Merlin in Cornwall: The Source and Contexts of John of Cornwall's Prophetia Merlini

Michael A. Faletra

Merlin in Cornwall:
The Source and Contexts of John of Cornwall's
Prophetia Merlini

Michael A. Faletra, Reed College

ad narracionem pertinent preterita, ad diuinacionem futura

—Walter Map[1]

I.

The twelfth century witnessed the heyday of the Merlinic prophecy as a topic of special—and sometimes even obsessive—interest among European literati. The publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* ca. 1135 was doubtless the pivotal moment in the development of the new intellectual hobby of interpreting and glossing the corpus of vaticination attributed to the semi-legendary poet-prophet-magician.[2] Within the next two generations, writers as diverse as Gerald of Wales, Suger of St. Denis, Orderic Vitalis, and Alain de Lille had all weighed in with interpretations of Geoffrey's obscure (indeed, probably obscurantist) prophecies.[3] That the glossing of Geoffrey's work became a fad among the intellectual luminaries of the twelfth century tends, however, to elide the very salient fact that Geoffrey's presentation of these prophecies represents a co-opting of a thriving native British literary genre. While scholars have noted that Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* seem to draw from the same textual well

1. Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 124.
2. On the date of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*, see Neil Wright's discussion in his edition of the Bern manuscript of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britannie* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), pp. x–xi; for an earlier but still valuable discussion of the date of both the *Prophetiae* and the *Historia Regum Britannie* as a whole, see J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and Its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1950), pp. 433–37.
3. For an excellent introduction and overview to Merlinic prophecy and commentary as a genre, see the introduction to Caroline D. Eckhardt's *The Prophetia Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth: A Fifteenth-Century English Commentary* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). Also useful are Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1911); Julia Crick, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, Prophecy, and History," *Journal of Medieval History*, 18 (1992), 357–71; and Jean Blacker, "Where Wace Feared to Tread: Latin Commentaries on

as Welsh Merlinic prophecies like the tenth-century *Armes Prydain Fawr*, no systematic attempt has been made to understand the nature of Geoffrey's uses of and attitude toward these traditions.[4] On the whole, current scholarship tends to remain agnostic about the issues of Geoffrey's political alignment and of his claim to be drawing upon material from "a certain very ancient book in the British tongue" given to him by his associate, Walter, the Archdeacon of Oxford.[5]

   What scholars of the period often overlook or underestimate, however, is the import of one of Geoffrey's earliest imitators, John of Cornwall, whose *Prophetia Merlini* (ca. 1153) offers a rich and overtly critical response to Geoffrey's project.[6] As Geoffrey's contemporary and as a writer working within (and reworking) the same traditions from which Geoffrey draws, John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini* constitutes a key piece of evidence in understanding Geoffrey's political alignment, at least as it is presented in his own Merlinic prophecies. In what follows, I shall argue that John of Cornwall bases at least part of his prophecy upon a genuine Brittonic source, specifically a roughly contemporary Cornish prophecy dating from about the early twelfth century. This Cornish material, taken in tandem with the overt political stance of John's Latin verse *Prophetia*, affords us in turn a view of Geoffrey of Monmouth as a writer who depoliticizes the content of earlier Merlinic prophecies, creating a text whose studied

Merlin's Prophecies in the Reign of Henry II," *Arthuriana*, 6 (1996), 36–52. By the end of the twelfth century, Geoffrey's version of the prophecies had also been translated into Anglo-Norman; see Jean Blacker, ed., "The Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies of Merlin," *Arthuriana*, 15.1 (Spring 2005), 1–125.

   4. See esp. A. O. H. Jarman, "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Rachel Bromwich et al. (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 117–45. Brynley Roberts provides a solid overview of Geoffrey's more general use of Welsh traditions in "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical Tradition," *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, 20 (1976), 29–40.

   5. The debate about the authenticity of Geoffrey's sources has been raging since the skeptical viewpoints of Alfred of Beverley, Gerald of Wales, and William of Newburgh in the twelfth century. As Francis Inglesew has put it in his essay "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*," *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 670: "if [Geoffrey's ancient book] did not exist, it would have to be invented." For a survey of critical opinions, see Geoffrey Ashe, "A Certain Very Ancient Book: Traces of an Arthurian Source in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History," *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 301–3; Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," p. 29; and, most recently, N. J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-Making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 218–26. Ian Short provides the most convincing argument for the existence of a Welsh source book in "Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber Vetustissimus*," *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 323–43, esp. p. 341.

   6. Throughout I will be citing John of Cornwall from Michael J. Curley's edition, "A New Edition of John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini*," *Speculum* 57 (1982), 217–49. My dating of the prophecy at ca. 1153 follows Curley, pp. 222–23, and is also consistent with Oliver Padel's estimated date of "nearer to 1160 than to 1138" in "Evidence for Oral Tales in Medieval Cornwall," *Studia Celtica*, 40 (2006), 147.

ambiguity would both please his Anglo-Norman audiences and provide an elaborate parlor game for European intellectuals for generations.[7]

John of Cornwall's importance as a writer both in relation to Geoffrey of Monmouth and in his own right has been largely overlooked; Julia Crick, for example, implies that John's *Prophetia* is a derivative version of and commentary upon Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*.[8] Although John of Cornwall's Merlinic prophecy is extant in only a single manuscript, Vatican City, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottobonianus Latinus 1474 (fols 1r-4r), it sheds significant light both on the possible sources of Geoffrey's prophetic material and on the political alignment of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* as a whole. If prophecy is, as Marjorie Reeves suggests, history told backwards, then the composition of prophecy and of prophetic commentaries in the Middle Ages is certainly as politically charged as the writing of history.[9] Like Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Cornwall claims his *Prophetia* to be a translation of an authentic political prophecy in the British tongue, but he presents a far more unambiguously pro-British vision of the Insular future, implicitly correcting and critiquing Geoffrey's Merlinic material in the process. In light of John of Cornwall's far more polemic and overtly anti-Norman prophecy, one can gauge more accurately the limits of Geoffrey's careful ambivalence. Even more importantly, the means by which John of Cornwall legitimates his own work reveal a potential new source for Geoffrey's own prophecies. While Geoffrey leads us to believe that the source for his *Prophetiae Merlini* can be found in the "Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum" (a very old book in the British tongue) that he spuriously cites at the beginning of his *Historia*, John of Cornwall makes use of a more readily identifiable source, a source that Geoffrey may plausibly have known as well.

My argument here is twofold. I shall first make the case that, based on the evidence of some of the so-called "Brittonic" glosses in his prophecy, John of Cornwall was drawing from, if not directly translating, an Old Cornish original that most likely dates from the early twelfth century. This conclusion, built upon philological and contextual evidence, differs from earlier and largely erroneous or unsuccessful attempts to date the

---

7. Of the few scholars who have examined John of Cornwall as a translator in his own right, rather than as a mere adapter of Geoffrey of Monmouth, we might make particular mention of Michael J. Curley, "Gerallt Gymro a Siôn o Gernyw fel Cyfieithwyr Proffwydoliaethau Myrddin," *Llên Cymru*, 15 (1984–86), 23–33, who argues that John translated either a Welsh or Cornish prophetic source.

8. Julia Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 216.

9. Marjorie Reeves, "History and Prophecy in Medieval Thought," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 5 (1974), 53–54. Reeves is amplifying the insights made earlier by R. W. Southern, "Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 3. History As Prophecy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 22 (1972), 159–80.

material cited in these glosses. Building upon arguments first made by
Michael Curley in 1982, this account of John's text and its source offers
a corrective to Oliver Padel's views that "John's Prophecy of Merlin need
not suggest the existence of prophetic poetry in Cornish in the twelfth
century" and that John essentially conceived the *Prophetia* as a composite
of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* and of Welsh Merlinic prophecies, peppering his
commentary extemporaneously with a few Cornish phrases to lend it a
"south-western relevance."[10] Curley, however, has demonstrated that John
is not "merely plundering" Geoffrey. "Only thirty-eight out of a total of
one hundred and thirty-nine prophecies," Curley claims, "can be plausibly
traced to Geoffrey," and he shows how even these thirty-eight differ signifi-
cantly from Geoffrey's versions of the same lines, strongly suggesting that
John is working with a different source.[11] Curley's analysis of the relation
of John's text to the extant Welsh prophecies likewise reveals that, while
John seems to share a number of common points of reference to poems
such as *Afalennau, Oianau,* and the *Gwasgargerdd Myrddin,* among others,
he duplicates none of them. After all, if John were translating or adapting
a Welsh prophecy, why would he cite Cornish terms in his commentary?
The aggregate of the comparisons to both Geoffrey and the Welsh prophe-
cies then, warrants the view that John was working with "an independent
Celtic source."[12]

   The implied existence of what I will identify as an Old Cornish source
for John's *Prophetia* suggests the tenor of Brittonic Merlinic prophecy
in the period directly antecedent to Geoffrey of Monmouth, throwing
into relief the extent to which Geoffrey has diminished a volatile and
potentially dangerous political content in his version of the prophecies.[13]
I shall discuss below the ways in which John's *Prophetia* manipulates the
authority of this Cornish source in order to differentiate itself from Geof-
frey of Monmouth's version of the prophecies. Through the act of offer-
ing a "new translation" of Merlin's prophecies in the wake of Geoffrey
of Monmouth (and, indeed, while Geoffrey himself was still alive), John
is formulating a direct and polemic, if not overtly politicized, response
to Geoffrey's handling of Merlinic prophecy in his *Prophetiae Merlini* and
Historia.[14] Specifically, John's use of at least one Cornish prophetic source

   10. O. J. Padel, "Evidence," p. 150.
   11. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 224.
   12. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 224.
   13. Oliver Padel, "Recent Work on the Origins of Arthurian Legend: A Comment," *Arthu-
riana,* 5.3 (Fall 1995), 106, has also speculated in passing that some of John's Celtic source
materials might represent "scraps of an original text" to which Geoffrey may also have had
access.
   14. I am bracketing discussion of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini,* since the estimated
date of its composition, ca. 1150, makes it unlikely that John would have had access to it.

and his own elucidating commentary upon this prophecy both legitimizes his own translation and seeks to redress the problematic ambiguity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae.* John's efforts toward relative clarity in the prophecies, as well as his quiet insistence that he is representing a more authentic version of Merlin's words, cast doubt upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's obfuscation, implying that Geoffrey's project of "translation" may not entirely be in good faith. The passages of Cornish (however fleeting and tantalizing) that appear in the marginal and interlinear commentary in the Vatican manuscript also render John's text more authentic and potentially more authoritative than the version "translated" by his more illustrious rival.

The *Prophetia Merlini* of John of Cornwall contains 139 lines of vaticination in Latin hexameters, as well as an epistolary introduction in which John dedicates his translation to his patron, Robert Warelwast, the bishop of Exeter. In terms of the prophetic "content" covered, the *Prophetia* corresponds very approximately to the first two and a half manuscript folios of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* in most manuscripts.[15] Foremost among the many striking verbal parallels between Geoffrey's and John's works are their respective openings; both versions of the prophecies begin by showcasing the struggle between peoples for Insular sovereignty. Geoffrey renders this most clearly through his omen of the Red and White Dragons (derived ultimately from the *Historia Brittonum*), while John describes the struggle as a conflict between winds: "Eure, tuum nostris extyrpat germen ab hortis / Auster" (p. 232: O East Wind, the South Wind is tearing your seed from our gardens!).[16] From there, John's *Prophetia Merlini* corresponds loosely to Geoffrey's version through what Rupert Taylor has labeled the Prophecy of the Seven Kings.[17] In its final section, John's prophecy concludes with a prediction that is far more politically explicit than any of Geoffrey's: a call to arms for an alliance between Brittany (represented by the figure of Conan) and Wales (represented by Cadwallader) to drive the Saxon and Norman invaders from British soil.[18]

15. John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini* corresponds specifically to sections 112–15 of Geoffrey's version as it appears in the standard critical edition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 144–51.

16. Translations from John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini* are my own. Julyan Holmes provides a useful translation of the *Prophetia* into Cornish and English: *An Dhargan a Verdhin: The Prophecy of Merlin*, rev. ed. (Gwinear, Cornwall: Kesva an Taves Kernewek, 2001). A French translation also exists: P. Flobert, trans., "La 'Prophetia Merlini' de Jean de Cornwall," *Études celtiques*, 14 (1974), 31–41.

17. Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, p. 14. The relevant prophecies can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve, pp. 144–49.

18. Blacker, "Where Wace Feared," pp. 42–43, argues for a specifically Welsh partisanship for John's *Prophetia Merlini*.

A comparative analysis of John's and Geoffrey's prophecies reveals many similarities of phrasing and vocabulary, though, importantly, no direct parallels or exact wording: John's "Insula tota mades lacrimis" (O entire island, you will be soaked in tears; this and the following quotations of John are from p. 233) against Geoffrey's "Nocturnis lacrimis madebit insula" (ed. Reeve, pp. 146–47: The island will be soaked nightly in tears); John's "Ergo uelit nolit, trunco pede fedus inibit / Latrans cum cervo" (like it or not, the dog, its foot cut off, will enter a pact with the stag) against Geoffrey's "Pedes latrantum truncabuntur. Pacem habebunt ferae. Humanitas supplicium dolebit" (ed. Reeve, pp. 148–49: The paws of barking dogs will be cut off. Wild beasts will enjoy peace. Men will suffer punishment); John's "Cum catulo aquilam lex rupta uorabit in iram, / Quique latent siluis uenantes menibus ipsis" (The broken law will devour the Eagle and the Lion's Cub, and the hunters in the forest will lie in wait in their fortresses) against Geoffrey's "Deaurabit illud aquila rupti foederis et tercia nidificatione gaudebit. Euigilabunt regentis catuli et postpositis nemoribus infra moenia ciuitatum uenabuntur" (ed. Reeve, pp. 148–49: The eagle of the broken treaty will gild the bridle and rejoice in a third nesting. The cubs or the ruler will awake, leave the forests and hunt within city walls); or, somewhat more loosely, John's "Tunc de narciso torquebitur et paliuro, / Et de pascentum manabit cornibus aurum" (Then the lily will be twisted from the narcissus and the Christ-thorn, and gold will drip from the horns of the sheep) against Geoffrey's "In diebus eius aurum ex lilio et urtica extorquebitur et argentum ex ungulis mugientium manabit" (ed. Reeve, pp. 146–47: In his time gold will be extracted from the lily and nettle, and silver shall drip from the hooves of lowing cattle). There are dozens of other verbal parallels between the two texts, sometimes constituting mere rewordings or syntactic variations in ways that would be typical of the versification of a prose passage, but often amounting to rather divergent meanings. While it is still possible, as Padel has conjectured, that John of Cornwall is simply adapting Geoffrey's prose prophecies into hexameter verse and augmenting them with motifs and images from Welsh prophecies,[19] too many of the divergences between the two texts cannot be accounted for by versification. Michael Curley's conclusion that the two prophecies may well represent independent translations of the same or similar Brittonic sources therefore seems strongly warranted.[20] If this judgment is correct, we may regard John's *Prophetia* as providing useful glimpses at at least one of Geoffrey's sources as well.

The unique manuscript of John's *Prophetia Merlini* also includes a lengthy and detailed interpretive apparatus consisting of both marginal commen-

19. Padel, "Evidence for Oral Tales," p. 149.
20. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," pp. 219–20.

tary and interlinear glosses. Despite the fact that two or more generations separate the Vatican manuscript from the *Prophetia*'s estimated date of composition ca. 1153—a span of time that would naturally invite interested scholars or scribes to provide glosses on an otherwise baffling text (if the numerous commentaries on Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* can serve as an index)—it seems that these glosses in fact originate, as Curley supposed, from John of Cornwall himself.[21] In the prefatory letter to Bishop Robert, John announces his intention to provide such an apparatus: "brevi admodum et in scolari palestra id eluctari puerili stilo conatus sum" (p. 231: I have attempted with my humble pen to elucidate it in a humble manner). Accordingly, the glosses and commentary are written in the first person no less than twelve times, half of those even in the first-person singular. Moreover, these first-person glosses make it clear that the voice of the glossator is identical with the author-translator of the *Prophetia Merlini*. The gloss on line 53, one of the more verbose, provides a perfect (and typical) example of John's voice behind the glosses and commentary:

> (53) *Tunc de narciso.* Hoc loco fateor transgressum quia in generali qualitate dicit Merlinus nec bonis [uel] nec malis parcet, iterum in speciali nec lilio nec urtice, tercio nec narciso nec paliuro. Sed existimaui istud ultimum sufficere eo quod sit incul< . . . > qui modus orationis sepissime occurrit in nostris cantilenis causa ornatus adhibendi, iuxta quod docetur in rethorica. (pp. 237–38)

> (Here I admit having transgressed, since Merlin actually speaks first about good and evil in a general sense, then again in more detail as the lily and the nettle, and for a third time as the narcissus and the Christ-thorn. But I deemed this final image to suffice for that which is <*text corrupt*>, a mode of oration that occurs quite often in our poetry, to be embellished according to the rules of rhetoric.)

The glossator here discusses, in the first person, matters of translation and adaptation; he admits freely to having in this case abbreviated the Merlinic original, allowing the metaphor of the narcissus (*narcisus*) and the Christ's thorn (*paliurus*) to stand in for the more general idea of good and evil.[22] The commentary here also seems to refer to the source text (*in nostris cantilenis*), again highlighting the process of translation. In another instance, in the commentary for line 79 the commentator admits the necessity for a particular passage to remain somewhat obscure;[23] surely a

21. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 218.

22. Tellingly, the commentary references the images of the lily (*lilia*) and the nettle (*urtica*), which appear in Geoffrey's version of the prophecies. In this, it seems that John is suggesting that Geoffrey's translation somehow misses the mark, rhetorically and perhaps prophetically as well.

23. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 238: "(79): *Periure.* De quo periurio dicat, non est utile ut diffiniam."

nonauthorial glossator would not be so coy about providing interpretation. The only person in a position to comment thus on issues of translation and interpretation in the first person would be the translator himself, John of Cornwall. One might also note that the glossator is not a later scribe abbreviating John, since he refers to adapting the words of Merlin, not of Merlin's translator. What's more, it seems unlikely indeed that a later, third-party scribe would purposely abridge the original text only to rehearse in the commentary the material he had earlier suppressed. The commentator's desire to abbreviate the original is consistent with John's statements in the dedicatory letter to Robert of Warelwast that he intends to suppress some of the material of the prophecy, especially the parts referring to the death of the Brittonic hero Conan. Finally, the commentator most often uses verbs in the perfect tense—*dixi, existimaui, nolui*, etc.—a pattern that indicates that his perspective is of speaking in the present about actions completed in the past. In terms, then, of the authorship of the glosses, the simplest solution proves the best: that the commentator is also the translator—namely, John of Cornwall himself.

We are thus faced here with a rather singular phenomenon in the history of the medieval British political prophecy; namely, a prophecy whose generic obscurity is supplemented by an authorial hermeneutic presence—a prophecy that provides its own gloss. "Without the commentary," Curley suggests, "any number of interpretations are possible; with it, however, the range is considerably narrowed."[24] John's *Prophetia* differs from the several extant annotated copies of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* precisely because the explanations here are supplied by the translator/author who claims access to an understanding of an original Merlinic source in a Brittonic language: "iuxta nostrum Brittanicum" (p. 231: according to *our* British language [emphasis mine]).[25] John of Cornwall, it seems, was anxious to have his *Prophetia* accepted as an authentic and *authoritative* Merlinic prophecy—no mean feat considering its publication in the wake of Geoffrey's version. Much more clearly than Geoffrey of Monmouth, John seems not to have wanted the anti-Saxon and anti-Norman content of his own *Prophetia Merlini* to be ignored, de-emphasized, misconstrued, or otherwise lost in translation.

Scattered among the many Latin glosses throughout the prophecy, John provides seven additional glosses in what appears to be a Brittonic language, though not one that is immediately recognizable or identifiable— Breton, Welsh, or Cornish would all initially seem reasonable possibilities. In each case, John's citations of this language purport to be from the Brit-

24. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 219.
25. In contrast to Geoffrey of Monmouth, John consistently refers to the source language and to the territories it concerns as *noster*.

ish original from which he is translating. However, Léon Fleuriot, in his philological analysis of the Brittonic glosses, discusses their significance both as a measure of the poem's authenticity and as an index for the types of political and prophetic poetry being circulated in Celtic Britain during the years preceding the composition of both Geoffrey's and John's works.[26] A more precise dating of this material can provide insight into both anti-Saxon and anti-Norman political sentiments in Celtic Britain; better dating can likewise illuminate Geoffrey's relationship to Cornwall and to his now notorious "quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum."[27] As I shall demonstrate, these Brittonic glosses represent—contrary to previous scholarly opinions—a form of Old Cornish dating approximately from the later years of the eleventh century to the early years of the twelfth, roughly the period from about 1070 to 1130. These conclusions suggest that a native prophetic tradition (perhaps preserved at Bodmin or Exeter) related to the Welsh traditions of prophetic poetry survived until at least the eleventh century, presenting us with a much different picture of British literary response to the Normans during the generation or two after the conquest, and before Geoffrey set out to write his *Historia*. While our current understanding of this response has been based largely on the study of inferences in a handful of poems such as the *Afallennau*, we may now be able to posit a much broader, perhaps even largely oral tradition of political prophecy encompassing not just Wales, but Cornwall as well. In fact, since the Norman impact on Cornwall was doubtless more complete and perhaps more immediately severe than on Wales, it is not surprising to discern in eleventh- or twelfth-century Cornwall a vibrant anti-Norman prophetic tradition.[28]

II.

John's Cornish connections extend beyond his name. Though schooled in Paris, John of Cornwall was attached to the cathedral at Exeter; his patron,

26. Léon Fleuriot's analysis of the glosses can be found in his "Les fragments du texte brittonique dans la 'Prophetia Merlini' de Jean de Cornwall," *Études celtiques*, 14 (1974), 42–56. Fleuriot's opinions should be referenced against his *Le vieux breton: elements d'un grammaire* (Paris: C. Klincksiek, 1964) and his *Dictionnaire des gloses en vieux breton* (Paris: C. Klincksiek, 1964).

27. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve, p. 5: "a certain very ancient book in the British language."

28. Cornwall was thoroughly inventoried in Domesday Book, for example. E. M. R. Ditmas, however, conjectures that the Normans paid little heed to Cornwall until the early twelfth century, when Henry I named his illegitimate son Reginald the first Earl of Cornwall and also secured certain Cornish properties for another illegitimate son, Robert of Gloucester (incidentally, one of Geoffrey of Monmouth's benefactors). See Ditmas, "A Reappraisal of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Allusions to Cornwall," *Speculum*, 48 (1973), 510–24.

Robert de Warelwast (d. 1155), was the bishop of Exeter, and John himself seems to refer to Cornwall as his home: *in partibus nostris*.[29] By analogy, we may also suppose that John's references to *lingua nostra* likely refer to Cornish, which was by the mid-twelfth century certainly an independent language, though still revealing close affinities to Breton and, to a lesser extent, Welsh.[30] (The twelfth-century term *britannicus*—"British"—could equally refer to what we now differentiate more scientifically as Welsh, Cornish, and Breton.) One might fruitfully compare John's use of the term *lingua nostra* with Geoffrey's claim to be translating his *Historia Regum Britanniae* from an ancient book *Britannici sermonis*. Whereas John claims a homeland and mother tongue of Brittonic provenance, Geoffrey, writing as a secular canon in the intellectual center of Oxford, distances himself from his putative source language, never referring to his historical material as comprising the past of his *own* people. Whatever Geoffrey's own ethnic background—Norman, English, Breton, Welsh, or some mixture thereof—he treats the ancient Britons in his work as the object of study rather than as an originary point for the identities of his patrons or himself.

Although it seems certain that John was fluent in Cornish, critical identification of the language of the Brittonic glosses in the *Prophetia Merlini* has, however, been far from unitary. Rupert Taylor identifies the glosses as Welsh, while Whitley Stokes, and later Henry Jenner, somewhat impressionistically label them simply as "early Cornish," seeing them as fragmentary evidence of a vibrant but now lost early medieval literary tradition in Cornish.[31] More recently, Oliver Padel assumes that the Brittonic words and phrases are twelfth-century Cornish, though he also surmises that they are perhaps of John's own coinage rather than being representative of a genuine lost original.[32] Fleuriot, however, disagrees, arguing force-

29. John of Cornwall, "A New Edition," ed. Curley, p. 240; for details on John's life, education, and works, see Eleanor Rathbone, "John of Cornwall: A Brief Biography," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 17 (1950), 46–60.

30. Giraldus Cambrensis in *Opera*, vol. VI, ed. J. F. Dimock (London: Rolls Series, 1868), p. 177, in fact suggests that Cornish, Breton, and Welsh were mutually intelligible during his lifetime in the late twelfth century: "Cornubia vero, et Armorica Britannia, lingua utuntur fere persimili; Kambris tamen, propter originalem convenientiam, in multis adhuc et fere cunctis intelligibili" (Cornwall and Armorican Brittany use practically the same language; and even among the Welsh, because of their common origin, they can be mostly understood in almost everything). While Giraldus is prone to exaggerate similarities, a cursory glance at the grammar and vocabularies of the three languages supports his observation. Alderik Blom, "The Welsh Glosses in the Vocabularium Cornicum," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 57 (Summer 2009), 23–40, demonstrates that the glossator of the *Vocabularium* perceived the difference between Welsh and Cornish to be mainly one of vowel sounds, and he concludes, p. 40, that "texts continued to travel between the different Brittonic-speaking areas after the abandonment of the common spelling-system, and to be used and studied without much difficulty."

31. Whitley Stokes, "Cornica," *Revue celtique*, 3 (1876–78), 85; Henry Jenner, "The Tristan Romance and Its Cornish Provenance," *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 19 (1913), 488.

32. Padel, "Evidence for Oral Tales," p. 149.

fully that the language of these glosses represents a dialect of southwest Brittonic that predates the linguistic divergence between Cornish and Breton: "le texte lui-même . . . était écrit dans une langue antérieure à la différenciation du Breton et du Cornique."[33] Judging by our current understanding of the linguistic history of the Brittonic languages, Fleuriot's analysis of these glosses would therefore date the source material of John's prophecy to the eighth or ninth century.[34] Close analysis of the glosses demonstrates the fallacy of Fleuriot's opinion and points to a far more recent Old Cornish exemplar from at least the late eleventh century and likely as recent as the first half of the twelfth. Such a provenance reveals not only that pre-Galfridian Merlinic prophecy was not restricted to Wales but also that Cornishmen of the period, like their Welsh counterparts, felt inspired to compose political prophecy in the wake of 1066 and in the face of increasing Norman domination.

The glosses under consideration consist of the following (I have followed Curley's editing and lineation but have rendered the Brittonic words in question in boldface):

Line 46: *Adicit iste leo bis septem desuper octo.* Marginal gloss: *predicto rithmo, id est, viii, et omnes fiunt xxxv; qui et ipse iterum hoc modo partitur:* **pemp bliden warn ugens ha hanter,** *id est, xxv. annos et dimidium; nec uult intelligi dimidium dimidii, sed dimidium uigenarii, scilicet x* (pp. 232 and 237).

(This lion adds twice seven upon eight . . . [gloss:] In the abovementioned number [that is, eight], and that makes twenty-five altogether; it is divided up again in this way: *pemp bliden warn ugens ha hanter,* that is, twenty-five years and one half; this half should not be understood as one-half but as half of twenty, or ten. [Flobert's French translation of John's *Prophetia Merlini* does not include the glosses or commentary.])

Lines 87–88: *Flamma, fames, morbi seu que nouissima fati / In te coniurant, socios hec ipsa flagellant.* Marginal gloss: *Fames. Fames ista contigit tum ex ingruente seuitia depredantium, tum ex intemperie. Eo enim tempore uentus tam uehemens insaniuit, ut frustrata relinqueret uota cultorum. Hoc malum nominat ipse in Britannico* **guent dehil,** *et interpretatur venti excussio* (pp. 234 and 238–39).

(Fire, famine, diseases, or whatever most recently the Fates conspire to mete unto you shall also be scourges unto your allies . . . [gloss:] Famine. This

---

33. Fleuriot, "Fragments," p. 48.

34. See K. H. Jackson, *A Historical Phonology of Breton* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 1–2, for a discussion of this periodization. Fleuriot himself, in his *Le vieux breton,* p. 1, places the emergence of Old Breton at around 750. The implications of Patrick Sims-Williams's "Dating the Transition to Neo-Brythonic: Phonology and History, 400–600," in *Britain 400–600: Language and History,* ed. Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1990), pp. 218–61, would put this date even earlier, perhaps as early as the mid-seventh century. See also John T. Koch's illuminating discussion of the nomenclature of these largely pre-historic languages in "When Was Welsh Literature First Written Down?" *Studia Celtica,* 20–21 (1985–86), 43–66.

famine occurred at times because of the impending assaults of pillagers, at times because of intemperance. At that time there was also a very strong wind that raced so violently through the land that it left the offerings to God unfulfilled. This evil was called *guent dehil* in the British tongue, and it is interpreted as "an onslaught of wind.")

Line 91: *Canus adoptatus Perironis obambulat ortus.* Marginal gloss: *Canus adoptatus. Hoc est quod dicitur in Britannico: michtien luchd mal igasuet. Perironis. Hoc dicit de aduentu illius in Cornubia, et quia tunc obsedit castrum apud Peririonem quod dicitur Dindaiol* (pp. 234 and 239).

(The hoary old adopted man wanders about the source of the Periron . . . . [gloss:] The hoary old adopted man. This is what is called *michtien luchd mal igasuet* in the British tongue. *Periron.* This refers to his entry into Cornwall, for he then laid siege to the castle by the Periron, that is, Tintagel.)

Line 108: *Per iuga Brentigie Galli dominantur ubique.* Marginal gloss: *Brentigie quoddam desertum est in Cornubia, et dicitur in nostra lingua goen bren, in lingua Saxonum Fawi-mor* (pp. 235 and 239).

(The French will be everywhere defeated throughout the hills of Brentigia . . . . [gloss:] Brentigia is a certain wasteland in Cornwall, and it is called *goen bren* in our tongue and *Fawi-mor* in the Saxon.)

Lines 110–12: *Ex quo murilegi precio comulantur et hirci. / Ventorum rabies et queque rebellio ciues / Affliget tristis dum desinat ira Tonantis.* Marginal gloss: *Ventorum, quod malum dicit Merlinus awel garu, id est, auram asperam, et ita large accipitur, ut quamlibet intemperiem possit nominare* (pp. 235 and 239).

(In exchange for which the cats and rams will multiply. The raging of the winds and a certain unrest will afflict the people until the grievous wrath of the Thunderer ceases . . . [gloss:] The wind is the evil which Merlin calls *awel garu*, that is the bitter breeze, and it is thus widely accepted that this can refer to some kind of raging storm.)

Line 119: *Et quid tam sero fatali pendere castro?* Marginal gloss: *Fatale castrum dicit illud municipium in partibus nostris quod in Anglico dicitur Aschbiri, in Britannico Kair Belli, et ut placet quibusdam, id est, Castel uchel coed* (pp. 235 and 240).

(And why now, so late, does one repay the fatal fortress? . . . [gloss:] Fatal fortress refers to that hall in our district that is called *Aschbiri* in English and *Kair Belli* in British, or, as some prefer, *Castel uchel coed*.)

Collectively, these glosses witness an otherwise unattested interest in Cornwall as the locus of prophetic events, and Padel believes that John inserted them not to reference his source but to supply earlier Merlinic prophecies (whether Welsh or Galfridian) with a specifically Cornish relevance, a point I shall return to below.[35] The first occurrence of a Brittonic marginal gloss at line 46 demonstrates the clearest case for a possible Cornish exemplar. Although the phrase *pemp bliden warn ugens ha hanter* is

35. Padel, "Evidence for Oral Tales," p. 150.

admittedly obscure in its numerological reference, its linguistic provenance could not be clearer, since the word *ugens* (twenty) could not be any Celtic language except for Cornish. Indeed, the development of southwest Brittonic final /nt/ to Cornish /ns/ is one of the shibboleths that distinguish Cornish from both Breton and Welsh (cf. Middle Breton *ugent* and Middle Welsh *ugeint*). K. H. Jackson dates this transformation clearly to the second half of the eleventh century, which establishes an *ante quem non* for this phrase.[36] On the other hand, Fleuriot's less cogent analysis of the line *pemp bliden warn ugens ha hanter* leads to a conclusion that the language must predate the splitting of Cornish and Breton merely because such a line, containing a seemingly Cornish –*ns* in *ugens* alongside a possibly Breton -*nt*- in *hanter*, could equally be either Breton or Cornish.[37] However, there are no reasons to link the text with the Breton language or with Brittany, other than the *Prophetia*'s passing references to the shadowy figure of Conan (a Breton in Geoffrey's *Historia* and the name of several dukes of Brittany) and the fact that John's schoolmaster, Thierry of Chartres, was Breton. We should therefore make the phonologically more conservative judgment that the text represents Old Cornish, which dates at the earliest from the mid-eleventh century. Indeed, the line quoted would require only slight orthographic adjustment to be comprehensible as Modern Cornish.

Fleuriot's major objection to a strictly Cornish provenance for the glosses rests on his analysis of the word *guent* that glosses line 87. Because the word for "wind" appears here as *guent* rather than later Cornish *guins*, Fleuriot takes this as proof of his theory that the text antedates the divergence of Cornish and Breton. Conversely, Fleuriot dismisses the presence of the unarguably Cornish word *ugens* here as simply a *hapax legomenon* or else an error from a later Cornish transcriber. By this logic, an earlier date for the underlying Brittonic material here may initially seem more likely, and one could perhaps suggest a date of ca. 950x1000. Jackson, however, provides an account of the phonological development of Old Cornish that confounds Fleuriot's theory. According to Jackson, the shift of Old Cornish final /nt/ to /ns/ occurred only *gradually* over the course of the second half of the eleventh century.[38] Given, then, the presence of *guent* in the glosses (Brittonic -*nt* preserved) and next to *ugens* (Brittonic -*nt* > -*ns*), we can more likely date the glosses to precisely this transitional period, that is, to ca. 1050x1150. Indeed, the *Vocabularium Cornicum* (ca.

36. Jackson outlines the historical phonetics of the development of Welsh, Cornish, and Breton from primitive Brittonic in admirable detail in *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953; repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994). His discussion on pp. 3–30 is particularly instructive here.

37. Cf. Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 21.

38. Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 507–8.

1100x1150), our primary linguistic witness to Old Cornish, captures this development in action, preserving many words in both final /nt/ (*tairnant, diskient*) and final /ns/ (*cans, argans, nans, abrans*).[39] Noting the same testimony from the *Vocabularium Cornicum,* Fleuriot argues that "l'original de notre texte [John's glosses] est antérieure à ce Vocabulaire." I cannot accept this reasoning. Instead, on the basis of the simultaneous presence of both /ns/ and /nt/, it seems that we are dealing in John's glosses with another example of a text from precisely this same transitional period, a text which, like the *Vocabularium Cornicum,* dates from the late-eleventh or early twelfth-century.[40] If we invoke Occam's Razor, it is unnecessary with this later, eleventh- or twelfth-century date to hypothesize, as Fleuriot does, a careless intervening Cornish transcriber of an archaic southwest Brittonic exemplar. This gloss, moreover, if it does represent fragments of some authentic Cornish prophetic tradition, dates from the same period as some of the known Welsh Merlinic poems such as the *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* or the *Gwasgargerdd Myrddin,* that is, 1050x1150.[41]

As for the Brittonic name *Dindaiol* in line 91, here too we can posit a Cornish original, though the precise form of the word as it stands requires analysis. Fleuriot and Curley agree that the word represents the place-name Tintagel, a name made famous by its Arthurian associations (definitively attested in literary texts from 1138x1485 and beyond);[42] Tintagel would carry a particularly powerful resonance in the wake of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae.* However, the word as it appears in the glosses—beginning with an initial <D> and using an <i> rather than a <g> in its second element—is unusual, at odds with all the other occurrences of the name in medieval texts. Oliver Padel, in his *Cornish Place-Name Elements,* parses the word as **dyn* (fort) + **tagell* (throat, constriction) a name that certainly describes accurately the narrow penin-

---

39. References to the *Vocabularium Cornicum* throughout are to the edition prepared by Eugene V. Graves, *The Old Cornish Vocabulary* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1962). For extended discussion of the etymologies and cognates of the words in the *Vocabularium,* see Enrico Campanile, *Profilo etimologico del cornico antico* (Pisa: Pacini, 1974). The fact that the manuscript of the *Vocabularium* probably dates from the end of the twelfth century raises the outside possibility that some of the salient sound changes occurred *after* the composition of John's glosses.

40. Blom, "The Welsh Glosses," pp. 23–40, argues convincingly that the *Vocabularium* as it stands was composed closer to 1150 than to the late-eleventh-century date assumed by Zeuss, Graves, and others. This revised date does not affect my argument here, however, as the *Vocabularium*'s new date of 1150 coincides perfectly with the date of composition of John's *Prophetia Merlini.*

41. See *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin,* ed. A. O. H. Jarman (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1982), pp. xxxiv–xl.

42. Fleuriot, "Fragments," p. 52, finds the identification of Dindaiol with Tintagel unsatisfying, but admits that at present there is no likelier explanation.

sula upon which Tintagel Castle was built.[43] He also notes the tendency of
the morpheme *dyn to be confused with *tyn (rump) and for other place
names beginning with an initial <T>, such as Treglyn and Trendeal also
to exhibit an occasional spelling in <D>.[44] John's spelling of *Dindaiol* at
the very least indicates his familiarity with the toponymy of Cornwall, but
his choice of what was by 1150 a nonstandard spelling is also consistent
with his program of lending his prophecy a genuine Cornishness that he
may have perceived as deficient in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth.
In other words, *Dindaiol* with its initial <D> may be one of the many ways
in which John attempts to one-up his more illustrious colleague.

The second element of *Dindaiol* (from **tagell*) is even more interesting,
as its unusual spelling allows us to identify the form as uniquely Cornish
rather than Welsh or Breton. The spelling of the second element of *Din-
daiol* with a medial <d> rather than a <t> (*Dindaiol* rather than *Dintaiol*)
reveals an orthographic system in which this type of internal lenition is
marked.[45] Jackson emphasizes that of the three Brittonic languages—
Welsh, Cornish, and Breton—only Cornish regularly represented internal
lenition in its spelling system by the eleventh and twelfth centuries; Welsh
and Breton, on the other hand, did not represent this particular sound
phenomenon in their writing systems until the early thirteenth century.[46]
The form *Dindaiol* representing *Tintagel* with a medial <d>, then, is of
a type unattested in contemporary Welsh and Breton but rather well
attested (though by no means universal) in twelfth-century Cornish;[47]
the *Vocabularium Cornicum*, for instance, gives us a host of compound
words—*ficbren, ofergugol, kiguer, guillua, hirgorn, guennuit, abarh*, and *ara-
deruur*, among others—whose spellings reflect such internal lenition.[48]

Finally, the gloss's spelling of *Dindaiol* with an <i> at the beginning of

43. Oliver Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Society,
1985), pp. 84 and 214.

44. Padel, *Place-Name*, p. 84.

45. Lenition in Celtic languages is a phonetic process whereby voiceless stops become
voiced stops and voiced stops become voiced fricatives in certain specific syntactic, morphe-
mic, or phonological environments.

46. Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 550–52.

47. The one exception to this rule might be the sound /μ/ as a reflex of Brittonic /m/.
While Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Emergence of Old Welsh, Cornish, and Breton Orthog-
raphy, 600–800: The Evidence of Old Welsh," *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 38 (1991),
20–86, and John T. Koch, "When Was Welsh Literature," have recently shown the antiquity
of orthographic practices in the neo-Brittonic languages, we might not be surprised that
John of Cornwall's glosses seem to retain the conservative spelling of <m> for lenited /μ/,
rather than employ an innovative <u> or <v>. Paul Russell, "*Rowynniauc, Rhufoniog*: The
Orthography and Phonology of /μ/ in Early Welsh," in *Yr Hen Iaith: Studies in Early Welsh*,
ed. Paul Russell (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2003), pp. 25–48, notes that the
Black Book of Carmarthen (thirteenth century) likewise evidences a spelling that may have
recognized a distinct /μ/ phoneme.

48. Concordantly, the *Vocabularium Cornicum* attests relatively fewer cases in which the
lenition is not reflected orthographically.

its final syllable, corresponding to the <g> of Tintagel, likewise suggests a Cornish rather than a Welsh or Breton source for the word. At first glance, the <i> might seem to represent a mutation of intervocalic -g-: /g/ > /ɣ/ > /j/. This, however, is not a phonetic process known to any of the Celtic languages during the period we are concerned with.[49] One could explain this <i> in two different ways, both of which strongly suggest an ultimately Cornish provenance. First, the <i> might reflect the influence of Anglo-Saxon orthography, a significant force in Cornwall from at least the tenth century on.[50] Since intervocalic /g/ regularly palatalizes in Anglo-Saxon, especially in the West Saxon dialect that would have infiltrated Cornwall, a Cornish or even English scribe might have pronounced the word *Dindagol* as */dindaɣol/ or even as a fully palatalized */dindajol/, quite plausibly transcribing the word as *Dindaiol* in either case. The *Vocabularium Cornicum* in fact bears witness to a similar process: the Anglo-Saxon word *pægel* (with the <g> pronounced as either /ɣ/ or /j/), meaning "wine vessel," appears in Old Cornish as *baiol*.[51] In like manner, as Graves asserts, we might also derive the Old Cornish *maister* of the *Vocabularium Cornicum* from Anglo-Saxon *magister*. In both cases, the English intervocalic /g/, which retains a conservative <g> spelling within Anglo-Saxon itself, palatalizes in its transformation into Cornish. The <g> of Tintagel (or Dindagol) might well appear, given the intervention or influence of an Anglo-Saxon scribe at some point in the word's transmission, as the <i> of *Dindaiol*. Again, the fact that the influence of Anglo-Saxon scribal practices at an early date in Cornwall (but not in Wales or Brittany) confirms *Dindaiol* as a word of strictly Cornish provenance.

Alternately, and especially when we remember that the scribe of the Vatican manuscript was probably an Anglo-Norman (the script reveals significant Anglo-Norman characteristics) whose first language was French, we might face another possibility.[52] A twelfth-century Francophone, faced with the foreign word *Dindagol* or *Dintagel* would most likely pronounce the <g> as a French <j>, thus as the affricate /dʒ/. Surely that is how the current English pronunciation of Tintagel arose. The <i> of the Vatican manuscript's *Dindaiol* might, then, simply represent a French <j> (indeed, <i> was the standard graph for the French /dʒ/ sound in the Middle Ages).[53] In the end, whether the <i> of *Dindaiol* represents the influence of an

49. Jackson, *Language and History*, p. 559, dates the transformation of Brittonic /g/ to /ɣ/ as early as the fourth century.

50. See Martyn F. Wakelin, *Language and History in Cornwall* (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 66–68.

51. Graves, *Old Cornish Vocabulary*, p. 162.

52. I am very grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this fine suggestion.

53. Even if the <i> is of French origin, we may again rule out a Breton provenance, as /dʒ/ does not occur in Old Breton or early Middle Breton. See Jackson's discussions in *A Historical Phonology of Breton*, pp. 778–80, 825–33.

Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Norman scribe at some point in the text's transmission, either scenario locates the word firmly within a Cornish rather than a Welsh or Breton provenance.

The Vatican manuscript's other glosses confirm the dating of the language to the late eleventh or early twelfth century. The form *Kair* of *Kair Belli* in the gloss to line 119 (*quid tam sero fatali pendere castro*) may at first suggest a Welsh rather than a Cornish provenance. After all, Welsh *caer* (stronghold, fortress) is a familiar element in Welsh place-names. On the other hand, the element *Ker-* is rather common throughout Cornwall (Padel reckons well over a hundred) and the term may well in the Old Cornish period have still been spelt *kair* or *cair*; place-names retaining the /*ai*/ diphthong persist well into the Middle Cornish period.[54] The second element in the name, *Belli*, proves more difficult to elucidate. A similar *Kaer Geri* appears in the tenth-century Welsh prophecy *Armes Prydein Fawr*, though this is usually understood to refer to Cirencester.[55] It is also possible that the Vatican manuscript's *Kair Belli* may represent an alternate or corrupted form of *Kair Kelli*, or *Kelliwig*, a site associated in a number of Welsh sources with Cornwall in general and with King Arthur in particular.[56] Identification of John's *Kair Belli* with either *Kaer Geri* of the *Armes Prydain Fawr* or, more likely, with *Kair Kelli* could easily be explained by textual corruption and scribal error, especially as a capital <B> might easily be mistaken for a <K> or <G> in certain pre-Gothic hands. Whatever the original form of the word *Belli*, John takes pains to specify his *Kair Belli* unambiguously as "Ashbury" in Cornwall. The fortress at Ashbury, in what is now Week St. Mary, Cornwall, has seen almost continual human occupation since prehistoric times and was, in fact, the location of both a neolithic hill-fort and an early Norman motte-and-bailey castle. John's gloss indicates his knowledge of some now lost lore, perhaps relating to Cornish history or folk traditions; he refers to the site as being *in partibus nostris*, that is, in Cornwall. He seems particularly insistent here in the threefold equivalence he sets up between Ashbury, Kair Belli, and Castell Uchel Coed.

One phrase in the glosses, *Castel uchel coed*, seems not to be Old Cornish

54. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, pp. 50–54.

55. *Armes Prydain Fawr*, ed. and trans. G. R. Isaac, in "'Armes Prydain Fawr' and St David," in *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation*, ed. J. Wyn Evans and Jonathan M. Wooding (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 174–75: "Meiryon Kaer Geri difri cwynant" (The officers of Cirencester will lament bitterly).

56. See Rachel Bromwich, ed., *Trioedd Ynys Prydain: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 3d ed. (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2006), p. 3. Bromwich associates the name with Kelly Rounds, a neolithic hill-fort in Cornwall on the road between Padstow and Fowey. Oliver Padel, "Some South-Western Sites with Arthurian Associations," in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 234–38, discusses the problems involved in pinpointing the location of Kelliwig.

at all but Middle Welsh, though the spelling of *coed* is rather unusual: *coit* would be the more expected twelfth-century Welsh spelling, though the manuscript's *coed* could technically also be an alternate spelling of either Old Cornish *cuit* or Old Breton *coit, coet*. Likewise, the gloss's *uchel* seems again more plausibly Welsh, but *uchel*, though not attested as such, would not be an impossible form in Old Cornish.[57] In this particular case, I believe that John, a speaker of Welsh as well as Cornish, supplies the name of the place mentioned in a form in which it might be recognizable by certain members of his audience, some of whom perhaps also knew Welsh or were familiar with some of the Welsh prophetic traditions and thus had heard this name.[58] *Castel uchel coed*—"the Castle of the High Wood" or perhaps "the Castle above the wood"—need not have (and phonetically *could* not have) been part of our hypothetical Old Cornish source text. We might conjecture that here, as with his supplying the term *Kair Belli*, John is drawing upon his knowledge of the Welsh language and presumably his acquaintance with Welshmen to further elucidate his Latin translation and, by extension, its Old Cornish exemplar.[59] Unfortunately for modern students of Merlinic prophecy, John did not further clarify the nature of the payment at the *fatale castrum* of Ashbury, and we must hope that John's audience was familiar with the whole story.

The word *dehil* in the gloss on line 87, referring to the Latin term *excussio* (a shaking or a blast) may well represent a form of Cornish *dihilha* (cf. Modern Cornish *dehelya* [to chase along, hurry]), even though Fleuriot aligns it—again, less plausibly—with its Breton form, *dishilha*. The phrase as a whole, then, *guent dehil*, would seem to mean something like "wind of raging" rather than John's *venti excussio* (a raging of [the] wind).

Two of the remaining Brittonic glosses—*goen bren* of line 266 and *awel garu* of line 271—prove of less value in dating the Brittonic text, since these might equally be Cornish, Breton, or Welsh. In fact, *awel garu* is a possible form in all three languages.[60] With *goen bren*, we are faced with a form that

57. For the Cornish *cuit*, see Graves, *The Old Cornish Vocabulary*, p. 305; the word would develop into Middle and Modern Cornish *coys/cos*. For the history of the word in Breton, see Jackson, *Phonology*, pp. 186–87. The Cornish and Breton cognates of the Welsh word *uchel* (high) usually display spellings with an internal -h- or -gh-, but -ch- representing internal /x/ is also attested elsewhere in the *Vocabularium*. See Graves, *The Old Cornish Vocabulary*, p. 65, and Jackson, *Phonology*, p. 535.

58. It is tempting to align John's *Castel uchel coed* with the *Pensa uel coit* of Nennius's and Bede's lists of British cities, or with the *Cair Penhuelcoit* that Geoffrey of Monmouth equates with Exeter.

59. Both Eleanor Rathbone, "Brief Biography," p. 49, and Michael Curley, "Gerallt Gymro a Sion o Gernyw," p. 28, attest to John's mastery of Welsh in addition to Cornish.

60. The *Vocabularium Cornicum* (Graves, *The Old Cornish Vocabulary*, p. 195) preserves the word *awel* with the spelling *auhel* as a gloss on the Latin word *aura*. We need not be troubled by the case of this *auhel*, however, as the *Vocabularium* sporadically records many words (*ba-*

does initially look slightly more Breton than Cornish, since Cornish tends not to use an orthographic <oe>.[61] Nonetheless, Padel notes that *Goen-* was the most common spelling of the word, as least within place-names, during the Middle Ages.[62] We can also locate a cognate for John's *goen* in the *Vocabularium Cornicum*'s *guen* (field, meadow), glossing the Latin *campus*. As Graves points out, the relevant cognates of the Cornish word—Old Welsh *guoun*, Middle Welsh *gweun*, and Middle Breton *gueun*—all retain an orthographic diphthong where Old Cornish usually reduces it to a simple /e/.[63] The *Prophetia*'s *goen*, then, merely represents an alternate way of spelling *guen*, with <o> representing the labial rounded semi-vowel rather than the *Vocabularium Cornicum*'s <u>. Thus the toponym *goen bren*, like so many of the other Brittonic phrases in the *Prophetia*'s marginalia and glosses, is also a uniquely Old Cornish form of a type consistent with the *Vocabularium Cornicum*, that is, within a generation or so of John's own lifetime.

The most perplexing of the Brittonic phrases that appear in the marginal commentary is surely the *michtien luchd mal igasuet* on line 91. Though looking vaguely Brittonic, the phrase is meaningless as it stands and is corrupt, a clear sign that the Anglo-Norman scribe of the Vatican manuscript was ignorant of Cornish. Fleuriot, drawing inspiration from the Latin prophecy itself in this case (esp. *canus*) and also from the analogue line in Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Niueus quoque senex in niueo equo fluuium Perironis diuertet*), emends the line to read *machtiern luitd mal i gassec*, which he translates as "le chef chenu comme sa jument."[64] Curley, however, offers a different suggestion in his edition of the poem. Basing his reconstruction on the idea that John's translation must represent the original fairly accurately, he reads the *mal igasuet* as some Brittonic form cognate with the Welsh word *mabwysiad*, meaning adoption.[65] Thus John's phrase *canus adoptatus* would correspond to something like "the hoary adopted man" or even, if we take the word *michtien* into account, "the hoary adopted steward."

Both Fleuriot's and Curley's reconstructions are not without problems. Fleuriot's reconstruction as a whole is quite reasonable, though one finds

---

het, euhic, mehil, ehoc, ehal, etc.) with an intrusive orthographic <h> that probably indicates vowel hiatus. For the cognate forms and an etymological discussion of Cornish *awel*, see Peter Schrijver, *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 325–26.

61. Based on the evidence amassed and analyzed by Patrick Sims-Williams, "Emergence," pp. 59–60, the spelling <*oe*> was very infrequent in the earliest orthography of any of the Brittonic languages, an observation that also confounds Fleuriot's hypothesis for an early Brittonic or proto-Breton exemplar.

62. Padel, *Cornish Place-Name Elements*, p. 108.

63. Graves, *The Old Cornish Vocabulary*, p. 313.

64. Fleuriot, "Fragments," p. 49.

65. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," p. 231.

it difficult to account for the paleographical transformation of an original *mal i gassec* into *mal igasuet*. Still, in his attempt to align the exemplar more with a hypothetical proto-Breton-Cornish of the eighth century, he restores the manuscript's *michtien* to *machtiern*, a term which clearly reflects the Breton form of the word. There is, however, no sound orthographic or phonological reason to replace the <i> of MS *michtien* with an <a>. Fleuriot dismisses the Welsh and Cornish forms of this word, *mechteyrn* and *myghtern/mytern*, respectively, simply because "en vieux-Breton le terme *machtiern* qualifie une catégorie fort nombreuse de chefs locaux qui forment l'armature de l'administration dans l'ancien royaume de Bretagne."[66] While he is of course correct in noting the importance of the term *machtiern* in Brittany, Fleuriot passes over the appearance of the term *mechteyrn* in the oldest Merlinic prophecy still extant, the Welsh *Armes Prydain Fawr* (ca. 930).[67] Given the presence of the term in pre-Norman Wales and Brittany, and given the later attestation of the term *mytern* (king) in the Middle Cornish *Beunans Meriasek*, it does not seem unlikely that the Cornish of the eleventh and twelfth centuries also possessed such an office. A more reasonable emendation of the word might thus be to a Cornish form like *michtern.

Curley's suggestion that *mal igasuet* may be a corruption of some cognate to Welsh *mabwysiad* is appealing, though without precise knowledge of what such a word would look like, it is impossible to determine if this scenario is even paleographically possible. The Welsh term *mabwysiad* (adoption) or its verbal noun *mabwysiadu* seem unlikely in themselves, because they do not account for the presence in the Vatican manuscript of the <g> of *igasuet*. If the word is to be derived from the roots *mab* (son, child) and something akin to the Welsh *gwystl* or Cornish *guistel* (both meaning hostage), yielding a word like *mabguistel (hostage-son, hence foster-son and thus adoption) or the like, we might be on firmer ground, but the current absence of anything like this word in medieval Welsh, Cornish, or even Breton documents leaves the issue undecided.

What we *can* learn from this tantalizing phrase—*michtien luchd mal igasuet*—is the observation that the two potential reconstructions offered by Fleuriot and Curley in fact correspond to the analogues to the phrase that we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth and John of Cornwall respectively. Geoffrey's "old man in white on a snow-white horse" corresponds, more or less, to Fleuriot's *machtiern luitd mal i gassec*: both horse and rider are

---

66. Fleuriot, "Fragments," p. 50.

67. See *Armes Prydain Fawr*, ed. G. R. Isaac, p. 170. Jenner, "The Tristan Romance," p. 478, notes that the term also occurs in the Middle Cornish *Beunans Meriasek*, where King Mark is referred to as *Mytern Margh ryal*.

hoary.[68] John's translation (*canus adoptatus*), on the other hand, approximates Curley's speculative *mabwysiad.* The divergence between John's and Geoffrey's renderings of this particular image confirms that they are in fact working with variant branches of the same prophetic tradition. The corrupt *mal igasuet* may in fact reveal a confusion within the Brittonic prophetic tradition itself: Geoffrey's exemplar may have construed the original phrase—whatever it was—one way, and John construed it in another. The fact that the parallels between the two Anglo-Latin writers can plausibly be shown to go back to two versions of a common original reinforces again both the idea that John is working with a genuine prophetic source (and one he deems more authoritative than Geoffrey's) but also the idea that Geoffrey is working with an original Brittonic prophecy as well. Given the details of this discussion, it is not impossible that the exemplar of Geoffrey's *Prophetia Merlini* was in Old Cornish.

As I mentioned earlier, Padel argues that the Cornish glosses represent not fragments of a genuine Cornish prophetic source but rather function as asides, merely part of John's desire to endow the entire prophecy with a "south-western relevance."[69] In this view, the Latin text as it stands would be only a verse adaptation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae*, with some other material of Welsh origin interpolated; the Cornish glosses themselves, in Padel's opinion, "could have been invented by John himself, or he could have created them from Welsh originals . . . John's Prophecy of Merlin need not suggest the existence of prophetic poetry in Cornish in the twelfth century."[70] While Padel's conclusions here are not entirely unreasonable, I think it is likely that the Cornish glosses are not simply window-dressing to the *Prophetia* but should be understood as part of the text's overall program to clarify its political position, to exhibit a certain transparency about the act of translation (in contrast with Geoffrey of Monmouth), and to *accurately* and more authoritatively represent the voice of a nation. Moreover, had John desired only to lend a specifically Cornish relevance to a prophecy originally composed in some other context, one would expect him to "quote" from his Old Cornish prophecy rather more densely than he actually does; the first Cornish gloss does not in fact appear until forty-six lines into the text, suggesting that John passed up many opportunities to apply his Cornish veneer. While the six or seven brief Cornish glosses as they stand certainly tantalize the modern scholar, they are not in themselves sufficient to Cornish-ize the prophecy as a whole. Indeed, the citation of a putative original would in that case be superfluous when the text already has ample glosses in Latin that clarify

68. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve, p. 148.
69. Padel, "Oral Traditions," p. 150.
70. Padel, "Oral Traditions," p. 150.

the prophecy's southwestern relevance. The Cornish glosses, in this light, more likely represent John's attempt to appeal to the original in order to shed further light on particularly interesting or thorny passages (the *pemp bliden warn ugens ha hanter* gloss on line 46 is a perfect case in point). Likewise, John's discussions of *guent dehil* and *awel garu* resemble the defense of a scholar-translator for the validity of his particular word choice. While Padel still might be correct in surmising that John's *Prophetia Merlini* is a composite of different prophecies, including both Galfridian and Welsh materials, it seems that, unless we are willing to dismiss John's Old Cornish glosses as an elaborate philological hoax (and who, one wonders, would be the audience for such a hoax?), we should accept them as fragments of a larger tradition of Cornish political prophecy.[71]

The conclusions of this philological analysis, then, support John's claim—and the opinions of Curley, Fleuriot, Taylor, and Jenner—that he is indeed translating a source from the British tongue (*nostrum Britannicum*), a claim which can now be corroborated, as we can now confidently identify John's source language as Old Cornish and date it somewhat conservatively to at least the second half of the eleventh century. Although it is ultimately impossible, given our lack of precise knowledge about the transmission of the exemplar, to determine the extent of John's adaptation of or additions to his Cornish source, we can at the very least dismiss Fleuriot's broader claim that the language of the glosses derives from the eighth or ninth century (although his analysis is otherwise helpful in many respects). It is tempting to follow Fleuriot in imagining the existence of such prophetic poetry in Brittonic so early, but surely the manuscript tradition does not support such a conclusion; the earliest extant Merlinic prophecy, the *Armes Prydain Fawr*, dates only from ca. 930.[72] Moreover, the general tone of this prophetic poetry seems inconsistent with the political situation of the Britons during this period and with the more heroic tenor of the poetry of the *cynfeirdd*; as Rachel Bromwich has pointed out, earlier Welsh poetry seems more concerned with highlighting, if elegiacally, the quasi-historical connections between the polities of the Old British North (Rheged, Manau Gododdin, etc.) or with extolling the virtues of particular dynasties rather than with positing any pan-British identity with claims to Insular sovereignty.[73] In contrast, the earliest extant Merlinic prophecies give voice in their triumphalism

---

71. Jenner, "The Tristan Romance," p. 488, who opines that the glosses were genuine Cornish, nonetheless notes the prevalent nineteenth-century view that they were a hoax.

72. An authoritative discussion of the date and political contexts of the *Armes Prydain Fawr* can be found in *Armes Prydein*, ed. Ifor Williams, trans. Rachel Bromwich (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1982), pp. xii–xx.

73. See Rachel Bromwich, "The Character of the Early Welsh Tradition," in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. H. M. Chadwick et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 83–136.

to the political ideals of an already marginalized people who nostalgically remember a day long ago when they possessed the entire island of Britain.[74] Characterized in this way, the prophecies seem consonant with the earliest of the Welsh triads, whose origin Rachel Bromwich conjectures to be no earlier than the tenth century.[75] I doubt whether the eighth century, as Fleuriot would have it, could have produced prophecies of this sort. In both language and content, John's *Prophetia* is instead more resonant with the tradition of eleventh- and twelfth-century Merlinic prophecies in Welsh such as *Ymdiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* or the somewhat earlier but certainly still circulating *Afallennau* and *Oianau*.[76]

Even if John of Cornwall was working with, at least in part, a genuine Old Cornish prophecy, we would do well to heed Padel's caveat that this Cornish source need not imply that John's source was a *Merlinic* prophecy. As the various texts of the Black Book of Carmarthen and the Book of Taliesin testify, not every political prophecy in the Brittonic world was attributed to the bard Myrddin. John may quite plausibly have fostered his Cornish text upon the figure of Geoffrey's Merlin. After all, John's references to "Merlinus Ambrosius" not only follow Geoffrey in Latinizing Myrddin to Merlinus (presumably to avoid the unpleasant associations of "Merdinus"), but he also accepts Geoffrey's identification of the Nennian boy prophet Ambrosius/Emrys with the semi-legendary Welsh bard.

On the other hand, John's proximity to Geoffrey on this point also need not rule out the existence of Merlinic prophecy in Cornwall. If we understand John's tantalizingly brief citations of Old Cornish as synechdochic of at least a single full (and now lost) Cornish prophecy, it is not impossible or even unreasonable to associate such a prophecy with Merlin. John's *Prophetia* shares a body of reference to specific people (Conan, Cadwallader), places (Periron, the plains of Rheon), and actions (the collection of tribute, a pan-Celtic alliance) that we find associated with Myrddin from the *Armes Prydain Fawr* on.[77] In fact, given that Welsh Merlinic prophecy

74. Jarman argues that the earliest core of the Merlinic prophecies, especially the material underlying the *Afallennau*, may date from as early as the ninth century, though the prophetic tradition was still productive of new material throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries; see *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

75. Rachel Bromwich, ed., *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, pp. lxxxvii–xcix, argues that the oldest strata of the triads date from the ninth or tenth century at the very earliest.

76. Curley, ed., "A New Edition," pp. 224–27. Some of these prophecies, such as *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* and the *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd*, date from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Many of the others, though much earlier in their inception, were still circulating and accruing new material during this period.

77. This said, I am very sympathetic to Padel's theory that certain Welsh prophecies, especially the *Afalennau* and the *Oianau*, were only associated with Merlin after the prophet attained notoriety in Geoffrey's *Historia*. See Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Development of the Merlin Legend," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 51 (2006), 37–65.

may have been born as a response to Anglo-Saxon incursions into Wales and Cornwall simultaneously during the campaigns of Æthelstan of Wessex, and given the mutual intelligibility or near-intelligibility of Welsh and Cornish (especially in the tenth century), it is possible that the figure of Myrddin did migrate to Cornwall at an early date and that John's Cornish source represents the culmination of a two-hundred-year tradition of Merlinic prophecy in Cornwall. Although Padel not unwisely warns that "evidence is lacking for any medieval Cornish version of the south Welsh legend of Myrddin," the existence of John's Cornish source, taken in tandem with its shared body of references to Welsh Merlinic prophecies, surely does not rule out the possibility of Merlin (or perhaps, more properly, *Merdin*) in Cornwall.[78]

Even if John of Cornwall's source was not specifically a Merlinic prophecy and thus not evidence for a tradition of Merlin *in* Cornwall, it nonetheless stands as a grand annunciation of a Merlin *for* Cornwall. In this, John co-opts Geoffrey of Monmouth's most potent spokesperson not just to lend his own prophecy a Merlinic luster but to subvert the subtle anti-British and pro-Norman bias of Geoffrey's text, an issue I will explore in the following section.

<div align="center">III.</div>

It might be expedient to rehearse the most salient points that have emerged in my discussion thus far. We have first of all noted that the main text of John's *Prophetia Merlini* is sufficiently divergent from both Geoffrey of Monmouth and from the Welsh prophecies—a point explored by Curley in his edition and reinforced by my own analyses—to warrant the claim that it is drawing upon another, hitherto unknown source. By his own admission, by the marked use of first-person verbs and pronouns within the marginal commentary, and by their own internal logic, we have concluded that John is the author (or principal author) of the *Prophetia*'s glosses and marginalia. The appearance in John's own glosses and marginal commentary of a number of Cornish words, in a manner that strongly suggests that they are the object of John's project of translation, reveals his knowledge of a political prophecy, and quite possibly a Merlinic political prophecy, in Cornish. We have now broadly dated this Cornish linguistically to the period 1050x1150. We can thus reasonably infer that John is translating a roughly contemporary Cornish political prophecy, though we may allow for the possibility that a few lines may have been adapted from or influenced by Geoffrey of

78. Padel, "Oral Traditions," p. 150.

Monmouth or Welsh prophecies or have been invented by John himself in order to address some pressing concern. In the final section of this essay, I will explore the implications of the above points and argue that John's presentation of a "new" Merlinic prophecy to the Anglo-Norman intelligentsia (if we may view Robert of Warelwast as representative of John's intended audience), especially a prophecy that promotes specifically pan-Brittonic and Cornish interests over Anglo-Norman interests, is calculated both to make a political statement and to call out the polemic insufficiencies of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini.*

The existence of John's Cornish exemplar—and perhaps of an entire lost tradition of post-Norman Cornish Merlinic prophecy—has further important ramifications. First, it suggests far more clearly than previous evidence that authentic Brittonic texts underlie the sources for Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae,* lending more credence to the idea that Geoffrey's claim to be translating from an ancient book may, in some very loose sense, be true.[79] This, in turn, also has implications for evaluating the status of fictionality and historicity in the *Historia.* Indeed, the British language in which Geoffrey claims the ancient book to have been written may plausibly even have been Old Cornish.[80] Even if, as is likely, Geoffrey's sources are far-ranging and varied, we cannot now rule out the influence of Cornish traditions on the germination of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* or the *Prophetiae Merlini.*[81] Padel has analyzed Geoffrey of Monmouth's particular interest in and emphasis on Cornwall in his *Historia,* suggesting that Geoffrey may well have done research for his book in Cornwall or used Cornish materials, and E. M. R. Ditmas has outlined some of the possible itineraries Geoffrey may have taken through the Cornish peninsula as a young man in the service of Robert of Gloucester.[82]

---

79. Geoffrey Ashe, "Ancient Book," pp. 322–23, makes such a claim, bolstering Geoffrey's status as a historian.

80. Indeed, the existence of an Old Cornish source for the *Historia* could explain why Geoffrey's book was so often "retranslated" back into Welsh throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

81. In the absence of evidence that Geoffrey's claim to be translating an actual book in the British language is true, scholars have identified a panoply of source materials for the *Historia* and the *Prophetiae.* Geoffrey's probable Brittonic sources include Welsh and/or Breton regnal lists, genealogies, and saints' lives; Welsh prophecies; as well as Welsh, Cornish, and Breton folk traditions, which were likely passed on orally. (Identifiable Latin sources of Geoffrey's *Historia* include Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae,* Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum,* pseudo-Nennius's *Historia Brittonum,* William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Angliae* and *Gesta pontificum Angliae,* and Henry of Huntington's *Historia Anglorum.*) Geoffrey's appetite for source material was both catholic and voracious. For an overview, see Michael Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Twayne, 1994), pp. 10–11 and passim.

82. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Cornwall," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies,* 8 (1984), 18; E. M. R. Ditmas, "A Reappraisal," pp. 510–24; and also J. S. P. Tatlock, "The English Journey of the Laon Canons," *Speculum,* 8 (1933), 454–65.

Cornwall's high confluence of Arthurian place-names and local legends may also have attracted Geoffrey, and he may easily have acquainted himself with any Cornish materials deposited at Exeter Cathedral, the same cathedral that John frequented a generation later and a natural point of interest for a young scholar. We might now more confidently include a hitherto unattested political prophecy as among Geoffrey's possible Cornish sources.[83]

If the existence of a Cornish Merlinic prophecy—or even, by implication, of an entire tradition (perhaps largely oral) of Cornish political vaticination—lends more credence to Geoffrey's claims to historical and vatic authority, it bolsters John of Cornwall's far more directly. Indeed, the presence of the Cornish exemplar permits us to emphasize the independence of John's work from Geoffrey's. In the early twentieth century, E. K. Chambers had opined that John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini* was merely a versification of parts of Geoffrey's authoritative text, an idea seconded by Fleuriot and endorsed more recently by Julia Crick.[84] Such views incorrectly assume that Geoffrey of Monmouth is the sole font of prophetic knowledge in Norman Britain after the publication of his *Prophetiae Merlini* ca. 1135. On the contrary, John's decision to translate a new or alternate Merlinic prophecy, to base it openly upon a "British" original, and to provide an extensive commentary for his work indicates his tacit recognition of the insufficiencies of Geoffrey's version. John's open declaration of an authentic source in the British tongue (one that he is even able to quote) also bolsters his reputation as a scholar, and, even if it reduces him to a mere translator, it paradoxically invests the prophecy with the authority of authenticity:

> Iussus ego, Iohannes Cornubiensis, prophetiam Merlini iuxta nostrum Britannicum exponere, in uestri gratia affectui meo magis quam facultati consulens, brevi admodum et in scolari palestra id eluctari puerili stilo conatus sum. Qua in re utcumque profecerim, non absque labore meo quicquam adeptus sum, cum pro uerbo uerbum lege interpretationis reddere studuerim. (p. 231)

> (I, John of Cornwall, having been commanded to set forth the prophecy of Merlin in our British tongue, and also esteeming your affection for me more than my own ability, have attempted in my humble style to elucidate it in a scholarly manner. No matter how I have fashioned my work, I have achieved nothing without labor. I did, however, strive to render it, according to the law of translation, word for word.)

83. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Cornwall," p. 19, considers this possibility "theoretically conceivable."

84. E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927), p. 29; Fleuriot, "Fragments," p. 44; and Julia C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth: IV. Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 86 and 216.

Despite the formulaic nature of this dedication, John here obliquely challenges Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim to have *faithfully* translated "quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum."[85] I will now show that John of Cornwall manipulates the authority of his authentic Cornish source as a means of legitimizing his prophetic refutation of the pro-Norman partisanship of Geoffrey's version of the *Prophetiae Merlini*.

Whether or not John of Cornwall and Geoffrey of Monmouth derive their respective prophecies—in whole or in part—from the same source or from closely related sources in Welsh and/or Cornish, their treatment of this material varies considerably, despite their many close correspondences. Overall, John of Cornwall's *Prophetia Merlini* constitutes one of the earliest and certainly one of the most comprehensive and pointed attacks on Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlinic material.[86] John does not conceal the purposes behind his presentation of the *Prophetia*. His addition of marginal commentary and interlinear glosses, which limit and stabilize hermeneutic response to the text, is likewise an overtly political act. A comparison, for example, of the way the two writers adapt the prophecy of Conan and Cadwallader highlights the difference in their political commitment.[87] John writes:

> Sit proba tempestas! Conanus nauigat undas,
> Et Kadualadro faueat quod precepit Euro . . .
> Posteritas magni tollet diadema Britanni.
> Mira ducum facies meritos conscendet honores,
> Mira duum uirtus medios concedet in usus. (p. 236)

(May the time be auspicious! Conanus sails the waves / and may that which rules the East favor Kadwallader . . . . / Posterity will uplift the diadem of the great Briton! The splendid character of the leaders will embark with due honor, / The splendid virtue of these two will restore everyday customs.)

John's *Prophetia* here plays in a triumphant key, looking forward expectantly to the day of an alliance between Conan (representing Brittany) and Cadwallader (representing the Welsh and perhaps also the Cornish). The leaders' names may be taken figuratively to represent their respective nations, and in this sense the *Prophetia* (and, presumably, its Cornish source) resembles the *Armes Prydain Fawr* (and other Welsh Merlinic prophecies), wherein Conan and Cadwallader likewise signify the union of the Continental and Insular Britons against an intrusive people, in this case the Saxons under Æthelstan:

---

85. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve, p. 1.
86. I here follow Curley, ed., "A New Edition," pp. 222–23, in his dating of the poem.
87. I emphasize the word "adapt" here to point out that, even if the Conan-Cadwallader alliance does not derive from John's putative Old Cornish source, it was certainly part of the tradition of Merlinic political prophecy from the tenth century on, appearing at least as early as the tenth-century *Armes Prydain Fawr*.

boet mor, boet agor eu kussulwyr
boet creu, boet agheu eu kyweithyd.
Kynan a Chatwaladyr, kadyr yn lluyd,
etmyccawr hyt Vrawt ffawt ae deubyd.
Deu vnben degyn, dwys eu kussyl.
Deu orsegyn Saesson o pleit Dofyd.
Deu hael, deu gedawl gwlatwarthegyd.
Deu diarchar barawt vnffawt, vnffyd.
Deu erchwynnawc Prydein, mirein luyd.
Deu arth nys gwna gwarth kyfarth beunyd.

([M]ay gore, may death be their comrades. / As for Cynan and Cadwaladr, glorious in their armies, the fate which is destined for their part will be celebrated forever. / Two steadfast rulers, whose counsel is wise. / Two tramplers on the English in God's name. / Two generous men, two gift-giving cattle-raiders. / Two brave, ready men, of one fate, of one faith. / Two guardians of Britain, splendid armies. / Two bears, daily battle does not put them to shame.) (ed. and trans. Isaac, pp. 178–79)

The *Armes Prydain Fawr* draws on the figures of the historical kings as a means of predicting—and, ultimately, creating—similar alliances in the future in order to accomodate the political goal of liberating Britain from the Anglo-Saxons; Conan and Cadwallader represent for the tenth-century audience symbols of power rather than historical entities. John's *Prophetia,* facing different historical circumstances, draws upon this tradition and invokes Conan and Cadwallader as symbols of resistance against a new enemy. Translating a similar (though more recent) Old Cornish source, the *Prophetia Merlini* surely posits the Normans—"Neustria seva" (harsh Normandy)—as having replaced the Saxons as the new alien occupiers of Britain.[88]

The pro-British (and implicitly anti-Norman) stance of John's *Prophetia Merlini*, drilled home by the precision of his commentary, contrasts starkly with the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey also presents a Conan-Cadwallader prediction in his *Historia*, but the political import in his version is far more difficult to gauge:

Cadualadrus Conanum uocabit et Albaniam in societatem accipiet. Tunc erit strages alienigenarum, tunc flumina sanguine manabunt, tunc erumpent Armorici montes et diademate Bruti coronabunttur. Replebitur Kambria laeticia et robora Cornubiae uirescent. Nomine Bruti uocabitur insula, et nuncupatio extraneorum peribit. (ed. Reeve, pp. 148–49)

(Cadualadrus will summon Conanus and make Scotland his ally. Then the foreigners will be slaughtered, the rivers flow with blood, and the hills of

88. Two roughly contemporary Welsh Merlinic prophecies that appear in the Red Book of Hergest, *Cyfoesi Myrddin â Gwenddydd ei chwaer* and *Gwasgargerdd Myrddin yn y Bedd*, also reveal a concern with the Norman presence in Britain; both are printed in *The Poetry of the Red Book of Hergest*, ed. J. Gwenogfryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911). See also Curley, "Gerallt Gymro," p. 30.

Brittany burst forth and be crowned with Brutus' diadem. Wales will be filled
with rejoicing and the Cornish oaks will flourish. The island will be called
by Brutus' name and the foreign term will disappear.)

Upon initial inspection, Geoffrey's version of this prophecy seems fairly
clear and fairly pro-Briton: Conan and Cadwallader will cast off the foreign
yoke, causing all Britain (including Cornwall) to rejoice and the true Brit-
ish dynasty to be restored. Two important distinctions, however, distance
Geoffrey's version from John's. First, an attentive reader of Geoffrey's ver-
sion will identify Conan and Cadwallader with the *actual, historical* kings of
the sixth or seventh century. Indeed, once the reader identifies Arthur as
the Boar of Cornwall (an easy reference point and one that Merlin sup-
plies later in the narrative), one theoretically needs only to count kings in
Geoffrey's prophecy to arrive at the historical Conan-Cadwallader alliance
recounted later in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*.[89] Insular history, there-
fore, goes on after Conan and Cadwallader's seventh-century victories;
only several lines later the reader of Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* will discover that
a new host of invaders plagues the island after Conan and Cadwallader,
and a reader of the *Historia* in its entirety will learn to situate Cadwallader
as the last native British king, the king who, at God's behest, relinquishes
control of Britain to the Anglo-Saxons for good. Second, Geoffrey's ver-
sion of this particular prophecy situates this moment of potential nativist
triumph toward the beginning of a long series of increasingly obscure
prophecies. Geoffrey's infamous *decimatio Neustriae* likewise comes near the
beginning of the *Prophetiae*, thus neutralizing any potential political threat
to Geoffrey's Norman patrons. Like his claim for a British resurgence
under Cadwallader, Geoffrey's prophecy of the slaughter of Normandy
is lost in the Merlinic shuffle.

   John's *Prophetia*, in contrast, importantly maintains Conan and Cadwal-
lader as ethnic *symbols* rather than as historical persons, and he strategically
places the prophecy regarding their triumph at the very end of his text.
In fact, the alliance between the two leaders, according to the *Prophetia
Merlini*, ushers in a new golden age. Moreover, this *aurea etas* of the *Pro-
phetia*'s final line is here and now: John envisions the extirpation of the
current Norman conquerors and the restoration of native (i.e., Brittonic)
rule. The Normans, whom John in a gloss identifies as the cleansing South
Wind in line 2, had served their historical purpose of ridding the island
of the hated Saxons. The current instability of their tenure—the begin-
ning of the end, so to speak—was now revealed in the civil war between
Stephen and Matilda. The Vatican manuscript's commentary ensures that

89. At least one early commentary does so. Jacob Hammer, "A Commentary." Michael
Curley, however, in *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 55, notes several inconsistencies in Geoffrey's
prophetic enumerations.

the reader will understand that the *Prophetia* provides a key to current events and not a dead recounting of the glories of the British past. For example, commenting on the prophetic line "Heu pelagi facinus quod tercius extulit annus" (Alas, for the crime of the sea that the third year has brought forth), John supplies the following explanation:

> *Heu pelagi*, quia mari demersi sunt nauigando in Normannia. *Quod tercius.* Hoc de Willelmo; tercius sui imperii annus fuit ultimus uite. (p. 238)

> (*Alas for the crime of the sea!* since they were drowned in the sea while sailing in Normandy. *That the third.* This refers to William; the third year of his reign was the last year of his life.)

Here John's commentary refers the reader clearly to the infamous sinking of the White Ship and the drowning of Henry I's only legitimate male heir in 1121. More importantly, the commentary orients the action of the prophecy in the twelfth-century present, rather than in the distant, already closed-off past that Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* and *Historia* describe. Other parts of the commentary further contribute to relating the prophecy to recent events; he glosses the "quartum seu quintum" of line 100, for instance, with "Quartus dicetur procul dubio ubi Willelmus, filius Henrici, reputetur inter reges; illo anteuersato aliis, erit iste quintus" (p. 239: The fourth doubtless refers to William, the son of Henry, who is to be counted as one of the kings; the fifth king, despite what others say, is the one who comes after Henry). Overall, John of Cornwall systematically clarifies the Prophecy of the Seven Kings to refer to the Norman dynasty: William I, William II, Henry I, William the Prince (who never reigned), Stephen, and two unspecified future kings.[90] After the reign of the seventh king, according to John's *Prophetia* and its commentary, the Brittonic world, represented figuratively by Conan and Cadwallader, would arise and reclaim sovereignty over the island of Britain.

   The cumulative effect of such careful marginal and interlinear explication is the explicit recognition of John's strong Cornish and, more broadly, *British* partisanship.[91] When, for instance, he speaks of the alliance of Conan and Cadwallader, he hopefully exclaims, *Sit proba tempestas!* His use of the optative here places the outcome of the alliance into the conjectural future, emphasizing the political explosiveness of his message. This again is a far cry from Geoffrey's apparent assertion that the alliance of Cornwall and Brittany occurred either in the seventh century with the literal,

   90. Depending on the precise date of composition of the *Prophetia Merlini*, John might have assumed that the sixth king would be Henry Curtmantle (Henry II), whose right of succession was formalized by the Treaty of Westminster in 1153.

   91. In fact, it may have been John's perceived pro-Celtic affinities more than merely his ability to speak Welsh that disqualified him as a viable candidate for the bishopric of St. David's in 1176. See Rathbone, "A Brief Biography," p. 49.

historical alliance between Conan and Cadwallader against the Saxons
(see Geoffrey of Monmouth §§203–5), or, less likely, with the necessary
cooperation between the Cornish and Welsh in the establishment of an
archdiocesan see at Menevia. In both cases, Geoffrey neutralizes the po-
litical implications of this so-called "Breton hope," either by relegating it
to a distant, seventh-century past where one could still take the struggle
between Celt and Saxon seriously without having it reflect on the current
political situation, or by diminishing it to part of an ongoing argument
about ecclesiastical affairs. John, however, retains the exhortatory aspect
of the Conan-Cadwallader alliance, rendering it as a call to arms *in the
present*—that is, in the twelfth-century present of Anglo-Norman domina-
tion in Cornwall and Wales. The political agendas of John of Cornwall
and Geoffrey of Monmouth seem therefore to operate at cross-purposes.
While John incites his countrymen and rejoices in the downfall of both
Saxon and Norman, Geoffrey carefully limits Brittonic revivalism to the
historical and now inaccessible past.

If both an anti-Saxon *and* an ultimately anti-Norman stance emerge
from John's *Prophetia Merlini*, the text also places an unusual emphasis
on the role of Cornwall throughout. Whereas Geoffrey of Monmouth
seems for the most part to limit discussion of Cornwall in his *Prophetiae*
to a reference to Arthur as "the Boar of Cornwall" and to the prediction
that the "robora Cornubiae uirescent" (the oaks of Cornwall will flour-
ish) after the alliance of Conan and Cadwallader, John's text affords a
particular focus on Cornwall, probably due both to his own patriotic
interests and to the specifically Cornish provenance of his source. For
example, insofar as John's *Prophetia Merlini* addresses the subject of King
Arthur at all, it places Arthur in a specifically Cornish context; the *Prophe-
tia* situates the "domus Arcturi" near the plains of Rheon, thus positively
identifying Arthur's home as Cornwall. The marginal commentary also
supports a Cornish reading, explaining the *solium* of line 63 as referring
to Cornwall, "que in hystoria appellatur domus Corinei" (p. 238: that in
history is called the house of Corineus).

Likewise, the appearance in both Merlinic prophecies of the shadowy
figure of the old man—Geoffrey's "senex niueus" (snowy-haired old man)
and John's "canus adoptatus" (adopted old man)—on the banks of the
river Periron provides another clear example of the probably deliberate
vagueness of Geoffrey's text and of the pointedness of John's attempts at
clarity. Although the earliest extant version of this particular vaticination
in the *Armes Prydain Fawr* places the old man and the river Periron (Welsh
Peryddon) on the marches of Wales, John makes clear in the commentary
that this particular omen of British victory is associated with Cornwall:
"*Perironis.* Hoc dicit de aduentu illius in Cornubia, et quia tunc obsedit

castrum apud Perironem quod dicitur Dindaiol" (p. 339: *Periron*: This refers to his entry into Cornwall, for then he laid siege to the castle by the Periron, that is, Tintagel).[92] The commentary elsewhere highlights Cornish participation in the overthrow of the Saxons. Where the *Prophetia* reads, "qua Tamarus exit in Austrum, / Per iuga Brentigie Galli dominantur ubique" (p. 235: where the River Tamar flows out toward the south, the French will be everywhere defeated throughout the hills of Brentigia), the gloss on this line provides a clear explanation of geographical terms in order to further clarify the importance of Cornwall in the unfolding of events: "*Tamarus* fluuius est qui separat Cornubiam et Deuoniam. *Brentigie* quoddam desertum est in Cornubia, et dicitur in nostra lingua *goen bren*, in lingua Saxonum *Fawi-mor*" (p. 239: *The Tamar* is the river that separates Cornwall and Devon. *Brentigie* is a certain wasteland in Cornwall, and it is called *goen bren* in our language, *Fawi-Mor* in the Saxon tongue). Not only does John's desire here to specify the geographical terrain of his prophecy emphasize the significance of Cornwall, but his reference to the native Cornish term *goen bren* further underscores John's reliance upon recent prophetic materials in the Old Cornish language. In contrast, Geoffrey of Monmouth's references to Cornwall are scattered piecemeal throughout his prophecies and thus cannot amount to a sustained focus on Cornwall as the locus of effective political-prophetic action.

   That a body of Old Cornish prophetic material such as the one that must underlie John's work existed can perhaps be expected on the basis of the parallel tradition of the much better-documented Welsh prophecies. However, the emphasis John places on Cornwall in the commentary, in tandem with the probable date of a late eleventh-century Cornish prophetic source for at least part of his material, suggests that John's source was itself composed in response to recent political developments; in this light, one might estimate the Cornish text as dating more toward the later end of the period I discussed above—that is, perhaps more toward 1130 than 1050. Based on some of John's explanations within the marginalia, we might state more specifically that this Old Cornish prophetic text arose as a direct response to Norman occupation. Following the prophecy concerning the wreck of the White Ship discussed above, John offers the following prediction:

> In sex Francigenis unius sanguine matris,
> Triste rubens solium tot mortes tot mala passum

---

92. The *Armes Prydain Fawr*, lines 17–22, similarly alludes to a conflict between Saxon tax-collectors and the Welsh at the estuary of the Peryddon in Wales: "Dysgogan Myrdin kyueruydyn / yn Aber Perydon meiryon mechteyrn. A chyny bei vn reith, lleith a gwynyn. O vn ewyllis bryt yd ymwrthuynnyn / meiryon, eu tretheu dychynnullyn, / yg ketoed Kymry nat oed a telhyn."

> Clamat et effatur: "Normannia, scis quid agatur?
> Nuper ego dolui, nuper mea uiscera fudi.
> His modo funeribus nostrum solabere funus.
> Insula tota mades lacrimis." (p. 233)

> (Along with the six Frenchmen born of the blood of the same mother, the throne—sad and reddened—was subjected to so many deaths, so many evils. It cries out and exclaims: "Normandy, do you know what is going on? Now I have been mourning, spilling my innards. Only by these pains will you assuage our own pain. Island, you are soaked with tears!")

An unusually dense cluster of interlinear glosses assist in the interpretation of this difficult passage, perhaps an indication both of John's reliance upon his source materials and of his insistence that a specifically Cornish political context be well understood. The word *moueat* in line 61 is glossed with the phrase *in pietatem* (in pity); the *sex Francigenis* of line 62 are explained *id est filiis Toki* (the sons of Toki); the *solium* of line 63 is glossed as *Cornubia*; the *ego dolui* of line 65 is clarified as *in morte Osulfi* (for the death of Oswulf); and, finally, a gloss explains *insula tota* as *Major Britannia*. The glosses here highlight John's desire to have the meaning of this obscure (and Cornish-oriented) passage construed clearly, and John's marginal commentary here further suggests his reliance upon a more verbose Old Cornish original:

> Hic totum completum est quando Frewinus Vicecomes et ceteri Cornubienses conspirarunt in ultionem illius, et istos interfecerunt apud uillam que dicitur Treruf. Et multa quidem hic dicuntur que transeo, ne mea uideretur oratio. (p. 238, l. 66)

> (This all came to pass when Viscount Frewin and other Cornishmen plotted to avenge him, and they slew them in the town known as *Treruf*. And many things are said about this which I pass over, lest my speech seem . . . [words omitted in manuscript].)

Even with John's relatively lengthy explanation, the passage remains rather obscure to modern readers. Drawing on the Domesday Book, the Pipe Roll of 1130, and a later, thirteenth-century tax account, Padel reconstructs the situation somewhat more clearly, reasonably suggesting "a feud of the natives against the Normans, in which a Cornishman, Osulf, had been killed, and that in vengeance the native sheriff of Cornwall, Frewin, and six Cornish accomplices killed the six Norman sons of Toki."[93] This reconstruction of events indicates some considerable friction between the Cornish and the Normans. Moreover, since Padel estimates that this feud occurred in the late years of the eleventh century, we can begin to discern perhaps the genesis of the political core of John's Old Cornish

---

93. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Cornwall," p. 26.

prophetic source.[94] John of Cornwall, then, most likely found much of his anti-Norman stance already in his Old Cornish source; indeed, he claims not to have been able to translate the entirety of this anti-Norman episode: "multa quidem hic dicuntur que transeo" (many things are said which I must pass over). As Padel notes, Geoffrey of Monmouth's discussion of this Cornish incident in his *Prophetiae* is minimal: *domus Corinei sex fratres interficiet.*[95] John's *Prophetia Merlini*, in contrast, strives to maintain—especially through its program of careful glossing—the anti-Norman vigor that it likely found in its Old Cornish source.

Like Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Cornwall claims the authority of ancient Brittonic sources for his work. Unlike Geoffrey, however, John gives us some indications, via the program of glosses and marginal commentary, of how he may have retained and amplified the political message of his exemplar. Indeed, the overall significance of the *Prophetia* and its accompanying commentary is clear and pointed, calling unequivocally (like the Welsh *Armes Prydein Fawr* and other Welsh political prophecies) for a pan-Brittonic alliance to move against both Normans and Saxons and to restore the Britons to their proper position as masters of Britain. In its very conception, John's *Prophetia* is revisionist, rewriting both British prophetic "history" and especially Geoffrey of Monmouth, and bestowing a prophetic import upon the role and grievances of Cornwall in recent times. Drawing authority from his Old Cornish source, John answers the obscurity and hermeneutic play of Geoffrey's text with an anti-Norman antagonism. He declares in the dedicatory preface his intention to get to the point, to leave out confusing or extraneous material: "De his que sequntur Conani lacrimabilem exitum ad presens supersedi . . . et de his et de illis alias et nuperrime supletum iri animaduertam qui si dexter aspirauerit, aliorum morabor neminem" (p. 231: I skip past those events which follow the deplorable death of Conan . . . and I delay too much if I aspire too much to outline other affairs as well). On the one hand, John's concern here speaks to the fact that he believes that the prophecies of Merlin have a very clear import that he will refuse to dilute with extraneous material. On the other hand, his words bear witness to the process of framing his prophecy in such a way as to produce a triumphalist narrative. John eschews dwelling on Conan's death in order to focus on a moment of British victory.

To conclude, we may note that both the beginnings and ends of these two prophecies of Merlin highlight again the differences between the

94. Padel's best guess, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Cornwall," p. 26, is that the feud occurred most likely between 1086 and 1100. These dates of correspond well with my arguments for a late eleventh-century or early twelfth-century Cornish prophecy.

95. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Cornwall," pp. 26–27; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve, pp. 148–49.

two authors. Geoffrey of Monmouth fittingly opens his version with the statement that the Britons are already defeated: "Vae rubeo draconi; nam exterminatio eius festinat . . . Rubeus uero gentem designat Britanniae" (ed. Reeve, pp. 144–45: Woe to the Red Dragon, for its death hastens! . . . [T]he Red Dragon stands for the people of Britain). Geoffrey stops to explain the symbolism in his prophecy only when it justifies or emphasizes the defeat of the Britons, and he ends his Merlinic prophecy with vague, apocalyptic imagery of winds clashing and seas thrashing:

> Cauda Scorpionis procreabit fulgura, et Cancer cum sole litigabit. Ascendet Virgo dorsum Sagitarii et flores uirgineos obfuscabit. Currus lunae turbabit zodiacum, et in fletum prorumpent Pleiades. Officia Iani nulla redibunt, sed clausa ianua in crepidinibus Adriannae delitebit. In ictu radii exurgent aequora, et puluis ueterum renouabitur. Confligent uenti diro sufflamine et sonitum inter sidera conficient. (ed. Reeve, pp. 158–59)

> (Lightning bolts will flash from the Scorpion's tail and Cancer will quarrel with the sun. Virgo will mount on Sagittarius' back and defile her virginal flowers. The moon's chariot will disrupt the zodiac and the Pleiades burst into tears. Janus will not perform his duties, but will close his door and hide in the precinct of Ariadne. In the flash of its beam, the seas will rise and the dust of the long-dead will be reborn. The winds will contend with a terrible blast and the stars will hear them howl.)

In comparison, John of Cornwall's version, as I have shown, places the ongoing struggle between the Britons and the usurpers of Britain at the fore. In its frequent denunciations of the Saxons and Normans and its numerous calls to arms, John's *Prophetia Merlini* implies that the native British reconquest of Britain is still a realistic political desideratum. John's prophecy accordingly closes not with astrological images of violent apocalypse but rather with the utopian promise of a new golden age: "Aurea libertas et celo concolor etas!" (p. 236: Golden liberty and an age of heavenly color!). Unlike Geoffrey of Monmouth, John of Cornwall embraces the idea that prophecy can have a direct, polemic effect on the present. Through his self-legitimization in his translation of what we may now declare a genuine Old Cornish Merlinic prophecy and especially through his judicious program of explanatory glosses, John of Cornwall exploits the power of prophecy as both history and teleology. His annotated *Prophetia Merlini* connects the present, past, and future in a way that opens up new possibilities for each.