Invention?

Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Nature of *De Gestis Britonum*

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Abstract

Geoffrey of Monmouth has long been credited with inventing the bulk of British history, and more especially the Arthurian legend, through his composition of *De Gestis Britonum*, also known as *Historia Regum Britonum*. Because so little of the text can be corroborated by other sources, Geoffrey is, however affectionately, referred to as a fraud, and scholars of early Arthuriana tend to dismiss material that shares commonalities with his work as being un-representative of the legend as it may have existed prior to Geoffrey's influence. This dissertation examines the assumptions behind the charges of fraud and invention and how they have held back attempts to reconstruct the 'pre-Galfridian' Arthurian mythos. First, it examines the nature of history as a literary genre in Geoffrey's era and lays rest to arguments that Geoffrey was deliberately attempting to pass off his work as a factual account of past events. Second, it looks at interactions between the Saxons and the Bretons—events corroborated by extant sources—to show how Geoffrey's account manipulates but does not invent material *ex-nihilo*. It will also examine some assumptions surrounding details and events, such as Arthur's invasion of Rome, that are not corroborated elsewhere, and how the political nature of these events shed light of the possible existence and provenance of a 'very old book' despite the long-held assumption that such a text was also the invention of Geoffrey's imagination. Finally, it will examine one of the most iconic aspects of the Arthurian legend—Modred's treason—and evidence that Geoffrey's account is actually based on Welsh traditions despite the fact that no corroborating sources survive. The overall conclusion is that Geoffrey did not invent as much as he's credited with, and further critique of such assumptions will only add to our understanding of early Arthuriana.

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Introduction

The earliest sources for the Arthurian legend are traditionally classified as pre- or post-Galfridian, meaning they came before or after Geoffrey of Monmouth published his highly influential *De Gestis Britonum* (*DGB*) more commonly called *Historia Regum Britonum* (*History of the Kings of Britain*; *HRB*).[1] This classification is based on the premise that Geoffrey invented much of his story, especially with regards to the Arthurian material, and thus anything that came after was influenced by his inventions, and is therefore not an 'authentic' representation of what might have existed before. This over-simplification has severely impeded the progress of scholars attempting to reconstruct the pre-Galfridian (usually Welsh) legends, as any material that might have been influenced or inspired by his interpretation of the legend is omitted from such reconstructions. A blanket dismissal of the post-Galfridian material disregards both the way surviving sources are used in *DGB* and the reception *DGB* had in Wales itself, as expressed through the translation of *DGB* into the Welsh *Brut y Brenhinedd* (*BYB*)[2] and how readily 'post-Galfridian' Welsh texts appear to have adopted Geoffrey's so-called inventions. Moreover, it ignores the process of complex narrative composition. As Edward Pace notes: 'the authors of complex literary works on historical themes rarely create them *ex nihilo*'[3] (from nothing). Even authors of modern genre fiction tend to draw on inspiration or re-interpretation of previous events or stories: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* contains tropes drawn from *Beowulf*; George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* was inspired by the War of the Roses. No author, of fiction or

[1] Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright, 'Introduction' in *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Geoffrey of Monmouth (Boydell Press: 2007) pp vii-lxxvi established that Geoffrey had originally titled the work *De Gestis Britonum* (p viii; lix). As modern academia surrounding this text appears to follow Reeve's conclusion by referring to the text as *De Gestis Britonum*, this study will likewise use *DGB* when discussing the text. *HRB* will only be used when quoting sources that use the previously ascribed title.

[2] While the *Brut y Brenhinedd* is often abbreviated '*Brut*,' this study will use the initials to avoid confusion with texts such as Laȝamon's *Brut* or Wace's *Roman de Brut*.

[3] Edwin Pace, 'Geoffrey's "Very Old Book", *Arthuriana*, 22.2 (2012), pp. 53–74 (p 54).

history, writes in a vacuum, and the implication that Geoffrey produced the whole of his Arthurian section solely through the exertions of his own imagination, while other sections of *DGB* liberally draw names, events, and tropes from virtually every source Geoffrey may have had access to, is unrealistic. Rebecca Thomas notes: 'while producing a dramatically different version of events, Geoffrey is nonetheless in constant dialogue with works such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*,'[4] and concludes that 'despite his efforts to create something new, Geoffrey remained conscious of what had come before.'[5] Yet despite this evidence of Geoffrey's obvious reliance on sources in much of his work, scholars too often ascribe the sections for which no extant sources remain as e*x nihilo* inventions of Geoffrey's imagination. It is my contention that this is improbable, and a careful analysis of the most contentious chapters—most notably the Arthurian material—will demonstrate how aspects of his sources remain, even when the sources themselves are lost.

This is *not* a study of Geoffrey of Monmouth's sources. Such studies are numerous[6] and it is not my purpose here to add to what is already a copious and thorough body of work. What I seek to accomplish here is to apply Hans Robert Jauss's theory of literary criticism, *Rezeptionästhetik*. This is 'not a way of interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretive assumptions that give them

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[4] Rebecca Thomas, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the English Past', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020), pp. 105-128 (p. 108). See also Neil Wright, "Geoffrey and Bede", *Arthurian literature*, 6 (1986) p. 27-59 for a thorough analysis of this dialogue.

[5] Thomas 'English Past', p. 128.

[6] For general overviews, see: J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Version*s, (Gordian Press, 1974) chapter 1; Michael A. Faletra, *The History of the Kings of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Broadview: 2008) pp. 14-21; Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright, 'Introduction' in *Geoffrey of Monmouth: the History of the Kings of Britain*, (Boydell Press, 2007) pp vii-lxxvi (p. Lvii-lix); Karen Jankulak, *Writers of Wales: Geoffrey of Monmouth*, series editor R. Brinley Jones (Univeristy of Wales Press, 2010), pp. 13-21. For a more comprehensive study see: Edmond Faral, *La légende Arthurienne: études et documents*, 3 vols. (H. Champion, 1929) despite the title, Faral actually goes chapter by chapter through DGB and provides source analysis for each.

meaning for different audiences at different periods.'[7] Specifically, it is about understanding the meaning of a work by examining the expectations of its readers. It is my contention that, by situating *DGB* in dialogue with its past (historical genre expectations, and how sources are alluded to, quoted from, translated, and otherwise manipulated to invoke specific interpretations and understandings in the reader) and its future (how readers responded to, re-interpreted, translated, and otherwise used the text in their lives), we can come to a more accurate understanding of how little Geoffrey actually invented, and the extent to which he 'conned' readers into believing a fictional 'history.'

Part of the difficulty of understanding literary works from the past (or, indeed, from other cultures), are the limits of modern, western theories of literary criticism. Jonathan Culler notes:

> [c]riticism has made almost no progress toward a comprehensive theory of fictions…. What is the status and what is the role of fictions or, to pose the same kind of problem in another way, what are the relations (the historical, the psychic, the social relationships) between the real and the fictive?[8]

These questions are especially relevant when attempting to reconstruct a historical culture and a historical people's understanding and reception of a medieval text. The twelfth century is a particularly difficult period for the classification of texts, as it is likely around this time that narratives began to develop features of what modern readers would recognize as fiction.[9] Furthermore, as most of the texts have survived in compilations, many of which have no obvious theme or guiding principle, it is exceptionally difficult to determine with any certainty what the purpose (education, preservation, entertainment) of any given text was intended to be.

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[7] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs : Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001) p.13.

[8] Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, p 6.

[9] Monika Otter, Inventiones, (University of North Carolina, 1996), p.1.

DGB has been many things to many people over the past nine hundred years, and a comprehensive study examining all the many meanings and roles it has adopted over these years is well beyond the scope of this project. Here, the aim is to demonstrate how situating *DGB* within an appropriate discursive space, in this case the space into which it was initially released, adds needed clarity and perspective on Monmouth's contribution to the Arthurian legend.

The difficulty, of course, is that, if Geoffrey *did* have access to recorded sources of Arthurian material, they have since been lost. However, it is possible to re-construct some of what those sources may have contained using an intertextual approach. With this method, the goal is not to identify previous texts which influenced a given work, but to situate a work within a discursive space, wherein sources also include symbols and practices whose origins may be lost or obscured but which continue to influence the expectations of an audience and the interpretation of a work. To accomplish this, this study will be divided into three sections.

Part one will focus on the discursive space in which the *DGB* and the *BYB* existed by first examining concepts of genres as they existed in Geoffrey's day. Our study here will begin, in chapter one, with an exploration of the nature of historiography itself, and will deconstruct one of the most common assumptions regarding *DGB*—that it was always intended to be a factual, 'historical' account. Here we will look at the tropes of the history genre and reveal how Geoffrey follows or diverges from these tropes. Chapter two will continue our study of genre by exploring the emergence of fictionality and examining Geoffrey's 'truth claim'—the understanding between author and reader about how much truth actually exists in the text.

In part two, we will embark on a study of sources. Not, as mentioned above, a review of all the sources Geoffrey used, but rather a brief study of *how* he used them: where does *DGB*'s account diverge from the source material? And, more importantly, what impact do such

divergences have on the narrative? Chapter three, then, will focus on his use of known English and Welsh source materials, particularly the events immediately preceding and following Arthur's era: the arrival of the Saxons and the final decline of the Britons. These sections were chosen because they cover material well documented in surviving Welsh and Old English sources, and thus demonstrate how Geoffrey drew on and adjusted narratives taken from beyond the Norman inheritance of classical texts. We will thus see Geoffrey's penchant for embellishing, re-organising, and re-casting key events, and how these changes are used to create particular impressions and further specific narrative or political agendas. Then, in chapter four, we will examine some of the more insidious assumptions modern scholarship has taken towards the 'very old book.' By looking at story lines most commonly attributed to Geoffrey's imagination, and how unlikely a man of Geoffrey's time and place is to have invented certain story lines—such as Arthur's campaign against the Romans—without influence from elsewhere. Through this, we will highlight the possibility that Geoffrey's 'very old book'—or, at the very least, the oral tradition he alludes to in his prologue—was a more tangible influence on *DGB*'s narrative than scholars like to acknowledge.

Finally, in part three, I will demonstrate how placing the text within the appropriate discursive space sheds light on what sort of (now lost) sources contributed to the Arthurian chapters of Geoffrey's text through a case study of the apparent villainization of the Welsh Medrawt through his association with *DGB*'s Modred. This will again consist of two chapters. First, chapter five will look back at the pre-Galfridian tradition surrounding Medrawt and explore why the translators of *BYB* would choose to associate this little-known but apparently well-respected character with Arthur's infamous traitor. Then, chapter six will look ahead to the development of Mordred, Arthur's son through incest, and aspects of sovereignty, legitimacy,

and faithless perfidy preserved for later generations by the change in their relationship. This chapter will also briefly look at the establishment of the Round Table as a means of translating a traditionally Welsh style of leadership for readers familiar with more empirical monarchies, and what these two enduring alterations to the legend can tell us about the pervasiveness of Welsh political culture in the post-Galfridian Arthurian tradition.

A Brief Note on Editions and Translations

Because 'the *DGB* came as close to what we mean by the word "bestseller" as it is possible to get in a medieval Latin context,'[11] there are hundreds of editions and translations to choose from. This study will make use of Michael D. Reeve's edited text and the accompanying translation by Neil Wright, which sought primarily to re-construct the British-Circulation manuscripts Φ or Δ through a coalition of fourteen separate manuscripts chosen after a careful classification and examination of all 219 surviving manuscripts.[12] The edition uses facing-page translations, and numbers both English and Latin with the book numbers used by Neil Wright in the Bern NS. As these book numbers have since been used by other editors of the text,[13] I will use these numbers in association with line numbers to cite the English text (e.g. 8:135 would refer to book eight, paragraph 135). References to the Latin text will present the book number in Roman numerals and will include line numbers (VIII.392-400: book eight, lines 392-400), as presented in the Reeve and Wright edition.

Fewer manuscripts of the *BYB* survive, and fewer yet have been edited for public access. This study will thus use John Jay Parry's text and translation, which is based on the *Cotton*

11 Jaakko Tahkohallio, 'Early Manuscript Dissemination' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020), pp. 155-180 (p. 180).

12 Reeve and Wright, 'Introduction', p xxxi-l.

13 Michael A. Faletra, *The Histrory of the Kings of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth*, (Broadview: 2008), p. 37.

Cleopatra B manuscript, found in the British Museum, which Parry chose because he considered the text to be 'very much closer to the original'[14] than other texts. However, Parry also includes variants of wording taken from the *Book of Bassingwerk* manuscript, as 'although the Cotton manuscript gives us a much better text than the *Book of Bassingwerk*… there are passages where it is clearly at fault, and in a few of them the *Book of Bassingwerk* preserves what seems to be the correct reading.'[15] These variants are given as footnotes to Parry's text, which includes both the Welsh and Parry's English translation, and will likewise be included when appropriate here. Parry's translation received mixed reviews,[16] but it is the only published volume that includes the full Welsh text,[17] and, as I will rely mostly on the original Welsh text, the quality of the translation is immaterial for the purposes of this study. *BYB* lacks the book and paragraph numbers that have become standard for *DGB*. However, Parry's text includes references to the Cotton Cleopatra folio numbers. Thus, citations to *BYB* will use the folio numbers as recorded in Parry's text.[18]

[14] John Jay Parry, *Brut Y Brenhinedd*, (Mediaeval Academy of America,1937), p. xvii.

[15] Parry, *BYB*, p xvi.

[16] For example, W J Gruffydd, 'Parry J. P., Brut y Brenhinedd (Book Review)', *Medium Aevum* 9.1 (1940), pp. 44-49 indicated it is 'throughout unreliable and would be of little use to the serious student' (p. 45), while Kenneth Jackson, 'Brut y Brenhinedd', The Modern Language Review (Cambridge University Press, 1938), 61–62 said: 'on the whole the translation is excellent, though sometimes one feels that Professor Parry has missed the true shade of meaning' (p. 61).

[17] Brynley F Roberts, *Brut y Brenhinedd: Llanstephan MS. 1 Version*, (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1984) includes selections of *BYB*, but without translation.

[18] Parry's volume places one folio of the Welsh text on the top half of the page and the English translation below, so a folio number can reference both the original text and the translation.

Part One: A Discussion of Genre

Historia

As we begin our study, it is necessary to examine some of the more wide-spread assumptions about *DGB* and its classification as an historiographical text. The most obvious, of course, is the title: as was noted in the introduction, the text has long been referred to as *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain, HRB*). Michael D. Reeve, as part of his intensive study of 217 manuscripts, concluded that 'Geoffrey must actually have called the work *De Gestis Britonum,'*[19] (*Of the Deeds of the Britons*). This original title is more in tune with the Welsh title *Brut y Brenhinedd* — literally 'The Kings of the Britons,' with no claim to being a history. Although Reeve discovered the misnomer, he does not delve into how the change of title can or should affect how the text is read beyond noting that 'keeping the familiar title will do no harm, though, as long as no arguments are founded on it.'[20] Siân Echard likewise declares that the original title has little bearing on arguments because Geoffrey opens 'by announcing that he has been searching for an *historia* of British kings, and he closes as well by saying that he has been writing about their *historia*.'[21] Echard's first point is evident from *DGB*'s preface, but the second is an interpretation of the text likely informed by the erroneous title. Moreover, it is important to take into account the historical understanding of *historia,* as opposed to story, fable, fiction, or fact. Thus, we will first examine the historical connotations of the word *historia*, and the implications associated with the genre of 'historical' writing in Geoffrey's era, and then we will

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[19] Reeve and Wright, 'Introduction', in *Geoffrey of Monmouth: the History of the Kings of Britain*, (Boydell Press, 2007) pp vii-lxxvi (p. viii).

[20] Reeve and Wright, 'Introduction', p. lix.

[21] Siân Echard, 'Introduction', in *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, (University of Wales Press, 2011) pp. 1-5, (p. 5).

look at the two passages referenced by Echard, as well as the context of *DGB*'s publication, to determine the extent to which Geoffrey meets, or does not meet, the expectations of the genre.

First, a dissection of the term 'history' itself. Note that the meaning of 'the literal events of a factual past' was not applied until the late 15th century.[22] Prior to this, 'history' and 'story' were almost interchangeable, as both, along with the Latin *historia*, derive from the Greek *historia*: 'knowledge, account, narrative,'[23] In fact, the primary distinction between 'history' and 'story' was more a matter of degrees of formality, where *historia* was recognised as a specific genre or a branch of rhetoric defined by Isidore of Seville's[24] [d. 636 AD] as: 'historia est narratio rei gestae per quam ea quae in praeterito facta sunt dinoscuntur.'[25] Note the emphasis on the distance between the narration of the past and the past itself. By this standard, history is merely a lens, a means of peering into the past to witness what came before, but it is not itself reality. On the surface, this might seem like an obvious and unnecessary distinction: even today, we understand that our knowledge of historical events is coloured by our own experiences as well as which version of events we've been told. Modern historians recognise the intersectionality of experience, and how merely recounting events can never truly reconstruct what it meant to live those events. But it is important to understand that medieval peoples likewise understood that a written account of historical events was not necessarily a literal recounting of events exactly as they occurred. Thus, even as the text became known as *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the word *historia* would not have implied that the text was a literally true

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22 Douglas Harper, 'History (n.), *Online Etymology Dictionary*, (2024).

23 Harper, 'History'.

24 Isidore of Seville is also credited as one of the sources for the world history that appears at the beginining of the B-text of the *Annales Cambriae*. See Ben Guy, 'Historical Scholars and Dishonest Charlatans', in *The Chronicles of Medieval Wales and the March*, ed. by Ben Guy, Georgia Henley, Owain Wyn Jones, and Rebecca Thomas (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp.69-106 (p. 75). This illustrates the continuing influence of Isidore's writings even beyond Geoffrey's era.

25 'History is a narration of a matter of accomplishments through which past deeds are distinguished.' Latin text quoted in Monika Otter, *Inventiones* (University of North Carolina, 1996) p. 9; translation mine.

account of past facts, only a narrative, or story, set in past times based on real people and places and deeds.

This is not to say that *DGB* did not carry any claim to or implication of truth. Otter notes that: 'in many medieval uses of *history*, the semantic elements of cognition and of truth outweigh the semantic element of "pastness." To Walter Map, for instance, *historia* is contrasted not, as it is for us, with "present"… but with "fabula."'[26] For Servius, a 12th century Virgilian commentator, the difference was that '*fabulae* are stories contrary to nature (*contra naturam*), whether factual at heart or not, while *historia* includes any plausible stories whether they happened or not.'[27] Thus, *fabula* was a term for stories more closely associated with legend or myth. However, it may also have referred merely to conversation or small talk.[28] Where *historia* was a grand thing, something thought out and reasoned, that impacted the present, and would continue to impact the future, *fabula* was small, passing, even ephemeral, but that did not imply there was no truth in it. Indeed, both *historia* and *fabula* could lay claim to elements of truth: some may have contained factual accounts of the past, some only moral or spiritual truths such as those found in Aesop's fables or Christ's parables. *DGB* as a whole falls more on the side of *historia* than *fabula* if only for the sheer length and the cohesive nature of its text, not to mention its use of the Latin language.

Latin, even today, imbues a text with a sense of academic authority, an impression that would have been doubly prevalent in Geoffrey's era. As Echard puts it: 'Latin came as part of a package with a certain kind of education, one that included self-conscious awareness of matters

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26 Otter, *Inventiones*, p. 9.

27 Justin A Haynes, *The Medieval Classic: Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Virgilian Commentary Tradition*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p 97.

28 John C. Traupman, *The Bantam New College Latin & English Dictionary*, (Bantam Books, 1995), p. 174.

of style at the level of word, argument, and form.'[29] We can see the effects of the authoritative weight *DGB* became imbued with even within Geoffrey's lifetime in how quickly it became a 'favourite sourcebook' for chroniclers looking to fill gaps in their accounts,[30] and Gerald of Wales' scathing dismissal of *DGB*'s value as a true record of the past, written a mere fifty odd years after *DGB*'s latest possible release, uses the erroneous title *Historia Regum Britanniae*,[31] so already the text had achieved the reputation for being a work of historical truth.

However, all that being said, the internal evidence that *DGB* was *intended* to be read as a factual record is scant and, in fact, tends to lean away from traditional indicators of an historiographical text. The novelty of how Geoffrey writes is likely lost on the modern reader, but to his contemporaries, the style would have been a stark contrast from earlier and even contemporary historical writings. The narrative of *DGB* is clearly not an annal, where events are carefully listed chronologically by the year in which they occurred—in fact, Geoffrey does not even reference dates that were well established. For example, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English* (*EHE*) and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*) agree that Hengist and Horsa arrived in Britain in 449, and though Geoffrey was familiar with these sources, he says only that they arrived at the same time as Vortigern, newly self-crowned king, was being troubled by reports of his military losses.[32] At the same time, Geoffrey's style differs from narrative historiographical writing in that he does not draw attention to when he is using sources his audience may have read previously. As Georgia Henley puts it:

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29 Echard, 'Introduction', p. 1.

30 Laura Keeler, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Late Latin Chronicles*, (University of California Press, 1946) p. 2. See also R.H. Fletcher *The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles* (Boston, 1906).

31 Gerald of Wales, *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Books, 1978), p.117.

32 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. by Michaeld D. Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright (Boydell, 2007) VI.237-249. (6.97-98)

> Geoffrey does not depart from the authorial voice he uses to narrate the *DGB* throughout. By contrast, William [of Malmsbury] and Henry [of Huntington] include a number of written sources in their histories that disrupt their own authorial voices with the insertion of other authorities relevant to early English history, including letters by Alcuin, Gregory, and Boniface that they have gotten from Bede…. It is through the elision of sources and the establishment of authority that Geoffrey departs the most from the commonplace tools of history writing exemplified by his two contemporaries. The entire *DGB* is written in his voice, with no departure or digression from the main narrative other than the deliberately marked departure of the *PM* [*Prophetiae Merlini*; *Prophesies of Merlin*], and little discussion of sources.[33]

The difference in styles described here is likely familiar to modern readers, and, as a modern reader can quickly distinguish an academic text from a fictional story or a passage of creative non-fiction by the presence or absence of formal quotations and citations, it is a discredit to medieval readers to assume they would not have recognised this feature of Geoffrey's narrative style, even though it was novel at the time.

To be clear, it is not that Geoffrey does not use sources, but that there is little *discussion* of them. That is, he does not usually interrupt his narrative to identify those sources.[34] When he does include notes regarding other texts, it is usually to direct readers who are interested in learning more about a particular event or person towards a resource they may find interesting,

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[33] Georgia Henley, 'Conventions of History Writing', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed by Georgia Henly and Joshua Byron Smith (Brill, 2020) pp. 291-316 (p. 303).

[34] One could argue that he does this to preserve his narrative framing: he has presented his text as a translation of the 'very old book' and consistently referencing other texts could detract from the authority of his primary source, but he could have incorporated source naming as either translations of the very old book's source referencing, or as interruptions to his narrative.

ostensibly because he does not want to tarnish the details with his 'rustic style,'[35] rather than to add authority to his own work.

Now that we have a somewhat better understanding of the term *historia,* I would like to turn our attention to the passages Echard noted as evidence Geoffrey was writing a history. The first is the often quoted prologue, and the second is from the very end of the text.

In the prologue, '*historia*' and its derivatives appear three times. The first is the origin of the erroneous title ('saepius animo reuoluens in hystoriam regum Britanniae inciderem')[36] and could just as easily be translated as 'my thoughts turned to the story of the kings of the Britons'. The second ('uir in oratoria arte atque in exoticis hystoriis eruditus')[37] refers to Archdeacon Walter's background, which is not relevant to our discussion here but will be addressed, briefly, in chapter four. The last, and most relevant to our discussion here, is the statement 'nam si ampullosis dictionibus paginam illinissem, taedium legentibus ingererem, dum magis in exponendis uerbis quam in historia intelligenda ipsos commorari oporteret.'[38] This last is a direct statement that specifically labels Geoffrey's text as 'historia'. Not *annales,* which might imbue it with the modern sense of a factual accounting of past events (though would perhaps be misleading, as, again, Geoffrey does not usually track the specific year of any given event), but the ambiguous *historia*. Wright chooses to translate the term here as 'narrative', which conveys the same ambiguity, though other translators, such as Michael Faletra, use 'history.'[39] Notably,

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35 See, for example, *DGB,* I.501: Quam contentionem quia Gildas hystoricus satis prolixe tractauit, eam praeterire praeelegi, ne id quod tantus scriba tanto stilo perarauit uidear uiliori dictamine maculare. (Since their argument has been discussed at length by the historian Gildas, I have chosen to omit it, lest my poor style should appear to spoil what a great author has described so well.)

36 *DGB,* Prologus.1-2: 'my thoughts turned to the history of the kings of Britain'

37 *DGB,* Prologus. 8-9: 'a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories'

38 *DGB,* Prologus.15-17: 'had I larded my pages with bombastic terms, I would tire my readers with the need to linger over understanding my words rather than following my narrative'.

39 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain,* trans. by Michael Faletra (Broadview, 2008), p. 41. Faletra's full translation of this passage reads: 'I would certainly annoy my readers if I attempted to render the original in flowery speech, since they would dwell more on unraveling my words than on understanding the history

the early Welsh translators used the borrowed term *ystoria*[40] rather than a more specific term such as *hanes* (annal; history) or *chwedl* (tale) or even *brut* (chronicle) as used in the title of the Welsh translation, that might ratify Geoffrey's text as either a factual history or an entertaining story. Ultimately, from the prologue alone, there is no indication that Geoffrey intended *DGB* to be taken as a factual account of past events.

The second passage, from the close of the text, is more complicated. It states: 'quem de historia eorum ueraciter editum in honore praedictorum principum hoc modo in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui.'[41] This is a difficult sentence to translate, because '*ueraciter*,'[42] which Wright translates as 'truthful,' is not a standard adjective, nor does it follow adjectival conventions. Though Latin allows adjectives to come before or after the noun they modify, when the adjective is emphatic or indicates a non-observable quality (such as an emotional state or subjective evaluation of worth), it is commonly put before the noun.[43] By this guideline, a term indicating the non-observable quality of truthfulness should come before the noun it is describing,[44] but Geoffrey's sentence puts the modifying *ueraciter* after *historia eorum* (their history). Moreover, *ueraciter* is not an adjectival form but an adverbial form derived from *uerax* (truthful) + *-ter*,[45] (the Latin equivalent of English's -ly) As an adverb, *ueraciter* should modify the nearest verb, in this case *transferre* (translate). Because *ueraciter* is not particularly close to *transferre*, the word again seems to be misplaced within the sentence. Faletra was so confounded

itself.' He also sugests, in footnote 2, that 'Geoffrey perhaps alludes here to the highly decorous phraseology of Gildas.'

[40] *BYB*, fol. 1v.

[41] *DGB*, XI.606-607. Translation to be discussed.

[42] Wright preserves Geoffrey's use of 'u' as the lowercase V. For consistency, and as the 'u' symbol more accurately reflects the Latin pronounciation, I will retain the convention.

[43] B.L.Gildersleeve and G. Lodge, *Gildersleeve's Latin Grammar*, (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1997), p. 185. See also Spevak, Olga., *The Noun Phrase in Classical Latin Prose* (Brill, 2014), p. 55-76 for an in-depth analysis on the positioning and use of Latin adjectives.

[44] Indeed, Geoffrey uses the phrase 'uerae fidei' (true faith) three times, and each instance places the adjective 'uerae' before the noun. See *DGB*, IV.405, V.1, and VI. 374.

[45] Gildersleeve, *Latin Grammar* p. 48. For example: fortis (brave) becomes foriter (bravely).

by what to do with *ueraciter* that he has it play double duty in his translation: 'This same book, which deals so *truthfully* with the honour of the native princes, I have endeavoured to translate into Latin as *accurately* as I possibly could.'[46] The Welsh translators chose an adverbial reading: 'Ac ef ay traethws yn wir ac yn gwbyl o herwyd ystoria y racdywededigeon kymre:'[47] if anyone wished to claim this was a true history, one might expect it to be the Welsh, as inheritors of the legacy contained within the text, but such does not appear to be the case. However, note that, again, the translation uses the borrowed *ystoria*, preserving some of the ambiguity of Geoffrey's original sentence.[48]

Furthermore, as this confounding sentence comes right at the end of the text, it appears far too late for a first-time reader to determine how they will interpret the text as they read it: it seems, if we are willing to credit Geoffrey with such cleverness, that he calculated these remarks to allow his readers to interpret it as they wished. Because the truth is, grammatically, either reading is acceptable: it *could* be saying the history itself is truthful, or it *could* refer only to the translation. In essence, a reader might see whichever sense they chose. This passage, more than anything else Geoffrey wrote, indicates that Geoffrey was experimenting with a new, emergent genre, but also that he was hedging his bets as to how it would be received by the public.

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46 *HRB*, trans. By Faletra, 12.208, emphasis added.

47 *BYB* Fol. 108v: And he treated of it all truly and fully, in accordance with the history of the aforesaid Cambrians.

48 Similarly, though Wace does not include a Geoffrey's prologue in his French verse translation *Roman de Brut* (*RDB*), his brief introduction captures this same ambiguity:
'Ki vult oïr e vult saveir / De rei en rei e d'eir en eir / Ki cil furent e dunt il vindrent / Ki Engleterre primes tindrent, / Quels reis I ad en ordre eü, / E qui anceis e ki puis fu, / Maistre Wace l'ad translaté
Ki en conte la verité. / Si cum li livres le devise…Wace, *Roman de Brut: A history of the British*: text and translation, revised edition, ed. and trans. by Judith Elizabeth Weiss (University of Exeter Press, 2002) p. 2.
['Whoever wishes to hear and to know about the successive kings and their heirs who once upon a time were the rulers of England—who they were, whence they came, what was their sequence, who came earlier and who later—Master Wace has translated it and tells it truthfully. As the book relates…']

Fictionality

Today, the concept of fiction is an inherent aspect of some of our most treasured texts. However, the term 'fiction' was not applied to literature until the early 19th century, and was derived from the 13th century definition of 'that which is invented or imagined in the mind.'[49] The Latin *fictionem,* which serves as the root word, is a noun related to the inventing or feigning of something. That being said, the idea of 'fictionality, in the sense familiar to us, had its first flowering in twelfth-century narrative.'[50] Note Otter's wording here: she is not saying that fictionality simply emerged, fully formed, in the twelfth century, but that aspects of it begin to make their appearance in narrative texts written in the twelfth century. In other words, texts contemporary with *DGB.* Thus, it is important to recognize that, when *DGB* debuted, there were no clear markers by which readers could identify it as a work of 'fiction,' but there are nonetheless indicators that *DGB* was experimenting with traditional genres.

As mentioned in chapter one, part of the reason *DGB* is so readily classified as an historia is that its Latin prose imbues it with a factual or academic weight, while most scholars reserve 'fiction' for texts written in poetry, or at least the vernacular, such as the body of works classified as French romance.[51] But there, too, is an unreliable delineation: Wace's *Roman de Brut* (*RDB,* 1155)—essentially a French translation of *DGB*—sits on the line between chronicle and romance. It is not my purpose here to classify any given text as fiction or non-fiction, but it is important to examine the validity of certain assumptions associated with Geoffrey's work in light of *DGB*'s close connection to and influence over the emerging genre of Romance and, in a

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49 Douglas Harper, 'Fiction (n.)' on *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2024).
50 Monika Otter, *Inventiones,* (University of North Carolina, 1996), p.1.
51 Otter, *Inventiones,* p.1.

broader sense, the blossoming concept of fictionality. With this in mind, we will again examine Geoffrey's text looking for indicators of genre—in this case, indicators of fictionality.

As with our discussion of 'history,' it is useful to begin with a clear understanding of what fictionality is. As this is an academic term not in use during Geoffrey's lifetime, an historical definition is not possible, and a modern definition of fiction is irrelevant. Therefore, fictionality, for the purposes of this study, will follow Monika Otter's framework, which:

> is defined by two different though not entirely separate approaches: a textual and a pragmatic one. A certain sense of textuality—that is, a self-aware notion of textual coherence by the text's own internal criteria, 'absence' of the author, and fictionalization of the author role…. This approach, however, makes the definition so broad as to be virtually useless: it would make any text that is consciously textual 'fictional.'… The obvious corrective to the broadly textual definition is pragmatic: the understanding between author and readers as to how this text should be taken, how it refers to outside reality, what its truth claim is.[52]

That is to say, a text must include fictional elements from a textual standpoint and should also have some indication for the reader to understand that not everything they read is meant to be taken as literal, factual truth.

The first aspect of Otter's textual qualifier, the 'self-aware notion of textual coherence,' can be satisfied by an analysis of a text's themes and continuity. Though and a detailed examination of these aspects of the text is beyond the scope of this project, even a cursory read-though of *DGB* demonstrates this conscious coherence through the recurring cycle of righteous conquerers, united peace, and discordant and unfaithful strife. While the narrative pacing of Geoffrey's many regime changes appears to be stylistically modelled after the Old Testament

[52] Otter, *Inventiones*, p.6-7.

historical books,[53] there is a convergence of classical and biblical sources in Geoffrey's use of giants, most notably Goemagog and the giant of Mont-Saint-Michel, the latter of which echoes both the biblical battle of David and Goliath as well as the classical encounter between Ulysses and the Cyclops.[54] Despite this melding of classical and biblical styles and tropes, it all comes together to create a unique and consistent style: Geoffrey weaves references into his work not only through direct allusions and partial quotes, but also through narrative pacing, style, and tropes. The DGB thus engages with its reader on multiple fronts, delivering or subverting expectations as necessary to bring the events together in a 'continuous narrative' of 'excellent style,' as established in the prologue, and easily satisfying Otter's first qualifier. Thus, we will focus on the second: the authorial role and truth claim. Ultimately, 'for fiction to be recognized as such, there must be a "contract" that suspends or "brackets" truth claims and therefore protects the speaker from the charge of lying.'[55] Geoffrey introduces his protection early: he is, after all, not the writer of this history, but merely a translator of a 'very old book.'

Geoffrey's claim to be a mere translator excuses him for any factual inaccuracies even as it lends authority to the finished product. The book he 'translated,' of course, has never been found, nor are there any contemporary attestations to its existence, and most scholars 'now recognize this passage and Walter's book as a fictional literary trope.'[56] Incidentally, it is the same trope found in Dares Phrygius's *De excidio Troiae* [*The Fall of Troy; DET*],[57] which ends its narrative (with the titular fall of Troy) precisely where *DGB* begins (with survivors from Troy travelling to Britain). It needs to be emphasized that, in Geoffrey's day, there was no doubt that

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53 Paul Russell, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Classical and Biblical Inheritance' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp. 67-104 (p. 91-94).

54 Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance' p. 96.

55 Otter, *Inventiones*, p.7.

56 Joshua Byron Smith, 'Introduction and Biography' in A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp 1-28 (p.21).

57 Smith, 'Introduction', p.21-23. Russell 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance', p. 70.

DET was a genuine first-hand account of the fall of Troy: it was not until late into the early modern period that the text's authority came into question.[58] Thus, Geoffrey's claim to be translating an older text which likely did not exist was not borrowed from Dares, but the translation claim definitely carried a heavy implication of authority and truth.

However, there are other aspects of the prologue that ought to be examined before we can draw any conclusions as to Geoffrey's truth claim. In addition to telling us the text is a translation, Geoffrey also asserts that he is using his own, rustic voice, rather than gathering elaborate and flowery words from more eloquent texts:

> Rogatu itaque illius ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo propriisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui; nam si ampullosis dictionibus paginam illinissem, taedium legentibus ingererem, dum magis in exponendis uerbis quam in historia intelligenda ipsos commorari oporteret.[59]

This passage is superficially meant to excuse Geoffrey's imperfect or unpolished Latin, but, in the same breath, expertly (and ironically) evokes a passage from Virgil's first Eclogue, in which Tityrus is permitted to 'play what I like upon my rustic pipes,' (also described as a 'slender reed'[60]). Again, we find Geoffrey playing with his readers: in the same breath by which he claims to be nothing but a humble translator, he reveals himself as an educated and eloquent writer. Russell points out that, 'while the reference has been noted, its significance has not been recognised even though it offers an immediate reason for thinking afresh about how Geoffrey

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[58] Justin A. Haynes, *The Medieval Classic: Twelfth-Century Latin Epic and the Virgilian Commentary Tradition*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2021) p 106.

[59] *DGB*, Prologue 12-17. I was persuaded by his request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed pipe; had I larded my pages with bombastic terms, I would tire my readers with the need to linger over understanding my words rather than following my narrative.

[60] Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance', p. 68.

was using source material which was probably part of his staple education.[61]' Moreover, the irony of this statement: a claim that he is not borrowing words from others expressed in words that are, in fact, borrowed, speaks to Geoffrey's authorial role as well as his truth claim. If even his claim of being nothing but a humble translator is dressed up with allusions to other works, an educated reader (and, in Geoffrey's day, there were few un-educated readers around) might question how much trust could be placed in the rest of the text.

Allusions aside, even the assertion that he is relying on his 'own reed pipe' evokes an image of a musician playfully improvising a tune rather than studiously performing another's composition. By introducing himself into the text in this paradoxical and ironic manner, Geoffrey becomes more than just the author or translator of the text, he becomes the narrator, a character within the text itself. In other words, though *DGB*'s author is very much present in the text, this statement indicates that Geoffrey's role as a humble translator is a fiction—even a lie—that the reader must accept as true, if only within the world of the text.

The reed pipe is not the only allusion to Virgil in *DGB*; in fact, 'it is easy to spot such allusions, but far harder to gauge their import to Geoffrey's audience.'[62] Part of the difficulty is that, in the 12th century, Virgil, and his *Aeneid* in particular, occupied 'a unique place… in the twelfth-century cannon.'[63] Not only was Virgil one of the most admired pagan poets (second only to Homer), he was 'presumed to have possessed deep philosophical knowledge.'[64] There was even a popular trend in the 12th century in particular that sought to understand his *Aeneid* allegorically[65]—ostensibly because Virgil's account did not precisely line up with the 'true' events as recorded in Dares. 'The net effect… is that Servius and other commentators, including

61 Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance', p. 69.
62 Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance', p. 69.
63 Haynes, *Medieval Classic*, p 3.
64 Haynes, Medieval Classic, p 2.
65 Haynes, Medieval Classic, p. 6.

Macrobius, undermine the credibility of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a historical text, even while building up Virgil as an excellent historian.'[66] Thus, the commentary tradition makes it clear that historical 'facts' were less important than the poetic demands of plot, narrative, symbolism, or even the poet's need to please their patron.

The evocation of Virgil offers an additional layer to Geoffrey's truth claim that is generally overlooked, especially as it is not a direct nor an attributed quote. By alluding to the poet in this way, Geoffrey quietly pairs *DGB* with Virgil's work. Poets were excused from religiously following the facts, but Geoffrey's 'rustic style' was not suitable for epic poetry: his statement that he is using a style free of bombastic terms so that his readers can more easily follow his narrative could be a way of introducing the fact that he has chosen to write in prose rather than poetry. Paul Russell notes a parallel between Tityrus and, by extension, Virgil, and Geoffrey of Monmouth: Virgil, under the protection of Octavian and other powerful friends, was able to write what he liked, just as Tityrus could play what he liked under the protection of a shade tree, and just as Geoffrey, in turn, was able to 'translate' his work at the persuasion of Walter.[67] By likening himself to Virgil through the imagery of the reed pipe, Geoffrey is also laying claim to the protections poets enjoyed to embellish and embroider their work with lies or, as we might call them today, fictions.

That Geoffrey chose to write *DGB* in prose rather than poetry because he did not feel his poetic skills were up to the task is corroborated by the fact that his one attempt at poetry, the *Vita Merlini* (*VM*, written nearly a decade after *DGB*) does not appear to have had the success *DGB* enjoyed. Throughout the middle ages, *VM* was a relatively obscure text[68] and consequently had

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66 Haynes, Medieval Classic, p. 104.

67 Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Influence', p. 69-70.

68 Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp. 31-66 (p. 63).

'no discernible impact' on later literary developments.[69] This could be an indication that the poem lacked the literary brilliance that made *DGB* such a compelling read. Similarly, Geoffrey's much less quoted dedication of *PM*, apologizes for the language of the prophecies: 'pudibundus Brito non doctus canere quod in Brittannico Merlinus dulciter et metrice cecinit,'[70] further indicating Geoffrey's insecurity (or humility) regarding his poetic skill. While there is some doubt as to whether or not this dedication was written by Geoffrey himself or the scribe of this edition,[71] the opening of *VM* itself offers a similar sentiment: 'Ergo te cuperem complecti carmine digno / sed non sufficio, licet Orpheus et Camerinus / et Macer et Marius magnique Rabirius oris / ore meo canerent Musis comitantibus omnes.[72]' It seems at every opportunity, Geoffrey expresses a reluctance to engage with the poetic medium, and while one might be inclined to ascrbe this to his ostensible humility, it is equally possible that his humility in this respect is a genuine reflection of his poetic ability.

This still leaves us with Geoffrey's claim that he is merely translating a 'very old book.' It is tempting to rest Geoffrey's entire truth claim on his assertion that he is merely a translator of 'quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum,'[73] and conclude that, as the book he was allegedly translating very likely never existed, his truth claim is a lie. However, Otter's concept of a truth claim is not dependant of the actual veracity of the claim itself, but the understanding it conveys to the reader as to what it is they are reading. Because the truth claim does not itself

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69 Françoise Le Saux, 'Geoffrey of Momouth's *De gestis Britonum* and Twelfth-Century Romance' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp. 235-256 (p. 235).

70 Smith, 'Introduction' p.20. 'I, a bashful Briton, have not been taught how to sing what Merlin had sung sweetly and in verse in the British language'.

71 Smith, 'Introduction', p.20.

72 Russell, 'Classical and Biblical Inheritance', p 73. 'Indeed, it might well have been yourself whom I would wish to embrace in a [noble poem.] / But I am not the man for it: no, not even if Orpheus and Camerinus and Macer and Marius and Rabirius of the great voice were to sing through my mouth and the Muses were my accompanists.'

73 *DGB*, Prologus 9-10: 'a certain old book in the British tongue'

have to be based in fact—for example, a modern author of historical fiction might narrate its story through a completely fictional character—it does not matter if the 'very old book' existed or not, what matters is what his readers were expected to imagine the book to be: where was it meant to have come from? Who was meant to have written it? Is the 'very old book' a chronicle, rescued from the past, kept by a series of dedicated historians, or is it the missing record of tales 'proclaimed by many people *as if* they had been *entertainingly* and memorably written down'?[74] These questions are key to understanding the type of authority, the truth claim, Geoffrey was imbuing his text with by attributing it to this source, in the same way that our theoretical historical fiction book must explain how its fictional narrator came to 'witness' the events of the story and what perspective they bring to the events described.

We will return to these questions regarding the nature of the 'very old book' in chapter four. For the time being, it is reasonable to conclude that Geoffrey's prologue undoubtedly offered his earliest readers a mixed idea of how much they ought to believe him by invoking connections to the unquestioned historicity of Dere's *DET* as well as the poetic and allegorical truth of Virgil's writings. This melange of images, combined with Geoffrey's unique style, as discussed in chapter one, should have, at the very least, imbued his readers with the sense that they were reading something new. Yet, again, it appears as though Geoffrey was hedging his bets: he provided enough of a truth claim to satisfy those who might wish for a historiography, but with almost the same breath provides enough doubt for the reader to approach the text with the same attitude they might bring to a piece of epic poetry: an imbued understanding that not everything written is exactly as it seems.

[74] *DGB*, Prologus 1, emphasis added

Part Two: A Discussion of Sources

Geoffrey and his Sources

Having established that Geoffrey was at the vanguard of an emerging literary movement, experimenting with genre in ways even he may not have fully understood, it is time to turn our attention to the actual content of *DGB*. If we are to understand how much Geoffrey drew on the so-called 'pre-Galfridian' Arthurian tradition, we must look at the ways Geoffrey used known sources. Many studies exist detailing which sources Geoffrey drew on to create or compile the *DGB*,[75] and while an exhaustive review of such studies here would neither meaningfully contribute to the available literature nor add substantively to this analysis, it is important to recognise *how* Geoffrey used his sources. Of particular interest are the ways in which he might re-arrange, embellish, or re-frame source material to create his intended effect—whatever it might be. Thus, this chapter will not be an exhaustive list of sources alluded to in *DGB*, but will focus on a few select episodes and how Geoffrey altered details and what effect those alterations have on the episode itself, the wider plot of the chapter, and how they act as indicators of genre.

The episodes drawing on English source material—such as the arrival of the Saxons to the Isles, and their interactions with the British inhabitants, are particularly illuminating because of just how much Geoffrey apparently alters the traditional English narrative as told in texts such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (*EH*) and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*). Rebecca Thomas notes that 'the way in which Geoffrey approached this subject is highly significant not only for our understanding of his attitude toward the English, but also for the composition of the *DGB*

[75] See this paper's Introduction, note 6 for a brief list of some such studies.

more generally.'[76] Here, we will focus primarily on Thomas's excellent analysis of Geoffrey's handling of the English source material. Later, we will look at what this might tell us for how Geoffrey might have used now lost Welsh sources.

To illustrate his methods in this regard, we will focus on the Saxons' arrival in Britain, and the wars that lead up to the coming of Arthur. There are two reasons these events are a good place to start comparing how Geoffrey might have drawn on (now lost) Welsh sources. First, the Saxons of the *DGB* are villainous heathens. Similarly, by the end of the *DGB*, the Welsh are 'degenerati autem a britannica nobilitate gualenses.'[77] While the Saxons are held in slightly higher regard than the Welsh at this point of the narrative,[78] this appears as merely a justification for why the Saxons dominated Britain in the years immediately prior to the Norman conquest. Thus, there are two peoples, the Saxons and the Welsh, both classified as violent and unstable, and both of which contributed material to Geoffrey's history, but far more of the English material has survived.

The most glaring contradiction between Geoffrey's account of the coming of the Saxons and the subjugation of the British is in the timing. Where Geoffrey's contemporary Henry of Huntington in his *History of the English* (*HotE*), has the English kingdoms more or less established by 519,[79] Geoffrey delays this for nearly four centuries, identifying Æthelstan, whose rule began ~893, as 'the first Saxon king to rule *Loegria*.'[80] As obvious as this discrepancy first appears, however, there are some important caveats: first, it is worth examining his assertion that Æthelstan is the first king to rule Loegria (more or less south-east Britain). The statement is more

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76 Rebecca Thomas, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the English Past', in A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth, ed. by Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020), pp. 105-128 (p. 105).

77 *DGB*, XI.595, 'unworthy successors to the noble Britons'.

78 See *DGB*, 11.207: 'the Saxons acted more wisely, living in peace and harmony…'

79 Thomas, 'English Past', p. 105.

80 Thomas, 'English Past', p. 106 in reference to *DGB*, 11.207.

specific than Thomas implies: 'et sic abiecto dominio Britonum iam toti Loegriae imperauerant duce Adelstano, qui primus inter eos diadema portauit.'[81] This wording does not indicate that Æthelstan (Adelstano) was the first Saxon king, only that he is the first Saxon king to rule over *all* of Loegria. Nor is he the first Saxon king mentioned, as Thomas implies: the era between the arrival of the Saxons and the beginning of Æthelstan's rule is full of Saxon kings and their interactions with the British, in war, under treaty, and through religion.

Comparatively, the assertion that the Saxon kingdoms were established by 519 is derived from Henry of Huntingdon's *HotE,* which says:

> The kingdom of Wessex was founded in the year 71 of the Angles in Britain, A.D. 519…. In the course of time the kings of Wessex subjugated all other kingdoms, and established a monarchy over the whole of England…. When Cerdic had reigned seventeen years in Wessex… some of the most powerful of the British chiefs joined battle against him. It was fought bravely on both sides… [but] the Saxons gained the victory; and there was great slaughter that day of the inhabitants of Albion.[82]

Two things stand out in this passage: again, though Cerdic is credited as ruling 'the whole of England' it does not identify specific borders for his territory. Moreover, the mention of the slaughter in Albion indicates that there was still a distinction between the lands of the Britons and the lands of the Saxons, so the Britons are likely not included in the statement that Cerdic subjugated all kingdoms to himself. Moreover, the account continues to discuss other battles and

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81 *DGB,* XI:596-7. 'Thus, with British lordship overthrown, they came to rule all Loegria, led by Athelstan, who was the first of them to wear its crown.'

82 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* in *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon comprising the History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry II also The Act of Stephen*. ed. and trans. by Thomas Forester (AMS Press, 1968), pp. 1-300, (p. 48).

wars Cerdic fought against the British. And, like Geoffrey, Henry describes Arthur's era as an era of British dominance.[83]

Perhaps it is difficult for our modern minds to comprehend a world in which even small tracts of land might constitute a kingdom, but it is not unfeasible for the Saxon kingdoms described in the English source materials to co-exist in Geoffrey's Briton-centric narrative—indeed, his narrative implies their existence by the mention of a select few of these kingdoms and their kings throughout the narrative of this period, but Geoffrey does not dedicate time to listing or naming kings who have no bearing on his narrative any more than the *ASC* or Henry's *HotE* spend time listing British leaders who fail to impact the Saxon's rise, because, in the end, Geoffrey is writing about the deeds of the *Britons*, not the Saxons. It is natural for his narrative to favour the victories and accomplishments of the people whose story it is, and it is possible for two apparently conflicting narratives to be equally true.

As an example of how differing narratives can twist events to favour their subject, it is worth looking at the battles of King Vortimer, son of the infamous Vortigern. Geoffrey says that Vortimer fought four battles against the Saxons 'all of which he won'[84]: one by the river Derwent, one at Episford, one on an unidentified stretch of seashore, and a siege on the isle of Thanet. His source here is likely chapter 44 of *HB*, which states:

> Vortimer fought four keen battles against them. The first battle was on the river Darenth. The second battle was at the ford called Episford in their language, Rhyd yr afael in ours, and there fell Horsa and also Vortigern's son Cateyrn. The third battle was fought in the open country by the Inscribed Stone on the shore of the Gallic Sea. The barbarians were

83 Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 48-49.
84 *DGB*, 6.101

beaten and he was victorious. They fled to their keels and were drowned as they clambered aboard like women.[85]

Note that, though four battles are indicated, only three are identified. This is mirrored in Geoffrey, with the fourth battle (the siege of the island following the Saxon's attempted escape by ship) rounding out the list only by implication.

What is important about these battles is that the *ASC* also lists a series of battles that appears to mirror those discussed above. Vortimer is not named, but his father, Vortigern, is. The entries are for the years 455, 456, 465, 473, and 477.

455 In this year Hengest and Horsa fought against King Vortigern at the place which is called Ægelesthrp [Episford?], and his brother Horsa was killed there; and after that Hengest and his son Æsc succeeded to the kingdom.

456 In this year Hengest and his son Æsc fought against the Britons in the place which is called *Creacanford*, and killed 4,000 men; and the Britons then deserted Kent and fled with great fear to London.

465 In this year Hengest and Æsc fought the Britons near *Wippedesfleot*, and there slew twelve British chiefs, and thegn of theirs was slain there whose name was Wipped.

473 In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons and captured countless spoils and the Britons fled from the English as from fire

477 In the year Ælle and his three sons, Cymen, Wlencing, and Cissa came into Britain with three ships at the place which is called Cymenesora, and there they killed many Britons and drove some into flight into the wood which is called *Andredeslea*.

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[85] *Historia Britonum*in *Nenius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. by John Morris (London: Phillimore, 1980), pp. 50-84 (p. 44).

Thus, the Saxon account of this era (and note also that the Saxon account is spread over more than two decades) implies Saxon victory in more or less every battle: even the one in which Horsa is slain is not cited as a loss, for it was Horsa's death that led to Hengest's rise. And yet, the accounts from Geoffrey and the anonymous author of *HB* would equally imply that the British were consistently victorious in their battles. This is the cause for the old phrase 'history is written by the victors:' those who record history are under no obligation to record their people's losses. Ironically, the most truthful account of this period likely comes not from a chronicle or history, but from a sermon. Gildas describes this era of British-Saxon relations as: 'from then on victory went now to our countrymen, now to their enemies.'[86] Geoffrey chose not to include the battles his heroes lost in his chronicle of their worthy deeds, but there is still room for these battles to happen where he falls silent, just as there is room for British victories between the entries in *ASC*.

All that being said, however, *DGB* does draw on English sources for many of the episodes following the arrival of the Saxons. In fact, there are segments where it seems Geoffrey is exclusively reliant on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*EHE*), but his version does differ quite significantly from Bede's accounts. Some are glaring inconsistencies: Thomas highlights the fact that Geoffrey's Cadwallon vastly outlives and outshines the character found in *EHE*.[87] However, most of Geoffrey's alterations are more subtle, emphasizing, glossing over, and even omitting or re-writing certain points in order to paint the Britons in the best

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[86] Gildas, *De Exidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom (Phillimore, 1978) p. 26. Henry uses similar language when describing the period following Arthur's reign: 'At this period there were many wars, in which sometimes the Saxons, somtimes the Britons, were victors; but the more the Saxons were defeated, the more they recruited their forces by invitations sent to the people of all the neighbouring countries.' Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 49.

[87] Thomas, 'English Past', pp. 117-119.

possible light.[88] Neil Wright has provided a detailed account of Geoffrey's allusions to and alterations of Bede,[89] and Thomas elaborates on the significance of a few key episodes;[90] their work will not be replicated in detail here. For our purposes, it is sufficient to understand that, for the most part, when *DGB* diverges from its apparent source material, it is usually in small ways, by adding or omitting details. However, as Ben Guy notes, even as Geoffrey is altering the material provided by his sources, 'he was nevertheless acutely conscious of the original meanings of the episodes.'[91]

For example: Bede was particularly critical of Cadwallon for his alliance with the pagan Mercians, but Geoffrey does not mention the Mercian's paganism,[92] thus erasing any questions over why an allegedly Christian king would ally with them. On the other side of the spectrum, both *EHE* and *DGB* include an episode in which seven British bishops are slaughtered following their refusal to accept Augustine's religious authority.[93] Thomas highlights the differences in the two accounts, noting that, again, the events themselves are largely the same, but enough details are altered that the separate accounts are vastly different stories.[94] In *EHE*, the Britons rejected Augustine out of pride, because he did not rise from his seat when they entered the meeting, and Augustine prophesied that they 'if they refused to accept peace from their brethren, they would have to accept war from their enemies; and if they would not preach the way of life to the

88 Thomas, 'English Past', pp. 120-145.
89 Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede', *Arthurian literature*, 6 (1986) pp. 27-59.
90 Thomas, 'English Past.'
91 Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp. 31-66, (p. 43).
92 Thomas, 'English Past', p. 125.
93 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Claredon Press, 1969) p. 138-143; *DGB*, XI:187-189.
94 Thomas, 'English Past', p. 144.

English nation, they would one day suffer the vengeance of death at their hands.'[95] Sure enough, in the very next paragraph, Æthelfrith leads an attack on Bangor and the priests, gathered together to pray for success of their countrymen, are slaughtered. *DGB* adds a few details that shift the perspective in favour of Bede's overly proud Britons: their refusal has nothing to do with Augustine's failure to stand, but rather that 'they owed no obedience to him, since they had their own archbishop, nor did they preach to their enemies, since the Saxons persisted in depriving them of their country.'[96] Moreover, *DGB* omits Augustine's prophesy, and Edelbert (Æthelfrith) launches his attack specifically to kill the priests who, as he perceives it, have slighted him by refusing to preach to his people. These are ultimately very small changes, but the result is that the British come out looking far more reasonable and persecuted than they do in Bede's account.

What is particularly interesting about this episode is that *BYB* actually adds more detail to the attack on Bangor. While *DGB* and *EHE* both have the monks gathered to pray, *BYB* adds that Dunod sent two hundred wise monks to Ethelfrid and offered 'every good thing that might come to him (Ethelfrid) as return for leaving them in peace in the monastery to praise and to serve God.'[97] These two hundred are killed, and Ethelfrid marches against the monastery. Here, also, the main battle is fought at the monastery itself, not the city of Bangor (though Bangor rallies to the defence of the monastery), and is called 'the battle of Bangor Orchard.'[98] Moreover, *BYB* names several British kings and princes that come to help drive back the Saxons, and adds additional, apparently superfluous details, including the fact that Bledrus, Prince of Cornwall

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95 Bede, *EHE*, 140-141 'si pacem cum fratribus accipere nollent, bellum ab hostibus forent accepturi, et si nationi Anglorum noluissent uiam uitae praedicare, per horum manus ultionem essent mortis passuri.'

96 *DGB*, XI:188. 'ipsos ei nullam subiectionem debere nec suam praedicationem inimicis suis impendere, cum et suum archipraesulem haberent et gens Saxonum patriam propriam eisdem auferre perstarent.'

97 *BYB* fol. 93: 'ac y gynnyc pob ryw da or a elleynt dyuot ydaw yr ev gadel yn hedwch yn ev manachloc yn wassaneithu duw.'

98 *BYB*, fol. 93: 'a hwnnw a elwyt gweith perllan bangor.'

(who dies in the battle) was 'one of the handsomest of men.'[99] These details are very specific, and point towards a once well-known but now lost Welsh tradition surrounding this particular battle. Whether this tradition existed before *DGB* began circulating is, as is the case with so much concerning Welsh tradition in relation to *DGB*, debatable. We will return to this question in part three.

Ultimately, while *DGB* tends to follow British sources, such as *HB* fairly faithfully, excluding poetic embellishments, it diverges far more frequently from English sources. This should not be surprising: again, the text is meant to be about the *British*, so a reader ought to expect a certain amount of propaganda or spin. Ultimately, virtually every divergence *DGB* makes from the English narratives result in the Britons appearing as the better party. Their deeds are unquestionably heroic. Almost all criticisms levelled at them from other sources are countered, defended, or dismissed as slander. This pattern is key, as it indicates a clear agenda to portray the Britons as heroic, and does *not* indicate a pattern of simply inventing material for no reason, nor does it imply he was likely to make similar alterations to any lost British sources he may have used. In fact, his lack of alterations to *HB* material indicates the opposite is more likely to be true.

[99] *BYB* fol. 93v.

The Very Old Book

It is virtually impossible to discuss *DGB* without some mention of the 'very old book' from which it was allegedly translated. As mentioned earlier, the book likely never existed, but Geoffrey's early readers did not know this—in fact, it is only recently that scholars have deduced Geoffrey's 'lie.' Since concluding that the 'very old book' was a fiction, scholarship surrounding *DGB* has been increasingly willing to denounce Geoffrey as a fraud, albeit a brilliant one. This is an unfortunate trend, as it not only diminishes Geoffrey's contribution to the evolution of literature, but also down-plays episodes and plot elements that have no surviving corroboration. That is to say, we ought to be more wary when concluding that, because the 'very old book' likely didn't exist, anything that doesn't appear in a text that verifiably predates *DGB* must have come from his imagination. Moreover, the mere assumption that the book never existed should perhaps be questioned more than it currently is.

The origin of this assumption dates back to John Tatlock's seminal 1950's study *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's The History of the Kings of Britain and the Early Vernacular Versions*,[100] which truly is a phenomenal and comprehensive study of *DGB*. Though Tatlock's arguments are spread throughout the course of his study—such that many of the authors who cite him as their source for stating that Geoffrey's old book is a fiction neglect to note a page number—some of his strongest points appear in his discussion on Geoffrey's motivations. Here he argues:

> That such a historical account in the British language could have as he says come from Brittany is improbable, for from his day no Breton literature survives; indeed, since as yet

[100] Edwin Pace, 'Athelstan, 'Twist-Beard,' and Arthur: Tenth-Century Breton Origins for the Historia Regum Britanniae', *Arthuriana*, 26.4 (2016), pp. 60–88 (p. 58); Karen Jankulak, *Writers of Wales: Geoffrey of Monmouth*, series editor R. Brinley Jones (University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 1-4.

> written literature in Welsh was deficient, to have come come from Wales would be about as improbable. The statement that the book was very ancient makes it still more seem impossible; this was inserted merely to invite belief from those who knew there was no contemporary Breton literature, and also respect for the antiquity of the tradition… We suspicious moderns detect further overdoing his invention when he says that the British book was written 'perpulcris orationibus'[101]; such enthusiasm over any Celtic style does not ring true in so skilled a Latinist who knew no real style except in Latin.[102]

Tatlock's points are logical, certainly, and, again, this is not the sum of his argument, but the improbability of an event is not proof that it did not occur. Furthermore, the apparent deficiency of Welsh literature can be explained by the relative lack of value attributed to vernacular texts compared to Latin texts: vernacular texts were more likely to fall victim to bookbinders, tailors, and haberdashers who would use the parchment to strengthen bindings and stiffen fabric, particularly after the invention of the printing press. Tatlock's assertion that there 'was no contemporary Breton literature' again overlooks the possibility of loss, and that 9th century Landévennec, Brittany was an intellectual centre of the Carolingian Renaissance.[103] All of this indicates that, while it may be difficult for modern scholars to accept the possibility of a text from Wales or Brittany existing in Anglo-Norman England, there have been substantial losses to the list of available manuscripts since Geoffrey's time, and it likely would not have seemed so improbable to Geoffrey's contemporaries that such a book may have come to his possession.

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101 *DGB*, Prologue.2 'excellent style'.

102 J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions*, (Gordian Press, 1974), p. 423.

103 Williams, J. E. Caerwyn, 'Brittany and the Arthurian Legend' in *The Arthur of the Welsh: the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, ed. by Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 248-272, (p. 251).

Edwin Pace has also recently proposed a provenance for Geoffrey's 'old book' that would negate, at the very least, Tatlock's doubt over a Latin scholar praising a 'Celtic' style. Pace suggests that, given the peculiar role of Rome-as-enemy prevalent in *DGB* (something he suggests Geoffrey would have no reason to invent).[104] and the clear Breton agenda of the text as a whole, it is likely Geoffrey is using source material derived from the era of Alain Barbetorte, a 10th century Breton king who, for a time, lived in exile at Athelstan's English court.[105] Alain appears at the end of *DGB* as Alanus, who shelters exiled King Cadualadrus in much the same way Alain was sheltered by Athelstan, who, in turn, is the last king mentioned in *DGB*. Athelstan fostered a court that valued literature and history, in the 'culmination of a cultural renaissance that had begun with Alfred the Great. English writers were producing some of the earliest serious works in the vernacular, to include the *ASC* and various translations from Latin.'[106] Pace's theory, in brief, is that Alain was deeply affected by this culture of intellectualism and vernacular literacy and, upon returning to Brittany and reclaiming his kingdom (with the help of Athelstan), he set out to write his people's own history. Because:

> Breton sources suggest that Alain Barbetorte and his entourage had, at most, vague legends of their dynasty's history, and the names of shadowy or mythical kings. The vast bulk of extant writing they would have accepted as secular history was about insular Britons, not Bretons. If Breton rulers were to boast of dynastic histories comparable to Athelstan's or the Carolingians,' their only real option was to use material that reported the deeds of earlier *insular* Britons.[107]

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104 Pace, 'Athelstan', pp. 77; 80.
105 Pace, 'Athelstan', pp. 72-77.
106 Pace, 'Athelstan', p. 73.
107 Pace, 'Athelstan', p. 73.

Pace does not suggest that his argument proves the very old book did, in fact, exist, (in fact, he insists that such a claim would be premature at best),[108] but his argument proposes that this hypothetical text, composed in the tenth century, was *a* source for some of Geoffrey's otherwise uncorroborated episodes. If correct, and such a text *was* the source Geoffrey praised for its 'excellent style,' it would likely not have been written in a 'Celtic' style, but the style of Athelstan's court, which produced texts, such as *ASC,* which had long been accepted as standard texts for the learned of Geoffrey's generation. This provenance could also explain Tatlock's own observation that 'what strikes one most in these names of Bretons is the invariable appropriateness, far greater in any group previously discussed…. One conversant with Breton historical documents is continually running across almost all these names, and constantly together. Further, many of them are distinctively Breton, hardly found elsewhere.'[109]

Whether or not Pace's theory represents an accurate recreation of events is largely irrelevant to our discussion here. For our purposes, it is enough to understand that the modern assumption that Geoffrey's 'very old book' is nothing but a literary trope all too often prejudices our interpretation of the text. Moreover, while Tatlock's study indicates that the 'very old book' was *likely* nonexistent in the form he claimed, he also acknowledges that:

> [Geoffrey's] rather vague words might mean anything from a work just like the *History* in scope and contents to something similar but a good deal shorter…. He might conceivably have got hold of a short chronology, a list of kings, or even merely a copy of Gildas-Nennius in the Briton language. Any of these would relieve him of the charge of complete deception.[110]

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108 Pace, 'Athelstan', p. 77

109 Tatlock, *Legendary History*, p. 163.

110 Tatlock, *Legendary History*, p. 422, footnote 1.

Tatlock also notes that 'Geoffrey intimates also that Walter had told him facts in conversation'[111] that could very well have found their way into *DGB*. These considerations are often minimized or outright dismissed by modern interpretations, but they are the crux of what we need to consider here: exactly what were Geoffrey's contemporaries expected to imagine the book to be?

Ultimately, Geoffrey's language once again appears to be chosen not necessarily to mislead his readers, but to allow them the greatest freedom to envision the 'very old book' to fit their own expectations or hopes. Unlike Dares Phrygius, who specifically identified his source for *DET* as an eye-witness's journal of events, Geoffrey offers no specifics about the author(s) or provenance of his book beyond what has already been discussed. For example, despite *DGB*'s clear favouring of the Breton people over the 'degenerate'[112] Welsh, the Welsh translators (who of course omit all such slurs against the Welsh people) were very clear in the translation of Geoffrey's prologue that the book was of Welsh origin.[113] On the other hand, Wace, in his French verse translation *Roman de Brut* (*RDB*) completely omits any direct reference to the 'very old book' and, indeed, of Geoffrey and *DGB*, though he does still indicate that he is translating (*translaté*)[114] a specific book ('*Si cum li livres le devise*').[115] This vagueness replicates Geoffrey's sentiment, but without any mention of the provenance of the book in question, even if everyone were to assume he was referencing *DGB*, it is easy for readers—and as a vernacular French text, his contemporary readers were mostly laymen, not scholars—to envision virtually any text they desired.

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111 Tatlock, *Legendary History*, p. 424.

112 *DGB*, XI.599.

113 *BYB* fol. 1.

114 Wace, *Roman de Brut: A history of the British: text and translation*, revised edition, ed. and trans. by Judith Elizabeth Weiss (University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 2.

115 Wace, *Roman de Brut*, p. 2. 'As the book relates'.

Part Three: A Discussion of Influence

Looking Back: Medrawt and Modred

At this point, I would like to turn our attention to one of the most controversial elements of Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative: the fall of Arthur at Camlann and, more specifically, his betrayal by Modred/Medrawd.[116] This episode is one of the most enduring of the Arthurian saga: even as Lancelot (or, in at least one version, Bedivere)[117] has taken on the role of the queen's lover,[118] Modred, now more commonly called Mordred, still plays the role of traitor in the majority of renditions: even modern texts that cast Mordred as the protagonist[119] end with his betrayal of Arthur (though sometimes with justification or through some misunderstanding). Moreover, of all the episodes and plot arcs in *DGB*, Modred's treason is the only one Geoffrey singles out for specific attribution to both the 'very old book' and oral stories:

> Ne hoc quidem, consul auguste, Galfridus Monemutensis tacebit, sed ut in praefato Britannico sermone inuenit et a Waltero Oxenefordensi, in multis historiis peritissimo uiro, audiuit, uili licet stilo, breuiter tamen propalabit, quae proelia inclitus ille rex post uictoriam istam in Britanniam reuersus cum nepote suo commiserit.[120]

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116 There are a great variety of spellings used for the name Medrawt; I will use this version as it is as it appears in the Welsh text of John Jay Parry's edition of *BYB*. However, when quoting other primary texts, I will defer to the spelling used there.

117 See Gillian Bradshaw, *Hawk of May*, (Simon and Shuster, 1980), Gillian Bradshaw, *Kingdom of Summer*, (Signet, 1982), and Gillian Bradshaw, *In Winter's Shadow* (Signet, 1982).

118 Though see Ian McDowell, *Mordred's Curse*, (Avon Books, 1996) and Ian McDowell, *Merlin's Gift*, (Avon Books, 1997) for examples where Modred retains this role.

119 See, for example, Vivian Verde Veld *The Book of Mordred*, (Graphia, 2005); Mary Stewart *The Wicked Day*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983); Douglas Clegg *Mordred, Bastard Son*, (Alyson Books, 2006); Nancy Springer *I am Mordred*, (Firebird, 2002); Peter Hanratty *The Book of Mordred*, (New Infinities, 1988); and Henry John Newbolt *Mordred; A Tragedy*, (T Fisher Unwin, pre1923).

120 *DGB*, XI.1-5 'Geoffrey of Monmouth will not be silent even about this, most noble earl, but, just as he found it written in the British book and heard from Walter of Oxford, a man very familiar with many histories, he will tell, in his poor style, but briefly, of the battles the famous king fought against his nephew, when he returned to Britain after his victory.'

Despite Geoffrey's claim, this episode is also among least corroborated in pre-Galfridian Arthurian texts. As such, it apparent evidence for Geoffrey's inventive imagination, and any Welsh sources that appear to corroborate Geoffrey's account are dismissed as having been 'influenced' by *DGB*. In other words, there is an ongoing assumption that Geoffrey invented his account of Camlann and all of his contemporaries, particularly the Welsh, simply adopted it because it was more complete or compelling than any other extant version of the story. This assumption is pervasive, but it is long overdue for examination.

The crux of the problem, of course, is that it is impossible to accurately date the content of surviving Welsh material as pre-Galfridian: the texts as they've come down to us are in manuscripts that were copied well after *DGB* made its debut, and, as established in part one, texts are constantly in dialogue with past and present. However, it is still possible to glean insights into this dialogue: by examining the material that directly contradicts Geoffrey's account (usually classified as 'pre-Galfridian'), and comparing material that differs only in names or details, we will see that Geoffrey was not inventing nearly as much as we commonly assume.

In *DGB*, Camlann is the culmination of Modred's treachery, the final battle between Arthur and Modred, in which Modred is killed and Arthur is mortally wounded. That both Modred and Arthur meet their end here is apparently corroborated in one of the few Welsh texts that is verifiably pre-Galfridian: the *Annales Cambriae* (*AC*, the Annals of Wales). The oldest copy of this text likely dates back to 954 CE, or shortly therafter.[121] The *AC* entry for the year 537 reads: 'Gueith Camlann, in qua Arthur et Medraut corruere; et mortalitas in Brittania et in Hibernia fuit.'[122] Obviously, this brief passage does not indicate that Arthur and Medrawt were

[121] Jon B. Coe and Simon Young, *The Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend*,(Llanerch Publishers, 1995), p. 12.

[122] *Annales Cambriae* in *Nenius: British History and the Welsh Annals* ed. and trans. by John Morris (Phillimore, 1980) pp. 45-49 [English translation]; 85-91 [Latin] (p. 85); 'The Battle of Camlan, in which Arthur and Medrod fell; and there was plague in Britain and in Ireland.' (p. 45).

enemies in the battle.[123] What is often overlooked in studies of Medrawt's villainization, however, is how tenuous the connection between *DGB*'s Modred and *AC*'s Medrawt actually is.

> The first issue is the names themselves:
>
> the possibility of equating *Medrawt* with the Cornish *Modred* of [*DGB*] (an equation which first appears in *Brut y Brenhinedd*) presents a difficulty…. **Mōdrāt*- would not give *Medrawd*… the *e* requires explanation, if the name is the same as that of the Cornish *Modred*.[124]

That the two names are not linguistically cognate is significant. The translators of *BYB* were quick to omit Geoffrey's derision of the Welsh people, as well as to add genealogical information not present in *DGB*, but equated Medrawt to *DGB*'s Modred despite the fact that the two characters' only apparent similarity is that they die at Camlann. On the other side, Geoffrey did not use the *AC*'s name 'Medraut,' which, if this was his his only source for the Camlann episode would seem the obvious choice—especially if Tatlock is correct in his statement that 'undoubtedly Geoffrey is following the tradition in the *Anneles Cambriae*,'[125] or even just given Geoffrey's apparent penchant for pilfering names from genealogies and chronicles to 'lend credibility' to the text. Moreover, the running theory is that *DGB*'s form of 'Modred' is Cornish, and that Geoffrey, 'knowing that the river Camlann was probably in Cornwall,' used a Cornish

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123 One thirteenth century manuscripts expands the passage to read 'Bellum Camlan, in quo inclitus Arthurus rex Britonum et Modredus proditor suus, mutuis vulneribus corruerunt' ('the Battle of Camlan, in which Arthur, king of the Britons, and Modred, his betrayer, fell by each other's wounds.') Coe and Young, *Celtic Sources*, p. 13. Because this rendition uses Geoffrey's spelling Modredus/Modred and not the Welsh name Medraut, it is very clear it has actually been influenced by *DGB*.

124 Rachel Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 4th edition (University of Wales Press, 2017), p. 445.

125 J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions*, (Gordian Press, 1974), p. 60.

name for Arthur's last enemy.[126] This argument seems tenuous, as, aside from Camlann, Geoffrey's Modred has no other connection to Cornwall.

To further highlight how surprising the equation of Medrawt and Modred is, it is worth examining the two characters as separate entities. First, let us look at the 'pre-Galfridian' Medrawt.

Though Medrawt is 'one of the first characters to be associated with Arthur'[127] (through *AC*), he does not appear terribly often outside of the Camlann narrative. However, when he does, it is difficult to reconcile the character presented with the traitor of *DGB*. To begin, the pre-*BYB* Medrawt had a completely different family tree from Modred: 'In Welsh tradition…. [Medrawt] is the son of Caurdaf and the grandson of Caradog Strong-Arm… [and] has the holy Dyfnauc as his son,'[128] while *DGB* states Modred is the son of Loth and Arthur's full sister Anna, and is given Gualguain as a brother.[129] While it is not uncommon for mythological figures to have different pedigrees in different sources, Medrawt's characterisation also appears vastly different from Modred's. The *Gogenferidd*[130] poetry references Medrawd nine times[131] and *The Red Book of Hergest* poems add another three references.[132] The importance of these references, though brief, inconclusive, and unfortunately unavailable in English translation, is that they support the

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126 Arthur E. Hutson, *British Personal Names in the Historia Regum Britanniae* (University of California Press, 1940), p.68.

127 Peter Korrel, *Arthurian Triangle*, (E.J.Brill, 1984), p. 96.

128 Korrell, *Arthurian triangle*, p. 97. Korrell references *Bonedd y Saint* as his source, but I was unable to obtain a copy of this text to provide the original quotations.

129 *DGB* IX 205-206.

130 Lit. 'Great Poets'

131 *Gogynfeirdd*, in The Poetry of the Gogynfreidd from the Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales. ed. By Edward Anwyl (Gee and Son, 1909), pp 28, 35, 53, 59, 81, 83, 164 (2), and 215.

132 *The Poetry of the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911), p 64 (2), and 81.

idea that 'Medrawd was traditionally regarded as a paragon of valour and of courtesy.'[133] This portrayal is at obvious odds with 'sceleratissimus proditor ille Modredus'[134] of *DGB.*

In *DGB*, Modred is mentioned only once prior to Arthur appointing him steward of the land, and the only thing learned from this mention is that he and Gualguain are both sons of Loth.[135] We learn a little more about Gawain a few paragraphs later, but nothing more of Modred. Modred is given stewardship of Britain at the beginning of Book X, and is not mentioned again until the end of Book X when it is revealed he has usurped Arthur's crown and married Arthur's wife. Book XI begins with a recounting of the battles between Arthur and Modred. By the end of the second paragraph, they are both dead, and Britain goes into a rapid decline culminating with the foundation of England. Thus, the Modred of *DGB's* only purpose and role is to betray Arthur.

Why, then, would the Welsh connect their noble and valorous Medrawt with *DGB*'s treacherous Modred—unless there was a pre-existing tradition connecting Medrawt not merely to Camlann but to the events as related in *DGB*? There is additional evidence that the Welsh translators were familiar with traditions surrounding these characters outside of *DGB* simply from the details added to *BYB* that are not corroborated in *DGB.* For example, where *DGB* indicates that Arthur conferred the kingdoms of Scotland, Moray, and Lothian to Auguselus, Urianus, and Loth, respectively, *BYB* adds that Arawn, Urien, and Lew are all sons of Kynvarch.[136] Where *DGB* cites Ganhumara's unnamed Roman ancestry, *BYB* names her father as Ogvran the giant, and offers that her mother was of noble Roman decent.[137] These details may seem small, but they lend credence to the idea that the version of Medrawt's family tree

133 Bromwich, *Trioedd*, p. 445.
134 *DGB*, XI:10 'that most foul traitor Modred'
135 *DGB*, IX.205-6; Note that this paragraph also has the first mention of Ganhumara (Gwenevere), in line 209.
136 *BYB*, fol. 81.
137 *BYB*, fol. 81.

presented in *BYB* was not novel: it is difficult to accept that the same people who went to the trouble of adding detailed familial relationships would turn around and randomly associate an otherwise unrelated character to the tree, especially considering the disparate personalities of the two personages.

Of course, there is always the possibility that the translators used the name Medrawt without intending to associate him with the personage from old poetry: after all, it is not unheard of for two people to have the same name.[138] However, the evidence suggests otherwise. First, there is the fact that Arthur gave Modred stewardship in the first place. The reasons for this decision will be discussed in chapter six, but for the time being it is enough to assume that Modred possessed qualities that led Arthur to believe leaving him in charge was a good decision—perhaps the sort of qualities Medrawt was praised for. Additionally, the Welsh Triads (*Trioedd Ynys Pridein*, *TYP*) further corroborate the theory that they are one and the same character. The 'Pedwar Marchog ar Hugain Llys Arthur'[139], which, despite dating from the fifteenth century,[140] lists Medrawt as one of 'tri Brenhinawl Varchoc'.[141] The passage explains that these 'royal knights' were peculiar because 'nid oedd na brenhin nac emerodr o'r byd a allai ballu uddynt rrac eu tecked a'u doethet mewn heddwch; mewn rryvel nis arhoi na milwr na rysswr, e daed I arveu.'[142] It is particularly interesting to find Medrawd described in this manner

[138] For example, the theories of the three Gwynhwyfars, multiple Ladies of the Lake, or the plethora of characters in Arthuriana all inexplicably named Yawain.

[139] 'The Twenty-Four Knights of Arthur's Court'

[140] Korrel, *Arthurian Triangle*, p. 97.

[141] *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, ed. and trans. Rachel Bromwich, (University of Wales Press, 2017) p 266: 'Three Royal Knights'

[142] *TYP* p. 266: 'there was neither king nor emperor in the world who could refuse them, on account of their beauty and wisdom in peace; while in war no warrior or champion could withstand them, despite the excellence of his arms.' Translation from p. 268.

in a text that has otherwise drawn on much later Arthurian tradition,[143] which tends to further vilify Medrawd rather than redeem him. This reference instead appears to draw on the older tradition of the *Gogenferidd,* while linking this well-mannered character directly with Arthur's court.

Furthermore, Medrawt is directly mentioned in four of the standard triads: numbers 51, 53, 54, and 59. 51, the 'Three Men of Shame,' recites the events of *DGB*, with some details apparently taken from the alliterative *Morte Arthure,*[144] and is of little use to us at this point. Triad 53, the 'Three Sinister Handslaps,' cites a slap delivered to Gwenhwyfar, Arthur's wife, which caused the Battle of Camlann. The standard version indicates the slap came from Gwenhwyfar's sister Gwenhwyfach, but a variant attributes the slap to Medrawt, and Ifor Williams suggested that Medrawt is the better reading.[145] Whether this triad is pre- or post-Galfridian, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which a slap played a part in Modred's taking of Arthur's wife. However, it is triad number 54, 'Three Violent Ravagings,' that is perhaps the most interesting, as it has no obvious correlation to events recounted elsewhere:

> Vn o nadunt, pan doeth Medrawt y lys Arthur yg Kelliwig yg Kerniw; nyt edewis na bwyt na diawt yn y llys nys (treulei), a thynu Gwenhwyuar heuyt o'e chadeir vrenhiniaeth. Ac yna y trewis baluawt arnei;

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143 For example, under the heading 'Tri Marchoc Gwyry' (Three Virgin Knights) there is a reference to 'Galath ap Lanslod Lak' (Galath son of Laslod Lak, or Galahad son of Lancelot of the Lake). *TYP* p. 266-7. Additionally, the passage cites Medrawd as the son of Llew (Lot) rather than Medrawd's 'pre-Galfridian' parentage.

144 Korrell, *Arthurian Triangle*, p. 99. Bromwich, *Trioedd*, p. 51.

145 Bromwich, *Trioedd*, p. 151. See also Ifor Williams, *Pedeir keinc y mabinogi allan o Lyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, 2ail arg. (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1951), p. xxvi: 'Sylwer ymhellach nad oes sôn am Wenhwyfach yn unman ond yma, yn ôl Rhys^ ; eithr yn y Triawd nesaf un (R.M. 301), Teir drut hcinia- Ynys Prydain, dywedir yn eglur fod Medraií'd wedi taro palfawd ar Wenhwyfar, "pan doeth medrawt y lys arthur yg kelli wic yg kernyw, nyt edewis na bwyt na diawt yn y llys nys treulei. a thynnu gwenhyuar heuyt oe chadeir urenhinyaeth. Ac yna y trewis ỳaluawt arnei" . Credaf yn sicr y dylid rhoi enw Medrawt ì mewn yn y Triawd blaenorol yn lle ;C Gwenhwyfach, ac joia peffid grym ac yna y trewis paluawt «m^î yny Triawdhwn sy'ndilyn. Y trais ar Wenhwyf ar a arweiniodd i Gad Gamlan.'

> Yr eil Drut Heirua, pan doeth Arthur y lys Vedrawt. Nyt edewis yn y llys nac yn y kantref na bwyt na diawt.[146]

The first part corroborates the reading for Triad 53 that Medrawd was the one who struck the sinister blow, but Triad 54 itself appears to have little influence from *DGB*. The Arthur depicted here is not so much the imperial conqueror: the two episodes are evocative of a wilder Arthur, one whose life was characterised by outrageous, episodic adventures such as those recounted in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Likewise, the Medrawt depicted here is not the treasonous villain of *DGB*—in fact, Medrawt's ravaging only consumed the food and drink in the court, while Arthur's consumed all that was in both the court and the cantref. [147] This, coupled with the fact that the triads tend to list items by order of severity, indicates that Arthur is, in fact, more villainous than Medrawt in this particular instance. Either way, the episodes hint at a tradition of strife between Arthur and Medrawt that appears to pre-date the imperialist struggle recounted in *DGB*, and may explain why the translators chose the name 'Medrawt' as a substitute for Modred.

One additional factor must be taken into account in our discussion here, and that is the fact that Modred is not the first to try to steal Arthur's queen away from him. Gwenhwyfar (whom Geoffrey calls Ganhumara) is stalked by stories of infidelity and abduction. One of the earliest surviving written examples comes from Caradoc of Llancarfon's *uitae Gildea* (*VG*, c. 1130-1150AD), in which Gwenhwyfar has been carried off by the 'Evil King Melwas.'[148] *VG* is a Welsh text written in Latin, and though it is from the same era as *DGB*, it echos no other

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[146] *TYP* no 54: 'One of them (was) when Medrawd came to Arthur's court at Celliwig in Cornwall; he left neither food nor drink in the court that he did not consume. And he also dragged Gwenhwyfar from her royal chair, and then he struck a blow upon her;
'The Second Violent Ravaging (was) when Arthur came to Medrawd's court. He left neither food nor drink in the court nor in the cantref.'

[147] A cantref is a division of land not dissimilar to a county.

[148] Caradoc of Llancarfan, Uita Gildae: Life of Gildas in The Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend, ed. by Jon B. Coe and Simon Young (Llanerch, 1995) pp. 22-27 (p.25).

aspects of Geoffrey's text. Here is an ostensibly obvious contender for the role of Arthur's traitor, with a name only slightly less phonetically related to Geoffrey's Modred, but Melwas was not cast in the role. Perhaps his name was too far off, or perhaps this episode, which ends in peace due to the intervention of Gildas, lacked the necessary war and death that finish Geoffrey's account.

Finally, I would like to address the question of how much Geoffrey actually knew of Welsh literary traditions. When discussing the Arthurian material, there is an ongoing debate between a general recognition that Geoffrey 'drew on sources originating from the Brittonic-speaking world'[149] and a caution that 'attempts at uncovering Geoffrey's knowledge of Welsh have proven inconclusive.'[150] Because there is little to no evidence that Geoffrey was conversant in the Welsh language, it is all too easy to assume *DGB*'s derogatory portrayal of the Welsh and far more favourable portrayal of the Bretons should be taken as a reflection of Geoffrey's own attitudes. That is, because the text dismisses the Welsh people, we ought to assume Geoffrey was likewise dismissive of anything the Welsh traditions may have offered, though the argument is rarely phrased so plainly. Put this way, the fallacy is easy to spot: after all, Geoffrey *did* draw on sources originating from Wales, such as *HB* and *AC*. Of more interest for our study here, however, is Geoffrey's *VM*. Despite reluctance for scholars of *DGB* to credit Geoffrey with access to Welsh source material, when it comes to *VM*, there is little doubt that the poem

149 Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp. 31-66 (p 21).

150 Joshua Byron Smith, 'Introduction and Biography' in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. By Georgia Henley and Joshua Byron Smith, (Brill, 2020) pp 1-28, (p. 20). Smith also notes that there may be a general reluctance to credit Geoffrey with knowledge of the Welsh language due to 'modern attitudes about which languages are accessible and which are not. All things being equal, knowledge of French or English seems more freely granted to medieval polyglots than Welsh or Irish.' This same bias could be applied to text availability: there seems a tendancy to assume that, because a text is rare or nonexistant in our time, it must have been equally difficult for medieval scholars to access.

'reflects Geoffrey's familiarity with versions of some surviving Welsh poems.'[151] Due to the vast differences between the Merlin of *DGB* and that of *VM*, 'it has been persistently claimed that Geoffrey discovered the Welsh legend of Myrddin between the completion of the *DGB* around 1138 and the writing of the *VM* around 1150.'[152] And while it may be true that Geoffrey only came across the legends of Merlin that appear in *VM* after he composed *DGB*, there is no reason to assume that he was ignorant of all Welsh poetic traditions prior to his discovery of the Myddin material.

While all of this does not indicate that Modred's treason took place exactly as recounted in *DGB*, it does tell us that we ought to be more careful about dismissing Welsh stories as somehow less authentic merely because they contain elements which also appear in *DGB*. Examining such similarities in more detail may actually open a window into reconstructing some of the sources used in the composition of *DGB* and, in turn, fill in some of the details currently missing from the 'pre-Galfridian' legend.

151 Guy, 'Welsh Sources', p. 63.
152 Guy, 'Welsh Sources', p 62.

Looking Ahead: Modred and Mordred

What is most interesting about Medrawt's case, however, is its evolution into the Romances: *Mort le roi Artu*[153] was the first to make Modred, now called Mordred, both Arthur's nephew and son, though it was another few centuries before this passed into the English tradition, while Alfred Huth, in his extension of the French poem *Merlin*, first introduced the story adopted by Thomas Malory of Mordred's birth on May Day and Arthur's attempt to kill him by drowning all the infants who shared his birthday.[154] Amy Varin notes the peculiarities of these additions:

> First, why should Malory make Arthur, otherwise an extremely just and virtuous man, drown a large number of newborn children in an attempt to destroy one child who could not be blamed for his incestuous birth? Second, why should Mordred, the villain, be provided with a birth story more fitting for a hero?… for a child to be exposed or thrown into the sea at birth, like Oedipus, Atalanta, Perseus, or Romulus and Remus, is in folktales an almost certain sign of his or her future greatness.[155]

These details are fascinating not merely because they make the narrative more compelling, but they blur the lines between good and evil in ways that are especially surprising given the eras in which they were composed. Varin observes that Arthur's slaughter of the children likens him to the Bible's evil King Herod.[156] One could likewise add that Mordred's miraculous survival at sea could be parallelled by Moses's similar survival of being set adrift on the Nile river to preserve him from a similar slaughter of infants. These parallels make no narrative sense given the future roles of these characters. Arthur is not an unjust and paranoid king. Mordred is not a prophet sent

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153 *The Death of King Arthur*, c. 1225

154 Varin, Amy, 'Mordred, King Arthur's Son', *Folklore*, 90.2 (1979), pp. 167–177 (p. 167).

155 Varin, 'King Arthur's Son', p. 167.

156 Varin, 'King Arthur's Son', p. 167.

to save his people, or establish a nation as is the fate of many of the heroes mentioned by Varin. Furthermore, casting Mordred as Arthur's son intensifies the emotional betrayal even as it legitimises Mordred's coup.[157]

This last is of particular note for our purposes here, as Modred, as the son of Arthur's father's daughter, was already committing one of the worst types of betrayal, and may even have possessed a legitimate claim to Arthur's domain. It is possible that the shift in Modred's relationship to Arthur from his nephew to his son was initially an attempt to convey the depth of Modred's betrayal to an audience that no longer grasped the significance of the 'avunculus,'[158] the bond between a man and his sister's sons. Both Patricia Price and Stephen Glosecki have examined the importance of this relationship in early Arthurian literature,[159] highlighting how devastating Modred's rejection of it would have been to medieval audiences. Price notes the prevalence and emphasis of avuncular relationships in *The Mabinogion*,[160] and the contrast, in *DGB*, between Modred and his much more valorous and loyal brother Gualguain.[161] She concludes that one reason for the shift in Arthur's relationship to his treacherous nephew is that 'by the end of the middle ages, treachery against kinship ties had ceased to move English audiences…. Thus the character of Mordred as it develops in the Middle Ages mirrors evolving attitudes towards household and family.'[162]

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157 Note that, by the time Mordred and Arthur's relationship changed, Lancelot had stepped in as the queen's lover, so that aspect of Mordred's treachery no longer exists.

158 From the Latin *avus*: grandfather/ancestor + the diminutive *-unculus*. Lit. 'Little grandfather'. Robin Fox, *Reproduction and Succession: Studies in Anthropology, Law, and Society*, (Transaction Publishers, 1993), p. 193.

159 Patricia Ann Price. 'Family ties: Mordred's perfidy and the avuncular bond', *Medieval Perspectives*, vol. 4/5 (1989/90), pp. 161-171;Stephen O. Glosecki, 'The kin bonds of Camelot', Medieval perspectives vol. 11 (1996) pp. 139-152.

160 Price, 'Family Ties,' pp 164-5.

161 Price, 'Family Ties', p. 165.

162 Price, 'Family Ties', p. 169.

Glosecki, however, focuses more on the political aspects of the avuncular bond, including a suggestion that, in some cultures, the sister's son may have been the traditional legal heir to his uncle's holdings.[163] Indeed, early medieval Irish succession may have employed a similar mechanism, though, in this case, the requirement was that the next king be a descendant of the current king's grandfather.[164] In terms of *DGB*'s family tree, this would mean the great-grandchildren of Constantinus. Similarly, in thirteenth century Gwynedd, Wales, successors were often designated from among the current prince's close kin:

> A practice of this sort seems to have been of ancient origin in Wales, where the designated successor to the ruler was commonly called in the lawbooks the *edling*, a word derived from the Anglo-Saxon *Aepeling*, and largely replacing the still older term *gwrthrych*. The lawbooks state that the *edling* was to be one of the ruler's near relations; he would be the most kingly, *brenhinolaf*, of these, the one to whom the king gave hope and expectation.[165]

In *DGB*, Constantinus apparently only had the two sons; Uther and Aurelius, and Aurelius dies without any named children; Uther's only children are Arthur and Anna; Arthur has no named children. Thus, the only two candidates for Arthur's succession under either the Irish or Welsh systems described above are Modred and Gualguain—and while Gualguain appears to be the more noble, it is Modred Arthur entrusts his kingdom to, indicating that, as previously discussed, Modred must have possessed at least some worthy traits, for all Geoffrey doesn't mention them. However, as the legend evolved, and Arthur accumulated more and more nephews, it may have seemed necessary to writers and translators of the legend to single Mordred out and give him a

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163 Glosecki, 'Family Ties', p. 140. See also Fox, *Reproduction adn Succession*, p. 194.

164 D. Blair Gibson, 'Celtic Democracy: Appreciating the Role Played by Alliances and Elections in Celtic Political Systems', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol.28 (2008) pp. 40-62 (p. 42).

165 Stephenson, David, *Political Power in Medieval Gwynedd: Governance and the Welsh Princes*, (University of Wales Press, 1984), p. 2.

more direct claim to Arthur's mantle in order to justify his attempt to seize it—and also Arthur's decision to leave him in charge during his campaigns overseas.

Ultimately, as much as the shift in Arthur's relationship with Mordred makes for a compelling plot element, it also preserves the legitimacy of Modred's claim to Arthur's lands. In isolation, this might not tell us much, but it is not the only evidence of adjustments to the legend being made to accommodate alternate political procedures and expectations. In 1155, less than twenty years after Geoffrey completed *DGB,* Wace translated it into a French poem now called *Roman de Brut* (*RDB*).[166] This text is the first to write about Arthur's famous Round Table, 'dunt Breton dient mainte fable.'[167]

The Round Table represents a system of political power that is utterly alien to most of Europe. Wace writes that:

> Illuec seeient li vassal
>
> Tuit chevalment e tuit egal;
>
> A la table egalment seeient
>
> E egalment servi esteient;
>
> Nul d'els ne se poeit vanter
>
> Qu'il seïst plus halt de sun per,
>
> Tuit esteient assis meain,
>
> Ne n'I aveit nul de forain.[168]

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[166] Lit. 'vernacular or common chronicle' Note, however, that, like *DGB*'s erroneous title *HRB*, the *RDB* was originally called 'Geste des Bretons' ('Deeds of the Britons'). See Gillette Labory, 'Les débuts de la chronique en français (XIIE et XIIIE siecles)', *The Medieval Chronicle*, v3 (2004), pp. 1-26 (p. 5).

[167] Wace, *Roman de Brut: A history of the British: text and translation*, revised edition, ed. and trans. by Judith Elizabeth Weiss (University of Exeter Press, 2002), line 9752: 'about which the British tell many a tale.'

[168] Wace, *RDB,* lns 9753-9760; 'There sat the vassals, all equal, all leaders; they were placed equally round the table and equally served. None of them could boast he sat higher than his peer; each was seated between two others, none at the end of the table.'

Despite the apparent importance of the table, it is not specifically mentioned again; it doesn't need to be. Wace here is laying a foundation for how Arthur's court functions, so that, later, when the Roman messengers arrive with the demand that Arthur pay tribute, it is not a surprise when Arthur seeks counsel from 'ses dux, ses cuntes, ses privez'[169] about how they ought to respond.

DGB, *BYB*, and *RDB* each include a lengthy discussion between Arthur and his council at this point in the text, resulting in the unanimous decision to declare war on Rome.[170] To English and Welsh readers, this scene was unlikely to raise eyebrows: King Henry I was known for holding great councils to discuss matters of importance—and most of them in England, rather than Normandy;[171] and, if the political structures of thirteenth century Gwynedd are any indication, Welsh princes (or kings) were expected to consult a council before making such decisions.[172] However, Wace's French audience, living under the reign of the Capetians, were accustomed to very a different style of kingship.

The Capetians ruled over France for more than two hundred years, and *RDB*, completed about 1155, dates to nearly the exact middle of their dynasty, under the reign of Louis VII. Both Louis VII and his predecessor Louis VI's reigns were marked by extreme centralisation and declination of power and importance of lesser offices.[173] Though Wace was raised in Normandy, and was writing for an ostensibly Norman public, possibly even as an official poet to the

169 Wace, *RDB*, ln. 10727. 'His dukes, his counts, his friends'.

170 Technically, this is Arthur's first act as Britain's official king: the messenger arrives at Arthur's coronation, though he has already spent a number of years campaigning and conquering large portions of Europe.

171 Judith A Green. *The Government of England Under Henry I*, (Cambridge University Press, 1986) pp. 22-24.

172 Stephenson, *Political Power*, pp. 6-10.

173 Elizabeth M. Hallam and Judith Everard, *Capetian France: 987-1328*, 2nd Edition (Longman, 2001) pp. 203-205.

English-Norman court,[174] the text itself is directed at a French-speaking, lay audience. 'His style is lucid and straightforward; indeed he sometimes takes it upon himself to explain more than seems warranted, and again this may have as much to do with his audience's needs as his own pedantry…. He is also happy to use proverbial wisdom [as with the highly symbolic round table], once again perhaps a good way of emphasizing a point to his audience.'[175] Given *RDB*'s influence on the developing genre of Arthurian Romance in the French speaking world through authors Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes,[176] and Wace's frustration with a lack of support from aristocratic audiences,[177] it is possible Wace may have tailored the text to appeal to a wider audience beyond the Norman microcosm, including the parabolic addition of a round table to explain why Arthur would bother to seek council from people who ought to be bound by his decisions, regardless of whether they agree.

These are two examples of how major and lasting additions to the Arthurian legend may have been created to preserve aspects of the legend that would otherwise have been lost on later generations or audiences. What is most important and noteworthy about these two additions is the way in which they seem to preserve traditions of Welsh political organization. Geoffrey, writing in Anglo-Norman England, even in the wake of Henry I's council-heavy reign, had little reason to include a record of Arthur's council regarding the decision to march on Rome. It is,

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174 Judith Weiss, 'Introduction' in *Wace's Roman De Brut A History of the British: Text and Translation*, (University of Exeter Press, 2002) pp. XI-XXIX., (p. XII).

175 Weiss, 'Introduction', p. XXIV.

176 Wace's influence on both of these authors is most obvious in the fact that both adopted the Round Table motif. Wace's earliest work. *Erec et Enid* specifies: 'Uns chevaliers, Erec ot non. / De la Table Reonde estoit' [one knight, Erec by name, was from the Round Table] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide: Text original et français moderne*, ed and trans by Michael Rousse (Flammarion, 1994), lns. 82-83. (Translation mine). Also, 'Vos sai je bien dire les nons, / de çaus de la Table Reonde, / Qui furent li mellor del monde.' [I can well tell the names of those of the Round Table who were the best of the world] ln 1688-90. Marie's 'Lanval' likewise indicates: 'A ceus de la table runde— / N'ot tant de teus en tut le munde—' [to those of the Round Table—no such people in all the world—'] Marie de France, 'Lanval' in *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Translation*, ed and trans by Claire M. Waters (Broadview Editions, 2018), pp. 162-195 (lns 15-16) (translation mine).

177 Weiss, 'Introduction', p. XII.

outside of Merlin's prophesies, the longest verbal exchange of *DGB*, and serves little purpose except to show how eager Arthur's councillors were to go to war against an enemy—the Roman Empire—which was not a power to be concerned with in Geoffrey's time. The treason of Modred, in the calm before the civil war between Matilda and Stephen, is of far more immediate concern to Geoffrey's contemporaries, and coincides with *DGB*'s overall theme of infighting leading to destruction and degeneration, but given our discussion in the previous chapter, it is unlikely Geoffrey invented much in his account of Modred's treason.

Conclusion

For far too long, Geoffrey of Monmouth has been charged with inventing large portions of *DGB*, particularly with respect to the Arthurian material. This charge neglects to place Geoffrey in the appropriate discursive space. As discussed in part one, Geoffrey was at the vanguard of a developing genre, and to label him a fraud undervalues his contribution to literary evolution. In part two, we likewise discovered the ways *DGB* weaves together narratives from a variety of sources, but also how certain narrative arcs traditionally ascribed to Geoffrey's inventive imagination are difficult to attribute to a man of Geoffrey's time and place. To assume that material that has no surviving corroboration is the product of pure invention neglects to account for Geoffrey's resourcefulness and unique position, on the March or border of Wales and England, to access sources, including oral materials, that were otherwise unlikely to survive. In part three, we examined pre- and post-Galfridian material for evidence that the Welsh-established link between Modred and Medrawt actually speaks to the validity of *DGB*'s account of Arthur's downfall, despite the fact that the details as found there don't appear in any pre-Galfridian texts. Again, attributing the episode to Geoffrey's imagination neglects to account for how the text was received in Wales and does a disservice to those early translators by assuming that they merely accepted the account because there was nothing so complete remaining to them in the oral tradition.

In all cases, what we find is that assuming Geoffrey was inventing *ex nihilo* is a prevalent and dangerous assumption that leaves many aspects of *DGB* unquestioned and unexplored. By setting aside the idea that uncorroborated episodes are products of his imagination, we will be able to more fully extrapolate pre-Galfridian aspects of the Arthurian legend as well and also, possibly, reconstructions of texts that may have represented Geoffrey's 'Very Old Book.' Both

avenues of enquiry will lead to a deeper understanding of the peoples, societies, and cultures that lived in the enigmatic era of pre-Norman Britain and Brittany.

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