

ARTHURIAN LITERATURE
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

*Pa gur yv y porthaur. Glenluid
gauaeluaur. Pa gur aegouu.
Arthur. a chei guu. Pa imda genhid.
Guir goxev imbid. ym ty ny doi. onysguar
ech. Mi ae guadi. athi ae gueli. Vythnei
ut elei. Assivyon ell tui. Mabon am myd
ron. guafuthur pen dragon. Ky sceint.
mab. Baron. a guu godybrion. Oet*

The Arthur *of the* Welsh

The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature

Edited by

Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman,

Brynley F. Roberts

THE ARTHUR
OF THE WELSH

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Pa gur yw y porthaur. Glenluid
ganaelnaur. Pa gur aegouu.
arthur. a chei guu. Pa unda genhid.
Gur gores umbid. ym ty ny doi. onysguar
edi. Mi ae guadi. achi ae gueli. Vythnei
nt elei. A ssiuon ell tui. Mabon am myd
ron. guafuthur pen dragon. Ry sceint.
mab. Banon. A guu godybrion. Oet
Ruin vy gueiffon in amuy ex detvon.
Manawidan ab llyr. oet diuf y cufil.
Heuttuc manauid eis tull o tywruid.
a mabon am melle. maglei guaed ar
guell. Ac anguas edeinauc. a lluch.
llauynnauc. Oetin diffreidauc ar ei
din cyminauc. Angluc ae llochei my

The first page of 'Pa gur yw y porthaur' from Peniarth MS 1, f 47v

(The Black Book of Carmarthen)

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OF THE WELSH**

THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND IN MEDIEVAL WELSH LITERATURE

edited by

Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, Brynley F. Roberts



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*Cyflwynir y gyfrol hon
i goffadwriaeth annwyl
yr Athro Thomas Jones*

PUBLISHED IN CO-OPERATION WITH
THE VINAVER TRUST

*The Vinaver Trust was established by the British Branch
of the International Arthurian Society to commemorate
a greatly respected colleague and distinguished scholar*

Eugène Vinaver

*the editor of Malory's Morte Darthur. Its aim is to
advance the study of Arthurian literature in all languages
by planning and encouraging research projects in the field,
and by supporting publication of the resultant studies.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AB** *Annales de Bretagne.*
- AC** *Annales Cambriae; Cy.*, 9 (1888), 141ff.; ed. and trans. J. Morris, *Nennius's British History and the Welsh Annals* (London and Chichester, 1980).
- ALMA** *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959).
- AP** *Armes Prydein: 'The Prophecy of Britain'*, ed. Ifor Williams. English edition translated by Rachel Bromwich, DIAS Medieval and Modern Welsh Series VI (Dublin, 1972, 1982).
- Ast.H** *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd*, ed. Rachel Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones (Cardiff, 1978).
- ATC** R.S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York, 1949).
- B** *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies.*
- BB** *Brut y Brenhinedd* (Llanstephan I Version), ed. B.F. Roberts (DIAS 1971).
- BBC** *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Pwllheli, 1907).
- BBIAS** *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society.*
- BD** *Brut Dingestow*, ed. Henry Lewis (Cardiff, 1942).
- BR** *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Melville Richards (Cardiff, 1948).
- BT** *The Book of Taliesin: Facsimile and Text*, ed. J.G. Evans (Llanbedrog, 1910).
- BWP** *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry: Studies by Sir Ifor Williams*, ed. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff, 1972, 1980, repr. 1990).
- CA** *Canu Aneirin*, ed. Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1937, 1961, repr. 1989).
- CBB** John Jay Parry, *Brut y Brenhinedd: Cotton Cleopatra Version* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937).
- CF** John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (Oxford, 1891).
- Ch.Br.** Joseph Loth, *Chrestomathie Bretonne* (Paris, 1890).
- CLILI** *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, ed. B.F. Roberts, DIAS Medieval and Modern Welsh Series VII (Dublin, 1975).
- CLIH** *Canu Llywarch Hen*, ed. Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1935, 1953, repr. 1990).
- CMCS** *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies.*

- COICO(1) *Culhwch ac Olwen: Testun Syr Idris Foster*, ed. and completed by Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1988) (CO(1)). An enlarged English edition with new introduction and notes is in the Press: references to line numbers in the text of the tale will correspond in the two editions.
- CS *Celt and Saxon*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1963).
- Cy. *Y Cymmrodor*.
- DIAS Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.
- EAR J.D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* (Göttingen, 1927).
- ÉC *Études Celtiques*.
- EHR *English Historical Review*.
- EWGT *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. P.C. Bartrum (Cardiff, 1966).
- G *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg*, ed. J. Lloyd-Jones (Cardiff, 1931-1963).
- GMW D.Simon Evans, *A Grammar of Middle Welsh*, DIAS, (Dublin, 1964).
- GPC *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language* (Cardiff, 1950-).
- Guide A.O.H. Jarman and G.R. Hughes, *A Guide to Welsh Literature* (Swansea, 1976).
- HB *The Historia Brittonum*, (i) ed. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora Saec*, IV-VII (MGH AA xiii); (ii) ed. F. Lot, *Nennius et L'Historia Brittonum* (Paris, 1934); (iii) ed. D.N. Dumville, *The Historia Brittonum: The Vatican Recension* (Woodbridge, 1985); (iv) ed. and trans. J. Morris, *Nennius's British History and the Welsh Annals* (see above under AC).
- Hend. *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, ed. J. Morris-Jones and T.H. Parry-Williams (Cardiff, 1933, repr. 1978).
- HLCB *Histoire littéraire et culturelle de la Bretagne*, ed. Jean Balcou et Yves le Gallo (Paris-Geneva, 1987).
- HRB *Historia Regum Britanniae*, I: Bern Burgerbibliothek MS 568, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1984).
- HRB(T) *Historia Regum Britanniae*, trans. Lewis Thorpe, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1966).
- HRB(V) *Historia Regum Britanniae*, II: The First Variant Version, ed. Neil Wright, (Cambridge, 1988).
- HW J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (Oxford, 1911).
- IPT Kenneth Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961).
- LA E. Faral, *La Légende arthurienne*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929).

- LAMA** *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.B. Grout *et al.* (Cambridge, 1983).
- LBS** S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints*, 4 vols. (London, 1907-13).
- Leg. Hist.** J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (California, 1950).
- LHEB** Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953).
- LL** *Liber Landavensis: The Book of Llandaf*, ed. J. Rhys and J.G. Evans (Oxford, 1883).
- LIC** *Llên Cymru*.
- LIDC** *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, ed. A.O.H. Jarman (Cardiff, 1982).
- MA(2)** *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, 2nd edn. (Denbigh, 1870).
- Mab.** *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (Everyman: London, 1949).
- MLN** *Modern Language Notes*.
- MLR** *Modern Language Review*.
- MP** *Modern Philology*.
- NLW** National Library of Wales.
- NMS** *Nottingham Medieval Studies*.
- Owein** *Owein or Chwedyl I arlles y Ffynnawn*, ed. R.L. Thomson, DIAS Medieval and Modern Welsh Series IV (Dublin, 1968).
- PBA** *Proceedings of the British Academy*.
- PKM** *Pedair Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1930, 1964, repr. 1989).
- PT** *The Poems of Taliesin*, ed. Ifor Williams. English edition trans. J.E. Caerwyn Williams, DIAS Medieval and Modern Welsh Series III (Dublin, 1968).
- RBB** *The Text of the Bruts from the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Rhys and J.G. Evans (Oxford, 1890).
- RBP** *The Poetry from the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J.G. Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911).
- RC** *Revue Celtique*.
- RM** *The Text of the Mabinogion from the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Rhys and J.G. Evans (Oxford, 1887).
- RWM** *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, ed. J.G. Evans (London, 1898-1910).
- SC** *Studia Celtica*.
- SEBC** *Studies in the Early British Church*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1958).

- SEBH** *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1954).
- THSC** *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*.
- TRh** *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith yn yr Oesau Canol*, ed. Geraint Bowen (Llandysul, 1974).
- TYP** *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich (Cardiff, 1961, 1978, 1991).
- VM** *The Life of Merlin* (Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*), ed. and trans. Basil Clarke (Cardiff, 1971).
- VSb** *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, ed. and trans. A.W. Wade-Evans (Cardiff, 1944).
- WAL** R.S. Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Legend* (Cardiff, 1956).
- WHR** Welsh History Review.
- WM** *The White Book Mabinogion*, ed. J.G. Evans (Pwllheli, 1907).
Second edition with introduction by R.M. Jones (Cardiff, 1973, repr. 1977).
- YB** *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, ed. J.E. Caerwyn Williams (Denbigh, 1965-).
- YMTh** *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin*, ed. A.O.H. Jarman (Cardiff, 1967).
- ZCP** *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*.

INTRODUCTION

The Editors

with a contribution by Daniel Huws

At a meeting of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society held in Manchester in 1985, the trustees of the Eugène Vinaver Memorial Trust announced the Trust's intention to commission a series of volumes to supplement and revise *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, edited by the late R.S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), a work to which a number of writers contributed. During the years which have intervened since that book appeared the results have been made available of major advances in research in many of the relevant fields of study, and this has necessitated an up-date of much of the material assembled in ALMA. It was decided that the first of the projected volumes to be undertaken should offer a revision of the earlier chapters in ALMA, which are concerned with various aspects of the Celtic sources and affinities of the Arthurian Legend. The three editors of the present volume were appointed by the trustees, and together agreed to organize the revision of these chapters by an appropriate panel of specialists. By the decision of the editors this first volume has been entitled *The Arthur of the Welsh*. The editors wish to thank Dr W.R.J. Barron for his initiative in organizing the project, and for setting the text and producing the camera-ready copy. Our thanks also go to the Manchester University Research Support Fund for financing the production of the text. The editors are grateful to the University of Wales Press, and especially to Ceinwen Jones, for their invaluable assistance.

Our purpose has been to revise and/or to supplement chs.1-8, 12 and 16 of ALMA in the light of more recent work which has been accomplished during the last thirty years. Some of the material in the earlier volume has been differently arranged: certain subjects have been treated more fully and others less fully. The early Welsh poems which make allusion to Arthur have been examined in greater detail, and a complete chapter has been allotted to each of the 'Three Romances' *Geraint*, *Owain*, and *Peredur*. These tales have been primarily considered in their Welsh context, rather than in their relation to the poems of Chrétien de Troyes (the so-called 'Mabinogionfrage' has however received brief mention in the final chapter). Since *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (1961, revised edn. 1978) appeared after ALMA, it has no longer been considered necessary to devote a separate chapter to the Triads,

though these have been cited individually as occasion required, and as a collection they have been briefly noticed in association with *Culhwch ac Olwen*. With *Culhwch* also have been considered the Welsh Saints' Lives and the 'Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain', two Arthurian sources which were only incidentally mentioned in ALMA. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* has been discussed in conjunction with its Welsh adaptations in *Brut y Brenhinedd*: these Welsh versions of the *Historia* possess a unique interest, and they received no more than a bare mention in the earlier work. In the later chapters reference is made to such twelfth-century works in Old French as warrant consideration in view of their original context in Brittany, and in some cases (conjecturally) in the Breton language. A full and separate chapter has been allotted to a discussion of the Breton contribution to Arthurian literature. The discussion of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* has been combined with that of recent research concerning the later adaptation of French romance material into Welsh: this is another new departure. More recent work on the Myrddin cycle has been cited, as also have some new opinions concerning the genesis of the Tristan legend (including a fresh examination of the relation between the insular sources and the Irish tale of *Diarmaid and Gráinne*). Progress in archaeological research, combined with place-name study has led to a reassessment of the original purpose of the site at Tintagel, and has also demolished misconceptions concerning the other supposedly Arthurian sites at South Cadbury and Castle Dore, while new light has been cast on the possible localization of Celli Wig. Significant parallels from early Irish literature have been frequently cited for purposes of comparison, though a later generation is less ready than were its predecessors to accept as inevitable an Irish origin, in place of a common Celtic inheritance for mythical themes which reappear in the Continental Arthurian romances. In contrast with these many amplifications, we have devoted less attention than did the late R.S. Loomis to the subject of Arthurian cave-legends and other aspects of Arthurian folklore, together with the different manifestations of the messianic hope for Arthur's return. Where variant opinions may have been expressed by the contributors, the editors have made no attempt to impose consistency.

Kenneth Jackson's discussion in the opening chapter of ALMA of the primary sources which relate to Arthur's historicity has been supplemented but in no way replaced by the observations of subsequent writers. Jackson showed that the twelve victories assigned to Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum* can only in a very few instances — *Cat Coit Celidon*, *Bellum in urbe legionis* — be certainly identifiable with existing place-names in Britain, and that the same may be said, though with less positive assurance, of the *bellum Badonis* (ann. 518) and *Gueith Camlann* (ann. 539) of the *Annales Cambriae*. Even though these names may all recall once-famous

battles, it is not necessary, and it is indeed hardly possible, that they can have all been fought by Arthur.¹ Jackson endorsed the suggestion originally made by the Chadwicks² that their source may well have lain in ‘some antiquarian poem on the long-dead hero’. He described the famous allusion to Arthur in the *Gododdin* poem as ‘what may well be one of the most convincing pieces of evidence for a historical Arthur’. He stressed also the potential significance of the occurrence of four (possibly five) historical figures whose names appear to commemorate the otherwise rare name of Arthur, and who are recorded as having lived in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. This point had also been made earlier by the Chadwicks and others.³ Jackson concluded: ‘He (Nennius) could hardly have invented Arthur himself, for Nennius was no Geoffrey: he was not capable of creating a character out of nothing at all.’

Each of these three testimonies in the ‘case for the defence’ for Arthur’s historicity has in the mean time been pursued further by subsequent writers. Indeed one of the most important surveys of the subject appeared almost concurrently with the publication of ALMA, though it was not seen by Jackson. This was Thomas Jones’s ‘Datblygiadau Cynnar Chwedl Arthur’, first published in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 17 (1958), and later translated by Gerald Morgan, to appear in 1964 as ‘The Early Evolution of the Legend of Arthur’ in *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 8. Like Jackson, Thomas Jones supported the suggestion first made by the Chadwicks that an early Welsh poem in retrospective praise of Arthur would be a likely source for the list of Arthur’s battles in the *Historia Brittonum*. This is a type of poem for which there are significant analogies in praise-poems addressed to other early Welsh heroes, but even when such poems preserve the names of authentic battles, these battles need not always have been correctly appropriated to the hero in question, nor need they always have been fought against the Angles or Saxons. Jones cast doubt on the ascription to Arthur of the victory of *bellum Badonis* in the *Annales Cambriae* (*in monte badonis* in the *Historia Brittonum*), observing that the allusion to Arthur’s carrying the Cross on his shoulders (more probably on his shield) ‘savours of a religious legend’. For Jones the allusion in the *Annales* to *Gueith Camlann* was ‘perhaps the most authentic historical reference to Arthur’. It is indeed noticeable that the sparse allusions made by the Welsh court-poets of the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries to the Battle of Badon do not associate it with Arthur,⁴ nor is any mention of the battle made in the Triads — whereas Welsh poets frequently revert to the memory of Camlan as a cataclysmic disaster for the Britons. It has subsequently been shown that these early entries in the *Annales* cannot be drawn from a contemporary, or even from a nearly contemporary, source for the period.⁵ There is no reason to doubt the identity of *Bellum Badonis* with the *obsessio*

Badonici montis of Gildas, but the latter's silence as to Arthur's presence at this battle (or indeed to Arthur's very existence) lends some support to Thomas Jones's suggestion that Badon was not in fact fought by Arthur.

Recent studies have envisaged the earliest sources for Welsh history 'subjectively' as expressive of their authors' intentions and circumstances, rather than 'objectively' as prime sources of reliable information for events which occurred many years before the time when they were written. Dr D.N. Dumville has published an important sequence of articles from this viewpoint as preliminary studies to his series of editions (now in progress) of the different versions of the *Historia Brittonum*.⁶ The results of this innovatory research are naturally of crucial importance for a correct interpretation of the significance of the passage in the *Historia Brittonum* on Arthur's battles. It is in relation to Dr Dumville's work that this subject is re-assessed in our first chapter by Dr Charles-Edwards. He concludes, however, on a note of qualified optimism by raising the query as to whether the *Historia Brittonum* can be *entirely* dismissed as consisting of no more than 'synthetic history'. Where the underlying sources are completely unknown, there must always remain an element of doubt as to their provenance.

The second item of evidence which has been frequently advanced in support of the case for Arthur's historicity is the allusion to Arthur in the *Gododdin* (*Canu Aneirin*, line 1241), where the warrior Gwawrddur is commemorated for his great deeds 'though he was no Arthur'. Most previous writers, including Jackson and Dumville,⁷ have laid considerable stress on the potential importance of this allusion. Whatever may be the date at which the line first became incorporated into the poem, its reference to Arthur plainly emanates from a tradition which is independent of the account of Arthur's activities in the *Historia Brittonum* or that in the *Annales*: it could quite probably be as old as the ninth-century redaction of the *Historia Brittonum*, even if it formed no part of the original *Gododdin* poem. Whether the reference is to a contemporary or to an earlier figure, it constitutes proof for the existence of a man named Arthur, since as Thomas Jones pointed out, early Welsh praise-poetry makes no allusion to characters not regarded as historical for purposes of eulogistic comparison.

The *Gododdin* emanated from one of the British kingdoms in the 'Old North'. Can this mean that the original field of Arthur's activities lay also in north Britain (that is in Cumbria and southern Scotland)? In his study of the *Gododdin* Jackson categorically rejected this view, for he regarded Arthur as 'the great national hero of the entire British people'.⁸ But the probability of an ambience in the 'Old North' for the genesis of the earliest traditions concerning Arthur's activities is consistent with the transference to Wales and fresh localization there of the traditions of a number of

other northern heroes, and it has received tentative support from Thomas Jones and others.⁹ The full implications of the *Gododdin* allusion have been most recently and comprehensively discussed by A.O.H. Jarman in ‘The Arthurian Allusions in the Book of Aneirin’, *SC*, 24/5 (1989-90), 15-25.

It is also relevant to mention here a further allusion to Arthur in an early poem which would be almost as significant as that in the *Gododdin* if only its textual authority were more securely established. An elegy for Cynddylan, a seventh-century prince of Powys, has survived only in copies from the seventeenth century and later, but it is composed in a language, idiom and metre closely resembling that of the *Gododdin*, while its text has orthographical features which suggest it was copied from a manuscript as old as the thirteenth-century Book of Aneirin. One of its lines describes Cynddylan and his brothers as *canawon Artur Fras, dinas dengyn*, ‘whelps of stout Arthur, a strong fortress’.¹⁰

The final item in the ‘case for the defence’ of Arthur’s historicity consists in the record in Gaelic sources of four (or five) historical figures named Arthur who are said to have been born in the late sixth or early seventh centuries — though this name is of extremely rare occurrence either before or after that date. Two of these men are conjectured to have been born c. 570: *Arturius* son of *Aedán mac Gabráin* of Dál Riada in Scotland enters into Adomnan’s *Life of Columba*¹¹ — a seventh-century and therefore a near-contemporary source— and *Artúr mac Petuir* (var. *Retheoir*) is named in the eighth-century Irish genealogy of the immigrant tribe of the Deisi,¹² and appears also as *Arthur map Petr* in the Harleian genealogy of Dyfed. The Irish descent of this line of the early rulers of Dyfed is a well-established and recognized fact,¹³ and *Arthur map Petr* is one of a series of twelve names for which there is close correspondence between the Welsh form of this genealogy and the Irish version. These names have been taken to commemorate the British hero Arthur, the Arthur who is alluded to in the *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambriae*, and the Welsh poems — though such a commemoration by name of an earlier and unrelated hero would be hard to parallel elsewhere in Celtic sources. Its likelihood must turn on the question whether Arthur was in fact, already by the eighth century, ‘the great national hero of the entire British people’ (Jackson), or whether he was originally a purely local war-lord whose original sphere of activity lay in the ‘Old North’. Some have indeed gone so far as to propose the identification of the Scottish Arthur of Dalriada with the Arthur famous in Brythonic tradition.¹⁴ The difficulty presented by these widespread and relatively early Arthurian ‘namesakes’ is likely to remain a lasting crux: one possible solution would be to postulate a derivation for the Gaelic names other than the commonly accepted derivation of ‘Arthur’ from the name of the Roman *gens Artorius*. The Irish word *art* and Welsh *arth*, ‘bear’, were frequently

used figuratively in both languages to denote a warrior, and *Art* actually survived as a personal name in Irish, and as the first element in such early Welsh names as *Arthgen*, *Arthgal*, *Arthgloys*.¹⁵ We are reminded also of the ancient Gaulish names *Dea Artio*, 'Bear Goddess', and *Artgenos*, 'Son of a Bear'.¹⁶ And this alternative possibility could also apply to the Arthur of the *Gododdin*. As Jean Markale has pointed out,¹⁷ it is significant that Latin writers always refer to Arthur as *Arturus* or *Arturius*, never as *Artorius*.

Attempts have been made to find a prototype for the Arthur of the Britons by identifying him with historical figures whose names have come down in early and independent records. It is commonly accepted that the most likely derivation of his name is from the Latin *Artorius*, and there is evidence that this name was known in Britain in the second century, for an inscription records that in this century a certain Lucius Artorius Castus, *praefectus castrorum* of the Sixth Legion stationed at York, was sent at the head of two legions to Armorica to suppress a rebellion.¹⁸ It would, however, be merely wishful thinking to identify this officer with the hero of the Britons: his date is much too early. But the existence of the inscription proves that the name *Artorius* was known in this country from an early date: Lucius Artorius could have left descendants or possibly namesakes in Britain.

More recently Geoffrey Ashe has advanced the claims of a different historical prototype for Arthur, and one who approximates more closely to the requirements of the chronology implied by the native records. In the late fifth century a shadowy figure called *Riothamus*, who is said to have been a 'king' of the Britons (that is, he was not *dux bellorum*) is briefly alluded to by the writers Gregory of Tours, Jordanes, and Sidonius Apollinaris, who between them testify that he led an army of sea-borne troops from Britain (less probably, from Brittany) to Gaul¹⁹ in order to oppose the Visigothic king Euric. It appears that *Riothamus* was betrayed by the Gaulish prefect Arvandus, that he was defeated by Euric near Bourges in 469-70, and that he fled afterwards to Burgundy. Henceforth he disappears from history — though the Burgundian town of Avallon (the Gaulish *Aballone*, the 'place of apples') is proposed as commemorating his demise. It is possible that *Riothamus*, 'supreme king', might be a title, rather than a personal name: hence the proposed conflation with the figure of Arthur.²⁰

Such suggestions as these can at best be no more than straws in the wind. Earlier than Geoffrey of Monmouth, Welsh traditions do not attribute any overseas expeditions to Arthur (that is, apart from the dubious testimony of the porter in *Culhwch ac Olwen* — hardly a credible 'historical' witness), but represent him as fully occupied in opposing human and non-human enemies in the Island of Britain. Undoubtedly a composite memory of the foreign expeditions led by Romano-British

leaders of long ago must have contributed to Geoffrey of Monmouth's portrayal of the great leader. Among these we should not forget the powerful legend of the Emperor Maximus, the Welsh 'Maxen Wledig', who was believed to have conquered Rome and afterwards to have left his troops as the first colonizers of Brittany.²¹

We may conclude by paraphrasing the words of the late Thomas Jones in his review-article of ALMA in *Llên Cymru*, 5 (1959), 99. He observes that there is an abiding mystery in the survival over so many centuries and in the literatures of so many countries of the memory of a hero about whom we can in reality know next to nothing. Arthur's name has left a deep imprint not only on literature but on the topography and popular traditions of Wales, Cornwall, and England, and in a few instances such localizations have even spread as far as the Continent. Thomas Jones suggested that it was not the raw material of the tales which was the most important element in this miracle, but rather some inexplicable creative impulse on the part of society as a whole, which found its expression through individual authors. But to conclude in this way does no more than raise a host of additional questions.

The texts of the Welsh poems and stories to be discussed are with few exceptions to be found in one or more of five manuscript volumes containing Welsh literary material. These are the Black Book of Carmarthen, the Book of Aneirin, the Book of Taliesin, the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest. These volumes can at best be only approximately dated, and not one of them is older than the thirteenth century. But most of the contents of all five have been shown on linguistic, orthographical and metrical evidence to be copies of earlier prototypes — in some cases prototypes very much earlier — and frequently these contents have evidently been transmitted through more than one intermediary version. It is the more unfortunate that all of these manuscripts, as they have reached us today, lack a number of quires and separate leaves.

Apart from the unique citation of Arthur's name in the thirteenth-century Book of Aneirin (Cardiff MS 2.81) as a paragon of valour in past times, the earliest source for Welsh Arthurian poems is the Black Book of Carmarthen, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (NLW Peniarth MS 1). This small parchment volume was compiled over a period of years during the latter half of the thirteenth century, apparently by a single somewhat eccentric scribe, whose handwriting alters considerably as the book progresses. Its contents comprise religious poetry, early praise-poems addressed to patrons, prophetic verse belonging to the cycle of Myrddin, and poems such as 'Pa gur yw y Porthaur' which evidently relate to stories concerning Arthur and other legendary heroes. The Black Book was known by its present title to sixteenth-century scholars, and the first

of these, Sir John Prys, records that it came from the Priory of St John the Evangelist at Carmarthen.²² A *Facsimile of the Black Book of Carmarthen* was published by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Oxford, 1888), and subsequently a diplomatic edition was produced by the same editor (Pwllheli, 1907). More recently the text has been republished by A.O.H. Jarman, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Cardiff, 1982). His introduction provides a guide to the many earlier editions and translations of individual poems. It also includes on pp. xiii-xxiv an authoritative description of the manuscript by the late E.D. Jones. A.O.H. Jarman's Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, 'Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin: The Black Book of Carmarthen', *PBA*, 71 (1985), 333-56, offers a convenient summary in English of E.D. Jones's views and a general survey of the contents of the Black Book.

The Book of Taliesin (NLW Peniarth MS 2) was written by a single scribe during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Its contents are a disparate collection of religious, prophetic, and historical poems purporting to comprise the collected works of the sixth-century poet Taliesin, as these were envisaged in the later Middle Ages. The title first appears in Edward Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica* (Oxford, 1707). The case for a genuine early nucleus, which may represent the poet's authentic work, is based on a group of archaic praise-poems addressed to Urien Rheged and other sixth-century rulers in the 'Old North' and in Wales (for these see Ifor Williams, *The Poems of Taliesin (PT)* and *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry (BWP)*). Of more certain date is the tenth-century prophetic poem *Armes Prydein (AP)* which foretells the victory of the Welsh with their allies over the English. But the main content of the manuscript consists of a mass of poems of differing dates which are implicitly attributed to the fictional figure of the omniscient Taliesin as he was conceived by later ages. (Only rarely is the attribution to Taliesin explicitly stated.) Such sparse allusions to Arthur as are found in these poems are invariably presented in the context of the 'Taliesin saga' and are usually to be understood as speech-poems declaimed by the legendary poet. In the Arthurian context the most meaningful is undoubtedly *Preiddeu Annwn*, 'The Spoils of Annw(f)n', which outlines a lost mythical story whose content (as shown in ch.2 below) can be partly elucidated from other sources. A *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Taliesin* was edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1910), and the manuscript is discussed by M. Haycock, 'Llyfr Taliesin', *NLW Journal*, 25 (1988), 357-86, and by the same author in her unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 'Llyfr Taliesin: Astudiaethau ar rai Agweddu' (University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 1982).

Certain other manuscripts have been shown to be in the same hand as that of the scribe of the Book of Taliesin, and these can therefore be similarly dated to within this scribe's life-span. Some of these manuscripts are of especial interest for subjects

to be discussed in this book. A large portion of *Chwedl Gereint fab Erbin* is contained in the fragmentary manuscript Peniarth 6, part iv (WM 206-25, 254). This is one of two fragments of the tale contained in this manuscript, and both appear to antedate the complete texts which are found in the White Book and the Red Book. Both fragments, together with others from *Branwen* and *Manawydan*, were printed by J. Gwenogvryn Evans in *The White Book Mabinogion* (WM). NLW MS 3036B (= Mostyn MS 117) which contains a version of *Brut y Brenhinedd* is also in this hand.

The thirteenth-century MS NLW Peniarth 16, part iv, ff.50-4v, contains the earliest extended version of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (the 'Early Version' of the Triads) and *Bonedd y Seint*; it originally formed part of NLW MS 5266B, the Dingestow manuscript of *Brut y Brenhinedd* (BD), and both manuscripts are in the same hand. See Henry Lewis, *Brut Dingestow* (Cardiff, 1942); *TYP* xviii and B.F. Roberts, 'Fersiwn Dingestow o *Brut y Brenhinedd*', *B*, 27 (1977), 331-61 (332).

The White Book of Rhydderch (NLW Peniarth MSS. 4 and 5) and the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus Coll. MS 111) are two remarkable compendia of medieval Welsh prose and verse which were inscribed during the fourteenth century, the first about the middle of the century and the second towards its close. A substantial part of the content of these two manuscripts corresponds: in particular, they have closely similar versions of the ten 'Mabinogion' tales (to which the Red Book adds one additional tale, *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, see below) as well as of the Triads (see *TYP* xxiii-xxviii) and other material. We are indebted to Daniel Huws for the essentials of the following account of these two manuscripts.

The White Book of Rhydderch, *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, is now bound in two volumes preserved in the National Library of Wales. The medieval foliation shows that originally Peniarth 5 preceded Peniarth 4. Whole quires and a few single leaves are now missing at several points in both volumes. When complete, Peniarth 5 contained religious texts, the Welsh Charlemagne cycle, the Welsh version of 'Bevis of Hampton' (*Bown de Hamtwn*) and other matter. Peniarth 4 contained the earliest complete text of the 'Mabinogion' tales. These are found in the following order: the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, *Historia Peredur fab Efwrawc*, the *Dream of Macsen Wledic*, *Lludd and Llefelys*, *Owein* or *Chwedl Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, followed by *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, *Bonedd y Saint*, Proverbs, early poetry or Hengerdd, and finally by *Chwedl Gereint fab Erbin* and *Mal y kavas Kulhwch Olwen*. The White Book thus provides the earliest texts of much of the best of Welsh medieval secular prose (the religious texts for the most part survive in earlier manuscripts). Unfortunately much of the early poetry once contained in this manuscript has come down only in later copies.²³ The 'Mabinogion' tales are inscribed in two

contemporary hands which are closely similar: one of these wrote the main collection of tales, and the other scribe followed with the two tales *Gereint fab Erbin* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. As a whole the White Book is a remarkable and unprecedented gathering together of a wide range of medieval Welsh literature, and its creation was an achievement unsurpassed until the Red Book of Hergest came to be produced. It probably derives its name from Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd (c. 1324-c. 1398) who appears to have been its original owner and may in fact have commissioned it. His home was at Parcrhydderch, Llangeitho, Ceredigion, and he was heir to a notable family tradition of literary patronage, besides being himself one of the most celebrated patrons of the Welsh poets of his day, the friend and patron of Dafydd ap Gwilym. The White Book was in the hands of his descendants until towards the end of the sixteenth century, about which time the title *Llyfr Gwyn i Rydderch* is first recorded. This seems to be good evidence for the White Book's original ownership. In mid-fourteenth-century Ceredigion the first place to have looked for a well-schooled body of scribes would have been Strata Florida Abbey, ten miles from Parcrhydderch, and Ieuan Llwyd's family had associations with the abbey which go back to its founder.

The fullest description of the White Book until now remains that of J. Gwenogvryn Evans in *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (RWM, I, pp. 305-16, and 324-5 (the latter pages describe the detached portion in Peniarth MS 12,²⁴ containing the Triads and other material which is now restored to its correct place in the White Book). The tales from Peniarth 4 were published by J. Gwenogvryn Evans in a diplomatic edition entitled *The White Book Mabinogion* (Pwllheli, 1907). This edition was reprinted with a valuable new introduction by R.M. Jones as *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch: Y Chwedlau a'r Rhamantau* (Cardiff, 1973). The manuscript is discussed at length by Morgan Watkin in the introduction to his diplomatic edition of *Ystorya Bown de Hamtwn* (Cardiff, 1958). An account of the White Book of Rhydderch by Daniel Huws will appear in *CMCS*, 21 (1991).

The Red Book of Hergest, *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, now preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford (Jesus Coll. MS 111) is the largest of the Welsh medieval vernacular manuscripts. It now comprises 362 leaves (measuring 34 by 21 cms.) — all that survives from perhaps about 400 leaves which the manuscript originally comprised. The Red Book has been described as a one-volume library. It is easiest to describe its contents by saying that it includes almost the whole of Welsh literature known to have been committed to writing before 1400, with the exception of religious and legal texts (no doubt deliberate omissions), and the early poetry found in the Book of Aneirin and the Book of Taliesin (these texts were probably not available to the compilers of the Red Book). Another exception is poetry in the

newly developed *cywydd* metre, which was perhaps regarded as too new-fangled to deserve a place in a collection which was essentially representative of classical Welsh literature. Like the White Book, the Red Book was evidently a planned and a bespoke work, and there seems no reason to dissent from the view expressed by the late G. J. Williams that it was made for the well-known *uchelwr* Hopcyn ap Thomas, who was an old man in 1403;²⁵ among his reasons is the fact that the Red Book contains five *awdlau* addressed to Hopcyn and one to his son.

The Red Book contains one of the two major collections of the poetry of the Princes (that of the *Gogynfeirdd*) together with a large amount of early verse in the *englyn* metre, including gnomic and saga poetry, much of it belonging to the cycles of Llywarch Hen and Heledd: these last poems are known also to have been contained in the lost quires of the White Book (see n.23 above). It included also the texts of two poems relating to the story of Myrddin — the *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd y Chwaer* and *Gwasgargerdd Fyrddin yn y Bedd*. The prose contents include *Brut y Brenhinedd* and *Brut y Tywysogion*, preceded by the Welsh version of *Dares Phrygius*. The Red Book also has the most extensive copy of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* and in addition to the ten ‘Mabinogion’ tales it has *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (cols.555-71), a tale which is absent from the collection in the White Book. The ten stories which are common to the two manuscripts fall into three distinct groups, which follow each other consecutively in the Red Book (cols.710-844) and in the following order: (i) *Owein, Peredur, Maccen Wledig, Lludd a Llefelys*, (ii) The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, (iii) *Gereint fab Erbin* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In the White Book the first two of these groups are found in the opposite order, namely (ii), (i), (iii), and each of the three groups is separated from the others by intervening prose items. It seems clear that these three groups already formed three separate entities in the manuscript(s) from which both the White Book and the Red Book were derived. It is worth noting that in both manuscripts *Gereint* and *Culhwch* formed one of these distinct groups and these two tales share certain special features which distinguish them from the other tales.²⁶

The Red Book is the work of three professional scribes working in collaboration sometime between 1382 and c. 1410. The chief scribe was a certain Hywel Fychan ap ‘Hywel Goch of Builth, whose hand has been identified in several other manuscripts, including Peniarth 11, the earliest text of *Y Seint Greal*. In one manuscript he names himself as ‘Hywel Fychan fab Hywel Goch o Fuellt’ and refers to his ‘master’ as ‘Hopcyn ap Thomas ab Einion’ of Ynys Dawe.²⁷ Not only did Hywel Fychan write much of the volume, including the three groups of ‘Mabinogion’ tales listed above, together with *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, but it is evident that he had access also to the White Book at some stage, for his hand

has been clearly identified in a brief passage in the White Book text of *Culhwch ac Olwen* (CO lines 324-6 = WM cols. 467-8) where the original scribe had left a blank space. At one time it was concluded from this that the Red Book scribes must have copied the texts of all these tales from the White Book, but more recently the consensus of opinion has favoured the belief that the texts common to the White and Red Books derive independently, whether directly or indirectly, from a lost common archetype. This subject has been fully discussed by R.M. Jones in his *Rhagymadrodd to Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*.

The fullest description of the Red Book of Hergest is that of J. Gwenogvryn Evans in RWM II, 1-29. This should be read alongside G. Charles-Edwards, 'The Scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', *NLW Journal*, 21 (1980), 246-56. The association of the Red Book with Hopcyn ap Thomas is proposed by G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Cardiff, 1948), 11-14, 147-8. The history of the Red Book is treated by Prys Morgan, 'Glamorgan and the Red Book', *Morgannwg*, 22 (1978), 42-60. By the mid-sixteenth century the Red Book had already acquired its name and had become known to some of the leading Welsh scholars of the day. It has been one of the famous Welsh manuscripts ever since, and has been all the more influential for having been easily accessible since 1709 in the Library of Jesus College, Oxford, and in more recent years in the Bodleian Library.

The main texts contained in the Red Book have been published in diplomatic editions: John Rhŷs and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1887) (includes *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*), *The Text of the Bruts from the Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, 1890); and J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest* (Llanbedrog, 1911). Most of the other contents of the manuscript have also been edited.

NOTES:

1. For Arthur's battles see *HB* ed. Loth, c. 56; ed. Dumville, c. 27. For the suggested localities of the battles see refs. cited in ch.I, n.24 below.
2. ALMA 7-8; see refs. cited in ch.I, n.46. Similarly P. MacCana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (DIAS, 1980), 29, who adds some Irish analogues.
3. H.M. and N.K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, i (Cambridge, 1932), 161-2; E.K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London, 1927, 1964), 169-70; ALMA 3-4.
4. Cf. *TYP* 276. The allusion to Badon in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is certainly based on Geoffrey.
5. On the *Annales Cambriae* see K.H. Hughes, 'The *Annales Cambriae* and Related Texts', *PBA*, 59 (1973), 233-58; reprinted in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1980), 67-85. The writer agrees, *ibid.* p. 92, that the expansion of the entry on *bellum badonis* 'reads like a gloss'.
6. D.N. Dumville, 'Nennius and the *Historia Brittonum*', *SC*, 10/11 (1975-6), 78-95; 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History*, 62 (1977), 173-92; 'The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*' in *Arthurian Literature*, 6, ed. Richard Barber (Woodbridge, 1986), 1-29.
7. ALMA 3. Cf. D.N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain', 187-8, L. Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (Harmondsworth, 1971), 15, 72.
8. K. Jackson, *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem* (Edinburgh, 1969), 112.
9. Thomas Jones, *B*, 17 (1958), 238; *idem.*, 'The Early Evolution of the Legend of Arthur', *NMS*, 8 (1964), 6; R. Bromwich, 'Concepts of Arthur', *SC*, 10/11 (1975-6), 163-81 and *TYP* 275; N.K. Chadwick, *Celtic Britain* (London, 1963), 48. Cf. also Charles Thomas, *Britain and Ireland AD 400-800* (London, 1971), 39-41; *idem.*, *Celtic Britain* (London, 1986), 89, 118; D.P. Kirby, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 121 (1972), 122.
10. Ifor Williams (ed.), 'Marwnad Cynddylan', *B*, 6 (1931-3), 134-41; discussion and modern Welsh rendering in R.G. Gruffydd (ed.), *Bardos* (Cardiff, 1982), 10-28. It must be recognized, however, that the reading *Art(h)ur Fras* is contingent on the acceptance of the minor textual emendation of *ar tir* to *Artur*. See also A.O.H. Jarman in *An Arthurian Tapestry*, ed. Kenneth Varty (University of Glasgow for the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society, 1981), 4; *idem.*, 'Y Darlun o Arthur', *LIC*, 15 (1984-6), 3-17 (6), and R. Bromwich, 'Concepts of Arthur', *SC*, 10/11, 177.
11. For *Arturius* son of Aedán see A.O. and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London, 1961), 228. According to *Seanchus Fir n-Alpáin*, ed. J. Bannerman, *Celtica*, 7 (1967), 160, *Artúr* was a grandson of Aedán; see n. *Celtica*, 8, 95-6. The names of Aedán's son and grandson, both called Arthur, may have been conflated.
12. *EWGT* 4, 124. The two versions of the tract *Tucait Indarba na nDessi* are ed. and trans. by Kuno Meyer and published (from Rawl. B. 502) in *Cy.*, 14 (1901), 104-35, and (from Laud 610) in *Eriu*, 3 (1907), 135-42.
13. See Harleian Gen. no. 2 (*EWGT* 10), and cf. HW 261; Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), 95.
14. N.K. Chadwick, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 7 (1953), 115-83; Richard Barber, *The Figure of Arthur* (London, 1972); see review of the latter by B.F. Roberts, *SC*, 8/9 (1973-4), 336-9.

15. For refs. see *Annales Cambriae* ann. 807; Harl. Gens. nos. 5 and 26 (EWGT 10, 26). Cf. LHEB 437.
16. Cf. Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London, 1967), 349. Cf. *TYP* (2nd edn.), 544-5.
17. Jean Marcale, *Le Roi Arthur et la société celtique* (Paris, 1981). Cf. A.O.H. Jarman, 'Y Darlun o Arthur', LIC, 15 (1984-6), 8-9. Cf. p.264 below.
18. For Lucius Artorius Castus see S. Frere, *Britannia* (3rd edn. 1987), 150 and n.40; P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (1984), 213 and n. Cf. Jackson, ALMA 2; Kemp Malone, MP, 22 (1925), 367-74, Barber, *Figure of Arthur*, 37-8.
19. Geoffrey Ashe, 'A Certain Very Ancient British Book', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 301-23, and refs. cited in N.J. Lacy (ed.), *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1986), 453-5.
20. On Riothamus see N.K. Chadwick, *Early Brittany* (Cardiff, 1969), 195-7, and Jackson, LHEB 13-14; on the name *Riothamus* < **Rigotamos* see LHEB 457. Léon Fleuriot would identify Riothamus with Ambrosius Aurelianus, *Les Origines de la Bretagne* (Paris, 1980), 170-6. The fact that these Britons are described as *super Ligerim sitos* leaves doubt as to whether they came from Britain and had merely camped temporarily on the Loire, or were early emigrants who came from the Armorican colony.
21. Cf. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain', 181.
22. Carmarthen is generally accepted as the place of provenance of the Black Book, and it has much to recommend it, although it cannot be proven owing to the lack of comparative evidence from other manuscripts known to have come from Carmarthen in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. In view of the traditional association of Myrddin, the legendary poet, with Carmarthen (see ch.5 below) it is not easy to disregard the significance of the presence of four of the six surviving poems of the Myrddin cycle in the Black Book, including the poem found on its opening pages. R.G. Gruffydd suggested (*YB*, 4 (1960), 16) that the Black Book was the product of a less Norman and more Welsh-orientated monastic establishment than Carmarthen, such as Whitland, Talley, or Ystrad Fflur. But this is to minimize the manifest interest taken by Norman clerics in Welsh secular material, demonstrated at least from the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth onwards, as also by the evidence for their activity in copying manuscripts. Even if it be no more than suggestive evidence, the association of *Bledfri latimer* with the Priory at Carmarthen deserves to be noted (see ch. 13, pp.286-7 and n.76).
23. Particularly unfortunate is the loss of the cycles of *englynion* relating to Llywarch Hen, Urien Rheged, and Heledd, preserved only in two seventeenth-century copies which are known to be derived from the White Book. See RWM I, 667; *CLIH* xii-xiii, Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Woodbridge, 1990), 395-7.
24. The detached pages of the White Book in Peniarth 12 (now correctly replaced) were edited by Egerton Phillimore, *Cy.*, 7 (1884), 123-54. Cf. *TYP* xxiii-iv. Together with the Triads, *Bonedd y Seint* and other material, these pages include a text of *Gwasgardedd Vyrddin yn y Bedd*.
25. On Hopcyn ap Thomas see G. J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Cardiff, 1948), 9-14, 147-8, *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig*, 343.
26. See B.F. Roberts, 'Dosbarthu Chwedlau Cymraeg Canol' *YB*, 15 (1988), 19-46 (22). Cf. introduction to *CO(2)*, and on the archaic orthography of *Chwedl Gereint fab Erbin* see R.L. Thomson, *Owein* (DIAS 1968), xxvi.
27. On Hywel Fychan see B.F. Roberts, 'Un o Lawysgrifau Hopcyn ap Tomas o Ynys Dawy', *B*, 22 (1968), 223-8.

THE ARTHUR OF HISTORY

Thomas Charles-Edwards

MORE than one question may be asked by an historian about a person such as Arthur.¹ There is the familiar one, asked perhaps a little anxiously: Was Arthur a real person? With a little more knowledge of the ways in which the minds of historians work, a further question may be put: Is there anything valuable which an historian can say about Arthur himself as opposed to his later manifestations in poetry, story and hagiography? And, finally, with even more awareness of the canons of historical criticism, one may ask a question, not about the real, or supposedly real, Arthur, but about the accounts of him given in such texts as the *Historia Brittonum*: what was a given text's perception of Arthur?

The essential, but difficult, truth to learn is that the first question must be asked last and the last question first. Otherwise there will be no critically sifted evidence on the basis of which either of the other questions can be answered. Anyone is entitled to have his hunch, but before a hunch can attain even the modest dignity of an informed guess it needs to be shaped by an understanding of the evidence. Moreover, that understanding will be marred unless ulterior motives are kept firmly in check: the enquiry must first be into the texts themselves without prejudice to any further edifice of argument which may be built upon their foundations.

We may concentrate on the most important of these texts, the *Historia Brittonum*, though there are independent references to Arthur in what may be historical circumstances in two early Welsh poems. The reference in the *Gododdin* to the heroism of a certain Gwawrddur 'although he was not Arthur' (*ceni bei ef arthur*) is only in the B Version; its antiquity is therefore uncertain, for it is only when a passage occurs in both the A and the B Versions that there can be any confidence that it goes back before the ninth or tenth century.² The other poem, *Gereint filius Erbin*, although much relied on by the late John Morris, is likewise no earlier than the *Historia Brittonum* (the earliest recension of which is to be dated 829/830). They attest the development of Arthur's reputation in the centuries after the *Historia Brittonum*, but they do not provide an adequate basis for arguments about the historical Arthur.³ I shall, therefore, concentrate upon the *Historia*

Brittonum, not because everything it contains is historical, but because it is an attempt to make sense of the past by the means then available. I shall, however, leave to one side the section known as the *mirabilia*, although c. 73 refers to a son of Arthur and also to his hound Cabal (Cafall) and the hunting of Twrch Trwyth. The latter is best treated together with *Culhwch ac Olwen* (see ch.3), while the former seems to be an echo of a story telling how a hero killed his son, such as the Irish *Aided Oenfir Aife*. My principal target will be c. 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*, containing the well-known list of Arthur's battles; but because that chapter can only be understood in the context of the *Historia* as a whole, I shall begin with a consideration of the structure and character of the work.

Our understanding of this History of the Britons', however, is in process of being put on a much surer foundation by the series of critical editions of its successive versions now being published by Dr D.N. Dumville.⁴ Fortunately, he has also published a number of preliminary studies, including a vigorously polemical essay on The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*.⁵ Nothing written at this stage of his great enterprise can pretend to any permanent value, but at least we can review progress to date.

Dr Dumville's main thesis may be summarized as an attack on the Heap' interpretation of the *Historia Brittonum*, an attack which is based upon both textual and historiographical premisses. The source from which the Heap theory has been derived is the 'Nennian Preface' which speaks in the first person: 'I, Nennius, a disciple of the holy Elbodugus have taken the trouble to write down some excerpts which the idleness of the people of Britain had caused to be thrown aside . . . I, however, have made a heap of all that I have found, both of the annals of the Romans and of the chronicles of the holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Irish and of the English and from the information handed down by the old men of our people.'⁶ The curious mixture of boast and modesty found in this Nennian Preface has been seized upon, both by those who would portray the writer as an ignorant and incompetent compiler and also by those who see in his words a foreshadowing of modern historical attitudes to evidence.⁷ Both these interpretations are based upon sandy foundations, for, as Dr Dumville has argued, the Preface was no part of the original text of 829/30 but was added later in a subsequent recension.⁸ It is, therefore, the idea of the authorship of the *Historia Brittonum* and of the nature of its contents put forward by a subsequent editor; and it remains to be demonstrated that this editor was any better informed than are modern scholars on the sources and working methods of the original author of the *Historia Brittonum*. It may be that the Preface has commanded respect because it is plainly correct in supposing that the original author used both Irish and English sources;⁹ for example, one of the sources