Saint Fittick – Some Linguistic Light?

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Torry, now a southern suburb of Aberdeen, was linked to the city only by a ferry until a bridge across the river Dee was built in 1887. The principal modern church in Torry is that of Saint Fittick, and a little further to the east (Grid ref. NJ 963 049), surrounded by fields just above the Bay of Nigg, there is an old ruined building, with attached graveyard, which was also once Saint Fittick's church, until it was abandoned in 1829. Who was Saint Fittick?

Mo Futag

On three small-scale maps in Gerhard Mercator's *Atlas* of 1613 (Mercator 1613: between pp. 57 and 62), a small circle to the east of Torry is marked *S. Mofutak*. The hand-drawn map of Lower Deeside made by the Reverend Timothy Pont between c. 1583 and 1596 (Pont Map 11) has a place-name which may be read as *S:Mofytacs. ness* at the same point: it appears to be the name of the headland now known as Girdleness.

The Calendar of Camerarius (1631, 203; cf. Forbes 1872, 243) has the following entry for 26 December:

> Sanctus Mofutacus Confessor. Celebris habebatur in Aberdonensi Dioecesi, extatque non procul à Torrey insignis Ecclesia sancto Monfutaco dicata

> [Saint Mofutacus, confessor, used to be considered famous in the Diocese of Aberdeen, and there exists, not far from Torrey, a distinguished church which is dedicated to Saint Monfutacus] (Camerarius – David Chambers, d. 1641 – was an alumnus of King's College, Aberdeen.)

It must surely be that the saint so named was known in the Scots-speaking Aberdeen area, right down to the seventeenth century or later, by the Gaelic-looking name *Mo Futag* (the *-n-* in *Monfutaco* is doubtless simply a typesetter's error). It may be the same saint who is already named in the form *Futtach* (with the loss of the Gaelic possessive *Mo* 'my') in a Dunkeld Litany of c. 1500 (Forbes 1872, lxi, 339a), where the name occurs among 'Nomina Sanctorum Confessorum et monachorum'[1]. And in dealing with the parish of Inverallan, at Grantown-on-

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[1] Some scholars, however, do not consider that Dunkeld Litany a reliable source of information (Forbes op. cit., xxxiv–xxxv). In this case the *-ag* in *Mo Futag* forms has been replaced by the much more common Gaelic ending *-ach*. The change from *-th-* in *Swithun* to the *-t-* in *Futag* may owe something to the loss of the dental fricative /θ/ in Gaelic in the period between 1000–1400 (cf. O'Rahilly 1930, 158ff.; McCone 141).

Spey, Scott (vol. 6, 363) tells us that 'There is good ground for the belief that the church of Inverallan was dedicated to St Futach', but no evidence is given there except, perhaps, that a Pictish stone in the churchyard may have been known as *Clach Futaich.*

The name *Mo Futag* resembles the hypocoristic forms ('pet-names') of Gaelic saints' names, forms which were most frequently used during the sixth century (Macquarrie xxii–xxiii). As described by Jackson (300), such pet-names for saints might be formed by using 'an abbreviated or otherwise mangled form of their real name': for example, in the early language, *Colum* [Cille], reduced to *Colm*, would be preceded by the (unstressed) possessive pronoun *mo* 'my', which lenites the initial consonant (*mo Cholm-*); and the diminutive ending *-óc* (modern Scottish Gaelic *-ag*) would be added, giving us the name *Mo Cholmag* (earlier *Mo Cholmóc*). That saint's name gives us the Easter Ross place-name anglicised as *Portmahomack.* Similarly the saint's name *Lugaid* (in the early language) gives the modern pet-form *Mo Luag*, patron saint of the churches of Clatt and of Tarland, Aberdeenshire, and of other churches. In Latin texts the Latin nominative masculine ending *-us* is often added. A long list of such *Mo-* names for saints may be seen in Ó Riain 1985, 255–261.

Taking *Mofutac*(*us*) as a Gaelic hypocoristic name, and dropping the unstressed *Mo* which causes lenition, we are then looking for a saint whose 'real' name, after lenition, begins with *F*: the obvious candidate would be a name which, before lenition, began with *P*. But since Gaelic is a Q-Celtic language, and has lost any letter *p* occurring in its ancestral Indo-European language, such a name here would have to be a borrowing from another language. Latin is the most obvious language, being the source of the names *Patricius* and *Petrus*, both of which became popular among the Gaels in their borrowed forms, modern Gaelic *Pàdraig* and *Peadar*. But I have found no Gaelic hypocoristic names on the *Mo Futag* pattern applied to either of those prominent saints.

Swithun

There is, however, another possible source for the *F* in *Mo Futag*: it could be a lenited form of the consonant /sw/ (or /sᵘ/), which occurs in some Indo-European words and becomes /s/ in Old Gaelic. That consonant gives us the initial consonant group of the German word *Schwester* 'sister'; Old Gaelic *siür* and Latin *soror* are developments of the same Indo-European word (Lewis & Pedersen 17–18, 129; cf. *TGSI* XLII [1925], 3–5). But when the word *siür* is preceded by the possessive *mo* the resulting lenition of the opening /sw/ (in Old Gaelic only) gives us *mo fiür* 'my sister'. After the Old Gaelic period

(c. 600–c. 900) the form *mo fiūr* came to be regularised in medieval and modern Irish to give us *mo shiúr*, but in Scottish Gaelic the change went the other way: the word for 'sister' became *piuthar* by the delenition of the *f* in *fiūr* (the *-th-* in *piuthar* is merely a mark of hiatus, not a consonant). The same process is detectable in a small number of other words in Old Gaelic, where an original /sw/ has been reduced to an *s-*, but where that *s-*, when lenited, becomes *f-* (Thurneysen §132; Lewis & Pedersen 129).

So, if the English name *Swithun* is 'mangled', to the extent of losing its second syllable, and is then preceded by the Gaelic leniting possessive *mo* (changing *Sw-* to *F-*) and followed by the diminutive suffix *-ag*, it might well become *Mo Futag*.

Saint Swithun (in the English of his time *Swīþhūn*, a compound *swið* + *hun*, 'strong cub')[2] was bishop of Winchester from 852 till his death in 863, and became patron of Winchester Cathedral; his feast-day is 15 July. He was most widely venerated in southern England and Lapidge (47) calls him a 'Southumbrian' saint.

In Scotland, Lapidge (86) has noted that Saint Swithun is named in an early Missal, *Liber Ecclesie Beati Terrenani de Arbuthnott.* That work, now part of the Heritage Centre collection at Paisley Central Library (shelfmark 091), was completed in 1491 by James Sybbald (d. 1507), vicar of the church of Saint Ternan of Arbuthnott, and was edited and published by Bishop A. P. Forbes in 1864. It must reflect liturgical practice at Arbuthnot, which is some eight miles south-west of Stonehaven and in the diocese of St Andrews (Cowan 8; Lapidge 86). It contains prayers to be said on the feast-days of the *depositio* ('burial'; 2 July) of Saint Swithun and of his *translatio* ('re-burial in a holy place'; 15 July). A prayer (*oratio*) there for 2 July (Forbes 1864, 326) opens as follows:

> DEUS, qui hodiernam diem sacratissimam nobis in beati Swythuni confessoris tui atque pontificis depositione celebrare concedis ...

> [O God, who grant that we celebrate today's most sacred day with the deposition of the blessed Swithun, your confessor and bishop ...]

Prayers for 15 July (ibid. 332) open with the heading

> TRANSLATIO SANCTI SWYTHUNI EPISCOPI SOCIORUMQUE EJUS.

In the Calendar which precedes the Missal proper, both of his July feast-days are listed (ibid. cix).

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2 Professor Lapidge (3, note) tells us that the usual spelling *Swithin* should be rejected, in favour of *Swithun*.

Dr Hogg tells me that similar information about Saint Swithun is to be found in other early liturgical books now held in the National Library, his name usually appearing in the genitive form *Swythuni* and his feast-day given as 15 July. These include the *Perth Psalter* (MS 652) and the *Fowlis Easter Breviary* (MS 21247), both dating from c. 1450, the *Blackadder Prayerbook* (MS 10271)*,* written c. 1475 for Robert Blackadder, Archbishop of Glasgow, and *Dean Brown's Prayerbook* (MS 10270), written c. 1498 for Master James Brown, Dean of Aberdeen (see McRoberts 1968).

The cult of Saint Swithun in England has been said (Lapidge 8) to have begun on Saturday 15th July 971, with the *translatio* of the saint from his tomb, a stone sarcophagus outside the door of Winchester Cathedral, to a new tomb inside the Cathedral. Miracles occurring then (and even before the *translatio*) were attributed to the saint, and became more numerous as his cult spread (Lapidge 13–21, 34–37). The Scottish documents noted above can be seen as providing evidence that Saint Swithun was known during the fifteenth century in churches in parts of Scotland, including Angus and the areas around Aberdeen, Perth and Glasgow; we cannot claim that these were the only places, since what evidence we have consists of only the handful of pre-Reformation liturgical writings which survive. Nor can we assume that the occurrence of Saint Swithun's name in these books, all written in Latin for the use of the clergy, constitutes evidence that he was a well-known saint among ordinary Scots.

It is surely significant that in the *Aberdeen Breviary* of 1510, compiled by William Elphinstone (c.1431–1514), bishop of Aberdeen, Saint Swithun is not listed at all. That Breviary was commissioned by the king to give prominence to Scottish saints in place of foreign saints named in earlier Breviaries (Macquarrie xv; Macfarlane 237–238). Study of those early Calendars, Breviaries, Missals and Prayerbooks must be left to informed scholars, but study of the name *Mofutac* (etc.), if it is basically a Gaelic name, may contribute to our knowledge of the history of Gaelic in the north-east. Since we have the name as *Mofutac*(*us*) only in sources close to Aberdeen, it seems logical to suggest that it was in the Aberdeen area that Gaelic speakers made the name *Mo Futag* for Saint Swithun.

One important fact might be held as evidence against this equation of *Swithun* and *Mofutac*(*us*): while Saint Swithun's feast-days occur in July (2nd and 15th), Camerarius, writing in 1631, gives *Mofutacus'* feast-day as 26 December. His use of the imperfect tense in *Celebris habebatur* ('he used to be considered famous') may suggest that that saint was no longer venerated in Aberdeen in 1631. But Forbes tells us (1872, xxxvii) that Camerarius' book is 'very uncritical, and often incorrect'. It may be relevant, as we will see, that in

the *Aberdeen Breviary* of 1510 Saint Fotinus' feast-day is 23 December, and *Mo Futag* is not listed at all (Macquarrie p.v.).

The name *Mo Futag* became *Fittick* in later times, the possessive *mo* having been lost because to Scots speakers it is meaningless, as well as being unstressed. The evident variability of the stressed vowel in *Swithun, Swythuni, Futtach, Fittick, Mo Futag, Mofytac,* might reflect something of present-day Scots dialects, including that of the Aberdeen area, where the words *foot* and *fit* are phonetically identical, or nearly so (Johnston 465–467); or perhaps the *-w-* in *Swithun* had the effect of rounding the *-i-* which followed it, to give it the *u*-sound.

While hypocoristic names for saints, on the pattern found in *Mo Futag*, are most prominent in the sixth century, Ó Riain (1997, 37) has noted some instances suggesting a revival of such naming (but using the Old Gaelic possessive *to* 'your' instead of *mo*) in the eighth century. That the Gaelic pet-name *Mo Futag* could be made for a saint who lived in the ninth century, and whose cult only arose in the tenth, raises the question of the extent to which Scottish Gaelic in the Middle Gaelic period (c. 900–c. 1200) tended to retain older linguistic features after Irish Gaelic had introduced new ones. The preservation of /f/ as the effect of the lenition of /sw/, as evidenced in *mo fiúr*, is a good example. As O'Rahilly (1932, 141–145) pointed out, the early Gaelic world in Scotland was 'conservative' in retaining old ways, including such early hiatus forms as *siúr* (> *piuthar*), after those ways had been abandoned in Ireland. The later formation of pet-names in Scotland may be another instance.

To sum up, it may be that the saint now known in the Aberdeen area as Saint Fittick was actually the English Saint Swithun, and that his cult reached Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland during the period c. 1000–c. 1400.

FOTINUS

In *Torry Churches Trail*, a brochure for visitors recently published by Aberdeen City Council, we are told: 'Although the church is dedicated to St Fittick, it is thought that "he" is in fact an amalgam of two other saints, St Fotin and St Fiacre.'

Since next to nothing is known about Saint Fittick, it is not surprising that somebody thought the name must be an error, for that of some other saint whose name began with *F*. We have no way of knowing when Saint Fotin(us) was first identified as an important saint in the north-east, but what may be the first extant appearance of his name in Scotland is dated 11 December 1495, when King James IV at Arbroath granted Torry the status of burgh of barony; he says he did so

pro singulari deuocione quam habemus beato martiri Sancto Thome
ac Sancto Fotino patrono ville de Torry iacentis infra vicecomitatum
nostrum de Kyncardin ... (Innes 292–293)

[... due to the singular devotion that we have for the blessed martyr
Saint Thomas and for Saint Fotinus, patron of the town of Torry which
lies in our sheriffdom of Kincardine ...]

Forbes (1872, 350–351) identifies *Fotinus* here as the martyr named
Potheinos in the Greek of Eusebius (Lake 420–423), or *Pothinus* in Latin, said
to have died bishop of Lyons in 177 AD: his feast-day was 2 June. There is no
obvious reason to change the initial *P-* there to the *F-* of *Fotinus*, unless it was
deemed necessary to find a saint whose name began with *F*, matching saint
Fittick. But a sizeable body of prayers and readings in the *Aberdeen Breviary*
(Macquarrie 14–19) makes it clear that the 'fame' of Fotinus, martyr bishop of
Lyons, reached Scotland long after his death and that 'a church was built in his
honour not far from the sight of the river Dee' (ibid. 17.7). It might be worth
considering whether Saint Fotinus appears in the *Aberdeen Breviary* primarily
to serve as a replacement for Saint Swithun.

There is considerable variation in the dates given in various sources for
Saint Fotinus's feast-day. The *Aberdeen Martyrology* (Forbes 1872, 137) gives
23 December: 'Ipso die Sancti Fotini episcopi et martyris apud Neyg Sancti
Andree diocesis' (*Neyg* is the parish name, nowadays spelt *Nigg*). Dean
Brown's Prayerbook of c. 1498 gives 22 December (McRoberts 157). The learned
scholar invited by the editors to examine this paper has generously called
my attention to the late Arbroath Breviary studied by Tolhurst in 1954: in the
Calendar there (p. 113) Saint Fotinus, bishop and martyr, is given 12 December
as feast-day. That Breviary belonged to Walter Baldowy, who was a monk at
Arbroath from 1522 till c. 1560 (p. 104). December feast-days for Saint Fotinus,
then, and it may be significant that the only identification I could find for a
feast-day for *Mofutacus*, Camerarius's 1631 Calendar, is, as we have seen, for 26
December (Forbes 1872, 243).

Ó Riain (1997, 17–18; cf. 1982, 155–156) has shown that variations of a few
days in what the sources list as a saint's feast-day are quite common, for a
variety of reasons. An instance of that may be found in the account of Saint
Fiacre below, where that saint's feast-day is 30 August in one source, 29 August
in another. It may be significant that in the *Martyrology of Aberdeen* (Forbes
1872, 133), though Saint Fiacre's feast-day is 30 August, another Saint Fiacre,
bishop of Autun in France, has 27 August as feast-day. In the case of Fotinus
we can only guess at the reason for the multiplicity of dates for his feast-day.

Scotland has only a few mentions of *Fotinus* in religious sources, including

the pious preamble of the Torry charter (above), and Ireland has none (cf. Macquarrie 410). Perhaps his name was brought into Scotland only as a replacement for *Mo Futag*, at a time when Gaelic was retreating from the Aberdeen area. The fact that Potheinos was a martyr, which Mo Futag and Swithun were not, evidently caused no problems.

The evidence might suggest, then, that the veneration of Fotinus was appropriated from Lyons to replace that of Fittick (< *Mo Futag* < *Swithun*), principally because both names begin with *F.*

Fiacre

The *Aberdeen Breviary* (1510) gives 30 August as the feast-day *Fiacri ab*[*batis*] (genitive case form), see Forbes 1872, 120, 133; lessons there (Macquarrie 200–208) make it clear that Saint Fiacre lived in France. Camerarius (1631) has a long account (168–170) of Saint *Fiacrius* which says he died on 30 August around the year 668.

On the National Library's manuscript map Gordon 25, made in 1640 by Robert Gordon of Straloch, the ruined Torry church now known as Saint Fittick's is clearly marked 'S. Fiacre', though Forbes (1872, 339a) tells us that an 'ancient burial-ground and well are still called S. Fithoc's' (possibly a late relic of *Mo Futag*?). Other places in the parish of Nigg are dedicated to Saint Fiacre with various forms of his name, including *Fiancorus, Feacar, Ficker* and *Fiacer* (ibid.).

One of a considerable number of saints *Fiachra* (Ó Riain 1985, 244), Saint Fiachra of Breuil left Ireland (sometimes called *Scotia* in Latin texts) for France, where he died about 670. In France he was known as *Fiacre*, for the sound system of the French language does not include the velar fricative *ch*-sound in *Fiachra*. His feast-day was 30 August: in the entry for that day in the Irish martyrology *Féilire Uí Ghormáin* (c. 1170) he is called *Fiachra flaith firian* ('a righteous prince'), and a footnote adds *díthreabhach, 7 ro bheandaigh fós isin Frainc*, which Stokes (167) translated 'a hermit, and he also blessed (consecrated?) in France.'

Another Scottish connection for *Fiacre* appears (in Latin) in Hector Boece's *Scotorum historiae*, published in 1527. In John Bellenden's 1536 Scots translation of Boece the account of King Henry V of England deals with the king's death (in 1422) as follows:

> Quhen King Hary had distroyed sindry boundis of Britane, with gret heirschippis and slauchter, he invadit the landis and Kirk of Sanct Fiacre: and, be vengeance of God, he wes strikin with sic infirmite, that na ingine of man micht cure him. At last, quhen he had demandit the

medicinaris, quhet maledy this bene falling to him sa haistely; thay said. It wes the maledy of Sanct Fiacre; quhilk wes sum time ane Scot, and discendit of the nobill blude thairof. (Bellenden II, 492)

Camerarius (1631) lists Fiacre's feast-day as 29 August: *Sanctus Fiacrius Eugenij Scotorum Regis hoc nomine quarti filius* (Forbes 1872, 240). Other late Calendars agree that Fiacre was a son of the king of Scots (Macquarrie 359). The linking of Fiacre (of Breuil) to Scotland is still widely accepted: the published *Fasti* of the Church of Scotland (Scott, Vol. 6, 69) tell us that the parish of Nigg, which 'belongs to' the Abbey of Arbroath, is dedicated to St Fiachra.

Possibly Saint Fiacre came to replace Saint Fotinus when someone noticed that a story now existed (in the fifteenth century?) identifying Fiacre as a Scot. The adoption of Saint *Fiacre* in place of Saint *Fittick* provides a clear French connection (as indeed does the adoption of Saint *Fotinus*): and it may be relevant that Bishop William Elphinstone, who compiled the *Aberdeen Breviary*, was a student at the University of Paris from 1465, and later became a 'reader' there (Macfarlane xix, 37).

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