

FISHING, FISHING BOATS AND TRADITIONAL LORE  
BASED ON MARITIME MEMORATES COLLECTED IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND  
20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES IN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

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**0. Introduction**

The focus of this paper is on matters relating to fishing, fishermen and their boats, in Ireland, especially on the Gaelic-speaking western seaboard, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, during the period under consideration.<sup>1</sup> Most of the narrators and some of the collectors themselves were fishermen, and the close bond and shared beliefs and taboos between informant and collector serves to emphasise the personal nature of the accounts. The information gained from these stories is supplemented here by works of other writers and scholars on Irish vernacular boats and on the practice of fishing and the legends, taboos and other matters associated with it.<sup>2</sup>

What we have been collecting are called memorates, a term coined by the Swedish folklorist and ethnologist C. W. von Sydow (1934), who defined them as short loose accounts in the first person of a personal experience or encounter with the supranatural, normally centring around one main theme. In addition to the first-hand accounts, there are also those which are at a further remove from the experiencer-narrator which have been told to the narrator by the person who has had the experience, often a family member or a close relative; or have been told to the narrator by some named person in the community or outside the community other than a family member. Others are more general still, being based on what

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1. This paper is based on a research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of Great Britain and Northern Ireland about stories of the sea which were collected in Ireland and Scotland from members of coastal communities, such as fishermen, beachcombers and other local people, between the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 2000s, from 1847 until 2002. The stories are mostly in Irish and Scottish Gaelic, with some also in English. The project was carried out by Dr Maxim Fomin as Principal Investigator and myself as Co-Investigator, in collaboration with Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, University College, Dublin, where the Irish National Folklore Collection is housed, and Dr. John Shaw, Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, which has the Scottish collections. Our Research Assistants were Séamas Mac Floinn and Dr. Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh. We have examined in previous works the parameters and content of the collection, to which the reader is duly referred. See, for example, Fomin and Mac Mathúna 2015, 2016. I am grateful to Dr Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Director, National Folklore Collection, for granting his permission to use photographs of the NFC's Photographic Collection.

2. See studies such as Mac Cárthaigh 2008, Ó hEochaidh 1965, Ó Súilleabháin 1942.

people say or have said about such experiences. The types other than the first-hand personal memorates are often categorised as fabulates or local legends.

Hitherto, we have assembled up to 300 stories, from published sources, from MSS in Dublin and Edinburgh, and some 30 sound recordings in Irish and Scottish Gaelic.<sup>3</sup> The stories narrated in the corpus developed out of a livelihood devoted to fishing, in particular the lives of small fishermen along the Atlantic coasts of Ireland and Scotland. These men and their families often depended on fishing to eke out a living. They were either full-time fishermen or worked part-time or on a seasonal basis, their fishing being complemented by small farming or working in fish factories. They possessed a remarkable cultural and traditional memory of coastal life and its waters—knowledge of boats and boat building, the habitats of different kinds of fish and when and how they were to be found and caught, the names and locations of important landmarks on land and at sea, dangers and hazards at sea, stories of shipwrecks, drownings, superstitions and taboos, and experiences with the supernatural. This rich knowledge of the ecosystem of the coastal environment was encoded primarily in the Irish and Scottish Gaelic languages which were spoken on the islands and along the western seaboard. The languages were, and still remain in some areas, a treasure trove containing stories, songs, proverbs, words and phrases connected with this marine life and environment and their sustainability.

During the period under investigation, fundamental changes occurred in the fishing industry which affected greatly the lives of fishermen, their families and communities. Many of these changes are reflected in this collection of memorates which tell of close encounters with the supernatural, offering a fascinating insight into the beliefs and aspirations of the communities from which they emanate and telling of a constant struggle with the unpredictability and precariousness of this harsh but entrancing coastal livelihood. Although some coastal communities were spared the worst of famine conditions thanks to the availability of fish, there were places on the west coast of Ireland in the time of the famine in the 1840s where many people died despite the fact that the sea around them had an abundance of fish.<sup>4</sup> This happened for a number of reasons—a lack of suitable boats and equipment, monetary problems in purchasing these due to lack of funds and the inflated

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3. Maxim Fomin and Séamus Mac Mathúna, *Stories of the Sea—A Typological Study of Maritime Memorates in Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic Folklore* Project Collection, 2010–. Hereinafter stories cited from this collection will be preceded by the abbreviation 'MM', followed by 'I' for Ireland and a running number for each item; they are found at [www.arts.ulster.ac.uk/storiesofthesea](http://www.arts.ulster.ac.uk/storiesofthesea).

4. See Ó Fatharta 2008: 73. On artisan subsistence fishing in the Dingle peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Roney 2019.

interest rates on loans from gombeen men,<sup>5</sup> difficulty in accessing markets due to poor infrastructure of roads and railways, curing stations being often at too great a distance from the fishing ports, the dangers of the Atlantic Ocean for small fishing craft and their crews and, not least, the overarching socio-political circumstances which were geared to serve the interests of the colonial power.

### 1. Seine boats, currachs/*naombógs*, yawls/*drontheims*

There was a wide range of vernacular boats throughout the country with many regional varieties. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the southwest of Ireland, the fishermen fished mainly from open rowing boats, called 'seine boats'. They used 'seine pocket' or 'purse nets' to catch the fish. Seine boats could be from 25–30 feet in length. There were up to twelve men on the oars to a boat and maybe up to five or six men in a smaller boat called *an leannán* ('the darling') alongside. The seine boats fished for pilchards until that species declined, and then mainly for mackerel and salmon.



Figure 1. Seine boat

In the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the currach (fig. 2), also called *naombóg* 'little holy one' in Munster) replaced the seine boat (fig. 1) for the most part as the main fishing vessel in west Kerry and in the Rosses and further along the north-west of Donegal, including Tory island, although yawl fishing boats continued to be used also. Along the west coasts of Ireland and Scotland, the currach was mostly used

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5 A 'gombeen man' originally referred to a money-lender who charged exorbitant interest rates, especially shopkeepers and merchants who exploited the poor during the Irish Famine. It comes from the Irish word *gaimbín* 'excessive interest-rate'.

for inshore and river fishing. This traditional boat of Ireland, resembling the Welsh coracle, has a wooden wicker frame which in the past was covered with animal hides, later more commonly tarred with canvas and in more recent years fibreglass. Different forms of currachs were made in different areas and ranged from the one-man paddling currach of Donegal (*curach céasla*), to two-, three- and four-man sized rowing currachs (*curach rámbha*) and *naomhógs*. Tim Severin's Brendan Voyage currach was thirty six feet in length while the Donegal paddle currach is about eight feet. A three-man currach or *naomhóg* was the norm in most areas for net fishing while four men were required for the longlines. Most kinds of fish could be caught from the currach. It also functioned as a carrier vessel for cows and other animals. During the summer months two crew members often sufficed.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2. Three fishermen in a currach offshore

In 1836 carvel-built boats were common along the western seaboard but by 1900, Donegal and the north-west, had changed to a clinker-built zone.<sup>7</sup> The Greencastle yawl or 'drontheim' (fig. 3), a successor to the 'Norway' yawl, became the small fishing vessel used predominantly in the north of the country from Co. Antrim to Inishowen in the north and as far as Sligo in the west. It was also used by Scottish fishermen, especially on the Inner Hebrides close to the Irish coast. The smaller clinker-built open work-boat, the punt, was also used throughout Donegal for inshore fishing with lines and pots, for herring and salmon fishing with drifts, and

6. On currach types in different parts of Ireland, see Mac Cárthaigh 2008: 417–578 ('Irish Skin Boats').

7 A carvel-built boat is one in which the hull planks are laid edge to edge and fastened to the frame, thus forming a smooth surface; a clinker-built boat is one in which the edges of the hull planks overlap each other.

for carrying seaweed and people to and from the islands. The punts were between 17 feet and 21 feet in length and were mostly rowed.<sup>8</sup> The drontheim is a clinker-built boat with wooden planks overlapping one another; it is normally between 23 feet to 28 feet in length and can be both rowed and sailed. It is based on a Norwegian design and its name derives from Trondheim in Norway. It was used like other yawls for both inshore and offshore fishing to a lesser degree.



Figure 3. Greencastle yawl (Drontheim)

The drontheims and larger currachs/*naombhógs* could fish for both pelagic fish, such as wrasse (*balláin/ballachai*), herring (*scadáin*), salmon (*bradáin*), pollack (*glasáin/mangaigh*), and demersal fish, such as cod (*trosc*), haddock (*cadóg/hadóg*), mackerel (*maicréal/ronnach/murlas*), but the boats were too small for trawling, and in bad weather the local fishermen were restricted to fishing close to the shore for whatever fish were available. Although local *naombhóg* fishermen were able to exploit to some extent the large shoals of autumn mackerel which appeared off the south and west coasts, generally speaking these fishermen could not compete with the larger boats and trawlers fishing the waters off the Irish coast, many of which were foreign-owned. For example, in 1891, large shoals of herring appeared off the Donegal coast but the local fishermen did not have the boats, equipment or processing facilities to exploit this excellent opportunity to improve their economic circumstances.

The spring mackerel fishery was essentially an offshore fishing activity which was unsuitable for smaller open boats. It was carried out thirty or so miles offshore

8. See Mac Cárthaigh 2008: 112–118 ('The Donegal Punt').

and required large strong seaworthy fully-decked sailing vessels which Isle of Man, Cornish and Scottish fishermen had, namely ‘nickeys’ (40–60 feet), and later the smaller ‘nobbys’ (30–40 feet) and ‘Zulus’ (ca. 50 feet).<sup>9</sup>

The large trawlers, and the interaction of the local fishermen with them, figure in a number of our stories. A memorate from Ardmore, Waterford, collected between 1900–1936, contains interesting information on the consequences not only of breaking the taboo of fishing on the Sabbath but also on the prevalence of trawlers in the area of Ardmore Head in the years before the Second World War. The narrator tells that he and the crew of their small rowing boat had gone out to the Head on a Sunday night in February to moor their nets when they saw a large vessel bearing down on them. They pulled in the nets and waited inside a little sea inlet but the vessel did not come around:

Jim Drohan known as Bob said it must have been a herring drifter. In those days a lot of English and Scottish drifters came to Ardmore and stayed for days or even weeks. Occasionally they’d give a few bags of coal to the fishermen. This was the nearest point to the fishing grounds. During the months of February to May in the 1930s I often saw half a dozen of them in here. They’d do the herring fishing at night. By the time the War came they were gone completely and we only saw Dutch trawlers after that.

(MM-I/0005)

They put out their nets again but saw the hull of a big ship and had to pull them in again, thinking they would be run down by this ship. They rowed around the Head but there was no ship there. Within a week the big storm came and Fleming’s boat went down.

According to the folklore collector and former fisherman Seán Ó hEochaidh from Teelin in south-west Donegal, two kinds of wooden boats were commonly used in the area up until 1917, a larger sailing yawl which operated between south Donegal and Connacht, and a fishing boat called in Irish a *bád deiridh* (‘stern-boat’). The latter was a seven-man boat, six men on oars and a *fear stiúrtha* or ‘steersman’. It went out of use early in the last century and the drontheim and smaller punt took its place:

*Bhí dhá chineál bád á n-úsáid i dTeilionn sa tsean-am. Bhí bádaí measartha móra seoil acu a ndéanfadh siad tráchtáil leofa idir Teilionn agus Connacht—bádaí dheich dtonna nó mar sin—agus bádaí iascaireachta a dtugad siad ‘bádaí deiridh’ orthu...Seachtar d’fhoirinn a bhíodh orthu—seisear ar mhaidí rámbha agus fear stiúrthach... I dtrátha*

9. See Mac Cárthaigh 2008: 3–12 (‘Irish Vernacular Boats’), 27–39 (‘The Great Spring Mackerel Fishery’).

*thús an chéad seo stadadh de thógáil na mbádaí seo ar fad, agus chlaoidh siad leis na 'yawltai'. Bádaí cheithre rámba atá i n-úsáid go fóill thart ar an chósta uilig. Is ionann toiseach agus deireadh díofa seo...*

(Ó hEochaidh 1965: 3–4)

Two kinds of boats were in use in Teelin in the old days. They had quite large sailing boats which they used for trading purposes between Teelin and Connacht – boats of approximately ten ton – and fishing boats which they called ‘stern boats’ ... They had a crew of seven – six on oars and a steersman ... Around the beginning of the century, they stopped building these boats entirely, and stuck to the ‘yawls’. Boats with four oars are still in use all along the coast. The bow and stern are the same in these.

Although fishing had a modicum of success in sustaining local fishermen and communities, it was under-resourced, underdeveloped and unsuccessful as an industry in these poor coastal areas until the establishment of the Congested Districts Board in 1891. The aim of the Board, set up by A.J. Balfour, the Chief Secretary to Ireland, was to alleviate poverty in these deprived western districts by means of public works such as assisting the fishing industry by building piers in local ports and improving infrastructure by building roads and railways to facilitate access to markets. To improve matters, the Board aimed to cut out the gombeen middlemen by purchasing the fish directly from the fishermen at a reasonable price and provided them with loans to buy large motor boats over a period of time, sail boats such as the ‘Zulus’ (or *Scotai* in Donegal), steam drifters, *curachai/naomhógai*, and nets. They improved local infrastructure, especially harbours and piers, and set up curing and processing stations in or close to the fishing villages. In this way, the fishing industry, already centrally important in the lives of coastal communities, became the foundation of social and economic life in these areas.

## 2. Galway hookers

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the farmer-fishermen of West Galway fished from currachs, which could be carried and did not need a harbour or pier. With the development of some piers, they could upgrade to one of the smaller hookers. However, at that time, these boats were too expensive for most of them to buy. The advent of the Congested Districts Board in 1891 transformed sea fishing and a modern successful spring herring-mackerel industry was established on the Aran islands in 1892. In the years before World War I the industry flourished and brought prosperity to the islands and parts of west Galway. However, after the war, the British fleet and other foreign trawlers returned, leading to a deterioration in the circumstances of the local fishermen. The Board, however, had provided loans to enable fishermen

to upgrade to a sailing hooker.<sup>10</sup> West Galway, renowned for its *bádóirí* ('boatmen') and boat songs in Irish, boasted four kinds of beautiful and useful sailing hookers, ranging from the *bád mór*, which was 35–44 feet, the *leathbhád* (28–35 feet), the *gleoiteog* (20–28 feet), and the *púcán* (23–28 feet, fig. 4). The *bád mór* was used for larger cargoes, such as turf and animals, or general cargo, including seaweed, and for commercial fishing and coastal trading; the *leathbhád* also carried such cargo, but often smaller loads, which was also true of the *gleoiteog*, which was an all-round smaller boat. Smaller still, the *púcán* was not a carrier boat but engaged in inshore fishing and local transport. The *púcán* was, and is still a highly-prized boat which, like the *gleoiteog*, also raced in regattas along the Galway coast. The heavy, open, carvel-built *bád iomartha* ('rowing boat') of Conamara is similar in size to the *púcán* and *gleoiteog*.<sup>11</sup> Here is the first verse of a famous Conamara *sean-nós* song on the shapeliness and capabilities of *púcán Mhicil Pháidín*, built by the finest of craftsmen:

*'S a chiall le Dia nár bhredá í, sí púcán Mhicil Pháidín  
An lá ar fhág sí crumpán Charna is é ina ghála mhór.  
Dheamhan bhréig atá mé ag rá libh ach an fharraige bhí sí a cháthadh  
Go dtiteadh sé 'na bháisteach ar dhá thaobh an chuain.*

*Gabháil síos ag Droim an Mhaoilín di bhí púcán Bhaibín roimpi ann  
Bhí sí réitithe amach ag líonta 's í amhlaidh le haghaidh seoil  
Séard dúirt Mister Casey as Maoinis, 'Tá sí déanta ó thogha na saortha,  
Is níl aon bhád ar an line seo a bhuailfeas í chun seoil'.*

God knows she was a lovely sight, Micil Pháidín's *púcán*,  
When she set out from the inlet at Carna with a gale blowing.  
I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that the sea was a froth of spume,  
And then it started raining on both sides of the bay.

As she reached Droim an Mhaoilín, Baibín's boat was ahead of her —  
All her lines were ready and she was all decked out for sailing.  
But Mr. Casey from Myrnish said, 'She was made by the best of shipwrights,  
And there is no boat in this regatta that will beat her under sail'.<sup>12</sup>

10. For the fishing industry in west Galway in the period 1923–1932, see Ó Fatharta, 2008.

11. See Mac Cárthaigh 2008: 3–12 ('Irish Vernacular Boats').

12. Heaney 2021. Boat songs were sung in all coastal Gaeltacht areas, those from the Galway Gaeltacht being particularly praiseworthy. For some songs from Iorras Aithneach about boats by Seán Ó Guairim and Nuala Ní Uaithnín, see Uí Ógáin 1999 and Cheoinín 1993.

### 3. Crew members

The choice of crew members was particularly important not only in the seine boats but in other types of boats as well, and our stories often speak of the character and dexterity of crew members and how they depended on one another in treacherous waters and conditions and in times of danger in general. The accounts refer to the great strength, judgement and trustworthiness of crew members as both fishermen and seamen:

*Ba iascaire mór m'athair mór. Donnchadh Ó Duibhir ab ainm dó, agus le cois a bheith ina fhear maith farraige, bhí snámh iontach aige. Fear láidir i gceart a bhí ann fosta.*

My grandfather, Donnchadh Ó Duibhir, was a great fisherman, and as well as being a good seaman, he was a wonderful swimmer. He was a very strong man, too.

(Fomin and Mac Mathúna 2016: 5-6)



Figure 4. Galway *púcán*

### 4. Line Fishing and Nets

The Teelin fishermen caught most of their fish with two kinds of lines, ‘hand lines’ (called *dorgaí láimhe* in Irish), and ‘long lines’ (*spileaid*), which were fitted with snoods (*snúdaí*) and hooks (*duáin*).<sup>13</sup> The making and preparation of the long

<sup>13</sup> Snoods are sections of fishing lines which end in a hook; spillets are long fishing lines with many hooks.

lines required very precise intricate knowledge to ensure that one did not hook the snoods and thus ruin the line. Smaller spilletts were also used for certain fish which could not be caught with the longer variety. Women were particularly accomplished at preparing and mending spilletts. The fishermen caught cod (*troisc*), ling (*langat*), black and white pollack (*glasáin/deargáin/mangaigh*) and gurnard/gurnet (*cnúdáin*) with the *dorgaí*; haddock (*hadógaí/cadógaí*), sea-trout/white trout (*feannógáil/fionnógáí*) and all other kinds of fish with the former. Seán Ó hEochaidh (1965: 8) says that most fish which were in demand in his area were caught with these two lines:

*Iascaireacht dorgaí a ba mhó a bhíodh ag gabháil sa tsean-am, idir dhorgaí láimhe agus spilleaid. Ba ar an dá ghléas sin a ba mhó a gheibhthí an cineál éisc a ba mhó a raibh ra-chairt air, dá olcas mar bhí an margadh...*

It was mostly line-fishing which was practised in earlier times, both hand-lines and spilletts. Most of the fish species which were in demand, no matter how poor the market, were generally caught with these two lines.

Various nets were used on boats of different types and sizes to catch certain species and shoals of fish, such as herring, mackerel and salmon — casting nets (*eangacha/líonta*), drift nets (*saighní/sruthlíonta*), purse nets (*eangacha sparáin*) etc.



Figure 5. Net-mending

### 5. Trustworthy witness statements, cautionary tales and taboos

Memorates and belief legends transmit information about the past in order to explain events, give lessons and entertain. They have the function of illustrating, convincing, warning and cautioning, and in our case they provide trustworthy eyewitness evidence of experiences at sea which reflect the cultural knowledge and traditional beliefs of the communities from which they emanate. Take, for example, the following short warning or cautionary tale which contains important information about local landmarks together with a supranormal element, namely, the emission from an unknown and unseen source of a *fhead bheag chaol* ('a short sharp whistle') warning the fishermen that they were heading towards a dangerous rocky area where the boat could easily go aground. The narrator tells that the crew, consisting of himself, who was also acting as steersman, and four men were out fishing for herring one such night. When they pulled in the net, the rudder became dislodged and they lost control of the steering. The narrator-steersman decided to return to shore immediately as they were a good bit out and it was very dark:

*Bhíomair a' ruith leis a' dtalamh chún ár gcuas féinig aidhmsiú, agus, ambasa, ba mhó ba mhór liom an méid rámhúochta a bhí déant' aca. 'Stadaig, a bhuachaillí! Tá an cuas diant' againn!', arsa mise. 'Níl,' aduairt duin' aca, 'nílimis có fada leis i n-aó'chor fós!' Lena linn [sin], do chuala an fheadín chaol ar a' dtaobh thiar díom. 'A bhuachaillí,' aduartsa, 'ar chualabhair an fhead?' 'Níor chualamair!' aduaradar. 'Úmpuigi a' bád siar arís dom' aduartsa. D'úmpuiodar, agus do bhuineadar straca siar aiste ansan tamall. 'Tá an ceart agatsa, a Sheáin,' a duairt duin' osna fir. 'Sin í An Fhail Bhán, agus tá an cuas ar a' dtaobh thiar di!' B'fhíor dó. Bhíomair a' dul isteach ar droh-thalamh mara raibh builigi a's cloha, agus mura mbeadh gur stadamair bhíomair ruite isteach i ndroh-áit lé duiruiheadas na huihe (sic). An fhead bheag chaol fé ndeara dhúinn fille.*

We were approaching the shore towards our own cove, and by God, the amount of rowing they had done! 'Stop boys! We have reached the cove!', said I. 'We haven't,' said one of them, 'we're nowhere near it yet!' During that time I heard a short sharp whistle behind me. 'Boys,' I said, 'did you hear that whistle?' 'No!', they said. 'Move the boat backwards for me!', I said. They did and they hauled it quickly back. 'You are right, Seán,' said one of the men. 'That is the Faill Bhán and the cove is on the other side of it!' He was right. We were heading into a bad stretch of coast and we would have been up on the rocks and only that we stopped we would have been going into a bad stretch in the darkness of the night. It was the short sharp whistle that told us of this.

(Ó Duilearga 1961: 120)

Encounters at sea with the supranatural were very often a portent of impending doom and disaster and these kinds of stories functioned partly as powerful warning tales — that traditional beliefs and superstitions regarding the avoidance of certain people, animals, places and actions were to be adhered to if safety at sea was to be maintained. For example, there were times and occasions when fishing was to be avoided, such as on Sundays, Whitsun and St Martin’s Day:

On St. Martin’s Day (*del.* ‘Night’) any of the Wexford fishermen will never go fishing. Long ago on St. Martin’s Night a lot of fishermen were drowned at a place called Ballygerry near Rosslare Pier. When they were about to go out a strange man on a horse came up to them and warned them not to go out but they took no notice of the warning. When they got out few miles a terrible storm arose and they were all lost.

(MM-I/0014)

The stories also tell that certain words and animals should not be mentioned when at sea, such as rabbits, hares, foxes, rats and pigs; in some areas this extended to particular species of fish which should not be mentioned by their own name, such as the salmon. This was true of both Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. Speaking about the fishermen of Port nan Giùran, Isle of Lewis, Màiread NicIomhair relates that:

*Eadhon air bhàrr nan tonn fhèin cha robh iad saor o chràbhachd oir bha cuid de dhìfhacail ann nach fhaodadh a bhith air an labhairt aig muir, mar eisimpleir am facal “bradan”.*

Even on the tops of the waves they were not free from taboos, because there were some words that could not be said at sea, for example, the word “*bradan*” (‘salmon’).

(Anon. 1998: 24–25)

Amongst the taboos mentioned in both countries, it was an ill omen to meet red-haired people, especially red-haired women, before going to sea. Clergy were likewise to be avoided. Religious artefacts, on the other hand, such as holy water and medals, were often kept in boats to bring good luck and our memorates record many prayers, such as *Márthain Phádraig*, being said in boats by fishermen while at sea as protection against danger. Such prayers were like *loricae*—breastplates against evil and danger. Boats were blessed by clergy before embarking on their maiden voyages or at annual blessings and Feast Days. Failure to attend Mass and take part in the ceremonies on these occasions would endanger those who went to sea.<sup>14</sup>

14. See Ó hEochaidh 1965: 8–23 (6. Pisreógaí Iascaireachta); Ní Fhloinn 2018; Ó Súilleabháin 1942: 27–28; Fomin 2020.

## 6. Conclusion

The stories in our Maritime Memorates corpus shed light on the lives of the fisher folk in the west of Ireland and Scotland during the period under investigation. The stories are categorised according to themes such as mermaids, seals and seal legends, enchanted islands and enchanted animals, sea creatures and sea monsters, and gales and storms. They contain much valuable information about traditional beliefs, superstitions and fishing practises.

Fishing at sea, for example, was almost exclusively a male occupation although women did play a major role in the curing and processing of the fish, helping with the nets, and also often with book-keeping. There had been successful curing stations in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in some parts of the country in which women of different ages, and boys, participated. But there were not enough of them, nor were a sufficient number strategically located. The Congested Districts Board set up many new stations which helped to greatly improve the industry and the lives of the people involved in it. This lasted until the demise of the Board in 1923 when matters began to deteriorate again.

By the time the period of our coverage ended at the beginning of the 2000s, the Irish inshore fleet consisted of 1198 registered boats and 900 small unregistered vessels. There had been major advances in technology and decided developments in funding and furthering the industry in centres such as Killybegs in southwest Donegal. These centres could boast of large boats and fleets capable of engaging in demersal fishing for mackerel, herring and shellfish, and of competing with foreign fleets. The coastal fishermen who feature in our stories, however, fished mainly the inshore waters within a 6-mile or 12-mile zone although, as we have seen, some also fished in the larger boats further out at sea. With regard to lobster fishing (*iascaireacht gliomach*) and fore-shore gathering (*cnuasach trá*) for shellfish and seaweed, these were also practised by our coastal fishermen and there is much interesting information about them in the corpus, such as the best times and locations to find them and the names, terminology and superstitions associated with them. We hope to say something more about this in future talks and publications.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Versions of the present paper were given (in Irish) at the conference 'ADUAIDH: Comhdháil Ultach i Leath Mogha', University College, Cork, 23–24 November 2018, and (in English) at the 'Fabled Coast' Conference, University of Chichester, 27 April 2019. I am grateful to all who attended the lecture and made valuable comments.

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### Web resource

**MM—Fomin, M., and Mac Mathúna, S., 2010–, *Stories of the Sea—A Typological Study of Maritime Memorates in Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic Folklore* Project Collection. [<http://arts.ulster.ac.uk/storiesofthesea>; accessed 5.07.2021].**

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