



Bill Mag Fhloinn

Blood Rite: The Feast of St. Martin in Ireland

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Billy Mag Fhloinn

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	13
Introduction.....	15
Sources	16
Printed Sources	18
Fieldwork.....	19
Dating of Sources.....	19
Source criticism	20
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Translation.....	24
1. European Traditions.....	25
Ecclesiastical Beginnings	25
The Saint's Life.....	26
Influence	29
Medieval Martinmas: Developing Traditions	30
Animals and Slaughter.....	40
Taboos on St. Martin's Day.....	42
Mumming on Martinmas.....	42
Conclusion.....	44
2. The Insular Tradition.....	45
Ireland	46
Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Sources.....	52
3. Killing for St. Martin.....	58
Killing for St. Martin	61
Distribution of Killing.....	63
Date	63
Killing for St Martin – Where.....	69
Where Blood Was Spilled	73
4. What was Killed, and who did the Killing.....	83
Fowl	83
Cocks, Hens and Chickens	85
Geese	86
Other Fowl.....	89
Sheep	90
Pigs	91
Cattle	91
Goats and Kids.....	95

Other Animals	96
Selection Criteria	96
Colour	99
Who Did the Killing.....	99
5. Flesh and Blood.....	105
Cures.....	107
Legend.....	108
Cures from the Blood.....	112
Disease	113
Flesh.....	115
Charity	118
Cross of Blood.....	120
Three Drops.....	121
I.H.S.....	121
Severed Head.....	123
Wears Away	124
Next Day	125
6. Motivations for Killing.....	127
Protection	127
Dangers – Sickness, Evil and Violence.....	129
Other Reasons.....	130
Milling.....	132
Belief Statements Regarding Bad Luck	133
Shedding Blood.....	133
Other Sources of Bad Luck.....	136
Promising Animals to St. Martin.....	137
7. Milling, Spinning and Wheels.....	143
Milling.....	144
Spinning.....	145
Horses, Carts and Ploughing	146
Punishment for Ploughing or Using Carts.....	149
Other Prohibitions.....	155
Beliefs about St. Martin's Death	156
Legend of Millers Being Killed in a Mill.....	159
Machinery Damaged.....	162
Possible Origins of Belief.....	164
Spinning.....	165
Milling.....	168
St. Brigid's Day	170
An Irish Phenomenon.....	174

8. Fishing.....	175
Legend.....	178
Legend Context.....	185
Other Versions	188
9. Legends of Reward and Punishment	191
St. Martin's Cloak Legend	192
Revival of Animals or Children	195
Miraculous Provision of Animals or Food.....	204
Punishment	208
Prosperity and Subsequent Failure.....	211
10. Folktales of Charity and Hospitality.....	219
Sprouting Shoots.....	219
Miraculous Milling.....	223
St. Martin Creates Cats/Mice/Rats or Pigs.....	227
11. Miscellaneous Legends and Folktales.....	232
The Ghost Mother on St. Martin's Day	232
The Clever Shepherd	237
Disembodied Voice	241
Miraculous Travel.....	243
Origin	246
Cooked Cock Crows	247
The Goose Stall Legend.....	250
12. Prayers and Phrases	252
Protection	253
13. Holy Wells and Church Sites.....	258
Co. Carlow.....	259
Co. Clare	259
Co. Cork.....	260
Co. Galway.....	260
Co. Kerry.....	261
Co. Kildare.....	262
Co. Kilkenny.....	262
Co. Laois	262
Co. Leitrim	264
Co. Limerick.....	264
Co. Longford	264
Co. Mayo.....	265
Co. Wexford.....	265
Co. Waterford.....	266
Co. Wicklow	266

Legend 1 – The Violated Well	267
Legend 2 – Saint Miraculously Causes Well to Appear	269
Legend 3 – The Thief Stuck to the Ground	271
Cures.....	274
Placenames	276
Co. Cork.....	278
Co. Derry	278
Co. Dublin	278
Co. Galway.....	279
Co. Kilkenny.....	279
Co. Limerick.....	279
Co. Laois	280
Co. Wexford.....	280
Co. Wicklow	280
14. Samhain and St. Martin’s Day.....	282
Origins	284
Bloodletting at Bealtaine.....	288
Sacrifice	292
November 1–11.....	296
15. Decline	302
Animals for the Rich	306
16. Continuity and Change	310
Southwest Co. Clare	311
Innovation and Change	320
The Current Situation.....	322
Conclusion.....	323
Bibliography.....	327
Archival Sources	327
Print Sources	327

Table of Figures

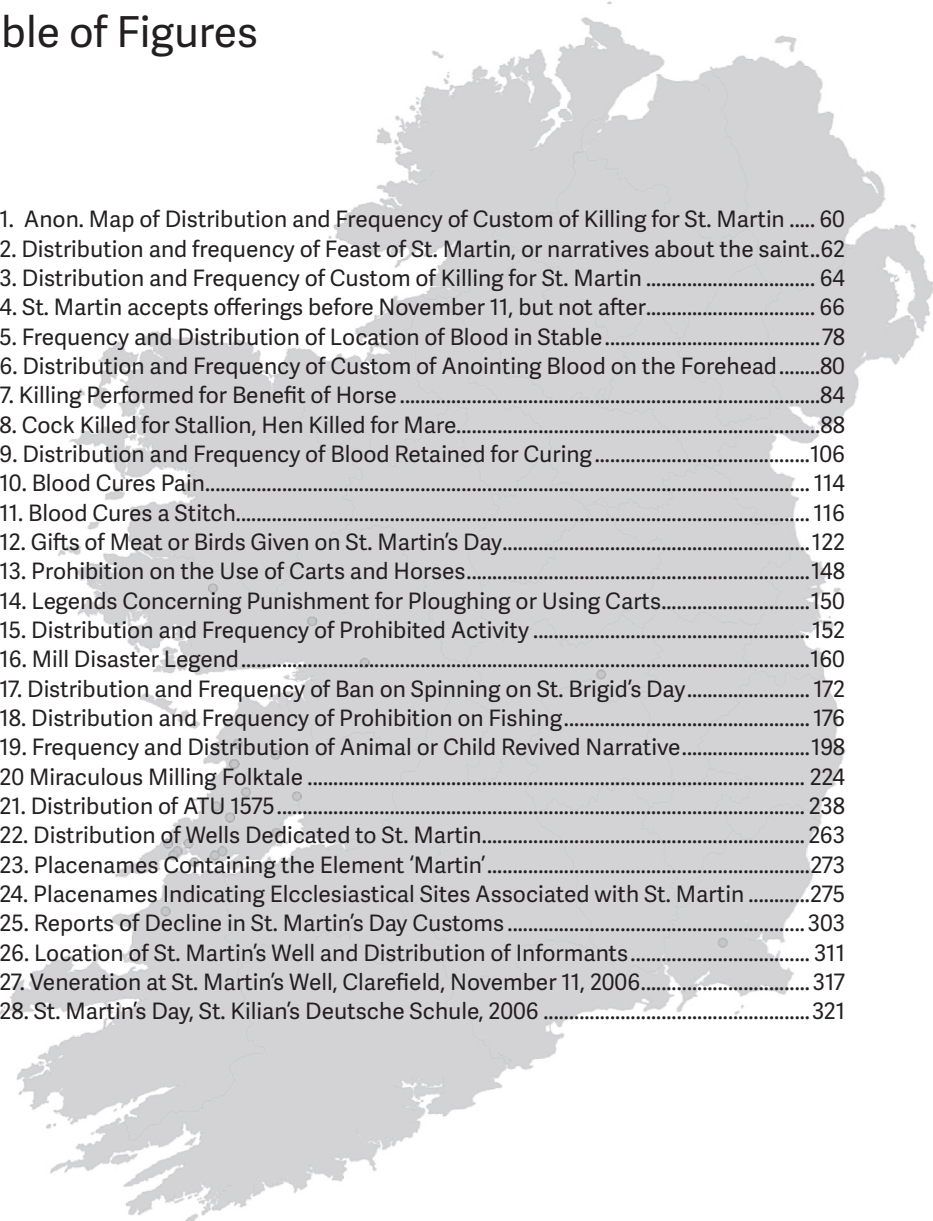


Fig. 1. Anon. Map of Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Killing for St. Martin	60
Fig. 2. Distribution and frequency of Feast of St. Martin, or narratives about the saint.....	62
Fig. 3. Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Killing for St. Martin	64
Fig. 4. St. Martin accepts offerings before November 11, but not after.....	66
Fig. 5. Frequency and Distribution of Location of Blood in Stable.....	78
Fig. 6. Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Anointing Blood on the Forehead.....	80
Fig. 7. Killing Performed for Benefit of Horse	84
Fig. 8. Cock Killed for Stallion, Hen Killed for Mare.....	88
Fig. 9. Distribution and Frequency of Blood Retained for Curing	106
Fig. 10. Blood Cures Pain.....	114
Fig. 11. Blood Cures a Stitch.....	116
Fig. 12. Gifts of Meat or Birds Given on St. Martin's Day.....	122
Fig. 13. Prohibition on the Use of Carts and Horses.....	148
Fig. 14. Legends Concerning Punishment for Ploughing or Using Carts.....	150
Fig. 15. Distribution and Frequency of Prohibited Activity	152
Fig. 16. Mill Disaster Legend.....	160
Fig. 17. Distribution and Frequency of Ban on Spinning on St. Brigid's Day.....	172
Fig. 18. Distribution and Frequency of Prohibition on Fishing.....	176
Fig. 19. Frequency and Distribution of Animal or Child Revived Narrative.....	198
Fig. 20. Miraculous Milling Folktale	224
Fig. 21. Distribution of ATU 1575.....	238
Fig. 22. Distribution of Wells Dedicated to St. Martin.....	263
Fig. 23. Placenames Containing the Element 'Martin'	273
Fig. 24. Placenames Indicating Ecclesiastical Sites Associated with St. Martin	275
Fig. 25. Reports of Decline in St. Martin's Day Customs	303
Fig. 26. Location of St. Martin's Well and Distribution of Informants	311
Fig. 27. Veneration at St. Martin's Well, Clarefield, November 11, 2006.....	317
Fig. 28. St. Martin's Day, St. Kilian's Deutsche Schule, 2006	321

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Introduction

The cult of St. Martin of Tours has existed in Ireland for a long period of time, beginning as early as the seventh century, and possibly earlier. The aim of this work is to examine the folk veneration of the saint in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by examining the beliefs, customs and oral narratives surrounding St Martin's Day, November 11. The custom of killing animals on St. Martin's Eve, or 'spilling blood for St. Martin', was known in a large part of Ireland until recently, and it is surprising to note how unfamiliar it has become to people of younger generations in most parts of Ireland in recent decades. That ritual animal sacrifice should play an important role in the religious calendar of thoroughly Christian communities in Western Europe has proven noteworthy to several authors on the subject over the last two hundred years, although many were quick to jump to conclusions about ancient pagan survivals being involved in the festival, without conducting in-depth study into the matter. (Wood-Martin 1901: 305.) This thesis is an attempt to address this situation, and to offer both an account and an analysis of the folk manifestation of the cult of St. Martin, and to present theories on the origin, meaning and function of much of its associated traditions and narratives.

The first part of this study examines the nature of Martinmas customs in Europe, in order to provide a background and context from which Irish customs and beliefs can be assessed. This also includes a brief account of early ecclesiastical sources about St. Martin. The next section addresses the rituals of animal sacrifice, including who performed the ritual, where it was done, what was killed, and what the meaning of this act was. There was much prohibition associated with St. Martin's Day, and many actions were forbidden on the feast-day of the saint. This will be examined, along with narratives outlining the potential repercussions for violating custom. Consideration will then be given to placenames, wells, and other topographical features associated with St. Martin. Next, an assessment will be made of sayings, prayers and miscellaneous narratives to do with St. Martin's Day. The relationship between the feast-day and other Irish calendar customs will be examined, and finally, elements of continuity and change will make up the final chapters.

The primary period of focus for the current study centres on the twentieth century, particularly the first half. Source material from this time is by far the richest available, due to the wealth of information that was collected by the Irish Folklore Commission during this period. Consideration will, of course, be given to the history of the cult in Ireland, and an overview of developments in the latter half of the twentieth century, and the early twenty-first, will be provided towards the end of the study.

Sources

Material housed in the archives of the National Folklore Collection are to be the main primary source for information available for research this project. It represents the results of fieldwork interviews, questionnaire surveys and sound recordings conducted by collectors and scholars over a number of decades. The archives also house a collection of material collected by schoolchildren, as part of the Schools' Folklore Scheme (1937–1938), which is discussed below. Broadly speaking, this material can be considered a reliable primary source of information on the topic at hand, and will, therefore, be used as the main source of data.

Main Manuscript Collection

The material in the National Folklore Collection relevant to this study can be arranged in three different groups. The first is the Main Manuscript Collection, and represents material collected and compiled by fieldworkers from the Irish Folklore Commission, and later the Department of Irish Folklore. Most of the information from this source that is relevant to the current study was obtained through the process of fieldwork interview, and subsequent transcription by part-time and full-time collectors. The Commission was tasked with saving the traditional forms of folklore that were fast disappearing in the modernising Ireland of the twentieth century, and the rapid decline of the Irish language. Through extensive fieldwork interviews and recordings, hundreds of volumes of folk traditions, customs and narratives have been preserved for posterity. As a result of the careful indexing of the material in these volumes, material relevant to the current study was easily located. This material was found to span a range of dates, with accounts spanning a period from

between 1926 and 1975. A total of 88 accounts, of varying length and detail, relevant to St. Martin were found in the Main Manuscript Collection.¹

Schools' Manuscripts

The second section of the archive of relevance to this study is the Schools' Manuscript Collection. The collection is the result of the Schools' Folklore Scheme, a project undertaken by the Commission in 1937–1938 in collaboration with the Dept. of Education and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. Primary school students from fifth and sixth class in the Republic of Ireland were instructed to document folklore and local history from their native place, and the results were compiled as a separate manuscript collection in the National Folklore Collection. (Ó Catháin: 1988, 19–30.) Students and teachers participated in weekly discussions on a given folklore theme, and at the weekend pupils were tasked with collecting information on this topic, and writing a resultant composition in English or Irish. Topics relevant to the current study include feast-days and festivals, local holy wells, folk cures, and so on. Material thus gathered was compiled in manuscript form, and sent to the Irish Folklore Commission, to be bound into archive volumes. Over 90% of primary schools in the Irish Republic took part in the scheme, and information was gathered by around 50,000 pupils. This ensured a fairly comprehensive assessment of many folklore themes throughout most of the country in the late 1930s. The material tended to be found amongst information on saints, holy wells and feast-days, and accounts were often more concise than those in the Main Manuscript collection. There are a total of 543 mentions of St. Martin's Day in this collection, of varying length and detail, a quite considerable number when preparing statistical data and frequency analysis.²

Questionnaire Material

The third major source of relevance is a series of manuscript volumes that contain the results of a questionnaire survey on the Feast of St. Martin that was

- 1 Sources from the National Folklore Collection have been abbreviated to NFC, followed by manuscript volume number, and then page number e.g NFC 123: 45
- 2 Sources originating in the National Folklore Collection, Schools' Manuscripts have been abbreviated as NFCS, followed by volume number and then page number e.g. NFCS 123: 45.

issued in 1938.³ Although contained in the main collection, these manuscripts, primarily comprising of volumes 674–684,⁴ can be considered a separate body of information. The results of the questionnaire came from over five hundred different places in the island of Ireland, and in a manner similar to the Schools' material mentioned above, provides a 'nationwide snapshot' of the calendar custom.⁵ The system of postal questionnaire investigation undertaken by the Irish Folklore Commission took advantage of contacts that had been established with dependable informants who participated in the Schools' Folklore scheme, as well as other contacts throughout Ireland. When taken as a single body of material, the resultant responses comprise the single largest source for Martinmas customs in Ireland. In total, it encompasses 619 entries, although 169 of these were negative responses. The amount and quality of the questions on the questionnaire ensured that the accounts given are, for the most part, rich and comprehensive, and can be considered generally very reliable. Together with the material from the Main Manuscript Collection and Schools' Collection, a very thorough and consistent body of primary source material is available for this study. It should be noted that no systematic attempt was made to standardise the Irish language material. On occasion, minor amendments were made for the sake of clarity, but the material is, for the most part, presented as it appears in the original manuscripts.

Printed Sources

A total of 53 print sources, of varying length and quality, were uncovered. Some amounted to little more than a single-line mention of some custom or belief, while others contain examples of narratives thousands of words in length. Publications range from statistical assessments and geographical surveys such as that conducted by William Shaw Mason (1814), to popular magazines such as *Ireland's Own* and Irish language newspapers such as *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Several academic papers and articles have also been included, mainly dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These represent the growing antiquarian interest in Irish folk custom, and can provide relatively early examples of the customs so extensively outlined in later archival sources.

- 3 See Ní Fhloinn, Bairbre, 'In Correspondence with Tradition: The Role of the Postal Questionnaire in the Collection of Irish Folklore', in Ó Catháin, Séamas (ed.), *Northern Lights. Following Folklore in North Western Europe*, Dublin (2001) 215–228.
- 4 A small number of additional responses were bound in volumes 766 and 1153.
- 5 See Ó Danachair, Caoimhín, 'Distribution Patterns in Irish Folk Life', *Béaloidéas* 25 (1957) 108–123: 122.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork material, which will be briefly considered towards the end of the project, has also proven beneficial in attempting to understand the subject in hand. This was conducted in Co. Clare in recent years, primarily in the area surrounding St. Martin's Well in Clarefield, in the southwest of the county. In the main, it has elucidated the factors at play in the decline of customs, as well as the elements that have survived into the twenty-first century, and the conditions that ensured their survival. The fieldwork material has provided insight into certain personal elements of belief that informants may not have mentioned in the archive material. It offers information on the economic, religious and social functions of certain aspects of belief and practice, and complements the archive material in this regard.

Dating of Sources

When considering the dates of the source material for the current project, it must be borne in mind that over 99% of it was gathered from the period 1930–1945. In fact, 87% of this material dates from the three-year period from 1938–1940. The reason for the particular clustering of dates in the source material is that the 1930s saw a dramatic increase in folklore collection, with the foundation of the Irish Folklore Institute in 1930 and the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. The middle of the period coincides with the Schools' Folklore Scheme of 1937–8, and the issuing of the St. Martin's Day Questionnaire in 1938. Comparatively little material on the subject was collected after 1945, which is unsurprising given the vast amount of information which had been gathered in the first ten years of the Commission. Thus, the material is, by and large, a snapshot of the state of the celebration of St. Martin's Day at a particular point in the twentieth century.

The Irish Folklore Commission tended to focus their attention on older persons, believing them to possess a more complete repertoire of narratives, and to be more familiar with older customs and traditions. Also, in the case of the Schools' Folklore Collection, although the accounts were documented by schoolchildren, some of the information was collected from persons who were remembering traditions from their early years, and may have been quite elderly at the time of recording. If informants were elderly at the time of their disposition, say approximately 80 years old, and they themselves received the information from other elderly persons, then this would provide us with a maximum *terminus post quem* for these accounts to around 1800 AD.

However, it is not likely that all, or even a majority, of the questionnaire respondents were advanced in years, and on the balance of probability, most accounts are likely younger, and likely describe events that date to the mid to late nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth.

Source criticism

The nature and limitations of the archive material must be considered, since not all entries are equal in scope and quality. As mentioned above, the material from the Main Manuscript Collection was often collected by professional and trained full-time collectors, and on occasion by part-time collectors, many of whom had studied the best practices of ethnological fieldwork. Although the aim of collectors was to gather material from every part of the country, the reality was such that, for a variety of reasons, areas in the west of the country, and Irish speaking areas in particular, received the lion's share of attention, and English speaking regions are thus proportionately underrepresented. (Almqvist 1977–1979: 6–26, 13.) Despite such imbalances, a wealth of information has been drawn from this part of the collection, and, in some instances, it provides well-developed examples of narratives that were not forthcoming from other sources. It also offers material from a range of dates, with examples spanning a period from 1926 to 1975. A total of eighty-eight accounts relevant to the feast of St. Martin were found in the Main Manuscript Collection.

In contrast, the material from the Schools' Folklore Project is often less detailed. There may be little reason to doubt their reliability, but they are certainly in some instances less comprehensive, often being simple one- or two-line statements. One of the drawbacks of the Schools' project was its limited distribution. Schools in the six counties of northern Ireland did not partake in the scheme, and therefore a comprehensive view of any distribution patterns is necessarily incomplete when it comes to Ulster. Many cities and towns were also excluded from the scheme, which further hampers a complete overview, giving as it does undue emphasis to rural Ireland. The nature of the material recorded in the Schools' Manuscripts means that accounts are sometimes less detailed than those in the Main Manuscript Collection. Schoolchildren were tasked with writing about saints or feast-days in their area, but mentions of St. Martin's Day are often quite brief. They tend to be found amongst accounts of other festival days, and the amount of festivals covered by a single essay meant that material concerning St. Martin is often not as extensive as those from other sources. They are very useful in conducting frequency analysis, however, as mentioned above. In relation to the specific customs under investigation in

the current study, one disadvantage of the Schools' Collection is that the persons compiling the accounts were often not the same as those who conducted the rituals described, such as the killing of the animals and the spilling of the blood. Thus, when questions about the meaning of certain customs are raised, these accounts are necessarily less reliable, as the informants are at something of a remove. In any case, notions of meaning are not as frequently raised in the Schools' accounts.

The information contained in the Questionnaire responses is by far the richest, in terms of both subject and detail. The cleverly-formatted questions of the original questionnaire were designed to elicit a broad range of information, regarding not only what customs were practised, but why they were undertaken. It probed all aspects of the feast, and offered suggestions about certain sayings and oral narratives. The accounts tend to be very long, and contain the most extensive descriptions, and examples of narratives. Thus, the Questionnaire responses are an extremely valuable resource when coming to any understanding of St. Martin's Day beliefs and traditions. One of the advantages of the questionnaire material is the presence of negative responses. Other types of sources confirmed the presence of a custom, belief or narrative in a given area, but in many instances, an absence of evidence did not necessarily mean that the custom itself was not present there. The questionnaire on Martinmas elicited a lot of responses from people saying that there were no customs or stories regarding the saint known in their area, thus providing evidence of absence, and allowing for a more accurate picture of the extent of the celebration of the feast-day.

The publications represent the most problematic sources, in terms of consistency and reliability. Although fifty-two additional literary sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were used to bolster the archival material, a significant disadvantage is their comparative lack of consistent structure. For example, in many cases, a location for a belief or narrative is not specified, and statements about traditions can be presented as if they pertain to all of Ireland. In others, the names of informants are not supplied, or the specific year in which material was recorded is not given. Considerable difficulty was encountered when establishing a location for the information referred to in these accounts. Only twenty-four accounts provided sufficient information to establish from where exactly the customs or beliefs originated. In a further three, only the county could be established, while a further two only mentioned the province.

Literary sources of this nature can on occasion prove to be unreliable, since they can be the result of editing or modification for aesthetic or ideological

reasons, and caution must be shown in accepting them at face value.⁶ Thus, the reliability of these accounts as an accurate reflection of genuine folk custom and belief can vary, and sweeping statements about beliefs do not indicate if they are only locally held, or refer to a wider area. The use of such information must therefore be tempered by caution, but their role in supporting the material from the primary sources is not insignificant, and some of the older examples can be useful in establishing the age of a given belief, custom or story. When they have been deemed reliable, examples from these printed sources have been utilised in the current study.

As with any study on folk religion, certain general caveats must be taken into consideration. When addressing written accounts of beliefs and customs, such as those relating to St. Martin's Day, particularly scholarly or antiquarian accounts from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is important to note that, on occasion, 'single, even unique, notes have at times mistakenly been used to characterize the culture or religion of a particular area.' (Pentikäinen 1979, 35–52, 37.) In addition, it must be borne in mind that when addressing ideas concerning folk belief, such as concepts of luck and taboo, in archival sources, the written form in which they are presented can vary somewhat from the conceptual form in which they existed prior to writing. This can arise from the lack of nuance in written accounts, the generalization of beliefs on the part of the person documenting them, or simple misinterpretation. Thus, in the transference from the oral to the written, sources can present alien forms of folk belief. (Rooth 1979, 53–70, 57.) Frequency analysis, therefore, must be paramount. If beliefs are modified through the transfer from concepts of the mind through to oral and then written forms, frequency analysis may help to elucidate common forms, patterns of thought and ideas that might be true to the original in a general sense.

Theoretical Framework

The current study has sought to draw on a number of different theoretical approaches, where deemed necessary, in order to best elucidate the nature of St. Martin's Day customs. The decision to utilize mapping and distribution patterns as a starting point for analysis of the archive material was influenced by several authors. Works by scholars such as Alan Gailey and Caoimhín Ó

6 See Lysaght, Patricia, *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death Messenger*, Dublin 1986, 25 for a discussion on the potential pitfalls in using such secondary sources, and strategies to employ to ensure accuracy.

Danachair have proven the value of ethnological mapping, and its usefulness to the folklorist. (Gailey & Ó Danachair 1976: 14–34; Gailey, 1974: 1–6.) This should be seen against a background of a well-founded tradition of ethnological mapping in continental Europe, particularly in German-speaking countries.⁷ Matthias Zender, a major figure in the field of ethnological mapping, addressed the question of distribution of customs associated with St. Martin on a European scale, and his insights have proven to be of great importance to the current study. (Zender 1970: 227.) Furthermore, works such as Patricia Lysaght's landmark monograph on the traditions of the Banshee in Ireland amply demonstrate the usefulness of distribution maps in analysing folk tradition. (Lysaght [1986] 1996.)

In terms of further methodologies, the work of Finnish folklorists since the 1970s has proven to be of value. Scholars such as Lauri Honko and Juha Pentikäinen have demonstrated valuable approaches to understanding, and finding meaning in, the study of folk religions. (See Honko 1985; Pentikäinen 1979.)⁸ Other elements of the current thesis have relied in part on the work of structuralists such as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964) and Celticist Joseph Nagy (1985) in order to provide potential insight into certain beliefs and customs. Wayland Hand (1983) and Patricia Lysaght's (1993) work on portals, thresholds and liminality were key influences in contextualizing St. Martin's Day traditions in the Irish folk calendar.

An important point must be made concerning the analysis of narratives in the current study, in terms of the theoretical framework. Lauri Honko has emphasised the potential weaknesses of the historical-geographical method in analysing and explaining forms, variants and distributions of narratives. (Honko 2000, 3–29.) Criticisms of these approaches include the notion that organic variation within texts is not studied well enough, and a lack of engagement with certain elements of oral narrative performance. Central to a proper understanding of narratives is the development of a 'thick corpus', where they are studied in a performance context, and meticulous records are made of the myriad elements involved in the transmission of oral texts. It also includes intensive fieldwork, where multiple examples of a narrative are recorded in

7 For example, the *Atlas der Deutschen Volkskunde*, first published in 1939, was very influential in European folkloristics.

8 Both scholars were involved in the establishment of the *Science of Religion. Study Conference of the I.A.H.R.* in Turku, Finland in 1973. See Honko, Lauri and Pentikäinen, Juha, 'Communication: Methodology of the Science of Religion. Study Conference of the I.A.H.R. in Turku, Finland August 27–31, 1973,' *Numen* 19, no. 2/3 (Aug. – Dec., 1972) 241–242.

a relatively limited geographical or social area. When analysing the legends and folktales in the current work, it must be pointed out that they are essentially derived from archival records, and are devoid of much of the contextual information required of the tradition-ecological approach analysis. In most instances, urforms are not sought, but the emergent themes and concepts, and potential significance within their given cultural context are discussed in relation to the cult of St. Martin, in an attempt to see how they relate to beliefs regarding the saint and his feast-day.

Finally, mention must be made of other studies into Irish calendar custom. Máire Mac Néill's seminal work on Lughnasa traditions is a key example of the richness of material in the archives of the National Folklore Collection, and a key text in the understanding of Irish calendar customs (Mac Neill 1962). Séamas Ó Catháin's comparative approach regarding St. Brigid is another recent example of Irish calendar custom study that has produced some intriguing hypotheses (Ó Catháin 1995). Patricia Lysaght's work on *Bealtaine* traditions and the Banshee, as previously mentioned, has also been hugely influential on the current work.

Translation

It should be pointed out that a large proportion of the source material was collected in Irish-speaking areas, and that many of the examples provided below were originally in that language. Quotations enclosed within square brackets have been translated to English, and all such translations are the work of the author unless otherwise indicated. In instances where the form and sound of language is of importance, such as rhyming couplets or prayers, the original Irish form is also provided.

1. European Traditions

In order to gain an insight into the traditions and customs surrounding Martinmas and the cult of St. Martin in Ireland, consideration will be given to the vast wealth of sources outlining the development of devotion to the saint, from earliest times through to more contemporary practices. The cult, which originated in fourth century Gaul, spread to many parts of Europe. From their beginnings in a purely ecclesiastical setting, manifestations of Martinmas traditions became part of popular folk customs in many regions.

Ecclesiastical Beginnings

The earliest information on the figure of St. Martin is contained in the *Vita Martini*. This account of the life of Martin of Tours was compiled by a monk by the name of Sulpicius Severus (Sulpice 1967), a former lawyer, and devotee and pupil of St. Martin, who compiled the *Vita* in the saint's own lifetime. He also compiled a series of dialogues featuring the saint, and together with the *Vita*, they present one of the first Western European hagiographies. These works were modelled on literary biographies of the classical world, and as such, their purpose was not so much to depict historical events accurately, but rather to convey certain ideas and motifs. The truth could be changed or exaggerated, as long as it could be seen to serve the greater Christian good.¹ Thus, many of the fantastic and unlikely elements in the *Vita* can be seen to communicate Christian ideals, as St. Martin is depicted as a miracle worker, exorcist and healer, with the ability to raise the dead. The purpose of the accounts of such miracles is to prove not only the sanctity and power of the saint, but also to portray him in a similar fashion to the miracle-working Christ. (Tezcan, 2004: 19.) Despite many fantastical elements, the *Vita* also contains

1 Claire Stancliffe discusses the nature of hagiography, and its base in classical biography. In this context, its function was less to depict history as to convey ideas. Stancliffe, C: *History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, Oxford 1983, 185–7.

some reliable information on the life of St. Martin. It reveals that the Gallic clergy of the day were occasionally hostile towards St. Martin's supposedly overt piety and exemplary asceticism. This situation must be viewed against a background of conflict in the Gallican church between ascetic monks and non-ascetic clerics. (Hunter 1999: 414.) Sulpicius's *Vita* was repeatedly transcribed, and was often used as a template for later saints' lives, or indeed, directly copied where 'plagiarism was almost an act of piety.' (Finucane 1977: 94.) It was to inspire many further works on the thaumaturgical Bishop of Tours, and is described by Whaley as "a standard hagiographical paradigm." (Whaley 1994 158.)

The Saint's Life

A brief outline of the saint's life, as depicted in Severus's account, will now be considered, to provide a background for later tradition and legends about St. Martin. He was born in Pannonia – now a region of Hungary – in 315 or 316 AD. It is said that he converted to Christianity when he was ten years old, despite his parents being followers of traditional Roman religion. He was the son of a military tribune, and entered the army at age fifteen due to an obligation of Roman law. One event in particular was said to have strengthened his faith – what became known as the famous incident of St. Martin's Charity. Severus recalls how St. Martin, upon seeing a shivering beggar at the gates of Amiens in Gaul, was so moved that he cut his cloak in two and donated half to the near-naked man. St. Martin had a dream that night in which he saw Christ wearing half of the cloak, and was said to have been inspired by this to devote his life to Christianity. According to Severus, St. Martin came to the realisation that his military career was incompatible with Christian devotion, and he eventually requested to be dismissed from the army in order to pursue a more devout lifestyle. On announcing that he would refuse his pay, and refrain from taking part in an impending battle with the Allemanni and Franks, St. Martin was accused of cowardice. To dispute this accusation, he offered to stand between the opposing armies. The authorities consented, and imprisoned St. Martin until the beginning of the battle. Before the hostilities commenced, however, an armistice was agreed upon and war was postponed. St. Martin attributed this to God, and was said to have been allowed to leave the army. In all likelihood St. Martin served his full term in the Roman army, with the above account being a form of revisionism on the part of Sulpicius, in order to excuse St. Martin of the apparent hypocrisy of a Christian participating in military exercises.

Martin went on to become a pupil of St. Hilary at Poitiers, and was ordained as an exorcist, which was a minor clerical order in the early Christian church. St. Martin's subsequent return to his hometown in Pannonia saw him being beaten and publicly humiliated for his vehement refusal to accept Arianism, which was a popular heresy in the fourth century. St. Hilary, too, suffered for rejecting Arianism, and was driven from Poitiers by heretics. Unable to return to Poitiers, St. Martin went to Milan to begin life as a hermit. St. Hilary and St. Martin returned to Poitiers some years later, however, and St. Martin established his first retreat there. While at this retreat, located in the wilderness of Ligugé, St. Martin was supposed to have performed many miracles, including exorcisms and the raising of the dead. (Clugnet 2004: 732.) Following the establishment of a monastery at Ligugé, the townsfolk elected St. Martin as bishop of Tours. It is written in the *Vita* that St. Martin was tricked into accepting the post by the townsfolk, who knew that he would initially refuse out of humility. He was lured to Tours on the premise that he would cure a sick woman there. Upon his entrance to the town he was pressed by the townsfolk into accepting the holy orders. This incident was to provide a context for a popular Martinian legend, which became widespread in the medieval period. The legend depicts St. Martin hiding from the townsfolk in a goose stall, and the cackling of the goose revealed his location. This is the reason, according to tradition, why goose is eaten on Martinmas.² It was in his position as a bishop that St. Martin essentially created a new role and function for the Episcopal station. To achieve this, St. Martin returned to the wilderness and founded a hermitage and later monastery at *Majus Monasterium*, or Marmoutier, some eight hundred metres outside the town. Here he combined the role of bishop and hermit/abbot. He fulfilled his Episcopal duties to the town and associated bishopric through the use of ecclesiastical intermediaries, as he all the while devoted his life to ascetic pursuits. From his hermitage, St. Martin launched a campaign to convert those in the surrounding countryside. Severus's account contains many legends that describe St. Martin's assault on paganism, from burning temples and chopping down sacred trees, to being confronted by demonic figures claiming to be Mercury, Venus and Jupiter. Along with St. Martin's zeal as a missionary, his tireless pursuit of a truly ascetic lifestyle was to inspire many people, and the introduction of the hermetic lifestyle, and its associated ascetism, to Western Europe is commonly attributed to St.

2 The development of Martinian oral tradition will be considered further elsewhere in this study.

Martin.³ Despite constant struggles with ‘demons’, engaging in fasting and a severe lifestyle, St. Martin lived to be around eighty years of age. He died on November 8 in Marmoutiers, sometime between 395 and 402 AD. He was buried on November 11, which became the main feast day of St. Martin of Tours in the ecclesiastical calendar.

A verse life of St. Martin, based on the *Vita Martini*, was composed by Paulinius of Périgueux, a fifth century Gaulish poet. Venantius Fortunatus (c.530–600), an Italian bishop of Poitiers, also compiled a version of the *Vita Martini* in a poetic format, in order to promote the cult of St. Martin. (Venantius Fortunatus 1919: 293–370.) His works tend to include more classical literary elements, in accordance with his education. In this particular version, he placed emphasis on St. Martin’s aristocratic background, to justify the occupation of Gallic Sees by the descendants of aristocratic families. (Coates 1998: 5.) This was not the only example of literature concerning St. Martin to be used for political effect. A contemporary of Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory of Tours, compiled yet another biography of St. Martin, and emphasised the miracles supposedly performed by the saint, both in his lifetime and posthumously. (Gregory of Tours 1974.) Gregory’s accounts of miracles may have been an attempt to portray the ideal society envisioned by early Christians, and exemplified by the Resurrection, which served his ends as a social reformer. (Heinzelmann, M. as cited in Tezcan 2004: 10ff.) Again, it appears that this is another example of the use of Martinian hagiographical literature to raise the contemporary issues that concerned the author. A further example of this is discussed by Brian Brennan, who argues that Venantius Fortunatus’s poetry may have been intended to reinforce Episcopal authority in Tours, and could have been used by the poet to place pressure on Gregory of Tours to engage in certain political affairs. (Brennan 1997: 121.) Thus, Martinian literature is shown as having real political influence. This was to continue throughout the medieval period, and further examples will be alluded to below. Even the treatment of Martinian relics was to become an issue of political power, as witnessed through the Clamour, a ceremony conducted between the tenth and thirteenth century by monks, who ritually humiliated the relics in elaborate ceremonies in order to enforce cooperation and fair dealings with laity. (Ball 2003: 249.)

3 There is evidence that St. Anthony (died 356 AD) was introducing monastic lifestyle to Europe, and Pachomius is a contemporary who also founded coenobitic communities, but St. Martin was by far the most popular and widespread influence in Western Europe. Stancliffe, C. *ibid.*

Influence

It is clear from his life that St. Martin was both inspirational and popular. Such was his esteem in the early Christian church that he was the first non-martyr to receive sainthood. One particular inscription on a vase found at Vendée in Gaul reads *Divvs S. Martinus* (St. Martin the God), where he is named in the fashion of the Roman *Genuis Loci*, or local deity (de la Marche 1881), clearly showing the high esteem in which he was held by the newly-converted Gaulish Christian community. Indeed, during his lifetime, many were attracted to his foundations at Ligugé, Tours and Marmoutiers. Christians came from distant parts in order to receive instruction and inspiration, and carried the message of St. Martin back to their areas of origin.⁴ His cult was actively promoted by many bishops of Tours, especially Perpetuus (d. 490 AD), leading to its furthering in Gaul. (Beaujard 2000, 917.)

One of the largest influences on the spread of the cult of St. Martin was the popularity of the *Vita Martini*. By all accounts, this book was extremely popular at the time of its publication, and was readily available from the book-sellers of Gaul, Rome, and beyond. (Wilson 1968: 135.) This led to the further promotion of the cult of St. Martin during the pontificate of Pope Symmachus (498–514 AD), thus ensuring its widespread popularity. (Macquarrie 1997: 26.) By the sixth century, the feast of St. Martin, celebrated on 11 November, had gained immense regard, with widespread devotion throughout Gaul. (Beaujard 2000: 917.) It appears that some of the festivity associated with St. Martin on this day was due to it falling on the date upon which new Christians prepared for baptism. In the sixth century, the fasting period leading up to Christmas was preceded by a feast, thus Martinmas became the last available opportunity for a full meal for forty days. It appears that this corresponds with the modern ecclesiastical period of Advent. (Diocese of Trier Online Encyclopedia of St. Martin.) The feast-day was known in the Gallican liturgy as *Martini* (ibid.) which is derived from the Latin '*dies Sancti Martini*,' or 'Days of St. Martin.' Devotion to St. Martin by the Frankish king Clovis I (466–511 AD), and the subsequent Merovingian patronage of Tours in the seventh century, (Van Dam 1993: 26) ensured widespread popularity throughout the medieval period. Indeed, the famous Cape of St. Martin was a relic treasured by Merovingian kings and carried into battle from at least 678 AD (Farmer 1991: 26.) This relic, housed in a church in Aachen that was founded by Charlemagne I (742–814 AD), subsequently became known as *Capella*, meaning cape.

4 See the account of Magnus Maximus and his wife, and the missionaries in Britain from Marmoutier in Severus' *Dialogues*, II, Chapter vi.

This relic gave rise to words such as ‘chapel’ and ‘chaplain’, such was the its importance. Martinian devotion expanded into Carolingian-controlled areas in the eighth and ninth centuries (Beaujard op. cit. 917), and Charlemagne commissioned a further history of the Life of St. Martin, which was compiled by the Abbott Alcuin of York at the end of the eighth century.

Medieval Martinmas: Developing Traditions

The character depicted in the hagiographies of St. Martin commissioned and compiled by the church in the late classical and early medieval period is a heroic miracle worker and destroyer of pagan temples. Nevertheless, he is presented as a pious, saintly figure who is doing God’s work, and pursuing an ascetic lifestyle.⁵ The figure of St. Martin, and stories associated with Martinmas, as depicted in later medieval texts and tradition, however, present a very different character. Due to the close proximity of the Feast of St. Martin to the end of the harvest, the appropriate times for slaughtering animals, and the uncasking of new wine, it appears that, by the medieval period, it had become a festival of indulgence and Bacchanalian excess. The nature of the development of the Martinmas festival in the medieval period must be examined in order to fully understand how its modern manifestations evolved from the early cult of the saint.

Martinmas falls on the threshold of winter in the calendar year. It marks two important events, the beginning of Advent and the end of the harvest. Thus, it can be seen to have had both ecclesiastical and spiritual importance, and a more worldly and social significance. The combination of these two strands in the rituals of the feast is evident in the way that Martinmas came to be celebrated over time. The integration of popular traditions and ecclesiastical rites of Martinmas may be seen to have begun as early as the sixth century. Scandal was caused in parts of France by the raucous behaviour displayed at the *pervigiliae*, the all-night vigils surrounding St. Martin’s day. (Chambers 1996: 247.) In this period, too, the *Vita Martini* becomes the subject of parodies by common folk.

Wine and drinking associated with Martinmas is a common theme in medieval records, and is evidenced by characters such as the drunken bishop in Notker’s ninth-century *Life of Charlemagne*. (Walsh 2000: 632.) Many satirical songs and plays describing the excesses of Martinmas indulgence, including

5 For more information on the early ecclesiastical celebrations on 11 November, including masses, sermons and liturgies, see Rose 2001.

bawdy and sometimes scatological imagery, are depicted throughout the medieval period in France and parts of Germany. There may be some precedent for scatological imagery in the *Vita Martini*, (Sands 2000: 451) though this is unlikely to have influenced the obscene depictions of the later period.⁶ They are more likely to be the result of medieval humour and satire. Obscene sexual imagery can also be associated with St. Martin, (Walsh 1996 b: 288) thus showing the continuing divergence of tradition.

The medieval folk version of St. Martin is a far cry from the the pious ascetic of the *Vita*. He is famously associated with the overtly phallic character Gargantua, in Rabelais' sixteenth-century work depicting the popular folk character of a giant. (Rabelais 1905.) There are examples from Italian tradition of burlesque rhymes recited on Martinmas. (Walsh op. cit. 288.) Cuckolding is also associated with Martinmas, and licentiousness is hinted at on several occasions. In Italian tradition, St. Martin was associated with the *Fira de Bec* (Fair of Horns) in Sanarcangelo, where a large pair of horns was hung up at the Martinmas fair to symbolise marital infidelity. Many other celebrations of this type occurred in Italy, such as the *Festa dei Cornuti* (Festival of Horns) in Abruzzo, celebrated as a festival of cuckolds. (*Journal of the Abruzzo World Club*.) These references may result from the carnivalesque nature of Martinmas, and the inversion or temporary removal of social norms as part of the celebration.

The adoption of Martinmas as the start date for the winter season of Carnival in continental Europe seems to be a nineteenth century development (Russ 1982: 75), but in the medieval period the removal of social stratification for the duration of the feast was an element of the feast of St. Martin. For example, it seems that St. Martin was the patron of boy-bishop festivities, in a fashion similar to St. Nicholas. In these celebrations, a boy would be elected as bishop, and would reign over festivities where normal conventions were discarded, similar to the *Lord of Misrule* character in Carnival.⁷ In fact, by the Elizabethan period, Martinmas was known as 'the Second Carnival'. (Wilson 1964: 30.)

- 6 There are, however, references to scatological behaviour associated with Martinmas bull-running in Stamford, England. See Walsh 1996 a. Again, they are not likely to be related to medieval satirical comedy.
- 7 Astrik, L. G., *Student Life in Ave Maria College, Mediaeval Paris*, Paris 1955, 181–84, referenced in Walsh 1997. Walsh gives further examples of the Lord of Misrule, once in the example of the 'greene king of St. Martin's' in Deloney's *The Gentle Craft* (London, 1598), and Shakespeare's *Falstaff*. He also suggests a third possibility, in the form of a cross dressing woman involved in the Stamford Bull Run. Walsh 1996 a.

A central theme of Martinmas tradition is the celebration of the feast by all types of people; in a single unifying commemoration. There is a precedent for this type of celebration that dates as far back as the sixth century. A sermon from this early period speaks of how all members of the church should celebrate the feast of St. Martin together, and people of all ages, and both sexes, are invited to participate in the unifying occasion. (Rose *op. cit.*: 285.) Another possible source for the removal of social norms concerns one of the central themes of Martinmas, namely that of charity. The example set by the famous incident of the Charity of St. Martin at the gates of Amiens, whereby St. Martin divided his cloak and gave half of it to a shivering beggar, was to be an enduring theme in Martinian tradition. In the medieval period, this manifested itself as the obligation on rich devotees of the saint to perform charitable acts towards the poor.

Martinmas was established as a festival of food and plenty, thus according well with its celebration at the end of the harvest. It is also the most appropriate time for slaughtering animals that will not survive winter, and much of the medieval record suggests that meat was widely consumed as part of the festival. The abundance of meat available at this time became one of the central elements of charity. Feasts were provided for the poor by the aristocracy, and fourteenth-century texts speak of how rich and poor celebrated together. (Spechtler 1972: VII.) This, according to Martin Walsh, ‘contributed to a creative tension between societal strata throughout Martinmas festival expression and added an almost Saturnalian quality to the profane celebration of the day’. (Walsh 2000: 633.) According to an English document of early Tudor origin *The Debates or Stryfes Betwene Somer and Wynter*, the personification of winter mentions Martinmas as a time when ‘great and small drink wine.’ (Barber 1997: 170.) The provision of meat and produce to poor neighbours and to those less well off was to have influenced the Irish celebration of Martinmas, and will be further explored in later chapters. Another aspect of Martinmas altruism was in direct imitation of the Charity of St. Martin, whereby cloaks were donated to the poor, as practised in Amiens since the year 1000. (Réau 1955: 903, as cited in Witte 1991: 76.)⁸ In the medieval period, poets often used the example of St. Martin’s charity to encourage the generosity of patrons. One such poem, dating from at least the thirteenth century, sees

8 The wearing of fur-lined cloaks has been linked by some writers to the figure of Peltz Martin in German folklore, which will be examined below.

Archipoeta Walter von der Vogelweide thus receive a cloak from the *Largior Martino*, Reinald Van Deissel.⁹

Feasting and Slaughter

The feasting that occurred on Martinmas was, as mentioned, due to the abundance of meat provided by winter slaughter. St. Martin was seen as a patron of animals since at least the tenth century. (Hälsig 1910: 79.) The slaughtering of animals at this time arose from practical necessity, but it likely facilitated the adoption of his role as patron of animals.¹⁰ There are many more references to St. Martin as patron of animals through the medieval period, and his association with horses is known from at least the twelfth century (see Chapter 7). The animal sacrifice and specific emphasis on shedding blood found in Martinmas tradition in Ireland in the post medieval period may have been more widespread in former times. It was certainly known in England as late as the eighteenth century, and there are suggestions that blood sacrifice rituals were more widespread in France (Zender 1970: 227) and Switzerland¹¹ in earlier times. There survives to this day a French saying that suggests the former presence of blood rites, ‘*On répand du sang a la Saint Martin* (One spreads blood on St. Martin’s Day). (Chambers 1903: 263.) In all likelihood, the tendency to slaughter animals for practical agricultural purposes in Europe throughout this period was often associated with St. Martin.

The ubiquitous Martinmas goose was common throughout France and Germany in medieval times. Legends blame the goose for betraying the location of Martin to a mob of people who were searching for him, referring to the incident in the *Vita* where Martin was pressed into service as Bishop of Tours by a group of townsfolk. (*Vita Martini*, Chapter IX.) Roast goose became the

- 9 The title *Largior Martino* is given to one who gives abundantly in the name of St. Martin. (Zender 1970: 227.)
- 10 One criticism of the belief that large amounts of animals were slaughtered on Martinmas in England has been published. In Platt 1978: 187, there is evidence that slaughter was not simply confined to Martinmas, and its importance in this respect has been over emphasised. This does not, however, detract from the fact that slaughter did take place at this time. Alison Hanham argues that the ‘great Martinmas butchery of beasts may be more modern myth than fact’ (Hanham 1985: 151). Nevertheless, there is enough evidence for slaughter at this time, to be confident that it was a common Martinmas practice, as indicated below.
- 11 The *Gansabhauet* in Sursee may be a survival of medieval ritual practices. See Gorini 1994: 38. These practices may also be related to similar German practices. See Weber 1965: 151.

typical Martinmas meal in Europe, and the spread of the cult in the later medieval and early modern period saw the popularity of the goose dish expand greatly. In German-speaking areas, Martinmas was known as the *Schlachtfest* (feast of slaughtering) or *Speckmarten* (St. Martin's Bacon) and the goose was known as the *Martingans* (Martin's goose). (Becker-Huberti 1996: 7.) The *Stoppelhahn*, a hen or rooster that grazed on the corn stubble after the harvest, was also killed at Martinmas.

The association of Martinmas with wine and beer is well known, and St. Martin is seen as the patron saint of vintners, alcoholics, innkeepers, wine growers and wine makers. As stated above, Martinmas falls about the time when new wine is ready for consumption, thus ensuring St. Martin's association with alcohol and indulgence. Countless examples exist of St. Martin being associated with wine, and this continues in modern manifestations of the feast, as will be seen below. Tithes due at this time of year were often paid in barrels of wine, and the abbey of St.-Martin-de-Tours employed some 20,000 people in its wine-producing facilities in the Loire valley during the Middle Ages. (Toussaint-Samat 1992: 281.) St. Martin was also popularly attributed with planting the first vines in Vouvray, and many medieval legends abound of St. Martin introducing wines and viticulture to various different regions. Pope Urban II claimed to have discovered a vine planted by St. Martin himself in 1096, and the vines were held as holy relics. (Toussaint-Samat 1992: 281.) There is also the legend of St. Martin, dressed in animal skins,¹² riding his donkey through the vineyards. His donkey chews the vines down to the wood, and the benefits of this on the following year's crop were said to have inspired the practice of hard pruning in viticulture. (Kladstrup 2001: 7.) Gregory of Tours mentions a miracle associated with a grape that grew from a vine St. Martin planted. (Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Confessors*, as cited in Hughes 2000: 131.) In Naogeorgus's writings we can see how feasting and wine formed a central part of Martinmas tradition in fourteenth-century Germany, with particular reference to new vintages being enjoyed. (Theobald 1908: 764.) In the French language, expressions like 'mal de Saint Martin' (St. Martin's sickness) indicates a hangover, while 'faire la Saint Martin' (do the St. Martin) means to enjoy oneself by indulging in food and drink. Similar expressions can be found in German, where to drink *Martinsminne* means to drink new wine, and *Martinswein* was ritually drunk by German vintners to ensure a good grape harvest for the following year. Renaissance imagery personifies

12 Again the image of Peltzmarten may be seen, and will be examined in the context of German folk custom.

Martinmas as a fat drunkard seated on a barrel of wine. (Gagnabet 1972: 313–45.)

It is clear that the many miracles of water being turned into wine that were attributed to St. Martin were borrowed from imagery concerning Christ. Such legends were known in France, and persist into modern times in German tradition, (Leach 1950: 682) and have also become associated with St. Nicholas, most likely through motif attraction from Martinian lore. Early accounts of St. Martin performing such miracles can be found as early as the sixteenth century, at least. (Hospinian, *Die Orig. Fest Christ.*, Fol 159 b.)

Processions

It is likely that many of the churches and communities dedicated to St. Martin held parades or processions in honour of the saint in the medieval period. In England, parades such as the fifteenth-century procession in Leicester, were known. (Lancashire 1984: 165.) By the modern period, some of these parades had taken on a less pious character. There is an example from England in 1702, whereby Sir Samuel Dashwood was inaugurated mayor of London. His company of vintners held a parade, headed by a horseback rider in armour, depicting St. Martin, followed by disorderly revellers. It also included a version of St. Martin's Charity, whereby a cloak was divided and alms give to beggars.¹³ Evidence for the continuation of such processions in popular tradition can be found in the German *Martinsumzug* (Martin's procession), that continues to the present day. (Bichler 2004: 103.) This parade can be seen to have earlier ecclesiastical precedents, as the procession, led by a person dressed as the saint, often on horseback, has its roots in the *Lucernarium*, a candlelight procession at first vespers and ecclesiastical parades in honour of a church patron.¹⁴ It is likely that the modern manifestation in German tradition, which incorporates other elements such as the *gripschen* (children begging for treats) and *Martinssingen* (Martin's singing), are the result of dominant interest in Martinmas over various different autumn festival activities, (Zender 1970: 226) but other factors in their current popularity will be examined below.

Martinmas in the Modern Era

By using placenames and church dedications as an indication of former patronage, it is clear from distribution patterns that the core area of Martinian

13 See the entry for November 11 in Chambers 1869, *The Book of Days*.

14 For more on the development of vespers see Cabrol 1912.

devotion was centred, unsurprisingly, in France and parts of Western Germany. (Zender 1970: 223.) The main concentration was focused on the regions formerly part of the Merovingian kingdoms, as described above, with some four thousand placenames (including towns, wells and so on) and churches associated with St. Martin in France alone. The initial period of Martinian dedication began in the sixth century. It expanded again in the eighth century, and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it gradually replaced a lot of previously existing dedications to other saints. (Couderc 1997.) There are a few churches and other various sites named after Martin of Tours outside of this area, but these dedications, however, tend to have a scattered distribution pattern, and there is a decrease in density the further they are from the core area. In an important study on Martinmas folk tradition in Europe in recent times, Matthias Zender used the model of spatial differentiation in distribution patterns of certain Martinmas customs in order to extrapolate former and current trends in their practice. (Zender 1970: 223.) We are presented with a picture of Martinmas tradition being strong in the early medieval period in France, parts of Germany, Austria and England. In some instances the customs are all but extinct in these areas now, and modern devotion to St. Martin in some of these regions may bear little resemblance to the former folk depiction of the saint. It is, instead, mostly the official ecclesiastical version of the saint that is seen. Meanwhile, the celebrations of the saint in regions outside this initial distribution area place a clear emphasis on the folk version of St. Martin, especially through his role as a helper of animals. The medieval accounts of the feast of St. Martin appear to fit this model of distribution very well indeed.

Bonfires and Parades

One of the most prominent elements of contemporary Martinmas customs in Europe involves the lighting of fires in his honour, and parades and processions of lantern-bearers. It was likely present in parts of France where traditional folk celebrations of St. Martin's Day were formerly observed (Provence 1942: 102), but have now fallen out of fashion, most likely due to the decline of Martin of Tours as a popular saint, amongst the upper classes in the post-medieval period. Such fire-lighting and parade customs, however, remain in many parts of German-speaking Europe, under the afore-mentioned name of *Martinsumzung*, on the night of November 10 or 11, and are often attended by a great number of people. The children who participate spend several days beforehand preparing home-made lanterns, which they carry in the parade. During these parades, they also sing songs dedicated to St. Martin in Catholic

areas, or Martin Luther in Protestant districts. A man on horseback, who represents St. Martin, usually leads the procession. Such parades are nowadays often associated with a bonfire, and the *Martinsfeuer* is a common sight along the banks of the Moselle and the Rhine valleys in Germany on the evenings of 10 and 11 November. An aspect of this celebration is the *Feuersprung* (fire leaping) where jumping over the fire was thought to bring good luck. The custom was forbidden in some areas, but continued in a diminished form through the practice of candle jumping.¹⁵ Those who dance around the fire are said to rid themselves of blemishes and mistakes, and to keep winter at bay. These fire traditions were known in at least the fifteenth century, where they were once part of plays and local dramas. (Zender 1970: 226.) At this early period, traditional fires were free from any connotations of good luck or healing, and such aspects may have been borrowed from traditions surrounding bonfires on St. John's day, or *Fastnacht* (Lenten) fires, which were lit to indicate the start of Lent. In later times, the fire customs spread into the areas of southwest Germany and northwest France, where Martinmas was still a feast celebrated by the social elites.

Some of the remnants of medieval Martinmas tradition in Germany were subject to a series of reforms in recent centuries. The custom of children begging and demanding treats (*gripschen*) were an aspect of such practices that had survived into modern times, especially in areas around the Niederrhein and in Duesseldorf. They would process from house to house with lanterns, often made from carved vegetables, and beg for gifts. The *Martinsfeuer* was also an element of tradition that has become integrated into modern manifestation of Martinmas in Germany. Children would often spend days beforehand collecting wood and other combustible material. The associated bonfire customs were often a source of unruly behaviour, and adults were increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of allowing children to attend these fires unsupervised. These practices were considered, in this period, to be increasingly at odds with the aesthetic and educational conception of a civil society. (Pertz 2003.)

In a similar process to the reform of *Karneval* that was occurring contemporaneously,¹⁶ Martinmas was beginning to be managed by local authorities and committees, clergy and schools. Emphasis was placed on elements of Martinmas that were considered acceptable, and these were often adapted to suit modern predilections. Thus, orderly parades, including lantern

15 Candle jumping was known in Münster in 1705. See Becker-Huberti, M., *loc. cit.*

16 For more information on the formal urban revival and restructure of *Karneval* in the nineteenth century see Frohn 2000.

processions and the singing of songs dedicated to St. Martin became a focus for revival. They were to occur along fixed routes, and begin at prearranged times. New songs were composed for the feast, and the children often sang the national anthem as part of the proceedings. It was seen as good civic duty to participate, and adults began to accompany children in the processions, and brass bands gradually began to join the parades. The bonfires became more ordered affairs, and, in the early twentieth century, local fire brigades participated in the parades in order to supervise the proceedings. (Schwedt 1992: 9–18.) These changes first took place in large cities, and the spread was then aided elsewhere by the active encouragement of children to participate by German kindergartens. (Kramer 1972: 40.) The heavy involvement of young children, and the participation by parents, has led to a widespread increase in the new form of Martinmas custom. Young children were encouraged to create their own lanterns, and artistic creativity was encouraged. The clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, have also promoted the customs. Some of the parades have become quite sophisticated in certain regions, including one instance where the light-bearers form an elaborate escutcheon, the symbol of Martin Luther, in honour of the reformer. (Spicer 1958: 71.)

The customs suffered a period of suppression by the Nazi party during the middle of the twentieth century, due to the imagery of a saint renouncing military service, as depicted in the *Vita Martini*, being incompatible with the party's militaristic ideologies. (Sankt Martin.) These customs continue to evolve as they find new or changing social significance. (Schwedt 1988: 257–268.) For example, in the 1950s, religious ministers promoted the feast as a way of culturally unifying East and West Germans, through the medium of *Martinsingen* and other Martinmas customs. It was celebrated in a non-denominational manner, and was considered to be a successful ecumenical venture. (Angermann 1957: 231.) The spread of the customs in their new format is also occurring in bordering areas, including Holland (Rose 1997: 175)¹⁷, Poland, Austria, Hungary and the north of Italy. (Mezger 1997: 273–350; *Herend Herald*, 10/11/2004.)

The reformed Martinmas customs of German tradition had influenced those of Holland (Helsloot 2001), and from the 1930s, a person playing the role of St. Martin was incorporated into the feast. In one such example, in Venlo, Limburg, St. Martin rides through the town in an open carriage. (Spicer 1958: 142.) The revived customs were widespread throughout the north and west of Holland by the 1980s, and continue to move into new areas of the

17 For information on Dutch Martinmas fires see Voskuil and Dekker 1970: 204–210.
For information on Dutch Martinmas songs see Helmer 1956: 1–21.

country to this day. In a similar development, many towns across Italy saw colourful parades take place on November 11, which often involved the display of statues of St. Martin. (Spicer 1958: 142.) These appear to be descended from ecclesiastical practices that were known in Italy for a long period of time. Lantern processions and songs about St. Martin were known in Venice in recent centuries, and date to the medieval period. (Walsh 1996 b: 288.) These processions appeared to have been declining in the 1960s, (Toschi 1963: 373) but recent introductions of German type *Martinsabend* traditions seem to indicate something of a revival. Even some of the songs sung by the Italian children at these lantern parades are in the German language. It appears that the customs revived in the Rhineland in the twentieth century are spreading to ever-greater areas, and can even traverse linguistic borders.

Feasting and Wine

St. Martin's Day continues to be celebrated as a festival of new wine and feasting throughout many parts of Europe. This is undoubtedly related to the medieval festivities, and the fact that the feast coincides with the first wine of the season coming to fruition. The bacchanalian excesses of medieval Germany and France were to spread to other areas in later times, and began to be observed in peripheral countries in the later- and post-medieval period amongst the upper classes. The famous Danish scientist, Tycho Brahe describes how on St. Martin's Day in 1573, he provided a Martinmas feast of wine, roast goose and pig to his friends. (Thoren 2001: 75.) A meal of roast goose was the central tenet of a recipe for a feast found in a Danish document, written in German in 1641, which describes the best way to stuff and roast a goose for Martinmas. (Nilsson 1950: 65–80.) Other similar texts from seventeenth-century Denmark also attest to feasting customs at this time. (Beyer 1997.)

Feasting and wine form central elements in how St. Martin's day is celebrated in Slavic countries, who appear to have adopted these customs in recent centuries. Goose and wine are the main aspects of the feast, and in Croatia, it is thought to be a source of shame to be without meat on Martinmas. (Filakovac 1914, as cited in Kis 2004: 209.) Similar themes are to be found in Slovenia, and contemporary customs of baptising new wine and goose feasts occur there on St. Martin's Day. (*Slovenia News*, 12-11-2002, 17.)

Wine festivals were known throughout Italy, where the saint appears in oral tradition as being jovial, and often in a drunken state. (Pitrè 1888: 56.) Spain and Portugal also show drinking and feasting as important features of St. Martin's Day, and roast pig, chestnuts and new wine are the traditional fare of that day. In Portugal, Women's St. Martin Day is observed on 9 or 10 November.

It is celebrated in a similar fashion to the regular feast, with wine and chestnuts, but only women take part in the festivities. License is given to women to drink as much as they desire on this occasion, without the fear of the social stigmatisation normally associated with female overindulgence of alcohol in Portuguese society. (Gallop 1961: 277.) Commercial interests have seen a promotion of Martinmas customs in recent times, most notably in the *Festival do Vinho* in Lisbon, which is a showcase of Portuguese wine that incorporates formal wine-tasting and cultural events.

Animals and Slaughter

Closely related to the notion of feasting and conspicuous consumption is the tradition of the killing of animals for St. Martin's Day. In Germany, survivals of the formerly widespread customs of animal sacrifice can be found, especially in Bohemia and the south, where hens were killed in honour of St. Martin. (Hoffman-Kraye and Bächtold-Stäubli 1932/33: 1709.) The remains were consumed the following day. This is in the wider context of the usual custom of eating goose on the saint's day, a common practice throughout Germany. This traditional *Martinsmahl* (St. Martin's meal) has origins in the medieval period in Germany, with one early example occurring in Cologne in 1571, where Hermann von Weinsberg spoke of it occurring on November 10. (Sankt Martin.) In Thuringia, children often presented their teacher with a live goose, some cakes, and a jug of wine. (Leach 1950: 682.) Elements of St. Martin's role as protector of animals are still to be seen in some regions, especially in Alpine Germany, Austria and Hungary, where St. Martin is considered the protector of shepherds and herdsmen. In Vattis, an icon of St. Martin is covered in a cloak every spring, and strips are torn off for use in protecting cattle against sickness and harm. (Leach 1950: 682.) St. Martin is invoked to protect livestock and pets by the sacrificing of iron effigies of animals. (Nork 1847: 680.) The *Martinsgerte* is a switch of wood that is used to bless and protect cattle that herdsmen bring from house to house on Martinmas, often accompanied by horn-blowing and tumult. (Russ 1982: 75.) The *rommelpott* was a musical instrument used on Martinmas in some regions to accompany such activity, and was used in certain regions on this occasion.¹⁸ St. Martin was once known as a protector of animals in Italy, and in Sicily he was believed to have guarded herds from the evil eye. (Hoffman-Kraye and Bächtold-Stäubli 1932/33: 1708.)

18 For a distribution see Harmjang & Kohr 1943, *loc. cit.*

St. Martin's role as protector of animals has, however, declined in this country recent years. (Polia & Chavéz Hualpa 2002.)

Pigs were slaughtered for Martinmas, (Spicer 1958: 77) a custom known to have occurred in Germany as early as the fifteenth century in Würtzburg. The resulting meat was distributed amongst townsfolk, again bearing witness to an emphasis on sharing and charity in Martinmas tradition.

Blood shed on St. Martin's Day formed a key ingredient in a dish that was served at this time, namely blood soup. *Svartsoppe*, as it is known in Scandinavian countries, remains a key element in Martinmas celebration, and has become a fashionable meal in restaurants, whose commercial interests have seen the promotion of such food into ever expanding markets in rural Sweden even to this day. (Bogle 1986: 183.)

Countries Like Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia appear to have received popular Martinmas traditions in the nineteenth century. In Estonia, it appears that goose was eaten, but this tended to be more of an upper class phenomenon, while the lower classes made do with chickens. (Estonian Foreign Ministry Publications 2000.) This indicates the custom most likely spread from France and Germany in the post-medieval period. Blood cakes and puddings are an element of Estonian and Latvian Martinmas feasts. St. Martin was also seen as having a protective role over animals in Estonia, and in areas like Mulgimaa and Tartumaa in the south of the country, and throughout neighbouring Latvia, cocks were slaughtered and their blood shed in stables for the benefit of horses on 10 November. (Hiimäe 1997.)¹⁹

Southeast Europe also has similar traditions, and the main feast of St. Martin is November 11, or in some cases on November 14, and marks the beginning of Advent.²⁰ In parts of Bulgaria, for instance, it is customary for women, who do not normally perform slaughter, to sacrifice a black cock to the *Mratinyak*, a supernatural creature with feathers and green eyes. (Niko 2005: 11.) The threshold is sprinkled with the blood, as it is thought that this will protect the animal from the *Mratinyak* for the year, and the gizzard was kept for healing purposes.²¹ The head and feet of the animal are hung behind the door, and are thought to keep out evil spirits. This shows remarkable parallels with Irish Martinmas tradition, and may point to the presence of a series

19 These sacrifices were also performed on St. George's Day, and Michaelmas.

20 Again the imagery of St. Martin having control over wolves, and protecting animals, is seen, but whether this is related to tradition surrounding St. Martin of Tours is unclear. St. Martin the Confessor is a well known saint in the Orthodox church. See Mann 1902, 385.

21 Exact parallels for this tradition have been collected from Co. Clare, IFC 675:264.

of practices associated with Martinmas sacrifice that has subsided in other areas. Given that both sets of customs are found on the peripheral areas of Europe, they suggest that similar rites were once known in the heartland areas of France and Germany, and have all but subsided.²²

Taboos on St. Martin's Day

As well as positive aspects of the feast, such as wine, feasting and celebration, there were proscribed activities as well. Millers often observed St. Martin's Day as a rest-day, and a taboo on operating mills at this time subsequently developed. (Provence 1942: 102.) It was thought in some places that if a mill were operated on this day, someone would be killed between the stones.²³ Selling anything, turning any wheels, and sewing, were also forbidden. It was said in Bohemia that if meat was not eaten on St. Martin's day, 'Martin will get his own meat', i.e. a farm animal will die. (John 1905: 208.) Martinmas was seen as a term day, when rent was due, and old agricultural contracts expired and new ones were drawn up. Servants and farm workers were often invited to the feast, which appears to have been inspired by the concepts of charity and equality associated with the medieval feast of St. Martin. The *Martinstaler* (St. Martin's Dollar) is a name given in Germany to payment for the completion of agricultural or servile work, which was due at this time. (Beckert-Huberti 1996: 21.)

Mumming on Martinmas

Martinmas was also a time for mumming activities, most likely related to its occurrence at the threshold of winter. The association of beggars and charity on Martinmas is also likely to have facilitated its role as a time for mumming. The figure of the *Pelzmartin* (Fur/Pelt Martin) was seen on St. Martin's day, and occasionally on St. Nicholas's day, where he fulfilled the role of Krampus or Ruprecht, the more usual assistant to St. Nicholas. He was a mummer-type character, with a black face, and occasionally wearing animal skins. There is a similar figure seen on Martinmas in Bavaria, known as *Wulflausen*, who is wearing wolf skins. Mummers wearing wolf skins first appear in Braunschweig in 1446, (Walsh 1996 b: 653) and may relate to St. Martin's role as protector of herds and master of wolves. The *Pelzmartin* distributed candy and

22 This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 15.

23 *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 12, cited in Hoffmann-Krayer & Bächtold Stäubli, 1932/33: 1712.

nuts, but also was said to distribute punishment to deserving children. (Klein 1998: 281–284.) His role was very similar to that of St. Nicholas, and in this way St. Martin was sometimes associated with the corpus of Christmas lore.²⁴ It appears that in certain areas, St. Nicholas replaced St. Martin as a patron of gift-giving, and adopted legends of converting water into wine, after the rise in popularity of the cult of St. Nicholas in Germany, between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. (Meisen 1931: 60.) This is a clear case of motif attraction between the cult of St. Martin and that of St. Nicholas, and precedents for some of the legends of St. Nicholas can be seen in German Martinian tradition.

Mumming appears to be an important element to Martinmas customs in the Baltic region as well, and mummers were known as *St. Martin's Beggars*. Such mumming customs are inherently linked with beliefs concerning the dead, and songs performed during these processions often spoke of the *Veli*, or Spirits of the Dead, and are related to similar Slavonic songs. (Lintrop 2001: 52.) In Martinmas mumming, the leader of the procession is known as 'Martin Father', while the female leader is 'Catherine Mother'. These characters continue their mumming activity until St. Catherine's day, after which Martin Father does not make an appearance. In some instances, children carried dolls with enlarged genitals, the male doll being called Martin and the female *Kadri*. (Loorits 1957: 92.) Goose mummers are also known, and in some instances they use special rods to beat people, in order to ensure health and well-being, in a similar fashion to the *Martinsgerte*. (Valk 1997.) Riddles were an important part of these proceedings, in both Estonia and Latvia. (Hiimäe 1995: 126.) Mumming traditions around Martinmas are currently enjoying considerable growth in popularity, especially in urban centres. (Tedre 1991: 18.) There is even a growing number of mummer's rhymes being recited in English, and Estonia's ethnic minorities are adopting mumming customs in towns and cities. (Estonian Foreign Ministry Publications 2000.) Estonian immigrants in Lund, Sweden, however, actively discouraged the celebration of Martinmas mumming tradition, in an attempt to integrate into Swedish society. The customs were seen as differentiating the immigrants from native Swedes, and were viewed in a negative light by those Estonians who had grown up in Sweden. As the customs associated with St. Lucia grew in Sweden, Estonian immigrants both consciously and unconsciously allowed them to replace their native traditions. (Kõiva 2001: 109.)

24 See also Meyer E. 1900.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this survey of St. Martin's Day customs, from its earliest manifestation as a solemn celebration of a Christian saint to more recent manifestations in popular folk traditions, there is a wide variety of ways in which it has been observed. The customs have never been static, and the ability of the feast to grow, change and adapt to a range of differing circumstances is not only a testament to its versatility, but is also a key factor in ensuring its continuing expansion and significance in the folk calendar of various parts of Europe. Of perhaps greatest significance to the current study of Irish Martinmas customs are elements of the medieval Martinmas festivities, which involved the slaughter of animals, and the shedding of blood. Notions of aristocratic celebrations of meat and plenty were abundant in the middle ages, particularly in France, Germany and England, and there is evidence that this may have been the case in Ireland as well.

Several areas show signs of a more ritualistic approach to shedding animal blood. This is evident in the folk traditions of southeast Europe, where fowl was killed in honour of St. Martin, and blood or feathers were placed on the doorway as a form of protection for animals and humans. Other customs in Alpine regions demonstrate a concern with the protection of cattle during seasonal transhumance movements, and St. Martin was clearly viewed as a protector of herds in this regard. The focus will now turn to the popular manifestation of the feast-day in Ireland, where certain parallels in custom, belief and practice can be seen.

2. The Insular Tradition

Consideration will now be given to the early history of St. Martin's cult in Britain and Ireland, in order to determine the origin of Martinian devotion in this part of Europe. The ecclesiastical sources are necessarily rich on the subject of veneration of the saint, documenting his popularity amongst the churchmen of Britain and Ireland from a very early time. One of the earliest English sources that mentions St. Martin is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, where he refers to a church dedicated to St. Martin in the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. Much debate has ensued as to the date of the establishment of this church, (see Macquarrie 1918: 129–133) which was known as *Candida Casa*, and was under the rule of St. Ninian. It appears that the association of St. Martin with St. Ninian, and the subsequent association of *Candida Casa* with St. Martin, occurred before the Anglian takeover of the Episcopal See, and most are agreed that this occurred in the sixth century.¹ Some later writings, namely Ailred's twelfth century *Vita Niniani*, directly associated St Ninian with St. Martin, and claimed that Ninian had visited the saint at Tours, and was his disciple. Due to chronological difficulties, however, this claim has been refuted, and is now considered a later fabrication. It is noteworthy that the earlier account of Bede, despite associating St. Martin with some of the earliest Roman missionaries, (Macquarrie 1918: 64) does not mention St. Ninian in this context. More recent study suggests that the popularity of the *Vita Martini*, and the esteem in which St. Martin was held in the early church, led to medieval writers inventing an association between the saints, in order to raise the status of St. Ninian. (Grosjean 1958: 357.)

The feast of Martinmas is recorded in the eighth-century Calendar of St. Willibrord on 11 November. (Wilson 1918: 13.) It is clear that certain hagiographical works of the early Anglo-Saxon church are based on various versions of the life of St. Martin by writers such as Sulpicius Severus (Roberts 1894), Fortunatis (Lapidge 1996: 399) and Gregory of Tours. (Van Dam 1993: 153–317.)

1 For discussion, see Orr Anderson 1948, 25–47.

One such example is Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, which shows considerable influence from these authors. (Coates 1995: 219–32.) Stephanus's eighth-century *Vita Wilfridi* can also be seen in a similar light. (Eddius Stephanus 1927.) Aelfric, the tenth century Abbot of Eynsham, compiled a *Life of St. Martin*. It was primarily based on Severus's version, but omitted many details of St. Martin's humility and servility, in order not to compromise the power enjoyed by late Anglo-Saxon bishops. (See Gerould 1925: 206–210.) Martinian influence on literature of this time, therefore, was clearly great. Devotion to St. Martin continued under the influence of the Anglo-Normans, when new churches dedicated to his name were established, with prominent examples being seen at Eynsford and Chelsfield, (Donaldson 1980: 139) Castle St. Martin in Pembrokeshire, and Combe St. Martin in Devon. (Wilson 1918: 138.)²

Ireland

Michael Richter has proposed that a knowledge of the Cult of St. Martin entered Ireland with some of its very first Christians. He states that the Palladian mission of 431 AD, the very first Christian evangelism on record for Ireland, was the likely conduit where the writings of Sulpicius Severus became known amongst the Irish. (Richter 1999: 225–230.) There is no direct evidence for Martinian devotion in the following century, but in the seventh century, a monk named Adomnán of Iona wrote the *Vita Columbae*, or *Life of St. Columba*. It records an instance of Columba commemorating St. Martin during a mass.³ It's not clear if this example refers to seventh-century practice known to Adomnán, or if it is genuine historical tradition contemporary with the life of St. Columba, thereby giving evidence for a sixth-century practice. Whatever the case, the story provides a *terminus ante quem* of the late sixth century. Michael Lapidge (1990: 240–251) has identified a Hiberno-Latin hymn in honour of St. Martin as dating to the seventh century, in which pilgrims coming to visit his shrine at Tours invoke the saint's protection against shipwrecks.⁴ The case for an early knowledge of St. Martin is further evidenced by a poem, dated linguistically to the seventh century, which mentions the instance from the *Vita Martini* where St. Martin divides his cloak

2 See also Wilson's citing of Arnold Forster's listing of 158 British churches dedicated to St. Martin, 136.

3 Adomnán of Iona, *Vita Columbae*, Chapter 12. See Fowler 1894. See also Anderson 1992, 488 ff.

4 See also Howlett 1995, 183–186.

with a beggar. (Carney 1983: 33.) The motif of St. Martin dividing his cloak became part of Irish folk tradition, and as will be explained in later chapters, entered into oral narrative, and survived in this context down to recent times.

During the eighth and ninth centuries, it appears the church began to consider St. Martin as a kind of national apostle amongst the Irish, alongside the native saints. (Kenney 1997: 665.) In early medieval Ireland, the monastic community associated with a particular saint was known as a *familia*, and the *familiae* of both St. Patrick and St. Columba, widely considered to be the most important of the period, promoted St. Martin through literary works. The Book of Armagh, produced by devotees of St. Patrick in the ninth century, contains the only Latin version of the *Vita Martini* from Early Medieval Ireland. (See Gwynn 1913.) The ninth-century *Vita Tripartita Sancti Patricii*, or the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick, mentions St. Martin, and even claims that he and St. Patrick were related. The text states that Patrick's mother was 'siúr do Mártin', meaning a sister or niece of St. Martin. The relationship between the two is repeated in a tenth-century account of St. Patrick by Probus. This connection is now considered to be a later fabrication, to raise the profile of the Irish saint. (Wilson 1983: 37.)

The so-called 'Gospel Book of St. Martin' was a relic of great importance in early Ireland. According to tradition, St. Columba took it from the breast pocket of St. Martin as he lay in his tomb, and brought it back with him to Derry. (Cooke 1888: 54.) In other versions of its origin story, St. Senan of Scattery Island, Co. Clare, is credited with acquiring the book from St. Martin's corpse. (Stokes 1890: 62.) This association involving St. Senan and St. Martin is thought to originate in a now-lost Life of St. Senan, written in the monastery on Scattery Island some time before the tenth century. (Kenney 1997: 364–5.) The *familiae* of other early Irish saints made links between their founders and Martin of Tours. Events from the Life of Columbanus outline a journey made by the Irish saint to Tours and devotions he made there at the tomb of St. Martin.⁵ Manuscripts such as the Stowe Missal, written circa 800, make reference to St. Martin, and place him high in the ascendancy of saints, even before St. Patrick. This text contains a prayer asking St. Martin to protect the common people. (Gwynn 1916.)

The ninth-century *Féilire Oengusso*, or Martyrology of Oengus, mentions three dates associated with St. Martin of Tours. The fourth of June is given as the date for the translation of Martin's relics, the fourth of July commemorates the date of Martin's ordination as Bishop of Tours, and the eleventh of November is given as the date of the saint's death. (Stokes 1905: 234.) He is specifically

5 For further reading see Lapidge 1997.

mentioned in a military role, where the text describes “Martin, a soldier of battle, a troop of the high saints of the world.” (Stokes 1905: 273.) The portrayal of St. Martin as a military figure is important in this context, because it went on to affect how he was perceived in the folk tradition of Europe in the medieval period. This will be discussed in further detail below. It is likely that St. Martin was held in high esteem by the ascetic monastic community known as the *Céile Dé*, given the amount of times he is mentioned by Oengus, a prominent member of this group.

The promotion of the ascetic eremitic lifestyle in Western Europe is popularly attributed to St. Martin, and he is especially noted for being one of the first Christian clerics to combine the roles of bishop, hermit and evangelist. (Wilson 1983: 141.) This was of particular significance to Ireland and Britain, where a monastic model of Christianity was an important part of the religious establishment in the early medieval period, (Mayr-Harting 1972: 36) and the combined role of abbot and bishop was one of both religious and political influence. (Charles-Edwards 2000: 274.) The monastic movement helped shape the religious, social and political landscape of Britain and Ireland of the time.⁶ St. Martin of Tours, a founder figure of western monasticism, was undoubtedly thought of as having been central to this development.

The following centuries saw the continuing development of the Cult of St. Martin in Ireland, particularly in the northern half of the country, amongst the Patrician and Columban *Familiae*. (Herbert 1988: 202.) Translations of the Life of St. Martin into Middle Irish show an ongoing interest in the French saint, and were part of his liturgical veneration. (Stokes 1875: 385.) A series of homilies on the subject of St. Martin was composed around this time. They appear to have been created to promote the church reforms that were taking place contemporaneously, and stories from the life of St. Martin were used to set an example, and to encourage a revival of monastic learning. (Herbert 1988: 202.) Juliet Hewish (2005: 213), in an unpublished thesis on the medieval Irish versions of the *Vita Martini*, suggests that these homilies were read out to those attending mass on the feast of the saint, which implies knowledge of the Life of St. Martin amongst the laity. One homily, contained in the medieval manuscript known as *An Lebhar Breac*, speaks of the healing power of St. Martin as follows:

Such was the amount of grace that God bestowed on St. Martin, that were anyone in tribulation, if he touched the mould or the rushes whereon Martin had spat, he was healed forthwith. Were anyone in danger of sea or land, if only he remembered Martin he was helped quickly. Were anyone

6 For further information, see Charles-Edwards 2000, 271–281.

demoniacally possessed in his finger or his neck, if a hair of his (Martin's) raiment was put around it he was healed rapidly. (Stokes 1875: 401.)

That St. Martin was seen in medieval Ireland as a healer, and a protector of those at sea is of great significance, for he was depicted in these roles in a very prominent way in the recent folk tradition of Ireland. Legends abound in Irish folklore mentioning St. Martin as healing or preventing sickness. Another Middle Irish text, a variant copy of the homily mentioned above, recalls an incident from the *Vita Martini*, whereby St. Martin exorcises a demon from a cow.⁷ Given the amount of later folk material relating to St. Martin as a protector of cattle, it may be of some significance to see the saint in this role at such an early date. The twelfth-century *Féilire hUí Gormáin*, or Martyrology of O'Gorman, mentions the Feast of St. Martin being celebrated as an octave, that is, from November 11–18. (Stokes 1895: 221.)

There are fewer references to the celebration of St. Martin's Day, particularly by the laity, in the high medieval period. The majority of references to it in this era identify it as a fair day, or a day upon which rents should be paid. It is likely that the linking of St. Martin's Day with fairs and commerce was a custom that had begun with the Norman invasion of Ireland. The more usual reckoning of time before this period seems to have seen great autumn assemblies held at *Samhain*,⁸ and Martinmas fairs begin to appear in the thirteenth century, in areas under control of the Anglo-Norman regime. For example, in the year 1245, Geoffrey de Turville, bishop of Ossory and former Lord Chancellor of Ireland, obtained a royal grant for an annual fair in Clonmore, Co. Carlow. The fair was held 'on the day of St. Martin and 7 following days,' (Carrigan 1905: 148) referring to the Octave of St. Martin. Another such fair, held at Limerick throughout the Octave of St. Martin, was granted permission in 1204. (Lennon 1988: 61.) Quarterly assizes began to be held in areas under English rule in Ireland from the thirteenth century, and one of the four quarter-days on which court was in session was the Feast of St. Martin. (Mac Ivor 1960/1961: 77.) The importance of November 11 as an administrative and economic occasion appears to have increased greatly under English rule, and in all likelihood began to eclipse the importance of the older feast of Samhain in areas outside Gaelic rule. The process of the shift in emphasis away from the older Samhain to Martinmas as the end of the summer period is one that

7 The tract is anonymous, and appears in Dublin, King's Inns Library, MS 10. See de Brún 1972.

8 Perhaps the most famous of these assemblies was that reputed to have taken place at Tara, and there are many other instances from medieval literature of assemblies taking place at this time. See Hutton 1996, 361.

seems to have continued throughout the medieval period, and one that would have significant effects on how the feast was celebrated in the post-medieval period.

From the earliest documents it is evident that St. Martin was held in high esteem in the Irish church, despite the apparent paucity of dedications of churches to St. Martin in Ireland, when compared to countries such as France. Irish churches in the medieval period were almost exclusively named after their founders or local saints, which goes some way towards explaining this apparent disparity. There are, however, several place names that point towards Martinian dedications in early Ireland. There exists a Templemartin townland in the barony of Gowran, Co. Kilkenny,⁹ and another in Kinalmeaky parish in Co. Cork.¹⁰ A third can be found in Dunkellin, Co. Galway.¹¹ There are Irish townlands named Kilmartin, one in Clandonough, Co. Laois, and the other in Castleknock, Co. Dublin. Desertmartin is a parish in Co. Derry, whose name means ‘Martin’s Fasting Place’, and likely dates back to the early medieval period. (Mooney 1946: 72.) In recent oral tradition, it was said to have been founded by St. Martin himself.¹² A church was founded in Dublin in the twelfth century, (Gwynn 1966: 363) although it was closed by 1341. (Clarke 2000: 18.) Another church was dedicated to the saint in thirteenth-century Wexford. There are ruins of a church at Ardkilmartin, Co. Limerick, which was dedicated to Martin of Tours on November 11, 1410. (Begley 1906: 258.)

The first mention in Irish tradition that associates St. Martin’s Day with the possible killing of animals comes in the form of an account of a lawsuit from the early fourteenth century. The following is a description of the case, from John Begley’s *The Diocese of Limerick, Ancient and Medieval*:

In 1290 a lawsuit was carried on between Thomas le Chapeleyn, Guardian of the house of St. Senan of Iniscatha (Scattery Island), and Benedict, Prior of St. Mary’s House, Rathkeale. 1307. Hugh, son of Elinor Purcell, was sued by the Prior of this house for not fulfilling the grant made to the monastery by his mother. Hugh pleaded that his mother made the grant after settling the manor on the heir. The Prior rejoined that after Elinor’s death John the Prior was put into possession of the charity by Hugh who ratified his mother’s deed. The lawsuit ended in a compromise,

9 This name is recorded since at least 1300 AD. See Carrigan 1905: 368.

10 Earliest records of this name date to 1625 AD. See O’Hanlon 185: 71.

11 First mentioned in the manuscript *Leabhar Buidhe Lecan*, by Mac Firbisigh in 1391.

12 Full information can be found in Mawhinny 1992. The site is known from at least 1397, when it was mentioned in Primate Colton’s visitation to Derry. See Reeves 1850: 83.

Hugh agreeing to give to the Prior yearly in lieu of the grant 2 crannogs of bread-corn, and three crannogs of oats, on the feast of St. Michael, and four porks on the feast of St. Martin, for ever. (Begley 1906: 366.)

Hugh Purcell, an Anglo-Norman lord, paid a yearly tribute to St. Mary's Priory, in the form of pigs. It is not clear if the animals were to be offered for slaughter in this instance, but it seems very likely. There is an account in the fifteenth century work *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* which mentions an incident that gives another indication of animals being killed for St. Martin in Ireland. (*Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*.) The manuscript dates from sometime around 1440, and was written in Connacht, possibly Co. Roscommon. The incident is outlined as follows:

Some of St. Patrick's monks were threshing corn on St. Martin's Eve, when a prior came up driving oxen to the church (as an offering in honour of St. Martin), among them a vicious bull. "You are giving the ground a good threshing," says the prior. "What if we threshed your bull?" they ask. "You may," says he, so they threshed the bull with their flails till they killed him: hence the saying Martin's bull." Ends. (Gwynn 1906-7: 20.)

There is a clear indication of animals being offered to the church in honour of St. Martin. Whether this was as some kind of tribute or rent due to the church at the end of a term which expired on St. Martin's Day is not mentioned, although it is likely. Neither is it obvious that the oxen are being offered for slaughter, but it is strongly suggested by the killing of the vicious bull. Of no small significance is the motif of threshing at the feast of St. Martin, as his associations with corn, threshing and milling are to the fore in later oral tradition. The feast is portrayed as falling at the harvest time. Also prominent in the story is the link between devotion to St. Martin and monks dedicated to St. Patrick. The association of the two saints became widespread amongst church and laity throughout the medieval and modern period. The next major mention of St. Martin's Day comes from a sixteenth-century version of the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*. (Stokes 1887: 560.) It more obviously outlines that pigs were killed for the feast, and is the first undisputed reference to the custom in Irish tradition. The quote goes as follows:

The tale of the Martinmas pig here below. Martin, it is he that conferred a monk's tonsure on Patrick: wherefore Patrick gave a pig for every monk and every nun to Martin on the eve of Martin's feast, and killing it in honour of Martin and giving it to his community if they should come for it. And from that to this, on the eve of Martin's feast, every one kills a pig though he be not a monk of Patrick.

The ultimate etymology of the word *lupait* is not clear, but it has been glossed in an Early Irish law text as a ‘*banb samhna*’, or young pig of November. (Kelly 1997: 85ff.) Another part of the same text, namely a glossary compiled by Dónal O Davoren, mentions the word *lupait*, and describes it as follows: ‘Lupait is said to be the name of the pig that is killed on Martin’s feast, and my opinion is that it is given to the lord.’ (Stokes 1887: 501.) The glossary entry suggests that people bestowed the pigs upon their lord, probably as tribute or rent. The text in which the reference to killing pigs appears was written in Park, Co. Galway in 1569, although it may have been compiled by a Brehon lawyer from Co. Clare, and ultimately copied from an earlier Galway original. (Costello 1940: 92.)

The medieval sources provide a clear picture of widespread reverence for the saint, in an ecclesiastical setting at least, from the earliest era of Christianity in Ireland. St. Martin was highly influential in literary tradition, and was highly regarded by Irish scholars and churchmen. The relationship between the official church veneration of St. Martin and the folk tradition is not known, due to the absence of material relating to how his feast was celebrated by the laity, although many later legends relating to the saint show influence from medieval hagiography. Legends regarding St. Martin do, on many occasions, bear witness to influence from stories relating to native saints, and ultimately betray a literary source. Consideration of these narratives will be made later in this study, in order to elucidate the relationship between literary and oral tradition, and to establish the origins of numerous legends relating to St. Martin. Consideration must now be given to sources from the modern period that relate to St. Martin’s cult, and in particular those relating to the folk traditions and beliefs surrounding the feast of Martinmas.

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Sources

The next significant body of information that must be assessed comes from the work of academics, antiquarians, and folklorists that were taking an increasing interest in Irish customs and oral traditions in the nineteenth century. At this time, there was a growing recognition of folklore as an area of interest to creative writers and scholars of Irish culture. Some of the information from this period comes by way of surveys, which were undertaken to gain certain information about the country, but occasionally recorded examples of folklore.

A valuable source in this regard is William Shaw Mason’s *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland*, which was compiled between 1814 and 1819. Mason was a statistician, and a member of the Protestant clergy, and was

often hostile towards examples of what he deemed ‘silly and absurd ceremonies’ when assessing the traditional Catholic folk customs. (Mason 1814–19: 116.) Despite his ambiguities, he provides a series of descriptions of St. Martin’s Day customs from around the country. He describes St. Peter’s Parish in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, where rich people slaughtered cows, or sheep, while poorer people resorted to fowl. The blood thus drawn was sprinkled on the threshold in order to ‘exclude every kind of evil spirit from the dwelling where the sacrifice is made till the return of the same day the following year.’ (Mason 1814–19: 75.) Mention is made of Kilrush Parish, in Co. Clare, where meat was consumed at Martinmas. (Mason 1814–19: 452.) For Tintern in Co. Wexford, as well as the usual customs of killing fowl, mention is made of a holy well where people performed pilgrimages to St. Martin, and held a fair on his feast-day. He also mentions the fact that people would avoid spinning or weaving on that day. (Mason 1814–19: 491.) Finally, the Parish of Rathcline in Co. Longford also held pilgrimages to a well dedicated to St. Martin. (Mason 1814–19: 291.)

Another valuable nineteenth century source emerges from the work of the Ordnance Survey in Ireland. The British administration at the time wished to thoroughly survey the entire country of Ireland, and produce a series of maps, for the purpose of facilitating a uniform valuation of land for taxation purposes. This began in 1824 with the work of Thomas Colby and a team of military engineers. As part of the overall project, civil servants were also recruited to sketch, draw and record features and sites of importance in the local landscape. Memoirs and letters resulting from this work often describe sites of local veneration throughout the country, and several of these mention St. Martin’s Day customs.¹³ For example, the accounts from Waterford describe patterns¹⁴ performed at St. Martin’s Well at Castlecraddock, in Dunhill Parish, Co. Waterford. (O’Donovan 1929: 3.) Another example can be found in letters relating to Co. Clare, where a well at Clarefield was the site of Martinian devotion.¹⁵ In general, the references to customs were restricted to that of devotion at holy wells.

An exceptional example of a primary source from the nineteenth century comes in the form of the diary of Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin, a native of Kerry

13 For a general discussion of the value of Ordnance Survey material to the study of folklore in Ireland, see Gailey 1982: 150–64

14 These were events of annual pilgrimage, on the feast-day of the ‘pattern’ or patron saint, to whom the well was dedicated.

15 Wells were identified in Ballynacally, Moyarta and Lemanagh. Westropp 1911: 203–213, 210.

who spent most of his life in Callan, Co. Kilkenny. Ó Súilleabháin mentions the feast of St. Martin, stating that spinning wheels must not be turned, nor milling undertaken, and that ploughmen would not do their work on that day. He also mentions that St. Martin was killed in a mill. (De Bhaldraithe 1980: 50.) He further states that he does not know what the meaning behind these customs was. This account is unusual at this time in that it represents a view of the customs from the insider's perspective, since most of the other nineteenth-century sources were compiled by people from outside the culture of rural Catholic Ireland.

Writers of this period began to draw on folk tradition for inspiration, and works such as Patrick Kennedy's *Holland Tide, or Munster Popular Tales* (1827: 275–6) and *Fireside Stories of Ireland* (1870: 157–8), give accounts of St. Martin's Day traditions. Jeremiah Curtin, another esteemed collector of folklore from the nineteenth century, recorded a series of legends associated with Martinmas in his 1895 work *Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World* (1895: 72–80, 110–120). These also provide accounts of folk beliefs and customs related to the feast, and will be examined below, alongside the material from the National Folklore Collection.

Aristocratic antiquarians such as William Wilde showed an interest in Irish customs at this time. He gave a brief description of how cocks were killed for St. Martin in 1854, although he does not give an exact location of where in Ireland this took place. (Wilde 1854: 127.) He also mentions that St. Martin was believed to have been a miller, and that 'in ancient times' wealthy families slaughtered pigs and divided the meat amongst the poor. (Wilde 1854: 127.) In another work, he mentions that the practice of killing cocks for St. Martin had declined in parts of Connaught, even in the mid nineteenth century.¹⁶ His wife, Lady Jane Wilde, continued researching in this vein after his death, and published material in the early twentieth century that contained detailed descriptions of Martinmas customs. (Wilde 1902: 141, 180.) In these accounts, it is stated that people would kill black cocks or geese in honour of St. Martin, spread the blood at the doorstep or the four corners of the house, and donate meat to beggars. The reason for the customs was said to be to protect the house from supernatural forces and evil. It is also described how people would abstain from milling, spinning and turning wheels. (Wilde 1902: 141, 180.) Wilde also provides an example of a legend concerning St. Martin, where he is rebuked for meanness when an angel visited him disguised as a beggar. The concept of

16 These accounts were originally published in periodicals in the mid nineteenth century, and compiled in a posthumously-published book. See Wilde 1900: 15.

charity was intimately tied up with Martinmas traditions and legends, as will become clear later in this study.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, we can see an emergence of scholarly analysis of Irish folk custom. Formal studies on the subject of ethnology and folklore were undertaken, and are a valuable source of contemporary practice from this time. No longer satisfied to simply document traditions as mere curiosities, attempts were made by scholars to interpret traditions, or at least contextualize them, usually by comparison with other cultures. In an article from 1890, David Fitzgerald provides an account of an international folktale that uses the motif of reward for sacrifice offered on St. Martin's Day as a plot device at the beginning of the story. (Fitzgerald 1890: 605–11.) Another article by the same author in 1891 describes how people in Galway believed blood must be shed on St. Martin's Day, and goes so far as to say that nine roosters were offered in some instances. (Fitzgerald 1891: 195.) It also mentions that geese were killed in Limerick for the occasion, and refers to an incident where a young man from Nicker parish in that same county was suffering from convulsions on St. Martin's Day, and was cured when a goose was slain at the doorstep.¹⁷ Brief mention is made of beliefs surrounding St. Martin, such as the Co. Westmeath idea of him being killed in a mill, or the Co. Limerick idea that he was slain and served as a meat dish to Jesus and his disciples. (Fitzgerald 1891: 197.) A version of a popular legend in relation to St. Martin is also provided, saying that its origin was Co. Wexford. It speaks of fishermen going out to sea on November 11, despite a taboo on fishing on this day, and how they were saved from drowning for showing piety towards the saint after he miraculously appeared on the ocean. (Fitzgerald 1891: 200.) All of this material is compared to other examples of continental European folklore, and in some cases ancient Biblical material, in an attempt to explain their origins.

Other scholarly examinations of Martinmas from the end of the nineteenth century provide information on Irish customs and beliefs. Ellen Powell Thompson published a paper in *The Journal of American Folklore* in 1893 that outlines familial traditions from Co. Roscommon of black roosters being killed, and blood being shed in the corners of the house. (Powell Thompson 1893.) Another academic study, written by James Mooney and published in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, recounts killing for St. Martin, and how in both Ireland and England this was a day when people abstained from weaving or turning wheels. It also provides examples of legends concerning people who are reluctant to sacrifice for the saint, and again

17 The origin of the belief in St. Martin's ability to cure epilepsy may lie in several passages from the *Vita Martini*. See Brown 1985: 727–29, 729.

the theme of generosity and obedience to tradition feature heavily. It states that people believed they would suffer at the hands of St. Martin if they failed to shed blood on the eve of his feast. In some cases, those too poor to kill an animal would shed their own blood. (Mooney 1889.)

Alongside the rise in scholarly interest in folklore, the twentieth century saw a similar development in the study and promotion of the Irish language.¹⁸ *Conradh na Gaeilge*, or the Gaelic League, was founded in 1893, and its first president, Dubhghlas de hÍde, was an avid and diligent collector of traditional oral narrative in the Irish language, especially in Connacht. His 1906 publication *Religious Songs of Connaught* contains a very developed example of a religious tale relating to St. Martin of Tours as a miller, who once again fails to show proper hospitality towards a holy visitor, this time Jesus. Another publication from the Gaelic League, the bilingual newspaper *Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Lae*, contains a long folktale relating to St. Martin's Day, published in 1901. ('The Rise of Conn Among the Goats' 1901:2.) M. Mac Craith mentions a saying from Kilkenny relating Samhain to St. Martin's Day in a 1911 edition of *An Claidheamh Soluis*.¹⁹

The twentieth century saw a dramatic increase in source material relating to St. Martin. Continuing the process of the Gaelic revival, and in particular with the growth of nationalism in Ireland and the eventual creation of the Irish Free State, more publications in the Irish language, or focusing on Gaelic culture, can be seen. *An Stoc*, an Irish language newspaper published in the 1920s by academics from University College Galway, printed a number of articles describing St. Martin's Day customs and legends.²⁰

The founding of the Folklore of Ireland Society, and the establishment of its resultant periodical *Béaloides* in 1927, emerged from a concerted effort towards systematic collection and analysis of Irish folklore. It was to prove a valuable primary source for material on St. Martin's Day, with articles mentioning folk beliefs and legends appearing regularly over the early years of publication.²¹ A tremendous boost in collection, however, came about as a result of the commencement of the Irish Folklore Institute in 1930, and its

18 For a discussion see Ó Giolláin 2000.

19 'Naoi n-oidhche agus oidhche gan áireamh, ó oidhche 'él Shamhan (soon) 'tí oidhche 'él Mhártain.' Nine nights and a night without counting, from the night of Samhain to the night of St. Martin.

20 See *An Stoc* 3, no. 12 (March 1927) 6. See also *An Stoc* 5, no. 3, (November 1928) and *An Stoc* 6, no. 3 (November 1929).

21 Six articles containing references to St. Martin appeared in the first twelve issues. These accounts mainly focus on tradition from Counties Clare and Galway, and were published between 1934 and 1941.

successor, the Irish Folklore Commission. It is through the work of the Commission, which continued until 1971, when it became the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin, that the vast majority of the National Folklore Collection was compiled. (See Almqvist 1977: 197.) Collection continues to this day under the auspices of the UCD Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore at University College Dublin. It is information from this collection that forms the vast majority of primary source material for the current study, as mentioned in the introduction.

The rest of the twentieth century saw the continuation of published material on the matter, some being minor points of information or casual mentions, and others being more comprehensive accounts. Two works in particular are of importance to the understanding of Martinian tradition in Ireland. The first is by Henry Morris, and was published in the 1939 issue of *Béaloides*. (Morris 1939.) It utilizes source material from many of the publications mentioned above, and is an attempt at understanding the nature of the tradition, with some historical contextualisation. The material collected during the Schools' Folklore Scheme, and the results of the St. Martin's Day Questionnaire were not included by Morris, as many had not been returned at that time, and certainly none had been systematically processed. The second major work on the subject comes from Seán Ó Súilleabháin, archivist with the Irish Folklore Commission, whose study, 'The Feast of St. Martin in Ireland', was published in a collection of essays by Indiana University Press. (Ó Súilleabháin 1957.) This essay was an overview of the material from the St. Martin's Day questionnaire, and offered preliminary findings. It outlined the nature of the feast and customs in Ireland, and gave summaries of common legends and folktales associated with the saint. Ó Súilleabháin posited tentative theories on the origins of aspects of the feast, some of which have been examined by the author elsewhere. (Mag Fhloinn 2005.) Ó Súilleabháin's article was to prove influential in the decision to undertake the current study, providing as it did a glimpse into the wealth of material contained in the National Folklore Collection, and may be considered its starting point.

3. Killing for St. Martin

The question of where customs connected with St. Martin's Day were practised is one that has been raised on a number of occasions in the past. Seán Ó Súilleabháin was probably the first to directly address the question in his 1957 article on Martinmas customs. (Ó Súilleabháin 1957.) He made the observation that the practice of shedding blood on behalf of the saint, perhaps the most central tenet of the feast in folk tradition, appears to be present in many parts of the country, but conspicuously absent from the south of Co. Kerry and most of Co. Cork, and largely absent from most of Ulster and northeast Leinster.

The point was again raised by Caoimhín Ó Danachair in an article on distributions in Irish folk life. (Ó Danachair 1957: 122.) He published a small map, indicating the lack of positive questionnaire responses from southwest Munster, north Leinster and practically all of Ulster. He discussed various factors that may contribute to such distributions, including geographical environment, social and economic factors at community and individual levels, and migration trends. He also discussed the fact that many of the customs (and the celebration of St. Martin's Day must be included in this regard) are widespread throughout Western Europe, and part of larger distribution patterns. Beliefs, narratives and ritual ideas weigh nothing, and can travel vast distances.

During archival research, an anonymous map was discovered in the National Folklore Collection by Criostóir Mac Cárthaigh (See Figure 1). It documents the distribution of the custom of killing for St. Martin, and was likely to have been produced by Caoimhín Ó Danachair some time before 1957.¹ It very clearly shows the same pattern, along with a distribution and frequency of negative responses. Again, the paucity of replies can be seen from Ulster, but it seems likely that most would have been negative, if more extensive fieldwork or questionnaire work had been undertaken in this area. Before

1 The reasoning for this date as a *terminus ante quem* is the discussion of the distribution in Seán Ó Súilleabháin's article, cited above.

this map was discovered, a digital map was created for this current work by the author, based on material from the Main Manuscripts Collection, the Martinmas Questionnaire, and the Schools' Collection (See Figure 2). This map outlined not only the custom of killing associated with the saint, but also included wells dedicated to St. Martin, or oral narratives associated with the saint. It is reassuring to note that the distribution compares very favourably with that published by Ó Danachair, with the two showing very similar patterns. One point of difference, perhaps, might be the material from Co. Kerry. Ó Danachair delineated most of south Kerry as an area where killing for St. Martin does not take place. Responses that came from the baronies of Iveragh, Magunihy and Clanmaurice indicated that the custom was known, albeit to a much lesser extent, than in north Kerry. Of significance, perhaps, are the responses from Glenarought, Dunkerron North, and Dunkerron South, all of which were negative. This represents the southernmost part of Co. Kerry, where the tradition genuinely seems to be absent, but almost all other parts of the county show that the custom was known, to a greater or lesser extent.

The material from Co. Cork is largely in agreement with Ó Danachair's patterns. Although 54 archive records come from Co. Cork, only six of these mention the custom of killing. Three come from the barony of Barrymore, which is close to Co. Waterford, an area in which the custom was well known.² The other three come from Duhallow, an area that borders north-Co. Kerry and west-Co. Limerick, where the customs were also practised.³ Other material from Co. Cork that were not explicitly negative responses generally contain miscellaneous information, such as placenames containing the element 'Martin,'⁴ but do not otherwise show any significant knowledge of Martinmas traditions.

This pattern was discussed by Máire Mac Néill in her study on Lughnasa traditions in Ireland, where she noticed that the distribution of customs associated with the old harvest festival coincided closely with that of Martinmas traditions in Ireland. She stated that the Feast of St. Martin had retained vestiges of some older, pre-Christian religion, and that there was some connection between this and the traditions surrounding those of Lughnasa, although no explanation was posited for either distribution by Mac Neill (1962: 33). The question is a difficult one, but several factors relating to distribution will be discussed in the course of the current study.⁵

2 NFC 676: 29, NFC 676: 37, NFC 676: 53.

3 NFC 676: 251, 676: 228, NFC 676:255.

4 NFC 676: 120, NFC 676: 241.

5 See Chapter 16.

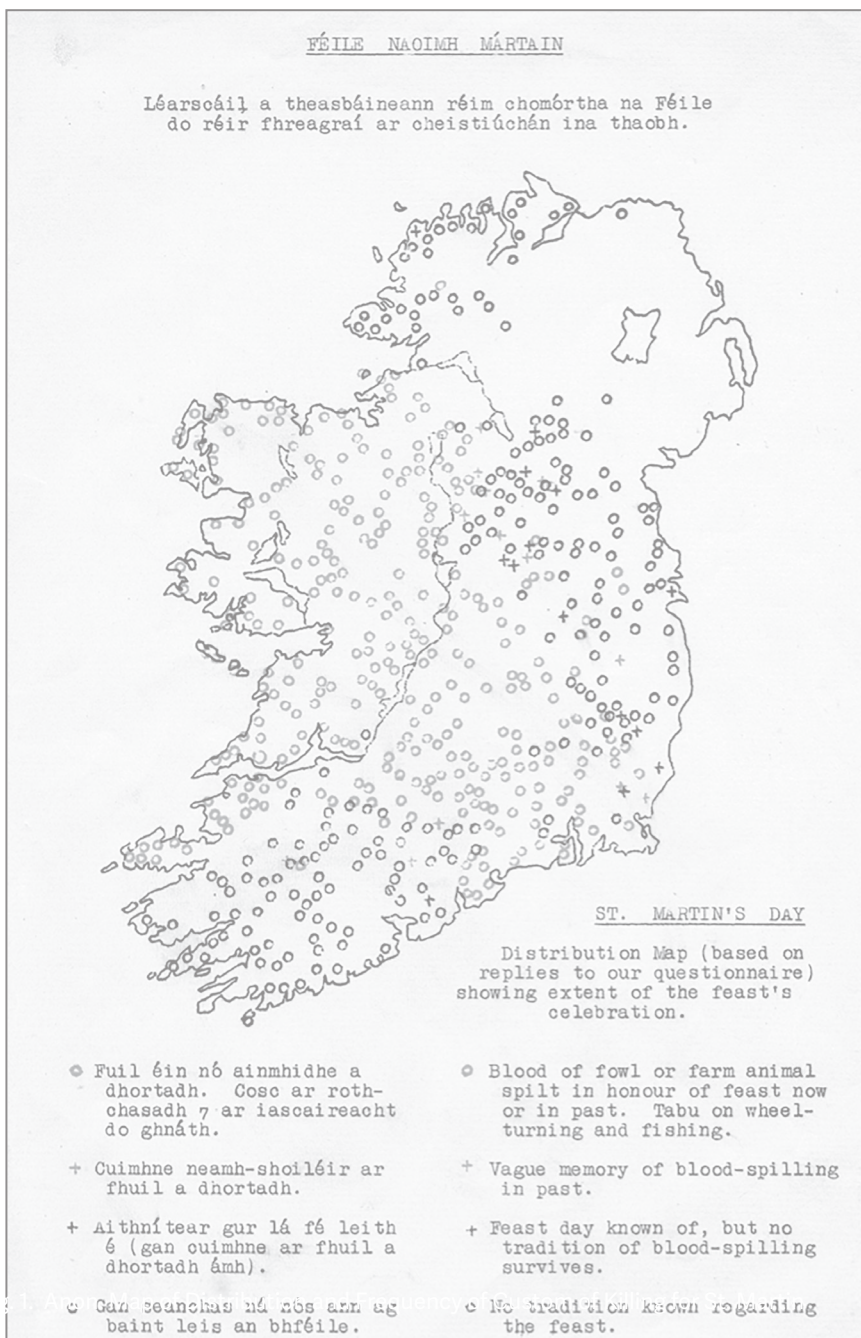


Figure 1 – Anonymous Map (but probably compiled by Caoimhín Ó Danachair) of Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Killing for St. Martin

Killing for St. Martin

The custom of killing animals or fowl for St. Martin is frequently considered the most important element of the feast. It is one of the primary criteria in determining whether the folk traditions of the saint are present in an area, and was used as such in Caoimhín Ó Danachair's preliminary investigation into the subject. (Ó Danachair 1957: 122.) It formed one of the main avenues of enquiry in the 1939 questionnaire, with no less than twelve questions dedicated to the subject.⁶ It is apparent that a thorough investigation of the practice is required, and will be undertaken according to a range of different criteria, in order to understand not only what was done, but why it was done, and what people believed to be the potential consequences if they did not undertake to do it before the saint's feast-day.

In Máire MacNéill's seminal work on calendar custom *The Festival of Lughnasa*, she makes the following statement: "Customs which have survived in connection with Samhain, St. Brigid's Feast and Bealtaine are of a kind which can be performed in or near the dwelling-place. The social unit taking part is the household or, at most, the youth of a townland". (MacNéill 1962: 12.)⁷ This bears repeating once again, as we see similar patterns in the rites of killing, given they are primarily domestic, and usually involved family members and those in the home. The main motivation seems to have been for prophylaxis or protection, sometimes as much to avoid the wrath of a vengeful saint as any concerns for pleasing him, or obedience to tradition. The theme of the house and its thresholds and boundaries is to the fore, throughout, and represents a significant element in the overall meaning of the practice. The concern is with delineating domestic space, and that of the farm animals, in many instances. The animals appear to be of near-equal importance in the interests of informants, many of whom were rural agricultural people. This is unsurprising, since the well-being of the herds, the plough horse and the domestic fowl was inextricably linked to that of the householders.

6 See *Index 1.1 – St. Martin's Day Questionnaire*.

7 The quote had been used by Séamas Ó Catháin in a study of St. Brigid's Day rites, and it seems pertinent to the present work as well.

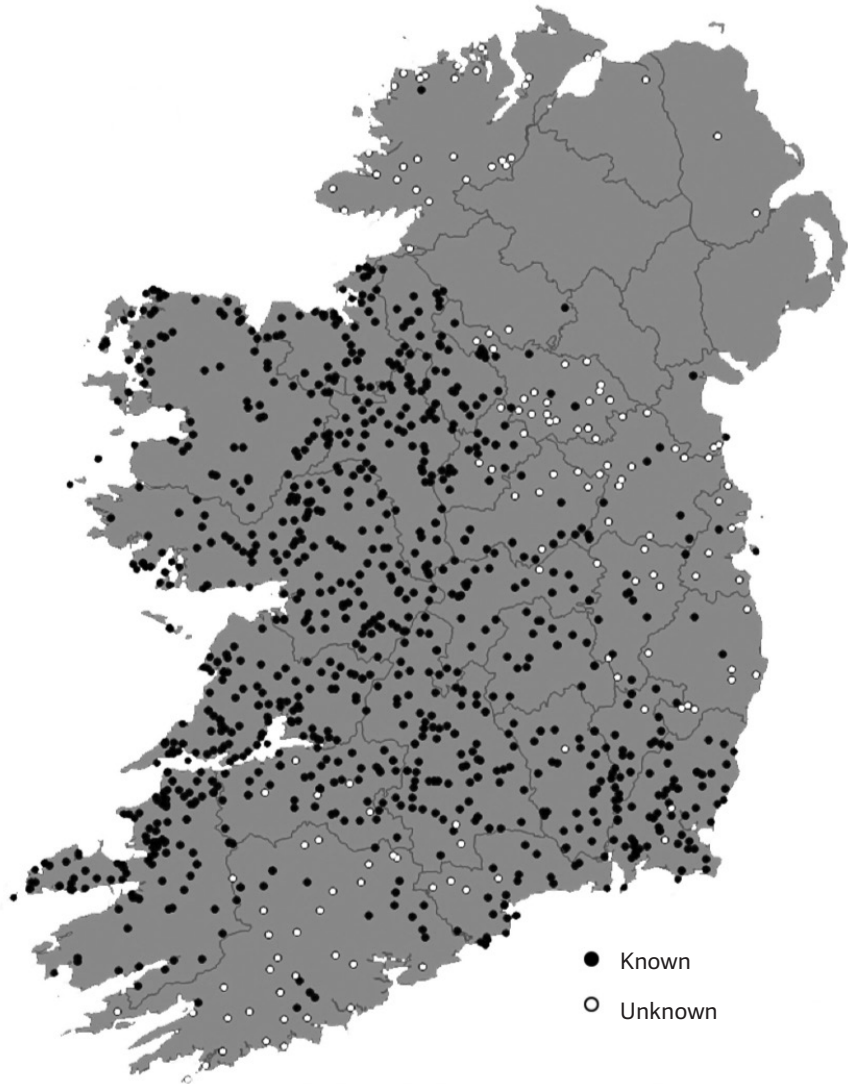


Figure 2 – Distribution and frequency of Feast of St. Martin, or narratives about the saint

Distribution of Killing

The killing ritual is generally depicted as being the most important factor in the celebration and veneration of St. Martin. It is, therefore, a good marker of the true extent of the manifestation of the cult in popular tradition. A total of 854 sources explicitly mention the practice of killing animals for the feast of St. Martin. The Main Manuscripts sources contain 31 mentions, 411 were uncovered in the Schools' material, 384 Questionnaire responses outlined the practice, and 25 print sources also describe it, in the following distribution: Carlow (19), Cavan (10), Clare (87), Cork (6), Donegal (1), Fermanagh (1), Galway (120), Kerry (99), Kildare (10), Kilkenny (100), Laois (16), Leitrim (30), Limerick (37), Longford (11), Louth (1), Mayo (73), Meath (6), Offaly (24), Roscommon (60), Sligo (45), Tipperary (79), Waterford (24), Westmeath (10), Wexford (36), Wicklow (1), Unspecified (14).

Date

Of concern in the study of the ritual is the time when killing was undertaken. Thus the date is of concern from the outset. In total, 289 informants, or 38%, mentioned the period when the killing was to be performed. A range of dates was given, varying from November 1 to November 11. The majority, however, regarded November 10, St. Martin's Eve, as being the correct date. Some 170 of the respondents, or 62% explicitly mentioned November 10.

It is clear from these replies that people could perform the killing before the eve of the saint, but the eve itself was the most favoured time for the majority. That the eve of the feast should feature so strongly is unsurprising. Many traditional feast-days and celebrations in Irish tradition begin at sundown on the evening before. (See Mc Dougal 1976: 34.) The Feast of All Saints (November 1) is traditionally celebrated as Hallowe'en, on the night of October 31. The eve of the first day of May, Bealtaine, features strongly in Irish tradition as a time of supernatural activity, as does the Eve of St. Brigid's Day. St. John's Eve and Christmas Eve are also significant points in the celebration of these Christian festivals.

In four instances, the Sunday before St. Martin's Day is indicated, while in other replies, such times as a week before November 11,⁸ a fortnight before November 11 or even November 7, are provided, although many such replies only occur once in the record. In one solitary example from Co. Galway, three

8 NFC 679: 273.

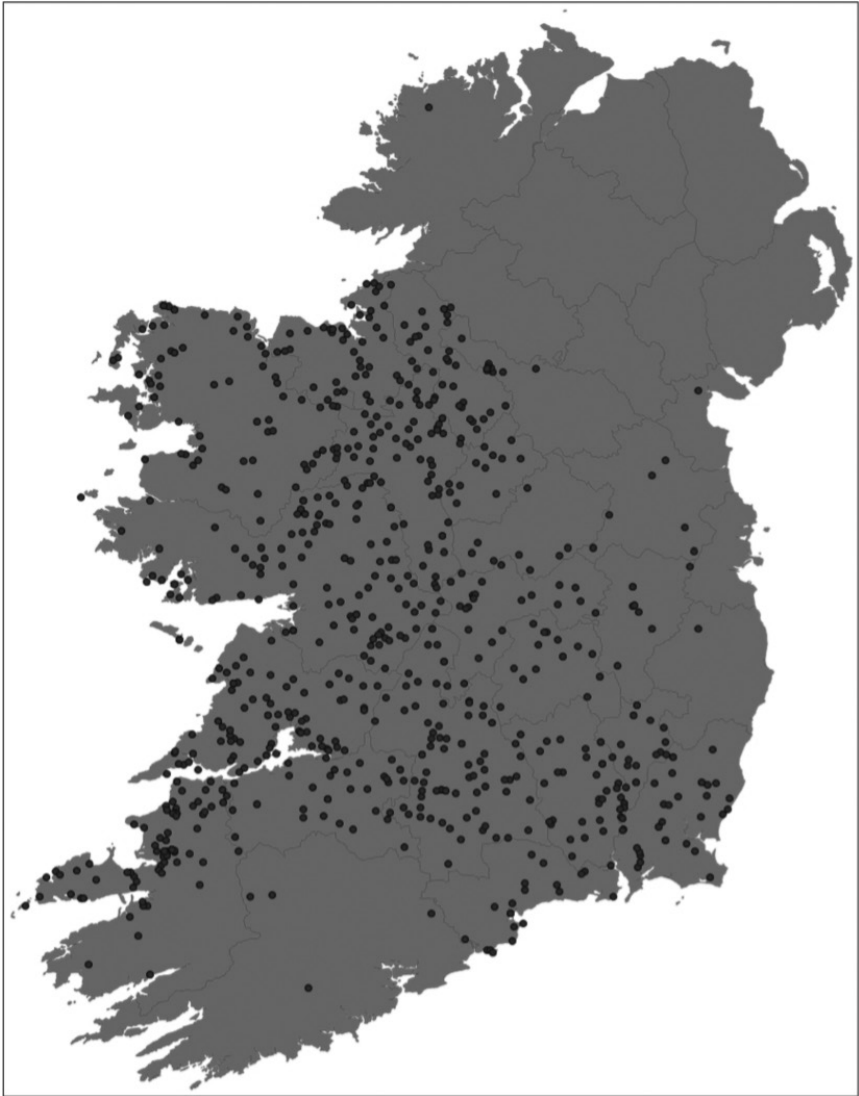


Figure 3 – Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Killing for St. Martin

birds are slaughtered, one on the eve of St. Martin's Day, another on the feast itself, and a third one week after the feast.⁹ Such variances do not appear to be of particular significance in themselves, and may represent personal, localised or family traditions that vary somewhat from the norm.

Before But Not After

When considering the reason why people may have made offerings on different dates, rather than a fixed time, there appears to be a strong feeling amongst respondents, particularly those from Connaught, that St. Martin would accept a sacrifice performed any time before November 11, but anything offered after his feast day would prove unacceptable. This was mentioned in a total of 82 cases. People seemed to fear upsetting the saint by failing to offer an animal in the appropriate time, and as will be seen in the legend material, he was seen as vindictive towards those who disobeyed custom and neglected to kill animals in his honour. Figure 4 represents informants who mentioned that St. Martin would accept an offering before his feast, but not after, illustrating the fact that this belief seems particularly strongly held in Connaught, as well as a small band across north Munster to the east coast.

As this example, from Claretuam in Co. Galway illustrates, people were clear as to the appropriate period for killing:

[‘Martin will accept before but he will not accept after,’ so says the old saying. This is to say that if you have an animal or bird to kill in honour of Martin, you have to give it the knife before the 11th of November.]¹⁰

The following account comes from Lower Purteen, in Woodlawn, Co. Galway:

St. Martin's ‘Cock’ can be killed any time between 2nd Nov. and 11th if no other Saint's day intervenes between the killing and St. Martin's Feast. It would not do well to kill the cock before 1st Nov. on account of All Saint's Day.¹¹

Of seeming significance in this account is the association of St. Martin's Day and the Feast of All Saints. The period between the two feasts seems to be considered by many to be an appropriate time to perform the killing. Fifteen accounts outlined the period from November 1–11, stating that any time within these dates was suitable. The following account, from Drumlaggagh

9 NFC 678: 382.

10 NFC 678: 134.

11 NFC 678: 546.

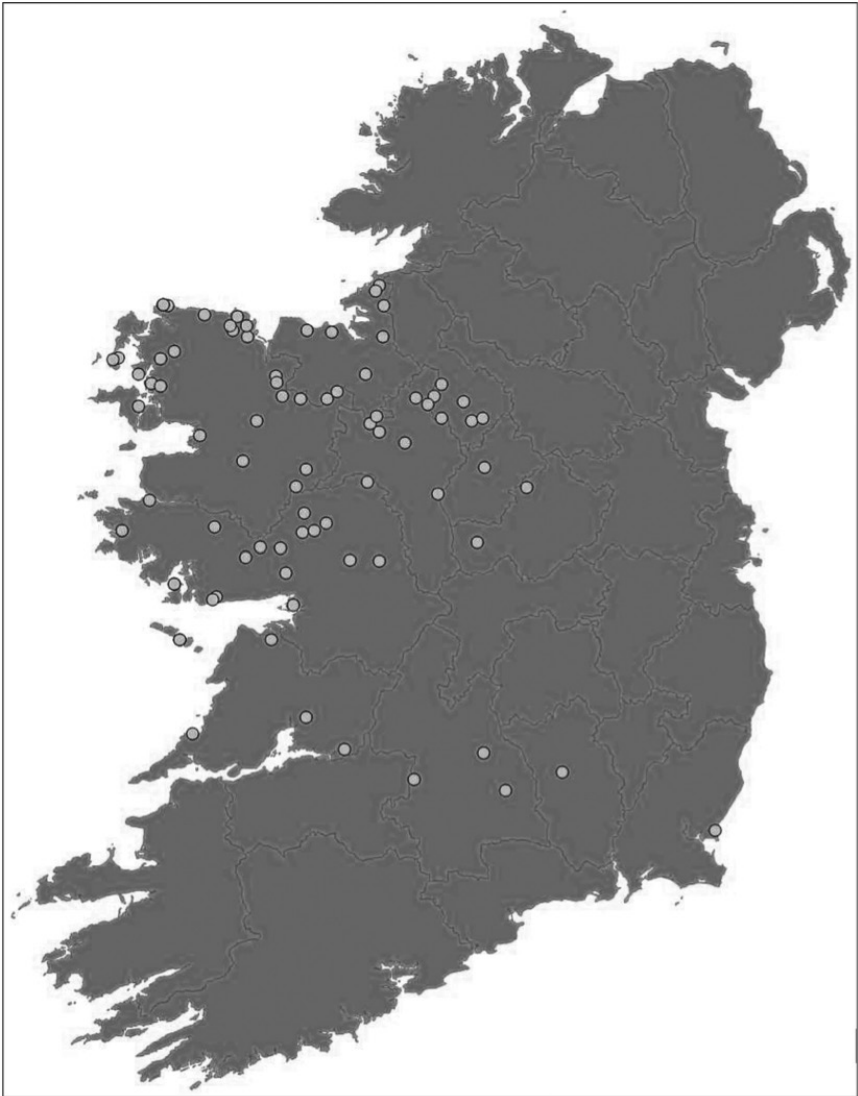


Figure 4 – St. Martin accepts offerings before November 11, but not after

in Co. Leitrim, is in a similar vein, but does not give a definite date for when exactly the killing must take place, allowing a more variable window of opportunity:

St. Martin is still honoured in some places in this locality. St. Martin's feast in this locality is held between the two Hallow Eve nights. e.g. Hallow Eve night, 1st of November and Old Hallow Eve Night 11th November. There is no definite date for holding the feast, but you must sacrifice inside of a week after the 1st Nov. St. Martin will accept it, if offered inside a week after Hallow Eve night, but not if offered after a week. In two houses in this locality the feast was celebrated this year on Saturday night, 4th November.¹²

Although the time permitted for the killing to take place can vary, it invariably occurs sometime between November 1 and November 11. The strong association with St. Martin's Day and Hallowe'en is a theme that occurs in several accounts, and will prove to be of great significance when considered with additional evidence below.

Time of Killing

The time of day when the bird or animal to be killed was also queried in the questionnaire, and some 91 informants made mention of when blood was to be shed. The evening of November 10 seems to have been thought of as being most suitable. Some stated that the killing must take place before sunset, but nightfall itself appears to have been of significance in several areas. Of this 91, 44 suggested that evening time on November 10 was the most suitable time, and a further 14 specified sunset as the most appropriate time of the evening. Most respondents, however, did not venture into any further detail beyond mentioning the 'evening' of the tenth. The remainder made mention of a variety of different times, including midday, before three o' clock, or between 11am and noon. An example from Upperchurch, Co. Tipperary outlines when it was done:

The woman of the house does the killing in the case of fowl, and the man in the case of animals.... [It is] done at nightfall.¹³

Another example, from Cloone, Co. Leitrim, is similar:

12 NFC 680: 351. The account was written on November 20, 1939.

13 NFC 677: 437.

This fowl is killed about night fall at the kitchen door.¹⁴

A further example, also from Cloone in Co. Leitrim, but drawing on the experience of informants from Co. Sligo, outlines the following:

It is generally believed that the fowl should be killed “with the dusk of the evening”. That is of course on St. Martin’s Eve.¹⁵

A variant on the date can be seen in the following example from Rathcline, Co. Longford:

A young cock was always killed in each house in the locality on the 11th of November by the bean a tighe (woman of the house), usually at nightfall.¹⁶

This may represent confusion on the part of the informant, who might have been thinking of November 10 rather than November 11, although some other instances mention killing on November 11, so it may be that killing in this instance really did take place on St. Martin’s Feast itself, rather than on the eve. There are a few scattered references to the killing taking place around midday. The following example, from Aghagower, Co. Mayo, illustrates this:

[A] bird [was] killed on St. Martin’s Eve (10th Nov.) in the middle of the day, because St. Martin [was] killed in the middle of the day.¹⁷

Another, from Morristownbiller in Co. Kildare, simply states that:

The killing was done at midday on the tenth of November. There is no explanation for this.¹⁸

Elsewhere in that area, however, various times for killing are given, including ‘after the Rosary’,¹⁹ and ‘before three o’ clock by the sun’ on the afternoon of November 10.²⁰ It is clear that there can be variation on the precise time that was considered appropriate. What is apparent, however, is that in many districts, there was a strong tendency towards sunset, or the evening in general, on November 10. This is of no small significance, seeing as though sunset is itself a transitional time, between day and night, and again the theme of liminality is strongly associated with the custom.

14 NFC 680: 192.

15 NFC 680: 274.

16 NFC 681: 317.

17 NFC 679: 436.

18 NFC 682: 104.

19 NFC 682: 99.

20 NFC 682: 91.

In summation, we can discern a general tendency in tradition towards several trends. People considered the appropriate time to kill birds as being the period between November 1, the Feast of All Saints' or Samhain, and the evening of November 10. Some shed blood on the day of the saint's feast itself, November 11, but most people considered the eve to be a more favourable time. Like many Irish calendar customs, the feast began on its eve, and this is reflected in the choice of killing time. Where the actual moment could be discerned with any accuracy, there is a propensity for transitional periods amongst people's choices of time in some instances, with nightfall being primary in this regard. This was the cusp of the feast, the moment when the remit of St. Martin came into effect, and it was marked by ritual animal slaughter. The theme of thresholds, be they temporal or physical, runs strong in the sub-text of these customs.

Killing for St Martin – Where

The ritual nature and function of the killing custom is partially revealed in the concern with where it was performed. Locations were not, in the main, haphazardly chosen, and seem to follow a general pattern of meaning that underlies the whole event. The physical location of a ritual is a vital component to understanding its function and potential symbolic meaning. The location where it occurs often forms as much of the dialectic as the physical actions, words said, or the persons present. This section seeks to understand the place where the killing took place, and where the blood was subsequently spread.

Doorways

The vast majority of places favoured for killing seem to be around portals or doorways. A total of 186 informants specified locations where the killing took place, and of these, 112, or 60%, specified some place around a door, be that behind the door, on the threshold or immediately outside the door. In most instances, a door from the domestic house leading outside seems to be what is inferred. There exists the possibility that some of the other locations mentioned by informants may also represent doors, since they are not specific. Places such as the stable, the kitchen or inside the house are all cited, but exactly where at these locations is not often stated. The following is a list of some of the places mentioned by informants: anywhere (4), back door (3), behind the door (5), byre or outhouse (5), door (29), doorstep (12), kitchen door (3), kitchen (19), outside (24), outside the door (11), stable (11), threshold (30).

This example, from Killoe in Co. Longford sums up the practice concisely:

[On the flagstone of the door the bird is killed.]²¹

This example is from Kilkenny West in Co. Westmeath:

The slaughtering is generally done on the threshold.²²

The following comes from Tullaghobegly townland in Donegal, a rare example, given that the custom of killing for St. Martin is virtually unknown throughout most of that county.

[The killing is done on the flagstone of the door or the threshold, and the blood is spilled on the flagstone.]²³

This full account comes from Ballagh in Co. Tipperary:

[Blood is spilled in honour of St. Martin, usually on the 9th day. This is done in two thirds of the houses here.... Usually cock's blood but a goose will do the job. The woman of the house does the killing, but if she is dead or ill, the man of the house kills the bird. The killing is done on the threshold of the door. The cock (goose) is killed at nightfall.].²⁴

Here is an example from Coolgarrow in Co. Wexford that specifies the position in which one should stand at the threshold:

The cock was killed at the threshold, the person doing it standing inside and facing out. The killing took place at nightfall on the day before the feast.²⁵

This account stands out from the others, in that they do not mention how one should stand, but the idea of a prescribed stance while killing may indicate that the person undertaking it may have recognised a formal ritualistic sense in the action.²⁶

21 NFC 681: 363.

22 NFC 681: 248.

23 NFC 684: 449.

24 NFC 677: 456

25 NFC 683: 297.

26 Parallels may be seen with other traditions that involve ritual slaughter or sacrifice. Halal slaughter in Islam, for example, requires the person undertaking the killing to face *Qibla*, and in Judaism, rabbis would face east when sacrificing animals at the feast of Yom Kippur. See Wege 2005: 92. See also Dietz 2005: 12–14.

Stable, Byre and Outhouse

The stable, byre or outhouse is often mentioned as an alternative location for killing, and people were often as concerned for the protection of farm animals as they were for the human inhabitants of a household. This example from Tawnagh in Co. Roscommon displays the custom clearly:

A cock is killed by the mother of the house. She picks the best cock. Kills it in the stable and sprinkles the blood on the doorposts and four corners of the house...²⁷

This example from Stonyacre in Co. Tipperary also illustrates the custom:

The killing of the bird is done by the woman of the house in an outhouse or stable.²⁸

Another example from the same county, this time in Knocknagapple, mentions the fact that both a cock and goose are killed for St. Martin:

The cock is killed in a stable. It is considered unlucky to kill a cock or rooster. Therefore a younger bird is chosen. The stable, because of its sacred associations dispels any evil that might befall the executioner of the sacred bird. The goose is slain behind the door of the dwelling house. In its agony the fowl sprinkles the door and doorpost: this is done to protect the occupants from the Destroying Angel – an untimely death.²⁹

Exactly what the informant means by the stable's 'sacred associations' is not mentioned, but it may be an allusion to the role of the stable in the traditional nativity story in popular Christian tradition. Indeed, this seems likely, since the informant appears well versed with Biblical tradition. He uses the allusion of the Destroying Angel from the Exodus account of the Passover as a metaphor for untimely death.³⁰ This, therefore, may represent a tradition-bearer looking for precedent in the Bible to contextualise the custom.³¹ In any case,

27 NFC 680: 431.

28 NFC 677: 560.

29 NFC 677: 593.

30 'The Destroying Angel' is another term for *Ha-mashhit*, the Biblical figure who killed the first born of Egypt in *Exodus* 12: 23. Parallels are occasionally drawn by informants between this story and the custom of killing for St. Martin, since the latter can involve the spreading of blood on the doorpost, in a similar fashion to the *Exodus* account. See, for example, NFC 678: 325.

31 That the informant appears to be searching in literary sources for material to do with St. Martin is apparent from the similarity between an account he gives of St. Martin choking on a goose bone (NFC 677: 593) and a similar account from

the fact that killing took place in relation to the dwelling place of animals seems important. In one curious example, from Ballindoon, Co. Sligo, it is stated that should a stray goat be found, it should be killed in the cow house 'for good luck with the cattle.'³² The stable appears to be a favoured location in Co. Clare. Eight of the twenty accounts that provide a location mention it as being the appropriate place to perform the killing. A striking example from Glenageer, Inagh, Co. Clare has the killing taking place directly under the horse's head: 'The killing is done out in the stable, and under the horse's head.'³³ Here follows a similar, but more developed, account from Luogh North, in Co. Clare:

[The blood is spilled in honour of the Saint. The goose (when people have such a thing) in honour of the feast, and the blood of a young cock in the horse's stable, so that the saint's protection would be on the horse.... Or some of it is spilled under the horse's legs in the stable. A cut is put in the neck or back of the bird's head inside in the stable, and while the bird's legs are shaking and the blood pouring out, he turns the bird around in such a way as the blood goes to the four corners of the stable, or sometimes the blood is spilled under the legs of the horse as an alternative way of doing it.]³⁴

The notion that killing for St. Martin should be associated with horses, especially in Co. Clare, arises from a general trend where the saint is portrayed as a protector of equines. Further examination of other elements of the feast, including the reasons people gave for why they killed for St. Martin, and the distribution of certain legends to do with horses, will confirm a pattern of association. The origin of this strong association with horses has much to do with St. Martin's depiction in the medieval period, where he is shown in art and legend as a soldier saint, mounted on horseback. (Mag Fhloinn 2005: 114.) The reason why the equine elements of St. Martin feature so strongly in Co. Clare is very likely to do with the Irish draught horse being such a popular animal in the area. West Co. Clare had a particular appreciation for draught horses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, (Lewis 2005: 152) and the environment and landscape saw the draught horse remain important in times

Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Both use very similar language, and the informant most likely read it from this publication. See Brewer 1898, 594.

32 NFC 549: 294.

33 NFC 675: 266.

34 NFC 675: 206.

when the tractor had replaced them for most of the work around the farm. (Quarton 2005: 142–3.)

In some instances, the idea of the killing taking place at a doorway is combined with the idea that it should take place in a byre or stable, such as the following example, again from Co. Clare: “On that night, everyone kills a cock in honour of St. Martin. They generally kill the bird on the stable door.”³⁵ This example, from Querrin in Co. Clare identifies the killing location as by the household fire: “*The killing is done by the woman of the house on the flag of the hearth.*”³⁶ Similar examples can be found in Counties Kerry,³⁷ Clare³⁸ and Tipperary.³⁹ A curious and exceptional example from Dunboyrne in Co. Meath appears to emphasise a link with St. Martin and milling:

[(The killing was done o)n a special stone out in the yard; a round stone like they have for shoeing wheels- about the size of an ass’s wheel. You know they used to use that stone long ago for threshing and for grinding the corn.]⁴⁰

That St. Martin of Tours was deeply associated with milling will become apparent later in the study, as it was a widespread belief throughout many parts of Ireland that he was crushed to death in a mill, despite this being at odds with the historical facts.

Where Blood Was Spilled

After the animal had been killed, the next step involved shedding the blood of the animal. This could take place in a location different from where it was initially killed, or in some instances, in a variety of locations. These could vary greatly, even within one area. Three accounts from the same parish in Co. Carlow are presented as follows; ‘A duck is killed and its blood is sprinkled on the threshold.’⁴¹ ‘A duck is killed in honour of this saint. The blood is sprinkled on the gateposts.’⁴² ‘The blood is put in a jar for two days. It is then sprinkled

35 NFC 675: 165.

36 NFC 675: 345.

37 NFC 676: 323.

38 NFCS 628: 177.

39 NFCS 576: 89.

40 NFC 681: 51.

41 NFC 683: 13.

42 NFC 683: 15.

on the doorstep and is left for three days. This is done about twelve o' clock at night.⁴³ Despite this variety, some distinct patterns and themes have emerged.

Doorways

In most instances, the blood was spread around the door, be that the exterior door of the house or that of the byre or outhouse. It was also often sprinkled around the four corners of the house, or even spread on the foreheads of those in attendance. A total of 657 sources, or just over 50%, mentioned a location where blood was spilled. Many sources provided more than one location, as it seems people used to spread the blood in several places around the house and farm. This example from Co. Galway is illustrative:

The cock is supposed to be killed indoors, and when he is killed the killer carries him around to the corners of the house and across the hearth-stone, letting the blood drip from him during that time. The head is cut off the cock and a cross is made on the inside of the back door, or front one, if there is no back one, with the blood of it.⁴⁴

As was seen when examining the location favoured for killing, doorways seem to have been the most common place people chose to spread the blood. A total of 316 sources, or 48%, mention the door as being the place where blood was spread. When sources are more specific, mention is made of the doorpost (80 instances), the threshold (83) and behind the door (21).

This example from Colmanstown, Co. Clare mentions the location in the following manner:

A goose is killed and its blood is sprinkled behind the doors, and on the door jambs in dwelling houses.⁴⁵

Another, from Camp, Co. Kerry, gives an explanation:

It is a great custom to kill something in honour of St. Martin. Long ago, when the old people would kill anything, they would sprinkle the blood on the door because they used to say that they saw St. Martin.⁴⁶

43 NFC 683: 19.

44 NFC 678: 221.

45 NFC 675: 119.

46 NFC 674: 82.

A third example, from Co. Sligo, states:

The fowl is killed by the man or woman of the house, and the blood spilt on the door and doorstep, or in some cases the four corners of the house.⁴⁷

This striking example from Co. Galway also sees the blood spread at the door:

[The blood that was drawn from the animal that was killed was kept and put on the door in such a way as to be visible to Martin when he would go around looking to see if anything had been killed in his honour. The blood was also placed on the foreheads of the boys.]⁴⁸

Once again, we have an image of St. Martin observing people, in order to determine whether they are obeying the customs and rites demanded of them at this time.

Four Corners

The second most popular place, as alluded to in an above-mentioned example, was the four corners of the house or room, with two hundred and twenty two mentions. It appears to have been a widespread idea that people should demarcate the house, or main room within the house, by allowing blood to fall in the corners. This example is also from Co. Sligo:

The blood is let drop from the fowl in each of the four corners of the kitchen.⁴⁹

The following is from 1898, and refers to tradition in Co. Roscommon:

While my grandmother lived, the blood of “St. Martin’s roosters” was spilled in the four corners of each room in the house. After her death the kitchen was the only room thus protected. (Powell Thompson 1893: 262.)

It is of great significance that the author considers the blood to be protective, and this will be discussed when addressing the topic of why people sacrificed to St. Martin.

47 NFC 680: 144.

48 NFC 678: 529.

49 NFC 680: 136.

Byre and Stable

Just as the killing of the fowl or animal was on occasion performed in the stable, cattle byre or out-offices surrounding the dwelling house, also blood was shed in these locations. They represent the next most popular location, with fifty-two examples of stables and forty-two examples of cattle sheds being mentioned. The idea that animals would benefit from the protection of blood shed for St. Martin is one that runs throughout the sources, and is a natural development of the folk belief in the saint as a patron and protector of animals.

This example is from Corlough, Co. Cavan:

Blood is shed in honour of St. Martin. A fat chicken or kid was killed by the 'bean a' tighé'. The head of the fowl was thrown across the house. The chicken or kid was carried into all the rooms, and into the byre and the blood was allowed to drop on the floor.⁵⁰

The following comes from Co. Carlow:

It was an old custom in our parish of Clonegal that the people always killed something in honour of St. Martin, usually poultry. It used to be killed on the threshold of the door and the blood used to be sprinkled over the doors of the cow houses to prevent disease.⁵¹

A third example can be seen from Co. Offaly:

In almost all parts of the country blood is shed and usually a goose is killed and stables and out-houses and the dwelling house door jambs are sprinkled with the blood because it is said to keep away sickness.⁵²

Once again the concern with protection from disease and sickness appears as a motivating factor in people's actions, and the protection is extended to the animals.

The horses were also to benefit from the protection of St. Martin. This account is from Bogtown, Co. Meath:

People kill a hen on St. Martin's Day. The blood is supposed to keep away disease. It is thrown in the stables.⁵³

50 NFC 684: 159.

51 NFC 683: 87.

52 NFC 682: 389.

53 NFC 681: 204.

Again, the concentration on protecting horses is particularly strong in Co. Clare, and this is reflected in what people did with the blood in the stable (See Figure 5). Take this example from Ruan in Co. Clare:

...the killing of a cock for St. Martin will protect the horse from danger during the year. The blood of the cock is rubbed to the horse.⁵⁴

A similar practice was seen in nearby Kilmaley, although it took place outside the stable:

A goose is killed on the afternoon of Nov. 10th and some of the blood is allowed to fall on the kitchen floor. More of it is sprinkled on the kitchen door and the remainder on the flags in the 'street', as the yard is usually called in Kilmaley. The cock is usually killed in the yard and the blood allowed to fall along the flag or flags around about. Some people drive the farm horse into the yard when the cock is being killed and sprinkle the horse's legs with the blood.⁵⁵

Forehead

Thirty-four records mention the practice of anointing people on the forehead with the blood, in the sign of the cross. These display has a distinctly western distribution, and is found mostly in the Connacht counties of Galway and Mayo, with a few instances in Munster (see figure 6). The custom most likely has its origin in the Catholic practice of blessing oneself with holy water, or with ashes on Palm Sunday, on the forehead. The water or ashes are placed on the forehead in the shape of a cross. The water was thought to offer protection to the person upon whom it was placed, in a similar fashion to the 'blood for St. Martin.' (See Thieler and Lang 1909: 27.)

[This blood is spilled inside on the floor of the house or at the threshold. The head of the household does the killing, and he makes the sign of the cross with his thumb on the forehead of everyone of the household and on the doors of the street.]⁵⁶

The street in this example is the paved area outside the door, and it seems that blood was placed on the outhouses and sheds near the house, probably the byre or stable. This example comes from Ballyhehan, Co. Clare:

54 NFC 675: 299.

55 NFC 675: 315.

56 NFC 678: 76.

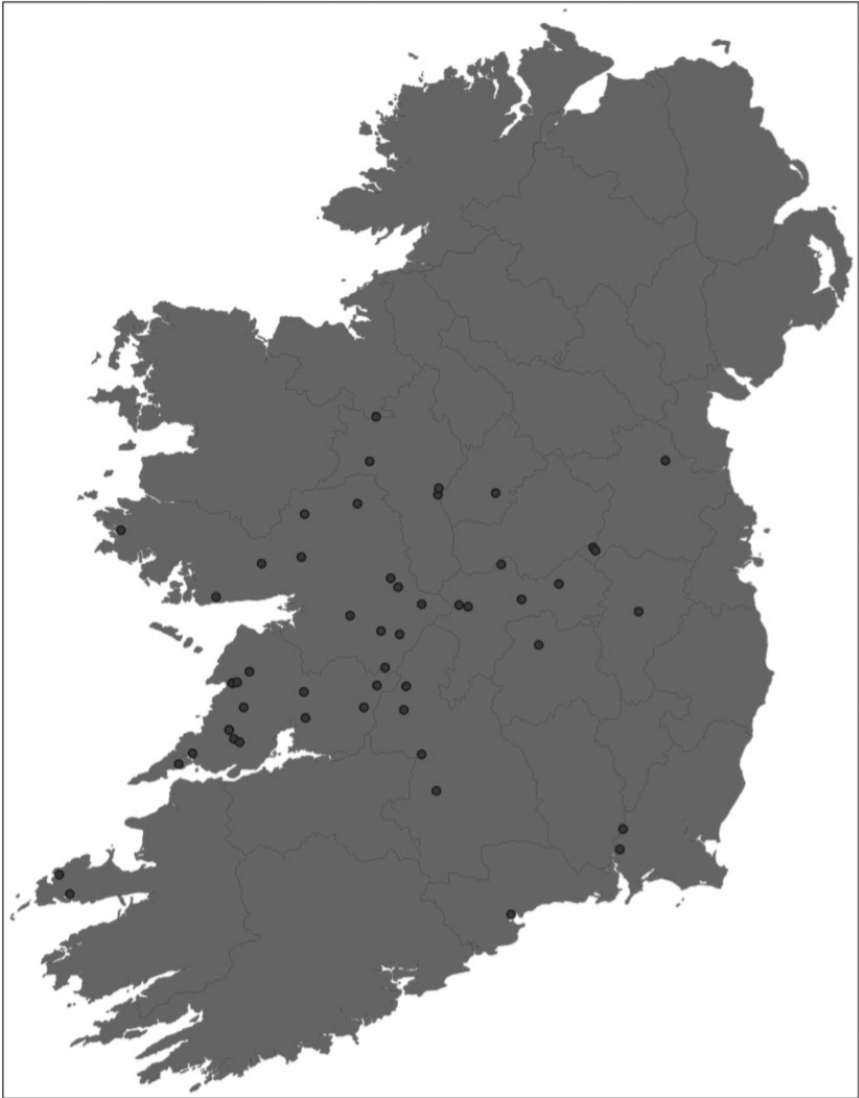


Figure 5 – Frequency and Distribution of Location of Blood in Stable

The blood is sprinkled on the back of the door, and the sign of the cross is made on the killer's forehead with the blood.⁵⁷

In one example from Co. Mayo, the woman of the house spreads blood on the four corners of the house, the cattle byre, the hen house, the pig pen, and finally a cross is made on the forehead:

[She makes the Sign of the Cross on her forehead with the blood.]⁵⁸

Other Locations

One very common way in which blood was used after being shed was to place it on a piece of cloth, a rag, or especially some unspun flax tow. It was treated differently to blood that was allowed to fall on the ground, or spread on the door, and will be examined separately in Chapter 5. Eighteen accounts say the blood was spilled outside, but they are not any more specific than that. Thirty-eight accounts fail to give a location, simply mentioning that blood was shed.

In one example, the remit of protection was extended to the crops, over which blood was shaken to ensure their fertility:

Blood was shed. When the calf was killed [it was] shaken over the crops.⁵⁹ When the blood is sprinkled on the land it is allowed to soak into the ground and it is never taken off again. It is said that if some animal was not killed there would be no blood sprinkled on the land, and it is said that one man tried it one year (not to kill anything, as he thought it was too much trouble) and that year he had not a single crop. The blood is supposed to help bring good crops, and the flesh that is eaten on St. Martin's Day is supposed to keep the person who eats it in good health for that year.⁶⁰

Caution must be exercised in accepting this source at face value, however. The overall account contains some very unusual features, not found elsewhere in the source material. Whether or not it is a genuine account of actual old customs is not clear. Since it is the only example from Irish sources of blood being shed on crops, judgement on its veracity must be reserved.

An account from Castledermot, Co. Carlow displays some unusual variations:

57 NFC 675: 91.

58 NFC 679: 160.

59 NFC 682: 96.

60 NFC 682: 97.

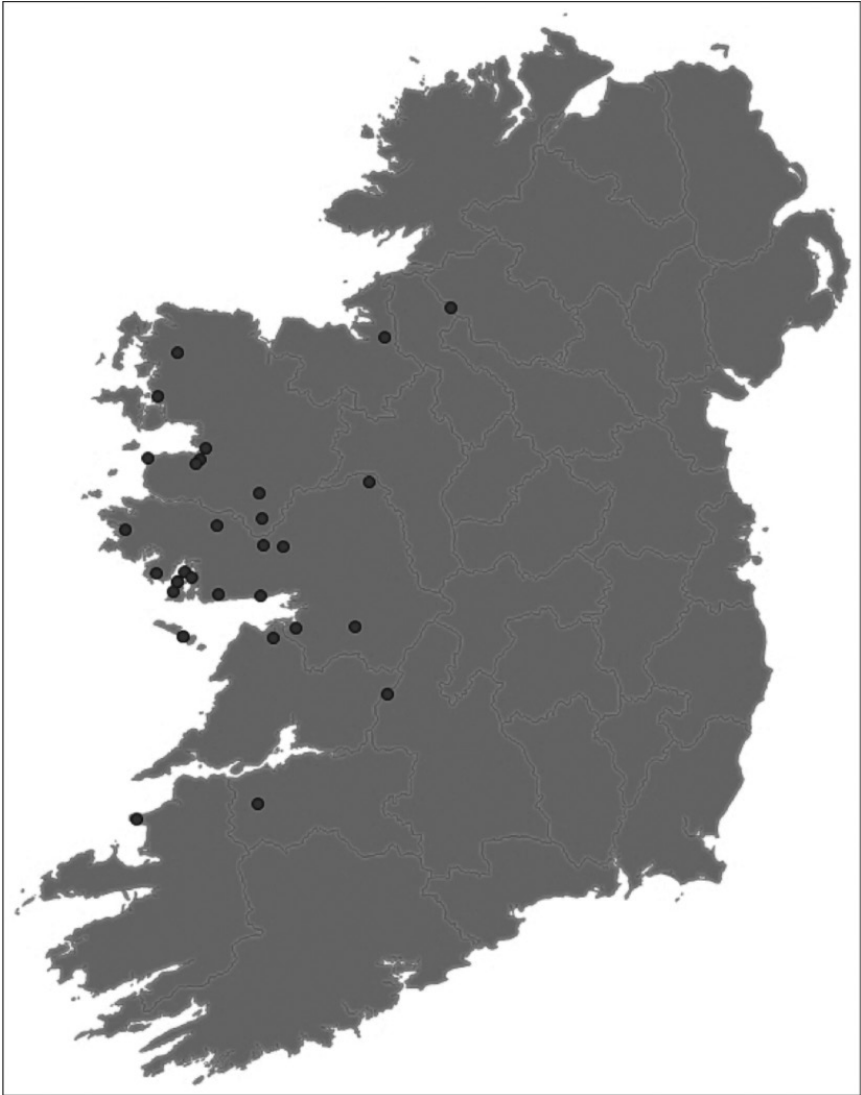


Figure 6 – Distribution and Frequency of Custom of Anointing Blood on the Forehead

They kill a chicken and sprinkle some of the blood on the door and in the four corners of the house. They throw the head of the chicken over the house, for they believe this brings them luck from St. Martin. After two months the rest of the blood is put on the door and on certain pictures in the house.⁶¹

The custom of rubbing blood on pictures is peculiar to this account, and may reflect a family tradition. Indeed, the blood may have been used to protect persons depicted in the pictures, such as family members, but this is not clear from the text. Neither does the text describe where the excess blood is stored for two months, but other accounts from around the country mention blood being stored in a vessel after the animal had been killed.⁶²

One unusual example from Carrownaseer North in Co. Galway has the blood spread on quern stones at the house.⁶³ This seems to accord well with the idea that St. Martin was killed in a mill, and that milling should not be undertaken on his feast-day. A similar practice can be observed in Dunboyne in Co. Meath, where blood was never spread inside, but instead was spread on a round wheel-shaped stone outside the house. Again, the link with milling is strongly suggested. This echoes a custom that was recorded in Devon in England, where a cock was killed in a mill on the eve of St. Martin's Day, and its blood allowed to fall on the millstone. (Binnall 1943: 408.)

My grandfather, who was born in 1787, and a miller by descent, told me of a curious custom observed by old-time millers at Martinmas. There was a rooted belief that the mill, in the course of the year, would demand blood, and to satisfy this sanguineous craving and thus ensure the safety of the miller from accident during the ensuing twelve months, a cock was killed on St. Martin's Eve (Martin being the patron saint of millers) at midnight, and the machinery sprinkled with blood.

This was known as 'bleeding the mill'. The miller's friends and neighbours were invited to be present, and at the conclusion of the ritual the remainder of the night was spent in festivity. – L. Pengelly, Bowenlands, Newton Abbot.

61 NFC 683: 16.

62 Co. Galway NFCS 39: 273, Co. Kerry NFC 674: 171, NFC 674: 426, NFC 674: 430, Co. Kildare NFC 682: 144, NFC 682: 99, Co. Laois NFC 682: 262, Co. Longford NFC 681: 363, Offaly NFC 682: 336, Co. Wexford NFC 683: 211.

63 NFCS: 37: 52.

That blood was shed in a mill is a very significant piece of information, as it may go some way to explaining some of the numerous legends, and hundreds of statements of folk belief, that St. Martin himself was killed in the mill. It is noteworthy that the idea of St. Martin himself being crushed in the mill is not found in the English account, which suggests that it may be an Irish development. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

In summary, a correlation can be seen between both the location of the killing and the shedding of blood with liminal areas, such as portals and doorways. People often had clearly-defined ideas of where the correct place to spill blood was, and distribution maps show a relatively even spread of elements such as blood in the four corners, on the threshold, or in the stable or byre, throughout the area in which Martinmas customs were practised. There appears to be an implicit theme of demarcation of domestic and agricultural space, and the area in which the outer world meets the internal, family space is a point of significance. Also present is a concern with protection as a motivating factor. In some cases, such as the marking of crosses on the forehead, this looks like it is an expression of personal protection, drawing on similar practices involving holy water. The notion of protection and boundaries will be developed when combined with information from other aspects of the study.

4. What was Killed, and who did the Killing

An account from Adare in Co. Limerick, illustrates an idea that appeared from time to time in the archive material, namely that blood itself was the most important element of the ritual of killing.

‘I remember I cut my finger accidentally with a broken bottle on St. Martin’s Eve and my mother killed no hen or goose that evening because they said my blood would do to honour St. Martin.’¹

As long as blood was shed, the obligation had been fulfilled, and St. Martin would be appeased. This is certainly not the case in every instance, as will be seen below. When the evidence from legend material is considered, it appears that people were expected to offer according to their means, and that people should kill animals of value, rather than something of little worth. There are many examples from traditional narratives that speak of people who were punished for making an offering that was too meagre, especially those who had benefitted from St. Martin’s generosity in the past. Economics do seem to be a factor in what was killed, and since most people who engaged in the custom of killing were of a rural, agricultural background, and not a particularly wealthy one at that, it stands to reason that fowl would be amongst the most common choice.

Fowl

The most favoured creatures killed were domestic fowl, particularly cockerels or chickens, and geese. A total of eight hundred and twenty five sources, or sixty three per cent of the overall, described the killing of living things, and many sources mentioned more than one example in a given townland, leading to a total of one thousand, two hundred and thirty-five. Informants generally made the distinction between an animal and a fowl, where animal refers to a mammal

1 The informant stated that he was about seven years of age when this happened, indicating that it took place around 1891. NFCS 505: 44.

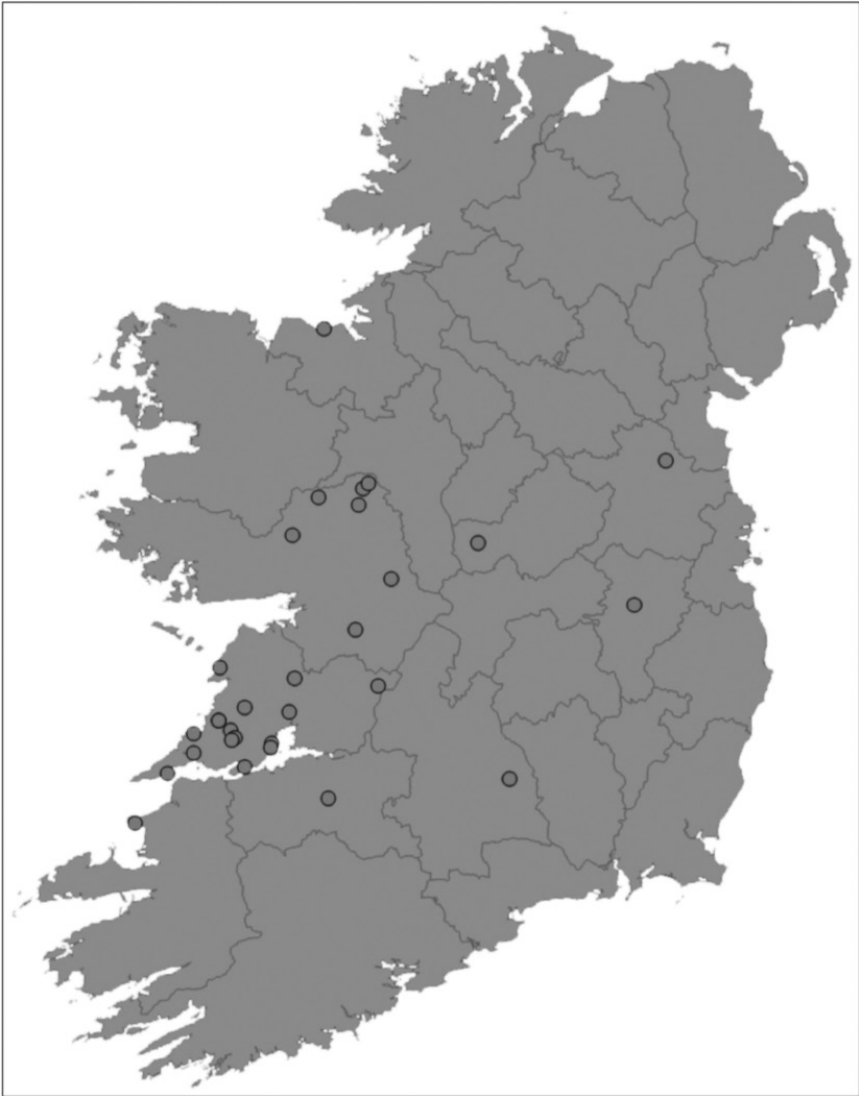


Figure 7 – Killing Performed for Benefit of Horse

of some kind. Nine hundred and ninety-six informants describe domestic fowl being killed, and two hundred and thirty-nine instances of mammals. It is clear, therefore, that the majority, eighty-one percent, were fowl of some kind.

Cocks, Hens and Chickens

The most common bird to be killed was a cockerel (the male *Gallus gallus domesticus*), which appears three hundred and fifty-three times, or in forty-three percent of all sources. Bearing in mind that two hundred and twelve sources also used the generic term 'fowl', and ten use the word 'bird,' there may be many more instances that are unrecorded. The distribution is spread evenly across the area in which Martinmas was celebrated, so it is appropriate to call it a universal element. Hens, the female of the same species, are mentioned one hundred and twenty times, and chickens, a term that can encompass young or female hens, are outlined seventy-one times. This puts the total for this species at five hundred and forty-four. This is unsurprising, since it represents the most common species of domestic fowl in Ireland. That people should choose a cockerel more than a hen may be down to the fact that cockerels do not lay eggs, and their meat can become tough if allowed to advance in years, so they are less rewarding to keep. Males can also be prone to fighting, so it would make sense to slaughter the excess cockerels that had been born in the spring. Thus, the preference for slaughtering male birds may be a purely practical one.

On the other hand, there may be a more particular significance to choosing roosters, especially when killing was performed for the protection of horses. In some instances, the sources mention that birds were killed for the benefit of horses in particular (see figure 7). This is especially the case in west Co. Clare, and again is likely due to the popularity of draught horses in the region, and their continued use for farm work there when they had elsewhere been replaced by machinery.

Sixteen sources mention this custom in Co. Clare, seven in Co. Galway, and one each in Counties Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Kildare, Meath, Westmeath and Sligo. This is an account from Moyarta in Co. Clare:

A cock used to be killed in the stable for the horse and if the horse got sick the blood would cure it.²

One from Castletogher in Co. Galway states:

2 NFC 675: 353.

In olden times there was a bird offered for every horse a farmer owned, that if a farmer owned three horses, three birds were sacrificed... Any householder who owns a brood mare is supposed to kill an extra cock. If there is no cock available, a sheep or pig is to be substituted.³

All three accounts describe the custom as if it was no longer practised. The second and third account date from 1939, and it appears that even then it had fallen out of practice. It is clear that birds were killed on behalf of horses, but one particular development of this idea is that cocks should be killed for the benefit of stallions, and hens for mares. This is an idea unique to Co. Clare, where ten examples of it have been found. Here is a clear account from Carrowlagan, in the parish of Kilmurray in the west of the county:

If a farmer has a horse he kills a cock in the stable, actually under the horse's feet. If he has a mare he kills a hen.⁴

This statement comes from Moyfadda, Co. Clare:

A hen is killed for luck for the mare.⁵

A third example is presented here from Luogh North, on the west coast:

[The blood is spilled in honour of the saint. The goose (when people have such a thing) in honour of the feast, and the blood of a young cock is spilled in the horse's stable so that there would be the protection of the saint on the horse...]⁶

Thus, it can be seen that in Co. Clare in particular, the choice of sex was on occasion determined by a less economic motivation, and there may have been symbolic significance to killing male birds for male horses, and vice-versa. In the main, however, the preference for cockerels was probably practical.

Geese

The goose (*Anser anser domesticus*), more than any other bird or animal, appears to have been the animal preferred for killing on St. Martin's Day in continental Europe, and indeed is a symbol for the saint in many regions. (Male 1913: 286.) Geese feature prominently in legends to do with St. Martin, including a

3 NFC 678: 126–7.

4 NFC 675: 236.

5 NFC 675: 137.

6 NFC 675: 204.

common story where the saint is hiding in a goose stall, and does not wish to be found by his parishioners. An angry goose hisses loudly and reveals his location, whereupon the saint is discovered. This is the reason given in folk tradition for why geese are eaten on St. Martin's Day. (Ferguson 1954: 19.)⁷ Geese represent the second most favoured bird. Two hundred and sixty-seven sources mention the custom of killing geese, evenly spread throughout the area where Martinmas was observed. Surprisingly, only two mention ganders being killed. Either ganders were not considered appropriate in most places, or the term goose referred to both male and female of the species. The distribution is relatively evenly spread, and it appears that it was a reasonably common choice in Ireland.

A factor in determining why geese may have been less popular than cocks or chickens may be cost. They would have been more expensive than chickens or cockerels, and therefore, beyond the means of poorer people. However, dedication to the saint, in some cases at least, may have motivated people to feel compelled to offer a goose rather than any other bird. An account from Co. Galway describes it in the following manner:

[A fine fat goose is preferred by people to have to kill in his honour. It is thought to be the best and most esteemed bird to kill for the feast. Rich and poor are the same in this instance, they all think the goose is the right bird to kill; the poorest person would seek to get one to have, and the richest person is happy with it. If there is a poor woman who does not have her own goose, she saves the price of one, and she buys one and takes it home maybe three weeks before the time, and it is fattened and fed at home. If there are not geese available to buy in the home area, she would go any length to get one.]⁸

Sometimes geese would be given as gifts to neighbours who could not afford their own.⁹ The custom of killing geese in this manner has striking parallels to the celebration of another holy day in the Irish folk calendar, the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel, on September 29. The only significant way in which St. Michael's Day was celebrated in Ireland is by the consumption of roast goose. (See Ó Danachair 1965: 108.) Geese hatched in spring would be ready for consumption at this time, and so would be killed and eaten. The day is also an important one for rent-paying, and in some instances the goose itself was

7 The story was known in Ireland, but it was very rare, with only four examples appearing in the sources. These are likely to have entered the oral tradition from some printed version of the legend. See Chapter 8 for discussion.

8 Co. Galway NFC 678: 51, Co. Clare NFC 675: 55.

9 Co. Mayo, NFC 679: 382.

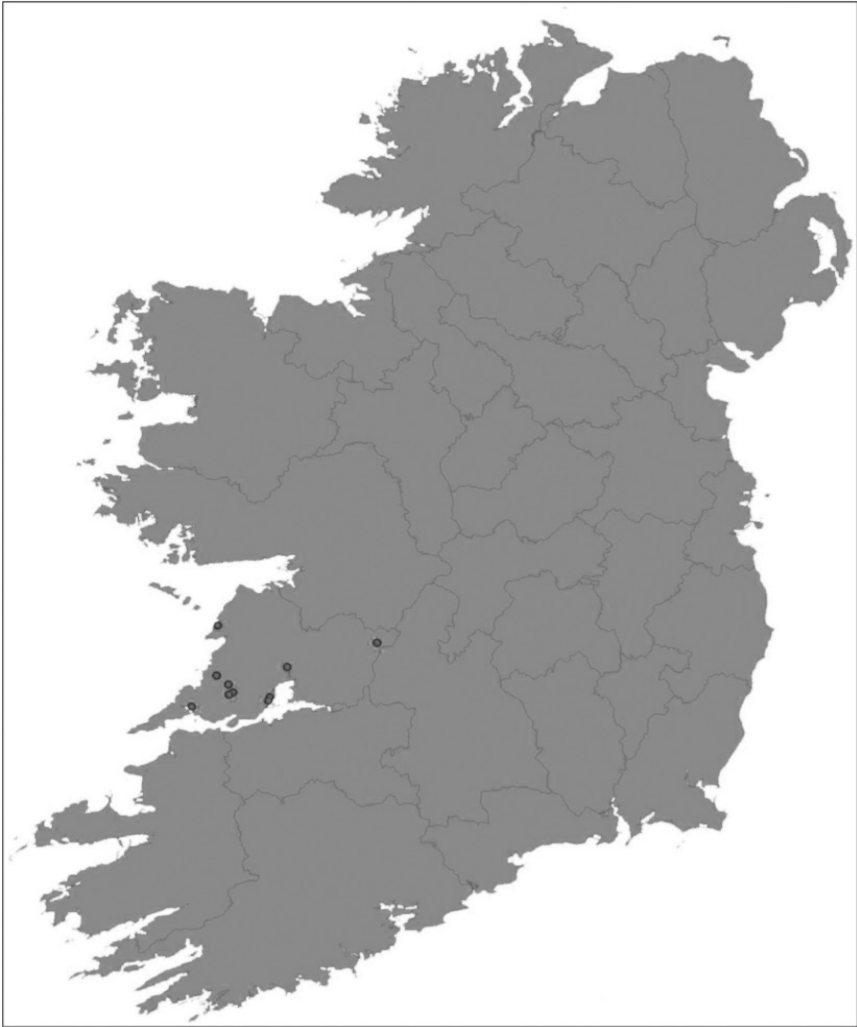


Figure 8– Cock Killed for Stallion, Hen Killed for Mare

offered as rent.¹⁰ There are instances reported in the National Folklore Collection where geese were killed on St. Michael's Day in a manner similar to Martinmas, although the ritual elements are not as common. For example, geese were killed and the blood spread on the threshold in Loughrea, Co. Galway.¹¹ In Killorglin, Co. Kerry, geese were killed and mills were not worked on the day.¹² St. Martin's Day was once an important day for paying rent, a convention that dates back to at least the ninth century in Europe. (Jellito 1910: 341.) Geese were used in payment of rent on St. Martin's Day from the thirteenth century. (Tille 1899: 37.) After the fifteenth century, there appears to have been a major change in the period in which rents were calculated, and Michaelmas takes over as the term-day for rents amongst the people of Ireland. Indeed, the use of geese as payment on Michaelmas appears in English rent rolls from this time, (Blount 1679: 8) and the custom of eating roast goose begins to be mentioned. (Drake 1817: 341.) If the rent-day shifted from Martinmas to Michaelmas, it would not be surprising to see this reflected in folk custom, thus explaining the consumption of goose on St. Michael's Day.

Other Fowl

Ducks (*Anas platyrhynchos*) were on occasion offered for killing, with sixty-three examples being found in the sources. The distribution is found evenly throughout the country. That a duck was not a preferred choice is suggested by one instance, where the informant states that two ducks was almost as good as one goose.¹³

Turkeys were a late introduction to Ireland when compared to other types of domestic fowl, and were not as popular, particularly due to the fact that they are not exploited for egg-laying. (Mac Con Iomaire and Cully 2007.) It is unsurprising, therefore, that they should not be found in such great numbers as other fowl. Their cost may have also been a factor. Only 17 examples were found in the sources, with two main areas of distribution. The first is in counties Mayo (8) Cavan (2) and Leitrim (1). The other area is counties Tipperary (3), Kerry (2) and Cork (1). In every case, the turkey is mentioned alongside other fowl as being the chosen animal, so it there does not seem to be any particular significance attached to it.

10 Co. Kerry NFCS 473: 462.

11 NFCS 34: 24.

12 NFCS 434: 177.

13 Rossandilisk, Co. Galway, NFC 678: 58.

Sheep

As stated above, 239 sources speak of mammals being killed. They were more expensive, and less replaceable, than poultry, and so they undoubtedly represented a larger sacrifice. Sheep (*Ovis aries*) account for the greatest number, with 62 mentions from around the country, and lamb account for 21 further mentions. They are scattered throughout the country, but there appears to be a particular concentration around Connacht, with the heaviest distribution in Co. Galway. Some 39 examples were found there. Mayo was the next numerous with 9 examples, and neighbouring Roscommon had 2. Counties Clare and Kerry both had 4 examples, and one each was found in Counties Sligo, Tipperary, Wexford and Carlow. Areas by the sea seem to be more likely to show sheep as the animal offered, and this may be due to the fact that they are more commonly grazed on poorer coastal and mountainous land.

A wonderfully comprehensive account of how sheep were killed on the Great Blasket Island in Co. Kerry was provided by informant Méiní Dunshléibhe, and goes as follows:

[In every inhabited house this animal was killed. None are killed outside. This is how one of them was killed, that there might come a day yet that no one would know how an islandman would kill the sheep. The sheep was caught and her four feet tied with a good strong cord. Then a súgán chair was placed by the door. There were two rungs in the back of this chair, two strong rungs. The sheep's feet were turned back to the rungs. The sheep's feet were put out through the rungs of the chair. Then the fire tongs were put upright through the sheep's feet, between the chair and the sheep's feet, then tied to the chair by the tongs. Whatever she would do she would not take the chair with her and she wouldn't fall down on the ground. Her head would be hanging at the side of the chair, and the man doing the butchering would be level, and several basins would be put under the sheep's head so the blood wouldn't go on the floor. The islandman had great skill in killing a sheep. When the blood was spilled, prayers were said to St. Martin in every house. The people of the house themselves would take part in that business, saying prayers. They preferred everyone to be in the house when the prayers were being said.]¹⁴

14 NFC 1605: 461.

Pigs

The next most numerous animal was a pig (*Sus scrofa domesticus*). Forty-seven examples were found, scattered throughout the area of interest. Again, Co. Galway dominates the distribution, with 18 examples. Co. Kerry is the next most numerous, with 10 examples. Wexford has 6, Clare 5, Tipperary 4, and Roscommon, Sligo, Wexford and Westmeath have one each. Pigs were a common feature of rural Ireland in the nineteenth century, and were commonly known in Ireland as ‘The Gentleman who pays the rent.’ (Partridge 1937: 453.) Pigs were sold when the rent was due and would have been amply fattened by November 11. They were a popular choice for slaughter on St. Martin’s Day in continental tradition, and many stories and sayings exist concerning pigs being killed about this time. (Mancing 2004: 468.) As mentioned above, an early record available in Ireland that mentions pigs being offered at this time is the sixteenth century version of Tripartite Life of St. Patrick, which says that the banb Samhna or November piglet, was given in honour of St. Martin. (Stokes 1887: 560.) There is reason to suspect that pigs were regularly killed around this period, even before the observation of St. Martin’s Day in Ireland, in association with the ancient festival of Samhain. (Nagy 2003.) The case for this will be examined later in the study.¹⁵

Cattle

Cattle (*Bos primigenius*) of various different kinds are mentioned as being killed on St. Martin’s Day. Cow, calf, cattle and bullock are all distinguished in the sources, but there does not seem to be any apparent pattern in the distribution. Thirteen instances of calf are mentioned, ten of cow, with the term cattle and bullock being used three times each. This brings a total of twenty-nine bovine animals being mentioned. They represent only two per cent of the total animals sacrificed, and probably with good reason. A cow or bullock would have been an extravagant offering in rural Ireland, and was likely to have been made by persons of financial means. It is much more common in legends to find examples of people offering cattle in sacrifice to St. Martin,¹⁶ and as will be revealed upon further study, many of the legends were didactic in function, and offered idealistic versions of what was considered best practice. Therefore, to depict poor people offering their last milch cow (a hazardous exercise for poor persons in

¹⁵ See Chapter 14.

¹⁶ An example from Co. Kerry can be found in NFC 744: 188.

rural Ireland), and the rich rewards they are provided by St. Martin, implies that the value of cows as a sacrifice was considerable.

There are some curious accounts of killing cattle for St. Martin's Day that feature elaborate ritual elements not found in relation to other animals. For example, consider the following from Co. Kildare:

People in olden times used to fatten a calf specially, to have it ready for the feastday. On the day of St. Martin's feast the fatted calf used to be killed and its blood shaken all over the fields and crops to grow and to yield good grain. The people in those times used only eat porridge for their breakfasts and they used eat it about five or six o'clock in the morning, and on St. Martin's feastday, they used eat no dinner so as to be able to eat all the calf, because if they didn't, they would have to bury it under the kitchen floor (the floors in those times were nothing but plain earth), and then the pig would not eat his food when he would smell the calf, (they used feed the pigs in those times out of a hole in the middle of the kitchen floor), and they were so odd they would not feed the pigs anywhere else; and when he wouldn't eat out of the hole he would be let pine away and die. So that was the reason why they used try and eat all the calf on the feastday.¹⁷

Whichever of the calves is the smallest on the farm is chosen; and it is then fattened until it is fat enough to be killed.¹⁸ When the blood is sprinkled on the land it is allowed to soak into the ground and it is never taken off again. It is said that if some animal was not killed, there would be no blood sprinkled on the land, and it is said that one man tried it one year (not to kill anything, as he thought it was too much trouble) and that year he had not a single crop. The blood is supposed to help bring good crops, and the flesh that is eaten on St. Martin's Day is supposed to keep the person who eats it in good health for that year....

Long ago a cow used to be set dry, then fattened; and when she was fat enough she used to be killed and the flesh cut up into three equal parts and each part hung up on three different yew trees which used to be got out of three different woods or groves; and after three hours it was taken down and buried; just as Our Lord was after dying on the cross. This was done on St. Martin's Day about one hundred years ago. The blood used to be caught in a pail, and when the flesh was buried the blood used to be thrown on the top of the shed. It was done, it was said, in memory of the way in which St.

17 NFC 682: 95.

18 NFC 682: 96.

Martin was killed, he was beheaded. Then as the years went on they began offering smaller things till they got down to fowl.¹⁹

The account is unconventional in certain respects, and appeared problematic as to its veracity on initial reading. It does not describe contemporaneous events witnessed by the informant, as they happened 'long ago', so they are second-hand at best. Some of the elements have parallels in tradition, such as blood being sprinkled for beneficial reasons, although it is not usually seen on crops.²⁰ That flesh of animals killed for St. Martin was thought to bring health is also a part of tradition. That St. Martin was thought to have been beheaded is a rare but not unprecedented belief.²¹ The notion that cattle were cut into pieces and buried under floors may be compared to the tradition of burying animal heads under the floors of houses in times past. This custom was studied by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, and the results of a questionnaire on the matter were published in a 1945 article on foundation sacrifice. (Ó Súilleabháin 1945: 45–52.) One account in particular, from Cloon in Co. Leitrim, is of significance:

Cows' heads are buried under the threshold of the kitchen door. The head of the first cow that died after a new house was built was cut off and buried under the threshold. One leg was cut off and put up in the loft while the 'clutes' were cut off and put up behind the couples [of the roof]. The head was buried facing the door. It was supposed to keep away ill-luck and evil spirits. (Ó Súilleabháin 1945: 47–48.)

This clearly mentions cows being divided into sections, and parts being hung up and buried under the floor. This is the only instance mentioned in Ó Súilleabháin's article of animals being killed in connection with St. Martin's Day. It may be the case that the informant was mixing up and combining two different traditions, or it may be that the account is a genuine description of some older custom.

This is not the only unusual account of cattle slaughter for St. Martin's day in this area. Consider the following from the same region of Co. Kildare:

Some of the real rich farmers were said to offer a lamb, or a ewe, or sometimes a young bullock to St. Martin; and the poor people would offer him

19 NFC 682: 96.

20 It was, however, customary in some places to spread the ashes from bonfires that were lit for other festivals, such as the feast of St. John, in fields for the health of crops. NFC 680: 305.

21 Co. Kilkenny NFC 683: 390, Co. Leitrim NFC 684: 214, Co. Antrim NFC 684: 412.

a hen or a duck or some other fowl. Sometimes they would offer him fruits or some of their crops.

The way they had for offering them was, to get a lot of stones and make a sort of flat table with them out in the middle of the field, and put a lot of straw over the stones, and on this, they would lay the animal which they had killed beforehand, and over the animal they would put a lot more straw, and then set fire to the straw and leave it there until it was burned to ashes.²²

A third informant, in the same townland in Co. Kildare, gave the following account:

On the feast day a small calf was killed by its owner and it was burned on a bundle of hay, that was done by the people of the West. Some other people who are rich killed a bull and buried it twelve hours after it was killed.²³

Again, the details are troublesome, as the informant is talking about something not witnessed by herself. It is not clear what exactly is meant by ‘the people of the West’, but it may be indicative of the potential source of this material. There are two instances of legends from western Galway that mention this kind of activity in relation to Crom Dubh, a popular antagonist figure in Irish folklore who has strong connections to the ancient festival of Lughnasa. They mention practices where cattle were burned or sacrificed. Here is one such text for comparison:

[It is said that Crom Dubh was a landlord. He was a pagan, and he had a real hatred for the poor Catholics. He was a kind of little god, and the people – the head of every household – had to place a cow in a fire in his honour on the last Sunday of July every year. It was the best bullock on the farm that was put in the fire, and it seems the bullock was laid out between two sconces or two piles of stone, and the fire lit under the bullock. That’s the reason it is called Crom Dubh Sunday.

When the Catholics were victorious they changed the festival to St. John’s Eve, the night of the bonfires, and it was on that night the bullock was roasted. The festival was kept on St. John’s Night from then on. The odd person says that it wasn’t to St. John’s Eve they changed the festival, but to St. Martin’s Eve.]

22 NFC 682: 106.

23 NFC 678: 92.

This information was found in a questionnaire reply on the subject of Lughnasadh traditions. It was submitted by M. Ó Catháin, Sailearna, An Spidéal, Co. Galway. He had the information from two middle-aged men in the district who themselves had heard it from their forebears. This account was first published in 1962 by Máire Mac Néill, in her monograph on Lughnasadh customs. (Mac Neill 1962: 584.) A similar account, from the same region, can also be found in the National Folklore Collection.²⁴ This story also mentions people burning cattle on pyres in honour of Crom Dubh, and that the event was later changed to St. John's Day.

No mention of St. Martin's Day is made in the second account, however. It is remarkable to note that sources from both areas mention the same practice, burning cattle on a pyre of hay, and join the custom to St. Martin's Day. If it is coincidence, it is a startling one. It is conceivable that a legend of this kind was the source of inspiration for the accounts from Co. Kildare, and was simply oral tradition, not reflective of actual practice. That all three accounts were found in the same area in Co. Kildare suggests that they may have a common source, perhaps someone from Galway who was familiar with legends of Crom Dubh, and the ideas were passed into Kildare oral tradition. Another possibility is that they are not derived from legend, but are echoes of a much older practice that is otherwise unaccounted for. The lack of first-hand evidence prevents a conclusive explanation, but the details are intriguing nonetheless.

Goats and Kids

Goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) and their young were a relatively uncommon choice. They were found in only eighteen cases, eleven goats and seven kids. They appear to have been a favoured choice in north Roscommon, where they were recorded in a cluster of six instances, with neighbouring counties of Leitrim and Sligo bearing two and one respectively. Other locations are Galway (3), Tipperary (2), Cavan (1), and Waterford (1). There does not seem to be any particular pattern for favouring kids over goats evident from the distribution data.

24 NFC 889: 593.

Other Animals

There are several other types of animals mentioned in the sources. Rabbit and hare are both mentioned once each, by informants from the same parish,²⁵ while two examples mention that fish were killed on St. Martin's Day.²⁶ These are in all likelihood local or personal idiosyncrasies, and do not seem to be of any great significance in the overall context of St. Martin's day customs.

As can be seen from the general trends in distribution and frequency, people largely favoured fowl as the animal to slaughter. When choosing galliform fowl, the male was preferred, and cockerels are the single most numerous category of living thing killed, but hens were also used in many places. Geese were another popular choice, and some people placed great import on them. Other birds such as ducks and turkeys were also offered, but in only one case was a duck the only bird mentioned by an informant,²⁷ and in the case of turkeys they are never presented as the only type of bird offered. The most popular mammals found on farms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were cattle, sheep and pigs. Sheep, being probably the cheapest of the four-footed animals, were the most common beast slain. Pigs were the next, in reasonably significant amounts, but cattle were relatively few, given their great numbers in Ireland. Goats were the animal of choice in only a few cases, and they were not nearly as popular as sheep or cattle in Ireland at the time, so it makes sense that they would not feature in great numbers. (Duffy 2005: 29.) The overwhelming pattern is that the descending hierarchy of popularity appears to tally closely with the economic value of the animal. It seems that, in the main, people chose what they could afford to offer.

Selection Criteria

The criteria one used when selecting the animal seems to have been of importance to some informants, and consideration was given to the colour of the animal in a few cases. There are several factors which affected the decision about which animal or bird they would select for killing. One hundred and thirty-eight informants mentioned ways in which they determined how the animal was selected. The foremost criterion was that the animal should be the best available. Fifty-one sources, or thirty-seven per cent of the overall,

25 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 17, NFC 683: 20.

26 Co. Kilkenny NFC 683: 372, Co. Carlow NFC 683: 16.

27 Co. Kerry, NFCS 435: 437.

mention this fact. They are relatively evenly distributed, and it was a common idea in most places. It may have to do with the sacrificial nature of the ritual, and that people should offer the most valuable thing within their means. It may also have been for gastronomic reasons, given that the slaughtered animal was almost always eaten afterwards. The following example is from Co. Kerry:

The best white goose of the flock, killed by the Mrs. or Mr. of the house.²⁸

Here is an example from Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo:

The animal is selected as a rule weeks before and is generally the best in the flock.²⁹

The next highest frequency was found where informants stated that the bird or animal must be fat. Twenty-eight sources, or twenty-one percent, show fat creatures being preferred. This may again refer to the nature of the ritual, where people felt compelled to give a valuable offering in honour of the saint. It may also have been less altruistic, given that in most cases the meat would be eaten, so a fattened bird or beast would be more appropriate for a meal, or for salting down in the case of larger animals. See the following example from Co. Sligo:

The woman of the house, or whoever does the killing, goes to the hen house and chooses the fattest one.³⁰

This example comes from Croom in Co. Limerick:

The goose selected for killing was the strongest of the flock, that is, the fattest of the young geese.³¹

Mostly every family has a young cock killed on the Saturday previous to the 11th of November, or on the eve of the 11th, and in olden times some had a sheep killed in honour of St. Martin, the fattest and best of either is always chosen.³²

In a similar vein, the third most significant factor was that the bird or animal should be young. Twenty-two sources, or sixteen per cent, mention this as a factor in selection, and again an even spread is apparent. The flesh of young animals or birds would be more tender and pleasing to the palate, so this choice, too, may have been for gustatory reasons as much as anything else.

28 NFC 674: 14.

29 NFC 679: 106.

30 NFC 680: 50.

31 NFC 675: 589.

32 Co. Mayo NFC 678: 220.

Five sources mention some variant of the idea that the bird offered is the first one encountered. One example, from Co. Roscommon, says that the person who is to undertake the killing places their hand in the pen, and closes it on the first bird touched.³³ Another, from Co. Wexford, mentions that the first bird to approach the door when one is choosing, is offered.³⁴ Other examples carry the same idea,³⁵ and it appears to have been an indiscriminate, seemingly random, way of choosing, without much import given to the features of the particular animal. There are twenty-eight other criteria upon which people chose animals for killing, and they are extremely varied in nature. An example from Co. Wexford states that the animal must be without blemish of any kind.³⁶ Another account, this time from Co. Leitrim, describes the due consideration and effort given to the selection of a bird for slaughter:

The way they choose the drake for St. Martin's Feast is when the chicks are young and that they can distinguish the drake from the duck, they just mark a special one, and put a special ring on its leg and says 'this one is for St. Martin' and then special care is taken of him and he is extra fed until the day of the feast comes along.³⁷

An unusual procedure was employed by the fishermen of Curracloe, Co. Wexford to select a cockerel for slaughter:

The men went out on the sea in a boat. They put a rope around the cock's neck and threw it into the water and held on to the other end. Then the boat was rowed into land and the cock pulled through the water. This was done until one of the cocks was alive when they got in. That was the cock that was killed.³⁸

Although this custom seems strange, it may well be an accurate account of actual events. Devotion to St. Martin was very strong in the fishing communities of Wexford, and many taboos and legends concerning fishing on November 11 have been recorded in the National Folklore Archives.³⁹

33 NFC 680: 531.

34 NFC 683: 324.

35 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 504, Co. Clare 675: 89, Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 463.

36 NFC 677: 83.

37 NFC 680: 394.

38 NFC 683: 295. The informant was himself a fisherman, from Enniscorthy, and appeared to be familiar with the custom.

39 For example, NFC 683: 239.

Colour

An inquiry was made on the original 1939 questionnaire regarding the colour of the animals to be killed. Only a few respondents made mention of the colour of the animal to be chosen, with twenty points of information, or one and a half per cent, making up the total. The favoured colour was black, always mentioned in the case of a cock, and in ten instances, from a range of locations around the country. White was mentioned four times, grey two, and red once, from a source in Co. Tipperary, which mentioned both red and black roosters being killed.⁴⁰ This does not appear to have been a compelling factor in the choice of animal in a lot of cases, and it may be descriptive rather than prescriptive.

It seems that people generally tended towards choosing some animal or bird based on its positive traits. It should be healthy, fat and often the best in the flock or herd. This accords well with the notion that the offering should be of value, and not something easily disposed of. It was also beneficial, no doubt, that the bird or beast was a good specimen for consumption, and would make for a pleasing meal. Colour is seldom mentioned, and it does not appear to have been a primary factor in the decision when choosing an animal to kill.

Who Did the Killing

The ritual of slaughtering animals was generally a household activity, private and familiar. As we have seen, the killing took place in and around the home, or in some instances the yard and out-houses, and generally the persons involved were family members and householders. The aim of this section is to establish who performed the ritual of shedding blood, and what animals they chose to kill. Precisely who did the killing, and who was present when it was done, is of interest, in order to establish a clear picture of the custom. A reasonably large dataset has been established to address this question, with 289 mentions of who performed the killing.

Woman of the House

By far, the person most often mentioned was the woman of the house. The female head of the household has the task of killing in 149 instances, over 50 per cent of the total. This seems especially the case when it comes to killing birds, and since fowl were also the majority of animals killed, it stands to reason that

40 NFCS 677: 603.

the matriarch should be the person to perform the act in these instances. Examples abound in the archive material, like this account from Tipperary:

The killing is done by the woman of the house. She partially conceals herself behind a half-opened door.⁴¹

A brief mention is made in Co. Sligo:

[The woman of the house does the work (of killing).]⁴²

Another account from Tipperary, in the townland of Ballagh, describes the custom in the following manner:

[The woman of the house kills it, but if she is sick or dead, the man of the house kills the bird.]⁴³

The role of women in killing was most noted in Co. Tipperary, with twenty-one examples. It was also popular in Co. Galway (19), Clare (16), Kerry (14), Mayo (13), Leitrim (10) and Sligo and Roscommon (9 each). Other examples were found in the following counties; Limerick (8), Kilkenny (5), Carlow (3), Cavan (3), Wexford (3), Kildare (3), Laois (3), Longford (3), Offaly (3), Waterford (1), Westmeath (1), Cork (1). Overall, it is relatively-evenly distributed throughout the places where Martinmas was observed.

Man

The man of the house was the second most frequent in being mentioned as the person who kills. Some 28 examples in total were uncovered, in the following distribution: Clare (4), Galway (5), Kerry (4), Kilkenny (3), Laois (1), Leitrim (1), Limerick (1), Meath (1), Roscommon (1), Sligo (3), Tipperary (2), Waterford (1), Westmeath (1), Wexford (1).

The custom is concisely mentioned in this account from Co. Sligo:

The fowl was killed in the center of the floor by the man of the house.⁴⁴

Man or Woman

Some 18 sources from around the country mention that it could be either the man or the woman of the house who undertook the killing.

41 NFC 677: 628.

42 NFC 680: 116.

43 NFC 677: 454.

44 NFC 680: 87.

Man or Woman, Depending on the Animal to be Killed

A practical variation on the theme is the notion that if the animal to be slaughtered was a fowl, the woman of the house would kill it, but if it were a larger animal such as a sheep, pig or cow, the man of the house would undertake the task. Take this account from Co. Kerry:

It is usual that the woman of the house kills a bird and the man of the house kills any other animal.⁴⁵

A Galway source states:

The killing is done by the woman of the house, except in the case of a pig or sheep, when the man does it.

In Clonlara, Co. Clare, it was the custom that:

The woman of the house or the housekeeper killed the cock or hen and the man killed the animal.⁴⁶

The distribution of this custom is as follows: Clare (2), Galway (3), Kerry (3), Mayo (2), Sligo (1).Tipperary (2), Waterford (2).

This, as stated previously, is a practical consideration, given that considerably more physical effort is required to subdue and slaughter a sheep, pig, or calf, so men would be trusted with the task. It may also relate to the general practice of four-legged beasts being the responsibility of the farmer, who was generally male, while the farmer's wife would be more likely the one responsible for the care of fowl. In fact, the caring for fowl, and the selling of eggs, would have been considered the remit of women, and were men to undertake this kind of work, they would be laughed at and ridiculed. (See Arensberg and Solon 1968: 48.) Therefore, killing fowl is likely to have been seen in a similar light, and therefore avoided by men for the most part. This may account for the comparatively few accounts of men killing poultry for St. Martin.

In a series of responses that did not mention the gender of the person, the neutral term 'Head of the Household' or something similar was used. This appeared in a total of thirty-one examples, with the following distribution: Clare (2), Galway (4), Kilkenny (1), Laois (1), Leitrim (3), Limerick (1), Longford (1), Mayo (3), Tipperary (2), Roscommon (4), Waterford (4), Westmeath (1), Wexford (3).

This example comes from Co. Galway:

45 NFC 674: 132.

46 NFC 675: 385.

The people of each house feast on a cock killed by the head of the family on the previous day... The killing is done by the head of the family who must be accompanied by its youngest member.⁴⁷

This example is from Co. Kerry:

[As a general rule it is the head of the house who kills the bird or animal.]⁴⁸

The implication is not obvious in these accounts. Traditionally, men would have been considered the head of the household on the average farm in rural Ireland, but where men had died, or were working away from home, or in the instance of unmarried women, females would be considered the head of the household.

Oldest and Youngest

Age, rather than gender, was another criterion people mentioned regarding who shed the blood. Twenty-seven accounts mention the oldest member of the household as the one who killed. The distribution is as follows: Carlow (1), Clare (2), Galway (4), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (1), Laois (2), Leitrim (1), Limerick (2), Mayo (5), Tipperary (4), Westmeath (1), Wexford (2).

Informants mention that:

The killing was done by the oldest member of the household in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.⁴⁹

This account from Westport in Co. Mayo mentions two possibilities:

[(1) The oldest person in the house kills it, or (2) anyone in the house.]⁵⁰

In other cases, the youngest in the house was involved in the killing. Four accounts in total mention the participation of the youngest member of the family, with one from Waterford,⁵¹ and the following three from Carlow, Galway and Limerick:

A duck is killed and the blood is sprinkled on the threshold. The youngest child in the house kills it.⁵²

47 NFC 678: 124–5.

48 NFC 674: 25.

49 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 328.

50 Westport, Co. Mayo NFC 679: 286.

51 NFC 677: 51.

52 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 13.

The killing is done by the head of the family who must be accompanied by its youngest member.⁵³

The youngest person in the house entered into the ritual by holding with the woman some part of the dying bird, while the spurting blood was meanwhile directed in a line across the threshold.⁵⁴

The tradition of having the eldest person of the household kill the fowl may have been due to the fact that the custom was best known by people of older generations. Even at the time when the vast majority of these accounts were compiled, there is widespread evidence that the custom was on the decline in most areas, a trend borne out by the fact that the custom is now no longer practised in practically any part of the country.⁵⁵ On the other hand, there may have been some esteem to the role, and the eldest member of the household may have conducted it by virtue of their status. That the youngest members of the family were occasionally involved may have been a strategy to pass on the custom to following generations, or simply a gesture of inclusiveness.⁵⁶

Everyone Present

The efforts to include people in the ceremony may be witnessed by the accounts that mention the fact that the whole family must be present while the killing was going on, and the blood being shed. Twenty-two accounts in the sources mention them, and though the tradition was not numerous, it was widespread: Carlow (1), Galway (4), Kerry (1), Kildare (4), Kilkenny (2), Meath (1), Roscommon (1), Sligo (1), Tipperary (3), Westmeath (1). Wexford (3).

A description from Knockaneerla in Co. Tipperary states:

All members of the household stand round and take part in the ceremony on the night of 10th November.⁵⁷

A Wexford source says that:

The members of the family took part in the killing and sent it to the poor.⁵⁸

53 Co. Galway NFC 678: 125.

54 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 587.

55 See Chapter 16.

56 It is perhaps noteworthy that the ritual of lighting the Christmas candle in Irish tradition is often undertaken by the youngest and an older member of a household. See Danaher 1972: 238.

57 NFC 677: 628.

58 NFC 683: 279.

Four sources state that the person who undertook the killing was a family member named Martin.⁵⁹ Finally, 17 records say that anyone at all could perform the killing:

Anyone in the house could do it.⁶⁰

In the main, these accounts describe a solemn ritual that was sometimes a family affair, and it strengthens the idea that these were private rites, conducted in a domestic setting, and were considered to be important to the well-being of the household. The clearly-defined gender roles of men and women, and what was considered appropriate work for each, was undoubtedly a great influence on who killed for St. Martin. Economic factors determined the choice of animal, and subsequently dictated who would kill it. Fowl were the most popular animals killed, and therefore most of the killing was done by women.

59 Co. Clare NFC 675: 89, Co. Kerry NFC 677: 321, Co. Tipperary NFC 681: 200, Co. Westmeath NFC 1605: 453.

60 NFC 674: 313.

5. Flesh and Blood

This chapter will consider some of the customs and beliefs related to both the blood and the flesh of the sacrificed animals. As seen so far, the blood was spread around doorways, or in the four corners of the house. The aim of this section is to examine some other uses people made of the blood, and what they did with the meat. In the course of examining the archive material in this regard, one custom in particular could be seen as common in certain areas. People would retain some of the blood which had been shed, very often on a piece of cloth, or unspun flax tow. In certain instances, the blood was retained in a bottle or cup, without resorting to soaking it in a textile. This blood, or bloody cloth, would be later used for curing diseases, sudden pains and other ailments. In association with this tradition, there were a few examples of a legend which was told to provide an explanation as to why this was done. The following chapter will now consider the nature and distribution of this practice, as well as mapping the locations in which the legend was recorded.

In total, 114 examples mentioned the blood being kept in cloth or on a piece of paper (See figure 9). They are clustered for the most part in an area encompassing Co. Clare (48 examples), north Co. Kerry (37), and Co. Limerick (9). There are a few examples in other counties, such as Galway (3), Tipperary, Westmeath, Roscommon and Mayo (2 each) and Kildare, Donegal, Kilkenny, Longford and Sligo (1 each). Another cluster, which represents a variation on the tradition, shows 8 examples from Co. Waterford, where blood was retained in a bottle or cup.

Informants describe the practice as follows:

One person told me that after the blood had been allowed to flow it was wiped up with a cloth. This was then kept in a hole in the wall behind the door, and was supposed to keep sickness from the house during the year. I have heard the following story from Mrs. Fitzgibbon, whose mother used to kill a goose in honour of St. Martin. This old woman used keep a box of tow and after the goose was killed she used hold it over the tow in the box

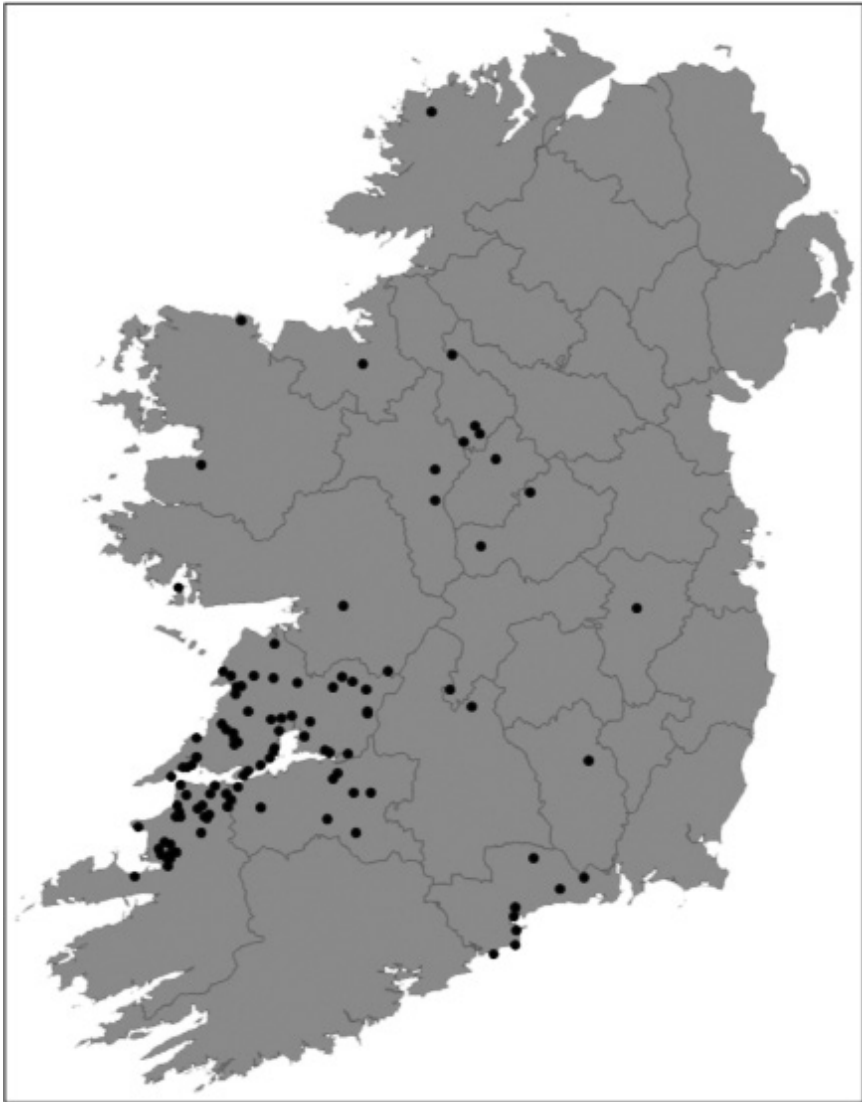


Figure 9 – Distribution and Frequency of Blood Retained for Curing

and make the Sign of the Cross with it. The tow used afterwards be used as a cure for a 'pain in the back'.¹

Some people steep a piece of wadding in blood and wrap paper around it. They put this away carefully as it is said to cure a wound, a pain or a stitch in the side.²

Pieces of tow or wadding are sometimes dipped in the blood and kept as a cure for 'stitches' i.e. pains in the side or back. They are rubbed just like a relic for pains in the bones. The words 'In honour of God and Martin' are used while rubbing.³

As well as pieces of flax tow, other media were used to absorb the blood, such as ribbons, flannel, hay and cotton.⁴ The cloth was stored in a safe place, sometimes in the rafters⁵ or in a hole in the wall.⁶ The tradition in Co. Waterford was to retain the blood without soaking it in cloth. Various vessels were used instead, such as a cup, a tin can or a bottle.⁷ In the latter case, the blood would be stirred to prevent it from coagulating, as liquid blood seems to have been preferred in that instance. By contrast, another account from elsewhere in the county mentions the blood being boiled to a solid cake with the addition of salt.⁸

Cures

As alluded to by the above accounts, it is clear that the cloth was thought to have had curative properties. The tow or cloth was explicitly depicted as having curative properties eighteen times, over a range of areas. Two instances mention it as a cure for sickness in general,⁹ five mention it as a cure for cuts,

1 Co. Limerick, NFC 675: 474.

2 Co Tipperary, NFC 677: 560.

3 Co. Westmeath, NFC 681: 285.

4 Co. Limerick, NFC 675: 452, Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 363, Co. Westmeath NFC 682: 95, Co. Kerry NFCS 414: 60 respectively.

5 Co. Longford NFC 681: 363, Co. Kerry 674: 224.

6 Co. Clare 675: 365, Co. Limerick 675: 471.

7 NFC 677: 211, 677: 83, NFC 677: 43, NFC 677: 172 respectively.

8 NFC 677: 51.

9 Co. Clare NFCS 607: 262, Co. Galway 678: 355.

wounds, and sores.¹⁰ Pain, sudden pain or a pain in the side was instanced seven times.¹¹ Two sources mention it as a cure for headache, and one mentions a sore throat in this context.¹² This must be considered against the background of a large amount of informants mentioning that the blood or flesh of animals killed at St. Martin had curative properties. There are many accounts from the sources that speak of cures thus elicited for a variety of different reasons but these are not presented in the context of a blood-soaked textile.

Legend

The notion that the tow with blood, or the blood itself, could cure a pain in the side appears to have attracted a legend to tradition concerning St. Martin. It concerns the Holy Family asking for lodgings while on a journey, and the only accommodation given to them is a shed or outhouse, which was granted to them by a brusque man. During the night, the man is struck with a stitch or pain in the side, and Jesus miraculously cures him by placing his hand over the site of the pain and reciting a charm. The legend usually ends with this charm.

Four examples of the legend have been found in the context of St. Martin's Day. The first is from Tullygarvan West in Kilmahkeen, Co. Clare, and is recorded in the following manner:

As the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord were travelling one night, they asked a night's lodging. The man of the house did not want to let them in, but the woman of the house welcomed them; although she thought her place not suitable for keeping lodgers. The floor of the house was strewn with hulls of flax in preparation for spinning, and Our Lord and his mother had to sleep on those during the night.

During the night the woman of the house got a 'stitch' in her side, and when the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord were going away in the morning, the Saviour said the following words in Irish:

"Bean binn agus fear borb,

- 10 Co. Kerry NFCS 439: 119, Co. Kilkenny NFCS 859: 312, Co. Sligo NFCS 172: 322, Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 558, Co. Westmeath 681: 248.
- 11 Co. Clare NFCS 598: 473, NFCS 602: 228, Co. Galway NFCS 34: 256, Co. Roscommon 680: 563, Co. Limerick NFCS 528: 287, Co. Tipperary 677: 558, Co. Westmeath NFC 681: 285.
- 12 Co. Limerick NFCS 517: 211, Co. Kerry NFC 674: 438, Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 455 respectively.

*Chuir mac Dé ina Luidhe sa cholg
Dar le Muire agus a Mac
Sgaoilich agus scaradh an ghream so.*

[A gentle woman and a brusque man
Put the Son of God sleeping in the husks of flax
By Mary and her son
Release and remove this stitch.]¹³

A full version of the story can be found in records from Doohoma, Co. Mayo:

Oidhche Nodhlag bhí an Mhaighdean Bheannauighthe ag dul thart. Tháinig sí go teach áithrid. Diarr sí lóisdín. D'aontaigh an bhean ach d'íultaigh an fear í. Chuaidh an mhaighdean amach d'tí an scioból. I rith na h-oidhche tháinig pian mhór ar an bhfear. Chuaidh a bhean amach go dtí an bhean bhocht a bhí san sgioból le comhairle nó leigheas a fagháil uaithi-

*“Is mine min ná grán
Is mine mná na fir
Cur colg leis an bpian
Agus beidh d’fhear slán”
ar sise léithi.*

Chuaidh sí isteach agus rinne mar dubhradh leis agus d'imthigh an phian. Ariamh ó shoin má tá barrach san teach téightear é agus cuirtear leis an áit a bhfuil an phian ann agus imthuigheann an phian ón áit na mbun. Dá mbeadh barrach ag daoine anois mar a bhí fadó agus fios aca go bhfuil leigheas ann ní bheadh call dochtúirí orra. Nuair a bhéas tú ag cur an bharraigh leis an áit a bhfuil an phian deireann tú:

*”Bean mín, fear borb,
agus Mac Dé na luighe san gcolg”¹⁴*

[On Christmas Eve the Blessed Virgin was going around. She came to a certain house. She asked for accommodation. The woman of the house agreed, but the man of the house refused her. The Virgin went out to the

13 NFC 675: 183.

14 NFC 679: 324.

shed. During the night a great pain came on the man. His wife went out to the poor woman in the shed to get a cure or advice from her”

“Flour is finer than grain
 Women are finer than men
 Put a flax hull to the pain
 And your husband will be cured”

She said to her.

She went in and did as was said and the pain went. Ever since then, if there is tow in the house it is got and put to the place where the pain is and the pain goes away from the place immediately. If people had flax now like there was long ago, and if they knew there was a cure in it, there would be no need for doctors. When you are putting the tow to the spot you say”

“Gentle woman, rude man,
 And the Son of God lying in the flax hulls.”]

Another similar version was recorded in Carrigkerry, Co. Limerick, where a comparable form of the charm is recited at the end of the legend.¹⁵ Finally, a printed version, along with an account of the custom, appeared in an article by James Mooney in 1887. (Mooney 1887: 164.)

A stitch in the side is cured by applying the blood of a rooster which has been sacrificed to St. Martin. On the eve of St. Martin it is customary to sacrifice an animal to the saint, or, as the people express it, they “draw blood for St. Martin.” The animal most commonly selected is a rooster, which has been consecrated to this purpose some time in advance. The blood is soaked up with tow or cotton, and preserved as a remedy for the stitch. At the moment of applying it to the side of the sufferer the following words are recited:

*“Fear caoin aig a mnaoi bhoirbh,
 A chuir Íosa Críosa na luighe anns a g-colg;
 Cúig mheuraibh Íosa Críosa fuascailt do ghreime,
 Dearnna Mhuire agus a Mic leat.”*

15 NFCS 487: 462.

Which may be thus rendered:

A mild man with the haughty wife,
 Who put Jesus Christ lying on the hulls (of the tow);
 The five fingers of Jesus Christ to relieve your stitch;
 The palm (of the hand) of Mary and of her Son with you.

In Galway the form is somewhat different, and the characters of the man and his wife are reversed. In the same county the blood is sometimes sprinkled upon the different members of the family when the animal is killed, and the words alone are used to cure the stitch, as well as a stomach ache. The words are founded on the legend that Christ once asked permission to stop overnight at a house, where the husband, a kind-hearted man, was disposed to accommodate him, but his wife, who was of the opposite disposition, compelled the Savior to sleep on the hulls stripped from the flax. For this reason tow is preferred to cotton. The practice is known throughout the country.

Mooney's assertion that the custom is known throughout the country is well-founded, but it is rarely portrayed in the context of St. Martin's Day traditions. The story is very popular in Irish tradition, being perhaps one of the most well-known religious legends in Ireland. (Ó hÓgáin 2006: 300.) It has its origin in an international migratory legend, and versions of it were told in Continental European lore. It is of considerable antiquity, and was recited in western, southern and central Europe in the Middle Ages. It can ultimately be traced back to ancient Egyptian mythology, whereby the religious characters involved were Isis and Osiris, rather than the Christian holy family. (Dömötör 1972.) In Ireland, the charm mentioned in the story is known as *Ortha an Ghreama*, meaning the 'Charm of the Stitch'. It is an example of a narrative charm, and combines a legend with a curing prayer. (Partridge 1980/1981.) Micheál Ó hAodha (2011: 30) explains the narrative's popularity and wide distribution throughout the country as a result of it being a common story amongst the Travelling Community, featuring as it does a travelling character in the central role. It was far from being an exclusively Traveller practice, however, and both the legend and attendant ritual were common amongst settled people in great numbers. In the usual course of the healing ritual, holy water would be placed on a piece of cloth, tow or wadding, and placed on the site of the pain. (Sayers 1973: 206.) This ritual parallels exactly that found in connection with St. Martin's Day, and is probably its ultimate origin. The legend and ritual were likely borrowed into Martinian tradition as a result of both contexts having strong connections with curing. Another factor that might

have influenced the borrowing is that of spinning, where work involving the turning of wheels, and the spinning of wool and flax in particular, was forbidden. People may have seen unspun flax in this context as having to do with St. Martin's Day, and drawn connections between the two traditions.

Cures from the Blood

Besides statements regarding the use of blood on cloth or a piece of tow, there were a great many sources which stated that the blood could provide cures, but did not mention the process used to enact the treatment. A large proportion, 144 sources, mentioned that the blood was effective in curing a pain in the side or a stitch, or a sudden pain (See figure 10). This is clearly linked to the practice of healing with tow mentioned above, and is likely a result of the popularity of the stitch legend. There is a distinct bias towards an area covered by counties Clare and Kerry, where the legend of the stitch was popular. The fact that the legend was much more popular in Irish-speaking areas could also be an explanation for this distribution. Most of these statements, 105, came from the Questionnaire material, while 39 came from the Schools' collection, and one came from a printed source. Their geographical distribution is as follows: Clare (53), Kerry (57), Kildare (1), Leitrim (1), Limerick (2), Roscommon (3), Tipperary (6), Westmeath (1), Waterford (7).

Old people say that there is a cure in the blood of St. Martin's Cock for a stitch in your side.¹⁶

They used to say there was a cure in it for a stitch or a pain in your side.¹⁷

It was supposed to cure a stick or a pain in the side.¹⁸

Given the propensity of examples to be present in greater number in Irish-speaking areas such as Kerry, Clare and Waterford, it is clear that oral tradition regarding the stitch legend and charm are responsible for the popularity of these beliefs in these areas.

16 Co. Clare NFC 675: 173.

17 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 406

18 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 426.

Disease

A similar but separate strand of belief can be seen in the idea that the blood spilled on St. Martin's Day, or the flesh of a bird so killed, could prevent disease. This was found in 22 examples, 2 from the Schools' Material and 20 from the Questionnaire responses: Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Galway (1), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (3), Leitrim (3), Limerick (1), Mayo (1), Offaly (1), Roscommon (12), Sligo (2), Tipperary (1), Waterford (2), Westmeath (1), Wexford (1).

This belief was more widespread, and does not appear to be particularly related to any legend or other oral tradition. The following examples illustrate the beliefs:

The flesh is eaten to keep away disease during the year.¹⁹

The blood is supposed to be a cure for certain kinds of skin disease.²⁰

St. Martin's bird keeps away the fever and disease.²¹

Although precisely how the flesh or blood was supposed to effect the cure is not mentioned in most cases, but one example from Co. Leitrim is illustrative in this regard:

A small piece of the flesh is given to every sick person, and as the flesh withers the person gets well.²²

This is an example of sympathetic magic, where the piece of flesh is associated with the disease, and as it decomposes, the sickness sympathetically diminishes. Such ideas and healing rituals are found elsewhere in Irish folk medicine. Take for example a cure for warts that involved burying a piece of meat that had been rubbed to the afflicted area, and as it rotted the wart faded. (Barbour 1897: 387.)

Thus a clear picture emerges of the traditional uses of blood that was shed on St. Martin's feast. It was widely believed to have curative properties, and this was in no small part related to the custom of curing a stitch with a piece of tow. The belief legend that inspired this notion was well known in Ireland, and was particularly associated with St. Martin's feast-day in west Munster, and the area around Tipperary. The fact that the legend and associated charm were

19 Co. Kilkenny NFC 675: 365.

20 Co. Kilkenny NFC 683: 441.

21 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 305.

22 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 382.

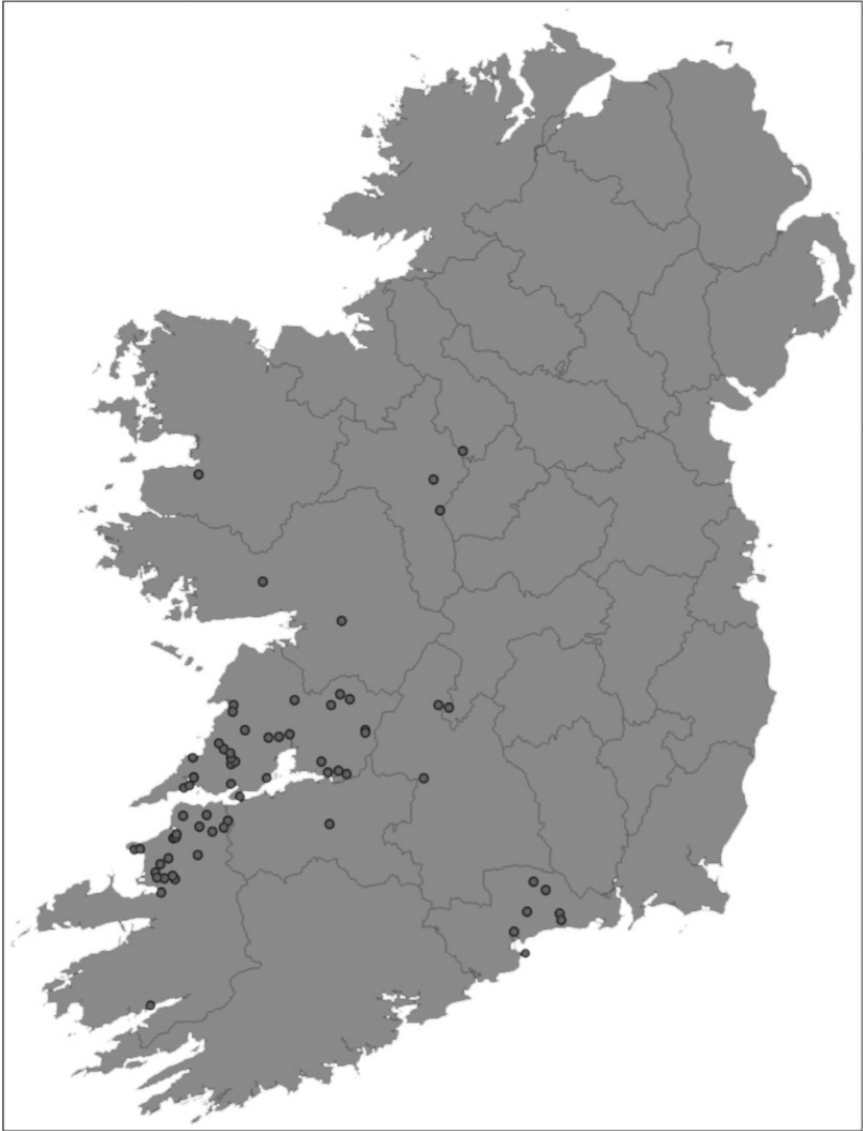


Figure 10 – Blood Cures Pain

mostly found in the Irish language fits well with the idea that they were most popular in the Munster *Gaeltacht* areas where St. Martin's Day was observed. In other areas, the blood, and sometimes flesh, was thought to be able to cure diseases of various different kinds. Blood spilled for St. Martin was seen as a holy product, and in a similar vein to its widespread use as a prophylactic item, it was also imbued with medicinal qualities. It was, unquestionably, viewed as a powerful substance, similar to holy water and other magico-religious charms.

Flesh

The blood for St. Martin and the meat for yourself.²³

In the vast majority of animal sacrificial rites across all cultures and times, the flesh of the slaughtered creature was consumed by those conducting the ritual. After the essence or life force of the animal has been offered, the body remains, and is subsequently eaten. (Petropoulou 2008: 26.) This is overwhelmingly the case in the Irish context. In total, 287 informants mentioned what was done with the flesh of the animals thus killed, 233 responses were from the Questionnaire material, 45 from the Schools' collection and 9 examples from the Main Manuscript collection. Only 12 informants mentioned that the flesh was not eaten, but dealt with in some other way. Some 238 definite instances have been recorded of the meat being eaten, and another 37 mentioned that the flesh was given away or shared with less fortunate people, the implication being that it was given as a gift of food for consumption.

The way in which the meat was eaten, the way it was prepared, or when it was consumed, sometimes varied, but the general agreement is that it was to be used as food. A total of 252 sources mentioned the fact that the flesh was eaten, although some accounts did not go into specifics as to when, or how, it was prepared. These were found in the following distribution: Carlow (5), Cavan (4), Clare (29), Donegal (1), Fermanagh (1), Galway (36), Kerry (4), Kildare (4), Kilkenny (11), Laois (7), Leitrim (11), Limerick (12), Longford (4), Mayo (28), Meath (2), Offaly (8), Roscommon (17), Sligo (13), Tipperary (26), Waterford (12), Westmeath (5), Wexford (11).

Most sources are straightforward and succinct about what was done with the meat:

The flesh is eaten in the usual way.²⁴

23 Co. Cavan NFC 684: 165.

24 Co. Clare NFC 675: 194.

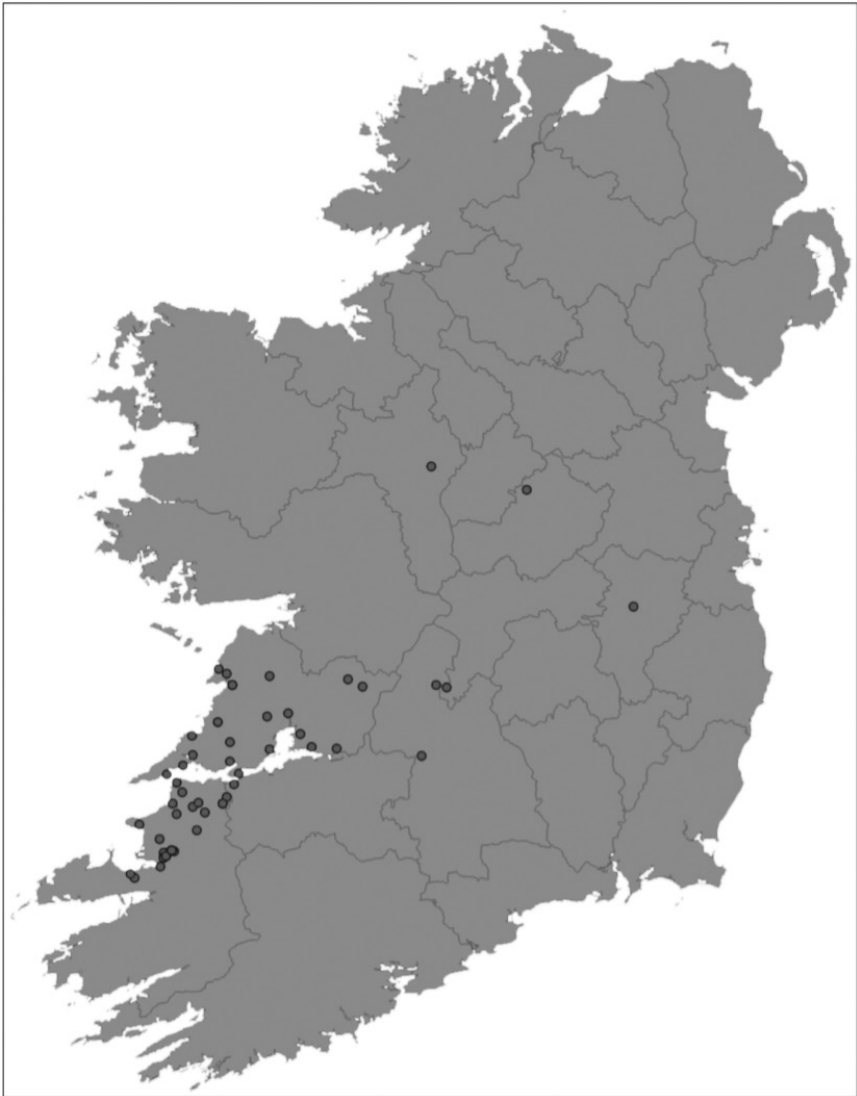


Figure 11 – Blood Cures a Stitch

The flesh is eaten by the household.²⁵

A good meal is made of the flesh of the fowl.²⁶

Some accounts specifically mention that the meat should be eaten on a Sunday, but this was only found in four examples.²⁷ This is probably adherence to the general Irish custom of eating meat dishes on Sundays. Another five sources specified that the meat was roasted,²⁸ and another six other sources insisted that the meat should be boiled.²⁹ These variations probably reflect the personal culinary preferences of the persons involved, and do not seem to have any deeper significance. In many cases, although the animal or bird was killed on the eve of the feast, the meat was kept and eaten the following day. This was found in fifteen cases: Galway (2), Kilkenny (2), Mayo (5), Offaly (2), Roscommon (2), Tipperary (2).

The flesh of the cock is eaten on 11th Nov.³⁰

The flesh is eaten on the feast-day of St. Martin.³¹

The flesh is eaten, at least the greater portion of it, but a tiny bit is preserved in honour of the feast. When the feast day comes around again it is destroyed.³²

This last example is illustrative of another use that was made of the flesh. In some cases, the meat, or a portion of it, was retained and kept as a talisman or charm. Carlow (2), Galway (1), Kildare (1), Tipperary (2), Wexford (1).

The flesh is eaten and a small piece is kept in the house as it is said to cure a pain in the side.³³

25 Co. Clare NFC 675: 218.

26 Co. Leitrim 680: 240.

27 Co. Galway 678: 216, Co. Roscommon 680: 455, Co. Tipperary 677: 380, Co. Westmeath 681: 145.

28 Co. Clare NFC 675: 55, Co. Kilkenny 683: 475, Co. Waterford 677: 123, Co. Waterford 677: 144, Co. Tipperary 677: 329.

29 Co. Laois NFC 682: 209, NFC 682: 246, Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 329, Co. Waterford NFC 677: 144, NFC 677: 211.

30 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 549.

31 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 389.

32 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 606.

33 Co. Tipperary NFC 678: 563.

They keep the flesh of a chicken in a dish, and they say that they would never be sick if this is done.³⁴

The flesh of the bird is eaten by the people of the house. A portion of the flesh is left up on the chimney and when an animal gets sick it is given a bit of the flesh, that is supposed to cure it.³⁵

Other sources also mention how the flesh could be curative, or preventative of diseases. As mentioned in the discussion on the curative properties of the blood, the flesh was, on occasion, viewed in the same light. This was the case in 21 examples, all from the Questionnaire results: Carlow (3), Kildare (3), Kilkenny (3), Leitrim (4), Mayo (2), Offaly (1), Roscommon (1), Sligo (1), Tipperary (1), Wexford (2).

[The flesh of the killed bird is eaten, and it is said that whomever eats it will be healthy from disease during the year.]³⁶

The flesh of the bird is cooked and eaten. It is supposed to keep away disease for the year.³⁷

As mentioned in the discussion on the blood shed for St. Martin, and cures subsequently elicited from it, it was viewed as a powerful healing or protective type of folk medicine. The curative or preventative properties of the animal products could extend beyond the protection of humans to animals also, as mentioned above, and is seen in the following example:

The flesh is then eaten by the people of the house. It is a cure for diseases in cattle. If you leave some of the bones or flesh in the byre it will keep away diseases.³⁸

Charity

A common theme that was found in relation to what happened to the meat was the idea that it should be given away as charity, to persons less fortunate. A total of 33 informants mentioned that they gave away the flesh to poor neighbours. Questionnaire sources accounted for 26 accounts, 6 came from

34 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 16.

35 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 448.

36 Co. Sligo NFC 678: 33.

37 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 450.

38 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 320.

the Schools collection and 1 from the Main Manuscripts material. This idea was found in a number of places, but was to the fore in the southeast, especially Co. Wexford: Carlow (2), Galway (3), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (5), Laois (2), Roscommon (1), Tipperary (3), Wexford (16).

The examples below illustrate the general idea of how the meat should be shared:

Some people divide the animal killed amongst the neighbours. I have known this to be done. This is considered luckier.³⁹

The draining of the blood done, the bird was given to some poor person to make a dinner of as a charity or alms in honour of St. Martin.⁴⁰

The flesh was eaten on Nov. 11th or if a poor person came to the house before the fowl was eaten it should be given to that person in honour of God and St. Martin.⁴¹

The flesh of the bird was then given to the poor for charity.⁴²

In other examples, live birds were given as charity to neighbours,⁴³ and on occasion other gifts such as clothing or vegetables were given away.⁴⁴ The notion that St. Martin should be so associated with charity is undoubtedly related to the account of him in the *Vita Martini*, dividing his cloak and sharing it with a beggar. An informant from Co. Clare expresses the idea of charity and St. Martin neatly, and relates it to the motif of the cloak:

There are [phrases] about St. Martin's Cloak, and it is that if you have so much charity as to give away clothes, or any other things, it is said that you give away part of Saint Martin's Cloak.⁴⁵

St. Martin was a medieval archetype of Christian benevolence, with his selfless act of charity serving as an example that others should follow. This concept was well known in early Ireland, and comparisons to St. Martin's

39 Co. Clare NFC 675: 332.

40 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 223.

41 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 75.

42 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 245.

43 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 379, Co. Sligo NFC 680: 100, Co. Mayo NFC 679: 345.

44 Co. Laois NFC 682: 262, Co. Westmeath NFC 681: 221.

45 Co. Clare NFC 675: 307.

charity were occasionally made in medieval Irish religious literature.⁴⁶ Its presence in folk tradition, however, as manifest in the idea of sharing with the poor, may be later in date, given that it is not particularly widespread across the country, and appears to have been concentrated in the southeast. It may be ecclesiastical in derivation, and somewhere like St. Martin's Parish Church in Tintern, Co. Wexford may have been the point of origin, with inspiration for the development coming from homilies or other readings about St. Martin. The case is not clear though, and the dating or nature of any such development proved impossible to determine with any accuracy.

The following section is an examination of some further elements of the killing and blood-shedding ritual, that will provide a fuller picture of all its aspects. The first part examines the format in which the blood was spread on the door, floor or corner of the room. People sometimes made crosses or other layouts with the blood. The second section deals with how long the shed blood was allowed to lie before it was cleaned up, if it was at all.

Cross of Blood

The way in which the blood was applied to the door, threshold or four corners could take several forms. Overall, 117 sources mention the form in which the blood was applied, representing nine per cent of the overall. The vast majority, 114, mentions the fact that the blood was applied in the shape of a cross. This accords well with other traditional Christian practices of the time, particularly with the application of holy water. The blood was often seen to have protective powers, and no doubt the fact that it was in the shape of a cross assisted in this regard. The custom of painting crosses in blood was particularly strong in Connacht, but was also well known in lesser concentration in most other areas. Clare (6), Galway (36), Kerry (7), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (3), Laois (2), Leitrim (7), Limerick (2), Longford (1), Mayo (12), Meath (1), Offaly (4), Roscommon (10), Sligo (4), Tipperary (6), Waterford (8), Wexford (8).

A cock, hen or goose is killed in honour of St. Martin. The boss of the house kills it. There is a cross made on the door jamb with the blood.⁴⁷

46 The Early Irish *Life of St. Samthann* depicts an act of charity by the saint, who is compared to St. Martin in her generosity towards the poor. See Plummer 1910: 255. Some are of the opinion that the reference to St. Martin is later in date than the Early Irish text, and was added to the original afterwards, but it is, nevertheless, medieval in date. See Africa 2000: 97–110, 109ff.

47 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 61.

They'd use the hen – or what ever it would be - and most of the blood. All they'd take out of it would be enough to cover the top of their finger, and put a cross on the jamb of the door.⁴⁸

Some people make a cross with the blood on to the back of the kitchen door.⁴⁹

Three Drops

Another variant was the practice of letting three drops fall from the bleeding animal. Three is a very common number in ritual, beliefs, and religious thinking, and was often imbued with symbolic significance.⁵⁰ This was not a particularly widespread idea, with only five examples being found, from various places around the country. It may represent spontaneous variation on the part of individuals, rather than a diffused continuum of a common practice. It was found in the following places: Mayo (2), Kilkenny (1), Galway (1), Leitrim (1).

The blood is dropped in the four corners of the house, three drops in each corner.⁵¹

I.H.S.

One very localised variation of the cross motif was presented in two sources that mentions I.H.S. being written in blood on the back of the door. Both came from the same region in Corkaguiney, Co. Kerry, namely Cloghane and Kinard.⁵² This was not found anywhere else, and seems to be an entirely localized variation of the practice.

[Sometimes the letters I.H.S. are written on the back of the door with the blood.]⁵³

48 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 293.

49 Co. Clare NFC 675: 299.

50 For an investigation of this theme, see Hopper 1938.

51 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 59.

52 NFC 217: 158.

53 Kinard, Co. Kerry NFC 674: 164.

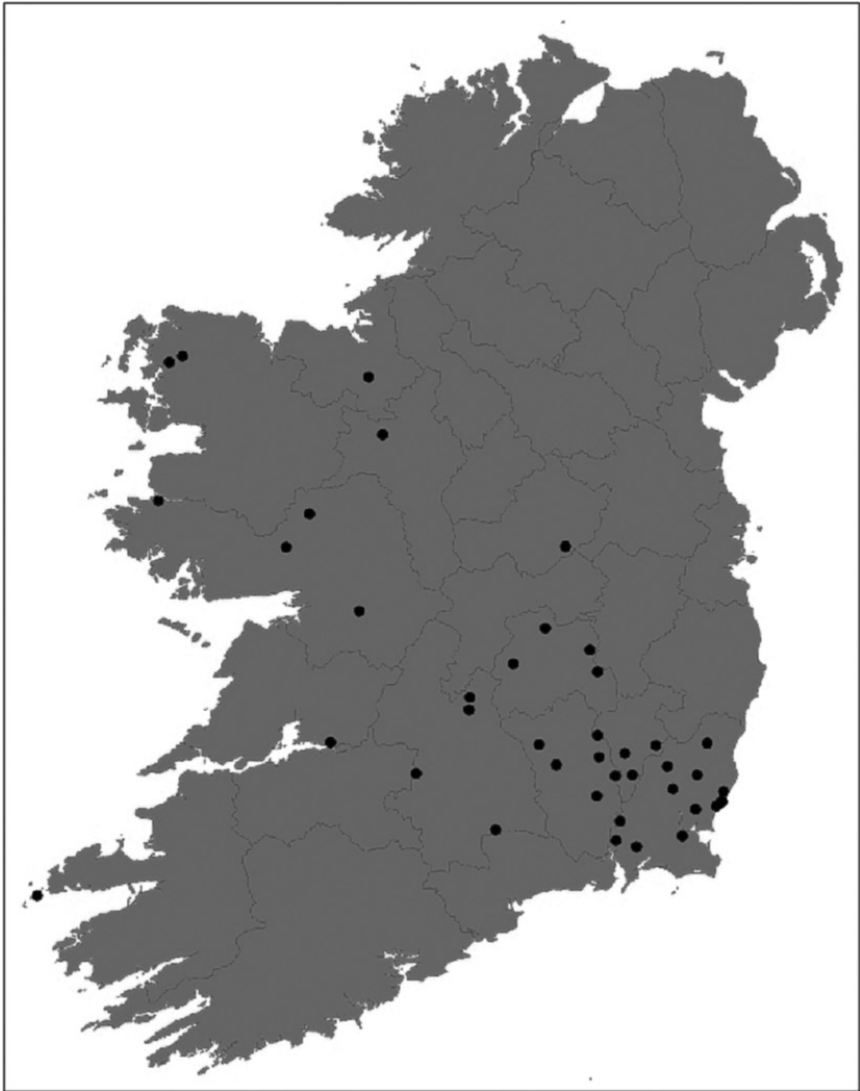


Figure 12 – Gifts of Meat or Birds Given on St. Martin's Day

I.H.S. is a Christogram, a monogram of the name of Jesus. It is thought to derive from the Greek spelling *Ihsous*, and was a popular symbol from the early days of Christianity. (Gieben 1980: 18.)

Severed Head

One further variation on the theme of spreading blood around one's premises in a particular fashion was the custom of throwing the head of the slaughtered animal over the house. This was not found in relation to larger animals, which is unsurprising given the cumbersome and impractical nature of such an act, and was restricted to the severed heads of fowl. This, too, was not especially common, being uncovered only 12 times in total, in the following frequency: Wexford (3), Cavan (3), Carlow (2), Mayo (1), Leitrim (1), Galway (1), Fermanagh (1).

This custom is so oddly specific that it is probably not a spontaneous development, and represents a scattered distribution of a common idea. Reasons were not given for this particular action, but it is presented in the same context as marking thresholds and doorways, and encircling the house by anointing the four corners in blood, which were protective rituals to ward off disease, bad luck and evil.

Some of the older people had a custom of severing the head of the bird from the body and of throwing the bleeding head across the house (outside). There is no explanation of this.⁵⁴

The head of the bird is cut off and is thrown across the house.⁵⁵

The blood is sprinkled in the four corners of the house, and the head of the chicken is thrown across the house.⁵⁶

The format of the blood, be it a cross, three drops or I.H.S., were very likely though to have some sacred association, and indeed may have been seen to aid in the prophylactic function of the blood in warding off disease, evil, or death. In general, they lend weight to the image of the blood as a sacred substance, and the fact that the blood shed on St. Martin's Eve was generally not consumed, unlike that shed on other occasions, confirms that it was thought of as being extraordinary.

⁵⁴ Co. Mayo NFC 679: 504.

⁵⁵ Co. Leitrim NFC 684: 165.

⁵⁶ Co. Leitrim NFC 684: 172.

The St. Martin's Day questionnaire of 1939 contained a question on how long the blood was allowed to remain after it had been spilled or applied at a particular location. There is a range of answers that were provided to this question, from a total of 190 questionnaire replies. Due to the question being particularly specific, the point was not addressed anywhere in material from the Main Manuscript Collection, and only twice in the Schools Collection.⁵⁷ No material from secondary sources has been forthcoming in this context, to date.

Wears Away

A total of 123 sources describe some version of the idea that the blood was not washed away, but allowed to remain where it was put until it wore away naturally. This idea was evenly distributed around the area in which St. Martin's Day was observed: Carlow (1), Cavan (2), Clare (15), Cork (1), Donegal (1), Galway (19), Kerry (1), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (4), Laois (1), Leitrim (6), Limerick (3), Longford (1), Mayo (14), Meath (1), Offaly (4), Roscommon (7), Sligo (7), Tipperary (19), Waterford (8), Westmeath (3), Wexford (5).

The idea is expressed as follows:

The blood was neither swept nor washed away, but remained till time obliterated the marks.⁵⁸

It is not rubbed off, and is said to avert diseases.⁵⁹

The blood is undisturbed during St. Martin's Day, but is worn away by any traffic after that.

This was widespread, although some variations on the theme were uncovered. A source from Co. Roscommon mentions the idea that the marks were left undisturbed, and were painted over again every year, until it left a permanent mark like paint, and could be generations old.⁶⁰ Another example mentions how turf mould could be placed on the blood as it was left to wear away, in case it was licked by animals.⁶¹ Another informant also places turf mould on

57 Co. Leitrim NFCS 195: 390, Co. Galway NFCS 67: 137.

58 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 224.

59 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 62.

60 Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 575.

61 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 485.

the blood as it was left to wear away, but the reason given was that it could be frightening for children.⁶²

Next Day

A total of 36 sources mention that the blood was left where it was for the duration of a day, or washed or swept away on November 12. This was found in a variety of places around the country. Clare (3), Galway (2), Kerry (2), Kildare (1), Laois (2), Leitrim (3), Limerick (2), Mayo (8), Roscommon (3), Sligo (4), Tipperary (4), Wexford (2).

The blood is left on till the day after the feast, that is the 12th.⁶³

The blood is sprinkled on the door posts and allowed to remain there until the feast is over.⁶⁴

The blood which was found on the threshold etc. was allowed to remain from the time of the killing on St. Martin's Eve until about the same time on St. Martin's Night, that is a complete day.⁶⁵

These accounts mention that the blood was washed or brushed away after the period of about 24 hours. A couple of informants describe how the blood was not washed, that St. Martin himself was believed to remove the blood:

[Some say that it would be gone the next day, and that it was the saint himself who took it.]⁶⁶

Some people say that the blood was sprinkled behind the door and always disappears by morning. They believed that St. Martin and The Good People came at night to take it away.⁶⁷

This belief was not common though, and the reference to St. Martin in association with the Good People, meaning the fairies, is not a typical depiction of the saint in Irish tradition. Another atypical account describes how the duration of the blood depended on the animal killed, and if it was a pullet it was

62 Co. Galway NFC 678: 108.

63 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 87.

64 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 136.

65 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 590.

66 Co. Clare NFC 675: 206

67 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 57.

left for 12 hours, a chicken for 24, and a cock for 48. The informant goes on to say that it was then washed off afterwards, and the brush used to wash it off was burned.⁶⁸ Questions have been raised about the atypical nature of other material from this informant, so the account may be somewhat fanciful.

Other variants on the duration of the blood saw it being left for two days, but only three examples of this were uncovered, and all from the same area near Tralee in Co. Kerry.⁶⁹ Two instances mention that it was left for three days.⁷⁰ One example from Co. Cork mentioned that it was left for nine days.⁷¹

Five examples mention that the blood was left all year long. In these instances, the blood was spread or daubed on the back of the door, since it would wear away from the threshold. Four examples came from Co. Kerry, and one from Co. Roscommon. The following is illustrative of the practice:

The cross'd be left there for the next twelve months, and they'd always put the next cross on the same spot.⁷²

The reasoning behind the shedding of blood on St. Martin's Day had a range of explanations, but to the fore is the idea of protection. The blood was often seen as sacred, and for the most part, people left it where it lay, and went about their business after the feast. Some instances saw the blood being preserved in situ, and repainted in the same spot once a year, and these accounts seem to emphasise continuity as an important element of the practice.

68 Co. Kildare NFC 682: 90.

69 NFC 674: 382–8.

70 Co. Clare 675: 248, Co. Mayo 679: 227.

71 NFC 676: 228.

72 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 293.

6. Motivations for Killing

This chapter explores the reasons people gave for killing on behalf of St. Martin. The shedding of blood was considered essential to the celebration of the feast, and it is clear that many people believed it was an obligation that should be upheld, regardless of circumstances, for fear of offending the saint or invoking his wrath. The reasons people gave reveal their direct thoughts on the subject, and get to the very heart of what the ritual meant to them. Of course, the reasons people gave to express their motivations in undertaking the killing may not be a satisfactory explanation for the origin of the customs, as the meaning of ritual can change greatly over time. People's explanations for the action may not always be historically accurate, but they are a good indicator of their beliefs at a given point in time, and in some instances, may indicate their attempts to interpret events that have become obscured with the passage of years. It can also be the case that, without some official narrative that explains the origin and function of a custom, people are free to shape their own, and the same event or action can vary in meaning amongst different persons. When considering the following explanations, it may also be worth bearing in mind that people can have more than one motivation for undertaking the rite, and can hold simultaneous explanations for the custom, as long as they do not contradict each other. Careful consideration, therefore, must now be made of the various accounts, in order to understand the broad picture that emerges concerning people's beliefs on the matter.

Protection

Protection was undoubtedly the main reason given for people's motivation for shedding blood. Some 48 sources mentioned protection in a general sense as the reason they would kill. One such explanation was given in the Main manuscript collection, 12 from the Schools' collection, and 35 from the Questionnaire material. They were found in the following distribution: Carlow (1), Cavan (2), Clare (8), Galway (7), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (3), Laois (3), Leitrim

(6), Longford (2), Mayo (3), Offaly (2), Roscommon (3), Sligo (3), Tipperary (2), Waterford (1), Westmeath (1).

The idea was relatively widespread throughout the country, although areas such as Clare, Galway and Leitrim that connected the killing most intimately with the protection of animals appear to dominate the distribution. Statements regarding the idea of protection demonstrate people's beliefs on the matter:

There is no explanation of the ceremony except that it is imploring St. Martin's intercession to protect the house and save the people from disease, accident etc.¹

The blood is offered to God and St. Martin, to protect the household during the year.²

Some accounts are more specific, such as an example from Co. Clare, which mentions that horses were to be protected,³ or another, from Co. Waterford, which mentions herds being protected from storms and bad weather.⁴ These last examples are typical of accounts that mention protection for animals. This is standard in Martinian belief in Ireland, and evidence so far presented regarding beliefs about luck and protection indicate that the saint was very clearly seen as a protector of livestock. Thus, it is not surprising to find 63 examples that specifically mention the protection of animals as being the motivating factor for killing. One came from the Main manuscripts collection, 21 from the Schools' material, and 41 from the Questionnaire responses: Carlow (3), Cavan (4), Clare (7), Cork (1), Galway (6), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (3), Laois (5), Leitrim (9), Longford (1), Mayo (1), Meath (1), Offaly (4), Roscommon (4), Sligo (6), Tipperary (3), Wexford (2).

The kinds of threats from which animals needed protection include disease, sudden death and accidents. The following examples illustrate the informants' beliefs in this regard:

The sprinkling of the blood is supposed to keep illness away from all the animals on the farm.⁵

The reason for it is that by doing so, they will have good luck, and that all the property and crops and cattle will be under the protection of St.

1 Co. Westmeath, NFC 681: 289.

2 Co. Galway NFC 677: 307.

3 Co Clare NFC 675: 269.

4 Co. Waterford NFC 677: 156.

5 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 89.

Martin and that they will be successful and prosperous for the coming twelve months.⁶

If you don't shed blood don't wonder or don't murmur if there's disease or red water in the cattle or disorder in the hens.⁷

Dangers – Sickness, Evil and Violence

Exactly what people wished to be protected from is mentioned in many accounts. Sickness accounted for 68 examples, and many of these are outlined in chapter 10, which discusses the prophylactic nature of the blood. Evil was another threat people wished to avoid, and this was mentioned in 14 accounts.⁸ More specifically, evil spirits were the danger outlined in a further 18 sources.⁹ The following examples illustrate these beliefs:

The object or motive was to invoke the aid of the Trinity and St. Martin to banish all evil spirits from the house and from each room in the house. It was also done to prevent all evil spirits from entering the house, rooms and out offices. It was also to prevent sickness or plague from entering the house, thus safeguarding the inhabitants and the animals from sickness.¹⁰

It was also believed that any house in which this sprinkling of blood was done, that it was impossible for any evil spirit to pass the threshold.¹¹

The widespread notion of blood shed for St. Martin having curative properties has been previously discussed, and the procurement of these cures was the main reason people gave for performing the killing in 68 examples. Ensuring good luck, or the avoidance of bad luck, was also noted as being the reason people gave for killing in 52 cases. A thorough discussion of these accounts can be found below. The prevention of violence was found in three

6 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 395.

7 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 305.

8 Carlow (2), Clare (1), Cork (1), Galway (3), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (1), Laois (1), Limerick (1), Laois (1), Limerick (1), Mayo (1), Roscommon (1), Tipperary (1).

9 Cork (1), Galway (2), Kerry (3), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (2), Longford (1), Mayo (1), Roscommon (1), Tipperary (2), Unspecified (2), Waterford (1).

10 Co. Kildare NFC 682: 146.

11 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 196.

cases,¹² and death was the threat that could be diverted by killing for St. Martin, according to 8 cases.¹³

Thus, it is clear that people explained their motivation for killing animals and shedding their blood as being for protection of people and farm animals. When this evidence is added to the numerous accounts of protective qualities that were believed to be possessed by the blood, as indicated in the previous chapter, and discussions of luck mentioned below, a strong case can be made for the widespread belief in the prophylactic nature of the sacrifice. Coupled with this are the many accounts of bad luck that was believed to befall those who neglected to shed blood, and legends indicating the negative consequences that could arise from this, and the case for protection as the main motivator in killing is unambiguous.

Other Reasons

There were a number of explanations given for the rite of shedding blood that are not related to protection or luck. These alternative explanations may represent varying personal views on the part of the informant, or an attempt to make sense of a custom whose original function may have been forgotten, or changed over time. Five examples, all originating in the Questionnaire material, relate the killing of fowl or animals to the Exodus account of Passover, probably in an attempt to contextualize it in a Biblical framework.

The only explanation they give for so doing is that it is in commemoration of the killing of the paschal lamb by the Israelites.¹⁴

The lamb was killed in memory of the Israelites in their flight from Egypt when the Red Sea opened and made a pass for them.¹⁵

The only explanation of the whole ceremony is supposed to be a commemoration of the sacrificing of the Paschal Lamb of the Israelites of old.¹⁶

12 Co. Galway NFC 27: 123, Co. Limerick NFC 675: 646, Co. Longford NFC 681: 397.

13 Galway (1), Kerry (2), Kilkenny (1), Laois (1), Roscommon (1), Tipperary (1), Waterford (1).

14 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 190.

15 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 248.

16 Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 575.

There are obvious parallels between the custom of killing for St. Martin and the Biblical account of the first Passover. In the Bible story, the Israelites slaughtered a lamb, and marked the door with the blood, so that the Angel of Death, who was inflicting God's wrath on the Egyptians, would pass them by.¹⁷ The motifs of ritual sacrifice, and the marking of the lintel with the blood, for protection from supernatural danger and death, are present in both traditions, so it is logical that they should be compared. One example portrays Jesus going around the countryside, and warning people of the impending danger:

Our Saviour went around and warned the people that anyone that would not have blood spilled on their doors, on that eve, that they would surely lose the first of the family before night.¹⁸

The following example is most explicit in its description of the danger, and draws heavily on the Exodus account:

Not very sure of the reason, but it is the story of the Passover being handed down. It is on this night the killing of the "First Born" took place long ago. The people are afraid that if they don't sprinkle the doors the Lord will visit them on that night, and kill the eldest child, or the 'first-born' of the flocks.¹⁹

The informant goes on to say that 'it is a night of fear rather than rejoicing', indicating the insecurity people may have felt at this time, and highlighting the potential dangers to livestock and family.

Seven accounts provide the reason for killing as adherence to tradition. They do not mention other reasons in most cases, and simply state that it was done because it was always done, or that it was an old custom.²⁰ This is a common idea in oral traditions, where tradition for tradition's sake is a satisfactory explanation for a given custom in some people's minds.

[They do not know what meaning was behind the spilling of blood except that they are following the customs of their families before them.]²¹

One account from Leitrim mentions that there was no explanation given for the killing, saying that it was 'just an old custom.'²²

17 *Exodus* 12: 1–23.

18 Co. Clare NFC 675: 297.

19 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 299.

20 Carlow (1), Galway (1), Leitrim (1), Mayo (2), Tipperary (2).

21 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 251.

22 Leitrim NFC 680: 413.

Milling

Finally, consideration must be given to the widespread idea of St. Martin's supposed death in a mill. This was an idea common throughout the country, and 202 sources outlined how the saint was thought to have been killed in a mill. Both belief statement and legend attest to the widely-held belief that St. Martin met his death in a mill, and this was the reason given why no wheels should be turned on his feast-day. In some instances, people conflated the idea of the saint's death with the custom of spilling blood, and drew on the grisly imagery of St. Martin being crushed in a mill as the reason why blood is spilled. It is easy to see the logic at work here, and blood rites and animal death could easily be associated with similar motifs concerning the saint. The following examples describe such explanations:

The local belief was that St. Martin was killed in a mill, the shedding of the blood is supposed to be in commemoration of this.²³

As St. Martin was ground in a mill, the works scattered his blood – so the blood is sprinkled.²⁴

The only explanation now available is that it is in honour of the amount of blood which St. Martin shed when crushed in the mill.²⁵

To honour the memory of St. Martin, whose blood was spilled when he was ground in his own mill.²⁶

In several of the stories concerning St. Martin's death in a mill, he is portrayed as a martyr, and this idea found expression in accounts that explain the reason for the shedding of animal blood:

The anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Martin is held on the 11th of November. He shed his blood for the Faith. Hence it is the practice of most people to spill some blood in honour of that sad event.²⁷

The above statements may represent people who may have forgotten the original purpose of the ritual, or are seeking to contextualize it in a different

23 Co. Clare NFC 675: 105.

24 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 516.

25 Co. Clare NFC 675: 370.

26 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 629.

27 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 242.

way. Whether it is by comparison to Biblical accounts, legends concerning milling, or simply adherence to tradition, the reasons provided vary from the vast majority of cases, which concern themselves with luck and protection.

Such notions of prophylaxis are once again seen to be to the fore in Martinian tradition, according well with related material concerning belief statements and legends discussed elsewhere in this study. More than anything else, people viewed the ritual as an active and positive attempt to invoke the protection of St. Martin, and to avoid his retribution. Their concerns were practical, reflecting their apprehension about family members and livestock, who could be vulnerable to disease, death or supernatural forces. The shedding of blood in honour of St. Martin was a way in which people could assert some power over these dangers, through the intercession of the saint. It also seems that St. Martin himself was viewed as the manifestation of these malign and destructive agencies in some cases, and his propitiation and appeasement was essential in maintaining a healthy farm and household.

Belief Statements Regarding Bad Luck

The celebration of St. Martin's Day was accompanied by both obligation and prohibition. Rituals such as shedding blood were very important, and it can be seen how people felt compelled to undertake this, even if it was economically costly. People believed that there were positive advantages to doing so, and that it would ensure luck, blessings and protection. Another motivating factor may have been the avoidance of negative consequence. It was not only perceived to be actively beneficial, but it also had a prophylactic element to it. Bad luck was something that was to be avoided, and this was achieved by doing the things prescribed by tradition, and avoiding those that were prohibited.

A total of 185 belief statements relating to bad luck, and its avoidance, have been uncovered as part of this study. This is in addition to a great deal of legend material that illustrated ideas of luck and consequence through inference and example. The independent statements are illustrative of people's interpretations, and reflect what they actually believed. Some are relatively small in number, but may be counted in addition to legends in establishing the veracity of beliefs.

Shedding Blood

The most prominent statement was the idea that neglecting to shed blood for St. Martin would lead to bad luck. 152 accounts relate how the failure

to spill blood on or before November 11 would have negative consequence. The distribution was found to be as follows: Carlow (3), Cavan (2), Clare (15), Cork (1), Galway (12), Kerry (17), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (5), Laois (4), Leitrim (10), Longford (1), Mayo (21), Meath (2), Offaly (4), Roscommon (10), Sligo (12), Tipperary (14), Waterford (8), Westmeath (4), Wexford (1), Wicklow (1).

It is supposed that if the blood is not shed, people would meet with bad luck and losses.²⁸

It is said that anyone who neglects to honour Saint Martin suffers heavy losses during the year.²⁹

While most of the accounts simply mention ‘bad luck’ as the outcome, there is a subset of beliefs contained within the sources that relate the idea that if people neglected to kill something for St. Martin, their farm animals would die. This was found in 28 instances, in the following frequency: Clare (1), Cork (1), Galway(1), Kerry (1), Leitrim (2), Mayo (5), Meath (1), Offaly (3), Roscommon (2), Sligo (5), Tipperary (5), Waterford (1).

This appears to be a common factor in Martinmas tradition, where the transgression reflects the punishment. The neglect of killing in honour of the saint would lead to more severe killing. The following examples illustrate the belief:

Something will die if St. Martin is not honoured, especially a horse.³⁰

[If a small bird is not killed in honour of St. Martin he will have blood, some animal will die.]³¹

Some examples even perceived the danger to be from St. Martin himself, who would kill animals if blood was not offered to him. In these instances, St. Martin himself is the destructive agency. This, however, was not a typical belief, only being found in eight instances, four in Co. Clare, two in Co. Leitrim and two in Co. Roscommon. The following examples demonstrate the belief:

Good luck is supposed to follow the observance of the time-honoured ceremony, and evil is the punishment which is visited on those who

28 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 77.

29 Co. Galway NFC 678: 431.

30 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 137.

31 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 117.

neglect it. St Martin will 'take something' unless blood is spilled for him. [It is] very bad to neglect it, even today.³²

It is said that if a person neglects to shed blood in honour of the saint, the saint himself will do the killing. Many of his flock will die during the year.³³

[A] bird [was] killed to appease St. Martin - If you don't give it to him, he'll take it himself.³⁴

In a few instances, the danger is not to animals, but to people:

It was said in the olden times that if you did not draw blood for St. Martin he would draw blood from you.³⁵

It can be seen, therefore, that there was a widespread belief that failure to comply with the customary rites would invoke bad luck and in many cases, this was defined as the death of animals. St. Martin was perceived as being the agency of destruction in a few instances, a personification of the danger that loomed at this time. In other examples, where St. Martin is not specifically named as the vector of death, the source of the danger is not explicitly mentioned. It may be the case that St. Martin was behind the death and bad luck. Other sources reveal that this may be the case in other areas.

The custom of 'marking' or 'offering' an animal for St. Martin is discussed below, and was widespread throughout the country. An animal had its ear slit if it was ailing, and the owners promised that they would kill it on St. Martin's day in honour of the saint if he saved it from death. It was generally believed that one should not sell this animal under any circumstances, and to do so was a violation of custom. In several examples, people believed that failure to offer a 'marked' animal to St. Martin would bring bad luck. This was found in 17 examples: Clare (1), Galway (6), Kerry (3), Limerick (1), Tipperary (1), Waterford (4), Westmeath (1).

People were supposed to kill some animal or get one but I never heard about the ill luck except if a calf or cow or pig was dying or thought not to get better some people would say that they would leave the animal to St. Martin. If the animal lived it could not be sold, but killed and the blood

32 Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 581.

33 Co. Clare NFC 675: 74.

34 Co. Clare NFC 675: 88.

35 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 231.

spilled. If the animal were sold it would not be lucky so ill luck followed that case.³⁶

I never heard of ill-luck to follow neglect, unless the animal was chosen for offering and that the custom then did not take place.³⁷

[It is often greedy people don't kill the beast when it is better, and they believe much bad luck follows a person like that.]³⁸

[If someone promises a thing to St. Martin, a pig or something like that, and if he doesn't kill it for Martin, or do anything with the blood, there is a danger he will have a sevenfold loss. It's many a person like that who promised to Martin, and they didn't kill the thing they promised, but in return they lost cattle and other things after that. It is right to kill the thing promised to St. Martin before the feast.]³⁹

Other Sources of Bad Luck

Only six sources explicitly mention that the turning of wheels brought 'bad luck', but a vast amount of legend and belief statements regarding wheels and mills testify to the fact that it was generally believed that people should abstain from such activity, to avoid the disastrous consequences such a violation would invoke. The distribution is as follows: Clare (1), Kildare (1), Sligo (2), Tipperary (2).

This example from Co. Kildare is clear:

They said that any kind of wheel turning brought bad luck on the family, and flocks, and crops.⁴⁰

In a related category is the belief that threshing brought bad luck. One example was found in Co. Kilkenny,⁴¹ and the following two examples are from Co. Laois:

36 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 544.

37 Co. Galway NFC 678: 383.

38 Co. Galway NFC 678: 168.

39 Co. Galway NFC 678: 150.

40 Co. Kildare NFC 682: 103.

41 Co. Kilkenny NFCS 859: 55.

There is a belief that it is unlucky to thresh on that day.⁴²

They say that if an engine threshed on that day that something would happen to it and it would not be lucky to work on that day.⁴³

A great deal of belief statements have been collected that testify to a widespread belief in the dangers involved in operating mills on St. Martin's Day. Only seven mention that bad luck was the outcome (the other statements mention destruction or death), as illustrated in the following statement from Co. Galway:

To neglect to observe this rule brings bad luck to any miller who works his mill during these hours.⁴⁴

Such statements were found in the following distribution: Carlow (1), Galway (1), Longford (1), Tipperary (1), Westmeath (2), Wexford (1).

In general, the beliefs relating to bad luck are in and of themselves significant, but they should be considered in the context of other belief statements, and in particular the legend tradition that amply illustrates people's ideas about the proper way to undertake customs, the things that should be avoided, and the resultant tragedy that could befall those who go against tradition.

Promising Animals to St. Martin

It is clear from the weight of evidence provided thus far that St. Martin was seen to have protective powers. He was viewed as being able to cure sickness, or prevent it in the first place, and was regularly appealed to when protection was sought. It is also clear that St. Martin was widely perceived as a protector of animals. People conducted rituals for the defence of their animals as much as for themselves, and on occasion, made specific offerings seeking protection for their flocks or herds. It is against this background that the next element of Martinian cult practices is to be examined. It concerns a ritual of protection or healing that was undertaken, at any time of year, if an animal was thought to be in danger of impending death. People would pray to St. Martin to take the animal under his protection, on condition that it is later offered to the saint on his feast-day. The following example from Co. Galway explains it thus:

42 Co. Laois NFC 682: 231.

43 Co. Laois NFC 682: 287.

44 Co. Galway NFC 678: 125.

[Sometimes around here if a pig or an animal is sick the person promises to kill it in honour of St. Martin. If it gets better, and if the animal lives they kill it in his honour. It is not right to sell something that has been promised to St. Martin, it must be killed instead. I myself had a pig that was dying and I promised it to kill it in his honour and the pig lived, and it was my best pig, but I killed it as I had promised it to him on his feast day.]⁴⁵

A total of 141 sources mentioned this practice. 23 sources came from the Schools collection, 9 from the Main Manuscript collection, 104 from the Questionnaire material, and 5 from printed sources. A variety of animals were said to have been marked in this way, including pigs (57 mentions), sheep (23), cows, calves, cattle or bullocks (50), or fowl (2). 35 examples made mention of an 'animal', but were not specific as to the species. Curiously, there are 3 mentions of horses being marked in this fashion,⁴⁶ but nowhere in any records is there mention of horses being killed in honour of St. Martin, so perhaps they just underwent the healing custom without being subsequently slaughtered.

The ritual clearly derives from the more usual Martinian custom of shedding blood while taking the animal's life, but in this instance only a small amount of blood is drawn, a reflex of the larger offering that was to come, should the saint be seen to save its life. It may also be derived from the idea, common in Irish folklore, that animals should have a small amount of their blood drawn as a health benefit or cure from disease. (Wilde 1853: 56.)

Several examples describe the process, including some variations on the usual practice. One mentions the fact that the animal promised to St. Martin is not slaughtered, but it must not be sold:

It is a custom in this parish if an animal is sick e.g. a yearling calf, a fat sheep etc. to cut the animal's ear so that a few drops of blood will flow. By doing this they offer up the animal to St. Martin. If the animal recovers, it is kept on the farm until it dies. The animal can not be sold.⁴⁷

Another variation sees early calves marked in this way, whether they are sick or not:

45 Co. Galway, NFC 678: 205.

46 Co. Waterford 677: 51, Co. Carlow 683: 35, Co. Wexford 683: 320.

47 Co. Clare NFC 675: 74. This may be the case with the examples of horses mentioned above, where they are kept on the farm rather than being slaughtered.

On some farms the first heifer calf calved after Martin's Day has her ears split. The calf is generally kept for a cow and it is said she will make a better one than any other.⁴⁸

The ritual was used in emergencies, for saving the animal's life. If the beast did not die, it was now destined to become an offering to St. Martin for the following November 11. This could, no doubt, prove a costly exercise, and people may have felt reluctant to uphold the agreement. To this end, there was a strong injunction against breaking the promise to St. Martin, and it was widely believed that to offer an animal, and then to sell it or fail to kill it, would bring bad luck. This was discussed above, where seventeen accounts mention this as an unlucky thing to do.

In addition to belief statements on the bad luck that followed the failure to kill marked animals, legends were told in Irish tradition that outlined the consequences of breaking one's promise to St. Martin. They describe a person who makes such a promise, but does not follow through, and the animal in question dies anyway, or in some instances they are punished further by having the entire herd die, or in one instance, the person himself dies.

A total of 26 versions have been found from around the country. Two examples were uncovered from the Main Manuscript collection, six from the Schools' collection, eighteen from the Questionnaire responses, and one from a printed source, in the following distribution: Clare (8), Galway (5), Kerry (2), Kilkenny (1), Mayo (1), Tipperary (2), Waterford (6), Unspecified (1).

The distribution of the legend is in general accordance with areas in which marking an animal for St. Martin was more common. The following examples illustrate the nature of the legend:

[If you had a sick animal, for example a sheep or calf, they would cut a piece in the ear of the animal in honour of St. Martin and they promised if it got better that they would kill on St. Martins feast. It is not right to break this promise. There was a man who had a sick calf and he cut a notch in the ear and he promised he would kill it on St. Martin's Feast, but he got greedy to get the value of the calf, and he sold it. Then he cut a notch in another calf's ear that he had but there was no good in it this time because this calf died, and everything he had died as well.]⁴⁹

Here is another version:

48 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 373. Similar accounts can be found in Co. Cavan NFC 684: 165 and Co. Sligo NFC 680: 100.

49 Co. Galway NFC 678: 184.

About 70 years ago a farmer named Liam Corry, residing in Cloonadrum, had a sick calf. He promised it to St. Martin, and it got well. The calf grew into a fine cow, and was in calf. Corry decided to sell the springing cow at the fair. His wife remonstrated with him and reminded him of his promise, but to no avail. The evening before the fair, the cow had an udder as big as a basket. When Corry rose [on] the fair morning to drive the cow to the fair, not a sign of an udder could he see, and the unborn calf withered away in the cow's womb.⁵⁰

[There was a man in this place long ago, and he had a sow. It got sick, and if it did, he cut her for God and St. Martin. He reared the pig, and he thought it a great pity to kill it. One of the days, he made a large rope of twisted rushes, and put it on the pig's foot. There was a fair on down in Clare, down in Ennis, and he and his mother went with the pig. And, by gor, down at Inagh, the old woman struck the pig. The pig jumped, it went out on the road, and it broke its neck. "By gor", he said, "I cut the pig for God and St. Martin, and the Devil and his mother took it!"]⁵¹

In this example, the person is forced to complete the bargain, otherwise the animal will die anyway:

A sick cow had been offered up to St. Martin on condition that it recovered. The cow recovered. The owner thought it a pity to kill the cow then. On St. Martin's Eve, she walked into the street, lay down, and began moaning as if she were going to die. The man had to kill her there and then, and keep his promise to St. Martin.⁵²

The following example shows the drastic personal consequences of violating the custom, where death is the punishment meted out to the farmer who tries to cheat St. Martin:

There was a family from Ballingarry (about 6 miles from Drangan). They had a fat pig and the pig got sick. They offered to make a sacrifice to St. Martin if the pig got well. He got well. They forgot the sacrifice and sold the pig. A short time afterwards the man of the house went out one day in the garden. He went over the ditch and was missed after some time. He was found bleeding to death.⁵³

50 Co. Clare NFC 675: 240.

51 Co. Clare, Ó Duilearga 1941: 150–77, 165.

52 Co. Clare NFC 675: 434.

53 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 517.

In the following example, the ending is changed, and instead of portraying disaster as a result of failure to comply, the farmer is rewarded by a vision of St. Martin, thanking him for obeying custom:

There lived in ancient times a man and his wife and son. He promised to kill a speckled pig in honour of St. Martin. The night previous of the 11th of November he commenced to decline killing the pig. The neighbours inquired if he killed the animal and such... if he wouldn't do as he promised, St. Martin would have his own. He complied with his promises. When the killing was done, St. Martin appeared at the doorstep and offered words of thanks.⁵⁴

The story still provides the warning, in the form of neighbours reminding the farmer to fulfil his obligation, and the use of the phrase 'St. Martin would have his own' is a clear implication of the potential death inflicted by the saint in the event of a breach of custom.

Overall, it is clear that there was a belief that St. Martin could cure ailing animals, but it was essential that the bargain be fulfilled. If it was not, there were dire consequences, and St. Martin is portrayed as being a powerful and vindictive protagonist. As usual in legend material, the punishment accords with the violation, and the failure to kill is met with death of one kind or another. The legends are a stark reminder to honour promises to the Saint, and to obey custom.

The origin of these legends may possibly be found in folktales or exempla. There is a narrative, identified as ATU 778 *To Sacrifice a Giant Candle*, that concerns a sailor at sea who makes a promise to God that, if he is saved from a storm, he will make an offering of a large candle. The crisis passes, and he fails to make the offering in the way he promised. (Uther 2004.) This story was well known in Europe, and seventeen examples of it have been found in Ireland, where it was categorised under a different title, *The Sailor's Promise*.⁵⁵ Some European versions have a farmer as the central character, whose crisis may involve saving cattle who are in danger. An example from France in the fourteenth century sees a man who makes a promise to St. Michael that he will offer a calf if he is saved from some encroaching waves. After he is saved, he fails to make the offering, and both he and the calf are subsequently drowned. (Hansen 2001: 435.) Such versions also feature as exempla, and were used by medieval preachers in sermons to illustrate moral lessons.⁵⁶ Thus, the

54 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 219.

55 See '1553 A The Sailor's Promise', in Ó Súilleabháin & Rieder 1968.

56 1297 *Cow and Calf Promised to St. Michael*, Tubach 1981.

background for this story in Ireland may well have been religious lore concerning promises to God or saints, and the moral implication is obviously that one should keep one's promises, lest they suffer the consequences of breaking them. The central motif of the story has been identified by Stith Thompson in his Motif Index of Folk Literature as K231.3. *Refusal to make sacrifice after need is past*, (Thompson 1955–58) and several examples are given that indicate its widespread distribution in Europe and beyond. The motif of offering animals in honour of a saint, and fulfilling that promise, are obviously very pertinent to lore surrounding St. Martin, and it is easy to see how such narratives could have developed in this context.

7. Milling, Spinning and Wheels

So far, a view of the feast-day and its popular celebration is appearing that outlines the various things people felt an obligation to undertake, such as killing an animal and shedding its blood. There were, however, a series of prohibitions or taboos, also associated with the feast, that indicated what people should *not* do. Certain actions and activities were forbidden during the feast, and bad luck or some other disastrous consequences was believed to befall those who violated these norms of behaviour. This is not unique to St. Martin's Day, as prohibitions can be found on other saint's days and holidays throughout the Irish folk calendar.¹ One of the defining features of these prohibitions is the sense of insecurity and ill ease people sometimes felt during these transitional times, and anxiety surrounding potential dangers was manifest in the idea that certain things should be avoided. This chapter will examine those activities that were considered to be prohibited.

Consider the following statement, collected from archival sources:

No work involving turning of wheels is done. Corn is never threshed, nor is a mill worked, but they keep the time in three different ways.:

- 1) Some will not turn wheels on the 10th November.
- 2) Others cease work at midday on the 10th and will not start again until mid-day on the 11th.
- 3) Others will not turn wheels on the 11th.

Some people will not use even a horse's or ass's cart as they consider it wrong to turn any kind of a wheel. Others think this applies only to

1 For example, lending anything from the house was avoided on Bealtaine. See Danaher 1972: 110. Whitsuntide was considered a very unlucky day, and swimming and travelling was avoided. Danaher 1972: 129.

threshing engines or mills. The reason given is that St. Martin was killed in a mill for grinding corn.²

The above account, from Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, is typical of many relating to activity that was prohibited on St. Martin's Day. A widespread belief amongst those who observed the feast was that wheels should not be turned on the day of the saint, and any work related to the turning of wheels, such as spinning, yoking a horse to a cart or churning should not be undertaken at this time. Perhaps most importantly, people felt that mills should not be worked on St. Martin's Day. This is related to a widespread belief that St. Martin was killed in a mill, and in most cases where the custom of avoiding the use of mills is mentioned, informants recall an incident of the saint being crushed between two millstones. Fishing was another prohibited activity, where people believed that boats should not set out on the sea, nor fishing be undertaken. This was mainly the case in the southeast, although many other coastal communities also held these beliefs. The reasons people gave for this prohibition was not related to the idea of the saint being killed in a mill, but instead many accounts describe an incident where fishermen were drowned after proceeding to fish on St. Martin's Day. Stories of people violating these injunctions, and the disastrous consequences that unfold as a result, are common in the tradition, and in most cases are given as the justification for the belief in the first place. The relationship between taboo, belief and legend must therefore be examined, in order to elucidate the possible origin and nature of this complex of ideas and practices.

Milling

As mentioned above, one of the most prevalent ideas surrounding St. Martin's Day was that mills should not be worked, and millers would be punished if they did. A total of 204 sources mention the fact that milling is not undertaken on this day. The Main Manuscript collection cited 6 examples, the Schools collection 66, Questionnaire material mentioned it 128 times, and print sources 5 times, in the following distribution: Carlow (7), Clare (23), Galway (37), Kerry (5), Kilkenny (15), Kildare (1), Laois (8), Leitrim (4), Limerick (3), Longford (1), Mayo (9), Meath (1), Offaly (10), Roscommon (8), Sligo (8), Tipperary (21), Waterford (3), Westmeath (10), Wexford (25), Unspecified (3).

The custom was present throughout much of Ireland, and counties such as Galway, Wexford and Tipperary see large concentrations of people who

2 Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. NFC 678: 231.

reported this belief. Informants often mention the fact that mills were not turned, followed by a brief explanation as to why this was the case. Take the following example from Co. Offaly:

No mills “are worked” on that day because the general belief is that St. Martin was killed in a mill, and it would be unlucky to work the mill wheels that day.³

The theme is more developed in the following examples, from Co. Wexford:

Corn mills, of which there are three now working in the parish, cease work on that day. The explanation is that St. Martin was a miller and met his death on 11th Nov. by being caught in the wheels of a mill.⁴

It is said that St. Martin was ground in a mill and that there are a lot of millers long ago that would not grind corn on that day, that is, the day he died. That custom has almost died out now, but there is one man, Willie Cullen of Polehone, not far from the village of Glynn, and would never grind corn on that day, no matter how busy he would be.⁵

Some sources have St. Martin in the role of miller, like this one from Co. Clare:

It is an old saying that the mills would not wheel on that day because St. Martin was a miller and he was ground by his mill.⁶

Spinning

Closely related to the idea that one should not work mills is a restriction on spinning fibre into yarn, because it involved the turning of a spinning-wheel. A total of 55 sources describe how spinning should be avoided, in the following frequency: Clare (8), Galway (11), Kerry (4), Kildare (1) Laois (1), Leitrim (5), Limerick (2), Mayo (16), Roscommon (1), Sligo (2), Tipperary (1) Waterford (1), Wexford (1), Unspecified (1).

Sources are clear on the matter, such as this account from Co. Mayo:

[No one spins on that day, because there is a holiday from turning wheels.]⁷

3 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 368.

4 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 326.

5 Co. Wexford 683: 340.

6 Co. Clare 675: 169.

7 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 394.

The following examples are from Co. Clare:

Spinning, knitting or any kind of twisting not carried out on St. Martin's Day. Dressmakers or tailors do not work on St. Martin's Day.⁸

There is no wheel turning on this day – no spinning is done and horses are not harnessed to carts.⁹

A variant of this idea mentions prohibitions on sewing¹⁰:

Women neither knit nor sew on the eve also. Spinning or weaving nor work involving wheel turning is not done.¹¹

Tailoring, too, was mentioned as being avoided in four instances¹²:

[No spinning is done on that day, and Seafraidh Ó Donnchadha's wife from Tulachán Dubh said that it wasn't right to do tailoring, knitting or sewing.]¹³

A similar restriction on knitting was found in 11 instances,¹⁴ and is demonstrated by the following example:

Women are not to knit or crochet, the thread having been spun. This custom prevails in honour of the martyrdom of St. Martin, who was crushed by a mill-wheel.¹⁵

Horses, Carts and Ploughing

Another taboo that was widely observed was that of ploughing, or yoking a horse to a cart. Any work involving the use of horses was refrained from on St. Martin's Day. In part, this appears to be linked to the idea that wheels should not be turned, as both carts and certain kinds of ploughs have wheels. In general though, there is a sense that the horse was to be rested on the day, lest

8 Co Clare NFC 675: 338.

9 Co. Clare NFC 675: 181.

10 The ban on sewing was found in 12 places in total: Clare (7), Galway (1), Leitrim (2), Mayo (2).

11 Co. Clare NFC 675: 72.

12 Co. Clare (1), Galway (2), Mayo (1).

13 Co Mayo NFC 679: 324.

14 Clare (3), Galway (1), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (2), Limerick (1), Mayo (2), Tipperary (1).

15 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 452.

some damage befall it. As seen in instances of killing, there was, on occasion, special importance given to horses around St. Martin's Day, and offerings were occasionally made specifically for the horse, particularly in Co. Clare.

In the current study, the notion that carts should not be used was mentioned 57 times (See Figure 13). There were 4 examples from the Main manuscript collection, 40 from the Questionnaire material, and 13 from the Schools' material, found in the following distribution: Clare (21), Galway (9), Kerry (1), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (1), Limerick (4), Mayo (7), Sligo (2), Tipperary (7), Wexford (2).

Examples are clear and concise:

No horse should be put under a car in honour of St. Martin.¹⁶

[People do not like to turn cart wheels or any other wheel on that day.]¹⁷

People do not do any work involving wheel turning, such as carrying with a horse and car.¹⁸

[Honour is given to St. Martin by spilling blood, and by abstaining from any cart work before this, and any kind of work where wheels would be turning.]¹⁹

Extending from the abstinence regarding carts, people also refrained from using horses for any work on that day. This was found in 42 cases, 4 from the Main Manuscripts, 11 from the Schools, material, and 27 from the Questionnaire responses, in the following distribution: Clare (14), Galway (4), Kerry (3), Kildare (2), Laois (2), Leitrim (1), Mayo (1), Offaly (2), Roscommon (2), Tipperary (2), Wexford (4).

The following examples illustrate the belief:

[Several years ago, the mills would stop on the 9th day (of November) and no horses would be working.]²⁰

It was a custom with the farmers in some parts of the country not to yoke horses in the fore-noon.²¹

16 Co. Clare NFC 675: 175.

17 Co. Galway NFC 678: 151

18 Co. Clare NFC 675: 428.

19 Co. Galway NFC 678: 25.

20 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 455.

21 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 244.

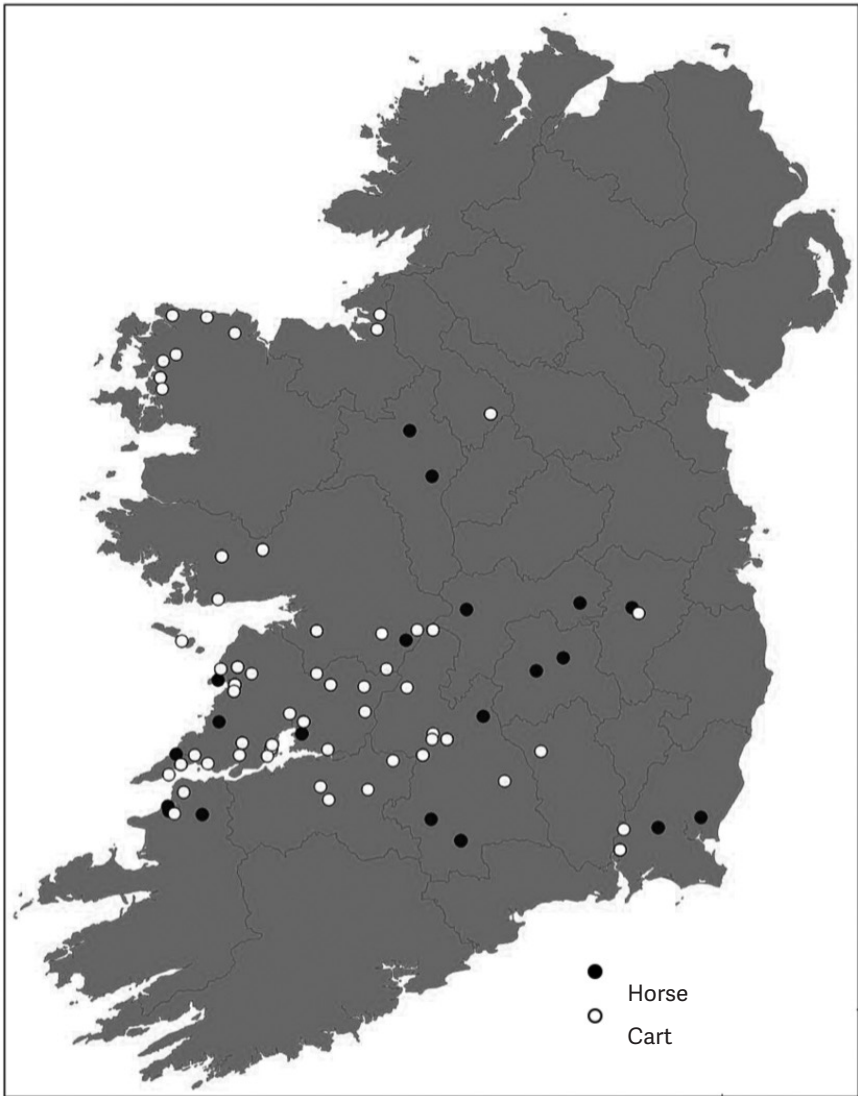


Figure 13 – Prohibition on the Use of Carts and Horses

Formerly Ploughmen would not plough on St. Martin's Day.²²

St. Martin is long associated with horses. In later medieval art, he is depicted on horseback, and legends concerning fishing often mention St. Martin riding over the sea on a white charger. The process of St. Martin becoming associated with horses was brought about through his depiction as a soldier saint. The *Vita Martini* features St. Martin as a soldier, although nowhere is he mentioned in a cavalry context, and indeed early artistic depictions of St. Martin do not feature horses.²³ The image of St. Martin as a soldier was promoted in the tenth century, which coincided with the emergence of mounted knights as the paradigm of the aristocratic Christian warriors. (Rosenwein 1978.) Contact with the eastern world at this time, particularly through the Crusades, saw both legend and imagery of military saints such as St. George spread to the west, and St. Martin was remodelled along such lines. After the tenth century he is increasingly depicted on horseback, and adopts specifically equine associations. (Walsh 1996 b: 295.) Thus, the emphasis on horses and ploughing in relation to St. Martin's Day has long standing precedent. This can be further demonstrated in the following series of legends, which describe the consequences of working with horses at Martinmas.

Punishment for Ploughing or Using Carts

A total of 24 legends describing the punishment one could suffer after using horses are present in the archive material, with 13 examples coming from the Questionnaire material, and 11 versions from the Schools' folklore collection, in the following distribution: Clare (18), Galway (3), Kerry (1), Offaly (1), Wexford (1).

Once again, there is a strong link between Co. Clare and horses on St. Martin's Day (See Figure 14). This is very likely to be a result of the popularity and persistence of draught horses in the area, particularly in the west of the county, and the special emphasis people there placed on the protection of horses. St. Martin's patronage over horses is well established, and it is a prominent theme in Co. Clare Martinmas tradition, as manifest in ritual, belief and also legend.

Examples of the legend are structurally and thematically similar to narratives that outline the potential punishment which might be exacted on those

22 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 261.

23 For example, one of the earliest artistic depictions of the Charity of St. Martin appears on the Sacramentary of Fulda, dating from c. 975 AD, and depicts St. Martin as on foot. Cf. Universitäts Bibliothek, Cöttlinger, Staatliche Bibliothek Bamberg.



Figure 14 – Legends Concerning Punishment for Ploughing or Using Carts

who violate a ban on spinning or milling. They tend to be short, with a strong moral undertone:

On one occasion a certain Protestant gentleman who lived near the well harnessed a pair of horses to a plough and went to plough the field not far from the well, as the people were doing ‘rounds’ on St. Martin’s Day. The moment he asked the horses to “go on” both of them fell dead under the plough. The farmer then went and got another pair of horses and again harnessed them to the plough, but just as before both fell dead when he began to plough. The gentleman never ploughed or did any other work on St. Martin’s Day afterwards.²⁴

There was a farmer in Tullagour (I don’t know what religion he professed) who did not believe; or rather wanted to test the credibility of the traditions associated with St. Martin. He went out to plough with a pair of horses and the first scrape he turned, the sock or coulter of the plough broke with the result he had to abandon the work. He afterwards believed in St. Martin.²⁵

The emphasis on the farmer being of the Protestant faith in the first example, and the storyteller’s ambiguity in the second example, would provide a reason why the characters would be seen to violate the ban. The reluctant or incredulous Protestant is a character that recurs in Irish religious legend, and provides a perfect antagonist. The theme of obedience to custom is clear, and the turnaround experienced in the second example demonstrates the power of the punishment to alter people’s behaviour.

Not all versions were found to be short and pithy, however. Consider the following example, from Co. Galway:

[On the east side of Annaghdown Church, around a mile and a half from the church and on the left hand side as you’re going away from the church there’s a place called “Cluain Linnáin”. There was a farmer of the name Ambrose Dan living there and he had a servant boy and when the second day of November came (All Saints’ Day) the boy said it wasn’t right to do work on that day and Ambrose Dan gave him the day off. Well, when the eleventh day came (St. Martin’s Day) the boy said it wasn’t right to do work on that day either and he said that to Ambrose Dan. Ambrose Dan answered, and he was angry, “Where was that lout (St. Martin) on the day

24 Co. Clare NFC 675: 108.

25 Co. Clare NFC 675: 386.

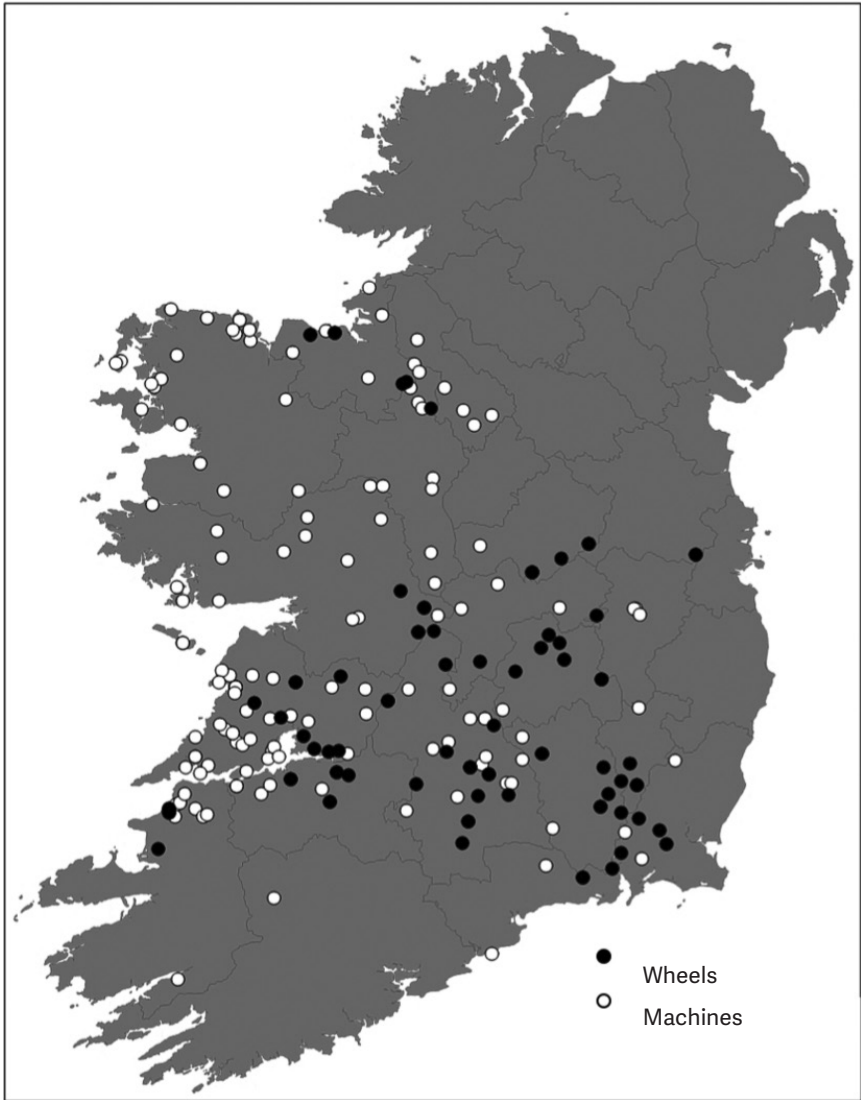


Figure 15 – Distribution and Frequency of Prohibited Activity

all the saints were out (All Saints' Day)?", and he said to the boy that he would have to work on that day.

The boy went ploughing with a pair of horses and a yoke, and when the horses were feeding he himself was sat on the yoke feeding himself, when thunder and lightning came, and one of the horses was killed, and the beam of the yoke was broken in two. The same moment the yoke was broken a gust of wind came and didn't leave a single scraw on any one side of the house.

When the boy came inside with one of the horses and the broken tackle he said to Ambrose Dan that he should have heeded his advice. "Half your horses are gone now and your yoke is broken", he said.

As for Ambrose Dan himself, he was a person without belief, and he went that afternoon without a trace, and no one saw him go, nor do they know where he went.

It is an old saying since then on, when someone disappears like that, e.g. He went without a trace like the way Ambrose Dan went.]

This well-developed version contains a contrasting pair of characters. The young and pious boy, who wishes to observe religious feasts and remain true to the norms of behaviour is cast against a gruff man who has little enough respect for religious tradition, even referring to St. Martin by the insulting term of '*bodach*'.²⁶ Not only is the man's plough destroyed and one of his horses killed, but it is implied that his mysterious disappearance is as a consequence of his violation of the prohibition. The punishment could, therefore, be very severe.

One example, from Co. Wexford, contains the motif of animals being turned into stone:

These three stones in the field near Ballynabola, well, they say 'twas three horses were turned to stone there wan day. They used say 'twas never right to yoke a pair of horses for ploughing on St. Martin's Day, that some misfortune would come to anyone who'd do it. Well, it seems long ago the man who lived in the place yoked a pair of horses and attached to go ploughing, and the three horses were turned into three big stones.²⁷

26 'Oaf' or 'lout'.

27 Co. Wexford NFC 437: 17.

Another example also comes from Wexford:

People say that St. Martin was ground in a mill next day, and after that, mill nor wheel worked on St. Martin's Day. But one Saint Martin's Day, a man went out to plough with a wheel plough and a pair of horses. He only went up and down the field when the man, the horses and the plough were turned into big stones. They are still to be seen in Quigley's Mullachs in Robinstown, near Palace West.²⁸

The motif of turning to stone is not widely found in relation to punishment on St. Martin's Day in Ireland, but it does bear more than a passing similarity to European narratives concerning St. Martin. Modern legends from France describe conflicts between the Devil and St. Martin, and the saint can be seen in some versions to turn the Devil's horses to stone as he is ploughing a field. (Sébillot 1904: 216.) Other legends from Corsica also depict the Devil ploughing, and St. Martin turns his oxen to stone. (Carrington and Grinsell 1982: 64.) In many instances in European folklore, petrification is a punishment for some violation of a religious edict, so it is appropriate to find it in the same context in the current story. (Menefee 1974.)

In eight of the examples, the horse is yoked to a cart, not a plough, but the results are the same.²⁹

It is said by the old people that on St. Martin's Day a man was going to town. He brought the horse and cart with him. He had not gone far when something frightened the horse. She fell on the road and broke two of her legs. It is said that man never rolled a wheel on St. Martin's day after that.³⁰

These legends are both typologically and thematically similar to other narratives from Martinian oral tradition that concern the violation of taboo, and are clearly meant to function as guides to behaviour, and designed to ensure that people maintain the tradition of abstaining from work on St. Martin's Day.

In general, the avoidance of using carts or cars, as well as horses, accords with the general prohibition of the use of wheels. Similar bans were extended to the use of certain machinery, such as threshers. This may be thematically related to the ban on milling, but it is more likely that it can simply be put down to the fact that threshing machines used to employ wheels for their belt-driven

28 Co. Wexford NFCS 883: 7.

29 Co. Clare NFC 675: 176, 232, 248, 264, NFCS 617: 240, NFCS 628: 216, 226, Co. Kerry NFCS 415: 173.

30 Co. Clare NFC 675: 176.

mechanisms, and so would be disqualified from use under the usual norms of behaviour regarding the turning of wheels.

A total of 43 examples of the legend relating to threshing machines was collected, with some of the more northern counties more conspicuously absent (See Figure 15). This may be due to a higher prevalence of tillage in more southern counties. Carlow (2), Clare (6), Galway (3), Kerry (3), Kilkenny (4), Laois (7), Limerick (1), Offaly (1), Tipperary (7), Waterford (1), Westmeath (3), Wexford (4).

A good many mill owners and others abstain from work, and a few years ago no farmer would thresh his corn on that day.³¹

Corn mills, engines, threshing sets etc. remain idle.³²

A general ban on the use of machinery, most of which probably involved turning wheels of some sort, was also observed in the following 27 locations: Clare (5), Kilkenny (1), Laois (1), Limerick (5), Meath (1), Offaly (1), Sligo (4) Tipperary (4), Waterford (2), Westmeath (2).

People in this locality abstained from wheel-turning of any sort, spinning, machinery etc. long ago. Even down to 60 or 70 years ago. Now the custom is not observed but it is remembered and spoken of.³³

Again, the bias towards certain parts of the country may be a result of the more prevalent practice of tillage farming, where machines for threshing the corn would have been more popular than in the north and west.

Other Prohibitions

Other activities that people refrained from doing on the feast of St. Martin include fighting,³⁴ churning,³⁵ and working in general.³⁶ A ban on churning may be explained by the fact that rotary churns require a wheel to be turned in their operation. The ban on fighting and work may have grown out of the idea

31 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 35.

32 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 51.

33 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 164.

34 16 examples in total, Galway (2), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (2), Limerick (1), Mayo (2), Meath (1), Offaly (1), Roscommon (3), Tipperary (2), Wicklow (1).

35 6 examples, Clare (3), Kerry (1), Limerick (1), Waterford (1).

36 20 examples, Carlow (1), Clare (3), Cork (1), Galway (3), Kerry (2), Kildare (1), Offaly (4), Sligo (1), Tipperary (3), Westmeath (1), Wexford (1).

that the day was meant to honour the saint, should be observed in a respectful and peaceful manner.

The feast of St. Martin is observed on Nov. 11th and on that day at one time people abstained from churning and women would not spin or warp thread on the day.³⁷

They do not fight on that day. Explanation: they are afraid of the anger of God.³⁸

People do abstain from fighting and religiously avoid wheel-turning of any kind.³⁹

People usually abstain from fighting and work involving wheel-turning on the feast of St. Martin, as he is said to have been killed in a mill. Ill luck is said to follow those who neglect to honour the feast in this respect.⁴⁰

There is no fishing done on this day, and as little work as possible.⁴¹

Beliefs about St. Martin's Death

It is clear from many of the examples provided above that people linked the prohibitions on wheel turning and milling to a common belief that St. Martin was killed in a mill. The notion appears many times in the sources, generally in the form of belief statements, and some 202 informants mentioned it. Carlow (5), Clare (42), Galway (24), Kerry (9), Kilkenny (14), Laois (10), Leitrim (1), Limerick (7), Longford (1), Mayo (9), Meath (3), Offaly (8), Roscommon (7), Sligo (7), Tipperary (29), Waterford (4), Westmeath (7), Wexford (16).

The idea was very prevalent in the southeast of the country, with counties Tipperary, Wexford and Kilkenny comprising 58 such accounts. There is a particular concentration in this area, but the belief was very widespread in other areas as well, and also appeared strongly in Co. Clare. Typical of the statements are the following examples:

37 Co. Clare NFC 675: 312.

38 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 296.

39 Co. Leitrim 680: 299.

40 Co. Galway NFC 678: 364.

41 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 13.

The only story in connection with milling is that St. Martin met his death by being ground up in a mill.⁴²

[Martin was put into a mill-race and he was killed on the wheel, and because of that a wheel of any kind wouldn't be turned on that day.]⁴³

St. Martin was a miller. He was a very good and holy man and was very good to the poor. He was killed in his own mill.⁴⁴

There are, of course, many variations within any given set of folkloric ideas, and a good amount of the belief statements mention further details about the saint's supposed death. Some 46 accounts mention the saint's death in the mill as a form of martyrdom, where he was thrown in by Protestants or Pagans. Such versions are more popular in Connacht and north Munster, and follow a pattern of anti-Protestant sentiment that was commonly found in Irish oral tradition from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁵ Distribution: Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Clare (4), Galway (6), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (4), Leitrim (5), Limerick (3), Mayo (6), Offaly (1), Roscommon (2), Sligo (4), Tipperary (4), Westmeath (1), Wexford (1).

This example is from Co. Sligo:

One day St. Martin went into a mill. The workers were pagans. He spoke to them about God but they were unfriendly. One man threw the saint into the mill and he was ground.⁴⁶

A Mayo account relates the following:

[Eibhlín Ní Chaoghagáin in Tulachán Dubh once asked an old woman the reason why sewing is abstained from on the feast of S. Martin. 'Didn't you ever know that Martin was ground in a mill?' she said. Maighréad Nic Ghiolla Mháirtín from Bonniconlon said the same thing, that he was ground in a mill by Protestants and the blood is spilled for fear that another person's blood would be spilled. There must be a connection

42 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 263.

43 Co. Sligo NFC 678: 35.

44 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 383.

45 Protestants were often anachronistically cast as the antagonist of some religious folk hero or saint in Irish legends of this period. See Ó Súilleabháin 1952: 3–337. Examples can be found on pages 270, 309, 326–8, 334. This was undoubtedly due to the diminished social and political status of Catholics in post-medieval Ireland. For more, see Claydon & McBride 1999.

46 Grange, Co. Sligo NFC 683: 74.

between the spilling of blood and the lamb that was killed by the Jews in Egypt.]⁴⁷

These brief accounts are from Co. Limerick:

All the family would be watching the killing. It was generally done at night, about 11 p.m. The reason it was done was that the people believed St Martin was martyred on a mill wheel.⁴⁸

There are no mills in this district, but round Adare (about 9 miles distant) where there are many grinding mills, the millers refuse to work on 11th Nov. On this day St. Martin is supposed to have been martyred by being ground up in a mill.⁴⁹

A Roscommon account depicts the action taking place in Co. Longford:

It is said that St. Martin was killed in a mill in Co. Longford. He died for his religion.⁵⁰

Two examples, both from the same area in Co. Kerry, represent a local variation that sees the saint survive the incident:

The people threw St. Martin into a mill long ago and the wheel wouldn't turn.⁵¹

People say the enemy tried to put St. Martin to death by tying him to a mill wheel, but no matter how hard they tried the wheel of the mill would not turn and so his life was saved.⁵²

Some have his death at a mill, but not crushed by the wheel:

It is said that St. Martin was drowned in a mill race.⁵³

Three examples mention that St. Martin was beheaded in the process of being killed:

47 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 327.

48 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 544.

49 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 472.

50 Kiltveevan, Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 457.

51 Castlequarter, Co. Kerry NFC 674: 239.

52 Coolard, Co. Kerry NFC 674: 225.

53 Knocklong, Co. Limerick NFC 675: 577.

Wheel turning is forbidden on this day. It is said that it was by a mill wheel St. Martin was beheaded.⁵⁴

The details in many cases vary slightly, and occasionally people anachronistically depict the saint as being from Ireland, as in the following account from Co. Limerick:

St. Martin is supposed to have been chased into a mill (somewhere in West Clare) and crushed to death. The mills in Kilrush never work on St. Martin's Day.⁵⁵

One Co. Wexford informant even goes so far as to give the year when St. Martin was supposedly killed, stating that he died between 11a.m. and 1p.m. on November 11, 1619.⁵⁶

Legend of Millers Being Killed in a Mill

These belief statements appear to be closely related to a legend that involved people who violated the prohibition on milling on St. Martin's Day, and were subsequently killed in a mill. The story was found in a total of 63 instances from around the country, in a pattern that resembles the distribution of belief statements regarding the saint being killed in a mill (See Figure 16). The frequency and distribution is as follows: Carlow (2), Clare (13), Galway (6), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (6), Laois (4), Leitrim (3), Limerick (1), Mayo (7), Meath (1), Offaly (2), Roscommon (3), Sligo (7), Tipperary (2), Westmeath (2), Wexford (2).

Examples relate the incident in the following manner:

Mills cease from grinding on that day. It is said that once upon a time there was a miller in Kilmacow, who said that he did not believe in ceasing and that he would do it in spite of St. Martin or any other saint. He milled on that day, and on the following day he met the same fate as St. Martin, that is to say that he was crushed to death himself in the mill.⁵⁷

It has been known that men who worked a mill on St. Martin's day were ground to death by the mill wheel and another was caught in a creamery

54 Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 468. The other examples come from Co. Sligo and Co. Leitrim, and seem to represent another local variation on the theme.

55 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 272.

56 NFCS 872: 186.

57 Co. Kilkenny NFC 683: 406.

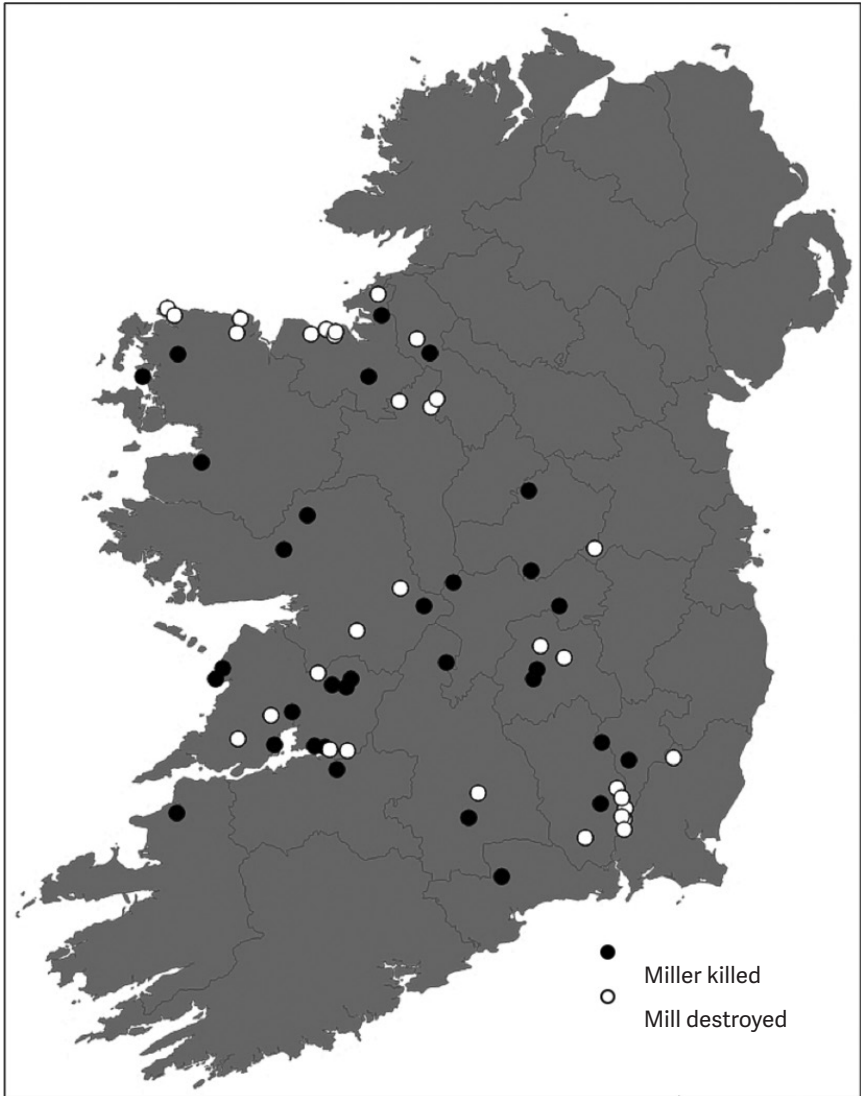


Figure 16 – Mill Disaster Legend

[machine] belt and killed. The belief is that St. Martin was ground in a mill.⁵⁸

Some examples cast the antagonist as a Protestant, in line with many religious legends from the time. That many mill owners in the eighteenth century would have been Protestant, and perhaps antipathetic towards Catholic folk beliefs, may have aided in the story's credibility:

Some old people relate the story of a man defying custom and working his mill on that day, and he was crushed to death about midday. ... There is a story told in the parish of Cratloe about a man who owned a mill in Sixmilebridge. His workers engaged his help in the mill for the year round. He was a Protestant and did not see why the mill should close for St. Martin's Day. 'Wasn't he with the other saints' was a favourite expression of his. The Catholics wouldn't work on the saint's day so he worked alone and was crushed to death while at work.⁵⁹

Counties Sligo and Mayo have a large amount of versions of the story, and this is likely a result of the legend becoming attached to an actual historical event that occurred in Ballisodare in 1856, where Robert Culbertson's mill was destroyed and nine people died in an explosion. (O'Rorke 1889: 331.) The incident became associated with the legend, and likely accounts for its popularity in that part of the country. Some examples are as follows:

On the 11th of November 1869 Ballisodare Mills were burned with the loss of eleven lives. On that day the men objected to go to work in the mill, but their [superior] ordered them in and made a very objectionable remark about the Blessed Virgin. The fire started soon after for no apparent reason. Nine were burned to a cinder and two lost their lives jumping from an upper story.⁶⁰

One St. Martin's Day the mills in Ballisodare worked and they went on fire and many people were lost.⁶¹

[The mill in Ballisodare in Co. Sligo exploded. A Protestant ran the mill. The Catholics said to him that it wasn't right for a mill to be working on

58 Co. Roscommon NFC 675: 491.

59 Co. Clare NFC 675: 57.

60 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 135.

61 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 109.

that day. He mocked them. The mill wasn't working half an hour when it exploded into the air.]⁶²

Accounts of the incident became popular in oral tradition, and at least two ballads were composed on the subject. (McGowan 2001: 27.) A fragment of one of the ballads was recorded from Co. Leitrim in the National Folklore Collection, detailing the names of some of the individuals thought to have been killed in the incident:

“The names of those to mention,
 Before my pen I will leave down,
 There were three boys, brave Taylor,
 Brave Smith and Master Brown.
 There was Drumm and Brennan, Connor,
 Though I am grieved to say,
 They lost their lives in these New Mills
 All on St. Martin's Day”.

Machinery Damaged

In many examples, the person operating the mill is not killed, but the milling machinery is damaged or destroyed completely. Such versions were found in the following places: Clare (5), Kerry (1), Laois (1), Leitrim (2), Mayo (2), Sligo (1), Waterford (1).

Another story relates how a miller started work in his mill on St. Martin's Day, and the machinery refused to operate.⁶³

Men were grinding at a mill. One remembered that it was St. Martin's Day. Another said that it didn't matter, they'd work on. They turned the wheel and it burst into four parts.⁶⁴

In the parish there are – or at least there used to be – three mills, and this old man says that one of these carried on business on a certain St. Martin's

62 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 324.

63 Co. Clare NFC 675: 387.

64 Co. Mayo 679: 438.

Day, with the result that the mill stone refused to work and no work was again carried out there.⁶⁵

Again, some versions cast the offending person as a Protestant, reflecting the religious and social tension of the time, and providing a convenient scape-goat who credibly violates the customs of rural Catholic Ireland:

Years ago, Dudly Pearse was a landlord in Roxboro. He used have a lot of tillage and he used employ a lot of workmen to manage the tillage for him. Dudly used sow a lot of corn and he decided that he would build a mill so that he could grind his own corn. The mill was erected, and 'twas working every day grinding. Dudly had a miller employed, and himself used come out every day and inspect the work. Everything was going along well until St. Martin's Day came and Dudly Pearse came out to the mill in a dreadful rage. The mill was idle and Dudly didn't know what was the reason. He sent for the miller and began to abuse him, and he threatened to sack him at once if he didn't set the mill working. The miller began to explain that no mill should work on St. Martin's Day, but his entreaties were to no good. Dudly only scoffed at his talk, so the miller reluctantly lifted the sluice and let the water turn the wheel. The water wheel hadn't given one full twist when there was a terrible noise and the wheel quaked and mill crumbled into a heap. That was the last of the Roxboro mill.⁶⁶

St. Martin was a miller, and passed on an 'eric' (decree) the first year that he was milling that no mill should be turned on St. Martin's Day. There was a Protestant miller in the locality, and he refused to comply with this request. His men, who were all Catholics, refused to turn the mill. The miller told his men that if they did not work on St. Martin's Day, they need not come any more. They came on St. Martin's Day as usual, but would not turn the mill. He went to turn it himself, and at the first round of the wheel one of the spokes caught him, he was carried as far as the mill race and was drowned. There was no mill turned since.⁶⁷

Another version, from Co. Laois, features a Quaker, likely due to the presence of a large settlement of Quakers in Mountmellick since the seventeenth century:

65 Co. Clare NFC 675: 194.

66 Co. Galway NFC 678: 438.

67 Co. Clare NFC 675: 335.

There is a story told that a certain man named Roberts, a Quaker, who owned the mill at Castletown, set his mill in motion on St. Martin's Day. The wheel and all the machinery went to bits, and the Quaker cried "Martin, Martin stop thy hand and I'll never grind on thy day again." The mill never was known to work again, though several new wheels were got and tried.⁶⁸

In summary, it seems that there was a strong set of beliefs regarding the operation of wheels, mills and carts on the feast of St. Martin, and that one should not operate such things, due to the fact that the saint died in a mill. Belief statements and legend are in accord on the issue, and the legends apparently re-enforced the ideas about wheel turning being taboo. They provided a justification for the beliefs, but caution is always advised when considering such material, and the words of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown should be heeded when considering the rationale provided by folk accounts:

The reasons given by the members of a community for the customs they observe are important data for the anthropologist. But it is to fall into grievous error to suppose that they give a valid explanation of the custom. (Radcliffe-Brown 1939:25.)

That this should be the case in this instance is clear from even the most cursory investigation of the facts relating to the historical figure of St. Martin. Nowhere in the early sources is he connected to milling, and the nature of his death is completely at odds with the folk explanation, given that he passed away peacefully in Tours in 397 AD. Careful consideration must be given, therefore, to these taboos and prohibitions, and the related narratives that were used to explain and justify them, in order to elucidate their possible origin and function.

Possible Origins of Belief

The official ecclesiastical figure of St. Martin was not widely known amongst the laity in twentieth century rural Ireland, or at the very least, this version is not reflected in the folklore of the saint. The missionary, demon-banishing hermit of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini* is scarcely represented, although the legend of St. Martin dividing his cloak was reasonably common in Ireland. Instead, a different version of the saint is presented, a miller who was killed in a mill, or a saint martyred for his beliefs, who offers protection to those who

68 Co. Laois NFCS 834: 136.

obey the customs of his feast-day, guarding the home and herds from danger, disease and death. The folk beliefs are in accordance with legend, and both appear in tandem throughout much of the country. If one of the functions of legend is to regulate behaviour, and to communicate societal norms, (Honko 1964: 15) then the legends of millers being killed in their mills iterate the belief that one should abstain from work on St. Martin's Day. Mills, wheels, carts, threshing machines, all are implements of work, and the turning of wheels is symbolic and central to the process. Thus, if a prohibition on wheels was enforced, it seems to be a concretization of the central concept that Martinmas should be a day of rest. An investigation of European tradition in other countries surrounding St. Martin is required, to see if similarities can be found with the Irish material.

Spinning

The notion that spinning should be forbidden on certain days of the year is a European-wide phenomenon, and is associated with several different holy characters and their feast-days.⁶⁹ Tradition surrounding figures such as the Virgin Mary in northern Europe (Granlund 1956–78: 370)⁷⁰, or Frau Perchta (Pechta 1889: 414) in Germanic and Slavic regions, ensured that people did not spin on certain holy days, and the lore surrounding these injunctions often contains depictions of punishment for those who violate the customs. This seems to be a reflection of the notion that people should not engage in work on days of religious obligation, in the same way that one should not work on the Sabbath. In a similar vein, a character from Austrian folklore, *Pfindzaweibl*, meaning 'Thursday Woman', enforced a day of rest that should be observed on Thursdays, by meting out punishment to those who disobeyed the ban on working on that day. (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1927: 572.) Various other religious feasts had associated spinning bans in recent centuries, including Shrovetide, The Feast of the Epiphany, and certain saints' days. (Angusheva 2008: 86.)

Spinning was looked upon as representing domestic work, and, therefore, the use of spinning wheels was forbidden in numerous places in Europe, on different days. The idea appears in relation to St. Martin's Day in many parts of Europe, as well as in Ireland. This is documented widely, and appears to have been observed in German-speaking areas, as well as Baltic and Slavic regions.

69 See Mencej 2011: 55–84, 58 for a list of examples.

70 See also Clodd 1898: 22.

The custom is current to this day in eastern and southeastern Europe, where spinning is forbidden on the Feast of St. Martin, for fear it would bring dire consequences. Of particular note in these instances is the explanation given for why spinning should not take place. Unlike Ireland, which attributes the ban to the grisly death of St. Martin in a mill, continental tradition states that spinning fibre on this day would cause wolves to attack livestock, and therefore it was to be avoided. (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1927: 795.)

This seeming incongruity must be considered in the context of tradition concerning the 'Master of Wolves.' This Wolf Master, or Wolf-shepherd, is a character from European folklore that has control over wolves, and dictates to them what food they must eat, and what food they must avoid. He is sometimes portrayed as riding on the back of a wolf, and several legends depict him at annual meetings with wolves, allocating them food for the coming year. (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1927: 795.) This enigmatic figure is associated with several saints, depending on the region, including St. George, St. Menas and, most importantly in this case, St. Martin of Tours. The saints portrayed in this context share a striking series of similarities. They are commonly depicted as soldier-saints, and often have strong associations with cavalry, or are depicted as appearing on horseback. Similarities in the medieval iconography, legends and customs relating to saints such as Martin, Victor, George and Menas are explicit, and legends and beliefs concerning their dominance over wolves seem to be interchangeable, depending on region and faith community. For example, traditions surrounding St. Menas amongst the Orthodox believers of the Balkans appear to be influenced by, and to have influenced, those of St. Martin.⁷¹ Thus, St. Martin was seen to have had dominion over wolves, and was invoked to protect herds against attack. November 11 marked the end of the grazing season in many areas in Europe, and often involved the driving of herds back to their stalls for the winter period. Such journeys could be long and precarious, so there is good reason to see why the saint would thus be associated with the protection of cattle and sheep. This was a link that was made relatively early in the medieval period, and tenth-century sources depicting St. Martin as a protector against wolves testify to this fact. (Hälsig 1910: 210.)

A strong belief concerning the Master of Wolves is that spinning should not be done on his feast-day. Thus, a widespread injunction against any work involving spinning wheels, or twisting threads, was observed on several saints' days, including that of St. Martin. (Kraev *et al.* 2012: 21.) As well as

71 The feast of St. Menas falls on November 11, and is known as *Mrata* or *Mratinia*, a metathesized form of the name for St. Martin's Day. See Mencej 2005: 238–285, 243.

the ecclesiastical significance of avoiding work on holy days, there may have been another reason behind the ban on spinning on St. Martin's day, one that connects it more closely to wolves and herds. Just as people in Ireland mentioned St. Martin's death as the reason for a ban on milling, the ban on spinning was explained as being protective against the malign influence of wolves. It may simply be a case of conflation of two separate ideas, namely that one should refrain from work on St. Martin's Day, and that St. Martin could protect the herds. Another intriguing possibility is raised by the folk explanation given in some areas for the custom. In certain parts of eastern Europe, the very act of spinning itself, drawing the wool from the distaff to the spindle, was thought to draw the wolves into the infields, where they would attack livestock. (Debeljković 1907: 255.) Pieter Plas has put forward the hypothesis that it might be seen as a kind of sympathetic or symbolic action, and by drawing the wool in its raw state from the distaff and processing it into a domestic product, one would draw in the wild animals to the domestic sphere, where they would attack the sheep. (Plas 2004: 267.)⁷² Other scholars see the act of spinning in a similar light. Mirjam Mencej has outlined a wide array of sources from Europe that suggest spinning was often conceptualized as a symbolic action connecting 'nature' to 'culture', and its transformative action was seen to traverse boundaries of the wild and domestic spheres. (Mencej 2011: 69.)

There is a potentially significant parallel in Irish tradition, where Joseph Nagy, drawing on the structuralist theories of Claude Levi-Strauss, describes the act of cooking in Fenian tradition as being symbolically transformative. As food is cooked by Fenian heroes, its wild nature is transformed, and it becomes a useful domestic product that could be easily consumed. The process is a metaphor for the transformation of the wild and untamed knowledge that originates in the Otherworld into something more palatable to mortal persons. The wild is brought into the domesticated sphere through the process of cooking. (Nagy 1985: 157.) The liminal nature of these transformations, undertaken by characters who traverse boundaries of the wilderness/otherworld, and often at junctures of temporal liminality, (Nagy 1980: 127) may be seen to possess certain similarities with the conceptual framework offered by Plas. Traversing these boundaries, and the meeting of the untamed wild with the controlled domestic, could often be fraught with danger. If the

72 There is a fascinating parallel in Irish traditions, where Joseph Nagy, drawing on the structuralist theories of Claude Levi-Strauss, sees the act of cooking as transformative, processing the wild nature of raw food into a useful domestic product. See Nagy 1985: 157.

comparison between cooking and spinning is justified, then the liminal nature of St. Martin's feast-day, revealed by virtue of the fact that it is the end of the grazing season, and the turning-point of the dark half of the year, would be regarded in a similar light to that of the Fenian stories. The insecurity surrounding such transition is expressed in Europe as a belief in the imminent dangers of attacking wolves. In Irish Martinmas traditions, the danger is less concretised, often mentioned as death, loss or bad luck. This may be due to the fact that Irish wolves were hunted to extinction by the eighteenth century, or it may be due to different concerns, such as a preoccupation with animal disease.⁷³ Nevertheless, the experience of St. Martin's Day in Ireland is little different to that of central and eastern Europe in this regard. Of course, the above explanation given for why one must abstain from spinning may be a case of *post hoc* rationalization, where the ban originally emerged for religious reasons, and acquired a different explanation amongst the folk. It is also worth bearing in mind that the beliefs in southeast countries may not be the same as those in western Europe. Whatever the ultimate reasoning behind the ban on spinning, its widespread prevalence in Europe appears to provide adequate context for such beliefs in Ireland.

Milling

Perhaps as an extension of the idea that spinning wheels should not be turned, there was a belief that mills should remain idle on November 11. It may also have arisen from the fact that the feast-day falls around the harvest festival at the end of autumn, and millers may have appreciated a holiday at the end of a busy period. The grain harvest, which in the medieval period began in September, (see Kelly 1997: 237) would have been drawing to a close around the feast of St. Martin. (Carville 2002: 183.)⁷⁴ German tradition relates St. Martin's Day to milling, even into the twentieth century. (Happ 2006: 310, 225.) Traditionally in Germany, there was a prohibition on operating mills on the saint's feast-day, and it was thought that if a mill was worked on this day, someone would be killed between the stones. (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1933: 1712.) Such beliefs developed in this area in tandem with

73 Wolves have been extinct in Ireland since 1786, so the sense of danger that may have once been associated with these animals has likely shifted context. See Hickey 2000: 185–198.

74 In Germany, fowl slaughtered at Martinmas were fed on the grain in freshly reaped fields, indicating a connection between the festival of St. Martin and the cereal harvest. See Weinhold 1884: 224.

narratives concerning millers who were killed in such a fashion for disobeying the custom. For example, a legend of a miller who was crushed in his own mill by the Devil while working on St. Martin's Day can be found in a Danish text dating to 1618. (Beyer 1997.)

But it happened also once that a bad, godless and thievish miller, who did not want to have Christian and honest company with his neighbours, went to the mill while his neighbours went to a feast. He investigated the peasants' sacks since he thought that he now had the best opportunity to use his thievish hands after his old way and custom. What happened? The Devil appeared in person to him in the mill and said: Good friend, what are you doing? I understand that you are working in foreign pockets. Let us now mill together and see how that will go. He lifted the millstone, put the miller under it, opened the sluice gate, started the mill and ground him to pieces. When this rumour spread over the whole country and all neighbouring areas, the millers disowned him. The result is that no honest miller will work on St. Martin's Day.⁷⁵

Although the legend is presented as Danish in origin, it is actually based on German originals. (Beyer 1997.) The miller is depicted as being dishonest, and engaging in stealing from his customers. The story is based on a series of motifs found in European tradition, primarily in the plots of international folktales, which feature the punishment of dishonest millers. (Hoffmann-Krayer and Bächtold-Stäubli 1932/1933: 979.) A miscellaneous folktale type, ATU 1853 – *Anecdotes About Millers*, includes narratives about millers being punished by the devil, and was common throughout western Europe. (Uther 2004: 458.)⁷⁶ Such a folktale seem to have formed the basis for a story describing a miller being ground in a mill on St. Martin's Day. Narratives reflected the idea that St. Martin's Day was a day of rest for millers, and punishment would be meted out to those who violated the norms of behaviour.

In nineteenth-century France, Martinmas was considered a feast of millers. Maquettes of windmills were left on the altars of churches, (Provence 1942: 102) and mills were not operated on the day.⁷⁷ Such traditions gave rise to

75 Thiele, J.M., *Danske Folkesagn*, Copenhagen 1818–23; 2nd ed. with the title *Danmarks Folkesagn*, Copenhagen 1843. Both contain the legend and present it as part of popular Danish oral tradition, but in no example is the story associated with any particular part of Denmark.

76 See also Vernaleken 1859: 180–82 and Grohmann 1863; 158.

77 Bennett & Elton 1900: 142.

proverbs, such as ‘*au Saint Martin bois le vin, et laissez l’eau au Moulin.*’⁷⁸ Similar sayings in Spain and Portugal testify to the custom of stopping mills on St. Martin’s Day there. (Machado 1996: 544.) French legend also depicts St. Martin as a miller, in a popular story where he made a mill from ice to outwit the devil. (Sébillot 1904: 126.) As mentioned previously in the study, there was a tradition in Devon, England, which linked St. Martin to milling, so the beliefs may have been present in England as well. (Binnall 1943.) The custom of abstaining from spinning or the turning of wheels on Martinmas was observed in England until after the Reformation, so it would not be beyond the bounds of possibility to think that milling was also forbidden.⁷⁹ Exactly when St. Martin first became associated with milling in Ireland is unclear, but there are suggestions that it may have been so in the medieval period. The previously-mentioned account of monks threshing at St. Martin’s Day, and subsequently using their flails to kill a bull, dates to sometime around 1440. (*Liber Flavus Fergusiorum.*) This is an early example, and provides links to the motif of threshing and killing animals on the feast of the saint. The following century saw the presence of mills in Galway, which were in the town from at least 1518, dedicated to St. Martin. (MacLysaght 1944: 90.)

St. Brigid’s Day

As mentioned above, there are many feasts and holy days upon which one should not spin in Europe. It is not surprising therefore, to find that St. Martin’s Day was not the only time in Ireland when a prohibition on spinning was observed. St. Brigid’s Day, February 1, was a celebration of the Co. Kildare saint that has its roots in the ancient Celtic spring festival of *Imbolc*. (Cunliffe 1997, 188–90.) It was observed in most parts of Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, and continues to this day in various forms. There are some similarities between the feasts of St. Martin and St. Brigid, mainly themes concerning the protection of animals, but the main similarity can be found in the prohibition on spinning (See Figure 17). Eleven examples appear in the National Folklore Collection, in the following frequency: Co. Donegal (2), Co. Mayo (2), Co. Kerry (3), Co. Cork (4).

The following examples from Co. Mayo discuss spinning on St. Brigid’s Day:

78 ‘On St. Martin’s day drink wine, and let the water flow in the mill’, i.e. do not operate the mill on this day. See Fitzgerald 1891: 195–201, 201.

79 An anonymous poem outlining a holiday from spinning was published in *The Cabinet, by a Society of Gentlemen* Vol. II, London 1795, 75. See also Drake 1817: 191.

I remember hearing that no wheel should be turned. So carts, spinning wheels etc. were idle.⁸⁰

On St. Brigid's Day, the old women would spin no wool. They would not turn the spinning wheel that day⁸¹

The following example is from Maulavanig, in Co. Cork:

[Bridget's Day was a holiday from turning, and they used not turn anything on that day. Weaving was not done, or spinning, or ploughing, and a horse wasn't put under a cart.]⁸²

Another account from Co. Kerry says that the spinning wheel is dismantled on St. Bridget's Eve.⁸³ Yet another example from Co. Kerry is quite explicit:

The people would allow no wheels to be turned on that day, either spinning wheel, cartwheels or any other wheels, in honour of the saint.⁸⁴

On Cape Clear Island in southwest Co. Cork, there are accounts of the disastrous consequences befalling those who violated the taboo on turning wheels on St. Brigid's Day. Those engaged in ploughing might break a leg, or the horse might get injured, or the land might end up barren as a result of a curse from the saint.⁸⁵

There is clearly a strong correlation between the two traditions, although actual legends concerning the punishments for violating the ban are not common in Brigidine lore. Of particular note is a quote from Kevin Danaher in his comprehensive study of Irish calendar custom, *The Year in Ireland*, where he states in relation to St. Brigid's Day:

In some places any kind of work which required the turning of wheels, such as carting, milling and spinning, was carefully avoided. This was especially the case in south Co. Kerry and west Co. Cork, from which area we hear of dressmakers refusing to operate their sewing machines, and of men walking long distances rather than use bicycles. In a few localities ploughing and smithwork also came under the ban. (Danaher 1972: 14.)

80 NFC 903:77.

81 NFC 903:35.

82 Co. Cork NFC 900: 12.

83 NFC 899: 5.

84 NFC 899: 17.

85 NFC 900: 36.



Figure 17 – Distribution and Frequency of Ban on Spinning on St. Brigid's Day

Danaher's observation that the belief was most prevalent in south Co. Kerry and Co. Cork is of interest, given the fact that this is a part of Munster that Martinmas customs are conspicuously scant. It may be the case that the injunction against spinning was adapted from the extensive lore of St. Martin, particularly in areas in which Martinmas customs were generally unknown. A similar example can be found in Co. Donegal, another region where the celebration of St. Martin was notably absent:

[In the evening, everyone ceased whatever they were doing. The old women stopped spinning and they washed and cleaned themselves up as well as if they were going to mass and they donned whatever good clothes they had.]
86

Another possible explanation for the custom of not turning wheels on St. Brigid's Day may have little to do with St. Martin, but may have originated in beliefs surrounding St. Blaise, whose feast-day falls on February 3. St. Blaise was a patron saint of wool combers in medieval Europe, and his imagery was strongly associated with the combing of wool, since the legend of his martyrdom involved him being flayed with steel combs. St. Blaise was a patron of Irish woollen manufacturers up until the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ He was represented in processions in medieval Scotland by a person riding a white horse, and shepherds would process in such parades. He is often depicted in association with St. George, and both are seen as patrons of domestic animals.⁸⁸ Legends recount his blessing of draught horses and beasts of burden, and he was subsequently venerated as their patron. Rituals involving the blessing of draught horses on his feast-day have been recorded in Germany, and in central Europe, brass combs were placed behind the ears of plough horses for their protection. (Banks 1934.)⁸⁹ Seán Ó Duinn (2005: 29–30) had made the case for motif attraction in the veneration of St. Blaise from customs surrounding St. Brigid (and indeed the pre-Christian goddess of the same name), namely the prohibition on spinning and the use of spinning wheels. It is not clear how or when this may have come to pass, since there is no clear precedent for the taboo against spinning in the context of native Irish saints such as Brigid. Saints such as Martin, George and

86 NFC 904:134.

87 For example, the Guild of Weavers and Combers in Limerick venerated St. Blaise on his patron day. See Curtin 2009: 11.

88 Both appear in this role as depicted in imagery surrounding the 'Fourteen Holy Helpers', a group of Catholic saints who were venerated as being especially efficacious in offering help to those who prayed for their intervention. See Sargent 1990: 673–696, 690.

89 See also Durham 1934: 163.

Demetrius all have clear precedents in this regard, and they are all associated with the protection of animals, and horses in particular. It may be of value to consider the idea that the motif attraction operated in the opposite direction, and that the ban on spinning originated with St. Blaise and was later adopted in a Brigidine context, or indeed that both come from the general notion that such work should be abstained from on holy days. Whatever the actual origin of the ban on spinning on St. Brigid's Day, it does not appear to have been the origin for the similar injunction on St. Martin's Day.

An Irish Phenomenon

The notion that St. Martin himself was the person killed in the mill appears to have been restricted to Ireland. It does not appear in other countries, and may have been developed entirely within the country, emanating from, or reflected in, the narratives concerning millers being killed in the mill. Why Ireland is alone in this regard is not entirely clear. There are rich traditions of St. Martin in Continental Europe as a patron saint of drunkards, vintners and tavern owners, due to the coincidence of his feast-day with the maturing of the first must of the season. He is often portrayed as a drunkard himself, enjoying excesses of food and drink. Such depictions of the saint were even common in England,⁹⁰ but did not appear to enter Ireland at any stage, or if they did, they subsequently disappeared without a trace. This may be due to the fact that Ireland is not a wine-producing country. In the absence of such a large amount of Martinian tradition which is otherwise present elsewhere, the idea of the saint being killed in a mill, and the prominence of legends associated with milling, may have arisen as an alternative set of beliefs and narratives. Whatever the case, the idea of St. Martin being killed in a mill is a particularly Irish phenomenon. Thus, Ireland was left with a legacy of legend and beliefs regarding mills, and the turning of wheels. Like many religious and supernatural legends, they appear to be didactic in nature. They outline the potential penalties for those who would disobey tradition, and break the normal societal rules. They functioned as an agency of regulation, and as long as they continued to be told, they ensured that people were aware of the consequences of deviation from what was considered socially acceptable behaviour.

90 Ballads involving St. Martin as a drunkard were popular in seventeenth century England. See Ravenscroft 1609: 16.

8. Fishing

The widespread restriction on milling and the turning of wheels formed a central part of beliefs to do with St. Martin's Day. It appears to be related to legends concerning millers who were killed in their mills for violating the sanctity of the day, and a great many belief statements developed from this complex of belief and oral narrative. Closely related to these beliefs is the idea that one should refrain from fishing on St. Martin's Day. There was a prevailing idea that St. Martin disapproved of fishermen going out fishing on his day, and that punishment would befall those who did. Some 82 sources in total mention that fishing was prohibited on either November 11 or the eve of the feast. Such beliefs were again most common in the southeast of Ireland, and in coastal regions in general (See Figure 18). The distribution is as follows: Carlow (2), Cavan (2), Clare (8), Galway (5), Kerry (6), Kildare (2), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (1), Limerick (2), Longford (1), Mayo (6), Roscommon (1), Sligo (3), Tipperary (3), Unspecified (1), Waterford (9), Wexford (28).

Co. Wexford has by far the greatest amount of sources concerning the prohibition on fishing, and the neighbouring county of Waterford is the second most popular county to bear this tradition. Accounts of the prohibition are often relatively concise and straightforward, such as the following examples from Wexford:

Fishermen do not fish on St. Martin's Eve.¹

Fishermen do not go out to fish on St. Martin's Day. This custom is observed by all the sea fishermen in Co. Wexford. It is considered very unlucky to go out on that day.²

A Co. Galway source is similarly succinct:

1 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 261.

2 Followed by legend concerning St. Martin and the fishermen. Co. Wexford NFC 683: 237.

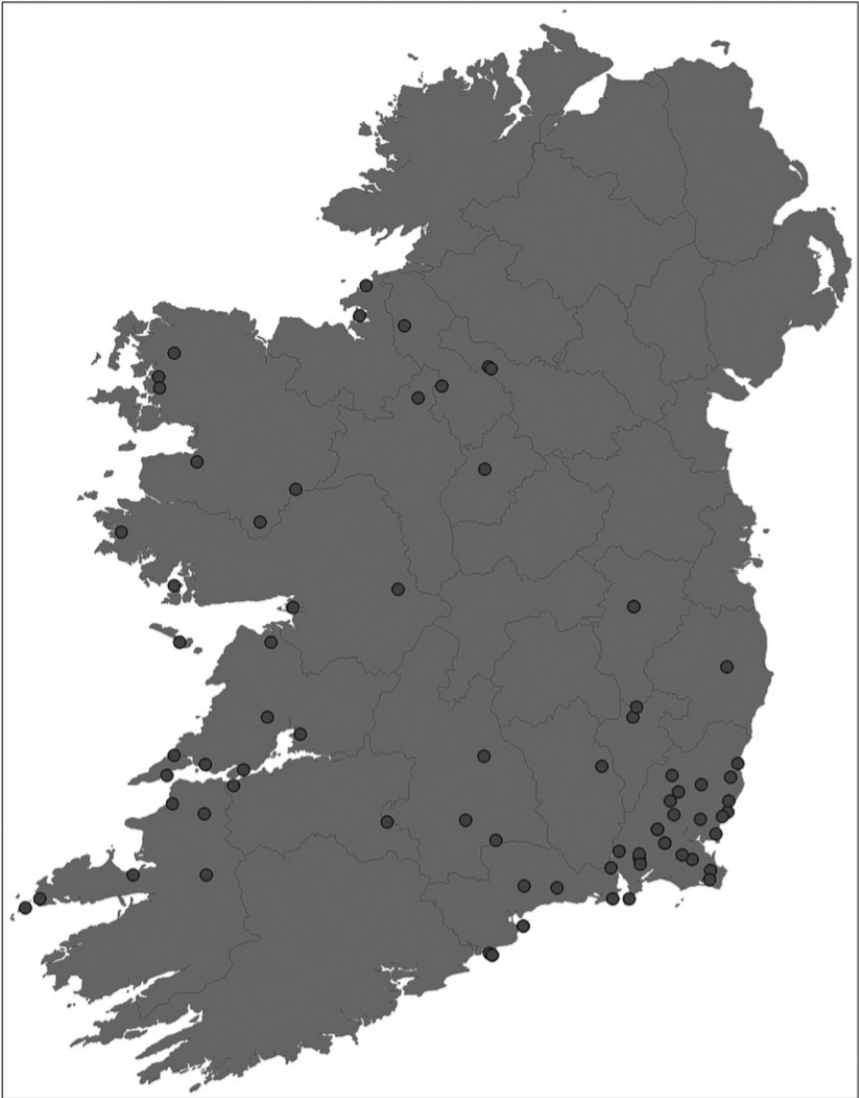


Figure 18 – Distribution and Frequency of Prohibition on Fishing

[Fishing is not done either.]³

This source, again from Co. Wexford, relates the prohibition on fishing to the custom of killing cocks on St. Martin's Eve:

St. Martin was honoured around Curracloe on the day before, the day after and on his feast-day. There was no fishing done by anyone unless 'Martin's Cock' had been killed by them. If the cock was killed on the first day, the people concerned could fish on the other days. If the killing was done on the feast day it was permissible to fish on the day after.⁴

One of the earliest possible mentions of a taboo on fishing is suggested by a description in Gerald Griffin's 1827 book, *Holland-Tide or Munster Popular Tales*. He recalls an incident where two men have to sail a boat up the Shannon estuary on St. Martin's Day, and are afraid of doing so due to the threat of storms. He begins as follows:

It is perhaps not generally know, even in Ireland, that the Shannon, which derives its name from its patron, St. Senanus, is yet further honoured by the countenance of two minor spiritual dignitaries, St. Margaret and St. Martin.... St. Martin, on the contrary, seems to receive their homage as his Satanic majesty is said to receive attention in some countries, rather out of fear than out of respect. They keep a holiday in honour of him once in the year, and seem to understand his temper so well, that if chance, or accident, should blow them out of harbour during its tedious lapse, they anticipate, with no little degree of certainty, some unprecedented calamity. (Griffin 1827: 275.)

The account then goes on to describe the anxiety felt by the men as they set sail up the estuary, although they manage to avoid disaster. Griffin's speculations notwithstanding, it does seem to be an account of popular belief regarding taking to the sea on St. Martin's Day, and although fishing is not specifically mentioned, the threat of storms as punishment is in accordance with later folk beliefs. This, then, in all probability gives us the earliest recorded date for the belief that fishing should be avoided on St. Martin's Day in Ireland, and it seems well established, so probably was present for some time before being written down. It is of no small significance that Griffin mentions that people honoured St. Martin and feared him, as the avoidance of disastrous consequences featured large in Martinian tradition in Ireland, and speaks to the insecurities people likely experienced at the onset of winter, when storms became more of a threat.

3 Co. Galway NFC 678: 25.

4 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 294.

Legend

The idea that one should not fish on St. Martin's Day is strongly linked to a legend, in much the same way that prohibitions on turning wheels and milling was related to narratives about millers who were killed in mills. The legend concerns fishermen who venture out to fish on November 11, and are warned of the potential danger by the miraculous appearance of St. Martin, riding across the waves on a white horse. In many of the versions, some of the fishermen heed the caution, and are saved from drowning, while those who ignore the warning perish in a tremendous storm. Many instances of the story omit the motif of a minority of fishermen obeying the warning, and in these cases, all are drowned. A few examples, particularly those found away from the southeast, do not contain the motif of fishermen being warned at all, and simply recount the disastrous consequences for those who violated custom.

A total of 47 sources provide some version of this legend. Three sources provide more than one example, bringing the total number to 50. Of this total, 24 mention an incident where some of the fishermen heed the warning of St. Martin, and are saved. In the other 26, all the fishermen ignore the warning given to them, and are drowned. Consideration will first be given to the version of the legend that concerns a warning given by the saint to fishermen, who then return safe and thereby avoid a storm. It appears in the following frequency: Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Clare (2) Kerry (1), Mayo (2), Roscommon (1), Waterford (4), Wexford (12).

It is clear that there is a particular concentration in the southeast. The earliest version of the legend that was found is from 1867, and appears in Patrick Kennedy's *The Banks of the Boro*:

A Wexford legend says that on one recurrence of this festival, November 11th, the people in all the boats plying about the Wexford line of coast were warned, by an apparition of the Saint pacing along the waves, to betake themselves to the harbours. All who neglected the advice perished in a storm that ensued the same afternoon. (Kennedy 1867: 364.)

Of interest here is the depiction of the saint. Unlike the later versions from oral tradition, he is not depicted on horseback, but walking on the surface of the water. Another early example of the legend is a poem describing the incident in vivid detail. It was written by Co. Meath poet and nationalist John Boyle O'Reilly, and appears in his 1878 collection *Songs from the Southern Seas and Other Poems*, under the title 'The Fishermen of Wexford'. The text is as follows:

There is an old tradition sacred held in Wexford town,
 That says: "Upon St. Martin's Eve no net shall be let down;
 No fisherman of Wexford shall, upon that holy day,
 Set sail or cast a line within the scope of Wexford Bay."
 The tongue that framed the order, or the time, no one could tell;
 And no one ever questioned, but the people kept it well.
 And never in man's memory was fisher known to leave
 The little town of Wexford on the good St. Martin's Eve.
 Alas! alas for Wexford! once upon that holy day
 Came a wondrous shoal of herring to the waters of the Bay.
 The fishers and their families stood out upon the beach,
 And all day watched with wistful eyes the wealth they might not reach.
 Such shoal was never seen before, and keen regrets went round—
 Alas! alas for Wexford! Hark! what is that grating sound?
 The boats keel on the shingle! Mothers! wives! ye well may grieve,—
 The fishermen of Wexford mean to sail on Martin's Eve!
 "Oh, stay ye!" cried the women wild. "Stay!" cried the men white-haired;
 "And dare ye not to do this thing your fathers never dared.
 No man can thrive who tempts the Lord!" "Away!" they cried: "the Lord
 Ne'er sent a shoal of fish but as a fisherman's reward."
 And scoffingly they said, "To-night our net shall sweep the Bay,
 And take the saint who guards it, should he come across our way!"
 The keels have touched the water, and the crews are in each boat;
 And on St. Martin's Eve the Wexford fishers are afloat!
 The moon is shining coldly on the sea and on the land,
 On dark faces in the fishing-fleet and pale ones on the strand,
 As seaward go the daring boats, and heavenward the cries
 Of kneeling wives and mothers with uplifted hands and eyes.
 "Oh Holy Virgin! be their guard!" the weeping women cried;
 The old men, sad and silent, watched the boats cleave through the tide,
 As past the farthest headland, past the lighthouse, in a line
 The fishing-fleet went seaward through the phosphor-lighted brine.
 Oh, pray, ye wives and mothers! All your prayers they sorely need

To save them from the wrath they've roused by their rebellious greed.
 Oh! white-haired men and little babes, and weeping sweethearts, pray
 To God to spare the fishermen to-night in Wexford Bay!
 The boats have reached good offing, and, as out the nets are thrown,
 The hearts ashore are chilled to hear the sougning sea-wind's moan:
 Like to a human heart that loved, and hoped for some return,
 To find at last but hatred, so the sea-wind seemed to mourn.
 But ah! the Wexford fishermen! their nets did scarcely sink
 One inch below the foam, when, lo! the daring boatmen shrink
 With sudden awe and whitened lips and glaring eyes agape,
 For breast-high, threatening, from the sea uprose a Human Shape!
 Beyond them,—in the moonlight,—hand upraised and awful mien,
 Waving back and pointing landward, breast-high in the sea 'twas seen.
 Thrice it waved and thrice it pointed,—then, with clenched hand upraised,
 The awful shape went down before the fishers as they gazed!
 Gleaming whitely through the water, fathoms deep they saw its frown,
 They saw its white hand clenched above it,—sinking slowly down!
 And then there was a rushing 'neath the boats, and every soul
 Was thrilled with greed: they knew it was the seaward-going shoal!
 Defying the dread warning, every face was sternly set,
 And wildly did they ply the oar and wildly haul the net.
 But two boats' crews obeyed the sign,—God-fearing men were they,—
 They cut their lines and left their nets, and homeward sped away;
 But darkly rising sternward did God's wrath in tempest sweep,
 And they, of all the fishermen, that night escaped the deep.
 Oh, wives and mothers, sweethearts, sires! well might ye mourn next day;
 For seventy fishers' corpses strewed the shores of Wexford Bay!

The following examples from Co. Wexford detail the general pattern of the oral narratives:

In connection with St. Martin, it is told locally that years ago, probably 60 or more, fishermen from Wexford town set out to fish on St. Martin's Eve. When outside the harbour a storm arose, and over the sea towards the men came a man on a white horse beckoning them to return to land.

Many of the fishermen heeded the warning and put back, several did not. Those who disobeyed were all drowned. On no account would Wexford fishermen set out to fish on St. Martin's eve, even to this day.⁵

The following story is quite well known here and is supposed to have happened in Wexford Harbour. The fishermen in Wexford were preparing to go out fishing and the day was fine and calm. Suddenly a man appeared on the waves riding a horse and scattering the spray. The women said that it was St. Martin who had come to give them warning. They implored the men to stay at home. Thirteen men ignored the warning and went out fishing. They were not long out when a storm suddenly arose and the men were drowned.⁶

Another common theme in these legends concerns the fate of fishermen who did not heed the warning. It was found in 28 cases, in the following frequency: Clare (1), Galway (1), Kerry (3), Kilkenny (1), Limerick (1), Mayo (4), Tipperary (1), Waterford (4), Wexford (13). Again the southeast dominates the distribution. The following example illustrates the nature of the legend:

It is said that fishermen were out on the sea and they saw a man on a white horse, and he warned them to go back and they did not so they were drowned; this man was said to be St. Martin.⁷

This version is from Co. Limerick:

Once upon a time, three fishermen set sail on St. Martin's Eve for the purpose of getting fish. It was a custom at the time that nobody should fish on St. Martin's Eve. However, these three fishermen went out to catch fish. They were not gone far when a man approached, riding on a snow white steed. He addressed them a few words, and told them to return home, but they did not heed him. A storm arose, and they far away on the water...⁸

Here is a version from Co. Tipperary:

One night a number of men were going out fishing on St. Martin's Night. A man met them and told them not to go fishing on St. Martin's night. The men replied that they would fish St. Martin himself. When they were out on the sea the boat turned over and they were drowned.⁹

5 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 263.

6 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 314.

7 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 246.

8 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 574.

9 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 520

One example of the story related it to the belief that fishermen would not be safe fishing on the day before or after St. Martin's Day unless they had killed a cock for the saint:

Once a foreign boat came in on one of the three days [November 10-12] and made a tremendous haul of herrings. The locals put out although none of them had killed a cock and they were all drowned. 180 bodies were washed in during the three days. St. Martin was seen out on the sea and he riding a white horse.¹⁰

A couple of instances have been identified where informants mention two versions of the story, one where St. Martin warns the fishermen and they are subsequently saved, and another where they ignore the warning and are drowned. This clearly shows that both versions were popular alongside each other in certain districts, and this is borne out by their overlapping distribution, particularly in the southeast. The following version comes from Co. Wexford:

Some years ago a party of fishermen went out from Rosslare on St. Martin's Day. When they had gone out a little bit, a man on a white horse came riding towards them across the sea, and warned them to turn back, and then he disappeared. They did not mind him. They carried on out to sea. They were no length out when a terrible storm arose, and every one of them got drowned. Ever since, the fishermen wouldn't dream of going out to fish on St. Martin's Day. The man on the white horse was St. Martin himself. Another version of the story is that, when he warned them, they turned back. They had only just landed when the terrible storm arose.¹¹

It is tempting to view both narrative types as different variants, but given the amount of organic variation within folk narrative, it is perhaps more useful to consider them as part of the same set of ideas. Motifs and ideas can be present in one form of a narrative, and absent within another in the same district, and even in the repertoire of the same storyteller, but the seeming differences in narrative were probably not of any major importance to any of the storytellers or their listeners. The didactic function of both legends is ultimately the same, so they should be considered part of the same set of oral texts.

A few examples have been recorded where St. Martin does not make an appearance, but fishermen experience heavy storms at sea as punishment for

10 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 294.

11 Co. Wexford 683: 239.

violating the custom. This well-formed example can be found in Co. Wexford tradition:

It is a pious belief that St. Martin was a fisherman and there is a tradition that fishermen are forbidden to fish on St. Martin's Day. My mother often told us the story, which she heard when she was a child. About 60 years ago there used to be about twenty-two boats each manned by a crew of local men fishing off Morriscastle Strand. The weather had been rough and stormy for a week or so, and the boats could not be put out to fish. On Saint Martin's Eve the weather was lovely and the sea calm. The men were all on the strand, mending and drying their nets and talking about the tradition which prevented them putting out to sea that evening. At length a few men decided they would take one boat and row out to sea and set lines and lay nets and come ashore again. The chief officers of the coastguard decided to take charge of the boat. When they were about a mile out at sea the sky became dark, a storm arose and the waves went so high that at times the boat could not be seen at all. The people at the shore raised the alarm but the storm was so great that the onlookers were afraid to go to the assistance of the men in the boat. Hundreds rushed to the strand (including two priests from Kilmuckridge Village). The priests recited the Rosary without ceasing for several hours. After about three hours the storm abated and then men and boat reached the shore. In a half-dazed condition two of the chief men fainted and did not recover for some time.¹²

Some of the details in this story, particularly that of people standing on the shore watching and praying for the safety of the fishermen, are reminiscent of the poem quoted above. Unlike the poem, however, St. Martin does not make an appearance, and the fishermen are eventually saved. The motif of praying onlookers may have been taken from the poem, or maybe both had a common source. It is equally likely that it is a spontaneous addition, added to lend realism to the story.

Other examples do not feature the figure of St. Martin, such as the following examples. The first is from Co. Clare:

The reason they do not fish is: A fisherman went out fishing on St. Martin's Day. His name was Seán Ó Cóilín. He had a salmon in his net and he could not put it into the boat. There was a current in the river in which he

12 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 286.

was fishing. The boat went off in the current and the man was dashed to pieces against the rocks.¹³

The second is from Co. Calway:

St. Martin's Day is also a holiday for fishermen. No nets are cast on that day. It happened on a few occasions that shoals of fish came into the shore as if to tempt the fishermen to go and cast their nets. It happened that some fishermen yielded to temptation. They put out in their fishing boats and cast their nets but they were never heard of after.¹⁴

The following example, from 1965, was collected from Méini Dunsleibhe of the Great Blasket Island in Co. Kerry. Méini was a fine storyteller, and provides a well-formed narrative. As a further demonstration of the didactic nature of the legend, this example does not feature an explicit connection with St. Martin's Day, although the date of November 12 is very suggestive. Instead, the violation involves the fishermen leaving mass before it is over, and their excessive greed also contributes to their downfall:

[Long ago, I don't know when, but anyway this happened as true as that book is in your hand. There were no fish available this year, and everyone thought that the horse mackerel were gone away. There was no sign of fish anywhere on the sea, and the poor people depending on it were cold and impoverished. On the twelfth day of November that year, at the time when Mass was being said, some of the people were out at the door of the church. When the bay lit up with herring and mackerel, with little horse mackerel. The whole bay from the four corners was full of activity. The boat crew was standing at the doors of the church when they saw the fish dancing in the bay, and they had a hard need for them, and the sight evoked the earthly need, and thye left the Mass and they went killing the fish. But, if they did, the fish left them out. They didn't ever come back after that. So many fish went into the nets, and their greed was too much, and they put too many fish into the nets, and they were drowned.]¹⁵

13 Co. Clare NFC 675: 90.

14 Co. Galway NFC 679: 434.

15 NFC 1605: 453.

Legend Context

There are a great many narratives found along the west and south coasts of Ireland that concern mariners encountering supernatural beings at sea. The most usual versions concern fishermen who meet a fairy boat, and many versions have the fairies warn the fishermen of an approaching storm. Often the men turn around, and head back to shore, avoiding disaster. Some versions concern the fishermen breaking the taboo on fishing on a Saturday night, or on a Sunday, and the warning they receive saves them from potential danger.¹⁶ Thus, there exists in Irish maritime lore a clear framework for the type of legend associated with St. Martin's Day, and it must be considered in this context. (Mac Cárthaigh 1996: 174.)

An obvious parallel to the legend in Ireland is an international migratory legend, identified and categorized by Christiansen as ML 4055 – *Grateful Sea-Sprite Gives Warning of Approaching Storm*. (Christiansen 1958: 69.) Usual forms of the story in Scandinavia involve a sea captain who shows kindness to some kind of sea sprite or mermaid, and the supernatural figure goes on to warn the mariner of an approaching storm. The warning is heeded, and disaster is avoided. The legend was common in the North Sea area, and versions have been recorded from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The most common way in which help or kindness is shown to the sprite is by giving it a pair of mittens when it complains of the cold. The story dates back to at least the sixteenth century, first being recorded in Sweden by Olaus Magnus in *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalis* (1555) II:23. The following is a translation of a version that was collected in 1943 by Sigurd Dahllöf from an informant in Kila, Sweden:

One stormy and cold evening on Lake Vanern, the *sjörå*¹⁷ emerged from the water next to a boat, stretched out her hands, and complained: "I'm so cold, I'm so cold." The skipper threw her a pair of gloves, which she immediately put on. All at once she cried out: "Steer for the east side of the lake, my glove-friend" The skipper did so, and thereby avoided a heavy storm. (Londow 1978: 126–7.)

Other elements in Christiansen's stories see people helping the sea sprite in different ways, including giving them food or money. Thus, the way in which kindness is shown to the sea-sprite is a variable motif, which is of significance

16 A full discussion on the phenomenon of phantom boats can be found in Mac Cárthaigh 1996: 165–176.

17 A type of Scandinavian water sprite.

when considering the legend in an Irish context. Another version, this time from Borre in Denmark, is as follows:

Once a skipper from Borre sailed by Sjobjaerg. There he found a large mitten. He took it home and knit a mitten to match it. Then he brought the pair of mittens back to Sjobjaerg. Sometime later he was sailing from Borre and passing by Sjobjaerg, when he heard a voice shouting:

Listen, my mitten friend,
Put your boat in at Borre
Cause Tolk¹⁸ is spitting,
And the oaks in Norway groan.

The skipper turned around and sailed back to Borre, and there brewed a storm the likes of which nobody had ever seen. All the boats that were out at sea were destroyed. (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988: 261.)

There is clearly a didactic function to the legends, as they bear the central theme that one should be kind to sea sprites and supernatural figures, and heed their warnings. It seems very likely that the motif of a warning of an oncoming storm was at least partly the basis for the legend in Ireland. That there are legends concerning fishing taboos, and the negative consequences of violation of these prohibitions, seem also to have contributed to the formation of the St. Martin narrative. It may be the case that the sea-sprite maritime legend found expression in narratives concerning fishermen violating taboos, with the forewarning of a storm being a motif common to both traditions.

In the case of the St. Martin legend there does not appear to be any reason why the saint should offer to help the fishermen, but the central idea that one should obey his commands is to the fore. One example, from Co. Clare demonstrates an example of why St. Martin would want to offer assistance to those who are violating the customs of his day. The narrative is relayed as follows:

There are several local stories, but one I know to be true happened off the coast of Clare around 100 years ago. On St. Martin's Eve several boats left the shore to go mackerel fishing as the evening was very fine. One old man objected to go, but being pressed by his sons he conceded, but first made them say the Rosary. When their nets were spread and the night closed round them, they were terrified to see a white horse galloping on the water towards them. The rider, believed to be St. Martin, spoke to the old man, saying:

18 *Tolk* is an inlet of water in Denmark.

“Haul your nets and go ashore”

Terribly frightened, they did so as quickly as possible. They had just reached safety when a terrible storm arose, and every other boat with its crew was lost on that terrible night. I could quote several more occasions where the saint was seen, always riding on his white horse.¹⁹

In this version, the old man's reluctance to go out on St. Martin's Day is motivated by reverence for the saint. He is rewarded for his piety by St. Martin warning him of the storm, and is subsequently saved. The general idea, namely that obedience to the saint would allow one to avoid drowning, is amply demonstrated in the other versions where fishermen survive the disaster. In some instances, both versions of the story exist side by side. The two central tenets of the story, namely that obedience to St. Martin brings reward, and violation of taboos concerning the saint invokes misfortune, are essentially different aspects of the same message, and therefore can sit comfortably within the repertoire of a single storyteller.

The fact that coastal areas dominate the distribution is likely due to the process of interest dominance, where fishing communities were the primary group whose concern the legend invoked. The international legend found expression in Ireland in a context which allowed its didactic nature to reenforce belief and custom. The notion that work should be avoided on St. Martin's Day may have meant that fishermen utilised the legend to give an explanation or justification for why they should not engage in work. In a study on supernatural figures, and the punishments they inflict on those who violate certain social customs, John Smith demonstrated how an injunction against spinning could shift over time, particularly when spinning became less relevant amongst a particular community or interest group. (Smith 2004.) New injunctions emerged, and new punishments were inflicted. There is usually a correlation between violation and consequence, so the punishment fits the crime, so to speak. The ban on spinning or milling appears to have developed into a ban on fishing in this case, and the punishment shifted from grinding in a mill to drowning at sea. Thus, the legend of the warning at sea developed amongst fishing communities, and St. Martin plays the role of the sea-sprite, as an instrument of instruction and social control. It is very similar to the notion that one should not fish on Saturday nights, or on a Sunday, reflecting the same motifs found in prohibitions and legends concerning spinning and grinding, which were also forbidden on Sundays in many places. Those who

19 NFC 675: 123.

worked at a time of religiously-ordained rest were punished. The sanctity of St. Martin's Day, like that of the Sabbath, should be preserved.

Other Versions

Given that the context of the storm-warning narrative, at least in part, lie in international maritime legends of northern Europe, it is unsurprising that some variants of the story contain plots or motifs from other migratory legends of a similar nature. The first can be seen in an example from Kilconly, Co. Kerry:

An old woman up in Galway asked for fish from the fishermen there, and they refused her, and she got a tub of water and she put a timber skimmer into it, and the water began to boil, and the fishermen were all gone out on St. Martin's Night, and she had some incantations, and the skimmer sank, and she said; "I have satisfaction now," and there were so many drowned that there were fifty Mary's widows in Galway in the morning.²⁰

This story is a version of a migratory legend known as *The Ship-Sinking Witch*, which was common along the north-west coast of Ireland, particularly in Donegal, although versions have been found in Co. Kerry.²¹ It is also known in Scotland, the Faroes, Iceland and Norway, and is of considerable antiquity, with literary versions dating back over 2000 years. (Mac Cárthaigh 1992/93.) This story concerns a witch who, upon being slighted by fishermen in some way, places bowls in a tub and agitates the water, causing the bowls to sink. This in turn causes the boats of those who slighted her to sink. It is clear from the legend that sympathetic magic is used, and the vessel in the tub symbolically represents the boat in the sea. Both legends contain the idea of sailors being caught in a storm and subsequently drowning, which may have facilitated the witch narrative in becoming combined with that of St. Martin punishing fishermen.

Another variant of the storm at sea legend was told in Co. Waterford, and was recorded as follows:

[Séamas Ó Mahony from Curragh and his crew were caught out on a night like this. It was a fine quiet night, but suddenly a storm arose and a huge tempest. That was when they remembered it was St. Martin's Night. They went to escape, and they got to a harbour and a quay as quick as

²⁰ NFC 674: 241.

²¹ NFC 1007: 275.

possible, and they still had their wits, and said they saw black figures on the ocean all around them, i.e. The host of the dead and their hounds.]

This variant on the St. Martin's Day Storm at Sea story is strongly connected to a series of Irish narratives concerned with belief in the Wild Hunt. A series of stories outlining a group of ghostly hunters pursuing their quarry over the surface of the sea has been discussed by Patricia Lysaght in her 1996 study 'The Hunt That Came Over the Sea: Narratives of a Maritime 'Wild Hunt' in Irish Oral Tradition.' (Lysaght 1996.) Lysaght examines these narratives in the context of northern European belief in the Wild Hunt,²² and outlines the Irish versions, which were found in the south west of the country, in Irish-speaking areas. Some of these versions appear to be connected to the dead, and portray the hunters as the spirits or ghosts. That the last line of the current narrative describes the characters within the storm as 'the host of the dead and their hounds' brings it in line with these legends, and shows that the motif of the storm at sea was combined with that of the maritime hunt. This is unusual for Irish versions of the story, as informants often emphasise that the day was fine when the hunt was encountered. (Lysaght 1996: 143.) It is not, however, at great variance with international versions of the Wild Hunt narrative, which often portray the pursuit as happening in a maelstrom. The version of the story provided in the context of St. Martin's Day differs from the Co. Kerry versions in many respects. The theme of the hunt is far less developed, and lacks the interaction between quarry or hunters and crew of the boat. It is far more akin to the Martinian legends above, and almost mentions the maritime hunt motif as an afterthought. That it is found outside the usual area of distribution, namely west Co. Kerry, lends credence to the idea that the motif of the hunt had been heard by an informant at some stage, who then combined it with narratives of fishermen and storms on St. Martin's Day. The motif could have travelled to Waterford via *spailpíní*, migratory agricultural labourers who were known to have come from west Co. Kerry to undertake seasonal work in Irish-speaking areas in Co. Waterford. (See Ó Donnabháin 2000.)

Thus, a clear picture can be seen regarding fishing customs and narratives in relation to St. Martin. Fishing was seen in a similar light to spinning or working wheels, namely work that was to be abstained from on November 10 or 11. Violation of this taboo could bring disaster to those who would disobey custom, and legends were told that reinforced the beliefs, by warning of punishments. These legends were similar to others from the west or south coasts that told of fishermen who similarly disobeyed customs of fishing on Saturday

22 See Motif E501 *The Wild Hunt*, in Thompson 1955–58.

nights or Sundays, and in many instances may have been influenced by international legends concerning supernatural figures who warn of oncoming storms. The pattern of belief, prohibition and legend existed together to maintain social custom, and this was most strongly observed amongst coastal inhabitants. In any event, the custom was well known, and offers insight into the nature of belief in St. Martin as a figure who was to be respected, and even feared.

9. Legends of Reward and Punishment

The concept of charity, giving to those who are less fortunate, is a prominent theme in religious legends. It was often a key motif in hagiographical texts throughout Europe in the medieval period, and appears to have had considerable influence on oral tradition. (Passerini 1984: 33.) It was one of the most important motifs associated with St. Martin from the very earliest writings concerning the saint. The image of St. Martin dividing his cloak in the *Vita Martini* was a powerful one, depicting a Roman Soldier cutting up a valuable garment and donating half to a shivering beggar. The incident is described as follows:

Accordingly, at a certain period, when he had nothing except his arms and his simple military dress, in the middle of winter, a winter which had shown itself more severe than ordinary, so that the extreme cold was proving fatal to many, he happened to meet at the gate of the city of Amiens a poor man destitute of clothing. He was entreating those that passed by to have compassion upon him, but all passed the wretched man without notice, when Martin, that man full of God, recognized that a being to whom others showed no pity, was, in that respect, left to him. Yet, what should he do? He had nothing except the cloak in which he was clad, for he had already parted with the rest of his garments for similar purposes. Taking, therefore, his sword with which he was girt, he divided his cloak into two equal parts, and gave one part to the poor man, while he again clothed himself with the remainder. Upon this, some of the by-standers laughed, because he was now an unsightly object, and stood out as but partly dressed. Many, however, who were of sounder understanding, groaned deeply because they themselves had done nothing similar. They especially felt this, because, being possessed of more than Martin, they could have clothed the poor man without reducing themselves to nakedness. In the following night, when Martin had resigned himself to sleep, he had a vision of Christ arrayed in that part of his cloak with which he had clothed the poor man. He contemplated the Lord with

the greatest attention, and was told to own as his the robe which he had given. Ere long, he heard Jesus saying with a clear voice to the multitude of angels standing round—“Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me with this robe.” The Lord, truly mindful of his own words (who had said when on earth—“Inasmuch as ye have done these things to one of the least of these, ye have done them unto me), declared that he himself had been clothed in that poor man; and to confirm the testimony he bore to so good a deed, he condescended to show him himself in that very dress which the poor man had received.¹

By showing generosity towards the beggar, St. Martin was, in fact, helping Christ. Severus reminds the reader of Jesus’ own words, rendered in Luke 25:40 as follows: ‘whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ The message is clear, Christ appeared as a beggar and St. Martin helped him, for which he received divine gratitude. The popularity of the *Vita Martini* has previously been discussed, and it was well known in Irish medieval literature from the earliest period. The popularity of St. Martin’s charitable act was to influence other works as well, such as the Irish Life of St. Samthann, where an act of charity by the saint is compared to St. Martin in her generosity towards the poor.² Thus, the idea that St. Martin should be associated with charitable works has a long pedigree in Ireland, and legend material reflecting this is prevalent throughout the country.

St. Martin’s Cloak Legend

A total of 34 examples of the legend of St. Martin’s Cloak were found, one in the Main Manuscript collection, three in the Schools’, 28 from the Questionnaire material and 1 printed example in the following frequency: Cavan (3), Cork (2), Donegal (1), Galway (6), Kerry (4), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (2), Laois (2), Leitrim (1), Limerick (1), Mayo (1), Roscommon (6), Tipperary (2), Waterford (1), Westmeath (1). Most examples from the folk tradition are short, and to the point:

- 1 Sulpitius Severus, *Vita Martini Turonensis*, Ch. III. See Roberts 1894: 5.
- 2 See Plummer 1910: 255. Some are of the opinion that the reference to St. Martin is later in date than the Early Irish text, and was added to the original afterwards, but it is, nevertheless, medieval in date. See Africa 2000: 97–110, 109ff.

St. Martin was a great soldier – he met a poor woman shivering with cold. He got a soldier to hold up his cloak- split it in two with his sword and gave half to the poor woman- he wore the other half himself.³

A few show more literary leanings, and are likely based on some printed version of the story. Consider the following example from Co. Leitrim:

There is a story of ‘St. Martin’s Cloak’, which goes as follows. One day a little company of soldiers passed through a city and he was with them. They saw an old beggar man sitting up to a wall ragged and torn. He put out his hand for alms but they all passed by in disgust, except Martin. He had compassion for the old man and he tore his cloak in two and gave him the bigger half. He then galloped after his companions and they laughed and jeered him. That night he had a dream. He saw Our Lord with the torn cloak on him and then he knew to whom he had given the poor gift. Our Lord said to him;

Whatsoever thing thou doest,
Unto least of mine and lowest,
Thou doest unto Me.⁴

This account is more detailed, and even includes the Biblical quote that was to serve as inspiration for the original Latin version. The precise relationship between oral and literary versions in Irish tradition is not clear, due to the fact that both have probably existed side by side for many centuries in Ireland. It may be the case that sermons preached by priests often included the legend, especially those delivered on November 11. The narrative was very evenly distributed throughout the area in which the feast of St. Martin was observed, with one account even coming from Co. Cork, an area normally devoid of Martinian tradition, suggesting the influence of ecclesiastical or literary tradition on oral narrative. Some versions from the folk tradition are slightly varied, such as the following example:

[There was a poor man once, and he was badly injured. He had streams of blood flowing. St. Martin came on his way. He put a piece of his cloak on the wound, and the wound was immediately healed.]⁵

3 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 523.

4 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 315.

5 Co. Galway NFC 678: 146.

Another variant shows similarity to a different tradition regarding saints and cloaks:

St. Martin went to ask another saint for a bit of land to build a monastery, but he was refused. Then the saint said “I will give you as much as your cloak will cover”. When St. Martin spread out his cloak, it covered the whole island.⁶

This is an example of a legend that is usually associated with St. Brigid in Ireland, and concerns her magical cloak spreading out to cover a large area of land. It is recorded in Irish tradition as tale-type 2400 *The Ground is Measured with a Horse’s Skin*. (Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen 1968: 342.) It was known in relation to St. Colmcille in the sixteenth century *Betha Colaim Chille*, and is popular in Irish oral tradition even today. (O’Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918: xxii.) Generally speaking though, the archive examples of legends of St. Martin’s cloak appear relatively consistent, and testify to its popularity throughout the country.

Closely related to the notion of charity is that of piety. Many Irish religious legends and folktales are at pains to emphasise the importance of faithfulness to saints and to God, Jesus or the Virgin Mary. They contain strong moral teachings on the proper behaviour and attitudes one should have towards religious figures, and the showing of proper respect and devotion is a theme found in much Irish, and indeed European, religious lore.⁷ Many of the beliefs regarding St. Martin’s day revolve around the idea of making an offering to the saint, and that luck and benefit would come to those who did so. Conversely, there was a belief that punishment would befall those who failed to make the offering, and that the saint’s wrath would befall those who had the means, and yet failed to do so. Thus, further attention will be given to some of the legends and folktales that have been collected in relation to St. Martin’s Day regarding punishments for those who did not make offerings, or those who were mean spirited and niggardly when it came to sharing with the poor, and to contextualise it in the broader theme of charity, fidelity, reward and punishment.

6 Co. Westmeath NFC 681: 218.

7 For a discussion of the main themes in Irish religious lore, see Ó hÉalaí 1976: 176–212.

Revival of Animals or Children

One popular narrative that revolves around the theme of piety and charity concerns the rewards bestowed upon those who sacrifice for St. Martin. The story often concerns a person who has nothing else to offer on St. Martin's Eve, so they kill their last cow. The next day, the animal is revived and found to be as alive as ever it had been:

[I heard there was an old man once upon a time who had no one living in the house only himself. He was very poor, and he had no birds or cattle, only one old cow who was providing him with a drop of milk, and she was tied up at the end of the house. When St. Martin's Night came, he had no bird or animal to kill. That made him very sad, and he sat down by the fire thinking about the situation. After a while, he got up and caught her behind and killed her in his honour. He threw the skin and the horns down to the bottom of the house, in the place where the cow was tied and went to sleep. He was happy, even though the cow was dead, and even though he wouldn't have milk any more, he was happy after that, he was able to spill blood for St. Martin. When he got up again the next morning, the cow was standing at the bottom of the house, and the halter on her head as good as she ever had been.]⁸

Some 30 examples of this tale were recorded as part of the current project. One example was found in the Main Manuscript material, 5 in the Schools collection, 20 in the Questionnaire responses, and 2 versions were found in printed sources (See Figure 19). They were found in the following distribution: Carlow (1), Galway (8), Kerry (3), Leitrim (1), Mayo (13), Waterford (1), Wexford (1), Unspecified (1).

The fact that over half of the narratives found were in the Irish language may be related to the concentration of the story along the west coast. The following comes from Co. Wexford, and provides another example of the narrative:

There lived at Rathgarogue, 5 miles from New Ross, neighbours of Mrs. Murphy's father, named Denn. Two girls and a boy formed the household. The boy kept a pair of game cocks, cockfighting being in vogue i.e. about 80 years ago. St. Martin's Day came around and there was no cock at Denn's only the two games. The girls made up their mind to kill

8 Co. Galway NFC 678: 73

one of the cocks – St. Martin’s Day had to be honoured at all costs. So unknown to the brother the cock was killed.

When he was in the pot boiling, the brother came in from the haggard for something or other, and if he did (to use her own words) “the devil such crowing and crowing as took place outside on the roost.” Out they went to see what was wrong and there on the roost was a cock the exact same as the one in the pot. “I thought you let out the cocks,” said the brother, and he never knew the strange cock. He won all before him everywhere he went to fight.⁹

This story appears to be related to a popular international folktale, ATU 750 B *Hospitality Rewarded*. This is a well-known folktale throughout Europe and Asia, and versions have been recorded from at least the medieval period. It often concerns hospitality towards a religious figure, and usually involves a poor person slaughtering their last cow to feed them, and afterwards the animal is magically restored to life. It appears in the *Types of the Irish Folktale* under tale-type 750 *Hospitality Blessed*, which is a catch-all title for several different versions, which focus on different ways in which charity towards the poor is rewarded. The particular variant of concern here is one that sees the miraculous provision of food to those who show hospitality, trust or fidelity to God, or some other religious figure. Versions of *Hospitality Blessed* are known throughout the country, and the particular variant of it that appears here concerns a person who offers their last animal to St. Martin, whereby it is restored to life. Here is another version, from Co. Kerry:

I heard an old man one time saying that there was a poor scholar one time and he could find no lodgings and he went in to a pigsty and slept there and there was a sow and a litter of bonhams there. So out in the night he thought it was St. Martin’s Night, and he got up and caught one of the bonhams and drew the blood and in the morning all the bonhams were there again.¹⁰

The central motif of the story is recorded in Stith Thompson’s *Motif Index of Folk Literature* as E32 *Resuscitated Eaten Animal*, which concerns the bringing back to life of an eaten animal. It was known throughout Europe and Asia, in relation to a variety of saints and religious figures, and was used as an exemplum for preaching in western Europe since at least the fifteenth century.¹¹

9 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 213.

10 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 237.

11 See 2533, Herdsman, Hospitality of, in Tubach 1981 for several examples.

It has an ancient pedigree in Ireland, and is a common theme in Early Irish hagiography in relation to a number of different saints. (Plummer 1910: cxliiii.) It can also be found in recent oral tradition in relation to other religious figures, such as St. Patrick. (Ó Súilleabháin 1951/52: 325.) The story contains an obvious moral message, that fidelity and hospitality towards a saint will be rewarded, which is an extremely relevant theme in relation to St. Martin, and would fit well with the idea of making offerings of animals for the saint, which was the central tenet of his feast-day.

Of additional interest are examples of the story that involve a child being offered. The story usually concerns a mother who has nothing else to offer for St. Martin, so she offers her child as a sacrifice. She is devastated at the loss, but is later visited by a stranger or beggar who seeks lodgings and food for the night. She admits the man, and he tells her to go check on the dead child. She finds the child alive and well. This variant was found in 20 of the 30 versions, in the following distribution: Galway (5), Kerry (1), Leitrim (1), Mayo (12), Unspecified (1).

St. Martin, having given away all his goods to the poor, was often in want of food, and one day he entered a widow's house and begged for something to eat. The widow was poor, and having no food in the house, she sacrificed her young child, boiled it, and set it before the saint for supper. Having eaten and taken his departure, the woman went over to the cradle to weep for her lost child when, lo! there he was, lying whole and well, in a beautiful sleep, as if no evil had ever happened to him; and to commemorate this miracle and from gratitude to the saint, a sacrifice of some living thing is made yearly in his honour. (Mooney 1889.)

This short version from Co. Galway also illustrates the story clearly:

[There was a man long ago and he didn't have anything to kill for St. Martin. He killed his own child and in the morning the child was alive again.]¹²

The theme of generosity towards the saint is once again to the fore in this story, although the idea of a mother offering her child to eat seems somewhat grotesque. It may in fact be derived from a humorous story involving a saint asking a foolish woman to cook for him 'that which she loves the most'. The woman misinterprets the order, and cooks her child, whom the saint must miraculously revive. It appears as motif E121.4.1 *The Cooked and Revived Child*. (Thompson 1955–58.) Curiously, this motif is not recorded

12 Co. Galway NFC678: 169.

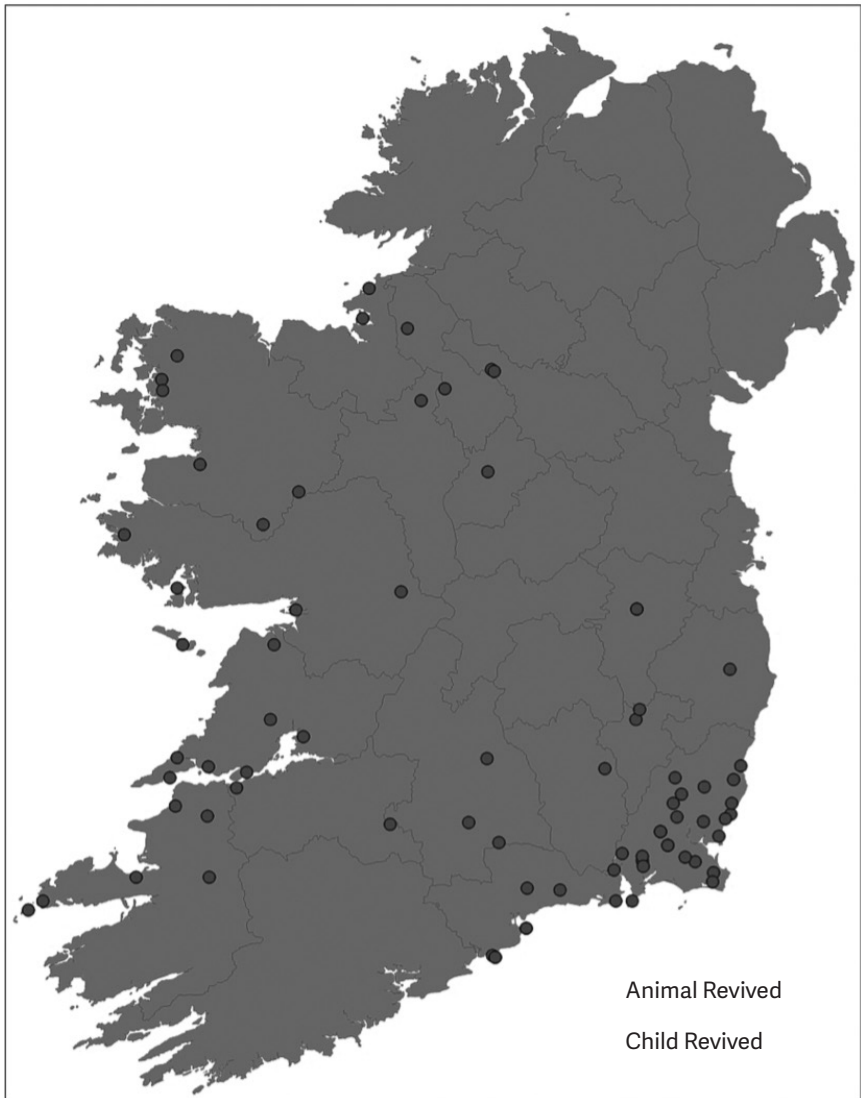


Figure 19 – Frequency and Distribution of Animal or Child Revived Narrative

by Thompson as being found in Ireland, or even in western Europe, and the closest documented example is from Lithuania. If there is some relationship between the tale and that motif, whatever link it has with the Baltic example, if indeed there is such a link, remains unclear. It may have been expressed in lore concerning St. Martin, although its humorous nature is changed to one illustrating piety. A version from Co. Galway is based on the same idea, but sees the child narrowly escape the knife, by a miracle from St. Martin:

[A man came in some place in Conamara on this evening, and it seems he was drunk because he started to ask his wife for some meat. She said she hadn't any, nor did she know where to get some. Well, he said, if you don't have it, kill that child for me. She had to put on the pot and she began to pray to St. Martin to send her meat, when she got the pot there was meat in it. She promised then that there wouldn't be another day ever that she wouldn't shed blood in honour of St. Martin on his day.]¹³

In the above version, the idea of eating the child is retained, but it becomes a threat, and the story is transformed into a cautionary tale, reminding people that they must shed blood on St. Martin's Day. The motif of meat miraculously appearing in a cooking pot is one common in Irish oral tradition, particularly in the context of charity, giving and generosity. This will be discussed further below.

Many of the versions concerning child-killing from Co. Mayo, particularly the cluster of tales on the northwest coast, provide a slightly modified narrative. Instead of the child being killed for meat, he or she is instead killed accidentally by a mother desperately trying to fulfil her obligation to St. Martin:

[There was a man and woman long ago, and they had a child. The man used be always playing cards, and he had big debt afterwards, and he'd be winning money and other things as well. It was St. Martin's Night, and he was gone, and his wife was left in the house with the child. It was the law in Ireland that time to shed blood for St. Martin. The old people say that he'll accept before but not after.

The woman was sad when she had nothing to kill for the night, and she knew he'd not accept after that night. The child was in the cradle, and she decided she would draw a drop of the child's blood from its finger, and she took the knife with her and she cut his finger, and the blood started coming, and in the end, she couldn't stop it, and the child died.

13 Co. Galway NFC 677: 466.

A good while after that a vagrant came in to her, and asked her for lodgings for the night. She said she hadn't much space, but all the same she would keep him, and she did. She was working all over the house for the night, but she was fairly sad. Later in the night, the man of the house came home, and had won a fine bit of meat from the cards. He welcomed the stranger into the house, and told the wife to get the dinner ready, and she did.

When they were seated for supper, the man asked the woman where the child was, and she said he was asleep.

"I don't care" he said, "I won't eat a bite until you take him up" and the woman knew there was going to be trouble.

"Oh", said the stranger, "bring him to the supper". Off with her to the child, and he was sweating in his sleep. She threw herself down on her knees and thanked God on the night that was in it.

She told the story to her husband, and they ate the supper, and when it was eaten, the vagrant said he was St. Martin, and that he revived the child from death.]¹⁴

In this example, the mother clearly did not intend to kill her child, and the death occurred accidentally, as a result of her spilling the child's blood. The custom of shedding blood from one's finger when no other offering could be made was known in relation to St. Martin's Day, and versions like the above may have been developed as an attempt to explain why the child was killed. The motif of resurrection by the power of St. Martin is central to all these tales, and they clearly serve as examples of how one should trust in St. Martin, and be generous and faithful to him. The revival of animals, a common motif in Irish tradition, has here been conflated with the motif of the saint reviving the child.

Of interest in the tales concerning the killing of a child is a form of narrative based around the Biblical account of the Binding of Isaac. This involves God testing the faith of Abraham by asking him to offer his son in sacrifice. He prepares to do so, but is stayed at the last minute by the intervention of an angel, and a ram is miraculously provided in substitution for the youth. The narrative is as follows:

14 Co. Mayo NFC 134: 62.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him,

“Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.” Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place “The Lord Will

Provide'. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."

(Genesis 22: 1–14.)

The central message of the Biblical incident is that trust in God will always be rewarded, and that persons prepared to go to great lengths to fulfil their obligations to the Lord are considered most pious. It has obvious parallels to the folktales and legends concerning St. Martin's Day, which carried the same theme. Unsurprisingly, there are several narratives from Martinmas tradition that are obviously derived from the Biblical story. Seven such versions were uncovered, 2 from the Schools manuscripts, one from a printed source, and four from the Questionnaire material, in the following frequency: Clare (1), Galway (1), Kerry (2), Mayo (1), Tipperary (1), Unspecified (1).

The following example is from Co. Kerry:

One St. Martin's Eve, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, a poor man, living inside in the middle of the bog with one only son (and his wife dead), didn't know what he'd do because he hadn't a goose or a hen or a chicken to his name, and he didn't know how he could spill blood in honour of St. Martin. He had great veneration to him, and he said whatever'd come or go, he'd never let the day go without giving him that much honour.

So, in the wind up, he made his mind to kill his young son, and that the blood would be spilled anyway. So, in the evening, he took him up to the top of the mountain (that the bog was cut there) and he got the knife ready, and he was just going to cut off the boy's head (the Lord save us!), when he rose up a bit off the ground and pointed with his finger.

"Look, look!" says he, "look yonder at the sheep!"

And there right enough was a pole driven into the mountain (and 'twas never there before, you know) and there was a sheep tied to it – and it all came there in a minute like a vision.

Although he was settled to kill the son, the thought of it was breaking the poor father's heart – and he was nearly out of the head, and when he saw the sheep he was sure 'twas sent by Saint Martin, to be killed instead of the little boy, when he was so good and faithful, and he fell down in a dead weakness with the relief.

He killed the sheep and spilled the blood, all right, and then he went down home with his son, and from that day out they prospered something wonderful.¹⁵

The details in this story are remarkably similar to the Biblical account. The killing is to take place high on a mountaintop, and a sheep appears miraculously, bound to a pole. The *deus ex machina* in this story is not the Biblical God, but rather is St. Martin. It is to him the offering is to be made, and he provides the sheep in substitution. Other than this detail, and the lack of an angel, the narratives are very similar. The moral message is made clear in the last line, and the reward for the sacrifice is that the man subsequently prospered.

[There was a man once who didn't have anything to kill for St. Martin's Night, He had one son, whom he thought would be right to kill. He was just about to kill him when Martin came in and said not to kill the son, that he wouldn't take him because he didn't have anything to kill only him.]¹⁶

This version contains the motif of the child being offered, but St. Martin acts as the angel in stopping the sacrifice before it is completed. Another version of the story, and one that shares motifs with the narratives concerning the child sacrifice story mentioned in the first section, comes from an article by James Mooney, written in 1889:

Another legend makes it his own son whom Saint Martin, like Abraham of old, was about to sacrifice out of love to God, because in his great poverty he had nothing else to offer him. Although he loved the boy more than life, he killed him late one night, and then lay down, intending to complete the sacrifice at daybreak. On opening his eyes in the morning, he was surprised to see a sheep hanging up in front of him, all skinned and dressed. Full of wonder he went over to his son's bed, and there he found the boy sleeping quietly and in perfect health, with not even a mark to show where his father had driven the knife. The saint gratefully offered up the sheep as a sacrifice to God in the place of his son, and thus the custom originated in remembrance of the miracle. (Mooney 1889: 416.)

This story features St. Martin as the protagonist. The comparison with Abraham is explicitly made by the author, but it is clear that the narrative is influenced by the Biblical account, with the provision of the sheep being a motif held in common with the Biblical account. Clearly, the account of Abraham and Isaac

15 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 302.

16 Co. Galway NFC 679: 489.

was influential on stories of the child being resurrected. It may be the case that the Biblical account inspired stories of a parent willing to sacrifice their child, which in some instances became conflated with stories of animals being revived. Perhaps the humorous motif of the child being cooked for dinner and subsequently revived by the saint was added somewhere in this process, although its nature was changed to make a serious point. In all cases, of both animal and human offering, the protagonists are portrayed as willing to offer that which is dear to them. This was a powerful message, and undoubtedly served to remind listeners of the importance of killing for St. Martin.

Miraculous Provision of Animals or Food

A narrative closely related to some of the above versions concerns the magical provision of animals to those who make extraordinary offerings to St. Martin. 36 instances of this story were found: 2 from the Main Manuscript collection, 10 from the Schools' folklore material and 24 from the Questionnaire responses. They appeared in the following frequency: Kerry (6), Kilkenny (2), Leitrim (3), Mayo (9), Roscommon (3), Sligo (2), Westmeath (1).

Once again, the tales often feature persons who are poor, and give their last animal, or make some other offering that is difficult for them to give. They are handsomely rewarded by St. Martin for their kindness. The following shows the expense people were making in order to fulfil their obligation to the saint, and the benefit bestowed as a result:

[There was a man long ago, and he had nothing to kill for Saint Martin. He went out and bought a pig from the neighbours and he gave fifteen shillings for the pig. When he came home he killed the pig for Saint Martin and when he got up in the morning the fifteen shillings were on the table and the house was full of pigs.]¹⁷

Other examples depict people in more dire circumstances, as the following versions show:

About eighty years ago, there lived a poor family in Jamestown. With the exception of a small calf, all their cattle and fowl had died. When St. Martin's Eve came, having nothing else to offer, they decided to kill their only calf. Having done so they put the blood on the four corners of the house. Next morning then the farmer went out to the field, to his surprise and astonishment he saw the field full of young cattle. He searched the

¹⁷ Co. Mayo NFCS 144: 14.

country for the owner of the cattle in vain. Then the priest told him to keep the cattle as he decreed them sent by God for his generosity.¹⁸

[There was a man long ago and he only had one sheep. Saint Martin's Night came and he had only the sheep to kill. He killed her and from that day until the day of his death he had a couple of hundred sheep.]¹⁹

The idea that one should kill their last animal for St. Martin emphasises the importance of the offering. There is a sense that, no matter how dire the situation, the offering must be made, and miraculous provision will be the reward. A similar example can be found in this account from Co. Mayo:

There once lived in a lonely cabin a poor boy who owned nothing and who had nothing to kill for St. Martin's Night. He did not know what to do when he hadn't anything to kill, so he cut his finger and shed the blood in the four corners of the house to honour St. Martin. In a few minutes he heard a knock on the door. He did not answer it until a second knock came. Outside stood a man who said "come out and bring your cattle". The boy answered and said "I own no cattle", but the man told him again to bring in his cattle. He went out this time and there he saw before him ten herds of cattle which was a reward for cutting his finger in honour of St. Martin.²⁰

In this case, the cutting of the finger represents the lengths to which someone in extreme poverty would go to, just to fulfil the obligation to St. Martin. Again, the provision of cattle is his reward. It holds much in common with stories where the offering of a cow is repaid in kind. In this instance, the poverty is more severe, but the reward is of a similar nature. The motif involved in this instance is Q141. *Reward: man's cows magically multiply*. (Thompson 1955–58.) It is also closely related to a narrative that revolves around food given away as charity being replenished. This concerns someone who gives away food from their personal stores, only to find that it has been miraculously replenished. These were discussed by Patricia Lysaght (1999) in an article concerning the concept of charity and its reward in Irish oral tradition. Lysaght outlines a series of narratives that are derived from tale-type 750 *Hospitality Blessed*, which feature the motif of food that has been given away in alms being miraculously replaced as a reward for generosity. The theme is ultimately Biblical in origin, and was known throughout Europe in the Middle Ages.

18 Co. Leitrim NFCS 209: 164.

19 Co. Roscommon NFCS 129: 226.

20 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 201.

It was adapted by oral tradition as a series of didactic religious tales, and appears to have been popular in folklore relating to the Famine in Ireland (*ibid.*) The Irish Famine was a period of starvation and disease that occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, and was hugely influential on Irish culture from that period. Studies on the narratives from the period following the Famine show themes of charity and giving to have been to the fore, and that the lessons implied by legends were designed to encourage generosity in people by reminding them of miraculous rewards they could achieve as a result. (Ó Cíosáin 2004: 225–6.) In a similar vein, the themes of charity and generosity feature strongly in Martinian lore, and the stories of the miraculous provision of cattle as a reward for sacrifice are a reflection of this theme, which was prevalent in Irish religious lore. The following example begins with a motif of a couple who disagree about offering to St. Martin, and end up in penury for their failure to do so. It is followed by the usual narrative of reward:

[This happened in a house long ago. There was a strong, independent man. His wife implored him one morning to kill a fat calf in honour of St. Martin.

“I’ll not kill it”, he said. “There’s naught but folly and foolishness in the business of killing animals”, and he did not kill a sheep or a calf. His wife killed a fat goose, and she drew its blood. At the coming of St. Martin’s Day again next year, there was not one cow coming to the house of that man. Every cow and calf he had died. One would go here, one would go there, until they were in poverty.

“Yes”, said the woman, “St. Martin’s Day is upon us and we have nothing left to offer to the blessed saint.”

“We have nothing left, woman” he said, “We were not worthy when we had much, we were not generous with our share. But we have one cow left, and we have nothing else in the world left but the cow, and I will give that cow to St. Martin tonight.”

He killed the cow. He drew the blood, and put a cross on every door, inside and outside, saying “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. When that much was done, he took a basin of blood to his wife to spread it around the house, or do whatever she liked with it. A year after that, with the coming of St. Martin’s Day, they had four or five cows, and life was improving for him. His wife didn’t have to remind him

to kill a fat calf for the feast, for he had his eyes opened for him. He had every success after that.]²¹

The notion that the husband and wife would disagree about the offering is a theme that will be returned to below, but for now focus will remain on the notion of reward. For a pastoral audience, the offering of a cow would have been seen as a significant financial outlay. The husband's reluctance is understandable, but ultimately misguided, and is portrayed in the story as being a negative trait. Meanness towards the saint is punished, and the man learns his lesson, and prospers after his change in attitude. Of significance, perhaps, is the prevalence of cattle as the animal of choice. They would have been the most expensive offering one could make, and so likely to feature in legend and folktale as exemplary models of proper generosity. Not all versions feature cattle in this regard, as the following account from Co. Kilkenny demonstrates:

Some time ago a woman was losing her fowl. She had but one cock left. She said she should kill the cock and sprinkle his blood. In the morning there was a fine big cock and a number of strange hens on the hen house. She sent my grandmother and my aunt to the neighbours' houses to see had they all their hens and their cock. They said they had all their fowl. After that there were hens and chickens coming into the yard every day. The next St. Martin's night the cock disappeared. This happened to my grandmother's grandmother, Mrs. Hughes.²²

Neither do all versions of the story feature a multiplicity of animals as a reward. In some instances meat is provided instead, as this version from Co. Kerry outlines:

One St. Martin's Eve a widow woman who was very poor had nothing to eat or nothing to kill for St. Martin. She cut off half her three fingers in honour of him. She had six children who were very hungry and were crying for something to eat. So the woman brought in a pot and put stones into it and told the children that it was meat she had; and as it would not be boiled till the morning she told them to go to sleep.

Then a strange man came in and asked for lodgings and she said he could stay but she had nothing to give him to eat. Then she was ashamed to take up the pot which was boiling. He said that whatever was in the pot was

21 NFC 1605: 456.

22 Co. Kilkenny 683: 477.

boiled and to take off the cover. She did so and it was full of meat. It was St. Martin who came in.²³

In many respects, the stories are akin to other narratives concerning people who offer alms to the poor, even if it means giving the last of their food, and should be considered as essentially part of the same corpus. The plots are extremely similar in this respect, and must be considered different aspects of the same tradition. The image of the pot full of meat was featured in stories of the child resurrection legend, and in fact is a common motif in legends concerning charity rewarded in the context of the famine, once again highlighting the interrelatedness of these stories to other narratives concerning charity in Irish folk tradition. (Ó Cíosáin 2004.)

Punishment

The narratives considered up to this point mostly focus on the rewards bestowed upon those who are generous, but there is a significant body of material concerning people who are too mean to make the offering, and are subsequently punished for their bad behaviour. They concern two people, usually a husband and wife, who argue over the offering that should be made to St. Martin. One is willing, while the other is reluctant, or refuses to do so, and they suffer losses as a result. It was found in a total of 45 examples, 3 from the Main Manuscripts collections, 9 from the Schools material, 31 from the Questionnaire results and one from a printed source, in the following frequency: Clare (1), Galway (4), Kerry (6), Kilkenny (1), Laois (3), Leitrim (6), Limerick (1), Longford (1), Mayo (12), Offaly (2), Roscommon (1), Sligo (5), Tipperary (1), Unspecified (1), Wexford (1).

The story's popularity is generally widespread, but once more a concentration on the western seaboard is evident, with specific concentration in the province Connacht (thirty-eight examples), and Irish language versions account for a significant proportion of the stories. The following example comes from Co. Kerry:

[There was a man long ago and he was going home and he left an order with his wife to kill a sheep on that night, if he himself was not at home. That night he was not at home, and his son knew to take it in to kill it.

“What’s that sheep for”, said the mother?

23 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 34.

“Oh, to kill it in honour of St. Martin”, said the boy.

“Ah, don’t bother with her”, she said, “she will make good money on the market, and I will put the cat’s tail in the fire, and there will be a smell of meat around the house”.

She was pleased that the sheep was released again. She caught an old cat that was stretched by the hearth and she flung his tail in the fire. When the heat hit him, such was the screaming, she had to let him go. He went mad with his tail lighting, and he leapt up on the back loft, and there was flax tow there, and the tow caught fire, and the house caught fire and burned completely, and only the four walls were left standing when the man of the house returned.]²⁴

In most instances, it is a woman who is the reluctant party, and refuses to kill for St. Martin.²⁵ There is a similar type of account from Irish famine tradition regarding the reward of charitable acts, which concerns the giving away of meal or seed corn to the poor. In these cases, the woman is portrayed as being generous, while the husband is the one reluctant to give it away. Patricia Lysaght (1999: 630) is of the opinion that the conflict between the couple as to the propriety of giving this food away allows storytellers to heighten dramatic tension in the story, illustrating the contrast in attitude between the two. She explains that stores of food would have been the concern of the woman of the house, while the man’s responsibility was with the livestock and crop management, hence the consistent portrayal of the woman as the one who wishes to donate the grain. However, in narratives relating to St. Martin’s Day, there is a reversal of attitude, and the man is the one who is featured as willing to offer the animal, while the wife is generally reluctant to do so. Not all versions feature a man and wife, but retain the element of conflict nonetheless:

[There was another woman long ago and she was living in Páirc Abhainn (a lovely place that is three miles south of this school). She was a good woman for keeping hens and ducks and such. This day she went into Bearraic. There was a servant girl and she was killing a goose. The woman asked her why she was killing the goose and she said to her that it was to honour St. Martin. The woman told her she would not kill a goose or any bird, because she didn’t believe in that kind of thing at all. So it was. The next day she went out to feed the hens, and every one was stretched out

24 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 140.

25 This was the case in 31 of the recorded narratives.

dead in front of her. She went back and told her sad story to Eibhlín – that was the servant girl. She started laughing at her and “Now”, she said, “do you believe there’s such a thing as the saint now?” From then on she killed the best bird she had.]²⁶

The punishment meted out for failure to offer a sacrifice can vary. Sometimes it involves loss of animal life, or damage and destruction to the home. The following example illustrates the severity of punishment that was sometimes associated with meanness:

There is another interesting story about a certain man named Martin Mul-lens (a tailor by trade), who lived with his wife near the town of Birr. They always killed a cock on the Eve of St. Martin’s, they sprinkled the blood on the threshold as was the custom, and boiled the craw and so on. There was a big stone just at the back door on which she used to kill the cock. But, to her misery, poor Martin fell sick and was obliged to go to hospital. He was there for 6 months, and when St. Martin’s Day came along, the woman didn’t bother, or rather, she was in no form for killing the cock as she used to do. Strangely enough, Martin’s wife had some clothes out drying, and when she went out to take them in, she found one sheet lying flat on the stone. She picked it up, and found the stone underneath covered with blood. She commenced wailing and crying and shouting “Martin is dead, Martin is dead.” She went quickly to the hospital and found the poor man lying on his death bed.²⁷

The following short example retains the motif of a woman reluctant to kill a fowl for St. Martin, but eliminates the conflict at the beginning of the story. It has been reduced into its simplest form, but retains the message that failure to offer a fowl to the saint invokes punishment:

There was once a woman who said it was only nonsense to spill blood in honour of St. Martin. She only had a few hens and she wouldn’t kill any of them. The night after St. Martin’s night the hens fell off the roost and perished.²⁸

One version of the story retains all the central motifs, but includes a humorous element, in the form of the husband tricking his wife into being in favour of the killing. The style of this narrative obviously betrays its literary

26 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 89.

27 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 363.

28 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 521.

origin, but it is most likely based on some oral variant that the author had encountered as part of his research:

There is a story told in Connemara to the effect that a man once named a sheep for Saint Martin, but as the day approached, the animal was in such fine condition that his avaricious wife was constantly urging him to sell it instead. Afraid to break his vow, and equally unwilling to incur his wife's displeasure, he secretly killed a fowl and smeared the bed with the blood. Then getting into bed and covering himself up as if sick, he persuaded the woman that the saint was drawing blood from him in punishment of the contemplated impiety, until such fear seized her heart that she was as anxious as himself to see the sheep killed. (Mooney 1889: 399.)

Prosperity and Subsequent Failure

This version of a narrative concerning punishment or reward for killing on behalf of St. Martin essentially involves a combination of motifs from the stories mentioned above. It describes a person, or a couple, who, though in poverty, make an offering to St. Martin, which may, in fact, be their last cow, or a cat, or blood from their own hand. They enjoy a rich reward during the following year, and prosper greatly. When St. Martin's Day comes around again, they fail to make a substantial offering, even though it is well within their means to do so on this occasion. Soon afterwards they fall into poverty again, and end up as poor as ever.

This scenario is found in eight instances in the archive material, once in the Main Manuscript material, three times in the Questionnaire material, four times in the Schools' material, and twice in printed sources, in the following distribution: Clare (2), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (2), Leitrim (1), Limerick (2), Unspecified (1).

The distribution is relatively haphazard, and the story is likely to represent a variant that emerged when storytellers combined plots from some of the above tales to make a more complete narrative.

There was an old couple and they had no fowl and had no blood to spill in St. Martin's honour. "What about the cat?" says the old woman. "Very good", says the old man. "The cat's blood will do when we can get no other blood." They killed the cat, and spilled the blood in honour of St. Martin.

That year everything prospered, and everything they turned their hand to turned into gold. They made all riches that year, and the coming St.

Martin's, the following year they had plenty fowl and plenty cocks. St. Martin's Eve came. "We were very lucky during the past year, when we killed the cat", says the old woman, "and we might as well kill the other cat?" They killed the cat. That year everything turned against them, and before the following St. Martin's again they were as poor as ever.²⁹

The avarice of people in the face of St. Martin's generosity is punished in this instance. The story provides a stark contrast between the benefits of offering versus the punishment for being stingy. Clearly the message in this narrative is that people should offer something within their means, especially after enjoying the success St. Martin miraculously provides. One version from the seven examples follows the narrative as usual, but the ending offers a different reason for the eventual loss:

There was a poor man there long ago, and he had but one cow. He wanted some money very badly, so he told his wife that they should sell the cow to get money to pay the rent to the landlord, or if they didn't pay the rent they were sure to be turned out on the side of the road. At last, they made up their minds to sell the cow, whatever they would do without the drop of milk, and that was a very bad thing to do. They were very sad to be parting with their cow, but they said that they would get a drop of milk from their neighbours, and that God was good, and his stores were always full.

There was to be a fair held in the next town to where they were living in a few days time. The day of the fair would be Saint Martin's Day. The town that the fair was to be held in was a good distance away, so the poor man had to start off with the cow on Saint Martin's Eve. He ate a bite of food and went out into the cow house, and put a rope on the cow, and started on the road to the fair.

When he had gone a good distance from his own house, he thought of St. Martin, and that this was the first year he hadn't anything to kill for the honour of St. Martin. The poor man was feeling very down in spirit over this, so he stood up in the road, and made up his mind that he would turn home, and that he would kill his cow to do honour to St. Martin. When he had made up his mind, he turned the cow around in the road and started home.

29 Co. Clare NFC 675: 434.

When he came home, his wife was surprised. What reason had he for turning home again? The man told her that he was going to kill the cow in honour of St. Martin, and didn't care if the landlord came in the morning and put them out in the road. At last, he prepared to kill the cow. His wife came out with the dish to put the blood into it. When they had the cow killed, the woman took the dish of blood into the house, and they made the 'Sign of the Cross' with the blood on the wall near the door.

When they had this done they said their prayers and went to bed. They were very happy when they had done the honour for St. Martin this year, just the same as they had always done, even if they had to kill their last cow. But the poor people said that St. Martin would do them a good return for the honour that they had done.

The following morning when the poor man got up, he made the fire, and put the kettle down to make a sup of tea. He went to the press for a bit of bread, but he hadn't a sup of milk to colour his tea, but the poor man drank his tea black. He made up his mind that he would go to one of the neighbours to get a sup of milk, to colour the tea for his wife. When he went out in the bawn he looked up in the direction of his fields, and he saw there was a lot of lovely white cows. The poor man was very much surprised – what put all the strange cows into the field. So he walked up to the field. When he came up near the cows, he noticed that they had big udders of milk, and the milk was dripping out of their paps down in the ground, and that the cows were in pain with their milk.

The man said that it was the proper thing to take some of the milk from the cows in order to ease their pain. So he went in home and brought out a bucket, and took some of the milk from the cows. There was no reason for him now to go for any sup of milk to colour the tea. The cows remained in the field all day, and no one returned to claim them, and the man had to milk the cows again in the evening. At any rate, the cows remained in the field for two or three days, and no one came to claim them.

So the man and his wife were beginning to think that it was St. Martin that sent the cows to them, instead of their own cow that they killed to do honour to him. They made up their mind to keep the cows, and they were quite happy, because they were making plenty butter, and plenty money. Everything went alright with them for a long time after, 'til one day the farmer went to the fair, and he met some friends of his. They went into a

public house and had a few drinks. They was talking about many things. At last the man got drunk, and he told his friends about how he got all the strange cows, and that he had all thanks on St. Martin.

After a while the man started off home, and when he reached home, it was very late, so he went to bed. When he got up the following morning, he went out to the cow-house to look at his cows, but there wasn't any cows in the house. The man went into his own house, and asked his wife if she put the cows in the cow-house last night. His wife said that she did tie in the cows, but he said that there wasn't any at all. He searched the fields, and he enquired of several people if they saw his cows, but no one' could give him any tidings of his cows.

But himself was the cause of losing the cows, when he got drunk and was telling all his friends that it was Saint Martin gave him all the white cows. It was so St. Martin took away the cows again from him when he couldn't keep his mouth shut.³⁰

The clear implication in this instance is that one should not be boastful about one's acts of charity. Again, this is a theme that emerges in Irish narratives about almsgiving, and Lysaght (1999: 632) connects it to the Biblical notion that one should be secretive about charitable endeavours. The man's failure to be discrete about the reward he received for his sacrifice was his downfall.

Herd Disappears

A variant of the narrative type above contains the same essential plot, but it ends with the herd of animals that had been magically bestowed upon the person disappearing into the sea. This was found in six examples, one from the Main Manuscript collection, one from the Questionnaire material, one printed source, three from the Schools' collection. They were found in the following distribution: Kerry (3), Mayo (1), Waterford (2).

The following example from Co. Kerry outlines the story:

There was a small farmer named James Murray, who lived between this and Slieve Mish. He had the grass of seven cows, but though he had the land, he hadn't stock to put on it; he had but the one cow. Being a poor man, he went to Cork with four firkins of butter for a neighbour. He never thought what day of the month it was until he had the butter sold

30 Co. Kerry NFC 744: 188.

in the city, and it was Saint Martin's eve at the time. Himself and his father before him and his grandfather had always killed something to honour Saint Martin, and when he was in Cork on Saint Martin's eve he felt heartsore and could not eat. He walked around and muttered to himself: "I wish to the Almighty God I was at home; my house will be disgraced for ever."

The words weren't out of his mouth when a fine-looking gentleman stood before him and asked: "What trouble is on you, good man?"

James Murray told the gentleman.

"Well, my poor man, you would like to be at home to-night?"

"Indeed, then, I would, and but for I forgot the day of the month, it isn't here I'd be now, poor as I am."

"Where do you live?"

"Near the foot of Slieve Mish, in Kerry."

"Bring out your horse and creels, and you will be at home."

"What is the use in talking? 'Tis too far for such a journey."

"Never mind; bring out your horse."

James Murray led out the horse, mounted, and rode away. He thought he wasn't two hours on the road when he was going in at his own door. Sure, his wife was astonished and didn't believe that he could be home from Cork in that time; it was only when he showed the money they paid him for the other man's butter that she believed.

"Well, this is Saint Martin's eve!"

"It is," said she. "What are we to do? I don't know, for we have nothing to kill."

Out went James and drove in the cow.

"What are you going to do?" asked the wife.

“To kill the cow in honour of Saint Martin.”

“Indeed, then, you will not.”

“I will, indeed,” and he killed her. He skinned the cow and cooked some of her flesh, but the woman was down in the room at the other end of the house lamenting.

“Come up now and eat your supper,” said the husband.

But she would not eat, and was only complaining and crying.

After supper the whole family went to bed. Murray rose at daybreak next morning, went to the door, and saw seven grey cows, and they feeding in the field.

“Whose cows are those eating my grass?” cried he, and ran out to drive them away. Then he saw that they were not like other cattle in the district, and they were fat and bursting with milk.

“I’ll have the milk at least, to pay for the grass they’ve eaten,” said James Murray. So his wife milked the grey cows and he drove them back to the field. The cows were contented in themselves and didn’t wish to go away. Next day he published the cows, but no one ever came to claim them.

“It was the Almighty God and Saint Martin who sent these cows,” said he, and he kept them. In the summer all the cows had heifer calves, and every year for seven years they had heifer calves, and the calves were all grey, like the cows. James Murray got very rich, and his crops were the best in the county. He bought new land and had a deal of money put away; but it happened on the eighth year one of the cows had a bull calf. What did Murray do but kill the calf. That minute the seven old cows began to bellow and run away, and the calves bellowed and followed them, all ran and never stopped till they went into the sea and disappeared under the waves. They were never seen after that, but, as Murray used to give away a heifer calf sometimes during the seven years, there are cows of that breed around Slieve Mish and Dingle to this day, and every one is as good as two cows. (Curtin 1895: 72–80.)

This example is a literary tale, and represents the earliest version of the story discovered by the author. It begins with the motif of a man miraculously travelling a great distance in order to be back in his native Corca Dhuibhne district in west Kerry. This is another well-known narrative concerning St. Martin, and will be discussed in a following chapter. Of concern here is the episode of prosperity and subsequent loss. As usual, the motif of the reluctant wife is present, and the reward for sacrifice. The man is punished for offering the calf, when a cow would have been more valuable, and therefore more suitable, sacrifice. The herd then disappears under the sea. This motif is found in other migratory legends concerning otherworldly cattle, found in a number of contexts in Irish and European folk tradition.

There are many examples of herds disappearing back beneath the sea or into a lake, with several examples dating from the Early Irish period. Many such versions include an association with saints. In the eleventh-century *Vita Sancti Maedoc*, oxen appear from under the sea to assist in ploughing, and disappear beneath the waves when the work is complete. Plummer provides references to a wide variety of such legends from early Irish literature. (Plummer 1910: 153.)

Recent folk tradition also records many instances where cattle disappear into the sea, and it seems to be a motif found in relation to supernatural or fairy herds. One particular version, or rather two versions by the same storyteller, have been recorded by Séamas Ó Catháin from an informant living in Drumquin, Co. Tyrone. The plot involves a man who buys a cow, under instruction from the seller not to sell the animal under any circumstances. He subsequently prospered and his herd grew to a large number. When the man decided to sell the animal, she broke free and disappeared under water. (Ó Catháin 1980/81.) This idea is often found in relation to supernatural cattle, where some kind of violation or failure to obey some custom sees them depart from mortal possession, and disappear under water. Another motif common in these narratives is the idea that supernatural cattle were superior to regular animals, and were capable of producing more milk.³¹ Thus, the idea of St. Martin miraculously providing animals bore obvious similarities to fairy legends, and the notion that some violation or taboo should cause them to depart is another feature found in both traditions, and it is easy to see how imagery surrounding fairy cattle would be associated with the Martinian narratives. This was not a common feature however, and is only found in a handful of tales from Irish-speaking areas on the coast.

31 See migratory legend 6055 Fairy Cows in Christiansen 1958 for Scandinavian versions of such narratives.

In general, the notion that people would suffer losses for not killing on behalf of St. Martin was widespread, not only in legend material, but also in statements concerning luck that confirm the belief. The relationship between belief and legend is important in this regard, and they likely reinforced each other. People thought that it was dangerous to neglect St. Martin, and the way in which this danger manifested itself in most cases was by loss of animal life, although both legend and belief confirm that it could be more severe, and could even involve loss of human life. This is contrasted with the potential rewards that people could expect, which follow a general pattern found in relation to the notion of charity and reward in medieval and recent Irish oral tradition, particularly in the wake of the Great Irish Famine.

10. Folktales of Charity and Hospitality

Continuing on the theme of charity, and the various rewards and punishments meted out to those deserving of them, consideration will now be given to a series of interrelated folktales that often concern St. Martin as a selfish figure, who is tested by a visit from Jesus or Mary. In some instances, it is St. Martin himself who comes to visit some other person. This, once again, is a theme that was commonly found in relation to tale-type 750 *Hospitality Blessed*. It is also related to folk motifs Q286.1. *Uncharitableness to holy person punished*, Q1.1. *Gods (saints) in disguise reward hospitality and punish inhospitality*, and Q1. *Hospitality rewarded – opposite punished*. There is considerable overlap between the stories, with motifs found in various combinations between them.

Sprouting Shoots

The first folktale to be examined involves a beggar visiting the house of St. Martin, and asking for alms. His servant girl refuses, or offers some meagre donation, usually a portion of grain or some dough from a cake she is baking. The beggar departs, and the girl finds that the rest of the cake has sprouted green shoots, or a sheaf of corn has grown out of it. Upon seeing the sprouting plants, St. Martin asks what has happened, and when he realises that it was a holy visitor who came to test him, he runs after the beggar, who turns out to be Jesus in disguise. He is forgiven, and turns to a life of piety afterwards. This story is not exclusive to Irish folk tradition surrounding St. Martin, and can be found in relation to a series of saints, such as Paul, Peter or Colmcille. (See Ó Súilleabháin 1951/52: 305.) The context in which these tales were related concerns greed and avarice, and they were obviously told as a warning against niggardliness. In this regard, they can be considered to be part of a greater body of lore concerning charity, reward, miracle and punishment. The following is an example from Co. Galway:

[When St. Martin was young, before he was a saint, he was a miller. He never gave alms to any poor person ever. He was a very vexatious person. A man came in looking for alms and who was it only the Son of God. The girl was kneading bread when he came in, and she gave a piece of the bread she was kneading to the Son of God without St. Martin's knowledge. He went away and she put on the cake to bake and a sheaf of oats grew up from the cake. When St. Martin came in, he asked what this was, and she told him what happened. When he realised that, he followed the Son of God and never returned from then on. That is how he came to be a saint.]¹

A total of 10 examples have been found of this tale in relation to St. Martin, 1 from the Main Manuscripts, 5 from the Questionnaire results, and 4 from the Schools' Folklore material. They were found in the following distribution: Clare (1), Galway (6), Limerick (1), Mayo (2).

Why exactly the cake should spring forth into green growth is not immediately obvious, but it is suggested by the following example, from Co. Galway:

[One day St. Martin came into this house, and he asked for something to eat, and he got it. When he had his share eaten:

“Well”, he said to the woman of the house, “where is the man of the house gone?”

“Out”, she said, “putting water on the vegetables.”

“Ah woman” said St. Martin, “won't God do that much?” Isn't it God who made vegetables, and he'll water them when he wants to?”

“Well, he always waters them”, she said, “any time there is a drought”.

“Put down the wheat”, St. Martin said to her. She put it on to cook and he told her to light a fire underneath it, and to leave it there until it was baked. She did. She lit a red fire underneath it and over it, and left it there for an hour.

“Well” said St. Martin to her, “it's time for that cake to be baked. Remove the cover and see how it is”, and wasn't there green shoots growing from the baking!. God did it, you know. Isn't it a great miracle.

1 Co. Galway NFC 678: 534.

“Well”, St. Martin said to her, “whoever put the cake of wheat growing out of green shoots, can he not water the vegetables?”] ²

In this version of the story, it is not St. Martin who is reprimanded, but an ordinary woman, and she is chastised for not having faith in God. The saint causes inert wheat to sprout forth, like the vegetables in the field, demonstrating God’s miraculous powers. The notion that one should place their trust in God for all things appears to be the point behind this folktale. The situation in which it occurs, namely a holy figure in disguise visiting and testing a person, has a lot in common with the more usual versions of the tale. Another example demonstrates the similarities in form:

St. Martin lived with his mother. He sowed some wheat and he said to his mother that the wheat would not grow. In despair he went and sprinkled it with water. While doing so a poor woman came with a child to his mother’s house and asked for some of the wheat she was drying on the floor. The saint’s mother put some wheat to boil and while it was boiling the poor woman went away and said that she would return again when it was ready. She never returned and when St. Martin’s mother went to the pot she saw that the wheat had grown green in the cooking. When St. Martin returned and saw what happened to the wheat he ran to a mill and threw himself in. The mill refused to work and the saint was untouched. That is why mills do not work on St. Martin’s Day.³

This once again features the sowing and the irrigation of the crops, which is likely meant to show St. Martin’s lack of faith in God to provide rain. The identity of the mysterious woman and child who visit the house is not revealed, but it is clear from other versions that it was Mary and Jesus in disguise. The story finishes with the well-known motif of St. Martin in a mill, although he is miraculously saved, seemingly a reward for his piety. In yet another version, the ending is slightly different again:

[St. Martin had a small land-holding for himself, and one year a great drought came. He was outside sprinkling water on the drills. He left a cake in the oven inside, and would you know it, what happened when he came in? There was the best of oats growing there. He knew then that he had sinned against God, and he felt great regret. He went out, and he threw himself and tore himself in thorns until blood was flowing from

2 Ardrahan, Co. Galway, NFC 432: 88.

3 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 612.

him heavily. That is the penance he made with God, and that is why we spill blood in his honour.]

This story appears to be another version of the first, and features St. Martin interpreting the sprouting cake as a sign of his lack of faith in God. The ending features a motif Q522.3. *Penance: creeping naked through thorns*. This is occasionally found in Ireland in relation to tale-type 756 D *Other Tales of Severe Penances*, and is likely borrowed from such narratives to express St. Martin's regret. St. Martin realises his mistake, and tears his flesh with thorns until he bleeds heavily. The notion of blood on St. Martin's Day undoubtedly derives from the custom of killing animals, and the pervasive practice of spilling blood, and is likely to have caused the motif to become attracted to the saint in this context. Further versions of the tale develop the motif of St. Martin tearing his flesh on thorns in an act of atonement, but instead of his blood being shed, lard from his body is torn away:

A long time ago St. Martin and his mother lived together. One day a poor beggar woman came to the house and asked for something to eat. She was refused. There was a little cake baking in the oven. When his mother lifted the lid there was nothing but grass in the oven. When St. Martin saw this he knew it was the Blessed Virgin.

He ran after her to excuse himself. He was a very stout man and was unable to run so he opened his stomach and took out some lard and when he was returning he went into this house and told the woman of the house to put it up safely in paper, and after a while it would be of much value. There was a boy in the house and he did not know what was in the package and he stole some of it, and hid it. When they went to see what was in the package they found a litter of bonhams in it. Then the boy went to his own paper and rats was in it and he got an awful fright.⁴

The motif of fat from St. Martin's body turning into animals will be discussed below. For now, it is sufficient to observe the image of wheat growing green in the cooking, which may be a cautionary symbol derived from a story about watering crops, and not trusting in God. Most versions feature a mysterious stranger, who begs for alms. The cake sprouting is a warning, and often St. Martin interprets this sign, and follows the holy figure to beg for forgiveness.

4 Co. Galway NFC 678: 259.

Miraculous Milling

Closely related to the above story is a tale that again involves a holy figure in disguise asking for alms. The holy person is treated meanly, and is given only a few grains. These are taken to a mill to be ground. This is done so reluctantly, but the few grains produce a tremendous amount of flour. This is seen as a great miracle, and the miller, St. Martin, pursues the holy figure from the mill. Again, many versions feature St. Martin tearing his flesh, and either he loses his blood, or the fat from his body is torn away. There were twenty-seven examples of this story found to date in the archive sources, one from the Main Manuscripts, five from the Schools' Folklore Collection, twenty from the questionnaire results, and one from a printed source, in the following distribution: Galway (15), Leitrim (2), Mayo (8), Roscommon (1), Unknown (1).

Most versions of the story are found in Co. Galway, and it appears to be generally localised in this and surrounding counties (see figure 20). The following example is from Co. Mayo:

[Long, long ago there was a woman out walking and her son walking by and they came as far as St. Martin's house. The woman knocked on the door, and the servant girl came out to them. The woman sought lodgings for the night, but the servant said she wouldn't provide it because St. Martin was very dangerous, and he would be very angry if she gave anyone lodgings for the night. And so it was. There was a bag of corn in the corner of the house. The poor woman sought three grains for the sake of God.

"I'll give you that", said the servant girl, "but for goodness sake don't tell anyone that you got them here."

The woman put the three grains in her bag and left. It wasn't long until she came to a mill. She came in. She called on the miller to grind the three grains for God's sake. He started laughing, but she asked again and again, and in the end he relented.

He ground them but she herself put them on the stone. She left then. When they were ground by the miller, there was so much flour there wasn't enough sacks in the mill to contain it. It wasn't long 'til St. Martin came and when he saw the floor of the mill covered in flour, he asked the miller where he got the flour.

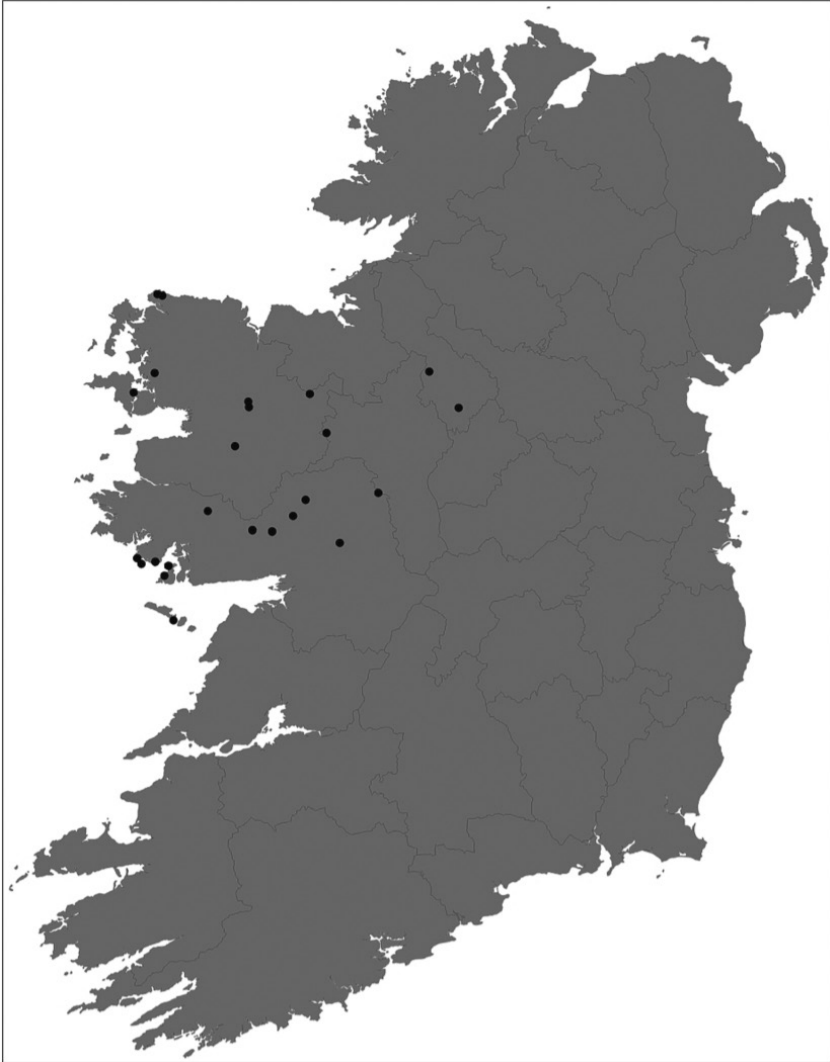


Figure 20 – Miraculous Milling Folktale

He told St. Martin the story from start to finish, that a woman and her son came and they sought to have three grains milled, and when he milled them the mill filled with flour.

St. Martin asked what direction they went. He told him. Martin followed her walking, but tore himself on the thorns and brambles until all the blood was gone from his body.

He didn't catch up with them, because it was the Mother of God and her Son, but St. Martin lost all his blood and died.]⁵

Once again, this tale features a punishment for lack of generosity, and ends with St. Martin tearing his body. The following example is essentially similar, but features an ending similar to that where fat from St. Martin's body turns into animals:

[Mary and her Son were weak travelling the road, and they were exhausted. The Mother went in to a house seeking alms. She saw a sack of flour in the house. The Virgin asked for alms of flour. The woman of the house refused her. She asked to put her finger in water, and to give her as much flour as would stick to her wet finger. That was done. Only six grains stuck to her finger. She walked on then until she came as far as a mill, and she asked the mill boy to grind the grain for her. The boy said it wasn't worth doing it. The miller, St. Martin, was listening to the talk and he said to the boy to mill it for her. They went off then, and a short while after St. Martin noticed the mill was full of flour. When Martin saw that miracle, he understood who it was, and he followed them. He came to them after a time, and Our Saviour said to Martin to get a share of the flour, and to put it on a dish, and to leave it until morning. Martin did the same. The servant girl was watching, and she herself put a handful under the pot. The next day, when St. Martin took up the dish, a sow ran out with a litter of piglets under her feet. When the servant girl took the pot up from the floor, what ran out only a mouse and a litter of young mice after her. That's how the first mouse came into the world.]⁶

Other, shorter versions of the milling legend sometimes leave out the motif of grains, but events still take place at a mill, and St. Martin is seen to be tearing his flesh:

5 Co. Mayo 679: 88.

6 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 126.

One time there was a man baking bread and as he was waiting for the loaves to be baked, a woman and her child came to the door and pleaded for some bread. The man who was likely tired and annoyed with his work refused her, as men often do. The woman and the child departed, and some time after, the man opened the oven door and found to his surprise not loaves, but braird, or what comes up after the corn is set. Immediately he thought of what he did, and was so sorry that he took his horse and followed the woman over ditches and hedges, thorns etc., and when he overtook her near a mill, he was all torn. Even his flesh separated from his bones, and his intestines slinging. He was in such pain that he asked the miller to put him under the wheel and crush him. The miller said that he had lost his blood, and that he was forgiven, so then he returned home satisfied. He felt that he had met Our Blessed Lady and her Son.

Where the beggar was turned away from the door of the house, or where he or she was refused food, the man of the house followed the beggar (on finding his mistake), and only got as far as him at a wheel of a mill. He was so sorry for his refusal that he asked the miller to put him under the wheel and grind him, and the miller answered that it was alright and that he was forgiven. Likely this is how he came to be connected with milling.⁷

Returning to the original concept of charity, we find that the motif that joins these narratives is the lack of generosity shown to a holy figure. Miracles regarding a disguised Jesus and Mary, or some other saint, are very common in Irish religious lore, and mention must be made of certain motifs contained in such tales that bear resemblance to the current variants. Consider the following example from Co. Galway:

There was a poor girl walking the road one night with no place to stop; and the Saviour met her on the road, and He said: "Go up to the house you see a light in; there's a woman dead there, and they'll let you in." So she went and she found the woman laid out, and the husband and other people; but she worked harder than they all, and she stopped in the house after; and after two quarters the man married her. And one day she was sitting outside the door, picking over a bag of wheat, and the Saviour came again, with the appearance of a poor man, and He asked her for a few grains of the wheat. And she said: "Wouldn't potatoes be good enough for you?" and she called to the girl within to bring out a few potatoes. But He took nine grains of the wheat in His hand and went

⁷ Co. Mayo 679: 103.

away; and there wasn't a grain of wheat left in the bag, but all gone. So she ran after Him then to ask Him to forgive her; and she overtook Him on the road, and she asked forgiveness. And He said: "Don't you remember the time you had no house to go to, and I met you on the road, and sent you to a house where you'd live in plenty? and now you wouldn't give Me a few grains of wheat." And she said: "But why didn't You give me a heart that would like to divide it?" That is how she came round on Him. And He said: "From this out, whenever you have plenty in your hands, divide it freely for My sake." (Gregory 1903: 105.)

This narrative features Jesus in disguise as a beggar, who miraculously causes a woman to use her grain store up because of her lack of generosity.⁸ Giving away grain is an important motif found in legend and folktale concerning charity, and appears to be related to miracles concerning the magical replenishment of seed corn that is donated at potentially great personal cost. (Lysaght 1999.) In addition, other narratives from Co. Mayo feature a miracle regarding a miller who grinds nine sacks full of flour from a few grains that adhere to Jesus' finger.⁹ Such stories bear strong resemblance to those featuring St. Martin. This, then, was clearly the background to the current version of the tale, and the motif of milling in relation to St. Martin derived from the widely-held folk belief that he was killed in a mill. The image of the girl in the story above running after Jesus to beg for forgiveness when she has recognised her mistake bears clear resemblance to that of St. Martin pursuing Jesus or Mary, although the motif of flagellation with the thorns appears to have been adopted in sequences regarding the saint. Thus, a complex of overlapping ideas and motifs can be seen to have been implemented by storytellers to create dramatic and exciting narratives. At the core of these plots, however, is the central idea that one should be kind to beggars, and should give alms freely when they are requested. Some also imply the message that one should trust in God for all things. Finally, consideration will be given below to the motif of the magical creation of animals, which does not make much sense in the stories mentioned above, but which will be clarified in the following discussion.

St. Martin Creates Cats/Mice/Rats or Pigs

In several of the narratives dealt with in the previous sections, they end with an account of how cats, mice, pigs, and so on, were first brought into the

⁸ For another example, see NFC 6: 497.

⁹ Co. Mayo NFC 257: 162.

world. Some 31 examples were found to involve St. Martin in this context, 5 from the Main Manuscript collection, 8 from the Schools material, 18 from the Questionnaire results, and one from a printed source. They were found in the following distribution: Galway (16), Kerry (3), Leitrim (2), Mayo (8), Roscommon (2)

Once again, the narratives are concentrated in the province of Connacht, which seems to be where most of this complex of interrelated tales were told. The following example of the creation of animals includes many of the motifs mentioned in previous tales, and describes the incident as a miracle performed by Jesus:

One day Mary and her Son were travelling the road, and they were heavy and tired, and it chanced that they went past the door of a house in which there was a lock of wheat being winnowed. The Blessed Virgin went in, and she asked an alms of wheat, and the woman of the house refused her. "Go in again to her," said the Son, "and ask her for it in the name of God." She went, and the woman refused her again. "Go into her again," said He, "and ask her to give you leave to put your hand into the pail of water, and to thrust it down into the heap of wheat, and to take away with you all that shall cling to your hand." She went, and the woman gave her leave to do that.

When she came out to our Saviour He said to her,

"Do not let one grain of that go astray, for it is worth much and much."

When they had gone a bit from the house they looked back, and saw a flock of demons coming towards the house, and the Virgin Mary was frightened lest they might do harm to the woman.

"Let there be no anxiety on you," said Jesus to her; "since it has chanced that she has given you all that of alms, they shall get no victory over her.

"They travelled on, then, until they reached as far as a place where a man named Martin had a mill.

"Go in," said our Saviour to his mother, "since it has chanced that the mill is working, and ask them to grind that little grain for you." She went.

"O masha, it's not worth while for me," said the boy who was attending the querns, "to put that little lockeen, a-grinding for you."

Martin heard them talking and said to the lout

“Oh, then, do it for the creature, perhaps she wants it badly,” said he. He did it, and he gave her all the flour that came from it. They travelled on then, and they were not gone any distance until the mill was full of flour as white as snow. When Martin perceived this great miracle he understood as well that it was the Son of God and His Mother, who chanced that way. He ran out and followed them, at his best, and he made across the fields until he came up with them, and there was that much haste on him in going through a scunce of hawthorns that a spike of the hawthorn met his breast and wounded him greatly. There was that much zeal in him that he did not feel the pain, but clapt his hand over it, and never stopped until he came up with them. When our Saviour beheld the wound upon poor Martin He laid His hand upon it, and it was closed, and healed upon the spot. He said to Martin then that he was a fitting man in the presence of God, “and go home now,” said He, “and place a fistful of the flour under a dish, and do not stir it until morning.”

When Martin went home he did that, and he put the dish, mouth under, and the fistful of flour beneath it. The servant girl was watching him, and thought that maybe it would be a good thing if she were to set a dish for herself in the same way, and signs on her, she set it. On the morning of the next day Martin lifted his dish, and what should run out from under it but a fine sow and a big litter of bonhams with her. The girl lifted her own dish, and there ran out a big mouse and a clutch of young mouselets with her. They ran here and there, and Martin at once thought that they were not good, and he plucked a big mitten off his hand and flung it at the young mice, but as soon as it touched the ground it changed into a cat, and the cat began to kill the young mice. That was the beginning of cats. Martin was a saint from that time forward, but it is not known which of the saints he was of all who were called Martin. (Hyde 1972: 361–5.)

Although the story is mostly found in relation to some miracle of Jesus or Mary, it is on occasion found in isolation, as a work of St. Martin himself, as in the following example from Co. Galway:

[It was St. Martin who brought pigs, mice and cats to Ireland. One night he had a dream saying to him to put a piece of his liver under a cup. He strongly advised his servant girl not to go near the cup. Curiosity wouldn't let her from doing the same as the saint. She stole a bit of it and put it under another cup. Out from Martin's cup came pigs. Out from the girl's

cup came mice. When Martin saw the mice, he threw a mitten at them and out from that jumped a cat, and his nature was in him because he chased the mice on the spot.]¹⁰

The story is apparently a version of international folktale ATU 825, *The Devil in the Ark*, which, amongst other things, explains the origin of cats and mice. Well-known versions of the tale tell the story of Noah's Ark, and the Devil's attempts to thwart its construction. Some versions have the Devil causing consternation amongst the animals inside by creating mice, whereby God, Moses or some other saint creates the first cat to chase it. In Ireland, the motif of the creation of mice and cats is recorded in a fifteenth-century medieval manuscript, likely written by the Mac Aodhgáin Brehons of Connaught and Ormond. (Flower 1926: 520.) This account mentions Lucifer creating the first mice in the world from his breath, to destroy all the food on Noah's Ark, but St. Michael creates the first cat to kill the mice. Folk versions of the tale from Europe include other Biblical figures, such as God, The Virgin Mary, Adam or Noah, creating cats from a fur glove they cast at the cat.¹¹ International evidence, then, demonstrates that the characters can be easily interchanged to suit whatever saint or religious figure was of concern to the storyteller. Although it is aetiological in function, the narrative is nevertheless considered a folktale rather than a myth. (Utley 1988: 337.) It is also linked to another international folktale, ATU 1416, *The Mouse in the Silver Jug*. (See Uther 2004.) In the international versions, it features a couple who bemoan their lifestyle, and curse Adam and Eve. A rich patron offers them a life of luxury, as long as they do not open a certain vessel. They succumb to temptation, however, and a mouse or bird flies out of the vessel upon opening it.¹²

The folktale was very well known in Ireland in relation to a wide variety of religious figures, mostly on the western seaboard, and in Irish-speaking counties. (See Ó Súilleabháin and Christensen 1968.) In Irish-language versions, as in the example above, the saint places a part of his body beneath a vessel, and commands that it not be lifted. Upon violation of this command, mice or rats emerge. A glove or hat is thrown after them by the saint, which changes into a cat. The reason the story may be considered in the same context as folktales mentioned above may be due to the motif of the saint's flesh being ripped by thorns. Irish versions of ATU 1416 most often include the animals being created from a part of a saint's body, so this common motif may have allowed for

10 Co. Galway NFC 678: 146.

11 See Utley 1988: 337–56, 342. See also Gaster 1915: 210–4.

12 Such stories contain the central motif entitled C324 Tabu: *looking into jug* and H1554.1, *Test of curiosity: mouse in jug*. See Thompson 1955–58.

overlap between the different tale-types. It is also a cautionary tale, but not against greed or miserliness. Obedience to a religious figure, as well as the suppression of curiosity, appear to be the lesson in this instance.

Overall, the folktales discussed here seem to fit well into the greater schema of Martinmas belief and custom. Fidelity to the saint, generosity in bestowing alms or offerings, and trust in God are all to the fore, and accord well with the broader religious beliefs espoused not only in relation to St. Martin's Day, but Irish Christian lore in general.

11. Miscellaneous Legends and Folktales

This chapter will consider a number of miscellaneous legends and folktales that are associated with St. Martin's Day. They are thematically related to other narratives considered so far in the study, but are, nevertheless, sufficiently different from them to merit being mentioned separately.

The Ghost Mother on St. Martin's Day

This narrative concerns a woman who does not wish to kill an animal on behalf of St. Martin. She dies soon after, sometimes as a victim of a curse she herself uttered, and returns as a ghost to kill her husband. She then pursues her child, who takes refuge in a stranger's house. Eventually, the child is saved by a mysterious stranger, who banishes the ghost. The child is then presented with a magic bottle, which helps revive some or all of those who have been murdered, and they live happily from then on. The story has all the hallmarks of a folktale. It is longer than the usual legends, and some versions are combined with plots from international tale-types. It does not seem to bear strong similarities to any other well-known narratives, and may be a new tale-type in itself. Eight versions of the story have been found so far; three were found in the Main Manuscripts collection, one in the Questionnaire material, and one in the Schools' material. Three were found in print sources, in the following distribution: Kerry (4), Galway (2), Mayo (1), Unspecified (1).

The following short example is from Co. Galway:

[Every St. Martin's Night that ever came, Donnchadh killed a sheep. His wife didn't like this. "May the Devil choke the person who eats the first bite of it", said the woman. She put the meat in the pot, and she was preparing it. She ate the first bite, and she was choked. She was buried the next day. When the father and son came home, they went to sleep. In the night, the woman came and killed the man. The son went into hiding in the place where the bull was, and the bull kept her out. The son left, and an old woman met him and gave him a bottle. He went home and rubbed

it to his father, and he was as well as ever. The woman said to him that she herself killed the woman who killed his father. He was overjoyed.]¹

The narrative begins with the familiar episode of a wife who is reluctant to offer a sacrifice on St. Martin's Day. Her punishment is fatal, and she seeks revenge in the afterlife. The identity of the person who saved the son in the end is not mentioned. This is revealed in other versions, however:

St. Martin came to this house, and the man of the house wanted to kill something for the night for him but he had nothing but butter in the house. The man was married a second time. He had a son by his first wife and this boy was living in the house with his father and stepmother. Anyway, they had potatoes for the supper and he asked if she could put butter on the table. She said she had no butter. Anyway he pestered her and she went out for the butter. The butter was in a deep chest. She leaned into it and died in the chest. He went out to call her. He found her dead in the chest, half in and half out. The next day she was buried. Some time later she appeared to the husband and she killed him to get satisfaction on account of him persuading her to get the butter. Next day she appeared to the little boy. He was in dread to stay in the house, and he took the father's bones in a handkerchief and travelled away. He lived with a farmer. His stepmother was after him tormenting him, so he told his story to the farmer. There were three rooms, one inside the other like a box inside a box.

"Every door of them will be locked" said the farmer, "and I'll put you inside the third room."

"She'll cut all the locks, and when she cuts the last one, fire the ball and kill her." So he did, he was fine when he knocked her dead with the ball and killed her.

"You need have no fear now," said the son when he had killed her. So the boy went outside the door, and he met a grey horse. Who was the man but St. Martin, for he came to his assistance and saved his life.

"Only for the honour that yourself and your father showed me, you wouldn't be alive today. Go home now," says he, "and you'll find your

1 Co. Galway NFC 1235: 467.

father as good as ever.” So he went home and he found his father as good as ever.²

Thus, this tale bears thematic similarities to the many legends that describe St. Martin rewarding those who offer him sacrifices, and punishes those who do not. The mother’s lack of charity causes her to be killed in the butter chest. The image of St. Martin visiting the family at the start is once again reminiscent of motifs, Q1.1. *Gods (saints) in disguise reward hospitality and punish inhospitality*, and Q1. *Hospitality rewarded – opposite punished*. Also of note in relation to this version are motifs shared with another international folk-tale, ATU 720 *The Juniper Tree*. This concerns a boy slain by his stepmother, by being killed in a chest. His bones are gathered together, and he is magically resuscitated in the end. This may have been a contributing factor in the composition of the current tale, but the resemblances are not clear enough to establish a strong link between the two. ATU 720 is very rare in Ireland, with only five examples uncovered by Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen, so questions of origin and typology must remain unanswered at this stage, unless further versions can be found in future research.

All versions of the current story include the idea that a woman, who is against giving an offering to St. Martin, is killed, but not all include St. Martin as the rescuer. In the following example, it is the child’s stepmother who returns as the murderous ghost, and his real mother acts as a supernatural guardian:

There was not any St. Martin’s Night that ever came that Martin would not kill a beast or sheep. The first wife he had, she died, and the first wife he had never opposed killing the beef; but the second wife- he married again- objected to killing the beef altogether. They opposed one another with talk. Nevertheless he brought in the beast and killed it, in spite of her. When the beast was killed, “May the Devil choke”, said the woman, “the first person who will eat a bit of it.”

The beast was flayed then, and a pot of it went down, on St. Martin’s night, and she attended on the pot as long as it was cooking. And when it was cooked, she took up the pot and brought it in, and the first thing she did was to put her hand down into the pot and to take up a piece of the meat and put it in her mouth. The bit choked her. She was inside, away from the people, and the company didn’t notice her being choked at all. They thought she was a long while away from them without speaking, and they looked to find out what was keeping her, and they found her choked.

2 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 311.

“That is true”, says Martin, “The hour of the petition arrives, that is the petition she made, the first person who would eat a bit of the beef, that he might be choked. The story went out through the town that her prayer had succeeded with her. Martin and Conn went to their own house. It was evening then, and they put their supper down. When they had their supper eaten, and were going to sleep, she struck the door and asked to be allowed in.

“This is the woman whom we left at the graveyard,” said the son. “I recognise her voice, and I am afraid.”

“If it is she, do not let her in,” said the father.

“She will come in spite of me,” said the son.

The son got up all the same, and he let her in, and the son was so much afraid of her that he went behind the door when he opened it. And the place she went to after being let in was up to the room of the father, and she killed the father. When the son got her in the room, and when he heard the scream the father gave, he ran out, and he went into a little house that there used to be goats, and a he-goat kept in, and he hid himself there.

When she had the father killed, she went following him to kill the son as well as the father, and she came to the door of the little goat cabin, the place where the son was inside, but when she endeavoured to come in, the he-goat stood before her, and struck her with his horn, and put her out.

She strove again to come in, the he-goat standing in the door before her, and every time she tried to come in, the he goat would strike her with his horns, driving her out again. She continued at that work until two o’ clock in the night, and when it was not possible for her to come in, she had to go anyway, and the son was saved that night.

At daybreak, the son went away fleeing from her, so she would not find him, and he spent the day walking until night. When the night was falling, he came to a farmer’s yard, and he asked for a lodging til morning. He got that. He was after his supper, and thinking of going to sleep, when this woman who was after him came to the gate, and she began beating the gate and seeking to get in.

“Go out,” said the man of the house to the boy he had, “and see who is at that gate.”

“Go out,” said he to the girl, “and see who is that at the gate.” The girl went out and she killed her.

“Oh, do not let anyone else out”, said Conn. “I know who is there; that is an evil spirit that is following after me, and she would kill the world if she could catch them.”

Everyone in the house was greatly afraid when they heard that, while she was outside beating the gate and giving every blow to it. Then the farmer let loose a pair of wild dogs he had, and the people of the house were listening to the noise of the fight throughout the night, and to every shout and roar they gave whilst they were beating each other. In the morning, she and the pair of dogs were found dead at the gate. Conn was very much ashamed then, because of the work which had been done by him—the girl and the boy dead for his sake. He left the farmer’s house, and he turned back and he met a woman on the road, and she enquired where he was going, and he told her that he was returning home, and that a boy and a girl were dead through him. I believe that it is his own mother, who had departed the world before this, who met him then. She gave him a bottle, and she told him to return back, and to put a drop of what was in the bottle in the mouth of each person of the pair who were killed the night before, and perhaps it would make them better.

He went back again to the farmer’s house, and he put a drop of the bottle in the girl’s mouth, and she stood up as well as she ever was. He did the same thing with the boy then. He left the farmer’s house then, and he went home to his father’s house. He buried the father and he lived in the house himself. No bad thing came troubling him since.³

In this version, the miraculous helper is the ghost of the boy’s mother. This motif, E323.2 *Dead mother returns to aid persecuted children*, is found in Irish and international folktales,⁴ although any similarities between them and the current tale are only superficial. The motif of the children’s real mother acting as protector is only found in this version, although it is suggested by

3 *Claidheamh Soluis agus Fáinne an Lae* 3, no. 1 (1901) 2.

4 See ATU 510A Cinderella, 511 One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes, and 923 Loving the Salt in Uther 2004.

the example from Co. Galway mentioned above. In all other versions, it is St. Martin who saves the children, illustrating once again the rewards bestowed upon those who are faithful to him.

Jeremiah Curtin included a long version of the tale in his *Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World*, which includes St. Martin as the supernatural helper. (Curtin 1895: 110–20.) Another lengthy version was recounted by Co. Kerry storyteller Peig Sayers in the second volume of *Béaloidéas* (1929), collected by Robin Flower. In this instance, the story forms a part of a much larger folktale, ATU 460B *The Journey in Search of Fortune*.

The narrative begins with the usual incidents mentioned above, but evolves into a longer tale about a young man on a journey to find the answers to important questions about the death of his father and mother. His mother was not a good person in life, but his father was, and he wishes to find out about their fate in the afterlife. Other examples of ATU 460B have been collected in Ireland, but it is not usually associated with St. Martin's Day.⁵ The motif of the selfish mother shows overlap with similar narratives in relation to St. Martin's Day, and demonstrate the negative nature of her character. Another version of the story appears in the National Folklore Collection, having been recorded in the same area of Co. Kerry from another storyteller, Méiní Dinnshléibhe, in 1961. It is very similar to Peig Sayers's version, and contains all the same motifs and plot. Both also feature St. Martin as a heroic figure, mounted on horseback, rewarding the boy for his loyalty after he offered an animal for slaughter on November 10. Thus, the stories accord with the notion that punishments befall those who fail to meet their obligations to the saint, and that rewards are bestowed on those who do. Whatever the ultimate origin of the folktale in question, it utilises well-established themes that are usually found in lore concerning St. Martin's Day in Ireland.

The Clever Shepherd

The following is a narrative concerning a young man who pretends to be St. Martin in order to encourage some reluctant person to offer a sacrifice on St. Martin's Day:

There is a local story which says that a certain farmer, whose bonham⁶ lay dying in the cabin, cut its tail and spilled the blood in honour of St. Martin, with the promise that he would not sell it at a later date, but kill it

5 See no. 50 and 52 in Ó Súilleabháin 1952.

6 Piglet.

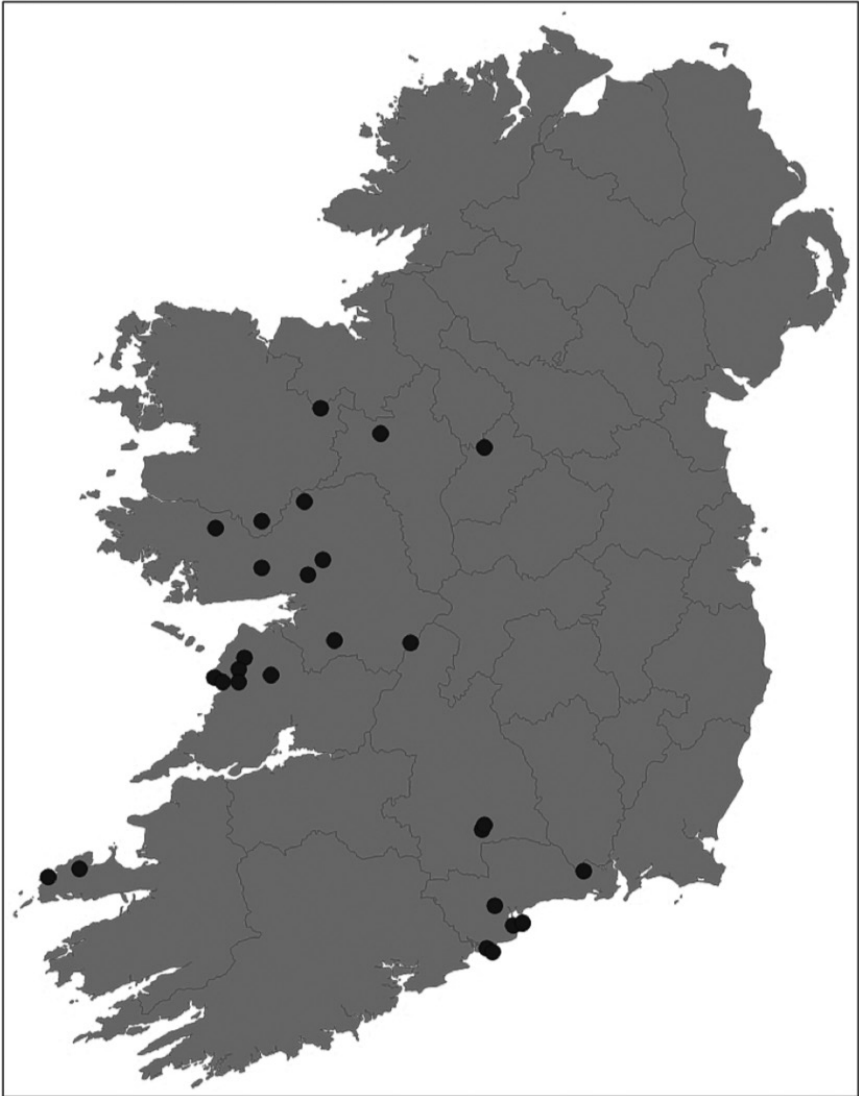


Figure 21 – Distribution of ATU 1575

for his own use and again spill the blood. The story goes on to say that the animal got well, and the farmer, forgetting his promise was about to take the pig to the fair when a voice was heard at the back door saying:

Mise Máirtín Fuireann Feoil: a chuireann dúil i ngach feol: Muna mharbhúigeann tusa do mhuc breac, marbóchfaidh mise do mhac Tone.

I am Martin who demands meat, who desires all meat: If you don't kill your speckled pig, I will kill your son Tone.⁷

The tale begins with the familiar practice of shedding some of a sick animal's blood, and promising to kill it on St. Martin's Day if he will heal it. It then employs the plot of an international folktale, 1575 *The Clever Shepherd*. This tale concerns a shepherd working for a mean master, who will not provide him with adequate food. The shepherd hides up a tree, and when the master passes by underneath, he speaks in a disguised voice and gives orders to the master to provide proper food for his employee. The master thinks it is God's voice, and obeys the command. Other versions of the story depict the master withholding money from the shepherd, and on hearing the voice and instructions as before, pays his debts in the end. (Uther 2004.) The tale has a wide distribution in Europe and Asia. Most Irish versions appear in the context of St. Martin's Day, although versions not including the saint's day are known. (Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen 1968: 280.) The story seems to have been associated with St. Martin's Day, for two possible reasons. One is the idea of providing adequate food, as St. Martin's Day was clearly a time of feasting and eating meat, which would have been a very desired foodstuff. The story admonishes the farmer for not providing a proper meal for the boy. The second concept in the story involves repaying debts. Irish versions of the story feature a farmer who has promised to kill a particular animal by way of thanks to St. Martin, who miraculously saved it from death. Another aspect of the story is that it clearly disapproves of the farmer renegeing on his promise, and, in a humorous manner, implies that death will visit the household as punishment.

A total of 31 versions of the story in relation to St. Martin's Day were found, 5 from the Main Manuscript Collection, 10 from the Schools' collection, 13 from the Questionnaire responses, and 3 from print sources, in the following distribution (See Figure 21): Clare (6), Galway (9), Kerry (2), Longford (1), Mayo (2), Roscommon (1), Tipperary (2), Waterford (7), Unspecified (1).

The following example is from Co. Clare:

⁷ Co. Clare NFC 675: 192.

An old incident relates this following story and lays the scene of it in the locality. A pig fell sick, its ear was cut and the animal promised to St. Martin. When the 11th drew near, the man of the house made up his mind that he would kill the pig. He said it was a pity that such a fine and valuable pig should be killed, and he so badly needing the price of it. The woman of the house went into ‘opposition’, reminding him that were it not for St. Martin he would not have the pig, good or bad. Whether out of respect for ‘treaties and contracts’ or through ‘fear of what was to come upon them’, she prompted their only son Seán Óg to go outside the window on Oidhche le Mártan and impersonate the saint:

“Mise Mártain Fíor Fearamhail,

Do chuir mé dúil i ngach feoil.

Mar a marbhóchaidh tú an mhuc bhreac,

Marbhóchaidh mise Sean Óg”⁸

[I am Martin Truly Manly,

I have desire for every meat.

If you don’t kill the speckled pig,

I will kill Seán Óg.]

Although some versions of the story are portrayed in English, the rhyme or poem uttered at the end is always in the Irish language. This may explain its distribution, as the area in which it is found corresponds to places where Irish was the predominant language in the first half of the twentieth century. Even if the main narrative passed into English, the rhyme did not, and remained very formulaic in this regard. Take the following example from Co. Kerry:

There was a man in the parish of Cloghane and he had a black pig which he was fattening. He had an only son named Martin, and he wanted to kill

8 Co. Clare NFC 675: 256.

the black pig in honour of St. Martin. Before St. Martin's Eve one night, he came outside the window of his father's room and knocked. When his father said "Cé tá ann?"

"Mise Máirtín na Míorbhuailt, go bhfuil dúil mór i bhfeoil agam agus mara marbhóchfadh an mhuc dhubh, marbhóchadh féin Máirtín Óg."

[I am Martin of the Miracles, who loves all meat, and if you don't kill the black pig, I will kill Young Martin.]

The father told the son in the morning of what happened and said they would have to kill the black pig.⁹

Disembodied Voice

Some more serious examples of the story removes the motif of the youth impersonating St. Martin, and instead portrays a disembodied voice making a threat.¹⁰ The tone is more sombre in these versions, because the danger appears to actually be coming from St. Martin himself. This variant is more akin to other narratives concerning punishment for failing to offer sacrifice on St. Martin's Day, or for breaking one's promise to the saint, and the widely-held belief that bad luck would result from such behaviour. One rather dramatic example, from Co. Roscommon, has a spirit call to the house, and offer a warning to the man who refuses to kill anything for St. Martin:

A story told to me by an old woman from Co. Mayo, who lived all her life here, something like the following. There lived a cantankerous little devil of a cobbler in her place. With him lived his wife and his son, Peadar Óg. The cobbler's name was Peadar Pheaits (she evidently didn't know his surname). His heart and soul were stuck in the son, and to eke out his little earning, in order to have a 'bob' for the youngster, he forced the wife – a decent father's daughter – not alone to sell everything saleable about the place, be it eggs, praties, pullets or cocks, indeed he was known to force her to sell the goose off the clutch of eggs: but to beg from the mouths of them that were poorer than themselves, to demean herself before all belonging to her, to get the bite to put in their mouths. Little

9 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 122.

10 Co. Clare 675: 190, Co. Waterford NFC 677: 51, Co. Galway NFC 678: 232, Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 547, Co. Tipperary NFCS 567: 165.

enough there was, God knows, but even then itself, he would manage to have something to sell from the fruits of her labour. Now it happened that St. Martin's came around and there wasn't a thing in the house to kill. Of course, the bonav (bonham) was there, but he would be required to pay the May Gale of the rent. Be this as it may, the night of the 10th of November came, and no blood marked the door posts. Peadar, the wife and the maicín were in bed. This slumber must have been an uneasy one, for when a howling greater than the November gale pierced through the foot square pane of glass that was their only window, they all jumped up. Prayers and heartfelt ejaculations were sent directly up, but the shrieking howl continued.

Peadar forced the wife to go and ask who was the poor spirit that was out on such an awful night. She did this, but the 'spirit' told her it was only to the man of the house he would speak. Peadar went to the door and invited the spirit in, but talk he wouldn't have on the floor, or breath blow between the four walls. Instead, in a terrible voice, he said to the quaking, shaking imitation of a man that Peadar was:

'Is mise Mártain Borb,

Cuireadh colg ar gach feoil

Mura marbhuigheann tú an mhuc bhreac,

Beidh do mhac agamsa, Peadar Óg.'

[I am brusque Martin,

a blade put to all meat.

If you don't kill the speckled pig,

your son, Peadar Óg will be mine.]

The pig was killed, the door posts were placed under the power of the blood, but, naturally enough, there was not enough help in the house to eat more than spare ribs on St. Martin's Day. The rest of it was salted, and whether or not the saint had anything to do with it, every bit of meat but the head alone disappeared from the tub, and Peadar was as hungry after

St. Martin's as before it. But he learned one thing, he ever after managed to have a Martin killing in the house.¹¹

This version begins by emphasising the greedy and miserly nature of the man, and employs the Clever Shepherd tale for the rhyming section in the middle of the tale. It ends with a miraculous punishment, where the meat disappears, although the author stresses that he does not know if it was St. Martin himself who was behind this. In terms of style, it differs from many of the other versions, and is constructed in quite florid prose, which is untypical of oral versions. It was compiled by Tomás Mac Maghnúis, a schoolteacher from Co. Roscommon, who mentions a Co. Mayo woman as his source. It is likely that the rather refined nature of the tale came from the writing style of the collector, although the main thrust of the story accords well with other narratives concerning St. Martin's Day. It is likely to be a combination of ATU 1575 and more common legends and folktales regarding punishment for failure to sacrifice. It may be of significance that the incident where the supernatural warning is given happens at the doorstep, and afterwards, the animal's blood is shed on the threshold. This probably derives from the strongly-held belief that blood spread at the door on St. Martin's Eve would keep evil spirits from the house.

The general message behind the above tales is that one should be generous, and fulfil one's vows and responsibilities to the saint. Some versions use humour to illustrate this point, while others adapt the story to the more stereotypical narratives that feature threats of punishment. The plot of the international folktale features these messages very clearly, and was adapted in Irish Martinian lore due to its thematic similarity to many other folktales and legends that were used to instruct people as to the norms of proper behaviour regarding their obligation to offer sacrifice in the saint's honour.

Miraculous Travel

This narrative appears as a legend, rather than a folktale, and concerns a person who is far away from home on St. Martin's Day, and suddenly remembers that he will miss the opportunity to offer a sacrifice to the saint. He is offered a lift on the back of a horse by a mysterious stranger, and in a very short time, is transported the vast distance back to his homestead. Thus, he is able to fulfil his vow, and the stranger turns out to be St. Martin. A total of twelve examples have been found so far: 1 from the Main manuscript collection, 1 from the

11 Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 550.

Schools' Collection, 9 from the Questionnaire responses and 1 from a print source, in the following distribution: Kerry (9), Kilkenny (1), Waterford (2).

The following is an example from Co. Kerry:

[A man from Luithriúc went to Cork with a load of butter in the old days. When they were going to sleep at night in Cork, one of the men said that tonight was St. Martin's Night. This man jumped to his feet when he heard this. "Oh dear, oh dear", said the man, "I have to go home. When I was young, I promised to St. Martin that as long as I was able, that I would spill the blood of some animal every St. Martin's night in honour of the saint, and I have to go home to fulfil that promise"

He set off walking on the road from Cork, and it wasn't long until a rider came up to him on the back of a horse.

The rider asked him who he was himself and where he was from.

"Ah", he said, "it's no good to be telling you stories, because I suppose my journey will come to no good, because I won't be able to get home", was more or less what he said. There hasn't been any St. Martin's Night since I took over the household that I wouldn't spill the blood of some animal in honour of St. Martin"

"I am St. Martin, and come here behind me," he did and it wasn't long until he was at home in Luithriúc.

"Now St. Martin, no one will believe me that it was you who took me home."

"They will believe", he said, "because I will leave footprints for you." He turned the horse around and he put the mark of two front hooves on the threshold, and they are to be seen to this day.]¹²

This is a comparatively long version, as most of the legends are short and to the point. The story is clearly presented as a local legend, and the addition of motif A972.1. *Indentions on rocks from imprint of gods and saints* is clearly used to demonstrate the veracity of the account. (Thompson 1955–58.) This motif is very common in Irish literature, and was employed in hagiographical legend from the early Medieval period. (Cross 1952: 31.) It was also present in two

12 NFC 16: 79.

other versions of the legend, one from Co. Waterford¹³ and another from Co. Kerry¹⁴. Consider the following, which featured in a paper from 1899:

In Kerry, they tell a story of a man who had been always mindful to draw blood for Saint Martin, but who, for some reason, was at last banished from his native land. One night, in his new home, he was going along a road all alone when he suddenly remembered that it was Saint Martin's eve, and there came over him a feeling of deep regret that he could not be at home to draw blood on the occasion. At that moment a horseman rode up from behind and inquired where he was going. On being told, the stranger said that he was going the same way and invited the man to ride behind him on the horse. He consented, and mounted behind the other. Soon the night grew so dark that he could not distinguish objects about him, until, at last, the stranger set him down at the end of his journey, and, sure, where did he find himself but at his own door at home in Ireland. "It was supposed from this," added the old man who told the story, "that the horseman was Saint Martin. (Mooney 1889.)

Other versions of the story are pithier, such as the following from Co. Kerry:

There was a man named O.D. living in Kilmore, and he went to Cork with butter, and it was St. Martin's Eve when he was on the road home. The night was there when he was as far as Camp, and about 12 miles from home, and he said that if he was at home he would kill something for St. Martin. The next place he found himself was landed on a path about a hundred yards from the house. He had been taken and put down there so that he would be home in time to kill something.¹⁵

This version is much reduced in detail, and the motif of the man on horseback is removed. It is exceptional in this way, as all other versions feature a rider magically transporting the man a great distance. The following version adds the motif, commonly found in legends regarding killing for St. Martin, where someone is rewarded for their sacrifice by being magically provided with animals:

[There was a man long ago and he was out walking on this day, and he remembered that it was St. Martin's night the next night, and he thought he wouldn't be home in time for the night, because he always killed a cow in honour of St. Martin. A saddled horse came up to him and he said to

13 Co. Waterford NFC 677: 83.

14 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 90.

15 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 120.

the rider to take him home. He did and he killed the cow, and he had nothing else only her, I think, and the next day there was six milch cows in the room in front of him.]¹⁶

Origin

The roots of this story are almost certainly to be found in Co. Kerry. This is not surprising, since 9 of the 12 accounts come from there. It seems to be related to a miraculous incident first recorded in a medieval hagiographical text. The *Life of St. Finan of Cenn Etigh* in the *Codex Salamanticensis* described how the saint caused a man to complete a journey in three hours that would normally have taken three days. (Plummer 1910: 91.) The story is from a collection of eleventh or twelfth century texts that were heavily redacted in the fourteenth century. The narrative outlines how a man needed to pay a debt, and would lose his freedom if he were late with the payment. St. Finan magically transported him back to his home in Corca Dhuibhne in west Co. Kerry, and he was able to pay the debt with ease. The localisation of the story in Corca Dhuibhne explains the distribution pattern, since all of the examples from the National Folklore Collection that originated in Co. Kerry were found in this area. The two examples that originated in Co. Waterford, and one from over the border in Co. Kilkenny, were most probably derived from Co. Kerry originals, and may have been heard from Kerry storytellers who came to that area. There is a long history of *spailpíní*, or migrant labourers, coming to the Co. Waterford area from Corca Dhuibhne, (see Ó Donnabháin 2000) and the fact that both Co. Waterford examples are in the Irish language is suggestive of such an origin. Exactly when the story manifested itself in oral tradition is not known, but it may have been picked up by local storytellers from some ecclesiastical source, or it may have been part of local lore since the medieval period. Its strong connection to Corca Dhuibhne may explain its limited distribution. The reason why it was associated with St. Martin seems to be connected with the motif of a binding obligation. In the version to do with St. Finan, a man must repay his debts by a certain time. This is reflected in the strong belief that if one has made a promise to St. Martin, it must be fulfilled, and before the end of St. Martin's Day, as there was a widespread belief that St. Martin will accept an offering before his feast, but never after. The consequences for the man in the original story would be loss of freedom were he to default. It was

16 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 77.

also widely believed that St. Martin would punish those who failed to meet their commitments to him.

Cooked Cock Crows

There is a series of legends found in St. Martin's Day lore in Irish tradition that describes cockerels, which are being cooked in a pot, coming to life and crowing, with little explanation being provided about why this is the case. Consider the following examples:

On St. Martin's Day our thoughts go back to the old story about St. Martin. As the story goes, on that day, long years ago, some people put a cock after it was killed, into a pot to boil and after some time the cock became alive and spoke some words which are still spoken by the cock when it crows.¹⁷

It is said that people had a cock boiling on St. Martin's Day and it got out of the pot and crew three times.¹⁸

One evening on the 10th of November a cock was boiling in a pot on the fire. There was a lid on the pot, and all of a sudden, the lid flew off the pot. The cock got up on the edge of the pot, and crew three times. Then he got back into the pot again.¹⁹

The story makes little sense as it is presented in the above examples. It is only when longer versions of the narrative are considered that its full context is revealed:

[When Our Lord was crucified the Jews were talking about him, and they standing around the fire. It was St. Martin's Day.

“He's ready now”, they said.

“Indeed He's not”, said the other person. “He won't arise now”, they said, “until the cock that is boiling in the pot rises.”

No sooner were the words from his mouth than the cock rose from the pot and shook his wings, and he let out three cries, and said:

17 Co. Wexford NFCS 898: 39.

18 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 247.

19 Co. Wexford NFCS 883: 8.

“*Mac na hÓighe slán!*” (The Son of the Virgin is safe), he said. He scalded and burned the Jews who were around him. From that day to this, the cock is blessed. That is the reason he is killed for St. Martin, because he is blessed.]²⁰

This is a popular Irish legend that concerns an incident surrounding the death of Christ. Someone who doubts the pending resurrection is boiling a cock in a pot, and makes a statement along the lines of “He will no more rise from the dead than the cock cooking in the pot.” At the utterance of this, the bird returns to life, and crows loudly. In some versions, the cock splashes them, and they are burned, or become leprous as punishment for their lack of faith. The story has ancient origins, and appears to be a variant of a narrative, concerning Christ reviving a cock, that appears in fifth or sixth century apocryphal texts written in Greek. (Piovanelli 2003: 437.) The story was widespread in medieval Europe, and its popularity appears to have spread through the cult of various saints from the eleventh or twelfth century onwards. (Nagy 2007.) It was well known in Medieval Ireland, appearing in Middle Irish poetry, (Leydon 2008) and was well established in Irish oral tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (O’Connor 1980.) In most cases, it is found independently of Martinmas associations, and serves as a didactic legend to illustrate the miraculous power of God, and the punishment meted out to those who lack faith.

A total of 18 versions have been found in association with St. Martin’s Day, 1 from the Main Manuscripts, 3 from the Schools’ collection, and 14 from the Questionnaire results, in the following distribution: Cork (1), Galway (8), Mayo (3), Offaly (1), Roscommon (1), Sligo (1), Wexford (3).

The particular concentration of the story in Co. Galway may be down to the popularity of the narrative in the Irish language, where the words ‘*Mac na hÓige Slán*’²¹ are depicted as having been the phrase uttered by the cockerel upon its resurrection. The cadence of the Irish words so uttered is meant to echo the normal crowing of a rooster. People appear to have used this popular legend concerning a cock being resurrected as an explanation for the custom of killing cocks on St. Martin’s Day. That this would happen makes sense, because of the centrality of the rooster to both traditions, and the many stories that outline animals being magically resurrected by St. Martin in gratitude for offering the life of the animal.²² The versions located in the west tend to be more developed, and contain the motif of Jesus’ death and His rising to

20 Co. Galway NFC 101: 29.

21 The son of the Virgin is safe.

22 See Chapter 9.

life. They can be contrasted with examples from the east, such as those from Wexford or Offaly, which only contain the idea of the cock coming to life and crowing. The following example is from Co. Galway:

[When our Lord was buried, one of the soldiers who did it came home to his mother. She was after putting a cock to boil in the pot.

She said to him, “Did you bury him well?” The son said, “There’s little fear of him getting up, we put a stone over him that he wouldn’t move. He won’t rise any more than the cock will rise from the pot.

At that second, the cock came up out of the pot, shook his feathers and crowed three times. From then on, people say that the cock must shake his feathers before he crows.

There was an old saying amongst the old people long ago, “When Martin’s Cock crows three times on the edge of the cauldron (pot) Jesus will rise.”²³

In this version, the connection with St. Martin’s Day is only tenuous, and is more similar to examples that come from outside Martinian tradition. Versions from the east of the country are quite different in this regard, such as the examples from Co. Wexford mentioned above, and do not feature Jesus or other holy figures. Consider the following from Co. Offaly. The narrative seems to lack its original context, and only retains the single central motif E168.1. *Roasted cock comes to life and crows*:

An old woman in our neighbourhood tells a story of how her mother once killed a cock and put it down to boil. After a short time, the cock began to crow and crow in the pot. The woman ran in terror to the priest and asked him as a special request to come up to her house and stop the cock from crowing. “Go home to your house, mam”, said the priest, “and kill the bird. It’s what you put him down in the pot alive”.²⁴

Some versions also situate the incident entirely in the context of St. Martin’s Day, and portray it as an element of the more usual legends concerning St. Martin being killed in a mill:

When Martin was thrown into the mill one of the workers lifted a cock which was picking about, and threw it also into the mill, saying “Martin

23 Co. Galway NFC 678: 170.

24 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 350

will not come out till you come”, but the cock flew out again, fluttered its wings and crew.²⁵

Thus, although 18 examples were found in the context of Martinmas, it is more usual to find Irish versions of the legend in relation to other religious figures. It usually concerns the resurrection of Jesus, and portrays Jews, Romans, or even St. Peter, as the character expressing a lack of faith. This is especially the case in the Irish-speaking counties of the west, where the narrative was most popular. This is reflected in the Martinian versions, and as one moves further away from Connacht, the versions have less to do with the religious legend of the Resurrection, as was the case with the Connacht examples.

The Goose Stall Legend

Another legend that purports to explain why fowl are killed on St. Martin’s Day describes how St. Martin once hid from pursuers in a goose stall, but the animal hissed and revealed the saint’s location. Only four versions were found, three from the Questionnaire material, and one from the Schools’ collection: Cork (1), Galway (1), Mayo (2).

It is told in this district that when St. Martin was hunted by the soldiers he went into a hen-house, thinking that he would be safe in it until the soldiers would have passed. As soon as he entered it, the cock crowed loudly. The soldiers, hearing the crow, came quickly to the hen-house, and it was with great difficulty that Martin escaped. It is with revenge on the cock for betraying St. Martin that the people kill him on the feast-day of St. Martin.²⁶

One version even has St. Martin hiding without being discovered:

One night, soldiers followed St. Martin, meaning to kill him, but he took refuge in a cabin, where there were a large number of geese, and the soldiers passed by without finding him.²⁷

This appears to be a version of a legend that was very popular on the Continent regarding St. Martin. It is, in part, based on an incident from the *Vita Martini* where a large assembly of people came together in procession to encourage a reluctant Martin to become bishop, though he did not wish this for himself.

25 Co. Sligo NFC 683: 79.

26 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 280.

27 Co. Galway NFC 678: 545.

(Roberts 1894: 8.) In European folk tradition, this incident is developed into one where St. Martin hides in a goose stall in order to avoid the crowd, but the goose betrays his position. He curses the bird, and this is provided as a reason why geese are killed on St. Martin's Day. It was well known in western Europe, particularly in Germany. ('The Martinmas Goose' 1872: 243.) It may have entered Irish tradition through printed sources, and this seems likely in at least one case, from Co. Cork, which is an area that can generally be regarded as having very little genuine oral tradition concerning St. Martin.²⁸ In any case, it is very scarce, and appears to have been of little significance to informants, who most often had other explanatory legends for why blood was shed on St. Martin's Day.

28 Co. Cork NFC 676: 228.

12. Prayers and Phrases

Traditional prayers are a valuable insight into the nature of folk religion, and the concerns of people in their everyday lives. Intercessions, pleas for protection and assistance, and devotional themes are all to the fore in this rich strand of oral tradition.¹ Daily rituals, such as getting up in the morning, going on journeys, or eating meals could all be accompanied by particular prayers. (Ó Duilearga 1969–70.) There are also examples from Irish folklore of specific prayers dedicated to individual saints, recited during rituals that were thought to be particularly associated with them. (Ó Catháin 1992.) The process of spilling blood for St. Martin often included prayers, which seem to further the sense of ritual associated with the act. The themes of these prayers may assist in the understanding of people's beliefs in relation to the killing, the motivation behind it, and the potential outcomes that could result in its successful completion.

A total of 161 prayers recited while spilling blood for St. Martin were recorded. They have a relatively even distribution, and were recited in practically every area in which St. Martin's Day was observed. Most of these accounts (142) supplied the actual words used, while the remainder (19) simply mentioned that prayers had been said, but could not recall the words. They were found in the following distribution: Carlow (4), Cavan (3), Clare (13), Donegal (1), Galway (27), Kerry (10), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (5), Laois (3), Leitrim (13), Limerick (3), Longford (1), Mayo (27), Meath (1), Offaly (2), Roscommon (14), Sligo (6), Tipperary (15), Waterford (4), Westmeath (3), Wexford (3).

The most prominent theme that was found in prayers is that of reverence for the saint. Some variant of the idea that the offering was being made 'in honour of St. Martin' was found in 38 examples, from around the country. This theme was most prominent in Connacht, and especially in counties Galway and Mayo: Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Clare (4), Galway (6), Kerry (3), Kilkenny

1 See Ó Laoghaire 1990 for a wealth of examples.

(1), Laois (1), Leitrim (2), Limerick (1), Mayo (11), Roscommon (1), Sligo (2), Tipperary (2), Waterford (1).

This example comes from Ballymacasey, Co. Kerry, and simply says:

We are spilling the blood in honour of holy St. Martin.²

Other variants include:

I offer this in honour of St. Martin.”³

I offer this up in honour of St. Martin.⁴

Sometimes the phrase was repeated three times, which may have been thought of as increasing its effect, such as this version from Kilcommon, Co. Mayo:

I’ll spill this blood for Saint Martin, I’ll spill this blood for Saint Martin,
I’ll spill this blood for Saint Martin.⁵

On occasion, the notion of honouring the saint was combined with other stereotypical formulae from Christian prayer, like the invocation of the Trinity:

I am spilling this blood around the house in honour of St. Martin, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.⁶

A total of 29 instances describe an invocation of the Trinity as the only prayer said, such as the following example from Co. Clare:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.⁷

Protection

The theme of protection features strongly in 26 prayers, where St. Martin is petitioned to prevent harm. They are found in the following frequency: Carlow (3), Clare (3), Donegal (1), Galway (7), Laois (1), Limerick (1), Mayo (2), Offaly (2), Roscommon (1), Sligo (1), Tipperary (1), Waterford (3).

2 NFC 675: 323

3 Parteen, Co. Clare NFC 675: 83.

4 NFC 675: 525.

5 NFC 679: 297.

6 *Holycross*, Co. Tipperary, NFC 677: 284.

7 Quin, Co. Clare NFC 675: 72.

These prayers of protection are of a kind extremely common throughout the country, and such requests for safety and security were made for practically every situation.⁸ The type of language used suggests that people were concerned with sickness and disease, or evil and malign influence, and believed that the saint could prevent such things from befalling them. Some prayers simply invoked the saint's protection:

*I n-onóir do Mhártan beannuighthe le go gcuiridh sé rath ar ár gcuid i rith na bliana so.*⁹

[In honour of blessed St. Martin, and that he would place protection over our share during the year.]

Others were more explicit, and specifically mentioned the dangers that they wished to be protected from. See this example from Kilgerrill, Co. Galway:

I sprinkle this blood in honour of God and St. Martin to banish all badness and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.¹⁰

One Co. Carlow source provides two variants of the prayer:

“By this sprinkling I hope that St. Martin will keep away all evil.”

Another version:

“Let this blood protect us from evil and harm.”¹¹

This example, from Faithlegg in Co. Waterford, mentions the falling sickness, which is another term for epilepsy:

Oh blessed and holy St. Martin save this house and family from hurt and harm for the year, and from the falling sickness, Amen.¹²

Another, unusual prayer regarding epilepsy was found in Killinaboy, Co. Clare:

*“Mártan Mín, Naomh gach nirt,
Go mbeinnuighid Righ na hAoine Duit
Nár thagaidh Lught Morg-Saoth ’nár ngaobhar anocht*

8 For examples, see Hyde 1906.

9 Co. Galway NFC 678: 136.

10 NFC 678: 293.

11 Urglin, Co. Carlow NFC 683: 17–20.

12 NFC 677: 144.

*Ná go dtí bliain ó 'nocht. Má's é do thoil é."*¹³

[Gentle Martin, saint of all strength,
May the son of Friday bless you,
May the *Lught Morg-Saoth* not come near us tonight,
Or until a year from tonight. Please.]

This was a prayer against falling sickness recited on Martinmas, which the informant attributes to evil spirits. In the original archival account, the informant variously translates the *Lught Morg-Saoth* as 'fallen angels', 'scorpions' or 'destroying angels'. It is clear that protection was sought against the harmful effects of malign supernatural forces.

Some prayers seek good luck and blessings, which are mentioned in nine examples. Others invoke both God and St. Martin together, which was found in 34 examples, again mainly in Connacht: Carlow (1), Clare (1), Galway (10), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (2), Leitrim (3), Mayo (6), Roscommon (5), Tipperary (3), Waterford (1), Westmeath (1).

"For the glory of God and the honour of St. Martin".¹⁴

*Do Dhia is do Mhártain.*¹⁵

[For God and for Martin.]

*In onóir do Dhia, is do Mhuire Mháthair, is do Naomh Mártain
Míorbhúilteach.*¹⁶

[In honour of God, and of Mary Mother, and Miraculous St. Martin.]

Although there are standardised and formulaic prayers in much of Irish folk tradition, there was often much variation on a theme. (Almqvist and Ó Cathasaigh 2005: 136.) Idiosyncratic expressions can be found within the prayers recited during the killing for St. Martin, some of which bear witness to influence from other narratives concerning the saint. For example, the following prayer from Co. Carlow seems to imply St. Martin's suffering, perhaps a reference to the common folk belief surrounding his violent death in a mill:

13 NFC 675: 248.

14 Ballyhehan, Co. Clare, NFC 675: 83.

15 Killinaboy, Co. Clare, NFC 675: 248.

16 Clifden, Co. Galway NFC 678: 58.

This is for the love of St. Martin, who bore great trials while on this earth.¹⁷

Another series of prayers refer to the saint as *Mártain Míoriúltach*, or miraculous Martin. This is a reference to a folktale that was common in Irish-speaking parts of the country where a youth pretends to be St. Martin, and recites a rhyme intended to frighten some reluctant person into performing the killing ritual.¹⁸ The youth, impersonating the saint, calls himself *Mártan Míoriúltach*, and it appears the phrase entered into the prayer tradition in areas where the story was popular, namely counties Galway and Mayo:

*In onóir do Dhia is do Mártain Míorbhúilteach.*¹⁹

[In honour of God and of Miraculous Martin.]

*Dá mharbhú go Dhia, go Mhuire agus go Mhártan Míorbhúilteach.*²⁰

[It's killed for God, for Mary and for Miraculous Martin.]

*Tá mé ag dortadh an fhuil seo in onóireachas Ríogh an Domhnaigh, don Mhaighdean beannuichte, do Mhártan Míorbhúilte.*²¹

[I am spilling this blood in honour of the King of Sunday, for the Blessed Virgin and for Miraculous Martin.]

Finally, an example of a prayer that appears to be of a personal nature, and a direct address to the saint, encapsulating one particular person's feelings on the matter of killing:

Marbhuighim é seo ar do shon, a Naoimh Beannaighthe,

Badh chuma liom a mba luach céad punt é.

*Acht marbhóchaidh mé é agus tá súil agam do ndéanfaidh sé maith dom.*²²

[I kill this for your sake, o Blessed Saint

It wouldn't matter if it were worth one hundred pounds,

17 Urglin, Co. Carlow, NFC 683: 16.

18 See Chapter 11.

19 Kilcreevanty, Co. Galway 678: 221.

20 Tourmakeadey, Co. Mayo NFC 679: 78

21 Drumsleed, Co. Mayo NFC 679: 286

22 Lettermore, Co. Galway NFC 678: 481.

But I would kill it and I hope it will do me good.]

The prayer seems to emerge from the idea that the shedding of blood is extremely important, that neglecting one's obligation to do so would bring negative consequences, and benefits that would be bestowed on those who fulfilled the custom. Broadly speaking, the main themes that emerge from the prayers are a sense of honouring the saint, invoking him or the Trinity or God to offer protection and blessings, and the avoidance of bad luck, evil spirits and sickness. They accord well with the folk beliefs surrounding St. Martin's Day, and in some instances show influence from legends or folktales concerning the saint. The act of shedding blood is unambiguously devotional, as well as a being a creative prophylactic act, where the person making the offering was in direct communication with the saint.

13. Holy Wells and Church Sites

Wells dedicated to saints are an ancient phenomenon in Ireland, and may have their origin in pre-Christian religious or cult tradition. (Kelly 2002.) They are heavily associated with saints, but in most cases these are of a native variety, and foreign saints only feature rarely in Irish holy well dedications. (O Giolláin 2005.) They are almost always seen to have curative properties, and people would often make pilgrimages or visits to the wells at certain times, particularly on the feast-day of the patron. These events were known as ‘pattern days’ or simply ‘patterns’, a metathesised form of the word patron. Visitors to the well would come and pray, performing circumambulations, commonly known as ‘rounds’ or ‘stations’, and invoke the protection, healing or intercession of the saint or patron. These stations often had fixed formulae, such as a certain prayer or prayers, which could be repeated a given number of times, according to local tradition. People then drank water from the well, or took it home with them. Wells were often thought to have cures, some quite specific, such as the healing of certain ailments or body parts. Sometimes, relics or evidence of the cures, such as walking sticks, were left behind. Other items could also be left behind, such as votive offerings of coins, medals, scapulars and other religious tokens.¹

Despite St. Martin not being a native saint, there is a reasonable number of wells dedicated in his honour from around the country. Some 24 were uncovered as part of this study, in the following distribution (See Figure 22): Carlow (1), Clare (3), Cork (1), Galway (4), Kerry (3), Kildare (1), Kilkenny (1), Laois (1), Leitrim (1), Limerick (1), Longford (1), Mayo (1), Waterford (2), Wexford (2), Wicklow (1). There are vague accounts of one other well in Co. Limerick, and two in Co. Kildare, but these were too general to be very informative.²

Below is a description of the information about these sites, on a county-by-county basis. In each case, mention is made of the townland (T), civil parish

1 For a discussion of Irish holy well tradition, see Rickard & O’Callaghan 2001.

2 Co. Limerick NFC 675: 471, Co. Kildare NFC 682: 99.

(P) and barony (B) in which the well is located. They are mainly based on the information supplied in the National Folklore Collection, with some supplementary sources providing contextual and historical information.

Co. Carlow

(T) Busherstown, (P) Kilderrig, (B) Carlow.

This well was mentioned by one informant as being located in Breen's field in Busherstown, and that a rock bearing an impression of St. Martin's hand was located by the well.³ Its location is verified by the 1897–1913 Historic 25" map.⁴

Co. Clare

(T) Ballynacally, (P) Kilchreest, (B) Clonderlaw.

The well at Ballynacally, Co. Clare continues to be attended on the feast of St. Martin's the present day. It was believed that the water from the well would not boil.⁵ The well was believed to cure problems with eyes and feet.⁶

(T) Clarefield, (P) Moyarta, (B) Moyarta.

This well is also in current use, and people continue to visit not only on November 11, but also on the first Sunday in August. This is further discussed in Chapter 16. Archive material relates that people would perform rounds at the well barefoot, and that decades of the rosary were recited as part of the pattern.⁷

(T) Leamaneh North, (P) Killinaboy, (B) Inchiquin.

3 NFC 683: 20.

4 Ordnance Survey 25" map, V 01, 75, (1897–1913).

5 NFCS 605: 95.

6 NFCS 605: 122.

7 NFCS 625: 313.

This well, identified as Tobermarteen on the 25" O.S. map from 1897–1913, was said to have been the main water supply for Leamenah Castle.⁸ No other details are given, but if this was the case, it may have had some former historical importance, being so closely associated with the prestigious O'Brien stronghold.⁹ It is also likely to be of no small importance that St. Martin was patronised by the aristocracy, and this idea will be discussed further below.

Co. Cork

(T) Ballymartin, (P) Dungourney, (B) Barrymore.

There is one mention of this well, and it was said to have had a tree associated with it.¹⁰ Given that it is said to be located in the townland of Ballymartin, there is every possibility that it is an accurate account. There are several springs in the townland, but none are named on the historic 25" O.S. map.

Co. Galway

(T) Clarinbridge, (P) Stradbally, (B) Dunkellin.

There was a well known as Tobar Máirtín on the western road out of Clarinbridge. It appears on the historical 25" map as Tobermartin Spring, and local tradition says that it cured deformed children.¹¹ There were rounds performed there around 1939, and the formula of prayers recited was apparently '*5 Our Fathers, 5 Hail Marys and 5 Glorias*.'¹²

(T) Eyrecourt, (P) Donnaghta, (B) Longford.

There was supposedly two wells dedicated to St. Martin in Eyrecourt, Co. Galway.¹³ Both could not be verified, but one can be identified as the covered

8 NFC 675: 248.

9 For more information, see O'Brien 1986.

10 NFC 676: 37.

11 NFCS 33: 173.

12 NFCS 33: 220.

13 NFC 678: 375.

spring that now supplies water to the town, located beside a church dedicated to St. Martin.¹⁴

(T) Peak, (P) Tiaquin, (B) Monivea.

A well was mentioned as being in Peak townland, Co. Galway, called Tober Mháirtín, and historical maps locate two springs there, but they are not named, and no other details are given.¹⁵

(T) Ballymacward, (P) Ballymacward, (B) Tiaquin.

There is a single mention of a well dedicated to St. Martin in Ballymacward, Co. Galway, and supposedly there was an inscribed cross at the site. A pattern was said to have been held there on November 11, but this was no longer the case by 1940.¹⁶ Historical sources locate several wells in the area, including one adjacent to the parish church, but the church itself is dedicated to Ss. Peter and Paul, and there is no other clue as to where St. Martin's well may have once been.

Co. Kerry

(T) Ballineestinig, (P) Cloghane, (B) Corcaguiney.

Although a well was mentioned in the archive material as being located in this area, the informant mentioned that there was no memory of any pattern being observed there.¹⁷ It was depicted on an Ordnance Survey map from 1842, and a pattern was known there on Easter Sunday and November 11. (Ó Danachair 1960: 71.)

(T) Kinard West, (P) Kinard, (B) Corkaguiney.

This well had fallen out of use by 1940, and sources mention that no memory of any pattern was recorded there,¹⁸ but it was located by the ruins of St. Martin's Church, an eighth or ninth century Christian site. (Hickson 1889.)

14 See EPA, *Water Framework Directive, Groundwater Monitoring Programme, Eyrecourt PS*.

15 NFC 678: 293.

16 NFC 678: 277.

17 NFC 217: 110.

18 NFC 217: 110.

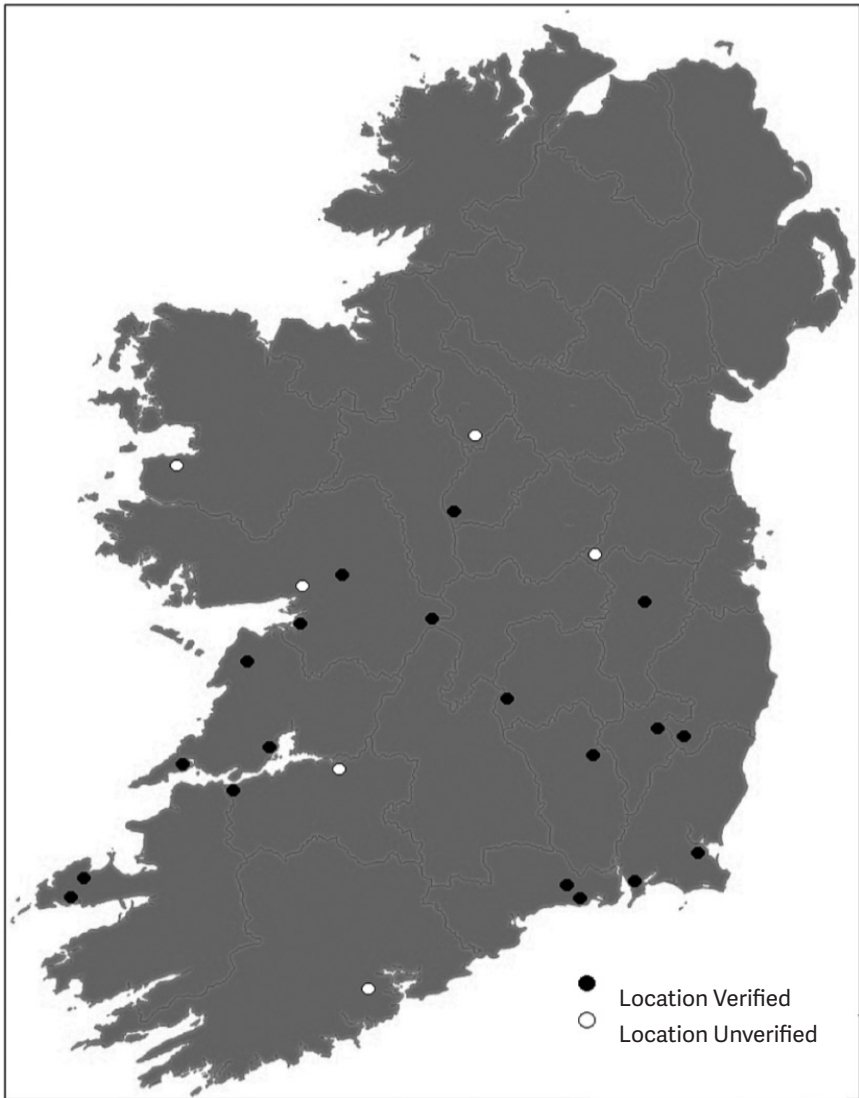


Figure 22 – Distribution of Wells Dedicated to St. Martin

(T) Tarmon East, (P) Kilnaughtin, (B) Iraghticonnor.

This well has been identified as Tobermartin since at least 1900, but even then it was only used for domestic purposes, but vague memories of a pattern and a miraculous cure were still current in 1958. (Ó Danachair 1958: 161.)

Co. Kildare

(T) Dunbyrne, (P) Rathernan, (B) Kilconnell.

Several sources mention this well, which is located adjacent to the Hill of Allen in Co. Kildare. The water was said to have cured ringworm in cattle, and supposedly once bore a plaque that read ‘Dedicated to St. Martin in 1648’, but no trace of such a plaque remained in 1940.¹⁹

Co. Kilkenny

(T) Templemartin, (P) St. Martin’s, (B) Gowran.

There is a well situated in the townland of Templemartin, and it was recorded in 1839 as being situated 200 yards northeast of the church, in a bog. (O’Donovan 1839.) The dedication to St. Martin at the site is of undoubted age, dating back to the medieval period. (Cockerham and Harris 2001: 184.) The well was visited on St. Martin’s Day, and said to have possessed a cure for toothache.²⁰

Co. Laois

(T) Kilmartin, (P) Kyle, (B) Clandonagh.

In the townland of Kilmartin, Co. Laois, there are four freshwater wells. One of these was identified in 1940 as being dedicated to St. Martin, and this is likely, given the name of the townland, but no confirmation could be found

¹⁹ NFC 682: 95.

²⁰ NFC 683: 475.

in historical or contemporary sources.²¹ No other information was provided on the subject.

Co. Leitrim

(T) Crossdrummon, (P) Mohill, (B) Mohill.

A well dedicated to St. Martin was reputed to have existed in or near Crossdrumman townland in Co. Leitrim. Its location could not be positively verified, but it was said to have run into a mill race, and people would fill bottles with its water and use them as holy water for blessing rituals.²²

Co. Limerick

(T) Templemichael, (P) Caherconlish, (B) Clanwilliam.

There was reputed to be a well named for St. Martin in Templemichael, near Caherconlish in Co Limerick. There are at least seven wells in the townland, but positive identification could not be made of the one dedicated to St. Martin. A 'white man' was reputed to have appeared at the well, but no pattern or other details were provided.²³ Another reference was made to a St. Martin's well, somewhere in the parishes of Templeglantine or Tournafola, in Co. Limerick,²⁴ but no further information was forthcoming.

Co. Longford

(T) Noughaval, (P) Shrule, (B) Rathcline.

A well dedicated to St. Martin is situated near to the Shannon River at Noughaval, Co. Longford. John O'Donovan mentioned the well in his Ordnance Survey letters for Co. Longford, but no pattern appears to have been associated with the well at that time. (O'Donovan 1837.) The well was supposed to have been a place where mass was said during penal times, according

21 NFC 682: 270.

22 NFC 680: 391.

23 NFCS 522: 199.

24 NFC 675: 471.

to local tradition.²⁵ Other informants mention that rounds were performed there from November 11–19, and that a rock with the saint’s footprint was reputed to have been at the site.²⁶

Co. Mayo

(T) Mountain Common, (P) Kilgeever, (B) Murrisk.

A source from Mountain Common mentioned the presence of a St. Martin’s well in his area, but no further details could be elucidated.²⁷ Another source from the same area said that St. Martin’s Well was located “in Turkeyland”, so the veracity of the claim may be questionable.²⁸

Co. Wexford

(T) Ballycullane, (P) Tintern, (B) Shelbourne.

There was a pattern at this site in approximately 1860, which was held on the Sunday after November 11. It was mostly abandoned in 1940, although some people did still visit the well around St. Martin’s Day in 1939.²⁹ A stone at the well bore an inscription ‘1699’, locally believed to have been the year of its first blessing, performed by a priest during the time of the Penal Laws.³⁰ St. Martin is the patron saint of the Catholic Parish at Tintern.

(T) Piercestown, (P) Rathmacknee, (B) Forth.

The well in Piercestown was thought to have once been the site of the miraculous appearance of an angel.³¹ By 1940 it had fallen out of use, and become filled with mud.³²

25 NFCS 752: 337.

26 NFC 681: 313.

27 NFC 945: 66.

28 NFC 1113: 73.

29 NFC 683: 211.

30 NFCS 871: 1.

31 NFCS 879: 401.

32 NFC 683: 259.

Co. Waterford

(T) Adamstown, (P) Kilmeaden, (B) Middlethird.

There was a well dedicated to St. Martin at Adamstown. Rounds were held there on November 11 around 1850, and the well was believed to be effective in curing headache. (Power 1908: 179.)

(T) Castlecraddock, (P) Dunhill, (B) Middlethird.

Another St. Martin's Well was found in Waterford, which had been largely forgotten by 1908, although there are reports of patterns in former years. (Power 1908: 155.)

Co. Wicklow

(T) Cronelea, (P) Mullinacuff, (B) Shillelagh.

This well appears on the map of Griffith's Valuation of 1868, and John O'Donovan mentioned that it was dedicated to St. Martin of Tours, and that he was an uncle of St. Patrick, reflecting popular oral and ecclesiastical tradition. (Shearman 1874: 294.) A large pattern was held there in the early nineteenth century, and it was still attended in 1939, where medals, ribbons and other tokens were left on a nearby tree.³³ One version of a popular legend was recorded in relation to the well, concerning a Protestant woman who tried to cook food for pigs, but it would not boil. (O'Toole 1933: 113.) The same source mentions that people took home water from the well, and drank it on St. Martin's Night.

Figure 22 shows the distribution of wells dedicated to St. Martin in Ireland. The examples mentioned above whose specific location within the townland could not be verified are outlined separately to those whose location was confirmed by additional sources.

³³ NFC 683: 185.

Legend 1 – The Violated Well

On occasion, narratives have been collected that relate to the above sites. Like many religious legends, they are didactic in nature, and they teach about the negative consequences befalling those who violate the sanctity of the well. The first example concerns an extremely common narrative in relation to wells in Ireland. It describes how a person, often said to be a Protestant, has a particular well on their land, and refuses access to people who wish to visit it for religious purposes, or violates its sanctity by using its water for some secular and often profane purpose. The result is some negative consequence, such as the well drying up and changing location, or misfortune visiting the violator. A total of 17 versions were uncovered, which were found in the following distribution: Co. Clare (6), Co. Limerick (1), Co. Longford (2), Co. Wexford (8).

The following accounts illustrate the nature of the narratives, such as this example relating to the well at Tintern in Wexford:

St. Martin's Well is on Mrs. Whelan's land, near Kinnagh graveyard. Local tradition says this well changed its original position – of its own volition – owing to its having been desecrated. Various accounts are given of the desecration:

That a Protestant brought his horse to drink in it, and the horse's head fell off the same night as the well changed position.

A man put a long stick down to find its depth, the man's hand withered off.³⁴

Another narrative speaks of the same well:

A protestant farmer, annoyed at the reverence shown to this blessed well, brought one of his horses to drink at it one day. The horse drank. That night, two strange things happened – the horse perished; the well changed its place. The well moved some considerable number of yards from its original position.³⁵

St. Martin's Well in Clarefield, Co. Clare was the location of a similar story:

The well is visited on the evening of the 10th and 11th of November by hundreds of people from the neighbouring parishes and rounds are

³⁴ Co. Wexford NFCS 871: 1.

³⁵ Co. Wexford NFC 683: 227.

performed. This well is said to have changed its position owing to actions of a Protestant in whose lands it was situated.³⁶

There is a well in Clarefield dedicated to St. Martin. It was supposed to be in another field at one time, but the owner of the field used to water his cattle at it. One morning when he came with the cattle he found that the well had been removed to a neighbouring field.³⁷

A short account of the well near Rathcline in Co. Longford gives a similar version:

An old woman washed clothes in it, and since that there was never any more water in it.³⁸

On occasion, rather than the well drying up, direct misfortune befalls the person responsible for its violation. This is another example from the vicinity of St. Martin's Well in Co. Longford:

The well is called St. Martin's Well because St. Martin appeared to a man a long time ago. There was a soldier one night and he cut down the trees that were around the well and a man came along and he told him it was a sin to cut the trees around the well because there was a saint seen at it. That night the soldier shot himself for the evil he had done.³⁹

These legends are of a particularly common type in western Europe, (Varner 2009: 21) with many examples found throughout Ireland relating to a number of different saints.⁴⁰ That they are associated with St. Martin is merely due to the fact that he was the particular patron of these wells. It is not generally part of Martinian tradition, but more properly belongs to narratives about holy wells and springs, and any connection with the saint is essentially secondary. They teach people to respect holy wells, and express the tensions regarding religious identity and practices. Once again, the Protestant landowner is often represented as the anti-hero in the story, and suffers consequences for disrespecting Catholic custom.

36 Co. Clare NFC 675: 355.

37 Co. Clare NFC 675: 346.

38 Co. Longford NFCS 756: 471.

39 Co. Longford NFCS 753: 92.

40 NFC 54: 99, also Ó Danachair 1960: 67–78, 74.

Legend 2 – Saint Miraculously Causes Well to Appear

This story concerns St. Martin causing a well to miraculously appear. It is a very common type in Ireland, and was used as an aetiological legend, in connection with a variety of saints. Early Irish texts, such as a ninth-century version from the *Lebar Brecc* depict St. Patrick requiring the use of some water for baptism, and blessing the ground, whereupon a well gushes forth. (Stokes 1887: 303.) Several other early texts mention a similar narrative, and it is identified as *Motif F933.1. Miraculous Spring Bursts Forth for Holy Person*, in Tom Peete Cross's *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature*, where numerous examples are provided. (Cross 1952.) Eight examples of the story were found in relation to St. Martin in Ireland. It was found in each of the following counties: Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Kildare (2), Leitrim (1), Mayo (1), Westmeath (2).

One night it was said that St. Martin was riding along a narrow roadway when he became very thirsty and had no place to get a drink. He came to a place where there was a sort of little pond on the roadside which was used for giving horses or cattle drinks, and St. Martin dismounted from his horse and knelt down beside the pond, and before he was long there a well of cool clear water sprang up, and ever afterwards it was called St. Martin's Well.⁴¹

The same informant provides another version of the same legend:

There was a small monastery in the place in question with some monks in it, and it is said that the only well they had for drinking dried up. St. Martin happened to be passing by one day, and one of the monks saw him, and stopped him and asked him if he could do anything for them, and he said that he certainly could. The saint raised his hand in blessing, and the minute he did, it became a well of clear water, and ever afterwards it was called St. Martin's Well.⁴²

A specific development in this legend is found in a particular variant of the story that was found only in Martinian tradition in Ireland. It describes how the saint causes the well to magically appear, but it is combined with motifs regarding milling, and death by being ground in a mill. The first examples come from Co. Westmeath:

41 Hawkfield, Co. Kildare NFC 682: 105.

42 Hawkfield, Co. Kildare NFC 682: 106.

The saint once built a mill in Fore (near Collinstown, Westmeath), and it was the strangest mill which was ever built because there was no river to turn it. A man who passed began to laugh at the saint but the saint promised him that when the mill was ready he'd find the water. 'Alright', said the man, 'I'll get into the 'hops' of the wheel that day. So he got into the hops, the saint struck a rock in the side of the hill, a stream gushed out and put the mill going, and the man was ground to small bits. Since that no one ever likes to work a mill on St. Martin's Day.⁴³

Saint Martin built a corn mill and when it was finished the man that helped him to build it said, "Now you have it built and there is no water to turn it." The man got into the grinder and Saint Martin went over to a lake and when he was walking back the water flowed after him. The mill wheel began turning and the man was ground up. Long ago mills were never worked on Saint Martin's Eve.⁴⁴

The following example is from Leitrim:

In this district also not far from the mill, along the mill-race there was an old well of very little importance until the owner of the mill got it under St. Martin's protection. After this the water sprang from the well into the mill race and there was always a plentiful supply of water to work the mill.⁴⁵

This version is from Co. Cavan:

St. Martin and other monks once built a mill at the top of a hill where there was no water. When this mill was finished one of the monks, who had all along opposed the idea of building the mill on the hill top laughed at St. Martin, who thereupon struck a stone and the mill floated away in a stream that gushed up from the stone.⁴⁶

It appears that the conventional legend of the saint bringing forth a well is combined with the common Martinian narrative of a person being killed in a mill, and was a popular narrative in the northern part of the region where St. Martin was celebrated in Ireland, and which contained wells dedicated to the saint. The legend, then, possesses a doubly explanatory function, providing an aetiological context for the existence of the well in question, and also providing

43 Co. Westmeath NFC 681: 264.

44 Co. Westmeath NFCS 719: 638.

45 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 406.

46 Co. Cavan NFC 684: 131.

a reason why milling should not be undertaken on November 11. The moral message of punishment towards those who are disrespectful of a holy person is obvious from the text, a universal theme in Irish hagiographical lore.

Legend 3 – The Thief Stuck to the Ground

This is an extremely localized legend, which was only found in six instances. Five of these are from west Co. Clare and the remaining one is from Co. Limerick, although the informant in that instance was from west Clare, so it is an entirely local story. Four of the Co. Clare informants came from the immediate vicinity of St. Martin's Well in Clarefield, while the fifth example from Clare came from near St. Martin's well in Ballynacally. They all describe an incident where a thief tries to steal from the landowner or some resident near the location of the well, and St. Martin miraculously intervenes by causing the thief to stick fast to the ground. This example comes from near Clarefield:

The tale goes that a big Protestant farmer lived here long ago, and his corn used to be stolen. He was once very aggravated at it and he promised St. Martin he would give him a little field for himself if the thief was caught. When the farmer got up on the 11th of November, it is said that the thief was stuck to the ground where the well is now, and the sheaf of corn was above on his back. Then afterwards that the well sprung up.⁴⁷

The legend was not found in relation to any of the other St. Martin's wells around the country, so a context must be sought elsewhere. The same type of plot can be found in association with St. Gobnait in Co. Cork. There are two locations in Co. Cork where St. Gobnait was said to have fastened a thief who was stealing cattle to the ground. One is at St. Gobnait's Well in Kilshannig, where there was a flagstone called Lackavihoonig (*Leac a' Bítreamhnaigh*, Flagstone of the Thief) to which the thief was magically fastened. (Joyce 1913: 459.) Another account mentions the same miracle, but in another part of Cork, near Kilgobnait. Again, a flag was said to have been located there, to which the thief was miraculously attached by the saint. (Grove White 1905–13: 331.) Several other incidents regarding St. Gobnait associate her with thieves, and using her miraculous power to defeat them. (Guest 1937: 379.) To this day, the site of St. Gobnait's Well and Church in Baile Bhúirne is home to a carved stone head, said to be the famous thief from Irish folklore, *An Gadaí Dubh*. Thus, there is a rich body of tradition from which this story emerged. Precisely

47 Co. Clare NFC 675: 371.

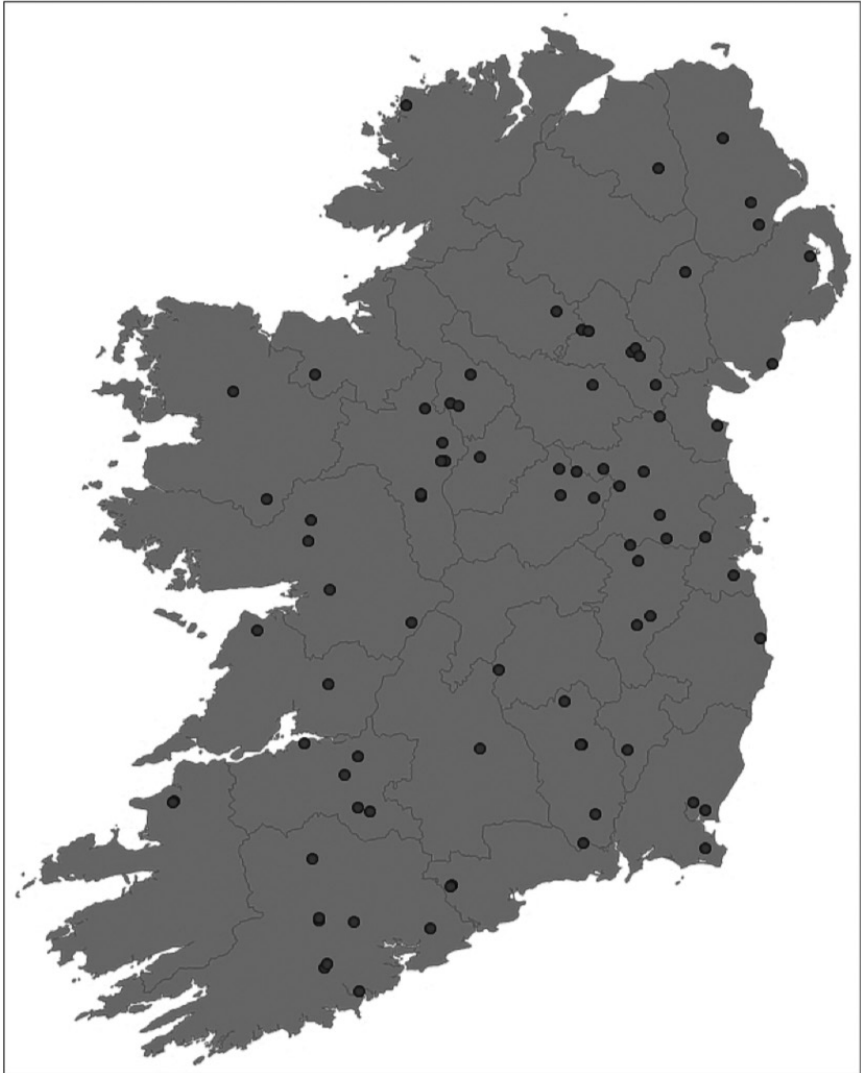


Figure 23 – Placenames Containing the Element 'Martin'

how it was associated with St. Martin is not definite, but it is very likely due to the fact that it bears more than a passing similarity to a miracle he was said to have performed in the *Vita Martini*. The story is as follows:

Now, it came to pass some time after the above, that while Martin was going on a journey, he met the body of a certain heathen, which was being carried to the tomb with superstitious funeral rites. Perceiving from a distance the crowd that was approaching, and being ignorant as to what was going on, he stood still for a little while. For there was a distance of nearly half a mile between him and the crowd, so that it was difficult to discover what the spectacle he beheld really was. Nevertheless, because he saw it was a rustic gathering, and when the linen clothes spread over the body were blown about by the action of the wind, he believed that some profane rites of sacrifice were being performed. This thought occurred to him, because it was the custom of the Gallic rustics in their wretched folly to carry about through the fields the images of demons veiled with a white covering. Lifting up, therefore, the sign of the cross opposite to them, he commanded the crowd not to move from the place in which they were, and to set down the burden. Upon this, the miserable creatures might have been seen at first to become stiff like rocks. Next, as they endeavored, with every possible effort, to move forward, but were not able to take a step farther, they began to whirl themselves about in the most ridiculous fashion, until, not able any longer to sustain the weight, they set down the dead body. (Roberts 1894: 9.)

The image of St. Martin causing the Gallic rustics to stick to the ground may have been a motif held in common with the tradition surrounding legends of St. Gobnait at her well, and inspired the story to be told in relation to St. Martin's well. The story is particular to this part of Clare, and most likely represents a local development that may, in part, have been influenced by someone reading the *Vita Martini*, and associating this with the legend from Cork.⁴⁸

48 Other saints have been observed to possess the power to fasten people to the ground and prevent them from moving, but they are not generally presented in the context of a well, and they do not involve thieves. For an example involving St. Enda of Inishmore, see Westropp 1913: 201–212, 205.

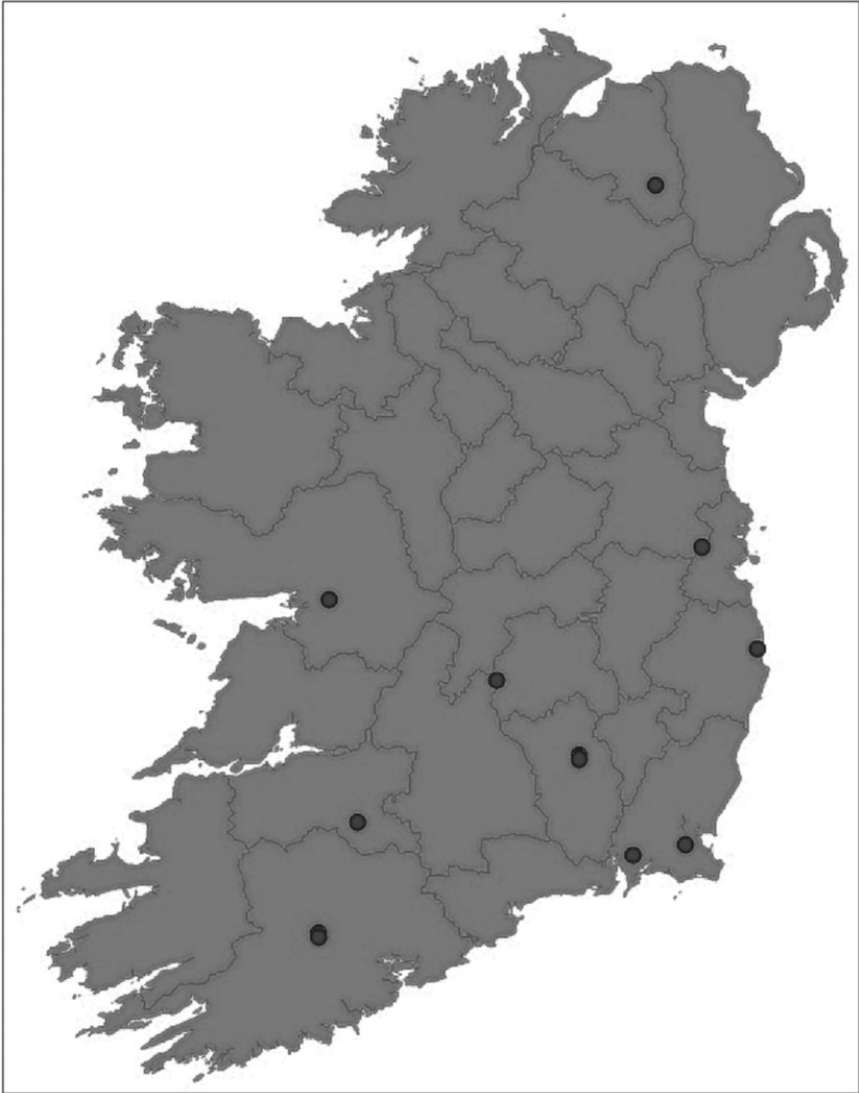


Figure 24 – Placenames Indicating Ecclesiastical Sites Associated with St. Martin

Cures

One of the most common aspects of holy wells in Irish tradition was that they were believed to be effective in curing ailments and sickness in humans, and in some cases animals also. The devotional activities undertaken on the Pattern day were very often for the purpose of asking for a saint's intercession and help in the provision of cures of one kind or another. (Downey 2006: 36.) Several of the sources mention cures at St. Martin's wells. Again, this material more typically belongs within the remit of wells and their associated lore, and is not, as such, particularly significant to the overall folk image of St. Martin. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning for the sake of completeness.

The following accounts describe the usual customs that were carried out at two of the better-known wells:

The only well dedicated to St. Martin in West Clare is in Querrin, about four miles from Kilkee – the nearest town in Clare to it. There are rounds done during St. Martin's Day and eight days after. It is supposed to be a great well for health in general. The water is rubbed to any affected part in a person, or anywhere there is a pain or sore. People leave mementos there as holy pictures, statues, old Rosary beads, and throw offerings into a small box kept there for the purpose. The money is used for the cleaning of the well and premises.⁴⁹

This account describes St. Martin's Well in Co. Longford:

The people also come still on the 11th of November. The people go around on their knees and say the Rosary, and they used to throw a stone into the well to show how many times they said the Rosary. In the olden days they had no woods as they have now. It used to cure people of fever... When people were sick of fever they used to drink the water or if they had any cuts or sore feet they would bathe in the stream. In olden days, if they were cured of a lame foot they would leave a stick behind them at the well.⁵⁰

A particular ritual that was said to have taken place at St. Martin's Well in Ballynacally, Co. Clare, is outlined below:

A mother would bring a delicate child to the well on three successive Sunday mornings before sunrise, and dip it in the well three times, each

49 NFC 675: 372.

50 NFCS 753: 96.

time. According to the old stories, the child either gets well or goes (dies). This custom was given up over 80 years ago.⁵¹

Some wells were associated with cures for eye problems, and sources from Clare confirm this.⁵² Lameness was thought to have been cured at the well in Tintern, Co. Wexford.⁵³ Sources in Roscommon believe that the well there cured toothache.⁵⁴

In summation, it can be seen that much of the material in relation to holy wells in the context of St. Martin is of a kind fairly typical in Ireland. The customs and beliefs presented here do not differ much from those associated with wells dedicated to countless other saints and religious figures throughout the country. Much of these customs, and subsequently the lore associated with wells, probably emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly during the period of Penal Laws, when the influence of centralised Catholic officialdom was lessened, and popular piety manifested itself in localised folk practices such as pattern days and stations. (Carroll1995: 363–5.) Of note, perhaps, is the development of legends regarding St. Martin causing the well to fill a mill-race, and the subsequent death in the mill. This appears to be the only significantly idiosyncratic development in this body of material. The legend of the thief being stuck appears to hold a lot in common with traditional material associated with another saint, and does not appear to be particularly distinctive in association with the figure of St. Martin. Broadly speaking, therefore, the material relating to St. Martin mentioned above is largely stereotypical of Irish holy well folklore, and provides comparatively little additional information about the specific nature of Martinian tradition in Ireland.

Placenames

The St. Martin's Day questionnaire contained a question inquiring into placenames associated with St. Martin, and a number of replies testified to the presence of a great amount of such places around the country. By cross referencing these accounts with topographical data and modern placename lists, a total of 80 townlands and civil parishes have been found that contain the element 'martin' somewhere in the name. The following is the distribution

51 NFC 657: 137.

52 NFCS 606: 09, NFCS 605: 95.

53 NFCS 870: 269, NFCS 871: 184.

54 NFC 680: 451.

in which they were found (See Figure 23): Antrim (3), Armagh (1), Carlow (1), Cavan (1), Clare (2), Cork (8), Derry (1), Donegal (1), Down (1), Dublin (2), Fermanagh (2), Galway (4), Kerry (2), Kildare (4), Kilkenny (5), Laois (1), Leitrim (3), Limerick (5), Longford (1), Louth (2), Mayo (2), Meath (5), Monaghan (5), Roscommon (6), Sligo (1), Tipperary (1), Waterford (2), Westmeath (4), Wexford (3), Wicklow (1).

The difficulty in relying on this material as an indicator of Martinian devotion is that exactly which Martin was referred to in many of the placenames is not always clear. Martin was common as both a first name and a surname, so a place called Ballymartin (from the Irish *Baile Mhártain*, meaning Martin's homestead or townland) could potentially be referring to an individual, a family, or the saint. Given the potential pitfalls of drawing any firm conclusion about this material in relation to St. Martin, it may be more worthwhile to determine from the above list which placenames are more likely to have been associated with the saint. Kilmartin is derived from the Irish *Cill Mhártain*, meaning 'Church of Martin', and this a good candidate for an indicator of religious devotion to St. Martin. Other names that may be informative in this regard include Desertmartin (from the Irish *Díseart Mhártain*, meaning Martin's hermitage), Templemartin (from the Irish *Teampaill Mhártain*, meaning Martin's temple) and a few parish names that bear the title, St. Martin. It has been taken for granted that St. Martin of Tours is the individual indicated in these names of places. The Peruvian St. Martin de Porres is another figure who is honoured in Ireland, but his cult is a much more recent phenomenon, given that he was only canonized in 1962. There are a few Irish churches and chapels dedicated to St. Martin de Porres, but they are of recent dedication, for obvious reasons, and tend to be located in urban areas.⁵⁵

Thus, we are left with a much-reduced number of townland and parish names that appear to relate to St. Martin. Kilmartin appears in a townland name in 5 places around the country, and the variant Ardkilmartin appears once. Templemartin is mentioned on 4 occasions, and Desertmartin is found only once in the records. Two civil parishes are known as St. Martin's. These names are distributed as follows (See Figure 20): Cork (3), Derry (1), Dublin (1), Galway (1), Kilkenny (2), Laois (1), Limerick (1), Wicklow (1), Wexford (2).

In many of these cases, the actual church referred to can be identified, and a small few of these continue to be places of worship dedicated to St. Martin to this day. Most, however, are ruined, and a few even obliterated

55 For example, St. Martin's Chapel at St. Saviour's Church, Baker Place in Limerick, or St. Martin's Church in Tallagh, Dublin.

without trace. These placenames are outlined below on a county by county basis, along with a brief description and some additional historical data. Once again, each entry is accompanied by the townland (T), civil parish (P), and barony (B).

Co. Cork

(T) Kilmartin Lower/Kilmartin Upper, (P) Donaghmore, (B) East Muskerry
There are two townlands and one Catholic parish that bear the name Martin located in Cork, all within the same area. The church and parish at Templemartin were mentioned in later medieval accounts, but may have existed for some time before that. (Murphy 1913: 185.) It is likely that the church was founded after the twelfth century Irish ecclesiastical reforms, based on the ‘Temple’ formula of the name. (Flanagan and Flanagan 1994: 148.) It was also mentioned in Down’s Survey of 1655. There is a church dedicated to St. Martin in the parish that continues to be used to this day. This was built in 1821, upon the site of an earlier church. (*Lismore Papers* 1854, MS 43.)

Co. Derry

(T) Desertmartin, (P) Desertmartin, (B) Loughinsholin.

The site of Desertmartin in east Co. Derry is thought to date back to the early medieval period. Many sites with the prefix, *Desert*, are thought to be associated with the Céile Dé church movement of the eighth and ninth centuries, (Flanagan and Flanagan 1994: 69) but some sources suggest that Desertmartin was instituted by St. Columba in honour of St. Martin, whose grave in Tours he visited in the sixth century. (Doherty 1899: 12.) The site is known to have been thus called from at least the fourteenth century. (Carrigan 1905: 368.) The current Roman Catholic church in the town is dedicated to St. Patrick, and the Anglican church is dedicated to St. Conghall.

Co. Dublin

(T) Kilmartin, (P) Mulhuddart, (B) Castleknock.

Kilmartin was mentioned in Petty’s *Hiberniae Delineatio* in 1685. The ruins of the church were noted in both the 1839 and 1899 Ordnance Survey maps,

although these remains have been ploughed over and destroyed since then. There is no longer any other church dedicated to St. Martin in the area. There was one dedicated to Martin of Tours in the centre of Medieval Dublin, but it fell out of use during the medieval period. (Mac Giolla Phadraig 1948: 93.)

Co. Galway

(T) Templemartin, (P) Killora, (B) Dunkellin.

The ruins of the church at Templemartin were marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1839, but the 25" map of 1897 simply marked it as a church site, with no visible features. Little trace of the church remains today. Again, linguistic evidence suggests that it was a post-twelfth century dedication.

Co. Kilkenny

(T) Templemartin, (P) St. Martin's, (B) Gowran.

There are two adjacent townlands named Templemartin in St. Martin's parish in Co. Kilkenny. The name goes as far back as the beginning of the fourteenth century, where it was mentioned as *Ecclesia Sancti Martini*. (Carrigan 1905: 386.) The church there was abandoned and already in ruins by the mid nineteenth century, although the well continued to be visited into the twentieth century. The church site is now overgrown and in a ruinous state. Some 20 km south of Templemartin, a church was dedicated to St. Martin of Tours at Derrynahinch, and this dedication was later transferred to nearby Ballyhale. Processions took place up to 1790 AD on the Sunday after St. Martin's Day, where a wooden statue of the saint (or possibly the church's original patron, St. Mocheallóg) was paraded around the churchyard. (Carrigan 1905: 18.) Ballyhale continues to be known as St. Martin's Parish, and the modern church is still called after the saint.

Co. Limerick

(T) Ardkillmartin, (P) St. Peter and Paul's, (B) Kilmallock.

The church at Ardkillmartin, Co. Limerick, was dedicated to Martin of Tours on November 11, 1410. (Begley 1906: 258.) It fell out of use after the medieval

period, and remains of the church can still be seen within Ardkilmartin cemetery, where one of its gable walls is still standing.

Co. Laois

(T) Kilmartin, (P) Kyle, (B) Clandonagh.

The dedication to St. Martin is at least late medieval in origin, as it was mentioned in 1582 in the Calendar of Fiants of the Reign of King Henry VIII. (Deputy Keeper of the Public Records of Ireland 1876, 3986.) The church seems to have become abandoned and ruined before the nineteenth century, since no trace of it was found on Ordnance Survey maps from that time.

Co. Wexford

(T) Ballycullane, (P) Tintern, (B) Shelbourne.

The parish of St. Martin's at Ballycullane was recorded by O'Donovan, and St. Martin's Church appears on the 1839 Ordnance Survey map. The modern Roman Catholic church at Ballycullane is still dedicated to St. Martin of Tours.

(T) Rathmacknee Great, (P) Rathmacknee, (B) Forth.

A church dedicated to St. Martin once existed in this place, although no traces of it remain today, and it was mentioned as being in a ruined state by the middle of the seventeenth century. (Hore 1921: 58.)

Co. Wicklow

(T) Kilmartin, (P) Killiskey, (B) Newcastle.

Kilmartin in Co. Wicklow was mentioned by John O'Donovan in the 1839 Ordnance Survey Letters, and the church was described as being in a ruinous state in Samuel Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, and appears as a ruin on the 1839 Ordnance Survey map. (Lewis 1839: 119.) The church site exists today as an overgrown patch of trees.

This survey reveals a scattering of church sites around the country. Many seem to have been instituted in the medieval era, probably in the post-Reform

period after the twelfth century. This may have been due to influence from Anglo-Norman settlers, whose dedication to St. Martin saw a greater number of churches named in his honour in medieval England.⁵⁶ This too would accord well with the image that we see of the cult of St. Martin in Continental Europe, where it enjoyed the patronage of aristocratic elements of society throughout the medieval period.⁵⁷ It was the case in England, France and parts of Germany that St. Martin's Day was once celebrated amongst rich members of society, and later declined as a popular festivity amongst the social elite. This may also have been the case in Ireland, and would help to explain the former popularity of church dedications to St. Martin in the medieval period, and the relative rarity of these in recent times. Also of note is the presence of churches dedicated to St. Martin in areas such as Co. Derry and Co. Cork, in which one notices an absence of St. Martin's day customs in recent centuries, suggesting that there may have been a more widespread distribution of Martinian devotion in the past. Possible reasons for this are outlined in Chapter 15.

Most of the ecclesiastical sites mentioned above had fallen out of use by the nineteenth century, and very few churches dedicated to St. Martin of Tours continue to be in use in Ireland. However, the memory of dedication to St. Martin lingered in a few instances, in the form of veneration of holy wells at the ruined church sites. These venerations may have arisen, or may have been renewed, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and may have drawn on folk memory of the church's previous dedication. On the whole, however, the sites testify to the fact that St. Martin no longer seemed to enjoy the popularity once bestowed on him in the middle ages. The widespread folk devotion to St. Martin on his feast-day, through the offering of blood, and the abstaining from work which involved the turning of wheels, contrasts with the paucity of churches dedicated to his name, and although these may have been more popular in the medieval period, decline had well and truly set in by the modern era.

56 158 church dedications to St. Martin were recorded in England. See Wilson 1918: 136.

57 See Chapter 1.

14. Samhain and St. Martin's Day

*Naoi n-oidhche agus oidhche gan áireamh,
Ó Oidhche Samhna go h-Oidhche Fheil Mártan.¹*

[Nine nights and a night without counting,
From Hallowe'en to St. Martin's Night.]

The Christian festival of All Hallows falls on November 1, and perhaps more significantly, All Hallows' Eve, or Hallowe'en, occurs on the night of October 31. This was traditionally a night of celebration, merriment and mischief, and continues to be observed, to this day, throughout the country as a vibrant expression of Irish calendar custom. Hallowe'en is known in Irish as *Oíche Shamhna*, or November Night, falling as it does on the commencement of November, and the beginning of winter. In this regard, it is related to the more ancient Irish festival of *Samhain*, a feast-day that was observed in Ireland before the advent of Christianity. This was a time for assembly, and great fairs were held at this feast, even down to the early Medieval period. (Hutton 1991: 177.) It was also a time when cattle were brought in from summer pasture, and rent or tribute was paid to lords in the form of slaughtered animals. (Kelly 1997: 46, 59–60, 320, 357, 461.) In these practical respects, the similarities between Samhain and Martinmas are apparent. Several scholars in the past have mentioned the possibility of a link between the feast of St. Martin and Hallowe'en. The idea was postulated in 1908, where it was given a brief mention by James Hastings in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, although the rationale for linking the two feasts was not provided.² More recent scholarship has also examined the connections. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, in *A History of Food*, claims the killing of geese at St. Martin's Day was a relic of more ancient practices to do with Samhain, and that it represented the practice, as she puts it, of 'eating the god'. (Toussaint-Samat 1987: 353.) Véronique Guibert de la Vayssière (1997) also drew close parallels with St. Martin's Day and the

1 Co. Waterford NFC 677: 107.

2 Hastings also linked Samhain to Yule and the Kalends of January, so perhaps his theories on the matter may be somewhat conflated. See Hastings 1908, 81.

ancient festival of Samhain, portraying St. Martin as inheriting mythological associations from ancient Celtic beliefs. The relationship between the two feasts will, therefore, be examined, to see if such claims have sufficient grounding to be taken seriously. Great caution must be exercised when pursuing such argument, however, as the broad theories of 'pagan survivals' so espoused by Frazerian anthropology have been critically deconstructed as a valid model for analysing folk tradition, and interpreting modern customs as vestiges of ancient religion can prove to be an academically precarious exercise.³

Bearing such caveats in mind, there seems to be at least some link between the two feasts. In a great many instances throughout the country, people reckoned the date of St. Martin's Day in relation to Oíche Shamhna, or All Hallows' Eve. A common two-line verse found in the tradition outlines how one should calculate St. Martin's Feast:

*Naoi n-oidhche agus oidhche gan áireamh ó Oidhche Shamhna go dtí oidhche Fheil' Mhartain.*⁴

[Nine nights and a night without counting, from Hallowe'en Night to St. Martin's Eve].

Nine nights and a night without talking, from Colcannon night to the night of St. Martin.⁵

All the old people claim it is the custom to have it [slaughter of animals] between the first and tenth of November. How they carry it out in this district is they have it in between the two Hallow Eve's, Hallow Eve and Old Hallow's Eve, saying 'nine nights and a night without counting.' It must be inside these dates.⁶

Some 64 examples of this saying have been found in the source material, from almost all areas where St. Martin's Day was celebrated. It seems likely that the saying originated in the Irish language. In many instances, it is obvious that it has been translated from Irish, and English versions are less consistent in their rhyming and content. The saying outlines that one must reckon nine nights, 'and a night without counting,' making ten in total. This accords well with actual custom, since *Oíche Shamhna*, or Hallowe'en, was celebrated on

3 For a discussion of this process in relation to animal sacrifice in a Christian context, see Watkins 2004: 140–150, 144.

4 Co. Tipperary, 677: 36.

5 Co. Kilkenny NFC 683: 396.

6 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 392.

the evening of October 31, and St. Martin's Eve fell ten nights later. In both instances the actual celebration of the feast in question begins at nightfall on the evening before. This accords well with general Irish tradition, where the night before an important feast was often when festivities or observances began.⁷ People appeared to have a general awareness of the dates of the two feasts, and calculated one from the other.

Origins

Early Irish tradition can be seen to divide the year into two seasons, as witnessed, for example, in the early medieval tale of *The Wooing of Emer*. The dating of this text has been ascribed to the tenth century, but appears to be a slightly modified form of an eighth century original. (Toner 1998: 87.) The relevant section reads as follows:

Bend Suain, son of Rosc Melc, which she said, this is the same thing, viz.. that I shall fight without harm to myself from Samuin. i.e., the end of summer. For two divisions were formerly on the year, viz., summer from Beltaine (the first of May), and winter from Samuin to Beltaine. (Meyer 1888: 232.)

It has been proposed that, in the Indo-European reckoning of time, there were originally two major seasons, summer and winter, and that this twofold division continued into the early medieval period (*ibid.* 220). This is an ancient system of reckoning time, and survived down to the historical period in a number of western European countries. (Anderson 2003: 219.) In the scheme of a twofold year, *Samhain* appears to be a point in the Irish calendar where the grazing term ends, cattle were brought to the infields for the winter, and some of these animals were selected for slaughter. Indeed, the case has been made that meat was a central component of the feasting at Samhain. Joseph Nagy has identified a series of references to feasting on pork and beef at this time. Incidents from the medieval tale *Macgnimmartha Finn* describe Fenian warriors consuming pork at *Samhain*. (Nagy 2003: 314.) Also discussed are events in the eleventh-century mythological tale *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, where characters feast upon a living pig:

There I beheld at the fire in front a man with black cropt hair, having only one eye and one foot and one hand, having on the fire a pig bald, black,

7 Consider the example of Christmas Eve, St. Brigid's Eve or Easter Vigils in Irish calendar custom. See Danagher 1972: 119.

singed, squealing continually, and in his company a great big-mouthed woman. Liken thou that, O Fer rogain!" "Easily done: Fer Caille with his pig and his wife Cichuil. They (the wife and the pig) are his proper instruments on the night that ye destroy Conaire King of Erin. Alas for the guest who will run between them! Fer Caille with his pig is one of Conaire's tabus. (Stokes 1901: 391.)

The time of year when the events took place are not mentioned in the eleventh-century version, but the tale was said to have taken place at the time of November in a twelfth-century topographical poem, entitled *Binn Étair*. The relevant passage states:

The three sons of Conmenn son of Conmac, three descendants of Donn Désa, marched on the eve of Samhain to Derg's house to take Da Derga's hostel on Conaire. (Stokes 1894: 331.)

Another famous Irish tale, *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, presents the imagery of feasting on a swine, and again the incidents of the story are said in a poem from the eleventh or twelfth century to have taken place at *Samhain*:

He departed thence, a death undesired, the five fair provinces came, on a time, in full array, at Samain-time, to seek the swine in the east where it had its loved abode. (Gwynn 1924: 193–4.)

Another piece of evidence from Early Irish literature seems to agree with Nagy's hypothesis. It consists of one of four quatrains that were written about the ancient festivals, of *Samhain*, *Imbolc*, *Bealtaine* and *Lughnasadh*. It clearly outlines the fact that meat was consumed at Samhain, and the inclusion of the word *cadla* in the first line, which is translated as the small intestine,⁸ indicates that it is most likely the offal from freshly-slaughtered animals that was consumed:

Carna, cuirm, cnoimes, cadla,
it e ada na samna,
tendar ar cnuc co n-grinde,
blathach, brechtan urimme. (Meyer 1894: 48–9.)

[Flesh, beer, nuts, intestines,
 These are the dues of Samhain;
 A bonfire for merriment at the top of a hill,
 Buttermilk and a fresh roll of butter.]

8 According to *Dictionary of the Irish Language* 1983.

As Christianity came to dominate Ireland from the fifth century onwards, the importance of the ancient pagan festivals was lessened somewhat, and Christian feast-days came to dominate the calendar. The celebration of All Saints's Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2) can clearly be seen as Christian festivals that eclipsed and replaced Samhain. (See Hutton 1996: 360–80.) Like many feast-days in the Christian tradition, meat was forbidden from being consumed on All Saints' Day, which may go towards explaining why the consumption of pork was displaced from Samhain. (Collinge 2012: 165.) If the custom of eating meat on November 1 was moved to a different context, St. Martin's Day was the natural place for it to go. This was, after all, the time of year which necessitated slaughter as an ordinary part of the agricultural cycle, and if rent and tribute was being paid in the form of meat and carcasses, then the process can be seen as both practical and economically necessary. The European evidence discussed in Chapter 1 outlines the widespread customs of eating meat on St. Martin's Day. The fourteenth century account of pigs being offered as tribute at Martinmas gives evidence of a change in Irish custom, particularly under the influence of the Anglo-Normans. Rent and tribute that was paid at Samhain under the Gaelic system can be seen to be paid instead at St. Martin's Day under the new economic model of the Anglo Normans. The transference of fairs and assemblies from Samhain to Martinmas was also part of this process of change, where the important commercial day at the end of summer was moved from November 1 to November 11. Thus, the practical economic customs of slaughter of animals and the feasting on their meat changed context. The popular sayings regarding 'nine nights and a night' express a widespread association of Samhain with St. Martin's Day, particularly in more Gaelic areas. In addition, it was widely believed that the period between the two feasts was the appropriate time in which to spill blood, but never after November 11.

Other elements of St. Martin's Day customs may also testify to this process. As mentioned above, pre-Norman Gaelic Ireland reckoned time from *Bealtaine* to *Samhain*. Thus, an examination of folk customs at *Bealtaine* may reveal certain themes and concepts that find similar expression in St. Martin's Day. If this is so, it will lend further evidence to the idea that St. Martin's Day partly inherited the role of Samhain as the end of summer, and the close of that half of the agricultural year.

Patricia Lysaght has undertaken an insightful study into the rituals and beliefs surrounding the festival of *Bealtaine*. She describes the many actions people undertook to 'promote personal and agricultural luck and prosperity.' (Lysaght 1993: 28.) There was a perception of danger at this time of the year, which was situated on a temporal threshold between winter and summer.

Indeed, at such liminal times, the effects of the supernatural could be most powerful. Thus, to confront and counteract any malevolent forces that might be at play at this time, people conducted particular rituals to reaffirm and redefine boundaries. These could include the use of water, iron or salt, and these substances were used to mark boundaries, such as the thresholds of the house, or the borders of the farmland. These rites of protection were often employed at sunset, or on the eve of May 1, which accords well with the idea that liminal time is the most effective for conducting magical acts. Lysaght cites a description given by Kevin Danaher (1972: 144) of a protective ritual undertaken in Co. Laois, whereby the hearth, threshold and four corners of the house are blessed with a candle, to ensure protection and prosperity for the coming year. She also mentions the notion that cattle were an important element in the Bealtaine rituals, and the protection of cattle and milk products was a central theme. (Lysaght 1993: 29.) This is related to the idea of the cattle grazing term usually being calculated from Bealtaine to Samhain, May 1 to November 1.

Thus, a clear picture has been painted of a temporally liminal festival, that employs rituals of protection and reaffirmation in order to protect the herds and farm from potential harm and supernatural forces. When compared to the feast of St. Martin in Ireland, the parallels are overwhelming. St. Martin's Day, poised on the threshold of winter, is the perfect analogue to Bealtaine, and has undoubtedly inherited the role from *Samhain* in this regard. The rituals of shedding blood for the saint were performed at temporally liminal times, most often at sunset, on the eve of the saint's feast. Thresholds are the most usual place where the act of killing was undertaken, and the blood was shed on the doorstep to banish bad luck, supernatural forces, and disease from the household for the coming year. The four corners of the house were marked with the blood, ritually reaffirming the boundaries of the home, and demarcating it with a protective substance.

The blood was a sacred material that could enact cures, and was seen to be beneficial to the health, as was the consumption of the flesh of the slaughtered animal. Efforts were also made for the well-being of animals as well as people. The byre or stable was marked with the blood, and in some cases, larger animals such as horses had specific offerings made on their behalf. There was a strong concern for protection, and it was enacted in a structured way, with prescribed actions, prayers and rites.

The supernatural nature of Samhain is still very much a part of folk tradition. The magical connotations of the festival, present in the earliest literature concerning Samhain, remain to the fore in its association with the dead, the

fairies and spirits.⁹ Some of this is likely due to the influence of the Christian feast of All Souls, which placed a strong emphasis on the dead, but early Irish mythology also testifies to the supernatural traits of the earlier festival. (Gantz 1981: 12–13.) Similarly, there is a definite sense of unease associated with the feast of St. Martin, and legends and beliefs concerning the supernatural repercussions that one could face are manifold. The threat of death, loss and disease are amply demonstrated in both legend and belief statement, and thus testify to the anxieties that were experienced by an agricultural people facing into a period of greater uncertainty. No doubt, the rites of Martinmas, and the spilling of blood in particular, were an attempt by people to assert control over the situation, and ensure that they stood the best chance of getting through the winter season with as little loss as possible.

If the complex of beliefs and activities surrounding Bealtaine can be seen as originating in the human desire for ritual protection against potentially harmful supernatural agencies at the beginning of the grazing period, then the rituals of St. Martin's day can be seen as an expression of similar desires at the end of the same period. Samhain surely occupied this position in the pre-Christian and early medieval period, but its economic and agricultural significance became transferred to Martinmas during the Middle Ages. The role of St. Martin's day as the threshold of winter is found in many other European countries, as outlined in Chapter 1, and there too, rituals of protection for people and cattle were practised. The twofold division of the year is not just an Irish phenomenon, and in many cases throughout Continental Europe it ran from St. George's Day to Martinmas. Similarities between Ss. George and Martin, in terms of legend, imagery, role and function are apparent, and testify to the similarities between the two festivals that are situated on the axis points for the turning of the agricultural year. (Mag Fhloinn 2005.) Thus, the role of St. Martin's Day as a point of potential danger and ritual protection, can be seen in a wider frame of reference, and contextualises the practices of slaughter and the attendant beliefs in the agriculturally-based belief systems of the people of Europe.

Bloodletting at Bealtaine

The balance of evidence suggests that Bealtaine and St. Martin's Day were ritually connected. They acted as bookends to the cattle grazing season, and therefore were important in terms of rites of protection and health for the animals,

9 See chapters 3 and 17 of Rees & Rees 1961.

as well as humans. The custom of bloodletting on May Day will now be examined, to further the idea of a link between the two feasts. It is clear that blood rites, in particular the sacrificial offerings of ritually shed blood, were a central part of Martinmas custom, and that the themes of protection and reaffirmation of boundaries were to the fore, something that it held in common with Bealtaine. In this context, the presence of blood rites for the benefit of animals at the May feast would be of great significance, furthering the idea that both Bealtaine and Martinmas share similar functions. There is a body of evidence that outlines the custom of people letting blood from cattle on May 1, and there is good reason to suggest that it may have had ritual significance.

The use of blood drawn from living cattle has been discussed, most notably by A.T. Lucas (1989: 202–20), who has documented it as being widespread in Ireland. He notes dozens of reports outlining the practice, including material from the National Folklore Collection, where blood was drawn and cooked for human consumption, or at the very least drawn to bestow benefit on the animal. This was undoubtedly related to the belief, prevalent at the time, that bloodletting was somehow good for the health of a person or animal. (See Seigworth 1980.) The custom was known in medieval Ireland, with its first recorded appearance in a fifteenth-century manuscript from the Book of Lismore, (O'Rahilly 1977: 185) and again in the Book of Fermoy, which likely dates to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. (Knott 1910: 224.) There are some cases, however, which strongly suggest that it had a deeper importance. In some instances, the date when such blood was drawn is mentioned. In several cases it is simply stated that it was during the summer season. Of particular note, however, are the accounts where the eve of the First of May, or May Day itself, is the date upon which blood is spilled. In an account given by William Wilde in his *Irish Popular Superstitions*, he talks about elaborate precautions taken by people to protect cattle around the first of May, and writes as follows:

We have known each head of cattle to be slightly singed with lighted straw upon May Eve, or to have a lighted coal passed round their bodies, as is customary after calving; and it was not unusual, some fifteen or twenty years ago, to bleed a whole herd of cattle upon a May morning, and then to dry and burn the blood.

We have more than once, when a boy, seen the entire of the great Fort of Rathcroghan, then the centre of one of the most extensive and fertile grazing districts of Connaught, literally reddened with the blood thus drawn upon a May morning. Bleeding the cattle at this period of the year was evidently done with a sanitary intention, as some of the older medical

works recommended in the human subject; but choosing that particular day, and subsequently burning the blood, were evidently the vestiges of some Heathen rite. In some districts, and particularly during hard times, some of the blood thus drawn used to be mixed with meal, boiled into a posset, and eaten by the herds and the poor people. But many of these ceremonies, having been either laughed at or positively interdicted by the more educated Roman Catholic clergy, are fast falling into disuse. (Wilde 1853: 56.)

A similar account appears in W.G. Wood-Martin's *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*. This often-fanciful work contains much speculation on the origin of folk customs, and therefore may not always be the most reliable of sources, but it provides an account as follows:

On May Eve, the peasantry used to drive their cattle into old raths, or forts, thought to be much frequented by the fairies, bleed them, taste the blood and pour the remainder on the earth. Men and women were also bled, and their blood sprinkled on the ground: though this practice, it is believed, now died out, though sacrifice through blood, or the taking away of life, is still considered sacred and beneficial. (Wood-Martin 1902: 6.)

There is little reason to doubt Wilde's account, as he clearly says that he saw it first hand. What remains unclear, however, is whether Wood-Martin has drawn on Wilde's work, or some other unmentioned source, for his own statement. Both of the antiquarian authors mention old forts, which have a strong association with fairies and the supernatural in Irish tradition, and both make much of this fact, seeking to associate the custom with ancient pagan rites or beliefs. But there does appear to be some genuine folk tradition that seems to testify to the practice occurring in association with *Bealtaine*, or the first of May, and indeed the bleeding of cattle appears to have taken place, on at least some occasions, within the remains of ancient enclosures.¹⁰ Lucas documents several accounts that testify to the association of bloodletting with the month of May. (Lucas 1989: 212.) Take for example, this description from Ross, Co. Galway:

Bleeding the cattle was another thing that was done on May Day. All the cows, calves and dry animals in the townland were collected together on

10 See, for example, the account from Kilnamartyra in Co. Cork, where cattle were bled within old ruins, NFC 476: 327. The use of such enclosures, however, may have been for purely practical purposes, as they were useful for corralling large amounts of cattle in one place.

May Day. A knowledgeable man was selected to carry out the work. He had a lance with a rectangular blade in the handle. There was a special vein near the root of the tail and the lance was struck through this vein, and the beast's blood would spout up in the air. When there was a large herd of animals together there was a large patch [of ground] red with blood when they were let out of it.¹¹

Another account, from Tullaghobegly in Co. Donegal, describes protective blood letting rituals that were performed upon cattle before being brought to the *buaille*, or summer pasture, at the start of May:

[They had another custom which I often heard my mother refer to: before they went with the cattle, the old people always liked to draw a little or a lot of blood from their tails (the animals'), and when that was done they took a small piece of red thread and tied it into the tail hair. Neither the evil eye nor any *pisreogaí* [magical spells] could be worked on an animal which had that thread in its tail!] (Ó hEochaidh 1943: 141.)

An anecdote recorded in Ballingearry in Co. Cork, makes mention of the custom as being performed around the start of May:

[There was a man living here long ago, in a hut that is yonder, and he had four children, three sons and a daughter, and so, around the beginning of May, the cows were driven down to a cattle field at the back of the house, and it happened that they were drawing blood from the bullocks, the day before in the yard.] (Ó Suibhne 1931: 164.)

John O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey Letter from Draperstown, Co. Derry in 1834 mentions the drawing of blood from cattle, and that this practice began in May, and continued until August 20.¹² He describes it as taking place in Muintirloney in Tyrone, and Ballynascreen, Co. Derry. He mentions in another letter, from Moneymore, Co. Derry,¹³ that it was beneficial for the cattle. Thus, there is a clear picture of bloodletting at Bealtaine. It bears more than a passing similarity to similar rites that were practised on St. Martin's Eve, with both featuring themes of health and protection. The fact that the Bealtaine customs were sometimes mentioned as taking place within old forts and enclosures seems to suggest that it may have more ancient, and possibly, ritual, undertones. Forts were considered liminal places, with definite supernatural associations. Once again, the notion of the twofold year, and the concern for

11 NFC 1096: 33.

12 *Ordnance Survey Letters*, Co. Derry, typescript, 214–5.

13 *Ordnance Survey Letters*, Co. Derry, typescript, 256–7.

health and protection is a key concern at juncture points, and blood is a powerful symbol present in both situations. People drew some of the animals' blood at the beginning of the grazing season, and spilled the remainder at the closure of the pastoral year.

Sacrifice

The practice of shedding blood around November 10 is overwhelmingly referred to as 'killing for St. Martin' or 'spilling blood for St. Martin.' Only rarely is the word 'sacrifice' used by informants to describe the action.¹⁴ Yet it is obvious that the custom was entirely sacrificial in form and function. People offered the blood, the very life force of the animal, to the saint. Where normally, the blood of animals and fowl was consumed as food, in this instance it became a holy substance, and was used for curing and ritual protection. It is strongly suggestive that an underlying concept behind the act is that of offering the life of the sacrificial victim as a way of ensuring the continued vitality and prosperity of others, be they herds or family members. The legend material and belief statements very clearly point out that the punishment for failure to make an offering to St. Martin could include death, loss or disease. Thus, the sacrifice of the life of one animal protected the others. St. Martin would demand blood, and if it were not given wilfully, it would be taken anyway, often at a higher price. This is often the nature of the concept of sacrifice, where the offering is made to placate the forces of destruction and divert further loss. Something is given, in the expectation of receiving something else of greater worth. (Smith and Doniger 1989: 189–90.)

If the act of killing for St. Martin can be seen as an obvious act of sacrifice, and if the role of St. Martin's Day in Irish calendar custom may be seen as a continuation, in certain respects, of its ancient predecessor *Samhain*, then can the sacrificial act be seen as a survival of ancient pagan practice under a Christian guise? To answer this question, it may be helpful to consider other examples of sacrifice in medieval European Christianity.

Martinmas customs in Ireland are by no means isolated in their sacrificial nature. Much material relating to St. Martin's Day customs in Europe testifies to some form of animal killing at this time. Sources relating to southeast Europe show striking similarities in the ritual killing of fowl and animals on St. Martin's feast, amongst other holy days. This custom must have at one point

14 Co. Leitrim NFC 680: 190, NFC 680: 238, Co. Longford NFC 681: 395, Co. Roscommon NFC 680: 575, NFCS 237: 48, Co. Wicklow NFC 183: 201.

been more pervasive, as attested to by the similarities in rituals found at the peripheral areas of the once-widespread cult.

First and foremost, the origins of slaughter at this time are rooted in practical necessity. The time at which St. Martin's Day falls was the point in the agricultural year that called for animals that would not survive the winter to be culled. It would be very surprising if animals were not ritually killed at this point prior to the advent of Christianity in Europe, for slaughter would have been happening anyway, out of sheer necessity, as it would not have been possible to keep all the small animals. By falling on November 11, St. Martin's feast likely subsumed any older ritual activity that accompanied the killing. Animal sacrifice is a widespread religious phenomenon, and has permeated a great many cultures at some point, so it is difficult to imagine that it did not exist in Europe prior to the advent of Christianity. In fact, there is plenty of archaeological and historical evidence to suggest that it did. (Aldhouse-Green 2001.) This being said, there is not really any compelling evidence for overtly pagan undertones to the offerings to St. Martin. If he subsumed the role of any older deities in the process of Christianisation, no such traces seem to have survived, in Western Europe at any rate.¹⁵ We are presented with a thoroughly Christian figure. The function of such a character in the folk tradition may have some precedent in past religious ideas, but such details are difficult to determine. If notions of security and reaffirmation of boundaries that were once probably associated with Samhain have their origins in pagan religious belief, they found full expression in the new Christian context. Such themes, concerning protection and reassertion, are universal to the human experience, emanating from natural anxieties and the psychological need for control and safety. At the particular time of year concerned, such anxieties would have been to the fore, and the movement of animals and the change from summer practices to those of winter would undoubtedly have brought concerns for protection from dangers into people's minds. To see a concern for safety, from both material and supernatural dangers, survive a change in religion does not necessarily indicate a continuation of pagan practice *per se*. Instead, it may be seen as a continued expression of an inherently human idea.

Sacrifice to saints, for honour, propitiation, and protection, was a known practice in medieval Europe, (Saintyves 1936: 36–7, 41–5) and continues to this day in certain places. (Georgoudi 1989: 183–203.) Take the example of a bull sacrifice that was recorded in Scotland in the twelfth century by Reginald

15 The case has been made for earlier deities occupying the role of protector of animals, particularly in the Lord of the Wolves character, in eastern Europe, but such a case is not evident in the west. See Mencej 2005: 238–285, 243.

of Durham (Raine 1835: 179). In the past, scholars have interpreted this as an obviously heathen practice, viewing the parishioners of St. Cuthbert's Church in Kirkcudbright as having had a form of belief that was essentially pagan, with a veneer of Christianity. (Hopkin 2000: 6.) Instead, careful analysis of the nature of the offering suggests that it was an entirely Christian affair, made to a local saint, and was an expression of what Carl Watkins (2004) referred to as unofficial, popular religion. He outlines the twin notions of 'official' Christian practice, and the folk expression of religious ideas. He goes on to describe how concepts of clear dichotomies between the two, and more importantly, notions of pagan survivals, are not necessarily sufficient explanations for such religious expressions as the Scottish bull sacrifice. (Watkins 2004.) Further examples of ritual animal sacrifice persisting in folk expressions of Christianity in Europe, and Britain and Ireland in particular, can be found in another work by Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, where he provides ample evidence for similar practices throughout the medieval period. (Watkins 2007: 94.) Thus, when considering the sacrificial components of St. Martin's Day customs in Ireland, concepts of barely-concealed pagan practices persisting from the ancient feast of *Samhain* need not necessarily be entertained.

The act of sacrifice in honour of St. Martin may be viewed in two ways. The first is as an active, positive gesture, where offering brings the reward of the saint's protection. This protection can be against disease, death or loss, the inevitabilities faced by any person engaging in agricultural work. The second portrays the sacrifice as a defensive action, where the offering is to ensure the prevention of negative consequence. This negative consequence also takes the form of disease and death, but St. Martin himself becomes the agent of destruction, and his wrath brings loss or death to the person who does not offer sacrifice. Thus, St. Martin takes on the role of an enforcer, and his beneficial and benevolent nature as a protector is balanced by his vindictiveness as an enforcer of social custom and obedience to tradition. The portrayal of St. Martin in this way may have grown out of a process where the natural and supernatural hazards associated with this potentially dangerous time of year became strongly associated with the saint, due to the alignment of his feast with the onset of winter. Legends and beliefs, that were intended to enforce customs, outline the consequences of deviation from socially- and religiously-accepted norms of behaviour. As oral tradition evolved in portraying St. Martin as a protector, his role further developed as a regulatory agent, and one who ensures customs are kept in the appropriate manner. This is not an isolated phenomenon, and can be seen in a range of figures in European folklore. John B. Smith's analysis of similar customs in European folk tradition has

identified a number of supernatural threat figures who employ punishments as revenge for people's disobedience of custom. (Smith 2004.) This was especially the case in relation to certain Christian festivals such as Epiphany, which required people to feast heartily and refrain from work. Punishments were inflicted in a way that fitted the violation, so those who failed to feast appropriately had their stomachs filled with rubbish, or those who engaged in spinning on this day of rest had their intestines spun out of their bodies.¹⁶ Direct parallels can be found in Martinian tradition, in which St. Martin kills the animals of those who fail to shed blood, drowns fishermen who violate the taboo on fishing, and destroys the equipment or horses of disobedient ploughmen. Similarly, millers who grind on St. Martin's Day can find themselves crushed in the mill as a result. Poetic justice is the remit of the saint in these examples, and would have made for entertainingly instructive legends amongst tellers and listeners. Thus, St. Martin can be viewed as a supernatural enforcement figure of a kind found regularly in European folklore, particularly in the context of religious lore. John Widdowsen has compiled a typology of threat-figures in oral tradition, and St. Martin can be regarded as a *Type A* character within this scheme, a supernatural figure with the power to punish those who transgress the norms of a feast-day, and to exact vengeance on those who violate taboo or fail to fulfil obligation. (Widdowsen 1979.) Thus, the duality of function in sacrificing to St. Martin, both as an active and defensive act, grew out of this context, being simultaneously pleasing and appeasing to the saint.

Finally, brief consideration will be given to a study by Wayland Hand of the concepts of boundaries and thresholds in folk tradition. He describes the threshold as 'perhaps the most magical part of the house' and outlines how rituals of protection from evil forces, and the creation of sanctuary within the domestic space, are part of a tradition that is widespread throughout many countries and cultures. (Hand 1982: 5.) Rites of affirming boundaries, and the protection of farms and their occupants, are commonly found in folk belief and custom, and the threshold of the house or barn is the usual location for such rituals. The numinous nature of the threshold as a terminus between the domestic and the wild is a collective concept in folk customs, and thus to find sacrificial rites at this location further emphasises their universality. The rite itself, as well as the context in which it is found, transcends particular religious notions, and expresses psychological concepts that have their ultimate origins in commonality of human experience.

16 For examples, see Wolfram 1980: 46.

November 1–11

Although the ritual function of St. Martin's Day in Ireland may have its origins in the more ancient festival of Samhain, it seems that people were well aware of the difference between the two, as evidenced by the popularity of the sayings relating to 'nine nights and a night'. This was not the case in every part of Ireland, however. It appears that there was some variation in the dating of Hallowe'en, especially in areas of Ulster. In several instances in the archive material regarding Martinmas, informants make reference to the celebration of Hallowe'en/*Oíche Shamhna* on or around November 11. For example, this account from Cloone in Co. Leitrim, states that:

St. Martin's Feast in this locality is held between the two Hallow Eve nights, e.g. Hallow Eve Night 1st November and Old Hallow Eve Night 11th November. There is no definite date for holding the feast, but you must sacrifice inside of a week after the 1st of Nov.¹⁷

A similar account from that same county describes stereotypical Hallowe'en activities taking place on St. Martin's Day, such as marriage divination.¹⁸ Material from Co. Cavan reveals that 'special customs were observed every day from Hallow Eve to November 11th.'¹⁹ An account from Creeslough, Co. Donegal, dating from 1939, is clear on the matter of how November 11 was marked:

There is a feast held here on this night, but it is evidently in connection with Sean-Oidhche Shamhna, and not in honour of St. Martin. Games and sticks are played, as on Hallow Eve, and on this night the boys pull cabbage and throw them into houses. Called locally 'The Night of the Kale Throwing'. Of late years this is only practised in a very few townlands.²⁰

A collector in the Baile Ghib *Gaeltacht* in Co. Meath conducted some interviews with informants who originally came from Co. Donegal, and gave the following account:

[There is little mention of Martin's Day in Donegal. They say that they heard the name, but that is all. Those from whom I sought a report about it did not know when that day was supposed to be.

17 NFC 680: 352.

18 NFCS 195: 57.

19 NFC 684: 128.

20 NDC 684: 357.

When I mentioned the 11th of November to them, they said that on that day fell Old Hallowe'en – Old November Day²¹ coming the day after, on the 12th of November – and meat would not be eaten on that day (the 11th of November), that it was a day of fasting. Old Hallowe'en was kept in a similar way to Hallowe'en, songs and little feasts etc....

...It was a custom of theirs to have meat on Old November Day, the 12th of November, especially to honour the boys and girls who were after coming home with their pay after having been employed on the Lagan e.g. [in] Co. Tyrone or Derry, and after coming home that night.]²²

An account from Co. Offaly describes how Hallowe'en was being celebrated on November 11th 'in former times', and that older people continued to celebrate it on this date.²³ There is a vague connection between the custom of killing a fowl and Hallowe'en in Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow, but the account seems unreliable, as the author is doubtful of its veracity.²⁴ Another description from Co. Donegal illustrates the point:

[It was not customary to kill a cock in this part of the country on Old Hallowe'en (10 November), or to make any use of its blood or meat. There was no old lore about that night that I am aware of, except that it was one of the most relaxing nights of the year, greater even than Hallowe'en itself. There were old fishermen in the area, that used to go to Connaught long ago fishing, and they saw cocks being killed over there on Old Hallowe'en, and their blood being shed around the house as would be done with holy water. That's something that was never done in this part of the country.]
(Ó hEochaidh and Ó U. 1969/70: 226–7.)

Further evidence from west Ulster can be found in the following statements regarding Old Hallowe'en:

[I would say that tonight is Hallowe'en. A week from now again they call it Old Hallowe'en.]²⁵

A recent study by Jack Santino on traditions to do with Hallowe'en in Ulster confirms the fact that it was often celebrated on the later date. He

21 *Sean Lá Samhna* translates as Old November Day, and would be the day upon which the Feast of All Saints' would be celebrated, according to the old calendar.

22 NFC 681: 78.

23 NFCS 812: 145.

24 NFC 683: 67.

25 NFC 1835: 72.

records that All Hallows' Day was celebrated on November 12 in many places in the northern part of Ireland.²⁶ He provides an example of a poem from the National Folklore Collection that mentions the celebration of Hallowe'en on November 11, or Old Halleve, near Ballymena, Co. Antrim. (Santino 1998: 89.) His informant, Joe Redmond, describes that Old Halleve was:

'like Old Christmas – twelve days after the first of November. I mind how we used to get nuts and we used to watch them gathering for the dance.'
(Santino 1998: 89.)

It is clear from the folk tradition that there is a distinction between the two dates for Hallowe'en, and that the festival could sometimes be celebrated on October 31, while it was in some places celebrated on November 11. Of particular note here is the fact that the areas in which Old Hallowe'en is celebrated are conspicuously lacking traditions to do with St. Martin. Sources mentioning November 11 as being the time when Hallowe'en was celebrated are for the most part on the periphery of the area in which St. Martin's Day was celebrated, and represent the frontier between the two traditions. The distribution maps relating to where St. Martin's Day was observed show a general lack of Martinian customs in most of Ulster, and this is precisely the area in which Old Hallowe'en customs are strongest.

The reason for this discrepancy is in all probability down to a process that began in the sixteenth century. The Julian calendar, which had been instituted by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C., had been the standard measure of time in Europe from before the medieval period. It was, however, inaccurate by several minutes, meaning that by the sixteenth century, the calendar date was out of synch with the sidereal year by ten days. Pope Gregory XIII issued a papal bull in 1582, ordering that the calendar be reformed by these ten days, so as to amend the discrepancy.²⁷ It was accepted at differing rates throughout Europe, but was rejected in many Protestant countries, who considered obeying it to be an acceptance of papal authority. It was rejected by English clergy, who expressed their position in the following manner:

Seeing all the reformed Churches in Europe for the most part do hold and affirme and preach that the Bishop of Rome is Antichrist, therefore we may not communicate with him in any thing.

(Dee 1789.)

26 Thus implying that All Hallow's Eve fell on November 11.

27 The Document is known as *Inter Gravissimas*, after its opening line, and was issued on February 24, 1582.

The English authorities were to continue to use the old calendar for almost two further centuries, until the passing of an act of government in 1752 finally brought that jurisdiction in line with the rest of Europe. By this time, the difference in the two calendars had grown to eleven days. Of course, due to the subjugation of Ireland by England after the sixteenth century, the new calendar was not officially accepted in this country until the middle of the eighteenth century. There was considerable consternation caused by the 1752 act, and many places in Britain were resistant to the change, for a variety of reasons. There is evidence, however, to suggest that because of Ireland's large Catholic population, parts of the country accepted the new calendar long before the British decree. Hiram Morgan's treatise on the dating of the Battle of Kinsale in 1601/2 indicates that there were plenty of Irish Catholics who had adopted the Gregorian calendar during the sixteenth century. (Morgan 2002.) The case for the seventeenth and eighteenth century is not as clear, but it is likely that the more Protestant parts of the country, particularly Ulster, would have been more resistant to change. Significantly, in England at any rate, some of the resistance was partly due to concerns over the proper celebration of saints' days and religious feast days. (Speck 1977: 254–5.) When the official change finally did come about, it was accepted in varying degrees in different areas.

One major problem in implementing the new reform was the potential problems that would have been encountered by changing economically- and commercially-important dates, without paying heed to the natural rhythms of the agricultural cycle. If hiring fairs and markets were held too early, produce would not be ready, and the terms of employment of seasonal labourers would not have been complete. For this reason, the British government made allowances for such events. Fairs were exempt from the new laws, and could continue on the older date. In the case of St. Martin's Day, the religious feast was, from that point, celebrated on November 11, but traditional Martinmas markets and hiring fairs were now held on November 21 or 22. St. Martin's Day fairs were regularly moved from November 11 to November 21 or 22 throughout England and Wales as a result of the 1752 act. Examples include a horse and cattle fair in York (Tillott 1961: 489), a cattle fair in King's Nympton, Cornwall, (Lysons and Lysons 1822: 366) Cumbrian horse and cattle fairs, (William 1816: 13) and a horse fair in Rugby (Lewis 1848: 712).

The process of divorcing the economic function of a feast-day from its religious context was detrimental to its survival, and in England, over half of all saint's days became disassociated in this manner. (Poole 1995: 114.) The process of decline can be seen in the example of St. Michael's Day celebrations in England. After Michaelmas was moved to its reformed date in the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a dramatic drop off in its popular celebration

amongst the everyday people. (Malcomson 1973: 16–18.) That this was the case for St. Martin's Day in parts of Ireland may explain the unusual distribution of its observance in parts of the country. Two major areas, comprising of Ulster in the north, and South Kerry and Cork in the south, appear to have little knowledge of St. Martin's Day customs. The case for Ulster being resistant to the acceptance of the Gregorian Calendar reforms is likely due to the large Protestant population that settled in that area during the plantations of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from an appeal made by the Catholics of Ulster to the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome in 1630, that they be dispensed from having to use the Gregorian Calendar, due to the fact that they were persecuted for doing so by the Protestant settlers in that province. (Morgan 2006.) That this process affected the celebration of popular customs is suggested by the fact that May hiring fairs traditionally took place in Ulster, not on the first of May like the majority of the country, but eleven days later. (Danaher 1972.) The strong Protestant influence on Dublin following their mass immigration into the city and hinterlands following the 1641 rebellion may also help explain the absence of Martinmas customs in that area, and in parts of adjoining counties. (Gibney 2006: 16.)

The case for Cork and South Kerry is less obvious. There were sizeable populations of Protestants in Co. Cork, especially around Bandon, and the seventeenth century saw the dramatic incident of the expulsion of all Catholics from Cork City. In fact, the Protestant settlers who came to replace them had an avowed intention of 'getting the Irish to adopt English religion, language, law, dress and other customs.' (Russell 1988: 167.) It may have been the case that the use of the Julian calendar was more popular in this part of Munster, through the influence of Protestant settlers, and subsequently the influence of the 1752 legislation would have affected the celebration of St. Martin's Day in a manner similar to the north of the country. Evidence for this process may be found in the form of fair dates from this area. There are a number of sources that indicate a change in dates of Martinmas fairs. For example, there was a cattle fair held in Castlemaine, Co. Kerry on November 21,²⁸ and one informant from the National Folklore Collection describes it as *Aonach Lá Mártain*, St. Martin's Day Fair.²⁹ This fair is located on the periphery of the area where St. Martin's Day was well known, namely the part of Co. Kerry, south of Tralee. Further suggestions come from the dates of fairs and markets in Co. Cork. Records for November 21, 1921 show a large proportion of markets in that county on this day, with examples being found in Kenmare, Buttevant,

28 'Castlemaine, formerly a market-town', from Lewis 1837.

29 Co. Kerry NFC 674: 75.

Timoleague, Newmarket, Youghal and Inchegeela.³⁰ Whether or not these represent St. Martin's fairs or markets is not clear, but it is certainly suggestive, especially seeing as cattle and pig markets were also held on November 22 in Ulster.³¹ This stands in stark contrast to the situation found elsewhere in the country, in which St. Martin's Day fairs were held on the usual dates around November 10 or 11.³² Areas where the Gregorian reforms had been accepted earlier than the middle of the seventeenth century would not have needed to accommodate a fair on a different date, and subsequently would not have experienced the schism in commercial and religious observances. These areas, then, are the places that saw St. Martin's Day customs survive into the twentieth century.

30 'Calendar of Fairs of Munster for 1921', *Guy's City and County Almanac and Directory for 1921*, 55.

31 Also in Ulster, cattle and pig fair on November 22nd, Lewis 1837: 445.

32 For example, there were Martinmas fairs in Co. Tipperary, NFC 675: 503, NFC 677: 574, Co. Mayo 683: 98, Co. Wexford 683: 117 and Co. Clare NFC 675: 312.

15. Decline

As can be seen thus far in this study, a large proportion of the source material from the National Folklore Collection presents the customs and narratives regarding St. Martin being in a relatively vital state, with strong beliefs, well-understood practices and plenty of associated oral tradition. But it is also evident that many of the sources that date to the period 1930-45 depict Martinmas customs and beliefs that were at least partly in decline, and in some cases dramatically so. In a few areas Martinmas traditions had become almost entirely moribund by then. It is only a few accounts that do not contain some reports of the waning of customs.

A total of 139 reports specifically mention that customs were on the decline, over ten per cent of the overall number. That these were more or less evenly distributed throughout the area in which St. Martin's Day was celebrated suggests that there was no particular area immune from a drop off in practice. The only real exception to this were counties Clare and Limerick, and considering the amount of reports from those counties, mentions of decline are comparatively few. The reason for this will be discussed in Chapter 16.

Of the 139 sources that mention customs or beliefs as no longer being observed, 3 come from the Main Manuscript collection, 25 come from the Schools' material, and the remaining 111 come from the Questionnaire results (See figure 25). They were found in the following distribution: Carlow (8), Cavan (1), Clare (2), Dublin (1), Fermanagh (1), Galway (31), Kerry (5), Kildare (9), Kilkenny (6), Laois (3), Leitrim (5), Limerick (1), Longford (2), Mayo (15), Offaly (6), Roscommon (6), Sligo (7), Tipperary (9), Waterford (2), Westmeath (5), Wexford (13), Wicklow (1).

The following examples give an idea of the nature of reports of decline:

Up to about twenty years ago, St. Martin was honoured in this district (Adamstown), and all over Co. Wexford. But the custom is almost dead

now. There are, however, a few houses, here and there, where the blood is still spilled.¹

The feast has only barely survived in this locality. About 3 families in every 10 do St. Martin any honour.²

In former times the people had a great devotion to St. Martin. Many old people still honour the saint, although the devotion is dying out.³

Many accounts of the decline explain that the customs were remembered in the area, but were no longer practised:

St. Martin's Day is not honoured locally by the present generation, and only faint memory of the customs of the past generation seems to exist within a radius of, say, three miles of Ratheniska Chapel. We consulted people of all ages and sought information from families long settled in this parish. All these were of the farming class.⁴

[It is] not now [celebrated], but it was about 30 years ago. The people abstained from carting any material on that day.⁵

Some of the old customs in connection with the celebration of St. Martin's day are given on the enclosed pages. None are observed now, or for at least 40 years past. St. Martin used to be honoured throughout this area on the 11th November each year.⁶

Some accounts mentioned that veneration of the saint may have still been current, but specific elements of the feast had become defunct by the time of writing. Killing for St. Martin was specifically mentioned as the element that was no longer current in some 25 examples, found in the following distribution: Carlow (1), Galway (6), Kerry (1), Kildare (3), Leitrim (1), Mayo (1), Offaly (2), Roscommon (2), Tipperary (1), Westmeath (1), Wexford (6)

In my young days, a cock was killed and the door posts sprinkled with its blood on that night, and the bird cooked and eaten on St. Martin's Day...

1 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 235.

2 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 316.

3 Co. Cavan NFC NFC 684: 162.

4 Co. Offaly NFC 682: 247.

5 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 582.

6 Co. Wexford NFC 683: 219.

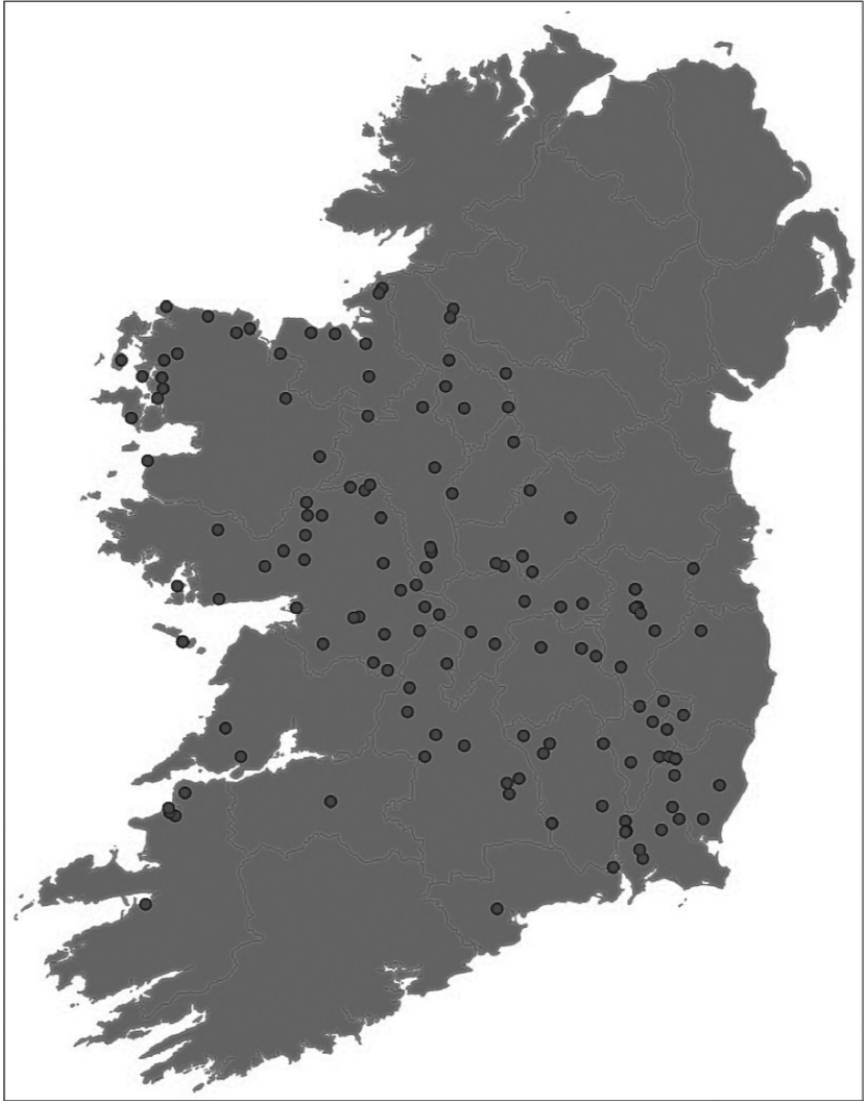


Figure 25 – Reports of Decline in St. Martin's Day Customs

This custom is locally, as far as I know, completely disappeared. I have not heard of its observance for over thirty years.⁷

The custom of killing a goose on St. Martin's eve is still partly observed in the parish around Cregganacopple but the customs and traditions with the blood of the goose is not observed, or not to any great extent.⁸

Another custom that was in decline was the abstaining from milling on St. Martin's day. This was observed here and there in a few places, with 15 examples in total, 4 from the Schools material and 11 from the Questionnaire replies: Carlow (2), Clare (1), Galway (3), Kerry (1), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (1), Mayo (1), Roscommon (1), Sligo (3), Wexford (1).

I have a vague memory of the mill not being worked on a particular day each year, because St. Martin, or the owner, or an employee, or someone else, was killed in that mill or some other mill in the dim and distant past.⁹

Very little attention is paid locally to the saint's feast-day at present. It is just remembered that it falls on November 11th and although most old people from whom I made enquiries say immediately: –'No mill ever works on that day' – in actual fact no one seems to take any notice of the fact that the owner of the only grinding mill in this parish never heard of St. Martin and works on that day.¹⁰

Other areas experienced a decline in the prohibition on spinning or turning wheels. This was observed in 24 examples, three from the Schools' material and 21 from the Questionnaire results. Galway (7), Kerry (3), Kilkenny (1), Leitrim (3), Mayo (5), Roscommon (2), Sligo (2), Tipperary (1).

[I never heard that people refrain from work in honour of St. Martin, and they don't refrain now either but when old women used be working with spinning wheels long ago late into the night, they wouldn't undertake any work on St. Martin's Eve or St. Martin's Day.]¹¹

In olden times they would not spin as it would be turning a wheel.¹²

7 Co. Galway NFC 677: 199.

8 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 426.

9 Co. Carlow NFC 683: 114.

10 Co. Westmeath NFC 681: 266.

11 Co. Galway NFC 678: 453.

12 Co. Sligo NFC 680: 152.

The decline in spinning may be due in part to fewer people partaking in the craft, as industrialization and mechanization replaced homespun fibre in many areas. The decline in turning wheels in general though, may not be explained in this way, and, perhaps, should be seen as a part of the broader picture of the waning of customs throughout the country.

Animals for the Rich

While studying the accounts of what animal people chose to offer to St. Martin on his day, and comparing this to those that mention the decline in certain customs, a theme that was repeated several times, was the idea that in former times, people used to kill a large animal, such as a pig, cow or sheep. In many cases, this is presented as a custom that once was common throughout the country, but that died out long before the time of writing:

A cock is usually killed, but geese, turkeys or ducks are also offered. In olden times a sheep was often killed.¹³

The only thing that is still killed in this locality is a fowl. Long ago a calf was killed in his honour.¹⁴

Long ago they used to kill a bullock for this feast instead of a cock.¹⁵

Long, long ago a cow used to be set dry, then fattened; and when she was fat enough she used to be killed.¹⁶

In several instances, emphasis is placed on the idea that it was a person of financial means who used to kill the larger animal:

Forty or fifty years ago, a pig might be killed on that day by the more or less well-to-do.¹⁷

Poor families killed a cock, better families killed a pig, and landowners killed a cow.¹⁸

13 Co. Mayo NFC 679: 503.

14 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 604.

15 Co. Galway NFC 679: 376.

16 Co. Kildare NFC 682: 99.

17 Co. Tipperary NFC 677: 536.

18 Co. Waterford NFC 677: 146.

About fifty years ago, the landlord of the district – Mr. Dolphin – always killed sheep for St. Martin's and the tenants were given some of the meat.¹⁹

Although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that larger animals were slaughtered for St. Martin on occasion, there was an indication that in previous times this was a more common practice. This seems indicative then, that devotion to St. Martin, and subsequent offerings made to him in this regard, used to be more popular amongst people of means, and the upper and middle classes. The overwhelming majority of animals chosen for killing during the period 1930-45 were fowl, and were probably offered by ordinary rural people, particularly of the lower classes. If richer people used to offer larger animals in former times, this custom had certainly waned by the middle of the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century was a time of massive social upheaval in Ireland. The Great Famine (1845–52) had a calamitous effect on Irish culture, and traditional rural Gaelic culture in particular. (See Ó Gráda 1996.) Coupled with this was a shift towards the end of the century away from traditional modes of native culture towards more anglicised and gentrified modes of behaviour and mores, mostly in imitation of the ruling elite, particularly amongst the emerging Catholic middle classes. (Earls.) Catholic emancipation towards the end of the eighteenth century, and the establishment of Maynooth seminary in 1795, saw the Catholic Church re-establish itself as an influential force in the country. (Corish 1995: 11–13.) There was an exponential growth in the amount of priests active in Ireland in the nineteenth century, and elements of folk religion, which in many instances had developed to fill a vacuum left by the decline in 'official' religion, began to wane. (Wilde 1852: 17.) Hand in hand with the degaelicisation of Irish culture and the decline in folk religion was the terminal decline in Irish language in many parts of the country. Certain religious concepts and folk belief were bound up in the Irish language, and its loss may have prompted, or at least contributed to, the general decline of some traditions. (Ó Duinn 2000: 157.) It is likely that all of these elements had a negative impact on the feast of St. Martin as a popular celebration, particularly amongst the upper classes. The decline appeared to have taken longer amongst the non-elite rural agricultural populations of Ireland, which saw customs linger into the twenty-first century, but the process was well and truly underway by the mid twentieth century, when most of the archival material was recorded. Later factors which may have contributed to the waning throughout the twentieth

19 Co. Galway NFC 678: 410.

century include urbanisation, the growth of centralised slaughterhouses, and the falling amount of people who kept and killed small numbers of fowl for personal use. Some of these are discussed in chapter 16.

Such a pattern of decline also makes sense when compared to Martinmas customs in other countries. Matthias Zender, in an article on spatial differentiation in Martinmas custom, mentions that the Cult of St. Martin was once the purview of European aristocracy, and that rich people slaughtered animals as part of great events involving feasting. (Zender 1970) He charts the spread of this activity to peripheral areas such as Scandinavia and Eastern Europe in the medieval period, and its subsequent decline in the post-medieval period in the original heartland. He makes the point that it was once popular for the rich of France and west Germany to kill larger animals, but that devotion to St. Martin amongst the nobility eventually declined.²⁰

The earliest accounts of St. Martin's day in Ireland concerned customs to do with killing animals, and present it in an ecclesiastical context.²¹ Three accounts, dating from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, mention people offering rents or tributes of animals such as pigs or cattle to local churches or monasteries, and in one instance, it is suggested that rent or tribute to the local lord was also paid in the form of pigs. That St. Martin's Day was a rent-day is clear from widespread medieval records, and even though it was replaced by the feast of St. Michael as a term day at a later stage, the connection between St. Martin's Day and the killing of animals remained strong. Placename evidence provided by the accounts from the National Folklore Collection, combined with historical and topographical records, suggest a picture of once-widespread devotion to St. Martin that has been in steady decline since the post-medieval period. It appears that St. Martin once enjoyed the patronage of both ecclesiastical and lay persons, particularly those amongst the upper

20 Criticisms of diffusionist models of the spread of folklore and customs have been levied at works such as Zender's, and the historical-geographical or 'Finnish School' of folkloristics has been improved upon with the development of hermeneutical or interpretive research models. The notion that folk culture should be adopted by the folk in imitation of elite culture, or mechanically spread from the centres of western imperium along defined lines, have been accused of themselves being elitist, and failing to account for other potential factors. See Sarmela, Matti, *Finnish Folklore Atlas*, Helsinki 2009, 22. The notion of an established centre in France and western Germany for the cult of St. Martin, however, is sustainable, given its geographic location in Tours, and it cannot be doubted that customs have spread to new areas along detectable paths in recent centuries, though the factors at play may be different from those postulated by Zender.

21 See Chapter 2.

classes, but this situation declined over the centuries.²² The evidence from Ireland accords very well, therefore, with Matthias Zender's model of distribution and historical progression of the cult in a European context. Zender also gave an account of how the cult was steadily declining across Europe, particularly regarding St. Martin as a patron saint of animals. He was replaced in this regard by a variety of other saints, depending on the region, but the process of decline was well established by the twentieth century, and the cult of St. Martin, once a popular high medieval feast, has all but disappeared, except in the most peripheral regions. That is very much the case in Ireland today, offering further explanation as to why so many sources mentioned the fact that the customs were in steady decline, even before the mid twentieth century.

22 The presence of a well dedicated to St. Martin at Leamenagh Castle in Co. Clare, as outlined in Chapter 13, is suggestive of his patronisation by Irish aristocracy.

16. Continuity and Change

This final chapter considers developments in Martinian practices in recent years, and the state of customs and beliefs to do with the feast of St. Martin at the present time. Special focus will be placed on fieldwork material that was collected in Co. Clare in 2005–2006, and on other developments around the country. The collection of material related to St. Martin's Day by the National Folklore Commission appears to have dropped off dramatically after the 1940s, and only 11 records to be found in the Main Manuscripts collection would appear to have been gathered in the period from 1950–1975.

No post-1975 sources have been found in the National Folklore Collection, besides the fieldwork material that is discussed below. Several factors may have given rise to this. Considering the fact that well over 1000 records had been gathered before 1950, it seems likely that the Commission felt that enough material had been collected to establish a clear overview of the subject. The Commission was working with limited resources, and had to focus its attention on subjects that were considered to be in danger of dying out before having been recorded. The material contained in the Schools' project, the Questionnaire responses, and in the Main Manuscripts collection regarding St. Martin represents a very significant body of work, so it is no great wonder that endeavour in this area eased off in the latter half of the twentieth century. Coupled with this fact is the process of decline that was essentially endemic throughout the areas in which St. Martin's Day was observed, even in the 1930s and 1940s. The customs were quickly becoming moribund, in a process that had begun before any recording was made by the collectors of the Commission. Several factors were at work in its decline. Significant changes to customs in certain parts of the country after the introduction of calendar reform in 1752 seem to have been a contributing factor. Developments in agricultural practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, including the widespread introduction of fodder in winter, meant that the economic necessity for wholesale slaughter of animals on the cusp of winter was greatly reduced, and the effect of this on the practice of killing for St. Martin must also have been

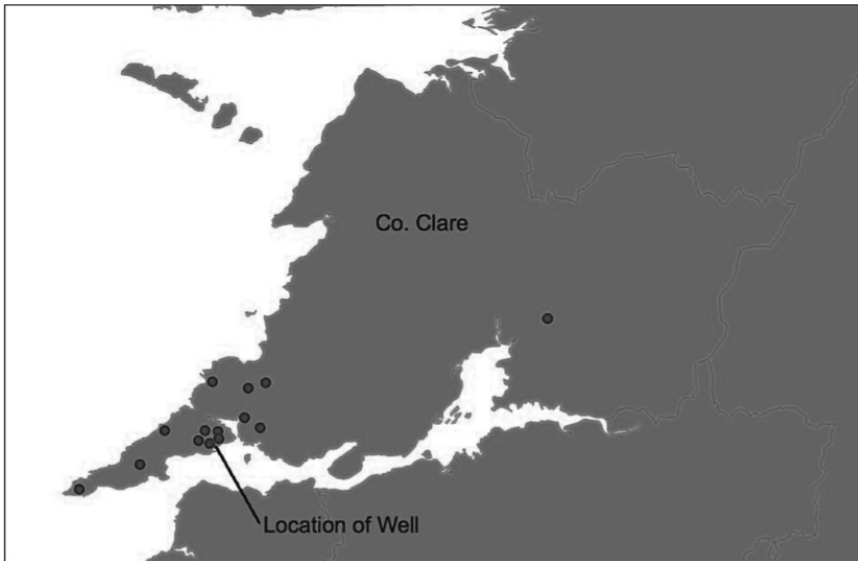


Figure 26 – Location of St. Martin's Well and Distribution of Informants

significant. As well as this, in the twentieth century, the practice of keeping small numbers of domestic fowl, or the keeping of pigs, amongst urban and rural dwellers, had greatly decreased, markedly so in the latter half of the century. This may have been the final blow in regards to the widespread devotion to St. Martin in recent decades, as the context for much of the beliefs and oral traditions had been removed. Divorced from their original setting, they appear to have all but died out in most areas. There is one area, south-west Co. Clare, that appeared to hold on to these customs a little longer than most other places, and will now be examined.

Southwest Co. Clare

A series of fieldwork interviews was conducted by the author in an area of southwest Co. Clare in the winter of 2005–2006, in an area surrounding St. Martin's Well in the townland of Clarefield. The aim of this activity was to investigate aspects of the feast of St. Martin that were still practised in the area at that time. Some of the preliminary findings of this investigation were published in an article in *Béaloides*, which examined elements of continuity and change in relation to the feast. (Mag Fhloinn 2007.) This material will again be considered, and a brief overview will be provided, with the aim of comparing

the status of the customs and beliefs present to those examined so far in this study. The primary sources used here are the transcripts of the interviews conducted in the area in question.¹ A total of fifteen interviews took place, with informants coming from a variety of different townlands, but almost all were in the vicinity of the well (See figure 26). One informant, Mary O'Halloran, came from Quin in the east of the county, having read about the well in a local newspaper. Typically, though, those interviewed were from the local area. During the course of the interviews, a range of questions were posed, many based on the original lines of the 1939 St. Martin's Day Questionnaire. Some of the results are presented here, to give insight into which customs have survived, and which have declined, and some of the possible reasons why this was so.

Every informant interviewed possessed some knowledge of the custom of killing an animal and shedding its blood on the feast, or on the eve of the feast. All said that fowl were killed, and in two examples a pig was also mentioned as having been slaughtered. The usual customs accompanied this, including the shedding of blood on the doorstep, and, in three instances, the spilling of blood took place at the cowshed or stable.

The following example, from an interview between the author (hereafter abbreviated as B.M.F. with two informants named Malachy Brown (M.B.) and Rita Taylor (R.T.), outlines the custom:

M.B.: Killing the fowl, and they'd spread the blood on the doors of the house and the cabins, cow cabins, and the horses' sheds as well. And around the yard, made the sign of the cross around the, around the farmhouse.

R.T.: They believed, you see, that by doing this, anything bad would be kept away. Like sickness in cattle, and all that. Made sure nothing bad would happen.

In the above example, a reason is given as to why the blood is shed, and it was seen to have protective qualities. Other informants mentioned this as well, with five describing it as being able to protect animals and cattle, and with one stating that it kept bad luck from the house. The following account, from Frank O'Dea, outlines how blood would not only be shed in the four corners of the house, but sometimes also used to mark the borders of the farm as well:

1 Full transcripts of these interviews are available in the original thesis upon which this monograph is based. See Mag Fhloinn 2013.

And the blood would be sprinkled around either the four corners of the house, or else the four corners of the farm, walked around the land, like. That was supposed to ward off diseases from stock and things, by going around the land. So that, that was an old custom.

Another informant, Seán King, mentions similar beliefs:

And you'd also have a goose for St. Martin, and the blood would be spilled. It was a ritual to spill the blood at the doorway, the entrance to the, of the household. Or in, or also going into the cowsheds, and the out-offices. I suppose 'twas some sort of a ritual for, to keep away the evil spirits and that sort of thing.

Some informants mentioned that they had forgotten the reason why blood was spilled, or whether or not there was any cure associated with it. Perhaps significantly, younger informants tended to have less knowledge of the function of the killing. Also forgotten were any prayers that might have been said during the killing. Six informants mentioned that the blood was also kept in a piece of cloth or tow, and used to cure pains in the side. An interview with Kitty Moloney (K.M.), Martin Haugh (M.H.), Theresa Conway (T.C.), Nora Haugh (N.H.), and Ellie Keane (E.K.) revealed the belief in the following manner:

B.M.F.: And what would be done with the blood then?

N.H.: The ground. It was never picked up.

E.K.: And then cotton wool. They'd get a....

N.H.: You'd keep a bit of cotton wool.

T.C.: And you'd put it under the mattress, or somewhere, wouldn't you?

N.H.: No.

E.K.: You'd keep it in a jar, or...

N.H.: Old people put it up in the thatch, in houses, long ago.

B.M.F.: Right. And have you ever heard of the cotton wool being good for a stitch, or a pain in the side?

M.H.: You're correct. You, you have it.

K.M.: Yeah.

E.K.: That's right.

M.H.: If you have it, rub it, bring it out.

Despite the belief in the efficacy of the blood to cure, and the custom of collecting it in a cloth, no informant possessed knowledge of the charm legend concerning the cure for a stitch. There was, however, widespread belief in the ability of the waters from St. Martin's Well to offer a range of cures, such as for skin complaints or lameness.

The traditional injunctions on the use of wheels, or the turning of wheels was mentioned by many informants. A total of 13 out of the 15 mentioned that milling or wheel-turning was forbidden, but the remaining two said that they did not know of, or could not remember, any such activity being forbidden. Of those that did recall the ban on wheels, none mentioned it as being current at the time of interview. The following example, an interview with Elizabeth Fitzgerald (E.F.), shows a lack of knowledge of the custom:

B.M.F.: And did you ever hear anything of things that you shouldn't do on St. Martin's Day?

E.F.: No [laughs].

B.M.F.: Like turning a wheel? Did you ever hear that?

E.F.: Turning a wheel?

B.M.F.: Yeah, that you shouldn't turn a wheel on St. Martin's Day

E.F.: No. We won't be able to drive our cars if we weren't allowed to turn a wheel [laughs]. No, no I didn't, no.

B.M.F.: Right. And is there any other customs or traditions or things?

E.F.: No. Just visiting the well and saying the prayers really is all that I'd really know much about.

Only five informants could recall the belief that St. Martin was killed in a mill, and even at that, one could only barely remember any such association. This was the case with Mary Marrinon (M.M.) and Kathleen Marrinon (K.M.):

B.M.F.: Did you ever hear a story of St. Martin in a mill?

K.M.: St. Martin?

B.M.F.: In a mill.

K.M.: In a mill. I did, but that's all I know.

B.M.F.: You don't...

K.M.: I don't know what it meant. I haven't a clue.

B.M.F.: Was, did you ever hear that he was killed in a mill?

K.M.: Killed in a mill? I probably did. He could have been. That could have been the reason.

M.M.: About the wheels turning.

K.M.: In France, is it?

M.M.: Oh yeah.

B.M.F.: Yeah. Well, I've heard that alright. Some people say that.

M.M.: Have you heard about a mill at some stage?

K.M.: I did, I heard yeah, I think you're right there.

M.M.: That might be why the wheels don't turn then. Because of the mill.

One informant, Joan Talty (J.T.), even mentioned the fact that traditional beliefs regarding the saint's death were in conflict with the historical reality, and that the notion that St. Martin was killed in a mill was false:

B.M.F.: And, the story was, Saint, you said St. Martin, you heard that he was killed in a, ground in a mill or wheel.

J.T.: No, that was false, because someone did a record of it, like.

B.M.F.: But that's what people used to think?

J.T.: That's what they thought at the time.

B.M.F.: That he was...

J.T.: Yeah, they mixed him up with some other saint.

Regarding narratives associated with St. Martin, five examples of a legend concerning St. Martin's Well moving to another location were found. They involve the violation of the sanctity of the well, and the removal of the well to a new location as a result. Another example of the legend involving St. Martin hiding in a goose stall was revealed, in the case of Paddy Grogan (P.G.):

P.G.: Well, the story about him, I suppose you heard that story, that he was travelling from the Cromwellian crowd, well, one of the groups that invaded the country, like. He was scooting along with his goose, it seems, well that's the story anyway, and he hid from them, like you know, and the goose let him down it seems, by saying "sss", you know, it hissed, and so, what he done was cut its head off. That's the story, yeah.

B.M.F.: And that's why people do it nowadays?

P.G.: That's right. That's where it started from, yeah. The goose let him down, gave away his concealment, like.

This is a relatively scarce story in relation to St. Martin, and no examples of it were found in oral tradition from Co. Clare in the archive material. It was more usually told in relation to continental Europe, and the example mentioned above may derive from a literary source, although it is contextualised using Irish tradition. Other than these examples, no other legend type that is normally associated with St. Martin's Day were noticed as being current in this part of Co. Clare.

The practice of visiting St. Martin's Well was universal amongst all who were interviewed. They came to the well and performed rounds on November 11, and for nine days afterwards as well. The traditions associated with the well, and cures associated with it, were still very much alive in the area. Other wells dedicated to saints and religious figures were also visited on other feast-days, such as those in the area dedicated to St. Senan and Our Lady. One of the primary reasons why the St. Martin's Day pilgrimage was so vital is that a deliberate effort had been made in the area to uphold traditional practices. A committee that was devoted to maintaining the well has been active in the area for several decades. Two committee members, Brigid O'Shea (B.O'S.) and John Lynch (J.L.), spoke of the social network that had grown up through its activities, and how neighbours and committee members would ensure that others from the area were continually attending:



Figure 27 – Veneration at St. Martin’s Well, Clarefield, November 11, 2006

B.O'S.: Because of the well, I think. You know. And people are always coming and going, and friends come that you wouldn't have seen for a long, long time. And you can always expect someone to call on that day.

B.M.F.: So the well is like a focus?

B.O'S.: It is, yes.

J.L.: Very much so.

B.O'S.: And sometimes you'd wonder why someone didn't come a certain year. I wonder were they sick, that they didn't come this year. You might make contact then after a few weeks, to see why didn't they come.

Another important factor in the continuing popularity of the well customs was the institution by a local priest of a second pattern day at the well, which fell in August:

B.O'S.: Well, Father Mc Inerney years ago, said he'd like, he had great devotion to St. Martin, and he said he'd like to have a mass annually. We never had mass there before. So it was a beautiful evening and it went down very well, and the crowd came there were so big that he couldn't believe there were so many there, and he said that he'd always have it every year. But unfortunately right after a few months he was playing golf and he died suddenly, and the new priest that came then, Fr. Culligan, he thought that he should fulfil his wishes, so that's the reason we're having it every year now.

B.M.F.: Right, and what exactly happens, normally? I mean this year in 2005 there was a mass said in Doonaha because of the bad weather.

B.O'S.: Well this year was the first year we had to postpone the mass. It was, as the weather was very unsettled and some days we had lovely days but it didn't work out, this, yesterday evening we had to cancel the mass because it was pouring, and mass was celebrated in Doonaha, and I was amazed that all the crowd did follow us to Doonaha, and we had a nice evening.

B.M.F.: And normally what happens down at the well? Do people do rounds there, on, in August?

B.O'S.: They do, the, the people do rounds. There is two rounds around the well, and people say two de., one decade of the rosary at each round for five rounds. There's a big round and a small round, and there's a decade of the rosary at each round, and then you say another rosary at the, for five rounds again, and that means two rosaries. And you finish the rosary at the well. And then you ask, whatever request you have, you make your petition, and hopefully you'll get it. Some people do and some people don't.

This newly-founded custom of celebrating mass at the well in August continues to this day. It appears to have given a boost to the veneration of the saint in the area, allowing people from the area to visit twice a year. It also provides a feast that occurs at a more favourable time of year, and is well attended by dozens of patrons. If the weather is inclement, a mass is held at a nearby church, and usually involves several references to St. Martin, although these tend to be based on the *Vita Martini*, rather than folk legend.

This area of the country is atypical in that St. Martin's Day customs survived there until relatively recently. In most other areas, the traditions had died out by the 1960s and 1970s. Several factors may have ensured their prolonged practice in the area around Clarefield. The fact that draught horses retained an importance in west Co. Clare may be part of the reason why certain customs survived there later than in other parts of the country. The association of St. Martin with horses was still strong amongst some informants, as mentioned above. Undoubtedly, the presence of the well in the area, as well as a dedicated local clergy and committee, have ensured that the saint remains significant for people in the area, and in certain respects this is responsible for the survival of some of the older customs and beliefs. It is telling, however, that the only traditional narrative to have survived to any significant degree in the last 70 years or more was one that related to the well. Other Martinian legends and folktales from Co. Clare, present in the archive material in significant numbers in the years 1935–1940, have all but disappeared, if the current sample is an accurate reflection of the wider community. It is perhaps likely that knowledge of St. Martin is even more diminished amongst the greater population of the area, since those chosen for interview were mostly pilgrims attending the well, so selection bias is obviously a factor that must be taken into account.

Many of the informants mentioned that they knew of the practice of killing for St. Martin, but few had done it themselves, and all had stopped the practice by the time they were interviewed. One informant mentioned that she had continued the custom until two years previous, but had eventually ceased. She did not express an intention to recommence in the future. Several interviewees attributed the discontinuation of the custom of shedding blood to the

fact that domestic fowl are no longer kept in most houses. Others attributed it to a decline in religiosity amongst younger people.

There is another St. Martin's Well that continues to be in use in Co. Clare. It is located at Ballynacally, and is still visited by pilgrims on November 11. Despite this fact, informal interviews conducted in the area failed to reveal a strong memory of the traditional celebrations of St. Martin's Day. Some of the older visitors remembered elements of the customs, but there was considerably less knowledge of the rituals and beliefs regarding the saint's feast-day. It appears that the process of decline that had begun by the 1930s has seen a dramatic fall in people actually practising the traditional rites in recent decades, to the point where not a single example of the living tradition of shedding blood for St. Martin could be elicited in the last ten years.

Innovation and Change

St. Martin's Day continues to be known and celebrated in a number of contexts in different parts of the country. The feast of St. Martin is observed on November 11 in several different churches around the country, such as those dedicated to the saint in Culmullen in Co. Meath, Piercestown in Co. Wexford and Templemartin in Co. Cork. These may include special mention of the saint, or a recounting of the miracle of St. Martin's cloak, as part of the liturgy on the day. In no instance could anything that might be considered akin to the traditional customs be found in relation to these observations, however, and they seem to be entirely ecclesiastical in nature, featuring the St. Martin of Sulpicius Severus rather than the Irish folk manifestation of the saint.

One significant development of Martinian custom in Ireland can be found amongst certain educational institutions that adopt German pedagogical approaches, such as Steiner schools, Waldorf schools and kindergartens. St. Martin's Day, as outlined in Chapter 1, continues to be celebrated in Germany by parades involving children making paper lanterns and processing in formation, while singing songs about St. Martin. These often feature a figure dressed as the saint, who participates on horseback, and re-enacts the famous incident of the dividing of the mantle with a beggar. Similar customs are practised in certain schools in Ireland, such as Clonakilty Kindergarten or St. Killian's Deutsche Schule in Dublin. In the latter case, the celebration is quite significant, and involves hundreds of schoolchildren and parents, partaking in a



Figure 28 – St. Martin's Day, St. Kilian's Deutsche Schule, 2006

parade, and singing songs about St. Martin.² It is also something of a social event, with parents and schoolchildren mingling afterwards, and eating traditional German breads and drinking spiced wine.

Whether these customs will spread beyond the German-modelled education system in Ireland is not known. There does not seem to be any indication of such a process happening, although the children participating in these events tend to have a firm knowledge of the legend of St. Martin dividing his cloak with a beggar. It must be stated, however, that any knowledge of Martinmas customs or lore are from an entirely different context to the traditional Irish celebration of the feast, and bear practically no resemblance to any of the folk manifestations of St. Martin's Day so vividly described in the archive material.

2 A full transcript of the play and songs performed at this event is contained in Mag Fhloinn 2013: Appendix M-16.

The Current Situation

The failure to elicit any living examples of the custom of spilling blood for St. Martin is not a good indication of the health of the cult in Ireland. When questioned about the nature of St. Martin's Day, often people of a certain generation will recall the tradition of shedding blood, although many will say that they never practised it themselves. People of younger generations mostly profess a complete lack of knowledge about the feast, and its associated customs and beliefs. It may be the case that there are some people in the Ireland who continue to shed blood on behalf of St. Martin, but no examples of such practices have been recorded as still going on in the last few years. Even in areas such as southwest Co. Clare, where the veneration of the saint continues to this day, a dramatic falling-off of almost all of the elements of the customs that do not directly relate to the holy well is evident. As mentioned before, such holy well customs are essentially part of a different set of religious traditions to those relating to St. Martin.

Conclusion

The feast of St. Martin in Ireland is one that was celebrated from a relatively early point in the history of Christianity in Ireland. The first records are ecclesiastical in origin, and suggest that the cult of the saint enjoyed widespread popularity amongst clerics and members of the church. This was undoubtedly due to several factors, amongst them being the popularity of the *Vita Martini*, and the prominence of St. Martin in the context of monastic Christianity. Devotion to the saint was exceptional in this period given his non-native status, and points towards a figure of great importance in the early church. These records, however, speak nothing of the popular celebration of the saint, and indeed any accounts of the manifestation of his cult amongst the common people are practically non-existent until the post-medieval period. More suggestive, however, is the placename and church evidence, which points towards a widespread patronage of the saint in many parts of the country in the high medieval period.

Contemporaneous records from the continent also demonstrate a popularity enjoyed by the saint in many parts of western Europe, particularly centring around France and western Germany. This developed during the medieval period from solemn and sombre celebrations to bacchanalian excesses, as the saint became associated with wine, and was patronised by rich and powerful lay members of society, as well as ordinary people. The raucous nature of Martinmas in the medieval period was to inspire much oral and literary tradition, and European records became less silent as to how people experienced the feast-day of the saint. In the post-medieval period, the emerging folklore records in many areas depict a festival connected with agricultural themes, feasting and drinking, as well as seasonal rites connected with ensuring the well-being of people and animals in the coming winter season. There was much local variation, and indeed new elements of the feast continue to develop and be adapted by communities to suit their particular needs and cultural values. Aspects of decline in the popularity of customs are also apparent, and in many areas where Martinmas was once observed, it has largely waned, in some cases to complete obscurity. A range of factors may be at play here, but social change

and developments in agricultural practices have seen the removal of much of the context in which the feast once flourished. It only survives in areas where it has adapted to such changes, or found new contexts in which to thrive.

St. Martin's Day as a folk festival in Ireland, and the cult of St. Martin as an expression of popular or folk religion, can really only be fully understood by examining source material from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as earlier accounts are either not very illustrative, or simply do not exist. The results of collecting by the Irish Folklore Commission depict a popular feast-day, observed in many parts of Ireland during this period. The killing of animals, and the spilling of their blood, was a central theme. It formed the basis of a sacrificial act, performed out of devotion to the saint, and ensured protection from natural and supernatural harm. People killed whatever they could afford, according to their means, and men and women often had proscribed roles in this killing, according to economic and social norms of the time.

Boundaries, liminality and the establishment of safe space are dominant features of the rituals of the feast, and follow well-established themes and patterns in human culture. On the threshold of winter, people stood at their doors and confronted the oncoming dangers and insecurities. Their actions were guided by a sense of tradition and piety, undoubtedly offering psychological and emotional reassurance at what was otherwise a time of potential insecurity and danger. Although people may have felt fear and trepidation, their actions allowed them to seize some control over their circumstances, and offer them a degree of agency. St. Martin's Day undoubtedly inherited much of its role as a threshold festival from the earlier festival of Samhain, although it is decidedly Christian in its manifestation as a folk religious celebration. The connection between Martinmas and Samhain is complicated by a number of factors, and involves a range of disparate elements, including ethnic changes amongst the ruling classes in the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, and calendar changes and religious considerations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is undoubtedly a complicated issue, and further work may remain to be done in this area to more thoroughly investigate the relationship between the two festivals in its entirety.

The legends and folktales associated with the feast appear to be manifestations of many of the themes and concerns emanating from its ritual and religious aspects. Generosity and charity are of paramount importance, where people were expected to make adequate offerings, and in many instances were expected to share the resultant fruits with the needy, or with family members. This is demonstrated by narratives which both reward those who are generous, and punish the miserly. Piety and compliance to tradition are also central ideas, where disobedience of popular custom is condemned and warned

against, again with stories of severe punishment. Both aspects should be seen against the broader background of popular Irish religious culture, where piety and charity highly were valued and promoted, particularly in a post-famine context. Belief and legend within the cult of St. Martin can be seen to exist in a symbiotic relationship, each mutually reinforcing the other, giving rise to occasionally elaborate narratives and folk beliefs which, despite contradicting historical and hagiographical records, were widely held.

As well as taking positive action and engaging with the rituals of the feast, people could also observe by abstaining from certain actions. Taboo and prohibition formed an important part of the day, most likely originating in a sense of reverence and piety at this particular time, although other factors may also motivate such proscriptions. Work of many kinds, including turning wheels and fishing, was considered inappropriate, and once again beliefs, legends and folktales intersect in a way where each supports the other. Narratives of warning, disaster, reward and punishment abound in the tradition. The folktale material concerning St. Martin and Jesus and Mary in particular amply demonstrates the prevalence of variation within folklore, where trying to separate elements, or searching for an original form of a story is impossible. They exist in such a convoluted set of overlapping motifs that any attempt at identifying a stable or authoritative form would be pointless. The same may be said of the other Martinmas narratives. Of value, however, are the emergent themes of piety, obedience and humility emerging from the stories, which accord well with the religious and cultural environment in which they were recounted.

The process of terminal decline of the feast as a popular celebration can be witnessed in many of the archival records from the twentieth century. This had already been the case in other parts of western Europe, including France, England and western Germany since the post-medieval period. A range of factors may be seen to be at work in this process in Ireland, although the decline was slower in some places than in others. Some elements allowed for the cult to hold on a bit longer, including the popularity of the saint as a patron of horses in an area where these animals enjoyed a comparatively late popularity, or the presence of a holy well, and its attendant rituals and narratives, in a given place. It didn't prove enough to stop the eventual eroding of relevance, however, and without an adequate environment for the popular beliefs, customs and stories, they could no longer survive as a living tradition. The cult of the saint is, of course, still a part of the liturgy of Roman Catholic and some Protestant churches. Incidents from the *Vita Martini* may form part of readings or homilies, read from the altar on St. Martin's Day, but this is not the same as the religious legends or oral tales associated with the

folk version of the saint. In a sense, it seems that the veneration of St. Martin in Ireland has come full circle. What once began as a solemn church-based celebration, and later developed into a dramatically different folk custom, has reverted to its roots, albeit in a much diminished form. It appears that almost all of the customs, beliefs and practices concerning St. Martin's Day in Ireland, including ritual sacrifices, prohibitions on certain kinds of work, and the oral narratives that reinforced belief and obedience to custom, are destined to fade away from folk memory.

Abbreviations

- NFC National Folklore Collection – Main Manuscript Collection
 NFCS National Folklore Collection – Schools’ Manuscript Collection

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