

HAGIOGRAPHIA

HYMNUS SANCTI NYNIE EPISCOPI

The *Hymnus Sancti Nynie Episcopi* (henceforth *HNE*) is an anonymous hymn¹ which, together with the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* (henceforth *MNE*)², represents one of the earliest texts on St. Nynia³, an elusive figure generally accepted to be a British bishop whose *floruit* has traditionally been posited in the early to mid-fifth century, although more recent scholarship has considered equally plausible to date it to the sixth century⁴. While many uncertainties persist about the historicity of Nynia, as well as about the origin and earliest phase of his cult and hagiographic tradition⁵, the *HNE* and *MNE* have been unanimously considered as twin poems, attributable to the same author⁶ and sharing the same milieu of composition as well as their subsequent transmission. Of the two, the *MNE* has attracted more scholarly attention⁷. Thus, the bibliography underlying this essay is mostly pertinent to the *MNE*, but the conclusions reached about the latter as to the dating, authorship, and context of composition can be taken to apply also to the *HNE*.

The earliest surviving source on Nynia is Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (henceforth *HE*), where a brief account of Nynia is introduced as a sort of digression or later addition within the chapter concerning

1. [CPL 2153; BHL 6240c; ICL 963]; K. Strecker (ed.), *Hymnus S. Nynie Episcopi*, Berlin 1923 (MGH PLAC 4.II), pp. 961-2.

2. Strecker (ed.), pp. 944-61; cfr. also *infra* the dedicated entry, pp. 260-78.

3. Nynia has in fact been attributed different names in both primary and secondary literature; in this paper I will abide by the name attested in the three earliest available documents of the hagiographic tradition, that is Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, the *MNE*, and the *HNE*, although the *MNE* also attests to a *Nyniau* form: cfr. below, p. 232. For an outline of Nynia's *corpus*, cfr. M. R. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion: The Evidence of Saints Cults*, unpubl. PhD diss., University of Durham 1998, pp. 42-6.

4. Cfr. D. H. Farmer, *Ninian (Nynia)*, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, rev. 5th ed., Oxford 2011, pp. 325-6 and D. Broun, *Ninian*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, XL, Oxford 2004, p. 919. For a summary of the scholarly debate on Nynia's *floruit*, cfr. M. M. Garcia, *Saint Alban and the Cult of Saints in Late Antique Britain*, unpubl. PhD diss., University of Leeds 2010, pp. 110-6; cfr. also further below, pp. 232-49.

5. Cfr. below, pp. 230-49.

6. Although we are in the dark as to the gender of the anonymous author of the *HNE* and *MNE* and although it has been suggested that the *MNE* may be the result of a class exercise, hence attributable to a group rather than a single poet, I will refer to them in the singular and with a masculine pronoun as shorthand for this/these unidentified individual(s). Cfr. also below, p. xyz.

7. Cfr. *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 260-78.

Columba (ca. 521-97) and his missionary activity among the northern Picts⁸. According to Bede, Nynia was a British bishop and holy man, who had been trained in the Catholic orthodoxy in Rome and eventually founded a church dedicated to St. Martin in his episcopal see situated in an area which in Bede's day belonged to Bernicia, the northern region of Northumbria, and which today corresponds to modern Wigtownshire, Galloway, a county at the southwestern tip of Scotland. In particular, the site of Nynia's church was called in Latin *Ad Candidam Casam*, in Old English *Hwitærn*, «(lit.) white building, Whithorn», because it was allegedly made of whitewashed stone in a manner unusual among the Britons. Nynia was a missionary among the southern Picts, who, thanks to his apostolate, had given up on their erroneous idolatry and accepted the true faith («relicto errore idolatriae, fidem ueritatis acceperant») much earlier than their northern fellows («multo ante tempore»), as the story goes («ut perhibent»)⁹.

While providing the traditionally accepted chronology and outline of Nynia's career, Bede's précis does not entirely correspond with the other two early medieval sources on the saint, namely the *MNE* and the twelfth-century *Vita S. Niniani* (henceforth *VSN*) by Ailred of Rievaulx (ca. 1110-67)¹⁰. The relationship between the three accounts has been subject to "turbulent" scrutiny by modern scholarship¹¹, in that both the origin of Nynia's literary tradition has been contested and its subsequent development has been complicated by the (often wildly speculative) inclusion of multiple intervening texts and contaminations¹². As the scholarly debate

8. B. Colgrave - R. A. B. Mynors (edd.), *Beda Venerabilis, Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Oxford 1969, III.iv, pp. 220-5. Cfr. K. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen für das Leben des hl. Ninian*, «Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde», 43 (1920-2), pp. 3-26, esp. p. 17; N. K. Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study of the Sources*, «Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society» 3rd s., 27 (1948-9), pp. 9-53, esp. p. 32; J. MacQueen, *St. Nynia: A Study of Literary and Linguistic Evidence*, 2nd ed., Edinburgh 2005, p. 3; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 78; M. D. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life of Saint Ninian*, «The Innes Review», 70/II (2019), pp. 205-12, esp. p. 206.

9. *HE*, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), pp. 222-3.

10. [BHL 6239]; D. Pezzini (ed.), *Aelredus Rievallensis, Vita Sancti Niniani*, in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera historica et hagiographica*, Turnhout 2017 (CCCM 3. *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera omnia*, 6), pp. 113-34. The most recent English translation features in M. L. Dutton (ed.), *Aelred of Rievaulx, The Lives of the Northern Saints*, trans. by J. P. Freeland, Kalamazoo (MI) 2006 (Cistercian Fathers Series, 71), pp. 35-63.

11. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., p. 205.

12. *Ibidem*, pp. 207-9 and 212.

tried to bridge the gap between a (supposedly) fifth- or sixth-century figure and the later extant narratives, not just the antiquity of Nynia but his very historicity has been called into question¹³.

The *HE*, *MNE*, and *VSN* all postdate the Northumbrian takeover of Galloway, which took place in the last quarter of the seventh century or the first quarter of the eighth¹⁴. Whatever its exact timing, however, the Northumbrian occupation seems to have been a gradual and fundamentally peaceful affair¹⁵. Archaeological excavations, in particular, have afforded evidence of a Christian settlement at Whithorn potentially as early as the fifth century¹⁶, with a subsequent phase of expansion and redevelopment as a consequence of the arrival of the Northumbrian newcomers¹⁷. The mode of this arrival suggests «accommodation rather than conquest»¹⁸, with the adoption of local culture (including a native saint's cult?), and, from the point of view of the ecclesiastical administration, the Northumbrian occupation was sealed by the rise of the English Pehthelm, formerly a monk and deacon under Aldhelm, to the episcopate of Whithorn *ca.* 731¹⁹.

13. Cfr. below, pp. 232-49.

14. P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavations of a Monastic Town 1984-91*, Stroud 1997, pp. 26-39, esp. p. 37 and J. M. Wooding, *St Ninian: Archaeology and the Dossier of the Saint*, in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland, Papers from the Conference Held by the Friends of the Whithorn Trust in Whithorn on September 15th 2007*, cur. J. Murray, Oxford 2009 (BAR British Series, 483), pp. 9-18, esp. p. 13.

15. C. Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons, Dalriadan Irish and Picts*, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. I: c. 500 - c. 700*, cur. P. Fouracre, Cambridge 2005, pp. 426-61, esp. pp. 431-5.

16. *Ibidem*, pp. 434-5; Wooding, *St Ninian: Archaeology and the Dossier* cit.; and K. Forsyth, *The Latinus Stone: Whithorn's Earliest Christian Monument*, in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland* cit., pp. 19-41. On the early Christian inscriptions of Galloway, cfr. C. T. Thomas, *The Early Inscriptions of Southern Scotland*, «Glasgow Archaeological Journal», 17 (1991-2), pp. 1-10; D. J. Craig, *The Distribution of Pre-Norman Sculpture in South-West Scotland: Provenance, Ornament and Regional Groups*, unpubl. PhD diss., University of Durham 1992, pp. 203-65; and K. Dark, *Stones of the Saints? Inscribed Stones, Monasticism and the Evangelisation of Western and Northern Britain in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*, «The Journal of Ecclesiastical History», 72/II (2021), pp. 239-58. On the different interpretations of archaeological evidence, i.e. in favour of a fifth- or sixth-century date of St. Nynia, cfr. Garcia, *Saint Alban and the Cult of Saints* cit., pp. 11-2; cfr. also above, n. 4. For a survey of the documentary evidence on Whithorn history from its foundation to s. XII^{1/4}, cfr. Craig, *The Distribution of Pre-Norman Sculpture* cit., pp. 44-63; A. Macquarrie, *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History, AD 450-1093*, Edinburgh 1997, pp. 22-7; and Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian* cit., pp. 1-4.

17. *Ibidem*, pp. 40-7 and 134-82, and Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 37-42 and 86.

18. *Ibidem*, p. 82.

19. M. Bateson (rev. by M. Costambeys), *Pehthelm*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, XLIII, Oxford 2004, p. 441; S. Keynes, *Appendix II. Archbishops and Bishops, 597-1066*, in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, cur. M. Lapidge - J. Blair - S. Keynes - D. Scragg, 2nd

Given the chronology of the three earliest documentary sources on Nynia, it has been much debated whether the new Northumbrian bishopric played as the very initiator of Nynia's hagiographic tradition or rather as the editor – and if so to what extent – of a pre-existent legend. Bede's fleeting as well as cryptic phrase «ut perhibent» has been variously interpreted: from a mere «hearsay»²⁰ to an expression of scepticism by a non-committal Bede who regarded his source(s) – whether oral or written and however worthy of recording – as perhaps dependent on a local tradition²¹; from a familiarity with an “abstract” of a full-fledged *uita*, now lost²², to, finally, a comprehensive knowledge of this putative *uita*²³. In the preface to the *VSN*, Ailred of Rievaulx quotes verbatim the account of Nynia from the *HE*, praising Bede's trustworthy testimony (*fideli testimonio*) and stating that his own work merely aims to expand on it by means of a certain *liber de uita et miraculis* [*S. Niniani*] (henceforth *LVM*)²⁴. Whereas no details are provided about the dating and authorship of this putative life (we are simply told that it was written by men of old, «uitam [...] a prioribus exaratam»)²⁵, Ailred dwells on its coarse style and basic language. Indeed, he claims that his work consisted of bringing out into the light of Latin eloquence («in lucem Latine locutionis educam») the life of the most holy Nynia, which had so far been obscured by a barbaric style and rustic language («sermo barbaricus obscurabat; nimis barbarico [...] stilo; a sermone rustico»)²⁶.

ed., Oxford 2014 (henceforth *BEASE*), p. 566; and B. Yorke, *Aldhelm's Irish and British Connections, in Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric Based on Papers Given at a Conference Held at Sherborne in June 2005 to Mark the Thirteen-hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Bishopric by Aldhelm of Malmesbury*, curr. K. Barker - N. P. Brooks, Oxford-Oakville (CT) 2010, pp. 164-80, esp. p. 178. Interestingly, the very anthroponym Pehthelm means «helmet, protector of the Picts»: cfr. Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 35-6; cfr. also below, pp. 236-7.

20. C. Plummer (ed.), *Beda Venerabilis, Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum; Historia abbatum; Epistola ad Ecgerbertum una cum Historia abbatum auctore anonymo*, II, Oxford 1896, p. 128; W. Levison, *An Eighth-Century Poem on St. Ninian*, «*Antiquity*», 14 (1940), pp. 280-91, esp. pp. 289-90; and P. Grosjean, *Les Pictes apostats dans l'Épître de S. Patrice*, «*Analecta Bollandiana*», 76 (1958), pp. 354-78, esp. p. 355, n. 2.

21. Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 11 and 31.

22. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 6 and 11-2 and J. E. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn and the Making of St Ninian*, «*The Innes Review*», 53/1 (2002), pp. 40-59, at p. 41. According to Colgrave and Mynors, «there is no doubt» that a *uita* of St. Nynia existed in Bede's day, although he did not have access to it, whereas the *MNE* is «almost certainly based on it»: *HE*, Colgrave-Mynors (ed.), p. 222, n. 2. Cfr. further below, pp. 237-8.

23. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 17; Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., p. 32; and Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit.

24. *VSN*, *Prefatio*, Pezzini (ed.), p. 115, esp. ll. 33 and 41-2.

25. *VSN*, *Prologus*, Pezzini (ed.), p. 113, ll. 16-7.

26. *VSN*, *Prologus*, Pezzini (ed.), p. 113, ll. 13 and 16-8.

Such statements have been interpreted as a hint of the vernacular origin of Ailred's exemplar²⁷. Evidence that he would have translated into Latin a putative Old English antecedent would be afforded by the place-name *Farres last*, «(lit.) bull's hoof-mark», commemorating the miraculous rescue of Nynia's cattle from some robbers on the part of a bull that killed the gang leader and left trace of his attack by imprinting his hoof into a rock as if into soft wax²⁸. In particular, the Old English place-name *Farres last*, unparalleled and unidentified, has been interpreted as the English calque of an originally Celtic placename via Latin²⁹. Also, in one of its three manuscript witnesses, that is London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius D. III (England, s. XII^{4/4}-XIII^{1/4}), the VSN is introduced as a translation from English («de Anglico in Latinum translata», f. 186r)³⁰.

On the other hand, Ailred's disparaging comments on the *sermo barbaricus* or *rusticus* of his immediate source does not necessarily mean a language other than Latin, but should rather be read as a stylistic assessment and taken to mean a less refined form of Latin than Ailred's own³¹. Moreover, the occurrence of an Old English placename *per se* does not necessarily imply that the whole lost LVM was in Old English, as a vernacular placename could just as well have been present in a Latin text³². Finally, the complaint about the barbarism of a source can be considered a commonplace and is indeed shared by the life of another early Scottish saint, St. Kentigern³³.

In sum, it is both unnecessary and unconvincing to posit an Old English life and the language of St. Nynia's early hagiographic tradition must

27. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 4-5 and 11, and Id., *The Literary Sources for the Life of St Nynian*, in *Galloway: Land and Lordship*, curr. R. D. Oram - G. P. Stell, Edinburgh 1991, pp. 17-25, esp. pp. 17 and 20. Cf. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 4-17; Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., p. 20; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 55-6; and Fraser, *Northumbrian Whithorn* cit., p. 43.

28. VSN viii.29, Pezzini (ed.), p. 125. The same episode is recounted in MNE but with no mention of the placename: cfr. MNE viii.227-30, Strecker (ed.), p. 952. Cfr. also *infra* the entry dedicated to the MNE, n. 62.

29. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 4-5 and 11, and Id., *The Literary Sources* cit., pp. 17 and 20.

30. VSN, Pezzini (ed.), pp. 56*-7* and R. E. Guglielmetti - G. Orlandi (edd.), *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, Firenze 2017 (Millennio medievale, 114. Testi, 29), pp. 32-4. Cfr. also the British Library record available online.

31. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 5-7 and 15-6; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 56; Levison, *An Eighth-Century Poem* cit., p. 289; and Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., p. 212.

32. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 55-6.

33. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., p. 212, n. 29.

have been Latin³⁴. Yet, it is a point of no little relevance whether what we might call Nynia's *Ur-uīta* (or what Ailred called the *LVM*)³⁵ pre- or post-dated the Northumbrian period, that is whether it was a British-Latin or an Anglo-Latin text. Scholars have long detected in the progression of Nynia's biography as well as in the miracle narratives of both the *MNE* and the *VSN* hagiological motifs which are best paralleled in west British and Breton hagiography³⁶. The derivative nature of Nynia's legend and its analogues with British saints' lives have been taken to the extreme by Thomas Clancy, who has argued that Nynia is one of the manifestations of a fissile saint, whose original name would have been **Uinniau* but is historically attested under a multiplicity of British and Gaelic names (and their Latinised forms), including Finnian, Innan, Winnin, Winnoc, as well as Ninian³⁷. The latter is the by-form sanctioned by the *VSN*, probably resulting from a misreading of a Latinised form *Nin(n)iauus*, itself in turn traceable to a misreading of an original British **Uin(n)iau*³⁸. (On this regard, it should be noted that the *MNE* also attests the form *Nyniau* in the nominative and vocative³⁹). According to this revisionist reading, Nynia would be a local (i.e. Galwegian) and literary personification of **Uinniau*, whom Clancy identifies with the historical individual ultimately underlying St. Finnian of Movilla († 579)⁴⁰. As all the relevant documentary and cultic attestations post-date the Northumbrian political annexation of Galloway at the end of the seventh- or early eighth-century, the Ninian-

34. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn* cit., pp. 43-4.

35. Cfr. above, p. 230.

36. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 11-6; J. MacQueen, *History and Miracle Stories in the Biography of Nynia*, «The Innes Review», 13 (1962), pp. 115-29, esp. p. 118; Id., *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 5-6, 12 and 87; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 54-69; and Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 37-43.

37. The original name, historicity and ethnicity of **Uinniau* is in fact far from controversial as Clancy himself admits: cfr. T. O. Clancy, *The Real St Ninian*, «The Innes Review», 52/1 (2001), pp. 1-28, esp. pp. 12-20. Cfr. also T. O. Clancy, *Scottish Saints and National Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, curr. A. Thacker - R. Sharpe, Oxford 2002, pp. 397-421, esp. pp. 399-404; and Id., *The Big Man, the Footsteps, and the Fissile Saint: Paradigms and Problems in Studies of Insular Saints' Cults*, in *The Cult of Saints and the Virgin Mary in Medieval Scotland*, curr. S. Boardman - E. Williamson, Woodbridge 2010 (Studies in Celtic History, 28), pp. 1-20. In the last essay, however, Clancy mitigated his arguments: cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 6-7, n. 21, and below, p. 233. Cfr. also P. A. Wilson, *St Ninian: An Onomastic Note*, «Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society» 3rd s., 52 (1976-7), pp. 167-8.

38. Clancy, *The Real St Ninian* cit., pp. 17-22, and relevant bibliography esp. p. 21, nn. 81-2.

39. *MNE*, vi.171 and xiii.402, Strecker (ed.), pp. 951 and 958.

40. Clancy, *The Real St Ninian* cit., p. 25. On Finnian of Movilla, cfr. T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 291-3.

named impersonation of **Uinniau* would be a Northumbrian creation, albeit of much earlier origin. This Northumbrian literary fabrication was eventually revived in the twelfth-century with the re-establishment of the Whithorn bishopric and the commission of the *VSN* to the influential reformer Ailred, and further boosted in the fourteenth century with the rise of Nynia to the rank of Scottish national saint, whose cult was actively promoted by Scottish kings⁴¹.

The nihilistic implications of Clancy's argument, potentially denying any historicity to Nynia, have not gone uncontested⁴², and even the sequel of misreadings posited to explain the transition from the fifth- or sixth-century **Uinniau* to the eighth-century *Nynia(u)* up to the twelfth-century *Ninian* has been disputed, in that the continuity of settlement consistently revealed by archaeological excavations «makes more likely a comparable continuity of records», as well as a presumable accuracy in the transmission of the founder's name⁴³. Clancy himself has mitigated his most controversial suggestions⁴⁴, but has maintained that Nynia's legend as we know it is «the literary and politicised narrative» or the «hagiographical propaganda» purposefully concocted by the Whithorn bishopric and its patrons in two crucial phases of its history, the eighth and the twelfth century respectively⁴⁵.

Building on Clancy's conclusions, James Fraser has agreed that the *LVM* must have been the work of an anonymous hagiographer «pulling together a handful of Galwegian traditions about Uinniau»⁴⁶; however, in

41. Clancy, *The Big Man, the Footsteps, and the Fissile Saint* cit., pp. 7-9; Id., *Scottish Saints and National Identities* cit.; G. Donaldson, *The Bishops and Priors of Whithorn*, «Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society» 3rd s., 27 (1948/9), pp. 127-54; and T. Turpie, *Kind Neighbours: Scottish Saints and Society in the Later Middle Ages*, Leiden 2015 (The Northern World, 70), pp. 94-139.

42. G. W. S. Barrow, *Saint Ninian and Pictomania*, Whithorn 2004 (The Twelfth Whithorn Lecture), pp. 7-10; MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 152-68; and Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit.

43. Wooding, *St Ninian: Archaeology and the Dossier* cit., p. 15.

44. Clancy, *The Big Man, the Footsteps, and the Fissile Saint* cit., pp. 6-7, esp. n. 21.

45. Clancy, *The Real St Ninian* cit., esp. pp. 2 and 6. Previous scholarship had already emphasised the historical pulls on the development of St. Nynia's dossier (i.e. «a reflection of Whithorn's response to new demands and opportunities in a changeable world») and his cult (which «was manipulated in different ways at different times to suit different ends»): cfr. D. Broun, *The Literary Record of St Nynia: Fact and Fiction?*, «The Innes Review», 42/II (1991), pp. 143-50, esp. p. 146 and Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 78 and 81-6, quotation at p. 78.

46. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn* cit., p. 52. The eclectic and diverse character of the hagiographical material at the origin of the Nynia dossier had already been pointed out by P. A. Wilson,

doing so, the anonymous hagiographer «[drew] parallels between his subject and St Wilfrid[d]» († 710)⁴⁷, the formidable and controversial bishop of York, who restored Paulinus's ruined cathedral and nurtured metropolitan ambitions for his see over the whole of northern Britain, as well as exerting his control on a number of important monasteries in Northumbria, Mercia, and Sussex⁴⁸. Nynia's career would have been modelled on that of St. Wilfrid's as attested in the *Vita S. Wilfrithi*⁴⁹, «one of the most vivid biographies to survive from the early medieval west»⁵⁰, authored within a decade of St. Wilfrid's death (710×720) by Stephen of Ripon, a disciple of St. Wilfrid's⁵¹, at the behest of Tatberht, abbot of Ripon, and Acca, bishop of Hexham (710-32)⁵². In particular, the reports of St. Wilfrid's many trips to Rome and his passionate advocacy of Roman observance, as well as his missionary activity on both sides of the Channel, would have influenced two key moments of Nynia's biography, namely his journey to Rome and his mission to the southern Picts, although the two experiences are related with a different degree of emphasis in the surviving sources⁵³. The (alleged) Wilfridian element in Nynia's legend would help define the dating of the *LVM* more narrowly, as the *Vita S. Wilfrithi* would afford the *terminus post quem* of 710×720, as opposed to the *terminus ante quem* of 731 represented by the *HE*⁵⁴. Moreover, a novel locale of composition and novel promoters of Nynia's cult would emerge, in that the impetus for putting together a *vita* of our saint, modelled on the *Vita S. Wilfrithi*, could have come from a Wilfridian foundation such as Hexham, especially under the episcopate of Acca, a devoted follower of Wilfrid, whom Acca had succeeded as bishop of Hexham after Wilfrid's death in 710⁵⁵. Besides commissioning, together with Tatberht of Ripon⁵⁶, the *Vita S. Wilfrithi*,

St. Ninian and Candida Casa: Literary Evidence from Ireland, «Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society» 3rd s., 41 (1942-3), pp. 156-85, esp. p. 177.

47. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn* cit., p. 52.

48. A. Thacker, *Wilfrid, St.*, in *BEASE*, pp. 495-6.

49. [BHL 8889]; B. Colgrave (ed.), Eddius Stephanus, *Vita S. Wilfridi*, Cambridge 1927.

50. Thacker, *Wilfrid, St.* cit., p. 496.

51. M. Lapidge, *Stephen of Ripon*, in *BEASE*, p. 443.

52. M. Lapidge, *Acca*, in *BEASE*, pp. 4-5.

53. Cfr. below, pp. 238-45.

54. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn* cit., pp. 48-54. Chadwick and Grosjean had already argued for a dating of the *LVM* after about 720 and before Bede's use of an abstract of it around 730: cfr. Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 30-2 and Grosjean, *Les Pictes apostats* cit., p. 360.

55. R. N. Bailey, *Hexham*, in *BEASE*, pp. 242-3. Cfr. also above, n. 52.

56. R. N. Bailey, *Ripon*, in *BEASE*, pp. 405-6. Ripon and Hexham were two of the major foundations of Wilfrid's extensive "family" of monasteries.

Acca built up a large library at Hexham, collecting passions of martyrs as well as other ecclesiastical books, and, last but definitely not least, Acca probably played a strategic role in the intricate and divisive question of diocesan organisation and episcopal provision which dominated the debate within the Northumbrian church in the first three decades of the eighth century⁵⁷. After Iona itself had conformed to Roman Easter in 716 and while York began campaigning to be created a metropolitan see, the lingering rivalry between the (Romanising) Wilfridians and the (Ionan) Lindisfarne played out in the competition between eligible new suffragan bishoprics and related saints' cults⁵⁸. Against the backdrop of these conflicting ambitions, Acca may have favoured Whithorn as an episcopal see with jurisdiction over the farthest west regions of his own see, Hexham, and with a founding saint whose legend would be subtly concocted in order to bestow upon him the same orthodox and missionary pedigree as St. Wilfrid's. By sharing the same Roman training and missionary zeal as St. Wilfrid's, a veritable champion and founding father of the Northumbrian church in Acca's eye, Nynia, though of British ethnicity, would be made to embody the key values of Northumbrian Christianity, thereby granting a sense of continuity between the original British see and the eighth-century Northumbrian one⁵⁹. Hence, the compilation of the *LVM* and the related promotion of St. Nynia should be put down to Acca (or his circle) at Hexham (or a dependent foundation) in order «to rationalise the elevation of the church of Whithorn to the seat of a Northumbrian bishopric»⁶⁰.

Indeed, an argument in favour of an origin of the *LVM* in a location other than Whithorn is that the **Uinniau/Nynia(u)* misreading or misspelling could hardly have occurred at Whithorn, where the name of the founder would have been well known⁶¹. Otherwise, Fraser's reconstruction of the ecclesiastical politics of early eighth-century Northumbria risks over-simplifying a situation which was probably more complex and more nuanced, and where Acca's attempts to undermine the Ionan legacy of the Northumbrian church represented by Lindisfarne and the related

57. C. Stancliffe, *Disputed Episcopacy: Bede, Acca and the Relationship between Stephen's Life of St Wilfrid and the Early Prose Lives of St Cuthbert*, «Anglo-Saxon England», 41 (2012), pp. 7-39.

58. *Ibidem*, pp. 31-9.

59. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whithorn* cit., pp. 55-9.

60. *Ibidem*, p. 57. Cfr. also J. E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795*, Edinburgh 2009 (New Edinburgh History of Scotland), pp. 68-93.

61. Cfr. above, p. 233.

cult of St. Cuthbert focused not so much on St. Nynia or even on St. Wilfrid himself for that matter, as on St. Oswald († 642), the first king of Northumbria⁶², and on the site of his first miracle, Heavenfield, conveniently located close to Hexham⁶³. Also, the bishop of the newly (re)-established see of Whithorn in the early 730s, Pehthelm, eludes Fraser's dichotomic outlook in that he can be considered an outsider, not being associated with either Hexham or Lindisfarne but with Wessex and, especially, Aldhelm instead⁶⁴. Traditionally credited as the chief architect of the transition from the British-Latin hagiographic tradition to the Anglo-Latin *LVM*, Pehthelm either personally revised the pre-Northumbrian life or supervised such a revision aimed at bringing the previous legend in line with the early eighth-century agenda of the new Northumbrian see⁶⁵. A former pupil of Aldhelm, Pehthelm must have been an erudite man of some repute, consulted by both Bede⁶⁶ and Boniface⁶⁷. (Nynia himself is also praised as *praeclarus doctor in orbe* in the *MNE*⁶⁸, a phrase which, beyond the obvious eulogy of the saint, could suggest that Whithorn had built up a reputation as a place of learning⁶⁹.) Bede identifies Pehthelm as the first bishop of Whithorn in a brief survey of the English church in 731 which concludes the *HE*⁷⁰, an apparent contradiction with the previous identification of Nynia as the founder and first bishop of Whithorn, which may be put down to a memory-slip by Bede or simply to his wish to emphasise Pehthelm as Whithorn first *Northumbrian*

62. P. Holdsworth, *Oswald*, in *BEASE*, p. 355.

63. Stancliffe, *Disputed Episcopacy* cit.

64. Cfr. above, p. 229.

65. Chadwick, *St Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 35-6; Grosjean, *Les Pictes apostats* cit., p. 361; and Clancy, *The Real St Ninian* cit., pp. 6 and 8-9. MacQueen only tentatively posits Pehthelm as the intermediary between the pre- and post-Northumbrian tradition: *The Literary Sources* cit., p. 20.

66. Bede is aware of Pehthelm's training with Aldhelm and acknowledges him as the source of two miracle stories recounted in the *HE*: cfr. *HE*, V.xiii and xviii, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), pp. 498-503 and 512-7.

67. In an undated letter, Boniface seeks Pehthelm's advice on a matter of canon law (i.e. asking him whether a godfather can marry the widowed mother of his godchild): Bonifatius, *Epistola* xxxii, in M. Tangl (ed.), *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, Berlin 1916 (MGH ES I), pp. 55-6, and *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. by E. Emerton, New York (NY) 1940, pp. 61-2.

68. *MNE*, i.17, Strecker (ed.), p. 945.

69. F. Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom: The Golden Age and the Viking Age*, Woodbridge 2019 (Studies in Celtic History, 40), pp. 120-6, and Ead., *Whitborn's Renown in the Early Medieval Period: Whitborn, Futerna and Magnum Monasterium*, Whithorn 2009 (The Sixteenth Whithorn Lecture).

70. *HE*, V.xxiii, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), pp. 556-61, esp. pp. 558-61.

bishop⁷¹. What is more, Pehthelm has generally, though not universally, been considered Bede's informant on St. Nynia, as he would have sent Bede what a persisting scholarly trend has envisaged as an "abstract" of the *LVM*⁷², which Bede would then have inserted *ex post* into his chapter on Columba⁷³.

Other sources for the (in)famous abstract consulted by Bede have been proposed in Ecgberht of Iona († 729), the English abbot who brought Iona into conformity with Roman practice and would have derived his knowledge of Nynia «from [a lost] Irish source», presumably corresponding with the British-Latin life underlying the *LVM*⁷⁴, and in the above-discussed Acca of Hexham, who was a correspondent of Bede and a dedicatee of several of his exegetical works⁷⁵. Whoever the epitomiser may have been, the fortune of Bede's "abstract" within the Nynia's dossier and relevant scholarship can also be put down to the brevity of Bede's own sketchy account on the saint in the *HE*. However, it is equally possible that Bede did not simply replicate the digest he had allegedly received but that he edited the whole *LVM* himself⁷⁶.

Indeed, Mark Laynesmith has recently argued that a synoptic reading of Bede's notice on Nynia in the *HE*, the *MNE*, and the *VSN* strongly suggests that not only the latter two⁷⁷, but also Bede's sketch could ultimately be traced to the same source-text, namely the Anglo-Latin *LVM* put together under or by Pehthelm⁷⁸. Hence, it is not necessary to posit Pehthelm's "abstract" intervening between the *LVM* and Bede, as Bede

71. MacQueen, *The Literary Sources* cit., p. 18; Id., *St. Nynia* cit., p. 3; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 82, n. 277; and Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., p. 207.

72. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 2-3 and 11. Cfr. also Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 17; Chadwick, *St. Ninian: A Preliminary Study* cit., pp. 24-32; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 78; Clancy, *The Real Ninian* cit., pp. 3-4; and Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., pp. 207 and 209.

73. Cfr. above, n. 8.

74. A. A. M. Duncan, *Bede, Iona, and the Picts*, in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R. W. Southern*, curr. R. H. C. Davis - J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Oxford 1981, pp. 1-42, esp. pp. 28, 31, and 33, quotation at 31. Duncan's arguments have been dismissed by Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., p. 304.

75. Fraser, *Northumbrian Whitborn* cit., pp. 54-6. Cfr. also above, pp. 234-5.

76. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit., pp. 211-2. According to Levison, the *LVM* may have post-dated Bede and depended on the *HE* instead: cfr. his *An Eighth-Century Poem* cit., p. 290.

77. As already put forward by Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 16-7.

78. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit.

himself could have been responsible for the pretty drastic editing of the *LVM*⁷⁹, just as Ailred and the anonymous poet of the *MNE* seem to have eventually interpolated additional matter into their shared ultimate source⁸⁰.

The common derivation of Bede's account, the *MNE*, and the *VSN* from the same ultimate source seems to be supported by the fact that they all share the same basic outline of Nynia's life, with the important exception of the saint's miracles, which are altogether lacking in the *HE*⁸¹. In particular the three defining episodes of Nynia's career, that is the journey to Rome, the missionary activity among the southern Picts, and the foundation of *Candida Casa*, stone-built and dedicated to St. Martin, feature in all three texts, though with a varying level of emphasis and detail.

For Bede, Nynia's sojourn in Rome was aimed at being instructed in the orthodoxy of the Christian faith («Romae regulariter fidem et mysteria veritatis edoctus»), whereas his mission among the southern Picts seems to reflect Bede's scruples in detailing the chronology and the mapping of the Christianisation of Pictavia, by distinguishing between Columba's apostolate, carried out among the northern Picts in the mid-sixth century, and Nynia's mission which involved the southern Picts at an unspecified time long before Columba («multo ante tempore»). Bede's report about these two undertakings by Nynia has predominantly been interpreted in view of Bede's own Roman penchant and apostolic preoccupations. Indeed, according to a famous definition, Bede would have tried to make Nynia a convenient "contra Columba"⁸² or at least a vigorous competitor of the latter in the conversion of the Picts, thereby ultimately undermining Columba's achievements as a missionary⁸³. Such a blatant anti-Ionan bias on Bede's part, however, overlooks the crucial role that Bede assigned

79. Bede's synthesis was especially radical with regard to Nynia's miracle stories, which abound in both the *MNE* and the *VSN*, while they are utterly absent from the *HE*, presumably because of Bede's caution in dealing with miraculous events which allegedly occurred in such a remote past and therefore could hardly be verified: MacQueen, *The Literary Sources* cit., p. 19. On Bede's attitude to miracles, in general, cfr. at least the recent reassessment by E. Ahern, *Bede's Miracles Reconsidered*, «Early Medieval Europe», 26/III (2018), pp. 282-303; cfr. also *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, p. 268.

80. Laynesmith, *Bede, Aelred of Rievaulx, and the Lost Anglo-Saxon Prose Life* cit. Cfr. also *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 268-75.

81. Cfr. above, n. 79.

82. Grosjean, *Les Pictes apostats* cit., p. 361.

83. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 78-81 and MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., p. 3.

to the Irish mission in Northumbria and the complimentary portrait he draws of Aidan of Lindisfarne, as well as Bede's appreciation of the model of monastic episcopacy or pastoral monasticism implemented at Lindisfarne and best embodied by St. Cuthbert⁸⁴, a saint to whom Bede dedicated both a prose and a verse life⁸⁵. In sum, the partisanship of Bede's "agenda" has perhaps been exaggerated⁸⁶, while it should be taken into account his more nuanced and balanced assessment of the Ionan legacy within the «eirenical synthesis» of the conflicting components of Northumbrian Christianity that he achieves in the *HE*⁸⁷.

In the *MNE* the trip to Rome seems to make a pretty adventurous pilgrimage to the shrines of the early saints, as well as having a practical purpose, that is securing Nynia's episcopal consecration⁸⁸. However, that the doctrinal instruction in Roman orthodoxy cannot have been just a Bedan fixation is shown by the *VSN*. Here, Ailred dwells extensively on Nynia's Roman sojourn, specifying that it lasted several years («pluribus [...] annis»), during which he devoutly prayed at the shrines of the Apostles («ante sacras apostolorum reliquias deuotionis sue obsides lacrimas dimississet»), but most of all he was engaged in the study of doctrine and exegesis under the supervision of teachers to whom he had been entrusted by the Pope himself⁸⁹ («amplexatus eius deuotionem pontifex, loco eum filii

84. Stancliffe, *Disputed Episcopacy* cit., pp. 36-9.

85. M. Lapidge (ed.), *Beda Venerabilis, Vita metrica S. Cudberti*, in *Bede's Latin Poetry*, Oxford 2019, pp. 181-313 and B. Colgrave (ed.), *Beda Venerabilis, Vita S. Cuthberti*, in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life*, Cambridge 1940, pp. 141-307.

86. On Bede's reformist stance as expressed in particular in Book IV of the *HE*, cfr. S. DeGregorio, *Monasticism and Reform in Book IV of Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of the English People"*, «The Journal of Ecclesiastical History», 61/IV (2010), pp. 673-87, and N. J. Higham, *Bede's Agenda in Book IV of the "Ecclesiastical History of the English People": A Tricky Matter of Advising the King*, «The Journal of Ecclesiastical History», 64/III (2013), pp. 476-93.

87. Stancliffe, *Disputed Episcopacy* cit., p. 39. Cfr. also P. A. Wilson, *The Cult of St. Martin in the British Isles with Particular Reference to Canterbury and Candida Casa*, «The Innes Review», 19/II (1968), pp. 129-43, esp. pp. 130-1.

88. *MNE*, II.38-9 and 52, Strecker (ed.), pp. 946-7.

89. The Pope that welcomes Nynia to Rome in the *VSN* is not named but according to an oblique reference in the *MNE* (i.42, Strecker [ed.], p. 946) he seems to have been Clement I; MacQueen suggested that it is more likely that the Pope intended was Siricius († 399), who built the basilica of San Clemente in Rome (MacQueen, *The Literary Sources* cit., p. 19, and Id., *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 6 and 86); however, the line in question from the *MNE* is not an allusion to a pope but a verbatim borrowing from Aldhelm's poem *De basilica edificata*, honouring Bugga, daughter of King Centwine of Wessex: cfr. D. Bracken, *Review of St Nynia. With a Translation of the Miracula Nynie Episcopi and the Vita Niniani. By John MacQueen and Winifred MacQueen*, «The Journal of Ecclesiastical History», 59/I (2008), pp. 107-8, esp. p. 107.

summa cum deuotione suscepit, moxque doctoribus ueritatis, fidei disciplinis ac sanis Scripture sensibus tradidit imbuendum»)⁹⁰. Notably, thanks to this superior Roman training, Nynia becomes aware of the deficiencies of his previous studies, when he and his compatriots were inculcated many false beliefs contrary to sound doctrine («intelligens nimirum ab imperitis doctoribus multa sane doctrine aduersa sibi suisque compatriotis fuisse persuasa»)⁹¹. Thus, rather than Bede it is in fact Ailred who seems to be particularly emphasising the orthodoxy of Nynia's Roman training as opposed to some lapses of his local education, in all probability a reflex of the contemporary promotion of reformed Cistercianism endorsed by Ailred against the remaining secular collegiate churches, of which Whithorn appears to have been one⁹². Whatever the subsequent interpretations of Nynia's trip to Rome may have been and although no other evidence than the documentary one exists on this regard, the agreement of the three earliest texts on the saint, on the one hand, and the feasibility for such journeys – especially in view of an episcopal consecration – between the British Isles and Rome even in late antiquity, on the other, allow to conclude that a trip to Rome is a circumstance entirely consistent with the career of a fifth- or sixth-century British bishop⁹³.

Interestingly, in the VSN Nynia's Roman apprenticeship is intrinsically linked with the other key element of his biography, namely the mission to the Picts, in that the latter was a task explicitly assigned to Nynia by the Pope who had consecrated him bishop («pontifex romanus [...] predictum Dei uirum ad episcopatus gradum propriis manibus consecrauit, et premissis genti, [...] apostolum destinauit»)⁹⁴. As to the ethnicity and area of settlement of the nation recipient of Nynia's mission, Ailred provides inconsistent information, in that at first he speaks, rather vaguely, of those in the western parts of Britain («quosdam in occiduis Britannie partibus»)⁹⁵, but in a subsequent chapter he puzzlingly mentions the Picts in-

90. VSN, ii.1-33, esp. ll. 25, 1-2, and 5-8, Pezzini (ed.), pp. 117-18.

91. VSN, ii.10-2, Pezzini (ed.), p. 118.

92. Premonstratensian canons replaced the secular clergy serving at Whithorn 1175×1177: M. Dilworth, *Whithorn Priory in the Late Middle Ages*, Whithorn 1999 (The Second Whithorn Lecture), pp. 3-4.

93. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., p. 26 and I. Wood, *Britain and the Continent in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: The Evidence of Ninian*, in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland* cit., pp. 71-82. Cfr. also above, n. 4.

94. VSN, ii.28-33, Pezzini (ed.), p. 118.

95. VSN, ii.28-9, Pezzini (ed.), p. 118.

habiting a corner of this island («in angulo huius insule») where Nynia himself had settled, by which he probably means the Isle of Whithorn, and then he specifies that the recipients of Nynia's mission are the southern Picts («australes Pictos»)⁹⁶. Another inconsistency in Ailred's account concerns the religious beliefs of the Picts, since at first they are said to be either still pagan or to have been already converted to some heterodox form of Christianity by heretics or those who had little knowledge of God's law («necdum Saluatoris nostris suscepisse fidem [...] uel ab hereticis uel a legem Dei parum scientibus uerbum euangelii audisse»)⁹⁷, but eventually they are branded as downright pagan and idolatrous («austral[ibus] Pict[is] adhuc error gentilis inherens, idola multa et surda et uenerari ac colere compellebat aggrediens»)⁹⁸.

In both the *HE* and the *MNE* instead, Nynia's missionary activity is unrelated to any papal mandate and is aimed at the southern Picts, a still pagan nation. In particular, Bede distinguishes between the northern Picts, who were the target of Columba's mission, and the southern Picts («australes Picti») who lived south of the Mounth, the mountain ridge that divides Pictavia («qui intra eosdem montes habent sedes») and were first converted to Christianity long before Columba by Nynia⁹⁹. The *MNE* briefly mentions the mission among the Picts twice, but at least once, that is in the heading to chapter III, it is specified that the Picts are called *naturae* (*sic*) and they are still heathen¹⁰⁰. The reading *naturae* was emended long ago by Wilhelm Levison into *Niduarae*, on the basis of a corresponding reading in both prose lives of St. Cuthbert, the anonymous one and Bede's¹⁰¹. Now, the Latin reading *Niduarae* is probably of Old English origin and etymologically related to the adjective and prefix *neope-/niopo-/nipe-*, «low, situated beneath»¹⁰²; hence, it can be taken to mean the Picts of the (southern) Lowlands, as opposed to those of the (northern) Highlands, thereby agreeing with the *Picti australes* of Bede and Ailred.

96. VSN, vi.2 and 10, Pezzini (ed.), p. 123.

97. VSN, ii.30-1, Pezzini (ed.), p.118; cfr. also ii.57-60, p. 119.

98. VSN, vi.9-10, Pezzini (ed.), p. 123.

99. Cfr. above, p. 238.

100. *MNE*, III, Strecker (ed.), p. 947. Cfr. also *MNE*, iv.78, Strecker (ed.), p. 948.

101. *An Eighth-Century Poem* cit., pp. 288-9.

102. J. Bosworth - T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the late Joseph Bosworth*, Oxford 1881-98; *Supplement* by T. Northcote Toller with Revised and Enlarged Addenda by A. Campbell, Oxford 1921, s. u.

As to the chronology of this apostolate, the evidence provided by the three texts is obscure and somewhat contradictory¹⁰³. In Bede's brief account, Nynia is said to have been active as a missionary long before Columba and after his own juvenile sojourn in Rome. In the *MNE* the mission in Pictland apparently precedes the foundation of Whithorn¹⁰⁴, whereas the sequence is inverted in the *VSN*, where Nynia is presented as a contemporary of St. Martin¹⁰⁵. Similarly, the outcome of Nynia's apostolate is portrayed differently, since while Bede just mentions Nynia's preaching, without any allusions to new foundations, the *MNE* and the *VSN* refer to more concrete results of such preaching but again with a different emphasis. The *MNE* attributes to the saint the foundation of many monasteries, provided with an excellent company of monks who truly observe the rule («Plurima basilicis construxit rura novellis, / Quę nunc eximio monachorum examine pollent, / Vere Christicole servant monastica iura»)¹⁰⁶, while the *VSN* alludes only metaphorically to new foundations and stresses instead the ordination of new priests and creation of new parishes («cepit in [fidelium mentibus] sincere fidei iacere fundamenta, superedificans aurum sapientie [...] bonorumque operum lapides; ecclesie eriguntur; cepit [...] sacer pontifex ordinare presbiteros, consecrare episcopos, ceterasque ecclesiasticorum graduum distribuere dignitates, totam terram per certas parochias diuidere»)¹⁰⁷. Thereby, Ailred stresses the pastoral and diocesan impact of Nynia's mission rather than the monastic dimension emphasised by the *MNE*.

Scholars have attempted to supplement the (contradictory) literary evidence of the extent and impact of Nynia's mission with the analysis of place-names and church dedications in Scotland and northern England¹⁰⁸. However, the (top)onomastic data have not gathered general consensus and have ultimately proved inconclusive¹⁰⁹, showing at the most that the southern

103. A. Macquarrie, *The Date of Saint Ninian's Mission: A Reappraisal*, «Records of the Scottish Church Society», 23 (1987), pp. 1-25.

104. Cfr. *MNE* iii (about the mission in Pictland) and iv (about the foundation of Whithorn), Strecker (ed.), pp. 947-9.

105. Cfr. *VSN*, iii (about the foundation of Whithorn) and vi (about the mission in Pictland), Pezzini (ed.), pp. 119-21 and 123-4. Cfr. also below, pp. 246-8.

106. *MNE*, iii.72-4, Strecker (ed.), p. 947.

107. *VSN*, ii.60-2, vi.16 and 25-7, Pezzini (ed.), pp. 119 and 123-4.

108. Farmer, *Ninian* cit., p. 326; MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 27-31, 68-74 and 134-50; G. W. S. Barrow, *The Childhood of Scottish Christianity: A Note on Some Place-Name Evidence*, «Scottish Studies», 27 (1983), pp. 1-15; and Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 432 and 453.

109. As MacQueen has concluded, «the ecclesiastical history of [south-western] Scotland in the fifth and sixth century is more complicated than has hitherto been recognised» and «[m]ore work

Picts adopted Christianity from their British neighbours to the south¹¹⁰. Thus, Nynia's very characterisation as apostle of the Picts¹¹¹ seems to rely on what may be called a Whithorn narrative¹¹² where both Northumbrian and Pictish concerns as to the alignment to the Roman Easter would be represented¹¹³. On the one hand, the motif of Nynia's mission may have originated in the first period of the Northumbrian presence in Pictland in the late seventh century, when the Picts were no longer heathen but rather Christians following the Ionan rite¹¹⁴. Nynia's Pictish apostolate may therefore reflect the effort on the part of English ecclesiastics between the late seventh and early eighth century to align the young Pictish church with Roman liturgy¹¹⁵. On the other hand, there may also have been a Pictish interest in advocating their own apostle¹¹⁶. Pictish literary evidence is notoriously scarce, if non-existent¹¹⁷, but the *HE* attests to an epistolary ex-

is needed and might modify our conception of events in Britain as well as Ireland»: *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 168 and 144.

110. Broun, *Ninian* cit. and Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 451-61.

111. Farmer, *Ninian* cit.

112. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 22-3, argues that Whithorn was the sole source for the story of the mission to Pictland, though in the Supplement to the 2005 edition, he also claims that «evidence for the existence of Irish and possible Pictish sources has come into better focus»: cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 168 and 144-50.

113. On the Easter controversy and the thorny issues it implies, cfr. the convenient resumé in Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 391-414.

114. In the wake of the aggressive Northumbrian expansion under King Ecgfrith (670-85), the first English bishopric in Pictavia was established at Abercorn, close to the Antonine Wall, but had to be abandoned after the defeat and death of the king at Dunnichen: M. Lapidge, *Abercorn*, in *BEASE*, p. 4. Cf. K. W. Hughes who has argued that the Picts were little touched by Christianity until the eighth century: cfr. her *Early Christianity in Pictland*, Jarrow 1971 (Jarrow Lecture 1970), rptd. in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Scottish and Welsh Sources*, Woodbridge 1980, pp. 1-16, and the counterarguments by Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 301-3. Cfr. also below, n. 117.

115. Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 459-61 and Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 304-6. According to Wakeford, Nynia's legend could be likened to that of other early missionary saints venerated in Scotland, such as St. Serf or Serbán and St. Triduna or Tredwell: *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 79-80.

116. D. P. Kirby, *Bede and the Pictish Church*, «The Innes Review», 24 (1973), pp. 6-25, esp. pp. 21-3, is inclined to think that the story about Nynia's mission to the southern Picts may have come from the latter rather than from Whithorn, contrary to what he had argued previously: cfr. Id., *Bede's Native Sources for the Historia Ecclesiastica*, «Bulletin of the John Rylands Library», 48/II (1965-6), 341-71, esp. p. 350. To complicate the matter further, it has also been suggested that the target of Nynia's missionary activity were the people called Cruithnig, who may have migrated from Ulster to Galloway in the fifth century: Broun, *Ninian* cit.

117. Written sources for the Picts are so poor that K. W. Hughes concluded that Christianity, with its close association with literacy, can have made but slow headway there during the seventh century, and did not win full royal support until the early eighth: cfr. her *Early Christianity in Pictland* cit., but cfr. I. Henderson, *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland Displaying Crosses but No Other*

change occurred in the years 706×715 between Nechtan, king of the Picts, and Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow. In particular, Bede reports Ceolfrith's detailed answer to Nechtan's request of information about the Roman Easter and tonsure, as well as about architects able to build him a stone church to be dedicated to St. Peter¹¹⁸. The consequence of such an exchange and of Nechtan's resolve to follow Roman usage was the expulsion of the Columban clergy from Pictland, a move which may have been triggered not only by doctrinal scruples but also by political reasons, that is by Nechtan's intention to ingratiate himself to such a prestigious Northumbrian ecclesiastical institution as Wearmouth-Jarrow after the Picts had been defeated by the Northumbrians in 711¹¹⁹. In this scenario, a missionary saint such as Nynia, Roman-trained and unrelated to Iona, would have made the perfect founder of Pictish Christianity.

Political considerations aside, the Christianisation of Pictland was more likely the result of the cooperation between different evangelising forces active in the region, among which the Britons' role should not be underestimated¹²⁰. Thus, Bede's picture of a Pictavia divided in a Columban-Ionan north and a Roman-British south may ultimately be taken as accurate, although this dichotomy should be stretched to include possible contributions from the Irish church¹²¹, as well as being interpreted as a joint venture rather than a competition between Columba and Nynia or between Iona and Whithorn¹²².

Indeed, the inconsistencies of the three literary sources as to the different condition of the Picts – whether downright pagans or heterodox Christians – and as to the different nature – monastic or parochial – of the alleged foun-

Ornament, in *The Picts: A New Look at Old Problems*, cur. A. Small, Dundee 1987, pp. 45-58, esp. p. 48; K. Forsyth, *Literacy in Pictland*, in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, cur. H. Pryce, Cambridge 1998, pp. 39-61, esp. pp. 39-42; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 301-3; and Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 457-9.

118. *HE*, V.xxi, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), pp. 532-53. On Ceolfrith's arguments, cfr. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 391-2 and 411-2.

119. Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., p. 461.

120. *Ibidem*, pp. 446-61; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 299-308; and Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence* cit., pp. 99-126.

121. On the notoriety of Whithorn and Nynia in Irish sources and on the links between Whithorn and north-eastern Ireland, cfr. Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence* cit., pp. 120-6.

122. «It may tentatively be proposed [...] that the Britons of what is now southern Scotland did indeed play a role in the conversion of the Picts, but that this was as collaborators, not as competitors or predecessors, of Columba»: Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* cit., pp. 307-8, quotation at p. 308. On Nynia's apostolate as part of a wider evangelising enterprise in Pictland, cfr. Wood, *Britain and the Continent* cit. Cfr. also Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 453-4, and on the alleged Columba-Nynia antagonism, cfr. above, pp. 238-9.

dations established in the wake of Nynia's mission¹²³ may reflect the difficulty in describing retrospectively the diverse situation of fifth- and sixth-century Pictland and the gradual progress of the evangelisation and/or Roman alignment of the different Pictish regions. By the late eighth century, when the composition of both the *HNE* and the *MNE* can be confidently dated¹²⁴, the focus of the Whithorn community had shifted to the promotion of their own saint as a miracle-maker and healer and of their own see as a centre of pilgrimage¹²⁵. Hence, the vagueness of the *MNE* as to Nynia's (alleged) foundations in the area of his missionary activity may have been deliberate in order to discourage rival claims about his place of burial and possession of his relics¹²⁶, and the emphasis on the monastic character of such foundations may be put down to the marked monastic brand of the eighth-century Northumbrian church, as well as being perhaps revealing of the possibly monastic affiliation of the anonymous poet.

Eventually, the politico-religious context of Ailred's *VSN*, namely that of the re-establishment of Whithorn bishopric in the 1120s, probably also affected the furthering of the motifs of the Roman-trained founder as well as of the Pope-invested missionary. The reconstitution of the old see of Whithorn was the result of the joint efforts of the Lords of Galloway with both the papacy and the Archbishop of York and was aimed at preserving the independence of the Galwegian church from the ambitions of the recently set-up Scottish bishopric of Glasgow, which was claiming for itself the control of all the territories outside the jurisdiction of York¹²⁷. The context of composition of the *VSN* may also have had a bearing on the pastoral and parochial character of the foundations attributed to Nynia, thereby emphasising the continuity of the episcopal vocation of Whithorn, which, if we go by Bede's testimony and archaeological evidence, started life as a secular rather than a monastic site¹²⁸.

123. Cfr. above, p. 242.

124. Cfr. below, pp. 251-3.

125. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 80-1.

126. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., p. 150.

127. R. D. Oram, *In Obedience and Reverence: Whithorn and York c. 1128-c. 1250*, «The Innes Review», 42/II (1991), pp. 83-100. On the status of the Whithorn diocese between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries more generally, cfr. Id., *The Lordship of Galloway c. 1000 to c. 1250*, unpubl. PhD diss. University of St. Andrews 1988, pp. 14-7, 21-3, and 252-321; D. Brooke, *Wild Men and Holy Places: St Ninian, Whithorn and the Medieval Realm of Galloway*, Edinburgh 1994, pp. 90-1, 135-8, and 171-2; Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 34-5; and Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian* cit., pp. 22-4.

128. Cfr. above, p. 242, and below, pp. 247-8.

Finally, the third element of Nynia's career attested by all the three literary sources is the dedication of the first Whithorn church to St. Martin of Tours († 397)¹²⁹. Moreover, the *VSN* goes so far as staging a personal meeting between the two saints during a visit Nynia would have paid to St. Martin at Tours on his way back to Britain from Rome and it would have been St. Martin himself to provide the stonemasons who would eventually build the *Candida Casa*¹³⁰. Thus, Nynia would have been a contemporary of St. Martin, albeit of a younger generation, and his decision to dedicate Whithorn was allegedly taken after he received the sad news of St. Martin's passing¹³¹.

This chronology is unlikely, however, and the dedication of Whithorn to St. Martin is in all probability later¹³². Also, although excavations have shown Whithorn to be a high-status sub-Roman site, with far flung contacts with the Mediterranean and then Francia¹³³, it is unnecessary to posit direct contacts with the Gaulish church in Nynia's alleged lifetime¹³⁴. St. Martin was culted in England, where one of the earliest churches in Canterbury was dedicated to him and the lives of the saint by Sulpicius Severus and Gregory of Tours circulated widely¹³⁵; moreover, he was a popular saint in the Gaelic world as well¹³⁶. Furthermore, the influence of St. Martin's cult can arguably be detected in the emphasis of both the *MNE* and the *VSN* on miraculous healings specifically by means of the antique rite of incubation by the saint's tomb¹³⁷. As the accounts of these

129. Cfr. *HE*, III.iv, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), p. 222, l. 9; *MNE*, iv.88-91, Strecker (ed.), p. 948; and *VSN*, iii.7-9 and xi.53-4, Pezzini (ed.), pp. 119 and 130.

130. *VSN*, ii.34-54, Pezzini (ed.), pp. 118-19.

131. *VSN*, iii.7-9, Pezzini (ed.), p. 119.

132. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 31 and 86.

133. The most comprehensive study of the Whithorn excavations is Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian* cit. Cfr. also Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 37-42 and Stancliffe, *Christianity Amongst the Britons* cit., pp. 434-5.

134. Farmer, *Ninian* cit., p. 326 and Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 65. Cfr. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 20, 22, and 86.

135. Wilson, *The Cult of St. Martin* cit. On the manuscript witnesses of the two lives circulating in England up to 1100, cfr H. Gneuss - M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, Toronto 2014 (Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, 15), nos. 264, 296, 782, and 915 (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*), and 264, 521.3.1, 689, 782, and 915 (Gregory of Tours, *De uirtutibus S. Martini*).

136. J. Mullins, *Trouble at the White House: Anglo-Irish Relations and the Cult of St Martin*, in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings*, curr. J. Graham-Campbell - M. Ryan, London 2009 (Proceedings of the British Academy, 157), pp. 113-27, esp. pp. 113-6.

137. Cfr. *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 272-3.

miracles date at least from the Northumbrian period at Whithorn and result from the promotion of the site as a pilgrimage centre under the Northumbrian episcopacy, they seem to substantiate the English derivation and the later dedication to St. Martin¹³⁸.

The association with St. Martin has also been advocated with regard to the very name of Nynia's establishment, *Candida Casa*, in that the name *casa* itself would seem to imply that Whithorn originally was a foundation modelled on early Gaulish monastic communities, where the term *casa* was used to denote some very basic building¹³⁹. Indeed, in both classical and late antiquity Lat. *casa* denotes any simple, rustic or poorly-built house, a little cottage or hut, and Bede himself uses *casa* to refer to the modest infirmary where the poet Caedmon died¹⁴⁰. However, when describing Whithorn and explaining its very name, Bede specifies that it was called *Ad Candidam casam* because it was a whitewashed church of stone («ecclesia de lapide»), indeed quite an architectural novelty in Britain¹⁴¹ and certainly not a rustic or humble structure. Amid poetic metaphors and eulogistic exaggerations, the *MNE* and the *VSN* also confirm Bede's description, in that the former speaks of Whithorn as a towering temple, with burn-brick walls and lofty roof¹⁴², and the latter stresses that it was the first church built of stone in Britain¹⁴³. Thus, the description of Whithorn in the three major literary sources and Bede's explanation of Whithorn placename seem in quite patent contradiction with previous usage of *casa* and indeed also with Bede's own usage of the term regarding Caedmon's infirmary. Such a contradiction has been explained by positing that the stone-church attested by the hagiographic tradition was a secondary foundation replacing Nynia's original and much simpler building¹⁴⁴, a supposition which seems supported by the archaeological evidence.

Subsequent excavations at Whithorn have indeed shown that the earliest buildings had a timber structure and an overlay of wattle and daub and

138. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 64-5.

139. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 17-21. But on the secular rather than monastic character of the original foundation, cfr. below, p. 248.

140. *HE*, IV.xxii, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), pp. 414-21, esp. p. 418, l. 29. Cfr. C. T. Lewis - C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.u. Cfr. also the relevant entry in Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* XV.xii.1 in J.-Y. Guillaumin (ed.), *Étymologies: Livre XV: Constructions et terres*, Paris 2016 (Auteurs latins du Moyen Âge, 29), p. 77.

141. Cfr. above, p. 228.

142. *MNE*, iv.85-91, Strecker (ed.), p. 948.

143. *VSN*, iii.5-7, Pezzini (ed.), p. 119.

144. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 20-1.

that between the seventh and eight centuries – that is at the time of the Northumbria takeover of the bishopric – the site was expanded and redeveloped with the employment of new construction techniques¹⁴⁵. Furthermore, the excavations have revealed that the original religious site started life as an enclosed «developed cemetery»¹⁴⁶, and what now looks like a monastic complex, with a stone-built church and mausoleum aligned along a raised terrace, definitely dates to the Northumbrian period¹⁴⁷. That the original site did not have a monastic character is also corroborated by the literary evidence, where Nynia is never referred to as a monk or abbot, but as a priest or bishop¹⁴⁸. The monastic terminology used for Whithorn in the *MNE* and, more sparsely and obliquely, in the *VSN* can be interpreted as an anachronism, that is it can be explained in view of the subsequent development of Whithorn into an ecclesiastical site with diverse functions, as familiar in Northumbria and Ireland¹⁴⁹. (Indeed, St. Martin himself was a monk-bishop, and the association between the two saints may have implicitly bestowed a monastic status upon Nynia and/or his foundation). Also, episcopal churches like Whithorn implied some communal living, in that they had a chapter, that is a core group of priests living in common but whose primary responsibility was that of pastoral care¹⁵⁰.

In sum, when all the (alleged) major circumstances of Nynia's biography are considered, we are still very far from «a clear and consistent portrait of Nynia and his activities against the background of his times»¹⁵¹, and it is tempting to indulge in the overly negative conclusion that «[t]he only certainty is that the life and career of the real St. Ninian is impenetrably obscure»¹⁵². However, the consensus of the three major literary sources on some key circumstances of this historically tenuous figure en-

145. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 37-42. Cfr. also above, n. 17.

146. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian* cit., pp. 34 and 89-94.

147. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 39 and J. Blair, *Whithorn*, in *BEASE*, p. 493.

148. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 75 and 316-7.

149. Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence* cit., p. 122.

150. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 39-41.

151. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., p. 86.

152. Broun, *Ninian* cit. Cfr. also Id., *The Literary Record* cit., p. 148: «At the end of the day, the best literary evidence for dating St. Nynia remains Bede's unhelpfully vague description of the saint as being active *multo ante tempore* St. Columba, which can hardly be regarded as contemporary or disinterested information».

ables to outline the sketchy profile of a priest of British ethnicity, who was (probably) consecrated bishop in Rome, who founded the see of *Candida Casa* or Whithorn, and, finally, was entombed there. The chronological setting of all that could admittedly belong to both the fifth and the sixth century, when Christianity spread north from the Roman-ruled area to the British peoples living between the two Walls, and Nynia could equally have been the offspring of the Romano-British elite of an early Christian site or, eventually, a prestigious collaborator in the great Columban evangelising campaign¹⁵³.

That Nynia was laid to rest in his own church is another detail on which Bede, the *MNE*, and the *VSN* all agree¹⁵⁴, and it is a crucial one for the subsequent development of the saint's cult from the eighth century onwards and for the concurrent promotion of Whithorn as a pilgrimage centre. While Nynia's contour as a historical figure remains inevitably hazy, it is his posthumous career as miracle maker and healer, as well as the future expansion and fame of his church that can be documented much better. The *MNE* and the *HNE* are the two most important witnesses to the crucial phase of Nynia's cult after the Northumbrian take-over of Whithorn in the eighth century, as well as to the cultural milieu there in that momentous century for Nynia's see.

The *HNE* is uniquely attested in manuscript Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Patr. 17 (B.II.10) (s. XI^{1/3}; Mainz)¹⁵⁵, where it occurs at f. 161va-b as the penultimate item of the devotional *florilegium De laude Dei et de confessione orationibus Sanctorum* assembled by a certain *Alchonijs leuita*, that is Alcuin of York (ca. 735-804), possibly in the early 780s before he definitively left England for the Continent (786?)¹⁵⁶. Besides the Bamberg

153. Wood, *Britain and the Continent* cit.

154. Cfr. *HE*, III.iv, Colgrave-Mynors (edd.), p. 222, l. 14; *MNE*, ix (rubric), Strecker (ed.), p. 953; and *VSN*, xi.53-4, Pezzini (ed.), p. 130.

155. G. Suckale-Redlefsen, *Die Handschriften des 8. bis 11. Jahrhunderts der Staatsbibliothek Bamberg*, Wiesbaden 2004 (Katalog der illuminierten Handschriften der Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, 1), I, p. 128, no. 75, plates 446-8; F. Leitschuh - H. Fischer, *Katalog der Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Bamberg*, I.1, Bamberg 1887, rptd. Wiesbaden 1966, pp. 363-6 (s. X ex.); and C. P. E. Springer, *The Manuscripts of Sedulius. A Provisional Handlist*, Philadelphia (PA) 1995 (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 85.5), pp. 119-20 (s. X-XI).

156. D. Ganz, *Le De Laude Dei d'Alcuin*, «Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest», 111/III (2004), pp. 387-91, esp. p. 387, and D. A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation. Being Part of the Ford Lectures Delivered in Oxford Hilary Term 1980*, Leiden 2003 (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 16), pp. xxiii, 177, and 361. According to R. Constantinescu, Al-

codex (ff. 133r-162r), Alcuin's *florilegium* is attested in the manuscript El Escorial, Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, b.IV.17 (s. IX^{3/4}, southern France; ff. 93r-136v), and consists of excerpts from Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, especially Augustine and Isidore, hagiographical writings, liturgical texts, and Christian poets, arranged in four books¹⁵⁷. The relationship between the two manuscripts is quite complex and their respective texts are very different at times¹⁵⁸. Notably, only the Bamberg version of Book IV of *De laude Dei* concludes with extracts from Christian Latin poets (ff. 151va-157va)¹⁵⁹, immediately followed by another three verse texts, namely the *MNE* (ff. 157va-161va), the *HNE* (f. 161va-b), and the *Versus de natiuitate Domini* (ff. 161vb-162rb)¹⁶⁰, that is an adonic poem on the birth of Christ likely by Alcuin and addressed to a certain Credulus, in all probability one of Alcuin's disciples at York¹⁶¹.

The *HNE* was edited jointly with the *MNE* in 1923 by Karl Strecker¹⁶² and two English translations were both published in 1998 by Gilbert Márkus¹⁶³ and Mark Wakeford¹⁶⁴.

Strecker's edition of the *MNE* and *HNE* resulted from the collation of an unpublished transcript by Friedrich Vollmer – the first scholar who drew attention to the Bamberg copy of *De laude Dei*¹⁶⁵ –, with the actual

cuin assembled the *florilegium* ca. 790 when he was temporarily back in Northumbria: cfr. his *Alcuin et les "Libelli Precum" de l'époque carolingienne*, «Revue d'histoire de la spiritualité», 50 (1974), pp. 17-56, esp. pp. 17 and 56; cfr. also below, pp. 251-3.

157. CALMA, I. 2, pp. 147-8; [BHL *Suppl.* 6240b-c]; M.-H. Jullien - F. Perelman, *Clavis scriptorum latinorum mediæ æui. Auctores Galliae 735-987*. II, Turnhout 1999, pp. 140-1; Constantinescu, *Alcuin et les "Libelli Precum"* cit., pp. 18 and 24-38; and Ganz, *Le De Laude Dei* cit., pp. 387-9. *De laude Dei* is still unpublished in its entirety and only individual pieces are available in print; however, an edition is being prepared by D. Ganz and S. Rankin.

158. Ganz, *Le De Laude Dei* cit., p. 388.

159. A. P. M. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf: The Art and Craft of Anglo-Saxon Verse*, «Journal of the British Academy», 8 (2020), pp. 295-399, esp. pp. 310-1.

160. K. Strecker (ed.), *Rhythmi ævi Merovingici et Carolini* no. lxxv: *Versus de natiuitate Domini*, Berlin 1923 (MGH PLAC 4.II), pp. 608-10. Cfr. M. Lapidge, *The Authorship of the Adonic Verses ad Fidolium Attributed to Columbanus*, «Studi Medievali» 3rd s., 18/II (1977), pp. 249-314, esp. pp. 263-4.

161. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., pp. 321-2. However, the *MNE* and the *Versus de natiuitate Domini* feature in the table of contents also of the Escorial witness of *De laude Dei* (f. 94r): cfr. *ibidem*, p. 322, n. 64, and Ganz, *Le De Laude Dei* cit., p. 388.

162. Cfr. above, n. 1.

163. *The Miracles of St Nynia the Bishop (c. 780?)*, trans. by G. Márkus, in *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry, 550-1350*, cur. T. O. Clancy, Edinburgh 1998, pp. 140-3.

164. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 332-4.

165. F. Vollmer (ed.), *Fl. Merobaudis Reliquiae. Blossii Aemilii Dracontii Carmina. Eugenii Toletani Episcopi Carmina et Epistulae*, Berlin 1905 (MGH AA 14), pp. XIV-VII.

manuscript¹⁶⁶. As Strecker lamented in a preliminary study, the Bamberg codex attests to quite a corrupt state of the transmission («Ueberlieferung ist sehr schlecht»); hence he carried out quite a few emendations, albeit tentatively because the frequent faults in prosody and syntax made him wonder whether the wrong readings were due to transmission mishaps or were rather to be put down to the author himself («mancher Fehler kann emendiert werden, aber viele sind zweifellos ursprünglich, und es ist schwer zu unterscheiden, wie weit man mit Emendationen gehen darf»)¹⁶⁷. Indeed, Strecker's suspicions have been confirmed by the rather critical assessment of the anonymous poet by more recent scholarship¹⁶⁸.

While Nynia himself remains an elusive figure, the combined evidence of the history of Whithorn and Alcuin's biography, as well as of the distinctive Latinity, style, and sources of the *HNE* and *MNE*, concurs to outline a fairly accurate date and context of composition of the two poems.

A broad *terminus post quem* can be said to coincide with the start of the Northumbrian period at Whithorn and Pethhelm's episcopacy (ca. 731-5), when Nynia's cult as a miracle-worker and healer and the role of Whithorn as a pilgrimage destination received new impetus¹⁶⁹. The *terminus ante quem*, on the other hand, is a letter by Alcuin addressed to the Whithorn community¹⁷⁰. In the epistle, Alcuin beseeches the recipients to keep memory of him and to intercede on his behalf in the church founded by Nynia, of whose virtues Alcuin learnt through certain metrical poems sent to him by some York students («Nynia episcop[us], qui multis claruit virtutibus, sicut mihi nuper delatum est per carmina metricae artis, que nobis per fideles nostros discipulos, Eboracensis ecclesiae scholasticos, directa sunt»)¹⁷¹. From the wording of the letter, it seems that Alcuin is writing from abroad, although Radu Constantinescu suggested that Alcuin wrote the letter and put together *De laude Dei*, including the two Nynia poems, during a sojourn in England in 790¹⁷². There is no

166. *Rhythmi aevi Merovingici et Carolini* cit., Strecker (ed.), p. 454 and *MNE*, Strecker (ed.), p. 944.

167. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 22 and 25, quotation at p. 25.

168. Cfr. below, pp. 256-7.

169. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 54 and 68. Cfr. also above, p. 245.

170. E. Dümmler (ed.), *Alcuini sive Albini Epistolae*, Berlin 1895 (MGH Epist. 4.II), no. 273, pp. 431-2.

171. *Ibidem*, p. 431, ll. 34-6.

172. Cfr. above, n. 156.

firm evidence or scholarly consensus as to the exact date of Alcuin's definitive departure for the Continent: according to Donald Bullough's chronology, Alcuin left in the summer or autumn of 786¹⁷³, while Peter Godman and others are more inclined to set his departure soon after his second meeting with Charlemagne in Parma in 781¹⁷⁴. The question of the timing of Alcuin's departure for the Frankish court is relevant to this discussion, because it affords a narrower *terminus ante quem* for the *MNE* and *HNE* and it is also of some import for the dating of *De laude Dei*. Given the prevailing scholarly opinion as to the assemblage of the *florilegium* before Alcuin's departure from York¹⁷⁵, the items of *De laude Dei* should all have been composed or excerpted by the first half or even the very beginning of the 780s.

This picture, however, seems to be contradicted – at least as far as the *MNE* and *HNE* are concerned – by the above-quoted letter, where the poems on Nynia seem to have been sent to Alcuin in his new Continental residence by some trusted and affectionate disciples from York¹⁷⁶. If this were indeed the case, then the dating of the *MNE* and *HNE* should be moved to the latter half or end of the 780s, and a broader implication would be that perhaps the idiosyncratic final section of Book IV of the Bamberg text of *De laude Dei*, consisting of excerpts from Christian Latin poets, the two Nynia items, and the *Versus de natiuitate Domini*¹⁷⁷, may have been a later addition to the *florilegium* made after Alcuin had left England for the Frankish court. A further hint supporting this supposition comes from the excerpts of Venantius Fortunatus's *De uirginitate* in the same final section of Book IV of the Bamberg *florilegium* (ff. 153va-154rb). The Bamberg selection shares a distinctive reading with two ninth-century Continental manuscripts, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 13048 and Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Rh. 73 (440), containing excerpts from Venantius's *De Virginitate* (indeed, one excerpt in both manuscripts breaks off at line 178, exactly like one of the Bamberg ex-

173. *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* cit., p. XXIII.

174. P. Godman (ed.), *Alcuinus Eboracensis, Versus de patribus regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, Oxford 1982, p. xxxvii; M. Garrison, *Alcuin*, in *BEASE*, pp. 26-7, esp. p. 26; A. P. M. Orchard, *Wish You Were Here: Alcuin's Courtly Poetry and the Boys Back Home*, in *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, curr. S. Rees Jones - R. Marks - A. J. Minnis, Woodbridge 2000, pp. 21-43, esp. p. 22.

175. Cfr. above, n. 156.

176. Cfr. above, p. 251, and below, p. 257.

177. Cfr. above, p. 250.

cerpts)¹⁷⁸. Now, *De Virginitate* is admittedly the only poem by Venantius that was known to Bede and, therefore, may have circulated in eighth-century Northumbria and incorporated in *De laude Dei* before Alcuin's departure to the Continent. However, the textual links with the two Continental manuscripts and the role that Alcuin possibly played in the circulation of Venantius's *De Virginitate* at the Frankish court¹⁷⁹ make it equally possible that the Venantius's excerpts of the Bamberg manuscript could have been a Continental addition to Alcuin's *florilegium*.

Style-wise, both the *HNE* and *MNE* have been associated with a distinctive school of Anglo-Latin poetry, active in and around York between ca. 780 and ca. 820 and with Alcuin as its figurehead, labelled as the "York school"¹⁸⁰. Such a poetic school relied on an equally distinctive method of versification, as well as a characteristic curriculum which can be reconstructed thanks to the combined evidence of Alcuin's description of the York library in his "York Poem"¹⁸¹, the verse excerpts in the Bamberg copy of *De laude Dei*, and, last but not least, the wide-range of sources of the *Carmen de abbatibus*, an early ninth-century Latin poem by a certain Ædiluulf¹⁸². Albeit themselves not amongst the most accomplished samples of the York school¹⁸³, the *HNE* and *MNE* shared in its poetic sources and models, diction, and metrical practice and, in turn, proved influential in that circle¹⁸⁴.

As to the locale of composition of the *HNE* and *MNE*, relevant scholarship has alternatively put forward Whithorn¹⁸⁵ or York¹⁸⁶ or a combina-

178. M. Lapidge, *Appendix: Knowledge of the Poems in the Earlier Period*, in R. W. Hunt, *Manuscript Evidence for Knowledge of the Poems of Venantius Fortunatus in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, «Anglo-Saxon England», 8 (1979), pp. 279-95, at pp. 287-95, esp. p. 295 and n. 6.

179. *Ibidem*.

180. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., pp. 303-24.

181. Godman (ed.).

182. R. Sharpe, *A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540*, Turnhout 1997, no. 69; ICL 15778; A. Campbell (ed.), *Æthelwulf De Abbatibus*, Oxford 1967. For a detailed survey of the sources of the *Carmen de abbatibus* cfr. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., pp. 348-76. For a recent study on the poem, cfr. C. Di Sciacca, "A Little Bird Told Me": *Imagining the Interim in Ædiluulf's Carmen de abbatibus*, in *Endzeitvorstellungen: Die Interkulturalität des apokalyptischen Mythos im lateinischen und germanischen Mittelalter*, curr. E. Di Venosa - G. Pelizzari, Würzburg 2022, pp. 215-46.

183. Cfr. below, pp. 256-7.

184. Cfr. below, p. 259.

185. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 16; Levison, *An Eighth-Century Poem* cit., p. 284; MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., p. 11; and Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 52-3.

186. M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Latin Background*, in *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, curr. S. B. Greenfield - D. G. Calder, New York (NY)-London 1986, pp. 5-37, esp. p. 24, rptd. as

tion of the two. According to one such dual solution, the two poems were the products of an author trained at York but writing at Whithorn, the latter location being especially likely as the place of composition of the *HNE*¹⁸⁷. Another compromise between the two sites has been put forward regarding the *MNE* in particular, arguing that it may be a later versification executed at York of a prose account of Nynia's miracles put together at Whithorn as part of the now lost *LVM*, according to the fashion of the *opus geminatum*¹⁸⁸.

The debate on the place of origin of the *MNE* and *HNE* has focused on the sources and models of the two poems, which – very much in line with the modes of composition of the York school or indeed of pre-Conquest poetry as a whole, both in Latin and the vernacular –, were largely derivative and systematically redeployed the verse of previous poets, including their near-contemporaries¹⁸⁹. If the *HNE* is mostly indebted to Bede, with echoes of Aldhelm, Arator, Sedulius, and the *MNE* itself¹⁹⁰, the list of sources of the latter is much lengthier¹⁹¹. The wide range of sources would naturally point to an origin at a major centre such as York. Indeed, archaeological excavations at Whithorn have failed to uncover a scriptorium, although three *styli* and other writing implements have been recovered from displaced contexts¹⁹² – a picture somehow at odds with the reputation of learning which Whithorn seems to have enjoyed¹⁹³.

Be as it may, it has also been argued that the anonymous poet's literary borrowings could be much more limited, in that his classical or late antique sources could just as well have been mediated by Bede and Aldhelm, by far the authors whom the *MNE* and *HNE* are most heavily dependent on and who, in turn, had a deep knowledge of classical and late antique

Anglo-Latin Literature, in M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600-899*, London 1996, pp. 1-35, esp. p. 25; Id., *Aedilulf and the School of York*, in *Lateinische Kultur im VIII. Jahrhundert. Traube-Gedenkschrift*, curr. A. Lehner - W. Berschin, St. Ottilien 1989, pp. 161-78, esp. pp. 166-7, rptd. in Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature* cit., pp. 381-98, esp. pp. 386-7; Orchard, *Wish You Were Here* cit., p. 28; and Id., *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., pp. 313-4 and 325.

187. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 52-3.

188. Lapidge, *Aedilulf and the School of York* cit., p. 386, n. 29.

189. Strecker had already noted the intrinsically derivative nature of early English poetry: *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 20. For a more comprehensive and updated development of the argument, cfr. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., esp. pp. 297 and 346.

190. Cfr. below, pp. 256-7.

191. Cfr. *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 264-5.

192. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 50.

193. Cfr. above, p. 236.

Latin poetry¹⁹⁴. If this were indeed the case, then the composition of the *MNE* and *HNE* would be fully compatible with Whithorn, which, albeit a lesser centre than York, would certainly have been provided with at least some works by Bede, easily available from nearby Northumbria, as well as by the Southumbrian Aldhelm, to whom bishop Pethelm had long been attached¹⁹⁵. Also, in the *MNE* the anonymous poet refers to Whithorn as “our” monastery, thereby identifying himself as a member of that community, arguably writing locally about the founder-saint¹⁹⁶. Moreover, Nynia is not known to have been culted anywhere else in pre-Conquest England and Alcuin’s complimentary words of thanks in his letter may be taken as an indication that the poet was still living in Whithorn¹⁹⁷.

On the other hand, a dedicated study of the use of Arator’s *Historia apostolica* in the *MNE* has argued that the extent of the borrowings by the anonymous English poet is greater than so far detected and, what is more, that he had a detailed knowledge of his late antique source and made a pertinent use of it¹⁹⁸. Thus, at least in the case of Arator’s work, the anonymous author does not seem to be recycling a source second-hand, and future efforts in the *Quellenforschung* of the *MNE* and *HNE* may well grant further insights into the working method of their (often chastised) anonymous author, as well as into the milieu and circumstances of their composition.

The *HNE* is an alphabetical acrostic of twenty-seven elegiac couplets, which are also epanaleptic, that is the first two and a half feet of each hexameter are repeated as the second member of each pentameter¹⁹⁹. In particular, the initials of the first twenty-three pairs make up the alphabetic sequence from A to Z (though omitting the letters J, U, and W), with reference to the Johannine characterization of Christ as the alpha and omega, or the beginning and the end. The initials of the last four couplets make up the

194. Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 22; A. P. M. Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, Cambridge 1994 (Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 8), pp. 260-3; and Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., pp. 52-3.

195. Cfr. above, p. 229.

196. *MNE*, ll. 21, 82, 99, and 324, Strecker (ed.), pp. 945, 948, and 955.

197. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 50 and Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., pp. 8 and 16.

198. R. Hillier, *Dynamic Intertextuality in the Miracula Nynie episcopi: Remembering Arator’s Historia Apostolica*, «Anglo-Saxon England», 44 (2016), pp. 163-79.

199. Cfr. Beda Venerabilis, *Hymnus XI. St. Æthelthryth (incipit: Alma Deus trinitas)*, in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Beda’s Latin Poetry*, Oxford 2019, pp. 138-41 and 412-9.

word «Amen» as a way to «accept and confirm the message of the first twenty-three in terms of the saint celebrated»²⁰⁰. The total number of twenty-seven couplets could also have numerological implications and trinitarian associations, in that twenty-seven is the cube of three and in Neoplatonism it was related to the *Anima Mundi* or, in Christian terms, the Holy Spirit²⁰¹.

The *HNE* is closely modelled on Bede's hymn to St. Æthelthryth († 679)²⁰², which, originally included in the *HE*²⁰³, also circulated independently²⁰⁴. Apart from the general structure, the most obvious correspondences between the *HNE* and Bede's hymn concern verse F, where the floral similes and imagery describing Mary's virginity owe to Bede's verses F, G, and H; verse P, which refers to the entombment of Nynia and is paralleled by Bede's verse U; verse Y, which in both poems describe the devil as a snake; finally, verse E of the «Amen», which in both poems concern the singing of hymns²⁰⁵. However, the *HNE* also makes a conspicuous use of Aldhelm²⁰⁶, a trait it shares with the fellow *MNE*, which is in turn also borrowed extensively in the *HNE*²⁰⁷. In sum, the anonymous author of the *MNE* and *HNE* is fully consonant with the poetic technique characteristic of his fellow poets of the York school as well as of early English poetry in general, that is the recalling, recycling, repeating, and repurposing of the verse of both other poets and their own, becoming in turn models for reference and reuse for subsequent generations of poets²⁰⁸.

The debt of our anonymous poet to his sources has been deemed rather mechanic and unimaginative, so much so that his poems have been considered as a mere concoction of verses from Aldhelm and Bede²⁰⁹. Moreover, numerous deficiencies in versification and highly repetitive diction have been pointed out. In the introduction to his edition, Strecker slated the anonymous poet for being «legum prosodicarum ignarus», admitting

200. MacQueen, *St. Nynia* cit., pp. 10-1, quotation at 11, and Id., *The Literary Sources* cit., p. 23.

201. J. MacQueen, *Numerology*, Edinburgh 1985, pp. 31-6 and 43-4.

202. R. C. Love, *Æthelthryth*, in *BEASE*, pp. 19-20.

203. *HE*, IV.xviii, Colgrave-Mynors (ed.), pp. 396-401.

204. W. Jaeger (ed.), *Bedas metrische Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, Leipzig 1935 (Palaestra, 198), p. 53, and Lapidge, *Bede's Poetry* cit., pp. 119 and 138-41.

205. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 51 and Strecker, *Zu den Quellen* cit., p. 25.

206. Orchard, *The Poetic Art* cit., p. 291.

207. Cfr. *MNE*, Strecker (ed.), pp. 961-2 (apparatus). On the Aldhelmian element of the *MNE*, cfr. *infra* the dedicated entry, p. 265.

208. Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit. Cfr. also above, p. 254, and below, p. 259.

209. Cfr. *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 264-5.

that the incidence of faulty metrics cautioned against frequent emendations as those very faults were likely to be attributed to the author himself rather than to the transmission²¹⁰. Having said that, the frequent reuse of lines and phrases shows the author's command of Latin prosody to be uneven, in that «the errors of prosody in one chapter will be found corrected (or compounded!) in another»²¹¹. Indeed, the two key traits of the anonymous poet's, deficient metrics and repetitive diction, may be sort of interdependent, insofar as it may have been the poet's awareness of his own flaws which led him to draw repeatedly on other poets²¹². Admittedly, the errors of syntax and scansion tend to occur the most when the author departs from his sources²¹³, and they certainly attest to a level of versification which has been labelled as "rustic" and "regional", quite unlike that attained by other more accomplished representatives of the York school, first of all Alcuin²¹⁴. Michael Lapidge has even suggested that the *MNE* and *HNE* may have been sent to Alcuin on the Continent not so much as a gift but as a sort of student composition to be reviewed and corrected by the former master²¹⁵.

Be as it may, the poor command of prosody could hardly be considered an incentive to borrowing, as the redeploing and repurposing of vocabulary, phrases, and lines make up a standard technique of early English *literati*, even of those of greater talent than our anonymous poet. Also, it should be born in mind that his repetitions are not only intertextual but also intratextual, that is the anonymous poet of the *MNE* and *HNE* often reused and recycled his own verse, and indeed the numerous borrowings from the *MNE* detectable in the *HNE* have been put forward as key evidence of the joint authorship of the two poems²¹⁶.

The profile of the anonymous author of the *MNE* and *HNE* can be reconstructed on the basis of his sources and style, although neither affords unambiguous evidence. As discussed above, source-study has not proved decisive in the argument concerning the place of composition of the two

210. *MNE*, Strecker (ed.), p. 944. Cfr. above, p. 251.

211. Orchard, *Wish You Were Here* cit., p. 32.

212. *MNE*, Strecker (ed.), p. 944.

213. Orchard, *The Poetic Art* cit., p. 262.

214. Orchard, *Wish You Were Here* cit., p. 34.

215. *Anglo-Latin Literature* cit., pp. 24-5.

216. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 51.

poems²¹⁷. Whether a member of the Whithorn community or of the York Minster and whatever the size of the library he could have consulted, the author of the *MNE* and *HNE* must have been either a Northumbrian or a Northumbria-trained (though not particularly gifted) individual, as the extensive debt to Bede, especially of the *HNE*²¹⁸, and the distinctively Northumbrian vocabulary of the *MNE*²¹⁹ show.

Constantinescu even attempted to name this anonymous individual, identifying him with Pehthelm, the first Northumbrian bishop of Whithorn, who may indeed have been responsible for the diffusion of Aldhelm's works there²²⁰. But other than his familiarity with Aldhelm – undoubtedly a key source of the *HNE* and, especially, *MNE* – there is not much supporting evidence to claim Pehthelm's authorship of the two poems, as we might expect Pehthelm to have been a much more proficient Latinist than our anonymous (and modest) versifier²²¹.

Traditionally the anonymous author of the *MNE* and *HNE* has been thought of as an individual, not least because in the letter acknowledging the receipt of the *carmina* on Nynia, Alcuin speaks of a single person, gracefully acknowledging his erudition («facientis agnovi eruditionem») ²²². However, the uneven distribution of prosodical errors and the disparity in the reliance on two key sources such as Aldhelm and Bede²²³, has led Andy Orchard to suggest a plural authorship, positing the *MNE* as «not a single work by one incompetent poet, but the joint effort of a committee of illiterates (perhaps a whole class?), each composing in the same restrictive and repetitive “house style”» ²²⁴. Be as it may, a composite authorship would hardly be applicable also to the *HNE*, which is a much shorter poem than the *MNE* and more homogeneous in its emulation of Bede's Hymn to St. Æthelthryth, hence more likely to have been authored by a single poet.

217. Cfr. above, pp. 253-5.

218. Cfr. above, p. 256.

219. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., Appendix A (I), pp. 291-6. Cfr. further, *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, p. 236.

220. Alcuin et les “*Libelli Precum*” cit., p. 56.

221. Orchard, *The Poetic Art* cit., p. 261, n. 66.

222. Dümmler (ed.), p. 431, l. 36.

223. Cfr. above, p. 256, and *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 264-5.

224. *Wish You Were Here* cit., p. 32.

Post-Conquest sources on Nynia, whether historical or liturgical, derive their information from the *HE* and *VSN*, suggesting that the English tradition of the *MNE* and *HNE* was very limited and died out rapidly²²⁵. Nor did they share in the diffusion and impact of *De laude Dei*²²⁶, as their *Fortleben* was ultimately confined in space and time. This is especially true for the *HNE*, which is not so much a hagiographic text as a devotional or liturgical one, and since it does not add any narrative detail to Nynia's legend, it has proved less popular than the *MNE* with subsequent devotees as well as with modern scholars²²⁷. Besides two parallels with the fellow poem *MNE*²²⁸, at least one echo from the *HNE* has been detected in Alcuin²²⁹ and in Ædiluulf's *Carmen de abbatibus*²³⁰, whereas the extent of the borrowing from the *MNE* on the part of Alcuin and, especially, Ædiluulf is much more conspicuous²³¹.

Thus, it can be concluded that the *HNE* circulated only within the York school, including its Continental offshoot represented by Alcuin and his circle at the Frankish court. It was the latter locale that proved crucial to the transmission of the *HNE*, in that while the copies present at York and Whithorn were presumably lost by the eleventh century²³², the *HNE* has come down to us thanks to its being appended to the Bamberg copy of Alcuin's *De laude Dei*²³³.

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225. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 43.

226. Constantinescu, *Alcuin et les "Libelli Precum"* cit.

227. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 52 and Orchard, *Alcuin and Cynewulf* cit., p. 312.

228. *Ibidem*, p. 359.

229. *Ibidem*, pp. 306-7, esp. n. 39.

230. *Ibidem*, p. 351, esp. n. 119.

231. Cfr. *infra* the entry dedicated to the *MNE*, pp. 276-7.

232. Wakeford, *The British Church and Anglo-Saxon Expansion* cit., p. 53.

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