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Northumbrian Whithorn and the Making of St Ninian

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Aelred of Rievaulx, in composing his twelfth-century *Vita Sancti Niniani*,[1] set as his goal the desire to expand upon the 'trustworthy' but 'brief' testimony' of Bede, who had written in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* that the 'southern' Picts were Christianised by someone whose name may, arguably, be rendered as *Nyniau*:

> a most reverent bishop and holy man of the nation of the Britons, who had been regularly instructed at Rome in the faith and mystery of the truth, and whose episcopal see, distinguished by the name and by the church of St Martin (where he himself, together with many other saints, rests in the body), the English nation has just now begun to govern. The place, which belongs to the kingdom of the Bernicians, is called in the vernacular 'white house', because he there built a church of stone in a manner to which the Britons were not accustomed.[2]

Aelred based his fleshing out of this description of *Nyniau*, as he tells us, upon an old text written by someone with 'no skill in elegant and artistic speech'—a 'book of his life and miracles (*liber de vita et miraculis eius*) written in barbarous style' within which 'the life of most holy *Ninianus*, commended by the saintliness of his character and

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[1] Aelred, *Vita Sancti Niniani*, in A. P. Forbes, ed., *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern compiled in the twelfth century* (Edinburgh 1874) 137-57; henceforth *VN* with chapter. Forbes also translated the text, but for a more recent translation by Winifred MacQueen, see J. MacQueen, *St Nynia* (Edinburgh 1990) 102-24. Professor MacQueen, *ibid.*, 4, has raised some doubt Aelred's authorship of this work, but the fact that, of our two manuscripts, one (BL Cott. Tib. D iii) identifies Aelred as the author in its rubric, while the other (Bodl. Laud Misc. 668) contains other works by Aelred, suggests that the traditional attribution is reliable.

[2] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, lib. iii, cap. 4, in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, edd. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford 1991); henceforth *HE* with book and chapter. For Aelred's quotation and discussion of this passage, see *VN* preface. The saint's name is rendered by Bede as *Nynia* (ablative); *Nyniau* is the nominative form preferred by the *Miracula* poet (K. Strecker, ed., 'Miracula Nynie Episcopi' in *Monumenta Germanica Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* IV (Berlin 1923) 943-61, caps. 6, 13; henceforth *MN* with chapter). As the latter form offers a ready explanation of the eventual (mis)rendering of the name as *Ninianus*, I shall use *Nyniau* throughout this article in reference to the subject of the eighth-century *liber de vita et miraculis* used by Aelred.

his famous miracles, was obscured by its barbaric language, and the less pleasure it gave to the reader, the less edification he received'.[3] Strecker long ago demonstrated that the late eighth-century hagiographic poem *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*,[4] though very similar in basic content, does not seem to have been the contemptible text used by Aelred, arguing instead that this lost *liber de vita et miraculis* (henceforth *LVM*) served as the common source for both surviving works and was therefore composed before the late eighth century.[5] Levison subsequently took issue with Strecker's suggestion that Bede too had access to *LVM*, arguing instead that the text was based on Bede's testimony regarding *Nyniau*,[6] but Chadwick and MacQueen have since put forward convincing cases for believing that, while Bede seems not to have seen the text of *LVM*, he probably based his description of *Nyniau* on some 'abstract' of the text that was to hand.[7] The balance of probability between these points of view has now swung decisively in the direction of the latter scenario, since Clancy has shown convincingly that Bede must have made use of some written text in which the scribal error which transformed the local saint of Whithorn from the historical *Uinniau to *Nyniau* had already taken place.[8] We may be quite confident then, that Bede was given an 'abstract' of *LVM* at some point before his *Historia Ecclesiastica* was completed, and that the text itself, upon which both *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani* would ultimately be based, must therefore have been composed before about 730.

The subject of the present study is not the date of *LVM* (although we shall duly consider this matter), but rather its nature and provenance, which by comparison have received little direct attention from scholars. Levison noted that most of the personal names recorded in *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani* are English and that one miracle story provided an explanation for an English place-name (*farres last*, 'bull's

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[3] Aelred, *VN* prologue & preface.

[4] See fn. 2 above. For a recent treatment and condemnation of this poem as a 'basic', 'technically deficient', 'formulaic', 'highly repetitive' and 'execrable' work composed either by 'one incompetent poet' or by 'a committee of illiterates', see A. Orchard, 'Wish you were here: Alcuin's courtly poetry and the boys back home', in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, edd. S. Rees Jones, R. Marks and A. J. Minnis (York 2000) 21-43, at 27-34.

[5] K. Strecker, 'Zu den Quellen für das Leben des hl. Ninian', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 43 (1920-22) 3-26.

[6] W. Levison, 'An eighth-century poem on St. Ninian', *Antiquity* 14 (1940) 280-91.

[7] N. K. Chadwick, 'St. Ninian: a preliminary study of sources', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History & Antiquarian Society*, Third Series [henceforth *TDGNHAS*] 27 (1950) 9-53, at 24-32; MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 1-11.

[8] T. O. Clancy, 'The real St Ninian', *IR* 52 (2001) 1-28.

track'), leading him to the sensible conclusion that their common source had been composed 'in the time of Northumbrian predominance in Galloway'.[9] Chadwick took this argument further, suspecting that the idea of a pilgrimage to Rome to receive instruction *regulariter* can only have been introduced into the Ninianic dossier when Whithorn 'had come under Roman ecclesiastical jurisdiction', a case which Grosjean later made more emphatically, arguing that the Roman pilgrimage 'carries the undeniable imprint of the eighth century, and not that of any previous age'.[10] With these factors in mind, Chadwick proposed that *LVM* was a text composed at Whithorn 'at the suggestion of bishop Pecthelm', whose appointment to that episcopal seat around 730 had been the subject of Bede's reference to the Bernician kingdom having very recently begun to govern *Nyniau*'s former see, and was intended 'to inculcate a belief in the orthodoxy of the original founder' of this new see 'as a part of the policy of the reformed Roman Church in Northumbria'.[11] This model has now, by and large, been reaffirmed by Clancy, who has taken it further by suggesting that, in addition to the dubious historicity of *Nyniau*'s pilgrimage to Rome, the ideas of a Ninianic mission to the southern Picts and the saint's status as both a bishop and a monk may be suspected as having been propaganda fashioned in the interests of furthering a particular ecclesiastical ideal shared by Pecthelm and Bede, furthering universalist orthodoxy, and arousing 'interest in reclaiming Abercorn's earlier jurisdiction' over the southern Picts.[12]

      Such thinking is, however, incompatible with Professor MacQueen's (rather baseless) desire to believe that *LVM* was not an original text composed at Bernician Whithorn, but rather one copied from 'an earlier British-Latin life' (dated on unclear grounds to the period 550-650). In defence of this belief, he has noted the important point that all of the English personal names would appear to have been located in the concluding section of *LVM* describing a series of posthumous miracles, and has proposed that this section formed 'an appendix, as it were, of miracles performed at the tomb' that, between the time of Pecthelm's appointment and the composition of *Miracula*, was added to an earlier and shorter version of *LVM*,[13] proving 'no more than that such miracles were held to have been performed during the

[9] Levison, 'Eighth-century poem', 289.

[10] Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 33; P. Grosjean, 'Les Pictes apostats dans l'épitre de S. Patrice', *Analecta Bollandiana* 76 (1958) 354-78, at 361.

[11] Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 35-36.

[12] Clancy, 'St Ninian', 6-7.

[13] The relevant sections are *MN* §§10-14 and *VN* §§12-15.

period of the Anglo-Saxon bishopric'. It has been further necessary for
Professor MacQueen to explain away the fact that one of the miracle
stories discusses the coining of an English place-name by proposing
that Aelred worked from an English translation of *LVM* rather than
from a Latin text (hence his contempt for this source), and so that in the
case of *farres last* 'we are here dealing with an ultimately Celtic place-
name, whose origin was explained [in *LVM*] in Latin, which was
afterwards translated into Old English, in which disguise it was
transcribed into the final Latin text [*Vita Niniani*]'.[14] The likelihood of
this latter scenario had, in fact, been undermined by Professor Jackson
even before Professor MacQueen first put it forward, since, as the
former argued convincingly in the case of Jocelin and his condemnation
of the quality of his source for *Vita Kentegerni*, such criticism has all
the appearance of 'a natural device intended to justify the production of
a new *Life*' and so cannot be taken as evidence that these earlier texts
were written in a vernacular language like English, Gaelic or British.[15]
Indeed, Strecker, by way of close textual scrutiny, had previously made
this same point with regard to the language of *LVM*,[16] leaving us in
little doubt that this text was composed in Latin and came down to
Aelred as such, and that Professor MacQueen has been led
astray—perhaps somewhat wilfully—by the writer of the rubric of the
British Library BL Cott. Tib. D iii manuscript of *Vita Niniani*, who was
under the impression that the text was 'translated from English into
Latin by Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx'.[17] Moreover, his interpretation of
the series of posthumous miracles at the end of *Miracula* and *Vita
Niniani* as having been contained in an 'appendix' of such miracles
tacked onto an earlier recension of *LVM* after 730 would seem to rest
upon the assumption that Whithorn cannot have been staffed with any
Anglo-Saxon clerics, and cannot have attracted Anglo-Saxon pilgrims,
until after it had become a Northumbrian episcopal seat. It is unclear
when Galloway became subject to the Bernician kings, but, as Hill has
pointed out, it is most likely to have happened sometime during the
reigns of either Oswig (642-71) or his son Ecgfrith (671-85),[18] and
there is every reason to suspect therefore that Anglo-Saxons had begun
availing themselves of the services of (and taking up clerical positions

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[14] For Prof. MacQueen's model see MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 4-5.
[15] K. H. Jackson, 'The sources for the Life of St Kentigern', in *Studies in the Early
British Church*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge 1958) 273-357, at 276-77.
[16] Strecker, 'Zu den Quellen', 4-17; see also Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 20.
[17] MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 5.
[18] P. Hill *et al.*, *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984-91*
(Stroud 1997) 37.

in) the established churches of Galloway and the monastic church at Whithorn two, or even three, generations prior to Pecthelm's appointment. As such there is no compelling reason to suppose that a series of posthumous miracles associated with *Nyniau*'s tomb and involving Anglo-Saxon witnesses cannot have been included in the earlier version of *LVM* consulted by Bede's informant. In fact, the very idea of an 'appendix' is undermined by the sense of continuity created by the appearance of English place- and personal names in both putative parts of the text, and by *Miracula*'s summary, having described the saint's death, of the miraculous powers demonstrated by *Nyniau* in life, three of which five items—the restoration of sight to the blind and health to the leprous and the lame—are then shown to have been made manifest at saint's tomb after his death.[19] The weight of the evidence, then, renders Professor MacQueen's unnecessary 'appendix' quite unlikely, suggesting instead, as Levison proposed, that *LVM* was an Anglo-Saxon Latin text composed, as Strecker suspected and as Clancy has now shown, prior to Bede's use of an abstract of it around 730, and which included from the outset a section describing posthumous miracles at *Nyniau*'s tomb that involved Anglo-Saxon witnesses.

A comparison of *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani* can take us only so far in reconstructing something of *LVM*'s content, while there are formidable—seemingly insurmountable—impediments to any attempt to recover its actual text. With regard to content our two independent witnesses to *LVM* differ from each other in several key ways. First, the events of the third chapter of *Miracula* (the conversion of the Picts) do not take place in *Vita Niniani* until the sixth chapter. Professor MacQueen has convincingly argued that Aelred is more likely to have preserved the order of *LVM*, whereas *Miracula* appears to have moved the conversion of the Picts forward in the interests of bringing the miracles performed by the living and dead saint—the focus, after all, of the poem—together into one continuous section.[20] Second, one of *Miracula*'s four posthumous miracles, in which the priest Plecgils experiences the miraculous revelation of Christ as an infant at *Nyniau*'s tomb, does not appear in *Vita Niniani*, where another more prosaic miracle takes its place.[21] Here again Professor MacQueen provides us with the most likely explanation for this divergence, noting that the Plecgils story was used in 831 by Paschasius Radbertus to support a view of transubstantiation that was subsequently much maligned, and

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[19] The summary is at *MN* §9; the relevant posthumous miracles are *MN* §§10-12.
[20] MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 6-7.
[21] *MN* § 13; *VN* § 15.

suggesting that the controversial nature of this story led to its omission from *Vita Niniani*.[22] Third and finally, *Vita Niniani* contains a further three episodes that do not appear in *Miracula*, including two full chapters and one substantial addition to a chapter that is otherwise attested by the poem. This last is Aelred's infamous description of Ninian's stopover in Tours on his way home to Britain from Rome, where St Martin, perceiving what great things lay ahead for Ninian, received him warmly and, at Ninian's request, provided him with masons who might help him to build a church.[23] Chadwick rightly dismissed the historicity of this episode and reasoned that it must have been added to the Ninianic dossier by Aelred,[24] but it is equally, and perhaps more, likely that it was not an invention of his, but a Whithorn foundation legend of sorts (comparable to legends of this kind that we know were being propagated at other Scottish churches in this period) that was already present in Aelred's copy of *LVM*, having made its way into the text at some prior stage in its textual history. On the other hand, where Ninian's intentions in asking for masons of Martin are described here as having been 'to imitate both the faith of the holy Roman church and their method of building churches and establishing ecclesiastical offices', we may well suspect the hand of the reform-minded Aelred himself.

Something similar appears to have taken place in the other two examples in *Vita Niniani* of substantial additions to the text of *LVM* as attested by *Miracula*. The first of these, Aelred's ninth chapter, describes how rain would not fall upon the saint while he read from a certain psalter, except on a particular occasion when he had an 'illicit thought' (*illicita cogitatio*) while reading and was rained upon, earning him the scorn of his companion Plebia, who succeeded in guiding the saint back to pious thoughts and so restoring the 'divine umbrella' of the psalter.[25] This story is quite remarkable in its suggestion that a saint like Ninian might be open to such corruption 'at the suggestion of the devil'. In the second case, Aelred's tenth chapter, an errant pupil, fearing the saint's punishment, carries off Ninian's crosier and tries to escape to Ireland, only to get swept out into Wigtown Bay in an unfinished coracle and rescued from this predicament by the power of the staff, whereupon, having been returned to shore, he plants the staff and watches as it transforms into a tree at the base of which 'a very clear spring burst out ... both delightful to look at and sweet to drink,

[22] MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 7.
[23] *VN* § 2.
[24] Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 22.
[25] The label 'divine umbrella' has been applied to this miracle by Hill, *Whithorn*, 2.

while useful and health-giving to the sick'.[26] Professor MacQueen grudgingly accepts that these two chapters 'may simply be later accretions' to *LVM*, but prefers the idea that they were present in this text but left aside by *Miracula* because they were not directly concerned, like the poet, with the miracles the saint had performed in life and after his death.[27] One wonders, if this were the case, why the poet did not also omit the story of the conversion of the Picts, which also contains no miracles. It is notable that these two chapters share a deeply moralistic character that sets them apart—like their having been placed alongside one another between the miracles of the living saint on the one hand and of the dead saint on the other—from the other stories recounted by both Aelred and *Miracula*. The lessons to be learned in both cases fairly clearly revolve around the consequences of undisciplined thoughts and disobedience: from the *illicita cogitatio* story, the reader learns that even the most seemingly pious person is capable of sin and that the dutiful subordinate must strive to help correct such faults; from the story of the stolen crosier, the reader learns the fruitlessness of seeking to escape the consequences of disobedience and is reminded that even the most strict of punishments ought to be tempered with mercy and affection. The compatibility of these morals with the authorial lament for the shame of his fellow monks which introduces this discrete section of *Vita Niniani*, along with the strange decision to underline Ninian's fallibility for didactic reasons in the *illicita cogitatio* story, is certainly suggestive once again of interference with the text of *LVM* on Aelred's part.[28] As in the case of the Whithorn foundation legend, the situation may, however, be more complex than appears at first to be the case. Chadwick pointed out, for example, that the Welsh tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* mentions in association two legendary figures called *Nynhyaw* and *Peibyaw*, men transformed into

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[26] P. A. Wilson, 'St. Ninian: Irish Evidence Further Examined', *TDGNHAS* 46 (1969) 140-59, at 143 argued that the pupil, having been swept out to sea, was brought ashore in Ireland by the 'wind arising out of the east', but it seems to me that a return to Whithorn and its environs is implied, and that the easterly wind was envisioned as blowing across Wigtown Bay towards Whithorn.

[27] MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 8.

[28] We may also suspect, therefore, that the saint's staff featured in *VN* § 10 has also been intruded into *VN* § 8, where its use by the saint to etch 'a little furrow...encircling the cattle' to provide them with 'divine protection' has no parallel in *MN* § 8 and may presuppose an understanding of the *termonn*, which suggests that this interpolation was developed at a comparatively late date; see W. Davies, '"Protected Space" in Britain and Ireland in the Middle Ages', in *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*, ed. B. E. Crawford (St Andrews 1996) 1-19, at 9-10.

oxen for their sins,[29] suspecting that Ninian and *Vita Niniani*'s Plebia somehow reflected a different manifestation of the connection between these two traditional characters.[30] Moreover, a manuscript in Köln, now lost, seems to have credited a saint called *Finianus* with a miracle of a staff turning into a tree, while the office of St Winnin of Kilwinning in the Aberdeen Breviary speaks of a 'sacred grove' associated with this saint, where a curative spring could be found.[31] The parallels implied here between the cults of these latter two saints and that of Ninian are particularly interesting in the light of Clancy's important arguments regarding the conflation of Ninian with the historical Uinniau, whose ancient cult seems to underlie those of Finnian, Winnin and Ninian,[32] and suggest, along with *Culhwch ac Olwen*, that, although Aelred may well have taken pains to dress these two additional chapters of *Vita Niniani* in a particular way, it is less likely that he wholly invented them than it is that these stories are related in some way to the ongoing absorption of long-standing local traditions in Galloway pertaining to the earlier cult of Uinniau by the ascendant cult of Ninian in the centuries following the composition of *LVM* and *Miracula*.

In the final analysis, then, the content of *LVM* may be reconstructed in general terms as having contained none of *Vita Niniani*'s extraneous episodes, all of which may be suspected as having been incorporated into one or more later recensions of the text, and having therefore followed the structure of *Miracula*—except that the conversion of the Picts, the third chapter of the poem, appears in *LVM* to have been situated between the poem's sixth and seventh chapters. There is no particular reason to doubt that the text began, like *Vita Niniani*, with the assertion that *Nyniau* was the son of a Christian and was himself baptised, although this cannot be substantiated from *Miracula*, and the assertion that his father was a king hardly seems unlikely as an eighth-century hagiographic device.[33] More difficult to assess is *Vita Niniani*'s claim that 'while still a boy in years, but not a boy in understanding, he shrank from anything that was contrary to religion, opposed to purity, contrary to morality, not attuned to the laws

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[29] R. Bromwich and D. S. Evans, edd., *Culhwch and Olwen: An Edition and Study of the Oldest Arthurian Tale* (Cardiff 1992) ll. 598-600.
[30] Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 37-42, although Chadwick makes rather more of this connection than is made here.
[31] Wilson, 'Irish Evidence Further Examined', 141-42; I. Sperber, 'Lives of St Finnian of Movilla: British Evidence', in *Down History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* ed. L. Proudfoot (Dublin, 1997) 85-102, at 96-97.
[32] Clancy, 'St Ninian', 12-27.
[33] *VN* § 1.

of truth',[34] for we have seen that we ought to expect that Aelred, writing in the twelfth century about a 'Celtic' saint, will have been assiduous about dressing his subject up in unequivocal affirmations of his orthodoxy. This makes it difficult for us to know whether *LVM*, many centuries earlier, had itself made affirmations of a similar nature. *Vita Niniani* goes on to report that

> in his study of the holy scriptures, after he had been taught the rules of the faith by certain skilled men of his own nation after their own fashion, he realised, since he was a young man of wise understanding, from a feeling which he had himself conceived from divine inspiration from the scriptures, that their instruction was far from perfect. Then he began to be disturbed in his mind and unable to endure anything less than perfection in himself.[35]

The possibility that something of this nature can have been written by an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon hagiographer is confirmed by Stephan's *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, completed around 720,[36] in which it is said of Wilfrith that

> it came into the heart of this same young man, by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to pay a visit to the see of the apostle Peter, the chief of the apostles ... by so doing he believed that he would cleanse himself from every blot and stain and receive the joy of the divine blessing.[37]

According to *Vita Niniani*, Ninian made a similar decision about his own desire for orthodoxy:

> 'And what shall I do?' he said. 'I have sought in my own land him whom my soul loves and I have not found him. I shall arise and ... seek the truth which my soul loves ... Was Peter not told, "You are Peter, and on this rock I shall build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it"? So, there is nothing lacking in the faith of Peter, nothing obscure, nothing imperfect, nothing against which false doctrine and perverse opinions like

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[34] *VN* § 1.
[35] *VN* § 2.
[36] *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge 1927); henceforth *VW* with chapter. On the dating of this text, see W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton 1988) 281-89.
[37] *VW* § 3.

the gates of hell can prevail. And where is the faith of Peter, if
not in the see of Peter?'[38]

In contrast to this, *Miracula* says simply that *Nyniau* went to Rome 'to
seek his confirmation, his sacred ordination by the pontiff most high',[39]
and it is only Bede's account, in which *Nyniau* is said to have been
'regularly instructed in the faith and mystery of the truth', that seems to
suggest that *LVM* did, in fact, contain discussion on some level of the
faultiness of the saint's British teachers and the orthodoxy of his
training in Rome, although we need not doubt that Aelred was inclined
to embellish what he found in the text. It hardly needs pointing out that
this kind of discussion also has its eighth-century parallels in *Vita
Sancti Wilfrithi*, where Stephan asserts that Wilfrith, while in Rome,
received tuition from an archdeacon called Boniface, 'from whom he
learned the four gospels of Christ perfectly and the Easter rule of which
the British and Irish schismatics were ignorant, and many other rules of
ecclesiastical discipline'.[40] Yet *Vita Niniani* and Bede's *History* are not,
of course, independent, and this leaves room for doubt and the
possibility that Aelred took his cue from Bede and made substantial
revisions to the text of *LVM*, infusing Ninian's story with repeated
affirmations of his orthodoxy.

      There is other evidence, however, which would seem to
indicate that Aelred, whatever embellishments he may have
contributed, did not take his cue entirely from Bede. Both *Miracula* and
Vita Niniani, for example, maintain that the saint's experiences in
Rome went beyond Bede's notice of orthodox training and included
regular visits to the shrines of the apostles and an audience with the
pope,[41] neither of which are mentioned or even suggested by Bede. It is
striking that here again we find parallels in *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, where
Wilfrith is said to have made 'daily visits to the shrines of the saints to
pray' and to have been presented by Boniface to the pope. Indeed, the
overall impression created by these recurring parallels is that the author
of *LVM* had these early chapters of *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* in mind when
he composed his text and described *Nyniau*'s pilgrimage to Rome in
very similar terms. This would seem to be confirmed, moreover, by the
fact that both *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani*, again unlike Bede, maintain
that, upon his return to Britain from Rome, the saint pursued the
reformation of the errant practices of his fellow Britons, with *Miracula*

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[38] *VN* § 1.
[39] *MN* § 2.
[40] *VW* § 5.
[41] *MN* § 2; *VN* § 2.

asserting that, 'turning his steps to his own lovely land, the great master filled the ranks of the faithful on earth and swiftly taught his own folk with wise speech',[42] and *Vita Niniani* reporting that the pope commended to Ninian not just non-Christians, but also those who 'had heard the word of the gospel either from heretics or from those who had too little knowledge of God's law', and that

> When he reached his native land ... the energetic husbandman of his Lord entered upon his territory and began to pluck out what had been wrongly planted, to disperse what had been wrongly gathered together, to demolish what had been wrongly built. Then, when he had cleansed the minds of the faithful of all error, he began to lay the foundations of the pure faith in them.[43]

Such a reform movement, present in both surviving texts, hardly makes sense unless *LVM* had cast aspersions over the orthodoxy of *Nyniau*'s British teachers and had used the device of the Roman pilgrimage in much the same way that it was employed by Stephan in *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* to affirm the saint's initial dissatisfaction with what he was taught at home, to underline his commitment to orthodoxy and to act as a prelude to the reform movement initiated by the saint. We need not doubt, then, that Aelred, at some level, was following *LVM* in describing Ninian along such lines, while at the same time our suspicions must be increased that the author of *LVM* had a figure like Wilfrith in mind as something of a model for *Nyniau*. Yet it is also notable that the fourteenth-century text *De Seruo Dei Finano*, the subject of which is Winnin, the patron saint of Kilwinning in Ayrshire (and evidently another later manifestation of the cult of Uinniau), records of this saint that 'although he was well instructed in monastic rules and in the holy scriptures, he decided to travel to the apostolic see, for there he could fully drink in what he might lack of holy knowledge'.[44] We have seen indications that the extraneous elements of *Vita Niniani* as compared with the content of *Miracula* may contain points of contact between the cult of Ninian and the earlier cult of

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[42] *MN* § 3.

[43] *VN* § 2.

[44] 'De Seruo Dei Finano Episcopo et Confessore', in *Nova Legenda Anglie, as collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave, and others, and first printed, with New Lives, by Wynkyn de Worde a. d. mdxui*, ed. C. Horstman, Vol. 1 (Oxford 1901) 444-47, at 445 [henceforth *DSDF* with Horstman's page number]. Note that this text refers to Winninus as *Finanus* in the title and at other points in the text. For a translation of this text (in which the saint is called *Finnian* throughout), see Sperber, 'Lives of St Finnian', 91-94.

Uinniau from which it seems to have sprung, and with this in mind we need not prefer the idea that the author of *LVM* invented *Nyniau*'s Roman pilgrimage outright to the possibility that an instructive visit to Rome was an existing element of the dossier of Uinniau that passed into that of *Nyniau* when *LVM* was composed.

Something similar appears to have happened elsewhere in *LVM*. *De Seruo Dei Finano* describes, for example, how Winnin clashed with two kings, the first of whom, *Diarmecius*, is said to have tried unsuccessfully to avoid an encounter with the saint by barring his gates and fleeing in his chariot, after which he is stricken blind and, having given in on an unstated demand, is cured by the saint. The second king is called *Tuatalus*, and, being less repentant after refusing alms to the saint, is murdered by a servant as Winnin foretells.[45] These two stories may be compared with an episode from *LVM*, told by *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani*, in which the saint is said to have clashed with a king called *Tudvael* (*Miracula*) or *Tudwallus* (*Vita Niniani*),[46] a name which, Wilson noted, is etymologically identical to *Tuatalus*,[47] who is said (like *Diarmecius*) to have been stricken with blindness as a result of having run afoul of the saint. Furthermore, *De Seruo Dei Finano* relates how Winnin, while a pupil at a monastery in Britain, restored to life a local princess who had died after luring her own father to her bed, and convinced the risen woman to live a life of chastity and virtue.[48] This may be compared with a tradition preserved in the preface to *Parce Domine*, the hymn of St Mugint in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, in which Finnian of Moville is said, like Winnin, to have gone to Britain as a pupil and to have been approached by a British princess called *Drusticc*, who asked him to arrange for her to marry *Rioc*, one of his fellow monks. The saint, however, sends someone else to her in Rioc's form, and when Drusticc becomes pregnant she naturally but falsely names Rioc as the father.[49] The similar elements of these two stories—the saint, as a pupil in Britain, has an encounter with a British princess who is or becomes associated with sexual misconduct—suggest that here we have another point of contact between two divergent cults descended from the early cult of Uinniau. With this in mind we may consider another story from *LVM*, recounted

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[45] *DSDF* 446-47.
[46] *MN* § 5; *VN* § 4.
[47] Wilson, 'Irish Evidence Further Examined', 143; the name appears to be that which is realised in Welsh as *Tudwal* and Irish as *Tuathal*.
[48] *DSDF* 445.
[49] J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, edd., *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, Vol. 1 (Henry Bradshaw Society Vol. XIII: London 1898) 22.

in *Miracula* and *Vita Niniani*, in which a woman gives birth in suspicious circumstances (like Drusticc) and (again like Drusticc) makes a false accusation of fatherhood, in this case against one of *Nyniau*'s subordinates.[50] The miracle that takes place here—the baby speaks at the saint's insistence and names its real father—features in *Vita Primae Sanctae Brigitae* and was, according to Gregory of Tours, performed by Bricius, the successor of Martin of Tours, in his own defence.[51] It may be that the author of *LVM* derived it from either source, but there would seem to be an underlying element here which betrays some fundamental connection with the dossiers of Winnin and Finnian. On balance, it is likely that here, as we have seen in the cases of *Nyniau*'s Roman pilgrimage and his clash with *Tudvael/Tudwallus*, we have yet another point of contact between the Ninianic dossier as it was developed in *LVM* and an existing dossier of Uinniau from which the slightly different versions of this story in *Liber Hymnorum* and *De Seruo Dei Finano* also descend. All of this would seem suggestive of Professor MacQueen's hypothesis that *LVM* was based upon an 'earlier British-Latin Life', but, while we need not doubt that existing material of some kind seems the likeliest explanation for our several points of contact between the cults of Uinniau and Ninian, there seems little reason to assume the existence of anything so cohesive and developed as a 'Life'; Wilson was likely nearer to the mark when he proposed that the Ninianic dossier was assembled from a more loose and disjointed body of material containing 'scrappy and confused' information.[52]

    We may now glimpse our author at work, pulling together a handful of Gallovidian traditions about Uinniau while misreading the saint's name as *Nyniau*, and composing a text in which he made some attempt to draw parallels between his subject and St Wilfrith, following the outline of the latter's early career contained in Stephan's *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*. This final point, if true, would confirm the suspicions of the likes of Chadwick and Grosjean that *LVM* was composed after about 720 and before Bede's use of an abstract of it around 730, and there are several more indications, if largely circumstantial ones, that this was indeed the case. For example, the specific injustice perpetrated by

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[50] *MN* § 6; *VN* § 5.
[51] S. Connolly, ed., 'Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* [henceforth *JRSAI*] 119 (1989) 14-49, §39; *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks* ed. L. Thorpe (London 1974) book ii, chapter 1.
[52] P. A. Wilson, 'St. Ninian and Candida Casa: Literary Evidence from Ireland', *TDGNHAS* 41 (1964) 156-85, at 177. I would place this material in place of α, a Latin Life of Uinniau, at the top of the stemma (which largely follows the MacQueen model) formulated by Clancy, 'St Ninian', 24.

Tudwallus against *Nyniau* in *LVM*, as related in *Miracula*, appears to have been exile,[53] a state of being with which Wilfrith became all too familiar over the course of his long and controversial career. At the same time, Foley has shown that, in stark contrast with other examples of Northumbrian hagiographic writing of this period, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* (quite understandably) places the 'theme of justification amidst persecution' at the heart of its understanding of sanctity, seeing rulers as agents of evil and emphasising that suffering and persecution are a viable avenue to divine favour,[54] and this theme is present in two of *LVM*'s four miracle stories involving the living saint—the Tudwallus episode and the episode in which thieves attempt to steal the saint's cattle.[55] Finally, this latter episode may indeed be taken as highly suggestive of Wilfrithian parallels, describing how miscreants endeavoured to make off with the saint's 'flock', only to be foiled by the intervention of God, after which Ninian, in confronting them, is quoted by *Miracula* as having asked, 'Why, pray, did you wish to harm one who had not deserved it, who never sought to deceive you in even the smallest theft?' The question makes little sense in this particular context, until this entire episode is compared with the way in which Stephan describes the deposition of Wilfrith in 678:

> in the absence of our bishop he [Archbishop Theodore] consecrated, by himself, over parts of Wilfrith's own diocese, irregularly and contrary to all precedent, three bishops who had been picked up elsewhere ... When our holy bishop heard this, he went to see the king and the archbishop and asked for what reason, without any wrong-doing on his part, they, like robbers, should defraud him of the possessions with which the kings, for God's sake, had endowed him.[56]

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[53] *MN* § 5. *VN* § 4 is very vague on this point, making no mention of exile, but the likelihood that *MN* here follows *LVM* is underlined by the fact that *VN*, relating that *Tudwallus* sent messengers to the saint, is compelled to explain why this was necessary (since mention of Ninian's having gone elsewhere has been expunged). Perhaps Aelred was uncomfortable with the notion that a king might presume to exile a bishop.

[54] W. T. Foley, *Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus' Life of Bishop Wilfrid, an Early English Saint's Life* (Lampeter 1992) 36-60.

[55] *MN* § 8; *VN* § 8. The form of this miracle story may have been borrowed from §16 of Cogitosus' Life of Brigit; see S.Connolly and J.-M. Picard, 'Cogitosus: *Life of Saint Brigit*', *JRSAI* 117 (1987) 11-27, §16; this same miracle also occurs in *Vita Primae Sanctae Brigitae* at §45.

[56] *VW* § 24.

Nyniau, too, was said by *LVM* to have been absent when the thieves came to threaten his flock,[57] and it is tempting to see this entire episode as an allegory of the deposition of Wilfrith, with Ninian's flock representing Wilfrith's see (a different kind of 'flock') and the thieves representing Ecgfrith and Theodore, the men who had deprived Wilfrith of his *regnum ecclesiarum*.

        If these recurring Wilfrithian parallels are important evidence in dating the composition of *LVM* roughly to the period 720-30, they may also provide a vital clue as to the text's provenance and its purpose. It has generally been assumed that Bede's information about *Nyniau* must have come from Whithorn itself, and since 1950 scholars have been content to follow Chadwick in naming Pecthelm, the new bishop of Whithorn, as Bede's most likely informant.[58] This scenario is now, however, a very problematic one indeed, since we must assume that anyone based at Whithorn itself or in Galloway generally will have been entirely aware that Uinniau, and not '*Nyniau*', was the name of the saint whose shrine at Whithorn continued to be the object of pilgrimage. We must therefore assume, in light of Clancy's convincing thesis, that neither the author of *LVM* nor Bede's informant about its contents had any ongoing intercourse with such pilgrims or with the ecclesiastical culture of that part of Galloway, and that such local material as appears to have been used in the text had been sent to our author from Whithorn in written form—having perhaps been incautiously or hastily written—and that this allowed the misreading of the saint's name as *Nyniau* to take place.

        This suggests that *LVM* was written in the scriptorium of some other Northumbrian monastery—albeit one that must have had some connection with Whithorn—and we must suspect, given all we have seen, that in this monastery the memory of Wilfrith as preserved by Stephan's *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* was greatly honoured. Given these criteria, the monastery of Hexham, where Acca, as bishop, over the course of his episcopate 'built up a very large and most noble library, assiduously collecting histories of the passions of the martyrs as well as other ecclesiastical books', looms as the likeliest place to have produced *LVM* during the period in which it was written.[59] Until the

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[57] *MN* § 8 says the saint had removed to 'a herdsman's hut', while *VN* § 8, perhaps in reflection of later views of the dignity of a bishop, says that he removed to 'the house of a certain respectable married woman'.

[58] Chadwick, 'St. Ninian', 35-36; see also MacQueen, *St Nynia*, 11; Clancy, 'St Ninian', 23-24.

[59] *HE* v.20. M. Lapidge. 'Aediluulf and the School of York', in *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899* (London and Rio Grande OH 1996) 381-98, suggest (at 386-7), that *Miracula* was composed at York; see also Orchard, 'Wish you were here', 28-34. If so , we must

creation of the see of Whithorn, Acca had jurisdiction over the churches of Galloway, and we need hardly doubt that, as reported in the twelfth century by Richard of Hexham, this bishop was the one who 'inaugurated and prepared the see in Whithorn'.[60] In addition to this connection, Acca had been, of course, perhaps the most devoted of all the followers of Wilfrith, who on his death-bed (according to Stephan) 'bade that the monastery at Hexham should be given to the priest Acca, who after him by the grace of God was bishop',[61] and was moreover named by Stephan as one of the two men who had charged him to compose *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*.[62] Finally, Acca is, like Pecthelm, known to have contributed information to *Historia Ecclesiastica*,[63] and Bede, who dedicated several of his works to him, had such frequent contact with Acca—who was, after all, his bishop—that he could speak about stories 'often related to me by the most reverend bishop Acca' and tales he was 'accustomed' to tell. On the whole, then, it would seem that a strong case can be made for believing that *LVM* was not written at Whithorn, but rather by a monk who was either based in Hexham or at a dependent church with close connections with Hexham, while there would seem to be every likelihood that it was Acca or a member of his circle who provided Bede with his abstract of the text.

Such a conclusion must lead us inevitably to wonder what possible reason such a monk, perhaps at the urging of Acca, can have had for composing *LVM*. Some at least of the past work done on this subject remains applicable in this matter. We have seen nothing here, for example, to lead us to doubt Chadwick's proposition already discussed that the text was intended 'to inculcate a belief in the orthodoxy of the original founder' of the see of Whithorn, but it would seem important to add to this what Chadwick left implicit—that we may detect an additional intention here to establish some sense of continuity between the new Northumbrian see and that of *Nyniau* established so long before. This notion was clearly passed along to Bede, accounting for his description of Pecthelm's see as being an existing one which the Bernicians had taken over rather than as a newly created diocese. Similarly, and on a related point, it is interesting that *Vita Niniani* foreshadows the establishment of Ninian's church at

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imagine that *LVM* was transmitted to York during the course of the eighth century, on which see below.

[60] A. O. Anderson, ed., *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers A.D. 500 to 1286* (Second edition, Stroud 1991) 53.

[61] *VW* § 65. According to *VW* § 62, Wilfrith also called for Acca after having his vision of St Michael; see also *HE* v.19.

[62] *VW* § preface.

[63] *HE* iii.13; iv.14.

Whithorn by employing architectural imagery with reference to the saint's reforming efforts, stating that 'when he had cleansed the minds of the faithful of all error, he began to lay the foundations of the pure faith in them, building as a superstructure the gold of wisdom, the silver of knowledge and the stones of good works'.[64] Even if Aelred did not get the language of this passage from *LVM*, he obviously detected that this text was making a fundamental connection between *Nyniau*'s reforming agenda and the foundation of his church—a connection which disappears in *Miracula* as a result of the decision to intrude the conversion of the Picts between these two developments, and which has been overlooked as an element of Aelred's text through the influence of Bede, whose testimony has led to the idea that Whithorn was an apostolic centre—a 'cradle of Christianity'—rather than a centre of orthodox teaching. The emphasis of *LVM*, however, appears to have been upon Whithorn's importance in bringing about—indeed symbolising—ecclesiastical reform, and this may well suggest, as Chadwick supposed some time ago, that the text was intended to pave the way for the implementation in Galloway of what she called 'the policy of the reformed Roman Church'.

Such motives, although they may well have existed, were probably only part of *LVM*'s central purpose. *Nyniau*'s mission to the 'southern' Picts was the focus of Bede's interest in the saint, but, as reconstructed here, *LVM* appears to have placed no particular emphasis upon this point as compared to the matter of reform. Aelred follows Bede in assigning Ninian's evangelical activities to southern Pictavia, but *LVM* may have been much more specific here, since the relevant chapter heading in *Miracula*, which otherwise makes no mention of 'southern' Picts, refers to the Picts among whom *Nyniau* evangelised as *Naturae*.[65] Levison long ago convincingly offered *Niuduera* (emended by Bede to *Niduari*), a Pictish polity mentioned by the anonymous *Vita Cudberti*,[66] as an extremely likely emendation here,[67] and this raises the possibility that the author of *LVM*, who may otherwise have had no meaningful understanding of who these *Niduari* were, intended to show that *Nyniau* had been responsible for the Christianisation of the same group of Picts which, so many generations later, would come under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Northumbrian church and be visited for

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[64] *VN* § 2.
[65] *MN* § 3.
[66] 'The Life of St Cuthbert by an Anonymous Author', in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge 1940) book ii, chapter 4. For Bede's version of this story see *ibid.*, 'Bede's Life of St Cuthbert', chapter 11.
[67] Levision, 'Eighth-century poem', 288-89.

that reason by St Cuthberct. It need not follow from this, however, that this aspect of *LVM* was intended to arouse 'interest in reclaiming Abercorn's earlier jurisdiction' as the episcopal seat of the *prouincia Pictorum*, which seems to me unconvincing.[68] Instead, making an association between *Nyniau* and the Niduari can as easily have been intended by our author as a further step in making and emphasising connections between the life's work of the founder of Whithorn among the Britons and Picts on the one hand, and the perceived achievements among these same peoples of the Northumbrian church that had recently annexed Whithorn on the other.

       Taken together, then, *LVM*'s descriptions of *Nyniau* as orthodox in his beliefs and teachings, as a reformer of his fellow Britons and as the evangelist of a particular group of Picts may be seen as having had the common purpose of demonstrating the logic of the establishment of a Northumbrian bishopric at Whithorn, which was suitable for such elevation because it had in the past been the seat of an orthodox reforming bishop with a passing resemblance to Wilfrith, whose life's work the Northumbrian church had unwittingly been emulating and moving forward in recent generations in its dealings with the Picts and the Britons. This sense of continuity between *Nyniau* and the Northumbrian church is underlined by the concluding section of *LVM*, where the author, by describing a series of posthumous miracles witnessed by Anglo-Saxons at the saint's tomb, made it clear not only that *Nyniau* continued to minister to pilgrims, but also, and more importantly, that whatever his own ethnic and national origins, the saint was now inclined to bestow his favour upon the new Anglo-Saxon overlords of Galloway. The point of all of this may well have been to rationalise the elevation of the church of Whithorn to the seat of a Northumbrian bishopric after the fact, but *LVM* may, equally, have been composed before the fact in the interests of convincing Acca and his circle, with their Wilfrithian sympathies, that any proposed new Gallovidian see ought to have Whithorn as its seat. In Bede's generation, York began campaigning to be made into the seat of a metropolitan, but it had only two existing Northumbrian bishoprics that could be counted as its potential suffragans. No doubt Acca, whose infamous mentor had actually claimed in earlier years to be metropolitan bishop of York,[69] was keen to lend a hand in this

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[68] Clancy, 'St Ninian', 7. As I see it, any such inclinations would have been extremely unrealistic and unmindful of the changes in the political and ecclesiastical situations on either side of the Forth since 685. On Abercorn and the *prouincia Pictorum* see *HE* iv.12.

[69] *VW* § 16.

campaign by finding a viable church to elevate to episcopal status and
to charge with jurisdiction over the furthest west regions of his see.
LVM may have been composed by someone for whom it was important
that Whithorn be chosen from among the other potential candidates.

        In a review of Professor MacQueen's reprise of his Ninianic
theses in 1990, Dauvit Broun drew attention to the important point that
'all our surviving information on St Nynia derives ultimately from
Anglian Whithorn' and wondered whether it would be 'more profitable
to view St Nynia's biography not as a repository of "fact" but as a
reflection of Whithorn's response to new demands and opportunities in
a changeable world'.[70] The Ninianic 'facts' die hard, and those who
find it difficult on principal to accept Clancy's radical new re-
interpretation of the evidence pertaining to 'the real St Ninian' will be
none too pleased to find that we have found the apostolic claims made
on *Nyniau*'s behalf—so important to Bede and to modern discourse on
this saint—to have been a comparatively minor and historically dubious
component of the eighth-century *'liber de vita et miraculis eius'* as it
has been reconstructed here.[71] Insofar as it can be understood, this lost
text appears, not surprisingly, to have been a thoroughly Northumbrian
hagiographic work in terms of context, purpose, and employment of
Wilfrithian imagery and allegory, and nowhere is this more apparent
than in the fateful misrepresentation of the subject's name,
demonstrating that, whatever intellectual continuity with the British
past in Galloway was envisioned by our author, the realities on the
ground may have been much different. Doubtless there will be some
who, given this underlying 'Englishness' and our inability to show
LVM to have had anything at all to do with the Picts, may feel that
Ninian emerges from this study as somehow less 'Scottish' a saint.
Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Indeed, the
circumstances surrounding the repackaging (indeed the making) of
Nyniau as the most important native saint of the Northumbrian diocese
of Whithorn in the eighth century have important things to tell us about
the significance and extensiveness of the Bernician legacy in southern
Scotland (that most understudied 'non-Celtic' area of early Scottish
history), while placing the saint and his cult more firmly into the early
Gallovidian context to which they belong—a context no less Scottish

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[70] D. Broun, 'The literary record of St Nynia: fact and fiction?', *IR* 42 (1991) 143-50, at
146.

[71] It remains, perhaps, to explain why the author of *LVM* felt it necessary to include a
mission to Pictavia in his text at all; it may be that a misunderstanding of some existing
reference to the Gaelic *Cruithne* in the dossier of Uinniau (*DSDF*, 444, makes Winnin a
nobleman of the Dál nAraidi) led to the idea of a Ninianic mission to the Picts.

today for its having been outside the historical territories of the Picts and the Dál Riata. If Whithorn does not emerge from this study as the 'cradle of Scottish Christianity' (at least not in the traditional sense), it remains nevertheless a place of great interest in the study of ethnic co-existence and interaction in early medieval Galloway, and both the place itself and its most famous saint will doubtless continue to merit a high degree of scholarly attention for some time to come.[72]

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Corrigenda to *IR* 52.1 (Spring 2001)

Several readers have kindly brought the editor's attention to two footnotes in the article 'The real St Ninian' which were cut off from the bottom of the page in the printing process. They are footnote 69 on p. 18, and footnote 74 on p. 19. In full these footnotes should read:

n. 69: Watson, *CPNS*, 155, 190; Black, *Surnames of Scotland*, 499, 501; cf. Stringer, 'Records of the Lords of Galloway', for earliest names: 1161x1164, *Gillecrist mac Gillewinin*; 1165x1174, *Gillecrist MacGillewinne* (p.213); 1164x1174, *Gilleberto mac Gillefin* (p.216).

n. 74: Edited in Sperber, 'Lives of St Finnian', 95-8, where however she distractingly translates the text's *Wynninus* as 'Finnian'.

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[72] This article has benefited from helpful comments on earlier drafts made by Alex Woolf, Thomas Clancy, Dauvit Broun and Professor William Gillies, and I am further indebted to Dr Clancy for having made available drafts of his work on Ninian in advance of publication.