The cult of St Moling and Buile Shuibhne

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THE CULT OF ST MOLING AND THE MAKING OF *BUILE SHUIBNE*[*]

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A new theory on the making of *Buile Shuibne* (henceforth *BS*) is outlined in the following pages. It is based on a mix of positive evidence, negative evidence, and speculation. What prompted the theory was consideration of the role played in *BS* by the seventh-century Leinster saint, Moling (died 697). This suggested that a relationship between Suibne and Moling was one of the fundamental features of Suibne's life-story. The earliest extant poem relating to Suibne ('M'airiuclán hi Túaim Inbir') seems to represent him as a holy *geilt*, somehow associated with Moling. The poetry concerning Suibne that is closest in time to this represents him as a *geilt* on the margins of society, enduring hardship imposed on him by the will of God, possibly on account of some wrong-doing, which however is not explicitly linked to the battle of Mag Roth. Given the central ideologies and themes of medieval Irish literature, Suibne's statements of belief in God in this poetry may be thought to create the expectation that he will be reintegrated into society and the communion of the church before death, at the behest of a saint. In *BS*, that saint is Moling, but it seems highly likely to me that Moling was represented as having a positive role in Suibne's life from the outset. Going against received opinion, I will argue that the association of Suibne's *geltacht* ('madness') with the battle of Mag Roth is a secondary, later development, an addition to the basic story-line of Suibne's being a holy *geilt*. To cite just one point in the argument, there is no reference whatsoever to Suibne or his *geltacht* in the first recension of *Cath Maige Rath* ('The Battle of Mag Roth'), which has been dated to the end of the Old Irish period. The tradition that Suibne's *geltacht* resulted from his experience of that battle is attested only in somewhat later tales of the literary cycle concerning this famous battle fought at Moira, Co. Down in 637, in which Domnall mac Áeda, king of Tara, defeated Domnall Brecc of Dál Riata and his ally, the Ulidian king Congal Cláen.[1] It is witnessed, for instance, in *Fled Dúin na nGéd* ('The Banquet of Dún na

[*] My thanks are due to Anne Connon, Ohio Dominican University, for the map accompanying this paper; and to Vera Ryan of Cork, and Dr Pádraig Ó Héalaí and Dr Feargal Ó Béarra of NUI Galway, for helpful discussion of aspects of *Buile Shuibne*.

[1] The cycle comprises three tales: *Cath Maige Rath* (henceforth *CMR*) 'The Battle of Mag Rath'; *Fled Dúin na nGéd* 'The Feast of Dún na nGéd'; and *Buile Shuibne*. For an overview of the cycle see Dillon, *Cyles of the Kings*, 56-74. There are two recensions of *CMR*. The first (henceforth *CMR*[1]) was edited and translated by Marstrander, 'A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath', 226-47. According to Dillon, *Cycles of the Kings*, 65, it is 'Old Irish save for a few later forms, and may date from the early tenth century'. The second recension of *CMR* (henceforth *CMR*[2]) was edited and translated by O'Donovan, *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Rath*, 90-321. He dated it to the late decades of the twelfth century (ibid., p. viii) but Dillon's dating to the late-thirteenth /fourteenth century is more convincing: see Dillon, 'The Texts of "Cath Maige Rath"', 201. One recension of *Fled Dúin na nGéd* (henceforth *FDG*) survives. It was edited and translated by O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, 1-87; reference throughout this chapter will be to Lehmann's edition, *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, and translation, 'The Banquet of the Fort of the Geese'. The tale is regarded as dating from the late eleventh or early twelfth century: Dillon, *Cycles of the Kings*, 57; Lehmann, *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, xx; and Herbert, '*Fled Dúin na nGéd*: A Reappraisal', 75. *BS*'s single recension was edited twice by O'Keeffe. Reference throughout will be to his edition and

nGéd'), the early twelfth-century tale of the feast that supposedly prompted the battle. But significantly, it is also witnessed in a series of texts of Leinster provenance: in the saga *Bórama Laigen*; in the sequence of late Middle Irish poems concerning Moling and Suibne in Brussels MS 5100-4; and in a Leinster section of *Acallam na Senórach*. I will argue that *BS* emerged out of the same context as this series of Leinster texts and that, like them, it owes its composition to an author with some kind of associations with one of Moling's churches in Leinster. I will also suggest that the unique thematization of *geltacht* that one finds in *BS* may have been inspired by the treatment of fury, demonic and otherwise, in the later tales from the cycle concerning the battle of Mag Roth. These tales were certainly available to Leinster writers, as we shall see.

Much has been written about the putative non-Irish origins of the legend of Suibne *geilt*, in either Strathclyde or Scottish Dál Riata, with the story supposedly spreading into Ireland through the north-east of the country and becoming attached to traditions about the historic battle of Mag Roth. If I am correct in holding that relations between Suibne and the Leinster saint Moling are part of an early stratum of the Suibne story, and Suibne's association with Mag Roth a later accretion, then it may seem appropriate to discount the theory of external origins for the Suibne legend in favour of native ones. At any rate, I believe it worth trying out the proposition that, notwithstanding any similarities between it and the legends of Myrddin, Merlin and Lailoken, the Suibne legend originated independently in Ireland.[2]

In the scope of these pages it would not be possible to address the complex arguments made by scholars in support of external origins for the Suibne legend. My aim is the far more modest one of drawing out the development of the Suibne legend, and Moling's part in that legend, up to and including the writing of *BS*. I am reminded of a statement by Thomas Charles-Edwards in an article he wrote on another figure of legend: 'Anyone is entitled to have his hunch, but before a hunch can attain even the modest dignity of an informed guess it needs to be shaped by an understanding of the evidence.'[3] Following some comments on Moling and his cult, I will detail the points in *BS* that led to my hunch that the Suibne legend originated not in the North-East but more likely in Leinster. Then I will adduce a sequence of texts, in rough chronological order insofar as I have been able to establish this, with comments relating these texts to the development of the Suibne legend. As the list has quite a few texts, the comments are necessarily very sketchy. Much more could be said about all of these

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translation in *Buile Suibhne*, ITS 12. Short recensions, in effect summaries, of all three tales also survive, in the hand of Míchél Ó Cléirigh, in Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels, MS 3410, fo. 59a-fo. 61b.

[2] For a masterful exposition of the traditions of the Wild Man in the literatures of the Celtic-speaking countries see Frykenberg, 'Lailoken'; 'Myrddin'; 'Suibne Geilt'; and 'Wild Man in Celtic Legend'.

[3] 'The Arthur of History', 15.

texts in relation to the theory I am advancing, but my primary aim is to present an outline of that theory. For ease of reference, the texts will be numbered.

St Moling and his Cult

Moling is assigned through his father Fáelán to the Uí Dega, a poorly attested sept located in south-east Leinster whose eclipse was probably due to the infiltration of the Carlow-Wexford area by the Uí Cheinnselaig; some sources go so far as to make the Uí Dega descend directly from Énna Ceinnselach.[4] The saint's death in 697 is recorded in all the main Irish annals.[5] He is listed as a guarantor to the Law of Adomnán (*Cáin Adomnán / Lex Innocentium*), first enacted in 697, as *Moling Luachra*.[6] Given that he died that year, he may have been quite old at that stage; the Fragmentary Annals say he died *plenus dierum*.[7] This gives a kind of verisimilitude to the idea that he befriended Suibne some years after the battle of Mag Roth in 637,[8] regardless of whether Suibne was historic or fictional.

As the guarantor-titles in the text of the Law of Adomnán appear to have been added by successive annotators over a long period of time,[9] the form *Luachra* is not necessarily representative of Moling's appellation in the late seventh century. It is noteworthy that he is called 'Moling Lúachair' in a rhyming example in the entry for his feast on 17 June in the *Félire Óengusso*:

> *In doss óir ós chríchaib,*
> *in grían án ós túathaib,*
> *congreit Ríg, balc bráthair,*
> *cain míl, Moling Lúachair*.[10]
>
> The golden bush over borders,
> the splendid sun over tribes,
> a high champion of the King, a strong kinsman,
> a fair soldier, Moling of resplendence.

[4] See Dobbs, 'A Poem on the Uí Dega', 227.
[5] 'Mo-Ling Lochair dormiuit' (AU 697.9); 'Quies Mo-Ling Luachair' (AI 696). In AT i.175, AI 696, AClon 692, CS 693, AFM 696 and ARosc 697.6, the appellation appears as 'Lúachra', 'Lochra' or 'Luachra'.
[6] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List', 189-90. In the second copy of the Law his name appears as *Moluacar*.
[7] FA 45 § 137 (for the year 697).
[8] According to *Buile Shuibne*, Suibne spent seven years around Ireland and one year in Fid Gaible *after the battle.
[9] Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List', 215.
[10] Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, 141. The translation is my own. Stokes's translated the last line as 'a fair soldier, Moling of Lúachar'. On the redating of *Félire Óengusso* from the traditional date of 797 x 808 to 829 x 833 see Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints*, 80-98.

I suggest that *Lúachair* here may be regarded as the genitive singular of an o-stem noun *lúachar* 'brightness, brilliance'. The relevant entry in DIL, cited under **'2 lúcha(i)r** brightness, brilliance', does not give the noun's stem or gender. It does however provide a second metrically guaranteed example which indicates an o-stem noun: 'muir-duchunn, nach leasg luac(h)ar, / dateasg ar muir uathmar Icht'.[11] An association with shining brilliance would seem to go well with the rest of the quatrain in the *Félire Óengusso*.

DIL also has an entry for '**1 lúachair** [i] f. *gs.* and *np*. lúachra', explained as a collective 'rushes', with a secondary meaning of 'rushy-place, marsh'. In certain cases, o-stem *lúachar* and i-stem *lúachair* fall together in form. But in the case of Moling's appellation, there was further potential for confusion. It seems there was a notable marsh-area not far from Tech Moling in County Carlow, Moling's main church, judging by the fact that an abbot of Ferns who was a younger contemporary of Moling's was known as 'Do-Chuae Lochre, abb Fernann' (*sic* AU 654; cf. 'Da Chua Luachra ab Ferna' ATig; 'Quies ... Cronain Lochra' AI 649). The obit for Moling in the Annals of Boyle also seems to point to the existence of such a place as it reads 'Moling i lLuachair quieuit'.[12] Having such a place in mind, the annalist in this case may have added the preposition *i* 'in' to an entry similar to what one finds for Moling's obit in AU.[13] Furthermore, various Middle Irish poems put in the mouth of Moling also refer to such a place.[14]

I suggest then that there were two separate designations for Moling: 'Moling of resplendence' and 'Moling of Lúachair', the latter referring to a place not far removed from Tech Moling; and that these designations were liable to be interchanged, and confused. But there is a further twist. The vernacular Life of Moling (**No. 7** below), and various genealogies, identify Moling's mother as Némnait, or Émnait, of the Cíarraige, or more specifically of the Cíarraige Lúachra. The Lúachair in question here is Lúachair Dedad, an area marching the modern counties of Kerry, Cork and Limerick, mostly to the west of Sliabh Luachra. Moling's Cíarraige Lúachra mother may have been called into being because of confusion, or opportunistic use of the potential for confusion, between the names Uí Dega (in Leinster) and Lúachair Dedad (in Munster), arising out of the partial homonymy that occurred when *-dh-* and *–gh-* fell together in the Late Middle Irish period. Half of the vernacular Life is taken up with an account of Moling's birth to a woman named Émnait of Cenél Sétna, a sept-name associated with the Cíarraige, (and also with other peoples in Munster and Leinster). And although

[11] Gwynn, 'The Dindshenchas in the Book of Uí Maine', 84 §74.
[12] AB §219 (for the year 697).
[13] See footnote 5 above.
[14] Stokes, 'Poems ascribed to Moling', 32 (Poem no. 15, quat. 8*ab*: 'For Aingid na morluacra / mo bennacht co meth'); 36 (Poem. no. 20, quat. 20*ab*: 'Mulling ro ling Luacair loir / mac Faelain d'Uibh Deghadh moir'); Stokes, 'The Birth and Life of St. Moling, 14 §15 ('Luid-siumh ...do cūairt na Lūachra'); ibid. 18 §22 ('bidh tú...Molling Lūachra dona lémennaibh ro lingis').

this Life does not mention Cíarraige Lúachra specifically, it brings Moling into close contact with Brénainn mac Findloga, chief saint of the Cíarraige. However the Latin Life of Moling (**No. 9** below) makes no reference to Émnait, Brénainn, Cenél Sétna or Cíarraige Lúachra. It also lacks the vernacular Life's sensationalist account of Moling's incestuous conception and his mother's efforts to murder him at birth. That the Latin Life suppressed these elements in the story seems less likely than their being the product of vernacular tradition.[15]

Tech Moling (St. Mullins) in County Carlow had the alternative Irish name of Ros mBruic.[16] It had a very favourable location on the river Barrow, Ireland's second longest river, which was tidal as far as St. Mullins. The richness of its woods, faunal life and fishpools is frequently mentioned in medieval texts. Its monastic establishment was likely to flourish, and to attract pilgrims. The fact that an entire quatrain is given to mark Moling's feast on 17 June in the early ninth-century martyrology *Félire Óengusso* is an index of the importance his cult had assumed by that time.

The Book of Leinster preserves a collection of six Old Irish stories relating to Moling (**No. 2** below). The fact that *single* texts concerning Máedóc of Ferns are placed on either side of this collection is suggestive of Moling's relative importance. The collection was reproduced almost verbatim in the late twelfth-century commentary to the *Félire Óengusso*, one recension of which is thought to have emanated from a West Midlands church.[17]

Moling's cult originated in South Leinster, in Uí Cheinnselaig territory. But a second Leinster church was also named for him, the County Kildare church of Tech Moling, called Timolin in English. When exactly this church was founded is not clear. Charles Doherty has suggested that it may have been founded as a result of Viking attacks on the main site in Carlow, and have come to the fore by the tenth century.[18] Doherty also points to annalistic references to joint abbacies of Tech Moling and another church which help distinguish the North Leinster Tech Moling from Moling's foundation in Carlow, e.g. in the case of Dublitir mac Selbaig who died in 932 as joint abbot of Glenn Dá Locha and Tech Moling, the northern Tech Moling is surely in question, whereas Conchobar Úa Laidcnén who died in 1043 as joint abbot of Tech Moling and Ferna (Ferns) was likely associated with Tech Moling in Carlow.[19]

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[15] For further details on Moling, see Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 470-90.
[16] If *ros* 'wood' is masculine, as indicated in *DIL*, perhaps the nasalization in the well-attested form 'Ros mBroic' can be explained by reference to 'Rinn Ros mBroic', a hypothetical variant on the attested form 'Rinn Ruis Bruic' (e.g. in Stokes, 'Poems ascribed to Moling', 24 (Poem 3, q. 8b); 25 (Poem 4, q. 2d)).
[17] Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints*, 200-03.
[18] 'Was Sulien at Glendalough?', 266.
[19] Ibid. Doherty also notes that Dublitir's brother Gúaire (died 945) was abbot of Dísert Diarmata (Castledermot), a church belonging to Glenn Dá Locha.

Following the foundation of Tech Moling in Kildare, Moling's cult had the advantage of a church in each of Leinster's principal dynasties, Uí Cheinnselaig and Uí Dúnlainge. The North Leinster dynasty of Uí Dúnlainge monopolized the provincial kingship from 738 to 1042. After that, the Uí Cheinnselaig ruler Díarmait mac Maíl na mBó (died 1072), and his descendants down to and including his great-grandson Díarmait Mac Murchada (died 1171), brought dominance over Leinster back to the South Leinster federation. During this long period of Uí Cheinnselaig rule Moling became 'peculiarly a patron of the Lagin',[20] throughout Ireland and even beyond. A rich seam of literature attesting to this emanated from churches in Uí Dúnlainge and Uí Cheinnselaig, including the two named for him. I will argue that *Buile Shuibne* is also to be attributed to this burst of activity.

Buile Shuibne

The opening section of *BS* relates how 'fits of frenzy and flightiness' came upon Suibne mac Colmáin, king of Dál nAraide, 'beyond all others'.[21] The cleric Rónán Finn mac Beraig happened one time to be marking out land to build a church in Suibne's territory, clearly without his permission. The enraged Suibne set out to drive him off the land. Suibne's wife, seeking to detain him, 'seized the wing of the fringed, crimson cloak which was around him'. Leaving the cloak with the queen, he proceeded stark-naked (*lomnocht*) to meet Rónán, and found him 'blithely chanting his psalms with his lined, right-beautiful psalter in front of him'. Suibne hurled the psalter into the lake, and then turned on his heel to go to Mag Roth, having been summoned there by Congal Cláen, king of the Ulaid, to support him in the upcoming battle. An obliging otter returned the psalter to Rónán, 'and neither line nor letter in it was injured' (*gan milledh líne na litri inte*).[22] Rónán then set out for Mag Roth, hoping to make peace between Congal Cláen's forces and those of Domnall mac Áeda, king of Tara. There were pre-battle skirmishes, with Rónán acting as guarantor for the cessation of hostilities at the end of each day's fighting. 'Suibhne, however, used to violate the cleric's guarantee of protection inasmuch as every peace and truce which Ronan would make Suibhne would break, for he used to slay a man before the hour fixed for combat each day, and another each evening when the combat ceased.'[23] On the day of the great battle Suibne arrived, magnificently attired: 'A filmy shirt of silk was next his white skin, around him was a girdle of royal satin, likewise the tunic which Congal had given him the day he slew

[20] Kenney, *Sources*, 461. That his cult was tending in this direction much earlier is suggested by the representation of Moling as prophet for the Laigin in the tenth-century recension of *Cath Almaine*: cf. Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, 2.
[21] *BS* 3.
[22] Ibid., 4, 5.
[23] Ibid., 9. I have left the orthography of O'Keeffe's edition unchanged throughout.

Oilill Cedach, king of Ui Faolain, at Magh Rath ....'[24] The description of the tunic (*ionar*) that follows is among the most colourful passages in the entire text. The glaring anachronism here – of Suibne wearing, as the battle of Mag Roth is about to begin, the tunic awarded to him for having slain Ailill Cétach *during* that battle – is significant, and will be discussed further below.

Suibne meets Rónán and his eight psalm-singers, who inadvertently sprinkle holy water on the already edgy king. Furious, he kills one of the psalm-singers on the spot, and attempts to kill Rónán as well, but his spear hits Rónán's bell 'and the shaft sprang off it up in the air, whereupon the cleric said: "I pray the mighty Lord that high as went the spear-shaft into the air and among the clouds of Heaven may you go likewise even as any bird, and may the death which you have inflicted on my foster-child be that which will carry you off, to wit, death from a spear-point..."'.[25]

Suibne's fate is now sealed. Having outraged Rónán on two occasions, the cleric's curse will result in his going mad during the great battle, and eventually dying by spear-point. The clamour and cries on the battle-field and their terrifying reverberations in the heavens are what trigger his *geltacht*, but it has already been ordained. As the state of *geltacht* is commonly represented in medieval Irish tradition as the direct result of terror experienced on the battle-field,[26] it is significant that the battle is relegated to the position of secondary cause in *Buile Shuibne*: it brings out the text's design to show Suibne move from being an outcast as the result of one cleric's curse, through a long penitential period in the wilderness, to eventual return to fellowship through the benevolence of another cleric.

On his first day as a *geilt* Suibne reaches 'Ros Beraigh i nGlenn Earcáin'.[27] This was identified by J. G. O'Keeffe as Ros Earcáin (Rasharkin), a place which lies about 10 kilometres due north of Portglenone in County Antrim.[28] O'Keeffe suggested that one should look to the same district for Glenn Bolcáin, and cited Bishop Reeves to the effect that there was 'a ridge called Dunbolcain (or Drumbolcain) about a furlong N. of Rasharkin'.[29] Such a location in Dál nAraidi would be an appropriate place from which the erstwhile king of Dál nAraidi should start out.[30] Glenn Bolcáin is repeatedly said to be Suibne's favourite, if oftentimes trying, haunt. His travels take him the length and breadth of Ireland but are largely concentrated in the Northern Half. It is not atypical for him to

[24] Ibid., 11.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Chadwick, '*Geilt*', 119-33; Bergholm, *From Shaman to Saint*, 57-76.
[27] *BS* 14 §12.
[28] Ibid., 162 (note on §12).
[29] Ibid., 164 (note on §17).
[30] Mac Eoin, 'Gleann Bolcáin agus Gleann na nGealt', argues that Glenn Bolcáin of *Buile Shuibne* is one and the same as Gleann na nGealt in County Kerry, a traditional resort of *gelta*. The argument for the identity of the two is based on a single passage in the fifteenth-century *Cath Finntrága*, while the context to various references to Glenn Bolcáin in *Buile Shuibne* (*BS* 22 §17, 30 §21 q. 8, 45 §33, 108 §53) clearly indicates, in my view, that this place was in the North-East.

traverse the country in one day, sometimes even taking in Scotland; his epic journeys[31] mirror those undertaken by characters in *Fíannaigecht* and Romance, but the author of *BS* may have also wished to suggest the great distances covered by real birds. The peripatetic nature of Suibne's journeys did not require the author of *BS* to have a detailed knowledge of the geography of any one area. And in fact the only time one finds details of a built environment in the text is when it brings Suibne to Tech Moling where he is befriended by St Moling, his years as an outcast finally over. On this reading, there is no obvious reason to reject the possibility that *Buile Shuibne* was written by a Leinster author or in a Leinster scriptorium.

A contrary view was put forward by Pádraig Ó Riain in a pioneering study of *BS* some thirty years ago. While his article discussed all the church-sites and church-associated figures referenced in the text, its primary focus was on the identities of the four saints, aside from Moling, who find mention in *Buile Shuibne*, namely, Rónán Finn mac Beraig, Urudrán, Teille, and Brugach mac Degad. The last three get little more than passing reference in *BS*. Professor Ó Riain demonstrated that all four were of the race of Colla Fochrích. He showed that Rónán Finn mac Beraig is actually a conflation of Rónán Finn mac Sáráin of Colla Fochrích, a saint associated with the church of Lann Rónáin Fhinn in Uí Echach Ulad (at Magheralin, named from *Machaire Lainne*, close to Mag Roth, County Down), and Rónán mac Beraig of Uí Néill, a saint associated with the church of Druim Inesclainn (Dromiskin, County Louth). He noted that this composite character, Rónán Finn mac Beraig, features not only in *BS* but also in other texts, including *FDG*. He traced the descent of the other three saints also to Colla Fochrích. As Urudrán and Teille do not figure in hagiographical literature, Ó Riain argued that the author of *Buile Shuibne* must have drawn on a list of saints' genealogies such as one finds in twelfth-century manuscripts. In his view,

> it may be inferred that 'Buile Shuibhne' in its extant form was compiled and edited in the *scriptorium* of a monastery either lying on lands governed by the descendants of Colla Fochrích or owing allegiance to that race by virtue of its founder. The most likely location for such a monastery in twelfth-century Ireland would have been the territory of Airgialla, several of the most important families of which traced their descent to Colla Fochrích.[32]

He concluded that Tech Moling had played no part in the final redaction of *BS*.

Here now are the main points that seem to me to suggest otherwise. As we have seen, the episode of Rónán's psalter is given prominence at the beginning of the tale. When Suibne's long years

[31] E.g. *BS* 30 §21 q. 8, 62 §39, 119 §§59-60.
[32] 'Materials and Provenance', 186-7.

in the wilderness are over and he arrives at last at Tech Moling, what he sees is this: 'The psalter of Kevin was at that time in front of Moling as he was reading it to the students.'[33] The introduction of the psalter at this point throws a graceful arc over the entire narrative that emphasizes the great changes wrought in Suibne since the time he threw Rónán's psalter into the lake. That the psalter in front of Moling is said to be that of Cóemgen of Glenn Dá Locha (Glendalough) suggests that *BS* might have been composed with a North Kildare audience in mind. It is noteworthy too that the Irish Life of Cóemgen itself tells of an otter rescuing Cóemgen's psalter from a lake, and returning it 'without loss of line or letter' (*gan báthad líne nó litre*);[34] we see how this chimes with the previous reference to Rónán's psalter in *BS*. Another pointer to North Kildare has been mentioned before: the tunic worn by Suibne as he went into battle 'which Congal had given him the day he slew Oilill Cedach, king of the Ui Faolain, at Magh Rath'.[35] No other tale in the cycle of Mag Roth has Suibne killing *anyone* during the battle of Mag Roth, while *BS* relates that he fled the scene in terror, which would seem to imply that he was not involved long enough to kill anyone. However *CMR*^{2} (**No. 14** below), a text which in its extant form is much later than *BS* but which seems to have been preceded by other, now lost, versions, relates that Ailill Cétach, king of Uí Fhailge, was killed by Suibne son of Eochaid Buide, this Suibne being a brother of Domnall Brecc, king of Dál Riata.[36] As Ailill Cétach does not figure in either *CMR*^{1} or in *FDG*, I take it that he has very probably been taken over into *BS* from now-lost traditions of *CMR*^{2}. But *FDG* (**No. 6** below) does feature a tunic, in Suibne's possession, and I suggest that it was this tunic in the extant *FDG* (or in a lost version of that tale) that inspired the image in *BS* of the magnificent purple *ionar* in which Suibne came dressed for battle, and also the pervasive contrasting images of his subsequent nakedness, or near-nakedness, and perhaps also the idea of Suibne being feathered.[37] In addition, it seems to me that the author of *BS* has combined the two borrowed elements - tunic and Ailill Cétach - to introduce an idea of his own invention: that Suibne had slain a king of the Uí Fháeláin in the battle of Mag Roth. Not only that, he adverts to this killing twice more. When Suibne makes his way to the great wood of *Fid Gaible*, having shaken off the nightmarish *caillech* of the mill, he runs into a hunting party and hears the bellowing of the hunted stag. '"This", said he, "is the cry of a great host, and they are the Ui Faelain coming to kill me to avenge Oilill Cedach, king of the Ui Faelain, whom I slew in the battle of Magh

[33] *BS* 137 §74.
[34] Plummer *Bethada* i.127 (§14). Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 149, suggests that the 'original' of the extant Lives of Cóemgen may be no earlier than the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century.
[35] *BS* 11 §8.
[36] O'Donovan, *The Banquet ... and the Battle of Magh Roth*, 243.
[37] For references to Suibne's nakedness or near-nakedness, see e.g. *BS* 4 §5, 8 §6 q. 10, 32 §21, 84 §43 qq. 10 and 12, 106 §52 q. 52, 108 §54 q. 3, 124 §67, q. 1. On the questions of feathers, see **No. 6** below.

Rath.'[38] When Suibne pays a second visit to his former wife Eorann, she speaks unkindly to him and turns him away. Suibne then laments his situation, in prose and in a poem of eight quatrains. The first three quatrains reprise what he has just said in the prose but the last four give more detail concerning his encounter with Ailill Cétach and are cited here:[39]

> 'Wretched in sooth is that', said Suibne, 'woe to him who trusts a woman after these words. For great was my kindness to the woman who dismisses me thus, seeing that one day I gave her thrice fifty cows and fifty steeds; and if it were the day I slew Oilill Cedach, king of Ui Faolain, she would have been glad to see me....'
>
> Rightly did Congal ask
> of us Ulster warriors:
> 'which of you will repel in battle
> Oilill Cedach the combative?'
>
> Wild and angry the man,
> huge his shield and his spear,
> he stilled for a time the host,
> the matchless, huge man.
>
> Said I at Congal's side –
> it was not the response of a timid man –
> 'I will ward off mighty Oilill,
> though hard beyond all is it to encounter him.'
>
> Headless I left Oilill,
> and right glad was I thereat;
> by me also there fell
> five sons of the king of Magh Mairge.

The reference in the last quatrain to Mag Mairge, which surely stands for Slíab Mairge in the kind of onomastic play that is characteristic of *Fíannaigecht*, gives Suibne's crimes a more southerly Leinster

[38] *BS* 63 §39.
[39] Ibid., 111 §55, 113 and 115 §§56 qq. 5-8.

association: Slíab Mairge was the old name for the Castlecomer hills that lie to the east of Lethglenn and Glenn Uissen.[40]

There is yet another pointed Leinster association in the fact that Fid Gaible is identified as the place in which Suibne recited 'the *laíd* in which he eulogized aloud the trees of Ireland' (*dorinni an laoidh 7* tuc testmolta crann Eirenn ós aird innte*).[41] At sixty-five quatrains, this poem is by far the longest in *BS*, and appearing as it does mid-way through the work it may be regarded as its centrepiece. The great wood of Fid Gaible took its name from the river *Gabal*, a tributary of the Barrow now known as the Figile river. The district was held by the Uí Muirecáin whose territory, recorded as 'Feranomvrghan' (*Ferann úa Muirecán*), lay 'in that part of the barony of Coolestown in Offaly lying east of the Figile river. There is evidence to show that *Fid Gaible* originally extended eastwards to take in Rathangan in Co. Kildare...'[42] Fid Gaible was one of the great woodlands of Ireland. It was from there, according to the early twelfth-century work *Cogadh Gaedheal re Gallaibh*, that Máelmórda, king of Leinster (and brother of Gormlaith, one-time wife of Brían Bórama), brought three great masts of pine to Brían at Kincora, one from each of the three neighbouring territories of Uí Failge, Uí Fháeláin and Uí Muiredaig.[43] A late tenth-century poem whose author, on internal evidence, appears to have been a member of the community of Clúain Mór Máedóc (Clonmore) in County Carlow, refers to Fid Gaible as one of the notable places of Leinster.[44]

The wood of Fid Gaible had another importance resonance for the author of *BS* and his audience as the location of the church of Berchán at Clúain Sosta (Clonsast, barony of Coolestown, County Offaly). Berchán's reputation as a prophet-saint was high in the late twelfth century. One illustration of this is that Gerald of Wales listed him, along with Patrick, Colum Cille and Moling, as one of the four great prophets of Ireland in his *Expugnatio Hibernica* which appeared shortly after 1188.[45] Berchán's dates are unknown.[46] His original reputation may derive from the idea that he foretold the coming of the Vikings. In any case, prophecies attributed to him were later applied to the coming of the Normans. While there appears to be a small core of Old Irish quatrains in his versified *Baile* ('Vision'), the bulk of it has been shown by the most recent editor to be the work of two late eleventh-century authors, augmented by further material added at intervals after their time.[47]

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[40] Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 610.
[41] *BS* 62, 63 §39.
[42] Smyth, *Celtic Leinster*, 75.
[43] Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 143.
[44] Dobbs, 'On the Graves of the Leinster Men', 143 (quat. 53).
[45] Scott and Martin, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, 232.
[46] For details of Berchán, see Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 97-8.
[47] Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchan*, *passim*.

The famous wood, dear to the Laigin, with its associations with Berchán, makes an ideal place for Suibne to address the beloved trees but also to foretell his own death, which he does in the penultimate quatrain, before reprising the first couplet of the poem ('A bhennáin, a bhuiredháin, / a bhéiceadháin bintt') in the final one:

Bidh ann bhias mo bhithlighi
tes ag Tuidhin tenn,
*ag Tech Moling biothaingl*ighi
taotus do bheind.

Dorad misi it chumann-sa
mallacht Ronáin Finn,
a bhennáin, a bhúireadháin
a bhéiceadáin binn.

At ever-angelic Tech Moling,
at puissant Toidhen in the south,
'tis there my eternal resting-place will be,
I shall fall by a [spear]-point.

The curse of Ronan Finn
has thrown me in thy company,
O little stag, little bleating one,
O melodious little clamourer.[48]

The entire poem is a deliberate assemblage by a writer of poetic sensibility who had a story-line to advance and who was not adverse to combining real poetry with less accomplished verse, some perhaps of his own making,[49] and some certainly from other sources. For instance, as O'Keeffe pointed out, quatrains 16 and 19 also feature in *CMR*[2];[50] they were probably derived from a now lost version of that work. It is easy to detect a fine poem in quatrains 3-11 in which the speaker addresses

[48] *BS* 80, 81, 82, 83 §§64-5.
[49] The literary quality of the different strata of poetry in *Buile Shuibne* merits further study, in part because of what it is likely to reveal about the author's poetic sensibility.
[50] *BS* 168-9.

various trees in the vocative, beginning with the majestic oak. The first and penultimate of the sixty-five quatrains refer to the bellowing stag, and the author has worked the 'poem' of quatrains 3-11 into his narrative by referring to the bellowing of the hunted stag in his prose, and then proceeding to his memorable opening quatrain:

> *A bhennáin, a bhuiredháin,*
> *a bhéiceadháin bintt,*
> *is binn linn an cuicherán*
> *do[g]ni tú 'san ghlintt.*
>
> O little stag, thou little bleating one,
> O melodious little clamourer,
> sweet to us is the music
> thou makest in the glen.

The other quatrains are miscellaneous, covering aspects of Suibne's varied experiences of life in the wilderness and his dealings with Rónán Finn, Congal, Loingsechán and the *caillech* of the mill, with some verses showing him in dialogue with the latter.

It is interesting to see how contemporary poets who translated parts of *BS* responded to this evident bricolage. For instance, quatrains 3-11 alone underlie John Skelton's 'He Praises the Trees' (the version published in *The Faber Book of Irish Verse*,[51] edited by John Montague); while Thomas Kinsella opted to translate all of quatrains 1-13 in the version he included in his *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*.[52] Seamus Heaney embraced *BS* in its entirety:

> My first impulse had been to forage for the best lyric moments and to present them as poetic orphans, out of the context of the story. These points of poetic intensity, rather than the overall organization of the narrative, establish the work's highest artistic levels and offer the strongest invitations to the translator of verse. Yet I gradually felt I had to earn the right to do the high points by undertaking the whole thing: what I was dealing with, after all, is a major work in the canon of medieval literature.[53]

[51] Pp 84-5.
[52] Pp 75-7.
[53] *Sweeney Astray*, 3.

One wonders whether the quatrains addressed to the different trees originally constituted a poem associated with Fid Gaible, or whether it was the author of *BS* who forged that link. He is certainly responsible for shaping the final section of *BS*, which is set at Tech Moling. This constitutes roughly one seventh of the work. Here again he drew on pre-existing materials. The narrative appears to have been driven by his efforts to include various poems, some more obviously intact than others. One finds echoes of the wording, or variant versions of the substance, of other texts that were composed at Tech Moling in Carlow (see **No. 2** below). But what is most surprising is that this section of *BS* includes poems with Tech Moling as their setting that are *not* found elsewhere: it seems evident that the author of *BS* had access to many poems that are no longer extant. A most interesting example of what he did include is the very last poem. In this, Moling, the implied speaker, celebrates the dead Suibne's grave (*lechtán*) and well (*tiubra*), simultaneously asking that, God willing, Suibne may rise up out of it. The sixth quatrain reads:[54]

Masa chead le Righ na reann
eirigh agus imthigh leam,
tucc dhamh, a c[h]ridhe, do lámh
on lighe agus on leachtán.

If it be the will of the King of the stars,
arise and come with me,
give me, O heart, thy hand,
from the grave and from the tomb!

In order to accommodate this poem on Suibne's tomb with its direct address to the *dead* Suibne, the author of *BS* creates a startling ending: he has Suibne die twice. Following his first death, the author has Moling tell, in prose, of the construction of Suibne's grave (§84). Then the author inserts the poem (§85), after which he relates that Suibne *did* actually rise again, that Moling *did* actually lead him by the hand as far as the door-post of the church, in which place the now saintly *geilt* breathed his last and was then buried honorably by Moling (§86).

This kind of reference surely implies that the author had some kind of association with one or other of Moling's churches. But this is not to suggest that he was custodian of an actual grave, the reputed burial-place of Suibne, for *BS* is not traditional hagiography and the author made very little

[54] *BS* 156, 157 §85 q. 6.

use of its conventions. What he wrote is a romantic tale about the rehabilitation of a murderer; one that draws, to be sure, on material such as nature poetry that might equally be turned to use in hagiography. But the emotional effects for which he strives are those of romance, as is made particularly clear in the sections in which the distraught Suibne converses with his former wife Eorann, and in which Loingsechán, in his efforts to return him to his senses, brings him to the verge of annihilation by telling him that all are dead – his father, his mother, his only daughter (the 'heart's needle', *snáthad chroidhe*) – and 'the little boy who used to say "daddy"' (*mac beg adberedh popa*).[55] The author would surely have identified with the new creative impulse witnessed in *Acallam na Senórach*, as Pádraig Ó Riain suggested; and with the imaginary of *Fíanaigecht*, in the deployment of which, as Ann Dooley has shown, Gaelic literature brought something new to the European mainstream.[56] But where was his home? His interest in Suibne and Moling suggests an association with one of Moling's churches. Given the previously discussed pointers in *BS* to North Leinster, I suggest that he was either a member of, or was closely associated with, the community of Tech Moling in County Kildare or, conceivably, of Glenn Dá Locha or Cell Dara.

Textual Markers for the Development of the Suibne Legend

The order in which the following texts are presented requires several caveats. The obvious one is that we are dealing with the *disjecta membra* of tradition; had more material survived, it might be clear that the order should be somewhat different. The lack of critical editions of some of the texts, in particular *CMR*[1], the *Bórama*, and the Irish Life of Moling, and of a linguistic study of the poems published in *Anecdota* 2, calls for caution. Furthermore, as some of the texts went through various recensions, the place I have assigned them in the list is not necessarily indicative of the original date of composition: this caveat applies to the *Bórama* in particular. It must also be borne in mind that the extant versions of *CMR*, *FDG* and *BS* drew on other versions that are now lost, probably including oral ones.[57] Consequently, the relationship between the extant versions is not necessarily linear in the

[55] *BS* 46-8 §32; 52-9 §36 qq. 3, 11, 13.
[56] 'Materials and Provenance', 173. On the *'fianaigecht* imaginary' of *Acallam na Senórach*, see now Dooley, 'The European Context of *Acallam na Senórach*'.
[57] As Marstrander noted, *CMR*[1] is obviously 'an abridgement of several older and varying accounts, as is proved by its disconnected form and the discrepancy between prose and verse.... Similarly [*CMR*[2]] has been drawn from several sources, as is hinted by the author himself, who in several places quotes his authorities and rejects accounts differing from his own' ('A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath', 230-31). In *FDG* xx, Lehmann pointed out that while this tale has a unified appearance, 'it seems to combine many elements and occasionally alternative traditions'. As for *BS*, it contains quatrains also found in *CMR*[2]: cf. *BS* 20 (§16, qq. 7-10, 12); 68 (§40, qq. 16 and 19), and Notes at 162-3, 168-9). As *CMR*[2] post-dates *BS*, and as these quatrains are not found in *CMR*[1], one must conclude that *BS* drew them from a version of *CMR* that is no longer extant. There is also evidence that *BS* drew on materials that may date back to the Old Irish period: see **No. 4** below).

way that the ordering here suggests. My aim has been to outline how the texts of the Suibne legend are enmeshed in each other; to suggest how details of the legend cascade down through the literature, often changing in the process; and to show that this literature is closely associated with Leinster and in particular with the churches of Moling.

No. 1

Poems in the *Codex Sancti Pauli*

Edition with translation in Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*, ii.294-5 (notes, ibid., xxxii-xxxiv).

Suibne first appears in association with Moling on a page of the famous *Codex Sancti Pauli* in the Benedictine monastic library in Sankt Paul im Lavanttal in southern Austria. The poem beginning 'M'airiuclán hi Túaim Inbir' is found on f. 8v with the name *Suibne Geilt* above *M'airiuclán* and the words *barr edin* ('ivied top') above *Inbir*.[58] A date of *c.* 800 was suggested by Gerard Murphy.[59]
In my view, the speaker is to be regarded as a holy *geilt* called Suibne, a willing fool for Christ, a kind of hermit. I find no suggestion in the poem that he lives above the ground, in the branches; his *tech* ('house') is clearly stated to be a place 'where no rain falls'. I take it he lives in a makeshift home that was built or adapted by a wright named Gobbán. Use of the words *airiuclán* ('little oratory'), the word *cridecán* ('heartling') in reference to God, and the emphasis on peace in the third quatrain give the poem a distinctly religious cast.[60] There is no imputation of fault to the speaker. I conclude that the speaker has yet to evolve into the *geilt* who went mad in the battle of Mag Roth, having been cursed for his wrongdoing.

At the same time, I believe the poem's Suibne is associated with Moling of Tech Moling. On the same page, beneath the poem attributed to 'Suibne *geilt*', one finds two quatrains attributed to 'Maling' (*sic*). The same two quatrains occur within a poem of eight quatrains addressed *to* Moling of Tech Moling in the series of texts listed under **No. 2** below. One couplet of the two quatrains may serve to convey the tenor of the whole poem: 'he is happy, he is beautiful, he is holy who does the will of the King'.

At the bottom of the page and in the same hand one finds the well-known praise-poem honouring a Leinster royal which begins 'Āed oll fri andud nāne', 'Áed great at kindling splendour'.

[58] For a detailed description of the manuscript and its contents, with illustrations, see Tristram, 'Die irischen Gedichte im Reichenauer Schulheft'.
[59] *Early Irish Lyrics*, 112.
[60] For the most recent discussion of this poem, see Ó Corráin, 'Early Irish Hermit Poetry?', 263-4.

The final rhymes show this poem cannot be earlier than the ninth century.[61] For this reason, the postulated identification of the addressee with Áed mac Diarmata, king of Leinster who died in 714 (AU), is to be rejected.[62] As the poem states that Áed hailed from 'the heights of Roíriu' (*di dindgnaib Roerenn*) and 'the marches of smooth Maistiu' (*di Moisten míne mrugaib*), it is entirely probable that he was a scion of the Uí Muiredaig. The poem identifies his grandfather as Muiredach, and Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin made the plausible suggestion that this may have been the Uí Muiredaig king named Muiredach (died 818) son of Bran Artchenn who is described as *leth-rí Laigen* ('half-king of Leinster') in his death-notice in the Annals of Ulster, and whose co-regent was the North Leinster king, Muiredach mac Ruadrach of the Uí Fháeláin.[63] It has long been held that the scribe of the *Codex Sancti Pauli* was a scholar from Leinster who wrote it in some monastic centre on the continent.[64]

The assocation of the names 'Suibne *geilt*' and 'Maling', and the praise-poem addressed to a royal from the vicinity of Tech Moling in County Kildare, might all be regarded as no more than a curious coincidence were it not for what is known of the ongoing association of Moling and Suibne in later tradition.

No. 2

Series of six Old Irish stories relating to Moling (in the Book of Leinster)

Edition only in Best et al., *The Book of Leinster,* v.1236-42. Similarly worded versions of three of these stories (the first, third and fourth) are found in the commentary to *Félire Óengusso;* for editions with translations see Stokes, *Félire Óengusso,* 152-7. The second and fifth story are edited and translated in Hull, 'Two Anecdotes Concerning St. Moling'. The first and sixth story are edited and translated in Meyer, '*Mélanges*. I: Anecdotes of St. Moling', 188-94.

This series of stories concerning Moling sheds interesting light on his cult in the Old Irish period: he is identified as a *céile Dé*, and 'foster-son' (*dalta*) to Máedóc of Ferna. He is addressed as 'the prophet' (*in tairchetlaid*). He is represented as a poet who indulges in slanging verse (verse is attributed to him in five of the six stories). His mill-race (*toídiu*) at Tech Moling ~~(County Carlow)~~ is an important feature of his church. Repeated reference to it seem to imply that the series was written at this church. Suibne is not mentioned in any of the stories, but the collection has relevance for the development of his legend.

[61] Murphy, 'Bards and *Filidh*', 205 n. 3.
[62] Stern, 'Über die irische Handschrift in St. Paul', 533; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, 33, 56.
[63] Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity*, 84.
[64] For a review of the scholarship, see Tristram, 'Die irische Gedichte'.

The two quatrains attributed to Moling in the *Codex Sancti Pauli* (see **No. 1**) reappear in the fourth story of the series, as the first two quatrains (but with the order reversed) of an eight-quatrain poem, now attributed to the Devil in conversation with Moling. Aspects of other stories find their way into **No. 7** and **No. 11** below, where Suibne and Moling are clearly brought together. A particularly important instance of this is the account of the death of Moling's bad neighbour Grác, found in the second story in the series. This account does not relate that Grác met a 'threefold death'. Later, however, in the Irish Life of Moling (**No. 7,** at §§41-6), Grác's death has become a 'threefold death', whereas in one of the Middle Irish poems relating to Moling and Suibne (**No. 11**, poem 5), Grác has mutated into Suibne's killer, with the 'threefold death' as his punishment. And finally, in *BS* **(No. 12**), Suibne is killed not by Grác but by Moling's *búachaill*, with details of a similar *búachaill* occuring in yet another one of the Middle Irish poems relating to Moling and Suibne **(No. 11**, poem 4).

Three stories from the series make their way into the commentary to the *Félire Óengusso*, of which there are two recensions, one of which appears to have been made at Armagh in the period 1170-1175, the other at a 'West Midlands monastery' shortly thereafter.[65] Much of the Book of Leinster appears to have been written *c.* 1160. It is clear then that the series of stories was circulating at a time of heightened interest in Moling. They witness very little scribal change to the Old Irish of the originals.

No. 3
The first recension of *Cath Maige Rath*
Edition with translation in Marstrander, 'A New Version of the Battle of Mag Rath'.

Neither Suibne nor Moling features here. Also absent is Rónán Finn mac Beraig, whose first appearance in the Mag Roth cycle of tales is in *FDG*; as we have seen, he has an important role also in *BS*. The first recension of *CMR* also lacks Suibne's tunic, which is a feature of both *FDG* and *BS*. This would seem to suggest that the legend of Suibne was not a feature of the earliest version of *CMR*. If so, one would like to know when it was first linked to the traditions of that battle. That question seems impossible to answer, but the search for a *terminus ad quem* might be expected to prove more fruitful. On that basis, it has been necessary to follow the lead provided by the next item.

No. 4

The quatrain beginning 'Meinic m'ong'

[65] Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints*, 202-3.

This quatrain occurs in *Buile Shuibne* within a poem of thirteen quatrains addressed by Suibne to his kinsman Loingsechán who has come in pursuit of Suibne in the hope of restoring him to his senses. O'Keeffe's text and translation are as follows:

> *Meinic m'ong*
> *cian om relic mo theach toll,*
> *nidom nía acht im geilt ghann,*
> *Dia romc[h]lann i cceirt gan chonn.*
>
> Frequent is my groan,
> far from my churchyard is my gaping house;
> I am no champion but a needy madman,
> God has thrust me in rags, without sense.[66]

The same quatrain is attested, without attribution, in the first recension of the Preface to *Amrae Coluimb Chille* which has been dated to 1006-7.[67] It also appears in a later recension of this Preface in the Yellow Book of Lecan where it is attributed to '*Subni*'.[68] Furthermore, the quatrain may date to the Old Irish period since three lines of it also appear in the Leabhar Breac version of *Sanas Cormaic*, under the lemma *ong*:

> *Ong. cian on relic mo tech tóll, nídamnia acht am geilt ghánd, dia dor ad icert mo chond*.[69]

Taken together, these facts suggest that the quatrain may be illustrative of Suibne *geilt* as he was represented in the late Old Irish period. Drawing on the various readings, it is easily rendered to Old Irish form:

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[66] *BS* 40, 41 §27 q. 9.
[67] Herbert, 'The Preface to *Amra Coluim Cille*', 67-76.
[68] Dublin, TCD MS 1318, col. 699, line 12.
[69] Dublin, RIA MS 23 P 16 (*Leabhar Breac*), p. 270a, lines 35-7. It should be noted however that the quatrain is not attested in any of the other three short versions of *Sanas Cormaic* (in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud 610; Dublin, RIA, MS D ii 1 (Book of Uí Maine); and Dublin, TCD, MS 1339 (Book of Leinster) which contains fragment T-U only). Nor is it found in either of the long versions in Dublin, TCD, MS 1318 (Yellow Book of Lecan) and Dublin, UCD, Franciscan (Killiney) MS A 12. I have not had the opportunity to check whether it is attested in the remaining long version, in Dublin, TCD, MS 1317.

Meinic m'ong,
cían óm' reilic mo thech toll,
níta nía acht am geilt gann,
Día do-rad i ciurt mo chonn.

I suggest that *cert* in the fourth line is the o-stem noun 'right, correctness', here employed in an idiom meaning 'limited', comparable to French *juste*.[70] I would therefore modify O'Keeffe's translation to read:

Frequent my groan,
far from my grave is my gaping house;
I am no warrior but a needy *geilt,*
God has diminished my sense.

As Suibne's *reilic* – a Christian term – is said to be far from his 'gaping house', the quatrain may imply the tradition that he will end his days in the care of Moling: he is not portrayed as having such a relationship with any other cleric. If one could be sure that the rest of the poem as found in *BS* were contemporary with this quatrain, then one would know that Suibne was linked to the battle of Mag Roth at the time this quatrain was composed since other quatrains refer to a battle to which the speaker wished he had not gone (q. 2), to some non-specific wrongdoing (*eciort*) on his part (q. 6), and to the death of Congal Cláen (q. 8).[71] The problem is that it is most unlikely that all these quatrains originally belonged together; the poem has all the signs of being a composite. Ruth Lehmann, who identified the poem on linguistic grounds as among the five oldest in *BS*, pointed out that it is in mixed metres: some quatrains are in *deibide* metre, others in *rannaigecht dialtach* or *rannaigecht dialtach gairit*.[72] The quatrain beginning 'Meinic m'ong' is an example of the latter, whereas those referring to the battle, the wrongdoing and the death of Congal Cláen are all in *deibide*. Lehmann regarded the quatrains in *deibide* as exhibiting the older linguistic features, but those she noted for quatrains 2, 6 and 8 actually persist well into the Middle Irish period.[73] This leaves us with the 'Meinic m'ong' quatrain as the only one with a plausible, if unproveable, claim to an Old Irish date of composition. Those containing the references to battle and Congal Cláen are apparently of Middle Irish date. At the same time, the tradition that Suibne's *geltacht* resulted from horror of battle may be inscribed in the 'Meinig m'ong'

[70] Vendryes, *Lexique*, s.v. '2 cert'.
[71] *BS* 38 (§27 qq. 2, 6), 40 (§27 q. 8).
[72] 'A Study of the Buile Shuibhne' (part 2), 122.
[73] Ibid. (part 1), 304-6, 308, 310.

quatrain itself, judging by Suibne's statment, 'I am no champion but a needy *geilt*': the contrast suggests that he had *formerly* been a champion in battle. In sum, all one can say for certain is that the association of Suibne's *geltacht* with a battle, and that of Mag Roth in particular, is found by the early Middle Irish period.

This quatrain, and the context in which it occurs in *Buile Shuibne*, illustrate the significant dating problems that *Buile Shuibne* poses. Efforts to date *Buile Shuibne* on linguistic criteria alone are bound to be fraught with difficulty, given the stratified nature of the text. An approach that combines literary and linguistic criteria (and perhaps others) is required if the different strata are to be distinguished. Perhaps such an approach might reveal a core of poetry that one could associate with Suibne that is not necessarily linked to traditions of the battle of Mag Roth.

No. 5

The Middle Irish poem beginning 'Fuarus inber soirchi sunt'

Edition with translation in Meyer, 'Poem Ascribed to Suibne Geilt'.

This poem of six quatrains with '*Suibhni .cc. so thíos*' as its colophon survives in Dublin, TCD MS 1337, p. 60b. The fact that its transmission is not associated with any of the extant tales in the Mag Roth cycle lends some credence to the idea that the Suibne legend may have originated independently of that cycle. The language of the poem is Middle Irish, of uncertain date. It begins:

*Fūarus inb*er *soirchi sunt,*
ūair is hé in Coimdhi rascum,
folil mu menmain dia éis
*it*er *fedhaib fo áin*[*s**]*éis.*

I have found a bright river-mouth here
for it is the Lord who shaped it;
my mind stayed thereafter
in woods on a splendid course.[74]

[74] Text from Meyer, 'A Poem Ascribed to Suibne Geilt'; the translation is mine.

It is noteworthy that there is no reference in this poem to *geltacht*. And while the speaker refers in the first quatrain to living 'in woods', and in the second quatrain to his future 'in the woods of Ireland' (*iter fidbadhaib Ērend*), there is nothing to suggest that he spends time above the ground, in tree-branches, or is naked or feathered. He says, 'it is Jesus who struck me down' (*is hé Ísacān romben*), but there is no reference to the battle of Mag Roth. He seems to have been in secular life since he says 'there used to be splendid men (*āinfir*) along with me', and refers to feasts. The poem contains three references to God (referred to as '*Coimdiu*', '*Fíadu*', and '*Ísucán*'), surely an index of its religious nature.

No. 6

Fled Dúin na nGéd

Edition with translation in O'Donovan, *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Roth*; edition only in Marstrander *Fleadh Dúin na nGéadh ocus Cath Muighe Ráth*; edition only in Lehmann, *Fled Dúin na nGéd*, with translation of this in Lehmann, 'Banquet of the Fort of the Geese'.

This tale is a key text for the development of *BS*. It relates that Suibne, here identified as king of Dál nAraidi, went mad in the battle of Mag Roth because he was cursed by the saint Rónán Finn mac Beraig; a tunic also features in the tale. All these elements, as we have seen, are found in *BS*. However, *FDG* makes no reference to Moling, and there is nothing in it to indicate an interest in the affairs of Leinster on the part of the author. In fact, it has been argued persuasively by Máire Herbert that the tale was composed to point up an analogy between the events it relates and political struggles in the Northern Half around the time of the significant battle of Mag Coba (near Dromore, County Down) in 1103.[75] But despite the absence of Moling, I surmise that the character of Suibne, King of Dál nAraidi, is actually founded on that of the *geilt* we have seen associated with Moling in earlier texts. I suggest that the author of the extant *FDG* (or of some precursor of it) drew on a pre-existing tradition of a *geilt* named Suibne, and identified him as a king of Dál nAraidi so that he might represent him as a minor variation on his main theme of an Ulidian king overcome by supernatural forces. But whereas the demonic possession of Congal, overking of the Ulaid, leads to his death, the *geltacht* imposed on Suibne as the result of the saint's curse offers a provocative positive contrast in that it results in the production of a body of poetry. Assuming that there were earlier, now lost, versions of *FDG*, which is highly likely since elements of it overlap with the other tales in the Mag

[75] '*Fled Dúin na nGéd*: A Reappraisal', 84-7.

Roth cycle, this theory could then account for the identification of Suibne as king of Dál nAraidi, and his association with Congal Cláen, in *BS*.

To make the argument that aspects of *Buile Shuibne* and other texts below evolved out of *FDG* or lost precursors thereof, it is necessary to recall some details from the tale. *FDG* relates that before his inauguration as king of Tara, Domnall mac Áeda is given various dire warnings that one or other of his foster-sons will revolt against him. He ignores the warnings and proceeds with the feast to celebrate his kingship. The feast is held at his royal residence at Dún na nGéd, on the Boyne. All the guests are given goose-eggs on silver platters, but that set before his foster-son Congal Cláen, king of the Ulaid, transforms into a hen-egg on a wooden platter. Congal is goaded by his servant to regard this as a most serious insult:

> *Ro ling dásacht 7* mire menman a Congal fri haithesc in óclaig sin 7* ro ling in fúir demnach .i. Tesifone a cumgaise a chride do chumniugad cecha drochchomairli dó. Ro érig didiu ina sheasam 7* ro gab a gaiscead fair 7* ro érig a bruth míled 7* a én gaile for folúamain úasa 7* ní tharat aichne for charait ná for nemcharait in tan sin amail ropa dúal dó óna sheanathair .i. ó Chonall Cernach mac Amairgin.*
>
> Frenzy and madness of mind sprang up in Congal at the speech of that young man, and devilish fury (that is, Tesiphone) sprang into the depths of his heart to recall every evil counsel to him. Then he stood up and took his weapons and his soldier's ardor arose, and his bird of valor flying above him, and he did not recognize friends or enemies at that time as was natural to him from his grandfather, that is from Conall Cernach, son of Amairgin.[76]

Congal rehearses all his grievances to Domnall, including his negligent care of Congal as a child, with the result that he was blinded in one eye by a bee (thus gaining the name Congal *Cáech/Cláen*), and his failure to honour his promise to grant him the kingship of the province. He declares war on Domnall, who responds by sending the saints of Ireland after him to offer him his full demand. When this fails, the saints curse Congal, and Suibne along with him (this is the first mention of Suibne in the tale):

[76] *FDG* 9-10 (lines 289-96); Lehmann, 'Banquet', 140.

*Ocus ro escainset di*diu *Suibne mac Colmáin Chúair mic Cobthaig ríg Dál nAraide, ar is é ruc úaidib int inar illdathach dorad Domnall i láim Rónáin Fhind (.i.* sanctus*) mic Beraig dia thabairt do C*h*ongal, 7* ó ro fhéimig Congal in inar sin, dobert Suibne i láim in c*h*lérig dia aindeóin inar in ríg ....*

And then they cursed that Suibne son of Colmán Cúar son of Cobthach king of Dál Araide, for it is he who took from them the many-coloured tunic that Domnall gave Rónán Find (that is, the saint) son of Berach to give it to Congal and when Congal refused that tunic, Suibne took the king's tunic from the cleric's hand in spite of him.... [77]

Congal refuses the terms of settlement offered by Domnall, and prepares for battle. His uncle encourages him to raise allies in Scotland, and to seek help in particular from his maternal grandfather, Eochaid Buide (son of Áedán mac Gabráin), king of Dál Riata. (Such a relationship is chronologically plausible but is not recorded elsewhere.) In Scotland, Congal is welcomed by Dub Díad, poet (also *druí*) of Eochaid Buide. Eochaid tells Congal that he himself cannot go to war against the king of Tara because of old ties of loyalty but that his four sons will. After many digressions, Congal raises an army of British, Saxon and French forces. They give battle to Domnall mac Áeda at Mag Roth. The battle itself is not described, but we are told in short order that Congal Cláen is killed. The close of the tale relates:

Ar it é sin teór*a búada in c*h*atha sin .i. maidm ria nDomnall ina fhírinne for Congal ina gói 7* Suibne do dul fri gealtacht ara méd do laídib ro lesaig 7* in fer di fheraib Alban do dul dia thír fesin cen luing, cen báirc, 7* láech aile i lenmain de*.

These are the three excellencies of the battle, namely, the defeat of Congal in his falsehood by Domnall in his truth and Suibne's going mad, from the number of poems that he composed,[78] and the man of the men of Scotland going to his own country without ship, without bark, and another warrior clinging to him.... [79]

[77] *FDG* 12 (lines 362-8); Lehmann, 'Banquet', 142.
[78] A closer translation would be 'that he corrected'.
[79] *FDG* 30 (lines 928-32); Lehmann, 'Banquet', 159.

The ‘man of the men of Scotland’ who swims back to Scotland with a dead man attached to his leg is identified as Dub Díad *druí*. Let us now consider some aspects of the story in the light of the concerns of this study.

First, the question of Congal’s demonic fury. In a highly original study of the way the representation of Congal’s tragedy changes from one story in the Mag Roth cycle to the next, Jacqueline Borsje points out that in *CMR*[1], it is Satan who acts as Congal’s advisor, and who incites him to do battle with his foster-father. In *FDG*, the author ‘replaces Satan by a personified emotion: *fúir demnach* and links this up with the state of being *dásachtach*. In a gloss, he explains the demonic fury as one of the Furies... Tesiphone’.[80] This is in the passage we have seen above. Borsje identifies verbal echoes of *Togail na Tebe*, the Irish adaptation of the classical tale of the war of Thebes, in *FDG*’s description of Tisiphone (to give the name its standard form) and in other passages of the text. She also points out that the author of *CMR*[2] brought the matter to a climax, describing Congal as having been possessed by the *Three* Furies *throughout* his life. Borsje's observations on demonic possession in the first two tales in the Mag Roth cycle prompt the idea that the author of the last tale, *BS*, who clearly had access to earlier materials, may have been inspired by them to choose to work up an individual’s *geltacht* as his main theme, something for which there is neither precedent nor follow-up in medieval Irish tradition. If so, a *geilt* who consorted with the demonically possessed Ulidian ruler Congal might be expected to be somewhat like him – arrogant, quick to take offence, showy – and quite different to the holy *geilt* I have suggested is represented in the earliest tradition concerning Suibne. This may go some way to explaining the remarkable amagalm one finds in the Suibne of *BS*.

As for the tunic, *FDG*’s reference to it is plausible whereas that in *BS* looks like an awkwardly done borrowing: the latter relates that Suibne was given it *before* the battle of Mag Roth for having slain Ailill Cétach *during* the battle. As suggested above, the author seemed intent on introducing a reference to the Uí Fháeláin at this point. But the tunic may also have been the catalyst for the idea that Suibne was to be as naked as the birds of the air. Interestingly *BS* does not state at any point that Suibne was feathered, though it frequently tells that he was *like* the ‘aerial winged creatures’, or living along with them.[81] There are two references in the text to *clúm*, a word that can mean either ‘feathers’ or ‘fur’; the first occurs in a verse-dialogue between Eorann and Suibne, where Eorann expresses the wish that she and Suibne might be together ‘until *clúm* should grow on our bodies’ (*co ttigeadh clum ar ar ttaobh*), while in the second Suibne declares that to be without a wife is ‘a garb of *clúm* to the

[80] Borsje, ‘Demonising the Enemy’, 27.
[81] E.g. *BS* 10 §9 (*amail gach n-ethaid*), 12 §10 q. 2 (*ar cráobhaibh / gurbhat aon re henaibh*), 14 §11 (*ar gealtacht 7* ar genidecht amail gach n-ethaid n-ærdha*), etc.

skin'.[82] In short, *Buile Shuibne* does not represent Suibne as a bird-man but rather as bird-like in being without clothing.

The reference to the 'three excellencies' (*teóra búada*) of the battle sits comfortably in *FDG*, indicating that this text was the ultimate source for similar passages found in the Middle Irish commentaries to *Auraicept na nÉces* and *Bretha Étgid*. The relevant passage from the commentary to the *Auraicept* will suffice to show this.[83] Both passages have often been cited in support of the claim that the Celtic 'Wild Man' legend was introduced into Ireland in the seventh, eighth or ninth century but their late date tells against this.

> *Log 7* aimser 7* perso 7* tucait scribind in libhuir sin Cindfæladh, log do Daire Luran, aimser do aimser Domnaill* ⁊ *mic Æda mic Ainmireach. Perso do Cendfæladh mac Oilella, tugait a scribind a hinchind dermait du beim a cind Chindfaelad i cath Muighi Rath. Ceithri buadha in catha sin: Maidm for Conghal ina gœi re nDomnall* ⁊ *ina firindi; et Suibni i ngealtacht, acht is ar a mhed du laidib duroni; in fear d'Albanachaib do breith in Erennaich 'na chois dar muir gen airiugudh .i. Dubhdiadh a ainm;* et *a inchind dermaid du bhem a cind Cindfæladh ar a mhed* ⁊ *do fhilideacht 7* do bhriathraibh 7* do legeand rothaisigh* (v. l. *doleasaig*).[84]
>
> The place and time and person and cause of writing of that book of Cenn Fáelad's: the place was Daire Lúrán, the time was that of Domnall mac Áeda maic Ainmirech. The person was Cenn Fáelad mac Ailella. The cause of its writing was the striking of his brain of forgetting from Cenn Fáelad's head in the battle of Mag Roth. The four virtues of that battle: the defeat of Congal in his falsehood by Domnall in his truth; that Suibne went mad, but this is [not because he went mad but] because of the number of lays that he composed; the man from Scotland to have brought the Irishman [tied] on his leg across the sea without being aware, i.e. Dub Diad his name; and his brain of forgetfulness to have been struck from Cenn Fáelad's head because of the amount of poetry and sayings and learning that he stored up.

No. 7

[82] Ibid., 48 §32 quat. 12; 54 §36 quat. 7.
[83] For the passage in *Bretha Étgid* (sometimes called '*Lebar Aicle*') see Binchy, *CIH* iii.926.1-18.
[84] Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces*, 6. The variant reading is from the version of the *Auraicept* in the Book of Ballymote: cf. ibid., 182. The translation is mine.

Irish Life of Moling

Edition with translation in Stokes, *The Birth and Life of St. Moling* (an emended version of his earlier edition with translation, 'The Birth and Life of St. Moling', published in *Revue celtique*).

Two copies of this Life are extant, one of them made by Míchél Ó Cléirigh who stated that he derived it from *Leabhur Tighe Molling*. As Plummer pointed out, it 'has no direct relation to either of the Latin lives. To some extent it covers the same ground; but even in these cases it gives a very different version of the incidents.'[85] It is not the usual hagiographical fare. It begins as noted above with a highly colourful account of Moling's ~~incestuous~~ conception and birth in Lúachair Dedad; it also contains other material with a Munster focus. It reflects knowledge of some version of the series of Old Irish stories concerning Moling (**No. 2** above). It gives a lengthy version of the threefold death of Grác, but the murder of Suibne is not attributed to this figure, as it is in the series of poems in **No. 11** below. The only reference to Suibne comes in a brief passage tacked on to the end of the Life as a kind of codicil, and this evinces no knowledge of *BS* or of Suibne's association with Mag Roth. Thus the Life, apart from the codicil, would seem to date from a period when interest in the Suibne legend was low, probably before *BS* and the poems in **No. 11** were composed.

No. 8

Baile Moling

A unique copy of this unpublished text is in Dublin, TCD MS 1318 (Yellow Book of Lecan), col. 340.[86]

This verse prophecy of forty-seven quatrains put in the mouth of Moling makes no reference to Suibne. Purporting to foretell the kings of Leinster, it begins by warning the Laigin to defend their borders against the encroachment of Fergal mac Maíle Dúin, a cipher for the Northern Uí Néill. This suggests it was composed during the time of Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó (died 1072), the first Uí Cheinnselaig king to take the kingship of Leinster in 300 years, or of his descendants, since these Uí Cheinnselaig kings struggled to defend the northern border of Leinster against Uí Néill, in part by making alliances with the Ulaid. Having regained the kingship, they held on to it down to the time of the great-grandson of Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó, Diarmait Mac Murchada. O'Curry argued that 'Flann of Cúil Gamna', the king with whom the poem concludes, was Diarmait Mac Murchada,

[85] *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* i.lxxxii.
[86] I am preparing an edition for publication.

depicted here as a vigorous young ruler who would subdue the Ostmen of Dublin, and curb the Uí Briain of Munster, a depiction that implies the poem was written before his banishment from Ireland in 1167. The date can perhaps be pushed back some years before this because **No. 9** below, for which a date of *c.* 1160 has been suggested, contains an apparent reference to the *baile*. There is no reference to Máedóc, something one would expect if the *baile* had been composed at Ferna, while Molaisse of Lethglenn gets special mention, which suggests it may have been composed there. The absence of reference to Suibne in a prophecy fathered on Moling would seem to be another indication that *BS* in its extant form had yet to be composed.

No. 9

Latin Life of Moling

Edition only in Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* ii.190-205.

The Life makes no reference to Suibne. It associates Moling closely with Máedóc's church at Ferna, while also providing rich material on Tech Moling. The writer tells that Moling was invited to become Máedóc's successor, performed various miracles at Ferna, and returned to Tech Moling shortly before his death and burial there. The latter church was given by Diarmait Mac Murchada as an endowment to the Augustinian priory at Ferna before about 1160 and Pádraig Ó Riain has been suggested that this probably led to Moling becoming the subject of a Latin life, written at Ferna, its author 'eager to consolidate in writing the union of the two churches'.[87] Reference to a *carmen* in which Moling foretold the kings of Leinster seems to ~~be~~ point clearly to *Baile Moling*.[88]

No. 10

A reference to Suibne in the Book of Leinster redaction of the *Bórama*

The Book of Leinster preserves a passing reference to Suibne and Mag Roth in one of the poems in the *Bórama*: 'a flying man will come/ from the north, from Mag Roth' (*doraga fer foluamnach / atúaid a mMaig Rath*)[89] This is glossed *.i. Suibne*. The Middle Irish work known as the *Bórama* (or, more fully, ~~the~~ *Bórama Laigen* 'The Leinster Cattle-Tribute') tells how the Uí Néill king, Fínnachta

[87] Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 488.
[88] 'Et fecit pulcrum carmen per suam linguam, id est per scoticam, de regno Laginensium, ymmo de regno totius Hybernie, nominans nomina regum, et quomodo regnabunt, et qualiter de hoc seculo exibunt, siue ferro sive morte; et nominauit multa bella et loca eorum, et victores et superatos in eis usque in finem seculi' (Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* ii.192 §vi).
[89] LL 38118-9.

Fledach (died 695), was tricked by Moling into remitting the tax of the *bórama* which his Uí Néill forebears had demanded for centuries from the Leinstermen. The role given to Moling in the work is a proof of his stature among the Laigin.

A version of the *Bórama* may have been in existence as early as the tenth century since an outline of it is found in a poem by one Flann, who has been identified as Flann, *airchinnech* of Glen Uissen (County Laois) who died in 979.[90] The extended version seems to date back to the eleventh century and to have been compiled in the interests of Diarmait mac Maíl na mBó.[91] Such a version could be expected to privilege the leading Uí Cheinnselaig church at Ferna over North Leinster churches, but Máedóc is conspicuously absent from the Book of Leinster version.[92] It has been suggested that the very prominent role given to Glenn Dá Locha and its allied churches, including Dísert Díarmata (Castledermot), in the Book of Leinster version is due to a final remodelling during the reign of Diarmait Mac Murchada.[93] It was noted that the compiler evinced an intimate knowledge of West Wicklow and East Kildare.[94] Charles Doherty made the compelling suggestion that 'Tech Moling in County Kildare is almost certainly the place of origin of the final version of the tale'.[95]

The oblique reference to Suibne as the *fer foluamnach* may well be contemporary with the Book of Leinster. The manuscript was begun in 1151 and, according to William O'Sullivan, the *Bórama* is in the hand of the scribe who was employed to copy material for Bishop Find of Kildare, and this scribe's work was probably completed before Bishop Find's death in 1160.[96] The form of the quatrain containing the reference to Suibne evidences signs of tampering.

No. 11

Five Middle Irish poems relating to Moling and Suibne in Brussels MS 5100-4.

Edition only in Stokes, 'Poems ascribed to S. Moling'; edition with translation of poem no. 3 in Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, 112-17 (with notes, 225-7).

There are twenty poems in the collection published by Stokes but, as Kenneth Jackson pointed out, only the first five concern Moling *and* Suibne, and in the manuscript these five are separated from the remaining poems by other, unrelated poems.[97] Jackson stated that the language 'seems to point

[90] Mac Eoin, 'The Mysterious Death of Loegaire mac Néill', 29.
[91] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 144-6; Doherty, 'The Transmission of the Cult of St Máedhóg', 271.
[92] Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, 282-4.
[93] Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in Pre-Norman Ireland*, 13.
[94] Mac Eoin, 'Mysterious Death', 29, citing comments by L. Price.
[95] 'Transmission', 271.
[96] 'Notes on the Scripts and Make-up of the Book of Leinster', 7, 27.
[97] Jackson, 'The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibhne Geilt', 537.

strongly to the eleventh century', but his analysis was based on the full twenty.[98] Gerard Murphy dated the second poem (one of the longer ones, beginning 'Gáir na Gairbe glaídbinne') on linguistic grounds to 'about the middle of the twelfth century'.[99] Whatever the date of the individual poems, it is clear from a reference to the Normans in the first poem[100] that poems one to five could not have been brought together as a collection until the 1170s or later. Other references indicate knowledge of a version of *BS*: for instance, Suibne is described as having the agility of a bird (*luth eisine*).[101] However, this version evidently differed in important respects from the extant **BS*. For instance, poem five relates that Suibne was killed by Grác, who then suffers a threefold death,[102] whereas his killer is named Mongán in the extant *BS* and the threefold death motif is absent there. Furthermore, poem five identifies Suibne as *mac Echach* twice,[103] while in the first poem he is described as *an t-Albanach*.[104]

Pointing to the fact that Suibne appears in *CMR*^{2} as an ally of Domnall Brecc, son of Eochaid Buide, king of Dál Ríata, Jackson suggested, plausibly, that such a tradition would account for the identification of Suibne as *mac Echach* and *Albanach* in poem five. He noted that while Suibne is repeatedly identified as son of Colmán Cúar, and king of Dál nAraidi (in Ireland) in *BS*, that text calls him *ua Each*ach *Sálbhuide* on one occasion.[105] Building this into a thesis that proved to be enormously influential, Jackson argued on the basis of these references that the tradition that Suibne belonged to Scottish Dál Ríata was of very long standing, that it had evolved out of a migratory legend that might also account for the legends of Lailoken, and through them for the legends of Myrddin and Merlin, and that 'the whole story probably arose in the first instance in Dál Riada, and was adopted into Strathclyde and into Ireland' in the seventh century or soon thereafter.[106] In these pages I have tried to show that Suibne's association with the battle of Mag Roth goes back no further than *FDG* or now-lost versions thereof. Given the many internal references to the southern Tech Moling in the five poems in Brussels MS 5100-4, it seems all but certain that they were composed there. As we have seen, miscellaneous materials relating to Moling and Suibne were available in Leinster at this time, and the differing versions of Suibne's ancestry may derive from these materials rather than the postulated much earlier sources.

[98] Ibid., 538.
[99] *Early Irish Lyrics*, 227.
[100] Stokes, 'Poems Ascribed to S. Moling', 20, q. 2b.
[101] Ibid., 21 q. 6a.
[102] Ibid., 26-8.
[103] Ibid., 27 qq. 13b, 15b.
[104] Ibid., 22 q. 17c.
[105] *BS* 56 §36 q. 15d.
[106] 'Motive of the Threefold Death', 549-50.

No. 12

Buile Shuibne

It has already been suggested that the author of the extant *BS* was a member of, or was closely associated with, the community of Tech Moling in County Kildare or, conceivably, of Glenn Dá Locha or Cell Dara. The sequencing of texts indicates that the work in its extant form was written no earlier than the closing decades of the twelfth century, and possibly in the early thirteenth.

No. 13

Section on Moling and Suibne in *Acallam na Senórach*

Edition and translation in O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i.152-3; ii.168-70; edition only in Stokes, *Acallamh na Senórach*, 75-6; translation in Dooley and Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, 80-82.

Moling and Suibne feature in a short Leinster-oriented section of *Acallam na Senórach*, and nowhere else in the work. Following a section on Ferna, the story moves to 'Ros mBrocc'. This is described as a place that had been most hospitable to the *fíanna* when it was the residence of a *fían*-chief called *Moling Luath* – clearly a prototype of St Moling – before it was plundered and razed to the ground by Finn's enemies, Clanna Morna, and all its people slaughtered. Finn and his men arrive on the scene shortly thereafter, too late to provide protection. Their grief cannot be assuaged until Finn chews on his 'thumb of knowledge' and has 'the third greatest revelation ever granted to him'. Then he foretells the coming to Ros mBrocc of St Moling, its renaming as Tech Moling, the battle of Mag Roth, the coming of Suibne, and his death and burial there. Then the details are recounted again in a poem beginning with the line 'Ros mBroc indiu is conair chuan'. There is an implicit reference to Suibne here also, one that echoes the reference in the *Bórama* in **No. 10** above:

> *Do-roichfea in fer foluaimnech atuaid a Maig Rath*
> *bid gairdiugud don chléirech maiden co méit rath.*[107]
>
> The flighty man will come from the north, from Mag Roth;
> it will be a cause of joy for the cleric, on a morning of much grace.

[107] Stokes, '*Acallamh na Senórach*', 76; O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i.153, ii.170; Dooley and Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, 82. The translation is mine.

The section also refers to Moling's mother, describing her as 'a woman of the men of Munster' (*ben d'feraib Muman*) and a Munsterwoman (*ben Muimnech*).

There have been major breakthroughs on the date and provenance of *Acallam na Senórach* in recent years. Ann Dooley discovered a highly pronounced western slant to the work, showed that the fictional characters of Muiredach mac Fínnachta and his son Áed stand for Cathal Crobderg (died 1224) and his son Áed, and argued that 'the king almost certainly reigning at the time the *Acallam* was composed' was Cathal Crobderg.[108] Cathal ruled from 1189 to 1224. She also elucidated the fictional role of Muinter Roduib (Méig Oirechtaig) in the *Acallam*, and their importance in real life as premier members of the *oirecht* of Cathal Crobderg and his son Áed, and long-standing controllers of Achad Fobair and the pilgrimage of Crúach Phátraic.[109] A further detailed study, by Anne Connon, concluded that the way in which the Augustinian house of canons at Roscommon 'stands at the intersection of the *Acallam*'s physical and dynastic landscapes of Connacht argues strongly for that house as the text's *locus* of composition', and that the attention paid to Muinter Roduib in the *Acallam* is coherent with this.[110] Áed son of Muiredach mac Fínnachta succeeds his father within the fictional world of the *Acallam*. To account for this, and other features of the *Acallam*, Connon would extend the period in which the *Acallam* may have been composed: 'Since a (grown-up) Áed mac Muiredaig was the ruling king of Connacht by the end of the *Acallam*, the implication is that by the time of the final section of the *Acallam* was written, Áed mac Cathail Úa Conchobair had succeeded his father. If this theory is correct, then at least the final Connacht section of the *Acallam* likely dates to the years of Áed's rule: 1224 to 1228. It may be that the writing of the *Acallam* spanned the reigns of Cathal Crobderg and his son, or that the whole text was written after 1224.'[111]

The question here is what date is to be ascribed to the section concerning Moling and Suibne. Noting the curious fact of 'the sporadic appearance of Oisín in the body of [the *Acallam*], only in association with Leinster hagiographical material', Dooley suggested that 'the Leinster association of *fíanaigecht* and saints' Lives may represent a slightly earlier kernel of [*Acallam*] textual tradition assembled before a western slant was put on the whole work'. The sequence of stories 'ends with the break-up of the royal assembly. The king of Tara returns with Patrick to Tara, the king of Ailech takes Caílte north, and the king of Leinster takes Oisín with him to Leinster. After this, Oisín fades from the narrative'.[112] Given Connon's arguments for the role of the Augustinian house at Roscommon in the composition of the *Acallam*, one may wonder whether the Augustinian canons at Ferna and Lethglenn

[108] 'The Date and Purpose of *Acallam na Senórach*', 103.
[109] Ibid., 108-23.
[110] 'The Roscommon *Locus* of *Acallam na Senórach*', 52 and passim.
[111] Ibid., 54.
[112] 'Date and Purpose', 110.

might have been the source of the material concerning Suibne and Moling. As Pádraig Ó Riain has said: 'Of all the external orders established in Ireland in the course of the twelfth century, none showed more interest in devotion to the native saints than the canons regular'.[113]

No. 14

The second recension of *Cath Maige Rath* Edition and translation in O'Donovan, *The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh and the Battle of Magh Roth*.

A modern critical edition of this recension is a desideratum, to clarify its make-up and relationship to other texts in the Mag Roth cycle, and to prove Dillon's view that its style and language are indicative of a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century date of composition.[114] Given the existence of the earlier recension, one may posit an intermediate version or versions, now lost, to account for the fact that quatrains found in the second recension, which apparently post-dates *BS*, also appear in the latter. The second recension evidences no direct debt to the *extant* version of *BS*. Moling does not feature, the episode describing how Suibne became a *geilt* during the battle of Mag Roth is self-contained, and no account is given of Suibne's fate thereafter, aside from the statement that 'it was by lunacy and imbecility he determined his counsels from that out as long as he lived'.[115]

A cursory reading of the second recension might lead one to think that the data in the Suibne episode were derived solely from some version of *FDG*. However it seems likely that the Suibne episode also drew on a version of *BS* that is no longer extant. Two passages from the second recension may suffice to argue this. We have already seen how *FDG* links the cursing of Suibne to the fact that he deprived Rónán of the tunic that Domnall (son of Áed mac Ainmirech) had given to the saint to pacify Congal (see under **No. 6** above). The second recension introduces the tunic without reference to the curse. It tells that Suibne was wearing it when he came to fight at Mag Roth:

> *...inar in aird-rig h-ua Ainmirech ro bui uime sium in laithe sin, ar na thidnacul ó Domnall do Congal, ocus ar na thidnacul o Chongal do Shuibne, do reir mar forgles Suibne a n-inad eli....*

[113] 'The Lives of Kevin (Caoimhghin) of Glendalough', 142.
[114] Five manuscript copies are known to exist, only two of which were used by O'Donovan, who apparently 'felt free to follow either manuscript', but did not always indicate which he was using: cf. Dillon, 'The Texts of "Cath Maige Rath"', 200. On the dating, see Dillon, ibid, 200-201, and *The Cycles of the Kings*, 65.
[115] O'Donovan, *The Banquet... and the Battle of Magh Roth*, 237 (236: *Conid re geltacht ocus re genidecht ro cind comairli o sin amach i cein ro pa beo*).

> He had the tunic of the monarch the grandson of Ainmire upon him on that day, which had been presented by Domhnall to Congal, and by Congal to Suibhne, as Suibhne himself testifies in another place.... [116]

The above account is partly consistent with the statement in the extant *BS* that the tunic Suibne wore as he came to the battle had been bestowed on him by Congal, but it lacks *BS*'s reference to Suibne's killing of Ailill Cétach. One may surmise that *CMR*^{2} was drawing on a lost version of *BS*. The words 'as Suibhne himself testifies in another place' would seem to suggest the same. And the next passage from the second recension lends further support to this. It tells that the reason Suibne suffered the affliction of *geltacht* in the course of the battle was because of Rónán's curse, which in turn was motivated by Suibne's killing of one of Rónán's clerical students:

> *Acht chena nir mid-lách ocus nir meraigi mi-gaiscid reme riam in ti d'á tancadar na h-abaisi ocus na h-airrdena tindscedail techid ocus urtrialla imgabala sin; acht ro mallacht Ronain, .i. sanctis, d'a ro buaidred ocus ard-naeim Erenn d'a eascaine ar na sínead ocus ar na sarugad fa slanaigecht, ocus marbtha in mic clerig da muinnter ós chind na clasach coiseagartha, inunn són ocus na fir-thiprat fonn-glaini ar ar' cuiread creadra ocus comaind in Coimded d'uaislib ocus d'ard-maithib Erenn ocus do chach ar cheana, re comtriall in catha.*
>
> But the person to whom these horrid phantasms and dire symptoms of flight and fleeing presented themselves, had never before been a coward, or a lunatic void of valour; but he was thus confounded because he had been cursed by St. Ronan, and denounced by the great saints of Erin, because he had violated their guarantee, and slain an ecclesiastical student of their people over the consecrated trench, that is, a pure clear-bottomed spring over which the shrine and communion of the Lord was placed for the nobles and arch-chieftains of Erin, and for all the people in general, before the commencement of the battle. [117]

FDG has no reference to the killing of Rónán's clerical student. *BS* does, but lacks the reference to the communion-box and host. In short, it seems very likely that *CMR*^{2} was indebted to a lost version of *BS*. Ruth Lehmann's view that the second recension and the extant *BS* were 'probably directly related' is not convincing.[118]

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[116] Ibid., 234-5.
[117] Ibid., 232-3.
[118] 'A Study of the Buile Shuibhne', 230.

The style of *CMR*[2] is bombastic; and the battle, and those involved, are presented in comic, absurd and extravagant terms. Suibne, here a minor character whose actions have no effect on the course of the battle, is painted in similar terms, and is thus in marked contrast to the penitent *geilt* who bears, however reluctantly, with the state to which his sins have reduced him in *BS*.

CONCLUSION

The earliest material we have concerning Suibne portrays him as a holy *geilt*, and associates him, if only on the page in the *Codex Sancti Pauli*, with the Leinster saint, Moling. However, when the poems in the *Codex Sancti Pauli* are considered in conjunction with other materials, they would seem to strengthen the case for the early association of Suibne and Moling. Moling is described as a *céile Dé* in Old Irish texts in the Book of Leinster (see **No. 2** above). Perhaps it may not be going too far to regard the speaker of 'M'airiuclán hi Túaim Inbir' as a *duine le Dia*, someone who is 'touched' by God in a manner that alters his relationship with the world and its denizens, causing him to prefer the companionship of nature to that of humans. But Suibne's inclination to live in the wild is not always a matter of preference: most Middle Irish texts relating to him link it explicitly to his maltreatment of St Rónán and his students and to his involvement in the battle of Mag Roth. At the same time, Suibne's love of nature remains a persisent and prominent theme. In *BS* he repeatedly chants poetry that is 'piercingly exposed to the beauties and severities of the natural world',[119] while at least one independent poem in Middle Irish credited to him is a paean to nature.[120] These are unlikely productions from a secular king, and there is nothing in the biography of the fictional Suibne, king of Dál nAraidi, to explain them. I hope that the preceding pages have shown that what accounts for them is the fusion of the holy *geilt* of Old Irish tradition with the character of a legendary secular king. Whether the holy *geilt* was originally historical or legendary is now no longer clear.

The fact that Suibne does not feature at all in *CMR*[1], and is but a minor character in *CMR*[2] and in *FDG*, does not make it easy to credit the idea that he originated as a type of the Wild Man in a legend transferred into Ireland through the North-East of the country. The only tale in the Mag Roth cycle to give Suibne a major role is the extant *BS* and I have argued that this was composed by a Leinster writer, possibly associated with Tech Moling in County Kildare. To Myles Dillon we owe the title of 'The Cycle of Domnall son of Aed son of Ainmire, A.D. 628-42' for the tales associated with the battle of Mag Roth, *BS* included. Domnall makes only a fleeting appearance in *BS*, while the battle provides the link between the three tales; for this reason, it seems preferable to me to name the

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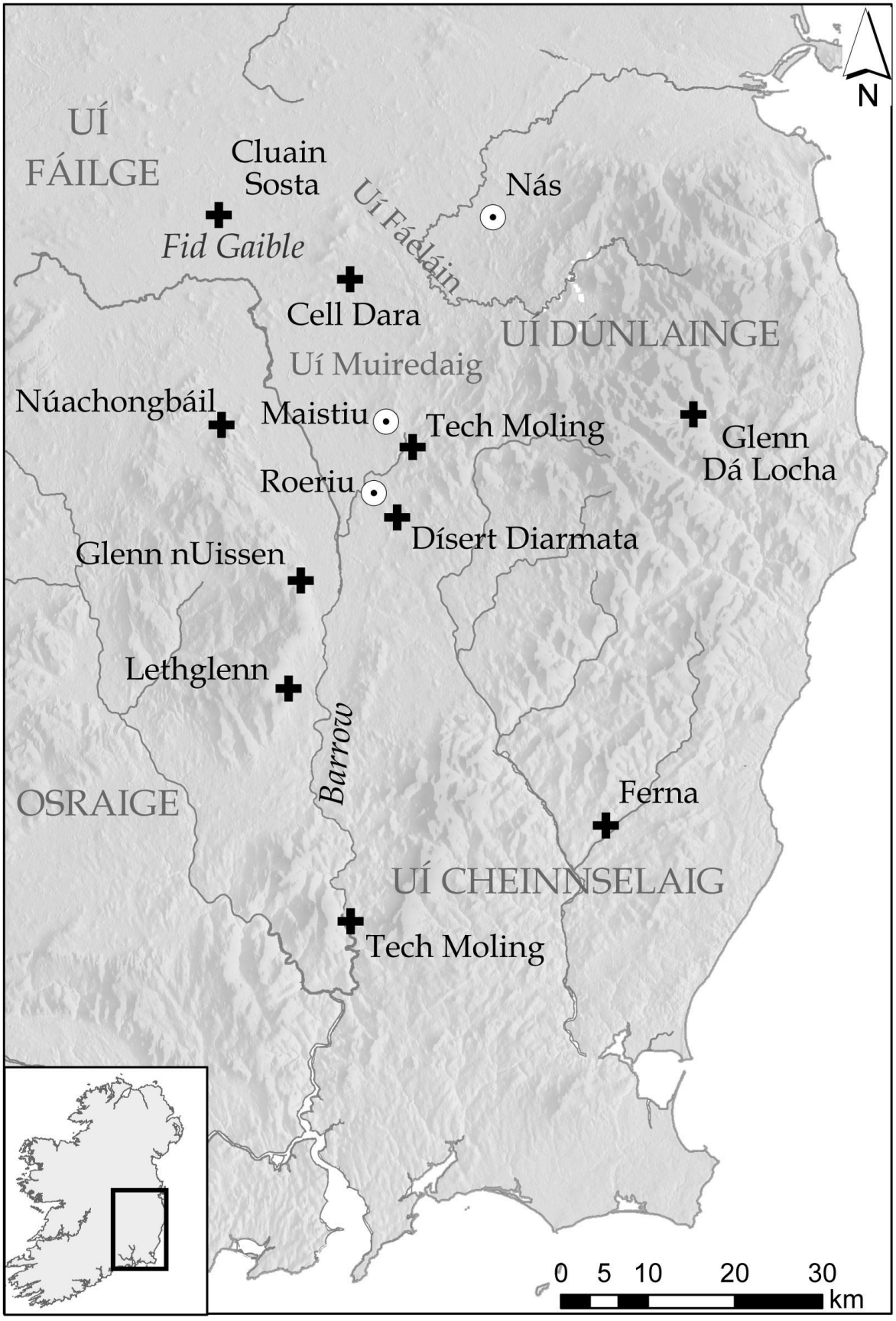
[119] Heaney, *Sweeney Astray*, Introduction [2].
[120] See the poem beginning 'Gáir na Gairbe glēbinne' (the third poem in **No. 11** above; also ed. in Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics*, 112-7).

cycle by reference to Mag Roth. Dillon's title probably bolstered the idea that the tales are of northern provenance; but given *BS*'s apparent Leinster provenance, and the apparent debt of *CMR*^{2} to a lost version of *BS*, the possibility that all three tales are of Leinster provenance should not be ruled out of court.

As noted already, Máire Herbert has argued persuasively that *FDG* was composed to point up an analogy between the events narrated in the tale and the political struggles in the Northern Half around the time of the battle of Mag Coba in 1103; the battle-site lay some 10 kilometres south-east of Mag Roth. Is it inconceiveable that the author of *FDG* was working in Leinster, writing a veiled commentary on the affairs of the powerful neighbouring kingdoms of the Uí Néill and the Ulaid? Interest in the Ulaid in particular is evident in ~~the~~ *Bórama Laigen*, and was likely coloured by contemporary politics.[121] It is also evident in the Latin Life of Comgall of Bangor, of which there are two versions, neither earlier than the late twelfth century; they make much of the links between various churches in Leinster and the Ulidian saint.[122] Comgall, like Suibne, was of Dál nAraidi.

Given the fragmentary nature of tradition, one can hardly expect to arrive at certainty. Nonetheless, Suibne's links with Moling and Leinster seem to be far stronger than the case for his origins as a type of the Wild Man in Scottish Dál Riata or Strathclyde and introduction into Irish Gaelic tradition through the North-East of the country.

[121] Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 144-6.
[122] Ó Riain, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, 218.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Maistiu
Tech Moling
Glenn Dá Locha
Roeriu
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ABBREVIATIONS

AB Freeman, *Annals of Boyle*

AClon Murphy, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*

AFM O'Donovan, *Annals of the...Four Masters*

AI Mac Airt, *Annals of Innisfallen*

ARosc Gleeson and S. Mac Airt, 'The Annals of Roscrea'

AT Stokes, 'Annals of Tigernach'

AU^2 Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*

CIH *Corpus iuris Hibernici* (ed. Binchy, 1978)

CMCS *Cambridge/Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*

CMR *Cath Maige Rath*

DIL *Dictionary of the Irish Language*

ÉC *Études celtiques*

EIM Murphy, *Early Irish Metrics*

FA^2 *Radner, Fragmentary Annals*

FDG *Fled Dúin na nGéd*

MMIS Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series

PHCC *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*

RC *Revue celtique*

VSH Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*

ZCP *Zeitscrift für celtische Philologie*

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