

Scottish and British? The Scottish authorities, Richard III and the cult of St Ninian in late medieval Scotland and Northern England

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In 1550 the Scottish poet Sir David Lindsay (c.1495-c.1555) wrote a scathing attack on what he saw as the idolatrous worship of the saints by his fellow Scots.¹ Prominent among the individual cults singled out for his wrath was that of ‘*Sanct Ringane*’, a saint that Lindsay chose to symbolise vividly as a rotten wooden statue.² Lindsay’s distaste for the saint, commonly known as Ninian of Whithorn, was a reaction to his broad popularity in Scotland, a cult that reached its peak in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. While Ninian had been an important regional patron in the southwest for some centuries, the later middle ages saw his cult emerge on a national scale, with recorded devotion to the saint far surpassing that of traditional Scottish patrons like Columba, Margaret and Kentigern.³ By the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this popularity had led many Scots, particularly those travelling or

¹ *Works of Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 3 vols, 1879), vol. iii, p. 267.

² The line reads ‘*Sanct Ringane, of ane rottin stoke*’. John Higgitt has suggested that the Old Scots word *stoke* was a contemptuous term for idols: John Higgitt, ‘From Bede to Rabelais: Or how St Ninian got his chains’, in Paul Binski and William Noel (ed.), *New Offerings Ancient Treasures: Studies in Medieval Art for George Henderson* (Strand, 2001), pp. 187-209 at p. 204 and n.55. A wooden statue of St Ninian was found in a bog during excavations near Whithorn and is now housed in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh: Richard D. Oram et al, *Historic Whithorn* (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 41.

³ For an extended discussion of the historiography of Ninian and his cult, recorded devotion in comparison to other Scottish saints, and an exploration of the catalysts for his broad popularity, see Tom Turpie, ‘Scottish saints cults and pilgrimage from the Black Death to the Reformation, c.1349-1560’, History and Classics PhD Collection, University of Edinburgh, 2011, <http://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/5983>, pp. 16-57, 63-80 and 98-107.

living abroad, to embrace Ninian as their unofficial patron saint.⁴ The late fifteenth century also saw the spread of the cult beyond Scotland, most notably across the southern frontier into the kingdom of England, where it was wholeheartedly embraced by the last Plantagenet monarch, Richard III (1483-1485). This article will examine how the Scottish authorities engaged with the increasing significance of the Ninian cult as a symbol of religious and political authority in late medieval Scotland, consider how the cult was able to bridge the political divide with England and explore the motivation behind patronage of the cult by Richard III.

I

The Scottish governmental structures of crown and national church were initially slow to recognise and embrace the growing popularity of the Ninian cult and his development into an informal national patron. Although Robert I (1306-29) visited Whithorn in 1329, the saint and shrine only became the beneficiaries of consistent royal patronage from the 1450s, while regular royal pilgrimages to Whithorn only commenced in the 1460s.⁵ The catalyst for the close bond that developed between saint and crown from the 1450s was the conflict between James II (1437-1460) and the Black Douglases. Crown patronage of the cult and shrine in the

⁴ This patronal role is most apparent in dedications to the saint by Scottish mercantile communities residing in Denmark and Flanders. It may well have been that, as David Ditchburn has suggested, Ninian provided those Scottish communities with a more distinctive patron than the universally popular Andrew: Thomas Clancy, 'Scottish Saints and National Identities in the Early Middle Ages', in Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (ed.), *Local saints and local churches in the early medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 397-420, at p. 404; Higgitt, 'From Bede to Rabelais', p. 202; David Ditchburn, *Scotland and Europe: The Medieval Kingdom and its Contacts with Christendom, 1214-1560, Volume 1: Religion, Culture and Commerce* (East Linton, 2000), p. 247.

⁵ Robert visited Whithorn on 1 April 1329: *RRS*, p.157.

1450s was part of a wider process by which James and his council tried to first interfere with, and after 1455 replace, Black Douglas lordship in the southwest.⁶ Whithorn's status as the predominant ecclesiastical centre in the region meant that it formed a natural focus for this patronage, as it had done in the 1310s and 20s during another period of political fragmentation and conflict in Galloway.⁷ Following James' death in 1460, patronage of Ninian and Whithorn would continue to be a central part of the display of royal authority in the south-west, reaching its peak in the reign of James IV (1488-1513) who made annual pilgrimages to the shrine.⁸

The national church was also slow to incorporate Ninian into their pantheon of Scottish saints. By the later middle ages the Scottish religious and secular elites had evolved a confident and coherent vision of their kingdom as a sovereign territory in which the king was

⁶ James II made a number of grants to the priory in what Oram has suggested was a clear attempt to 'undermine the earl of Douglas's position in Galloway': Richard Oram, *A Monastery and its Landscape; Whithorn and Monastic Estate Management in Galloway (c.1250-c.1600)* (Whithorn, 2005), pp. 7-8; *Registrum Magni Sigillii Regum Scotorum*, ed. J.M. Thomson and J.B. Paul (11 vols, Edinburgh, 1882-1914), vol. ii, nos 453, 459 and 698. Michael Brown and Katie Stevenson have discussed the various political means by which James and his council attempted to win the loyalty of key community leaders in Galloway and other Douglas territories: Michael Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland, 1300-1455* (East Linton, 1998), pp. 288-9; Katie Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424-1513* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 179-182.

⁷ Patronage of Whithorn by the Bruce party was part of a wider policy by which first Edward Bruce, as lord of Galloway, and later his brother, attempted to assert royal authority in a region previously controlled by their Balliol and Comyn rivals: *RRS*, no. 275.

⁸ James IV visited the shrine every year from 1491-1513 and made a number of gifts there and at other sites associated with St Ninian. The shrine was also visited on a number of occasions by James III (1460-88) and James V (1513-42): Turpie, 'Scottish saints cults and pilgrimage', pp. 82-92.

the ultimate secular authority.⁹ Alongside, and in support of, this narrative of political independence it is possible to identify the development of a distinct history of Christianity in Scotland. This narrative, which can be seen within the diplomatic documents of the Anglo-Scottish wars and the late medieval chronicle tradition, stressed Scotland's separate spiritual development from England and Ireland. Those saints who were deemed to have been active in Scotland provided the chronological markers for this history, with their careers demonstrating the richness and longevity of the kingdom's Christian past and, perhaps more importantly, of its independent ecclesiastical institutions.¹⁰

The earliest extended versions of this religious history can be found in the chronicles of John of Fordun (compiled in c.1384-87 but containing earlier materials), Andrew of Wyntoun (1407x24) and Walter Bower (1440s). Within these works the catalyst for the development of Christianity in Scotland was the arrival of St Palladius, sent to Scotland from Rome in c.435AD, with his disciples SS Serf and Ternan.¹¹ Further important missionary work was carried out during the sixth century by SS Columba in western and central Scotland, Kentigern in Strathclyde and Boniface in the north.¹² The ninth century was marked by further conversions of the Picts with the help of the newly arrived relics of St Andrew, and

⁹ This narrative seems to have been first developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was refined during the Anglo-Scottish wars and fleshed out in the fifteenth and sixteenth century chronicles: Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 235-89.

¹⁰ Turpie, 'Scottish saints cults and pilgrimage', pp. 25-32.

¹¹ *Chron. Fordun*, vol. i, pp. 85-6; *Chron. Wyntoun*, vol. iv, p. 11; *Chron. Bower*, vol. ii, pp. 21-3; Broun, *Scottish Independence*, pp. 215-30 and 261-2.

¹² *Chron. Fordun*, vol. ii, pp. 103-5, *Chron. Wyntoun*, vol. iv, pp. 11 and 77-91; *Chron. Bower*, vol. ii, pp. 2, 65, 79 and 83-5, and vol. ix, pp. 315-20 and 339-47.

by missionary groups who spread the gospel to peripheral areas.¹³ The modern era of church organisation was then introduced by the marriage between Margaret and Malcolm III (1058-93) in the eleventh century.¹⁴ Ninian, whose shrine was located in Galloway, a region of traditionally weak royal authority close to the English border and whose bishops were suffragans of York until 1472, sat awkwardly in this patriotic narrative. Although Ninian features in each of these works, he was a marginal figure, described merely as an early apostle of the southern Picts.¹⁵

The first hint of Ninian's integration into this national narrative can be found in Wyntoun, who has Simon Fraser appealing to 'Sancte Andrew, Sanct Nynyare, and Sanct Mergret', prior to the battle of Roslyn in 1302.¹⁶ By the second phase of Scottish historical writing in the sixteenth century, Ninian had been fully integrated. While John Maior (1521), in his history of '*Greater Britain*' followed the traditional Palladius-Margaret chronology, he assigned a notably wider role to Ninian. Maior included an expanded account of the life of the saint and a description of a visit he had made to the shrine at Whithorn, presumably on pilgrimage.¹⁷ Hector Boece (1527) took this a step further, making Ninian, rather than Palladius, the earliest catalyst for the spread of Christianity in Scotland, broadening his role

¹³ The missionary groups led by Boniface of Rosemarkie and Adrian of the Isle of May feature in Wyntoun and Bower: *Chron. Fordun*, vol. ii, pp. 146-7 and 170-1; *Chron. Wyntoun*, vol. iv, pp. 123 and 179; *Chron. Bower*, vol. i, pp. 15, 315 and 317.

¹⁴ *Chron. Fordun*, vol. ii, pp. 201-10; *Chron. Bower*, vol. v, pp. 337-9.

¹⁵ *Chron. Fordun*, vol. ii, pp. 86-7; *Chron. Wyntoun*, vol. v, p. 339; *Chron. Bower*, vol. ii, pp. 21-3.

¹⁶ *Chron. Wyntoun*, vol. iii, p. 461.

¹⁷ John Maior, *A History of Greater Britain, as well England as Scotland*, ed. Archibald Constable (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 37.

from regional missionary to general apostle of the Scots.¹⁸ This transition from the local to the national is most apparent in the Aberdeen Breviary (1510). Within this new national liturgy produced by the bishop of Aberdeen, William Elphinstone (1483-1514), Ninian has pride of place amongst a select group of saints who received an extended entry and double feast.¹⁹ As Leslie McFarlane has suggested this is a strong indication that Ninian was thought to ‘belong to the nation’.²⁰ By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Scottish church had emulated the crown by fully embracing the Ninian cult. They had integrated Ninian into their history and into the pantheon of national saints, responding to the growing popularity of the cult amongst clerics and laity by celebrating Ninian as a distinctly Scottish saint.

II

The efforts by the Scottish authorities in the fifteenth century to appropriate Ninian were carried out against a background of the increasing internationalisation of his cult. Central to this growing international interest in Ninian was the miraculous reputation of his shrine at Whithorn.²¹ Governmental legislation passed in 1427 and 1516 to protect and regulate

¹⁸ Hector Boece, *The Chronicles of Scotland*, trans John Bellenden, ed. E. Batho and R.W. Chambers (STS, Edinburgh, 2 vols, 1938-41), vol. i, p. 271.

¹⁹ *Legends of Scottish Saints: Readings Hymns and Prayers for Scottish Saints in the Aberdeen Breviary*, ed. Alan Macquarrie (Dublin, 2012), pp. 215-28.

²⁰ Leslie Macfarlane, *William Elphinstone and the Kingdom of Scotland- 1431-1514: the Struggle for Order* (Aberdeen, 1995), pp. 237-8.

²¹ Miracles of various types associated with the saint were also mentioned by Fordun, in the mid-fourteenth century *Legends of the Saints*, by French ambassadors and during the reigns of James IV and James V: *Chron. Fordun*, vol. ii, pp. 86-7; *Legends of the Saints*, ed. William M. Metcalfe (STS, Edinburgh, 2 vols, 1896), vol. i, pp. 327-42; Louis Barbé, *Margaret of Scotland and the Dauphin* (Glasgow, 1917), pp. 50-54; *TA*, vol. iii, p. 193; *The Letters of James V*, ed. R.K. Hannay and D. Hay (Edinburgh, 1954), pp. 362-3.

pilgrimage to Whithorn, indicates that some of the largest proportions of visitors to the shrine came from Ireland, whilst pilgrims from the Isle of Man, Wales, Spain and France were also noted there on an important feast day in the fourteenth century.²² However, the best and most commonly attested international visitors came from England. References to Ninian and Whithorn in a series of literary works attest the growing reputation of saint and shrine in England from the fourteenth century. The earliest English reference to the shrine comes from Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (c.1326) which mentions 'Whitherne, where Seynte Ninian, otherwise callede by the commune people Seynt Ronyon, was firste founder and doctor'.²³ A 'Seint Ronyan', also features in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale', although the identification of this saint as Ninian has been disputed.²⁴ The saint was certainly one of only three from Scotland who featured in John of Tynemouth's late fourteenth century *Sanctilogium Angliae*, a compilation of saint's lives from the British Isles.²⁵ Travelling cleric

²² *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, ed. M. Livingstone (Edinburgh, 8 vols, 1908-82), vol. i, no. 2844. A description of Whithorn on a feast day, that appears to be an eye witness account, features in the *Legends of the Saints*, ii, pp. 304-45, at pp. 325-6. Three French ambassadors - Girard in 1434, De La Motte in 1508 and Dampier in 1512 - visited Whithorn: Barbé, *Margaret of Scotland*, pp. 50-54; *TA*, vol. iv, pp. 135 and 400. A Welsh pilgrim/political refugee, James Griffith, was at Whithorn in 1533 with 8 companions: *State Papers: Henry the Eighth* (London, 11 vols, 1830-52), vol. iv, pp. 647-51.

²³ The quote noted above is from the fifteenth-century English translation: BL, MS Harl 2261; *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, ed. C. Babington, (Rolls Series, 9 vols, London, 1865-1888), vol. ii, pp. 135 and 149.

²⁴ John Sledd, 'Canterbury Tales, L.310,32: By seynt Ronyan', *Medieval Studies*, xiii (1951): pp. 226-35. Anne Haskell and others have argued that Ronan was a Breton saint: Anne Haskell, *Essays on Chaucer's Saints* (Paris, 1976), p. 18.

²⁵ The legendary also included the lives of Kentigern and Columba: *Nova Legenda Anglie* ed. C. Horstmann (Oxford, 2 vols, 1901), vol. ii, pp. xii-xiii and 219-24.

William of Worcester mentioned ‘*the town of Whithorn where St Ninian lies buried*’ in 1478, while playwright John Heywood referred to the shrine of ‘*St Tronion*’ in a work of 1544.²⁶ Another English observer, Ralph Hollinshead, writing 1578x82, would recall Whithorn as the place where ‘*lieth his (Ninian’s) carcase which is honoured by the people with great superstition and error*’.²⁷

These literary references are supported by evidence of growing numbers of English pilgrims at Whithorn in the later middle ages. The earliest named English visitor was the future Edward II (1307-27) who called at the shrine in 1301. According to an English spy Edward’s visit was also the occasion for a miraculous event. Fearing the consequences of a visit by the Prince of Wales and his entourage, the shrine custodians were said to have moved a famous image of the saint 50 miles east to Sweetheart Abbey for safe keeping. To the amazement of the custodians the image was found to have returned to its normal place the following morning in time for Edward’s arrival.²⁸ Further English visitors are noted in the mid-fourteenth century *Legends of the Saints* and within the governmental legislation of 1427, while evidence from English wills suggests that by the fifteenth century Whithorn had been incorporated into a British pilgrimage network.²⁹ In 1414 Thomas Colliyer, the King of Arms for Ireland, paid for a man to make a posthumous pilgrimage to Whithorn and a series of other northern English shrines on his behalf.³⁰ Similar requests for proxy pilgrimages were

²⁶ *William Worcestre Itineraries*, ed. J. Harvey (Oxford, 1969), pp. 6-7; *Plays of John Heywood*, ed. R. Axton and P. Happe (Cambridge, 1991), p.112.

²⁷ Ralph Hollinshead, *The Scottish Chronicle* (Arbroath, 2 vols, 1805), vol. i, p. 5.

²⁸ *CDS*, vol. ii, no. 1225.

²⁹ *Legends of the Saints*, vol. ii, pp. 325-6; *Registrum Magni Sigillii Regum Scotorum*, vol. ii, no. 107.

³⁰ Cited in Henry Summerston, ‘Carlisle and the English West March’, in Anthony Pollard (ed.), *The North of England in the Reign of Richard III* (Stroud, 1996), pp. 89-115, at p. 92. The tour began in London then moved

made in the wills of Margaret Aske of Kelby (1465), and William Eccop, Rector of Heslerton in the East Riding (1472).³¹ The last recorded bequest of this nature was made in 1540 by Robert Ardern of Stockport who asked that a man be hired to make an offering on his behalf at ‘*Seynt Truyons in Scotlande*’.³²

Post-mortem inquiries from the late fifteenth century give further details of visits to Whithorn by individual Englishmen. Richard Shepard of the North Riding remembered visiting the shrine in 1482, and John Smith from Buckingham was there in the same year.³³ Further English pilgrims were found at the shrine in the early sixteenth century when James IV is recorded giving alms to four separate groups, while Sir William Tyrwit was granted a safe conduct to visit Whithorn with 16 companions in 1506.³⁴ Two of the visitors given alms by James had been robbed on the pilgrim road and the last recorded English pilgrim, Jeffrey Middleton of Lauderdale, was kidnapped in the borders in 1528 on his return from

on to Walsingham, and the shrines of John of Beverley, John of Bridlington, William of York and the Marian chapel in Carlisle.

³¹ Margaret requested that man travel to Canterbury and Whithorn: *Testamenta Eboracensia: A selection of wills from the registry at York*, ed. J. Raine and W. Clay (Durham, 6 vols, 1832-1906), vol. ii, pp. 275-6. William specified nineteen shrines, most of which were in the north; Whithorn was the only shrine outside of England mentioned in his will: *Ibid.*, vol. iii, pp.199-201.

³² The man was first to visit the popular Marian shrine at Walsingham in Norfolk: *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories* (Chetham Society, 3 vols, 1858-61), vol. ii, pp. 138-41.

³³ Smyth is noted as going on pilgrimage to Whithorn from Buckingham whilst Shepard was from Hovingham, just north of York: *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Henry VII* (London, 1898-), vol. ii, nos 640 and 652.

³⁴ On four separate occasions in 1504 and 1506 James gave money to individuals or groups of English pilgrims: *TA*, vol. ii, pp. 443, 458 and vol. iii, p. 193. For Tyrwit see *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, vol. i, no. 1291. This man was probably William Tyrwhitt of Kettleby (1458-1522) whose father was sheriff of Lincoln in 1482, who was sheriff himself in 1497 and was described as a ‘knight of the king’s body’ in 1488: *CPR, 1476 - 1485*, pp. 159, 342, 393; *CPR, 1494-1509*, pp. 122 and 198.

Whithorn.³⁵ The large numbers of pilgrims on the roads and the potential for abuse of the system by criminals may have prompted the Scottish regency government in 1516 to reissue the legislation from 1427 protecting pilgrims who came to Whithorn by ‘*sea or land*’.³⁶ What is particularly striking about these late medieval literary and testamentary records is that apart from two references to the shrine of St Duthac in Tain, Whithorn was the only Scottish shrine mentioned by these English observers or deemed worthy of a visit by pilgrims.³⁷

By the late fifteenth century a series of dedications indicate that a local branch of the Ninian cult was well established in England. This English cult was based primarily in the northeast, focused on Ripon and York. Altars dedicated to Ninian could be found in those towns by the end of the fifteenth century, while a series of references to the saint in the wills and post-mortem enquiries of Yorkshire women and men like Margaret Aske, William Eccop and Richard Shepherd noted above, attest to the growing popularity of the cult in that region.³⁸ Further patronage of the cult in the northeast came from John Trollop of Thornley who left money in 1476 to the light of St Ninian in the parish church of Kelloe, county Durham and Hugh Hastings, head of an important West Riding family, who in 1482,

³⁵ An English couple were robbed on the way to Whithorn by an Englishman and a Scotsman in 1504: *TA*, vol. ii, p. 458. Middleton was kidnapped by a group of border brigands and held for ransom: *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of King Henry the Eighth*, ed. J. S. Brewer (London, 21 vols, 1864-1932), vol. iv, nos 4532 and 4829.

³⁶ *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, vol. i, no. 2844. The legislation of 1516 specified that travellers were to be unarmed, with badges as proof that they were genuine pilgrims.

³⁷ **Duthac and Tain feature in the chronicles of Worcester and Hollinshead. REFERENCE?**

³⁸ The altar in the church of St Peter and Wilfred of Ripon was in existence by 1500: *Memorials of the Church of SS Peter and Wilfrid, Ripon* (Surtees Society, 4 vols, 1882-1904), vol. iii, pp. 264, 268 and 271. The altar in York Minster is first mentioned in 1483: *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, ed. J. Raine (Durham, 1859), p. 305; Eric Gee, ‘The Topography of Altars, Chantries and Shrines in York Minster’, *Antiquaries Journal*, lxiv (1984): pp. 337-51 at p. 347.

stipulated that a taper of wax should be kept burning by the Friars of Tickhill, near Doncaster in ‘honour of seynt Ninian’.³⁹ A more interesting bequest was the donation of ‘a bone of Saynt Nynyan’ to the Grey Friars of York by Margery Salvin in 1491.⁴⁰ The popularity of the cult was also reflected in the emergence of the forename Ninian, previously unknown in the region. Seven men with the name were active in Ripon and the local area with two others recorded in York and Knaresborough between the late fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries.⁴¹

The most high profile English patron of the cult also had strong territorial interests in the northeast. Richard III included Ninian in a series of religious dedications between 1477 and 1485, beginning with personal grant to fund four studentships at Queen’s College, Cambridge in honour of SS Mary, George, Anthony and Ninian.⁴² The following year Richard would name a stall at his collegiate church at Middleham in honour of the saint.⁴³ In

³⁹ Trollop was a soldier and was buried in the Franciscan friary in Hartlepool. He made bequests to the lights of SS Katherine, Cuthbert, Margaret, Nicholas and Ninian in Kelloe: *Wills and inventories illustrative of the history, manners, language, statistics, &c. of the northern counties of England, [or rather, mostly of Durham] from the eleventh century downwards*, ed. James Raine (Surtees Society, Durham, 4 vols, 1835-1929), vol. i, pp. 97-9. For Hastings see *Testamenta Eboracensia*, vol. iii, p. 273.

⁴⁰ Salvin was a resident of York: *Ibid.*, vol. iv, p. 116.

⁴¹ For example Ninian does not feature in the *Database of the People of Northern England 1216-86*, <http://www.pone.ac.uk/>. For Ripon see, *Memorials of the Church of SS Peter and Wilfrid*, pp. 12, 278, 301, 326, 344 and 348. Ninian Blythman was a tiller from York active in 1529: *Register of the Freemen of the city of York 1272-1558* (Surtees Society, Durham, 2 vols, 1897-1900), vol. i, p. 250. Ninian Pullayne was a soldier from Scotton near Knaresborough, who died in 1565: *Wills and inventories from the registry of the Archdeaconry of Richmond* (Surtees Society, Durham, 1853), p. 176.

⁴² William George Searle, ‘The History of the Queens College of St Margaret in the University of Cambridge, 1446-1560’, *Publicity of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, viii-x (1867): pp. 88-9.

⁴³ *Documents relating to the foundation and antiquity of the collegiate church of Middleham*, ed. W. Atthill (Camden Society, 1847), p. 8. The other five stalls were named after Our Lady and SS George, Katherine, Cuthbert, Anthony and Barbara.

1479 Richard was granted permission to found a college at Barnard Castle, which he dedicated to Christ and SS Mary, Margaret and Ninian, and the saint was also recognised in a proposed foundation of one hundred priests at York, about which nothing else is known except that they were to sing for ‘*God, our Lady, Seynt George and Seynt Nynyan*’.⁴⁴ Richard’s special devotion to Ninian is also clear from the additions made to his personal book of hours. The four additions to the book were made, according to the most recent editor, at the time of his coronation in 1483. These were the inclusion of Richard’s date of birth, a common contemporary prayer, a long devotion and a collect of St Ninian.⁴⁵

The conspicuous devotion of Richard III to the saint of Whithorn has received some comment with Hughes suggesting that the interest in the saint showed that the king’s Scottish campaigns of the 1480s were ‘driven by a degree of moral fervour’.⁴⁶ However, whilst the king may have had a personal connection to Ninian, Richard’s patronage of the saint must be placed in the context of his territorial aspirations in the southwest of Scotland.⁴⁷ In January 1483 Edward IV (1461-83) made a prospective grant to his brother of all the lands he could conquer across the western border in ‘*Liddesdale, Eskdale, Ewesdale, Annandale, Wauchepdale, Clydesdale and the Scottish West March*’.⁴⁸ Grant has suggested that this

⁴⁴ Higgitt, ‘From Bede to Rabelais’, p. 202; Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, *Richard III’s Books: Ideals and reality in the life and library of a medieval prince* (Stroud, 1997), p. 61.

⁴⁵ Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, *The Hours of Richard III* (Stroud, 1990), pp. 1 and 39-42.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Hughes, *The Religious Life of Richard III: Piety and Prayer in the North of England* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 36-7.

⁴⁷ Richard Dobson, ‘Richard III and the church of York’, in Ralph A. Griffiths and Jonathan Sherbourne (ed.), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages* (Gloucester, 1980), pp. 130-155 at p. 146; Alexander Grant, ‘Richard III and Scotland’, in Anthony Pollard (ed.), *The North of England in the Reign of Richard III* (Stroud, 1996), pp. 115-48, at pp. 115-16.

⁴⁸ Cited in Grant, ‘Richard III and Scotland’, p. 115.

charter represented Richard's long held aspiration to carve out a principality for himself in south western Scotland.⁴⁹ The importance of Whithorn as the main sacred power centre in this region would have been a key attraction for the future king. The tradition of English ecclesiastical control of Ninian's diocese would also have provided an attractive precedent and justification for Richard's attempt to control the region.⁵⁰ Galloway was the diocese with the weakest connection to the Scottish national church and following the controversial creation of the Archbishopric of St Andrews in 1472 Richard and his councillors may have felt the time was ripe for the renewal of the old relationship.⁵¹ Whilst Richard's interest in the saint may have initially had a strategic political purpose, in a similar manner to a series of Scottish monarchs in the same period, it is clear that the English king also developed a genuine personal devotion to the saint, as indicated by the additions to his book of hours in 1483.

Can the emergence of a branch of the Ninian cult in the northeast be attributed to the high profile patronage of the saint by Richard? The bulk of recorded English devotion to Ninian came after 1477, when Richard is first recorded as displaying an interest in the saint, and was located in the region of his greatest political influence. The king may have been behind the foundation of the altar at York Minster dedicated to Ninian c.1483, while Richard also seems to have encouraged his supporters in devotion to the saint. Hugh Hastings, who paid for a light in '*honour of seynt Ninian*' in Tickhill and Thomas Merkenfield, whose son was named after the saint, were retainers of the then Duke of Gloucester and accompanied

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 116.

⁵⁰ This motivation has been posited by Anne Sutton, who suggested that an association with the saint would add authority to any 'claims the English may have to regions of Scotland that Ninian Christianised or civilised': Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, *Richard III's Books*, p. 62.

⁵¹ I am grateful to Michael Penman for this suggestion.

him on his Scottish campaign in 1482.⁵² William Tyrwhitt who visited Whithorn in 1506 was also from a family with strong Yorkist connections.⁵³ However, although Richard's devotion to the saint may have encouraged the northern cult, it was not the primary stimulant. English pilgrims had been present at Whithorn in the fourteenth century and were specified within the legislation of 1427, while the shrine seems to have become part of a northern pilgrimage network well before 1477.

John Hughes and Anne Sutton have explained Richard's interest in the saint by characterising Ninian as the patron of the West March on both sides of the border.⁵⁴ However, evidence of significant Cumbrian interest in Ninian is limited.⁵⁵ St Cuthbert retained his prominence in the region throughout the later middle ages, while more significant cross-border interest may have been sustained for the cult of St Kentigern, which had been widespread in the region prior to the Wars of Independence.⁵⁶ The main focus of the English

⁵² Hughes refers to this connection between devotion to Ninian and Richard and his retainers: Hughes, *Religious Life of Richard III*, pp. 36-7.

⁵³ *CPR, 1476 - 1485*, pp. 159, 393 and 512.

⁵⁴ They both emphasise the west march *facing* Scotland: Hughes, *Religious Life of Richard III*, pp. 36-7, Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, *The Hours of Richard III*, p. 41. Grant also stresses the importance of the cult in north-western England: Grant, 'Richard III and Scotland', p. 116.

⁵⁵ Although Summerston has suggested that people made pilgrimages from Carlisle to Whithorn the only named devotee of the saint with probable Cumbrian connections was Jeffrey Middleton: Summerston, 'Carlisle and the English West March', p. 93. Arnold Forster has tentatively identified only one Ninian dedication in the county: Frances Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications or England's Patron Saints* (London, 3 Vols, 1899), vol. ii, p. 223.

⁵⁶ Robert Rose, 'Cumbrian Society and the Anglo-Norman Church', in Stuart Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 119-37, at p. 131. There were 15 churches dedicated to St Cuthbert and eight dedicated to St Kentigern in the county: Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications*, vol. ii, pp. 225-6.

cult was in the east rather than the west.⁵⁷ Longer term ecclesiastical connections may have played a role in this geographical focus. From the revival of the see of Galloway in the twelfth century until St Andrews became the metropolitan of the Scottish church in 1472, the diocese was officially under the authority of York. In practice the warfare of the fourteenth century had severed the relationship, with Michael (1355-58x59) the last bishop to seek consecration at York in 1355.⁵⁸ However, it had been common for Galloway bishops to supplement their income by serving as part time assistants in the English diocese, a role carried out by successive office holders from John (1189-1209) to Thomas (d.1324).⁵⁹ The regular presence of these men in York may have contributed to the early establishment of the cult in the region, a local interest further stimulated by the positive reports of pilgrims returning from Whithorn in the fifteenth century and given a final boost by the high profile patronage of Richard III in the 1470s.

III

Although Ninian was identified by one English observer in the early sixteenth century as a distinctly Scottish patron, in general English devotees of the cult appear to have had a different interpretation of the saint.⁶⁰ The manner in which they may have viewed Ninian can

⁵⁷ The only reference I have so far located to interest in the cult in the northwest is the proxy pilgrimage paid for by Robert Arden of Stockport: *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories*, vol. ii, pp. 138-41.

⁵⁸ Michael required a safe conduct to attend his consecration: *CDS*, vol. iii, no. 1584. His successor, Adam of Lanark (1363-1378), renounced his allegiance to York: see Richard Oram, 'In Obedience and Reverence': Whithorn and York c.1128-c.1250', *Innes Review*, xlii (1991): pp. 83-101.

⁵⁹ Gordon Donaldson, 'The Bishops and Priors of Whithorn', *Transactions of the Galloway Naturalist and Antiquarian Society*, xxvii (1948-9): pp. 127-55, at pp. 130-131.

⁶⁰ An early sixteenth-century English ballad refers to Andrew, Ninian and Duthac as the patron saints of the Scots: *The Battle of Flodden Field: A Poem of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. H. Weber (Edinburgh, 1868), p. 27.

be seen in a prayer which Richard ordered to be said daily by the four priests at Queen's College, and in the collect within the book of hours belonging to Richard III. The prayer read 'O God, you who have converted the peoples of *the Britons and Picts* [my italics] by the teaching of St Ninian', identifying the saint as an early apostle of the north, rather than specifically of Scotland.⁶¹ It is this non-partisan figure with which the English devotees of the saint seem to have engaged. It is clear from fourteenth-century *Legends of the Saints* that those responsible for generating the image of the saint at Whithorn were keen to stress this comprehensive appeal, unsurprisingly given the location of the shrine so close to the Irish Sea zone and English border. In addition to a translation into the Scots vernacular of Aelred of Rievaulx's twelfth-century Latin *Vita Niniani*, the *Legends of the Saints* includes a description of a feast day at Whithorn and five miracle stories from the second part of the Wars of Independence (c.1332-46). Five miracle stories from the same period feature in Abbot Bower's *Scotichronicon* of the 1440s.⁶² In four of Bower's stories English troops in Scotland who transgressed the patrimonies of SS Columba and Serf were dealt with in a summary manner, in three out of the four instances they all die.⁶³ In a further Bower legend, the Scottish defeat at Neville's Cross was attributed to the lack of respect shown by David II

⁶¹ The prayer is translated in Hughes, *Religious Life of Richard III*, p. 37. The collect is only four lines long and also describes Ninian as the convertor of the Britons and the Picts: Lambeth, MS 474, reproduced in Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, *The Hours of Richard III*, p. 41.

⁶² The first miracle was attributed to Serf who helped Scots forces under siege at Lochleven; three others featured Columba protecting Inchcolm and Dollar from English raiding parties: *Chron. Bower*, vol. vii, pp. 99, 109, 119-21 and 399-403.

⁶³ The troops besieging Lochleven and two groups of English pirates perished at sea or at the hands of Scottish soldiers.

(1329-71) to St Cuthbert.⁶⁴ Miracle stories emanating from Durham in this period showed Cuthbert acting in a similarly partisan manner.⁶⁵

While, as John Higgitt has observed, it is clear in the *Legends* that Ninian's sympathies are with the Scots, in comparison to other miracle stories from the Anglo-Scottish wars the body count in the *Legends* is minimal, with the saint intervening on both sides.⁶⁶ In one miracle Ninian actually restored to health an English officer who had vowed to visit Whithorn at the suggestion of his Scottish captive.⁶⁷ The soldier's initial fears that the saint would not intercede on his behalf, as he was not a Scot, proved groundless.⁶⁸ Differing audiences could take from this story varied images of the saint. Ninian could be perceived as a patriotic figure, protecting Scots from the invading English, as a local patron helping the Gallovidian captive, or as regionally powerful saint, receptive to all genuine supplicants. This inclusive aspect of the saint's reputation is more apparent in a further original miracle from the *Legends*. In a fairly standard version of the hanged man miracle type, Ninian intervened

⁶⁴ *Chron. Bower*, vol. vii, pp. 255-7.

⁶⁵ See John Blièse, 'Saint Cuthbert and War', *Journal of Medieval History*, 24(1998): pp. 215-43.

⁶⁶ Two miracle stories from the *Legends* have been used to suggest that Ninian was acting as a 'heroic national saint': Clancy, 'Scottish Saints and National Identities', p. 404. In the first miracle Ninian saved Fergus MacDowell, a nobleman with lands in Kirkcudbright and Dumfries who was rewarded in 1357 for his support of the Bruce party after David II's return to Scotland, from an English ambush: *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, vol. i, App. ii, nos 835 and 1007. In the second miracle an unnamed Gallovidian who had been captured by an English raiding party was saved by the saint: *Legends of the Saints*, vol. i, pp. 327-9 and 335-42; Higgitt, 'From Bede to Rabelais', p. 194.

⁶⁷ The English soldier had worms in his feet: *Legends of the Saints*, vol. i, p. 341.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

to save an English prisoner from execution.⁶⁹ The saint's motivation for helping the man was not his innocence, the narrative makes it clear that he was guilty, but that he undertook to fast and visit Whithorn.⁷⁰ As with the story of the English soldier, nationality or merit was of no consequence to the saint. The ability of the late medieval Ninian cult to thus embody a sense of Scottishness for some supplicants, whilst remaining a non-partisan figure for others, was central to its success as a cross border cult.

Conclusion

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Ninian and his shrine at Whithorn, was a natural focus for the Scottish authorities, as well as a target for religious reformers. The striking engagement with the saint and shrine by the Scottish crown in the 1450s was directly related to the political situation in Galloway and the southwest, where Ninian was the pre-eminent regional patron saint. Ninian's patronal role in the region also prompted sponsorship of the saint by the English monarch Richard III, as he looked to carve out a territorial base for himself in south western Scotland. The continuing engagement with cult and shrine by Scottish monarchs and the full incorporation of Ninian into the top rank of national saints by the Scottish church elite, alongside Andrew, Margaret, Kentigern and Columba, was also a reaction to the popularity of the cult and a recognition that, for some sections of society, Ninian had already come to be identified as a national patron saint.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 331-5. The hanged-man miracle topos has been explored in relation to the canonisation process surrounding Thomas of Hereford in Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged man: A Story of Miracle, Memory and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 42-52.

⁷⁰ He is described as a 'wicked man' in the text: *Legends of the Saints*, vol. i, p. 331. As Bartlett has shown innocence was not a pre-requisite for saintly intervention in this miracle type: Bartlett, *The Hanged man*, pp. 49-50.

However, efforts by the Scottish authorities to appropriate the Ninian cult had little impact on its broader popularity in the British Isles. The spread of the cult into northern England is what makes the Ninian cult such a rare and interesting phenomenon in this period. There is little or no evidence of Scottish interest in newly canonised English saints like Thomas of Hereford (1320), John of Bridlington (1401) or Osmund of Salisbury (1456), or any of the various unofficial saints who sprang up in later middle ages.⁷¹ Similarly references to English pilgrimage to St Andrews and Dunfermline tail off after the mid-fourteenth century, as would evidence of the previously vibrant Kentigern cult in Cumbria.⁷² However, recent work on the late medieval cults of SS George and Thomas of Canterbury has shown that the appeal of those saints to certain groups in Scotland was able to transcend their English associations.⁷³ Similarly there is evidence of some continuity in devotion to Cuthbert of Durham north of the border in the later middle ages, despite the firm identification of that saint with English military triumphs over the Scots.⁷⁴ Scottish supplicants of Cuthbert were able to engage with that saint as something other than a hammer of the Scots, and the surviving English prayers suggest that Ninian was also open to interpretation. It was the existence of these differing representations of the saint combined with a popular miracle-

⁷¹ None of these newly canonised saints, or what Swanson describes as ‘would be saints’ such as Henry VI (1423-71) and Richard Scrope (d.1405), had recorded dedications in Scotland: Robert Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 287-90.

⁷² Henry Summerston, *Medieval Carlisle: The city and the borders from the late eleventh to the mid-sixteenth century* (Kendal, 2 vols, 1993), vol. ii, p. 617.

⁷³ Steve Boardman, ‘The Cult of St George in Scotland’, in Boardman, John R Davies and Eila Williamson (ed.), *Saints’ Cults in the Celtic World* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 146-59; Michael A. Penman, ‘The Bruce Dynasty, Becket and Scottish Pilgrimage to Canterbury, c.1178-c.1404’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 32 (2006): pp. 346-71.

⁷⁴ Tom Turpie, ‘A Monk from Melrose? St Cuthbert and the Scots in the later middle ages, c. 1371-1560’, *Innes Review*, 62 (2011): pp. 47-69.

working shrine and patronage from influential individuals, which allowed the cult of St Ninian to rise above national strife and political hostility. In the end, for late medieval Scots and Northern English it was not where a saint was from, but what he could do for you that really mattered.