Historical Writing in Medieval Welsh

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Professor A. H. Dodd, writing on 'Welsh History and Historians in the Twentieth Century' (Davies 1963: 49-70) has a sentence which would appear to suggest that there is not much that can be said on my subject. Professor Dodd writes:

> To write of Welsh historiography in the present century is virtually to cover the whole subject for it is only here that the serious writing of Welsh history begins.

In this context 'serious' means 'serious in the opinion of the twentieth century historian'. The medieval historian, however, was equally serious in what he believed to be the past history of the world and the place of the Britons in that history. This means that I must devote some attention to certain texts which modern criticism has refused to accept as embodying authentic history.

The editors of the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, of which the first two volumes were published in 1801 and the third in 1807, would have been at a loss to understand Professor Dodd's statement. In their second volume they brought together what they described as 'a collection of historical documents', of which the most important are the following: the so-called *Brut Tysilio* and *Brut Gruffudd ab Arthur*, which represent two Welsh versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae; Brut y Tywysogion* (*The Chronicle of the Princes* [*of Wales*]) from the Red Book of Hergest; *Brenhinedd y Saesson* (*The Kings of the Saxons*), wrongly entitled *Brut y Saesson* in the printed volume, from British Museum Cotton MS. Cleopatra B v; another version of *Brut y Tywysogion* allegedly from a transcript made in 1770 by Iorwerth ab Iorwerth Gwilym (better known as Iolo Morganwg) from a text copied in 1764 by Thomas Richards, curate of Coychurch, 'from the book of George Williams, squire of Aberpergwm'—hence this *Brut* is known as 'the Aberpergwm *Brut*'; *Brut Ieuan Brechfa* transcribed in 1780, so it is claimed, from a manuscript known as 'The Book of Ieuan Brechfa'; *Buchedd neu Hanes Gruffudd ap Cynan* (*The Life or History of Gruffudd ap Cynan*). All these texts and certain others the editors of the *Myvyrian Archaiology* describe as 'such materials as were deemed . . . most important towards the elucidation of British history'. Some of them are certainly irrelevant to my subject. These are the Triads, the Saints' Genealogies and the two tracts which list respectively the cantrefs and commots, and the parishes of Wales. *Hanes Gruffudd ap Cynan* is unique as the biography of a Welsh prince, but its very

uniqueness makes it of less importance to the central theme of my paper, which is to say something of those texts which together represent the medieval view of world history and of the history of the Britons in particular. *Brut Tysilio*, however, *Brut Gruffudd ab Arthur*, *Brut y Tywysogion* from the Red Book of Hergest, and *Brenhinedd y Saesson* are relevant to my subject. The remaining two texts—the Aberpergwm *Brut* and the *Brut* of Ieuan Brechfa—have long been recognised as forgeries and do not merit our attention (T. Jones 1952: xxviii–xxx).

The texts with which I propose to deal are four in number: *Y Bibyl Ynghymraec*, *Ystorya Daret*, *Brut y Brenhinedd* and variant forms of *Brut y Tywysogion*. Of these texts the only one which contains history in the modern sense of the word is the last named, but the four together formed a series of texts which covered the period from the Creation to the end of the thirteenth century. It is significant that in two of the texts the word *brut* forms part of the title in the sense of 'history', 'story': the word derives from the name of Brutus who was, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth, a great-grand-son of Aeneas and the founder of the British people. Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* appeared about 1136 and it purported to trace the history of the Britons from Brutus down to Cadwaladr the Blessed, their last independent ruler. The work won immediate popularity in Wales and those who thought—as Giraldus Cambrensis did—that the book owed more to the author's imagination than to true history were but few in number. The *Historia* was soon translated into Welsh, and that more than once. Today there are extant about sixty manuscripts which contain Welsh texts variously related to Geoffrey's Latin text. My colleague in the Department of Welsh at Aberystwyth, Mr Brynley F. Roberts, has undertaken a survey of these manuscripts and his researches have already made some things fairly certain. There is not a single text which can represent an earlier Welsh text on which Geoffrey's Latin *Historia* could have been based. There are six Welsh versions of the *Historia*, three of which are independent translations produced in the thirteenth century. One of these, *Brut Dingestow*, was edited by Professor Henry Lewis in 1942, and Mr Brynley F. Roberts has editions of the other two in preparation. Geoffrey's scheme of British history, with the reign of Arthur as its glorious climax, was generally accepted in Wales right down to the early nineteenth century, as is illustrated by the inclusion of *Brut Tysilio* and *Brut Gruffudd ab Arthur* amongst 'the materials deemed by the editors' of the *Myvyrian Archaiology* as 'most important towards the elucidation of British History'. *Brut Tysilio*, it was thought at the time, was the original Welsh text, the 'Britannici sermonis librum vetustissimum', which Geoffrey claimed to have translated, and *Brut Gruffudd ab Arthur* a Welsh translation of Geoffrey's Latin text. It is this which explains the inclusion in the *Myvyrian Archaiology* of these two texts, in that order, both of which we now know to be derived from the *Historia*.

Fiction though it be for the greater part, the *Historia*, in its Welsh translations, formed the foundation of medieval historiography in Wales. To it were added three other

texts, two of them together covering the period from the Creation to the fall of Troy, the arrival of Brutus in the island that was to bear his name and the story of his descendants down to the sixth century, and the third tracing the fortunes of the Britons from the death of Cadwaladr the Blessed, with which the *Historia* closes, down to the late thirteenth century. These three texts also are translations from Latin. My remarks on the first two will be brief for the reason that they can no longer qualify as historical texts. The third text deserves a more detailed discussion.

Through the story of Brutus Geoffrey linked British history with the fortunes of Troy and the foundation of Rome. Every now and then he refers to events not only in the classical world but also in the story of the Jewish people. It is through these references that Geoffrey seeks to place his British history within the wider framework of world history accepted in his day. This medieval conception of universal history derived ultimately from St Jerome's Latin translation of Eusebius's 'Chronological Tables'. As C. H. Haskins (1927: 227) put it, 'Christian Europe, far down into modern times, took its philosophy of history from Augustine and its chronological system from Eusebius, and the two were combined in the medieval chronicle on general history'. The combination was also found in the many Bible-histories which existed alongside the Bible, and of which the most influential was the *Historia Scholastica* compiled in the second half of the twelfth century (before 1176) by Peter Comestor of Paris. In it the 'history' begins with the Creation and continues in the order of the Biblical books—omitting such as do not record events—to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. This is essentially sacred history, but at the end of certain sections a few 'pagan' contemporary events are recorded as 'Incidentia'. Although no Welsh translation of the *Historia Scholastica* appeared it must have been well-known in the monasteries of Wales. In any case it wielded an influence on the medieval conception of history, as expressed in Welsh, in an indirect way. The very size of the *Historia Scholastica* made it a very expensive volume, and other less expensive and shorter texts were compiled with the aim of presenting with conciseness the historical content of the Bible. In the main these texts, some in prose and others in verse, were synopses of the *Historia Scholastica* and were known as 'Bibles of the Poor', the poor being the poor clerks or students who could not afford to buy either the *Historia Scholastica* or the Bible itself. One of the best known of these 'Bibles of the Poor' was the *Promptuarium Bibliae*, a synopsis of the *Historia Scholastica* compiled by Peter of Poitiers who was Peter Comestor's successor as Chancellor of the Church of Paris (Vollmer 1931). This *Promptuarium Bibliae* was translated into Welsh, by an anonymous monk or parish priest, towards the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, under the title 'Y Bibyl Ynghymraec' ('The Bible in Welsh'). Unlike the main text of the *Promptuarium*, which deals almost exclusively with the descendants of Shem son of Noah, the Welsh version has, towards the end, an addition which reverts to Noah and lists the descendants of Japhet right down to Anchises and his son Aeneas Whiteshield (T. Jones 1940: 63). 'And of him and his progeny', the text says, 'an account is given in *The Story of*

Brute.' In the same text Priam of Troy is named as a descendant of Japhet. 'And of him (*sc.* Priam) and his progeny an account is given in *The Story of Daret*', by which is meant the very popular medieval text describing the fall of Troy which was attributed to Dares Phrygius. This work was as well-known in Wales as in other countries and six Welsh versions of it—not all complete—have been identified (Owens 1952). Very often in the Welsh manuscripts the *Ystorya Daret* forms a kind of introduction to *Brut y Brenhinedd*, and the latter in turn is followed by *Brut y Tywysogion*, of which I propose to speak presently. The purpose of the addition at the end of the Welsh version of the *Promptuarium Bibliae* was to link Biblical history with both the *Ystorya Daret* and *Brut y Brenhinedd*. Together these three texts supplied a general history of the world and a history of the Britons from the Creation to the death of Cadwaladr the Blessed.

Let us now turn to *Brut y Tywysogion*. In purpose as well as in effect it is a continuation of Geoffrey's *Historia*. It was originally written in Latin, but not one copy of the complete Latin text has survived, and this is also true of the Latin original of *Buchedd Gruffudd ap Cynan* (A. Jones 1910: 14–16). However, three independent Welsh versions of the *Brut* have survived along with four related sets of Latin annals which record events in Wales and elsewhere. By a careful comparison of the three Welsh versions, one with another, and with the pertinent sections of the Latin annals, much of the lost Latin chronicle can be reconstructed.

What was it that prompted the compilation of this chronicle, one of the many continuations of Geoffrey's *Historia*? Let me remind you of one sentence in the colophon to the latter. Geoffrey, with his tongue in his cheek (as it appears to me) writes:

> I remit as subject matter to Caradog of Llancarfan, my contemporary, the kings of the Britons who since the time of Cadwaladr have succeeded in Wales.

It is these words that suggested to someone that he should compile a chronicle of the princes of Wales and it is the reference to Caradog of Llancarfan, a known contemporary of Geoffrey's, that made later scholars attribute the chronicle, in its Welsh forms, to this Caradog. Many years ago Sir John Edward Lloyd (1927) advanced cogent reasons, which I need not repeat, why Caradog of Llancarfan could not have been either the compiler of the original Latin chronicle (now lost) or the translator of any one of the three Welsh versions. Whosoever the true compiler was, his conception of the historian's role and methods was very different from that of Geoffrey. Whereas the latter wrote romance in the guise of history his unknown continuator recorded authentic historical events although he sometimes felt the urge to emulate the literary quality of Geoffrey's compilation.

I must say something about the three Welsh versions. Of the several texts included from time to time under the generic term 'Brut y Tywysogion' two only are so called in the manuscripts. The first is the 'Brut y Tywysogion' which is found complete in the Red Book of Hergest, incomplete in two earlier manuscripts, *viz*. Peniarth MS. 18,

written *circa* 1330, and Mostyn MS. 116, written later in the same century, and complete or incomplete in about twenty-five later manuscripts. This version is known as the Red Book of Hergest version, and covers the period from the year 682 to the year 1282 (T. Jones 1955).

The second version is that generally referred to as the 'Peniarth MS. 20 version'. Complete or incomplete copies of this version are extant in about fifteen manuscripts of various dates, but the only manuscript of importance for textual purposes is Peniarth MS. 20 itself, written towards the middle of the fourteenth century. The Peniarth MS. 20 version originally ended, like the Red Book of Hergest version, with the year 1282, but it contains a continuation, by more than one hand, down to the year 1332 (T. Jones, 1941 and 1952). Brief mention must be made of certain other differences between the two versions. There is a lacuna for the years 900–49 in the Peniarth MS. 20 text due to the loss of a leaf from the manuscript, and this lacuna occurs in all other copies of this version except for those manuscripts in which the missing section has been supplied from a different version. The Peniarth MS. 20 version provides fuller chronological data than the Red Book of Hergest version, and the set rhetorical passages in praise of princes and clerics are longer and more fulsome in the former than in the latter. The Peniarth MS. 20 version alone contains the Latin poem of eighteen elegiac couplets 'composed', as the text says, 'when the Lord Rhys died' and another set of five elegiac Latin couplets and a concluding hexameter which formed the epitaph on Rhys's sepulchre. Except for these major differences and many other minor ones, most of which can be explained in various ways, the Peniarth MS. 20 version and the Red Book of Hergest version agree in substance down to the year 1282, the original terminal point of both versions. Yet they are different in phraseology.

This brings me to what is in effect a third version, although it goes under a title other than 'Brut y Tywysogion' and does not agree in substance with the two versions already discussed. In the manuscripts the title of this third version is 'Brenhinedd y Saesson' ('The Kings of the Saxons'). It is only two of the several manuscript copies extant that are important for textual purposes, that of British Museum Cotton MS. Cleopatra B v (first half of the fourteenth century) and National Library of Wales MS. 7006 (The Black Book of Basingwerk), a considerable portion of which, including our text, was probably copied by the poet Gutun Owain in the second half of the fifteenth century. The former text, beginning with the year 682, is incomplete and ends with the year 1197, but the latter continues down to the year 1461. For the years 1198 to 1282, however, it appears to represent a compressed conflation of the Red Book and Peniarth MS. 20 versions of 'Brut y Tywysogion'; the entries for the years 1283 to 1332 derive from the continuation in the Peniarth MS. 20 version; and those for the period 1333–1461 are uneven, disjointed and generally unimportant. Hence the only section of *Brenhinedd y Saesson* which is of any importance as a historical source is that for the years 682 to 1197, that is, the incomplete text of the British Museum Cotton MS. Cleopatra B v. It is closely related to the two versions of *Brut y Tywysogion* proper.

Although it is not in substantial agreement with them, many of its entries agree closely with the corresponding ones in the Red Book of Hergest and the Peniarth MS. 20 versions of the *Brut*, but the phraseology is again different. The two versions of the *Brut* record many events in the history of England, but in the *Kings of the Saxons* an attempt has been made to combine and to synchronise Welsh and English history, at least down to the year 1090, although the entries which record events in Wales, whilst agreeing in substance with the corresponding entries in the two versions of the 'Brut', are in general considerably shorter.

In the two manuscripts already mentioned—British Museum Cotton MS. Cleopatra B v and the Black Book of Basingwerk (National Library of Wales MS. 7006)—*Brenhinedd y Saesson* follows immediately after a Welsh version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* entitled *Brut y Brenhinedd*, and its original Latin text appears to have been compiled as a continuation of the Galfridian *History*. Let us remind ourselves of what Geoffrey said in his colophon. He is leaving, so he tells us, two tasks to three of his literary contemporaries: to Caradog of Llancarfan, that of writing of the rulers of Wales after Cadwaladr the Blessed—as we have already noted—and to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon that of writing of the kings of the Saxons. The Latin original of *Brut y Tywysogion* appears to have been compiled, though not by Caradog of Llancarfan, as a fulfilment of the first of these two tasks. The second task bequeathed by Geoffrey, that of writing of 'the kings of the Saxons' appears to have suggested the compilation of *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, the very title of which reproduces the words *reges . . . Saxonum* of Geoffrey's colophon. *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, however, does not confine itself to 'the kings of the Saxons'. Down to the year 1090 it combines entries relating to the princes of Wales with those relating to the Saxon kings, and so in a way it attempts to fulfil, in one and the same text, the two tasks which Geoffrey had left to other writers. The source of the entries relating to Wales, it is clear, was a variant version of the Latin original of *Brut y Tywysogion*, but what was the source of the entries which relate to England? Aneurin Owen in his edition of *Brut y Tywysogion* down to 1066 in the *Monumenta Historica Britannica* (1848: 841, footnote *a*) expressed the following opinion:

> It may be noted that this MS. [i.e. British Museum Cotton Cleopatra B v] . . . consists of the usual Welsh text, mixed with a Welsh version of considerable portions of the Winchester Annals of Ricardus Divisiensis and of a few excerpts from other English writers.

This opinion was repeated by the Rev. John Williams ab Ithel in his edition of *Brut y Tywysogion* (1860: xlvi), but as late as 1928 Sir John Edward Lloyd was loth to commit himself to the view that the notices on the Saxon kings derived from the *Annals of Winchester* (Lloyd 1928: 10), although he quoted one example of close agreement between the latter and *Brenhinedd y Saesson*. The frequent references to Winchester suggest a source connected with, if not emanating from, that city and the *Annales de Wintonia* appear to be a likely source. They need not have been the immediate source

used in the compilation of *Brenhinedd y Saesson*. It is more probable that the Welsh translator of the text had before him, as a continuation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a complete Latin text in which the original of *Brut y Tywysogion* had already been combined with the sections on the Saxon kings, most of which, but not all, ultimately derived from the *Annals of Winchester*, the authorship of which has been attributed, probably correctly, to Richard of Devizes (Appleby 1963*a*,*b*). Our main concern, however, is with the sections which relate primarily to Welsh history. Allowing for their greater conciseness as well as for a greater number of palpable errors, they are in substantial agreement with the two versions of *Brut y Tywysogion* down to the year 1197.

We can now attempt a closer definition of the relationship between the three Welsh texts. All three derive from a Latin original. The Red Book *Brut* and the Peniarth MS. 20 *Brut* are two independent translations of two slightly different copies of the complete original Latin chronicle which was probably entitled *Cronica* (or *Historia*) *Principum Walliae* (or *Britanniae*). *The Kings of the Saxons*, on the other hand, appears to be a translation of another Latin chronicle in which a more concise version of the Latin text underlying the two versions of the *Brut* proper had been combined with excerpts from the *Annals of Winchester* and certain other chronicles to supply another continuation, embracing both Welsh and English history, to Geoffrey's *Historia*. No copy has been traced either of the conflated Latin text underlying *Brenhinedd y Saesson* or of the complete Latin chronicle on which it was partly based and which was the original of *Brut y Tywysogion*. It is to be noted, however, that textual variations between the three Welsh texts show that each is derived from a different copy of the original Latin chronicle, thus proving that at least three copies of it were once in existence. Moreover, the lost Latin original was closely related to four sets of Latin annals still extant—the three sets published in the Rolls *Annales Cambriae* (Williams ab Ithel 1860) and the *Cronica de Wallia* (T. Jones, 1946, Smith 1963). Each of these sets of annals contains passages which, so far as they go, may be regarded as the Latin original of sections of the three Welsh texts. Where the Welsh texts differ in detail, as they often do, the evidence of one or more of the Latin annals can decide which version is correct. *S.a.* 1195 (= 1196), for example, we are told in the Red Book *Brut* (T. Jones, 1955; 176–7) that the Lord Rhys 'attacked Carmarthen and burned it to the ground *except for the castle alone*' (*eithyr y castell ehun*), but in the Peniarth MS. 20 version (T. Jones, 1952: 75–76) we read that Rhys 'fell upon Carmarthen and destroyed it and burned it to the ground *after the constable of the castle alone had escaped*' (*wedy diang kwnstabyl y kastell ehun*). *Brenhinedd y Saesson* (T. Jones [1968]: 190–1) records briefly that Rhys 'gathered a host against Carmarthen, and he burned it and ravaged it'. The evidence of the *Cronica de Wallia* (T. Jones 1946: 47) shows that the text of the Red Book version is here more correct than that of Peniarth MS. 20. It reads: eamque (*sc.* Kaermerdin) incendio solotenus destruxit, *tantum castelli apice euaso*. It is clear that in this context *castelli apice* refers to the keep and that the Red Book version is tolerably correct. The translator of the Peniarth MS. 20 version has gone astray by taking *apex* to mean 'head' or

'chief', a meaning which it could have in certain contexts and which in the case of a castle would refer to its constable. Again *s.a.* 1201 the Peniarth MS. 20 version (T. Jones, 1952: 81) says of Gruffudd son of the Lord Rhys:

> He was a *wise* (*doeth*), prudent man and, as was hoped, he would in a short while have restored the *march* (*ardal*) of all Wales if only envious fate had not snatched him away on the feast of James the Apostle after that. . . .

No parallel entry is found in the Red Book *Brut* or in *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, but the *Cronica de Wallia* (T. Jones 1946: 49) supplies the original Latin:

> . . . uir *magnus* et prudens nimirum . . . et, ut sperabatur, Kambrie *monarchiam* in breui reformasset si non prepropere, tam premature, tam inopinate eum sequenti festiuitate Sancti Jacobi Apostoli inuida fatorum series rapuisset.

For *magnus* and *monarchiam* the Welsh translator must have read *magus* and *marchiam*. Errors found in any one of the Welsh versions are either errors of translation or the result of textual errors in the particular copy that was used of the original Latin, whereas errors common to all three versions, as many of them are, must derive from the Latin chronicle as compiled by the final redactor.

Let us turn from problems of textual detail to more general questions relating to the chronicle. Like most medieval chronicles of its kind the *Chronicle of the Princes* is in the form of annals, and major and minor events are often recorded together in a way which does not suggest much appreciation of their relative importance. The chronicle shows great unevenness in its treatment of the various parts of the six-hundred year period which it covers: in some places the narrative is full and detailed, in other places we have to be content with a long series of bare entries. The varying meagreness and fullness of the compilation, it need hardly be stressed, reflects the original sources which were at the disposal of the compiler. One prominent feature of the chronicle are the set eulogies of princes and churchmen, which generally accompany the notices of their death. Some of these eulogies, it must be admitted, are often not very consistent with the previous recital of the deeds committed by the persons eulogised; but we must bear in mind that the medieval chronicler, like the contemporary bards, eulogised not so much individual persons and their deeds as the abstract virtues which were regarded as their natural endowment by virtue of their high station in society. The most ambitious and fulsome of these formal eulogies is that of the Lord Rhys, which follows the notice of his death in 1197, but it is too long for quotation. Let me quote, from the Peniarth MS. 20 version, the shorter and more typical passage in praise of Gruffudd ap Cynan (T. Jones, 1952: 52):

> In that year (*sc.* 1136=1137) Gruffudd ap Cynan, prince of Gwynedd and head and king and defender and pacifier of all Wales, ended his temporal life in Christ and died after many perils by sea and land and after innumerable victories in wars and the winning of spoils, after great wealth of gold and silver, after gathering [the men of] Gwynedd together from the several lands whither the Normans had dispersed them, after building many churches

> and consecrating them to God and the saints, after receiving extreme unction and communion and confession and repentance for his sins, and becoming a monk and making a good end in his perfect old age.

Yet despite its annalistic arrangement, its unevenness and the occasional display of rhetoric in which the compiler indulged, in its own way and within the imposed limitations of its form and content, the chronicle succeeds in presenting not unfairly the development of the Welsh people and their vicissitudes during the years from 682 to 1282. In the early sections there are frequent references to the old British kingdom in North Britain and to the many petty kings who held sway, each over his own land, in various parts of Wales. Gradually among all the events recorded—battles, deaths, plagues and acts of treachery—we see the emergence of Gwynedd, Powys and Deheubarth as the three supreme kingdoms in Wales. Then follows the rivalry between them, the gradual eclipse of Powys, the consequent struggle between Gwynedd and Deheubarth, the supremacy of Gwynedd under the two Llywelyns and the near unification of all Wales into a state which might almost be described as feudal despite the survival of many earlier customs and usages which were anything but feudal in origin. The chronicler conveys his awareness of the greatness of leaders like Gruffudd ap Llywelyn ap Seisyll, Gruffudd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr, Gruffudd ap Cynan, Owain Gwynedd, the Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd, Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, and of the role they played in the development of the nation. In recording their deeds the chronicler's style often has a heroic ring, especially when there is mention of the exploits of the loyal war-bands in fulfilment of their lords' command. His 'philosophy of history' re-echoes that of Gildas, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Giraldus Cambrensis: in the constant disunity of the Welsh, ever wrangling amongst themselves, and in the defeats inflicted upon them by the Irish, Saxons, Scandinavians and Normans he sees the hand of God dispensing punishment for their sins in the past.

Who the compiler of the original Latin chronicle was, we do not know, but there are certain things we can learn about him from a careful examination of the Welsh versions. It is clear that he intended his chronicle to be a continuation of Geoffrey's *Historia* for he begins with the death of Cadwaladr the Blessed, although one of his main sources, the British Museum Harleian MS. 3859 annals, begins about 240 years earlier. The terminal date of the chronicle is the year 1282, and so it must have been compiled either in that year or fairly soon afterwards. There is one reference, found in both versions of the *Brut* and therefore in the original Latin, which would appear to show that the chronicle could not have been written before the year 1286. *S.a.* 1280 the following entry occurs (T. Jones 1952: 120; 1955: 268–9):

> That year died Phylip Goch, abbot of Strata Florida. And after him came Einion Sais, under whom the monastery was thereafter burnt.

We know that the fire to which the entry refers, took place in 1286, as is recorded in the Breviate of Domesday annals. However, since there is no reference to the death of

Llywelyn, the 'last prince', in December 1282, except in the Peniarth MS. 20 continuation, it can be argued that the original Latin was compiled before that event and that the second sentence in the entry quoted above was a gloss added after the year 1286.

In two places the compiler has quoted Welsh proverbs; and this, together with his general sympathy towards the Welsh, proves him to have been, unlike Geoffrey of Monmouth who was a Breton settled in Wales, a Welshman. He can quote Scripture, and he has borrowed one simile from the *De Excidio Britanniae* of Gildas. He knows of Gawain, the hero of medieval romance, of Merlin and his prophecies, of the classical heroes Achilles, Hector, Nestor and others, and he can refer to 'the songs of Virgil' and 'the histories of Statius the historian'. All this points to a historiographer writing in a monastery; and it is not difficult to identify the monastery in which he worked. Once only is there a specific mention of a source drawn upon by the compiler, the mention of the 'Annals of Strata Florida' *s.a.* 1248 (T. Jones 1952: 108; 1955: 240–1):

> In that year, in the month of July, Gruffudd, abbot of Strata Florida, made a settlement with king Henry concerning a debt which the king had demanded of the monastery a long time before that, with half the debt, that is, three hundred and fifty marks, being remitted to the abbot and the convent and it being taken at fixed intervals, as is recorded in the *Annals* of the monastery.

It is probable that the same annals were the chronicler's source for records of other events at Strata Florida: the monks' entering their new church in 1201, the purchase of a new bell in 1255, and the appointment and death of many of the abbots. All this makes it fairly certain that the chronicle was compiled at the Cistercian monastery of Strata Florida.

The compiler reveals his sympathy with the Welsh in their struggle against the Normans, whose avowed aim, so he says, was 'to annihilate all the Britons so that the name of the Britons should nevermore be remembered'. He commends Einion ab Anarawd, for example, for his readiness 'to abolish his people's bondage' and condemns the unfair trial of Iorwerth ap Bleddyn at Shrewsbury in 1103, when judgment was given 'not by law but through might and power and violation of the law'. 'And then', he adds, 'there was great lamentation amongst all the Britons for their hope and strength and safety and splendour and comfort.' As an example of the same sympathy expressed in words composed for delivery by one of the Welsh leaders, let me quote the plea made by Iorwerth ap Bleddyn in 1110 to Owain ap Cadwgan and Madog ap Rhiryd (T. Jones 1952: 32):

> God has placed us in the midst and in the hands of our enemies and has brought us so low that we cannot do aught according to our will. And frequently it happens to us Britons that no one will associate with us in food or drink or counsel or help, but that we are sought and hunted from place to place and are at last placed in the hands of the king to be imprisoned or put to death or to do whatever is willed with us. And, above all, we have been commanded not to enter into agreement with anyone, because of distrust in us. . . . And therefore if we were to enter into an agreement with you in a small matter, we would be

> accused of violating the king's command, and our territory would be taken from us, and we ourselves would be imprisoned or put to death. Therefore, as friend I beseech you, and as lord I command you, and as kinsman I pray you, that you come not henceforth into my territory nor into Cadwgan's territory, any more than into other land which lies around it. For there is greater enmity towards us than towards others, and it is easier to bring a charge against us.

Sympathetic though he is towards the Welsh, the chronicler notes their faults: their rashness in action, their constant internecine quarrels, and their failure to turn plans into effective deeds. On the other hand, his general prejudice against the Normans and his many references to their treachery and deceit are tempered by praise for their ingenuity and circumspection.

What of the compiler's sources? Reference has already been made to the only source which is mentioned by name, the 'Annals of Strata Florida'. Down to the year 953 the chronicler's main source was some version of the annals now extant in British Museum Harleian MS. 3859. There are only twelve very short entries in the 'Brut' which are not in the Harleian annals; and there is only a single entry in the latter, the mention of the death of Edmund, king of the Saxons, which is not in the 'Brut'. For the period after 953 he used many sources including some forms of the Public Record Office Breviate of Domesday Annals and the British Museum Domitian MS. A. I annals, often combining the evidence of the two. It is certain that he also used annalistic records, many of them more or less contemporary with the events, kept at the *clasau* of St David's, Llanbadarn and possibly Tywyn in Merionethshire, at Cistercian houses such as Whitland, Cwm-hir, Llantarnam, Valle Crucis, Basingwerk and Strata Marcella, and at the Premonstratensian house at Talley. Once or twice he mentions oral tradition, and there is reason to believe that this is the source of some of his best told tales. Such is the story of the abduction of Nest, the beautiful daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr and, at that time, wife of the Norman Gerald de Windsor, by the impetuous Owain ap Cadwgan of Powys (T. Jones 1952: 28; 1955: 54–57), and that of the brave youths sent by Maredudd ap Bleddyn to harass the king's forces during his expedition against the Welsh in 1121 (T. Jones 1952: 48, 1955: 106–8). It is not without significance that neither of these tales is so much as mentioned in the Breviate of Domesday and Domitian MS. annals.

There is another element in the composition of the chronicle which we must briefly consider. Within the annalistic framework of his compilation the chronicler often aims at literary effect. Hence his frequent attempts to dramatise events, to attribute speeches to some of the characters, the heroic quality of his narrative in places, and the many set rhetorical panegyrics. Sometimes we can point to his very source for a particular entry and show that he has transformed bare statements of fact into narrative passages which reflect a conscious, if modest, literary effort, but in which the truth has not been seriously distorted. Let me quote one example. The chronicler's only sources for his account, *s.a.* 1022, of the uprising and defeat of the Irish pretender Rhain were the

parallel entries in the Breviate of Domesday and the Domitian MS. annals, which are as follows:

Breviate of Domesday Annals	*Domitian MS. A. 1. Annals*
Reyn Scotus mentitus est se esse filium Mareduc qui obtinuit dextrales Britones; quem Seisil rex Venedocie in hostio Guili expugnavit, et occisus est Reyn. Eilaf uastauit Demetiam. Meneuia fracta est.	Lewelin filius Seissil, rex Uenedotie, pugnauit contra Reyn, qui dicebat se esse filium Maredut; et deuictus est Reyn in ostio Guili. Eilaph uenit in Britanniam et uastauit Dyuet et Meneuiam.

In these bald entries there is no attempt at literary presentation. Let me quote the corresponding passage in the *Brut* (T. Jones 1952: 12; 1955: 20–23):

> One thousand and twenty was the year of Christ when a certain Irishman lied in saying that he was son to king Maredudd. And he would have himself called Rhain. And he was accepted by the men of the South and he held territory. And against him rose up Llywelyn ap Seisyll, king of Gwynedd, and the supreme and most praiseworthy king of all Britain. And in his time, as the old men were wont to say, the whole land from the one sea to the other was fruitful in men and in every kind of wealth, so that there was no one in want nor any one in need within his territory; and there was not one township empty or desolate.
>
> And Rhain weakly and feebly gathered a host; and, as is the custom with the Irish, he boastfully incited his men and he promised them that he would prevail. And he confidently encountered his enemies. But the latter, calm and steady, awaited that presumptuous inciter. And he made for the battle bravely and fearlessly. And after there had been great slaughter on either side equally, with men of Gwynedd fighting steadily, Rhain the Irishman and his host were defeated. For, as is said in the Welsh proverb, 'Urge on thy dog, but go not with him', so was he a lion in attack but fox-like in flight. And the men of Gwynedd in cruel and vengeful pursuit of them slaughtered them and ravaged the whole land and carried off all the chattels. And he was never seen again. That battle was at the mouth of the river Gwili at Abergwili.
>
> And thereupon Eilaf came to the island of Britain. And he ravaged Dyfed. And Menevia was destroyed.

This passage, obviously a conscious literary effort by the compiler, does not contain a single fact that is not already in the two sources which I have quoted above. What makes the passage longer than either of its sources are the studied embellishments: the conventional praise of Llywelyn ap Seisyll as a good king, the deliberate and balanced contrast between Rhain's confident attack and his ignominious retreat, the Welsh proverb quoted, and the stock description of the battle. In all this the chronicler is a conscious literary artist who gives us at the same time more than a hint of his acquaintance with historical texts which placed some emphasis on literary presentation and style. One small point shows that he was not prepared to allow his imagination to distort the facts. The Breviate of Domesday Annals state that Rhain was slain in the battle (*occisus est*), whereas the Domitian MS. Annals merely say that he was defeated

(*deuictus est*). One can almost see the compiler pause and ponder over this discrepancy; and then, like any cautious modern historian, he arrived at a happy compromise with the ambiguous statement that Rhain 'was never seen again'. There is reason to believe that the same care was exercised throughout the compilation of the chronicle—a chronicle which has long been recognised and used as a source of major importance for the history of medieval Wales.

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