



## Old names for the River Suck and associated sites

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Author(s)	Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín
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# OLD NAMES FOR THE RIVER SUCK AND ASSOCIATED SITES<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evidence indicating that the names *Bré* and *Dubabainn Bré* (and variants thereof) may be regarded as older, alternative names for the river Suck. It also considers textual references to some other toponyms associated with the Suck, including the pools named *Duiblind Fróich* and *Duiblind chríche Cíarraige*, and the fort named *Dúnad Átha Deirg* alias *Dún Díarmata*. *Inter alia*, it suggests that the toponymy of the materials discussed raises interesting questions as to the authors' knowledge of the landscape and motivation for referencing it.

That the river Suck (*Int Súca*) may previously have had the name *Bré* has been mooted before.<sup>2</sup> This paper verifies the evidence for identifying the Suck by the alternative names *Bré* and *Dubabainn Bré*. It also clarifies that there were two distinct, significant pools on the river Suck named *Duiblind* ('Black Pool'), although these have been misidentified or conflated in some sources. It suggests that one of these, *Duiblind Fróich* ('Fróech's Pool'), may be the pool named *Duiblind chríche Cíarraige* ('the Black Pool of the territory of the Cíarraige') in a late Old Irish source, and that this pool may have been within or contiguous to what later became known as Castlerea, County Roscommon. The name of *Dún Díarmata*, a fort overlooking the Suck near Ballymoe, is also discussed.

The Suck is a major Connacht river, second in importance only to the Shannon. Its source and initial section as far as Castlerea are within the ancestral territory of the Cíarraige. The Cíarraige came to share the plain of Mag nAí with the genealogically distinct Uí Briúin Aí, but into the eighth century, they were still the dominant population group in this territory and are often dubbed *Cíarraige Aí* in the literature.<sup>3</sup> They were the main branch of the population-group known as the *Trí Cíarraige Connacht*.<sup>4</sup> John O'Donovan identified the headwater of the Suck as a small mountain stream of that name in the townland of Coolnafarna, parish of Annagh, County Mayo (some 5 kilometres east of Ballyhaunis). The burgeoning stream runs eastwards into Lough O'Flynn (*Loch Uí Fíloinn*), then winds its way further east to Castlerea, where it turns sharply southwards, passing through Ballymoe (*Bél Átha Moga*), Dunamon (*Dún Imdain*), Athleague (*Áth Liac Máenacáin*), Ballyforan (*Bél Átha Feórainne*), and Ballinasloe (*Bél Átha Nadsluaig*, later rendered *Béal Átha na Sluaigheadh*), joining the Shannon just south of the village of Shannonbridge.<sup>5</sup> From Athleague onwards or thereabouts, the Suck's course is through Uí Maine territory. While one of the two pools to be discussed is in the territory of the Cíarraige, and is clearly identified as such in at least one source, the other can be shown to lie further south, in Uí Maine territory.

## THE RIVER *BRÉ* AND *DUIBLIND FRÓICH* IN *TÁIN BÓ FRAÍCH*

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to the anonymous reader for various important additions and corrections, and to the editors of *Celtica* for their careful reading.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Pádraig Ó Riain, Diarmuid Ó Murchadha and Kevin Murray (eds), *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames / Foclóir Stairiúil na Gaeilge*. Fascicle 2 (Names in B-), 171, s. n. *Bré* (2): 'R. in E. CONN., perh. early name for Suca / area around tl. Dundermot, p. Drumatemple, b. Ballymoe, RN.' The citations in this entry, and others, are discussed below. See, earlier, E. Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (1910), 370b: *d[ubh]abha bhreagha*.

<sup>3</sup> See Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London, 1973), 245–7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 236.

<sup>5</sup> O'Donovan, *AFM* s.a. 1263 (vol. III, 390–1, footnote u); based on O'Donovan's letter written in Castlerea on 5 July 1837, *Ordnance Survey Letters, Roscommon*, 2 vols. (1837–8), vol. I, 146–51 (= Michael Herity (ed.), *Ordnance Survey Letters: Roscommon* (Dublin, 2010), 41–3).

What appear to be the two earliest references to the river *Bré* occur in the eighth-century tale *Táin Bó Froíoch*.<sup>6</sup> These do not identify the *Bré* as an alternative name for the Suck; for that, we are dependent on various Middle and Early Modern Irish texts which are cited below. The Connacht warrior Fróech mac Idaith is the central figure in *Táin Bó Froíoch*,<sup>7</sup> a tale which opens with an extravagantly detailed account of himself and his splendid cavalcade arriving at the royal fort of Ailill and Medb where he intends to court their daughter Findabair. So impressive is the visitors' appearance that sixteen people die of suffocation as the people in the fort press forward to catch a glimpse of them. Fróech's cavalcade plays to this admiring audience: as soon as the horsemen dismount, they unleash their hunting dogs who tear off on a chase that begins and ends at Ráith Crúachan:

Scoirit a n-echu agus léicít a mmlchona. Do·sennat secht n-aige do ráith Chrúachan, agus secht sinnchu agus secht míla maige agus secht turcu altai, conda·rubatar ind óic issind aurlaind in dúine. Íar sin fo·cerdat inna mílchoin bedg i mBrei. Gabait secht ndoborchona. Dos·mbertatar dochum na harddae i ndorus inna prímrátha.<sup>8</sup>

'They unharness their horses and unleash their hunting hounds. They hunt seven deer to the rampart of Cruachain, and seven foxes and seven hares and seven wild boars, so the youths could kill them on the front-lawn of the fort. Then the hounds throw themselves into the Brei. They catch seven otters. They brought them to the height at the entrance of the main rampart.'<sup>9</sup>

For the next fortnight the visitors spend part of each day hunting, their course ending always in front of the royal fort at Ráith Crúachan, presumably so that onlookers can watch the spectacle of the kill: *Anait íarum co cenn cóicthigis issin dún, agus toffunn doib cach óenlae dochum in dúine. Do·saigtis Connachta dia ndécsin* 'They stay then until the end of a fortnight in the fort, and it was hunting for them every single day towards the fort. The Connachtmen used to come in order to watch them.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the most recent edition, see Wolfgang Meid (ed. and trans.), *The Romance of Froech and Findabair or The Driving of Froech's Cattle: Táin Bó Froíoch* (Innsbruck, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the name-forms *Fróech* and *Idaith* see Meid, *Táin Bó Froíoch*, 78–9 and 80. The hero's patronymic in later texts is usually rendered as *Fidach*. I use the form *Fróech* (genitive *Froíoch*) in the body of this article.

<sup>8</sup> Meid, *Táin Bó Froíoch*, 42 (§5). The tale is preserved in four manuscripts 'which are not directly related to one another': for details, see Meid, *Táin Bó Froíoch*, 27–31. These are: TCD MS H 2.18 (1339; The Book of Leinster), henceforth L; TCD MS H 2.16 (1318; The Yellow Book of Lecan), henceforth Y; BL Egerton MS 1782, henceforth Eg.; NLS Gaelic MS XL, henceforth Ed. Variant readings for *i mBrei* in the citation above are: *issin mBreit* (Eg.); *isin mBree(?) .i. aband mor fail i connachtaib* (Y). The letter following the first *e* of *mBree*, while not entirely clear, is almost certainly *e*. The words *i. aband mor fail i connachtaib* (written in the same hand as the rest) are not noted in Meid's *Variae Lectiones* (op. cit., pp. 53–61, at 54), but cf. the online image of the MS at [www.isos.dias.ie](http://www.isos.dias.ie) (col. 651, line 8). In his note on the forms (*Táin Bó Froíoch*, 145), Prof. Meid comments: 'Apparently the same name as that of the river Bray (and eponymous settlement) in Co. Wicklow. In the *Dindsenchus* of Carn Fraích (RC 16, 137) the river in Connacht is identified as the *Suca*, the present-day *River Suck*. Inconsistencies in the extant attestations make it impossible to reconstruct the original form and inflection of the name. Tradition *a* at least appears to interpret it as a plural, cf. 200 *i mBreib*. Inflected forms are reminiscent of words like *ré* "time, space", gen. *ree*, acc. *ré*, nom. acc. pl. *rei*, dat. *réib*, or *gléo* "fight", gen. *glee*, dat. acc. *glé*, etc. On the other hand *issin mBreit* Eg. (reading of Y uncertain) seems to point to an *nt*-stem, nom. *Bree* ?, gen. *Bret*, dat. *Breit*. Forms lacking *t* in the other attestations may be based on this nominative. Etymology uncertain.'

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 44 (§13); 68.

A pool on the river *Bré* is identified as the site of the action at a later stage in the tale. This is said to be located at a spot on ‘the river’ (as the *Bré* is alluded to initially, in §§13 and 16) which is the customary bathing place of the royal household. Ailill, who feels threatened by Fróech, schemes to have him killed by a monster that lives in this pool, and twice he sends him back to the pool to gather berries from a rowan-tree which overhangs it. But when the monster seizes Fróech, Findabair saves his life by leaping into the water and handing him a sword. He duly slays the monster, winning the admiration of all:

[...] fácaib in claideb i lláim Fróich, agus co'mben a chenn den míl co'mboí fora thóeb, agus do-bert a mmíl leiss dochum tíre. Is de atá Dublind Fróich i mBreib i tírib Connacht.<sup>11</sup>

‘[... Findabair] leaves the sword in Froech’s hand, and he cuts off the head of the beast so that it remained at his side, and he brought the beast with him to land. It is from this that there is (named) the Blackpool of Froech in the Brei in the lands of Connacht.’<sup>12</sup>

If the *Bré* is the river Suck by another name, where on this river was *Dublind Fróich*? As the crow flies, Ráith Crúachan is around 12 kilometres from the nearest point of the Suck. It turns out that this is where the river bends at Castlerea. Was *Dublind Fróich* at or contiguous to Castlerea? However, as a bathing-place for the royal household, one would think Castlerea inconveniently distant from Ráith Crúachan. Its remove from Ráith Crúachan also seems to be at odds with the detail that the hounds take a leap into it, straight after hunting a drove of animals onto Ráith Crúachan (cf. citation above, p. 000). And indeed there is a river much closer to Ráith Crúachan than the Suck: the river known today as the Ogulla river. This is almost certainly not the river’s original name; rather, it is the name of a townland and civil parish, and church-site, that later came to be applied to the river. The name itself is problematical: early forms include *Odolf* (1306),<sup>13</sup> *Odealba* (1411),<sup>14</sup> *Godeilb* (1414),<sup>15</sup> *Odelb* (1420),<sup>16</sup> and *Doideilbh*.<sup>17</sup> The name of the church-site in its earliest attestation is *Killogealba*.<sup>18</sup> Given that there are only two kilometres or less between Ráith Crúachan and

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 46 (§18). Variant readings for *i mBreib* are: *i mBrae* (Eg.); *i mBrea* (Y). Other references to the pool are *issin lindi* (45 (§16)); *tar dublind* (45 (§17)); *issin ndublind* (47 (§23)).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>13</sup> H. S. Sweetman and Gustavus Frederick Handcock (eds) *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland*, 5 vols (London, 1875–86), vol. V (1302–1307), 223.

<sup>14</sup> William Henry Bliss and J. A. Twemlow (eds), *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, A.D. 1198–1498*, 16 vols (London, 1893–1986), vol. VI (1404–1415), 263.

<sup>15</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1414.22 (*i nGodeilb*). Note Diarmuid Ó Murchadha, ‘A reconsideration of some place-names from the *Annals of Connacht*’, *Ainm: Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society* 6 (1994–5), 1–32, at 18: ‘Perh. recte \*i nOgdeilb’.

<sup>16</sup> *Ann. Conn.* 1420.15 (*co hOdelb*). Ó Murchadha, ‘A reconsideration’, 24, suggests *Oghdhealbh* as the standardised spelling.

<sup>17</sup> Myles Dillon, ‘The inauguration of O’Conor’, in J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall and F. X. Martin (eds), *Medieval Studies Presented to Aubrey Gwynn* (Dublin, 1961), 186–202, at 189 (*ó Dhoidheilbh*; v. l. *ogh deala*). This instance of the name occurs in a prose tract (in two manuscript witnesses) preceding a poem with an attribution to Torna Ó Maol Chonaire (†1468). Dillon allowed that the poem and prose tract ‘might both be as early as the fourteenth century’, but equally that there was nothing in the language of either ‘that need be earlier than the sixteenth century’: cf. *ibid.* 187.

<sup>18</sup> John O’Donovan, ‘The Registry of Clonmacnoise with notes and introductory remarks’, *Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society* I.2 (1857), 444–60, at 451. This document is an English translation of a lost Irish-language original. The translation survives in a number of copies; the earliest, which dates from the seventeenth century, is that cited here. On the misattribution of the translation to Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh see Nollaig Ó Muraíle, *The Celebrated Antiquary: Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh* (c.

the Ogulla at its nearest point, and that the original name of the Ogulla river is apparently lost, it is tempting to identify it as the *Bré*. However, as we have seen, the copy of *Táin Bó Froích* in the Yellow Book of Lecan describes the *Bré* as a ‘great river’ (*aband mór*).<sup>19</sup> This description is clearly more apt for the Suck than the Ogulla since the stretch of river to which the name Ogulla is commonly applied is that extending from its source eastwards to the village of Tulsk, a section of a mere 6 kilometres or so.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it appears that the extant sources employ the name *Bré* as an alias only for the Suck. One might argue that the medieval sources that do so are all in error, and that *Bré* may in fact have been the original name of the Ogulla river, but evidence to support this is not forthcoming. On balance, it seems one must accept that the references in *Táin Bó Froích* to the *Bré* do indeed relate to the river Suck.

*Táin Bó Froích* tends towards hyperbole, particularly in the opening paragraphs which describe the appearance of Fróech and his retinue as they arrive at Ráith Crúachan, the headlong hunt to the river *Bré* and back, and the description of the fort and the entertainment offered to the guests.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the image of Fróech’s hounds bounding improbably from Ráith Crúachan into the Suck was conscious exaggeration on the part of the author. However the possibility that he was not familiar with the local terrain also deserves consideration. Yet a further possibility is that he did know the terrain, and was well aware of the greater proximity of the Ogulla river to Ráith Crúachan, yet chose to site events at the Suck because his tale was aimed at an audience that might know only the larger rivers of Connacht.<sup>22</sup> While all three possibilities seem plausible, it is difficult to choose between them. In any case, realism is not so characteristic of *Táin Bó Froích* that one is compelled to reject the identification of the river *Bré* with the Suck.

#### FRÓECH’S NAME ON SITES IN *MAG NAÍ*

Before moving on to the references in later texts which *explicitly* identify the Suck with *Dubabainn Bré* (which I take to be a fuller version of the name *Bré*), we may note the number of features which are named for Fróech on the landscape of *Mag naÍ*, even today – and there may have been more in the past whose names are now forgotten. In addition to *Dublind Froích*, there is *Carn Froích*, which for centuries was the traditional inauguration site of the O’Conor kings of Connacht, descendants of a branch of Uí Briúin Aí.<sup>23</sup> There is also *Clúain Froích*, the site of a moated residence built for Áed Úa Conchubhair, the sometime king of Connacht from his installation in 1293 until his death in 1309; this moated residence was the

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1600–71) (Maynooth, 1996), 273, 276–7. O’Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Letters: Roscommon*, II, 54–5 (= Michael Herity (ed.), *Ordnance Survey Letters: Roscommon*, 103–4) notes also the existence of *Tobar-Oig-Giolla* ‘near the old grave yard’.

<sup>19</sup> See n. 8 above.

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Daniel Curley, Director of the Rathcroghan Visitor Centre, Tulsk, for detailed information on the Ogulla river. He points out that the river continues after Tulsk on an eastwards course through ribbon lakes in a sequence of townlands with the element *clúain* in their names, including Cloonfree and Cloonfinlough, before emptying into the Scramoge river east of Strokestown. Also, that the stretch of river from Tulsk eastwards to the Scramoge is variously named the Scramoge river and the Ogulla river, and that this stretch is approximately 14–16 kilometres long. For our purposes, it is important to note that the Ogulla/Scramoge is more stream than river at all points.

<sup>21</sup> Meid, *Táin Bó Froích*, 41–3 (§§3–11).

<sup>22</sup> Such an audience is perhaps implied by the sentence already cited: ‘It is from this that there is (named) the Blackpool of Froech in the Brei [*sic*] in the lands of Connacht’.

<sup>23</sup> See Elizabeth FitzPatrick, *Royal Inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c. 1100–1600: A Cultural Landscape Study*, Studies in Celtic History XXII (Woodbridge, 2004), *passim*.

subject of two poems composed to celebrate its construction.<sup>24</sup> Most intriguing of all is the lintel stone in the Cave of Crúachu, a natural rock-fissure c. 750 metres south-west of the Mound of Ráith Crúachan known as *Úaimh na gCat/Oweynagat* ('The Cave of the Cats'). This bears the ogham inscription *VRAICCI MAQI MEDVVI* '[The stone of] Fróech son of Medb', the masculine inflexion showing that Medb is a patronymic in this case.<sup>25</sup> Whether the traditions concerning Fróech (mac Idaith/Fidaig), the warrior of Queen Medb, evolved from earlier traditions concerning the individual named in this lintel-inscription is a difficult question. The point I wish to make here is that since *Cluain Froích* and Castlerea are roughly equidistant from Ráith Crúachan, the symbolic epicentre of Connacht royal power, it would not be surprising to find Fróech's name attached to a notable *Duiblind* 'Black Pool' at, or near, Castlerea. The town is situated at the centre of a major groundwater body, where the Suck is joined by the Francis river, both being large rivers at this point.<sup>26</sup> One kilometre further east, the Francis river is joined by the Termon river, named from the early ecclesiastical site of *Termann Cáelainne*, itself named after Cáelainn, patron-saint of the Cíarraige. The earliest annalistic attestation of the name *Caislén Riabhach* appears to be that in the *Annals of the Four Masters sub anno* 1489.<sup>27</sup> A settlement of earlier date might conceivably have been named *Duiblind* from a deep pool in the vicinity of Castlerea. If so, the pool's association with Fróech was probably secondary, and the production of aetiological tales such as the incident in *Táin Bó Froích* concerning Fróech's killing of the water-monster need not have resulted in his name becoming permanently attached to it; at any rate, there appears to be no instance of the name *Duiblind Froích* apart from that in *Táin Bó Froích*. Furthermore, Fróech's killing of the water-monster is associated in the literature with at least one other body of water, namely the small lake called *Loch Bága* (later *Loch Bá*) which is situated at the centre of the modern townlands of Ballaghabaweg and Ballaghabawmore, less than two kilometres to the south-west of Carn Fraích.<sup>28</sup> This tradition is attested in the poem beginning *Carn Fraoich soitheach*

<sup>24</sup> 'Poem to Cloonfree Castle', edited by L. McKenna, *The Irish Monthly* 51 (1923), 639–45 (beginning *Tomhus mhúir Chruachna i gCluain Fraoich*), and 'O'Connor's House at Cloonfree', edited by E. C. Quiggin in *idem* (ed.), *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1914), 332–51 (beginning *An tú a-rís, a ráith Teamhrach?*). On the form of the residence see Katharine Simms, 'Native sources for Gaelic settlement: the house poems', in Patrick J. Duffy, David Edwards and Elizabeth Fitzpatrick (eds), *Gaelic Ireland c. 1250–c. 1650: Land, Lordship and Settlement* (Dublin, 2001), 246–67, esp. 250–2; also, Tom Finan and Kieran O'Connor, 'The moated site at Cloonfree, Co. Roscommon', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 54 (2002), 72–87.

<sup>25</sup> R. A. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* I (Dublin, 1945), no. 12. For discussion of the name-forms see Meid, *Táin Bó Froích*. 78–9, and Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam* (Dublin, 1991), 107, 111. Images and further information on the inscription, site and location are available on the website 'Ogham in 3-D' maintained by the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (<https://ogham.celt.dias.ie>).

<sup>26</sup> Further north, the Francis river is known as the Cloonard river: it flows southwards from what is now known as Cloonard Lake, named from the townland of Cloonard, parish of Tibohine.

<sup>27</sup> A note by John O'Donovan on the entry for that year (*AFM* IV, p. 1168) states: '*Caislén-riabhach*, i.e. the grey castle, now Castlerea, a small town in the old barony of Ballintober, in the county of Roscommon; but by a late grand jury arrangement the barony has been called Castlerea after the little town itself. The castle from which it is named stood on the west side of the town, but no ruins of it are now visible.' The form *Caislén Riabhach Meic Ceithearnaigh*, named from the ruling family of Cíarraige Aí, generally anglicised as Carney, is attested in a mid-sixteenth-century copy of a legal document dated 1510: cf. Pádraig Ó Macháin, 'Two legal documents relating to Ó Conchubhair Donn', *Ériu* 57 (2007), 113–19, at 116 and 117. This distinguishes it from *Caislén Riabhach Clainne Faghartaigh* alias *Cairrgín Riabhach Clainne Faghartaigh*, which site was 'prob. in or nr t.l. Cloonyquin, p. Elphin, b. Roscommon' (cf. Ó Riain, Ó Murchadha and Murray, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames*, 11 s.n. *Cairrgín Riabhach Clainne Faghartaigh*).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ó Riain, Ó Murchadha and Murray, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames*, 32 s.n. *Baile Locha Bágha*.

*na saorchlann* ('Carn Fraoich, goodly house of the noble kindreds'), which relates the story told in *Táin Bó Fraích* but with some differences in detail.<sup>29</sup>

#### TWO MIDDLE IRISH TEXTS WHICH IDENTIFY THE *BRÉ* AS AN ALIAS OF THE SUCK

An item concerning *Carn Fraích* in the Middle-Irish Prose *Dindsenchas* conveys that the Suck was formerly known as *Dubabaind Brea* although, as we shall see, this reading depends on an emendation.<sup>30</sup> This item combines the *Dublind* tradition witnessed in *Táin Bó Fraích* with other traditions concerning Fróech's associations with *Carn Fraích*, and also with *Síd Fraích* on the border of *Slíab Fúait* – a place far from *Mag nAí*.<sup>31</sup> Only the *Dublind* tradition need concern us here. The following text and translation are from Whitley Stokes:

[...] Carn Fraich .i. Fraech mac Fidaig dodeachaid do serc [F]indabrach do chrothad in chaerthaind robai ar dublind Brea risi n-abar in tShuca indiu, cor' airig pest bona in chaert[h]aind he, cor' len \*7 cor' geogain co mor, co tuc Fraech a coscur \*7 in caerthann co Meidb, co roibi 'ga fothrus isin charnn, conad[d]e dogairther Carn Fraich. No comad and fogabad bas lasin pest, \*7 a adnocol 'sin charnn beos.<sup>32</sup>

'[...] *Carn Fraích*, that is, Fráech son of Fidach (leg. Idath?) went for love of Findabair to shake the rowantree that was over the black linn of Brei, which to day is called the Suca; but the monster at the foot of the rowan tree perceived him, and pursued him, and wounded him sorely. But Fráech brought Medb the monster in triumph, and the rowan tree; and he was healed in the cairn, wherefore it is called *Carn Fraích*.'<sup>33</sup>

The actual manuscript-reading is *dubaind Brea* and Stokes emended this to *dublind Brea*; however, there is no support elsewhere for such a form.<sup>34</sup> *Táin Bó Fraích* has *dublind*, in *dublind*, and *Dublind Fróich i mBreib*, but not *Dublind Brea*.<sup>35</sup> One may conclude that the *Dindsenchas* reading should be emended instead to *ar dub[ab]aind Brea*.

This is consistent with a further Middle Irish reference in which the Suck is identified by this alias. It occurs in a Middle Irish tract on the kings of Connacht in the late-fourteenth- or early-fifteenth-century Book of Lecan. This relates that the supporters of Sanb, son of Cet mac Mágach, whose territories were to the north-west and south of Crúachu, contended for the

<sup>29</sup> For edition and translation see James Carney, 'Carn Fraoich soitheach na saorchlann', *Celtica* 2.1 (1952), 154–94. He surmised that the poem was 'probably a century or more older' than the Book of Uí Maine, the late-fourteenth-century manuscript in which its unique copy survives: cf. *ibid.* 154.

<sup>30</sup> Whitley Stokes, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*', *RC* 16 (1894–5), 136–9 (§132 *Carn Fraích*).

<sup>31</sup> The last-mentioned tradition is also witnessed in Recension I of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, in the episode known as *Aided Fróich* 'The Death of Fróech'. Garrett S. Olmsted has argued cogently that this episode was displaced from its original position in the *Táin*, with the result that the location of *Síd Fraích* was also moved, from a place near Crúachain to the area of *Slíab Fúait*. Cf. Olmsted, 'On the origin of the *Aided Fraích* episode of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*', *EC* 19 (1978), 537–47.

<sup>32</sup> Stokes, 'The Prose Tales in the Rennes *Dindsenchas*', 137.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 138.

<sup>34</sup> Stokes's emendation (*dublind* in *dublind Brea risi n-abar in tShuca indiu*) is cited as though an actual form in Ó Riain *et al.*, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames*, 171 (*s.n.* Bré (2)).

<sup>35</sup> As Stokes's proposed emendation to *dublind brea* underpins the sole entry for this name in Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goidelicum* (Dublin, 1910), the entry may be disregarded, as may its reiteration in Kaarino Hollo (ed. and trans.), *Fled Bricreann ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait and its Place in the Irish Literary and Oral Narrative Traditions: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Notes, Translation, Bibliography and Vocabulary* (2005), 108.

kingship of Connacht with Maine Aithremail, son of Ailill and Medb, and that the border between them was *dubaband breaa .i. succa*.<sup>36</sup> A version of this text is given by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh (†1671) in his genealogical collection *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, with an additional detail on the naming of the Suck:

[...] agus as í fa coicrioch eatorra Dubhabhainn Bhrea ris a ráitear Suca .i. o Shogca inghean Chairbre do baidheadh ann.<sup>37</sup>

‘[...] and the frontier between them was Dubhabhainn Bhrea which is called Suca, i.e. from Sogca daughter of Cairbre who was drowned in it.’<sup>38</sup>

#### TWO EARLY MODERN REFERENCES TO *DUBABAIND BREÁ*

Two references to the river-name are found in the Early Modern Irish version of *Táin Bó Flidaise*, a tale which commentators sometimes identify as ‘The Mayo *Táin*’.<sup>39</sup> This incorporates traditions found in the much shorter Old Irish version of *Táin Bó Flidaise*, but expands and alters them substantially, providing many extra details.<sup>40</sup> The first reference to *Dubabaind Bré* occurs in a passage concerning the route taken by Fergus mac Róich when he travels from *Ráith Crúachan* to *Irrus Domnann* (Erris) in north-west Mayo to visit Flidais. Medb implies that he will travel in a southerly direction initially, identifying the place in which he will spend the first night as follows:

[...] a tigh Modho minadhmádh mollaman cerdasa a ndúnad atha deirg ar dubabainn breá ré ráiter ath senmodho ar suca.<sup>41</sup>

‘[...] in the house of Moda Minadhmádh, my chief craftsman, in the fort of Red Ford [*Áth Derg*] on *Dubabaind Bré* which is called the Ford of old Moda [*Áth senModa*] on the Suck.’

Presumably the adjective *sen-* ‘old’ in *ath senmodho* was introduced to make alliteration with *Suca*, and the placename in question is *Áth Moga*, a fording point on the river Suck where the modern village of Ballymoe (*Béal Átha Mogha*) now stands. The second reference to *Dubabaind Bré* in this text occurs in a passage describing the route taken by Medb when she and her troops set out to rescue Fergus following his imprisonment at Flidais’s house. In this

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<sup>36</sup> *isi ba coicrich eturru .i. dubaband breaa .i. succa*, Dublin, RIA MS 23 P 2 (535, Book of Lecan), fol. 176ra, ll. 41–2.

<sup>37</sup> Nollaig Ó Muraíle (ed. and trans.), *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach: The Great Book of Genealogies, Compiled (1645–66) by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh*, 5 vols (Dublin 2003), I, 232 (§59.5) (cf. similar entry at vol. III, 350 (§1019.3)).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* I, 233.

<sup>39</sup> Donald McKinnon (ed. and trans.), ‘The Glenmasan Manuscript’, *Celtic Review* 1 (1904–5), 12–17, 102–31, 208–29, 296–315; 2 (1905–6), 20–33, 100–21, 202–3, 300–12; 3 (1906–7), 10–25, 114–37, 198–215, 294–317; 4 (1907–8), 10–27, 104–21, 202–19.

<sup>40</sup> See Ruairí Ó hUiginn, ‘Growth and development in the Late Ulster Cycle: The case of *Táin Bó Flidais*’, in Joseph Falaky Nagy (ed.), *Memory and the Modern in Celtic Literatures*, CSANA Yearbook 5 (Dublin, 2006), 143–62.

<sup>41</sup> My reading (for which I consulted the image on [www.isos.dias.ie](http://www.isos.dias.ie) (accessed 10 February 2019)) of NLS, MS Adv. 72.2.3, p. 19, col. 37, ll. 14–16, differs somewhat from McKinnon’s (in ‘The Glenmasan Manuscript’, *The Celtic Review* 6, 114). He rendered the last placename as *Ath s mó* with unexpanded suspension strokes above both the *s* and the *ó*. His translation reads ‘in the house of Moda Minadhmádh, my chief steward, in the fort of Red-ford on the black river of Brea, called the Ford of ... on the (river) Suck’ (*ibid.* 115).



case, no alias is cited for *Dubabaind Bré*, which suggests that the river may still have been identifiable by this name alone in the early modern period:

Agus is h-i so slighe do dechaid Meadb con a maithib agus con a marc-sluagaib  
.i. tar mín muigheí Aí, agus tar oirter Sleibhi Treblainde, agus tar mullach  
Cruad-luac(h)rai, agus tar Dub-abuind m-Breaa, agus tar iartar cineoil Forcaill,  
agus tar Moin Coindedha [...]<sup>42</sup>

‘And this is the road which Meave with her chiefs and cavalry followed, viz.,  
across the smooth plain of Ai, and over the east of Sliabh Trebland [*sic*], and  
across the top of Cruad-Luachra, and across the Black-river of Brea, and across  
the western part of the race of Forcall’s land, and across the Moor of Coindedh  
[...]’<sup>43</sup>

#### DÚNAD ÁTHA DEIRG ALIAS DÚN DIARMATA ON THE SUCK

In his study of the routeways outlined in *Táin Bó Flidais*, R. B. Aldridge identified the aforementioned *tech Modo* at *dúnad Átha Deirg* on the Suck with a now unnamed large rath in Dundermot townland, parish of Drumatemple, on the east bank of the Suck near Ballymoe. The rath, about 1 kilometre ESE of Ballymoe, is ‘standing on the high bank above flood level and overlooking the river. The interior measurements of this rath give a diameter of between 165 and 180 feet, roughly circular; the outside vallum is about 27 feet from the inside bank, and there are traces of another fosse and vallum outside this again. This fort guards the fords at Ballymoe, and the approaches are over high ground.’<sup>44</sup> I suggest that this is very likely the *Dun Diarmota os Dubabaind Brea* which is mentioned in an anecdote embedded in a genealogical tract on the Uí Diarmata as the fort built by the Uí Briúin Aí dynast and sometime king of Connacht, Diarmait (†833) son of Tommaltach; he was a brother of the more famous Muirges (†815) son of Tommaltach whose descendants dominated the kingship of Connacht down to the thirteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of the anecdote is to explain why none of Diarmait’s descendants became king of Connacht (their failure to do so is associated with the battle of *Tarbga*, which occurred in 822), and why they settled near Ballymoe, on the southern border of *Mag nAí* (*Áth Moga* is identified as one of the four major fords leading into *Mag nAí* in various sources).<sup>46</sup>

[...] nir gob Diarmaid fearand aile o [a] brathair .i. o Muirgeas mac Thomaltaigh  
acht fearann bad chomachus da oidi .i. do [Fh]aithleach, conad airi sin tugad  
Anarta & in Calad do Diarmaid cona cloind. Acus ro ba cumang leis in fearann

<sup>42</sup> McKinnon, ‘The Glenmasan Manuscript’, *Celtic Review* 3, pp. 6 and 18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 17, 19. Some of the preceding names are no longer extant, and some are probably fictional, but *Móin Choinneda* is mentioned frequently in annalistic and other sources as bogland through which an important routeway passed, part of which is identified as *Tóchar Móna Choinneda*, the initial element of which forms part of the name of the civil parish of Templetogether, barony of Ballymoe, County Galway, and the townland of Castletogher in the same parish.

<sup>44</sup> R. B. Aldridge, ‘The routeways described in the story called *Táin Bó Flidhais*’, *JRSAI* 91.1 (1961), 117–27; 91.2 (1961), 219–28. See 91.1, p. 123.

<sup>45</sup> For edition and translation of this text, and discussion (though not of the placenames), see Gearóid Mac Niocaill, ‘The background to the Battle of *Tarbga*’, *Celtica* 11 (1976), 133–40. He suggested that any hypothetical original redaction could hardly be earlier than the late tenth century, and that the text as it stands was unlikely to be earlier than the thirteenth century (ibid. 134–5).

<sup>46</sup> E.g. in the Book of Leinster version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cecile O’Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967), 5, ll. 171–2); and in the Stowe version of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cecile O’Rahilly (ed. and trans.), *The Stowe Version of Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Dublin, 1961), 6, ll. 181–2; 159, ll. 5011–12.

sin fo deired co ndechaid a n-airrther na crichi co nderna dun and .i. Dun Diarmota os Dubabaind Brea, conad and ro bai 'na rig an aired ro bai beo & cach neach da cloind.<sup>47</sup>

'[...] Diarmait accepted no other land from his brother, Muirgius son of Tomaltach, but land that was near his fosterfather, Faithleach, which is why Anarta and In Calad were given to Diarmait and his sons. And eventually he found that land cramped and went into the east of the territory and built a fortress there, that is, Dún Diarmata above Dubaba Brea, and there he was king as long as he lived, and every one of his sons.'<sup>48</sup>

We may note that in this anecdote, as in one of the two references cited above from *Táin Bó Flidaise*, no alias is given for *Dubabaind Bré*.

#### TWO DISTINCT POOLS ON THE SUCK NAMED *DUIBLIND*

It remains to show that there were two distinct pools named *Duiblind* on the river Suck. The clearest evidence for this is found in the late Old Irish tale *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuíl Dermait*.<sup>49</sup> This tells of Cú Chulainn and a party of warriors travelling from Ulster into Connacht along a route that brought them across the rivers Duff and Drowes, and proceeding as far as *Duiblind Chríche Cíarraige*.<sup>50</sup> On arriving there, they split into two groups and head southwards, one group making its way along the western bank of the Suck, the other along its eastern bank, with both groups eventually arriving at *Áth Ferthain*, and more particularly at *Duiblind Átha Ferthain*.<sup>51</sup> This is implicitly located in Uí Maine territory since Cú Chulainn is said to be accosted there by Findchóem, daughter of the king of Uí Maine, who says she is in love with Cú Chulainn. He and the Ulstermen take her back with them to *Ráith Crúachan*, travelling north by way of the wood called *Fid Manach* (which is between Ballymoe and Dunmore), on to Ballymoe (*Bél Átha Moga*), and back into *Mag nAí*.

*Áth Ferthain* appears in the form *Áth Feórainne* in the *Annals of the Four Masters sub anno 1236*. John O'Donovan identified this as 'Afeoran, a townland on the east side of the River Suck', noting that its situation was clearly described in a grant of 1612.<sup>52</sup> The grant

<sup>47</sup> Mac Niocaill, 'The background to the Battle of Tarbga', 135 (§1).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 138 (§1). Faithleach is presumably the saint associated with Cloontuskert on the west bank of the Shannon, about 2 kilometres from Lanesborough, County Roscommon, on whom see Pádraig Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin, 2011), 302. The 'coarb of Faithleach from Cloontuskert' is named as one of the clerics entitled to be present at the inauguration of the king of Connacht in an Early Modern Irish tract on the ritual: cf. Dillon, 'The inauguration of O'Conor', 188–9 (full reference at footnote 16 above). To the anonymous reader I owe the suggestion that *Anarta* underlies the townland name of Anrittabeg in the parish of Cloontuskert, about 3 kilometres west of Lanesborough, and that presumably there was once also an *Anarta*, or an *Anarta Mór*. It follows that *In Calad* is likely a callow nearby, on the west bank of the Shannon. Our text erroneously describes Diarmait's westward move from the vicinity of Cloontuskert to *Dún Diarmata* on the Suck as a move *a n-airrther na crichi*. A copy of the text found in Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh's *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach* evidences the same slip (*in airtheor na críche*), silently identified as such by the editor who translates the phrase as 'into the west of the territory': cf. Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, I, 535 (§236.9; full reference at footnote 36 above).

<sup>49</sup> Hollo, *Fled Bricrenn* (full reference at footnote 28 above).

<sup>50</sup> *for Duib \*7 Drobaís co Duiblinn Chríchi Cíarraigi*, Hollo, *Fled Bricrenn*, 53 (§5). As Hollo notes, 'the present-day Duff, which runs along the Sligo-Leitrim border, and the Drowes, which runs from Loch Melvin into Donegal Bay ... were regarded as marking part of the Ulster-Connacht border' (*Fled Bricrenn*, 107).

<sup>51</sup> *Do-dechadar dó co torachtar im airenach inn Átha Fertain fri Corra for Achud antúaiith* (Hollo, *Fled Bricrenn*, 53 (§5)); 'They went thither until they came into the forepart of Áth Ferthain, north of Corra-for-achud' (ibid. 98 (§5)).

<sup>52</sup> *AFM* iii, 284–5.

locates it ‘between the towns and lands of Bealaforen on the east, and Mucklone on the west side of the river’, evidently adjacent to the modern town of Ballyforan (*Bél Átha Feórainne*). Clearly, then, *Dublind Átha Ferthain* lies well south of the land of the Cíarraige whose territory bounded that of the Uí Briúin Aí, and is quite distinct from *Dublind Chríche Cíarraige*.<sup>53</sup>

I have suggested above that *Dublind Fíoch* may have been located in or close to to present-day Castlerea. If so, it was also close to the important site of *Termann Cáelainne*, the church of Cáelainn, patron-saint of the Cíarraige, which is in the townland of Termon More, about one kilometre to the east of Castlerea. The possibility that *Dublind Fíoch* and *Dublind Chríche Cíarraige* both refer to the same ‘black pool’ at Castlerea seems strong. Finally, while *Dublind Fíoch* was perhaps never more than a fictional name, the name *Dublind Chríche Cíarraige* or, more likely, the shorter form, *Dublind*, could conceivably have remained in use until today, were it not for the building of the *caislén ríabach* and its eclipsing of the placename that preceded it.

MÁIRÍN NÍ DHONNCHADHA

*National University of Ireland Galway*

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<sup>53</sup> Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 372, s.n. ‘Dublinn críche ciarraigi’, has ‘al[ias] Dublind Átha Ferthain, and was in Hui Maine’. The two *Dublind*s are also conflated in Hollo, *Fled Bricrenn*, 108. Ó Riain, Ó Murchadha and Murray, *Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames I*, 132, s.n. ‘Áth Ferthain’, has ‘perh. on the Sinking r., betw. tls. Ballymoney (N./S.) and Gortnagoyne, p. / b. Dunmore, GY.’; this misidentification was taken over from an earlier publication by Kaarina Hollo, ‘The Feast of Bricriu and the Exile of the sons of Dóel Dermait’, *Emania* 10 (1992), 18–24, at 24.