

St Náile, Clann Suibhne Banagh, and the Uí Dhroma of Kinawley

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Despite the length of his biography, or Life, known as *Betha Náile*, and multiple church associations in both Donegal and Fermanagh; as a saint, Náile has received little scholarly attention. The Life itself was translated and published by Charles Plummer in *Miscellanea hagiographica hibernica* in 1925, who had a low opinion of the text's literary value.¹ The late Raymond Gillespie, discussing *Betha Náile* within the context of other saints' Lives produced in sixteenth-century Breifne, argued that Náile's Life was composed on behalf of the Uí Dhroma between 1540 and 1600, who were the erenagh family of Náile's church in Kinawley (Cill Náile), in what is now County Fermanagh.² The Fermanagh provenance of the Life is demonstrable as nine chapters³ of the text situate the saint in Kinawley, Devenish, and among saints associated with churches surrounding the upper Lough Erne.

However, the first seven chapters indicate that they were possibly composed in the vicinity of his church in Inver, Donegal.⁴ It is further possible that *Betha Náile*, as it survives, may have been compiled out of different material relating to the saint associated with both of his church foundations and his local cults. While it seems likely that a Life of Náile was commissioned by the Uí Dhroma as it contains material associated with Kinawley, the text never mentions any of them by name and references to them in other surviving historical sources are sparse. The author has suggested elsewhere that what might be deemed the 'Fermanagh' portion of the Life may have been compiled earlier in the medieval period, and that the text as a whole was revised in the sixteenth century within the context of other Lives produced approximately in the same timeframe in the northwest of Ireland.⁵ This article will therefore discuss the possible provenance of both sections of the Life, focusing first on Náile's association with Inver, and then the potential involvement of the Uí Dhroma in the completion of the Fermanagh portion.

- 1 Charles Plummer (ed.), *Miscellanea hagiographica Hibernica: vitae adhuc ineditae sanctorum Mac Creiche, Naile, Cranat* (Brussels, 1925), pp 97-155.
- 2 Raymond Gillespie, 'Saints and manuscripts in sixteenth-century Breifne' in *Breifne*, 44 (2008), pp 533-556 at pp 546-547.
- 3 Following Plummer's chapters, which are based on their categorisation in the manuscript.
- 4 Plummer (ed.), *Miscellanea hagiographica*, pp 100-103, 126-129.
- 5 Courtney Selvage, 'Three Saints' Lives from the northwest of Ireland: a study from within the context of the Columban tradition' (unpublished PhD thesis, Ulster University, 2023), pp 228-236.