

# The Role of Dogs in Medieval Wales

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## Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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**Abstract:**

This thesis explores the role of dogs in medieval Wales. References to dogs can be found in sources such as the law codes and the *Mabinogion* and other forms of literature, including hagiography and poetry, providing a wealth of material for understanding what kinds of dogs there were, what they did, who owned them, and how they were viewed. It is helpful to examine these sources in three ways, and thus, the thesis is divided into three chapters: the law codes, hunting, and literature. The law codes give many details about societal expectations of dogs while representations in story or poetry reflect how dogs performed their tasks, particularly that of hunting, and how society's views of them could be used for literary effect. It is argued that dogs were ubiquitous in medieval Wales, serving a variety of functions from herding and guarding to acting as pets. However, the dogs that receive the most attention are hunting dogs because of their essential role in an important aristocratic pastime. This is what appears most in the law codes and the literature, and such dogs are generally the ones to appear with admirable characteristics to emulate. While other dogs do not possess great value, hunting dogs are often praised for their tenacity and ferocity in the hunt as well as for their faithfulness to their masters. It is also these dogs who take on otherworldly and magical characteristics in literature.

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## Introduction:

In the *Third Branch of the Mabinogi*, the four characters Pryderi, Cigfa, Manawydan, and Rhiannon find themselves in a kingdom suddenly devoid of the presence of all humans and domesticated animals except themselves and their closest animals, their horses and their dogs, and Pryderi and Manawydan must hunt to feed and support the four of them. One morning the two men take their dogs hunting, and the dogs raise a fearsome, gleaming white boar and chase it into a mysterious castle. And hours later they still have not emerged. Manawydan, the wise and cautious one, proposes leaving the site and the dogs as well, but Pryderi cannot and will not do so. Emphatically, he tells Manawydan that God knows that he will not leave his dogs: ‘*Dioer, ny madeuaf i uyg kwn*’ and soon finds himself caught in a trap as he follows after his dogs.<sup>1</sup>

Pryderi’s attachment to his dogs is emblematic of the bond between medieval Welsh nobles and their dogs. In this they were no different from the rest of medieval Europe, which sang the praises of the dog and its nobility. In general dogs were seen to exemplify some of the noblest of traits and to have rightfully earned the attachment of their masters. This thesis will examine the position of dogs in medieval Wales and the role that they played in it. Here, just as in the rest of medieval Europe, dogs could and often did perform important tasks and hold the affections of their masters, and medieval Wales would certainly have been a different place without them.

Laura D. Gelfand, in her introductory chapter to *Our Dogs, Our Selves* notes perceptively that whilst we can study the history of dogs, their lives and identities have become so intimately bound up with ours that we learn just as much about ourselves and the history of human values and perceptions of how dogs fulfilled those values as we do about the dogs themselves.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the relationship between human and dog evolved considerably from the beginning of the medieval period to the end. At the beginning, the Christian idea that man was made lord over the animal kingdom and the primary object of God’s affections meant that animals were completely distinct from man and existed only to serve him. Joyce Salisbury in her work *The Beast Within*, however, traces the change in thought and attitude towards animals over the medieval period as people came to recognise the similarities

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<sup>1</sup> Sioned Davies, trans., *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 39–40 and Ifor Williams, ed., *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi: Allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1930), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Laura D. Gelfand ed., *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society* (Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 10–11.

between humans and animals, blurring the once clear distinction between man and beast.<sup>3</sup> Dogs are primary examples of this change as they entered the medieval period with the primary identity of working animal and by the end had become hunting partners and pampered companions treated like little children. However, that original clear distinction between human and animal remained the standard theological position regarding the place of animals, and the Church did not welcome new perspectives on animals.<sup>4</sup>

Susan Crane notes that it was dogs in their role as hunting companions that enabled them to partly bridge the gap between human and animal and become partners with, rather than mere tools of, their owners,<sup>5</sup> and others have noted how dogs' rise in importance over the duration of the medieval period owed much to their role in hunting. One such author is John Cummins, who has written the classic work analysing hunting in the medieval period. Describing the participants, protocols, and practices, he shows that hunting was mostly an aristocratic sport and in its purest form a highly ritualized affair. It was the dogs' essential role in such an aristocratic pastime that gave them importance.<sup>6</sup> Sophia Menache elaborates on this point, noting that the position and value of dogs evolved as hunting developed from an activity necessary to provide food to a sport mirroring combat that became the prerogative of the upper classes. Not only did dogs' participation in such a knightly endeavour result in nobles' attachment to them, but also the exclusivity of the activity and the kinds of dogs participating in it gave those who owned them additional status.<sup>7</sup> Further, whilst a few women might participate in hunting, Harriet Hudson notes that hunting was clearly a masculine sport, creating a bond between the men and the commonly believed to be masculine animals who participated in it, such as large hunting dogs.<sup>8</sup> In 'Hawk and Hound', Dafydd Jenkins discusses what the Welsh law codes contain concerning hunting, noting that

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<sup>3</sup> Joyce Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2022), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142–144.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> John Cummins, *The Art of Medieval Hunting: The Hound and the Hawk* (Edison: Castle Books, 1988), pp. 5–6, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Sophia Menache, 'Hunting and Attachment to Dogs in the Pre-Modern Period' in *Companion Animals and Us: Exploring the Relationships between People and Pets*, ed. by Anthony L. Podberscek, Elizabeth S. Paul, and James A. Serpell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 51–52.

<sup>8</sup> Harriet Hudson, "'Grete Kyndenes Is in Howndys": Dogs and Men in Middle English Romance', *Enarattio*, 18 (2013), 98–127, (p. 102)

they supported the concept of hunting as an exclusively noble sport.<sup>9</sup> Further he argues that hunting with hounds was a long established practice in contrast to hunting with hawks, which was a new and exotic sport at the time of Hywel Dda.<sup>10</sup>

Not all popular dogs in the medieval period were hunting dogs, however. Kathleen Walker-Meikle has written a comprehensive book on pets in the Middle Ages. She defines a pet as an animal that serves no purpose other than to give pleasure to its owner. Such animals, she notes, often served as status symbols for their owners and reflected their owners' gender. In general, aristocratic men owned large hunting dogs, confirming the image of these dogs as masculine animals, whilst aristocratic women and some men leading an indoor life, such as scholars, owned small lapdogs.<sup>11</sup>

The dog's growing importance lent it key roles in literature. As David Salter points out, for the knight of secular literature, dogs provided clear indications of his status. Again and again in the stories of medieval romance, the reader is reminded of a hero's noble status by the repeated mention of his horses, hounds, and hawks.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, dogs serve as key elements in pivotal scenes in literature as Susan F. Garlick demonstrates in her analysis of the role of animals in the *Mabinogion*. In these stories, dogs are among the animals that appear most often, and generally they appear in the hunting scenes which often serve as the starting point for adventures.<sup>13</sup> Dogs also have a role in hagiographical literature. Both Elissa R. Henken and Dominic Alexander discuss how dogs are employed to reveal the holiness of the saint. They appear in such stories as the companions of royal hunters, pursuing an animal that runs to the saint for safety. The dogs' reactions as they are unable to approach the animal reveal to the hunter and to the reader the sure holiness of the saint.<sup>14</sup> Finally, dogs' relationship with humans and the part that they play in hunting has given them a role in

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<sup>9</sup> Dafydd Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound: Hunting in the Laws of Court' in *The Welsh King and His Court*, ed. by T. M. Charles-Edwards, Myrhydd E. Owen, and Paul Russell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 255–57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 261–62.

<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 1–4.

<sup>12</sup> David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Susan F. Garlick, 'Horses, Swine and Magical Birds: The Role of Animals in the *Mabinogion*' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2011), pp. 10, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Henken, Elissa R., *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 87 and Dominic Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 120–121.



folklore. Elias Owen and T. Gwynn Jones examine stories of fairy dogs in folklore that have developed from the medieval period, revealing cute little dogs that would do no harm and terrifying dogs that hunt for the souls of men.<sup>15</sup>

This thesis will examine the role of medieval Welsh dogs in three major areas. The first chapter will analyse their depiction in the Welsh law codes. The law codes discuss the different kinds of dogs in medieval Wales and who might own them as well as various laws concerning them, including hunting rules, and their legal worth. Because hunting is such an important aspect of the medieval Welsh dog, the second chapter is devoted to a discussion of dogs and hunting in medieval Wales. It includes a description of the classic form of medieval aristocratic hunting as well as an analysis of the Welsh hunting text, *Y Naw Helwriaeth*, and references to hunting in literary sources that depict and demonstrate how the medieval Welsh hunted with dogs. Finally, the third chapter examines the appearance of dogs in medieval Welsh literature. This includes their roles in literature such as the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the Arthurian stories as well as their depictions in poetry and hagiography. Ending this chapter is a discussion of otherworldly dogs, which provides an fascinating picture of man's best friend as greater than life.

The dogs of medieval Wales were not involved in the doings of war and conquest that so frequently occupied the chroniclers and bards, yet there is an abundance of material that can help us to understand something of what they were like, what they did, and how they were viewed. They were important animals in medieval Welsh society, providing useful services and companionship and enhancing the status of their owners, and in this Wales differed little from the rest of Europe. For Wales in particular, it was the hunting dog that appears to have been regarded as the dog *par excellence*. Where dogs are concerned, hunting dogs dominate the law codes, literature, and other sources. They are the companions of nobles, the faithful dogs who protect their masters, and are exemplars to those who hear their stories. And they are the dogs who appear in literature as wonderful creatures with supercanine ability, tenacious and fierce in their pursuit of the most dangerous of creatures.

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<sup>15</sup> Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of Folk Tales and Legends of North Wales* (Oswestry and Wrexham: Woodall, Minshall, and Co., 1896), pp. 125–28 and T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), pp. 46–47, 202–03.

## Chapter 1: Dogs in the Welsh Law Codes

One of the legal triads of Wales notes that the three things that indicate that a country is inhabited are ‘young children, and dogs, and cocks, *meibon bychein, a chvn, a cheilogeu*’,<sup>16</sup> signaling how medieval Welsh law saw dogs as intimately bound up with human society. Indeed, Welsh law constitutes a key source for understanding the place and role of dogs in medieval Welsh society. No records of court cases have survived, but what remain are the law codes, including the legal triads. Dogs appear throughout the legal material, revealing many of the functions that they served in medieval Welsh society and the regard with which they were held.

It should be noted that the law codes have long been determined by scholars to often reflect an idealized picture of Welsh society rather than what may actually have obtained. According to the law codes themselves, the Welsh king Hywel Dda oversaw the compilation of Welsh laws in the tenth century, and this was copied and handed down through succeeding generations. However, it was not handed down without changes. There are three redactions of Hywel’s laws in addition to Latin translations as well as a compilation of laws called *Llyfr y Damweiniau*, and they all show various changes, making it difficult to establish what was original to the law codes and what was added with the changing times and the influences of Norman England on Welsh society and culture. Additionally, some material, whilst faithfully recorded, may represent antiquated law rather than what continued to be observed among the Welsh kingdoms.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it is not possible to assume that laws dealing with dogs were necessarily followed exactly as written in the law codes throughout the whole of Wales and for the duration of the Middle Ages, but they present a good picture of the way that society viewed dogs, and many of the details must also reflect common practice.

Eight kinds of dogs appear in the Welsh law codes. The first was the *milgi* or greyhound. Dafydd Jenkins notes that the *milgi* was considered to be only worth half of its counterpart, the *gellgi*, and yet it is thought that it was somehow seen as more important since the collars and leashes of greyhounds were assigned a set value according to who owned

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<sup>16</sup> Sara Elin Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 90–91, Triad U38.

<sup>17</sup> Dafydd Jenkins, ed., *The Law of Hywel Dda: Law Texts from Medieval Wales Translated and Edited* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1986), pp. xxiii–xxvi.

them, in contrast to other dogs.<sup>18</sup> The second kind of dog was the *gellgi*, already mentioned as the counterpart of the *milgi*. Jenkins notes that *gellgi* tends to be translated as staghound, and whilst it is not certain what it was exactly, it was clearly bigger and stronger than greyhounds so that it could take down adult male deer. Latin law texts always translate *gellgi* with the Latin word *molossus* or *molosus*.<sup>19</sup> There is an interesting reference to such a hound in Giraldus Cambrensis's *Itinerarium Kambriæ*. He tells of a pig nursed by a dog that was 'remarkable for its acute sense of smell' and grew up to be 'so extraordinarily skilled in the pursuit of game that in following a scent it was considered far superior to the Molossian hounds, which started with a natural advantage and then were trained by man'.<sup>20</sup> This story appears to be a little fantastic, but it reflects the reputation of the *gellgi*.

After the *milgi* and *gellgi*, there were two kinds of scenting hounds, the *bytheiad* and the *olrhead*. What exactly they were is not certain. The *bytheiad* always goes by that name, even in Latin texts, and it is noted for the fact that it hunts by means of scent.<sup>21</sup> This is clearly supported by Gutun Owain's description of two *bytheiaid* as 'Lads keeping their heads down low/ Where they go, men will follow', depicting dogs with their noses to the ground following the scent trail of an animal. The *bytheiad*'s name also suggests that it bayed loudly as it hunted,<sup>22</sup> and this is also clearly depicted in Gutun Owain's description of the *bytheiaid*:

They give cry to the master  
When they get wind of the stag...  
They make music chasing a hind.<sup>23</sup>

The *olrhead*'s name itself indicates that it was another hound following scent since it contains the element *ôl* at the start of its name, indicating that it is a hound that, according to Jenkins, 'follows the spoor'. However, this last kind of hound does not appear to have had much

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<sup>18</sup> Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound', pp. 269–70. Interestingly, the Cyfnerth Redaction says that a greyhound loses its special status if it is without its collar: 'A destrier grazing in the open and a greyhound without its collar lose their status.' Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound', p. 270–71.

<sup>20</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 87–88. Giraldus's text reads *molossi*. Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerarium Kambriæ et Descriptio Kambriæ*, ed. by James F. Dimock (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1868), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound', pp. 271–72.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 291. It is related to the word for bluster, *bytheirio*.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), p. 342.

importance because it is rarely mentioned and does not appear outside the law codes.<sup>24</sup>

Although it is infrequently mentioned, the *olrhead* is listed as one of the ‘three dogs of gentry status, *tri chi bonheddig*’, along with the greyhound and the lapdog.<sup>25</sup>

Four other kinds of dogs performed roles other than hunting. First was the guard dog, called a *ci callawedd* or *ci callawfedd*. This name is related to *cynllyfan*, the Welsh word for leash, giving the idea that such a dog was kept on a leash by the door to guard the house.<sup>26</sup> The *bugeilgi* was a herd dog that herded and protected sheep and cattle.<sup>27</sup> There is also a reference to the *colwyn* or pet dog, the little lapdog with no task other than providing companionship and pleasure to its owner.<sup>28</sup> And finally, the dunghill cur was a dog that appears to have been useful for little and worth little.<sup>29</sup>

The law codes mention nearly every member of medieval Welsh society—except members of the church—as potential owners of dogs. Certain ranks of society, however, receive greater attention and their dogs more mention, and for some kinds of dogs, the law codes appear to assume that they belong mostly to these same ranks. Since the law codes place special emphasis on royalty, it is perhaps not surprising that they discuss the king’s ownership of dogs. The law codes give the values for his staghound, greyhound, and pet dog and assume that a king will own more than a few dogs.<sup>30</sup> The first two dogs, the staghound or *gellgi* and the greyhound, were hunting dogs and symbols of status, and part of the appeal of the pet dog or *colwyn*, one that fulfils no task except the giving of pleasure, was the fact that the ownership of a dog with no obviously practical use was a clear sign of wealth and status.

It is interesting that here pet dogs are said to belong to the king and other men of status in addition to their hunting dogs. There is no mention of such dogs belonging to the queen or other women, yet these were the primary owners of pet dogs throughout medieval Europe, and Irish law codes even state that a nobleman should own a hunting hound and his

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<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, ‘Hawk and Hound’, p. 272.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 291.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290–91.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

lady a lapdog.<sup>31</sup> However, women appear nowhere in the Welsh law codes in connection with dogs even though they must have owned some as is evidenced in the story *Peredur* where a black-haired maiden tells Peredur of a lapdog clearly belonging to a lady: ““There is the lady’s lapdog—it will raise the stag for you””.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that the husband was recognized as the general owner of the dog even if it was his wife who truly owned it.

After the king, the next persons described as owning dogs are the *edling*, the heir to the king, and the *penteulu*, the head of the king’s personal military force and often closely related to him. The law codes state that the *penteulu* had a right to the king’s dogs as well as his horses, hawks, and arms.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the *edling* owned his dogs through the king along with his horses and jewels and could not part with them without the king’s permission. Furthermore, since they came from the king, they returned to the king’s ownership if the *edling* died before he did.<sup>34</sup> In a way it could be said that they really continued to belong to the king, and the *edling* was merely granted the enjoyment of them. What is interesting in the case of the *edling* is that he himself was assigned a worth of only one third of that assigned to the king whilst his dogs had equal worth with the king’s dogs.<sup>35</sup> Robin Chapman Stacey considers the reason for this to be the fact that the *edling* and the *penteulu* represented the king and were closely associated with him. As representatives of the king, therefore, their possessions held the same value as his.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps also the greater value of the dogs was because they indirectly belonged to the king rather than completely to the *edling*.

Only the dogs of one other officer of the king’s court receive mention, and these were the dogs of the *pencynydd* or the chief huntsman who oversaw the king’s hunts and the care of his hounds.<sup>37</sup> His dogs, too, held the same value as those of the king’s, and perhaps it was the close association of his position with dogs that gave them particular recognition.<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*, p. 3 and Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997), p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Robin Chapman Stacey, *Law and the Imagination in Medieval Wales*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, pp. 11, 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

last two kinds of dog owners mentioned in the law codes are general categories that comprised the two ends of non-royal medieval Welsh society. These were the *uchelwr* or nobleman and the *aillt* or peasant. The *uchelwr* is said to own staghounds, greyhounds, and pet dogs, all status symbols, and to engage in hunting. The *aillt* is said to own a dunghill cur, but interestingly, the law codes consider it a possibility that a peasant might also be able to own a pet dog.<sup>39</sup>

As might be expected to be the case with an animal that is both valuable and has the potential to cause harm, the Welsh law codes address what should happen in the case of a dog attack or in the case of its theft. In the case of a dog attacking a human, the punishment varied depending on the severity of the attack and whether it could have been expected and avoided. Thus, according to the Cyfnerth Redaction, the owner of a dog that drew blood was required to pay the attacked party, but the amount was lessened if the victim was able to kill it without having to flee.<sup>40</sup> However, if the dog attacked a person three times, and therefore the attack could have been anticipated on the part of the owner, and the owner refused to kill it, the dog was to be tied to the owner and killed, and the owner was required to pay a fine to the king.<sup>41</sup> By killing a dog whilst attached to its owner, the Cyfnerth Redaction would appear to be symbolising the responsibility of the negligent owner and his connection with his dog and its actions. Further, the Cyfnerth Redaction protects those who were attacked and acted in self-defence, stating that a person who killed a dog that was attacking them was not required to pay for depriving the owner of their dog,<sup>42</sup> and this is repeated in Triad U35 of the Cyfnerth Redaction.<sup>43</sup> It would seem that a dog attack that did not involve the drawing of blood or the death of the dog resulted in no payment or loss on either side.

*Llyfr y Damweiniau* addresses what happened when a dog ran through a person's field and presumably destroyed some of the grain. Triad Q92 states: 'Three blows for which

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 182: 'If a dog attacks any person to try to tear him, even though the person should kill the dog with a weapon in his hand, he does not pay either dirwy or camlwrw for him. If a dog bites any person until blood flows, let the dog's owner pay for the person's blood, but if the person torn, however, kills the dog without moving from there, he will get only sixteen pence.'

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.: 'For a habituated dog which tears a person three times, if the owner does not kill it, law is that it be tied to its owner's foot, two spans away from him, and so killed, and then let him pay three kine camlwrw to the King.'

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 88–89: 'Three injuries for which there is no compensation:... The third is the injury of a man to a dog attacking him and he can see it.'

nothing is paid: to a deer in corn, to a dog in corn, and to a wild foal in corn', indicating that a person had the right to protect his crop even at the risk of harming a neighbour's dog.<sup>44</sup>

Further, a person might use his dogs to chase livestock out of his fields, but if the dogs killed the animal, he had to repay the owner. Likewise, if his neighbour's dogs were to join his in the chase and kill the animal, the neighbour had to pay for the actions of his own dogs. And if a man's dogs continued the chase beyond his property, he had to pay the owner and pay a fine.<sup>45</sup> Finally, just as the mentally ill are not generally held responsible for their actions, the Cyfnerth Redaction states that no compensation was to be made for the actions of a rabid dog because 'there is no control over it'.<sup>46</sup>

In the case of theft or harm to the dog, the law codes assigned a value to each dog to be paid by the offender. However, the Iorwerth Redaction specifies that a wrong done to a dog or to a bird (presumably a hawk or other hunting bird) would not involve the payment of *dirwy* or the death penalty, as it would if the wronged individual were human, but the offender would pay a fine to the lord and compensate the owner.<sup>47</sup> The Cyfnerth Redaction claims that no fine was to be paid for the theft of a dog because it was not edible.<sup>48</sup>

The value assigned to dogs reflected their worth in society from the practical labor they performed as well as from the visual confirmation they gave of their owners' status, and thus their worth varied due to the status and rank of their owners and further depended on what kind of dog they were as well as their age and level of skill. Thus, a king's staghound was worth a pound if skilled, but only 120 pence if not. And it was worth half of the latter if it was a year old, half that if in its kennel, and finally, only fifteen pence from birth until it opened its eyes.<sup>49</sup> Finally, a staghound owned by the king was assigned twice the worth of a

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 138–39.

<sup>45</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 206: 'If it happens that a person chases livestock from his corn and in that chase they break their necks or are hurt, he is not bound to pay for them if he chased them legally. This is how he is entitled to chase them: while they are on his own land and his corn. If he has dogs with him and the dogs kill the stock, it is right for him to pay for the act of his animal. If it happens that he chases and that the neighbours' dogs come to him to the chase, and those dogs kill the stock, it is proper for everyone to keep his animal from doing wrong, and therefore let each of them pay for his own dogs; and if he chases them beyond his own boundary, let him pay a camlwrw, and the livestock to the owner.'

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 182. Triad Q144 further states that the family of a nobleman killed by a rabid dog does not receive *galanas* or *sarhaed*, the normal compensation paid for his unrightful death. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 164–65.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 167. The *dirwy* was a fine of twelve cows payable to the lord.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

greyhound also owned by the king at the same age and level of training. And a king's staghound and greyhound were worth twice the value of the same animal owned by an *uchelwr*. However, the pet dog of a king and an *uchelwr* were both worth as much as a king's staghound, indicating the value placed on a dog whose main purpose was to enhance the owner's status. The worth of a free man's dog and the dog of a peasant, however, clearly reflected the lower status of their owners. A pet dog belonging to a free man was worth half that of one owned by the king and *uchelwyr*, and the dog of a peasant was worth only four pence whether it was the expected dunghill cur or a special dog such as the prestigious pet dog, as unlikely as that might be.<sup>50</sup> Regarding this, the Cyfnerth Redaction states: 'One animal which goes from fourpence to a pound in one day is a staghound: if it belongs to a villein in the morning it is worth fourpence, and if it is given to the King that day it is worth a pound'.<sup>51</sup> Triad Q197 includes the greyhound and pet dog along with the staghound and states that it was possible for these three dogs to hold three different values in one day depending on who owned it at the moment.<sup>52</sup>

There are some unique features in how the law codes assigned worth to dogs. Two dogs were given a set worth regardless of the owner: the guard dog and the dunghill cur. The first, if it was one tasked with guarding livestock, was assigned a value commensurate with that of the most important animal that it protected.<sup>53</sup> For one tasked with guarding the house, the payment made for killing it depended on where it was killed. If it was killed no more than nine paces from the door it was set to guard, twenty-four pence had to be paid for it, but if it was killed outside this range and thus outside the area designated by law where it might attack those who approached the house, the one who killed it was not required to pay the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 181–82. Considering the sequence of being a year old, being in its kennel, and being too young to open its eyes accompanied at each stage by diminishing worth, it seems reasonable to think that a dog in its kennel is a puppy who has opened its eyes but has not grown and matured to be able to work. This is supported by the medieval hunting manual *The Master of Game*, which states that 'men should let run no hounds of what condition that they be nor hunt them until the time that they were a twelve month old and past'. Edward of York, *The Master of Game*, trans. and ed. by William A. Baillie-Grohman (New York: Duffield and Company, 1909), p. 84. With no reason to leave their kennels to work for extended periods of time such young dogs might be said to be in their kennels.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 194–95: 'Three animals whose value is augmented three times in one day: a greyhound, and a staghound, and a pet dog, because their ownership is moved from that of a villein to that of a nobleman and a king'.

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p.181.



owner restitution.<sup>54</sup> The dunghill cur was valued at the lowest amount—four pence—and its value remained the same regardless if it happened to be owned by the king: ‘A dunghill cur, to whomsoever it belongs, (even if it belongs to the King), its value is fourpence’.<sup>55</sup> It would seem that such ownership was hypothetical and merely ensured that no one could question that any dog of theirs considered to be a dunghill cur should have greater value because they were not peasants. Additionally, according to Triad Q199 such a dog was considered to have reached its full legal value before it turned one in contrast to the staghound which is said to be worth only a fraction of its value at this point, ensuring that the dunghill cur maintained its low worth.<sup>56</sup>

Also, the Blegywryd Redaction claims that a *bytheiad* had no legal value because there were no such dogs at the time of Hywel Dda when the laws were compiled and written down, and the law codes list the *bytheiad* among a list of items of no legal value, stating that its value was determined by ‘sworn appraisal’.<sup>57</sup> It seems strange that such a valuable hunting dog should never have been assigned any worth, and some scholars question the explanation given by the Blegywryd Redaction, but the law codes do seem to agree that the *bytheiad* did escape strict valuation, unlike other kinds of dogs.<sup>58</sup> Finally, greyhounds are noted for the value assigned to their leashes. Besides the greyhound, the only other dog whose leash is given a set value in the law codes is the *olrhead*, a scenting dog most likely to work on a leash, and its value remained the same regardless of the owner’s status.<sup>59</sup>

The law codes give details on the position of the *pencynydd* and his work. He was the tenth officer of the court, and he swore on the marks of his office: his horn and leash.<sup>60</sup> As noted above, the prestige that he held above his fellow *uchelwyr* can be seen in the greater value assigned to his dogs, and he had greyhound huntsmen and staghound huntsmen under him who had to pay him on achieving their position.<sup>61</sup> He had a yearly routine that he

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>56</sup> Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 194–95.

<sup>57</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, pp. 182, 193. Triad Q80 also claims that the *bytheiad* has no legal value. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 134–35.

<sup>58</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 291.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 21–22.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 21.



Illustration of the pencynydd in Peniarth MS 28, f. 5r

followed, remaining with the king from Christmas to the beginning of February and then going on a circuit for spring and fall hunting.<sup>62</sup> On the kalends of December the skins from animals hunted that year were divided between the king and the huntsmen. The staghound huntsmen received twice the number of skins as the greyhound huntsmen, and the *pencynydd* received two-thirds of the skins he won from them and one third from the king.<sup>63</sup> From 1 December to 9 December, however, the *pencynydd* no longer hunted for the king and could keep all that he killed.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the role of the *pencynydd* as someone who cared for the dogs finds mention in Triad Q94 concerning the three legal needles, including ‘the needle of the chief huntsman (*pencynydd*) to stitch the torn dogs’.<sup>65</sup>

Hunting was an important pastime for royalty and nobility, and thus the law codes devote some attention to hunting with hounds, but they emphasize the right of the king above all others.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Stacey notes that in the Cyfnerth Redaction and in some Latin translations, many of the laws concerning hunting and hunting dogs can be found in the section devoted to the court.<sup>67</sup> The Blegywryd Redaction claims that a king could hunt anywhere.<sup>68</sup> The *uchelwyr* were required to wait until the king had loosed his hounds three times before they could loose theirs for the day’s hunting.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the king had the right to go on a circuit throughout his land, being housed and fed by his subjects, and this right included the housing and feeding of his dogs.<sup>70</sup> This can be seen in the case of

<sup>62</sup> Jenkins, ‘Hawk and Hound’, p. 273.

<sup>63</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, ‘Hawk and Hound’, p. 273.

<sup>65</sup> Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 138–39. The other two belong to the queen’s seamstress and the court physician.

<sup>66</sup> Jenkins, ‘Hawk and Hound’, p. 257.

<sup>67</sup> Stacey, *Law and the Imagination in Medieval Wales*, p. 84.

<sup>68</sup> Jenkins, ‘Hawk and Hound’, p. 274.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>70</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, pp. 121, 124, 129.

Aberconway Abbey, which claimed that Llwelyn ap Iorwerth had issued a grant on 7 January, 1199, specifying that the abbey was free for all time from such a service.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, the law codes address who had a right to a deer once it had been hunted with hounds and killed. With the exception of cases when it was the king's hounds that brought down the deer, the owner of the land on which the hunted deer was killed was to receive a share in the form of the hindquarter.<sup>72</sup> When the king hunted, however, the land was treated as his own, and thus the real owner got nothing.<sup>73</sup> The law codes give complicated rules for what was to happen if the king's hounds brought down a deer on a person's land, and the king or his huntsmen did not appear until later. If the kill happened in the morning, the owner of the land was required to look after the deer and to care for the hounds. If the hounds killed the deer later in the day, he was to skin the deer and feed the hounds. Eventually, if the hounds killed the deer late in the day and the huntsmen did not come until the following morning, the owner was given the hindquarter.<sup>74</sup>

There could also be a conflict over who could claim an animal if the dogs of more than one hunter chased it.<sup>75</sup> According to *Llyfr y Damweiniau*, it was generally the case that the person whose hounds first pursued it had a claim to it with only a few exceptions. The first exception occurred when the owner of the first dogs abandoned the hunt. At that point, even if his hounds killed an animal, he could not claim it.<sup>76</sup> The other exception occurred when the king's dogs joined the chase after another's. In this case, the king had the right to claim the animal even if his dogs were second to the chase.<sup>77</sup> This is illustrated in the

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<sup>71</sup> Huw Pryce, ed., *The Acts of Welsh Rulers, 1120–1283* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2005), p. 355: '*Concessi insuper eisdem monachis quod liberi sint imperpetuum et quieti ab omnibus pastibus et poturis hominum, equorum, canum et avium et non compellantur ad pascendum me aut ministros aut alios quoscumque seculares sub obtentu consuetudinis*, Further I have conceded to the monks that they might be free forever from all feeding and pature of men, horses, dogs, and birds and that they not be compelled to feed me or my ministers or any other secular persons according to prevailing custom.'

<sup>72</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 185.

<sup>73</sup> Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound', p. 275.

<sup>74</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 185.

<sup>75</sup> Triad LatB58 states that the dunghill cur should be given the right to the hare, wild goat, and fox if it is first to take them ahead of greyhounds and other hunting dogs: 'There are three animals which a dunghill cur ought to have in preference to the greyhounds and hound dogs, if it catches them before those [hounds]: they are, a hare, a wild goat, and a fox'. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 342–43. This would seem to reflect on the value assigned to these animals. Whilst providing great fun, they did not hold the prestige of the deer, in particular the hart, or the boar.

<sup>76</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 186.

opening scene of the *First Branch of the Mabinogi* in which Pwyll's hounds are second to chase the deer, and yet because he is king of Dyfed, he thinks that he is entitled to the deer. Ordinarily, he would have been correct, but upon entering the liminal space of a clearing, he has stumbled upon the Otherworld where Arawn is king and holds a higher position than even Pwyll. Arawn, the owner of the first pack of dogs, is understandably outraged and refuses to greet Pwyll, explaining to Pwyll that it is because of his poor behaviour. Pwyll shows no understanding that he has done anything amiss, and even when Arawn explains that it is because he drove away Arawn's dogs and set his own dogs on the deer, Pwyll still is not clear that he is in the wrong, saying, 'If I have done wrong, I will redeem your friendship, *O gwneuthum gam, mi a brynaf dy gerennyd*' and explaining that he would do so according to Arawn's rank. It is only when Arawn explains who he is, that he is a crowned king of Annwfn, that Pwyll shows eagerness to make right what he has done.<sup>78</sup>

In conclusion, it can be seen that the law codes reveal much about the place of dogs in medieval Welsh society. They reveal the ubiquity of dogs as well as what kinds of dogs people owned and everyday issues that accompanied the possession of such animals. Furthermore, they show what members of society were expected to own which kinds of dogs and the values that society placed on them by the worth assigned to them. And finally, the law codes reveal what activities involving dogs interested Welsh royalty and nobility most. That this was hunting can clearly be seen in the fact that there was an officer of the king's court of extremely high status whose sole task was to organize hunting and oversee the care of the king's dogs. It is thus that the law codes reveal the importance of dogs, and particularly hunting dogs, to the world of medieval Wales.

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid. The right of the king to the animal was so strong that Triad Q33 even claims that any who stole a deer killed by the king's dogs must pay the fine of *dirwy*: 'There are three thieves liable to *dirwy*: the thief of a king's hart after his hounds kill it'. Roberts, *The Legal Triads of Medieval Wales*, pp. 334–35, Triad K41.

<sup>78</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 3–4 and Catherine McKenna, 'The Theme of Sovereignty in *Pwyll*' in *The Mabinogi: A Book of Essays*, ed. by C. W. Sullivan, III (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 321–22.

## Chapter 2: Dogs in Medieval Welsh Hunting

In a poem to Hywel ap Rhys, the bard Gutun Owain claimed that there were three things that the Welsh noble loved: ‘Falconer, hunt master, hounds’.<sup>79</sup> And Hywel ap Rhys was not unique in his love of hunting and hunting dogs. As noted in the previous chapter, hunting dogs received by far the most attention from the law codes, and this is no different from the other extant sources that discuss or mention dogs. For this reason, it seems fitting to devote an entire chapter to hunting and the hunting dog of medieval Wales. This chapter will first examine how hunting was practiced throughout the medieval world in order to provide a comparative backdrop for medieval Welsh practices. Then it will analyse the sole extant Welsh hunting text from the close of the medieval period, and it will end with an examination of literary sources that illustrate medieval Welsh hunting practices.

Across the medieval world, hunting was an important pastime for the nobility. Peasants also hunted, but they did so with traps or by stealth, often hunting what the law prohibited.<sup>80</sup> Laws restricted hunting to the nobility, and the expense of hunting animals and equipment meant that only the wealthy could participate in the classic grand hunt of the Middle Ages.<sup>81</sup> Such animals were the horse, the hound, and the hawk, and Richard Almond notes that ‘these personal living and expensive items were the icons of social identification which differentiated the gentleman from the ungentleman’.<sup>82</sup> They were integral elements in hunting, making them inseparable from noblemen’s favourite pastime.

Many believed that hunting was very beneficial for the nobleman. It gave exercise, occupied the nobleman so that he had little time to engage in sin, and it trained him for war.<sup>83</sup> The claim that hunting trained the hunter for war reflects Harriet Hudson’s observation about hunting:

Hunting was a demonstration of masculine prowess, a kind of ritualized combat requiring skill in horsemanship, weaponry, and the deployment of troops (the packs of dogs and their handlers), standing third in chivalric prestige to military combat and tournament.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 342.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Almond, *Medieval Hunting* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>83</sup> Cummins, *The Art of Medieval Hunting*, pp. 5, 10.

It was essentially a masculine exercise that imitated war but could be engaged in during peacetime and consisted of far less danger while still bringing much glory to the successful hunter.

Dogs, as hunting companions, fulfilled a role much like fellow warriors, and it was this role that tied them closely, like horses and hawks, to the nobility. As Sophia Menache notes, during the high medieval period hunting dogs became ‘a symbol of the knightly class’.<sup>85</sup> This is reflected in the stories of SS. Eustace and Isumbras, both nobles before their saintly career, whose dogs served to illustrate and emphasise their noble status.<sup>86</sup> Whilst there were several kinds of dogs used for hunting, it was the greyhound that came to most symbolize the nobility of its master, being endowed in stories with noble characteristics until it ‘symbolised the chivalric virtues (faith), occupations (hunting) and, more generally, the whole aristocratic way of life’.<sup>87</sup>

Much of what is known about the hunting of medieval nobles can be found in the hunting manuals that they used. In these they discuss the kinds of animals hunted, the kinds of hunting hounds and how to care for them and what kinds of illness they were prone to, and the way in which hunting was conducted. There were three main kinds of hunting dogs. The first was the greyhound, the symbol of nobility. It was fast and could chase the game and pull it down. It appears to have changed little from the medieval period to the present. The second was the alaunt or alant. This was a dog bigger than a greyhound and capable of taking on larger and fiercer game. Finally, there was the lymer, the dog used to follow a scent to discover the location of the animal to be hunted.<sup>88</sup> The most notable equipment of the hunter beyond his weapons was the hunting horn and the leash, both used with hunting dogs. The hunting horn was used to communicate with fellow hunters, both human and canine, and John Cummins says that it was ‘the principal tool and symbol of the huntsman’s craft’.<sup>89</sup>

For nobles hunting with dogs, there were two basic forms of hunting: hunting *par force de chiens* and hunting bow and stable. *Par force de chiens* means to hunt ‘by strength

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<sup>84</sup> Hudson, “Grete Kyndenes Is in Howndys”, p. 102.

<sup>85</sup> Menache, ‘Hunting and Attachment to Dogs in the Pre-Modern Period’, p. 51–52.

<sup>86</sup> Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, pp. 66, 68, 148.

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Martin Thom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> Cummins, *The Art of Medieval Hunting*, pp. 13–14, 22.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

of hounds' and was often shortened to *par force*.<sup>90</sup> When hunting a hart, this was the ultimate form of hunting, though the boar was also hunted *par force*.<sup>91</sup> Cummins aptly describes it: 'In its essential form, *par force* hunting involved pitting a pack of hounds against a quarry which was unhampered in the direction or length of its flight'.<sup>92</sup> It began with the lymers. Early in the morning the lymers' handlers, the lymers, would take their dogs separately in search of a quarry. The dogs remained on a leash, each silently tracking an animal's scent until its location was discovered. Both man and dog then returned to the waiting hunters where the lymers reported on the animals found, and the hunters decided which animal to follow. Then the hunters moved towards where the animal was found, and after the lymers flushed out the animal, alaunts and greyhounds were unleashed after it. Other hounds waited leashed together in couples until the pursued animal passed them so that they could continue the hunt. Finally, the weary animal would turn to fight, and that was when dogs and men accomplished its death. The final stage of the hunt was the *curée*, the rewarding of the hounds. The animal was systematically divided up, and its intestines mixed with bread soaked in blood and placed on the animal's skin. The men blew their hunting horns and excited the dogs before allowing them to feast on this mixture as their reward.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to hunting *par force*, hunting bow and stable, Cummins says, 'used men and hounds to drive the quarry towards and through a line of archers; if the beast came unscathed through the winnowing arrows it went free'.<sup>94</sup> By its very nature, bow and stable hunting allowed for the killing of potentially many animals and was useful for procuring food as well as providing pleasure.

Like the rest of the medieval world, hunting was an important pastime for princes and nobles in medieval Wales, and hunting with dogs was an old activity in Wales, predating the arrival of the Normans and the rise of the close association between hunting dogs and the knightly classes. Not only do the law codes contain older material discussing hounds, but a

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<sup>90</sup> Almond, *Medieval Hunting*, p. 73.

<sup>91</sup> Cummins, *The Art of Medieval Hunting*, pp. 32–33, 98.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>93</sup> In general, hounds were not fed meat to make their excitement for the hunt all the greater. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23, 41.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

lullaby tacked onto the end of the A-text of the famous early medieval poem *The Gododdin* describes a man calling to his hounds to accompany him as he hunts.<sup>95</sup>

There are six words used in Middle Welsh to reference different kinds of hunting dogs. Two general terms are *ci* and *huad*, meaning dog or hound and hound respectively.<sup>96</sup>

The others are the kinds of hunting dogs that appear in the law codes and were discussed in the previous chapter. The *milgi* is the greyhound, and the larger, stronger *gellgi* appears to correspond to the alaunt. Finally, as scenting dogs, both the *bytheiad* and the *olrhead* may correspond to the lymer.<sup>97</sup> And like the rest of the world, the horn and the leash figure notably among the hunting equipment. In the law codes, the head huntsman, the *pencynydd*, is said to properly swear only when he does so ‘by his horn and his leash’.<sup>98</sup>



Illustration of a dog in Peniarth MS 28, f. 21r

Essential to hunting and marking the hunter, the importance of the horn and leash gave them symbolic significance. The use of the horn can be seen in the illustration of the *pencynydd* in Peniarth MS 28 and in the rood screen at Pennant Melangell.<sup>99</sup> In both, the man depicted holds a horn to his lips, and in the rood screen he is encouraging the running hounds by the calls of his horn.

There is no extant hunting manual from medieval Wales like those to be found in England and France, though Dafydd ap Gwilym does make an intriguing reference to a hunting manual in one of his poems.<sup>100</sup> William Linnard notes that the only extant written material on hunting in medieval Wales consists of law codes, literary material, and a few

<sup>95</sup> A. O. H. Jarman, ed., *Y Gododdin: Britain's Oldest Heroic Poem* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1990), pp. lxii, 68. The words depicting hunting dogs in early medieval Wales are found on page 68:

When thy father went a-hunting,  
A spear on his shoulder, a club in his hand,  
He would call the nimble hounds,  
'Giff, Gaff: catch, catch, fetch, fetch.'

<sup>96</sup> William Linnard, 'The Nine Huntings: A Re-Examination of *Y Naw Helwriaeth*', *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 31 (1984), 119–32, (p. 130).

<sup>97</sup> Jenkins, 'Hawk and Hound', pp. 269–72.

<sup>98</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 22.

<sup>99</sup> Illustrations for both can be found on page 13 and page 42.

<sup>100</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Serch fel Ysgyfarnog', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]: 'A rule book of the work of a master of hounds, *llfr canon llafur cynydd*.'



scattered references.<sup>101</sup> However, there is a hunting text, titled *Y Naw Helwriaeth* or *The Nine Huntings*, that dates from the period immediately following the Middle Ages.<sup>102</sup> The work consists of three sections: the first lists the nine kinds of hunts, the second—taken in many places from Welsh law codes—explains rules and etiquette when hunting with dogs, and the third—a translation of a small portion of the *Book of St Albans*—discusses what makes hounds chase a hart.<sup>103</sup>

The author of this work is unknown, though it was attributed by several early modern writers to Gruffydd ap Cynan.<sup>104</sup> Linnard, however, dates the work to the years between 1486 and 1560, basing his dating on the known date of 1486 for the composition of the *Book of St Albans* and the dates of the extant manuscripts.<sup>105</sup> Even though *Y Naw Helwriaeth* post-dates the medieval period, it contains medieval material, making it a good source for understanding hunting in medieval Wales.

*Y Naw Helwriaeth* contains references to both *par force* hunting and bow and stable hunting.<sup>106</sup> The *bytheiaid* appear to play the role of the lymer in *par force* hunting.<sup>107</sup> There even appears to be the Welsh equivalent of the lymerer in the person of the individual in charge of the *bytheiaid* ('*y neb a fo yn calvn y bytheiaid*').<sup>108</sup> It is only after the *bytheiaid* have done their work that the greyhounds are loosed.<sup>109</sup> Finally, *Y Naw Helwriaeth* agrees with hunting manuals in saying that the prime animal to be hunted *par force* is the stag, claiming that it is 'the finest and bravest animal that is hunted with scenting hounds and greyhounds, *ef yn bchaf ac yn wrolaf anivail, ar i mae helwriaeth arno a bytheiaid a milgwnn*'.<sup>110</sup> At another point in the work, however, *Y Naw Helwriaeth* mentions hunting a

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<sup>101</sup> Linnard, 'The Nine Huntings', p. 126.

<sup>102</sup> The three primary manuscripts containing *Y Naw Helwriaeth* are Peniarth MS 155, Add. MS 9817, and Add. MS 31055.

<sup>103</sup> Linnard, 'The Nine Huntings', p. 132.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131–32.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 125

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 124.

variety of animals ('a hare, young hart, stag or roebuck or any animal when it is in its lair') as was common with bow and stable hunting.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, *Y Naw Helwriaeth* mentions hunting with bow and arrow and specifies when it is acceptable to use them.<sup>112</sup> These were common weapons used in hunting bow and stable as archers shot down animals as they were driven towards them by the hounds.

*Y Naw Helwriaeth* also mentions the *curée*, referring to the reward of the hounds as the skin (*croen*).<sup>113</sup> Linnard notes that the term *curée* comes from the French word *cuir*, meaning skin, and thus *croen* is close to a translation of *curée*.<sup>114</sup> The text is very specific on the rules detailing which hound should receive the reward, claiming that such hounds win it ('*anillodd groen*') or that they own it by right of their performance ('*piav y croen*').<sup>115</sup>

An important element in *Y Naw Helwriaeth* is the rules of courtesy in hunting with dogs. One could not release one's greyhound on the game unless one's *bytheiad* was instrumental in flushing out the game in the first place.<sup>116</sup> In fact, the work claims the right of the person following the *bytheiad* to hamstring any greyhound so released, citing the law codes as support ('*hynny wrth y gyfraith*') even though the law codes make no such rule.<sup>117</sup> Other rules of hunting etiquette involve who could lay claim to the animal. The first hounds to begin chasing the game were those who won it even if joined later by other hounds, unless the later hounds belonged to the king, and one lost the right to the game once one began heading for home even if one's hounds did actually continue hunting and brought down an animal.<sup>118</sup> These last rules can be found in the law codes.<sup>119</sup>

*Y Naw Helwriaeth* is a text about hunting, not about dogs, yet dogs occupy a high percentage of the work. In the first section, the section on the nine kinds of hunting, hounds are mentioned specifically in the discussion of three animals—the stag, the climber, and the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 123, 125

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 123, 125, 129.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

cock-of-the-wood—whilst the bear is said to be barked at, implying their presence.<sup>120</sup> In the second section, which details the rules of hunting etiquette, hounds appear in every paragraph except one which states that a hunter cannot appear at a hunt with his leash unless he can name the nine huntings, implying even here the presence of dogs and implying that only a knowledgeable hunter can be worthy to handle them.<sup>121</sup> Finally, hounds are the only subject of the third section as it discusses how it is that hounds can follow a hart so well.<sup>122</sup> From this it can be seen that the general medieval delight in hunting dogs was to be found in medieval Wales. Dogs dominate *Y Naw Helwriaeth*, signalling their importance for the hunting of the nobility.

The appearance of hunting hounds in medieval Welsh literature supports the picture presented by *Y Naw Helwriaeth*. As will be seen in the following chapter, hounds appear in many of the stories of the *Mabinogion*, occupying important roles, whilst in poetry they feature as companions and objects of desire and in saints' Lives as characters who recognise the saints' holiness.<sup>123</sup> Hunting dogs were a prized possession among Welsh nobles and an important aspect of their identity. In the *Fourth Branch*, Gwydion creates greyhounds using magic to use as valuable currency to persuade Pryderi to give him his swine.<sup>124</sup> As Gwydion knew, the greyhounds, along with magically created horses and shields, would prove to be too tempting a proposition for Pryderi to refuse. Dafydd ap Gwilym claims that the ability to hunt with hounds is a great honour:

A great honour has befallen me:  
If I live, I'm allowed  
to hunt with hounds.<sup>125</sup>

Indeed, intimate familiarity with hunting dogs could enhance one's position. MS Cotton Cleopatra B, a late medieval version of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, reports that the duke of Burgundy loved Bran 'because so good was his knowledge of hunting and dogs and birds'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 124–25.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 125–26.

<sup>123</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 97, 308, 341–42; A. W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1944), pp. 205, 247–49; and Huw Pryce, 'A New Edition of the *Historia Divae Monacellae*', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, 82 (1994), 23–40, (pp. 39–40).

<sup>124</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 49.

<sup>125</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Basaleg', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

Likewise, hounds in medieval Wales served as status symbols to show off the wealth of their owners, and this was, no doubt, part of their appeal. In the poem entitled *The Vanity of the World*, Siôn Cent asks where all of an individual's expensive possessions have gone on his death. Found in the list are hounds: 'where are the huge noble hounds?'.<sup>127</sup> Another instance of the ostentatious use of hunting dogs can be found in *Culhwch ac Owen* in which Culhwch appears at Arthur's court decked out in regal clothes and riding an impressive horse. Additionally, the text says that

there were two spotted, white-breasted greyhounds in front of him, with a collar of red gold around the neck of each from shoulder-swell to ear. The one on the left side would run to the right side, and the one on the right side would run to the left side, like two sea-swallows swooping around him.<sup>128</sup>

While Culhwch may have brought these dogs to hunt with, they are wearing improbably large collars made of gold and appear to be moving about Culhwch and his horse in a kind of choreographed dance, revealing how their presence was intended to enhance Culhwch's impressive appearance.

Dogs' usefulness in hunting and in showing off one's status and wealth made them excellent sources for gifts. Thus, in the *First Branch*, they appear among the valuable gifts shared between Pwyll and Arawn as a mark of friendship, and these dogs are specifically stated to be *milgwn*.<sup>129</sup> Later, Pwyll offers Teyrnnon Twrf Liant 'the most highly prized dogs' ('*a'r cwn hoffaf*'), considering them a worthy gift to show his gratitude for the care that Teyrnnon had given to his son Pryderi.<sup>130</sup> In claiming the prestige of the prince of Gwynedd, the Iorwerth Redaction claims that he owes tribute or dues only once to the English king; after that he only owes gifts: dogs, hawks, and horses.<sup>131</sup> In the late medieval period, bards had the custom of composing poetry asking for things from patrons for themselves or for others and thanking them for their gifts. Such items could be a cloak or a horse to ride about the country. Bleddyn Owen Huws notes that along with horses, bulls, shields, hawks, and harps, hunting dogs were the most popular and most requested.<sup>132</sup> Five *cywyddau* devoted to

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<sup>126</sup> John Jay Parry, trans., *Brut y Brenhinedd* (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1937), p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 291.

<sup>128</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, pp. 180–81.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 and Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 21 and Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, p. 27.

<sup>131</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 154.

requesting dogs can be found in the editions of poetry by *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr*, showing how prized a gift they were.<sup>133</sup> Huws discusses even more such *cywyddau*, including the famous one by Gutun Owain that opened this chapter.<sup>134</sup> In the *cywydd*, Gutun Owain asks Hywel ap Rhys to give two *bytheiaid* to his nephew Dafydd ap Ieuan. He praises Hywel and waxes eloquent about hunting with dogs, claiming of the falconer, hunt master, and hounds that Hywel was fond of, ‘And I have set my heart on/ One of these, and the gift is hounds’.<sup>135</sup>

How the medieval Welsh hunted is depicted in literature, and it appears to accord very well with general medieval practice as supported by the law codes and *Y Naw Helwriaeth*. In the *Third Branch*, Manawydan and Pryderi use hounds to hunt for sustenance until both Pryderi and the hounds disappear in the magical fort. Manawydan’s words to Pryderi’s wife Cigfa after their disappearance reflect just how essential dogs were for the hunting of nobles. He tells her that ‘there is no point our staying here. We have lost our dogs and we cannot support ourselves. Let us go to England’.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps if he were to try the form of hunting employed by peasants, such as the use of traps, he might have success, but he appears to only understand aristocratic hunting, which could not exist without the aid of dogs. Further, it is interesting that without the dogs, Manawydan does not just lose the ability to hunt, but he is also forced to pursue plebian activities like craftsmanship and farming, as if the dogs were an essential element of what made him a noble.

The Welsh literary sources clearly depict *par force* and bow and stable hunting. Gutun Owain describes the two hounds that he is requesting on behalf of his nephew as ‘two yoke-fellows in two chains’, reflecting the practice of coupling hounds before unleashing them in the hunt.<sup>137</sup> It is through a *par force* hunt that Blodeuedd meets Gronw and finds a

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<sup>132</sup> Bleddyn Owen Huws, *Y Canu Gofyn a Diolch, c. 1350–c. 1650* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 67.

<sup>133</sup> M. Paul Bryant-Quinn, ed., *Gwaith Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan Ieuan Llwyd Brydydd a Lewys Aled*, Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2003), pp. 13–14; R. Iestyn Daniel, ed., *Gwaith Llawdden*, Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2006), p. 82; R. Iestyn Daniel, ed., *Gwaith Llywelyn ap Gutun*, Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2007), p. 27; Huw Meirion Edwards, *Gwaith y Nant*, Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2013), pp. 42–44; Owen Thomas, ed., *Gwaith Dafydd Epynt*, Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2002), pp. 48–49.

<sup>134</sup> Huws, *Y Canu Gofyn a Diolch*, p. 178.

<sup>135</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 341–42.

<sup>136</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 41.

lover. First she hears the hunting horn, and then she sees an exhausted stag being chased by hounds and huntsmen just like the relays of hounds that chased a chosen stag until it was completely exhausted. The story says that Gronw finally caught up with the stag at the river Cynfael, which would be where the exhausted stag gave up flight and turned to fight.<sup>138</sup> The opening scene of *Ystorya Geraint uab Erbin* is the great hunt of Arthur and his knights for the white stag with the prize to the slayer of the stag being the right to present its head to any woman he wished. In this hunt, relays are set up, and the dogs unleashed on the stag as it reaches them. The last dog to be released is Arthur's own dog Cafall, who is able to direct the stag towards his master and enable him to win the honour of killing the stag.<sup>139</sup> *Culhwch ac Olwen* depicts a massive *par force* hunt for the fearsome boar Twrch Trwyth.<sup>140</sup> In Ysbaddaden's list of impossible tasks that he sets before Culhwch, several involve preparations for the hunt, including the obtaining of special hounds and the leashes and huntsmen necessary to control them.<sup>141</sup> When all such preparations have been made, the massive and exaggerated hunt begins with every available man, hound, and horse, and the chase extends across Wales and into Cornwall until Twrch Trwyth disappears under the waves of the sea.<sup>142</sup> Finally, *Peredur* depicts bow and stable hunting. In the story, Peredur encounters a squire with two greyhounds on leashes. In the distance Peredur can hear other hounds hunting, and the squire invites him to stay to

see the hunting-dogs driving the tired deer from the forest to the open ground; and you will see the best greyhounds you have ever seen and the bravest to face deer, killing them by the water near us.<sup>143</sup>

Here the two greyhounds lying beside the squire appear to be waiting their turn to chase the deer as the others drive them towards the water where they will be killed in numbers.

The last element of *par force* hunting, the *curée*, appears significantly in two stories. In the *First Branch*, Pwyll meets Arawn as he is feeding his hounds on the deer that Arawn's

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<sup>137</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 342.

<sup>138</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 59.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209–12. The search and the dogs who participated in it will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198–99.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209–12.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

hounds have killed.<sup>144</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is possible that Pwyll thought that he was doing no more than what was his right when he drove the original pack of hounds from the deer to feed his dogs on it since the law codes state that it was the right of the king's hounds to take the game from the first hounds to pursue it. The fact that such a right appears here and also in the law codes and in *Y Naw Helwriaeth* would seem to indicate that this was established practice.<sup>145</sup> Pwyll certainly appears to think that his actions followed normal custom. In the *Fourth Branch*, whilst it is the exciting hunt passing by Blodeuedd that must have intrigued her, it is the *curée* which leaves Gronw close to Blodeuedd and in need of a place to stay for the night: 'And there he was, skinning the stag and baiting his hounds until night closed in on him'.<sup>146</sup>

Finally, the words of Pryderi in the *Third Branch* sum up the attachment of nobles to their dogs. He has watched his hounds disappear inside a mysterious fortress, and his companion Manawydan points out the dangers of following them. Pryderi, however, answers, 'God knows, I will not abandon my dogs'.<sup>147</sup> It did not matter that there was danger; they were his dogs, and he was going after them.

Thus, just as hunting was an important pastime for nobles throughout medieval Europe, giving them some of the thrill and excitement of battle when at peace and reinforcing and supporting their noble status, so it was in Wales, and such hunting could not take place without dogs. The pervasiveness and importance of hunting and hunting dogs in Wales can be seen in how often and how extensively they appear in literature of all forms, from law codes to secular romantic literature and poetry, where they are the companions of Welsh princes and nobles and share in the thrill and delight of hunting.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Jenkins, *The Law of Hywel Dda*, p. 186 and Linnard, *The Nine Huntings*, p. 125.

<sup>146</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 59.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 39 and Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, p. 55.

### Chapter 3: Dogs in Medieval Welsh Literature

The tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* claims that in the hunt for the great and fierce boar Twrch Trwyth, Arthur ‘gathered together every warrior in the Three Islands of Britain and her Three Adjacent Islands, and in France, and Brittany, and Normandy, and Gwlad yr Haf, and every hound and celebrated steed’.<sup>148</sup> One of these hounds was Arthur’s own dog, Cafall, and in describing the *Mirabilia* of Britain, the *Historia Brittonum* tells the onomastic tale of a stone to be found in Buellt bearing the imprint of Cafall’s paw, created as he pursued Twrch Trwyth.<sup>149</sup> Considering the close relationship between man and dog, it is hardly surprising that dogs appear frequently in medieval Welsh literature where they perform literary as well as practical roles that reveal their position in medieval Welsh society. This chapter will look at the appearance of dogs in medieval Welsh literature, examining the appearance of different kinds of dogs, and then it will look more specifically at poetry and hagiography, ending with an exploration of otherworldly dogs that appear in these texts.

Many of the same dogs that appear in the law codes—the greyhound, the staghound, the *bytheiad*, the guard dog, and the pet dog—also appear in medieval Welsh literature. Hunting dogs comprise the greatest number of such appearances, even when they are not engaged in hunting, but other kinds of dogs appear as well. The first dog to be examined is the pet dog, which became an important character in medieval romance due to its close relationship with ladies. Kathleen Walker-Meikle notes that little lapdogs frequently served as symbols of love, often being given by a lover to his lady or assisting the two lovers.<sup>150</sup> In contrast to the significant roles played by the pet dog in French and continental literature, however, the pet dog makes only a rare appearance in medieval Welsh literature. The one significant appearance of a pet dog occurs in *Peredur*. Here, a black-haired maiden tells Peredur of a dangerous and troublesome stag. Then she points to a lapdog belonging to a lady, saying that the lapdog would lead Peredur to the stag. And the lapdog does so. After Peredur has defeated and killed the stag, ‘he could see a lady on horseback coming towards him and picking up the lapdog in the sleeve of her cape’.<sup>151</sup> There are a few things of note

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<sup>148</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 209.

<sup>149</sup> Jon B. Coe and Simon Young, *The Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend* (Burnham-on-Sea: Llanerch Publishers, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>150</sup> Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*, p. 90–93.

<sup>151</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 101.



about this story. In the first place, the black-haired maiden specifically calls the lapdog ‘the lady’s lapdog’, identifying it as a woman’s dog. This accords well with general medieval practice in which such dogs did belong to women, and it is also noteworthy that it is one of the very few dogs in medieval Welsh literature said to be owned by a woman. Since it is also one of the very few pet dogs mentioned, it would support the idea that the pet dog was a woman’s dog. Further, the dog is fully capable of running as can be seen by the way that it leads Peredur to the stag, and yet the woman picks up the dog and carries it in the sleeve of her cape as she rides just as was common practice among ladies with their pet dogs.

Herd dogs are another kind of dog neglected by literature, and there appears to be no mention of them outside the law codes. This is hardly surprising. Since their task was to herd sheep and cattle who were cared for by peasants, most were no doubt the property of the lower classes. Even a herd dog owned by a lord for the care of his sheep and cattle would have worked with the peasants assigned to the animals’ care. The lord himself did not herd sheep and cattle. Thus, it would be expected that such a dog would not appear in literature devoted to the entertainment of the wealthy.

Guard dogs do make a few appearances in medieval Welsh literature. The most significant guard dog to appear in the literature can be found in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. This is a dog outside of the giant Ysbaddaden’s court described as a ‘shaggy mastiff, *gauaelgi kydenawc*’ and ‘bigger than a nine-year-old stallion’. He is so fierce that he has never lost a sheep, and it is impossible to pass him without harm. His size complements the gigantic stature of his owner and presages the impossible tasks that Ysbaddaden will set before Culhwch. However, foreshadowing how such tasks will prove to be possible for the warriors of Arthur’s court, one of Culhwch’s companions, Menw ap Teirgwaedd, casts a spell on him, allowing the party to pass.<sup>152</sup> A little later, the band tries to enter Ysbaddaden’s court, which has nine gates, each guarded by a gatekeeper and a mastiff. These guard dogs are not as impressive as the one encountered earlier, and the band is able to kill all of them and so gain access to Ysbaddaden’s hall where Culhwch can ask him for Olwen’s hand in marriage.<sup>153</sup> It is interesting that in both these instances the guard dogs are associated with a reprehensible and violent giant rather than a noble. They do not appear as impressive animals reflecting the high status of their owners. Other instances where guard dogs appear will be examined later

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<sup>152</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 190 and Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 15.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

in the section on poetry, but essentially they consist of Dafydd ap Gwilym's failed attempts to tryst with a girl, foiled through the presence of a guard dog belonging to her father or husband.<sup>154</sup> In all these appearances, both in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and in Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry, the guard dog fulfills the same role: he is an obstacle to the fulfillment of the main characters' desires. In the case of *Culhwch*, these obstacles are surmountable through the prowess of his companions, but Dafydd ap Gwilym is alone and out of luck and will have to look elsewhere for a girl with whom he can enjoy a tryst.

Lastly, hunting dogs appear frequently in medieval Welsh literature where they perform significant functions and are often used for literary effect. Susan F. Garlick notes that dogs in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* serve as catalysts in stories, initiating adventures and introducing new plots. In particular, hunting and hunting dogs often lead to encounters with the Otherworld as dogs chase after an animal, sometimes an otherworldly creature, leading their masters away from their companions into lone adventures with people of the Otherworld or into the realm itself.<sup>155</sup>

This central role of hunting dogs to medieval Welsh literature can be seen in the collection of stories referred to as the *Mabinogion*. Hunting dogs appear in seven out of the eleven stories, including three of the four branches of the *Mabinogi* and three of the four Arthurian stories, and they often serve as key characters in pivotal moments in the stories. These moments also reveal important aspects of the characters. In the *First Branch*, hunting dogs are a key element in the opening scene as Pwyll goes hunting and encounters a stag already being chased by a pack of hounds whose colouring reveals them to be hounds of the Otherworld. Pwyll drives these hounds away to feed his own on the stag, revealing how he fails to act with prudence and forethought. Through this behaviour, he encounters Arawn, the king of Annwfn, and goes on to rule the otherworldly kingdom of Annwfn for a year. Here Pwyll's hunting dogs can literally be said to have led him into an adventure that would change his life, and indeed it changed his name, for he became known as Pwyll Pen Annwfn after this adventure.<sup>156</sup> In the *Third Branch*, the dogs encounter otherworldly magic in the form of a gleaming white boar. Running ahead of Manawydan and Pryderi, they lead these two characters to a magical fortress that had never existed there before. The responses of

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<sup>154</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Tri Phoror Eiddig' and 'Y Wawr', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023], and 'In a Tavern' in Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 191.

<sup>155</sup> Garlick, 'Horses, Swine and Magical Birds', pp. 9, 61.

<sup>156</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 3.

both men reveal their character as Manawydan counsels caution and Pryderi acts recklessly in following his hounds and becoming stuck in the magical fortress until Manawydan can free him.<sup>157</sup> And in the *Fourth Branch*, it is the sound of the hunting horn and the barking of the hunting dogs that introduces the lover Gronw to Llew's wife Blodeuedd. She does not have the depth of character to remain faithful to her husband, and this chance encounter leads to their infatuation with each other and their plot to kill and usurp Llew's place.<sup>158</sup> In all of these stories, hunting dogs appear as part of the natural backdrop of many stories as if they are a normal part of the Welsh noble's everyday life like feasting, horses, and arms.

Hunting dogs are just as visible in the Arthurian stories as they are in the *Four Branches*. *Culhwch ac Olwen* particularly features hounds since it contains the story of the famous hunt for the boar Twrch Trwyth. Among the members of Arthur's court whom Culhwch calls upon to aid him are Eli and Trachmyr, Arthur's chief huntsmen or *pencynyddion*, who take part in the hunt.<sup>159</sup> And multiple hounds are mentioned by name whose presence is essential in the pursuit for the comb between the boar's ears required by Olwen's father Ysbaddaden if Culhwch were to marry her: Gwyddrud and Gwydden Astus, the offspring of the dog Rhymhi, as well as the three dogs Glas, Glesig, and Gleisiad, the two dogs of Glythfyr Ledewig who are possibly the dogs Aned and Aethlem, and finally Drudwyn and Cafall.<sup>160</sup> When Culhwch arrives in Arthur's court and calls on the men and women there to help him in his suit for Olwen's hand, he calls on Gwyddrud and Gwydden Astus as well as Glas, Glesig, and Gleisiad.<sup>161</sup> And when Ysbaddaden lists his requirements for Culhwch to marry Olwen, he includes the hounds necessary to hunt the boar Twrch Trwyth, including

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 186–87.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 198–99, 210. Peter C. Bartrum suggests that Aned and Aethlem are the otherwise unnamed dogs of Glythfyr Ledewig, and this would make sense. Besides a quick reference to Glas, Glesig, and Gleisiad, Ysbaddaden names three dogs that are necessary for the hunt of Twrch Trwyth: Drudwyn, Aned, and Aethlem, the last two of whom are paired together. The story first describes the acquisition of Drudwyn, and immediately after this follows the acquisition of the two dogs of Glythfyr Ledewig, another pair of hounds that appear to be essential to the hunt. These dogs are said to be involved in both the hunt for Ysgithrwyn Pen Baedd and Twrch Trwyth, which would be expected of dogs deemed necessary by Ysbaddaden. They are named among the dogs held in preparation for the hunt of Twrch Trwyth along with Drudwyn and Cafall, and if they are not Aned and Aethlem, then the first and only appearance of Aned and Aethlem in the story would take place as they follow Twrch Trwyth into the sea despite being named and described as essential by Ysbaddaden. Peter C. Bartrum, *Welsh Classical Dictionary: People in History and Legend up to about A.D. 1000* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1993), p. 326.

<sup>161</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 187–88.

Drudwyn (whose name means Fierce White) and Aned and Aethlem: ‘You cannot hunt Twrch Trwyth until you get Drudwyn, the whelp of Graid son of Eri’ and ‘Twrch Trwyth will never be hunted until you get Aned and Aethlem. They are as swift as a gust of wind; they have never been unleashed on a beast they did not kill’.<sup>162</sup> He also repeats the poem naming Glas, Glesig, and Gleisiad, claiming that they too are necessary.<sup>163</sup> Later Arthur describes Gwyddrud and Gwydden Astus as a wonder. He and his men seek them along with their mother Rhymhi, and on being found, God returns them to ‘their own shape’.<sup>164</sup> Presumably they were once human and had in some way become dogs.<sup>165</sup>

Hunting dogs also figure in the opening scene of *Ystorya Geraint uab Erbin* as Arthur leads a massive hunt for a special white stag with the aid of the hounds of the court. By sleeping late and missing the start of the hunt, Geraint finds himself setting out on an adventure that will win him a wife after he accompanies Gwenhwyfar to observe the hunt, and she is insulted so that he must seek recompence.<sup>166</sup> In *Peredur*, the knight’s dog leads him to a deserted place where he encounters numerous adventures.<sup>167</sup> In both of these stories, the position of these men as Arthurian knights who ride out in pursuit of adventures becomes clear as the dogs bring them to the adventures they seek. Other hunting dogs appear in the story of *Peredur* as a distraction. Peredur is travelling in pursuit of a specific adventure until he encounters a squire accompanied by greyhounds in the middle of a hunt, and he finds himself invited to stay for the hunting. The hounds here appear to represent the call of the pleasures of the world, and Peredur the knight must remain dedicated to his quest and ignore them to pursue his nobler adventure.<sup>168</sup>

One other story in the *Mabinogion* contains similar references to dogs, and this is *Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig*. In this dream, the Roman emperor Maxen is out hunting and stops to rest. His men create a tent for him, and he falls asleep, finding himself travelling in a dream across far lands until he reaches a city. Inside the city is a hall, and in that hall is a

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., pp. 198–99, 270.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 141–42.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

beautiful woman. He has just sat beside her with his arms about her when the excited barking of the dogs at their leashes wakes the emperor, and he is left pining for the woman in the dream until he sends messengers in search of her.<sup>169</sup> Here the literary effect of the abrupt and rude awakening of the emperor from his wonderful dream is beautifully accomplished by the noisy excitement of the dogs. As Garlick so aptly closes her thesis, dogs and other animals' 'importance in the tales is immeasurable and the narratives would undoubtedly be considerably different and far less engaging without the animals to enhance them'.<sup>170</sup>

Finally, hunting dogs are noted for their faithfulness to their masters. This is clearly illustrated by their depiction in medieval heraldry. In the late medieval period, Siôn Trevor translated *Tractatus de Armis* into Welsh, making heraldry easily accessible to the Welsh, though it may be argued that they were already familiar with heraldic signs and their significance.<sup>171</sup> He writes that 'a dog borne in arms represents a loyal man who will not desert his lord and master in life or death, but will willingly die for his master'.<sup>172</sup> Notably, Giraldus Cambrensis tells the stories of faithful dogs and sings their praises, stating that

Of all animals the dog is most attached to man. A dog recognizes its master and, if that master dies, it may itself refuse to go on living. In defence of its master a dog has the courage to face death. In short a dog is prepared to die both for its owners and with its owners.<sup>173</sup>

He recounts intriguing stories of faithful dogs, including the story of how a pack of dogs rescue a king and another in which a dog fights a duel with the man who killed his owner and wins. These stories, first appearing in the works of classical and late antique authors can also be found in medieval bestiaries, showing how enduring such stories were.<sup>174</sup> And to these he

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>170</sup> Garlick, 'Horses, Swine and Magical Birds', p. 65.

<sup>171</sup> Evan John Jones, trans. and ed., *Medieval Heraldry: Some Fourteenth Century Heraldic Works* (Cardiff: William Lewis Ltd., 1943), pp. xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 33: '*Am gi weithian i traethwn. Dwyn ki mewn arveu a arwyddoka gwr kywir, yr hwnn ni edy i arglwydd nac er byw nac er marw, onid ymroi ehun yw varwolaeth dros i arglwydd a'i veistr*', p. 32.

<sup>173</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, p. 128.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 129–30. Giraldus was hardly unique in telling such stories or in claiming that dogs were particularly faithful to their masters. In his much consulted work, *Etymologies*, Isidore of Seville early in the medieval period claims that dogs are the smartest animals and that their faithfulness to their masters leads them to sacrifice themselves for their masters' protection and to refuse to leave the side of their dead masters. He notes the close relationship between man and dog, claiming that 'it is part of their (dogs') nature not to be able to live apart from humans'. One twelfth century bestiary repeats Isidore's words and goes on to tell of dogs saving their master, caring for their master, and dying from sorrow for their dead masters. Further, the great medieval student of animals, Albertus Magnus, too, comments on the dog's faithfulness to his master even after death. Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A.

adds stories from Wales as if to show that Wales, too, was home to extraordinarily faithful dogs. The first is the story of the greyhound belonging to Owain ap Caradog, nephew to Prince Rhys. Owain was assassinated, but not without a tremendous defence being made by his faithful greyhound who, according to Giraldus, was ‘wounded in seven places, for it was shot through the body with arrows and prodded with spears’. The dog survived, but the scars remained to tell of his brave, if unavailing, defence of his master.<sup>175</sup> In the second story, a greyhound defends his slain Welsh master until the English bury the stinking body out of respect for the faithful dog. Giraldus waxes lyrical about this dog, asking ‘What son to his father, what Nisus to Euryalus, what Polynices to Tydeus, what Orestes to Pylades, would have shown such affectionate regard?’<sup>176</sup> And the answer is that no one could hope to show more care or remain more faithful than this dog. Another interesting representation of the faithful hunting dog in literature appears in the case of a lion rather than a dog. In *Owein*, the hero rescues a lion who then follows him faithfully. The author says that as Owein travelled, he ‘could see the lion following him, playing around him like a greyhound he had reared himself, *y llew yn y ganlyn, ac yn gware yn a gylch ual milgi auackei e hun*’.<sup>177</sup> Here the lion’s faithful behaviour is clearly identified as the behaviour typified by the greyhound, the quintessential hunting dog. Finally, a more recent depiction of the faithful greyhound of the Middle Ages can be found in the famous Gelert. The story significantly postdates the medieval period, and the first recorded appearance is from 1800.<sup>178</sup> Intriguingly, however, Jean-Claude Schmitt has pointed out that the legend may have older roots going back into the Middle Ages. This is deduced from the crest on the Welsh arms depicted in the late medieval Rous Roll. While England’s crest depicts a lion, France a fleur-de-lys, and Ireland a harp, Wales has a white greyhound inside a cradle, seemingly referencing some form of the legend.<sup>179</sup> Whether the legend of Gelert reflects an earlier medieval story, or whether it is

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Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 253, T. H. White, ed. and trans., *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954), pp. 61–67, and Albertus Magnus, *On Animals: A Medieval Summa Zoologica*, trans. by Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. and Irvn M. Resnick, 2 vols (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), II, p. 1457.

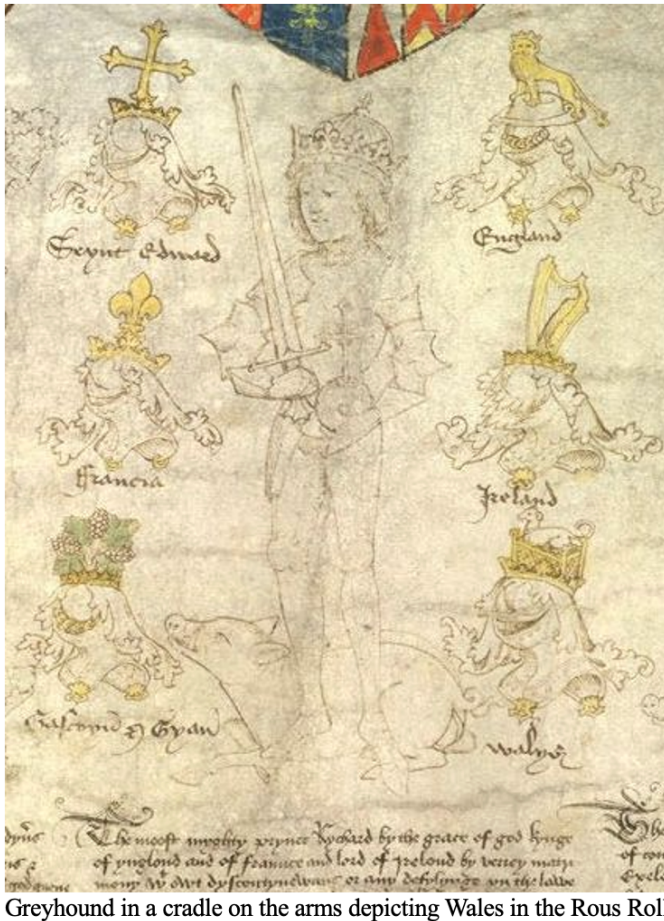
<sup>175</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, p. 128.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197–98.

<sup>177</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 134 and R. L. Thomson, ed., *Owein or Chwedul Iarllles y Ffynnawn* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), p. 25.

<sup>178</sup> Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound*, p. 46.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.



Greyhound in a cradle on the arms depicting Wales in the Rous Roll patrons, and as Nerys Ann Jones notes, horses performed the role of ‘war-machines’ and ‘seem to have become a symbol of their owners’ military might in poetry’.<sup>181</sup>

However, despite the fact that dogs do not appear in poetry with the regularity of a horse, they are most certainly present, and, particularly for the *Cywyddwyr* of the late medieval period, they could be the subject of poetry. As noted in the previous chapter, bards not infrequently wrote poems to request dogs from their patrons. Dogs also figured well as hunters or pursuers, often metaphorically. In some of the poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym, hunting dogs chasing game depict his pursuit of the woman he has set his eyes on, and at times hunting dogs are assistants to the bard in his pursuit. In describing the way that he chased after women, Dafydd ap Gwilym in one poem compares himself to a ‘fierce panting blood hound (*bytheiad*)’ whose desire for the quarry, despite his exhaustion, could hardly be

merely a modern creation, the depiction of the heroic and faithful greyhound accurately portrays medieval Welsh beliefs about many of their beloved hunting dogs.

Additionally, the way in which dogs are mentioned in poetry reflects their role in medieval Welsh society. While they certainly do appear, they do not appear nearly as often as horses, and this is hardly surprising. Ruth Griffiths suggests that war was far more important to one’s status than hunting was in the early medieval period.<sup>180</sup> Poetry for the *Cynfeirdd* and *Gogynfeirdd* focused most often on the military prowess of their

<sup>180</sup> Ruth Griffiths, ‘Animals in Early Welsh Poetry’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2021), p. 66.

<sup>181</sup> Nerys Ann Jones, ‘Horses in Medieval Welsh Court Poetry’ in Davies, Sioned and Nerys Ann Jones, eds., *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 83–85.

surpassed.<sup>182</sup> In another poem, he compares his pursuit of a girl to that of dogs for a hare, saying that ‘she is what hunting dogs long for’.<sup>183</sup> And more interestingly, in the poem *Y Breuddwyd* or *The Dream*, he dreams of hunting a white hind with hounds:

I was delighted by the chase,  
and a pack of hunting dogs in full cry  
after it, unerring their course.<sup>184</sup>

Then, paradoxically, the hind flees to him for safety. When he tells the dream to a ‘righteous old woman’, she informs him that the white hind he has been pursuing is a lady, and his dogs ‘your bold love messengers’.<sup>185</sup> In this poem, the dogs in their pursuit of the white hind represent the pursuit of his protestations of love, and since the white hind circled back to him for safety, it may be assumed that his suit was well received.

Another interesting use of dogs in poetry can be seen in the appearance of guard dogs. Here Dafydd ap Gwilym is humorous in his depictions of the impediments that keep him separated from the women with whom he is seeking a tryst. In one poem, *Tri Phoror Eiddig* or *Eiddig’s Three Gatekeepers*, he describes his encounters with three guards that Eiddig has set up to protect his wife Morfudd from clandestine suitors such as Dafydd himself. The second of these, along with a squeaky door and an old woman, is the guard dog, said to be ‘a strong damp-stinking fierce barking dog’.<sup>186</sup> At the door, Dafydd says:

a red dog jumped out at me from a pigsty,  
intent on leaving its mark on me.  
It growled at me most fiercely,  
and took a full bite of the horse-hair of my cloak.  
The man’s dog ripped the whole of my mantle.<sup>187</sup>

Dafydd is forced to flee, chased by the dog.<sup>188</sup> No doubt this depiction, while characteristic of the bard’s sense of humour at his own expense, accurately represents what guard dogs did

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<sup>182</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, ‘Taith i Garu’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University  
<<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>183</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, ‘Serch fel Ysgyfarnog’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University  
<<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>184</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, ‘Y Breuddwyd’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University  
<<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. Dogs were not the only animals to serve as love messengers in Dafydd’s poetry. Other animals include the roebuck, peacock, skylark, gull, and heath-cock.

<sup>186</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, ‘Tri Phorthor Eiddig’, *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University  
<<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



in medieval Wales. In yet another poem, Dafydd depicts a conversation between a woman and her lover. The woman tries to persuade the man to leave, noting the ominous barking of the guard dog while the man boasts that he is faster than the dog and so can prolong his stay.<sup>189</sup> Whether he is proved right or regrets his decision is not told. Rhys Goch Eryri also makes note of guard dogs as hindrances to a poet's suit. In a poem dedicated to a fox, he asks the fox for advice in his suit for the married Gwen against the suit of another bard, and the fox observes that the poet should be careful of 'Eiddig's gun, and his men and dogs'.<sup>190</sup> Presumably Gwen is the wife of Eiddig, and the dogs here could easily alert Eiddig and his men to the presence of an intruder as well as lead the attack.

As noted in the previous chapter, dogs were often a mark of wealth and status, and this is clearly evident in the works of the bards. The bard Dafydd Bach ap Madog Wladaidd recounts the noise of animals at Christmas, including such exotic and expensive animals as peacocks and swans, as well as dogs of various kinds from 'slender greyhounds' to 'snub-nosed dogs'.<sup>191</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym sings in one poem of the glories of a fine time with Ifor of Basaleg, including hunting with hounds as one of the chief delights,<sup>192</sup> whilst in another he lists the wonderful things to be found in Basaleg, including greyhounds.<sup>193</sup> As can be seen, dogs were an important element in a bard's description of his patron's wealth and prestige.

Finally, at times bards compared warriors to dogs, ascribing to them well-known canine characteristics. In general, dogs do not appear in this role very often. The animals that the poets tended to use in their praise of their patrons were dragons, lions, hawks, and wolves, and these choices are hardly surprising. All these animals portray strength and fierceness, characteristics greatly desired in a warrior.<sup>194</sup> In contrast to the poetry composed in later periods, however, early medieval Welsh poetry does make use of the dog as a picture

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<sup>189</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Y Wawr', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>190</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 308.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>192</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Basaleg', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>193</sup> Dafydd ap Gwilym, 'Diolch am Fenig', *Dafydd ap Gwilym.net*, Swansea University <<https://dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.php>> [accessed 19 October 2023]

<sup>194</sup> A good example of this can be found in Gruffydd ab yr Ynad Coch's *Marwnad Llywelyn ap Gruffydd* in which the bard compares the dead prince to each of these four animals: 'I grieve for a prince, hawk beyond reproach', 'A lord bold as a lion guiding the land', 'Head of a warlord, dragon's head', 'Head of a kingly wolf out-thrusting'. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, pp. 171–73

of a brave and valiant warrior. In the Heledd Saga, Heledd mourns for her brother Cynddylan, killed defending his land against the Saxons, and she says that he had a greyhound's heart ('*Kyndylan callon milgi*')<sup>195</sup> before describing his prowess in battle: 'When he alighted in combat's fury,/ He would slaughter many'.<sup>196</sup> His heart, like that of a greyhound, was what gave him the strength and courage to fight so ferociously. Similarly, throughout the poem *The Gododdin* (Text A), Aneirin describes the warriors who fought at Catraeth as hounds and even as war-hounds: ('In close ranks, grimly, the war-hounds fought', 'Three hounds and three hundred', 'Blaenwydd...war-hound charging a hill on the day of battle'.<sup>197</sup> The title *war-hound* makes it clear that it is the dog's ferocity in charging and fighting that makes it the perfect comparison to warriors. Dogs also represented the followers of heroes in early medieval Welsh poetry, both as fighters and as descendants, and a prized characteristic of a follower was that of faithfulness.<sup>198</sup> Thus they appear in *Englynion y Beddau*: 'Eiddew and Eidal, the unflinching exiles,/ The whelps of Cylchwydrai'.<sup>199</sup> In the *Book of Taliesin*, Taliesin sings that 'the hounds of Coel's litter would be hard-pressed indeed/ Before they'd hand over one man as a hostage!'<sup>200</sup> In another poem from the same collection, Taliesin is said to ask, 'Who deserves the drink of honour?', and he lists several names, including 'Coel and his hounds, *ae Coel a'e kanawon*'.<sup>201</sup> In singing of the death of Cunedda, the legendary founder of the kingdom of Gwynedd, the bard describes Cunedda's men as his hounds: 'His hounds used to admire his presence'.<sup>202</sup> This is particularly interesting since Cunedda's name can be interpreted as meaning 'having good hounds'.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Marwnad Cynddylan*, s. 7. Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), p. 430.

<sup>196</sup> Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 90.

<sup>197</sup> Jarman, *Y Gododdin: Britain's Oldest Heroic Poem: 'Dwys, dengyn, ydd ymleddyn aergwn..*, line 87, pp. 6–7 and '*Trychwn a thrychant*', line 191, pp. 14–15. The last quotation is found in a variant stanza translated in Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 63.

<sup>198</sup> Marged Haycock, ed. and trans., *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, 2015), pp. 380, 497.

<sup>199</sup> William F. Skene, *Four Ancient Books of Wales: Containing the Cymric Poems Attributed to the Bards of the Sixth Century*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1868), I, p. 315.

<sup>200</sup> Lewis and Williams, *The Book of Taliesin.*, p. 15.

<sup>201</sup> Haycock, *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, p. 374.

<sup>202</sup> *Kefynderchyn y gwn y gyfyl*. *Ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>203</sup> John T. Koch, ed., *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, 5 vols (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2006), II, p. 519.

Thus, the description of his men as hounds is also a pun on his name, and according to the bard, they were indeed ‘good hounds’.

In addition to secular literature and poetry, dogs also appear in medieval Welsh hagiography. Many other animals such as birds, hares, deer, and even wolves appear in the saints’ Lives to reveal the saints’ holiness as they exercise power over the natural world, often as the animals serve them in ways completely contrary to their nature.<sup>204</sup> Dogs in the Lives serve the same purpose though in a different way. The one non-hunting dog that appears is the little dog or ‘*canicule*’ that appears in Rhygyfarch’s Life of St David. In this story, the saint knowingly gives poisoned bread to the dog before taking some himself, and the dog dies a horrible death, but St David remains well.<sup>205</sup> There is nothing in this text to indicate whose dog this was or what kind of dog it was. What can be said is that this dog was clearly no hunting dog, and its sole purpose in the story was to die a horrible death in order to demonstrate the holiness of St David who was unaffected by the poison that killed the dog.

However, it is hunting dogs that appear most often in hagiographical literature, and here they represent the secular world as it comes into contact with the religious. No saint is said to own a hunting dog or to treat one kindly. In the Life of St Beuno, the saint overhears a Saxon encouraging his dogs as they hunt for a hare, and he immediately abandons the place to live out of reach of the invading Saxons.<sup>206</sup> Here the dogs are associated, not just with a secular man, but also with a pagan. Besides this instance, the way in which nearly all hunting dogs appear is called the ‘hermit and hunter’ topos.<sup>207</sup> This is a literary topos that can be found across Europe, and it begins with a hunter pursuing an animal.<sup>208</sup> The animal flees for safety to the saint, and on arriving, the hunter’s dogs are unable to approach the animal because of the saint’s holiness. Impressed by such sanctity, the hunter, generally a king or a noble, grants land to the saint on which they can build a church and house a monastic community. Such a topos is present in the Lives of SS. Illtud, Cybi, Oudoceus, Pedrog, and

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<sup>204</sup> Henken, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 80.

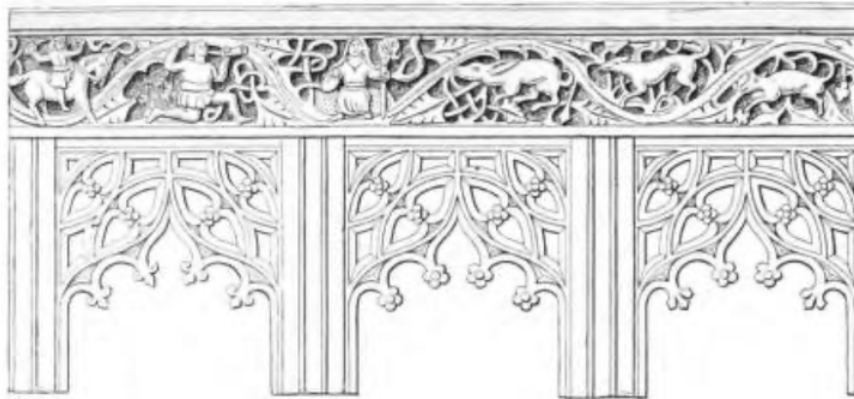
<sup>205</sup> Rhygyfarch, ‘Rhygyfarch’s *Life of St David*’, ed. and trans. by Richard Sharpe and John Reuben Davies in *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. by J. Wyn Evans and Jonathan M. Wooding (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), pp. 134–35.

<sup>206</sup> Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, , p. 17.

<sup>207</sup> Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages*, p. 3.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Melangell.<sup>209</sup> The most famous of such stories occurs in the Life of St Melangell. Brochwel Ysgithrog, prince of Powys, is out hunting when his hounds begin chasing a hare. The hare runs ahead, and Brochwel discovers it lying safely under the skirt of a praying virgin ‘with its face turned towards the dogs boldly and calmly’.<sup>210</sup> Brochwel encourages his dogs to overcome their fear and catch the hare, but ‘the more he shouted to urge them on, the more distant and farther away the dogs retreated and fled from the little animal howling’.<sup>211</sup> On recognising the virgin’s sanctity, Brochwel gives the land to St Melangell for her and other



Sketch of the rood screen at Pennant Melangell

virgins to live safely.<sup>212</sup> In the church at Pennant Melangell there is a rood screen depicting this scene. It shows St Melangell in the center with the hare running towards her

followed by the hounds as well as a man blowing a horn and Brochwel himself. In all these stories, the hunting dogs are clearly associated with secular rulers, and in their pursuit of the game seeking shelter with the saint, they act as extensions of the secular ruler, coming into contact with the saint and their sanctity before he arrives. In this way, they actually recognise and acknowledge the saint and their holiness before their human masters, and it is their reactions to the saint that alert their masters and the reader that they are in the presence of holiness.

Finally, Medieval Welsh literature contains many dogs that clearly belong to the Otherworld or that possess magical or supercanine abilities. The dogs that most clearly hail from the Otherworld are the Cŵn Annwn or the hounds of Annwfn. These appear in the opening scene of the *First Branch* as Pwyll is out hunting. He comes to a clearing in the woods, a liminal space where the boundaries between this world and the other can become

<sup>209</sup> Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, pp. 204–05, 247–49, and Henken, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 87.

<sup>210</sup> Pryce, ‘A New Edition of the *Historia Divae Monacellae*’, p. 39.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

blurred, and he hears the sound of another pack of dogs. However, what stands out to Pwyll about this second pack is their colour: ‘Then Pwyll looked at the colour of the pack, without bothering to look at the stag. And of all the hounds he had seen in the world, he had never seen dogs of this colour’.<sup>213</sup> They are glistening white with very red ears, and that colouring is a sure sign that they are from the Otherworld. Soon this is confirmed as Pwyll learns that they belong to Arawn, the king of Annwfn. In this story, the otherworldly dogs appear to be fairly normal apart from their striking colour. While entranced by their appearance, Pwyll feels no compunction and experiences no difficulty in driving them away from the stag they have killed. However, Christian influence altered views of Annwfn until it appeared much like *uffern* or hell,<sup>214</sup> and the hounds of the Otherworld would go on to have a frightening career as soul-hunting spectres who hunt in the skies, often led by Gwyn ap Nudd.<sup>215</sup>

One named member of the Cŵn Annwn is Dormarch. According to the poem *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir a Gwyn ap Nudd*, Gwyn says that Dormarch once belonged to Maelgwn Gwynedd, but now he belongs to him. He praises Dormarch, saying that he is ‘fair...and brave. The best of dogs is Dormarch’.<sup>216</sup> What makes him clearly a member of the Cŵn Annwn besides the fact that Gwyn ap Nudd is his master is his physical description. Gwyn says that he is ‘ruddy-nosed when you look at him carefully, because as you perceive, he is constantly wandering in the mist of the mountain’.<sup>217</sup>



Illustration of Dormarch in the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, f. 49r

<sup>213</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, p. 141.

<sup>215</sup> Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom*, p. 203. That Gwyn ap Nudd was early on associated with Annwfn in the form of hell can be seen in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, written sometime around 1100, which states of Gwyn that ‘God has put the spirit of the demons of Annwfn in him, lest the world be destroyed’. Bromwich and Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, p. 141 and Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 199. Another source that seems to include dogs in this picture can be found in a poem by Gutun Owain who mentions Gwyn ap Nudd and says:

A conversation with Annwn  
The hounds hold in wooded ground,  
Shaping song in cuckoo’s copses,  
And shaping death for the fox.

Here the subject that the hounds have with Annwfn is death. And while it is merely an animal being hunting in the normal fashion, this would appear to picture the later pursuit of condemned souls by the Cŵn Annwn. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh Poems*, p. 342.

<sup>216</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans, ed., *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, (Pwllheli: Issued to subscribers only, 1906), p. xi.

As J. Gwynogvryn Evans, notes, the Welsh reads that he wanders ‘*ar wibir*’ or on the sky or clouds, indicating that he runs through the air much like the Cŵn Annwn are said to do.<sup>218</sup> Accompanying this poem in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* is an illustration of Dormarch. Here Dormarch has no back legs and only a great, feathery tail as if this allowed him to fly in the clouds rather than run.

As noted in the previous paragraph, Dormarch was once the property of Maelgwn Gwynedd, though why Maelgwn gave up ownership of him to Gwyn ap Nudd is not explained. Unlike Arawn or Gwyn ap Nudd, Maelgwn Gwynedd was a real ruler of Gwynedd in the early medieval period, but he came to appear in many stories and legends. His name, Maelgwn, means Hound Prince, and he was often associated with dogs,<sup>219</sup> as can be seen in a poem by Dafydd Bach ap Madog Wladaidd: ‘the looking of Maelgwn’s greyhounds, *Edrychiad milgiad Maelgwn*’.<sup>220</sup> In the story of his confrontation with St Cybi, he does not easily give up the she-goat that has sought protection with the saint but engages in a gamble that his dog can catch the she-goat before she can cover an area that will become the saint’s.<sup>221</sup> Of course the dog fails, but Maelgwn’s reliance on his dog is intriguing. Further this dog is specifically claimed to be a *molossus*, which means that it is probably a *gellgi*, possibly the largest and most powerful hunting dog.<sup>222</sup> Yet another reference to a confrontation between Maelgwn Gwynedd and a saint can be found in a poem about St Tydecho: ‘Maelgwn came with his white dogs to the rock yonder and this rock’.<sup>223</sup> It is of note that the dogs so closely associated with Maelgwn here are specifically said to be white. Indeed, Elissa R. Henken has noted that Maelgwn’s horses and dogs are often said to be white much like Arawn’s otherworldly hounds.<sup>224</sup> The fact that Maelgwn was once the owner of

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>219</sup> Elissa R. Henken, *The Traditions of the Welsh Saints* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), p. 305.

<sup>220</sup> R. Iestyn Daniel, ed., *Gwaith Dafydd Bach ap Madog Wladaidd ‘Sypyn Cyfeiliog’ a Llywelyn ab y Moel*, *Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 1998), p. 29.

<sup>221</sup> Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, pp. 247–49.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>223</sup> Henken, *The Traditions of the Welsh Saints*, pp. 211–212.

<sup>224</sup> Henken, *The Welsh Saints*, p. 90.

such a unique, otherworldly hound as Dormarch shows that not only were dogs an important aspect of his identity but that he was associated with dogs who were far from ordinary.

Another otherworldly dog reveals many of the characteristics of the Otherworld. In Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, he tells a story about an ancient British king named Herla.<sup>225</sup> On returning from a wedding in an otherworldly realm, Herla receives a small bloodhound at the liminal space where one world meets another along with instructions that the party should not dismount until the dog jumped from his arms of its own accord. Arriving in the ordinary world, some dismount before the dog only to turn to dust, and King Herla and his men ride on for centuries waiting for the dog to choose to jump to the ground, but as Walter Map says, 'the dog has not yet alighted'.<sup>226</sup> It would seem that the little bloodhound, given in the liminal space, possesses the otherworldly quality of time distortion. While in this world, time moves on steadily, and all grow old and decay, time moves differently in the Otherworld, and death does not occur. Herla and his party appear to have become bound by otherworldly rules by taking on an otherworldly dog. Thus, the person who does not wait on the dog's timing turns to dust as if the process of death and decomposition that all experience is hastened, but waiting on the dog allows a person to live on regardless of the passing of years. Herla and his party appear to become otherworldly characters as he 'holds on his mad course with his band in eternal wanderings, without stop or stay',<sup>227</sup> much like the Cŵn Annwn, only finding relief when they ride into the River Wye in the twelfth century.

The last otherworldly dog of note is Arthur's own dog, Cafall. That the dog of the premier and legendary king of Britain should also be noteworthy is hardly surprising. Peter C. Bartrum notes that Cafall is Welsh for the Latin *caballus*, meaning horse, noting that his name 'evidently implies that Arthur's legendary dog was of enormous size'.<sup>228</sup> While a number of special dogs are listed in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Cafall appears to be more noteworthy than them all and the dog most capable of hunting the fierce and large Twrch Trwyth. As the author notes in the hunt for Ysgithrwyn Pen Baedd: 'it was not the dogs that Ysbaddaden had demanded of Culhwch that killed the boar but Cafall, Arthur's own dog'.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers' Trifles*, trans. by M. R. James (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 29–31.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> Bartrum, *A Welsh Classical Dictionary*, p. 102.

<sup>229</sup> Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 208.

The others, Drudwyn, Aned, Aethlem, and others, were certainly noteworthy and possessed powers beyond the ordinary dog, but they were no Cafall. Similarly, the story of the hunt for the white stag at the beginning of *Ystorya Geraint uab Erbin* tells the same story. The hunt is underway and

the last dog that was unleashed on it was Arthur's favourite dog—Cafall was his name. He left all the other dogs behind and caused the stag to turn. On the second turn the stag came to Arthur's hunting station, and Arthur set upon it.<sup>230</sup>

Cafall is faster than all the others and chases the stag with skill, herding him quickly—the text says that it was only the second turn—to his master, giving him the prize. It is no wonder that he is Arthur's favourite dog. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the *Historia Brittonum* claims that Cafall left a print in solid rock as he chased Twrch Trwyth. Arthur gathered up stones in a pile, placing the stone with his dog's paw print on top, and the name of the pile of stones was Carn Cafall. That stone pressed with Cafall's print had the magical property that even if someone should carry it away from the pile for an entire day and night, it would mysteriously return to the top of the pile in the morning.<sup>231</sup> This paw print in stone is listed among the *Mirabilia* of Britain, and it is an onomastic tale to explain the origins of such a unique print in stone. In the notes to her translation of the *Mabinogion*,



Sketch of Cafall's paw print in Lady Charlotte Guest's *The Mabinogion*, vol. 2, Longmans, 1849, p. 360

Lady Charlotte Guest includes a description, written by an acquaintance, of a stone that may have had the mark once believed to be Cafall's print.<sup>232</sup> He notes that it has no visible marks for the toes or nails.

Regardless, the fact that Cafall could leave a print in stone as if it were mud indicates that his name would seem to reflect the fact that he was a unique and massive hound whose magical properties could be transferred to the stone bearing his mark. Clearly, Cafall was a wonder dog belonging to Welsh literature, a literature that appreciated strong, powerful, and special dogs.

From this survey of medieval Welsh literature, it can be seen that dogs play a vital role in the stories in which they appear. They appear in many key scenes in such central

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>231</sup> Coe and Young, *The Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>232</sup> Charlotte Guest, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1906), pp. 331–32.



stories as the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the Arthurian stories, and they serve as ideal comparisons for the faithful followers of men whose praises are sung in poetry. They represent secular authority as they confront and bow before the sanctity of the saint and Church, and they represent the Otherworld and possess qualities that allow them to tower over others much like their heroic masters.

### Conclusion:

As can be seen in the three chapters above, dogs were ubiquitous in medieval Wales, and they can be found in such diverse literary texts as the law codes and legal triads, cultural stories such as the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* and the Arthurian legends, and other texts such as hagiography and poetry. Dogs even appear in travel writing and writing wishing to entertain a Norman audience with stories from Wales. While it is certainly possible to pass over them in a cursory reading of the material, they are there, adding to the richness of life in medieval Wales.

The law codes present an idealised depiction of medieval Welsh life and the role of dogs within it, but they still depict what the lawyers thought should be their position and role in society. It is in the law codes that it is possible to see the different kinds of dogs (such as the various kinds of hunting dogs, the guard dog, herd dog, and pet dog) and the values assigned to them by law as well as society. While the more prestigious kinds of dogs held greater value and thus were worth more, their monetary worth was not generally intrinsic to them but also reflected the social position of their owner. Furthermore, the law codes reveal the way in which the ownership of prestigious dogs was a sign of status. Many of the customs of hunting with dogs are laid out in the law codes, including an entire discussion of the position of the king's chief huntsman or *pencynydd*, revealing that hunting was considered so important in society that it required the elaboration of lawyers.

Indeed, of all the experiences of dogs in medieval Wales, hunting outstrips all others in the number of times that it receives mention and discussion in the extant texts, and these texts often glorified the dogs who engaged in hunting. Like nobles in the rest of medieval Europe, the Welsh prince and his nobles enjoyed the sport. Hunting was an activity that set the noble apart from the rest of society, and just as the horse, the hawk, and arms identified a noble, so too the presence of a hunting dog indicated the nobility of its master. While unnecessary for warfare like the horse, and thus not possessing the same status, hunting dogs were essential for aristocratic hunting, and thus they appear often as the companions of the heroes of literature as they engage in such a well-loved activity. Indeed, the one extant Welsh hunting text to find origins in the Middle Ages would hardly exist if all references to dogs were removed from its pages.

In medieval Welsh literature, dogs appear at times as important characters in key scenes, and at other times they are used metaphorically when the characteristics for which they were renowned could stand in for specific concepts the author wished to convey. Thus, their prime activity of chasing game may represent messengers bearing notices of love to a

bard's beloved, or their bravery may make them perfect representations of warriors in battle. Their close association with secular royalty and nobility means that they act as extensions of secular authority when they come into contact with a saint, and their attribute of faithfulness is a characteristic to be emulated by the same sector of society that they represent. Their close association with their masters requires that the dogs of heroes also possess heroic qualities that make them the worthy companions of men such as Arthur and his companions, and their importance means that they have left their mark on the Welsh landscape in the form of onomastic tales such as the paw print Cafall left in stone.

Mostly this thesis has looked at the dogs of princes and nobles because, like so many other areas of medieval life, these are the dogs that are mentioned and remembered. The records found in literature, chronicles, poetry, and hagiography focus almost exclusively on aristocratic society and aristocratic activities. The exploits of the peasant's dog do not appear, and even less prestigious dogs owned by nobles, who must have found their services essential, hardly appear in the record. It is almost solely in the law codes that the peasant's dog finds a place in the written record because peasants and their animals were members of society governed by law and needed regulation just like the noble. However, even the law codes focus on the prince and his nobles, and their animals receive greater attention. Nevertheless, there are enough glimpses of such dogs to reveal that they served peasant as well as noble. Peasant dogs herded and guarded livestock and guarded the house. They were assistants in their masters' work. The pet dog also receives little mention in the literature, though clearly women did own them. But literature often focuses on the doings of men, leaving little space for the little dog that sat on a lady's lap and gambolled about her feet. Thus it is that there is far more information about the noble's hunting dogs than there is about all other kinds of dogs in the medieval period.

These hunting dogs fulfilled a unique role in medieval Wales. Like the horse and the hawk, they were prestigious animals whose ownership indicated high status and nobility. Unlike the horse, but like the hawk, they accompanied their master only in hunting and did not share in the glory of war. However, unlike the horse and certainly unlike the hawk, hunting dogs provided a close companionship centered on a shared passion for hunting and on the dog's devoted faithfulness to its master. The hawk was notorious for the fact that one could not be certain that it would not fly away on being released after a bird, never to be seen again. And despite the fact that the Welsh triads contain no mention of dogs while several are devoted exclusively to the notable horses of Britain, in other literary texts it is the dog, not the horse, who is depicted as defending his master with his life and refusing to leave his side

even after his master has been slain. The hunting dog's faithfulness has become emblematic of the faithfulness that a vassal ought to have for his lord. And if such dogs were noted for their faithfulness, their masters appear to have returned the devotion, so eloquently expressed by Pryderi when asked to take the prudent course and abandon his dogs: '*Dioer, ny madeuaf i uyg kwn*, God knows, I will not leave my dogs'.

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