

That the name ‘Fergus’ denotes the Jewish ringleader in the York ‘Funeral’ has been generally accepted, though the origins and use of the name in this context have remained a source of interest. In versions of the narrative as written or performed in England and on the continent, the name given to this ringleader would be considered recognisably Jewish by late medieval audiences – as Anna Mill notes, he is referred to variously as ‘Japhia, Isachar, Reuben, the High Priest Adonijah, Bezerlay’, as well as simply ‘Judea aldorman’ in the *Blickling Homilies*, or *primus princeps* in the *N. Town Assumption of Mary*.⁸ This list demonstrates the variety of guises and labels which the lead antagonist of the Funeral of the Virgin narrative could be given to inhabit, whether a prince, priest, or even alderman, but the chief characteristic shared by all of these names is their unambiguous Jewishness.

By contrast, the appellation ‘Fergus’ notably carries Caledonian rather than Jewish associations. Mark Sullivan, among others, has reasoned that the use of this name marks out the antipathy of the people of York to the Scots, who led military excursions into Yorkshire sporadically throughout the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and remained a threatening presence throughout the fifteenth.⁹ The character Fergus therefore represents an amalgamated Scoto-Jewish figure of hatred, bringing together the localised enemy of the Scot with the much-maligned Jew. The Scottish adversary was a tangible threat, and may have provided a stand-in for the Jew whose communities had been expelled from England in 1290, and represented an otherwise absent foe.

Although the assumption that ‘Fergus’ references Scottish enmity seems fairly likely, in the following pages I wish to argue that the use of the name was inspired by far more specific associations than a simple anti-Scots polemic. I contend that ‘Fergus’, used as shorthand for the ‘Funeral’ pageant, actually referenced a specific enemy of the people of York who was not merely a representative of Scotland, but also a distinct ‘Other’ with a complicated past, posing an ancient threat to the region of the north-east. But to locate this Fergus we must look backwards into the history of twelfth-century Yorkshire, and consider how this history was transmuted into a controversial performance of the early fifteenth century.

8. Anna J. Mill ‘The York Plays of the Dying, Assumption, and Coronation of Our Lady’ *PMLA* 65: 5 (1950) 868.

9. Sullivan ‘Missing York Funeral’ 150–4.

Fergus of Galloway and Aelred of Rievaulx

From around 1130 until his deposition in 1160, a figure named Fergus of Galloway ruled over a vast swathe of land in the south-west of modern-day Scotland, extending from the west coast on the Irish Sea as far as the region of Annandale in the east, and up to the lands of Carrick and the river Doon in the north.¹⁰ Fergus was a leader of some renown, lord and self-styled 'king' of a Galloway which was entirely autonomous of Scottish rule. He was a major player in Anglo-Scottish politics of the twelfth century, a politician who shrewdly maintained a policy of alternating allegiance between Scottish and English rulers to maintain political freedom.¹¹ His region represented a bastion of Gaelic culture looking westward to Ireland and the Isle of Man, against the pervasive and colonising powers of Anglo/Scoto-Norman influence to the east and the south.¹² And, I argue, it is to him that we must look to find the antecedent of the 'Fergus' mentioned in York's 'Funeral' pageant.

A record of the ousting of Fergus of Galloway from power comes to us through the *Vita Aelredi*, a hagiographical account of the life of Aelred of Rievaulx written shortly after his death in 1167 by the abbot's fellow Cistercian and friend Walter Daniel:

the father went down to Galloway to visit and comfort a daughter-house of Rievaulx. There he found the petty king of that land incensed against his sons, and the sons raging against their father and each other. It is a wild country where the inhabitants are like beasts, and is altogether barbarous ... There chastity founders as often as lust wills, and the pure is only so far removed from the harlot that the more chaste will change their husbands every month, and a man will sell his wife for a heifer ...

As I have said, our father on a visit to the place found the princes of the province quarrelling amongst themselves. The King of Scotland could not subdue, nor the bishop pacify, their mutual hatreds, rancour, and tyranny. Sons were against father, father against sons, brother against

10. Daphne Brooke *Wild Men and Holy Places: St Ninian, Whithorn and the Medieval Realm of Galloway* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994) 79.
11. Richard D. Oram 'Fergus, Galloway and the Scots' in *Galloway: Land and Lordship* edited Richard D. Oram and Geoffrey Stell (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1991) 121.
12. See Hector L. MacQueen 'The Laws of Galloway: A Preliminary Survey' in *Galloway: Land and Lordship* 131–43.