCelt. \**-ē-* < PIE \**-ey-*; on the other hand, *-i-* in *cilydd* must rather go back to \**-ī-*. If it is an inherited word, MW *cilydd* must then be from \**k'īliyo-* (\**kīkliyo-* or \**kikliyo-* would probably have given \**ciglydd*, cf. *cigleu* 'he heard' from the PIE perfect \**k'ek'luwe* 'he heard'). However, the *i*-vocalism in this form would be difficult to account for. The simplest solution is to assume that W *cilydd* was borrowed from Goidelic after the loss of \**k* before \**l* and the first phase of compensatory lengthening in Irish, when the OIr. word had a long, closed \**ē*, which was substituted by Brittonic \**ī* (since, at the

<sup>1</sup> Other etymologies of OIr. *céile* found in the literature are not satisfactory. LEIA C-52 (hesitatingly followed by Schrijver 1995:242) derives this word from the root \**k'ey-* which is found in Lat. *cīvis* 'citizen' (< \**k'ey-wi-*) and Lith. *šeimà* 'family' (< \**k'oy-mo-*), but this is semantically not very convincing. The connection with Lith. *kēlias* 'path, way' and Gr. *kēleuthos* 'path', mentioned by Mikhailova (2007:18–19), is even worse, since the root vocalism in the Proto-Celtic pre-form of *céile* was certainly not \**-e-* but \**-ē-* < PIE \**-ey-*. She also speculates about putative Altaic parallels to OIr. *céile* and its Celtic cognates, but these are, in our opinion, chance similarities.

time of borrowing, Brittonic did not have a closed \*ē). Less likely is the possibility that *-i-* in *cilydd* is the result of analogy with *cilydd* ‘fugitive’, which is derived from the verb *ciliaf* ‘flee, run’ (a denominative of *cil* ‘angle, corner’, cf. OIr. *cúl* ‘back’ < PCelt. \**kūlo-*, EDPC 229).

An inherited derivative of the root \**k’ley-* in Brittonic is, in our opinion, MW *arglwydd* ‘lord’ (also MCo. (*Tren*)*argluth*, OCo. *arluit*). This word, for which GPC does not give an etymology (besides saying that it is built from the prefix *ar-* and ‘an element’ *-glwydd*)<sup>2</sup> can be regularly derived from PCelt. \**fare-klēyo-*, where \**fare-* is the prefix (OIr. *ar-*, *air-* ‘at, by’, MW *ar-* ‘at, to’, Bret. *ar* ‘at, in front of’ cf. also Gaul. *are-* in place names such as *Aremorici* ‘(people) who dwell by the sea’, *Arelate* ‘(place) in front of the swamp’ EDPC 122, Delamarre 2003:52f.), and \**klēyo-* is the derivative of the same PIE root \**k’ley-* as in OIr. *céile*. Its original meaning was, we believe, ‘he who is with supporters (clients)’, or ‘he who is in front of clients’, which is precisely what the position of a patron was in early Roman and medieval Irish societies (see below). A similar compound, containing the same element \**klēyo-*, is W *culwydd* ‘sovereign, lord, God’ from *cu-* ‘dear’ (MW *cuf* < \**koymo-*, cf. OIr. *cóem*) and *-glwydd* < \**klēyo-* (with the regular loss of *-g-*).

Although a common Proto-Celtic noun meaning ‘client’ cannot be reconstructed (unless MW *cilydd* has somehow been analogically changed from \**ciglydd*), what we have shown so far points to the conclusion that the reflexes of the PIE root \**k’ley-* ‘lean, support’ acquired a specifically legal aspect of their meaning in Celtic, and became associated with the institution of clientship. Moreover, because of the similar semantic development of Lat. *cliēns*, this process can probably be dated to the Italo-Celtic period.

The Celtic equivalent of Lat. *patrōnus* is probably preserved in MW *athraw* ‘teacher, tutor’, which is attested in this meaning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (in later language this word means ‘professor’). CCCG 47 and most handbooks claim that *athraw* is actually from MW *alltraw* ‘godfather, sponsor’ (also in OCo. *altrou*, gl. *victricus*, Co *aultra*, OBret. *altro*, MBret. *autrou*, Mo-Bret. *aotrou* ‘lord, gentleman’), which is from PCelt. \**altrū* (n-stem, cf. OIr. *altru* ‘foster-father’), a derivative of the verb \**al-* ‘nourish’ (OIr. *alid*, Lat. *alō*), but *alltraw* is actually attested later than *athraw*, only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, two centuries after *athraw* which is supposed to have developed from it. We therefore think it probable that two similar words, reflexes of Brittonic

<sup>2</sup> Schrijver (1995:236), following an earlier suggestion by Morris Jones (1913:186), mentions the possibility that *-glwydd* is somehow connected with MW *glyw* ‘chieftain, ruler’, which would be derivable (via \**gwlyw*) from \**wli-wo-*, from the root \**welh<sub>2</sub>-* ‘rule, be strong’ (Lat. *valēre*). However, he himself admits that this etymology is formally very difficult (syllabic \**l* would not have given \**li* before \**-w-*, but \**al*).

\**atrū* ‘patron’ and \**altrū* ‘nourisher, godfather, foster-father’ were confused in individual Brittonic languages. If that is correct, then the opposition between \**k’ek’leyo-/k’leyo-/k’liyent-* ‘client’ and \**ph<sub>2</sub>trōn/\*ph<sub>2</sub>trōno-* ‘patron’ was present in both Italic and Celtic, and can be reconstructed in the Italo-Celtic period.

The conception that clients are ‘supports’ of their patrons is in line with a common metaphor in the poetic languages of many Indo-European traditions, where heroes are called ‘pillars’, e.g. in Pindar’s Olympian Ode 2.81, where it is said of Hector: Τροίᾳς ἄμαχον ἀστραβῆ κίονα, ‘Troy’s uncombattable, unwarped pillar’, while in Ol. 2.6 Theron is called ἔρεισμός Ἀκράγαντος ‘the support of Acragas’. In the Welsh tradition, Urien of Rheged is called ‘the pillar of Prydain (Britain)’, and Rheithfyw ‘the pillar of battle’ (West 2007:455, cf. also Campanile 1977:120f. for some similar examples from Old Irish). We see now that, in the Celtic tradition, this poetic metaphor is also reflected in the language, where at least one term for a ‘client’ is lexified as ‘supporter’, or ‘the one who leans on’ (OIr. *céile*, probably borrowed into MW as *cilydd*), while the term for ‘lord’ is lexified as ‘one with supporters’ (MW *arglwydd*).

The relationships of clients and patrons were very similar in the archaic Roman society and in the early medieval Ireland and Wales (we are better acquainted with the situation in Ireland because of the extensive law tracts dealing with the position of the *céili*).<sup>3</sup>

In early Ireland, there were two different types of clients, ‘free clients’ (*sóer-chéili*) and ‘unfree clients’ (*dóer-chéili*), which are also called *céili gíallnai* (‘hostage-clients’). The former had to pay an annual rent to their patrons (lords), but it was smaller than the amount paid by the unfree clients. Moreover, it appears that the free clients were often of the same social class as their lords, and, unlike the unfree clients, they could terminate their contract with the lord whenever they wished without penalty (the unfree clients had to pay a fine). Both types of clients had to provide some labour-services to their lords<sup>4</sup> and to personally attend them and to show them respect by rising before them in public. The unfree (or ‘base’) clients, unlike the free clients, had military duties, which means that they had to

<sup>3</sup> It was Henri d’Arbois de Jubainville (1897) who first noticed that the institution of clientship existed among the ancient Celts. He pointed out certain passages in Caesar’s *De bello Gallico* (VI.15, VI.19, VII.4) where clients of Gaulish *equites* are mentioned, and he also stressed that clients in medieval Ireland were helped in court by their patrons, similarly to clients in Rome, who needed support of their patrons in legal matters.

<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the free clients could send their servants to do this labour (Kelly 1988:33).

follow their lords to war and perform such tasks as patrolling the lord's lands (*rubae*) and hunting down brigands (*fubae*).<sup>5</sup> They were also obliged to provide their lords with an annual food-rent (*bés tige*).<sup>6</sup>

In early Rome (during the Republic), the institution of clientship played a very important role in politics, as well as in the everyday life of citizens. However, we do not know as much as we would like about the clientship system in Rome, since it appeared so natural to the Romans that their writers did not need to explain it.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, certain that the clients entrusted themselves (*in fidem et clientelam se dare*) to their patrons and received protection in return. While the patrons were, as a rule, *patricii*, the traditionally privileged class of citizens, the *clientes* were usually *plebeii*, but the terms *plebeii* and *clientes* were not synonymous, since the former was absolute and the latter contextual and relative (dependent on a particular social situation and definable with respect to *patroni*, the 'patrons').<sup>8</sup> In principle, there was only one type of clients in Rome, but in practice, the freedmen, who by default became their former master's clients, were not in the same position as the "regular" clients, who were never slaves. In this sense the distinction between *clientes libertini* and "regular" clients is similar to the Old Irish distinction between *sóer-chéili* and *dóer-chéili*.

Moreover, clientship in Rome shared some other features with clientship in medieval Ireland:

1. As in Ireland, having a large number of clients in Rome provided the patron with higher social status;<sup>9</sup> moreover, in both traditions clients were expected to provide services for their patrons.

2. As in Ireland, the clients in Rome were free men and their clientship to a patron was voluntary (except for freedmen).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Kelly 1988:31.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kelly 1988:30.

<sup>7</sup> Even Polybius, as a Greek writing about Roman customs, mentioned only those aspects of the clientship system that he found unusual or inherently interesting for his audience (who was also partly Roman, hence knowledgeable about the system, Rosser Dauster 2001:110f.). The Roman poets, on the other hand, are often unreliable – ironic and/or exaggerating – when writing about clientship (see Militello 2019 for a thorough account of passages in Roman poetry in which clientship is mentioned).

<sup>8</sup> Some Roman authors, e.g. Livy (5.32.8) stress the connection between the *plebeii* and the *clientes*, but such passages do not imply that these two classes of people were co-extensive.

<sup>9</sup> Kelly 1988:30, Rosser Dauster 2001:179f.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, in a society where social advancement was possible only through help of influential friends, the actual choices for clients were rather limited, and for poor people remaining free of a client's obligations was probably not a realistic op-

3. As in Ireland, the clients in Rome could count on their patrons to vouch for them in courts and act as sureties.<sup>11</sup> Both in Ireland and in Rome, the clients had independent legal capacity (unlike the slaves), but relying on their patrons to represent them or vouch for them in courts gave them significant advantage in the legal proceedings.

4. As in Ireland, one person in Rome could be a client to more than one patron (Rosser Dauster 2001:188, Kelly 1988:32).

There were also some significant differences between Roman and Irish clientship systems. However, most of these differences can be explained by different historical processes that had taken place in Ireland and Rome in the last few centuries before Latin and Old Irish were attested. In a society in which cattle herding played such a great role as in Ireland, it is no wonder that social and economic relations revolved around cattle, and that fiefs of cattle that were advanced to clients by their patrons formed the basis of their relationship and contractual obligations (Kelly 1988:29). In Rome, where herding played a minor role in comparison with agriculture, clients did not normally receive any fiefs of cattle from their patrons (at least in the historical period). Moreover, the Irish *céili* were expected to be hosts to their patrons on certain fixed days of the year,<sup>12</sup> while in Rome it was the other way around – it was the patrons who would invite their clients to dinners and festivities,<sup>13</sup> where it was expected of them to show largesse as a symbol of power and social dominance. This is in line with the political developments in late Roman Republic, when patrons had to compete for votes in order to be elected to offices, so organizing sumptuous feasts for their clients was, in a way, a form of institutionalized electoral bribing. In Ireland, on the other hand, voting was unknown and patrons were not motivated (or obliged by custom) to organize feasts for their clients.

---

tion. Also, traditional family ties often determined whose client one was expected to become, but at least in principle, free citizens could choose whose clients they would become (Rosser Dauster 2001:165).

<sup>11</sup> Plautus, *Menaechmi* 571–590.

<sup>12</sup> A particular feast had to be organized by a base client for his patron around New Years Day (the so-called “winter hospitality”, *cóe*, cf. Kelly 1988:30), and the patron could bring from 20 to 60 people to it (depending on his rank).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plautus, *Trinummus* 468–473. The Roman clients were also expected to regularly visit their patrons (the so-called *salutatio*, the occasion on which they expected to receive presents); on some occasions (but, unlike in Ireland, this was not prescribed by law) they would also bring presents to their patrons, usually food (Lucilius, 4.159–60: *Hi prae portant mi ingentes munere [sic] pisces triginta numero* »They [the clients] bring me huge fishes as a present, thirty of them«).



On the whole, then, the clientship systems in Republican Rome and early medieval Ireland show similarities that cannot be due to pure chance, and their differences can be explained by different cultural and social developments that shaped them. In light of the fact that in both traditions there appears to have been a common, inherited term for the institution of clientship, a noun derived from the root *\*k'ley-* 'lean, support', we can safely conclude that clientship in Rome and Ireland has common roots going back to the period when Italic and Celtic peoples belonged to the same cultural, and possibly linguistic, community.

The institution of clientship was probably established in the westernmost branches of Indo-European (i.e. in Italo-Celtic)<sup>14</sup> during the rise of hierarchically stratified and militarized societies in Western Europe in the Early Bronze Age, i.e. during the last centuries of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first centuries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. This period was also characterized by the emergence of local elites and long-distance trading, which implies that social hierarchies, based of patron-client-like relations, also played a significant role in Western Europe at that time.

---

<sup>14</sup> In this paper we do not wish to imply that Italo-Celtic was a genetic branch of Indo-European. It may have been just an areal grouping, but in geographic terms it is certainly the westernmost such grouping of reasonably well attested Indo-European languages.

## References

- Campanile, Enrico. 1977. *Ricerche di cultura poetica indoeuropea*. Pisa.
- CCCG = Pedersen, Holger; Henry Lewis. 1989. *A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- D'Arbois de Jubainville, Henri. 1897. La clientele en Irlande. *Nouvelle revue historique de droit français et étranger*, Vol. 21, 295–297.
- Delamarre, Xavier. 2003. *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*. Paris: Errance.
- De Vaan, Michiel. 2007. *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages*. Leiden: Brill.
- EDPC = Matasović, Ranko. 2009. *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*. Leiden: Brill.
- EM = Ernout, Alfred; André Meillet. 1967. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*. Paris.
- ERHJ = Matasović, Ranko; Tijmen Pronk; Dubravka Ivšić Majić; Dunja Brozović Rončević. 2016. *Etimološki rječnik hrvatskoga jezika. Svezak I: A-NJ*. Zagreb: Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje.
- GPC = *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*. Aberystwyth: University of Wales Press, 1950–2002.
- IEW = Pokorny, Julius. 1959. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke.
- Kelly, Fergus. 1988. *A Guide to Early Irish Law*. Dublin: DIAS.
- LEIA = Vendryès, Joseph. 1959-. *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*. Paris: CNRS.
- LIV = Rix, Helmut; Martin Kümmel; Thomas Zehnder; Reiner Lipp; Brigitte Schirmer. 2003. *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Mc Cone, Kim. 1996. *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change*. Maynooth: St. Patrick's College.
- Mikhailova, Tatiana. 2007. Macc, Cailín and Céile – an Altaic Element in Celtic? In: Hildegard L. C. Tristram (ed.) *The Celtic Languages in Contact*. Potsdam: Potsdam University Press, 4–24.
- Militello, Flores. 2019. *Tali dignus amico. Die Darstellung des patronus-clientis-Verhältnisses bei Horaz, Martial und Juvenal. (Classica Monacensia 54.)*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto.
- Morris Jones, John. 1913. *A Welsh Grammar, Historical and Comparative*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rosser Dauster, Molly Ann. 2001. »Sine legem fide«: Clientage in Ancient Rome from the Punic Wars to the Social War. Ph. D. Thesis Submitted to the Texas Tech University. Lubbock: Texas Tech University.



- Schrijver, Peter. 1995. *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology*. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi.
- West, Martin L. 2007. *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- WH = Walde, Alois; Johann Baptist Hofmann. 1938. *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg: Winter.

## Latinski *cliēns* i staroirski *céile*: italsko-keltska društvena institucija

### Sažetak

U ovom članku izvodimo latinsku imenicu *cliēns* 'klijent, pratilac' i staroirsku *céile* 'klijent, pratilac' iz indoeuropskoga korijena *\*k'ley-* 'osloniti se, podržati'. Srednjovelški *cilydd* i odgovarajuće riječi u britskim jezicima zacijelo su posuđenice iz goidelskih jezika, a ne naslijeđene riječi. S druge strane, tvrdimo da je srednjovelški *argwlydd* 'gospodar' izvedeno iz istoga korijena kao i riječi koje znače 'klijent, pratilac' u drugim italskim i keltskim jezicima. Pokazujemo i da postoje značajne usporednice između društvenog položaja klijenata u srednjovjekovnoj Irskoj i u antičkom Rimu, što upućuje na postojanje zajedničke italsko-keltske društvene institucije.

Ključne riječi: klijent, indoeuropska etimologija, italsko-keltski

Keywords: Indo-European etymology, clientship, Italo-Celtic

