

Sanctus ex machina: Colum Cille in the Lives of other saints

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Abstract: The medieval and early modern memory of Colum Cille is most clearly preserved in his own hagiographical tradition between Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, his Middle Irish Life, and Maghnus Ó Domhnáill's *Betha Colaim Chille*. Colum Cille appears elsewhere in medieval and early modern Irish literature, and most notably in the medieval and early modern hagiography of other Irish saints. In the later medieval and early modern Lives *Betha Berach*, *Betha Farannáin*, and *Betha Náile*, Colum Cille is intentionally utilised in the texts to underscore the saints' claims to church land and to ensure the tribute and respect to be paid to their respective monasteries. In *Betha Maedóc Ferna* he assists in the interpretation of angelic visions, and his testimony within the lives of Baithéne, first successor of Iona, legitimises the sanctity of his close companion. This paper will therefore explore the understudied and underlying themes of Colum Cille's appearances in the hagiography of other saints in the sense of their representations of the cultural memory of Colum Cille from the later medieval Irish perspective.

The influence of the cultural memory of Colum Cille and Iona in Ireland, Scotland, and beyond hardly knows bounds. However, while Colum Cille's hagiographical tradition and other texts relating directly to the saint have been well-studied, less attention has been paid to his appearances in other saints' Lives. This article will briefly explore the presence of Colum Cille in three examples of hagiography dating between the 12th and 16th centuries. All three appear to originate from or are connected to the northwest of Ireland, which is perhaps indicative that the strength of the cult of Colum Cille and the cultural memory of the saint played a crucial role in the production of hagiography in this area. It may further reflect interests of coarbs or erenagh families in claiming possession of the saint and his testimony. Associating their saints with Colum Cille, and other more widely known Irish saints and their monastic houses legitimised their political claims to land and their status as guarantors. The character and memory of Colum Cille could be

Í Chaluim Chille: Interdisciplinary Studies on Iona and Columba on the 1500th Anniversary of the Birth of the Saint

harnessed by hagiographers, creating new traditions relating to him in these other saints' Lives. Therefore, examining these later medieval and early modern Irish saints' Lives from this perspective offers a window into the way the character of Colum Cille could be utilised to underscore the spiritual and political interests of the authors and possible patrons of these texts.

The appearance of Colum Cille in the Irish Life of St Berach, *Betha Beraigh*, is the first example of this type of hagiographical interloping. Berach is said to be the founder of the church of Clúain Coirpthe, Co. Roscommon (Kilbarry | Cill Bhearaigh); though Pádraig Ó Riain remarked that he may also be the Berach associated with Cúil Dreimne, Co. Sligo, which is perhaps more relevant to this connection with Colum Cille.¹ The Latin Life of the saint, *Vita Sancti Berachi*, is preserved in the *Codex Insulensis*, and an illustration of the saint is found in the Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B 505 recension.² It has been suggested by Ó Riain that this Latin Life may have been composed on Saints' Island | Oiléan na Naomh, Co. Longford. As he argued, the surname of the late 14th/early 15th century prior of Saints' Island, Aughuistín Magraidhin, is echoed in the Roscommon townland of Bailemagrine | Baile Mhagraidhin, located in the parish of Termonbarry | Tearmann Bearaigh.³ This may indicate that Aughuistín belonged to an ecclesiastical family with especial interest in promoting the saint through the composition of his Life. The Irish Life, *Betha Beraigh*, may also be of Roscommon provenance as it is preserved as copied by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh in Brussels, KBR, MS 4190-4200. In the colophon to *Betha Beraigh*, Ó Cléirigh relates that the text was in an old book belonging to the children of Brian Óg Ó Máoil Chonaire, a member of the learned scribal family of Roscommon.⁴ This text has been dated to the late 12th century by Ksenia Kudenko and is

¹ Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin, 2011), 39.

² Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Longford priories and their manuscripts: All Saints and Abbeyderg', in Martin Morris and Fergus O'Ferrall (eds), *Longford History and Society. Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, (Dublin, 2010), 39-50, 43.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Charles Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉirenn - Lives of Irish Saints* vol. 1 (Oxford, 1922), 43; Paul Walsh, 'The learned family of Ó Maolconaire', *Catholic Bulletin*, vol. 26 (1936), 835-42.

significantly longer than *Vita Sancti Berachi*.⁵ While both texts detail Berach's activities with Coemgen of Glendalough,⁶ the Latin Life lacks many of the references to other major saints who appear in *Betha Beraigh*. Furthermore, while both texts share common accounts of Berach's miracles, the Irish account is significantly longer and more expansive in this regard.

Betha Beraigh is a highly politicised and formulaic example of hagiography, composed as a homily to be read on the saint's feast day.⁷ Berach is purposefully associated with several political families; perhaps most notable is his connection to Cenél Dobtha,⁸ to whom he is given genealogical relation.⁹ This preoccupation is further underscored by the presence of Cenél Dobtha in the Life, especially in terms of their claim to the land upon which Berach's churches were founded.¹⁰ However, while the Latin Life is preoccupied with Berach's activities with St Coemgen, this Irish text provides Berach with a more intimate connection with the saints whom he encounters. This is first shown through St Patrick's lengthy prophecy of Berach's birth to Dobtha, the progenitor of the Cenél Dobtha.¹¹ Again, Berach is demonstrated both through

⁵ Ksenia Kudenko, 'Hagiography as political documentation: The case of Betha Beraigh (The Life of St Berach)', in Emily Lyle (ed), *Myth and History in Celtic and Scandinavian Traditions* (Amsterdam, 2021), 151-70, 151.

⁶ Ó Riain notes that the passages involving Coemgen in *Vita Sancti Berachi* appear to have been taken directly from the Life of the Glendalough saint; Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 95. For further discussion on the relationship between these saints' lives, see: Lindy Brady, 'Apples on willow Trees: A metaphor for grafting and spiritual succession in the Early Irish Saints' "Lives" of Berach and Coemgen', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. 31 (2011), 56-73.

⁷ Kudenko, 'Hagiography', 155-56.

⁸ One of the kingdoms of Roscommon whose lands were to the north-east of the River Shannon, see: Kudenko, 'Hagiography', 158.

⁹ Beirech Cluana Cairpde m. Amargin m. Nemaínd m. Fintain m. Máil m. Dobtha m. Oengusa m. Erca Deirg m. Briain m. Echach Mugmedoin; Pádraig Ó Riain, *Corpus Genealogarium Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1985), 7; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 1, 25-26.

¹⁰ For a full discussion of the political nature of this text, see: Kudenko, 'Hagiography'.

¹¹ Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 1, 23-25; Charles Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn - Lives of Irish Saints* vol. 2 (Oxford, 1922) 22-24.

Patrick's prophecy and his genealogy to be a direct descendant of Dobtha, providing a political link between the saint and the sept. Patrick promises Dobtha that his seed will be protected and prosperous in wealth, asceticism, and learning if he and his family act accordingly and acknowledge Berach's sanctity. He also leaves Dobtha with a holy meadow for Berach to build his first monastery upon, threatening that anyone who deprives the saint of his designated spot will be deprived of heaven and earth if they do not repent.¹² When Berach is born, he is taken to study under St Daigh of Inishkeen, Co. Monaghan, before travelling on to Leinster where he serves Coemgen of Glendalough for seven years.¹³ Eventually Berach returns to Clúain Coirpthe, the name ultimately given to the meadow bestowed by St Patrick for his monastery, where he is visited by Colum Cille.

I nairaille aimser doluidh Coluim Cille mac Feidhlimidh, iar mbhriredh chatha Chúile Dreimne, go Berach, ar ní fhuair fáilte ag náomh aga taraill conige sin ... Is annsin doluidh Coluim Cilli dar Magh Ráthoinn, 7 suidis i ccin descertach i tóchair; 7 ata cros 7 annoit annsin. Ro foillsigheadh do Berach anní sin, 7 doluidh a ccomdhail Coluim Chille, 7 beannachais do. Beannachuis Coluim Cille dó san, 7 ro fear Bearach mór-fhailti fri Coluim Chille, 7 ro ráidh fris 'Tíagham fodechta don chathraigh'. 'Nocha ragh sa dom chasaibh annocht dhi', ar Coluim Cille, 'ar tainic an aghaidh domhnaigh. 'Berat sa liom tú,' ar Bearach, 'ar mo mhuin.' 'Ní bherair,' ar Coluim Cille, 'an aghaidh si reamhom anocht di.' 'Bérat sa', ar Berach, 'tú, 7 do chúl reamhat.'" Ro iomchuir dano Bearach Coluim Cille ar a mhuin, 7 cúl cáich dibh fria cheile, go rochatar in prainn-teach, 7 ro léig ar lár annsin.

Once upon a time, after the defeat of the battle of Cuil Dremne, Columcille son of Feidlimid set out to (visit) Berach; for he had found no welcome with any saint whom he had visited up to that time ... At that moment Columcille was crossing Magh Rathoinn, and sat down at the southern end of this causeway; and there is a cross and parish church there. This was revealed to Berach, and he went to meet Columcille, and greeted him. Columcille greeted Berach, who welcomed him heartedly, and said to him: 'Let us go

¹² Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 1, 25; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 2, 24.

¹³ Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 1, 26-28; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 2, 25-27; Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 252.

to the monastery now.' 'I will not go there on my feet tonight,' said Columcille, 'for the eve of Sunday has begun.' 'Then I will carry thee on my shoulders,' said Berach. 'Thou shalt not carry me forward to it tonight,' said Columcille. 'Then I will carry thee backwards' said Berach. So Berach carried Columcille on his shoulders, back to back, till they reached the refectory, and there he deposited him.¹⁴

Of immediate note is that this text relates that Colum Cille visits Berach after 'the defeat of the battle of Cúil Dreimne,' after which it is traditionally said that he left Ireland to found Iona.¹⁵ The author of the text seems to have been aware of his fate, as we are told that no other saint would welcome his visit aside from Berach. Returning to Pádraig Ó Riain's suggestion that this Berach is the same venerated in Cúil Dreimne, this would be a convenient visit, although that saint is referred to as 'Senberach' in the martyrologies.¹⁶ Even with this in mind, as Colum Cille meets Berach on the 'eve' of Sunday, he cannot walk to Berach's monastery in Cluain Coirpthe, wishing to observe the day of rest. Instead, as the text describes, Berach lifts Colum Cille so that the two saints' backs are touching, offering to carry him to the monastery backwards. Colum Cille's request to be carried backwards is particularly interesting, especially as *Cáin Domnaig* prohibits travel by horseback on Sundays.¹⁷ However, if Colum Cille, after just having met Berach following the battle of Cúil Dreimne, is presented as following the ordinances of Sunday observance, Berach appears to be exempt from the rule due to his aiding another saint. Instead, he is presented as serving Colum Cille in an ascetic manner, facilitating his travel, and dignifying his requests. While the text describes St Patrick as the saint said to have prophesied Berach's birth and

¹⁴ Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 1, 39; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 2, 38.

¹⁵ Richard Sharpe (ed. and trans.), *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba*, (London, 1995), 118.

¹⁶ R. I. Best and H.J. Lawlor (eds), *The Martyrology of Tallaght: From the Book of Leinster and MS. 5100-4 in the Royal Library, Brussels*, Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. 68 (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1931), 49; Stokes, Whitley, *Féilire Húi Gormáin: The Martyrology of Gorman, from a Manuscript in the Royal Library, Brussels*, Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. 9 (London, 1895), 114.

¹⁷ Vernam Hull, 'Cáin Domnaig', *Ériu*, vol. 20 (1966), 151-77, 169.

granted the meadow for his monastery, it is Colum Cille who legitimises the sanctity of the monastery constructed in Cluain Coirpthe. As the text states:

7 doronsat aontaidh 7 cotach, Berach 7 Coluim Cille; 7 forfhagaibh Coluim Cille fagbhala maithe imdha i cCluain Coirpthe; forofhagaibh neam dia sagart, 7 dia habaidh, acht go ndearna ernaihthe fo trí ag crois Coluim Chille co coibhérta; ro fagaib co tибhértha cummaidh fris féin ar neam dá gach manac Bearaigh nó rachadh dí ailithre chuca. Ro fhagaibh in soisgél ro scriobh dia láim feisin, a ccomarta a áenta 7 Bearaich; farofhagaibh moir-bheannachtain ag Berach 7 ro luidh fora shétt.

[a]nd Berach and Columcille made a covenant and compact, and Columcille left many good bequests in Cluain Coirpthe; he left heaven to its priest and to its abbot (the promise) that he would be helped if he pray three times at the cross of Columcille; he left (a promise) that association with himself in heaven should be granted to every monk of Berach who should come to him on pilgrimage. He left the gospel which he had written with his own hand in sign of the covenant between himself and Berach; and he left abundant blessing with Berach and proceeded on his way.¹⁸

While the other pre-eminent saints such as Patrick and Coemgen have their roles to fulfil in *Betha Beraigh*, prayer to Colum Cille will ensure the salvation of Berach and his monks. Crucially, it is the *only* section of the Life which associates Berach with Colum Cille, yet Colum Cille is crucial to Berach's own legitimacy as a saint.

This Life of St Berach was used as an exemplar by Muirgheas Ó Maol Chonaire to complete the Life of St Caillín in the Book of Fenagh in 1516.¹⁹ In turn, *Betha Caillín* was a likely source for the 16th century 'second' Life of Máedoc of Ferns.²⁰ The sharing of hagiographical materials is further underscored through the fact that the only surviving copy of *Betha Beraigh* is found in KBR MS 4190-

¹⁸ Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 1, 39; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 2, 38-39.

¹⁹ Raymond Gillespie, 'Imagining St Caillín: The making of the Book of Fenagh', in Raymond Gillespie, Salvador Ryan, and Brendan Scott (eds), *Making the Book of Fenagh; Context and Text* (Cavan, 2016), 63-83, 73.

²⁰ Raymond Gillespie, 'A sixteenth-century aint's Life: The second Irish of St. Maedoc', *Breifne*, vol. 10.40 (2004), 147-54.

4200. This use of Berach's Life as a hagiographical model may account for a portion of the last chapter of the text, itself copied from *Bethu Phatráic*.²¹ This also appears in two other Lives in the same manuscript, *Betha Adamnáin*, and *Betha Farannáin*, the latter of which is the second example of Colum Cille's appearances to be discussed in this chapter.²²

Betha Farannáin is a brief Life consisting only of ten chapters, copied by Ó Cléirigh from a book belonging to Seán Carrach Ó Maonaigh, coarb of Farannán's church at Allt Fharannáin, just outside of Easky, Co. Sligo.²³ Only four chapters of *Betha Farannáin* reference the Uí Mhaonaigh, who were members of the Uí Fhiachrach Muaidhe. The rest of the text is material relating to Colum Cille and his activities after attending the meeting of Druim Cett, especially evidenced by its preservation of *Fil súil nglas*²⁴ and the tradition of the release of Scannlán Mór.²⁵ The text appears to also imply that Farannán, whose genealogy indicates him to be a member of the Cenél nEogain, was present at the meeting of Druim Cett in Colum Cille's company.²⁶ This already extant local tradition may have inspired the hagiographer to more closely entwine the relationship between the two saints. In the text, Colum Cille is described as travelling to southern Sligo in the company of a group of saints, among them, Adomnán, and Baithéne, first successor of

²¹ Whitley Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick: With Other Documents Relating to That Saint*, 2 vols (London, 1887), vol. 1, 62; Plummer, *Betha Náem nÉrenn*, vol. 1, 42.

²² Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Betha Adamnáin: The Irish Life of Adamnán*, (London, 1988), 60-63; Charles Plummer, 'Betha Farannáin', in O. J. Bergen, R. I. Best, and Kuno Meyer (eds) *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* vol. 3 (Dublin, 1910), 1-7.

²³ Plummer, 'Betha Farannáin', 5.

²⁴ In the text, *fuil súil nglas*.

²⁵ It should be noted that this text only mentions two reasons for Colum Cille's return to Ireland, rather than the typical three. Plummer, 'Betha Farannáin', 1-2; Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988), 65-69.

²⁶ Some evidence of this tradition can be found in John Colgan's notes on his Latin translation of the Irish life, John Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Veteris et Maioris Scotiæ Seu Hiberniæ, Sanctorum Insulæ* (Louvain, 1645), 340; For further discussion on Colum Cille in Sligo, see: Brian Lacey, 'Cúl Dreimne, Drumcliff, and Colum Cille', *Sligo Field Club Journal*, vol. 6 (2020), 47-58.

the abbacy of Iona. This anachronism appears to reflect local traditions relating to their respective church foundations in this part of Sligo. He leaves Adomnán with the foundation of a church in Scrín Adomnáin, and reaches Allt Fharannáin, where there is still a ‘holy well’ dedicated to the saint today.²⁷

Tainic Columcille chuca 7 tangatur dibhlínibh tar Traigh na Mna Mairbhe .i. Traigh álainn Eóthuile agas ass é go Tulach na Maoile, ris an abarthar Sccrin Adamnáin aníu. Agas ro bennaigh hí, agas ro faccaibh Adamnán úasal naomh innte; agas as sein go hAll na Faircsiona ris anabthar All fíor-álainn Farandáin aníu. Tainic ina ccoinne ann sin Tiopraite mac Maoile Duin mic Fiachrach Ealgaigh mic Dathí agas a mhac Dúinchad. “Maith amh,” ar Farannan, “a Choluim Cille, as ionad crábaidh 7 cleircehta an t-ionadh so; 7 fuarus fein mian mo mhenman, 7 gradh glemaisech mo chriodhe fa áras naoimh 7 neimedh do denamh annso; 7 anmhain ann go foircend mo bethadh ag bindgabail mo psalm 7 mo psaltrach, ag moladh rígh nimhe 7 talman.” “Do gébha tusa an fearann so ar son do bhennachta 7 ar bhennacht Coluim Cille 7 na naomh díblinaibh,” ar Tiopraitte mac Maoile Duin. Ruccattur na naoimh buidechus adhbail ris an iodbairt sin, 7 ro bennaighettur an t-ionad sin, 7 an t-uisce iodhanghlan, 7 an t-all taitnemach; 7 ro fáccbatur Forannán na fíort ‘san reigles riaghalta sin.

Colum Cille came to them, and both parties came over the Shore of the Dead Woman, that is, the beautiful shore of Éothuile, and from there to Tulach na Maoile, which is called Scrín Adomnáin today, and blessed it; and left noble saint Adomnán there and [went] from there to All na Faircsiona which is called exquisite All(t) Fharannáin today. Tiobraide son of Maol Dúin son of Fiachra Ealgach son of Dath-Í and his son Dúinchadh came to meet them there. “Good indeed,” said Farannán, “Colum Cille, this place is a place of piety and clerical life; and I have found my heart’s desire and the bright and beautiful delight of my soul here; melodiously singing my psalms and my psalter, making a place of holiness and sanctity here until the end of my days, praising the King of Heaven and Earth.” “You will obtain this land for the sake of your blessing and the blessing of Colum Cille and all the saints,” said Tiobraide son of Maol Dúin. The saints gave great thanks for that offering and they blessed that place and the pure

²⁷ A holy pool or vat at the foot of a waterfall.

water, and the bright foundation, and they left Farannán of the marvels in that monastic church.²⁸

Travelling southwest towards Easky one passes through the modern towns of Skreen | Scrín Adomnáin and Templeboy | Teampall Baoithín before coming to Alternan | Allt Fharannáin.²⁹ While Baithéne, the first successor of Colum Cille, is mentioned as being in this company, no mention of a foundation of his church, though close-by, is found in the text. However, the near proximity of these places dedicated to saints with their own close connections to Colum Cille may further underscore the intentional association of Farannán with the saint. Like the previous Life discussed, Colum Cille is not directly responsible for granting the actual land for these churches. The group is met in their travels by Tiopraite son of Maol Dúin, said to be the king of the Uí Fhiachrach Muaidhe, who grants land to Colum Cille, which he bestows upon the saints in his company mentioned. While the grant of a church or monastery from one saint to another is not an uncommon hagiographical trope, Colum Cille again serves as the pre-eminent saint with the agency and ability to enable the foundation of these churches and therefore legitimise their sanctity through his association. Despite its brevity, like *Betha Beraigh*, *Betha Farannáin* is another example of late hagiography written with clear political motivations. The inclusion of Tiopraite son of Maol Dúin, the “king” of Uí Fhiachrach Muaidhe, is a strategic one and a clear attempt by the author of the text to associate Farannán and his coarb with one of the earliest patriarchs of the Uí Dhubhda who may have ruled this area of south Sligo.³⁰ Portraying

²⁸ This semi-diplomatic transcription and translation is my own, from MS 4190-4200, ff. 92^v-93^r, corresponding to Plummer, ‘Betha Farannáin’, 4. A full edition and translation of the text with some notes by the author is forthcoming publication in *Analecta Hibernica*.

²⁹ ‘Scrín’, in Logainm.ie; ‘Teampall Baoith’, in Logainm.ie; ‘Allt Fharannáin’, in Logainm.ie.

³⁰ I have not found any explicit reference elsewhere to Tiopraite as king of the Uí Fhiachrach Muaidhe. However, the text notes his arrival in the company of his son, Dúnchad. Dúnchad was known as Dúnchad Muirisci, king of Connacht from 682. Strangely, the Uí Mhaonaigh are presented as members of Clann Teimhin, and descended from Teimhin son of Maol Dúin, rather than Tiopraite, in their genealogy. This may present a separate tradition or a case of mistaken identity. Regardless, the role of this early patriarch of the Uí Dhubhda in granting land to Colum Cille in the text

Tiopraite as the 'king' who granted church land to Colum Cille, and Colum Cille as the saint who dedicated Farannán's church, therefore marks an intentional use of both figures by the hagiographer to legitimise Allt Fharannáin on behalf of its coarb.³¹

A similar representation of Colum Cille is found in the Life of St Náile, *Betha Náile*. Preserved in the same manuscript as the two Lives just discussed, this text is yet another example of political hagiography utilising Colum Cille to legitimise the claims of its saint.³² The genealogies and the prologue to *Betha Náile* provide Náile with a Munster pedigree as the son of Óengus son of Nad Froích, but he is presented as another contemporary of Colum Cille.³³ Despite this connection with Munster, Náile ultimately became associated with southwest Ulster, Cill Náile (Kinawley), Co. Fermanagh and Inbhear Náile (Inver), Co. Donegal.³⁴ Ó Cléirigh remarks in his colophon that the text was copied in Drowes from a book belonging to a member of Clann Suibhne Boghaineach.³⁵

explicitly for Farannán's use indicates the hagiographer's clear interest in asserting the claims of Farannán and his coarb to his church land; Maol Dubh s. Fiachrach Ealga had three sons, Cobhthach, Teimhean, and Tiobraide; Maoldubh, mac Fiachrach Ealgaigh, trí mac les, .i. Cobhthach, Temean, agus Tiobraide; Teimhin s. Maol Dubh, from whom are Clanna Teimhchin, i.e. Uí Mhuirgheasa and Uí Mhaonaigh and Meic Giolla Riabhaigh, Uí Aodha and Uí Dhonnchadha; Temin, mac Maoilduibh, o d-táid Clanna Temin, .i. Uí Muirgheasa, agus Uí Maonaigh, agus Meic Giolla riabhaigh, Uí Aodha, agus Uí Donnchadha; Nollaig Ó Muraile (ed.), *Leabhar Mór Na nGenealach: The Great Book of Irish Genealogies. Compiled (1645-66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh*, 5 vols (Dublin, 2003), vol. 5, 597. Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (Dublin, 2001), 298.

³¹ For further discussion of the political structure and context of *Betha Farannáin*, see Courtney Selvage, 'Cultural and political identity in the hagiography of Gaelic Ireland', in Simon Egan (ed.) *Beyond the Pale and Highland Line: The Irish and Scottish Gaelic World, c. 1400-1630* (Manchester, 2025), 205-23.

³² For a longer discussion of this text and its provenance, see: Courtney Selvage, "'I am the lion destroying cattle, I am the bear for courage': An Examination of *Betha Naile*", *Quaestio Insularis*, vol. 21 (2020), 85-110.

³³ Charles Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica Hibernica: vitae adhuc ineditae sanctorum Mac Creiche, Naile, Cranat* (Brussels, 1925), 100.

³⁴ Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 509.

³⁵ Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica*, 125.

Raymond Gillespie has indicated that it was possibly commissioned for the Uí Dhroma family, the erenagh family of Kinawley, Co. Fermanagh in the 16th century.³⁶ The church of Kinawley and its lands appear to have been a matter of great dispute in the early modern period. It was granted to Seán Mag Uidhir by Pope Paul III in 1535 but was later burned by the Uí Raghallaigh in 1538.³⁷ That the church was in Meig Uidhir possession is perhaps evidenced by Náile's claim of tribute payments owed to his church in Kinawley, which are detailed at length in the second half of the Life. Náile baptises an individual named Lúan, himself apparently a member of the Meig Uidhir of Fermanagh (though this is not explicitly mentioned in the text), and lays claim to the tribute owed to his church by Lúan's descendants.³⁸ This would perhaps indicate some interest by the hagiographer in asserting the Mag Uidhir claim to the church and association with Náile, whether this was an earlier medieval claim, or a result of the Life being composed in direct response to the disputed territory in the early modern period is unclear.³⁹ However, Kinawley and its land were ultimately held by the Uí Dhroma, who were the coarbs of his church.⁴⁰ The beginning

³⁶ Raymond Gillespie, 'Traditional religion in sixteenth-century Gaelic Ireland', in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong (eds), *Christianities in the Early Modern Celtic World* (London, 2014), 29-41, 35-36.

³⁷ Liam Kelly, *The Diocese of Kilmore 1100-1800* (Dublin, 2017), 150; W. M. Hennessey and B. Mac Carthy, *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster, Otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540*, 4 vols (Dublin, 1887), 623.

³⁸ *Betha Náile*: [Lúan] mac Irghalach mac Eignigh meic Fergusa, meic Aodha meic Corbmaic meic Coirbre an Daimhairgitt, meic Féicc meic Deghadh Duirn meic Rochada meic Colla Focrich meic Eachach Doimhléin meic Cairpri Lifechair, f. 135^v, this matches the genealogy given for the Lughán of Meig Uidhir, see: Ó Muraile, *Leabhar Mór*, 22.

³⁹ Ó Riain in particular notes that the inclusion of Lúan may have been in direct response to the rise of the Meig Uidhir in the period after 1300; Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Saints in the Catalogue of Bishops of the Lost "Register of Clogher"', *Clogher Record*, vol. 14.2 (1992), 66-77, 67; On the involvement of Clann Suibhne Boghaineach (Banagh) and the Uí Dhroma in the composition of the Life, see: Courtney Selvage, 'St Náile, Clann Suibhne Banagh, and the Uí Dhroma of Kinawley', *Breifne* (2025) forthcoming.

⁴⁰ Kelly, *Diocese*, 87.

of the text, on the other hand, situates Náile in Donegal, indicating that Ó Cléirigh or the hagiographer(s) compiled material relating to the saint from both areas, as well as from other sources. The text opens with a brief description of Óengus son of Nad Froích's succession to the sovereignty of two provinces of Munster.⁴¹ His mother Eithne's vision of his birth,⁴² follows in verse, describing Náile as a pup washed with milk so that every territory of Ireland would be full of learning and piety in Náile's lifetime.⁴³ Óengus himself interprets the vision, telling her that St Patrick blessed him with a prophecy that she would bear his son, who will fill the mouths of Ireland with his piety. Following his birth, Náile is instructed by an angel to travel north to meet Colum Cille. Náile travels 'from the south' with a band of followers, where he finds Colum Cille, reciting psalms. Upon meeting, Colum Cille bestows a church on Náile, declaring its name and its dedication until doom.⁴⁴

*'Inbher Naile an átha
a ainm go laithe an bhrátha
bronnaim,' ar Colaím na ccnedh
'duit, a Naile, as mochen.'*

*'Inbhear Náile of the ford
Its name until doomsday,
I bestow', said Colum of the wounds,
'to you, Náile, and welcome.'*⁴⁵

As in St Berach's Life, Náile's birth and sanctity are prophesied by St Patrick; but as Náile is a saint hailing from Munster, Colum Cille is again needed to facilitate and legitimise his claim to the church association in Donegal. The composition of Náile's Life additionally seems to have been greatly influenced by the Life of Colum Cille compiled by Maghnus Ó Domhnaill. A shared passage between these

⁴¹ Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica*, 126.

⁴² A parallel with Adomnán's account of Colum Cille's mother's vision in VC iii, 1, but more closely with Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's accounts of her visions, see: Sharpe, 205; O'Kelleher, A. and G. Schoepperle, 33.

⁴³ For some discussion of the similarities between Náile's mother 'Eithne', and Colum Cille's mother 'Eithne', see: Selvage 2020.

⁴⁴ Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica*, 126-29.

⁴⁵ My own semi-diplomatic transcription and translation, MS 4190-4200, f. 130^v, corresponding to: Plummer, *Miscellanea hagiographica*, 103, 129.

two Lives presents Colum Cille in the Kinawley portion of the text as a key figure in the creation of Náile's holy bell, which is ultimately made from a piece of iron used to slay the Loch Ness monster.⁴⁶ With Colum Cille's blessing, the bell is primarily for cursing those who do not fulfill the tributes to be paid to Náile's monastery in Fermanagh. As a now lost bell associated with Náile was owned by the Uí Dhroma,⁴⁷ the inclusion of this narrative, borrowed directly from *Betha Colaim Chille* or otherwise, likely serves as a political device to assert their claim to the saint.

While the three examples discussed place Colum Cille in situations in which he can legitimise claims to churches and monasteries on behalf of the saints in whose Lives he appears, this is not the only role he plays as a figure in the hagiography of other saints. In the 16th century second Life of St Maedóc of Ferns, which primarily places Maedóc in Ulster rather than the southeast of Ireland, Colum Cille also appears in the text after he is sent for by the saint to interpret an angelic vision sent to Maedóc.⁴⁸ The implication that Colum Cille is the only saint able to assist Maedóc is more likely a direct reference to his seasoned experience with angels as portrayed at least by Adomnán in Book III of *Vita Columbae*. Likewise, in the hagiographical tradition of his first successor of the abbacy of Iona, Baithéne, the close relationship and bond between the two monks is continuously drawn upon to illustrate Baithéne's sanctity.⁴⁹ Though a cult of Baithéne was present in County Roscommon and County Donegal,⁵⁰ the testimony of Colum Cille as present in the Latin and Irish Lives is required to legitimise Baithéne's sanctity. A discussion of these Lives goes beyond the limitations of this chapter, but these other examples of Colum Cille in other saints' Lives serve to demonstrate the utilisation of his character in situations beyond his involvement

⁴⁶ Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica*, 140-41; A. O'Kelleher, and G. Schoepperle (eds), *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Colum Cille* (Urbana, 1918), 344-45.

⁴⁷ Cormac Bourke, *The Early Medieval Hand-Bells of Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 2020), 271.

⁴⁸ Plummer, Charles, *Betha Náem nÉrenn* vol. 11, 227.

⁴⁹ Kuno Meyer, 'Baithin Mac Brenainn ocus Colam Cille', *The Gaelic Journal*, vol. 4.47 (1893), 229; W.W. Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice Olim Salmanticensi Nunc Bruxellensi* (Bruxelles, 1965), 382.

⁵⁰ Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 89.

in the foundation of other saints' churches as he is portrayed in *Betha Beraigh*, *Betha Farannáin*, and *Betha Náile*.

All three of these Lives present their saints in situations which need a solution to fit the narrative desired by the hagiographer. While Berach is given land for his monastery by St Patrick, it is not actually constructed until after he is educated and experiences spiritual growth. Patrick also performs his own specific role in this text, as he does also in *Betha Náile*—he prophesies the births of both Berach and Náile in their respective Lives and his testimony alone is enough to ensure that what he says will come true. Of course, this is true of all the major saints present in these Lives, whether Patrick or Colum Cille, or Ciarán or Molaise of Devenish;⁵¹ each of these saints acts accordingly and can be manipulated as needed. It is furthermore clear within the context of the compilation and production of these examples of hagiography from the later medieval period, that these texts have been written with specific political motivations in mind. Connecting and claiming association with Colum Cille and Patrick not only granted agency and legitimacy to the coarb or erenagh families associated with the saints, and particularly so post-Irish church reformation, and in post-Norman Ireland. Although Colum Cille was a well-travelled individual in his historical Life, it would however be utterly impossible to be in as many places as he is claimed to be, as he appears in the company of or associated with dozens of other saints in Ireland and Scotland. We are presented instead with a Colum Cille as he is preserved in Irish cultural memory within these hagiographical traditions. He appears when the hagiographer needs to present his subject as having claim to tributes, churches, local families, and whatever else may be desirable as the text progresses. Like the *deus ex machina* of Classical tragedy, the saint may be brought in by the hagiographer at seemingly any point in the narrative to resolve what otherwise may be unsurmountable problems of geography, monastic affiliation, or genealogy. With this in mind, we may understand Colum Cille as *sanctus ex machina*.

⁵¹ Who also appears in Náile's Life.

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