



## A hill of angels and fairies: Sithean Mòr, Iona and the dynamics of Scottish onomastics

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*This article investigates the place-names of the island of Iona in Scotland, using it as a case-study to consider broader issues relating to theoretical and practical approaches to Scottish onomastics and name-studies more generally. The multilingual environment of Scotland creates unique challenges when working towards a process of standardisation and comprehensive name-analysis. When researching the place-names of Iona, which was historically Gaelic-speaking, it is necessary to carefully balance the interface between Gaelic and English and to examine potential tensions between the two languages in a toponymic context. Many of the island's place-names are not recorded on published maps, creating a need to carefully analyse how they have been used and preserved in different contexts. Furthermore, this requires a consideration of authority in naming processes by asking who has the right to create and preserve place-names. The discussion will address contested namescapes in a multilingual environment by examining two place-names on Iona (Sithean Mòr and Angel Hill which both refer to the same feature). In doing so we can elucidate the role of place-names as ideologically charged markers of cultural heritage.*

*Artikeln studerar ortnamn på Iona i Skottland med syfte att undersöka deras funktion och att beskriva hur forskning som fokuserar på en liten ö i västra Skottland kan besvara frågor som relaterar till teoretiska och empiriska namnstudier mer generellt. Skottlands ortnamn karakteriseras av ett flertal olika språk och dialekter som har bidragit till det nuvarande onomastikonet, främst fornnordiska, gaeliska, och engelska. Eftersom många ortnamn som historiskt*

*har använts på Iona aldrig har bevarats i skrift är det speciellt viktigt att undersöka hur namn och traditioner har bevarats av olika användargrupper. Det är också viktigt att fråga sig vem som har och har haft rätten att namnge platser, samt att undersöka vilka namn som bevarats och vilka namn som har ersätts av nya namn i olika sammanhang. Diskussionen fokuserar främst på två ortnamn på Iona (Sìthean Mòr och Angel Hill) som refererar till samma plats, en liten kulle i mitten av ön. Genom att studera dessa ortnamn och deras omgivning kan vi belysa samtida maktrelationer, ortnamnens ideologiska roll och deras funktion som kulturminnen.*

The island of Iona (Ì Chalum Chille in Gaelic) in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland is of immense historical and cultural importance despite its limited size (ca six kilometres in length and two kilometres across). Its fame is rooted in its connection to St Columba (Calum Cille in Gaelic), one of the most famed saints in Scotland and Ireland. After arriving on the island in ca 563, he established a monastery which would become one of the most significant religious sites in Scotland and which continues to be a place of major historical and religious importance.<sup>1</sup> Iona is an island with a remarkably rich recorded history (textual and oral), resulting in a unique record of the island's place-names. Additionally, at least three languages, Gaelic, Old Norse and English, have contributed to the present namescape. This means that the place-name record is often complex and multifaceted, necessitating careful analysis of each individual name. In some regards this is good news for the name-researcher; it allows us to use research into Iona's place-names as a testing ground for future surveys and to consider the theoretical issues that arise from the present study in their broader onomastic context. Researchers from the University of Glasgow are currently working on a full survey of the place-names of Iona and the nearby island of Staffa.<sup>2</sup> We hope that by studying this material, we will be able to provide answers to difficult

1 For scholarly work on the historical context of Iona and St Columba see for instance Broun, D. and Clancy T.O. 1999. *Spes Scotorum: Hope of Scots: Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland*.

2 This is a three-year project based in Celtic & Gaelic at the University of Glasgow titled 'Iona's Namescape: Place-Names and their dynamics in Iona and its environs'. Our work is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. For more information about the project and its aims see <https://iona-placenames.glasgow.ac.uk/>.

questions regarding the preservation of place-names. This includes the development of new and existing protocols<sup>3</sup> for establishing a standardisation process in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd (the modern and historically Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland). The present discussion will examine some issues we have thus far encountered, including:

The relationship between Gaelic and English name-forms (their use, how they are recorded and preserved). This includes an examination of potential tensions between user groups of different linguistic backgrounds. By exploring this, I hope to advance our understanding of contested namescapes in historical and modern contexts.

Recognising the importance of place-lore in informing our understanding of people's perceptions of place and how it contributes to the dynamic, constantly changing nature of place-names.

The complex history of Iona necessitates a critical analysis of the available source-material, and this is a natural starting point for any consideration of the island's place-names. We have an unusually early record of Iona provided by Adomnán in his *Life of St Columba* (c. 690s)<sup>4</sup> in which many of the miracles performed by the saint takes place on the island. Although the number of Iona place-names explicitly recorded by Adomnán is rather limited, the *Vita* provides rich information about the landscape and mental map of the medieval monks of Iona. As we shall see below however, some toponyms are mentioned, providing some of the earliest written records of place-names in Scotland.

Later official maps and charters only provide limited insight into the history of the island's place-names. In fact, two of the most important sources for Scottish place-names, the 6 inch 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Ordnance Survey (henceforth OS) maps,<sup>5</sup> are quite problematic for the type of survey required in an Iona context. The OS 6 inch 2<sup>nd</sup> ed map (1900) records

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3 For current protocols see the Gaelic place-name policy created by Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (<https://www.ainmean-aite.scot/>).

4 *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 1991 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed): A. O. Anderson & M. O. Anderson (eds.). Oxford.

5 This is the first comprehensive survey of Scotland's place-names. The maps are now available online through the National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch/>.

ca 170 place-names for Iona, but this only represents a fraction of the full place-name record. The process of surveying is also worth taking into account here. In her discussion of the OS Name Books,<sup>6</sup> Williamson (2021: 3) highlights that the ‘authorities employed had implications for the forms of name chosen, especially in bilingual areas, including parts of Wales, Ireland and Scotland, where issues of anglicisation, standardisation and translation arose.’ There are many instances in the OS Name Books where one spelling or name has been chosen as the ‘correct’ one and another one has been crossed out. This process of attempting to establish one single correct name for each place creates major implications for the possible erasure of place-names that were in use in the nineteenth century.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have sources that are predominantly informed by local authorities. One such source, usually referred to as ‘the Ritchie map’, was first published in a book by Alec and Euphemia Ritchie in 1928,<sup>7</sup> with considerable input from Gaelic scholar David Munro Fraser who compiled the accompanying appendix. Many of the place-names recorded here do not appear on maps published by official government bodies, and they wonderfully illustrate the richness of Iona’s namescape. Once this data is added to the Iona survey, it contains roughly 500 entries. There are also a number of vitally important oral sources, several of which were recorded in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these sources – which may appear rather typical to most name researchers – there is another category of material which was particularly productive in an Iona context. The early modern period saw an explosion of travellers to western Scotland from the late seventeenth century onwards, with Iona being one of the most popular destinations. These travellers often wrote about their experiences in travel diaries, some of them published at the time or later. They were typically scholars and antiquarians, especially ones whose accounts have become firmly embedded

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6 The Ordnance Survey Name Books contain spatial, linguistic and contextual information about the place-names surveyed in the nineteenth century which provided the basis for the 6 inch 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS maps. They have now been digitised by ScotlandsPlaces: <https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books>.

7 The map has been digitised by the National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/counties/rec/6284>.

8 Many of these have been digitised and can now be accessed through the Tobar an Dualchais / Kist o Riches online resource: <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>.

in the popular image of Iona. Examples of influential writers include Martin Martin (1703) who visited Iona in 1695, Bishop Richard Pococke (1760), Thomas Pennant (1774) who visited the island in 1772 and Samuel Johnson and James Boswell (1785) who visited the island in 1773. Importantly, they do not only record the names of places, but also include traditions associated with the sites they visited, accounts of their history, topography and more. It is, however, equally, and perhaps even more, important to approach these sources critically than those listed previously. Although some of the visitors had knowledge of Gaelic, consulted Gaelic scholars in their research or had Gaelic-speakers accompanying them, the levels of Gaelic fluency varied considerably. This undoubtedly had a significant impact on the material transmitted and spellings provided for individual place-names. It is not always clear who, if any, local residents acted as informants. In some instances, they may be alluded to in expressions like ‘we are told’ (Pennant 1774: 295) or ‘I was informed’ (Pococke 1760: 81), but names of individuals are often not included. The authors also relied on the writings of their own peers. Sometimes this is obvious from the presentation of certain motifs (for example, we know that Pennant drew on material provided in letters written to him by John Stuart<sup>9</sup>), but they also make explicit references to the writings of other authors (see Sithean Mòr case-study below). Significantly, this may have resulted in an echo chamber of early modern antiquarian perceptions of Iona which were subsequently perpetuated by later authors until the present day. All of this means that we have a very particular, but complicated record of Iona’s place-names.

In addition to the complexities of dealing with such a rich historical record, Iona does not represent a neutral space. The island’s significance means that it is essential to address certain aspects of naming which in recent years have been thoroughly explored in the field of critical toponymies. At the core of this line of investigation lies the question posed by Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009: 7): why do ‘toponyms often appear to people as ideologically innocent rather than power-charged semiotic dynamos for making meaning about places’? There can be no doubt that this question is vital for any study of the place-names of Iona. As stated above,

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9 The letters have been transcribed by the Curious Travellers digital edition and can be accessed here <https://editions.curioustravellers.ac.uk/>.

surviving place-names in the Hebrides were created in three main languages: Gaelic, Old Norse and English. The interface between Gaelic and English is especially important to carefully navigate considering the decline of Gaelic and the fragility of Gaelic name-forms and traditions. This also needs to be discussed in the context of Iona's popularity as a tourist destination. To what extent does the large number of visitors, a majority with little or no knowledge of Gaelic, impact the proliferation and preference for English name-forms? A possible example of this can be seen in the case of the bay located in the southernmost part of the island, in Gaelic known as Port a' Churaich 'Port of the coracle or wicker boat'. The origin of the name is traditionally associated with the arrival of St Columba and his companions at this site in 563. Martin (1703: 263) records one version of the tradition, stating that 'The Dock which was dug out of Port *Churich* is on the shore, to preserve *Columbus's* Boat call'd *Curich*'. However, in an English-speaking context, the name of the bay is often given as St Columba's Bay, a name which was likely influenced by the same story. It should be noted that strictly speaking, these names do not refer to the same feature. St Columba's Bay refers to the whole bay, whereas Port a' Churaich refers to the eastern portion of the bay, but they are often used interchangeably. Websites targeting tourists tend (perhaps unsurprisingly) to favour the use of the English form of the name.<sup>10</sup> Considering the popularity of Iona as a tourist destination and the gradual decline of Gaelic, it is important to consider what impact developments like this have on the preservation and survival of Gaelic place-names. A counterpoint is the fact that in some contexts, the English name St Columba's Bay has been translated into Gaelic as Bàgh Chaluim Chille (MacArthur 1999: 250).<sup>11</sup> These points illustrate the complex interplay between Gaelic and English and the importance of considering various influences on the development of name-forms, a point which will be further explored below. Furthermore, in looking at these two place-names, both important in a Christian context, we might also address the question of what was there

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10 See <https://visitmullandiona.co.uk/listings/st-columbas-bay/> (St Columba's Bay) and <http://www.welcometoiona.com/places-of-interest/st-columbas-bay/> (St Columba's Bay).

11 Also see Clancy (2021) 'Ì Chaluim Chille' for more information about place-names on Iona commemorating St Columba: <https://iona-placenames.glasgow.ac.uk/i-chaluim-chille/>.

before St Columba. The name Port a' Churaich likely replaced an existing name used by the local population, pre-dating the establishment of the Christian community on the island.<sup>12</sup> Thus, this is an example of a site with multiple ideologically charged layers, potentially reflecting a continuous process of erasure and innovation which has contributed to the past and present namescape.

Iona's historical fame means that there are many different groups who have influenced the naming of places on the island. Some of these groups include local islanders, groups with religious interests (e.g. the resident religious community and visiting pilgrims), scholars (including heritage bodies and archaeologists) and finally, tourists. The latter is a significant group to consider when studying a place like Iona and it is important to acknowledge that all these user groups may have very different, sometimes conflicting, perceptions of the landscape. This point cannot be completely decoupled from the linguistic considerations outlined above as they are undeniably intertwined, but it is a point worth stressing. Tensions between languages and user groups can create a myriad of problems when attempting to establish a standardised process of presenting place-names. In the following discussion I will attempt to unpack some of these issues by analysing two place-names, Sithean Mòr and Cnoc nan Aingeal, both referring to the same topographical feature.

### SÌTHEAN MÒR<sup>13</sup>

*high & low Sion* 1776 Anon 87 (fo. 42r)

*Sithean Mor* 1877 Skene 89

*Sithean Mor / Great Fairy-mount* 1857 Reeves cxli

*Cnoc an t-Sithein* 1881 OS 6 inch 1<sup>st</sup> edn ARG CIV

*Sithean* 1890 Graham 276

*Sithean More / Angel Hill* 1898 MacMillan 90

*the shi-en* Campbell 1900 62–63

*Cnoc an t-Sithein* 1900 OS 6 inch 2<sup>nd</sup> edn ARG & BTE CIV

*Sithean Mor / Angels' Hill* 1920 McNeill 79

12 As an alternative interpretation we might consider the possibility that the story was attached to an existing name, but if this is the case the points made above would arguably still apply.

13 Where more than one name is given, both are included.

*the “sithein”* 1920 Gordon 144

*the sithean* 1923 Donaldson 386

*Sithean* 1938 Shedden

*Sithean Mor* 1947 McNeill 125

*Fairies' Hill / Cnoc nan Aingeal, the Angels' Hill* 1964 Swire

*Sithean Mor / Big Fairy Mound (Hill of the Angels)* 2017 The Iona Community map

*Cnoc an t-Sidhein* 2021 OS MasterMap

Sithean Mòr (Grid reference: NM 272 237) refers to a small hill in a central location of a flat stretch of land roughly in the centre of Iona, making it appear prominent despite its relatively low altitude (elevation 22.7 metres). The farm of Sithean (spelled Shian on the 1930 Ritchie map) located directly to the south takes its name from the hill. This site is particularly appropriate for a discussion focusing on the dynamics of place-names and issues of bilingualism. Its multifaceted history raises a number of issues pertinent to broader questions, including the use of bilingual name-forms and the establishment of appropriate head-forms. The name Sithean Mòr is semantically straightforward, containing the elements *G sithean* and *G mòr* meaning ‘the large (fairy) knoll’.<sup>14</sup> The OS maps and OS Name Books, however, record the name of the hill as *Cnoc an t-Sithein*, providing the translation ‘Knoll of the Fairies’ (OS1/2/37/18). A more accurate translation would be ‘Hillock of the (fairy) knoll’, the former translation being more consistent with the name Sithean Mòr. As is standard practice, the associated entry in the OS Name Books lists the name alongside local informants who acted as authorities for the correct spelling. In this instance the authorities were James McArthur, John McDonald, postmaster and Dugald McCormick, farmer, all Iona residents. In 1966 Iona native Dugald MacArthur gave the following information: ‘and then you have Sithean [presumably referring to the farm] and Cnoc an t-Sithein or Sithean Mòr as it’s more commonly called, that’s the big fairy knoll’ (Tobar an Dualchais Track ID 84012). It is worth noting that an OS map was used as the basis for the recorded interview. Thus the OS map may have prompted the mention of the OS form since other available maps and so-

14 The element *sithean* in Scottish place-names and its connotations of representing otherworldly dwellings of fairies has been discussed elsewhere. See Taylor (2012: 499).



urces consistently record the name as *Sithean Mòr*, or sometimes simply the *Sithean*. For example, in 1988 Ena MacArthur recalled a story about the hill where she calls it ‘the *Sithean*’ (MacArthur 1989: 115). In cases such as this it is necessary to carefully consider appropriate protocols for establishing a head-form. Although the name *Cnoc an t-Sithein* is attested locally, the OS entry does not represent the more consistently used name for the site, *Sithean Mòr*. As highlighted above, it is clear that when studying Gaelic place-names it is not advisable to rely solely on OS spellings since they do not always accurately represent modern Gaelic spellings, local usage and pronunciation. We might turn to sources which reflect greater local and Gaelic knowledge, such as the Ritchie map, but these sources also require a critical approach. For example, the Ritchie map is notoriously inconsistent in its use of length marks in Gaelic names. In fact, a brief survey of the map shows that length marks are absent where they would be expected as a matter of course and should not be interpreted as representing pronunciations with short vowels. *Sithean Mòr* is one such example, given on the Ritchie map as *Sithean Mor*. In this instance the head-form in the Iona place-name survey is given with correct modern Gaelic orthography as *Sithean Mòr*. However, when working with this type of material it is necessary to approach names on a case-by-case basis.

### **CNOC NAN AINGEAL / ANGEL HILL**

*colliculus angelorum / cnoc angel* ca 690s Adomnán

*Angel Hill* 1760 Pococke 86

*Cnoc nan Aingeal* 1771 Anon iii 133

*hill of the angels, Cnoc nar-aimgeal* 1772 Pennant 297

*Cnoc-nan-aingeal-mòr* 1773 Stuart

*Angel Hill* 1788 Stuart

*Cnoc nar-aimgeal / hill of angels* 1798 Garnett 267

*Cnoc-an-aingell / Angel's Mount* 1850 Lindsay 169–170

*Cnoc an Aingeal* 1850 Graham plate 2

*Cnoc-na-nAingel* 1857 Reeves cxli

*Cnoc Aingil / Sithean Mor* 1887 MacLean 37–38

*Angel Hill / Sithean More* 1898 MacMillan 90

*The Angels' Hill* 1909 Trenholme 35

*Cnoc-nan-Aingeal* 1912 Macleod 104

*Angels' Hill / Sithean Mor* 1920 McNeill 79

*Cnoc nan Aingeal*, the Angels' Hill / Fairies' Hill 1964 Swire

*Angels' Hill* 1973 Underwood 121

*Sithean Mor / Big Fairy Mound (Hill of the Angels)* 2017 The Iona Community map

There is another dimension to explore here. In addition to the name *Sithean Mòr*, another, almost certainly earlier, name referring to the same hill exists. This was recorded in Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* (c. 690s) where it is attached to a story in which St Columba converses with angels on top of the hill (see Reeves 1857: 205). The name is given both in Gaelic (*Cnoc Angel*) and in Latin (*colliculus angelorum*). It is now typically recorded in its Gaelic form as *Cnoc nan Aingeal* 'hill of the angels', but is often given in English as Angel Hill. Having two different names is not necessarily an issue for a place-name survey; adding variant names for the same feature is not uncommon and can be relatively easily navigated by cross-referencing two separate entries in the survey. However, there is a rather interesting question regarding the use of the names in Gaelic and English. Both place-names have attested forms in both languages, but *Sithean Mòr* is arguably more consistently used in Gaelic and vice-versa. That is, *Sithean Mòr* is rarely given in English as a name-form (e.g. The Large Fairy Knoll), whereas *Cnoc nan Aingeal* is often given only in its English form, Angel Hill, especially from the nineteenth century onwards. It should be emphasised, however, that this does not mean that *Sithean Mòr* is only used in a Gaelic-speaking context, and there is no doubt that it is also used by English-speakers. As noted above, there are several contexts in which the name has become anglicised, for example lacking length marks and the hill is sometimes referred to as 'the *Sithean*' in an English-speaking context. The name of the nearby farm, *Sithean* or *Shian*, is also given with an anglicised spelling. This pattern is likely meaningful and reflects developments that are the result of a number of linguistic and cultural factors, some of which I will attempt to unpack here. However, before discussing this further, it is necessary to address yet another topic.

In addition to multiple different name-forms, there is a wealth of place-lore associated with this hill, much of which was recorded by travellers visiting Iona. It is worth exploring this point further since place-lore can reveal a great deal about how and why this hill has been understood in different contexts, and perhaps also shed further light on the two names in-

roduced above. There are at least three, and arguably four, quite distinct strands of traditions featuring the hill. The story of St Columba conversing with angels discussed above, associated with the name Cnoc nan Aingeal / Angel Hill, represents the first of these strands. It should be noted that this story was subsequently repeated in many of the sources which mention the name, typically referring to Adomnán's account (see early forms above).

However, the hill has also been associated with St Michael and Michaelmas celebrations, representing a second strand. Our earliest surviving record of this tradition, presumably much later than the origins of the practices described, is provided by Pococke (1760: 86) who wrote:

I went to the South west part of the Island and in half a mile passed by a fine small green hill, called Angel Hill, where they bring their Horses on the day of St. Michael and All Angels, and run races round it; it is probable this custom took its rise from bringing the Cattle at that season to be blessed, as they do now at Rome on a certain day of the year.

His account undoubtedly influenced reports by subsequent authors, including Pennant (1774: 297) who directly cites Pococke in his account: 'Bishop *Pocock* informed me, that the natives were accustomed to bring their horses to this circle [of stones on top of the hill] at the feast of St. *Michael*, and to course round it'. It is difficult to know the exact nature of the celebrations described and to what extent they were still practiced when these texts were written. As Stiùbhart (2014) has highlighted, such Michaelmas celebrations, despite having been widely observed across the Hebrides, may have largely fallen out of use in many areas by the time the bulk of our written accounts were composed.

The third strand is connected with the name Sithean Mòr and includes traditions associated with fairies and fairy knolls. One such story which likely refers to this site recounts how:

Two young men in Iona were coming in the evening from fishing on the rocks. On their way, when passing, they found the shì-en of that island open, and entered. One of them joined the dancers, without waiting to lay down the string of fish he had in his hand. The other stuck a fish-hook in the door, and when he wished made his escape. He came back for his companion that day twelvemonths, and found him still dancing with the string of fish in his hand. On taking him to the open air the fish dropped from the string, rotten. (Campbell 1900: 62–63)

Stories of fairies are a common motif in Gaelic folklore and migratory legends, frequently anchored in the physical landscape. For example, a search for *sithean* on the Tobar an Dualchais / Kist o Riches website will yield numerous stories with parallels to the one outlined here and they are often associated with specific places. It is likely that the element *sithean* provided a basis for many stories involving fairies and related supernatural features.

Finally, it may be appropriate to add a fourth strand to this list. From the twentieth century onwards multiple accounts also describing supernatural events appear, but they are rather different from the accounts associated with fairies described above. Folklorist and regular Iona visitor F. Marian McNeill (1947: 125) recorded the death of:

a lady, a visitor to Iona, who fell a victim to ‘the lure of the fairy hill.’ One moonlight night she slipped out of the cottage where she was staying, unclad, with a knife in her hand (with which to open the hill), and in the early morning her body was found beside the *Sithean Mòr*:

The episode described here seems to refer to the death of a woman by the name of Norah Emily Fornario (nickname Netta), who visited Iona in the autumn of 1929 and who had a strong interest in the spiritual world and the occult. The McNeill account, however, is not correct as the body was found in the southern hills of Iona, a long distance from *Sithean Mòr*. So what could have prompted this association? Mairi MacArthur (1995: 141) argues that the newspapers who reported the story assumed, wrongly, that someone with Netta’s spiritualist leanings must be linked to ‘the landmark where fairies were said to dance and St Columba had a vision of angels’, resulting in newspapers incorrectly reporting that her body was found near *Sithean Mòr*. The dramatic circumstances of her death have subsequently been the subject of books, poetry, drama and much speculation, persisting into the twenty-first century. A Google search (as of 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022) for ‘Netta Fornario’ will yield numerous blog posts and podcasts describing different versions of the event. On a related note, a 1973 (121) *Gazetteer of Scottish and Irish ghosts* rather ominously describes sightings of ghosts on the hill:

Many are the reports of ghostly monks seen here over the years, often at certain spots where the local people will not venture at night-time, such as the

Angels' Hill, almost in the centre of the island, where many odd things have happened.

These accounts may ultimately derive from existing associations with fairies and the Otherworld, but they create a rather different image of the hill which seems to have been rooted in the experiences of visitors to the island who had an interest in spiritualism, rather than local residents.

As noted above, there is a pattern of Cnoc nan Aingeal being more consistently used in its English form Angel Hill, especially from the nineteenth century onwards, whereas Sithean Mòr is more consistently given in Gaelic (but as noted above the name Sithean Mòr can be used in both Gaelic and English-speaking contexts). Where both names are given, variations of Sithean Mòr, or just Sithean, and Angel Hill are most frequently used (see Anonymous 1776, MacMillan 1898). This pattern can also be found in present-day contexts. For example, the official website of the Iona Community Council has an entry on the hill which begins 'Sithean Mòr (large fairy hill) lies to the south of the road leading to the Machair. It is also known by the alternative name of Hill of the Angels.'<sup>15</sup> It should be stressed that this does not necessarily imply that there is a deliberate process of erasing the Gaelic name-form Cnoc nan Aingeal, although that dimension is also an important one which warrants further investigation in its broader context. Rather, perhaps the best way to interpret the pattern noted here is to discuss it in relation to the various traditions associated with the hill. There may be a certain bias towards the use of some name-forms depending on the image of the hill the user wishes to evoke. We can arguably assume that a desire to emphasise an association with St Columba would increase the likelihood of using the name Cnoc nan Aingeal / Angel Hill. Therefore, the promotion of a connection between Columba (the original source of Iona's prominence) and the hill may be especially likely in light of the explosion of tourism, especially faith tourism, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is possible that visitors, often with little or no knowledge of Gaelic, would be more prone to use an English name which can be clearly associated with St Columba, explaining the tendency towards the use of the name Angel Hill. This only demonstrates one of potentially many aspects of how perceptions of this

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15 <http://www.welcometoiona.com/places-of-interest/sithean-mor/>.

hill have been shaped by the linguistic and cultural context in which its different names have been used. It does, however, highlight the myriad of influences that need to be considered when studying place-names with a complex history more generally. Not only can we have many different name-forms, but there may also be multiple different co-existing traditions associated with any given feature, creating a highly multifaceted, dynamic namescape.

The examination presented here has attempted to demonstrate that working towards a process of standardisation in a multilingual environment requires a number of particular considerations. This raises questions regarding the role of the onomastician in establishing authoritative name-forms. It is clear that in the context of Gaelic place-names in Scotland, it is necessary to approach each area on a case-by-case basis. However, we can make some general observations regarding protocols for name-research which are used as part of the Iona's Namescape project. As demonstrated above, when studying Gaelic place-names it is crucial to consider correct Gaelic orthography, including adding length marks and using modern spellings for elements as appropriate, meaning that it is generally not sufficient to rely on OS spellings. As part of this process, we are working in consultation with Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba<sup>16</sup> and other progressing surveys of Gaelic place-names<sup>17</sup> to determine appropriate orthographic conventions in a toponymic (Gaelic) context. It is, however, equally vital to consider local usage and pronunciation which means that in some instances locally attested spellings may take precedence over modern Gaelic orthographic conventions. It is also important to acknowledge the capacity for multiple name-forms and traditions to exist simultaneously. Our responsibility as onomasticians is arguably to preserve these as comprehensively as possible and to avoid any past mistakes made by OS surveyors in their attempt to establish a single 'correct' name for each place. When investigating a site like Sithean Mòr we are dealing with a highly dynamic human artefact. The case-study presented above portrays a hill which is frequently featured in the experiences of early modern and subsequent

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16 Scotland's national advisory partnership for Gaelic place-names.

17 This especially includes ongoing surveys that form part of the Survey of Scottish Place-Names such as Whyte, *Ainmeannan-Àite Mhuile & Ulbha / The Place-Names of Mull & Ulva* (forthcoming).

visitors to Iona, but there is no singular coherent narrative. Rather, we find multiple traditions and place-names co-existing which are all subject to different linguistic and cultural influences, all of which need to be carefully balanced. In this case, it is important to include more than one name (and in both Gaelic and English) as part of our survey to adequately represent the historical and cultural role of this hill. These findings emphasise the potential benefits of intensive analysis of individual sites in places like Iona where the rich historical record facilitates such research. This in turn can increase our understanding of how humans conceptualise place and place-names.

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