

## Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Development of the Merlin Legend

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THE central problem to be tackled in studying the early development of the Merlin legend lies in ascertaining the relationships between three bodies of material which share names and themes: first, the Welsh poems associated with Myrddin; second, Geoffrey of Monmouth's two works, *Historia Regum Britannie* and *Vita Merlini*; and third, the Latin writings associated with St Kentigern of Glasgow, especially legends associating him with a wild man, Lailoken. The standard theory, for nearly fifty years, has been that of A. O. H. Jarman.<sup>1</sup> What is offered here is an attempt to solve a difficulty within Jarman's scheme, by suggesting an alteration to it. The problem embraces two additional questions: what Geoffrey's sources were in writing his two works, and what the Welsh legend of Myrddin was like before Geoffrey made his influential contributions.

Jarman suggested that the legend developed in four stages, as follows:

- (1) A character, Myrddin, developed out of the name of the town Carmarthen (Caerfyrddin), with which Myrddin has retained an association to this day; a figure invented from the place-name (actually \**Moridūnon* 'sea-fort' originally) became a prophet associated particularly with the town.
- (2) To this Welsh figure was added a northern legend of a wild-man, associated with the battle of Arfderydd (Arthuret, in Cumberland). This wild-man was called Lailoken, but after his legend had

<sup>1</sup>'The Welsh Myrddin Poems', in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, edited by R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), pp. 20–30; *The Legend of Merlin* (Cardiff, 1960); 'Early Stages in the Development of the Myrddin Legend', in *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd, Studies in Old Welsh Poetry*, Cyflwynedig i Syr Idris Foster, edited by Rachel Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 326–49; 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, edited by Rachel Bromwich and others (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 117–45.

travelled south to Wales it became merged with the legend of Myrddin (who acquired Lailoken's northern attributes), and his original name was largely replaced by Myrddin's. This merging of legends would need to have happened before about 1100 at the latest, but in fact Jarman suggested that the Lailoken legend travelled to Wales 'during the seventh or eighth century', and that Welsh poems reflecting this stage of the legend dated from 'between 850 and 1050'.<sup>2</sup>

- (3) Geoffrey of Monmouth probably completed his *History* in 1138,<sup>3</sup> in it he adapted the south-western prophet, latinizing his name as *Merlinus* but retaining the association with Carmarthen; and he attached to the figure yet another legend, borrowed from the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* — that of the fatherless boy there called Ambrosius, which Geoffrey gave as an alternative name for his Merlin. Most importantly, Geoffrey wrote the set of Latin prophecies for which Merlin was primarily known in the Middle Ages, incorporating it into his *History*.
- (4) About ten to twelve years later, probably in 1148–51, Geoffrey wrote another work, *Vita Merlini*, in which he made use of the northern wild-man, parts of the composite south-Welsh legend of Myrddin — parts which he had not known about, or had omitted, in writing his *History*.<sup>4</sup>

Jarman's four-stage theory accounts satisfactorily for the sharing of names and themes in the various texts; it has stood for nearly fifty years, partly for lack of a convincing alternative. In 1966 Rachel Bromwich suggested, because of similarities in the development of Myrddin's and Taliesin's legends, and the allusions made to them both by twelfth-century poets, that Myrddin might have some claim to be considered a historical poet of the Old North in the later sixth century, as Aneirin and Taliesin are often considered to be; but her suggestion was convincingly resisted by Jarman.<sup>5</sup> Nikolai Tolstoy has also argued for a real sixth-

<sup>2</sup>'Welsh Myrddin Poems', pp. 29 and 21; cf. his *Legend of Merlin*, pp. 22–23 and 27. <sup>3</sup>*The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, 1, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568, edited by Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1984), p. xvi. <sup>4</sup>For the probable date of *Vita Merlini* see *Life of Merlin: Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vita Merlini*, edited by Basil Clarke (Cardiff, 1973), pp. 40–42; see also below. <sup>5</sup>Rachel Bromwich, 'Y Cynfeirdd a'r Traddodiad Cymraeg', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22 (1966–68), 30–37 (pp. 32–34); A. O. H. Jarman, 'A Oedd Myrddin yn Fardd Hanesyddol?', *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975–76), 182–97; cf. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, edited by Rachel Bromwich, second

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century Myrddin who was a shaman-prophet in southern Scotland, but his theory has not gained widespread acceptance.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, Graham Isaac has proposed a different origin for the name *Myrddin*, but his suggestion remains compatible with the later stages of Jarman's theory, which are our concern here. In fact, the hypothesis offered below provides alternative answers to certain doubts which formed the starting-point for Isaac's discussion, such as how Myrddin came to be transferred to the north, or why the wild-man story was not relocated in Wales.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this general acceptance of, or acquiescence in, Jarman's theory, certain unresolved difficulties remain within it. What is offered here is an attempt to resolve those difficulties by refining his scheme without radically reshaping it — a suggestion for consideration, rather than one to be regarded as demonstrably superior. This new scheme also entails some difficulties, and I shall specify those which I have noted. Others may be able to suggest in turn some further refinement, or an altogether new theory, in order to resolve them.

The primary difficulty in Jarman's scheme arises from Geoffrey's treatment of the composite south-Welsh legend. How did Geoffrey, in writing his earlier *History*, come to omit from the story of his Merlin all trace of the northern wild-man — precisely that aspect which was an extraneous accretion to Myrddin's legend, according to Jarman, but which had become the most prominent aspect of the developed Welsh legend of Myrddin, as seen in the surviving Welsh poetry? Geoffrey's *History* gives no hint of the northern legends in association with Merlin, even though Geoffrey liked alluding obliquely to legends associated with his characters.<sup>8</sup> Jarman suggested that at this stage Geoffrey must have known the legend of Myrddin only 'very vaguely and incompletely', and acknowledged that it was 'singular' that he seems to have known so little of its content, even though he did know of the link with Carmarthen.<sup>9</sup>

Second, why did Geoffrey then recant (as it were), some years later, and write a new story about Merlin which did incorporate exactly those aspects he had previously omitted? Geoffrey had to acknowledge that this new story about his Merlin strained chronological credibility, since his previous work had placed Merlin in the second half of the fifth

edition (Cardiff, 1979), pp. 559–60. <sup>6</sup>Nikolai Tolstoy, "'Merlinus Redivivus'", *SC*, 18/19 (1983–84), 11–29, and *The Quest for Merlin* (London, 1985). <sup>7</sup>Graham Isaac, 'Myrddin, Proffwyd Diwedd y Byd: Ystyriaethau Newydd ar Ddatblygiad ei Chwedl', *Llên Cymru*, 24 (2001), 13–23 (p. 15). <sup>8</sup>O. J. Padel, 'The Nature of Arthur', *CMCS*, 27 (Summer 1994), 1–31 (pp. 11–12). <sup>9</sup>*Legend of Merlin*, pp. 11 and 23; compare Tolstoy's doubt concerning Jarman's explanation, "'Merlinus Redivivus'", p. 16.

century (as a contemporary of Vortigern and Uther Pendragon, father of King Arthur). The new story placed him in the later sixth century (the battle of Arfderydd having occurred in 573 according to the Welsh Annals, which Geoffrey knew),<sup>10</sup> but he made it clear that it was nevertheless the same Merlin.<sup>11</sup>

Jarman's explanation (as seen above) was that when Geoffrey wrote his *History* he hardly knew the legend, and that in the intervening years he 'had gone deeper' into the subject, and had discovered a wealth of legend not previously known to him — as a result of which he realised that he 'had gone astray' in earlier associating his Merlin with Vortigern.<sup>12</sup> Both stages of Jarman's explanation are unconvincing. The first entails an assumption of Geoffrey's earlier ignorance, which is perilous since it is difficult to envisage how Geoffrey might have known of the legend without knowing of its (by then) most prominent aspect. In any case, Geoffrey usually turns out, on investigation, to have known more than his modern investigators have supposed, rather than less. The second stage makes the *Vita* seem like an exercise in correcting Geoffrey's previous error, but the idea of the author of the *History* ever having been motivated by a desire to set the record straight is not persuasive.

In order to examine these questions further, we turn first to the Welsh evidence. To the question of what the legend of Myrddin was like before Geoffrey made his contributions, Jarman's answer is that parts of the poems *Afallennau*, the 'Apple-tree verses', and *Oianau*, the 'Ahoy (O piglet!) verses', in the mid-thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen, show us. These poems both consist of prophecies spoken by the northern wild-man during his forest-life, of which they both also give details. They therefore date, according to Jarman, primarily from stage (2) of his scheme, showing us the composite Welsh legend with its northern admixture, before Geoffrey's interference — thus from approximately the ninth or tenth century.<sup>13</sup> Jarman recognized that some of the prophecies in these poems concern events which occurred later than 1138;<sup>14</sup> he resolved this anomaly by suggesting, legitimately, that

<sup>10</sup>Nennius: *British History and the Welsh Annals*, edited and translated by John Morris (Chichester, 1980), p. 85. <sup>11</sup>*Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, line 19: many years had passed; line 681: details of this Merlin's previous prophecy to Vortigern, as in Geoffrey's *History*. <sup>12</sup>Jarman, *Legend of Merlin*, pp. 24–25; this explanation had already been suggested in *The Vita Merlini*, edited by J. J. Parry (Urbana, IL, 1925), pp. 13 and 16, in defence of Geoffrey's authorship of the later work, which would not be questioned today; so also M. E. Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh with English Parallels* (Cardiff, 1937), p. 78. <sup>13</sup>Jarman, *Legend of Merlin*, pp. 22–23. <sup>14</sup>*Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, edited by A. O. H. Jarman (Cardiff, 1982), pp. xxix–xxxiii; Jarman, 'Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin: The

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prophecies of later events had been added retrospectively to poems of which the core was much older.<sup>15</sup>

The name of Myrddin never appears in these poems, however. If we ask why they have universally been assigned to that character, the answer is primarily the story-material which they share with Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*. The equation has been made since at least the fifteenth century (see below), but that does not necessarily mean it is correct. This observation makes possible an alternative scheme for Jarman's stages (2) and (4). We have already seen how, in his *History*, Geoffrey had introduced an extraneous element into the existing Myrddin story by adapting the episode of the fatherless boy (Ambrosius) from the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. Owing to the wide circulation of Geoffrey's *History*, this element came to be an accepted part of the story of Merlin.<sup>16</sup> An alternative possibility for the accretion of the northern material therefore presents itself: supposing the northern wild-man was merged with the south-Welsh prophet, not within Welsh tradition before the twelfth century, but by Geoffrey himself in his *Vita Merlini*? The rest of this article will be concerned with considering the implications of this possibility. It has already been hinted at by Bromwich, who perceptively asked in 1975 whether Geoffrey might have been responsible for conflating the two figures of Myrddin and Lailoken.<sup>17</sup>

One immediate consequence of this suggestion is that Geoffrey's actions, in writing both the *History* and the *Vita*, become more comprehensible. His omission of all reference to the northern legend when writing the *History* makes sense, because at that date the Welsh legend of Myrddin would have had no northern dimension. Jarman's suggestion of Geoffrey's ignorance of the legend (following Parry) is no longer required. We can envisage that Geoffrey, writing his *History* in the 1130s, was acquainted with Myrddin's legend in whatever form it then had in south-west Wales.

Geoffrey's later action in writing the *Vita* also makes more sense by this scheme. In adding the extraneous story of the northern wild-man, he would have been developing the legend in the same way as he had done previously, in his *History*, by introducing the theme of the

Black Book of Carmarthen', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 71 (1985), 333-56 (p. 336). <sup>15</sup>On his treatment of these poems see now also John Bollard, 'Gwyn eu Byd: Some Comments on the Myrddin Poetry', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 10 (1990), 67-87. <sup>16</sup>*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, edited by Bromwich, p. 472 and references; Griffiths, *Early Vaticination*, pp. 82-83. <sup>17</sup>Rachel Bromwich, review of *Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, in *Welsh History Review*, 7 (1974-75), 366-68 (p. 368).

fatherless boy. In the *History*, he had dedicated the Prophecies of Merlin to Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, the diocese within which Geoffrey lived at Oxford. He may have been hoping to obtain ecclesiastical advancement, but that did not occur. Bishop Alexander died in 1148, and *Vita Merlini* seems to represent a second attempt by Geoffrey, since he dedicated it to Robert, the new bishop of Lincoln (1148–66). If Geoffrey was a canon of St George's Church in Oxford, as is thought likely, he would have had particular reason to seek a new appointment at just this period, since the college of canons was dissolved in 1149.<sup>18</sup> This time he was successful, for in the latter half of 1151 he witnessed a charter as *electus sancti Asaphi* '[bishop]-elect of St Asaph', and early in 1152, in London, he was ordained priest, and eight days later consecrated as bishop of St Asaph.<sup>19</sup>

The date of the *Vita* is thus governed, at the earlier limit, by the accession of Robert as bishop of Lincoln in December 1148.<sup>20</sup> Its latest date is determined by Geoffrey's death in 1155.<sup>21</sup> Clarke favoured a date nearer to 1148, while acknowledging that it was not possible to be certain.<sup>22</sup> Early evidence for knowledge of Geoffrey's work on the Continent appears in a library catalogue, perhaps of the 1150s, from Le Bec (Normandy), which draws a distinction between *Merlinus Silvester* and *Merlinus Ambrosius*. Since the *Vita* was, by any scheme, the first Latin work to treat of Merlin as a northern wild-man, this distinction implies an acquaintance with the *Vita*, although that work is not listed in this catalogue.<sup>23</sup>

We shall return below to Geoffrey's appointment at St Asaph, but for now the important point is that the *Vita* seems to have been, in some

<sup>18</sup>H. E. Salter, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Oxford', *English Historical Review*, 34 (1919), 382–85 (p. 385); J. E. Lloyd, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth', *ibid.*, 57 (1942), 460–68 (p. 464). <sup>19</sup>Salter, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Oxford', p. 384 (no. 7); *Canterbury Professions*, edited by Michael Richter, Canterbury and York Society, 67 (n.p., 1973), p. 47 (no. 95, February '1151' for 1152); *Handbook of British Chronology*, third edition, edited by E. B. Fryde and others (London, 1986), p. 295. <sup>20</sup>*ibid.*, p. 255. <sup>21</sup>*ibid.*, p. 295; see also *Brut y Tywysogion, or, The Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, translated by Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), p. 178, note on the annal for 1154 (for 1155). <sup>22</sup>*Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, pp. 40–42. <sup>23</sup>J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*', *Speculum*, 18 (1943), 265–87 (p. 272 and references); see also D. N. Dumville, 'An Early Text of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the Circulation of Some Latin Histories in Twelfth-Century Normandy', *Arthurian Literature*, 4 (1985), 1–36 (p. 3). This library catalogue, however, is dated to after 1164 by Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford, 1978), p. 202.

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sense, a second attempt by Geoffrey. It would have been natural for him to return to the theme of Merlin, both because by 1148 he would already have known that it was one of the most successful and popular parts of his *History*, and also because it was appropriate, in a work for Bishop Robert, to develop the theme of his Prophecies of Merlin, which had been dedicated to Robert's predecessor, Alexander. However, he would have needed to introduce a new element, and in choosing the theme of the northern wild-man he used one which was accessible to him alone, in the Anglo-Norman circles in which he and the Bishop moved, since it occurred primarily in the Welsh poems. (Gerald of Wales stated in the 1190s that the prophecies of the northern Merlin were available only to a Welsh-speaking audience; see below.) The equation of the two figures could have been suggested to Geoffrey by the fact that both Myrddin and the northern wild-man were renowned as prophets in Welsh poetry. Towards the end of the *Vita* Geoffrey portrayed Merlin being cured of his madness by drinking from a healing spring (lines 1145–53), and at the very end he made Merlin hand over his gift of prophecy to his sister Ganiada (lines 1471–1524). Thus Geoffrey ensured that nobody else could capitalize on his success by attributing yet further adventures and prophecies to his character — although that could not pre-empt the expository industry which was already growing up around the earlier Prophecies of his *History*.

The implication of this scheme for our reading of the Welsh poems *Afallennau* and *Oianau* is that they would still be concerned with a wild-man living in the Caledonian forest, mad since the battle of Arfderydd — but he was not called Myrddin. By the time the poems were written into the Black Book of Carmarthen (mid-thirteenth century) Geoffrey's contributions were both known in Wales (see below), so his merging of the legends would have been available; but even that need not necessarily mean that the ascription of the poems had changed as a result of Geoffrey's work, and in the Black Book as it came from the scribe's pen, there is no indication that these poems were ascribed to Myrddin.

This conservatism is only part of the story, however. There is a twofold corollary of the scheme suggested here: first, the present hypothesis would be disproved if a Welsh text linking Myrddin with the northern (Arfderydd) story were decisively shown to be earlier than Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini* — that is, older than about 1150. Second, where we do find Myrddin's name linked, in Welsh, to the legend of Arfderydd, that link would have to be due to the influence of the *Vita*. We must therefore consider those Welsh texts which link Myrddin with Arfderydd, or with the northern story in general, to see whether they



offer a threat to the hypothesis. It is in the nature of Welsh poetic texts that they cannot be dated very closely, but recent work on linguistic developments at this period has advanced our understanding.<sup>24</sup>

The earliest text which associates Myrddin with Arfderydd is *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* 'The Conversation of Myrddin and Taliesin', in the Black Book of Carmarthen — the only poem definitely concerned with Myrddin in that manuscript.<sup>25</sup> This poem is complex and problematical, even though it is short and its language fairly straightforward. Apart from its mention of Arfderydd, it has an additional relevance for *Vita Merlini*, since it may have provided part of Geoffrey's inspiration for that text (see below). Jarman has very tentatively suggested dating the poem to the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>26</sup> The poem is divided into two halves by a change in subject matter, verbal tense, metre, and orthography, occurring at the beginning of line 23, but the use of a single end-rhyme throughout suggests that the poem is nevertheless a single composition.<sup>27</sup> The first half deals with a battle between Gwynedd and Dyfed, expressed mainly in the past tense (though with present-tense verbs in lines 6–8 and 14, and future-tense in line 10); in this section Myrddin seems to speak for Dyfed, as we should expect, and Taliesin for Gwynedd — appropriately so, if he already had a role as court-poet to Maelgwn of Gwynedd, as in later legend.

In the second half of the poem (lines 23–38) the two poets discuss the battle of Arfderydd, mainly in the future tense. It is in this context that Myrddin says: 'Seith ugein haelon a aethan ygwllon; / yg Coed Keliton y daruuan' ('Seven score noblemen went wild (*gwyllt*); in the Forest of Celyddon they perished') (lines 35–36; the only two past-tense verbs in the second part). These 140 nobles have generally been assumed to include Myrddin himself, but that is not a necessary interpretation. The battle was extremely important in Welsh legend, perhaps second only to Camlan in its literary significance (as shown, for instance, by references to it in the Triads);<sup>28</sup> so Myrddin and Taliesin could be discussing it because of its general renown. This poem therefore does not

<sup>24</sup>Simon Rodway, 'A Datable Development in Literary Welsh', *CMCS*, 36 (Winter 1998), 71–94, and idem, 'Absolute Forms in the Poetry of the Gogynfeirdd: Functionally Obsolete Archaisms or Working System?', *Journal of Celtic Linguistics*, 7 (1998), 63–84. <sup>25</sup>*Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin*, edited by A. O. H. Jarman, second edition (Cardiff, 1967); translation by J. K. Bollard, 'Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition', in *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, edited by Peter Goodrich (New York, 1990), pp. 13–54 (pp. 16–19). <sup>26</sup>*Ymddiddan*, edited by Jarman, pp. 49–54. <sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 4–5, 10–11, and 17; cf. Bollard, 'Myrddin in Early Welsh Poetry', p. 17. <sup>28</sup>*Triodd Ynys Prydein*, edited by Bromwich, pp. 208–10.



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demonstrate that Myrddin was regarded as a participant in the battle before the composition of Geoffrey's *Vita*. It has previously been remarked as odd that Myrddin is never mentioned in the Triads concerned with Arfderydd,<sup>29</sup> but if we cease to think of him as taking part in that battle until Geoffrey's *Vita* made him do so, this anomaly disappears.

Taliesin's prophetic role in this poem is slight. He assists in the past-tense description of the Welsh battle, using one of his favoured devices of claiming to have witnessed it ('oed Maelgun a uelun' 'it was Maelgwn that I could see', line 5); but when they come to discuss the future battle of Arfderydd, Myrddin takes a dominant role, with Taliesin questioning him about it (lines 23–24). It is true that Taliesin then shares in the description of the battle (lines 29–30 and 33–34), but in the final couplet Myrddin again seems to assert his pre-eminence: 'Can ys mi Myrddin, guydi Taliessin, / bithaud kyffredin vy darogan' ('Since I am Myrddin, gwydy Taliessin, / bithaud kyffredin vy darogan') (lines 37–38).<sup>30</sup> Myrddin's dominance in this section can be explained by his particular role as a prophet, since the battle is discussed in future terms.

Of additional interest is the relationship between the conversation of the two poets and the extended conversation of *Merlinus* and *Telgesinus* which occupies most of the second half of Geoffrey's *Vita* (lines 732–1463). A probable connection between the two conversations is rightly accepted.<sup>31</sup> In that case, we wish to know which one served as the inspiration for the other. They are on quite different subjects: that of the Welsh poem is battles, and the roles of the two poets do not seem to differ significantly from one another, except for Myrddin's dominance in prophecy. In the *Vita*, however, the roles of the two sages conform to those of their counterparts elsewhere in Welsh poetry, with *Merlinus* specializing in prophecy (lines 310–44, 555–688, and 941–75), while *Telgesinus* displays scientific knowledge — about cosmology, climatology, oceanography, fish, and geography. When it comes to prophecy, the pre-eminent role of Geoffrey's Merlin corresponds to that of Myrddin in the *Ymddiddan*: after Telgesin has described how he accompanied Arthur to the Island of Apples to be nursed following the battle of Camblan, Merlin describes briefly the present state of Britain,

<sup>29</sup>Jarman, 'Welsh Myrddin Poems', pp. 23–24; *Legend of Merlin*, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup>Bollard's translation here, 'in the style of Taliesin' ('Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition', p. 19), seems not to be justified by other instances of *gvedi* 'after': *Ymddiddan*, edited by Jarman, p. 67; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, edited by R. J. Thomas and others, 4 vols (Cardiff, 1950–2002), II, 1608–9, s.v. <sup>31</sup>H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1932–40), I, 127; *Ymddiddan*, edited by Jarman, p. 44; idem, *Legend of Merlin*, p. 25.

political and economic (*Vita Merlini*, lines 941–52). On hearing this, Telgesin urges sending for Arthur again (though without naming him), to resist the English; but Merlin advises restraint, based on his own knowledge of the future, although he offers the comfort of future international co-operation to expel the English (lines 953–75), as in the tenth-century *Armes Prydein*.

In this conversation Merlin too displays scientific knowledge, but in only one area, namely birds (lines 1292–1386) — knowledge which he says that he has gained during his life in the forest: ‘Sic didici multis silvis habitando diebus’ (‘Thus have I learnt through living for many days in the woods’, line 1300). It is tempting to suggest that, in allocating this particular area of learning to Merlin, Geoffrey was alluding to the idea of wild-men growing feathers and becoming almost able to fly like birds, although that idea is not attested in British versions of the wild-man legend, only in Irish ones.<sup>32</sup> Allotting specialist knowledge in this area to his wild-man would be a typically oblique way for Geoffrey to allude to such a motif. Be that as it may, in addition to Merlin and Telgesin the names of several characters in the *Vita* — such as *Peredurus*, *Guennolous* (*Gwenddolau*), *Rodarcus* (who is *Largus* ‘generous’ in line 730, like Welsh *Rhydderch Hael*) — are clearly drawn from Welsh learning, and agree broadly with their roles there; some of these characters are attested in sources earlier than Geoffrey’s time, so were clearly not invented by him.

Thus in certain areas *Vita Merlini* is informed by Welsh learning, both concerning the two poetic sages and their roles, and also more broadly (see further below), whereas the *Ymddiddan* shows no hint of Galfridian influence, whether from the *History* or the *Vita*. So it is likely that Geoffrey’s dialogue in the *Vita* was inspired by that of the *Ymddiddan*, not the other way round. It would have been characteristic of Geoffrey’s method of working to borrow the idea of the conversation, but put his own themes into it.<sup>33</sup> In dating the *Ymddiddan* to about 1050–1100, Jarman’s chief reason was its probable influence on the *Vita*, while the evidence of its language pointed to a date no earlier than c. 1000.<sup>34</sup> Incidentally, Telgesin’s role in the *Vita* also provides amplificatory attestation for the development of Taliesin’s own legend, particularly for his

<sup>32</sup>Suibhne Geilt growing feathers: *Buile Suibhne*, edited and translated by J. G. O’Keeffe, Irish Texts Society, 12 (Dublin, 1910), §§ 60 (prose) and 61 (poem), and likened to a bird elsewhere in the text; cf. Kuno Meyer, ‘The Irish Mirabilia in the Norse “Speculum Regale”’, *Ériu*, 4 (1908–10), 1–16 (pp. 11–12).

<sup>33</sup>Compare, for example, Tatlock, ‘Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*’, p. 270: ‘Invented narrative attached to authentic names ... is so common in the *Historia* as to be fairly called its formula’. <sup>34</sup>*Ymddiddan*, p. 53.

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Isidorean and other scientific learning.<sup>35</sup> Although the date of the *Vita* (c. 1148–51) is no earlier than dates normally suggested for comparable poems in Welsh that demonstrate Taliesin's learning, Geoffrey's work provides a useful independent date for those developments.

At any rate this poem, although it is earlier than Geoffrey's *Vita* and mentions the battle of Arfderydd, does not conflict with the suggestion that it was Geoffrey who first made Merlin a participant in the battle by merging him with the unnamed northern wild-man of *Afallennau*. The next poem to be considered in this connection is *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer* 'The prophecy of Myrddin and his sister Gwenddydd', known from two medieval manuscripts: Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 3.ii (c. 1300, lacking the first 47 stanzas) and the Red Book of Hergest (c. 1400).<sup>36</sup> This text unequivocally places Myrddin, by name, in the northern legend: Gwenddydd frequently addresses him by name (as well as using other titles), and he says of himself, 'O leas Gwendoleu y gwaetfreu Arderyd, / handwyf eoith[in]' ('Since Gwenddolau was killed in the blood-flow of Arfderydd, I have been frenzied'), and 'Cann ethyw uym pwyll gan wyllyon mynyd' ('Since my sanity has gone with the wild-men of the mountain').<sup>37</sup> In order to sustain the hypothesis that Geoffrey was the first to merge the legends, the whole of the poem would therefore need to be dated later than c. 1150, and to have been influenced by *Vita Merlini*. This poem would thus demonstrate that *Vita Merlini* had become known in Wales, and that Geoffrey's identification of Myrddin with the northern wild-man had been adopted into Welsh literary culture. Alternatively, if the poem were definitely earlier than c. 1150, it would invalidate the hypothesis offered here, by showing that Myrddin was identified with the northern wild-man before Geoffrey wrote his *Vita*.

Jarman's comment on the date of the *Cyfoesi* was that 'the earliest portions ... need not be dated later than the nucleus of the *Afallennau*' (for him, about the ninth or tenth century), but that it was composite, and represented 'a stage in the development ... out of the original legend'.<sup>38</sup> The latter remark was probably prompted by the different

<sup>35</sup>Marged Haycock, 'Taliesin's Questions', *CMCS*, 33 (Summer 1997), 19–79 (pp. 77–78). <sup>36</sup>Ifor Williams, 'Y Cyfoesi a'r Afallennau yn Peniarth 3', *BBCS*, 4 (1927–29), 112–29 (pp. 114–21); *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest*, edited by J. Gwenogvryn Evans (Llanbedrog, 1911), cols 577–83; translation by Bollard, 'Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition', pp. 30–46. Daniel Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 58, gives the date of Peniarth 3.ii as 'Saec. XIII–XIV'. <sup>37</sup>*Poetry in the Red Book*, edited by Evans, cols 577.27–28 and 578.5–6. <sup>38</sup>'Welsh Myrddin Poems', p. 24.

feathers: *Bull Salbuo*, edited and translated by ... 12 (Dublin, 1910), 88–90 (prose) and 61 (poetry); in the text; cf. Kuno Meyer, *The Irish Merlin Legend*, *Ériu*, 4 (1908–10), 1–16 (pp. 11–12); *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Vita Merlini*, edited by ... is so common in ... *Ymddiddan*, p. 53.



portrayal of Myrddin in this poem, when compared with that of the wild-man in *Afallennau* and *Oianau*: Myrddin's fear of Rhydderch Hael and his men, which dominates the story-portions of *Afallennau* and *Oianau*, is absent in the *Cyfoesi*, and he is now on friendly terms with Gwenddydd, whereas in *Afallennau* he complains that she does not visit him since he has caused the death of her son and daughter.<sup>39</sup> In fact, these differences from the wild-man story as found in those two earlier poems bring the story-background of the *Cyfoesi* into agreement with the story of *Vita Merlini* (where Merlin is on amicable terms with his sister Ganieda, and with her husband King Rodarchus), and they might themselves have resulted from the influence of Geoffrey's work.

Kenneth Jackson, in 1940, dated the *Cyfoesi* to the eleventh or even tenth century, on linguistic grounds.<sup>40</sup> However, the use of linguistic forms to date Welsh poetry has progressed since he wrote, especially since the fresh publication of the securely dated poetry of the Gogynfeirdd, and it is now clear that many verbal forms previously considered 'early' (usually meaning pre-1100) continued in use through the twelfth century.<sup>41</sup> It therefore seems likely that most if not all of Jackson's evidence is inconclusive, and that it would be unwise to insist upon a date earlier than c. 1150 for this poem on linguistic grounds. As far as the evidence goes at present, therefore, it would be unsafe to claim, on linguistic grounds, that the association between Myrddin and Arfderydd in this poem was earlier than Geoffrey's *Vita*.

Another reason which has been suggested in support of an early date for the poem is that it provides a historical list of rulers of Gwynedd, which seems to come to an end with Anarawd ap Rhodri (d. 916) and his nephew Hywel Dda of Dyfed (d. 949), after whom the historical information becomes vague until twelfth-century material makes an appearance, later in the poem.<sup>42</sup> One possible inference is that the first part of the poem was composed at about the time of Anarawd or Hywel Dda, and that the list was not updated when twelfth-century material was added later. Other explanations for the omissions might also be envisaged, but if the omission of kings after Hywel were considered a cogent reason for dating part of the poem to the tenth century, then the

<sup>39</sup> *Afallennau*, lines 39, 41, and 53; *Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, p. 27. <sup>40</sup> Kenneth Jackson, 'The Motive of the Threefold Death in the Story of Suibhne Geilt', in *Féil-sgríbhinn Éoin Mhic Néill*, edited by John Ryan (Dublin, 1940), pp. 535-50 (p. 545, n. 30). <sup>41</sup> Rodway, 'Datable Development' and 'Absolute Forms'. I am very grateful to Simon Rodway for his advice on the *Cyfoesi*. <sup>42</sup> *Poetry in the Red Book*, edited by Evans, cols 579.12 and 580.26; Griffiths, *Early Vaticination*, p. 98; cf. Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 292.



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poem's northern Myrddin would stand as an argument against the scheme suggested here.

The other two poems concerned with Myrddin, *Gwasgargerdd Fyrddin yn y Bedd* 'Myrddin's diffuse-song in the grave' and *Peirian Faban* 'Commanding Youth', have received less attention, primarily because they are not thought to be so early.<sup>43</sup> Jarman said that *Gwasgargerdd* 'may be regarded as a sequel' to *Cyfoesi*; he declined to date *Peirian Faban*, but saw influence from *Afallemau* and *Oianau* in it.<sup>44</sup> It seems unlikely that anyone would think it necessary to date these poems earlier than the second half of the twelfth century, so they pose no threat to the hypothesis that all association in Welsh literature between Myrddin and the battle of Arfderydd could be due, directly or indirectly, to *Vita Merlini*.

In addition to prophetic poems centrally concerned with the legend of Myrddin, there are incidental references to him in some poems of the Gogynfeirdd. Most of these are to Myrddin simply as a poet or prophet, and therefore would be compatible with any scheme for the development of the legend: for example, they could allude to a Myrddin as ill-defined as in *Armes Prydein*.<sup>45</sup> However, two references are more distinctive, and need to be considered here. The earlier is by the poet-prince Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd (d. 1170), in his boasting-poem *Gorhoffedd*.<sup>46</sup> In switching the focus half-way through the poem, from praise of his native Gwynedd to praise of his conquests in love, Hywel introduces his second theme thus: 'Kysylltu canu kysseuin, / kert uolyant, ual y cant Mertin, / y'r gwraget a'e met uy martrin' ('composing an old-style song, a poem of praise, such as Myrddin sang, to the women who govern my muse').<sup>47</sup> Here Hywel seems to refer to Myrddin as a lover, indeed a composer of love-poetry, which is not his usual role in early material, but one which does reappear in later Welsh poetry and elsewhere in romance literature; his madness is occasionally linked to his role as lover.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup>The *Gwasgargerdd* is found in the White Book of Rhydderch (c. 1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (c. 1400): E. G. B. P[hillimore], 'A Fragment from Hengwrt MS. no. 202', *Y Cymmrodor*, 7 (1886), 89–154 (pp. 112–21 and 151–54); *Poetry in the Red Book*, edited by Evans, cols 584–85. *Peirian Faban* is found in Peniarth MS 50, mid-fifteenth century (Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 61), lying between texts of the *Oianau* and the *Gwasgargerdd*: A. O. H. Jarman, 'Peirian Vaban', *BBCS*, 14 (1950–52), 104–8. <sup>44</sup>Jarman, 'Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy', p. 120, and 'Peirian Vaban', pp. 106–7. <sup>45</sup>For references see A. Parry Owen, 'Mynegai i Enwau Priod ym Marddoniaeth Beirdd y Tywysogion', *LIC*, 20 (1997), 25–45 (p. 35). <sup>46</sup>*Gwaith Llywelyn Fardd I ac Eraill o Feirdd y Ddeuddegfed Ganrif*, edited by Kathleen Anne Bramley and others, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*, 2 (Cardiff, 1994), no. 6 (pp. 114–30). <sup>47</sup>*ibid.*, p. 120, lines 45–47, and notes, p. 128. <sup>48</sup>*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, edited by

Jarman, p. 27. <sup>49</sup>Kennedy, *History of Sublime Gell* (Dublin, 1940), pp. 558–59. <sup>50</sup>*Absolute Forms: A Study of the Cyfoesi*. <sup>51</sup>*Poetry in the Early Victorian Age*, 1990, p. 292.

Where did this additional role for Myrddin come from? Hints of it can be detected in *Afallennau*, where the wild-man portrays himself as a former lover: 'ir bot y wun' ('for the sake of pleasing a girl'), 'kin[s] buyf aelav hetiv gan eiliv eleirch' ('though I am not treasured today by (her of) the beauty of swans'), and 'tra fuvm puyll wastad am buiad in i bon / a bun wen wariu vn weinun vanon' ('while I was of sound mind, I used to be at its roots with a fair playful girl, one slender and queenly').<sup>49</sup> Once Myrddin had been merged with the wild-man of Arfderydd, therefore, these allusions in *Afallennau* could have suggested casting him in the role of a lover. Other references to this idea in Welsh poetry are late enough to be due to the (indirect) influence of *Vita Merlini* in making the necessary equation of Myrddin with the northern wild-man; but Hywel's poem is dated to 1140 × 1167 by its recent editor.<sup>50</sup> We should need to place it later in that period in order to leave time for the *Vita* to become known, and for the consequent equation to have been made in Welsh literary circles.

This example of possible influence is difficult to assess. In the first place, the date of Hywel's *Gorhoffedd* is uncertain, although it could be late enough to have drawn influence from Geoffrey's *Vita*. Second, it is not certain that Hywel would have needed a Myrddin who was already identified with the northern wild-man in order to allude to Myrddin as a composer of love-poetry, although that is the best explanation on present evidence. If so, the influence on Hywel's poem could be indirect: not from the *Vita* itself (where Merlin is married, but is not portrayed as a lover), but from a resulting merger, within Welsh literary culture, of Myrddin with the northern wild-man, and hence with his additional role as a lover (either as portrayed in *Afallennau* itself, or more generally in the legend of the northern wild-man). Hywel was innovative in introducing the love-lyric in formal Welsh poetry (as far as the evidence goes), and some have considered that he drew influence from Continental models;<sup>51</sup> a few lines earlier in his *Gorhoffedd* Hywel had also mentioned Ovid as a love-poet (line 40). It would not be problematical to think of Hywel as having known Geoffrey's *Vita*, and having himself made the identification of the Welsh Myrddin with the northern wild-man of *Afallennau*. Alternatively, the identification could already have been made within Welsh literary circles, as a result of Geoffrey's work, and

Bromwich, pp. 472–74; cf. Jarman, 'Welsh Myrddin Poems', p. 28 and n. 2.

<sup>49</sup>*Afallennau*, lines 28, 46, and 56–57: *Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup>Bramley, in *Gwaith Llywelyn Fardd I*, p. 116, from probable allusions in the poem to events of the period. <sup>51</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 106–10.

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Hywel could simply have been following the recent literary trend. In any case, Hywel's allusion to Myrddin need not threaten the hypothesis offered here, provided that Hywel's poem were allowed to be late enough to show the influence of Geoffrey's *Vita* — if indeed such influence is considered the best explanation for the allusion.

The second example of such influence within the twelfth-century Gogynfeirdd poetry is more straightforward. Cynddelw's long *marwnad* (elegy) for Hywel's father, Owain Gwynedd, was presumably composed soon after Owain's peaceful death in November 1170 (shortly before Hywel's own death in battle).<sup>52</sup> This Owain was in fact the ruler whose dominance of north-east Wales in the mid-twelfth century had made Geoffrey's see of St Asaph somewhat inaccessible to the English (see below). In a section of the *marwnad* extolling Owain's martial valour (lines 77–112), Cynddelw included the following praise:

Mal Gweith Arderyt, gwyth ar dyruain — cad  
yn argrad, yn aergrein,  
uch myrtwyrt, uch Myrtin oet kein (lines 97–99)

As [in] the battle of Arfderydd, fury over the hosts of battle,  
in commotion, in carnage,  
over thronging men, over Myrddin, he was magnificent.

The poet is here suggesting a comparison of Owain with the legendary northern ruler Gwenddolau, though without naming him. Gwenddolau was the leader of one of the armies in the battle of Arfderydd, and hence is named by the wild-man in *Afallennau* as his lord.<sup>53</sup> By naming Myrddin in this context, Cynddelw showed that he thought of him as taking part in the battle.<sup>54</sup> Later in the poem there is a reference to the ruler Eliffer, whose name was also linked with the battle, since his sons were Gwenddolau's opponents there. (Eliffer is mentioned in this connection in *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin*, in the Triads, and in a late manuscript of the *Annales Cambriae*.)<sup>55</sup> Cynddelw's poem thus provides the earliest datable association in Welsh of Myrddin with the battle of Arfderydd. For the present hypothesis to be sustained, we must suppose either that Cynddelw himself knew *Vita Merlini*, or that by 1170 the contents of Geoffrey's work had entered Welsh literary currency

<sup>52</sup> *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr*, edited by Nerys Ann Jones and Ann Parry Owen, 2 vols, Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion, 3–4 (Cardiff, 1991–95), II, 44–86.

<sup>53</sup> *Afallennau*, lines 43 and 63, in *Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, pp. 27–28.

<sup>54</sup> *Gwaith Cynddelw*, edited by Jones and Parry Owen, II, 75. <sup>55</sup> *Marwnad Owain*, line 265; *Ymddiddan*, edited by Jarman, pp. 13 (line 29) and 58; *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, edited by Bromwich, no. 44; *Nennius*, edited by Morris, p. 85.

sufficiently for the identification between Myrddin and the wild-man of Arfderydd (as seen also in the *Cyfoesi*) to become normal, or at least acceptable, and for Myrddin thus to have acquired a new role as a warrior in that battle.

Even if that was the case, however, there are signs that such an equation was not all-pervasive in Welsh learning, and one of the advantages of the scheme offered here is that it provides for the apparent inconsistency in the sources. It has already been noted that the Triads fail to mention Myrddin in connection with the battle of Arfderydd. The Triads may have been written down as early as the first half of the twelfth century, and so before Geoffrey (hypothetically) merged the two legends.<sup>56</sup> The surviving texts of them incorporate updating and additional material, and therefore the fact that they apparently continued not to associate Myrddin with Arfderydd suggests that the Triadic tradition, at least, resisted the merging of legends which some poems (most obviously the *Cyfoesi* and Cynddelw's *Marwnad Owain Gwynedd*) had adopted from Geoffrey's work. It has been suggested that the Triads, as we have them, may reflect antiquarian interests rather than current usage among the professional poets.<sup>57</sup>

One could even consider the possibility that when the *Afallennau* and the *Oianau* were copied into the Black Book of Carmarthen, in about the middle of the thirteenth century, they were still not necessarily thought of as spoken by Myrddin. If we accept that these are layered poems, with parts which may be rather earlier than the twelfth-century events mentioned in some of their prophecies, then the poems were originally composed before Geoffrey merged the two legends, and so their original speaker was (by the present hypothesis) the wild-man of Arfderydd, not yet identified with Myrddin. It could be that the learned tradition in which these texts were transmitted continued to resist or ignore Geoffrey's equation, and that the scribe of the Black Book received and copied them as such. Although it may not count for much, these poems are separate from the *Ymddiddan* in the manuscript. The third poem in their group, immediately preceding them in the manuscript, is *Bedwenni*, the 'Birch-tree (stanzas)'; it is set in Wales rather than the north, and is clearly a later composition based on

<sup>56</sup>*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, edited by Bromwich, pp. cxi-cxxi. <sup>57</sup>Brynley F. Roberts, 'Gerald of Wales and Welsh Tradition', in *The Formation of Culture in Medieval Britain: Celtic, Latin, and Norman Influences on English Music, Literature, History, and Art*, edited by Françoise H. M. Le Saux (Lampeter, 1995), pp. 129-47 (p. 130).



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*Afallennau* (or on that and *Oianau*). Being set in Wales, with no reference to the northern story of Arfderydd, it has received rather less attention than its two companions, but it is worth considering whether, when composed (say, in around 1200?), it must have been intended to be spoken by Myrddin. It could instead have been attributed to a wild-man (perhaps anonymous) as portrayed in *Afallennau* and *Oianau*, but transferred to Wales — much as Jarman envisaged the development of the northern legend, but before the identification with Myrddin had occurred.

Later manuscript evidence is also relevant to this question. By about 1300, the scribe of Peniarth 3.ii clearly did think of Myrddin as the speaker in *Afallennau* and *Oianau*, since he placed them straight after the *Cyfoesi*.<sup>58</sup> Within the Black Book itself, the identification of Myrddin as the speaker in those poems was made in about 1600, when Jaspas Gryflyth, its then owner, inserted a note specifying Myrddin as the composer of the three poems (*Bedwenni*, *Afallennau*, and *Oianau*) before the start of *Bedwenni* (at the foot of fol. 23<sup>v</sup>).<sup>59</sup> He also inscribed some lines from a *cywydd*-poem about Myrddin in his role as northern wild-man, composing poetry to his piglet and birch-trees (as in *Oianau* and *Bedwenni*). This poem probably dates from the later fifteenth century, so its use of the merged legend is not noteworthy,<sup>60</sup> but its reference to Myrddin as the composer of *Bedwenni* may be the earliest clear association of that poem with Myrddin. Jaspas Gryflyth's later annotation in the Black Book constitutes the earliest evidence for the poems as they appear in that manuscript being ascribed to him.

Overall, then, it is possible to reconcile the evidence of medieval Welsh literature with the scheme offered here, in that there is no clear evidence that Myrddin was identified with the northern wild-man of *Afallennau* and *Oianau*, or was otherwise associated with the battle of Arfderydd, before the second half of the twelfth century (Cynddelw's *Marwnad Owain Gwynedd*, 1170). We should have to suppose, however, that this identification within Welsh literary circles resulted from knowledge of Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, and that *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd* was composed in that light about then, or a little later. But the equation may not have become fully accepted immediately, and the Triads continued to omit Myrddin from their references to Arfderydd:

<sup>58</sup>Ifor Williams, 'Y Cyfoesi a'r Afallennau'. <sup>59</sup>*Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, p. 94; *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, edited by Bromwich, p. 473; for Jaspas Gryflyth see Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, pp. 99 and 291 and references. <sup>60</sup>Thomas Roberts, 'Pedwar Cywydd Brud', *BBCS*, 7 (1933–35), 231–46 (pp. 243–45).

Bromwich, pp. cxi–cxi. <sup>61</sup>'Byzantine tradition', in *The Formation of Cultural Norms: Influences on English Manuscripts*, ed. H. M. Le Saix (Lampeter, 1998), p. 100.

indeed, no medieval Triad mentions Myrddin at all.<sup>61</sup> When *Afallennau* and *Oianau* were written into the Black Book of Carmarthen in the mid-thirteenth century, therefore, the scribe need not necessarily have thought of them as spoken by Myrddin, or he could have remained uncommitted about the matter. (See further below, on the evidence of Gerald of Wales.)

We now turn to consider the third body of textual evidence, the Latin writings about St Kentigern of Glasgow and St Asaph, in relation to the hypothesis suggested here. The Latin writings which concern us are three:<sup>62</sup> first, the fragmentary and anonymous *Life* of St Kentigern, known as the 'Herbertian' *Life* because it was written for Bishop Herbert of Glasgow (1147–64);<sup>63</sup> second, the *Life* of St Kentigern by Jocelin of Glasgow (1147–64);<sup>63</sup> third, two free-standing episodes about the monk of Furness Abbey in Lancashire, written in about 1180 for Bishop Jocelin of Glasgow (1175–99);<sup>64</sup> third, two free-standing episodes about the northern prophetic wild-man Lailoken, one of them telling how he was befriended by St Kentigern.<sup>65</sup> It should be noted immediately that these writings are not entirely independent of *Vita Merlini* in the surviving manuscript tradition: the only known copy of the Herbertian fragment and the two Lailoken episodes (which, significantly, all occur together) is in London, British Library, MS Titus A.xix (fifteenth century), which also contains an abridgement of Geoffrey's *Vita*.<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to know what to make of this association of the texts, but it would be unwise to ignore it.

Our particular interest in this material is again certain narrative motifs and names, some of which it shares with *Afallennau* and *Oianau* and some with Geoffrey's *Vita*. We need to know whether Geoffrey, in writing his *Vita Merlini*, used northern Latin materials such as these in addition to, or instead of, the Welsh poems. It will be noted that the Herbertian *Life*, even if it was written near the beginning of Herbert's

<sup>61</sup>Jarman, *Legend of Merlin*, p. 18. <sup>62</sup>Kenneth Jackson, 'The Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', in N. K. Chadwick and others, *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 273–357. <sup>63</sup>*Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern*, edited and translated by A. P. Forbes (Edinburgh, 1874), pp. 123–33 and 243–52. <sup>64</sup>*Lives*, edited by Forbes, pp. 33–119 and 159–242; Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985), p. 283 (no. 1018). <sup>65</sup>H. L. D. Ward, 'Lailoken (or Merlin Silvester)', *Romania*, 22 (1893), 504–26 (pp. 514–25); translations in *Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, pp. 227–34, and *Romance of Merlin*, edited by Goodrich, pp. 3–11. <sup>66</sup>H. L. D. Ward and J. A. Herbert, *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols (London, 1883–1910), 1, 272–98; on the manuscript see also Michael Lapidge, 'Additional Manuscript Evidence for the *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri*', *Arthurian Literature*, 2 (1982), 163–68.

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episcopacy, would only just have appeared when Geoffrey composed *Vita Merlini*, so it is unlikely that he would have known it; Jocelin's *Life* is clearly later in date than Geoffrey's time; and the two Lailoken episodes are undated. (It is one of the puzzles of this whole study that this group of materials seems to have come into being at about the same time as Geoffrey's *Vita* and the Welsh poetry, and apparently independently.) Therefore, if Geoffrey knew of any northern Latin material, it would need to have been something older than these surviving compositions — perhaps a lost eleventh-century Latin *Life* of St Kentigern which, Jackson postulated, was a source used by the author of the *Herbertian Life*.<sup>67</sup>

The relevant part of the Kentigern narratives is his dealings with the wild-man. Geoffrey's *Vita* shares some themes with this Latin material, but they are not found in the corresponding Welsh poems. The *Herbertian* fragment does not contain this material, because it breaks off after the birth of St Kentigern (here a virgin birth, vaguely analogous to that of Ambrosius in the *Historia Brittonum*, and hence to that of Geoffrey's Merlin in his *History*). The two Lailoken episodes ('Lailoken A' and 'B') both tell the same story, of how the prophetic wild-man was discredited by (truthfully) prophesying three different deaths for himself. They tell it from different perspectives, however, 'A' concentrating on St Kentigern's kindness to the wild-man, and 'B' on Lailoken's relations with a King Meldred (otherwise unknown) and his unfaithful queen, whose adultery Lailoken revealed from a leaf caught on her shawl. The prophecy of the threefold death seems arbitrary in 'A', but serves a narrative function in 'B', since the queen uses it to discredit the prophet and so save her own reputation.<sup>68</sup> Both these episodes explicitly equate Lailoken with Merlin.

It has been suggested that 'Lailoken A' may have come from a lost part of the *Herbertian Life* of St Kentigern.<sup>69</sup> 'Lailoken B' can hardly have been taken from the same text, since the two overlap in their contents. Tatlock thought that these episodes were later than, and derived from, Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*;<sup>70</sup> but their use of the name

<sup>67</sup>Jackson, 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', pp. 330–42. <sup>68</sup>Earlier instances of the Threefold Death theme are given by J. J. Parry, 'The Triple Death in the *Vita Merlini*', *Speculum*, 5 (1930), 216–17, and Jackson, 'Motive of the Threefold Death', pp. 536 and 550. This whole complex of material is also discussed by J. Carney, 'Suibne Geilt' and 'The Children of Lir', in his *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 129–64 and 385–93. <sup>69</sup>Ward, 'Lailoken', p. 513; Jackson, 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', p. 329. <sup>70</sup>Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, p. 268 and n. 6.



Lailoken cannot be derived from that work, and subsequent commentators have thought that the two episodes are independent of Geoffrey's *Vita*, although the form of Merlin's name, with *-rl-*, is assumed to show influence from the Galfridian tradition on the extant texts. If independent, they form part of the northern tradition which Geoffrey drew upon for *Vita Merlini*, since certain features — notably the leaf in the hair betraying the unfaithful queen — are known only in these two works among this whole complex of texts.

The puzzle of the connections between these various texts is greatly increased, however, by the manuscript association of the two Lailoken episodes and *Vita Merlini* in Titus A.xix, this being one of the twelve known manuscripts containing that work or parts of it.<sup>71</sup> It is clear that as yet, we are only dimly glimpsing the textual complexities and interrelationships of this group of works, and therefore any suggestions about Geoffrey's use of the northern material remain provisional, until more work has been done on the contexts and backgrounds of the texts in their various manuscripts.

Jocelin's *Life* contains a very truncated form of this material, saying only that a fool or jester (*homo fatuus*; not a wild-man) called Laloccen, at the court of King Rederech (Rhydderch of the Welsh poems), was inconsolable after St Kentigern's death, and prophesied the deaths of two others: Rederech himself and a nobleman.<sup>72</sup> (Jocelin shares this idea with 'Lailoken A', where the wild-man prophesies first his own threefold death, then the deaths of the unnamed king, the saint, and a nobleman.)<sup>73</sup> In Geoffrey's *Vita Merlin* reveals the adultery of the queen (here his sister, Ganieda, married to King Rodarchus) by means of a leaf in her hair; she discredits his vision by asking him to prophesy the death of a boy in three guises (lines 254–415). Geoffrey's version of the motif is thus closer to that of 'Lailoken B', where the prophecy is used by the queen to discredit the wild-man, except that the king in Geoffrey's *Vita* is Rodarchus instead of Meldred and that Geoffrey's Merlin prophesies the threefold death for someone other than himself.

The prophecy of the threefold death does not occur in any of the

<sup>71</sup>Eleven are listed in *Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, pp. 43–45; the twelfth, the earliest known, is York Minster, MS XVI.Q.14, of c. 1200 or slightly later: see N. R. Ker and A. J. Piper, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, IV (Oxford, 1992), pp. 776–83 (p. 782, item no. 20); also Lapidge, 'Additional Manuscript Evidence', p. 168. I owe this information to the kindness of Neil Wright, who is preparing a new edition of *Vita Merlini* using this important additional witness to the text. <sup>72</sup>Jocelin, §45; *Lives*, edited by Forbes, p. 241. <sup>73</sup>Ward, 'Lailoken', pp. 517–20; *Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, pp. 229–31.



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Welsh poems, so it has generally been assumed that Geoffrey obtained this material from a northern Latin source.<sup>74</sup> In theory the story could have occurred in a lost Welsh poem, but since it requires a taut, intricate narration, the allusive treatment of the story-background in the Welsh poems may not have been suited to it. Geoffrey seems more likely to have obtained it from a properly narrative source, presumably in Latin.

However, in addition to the suggestion that Geoffrey knew Latin material about Lailoken, there are also features of the *Vita* which suggest that he drew on Welsh poetry — not only *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thalesin*, as already seen, but also the Welsh poems about the northern wild-man, or at least *Afallennau*. The absence of St Kentigern from both Geoffrey's poem and the Welsh ones (as well as 'Lailoken B') is a point they have in common. Geoffrey's Merlin laments the failure in winter of nineteen apple-trees which had fed and sheltered him (*Vita*, lines 90–98). In addition to the general allusion to the refrain of *Afallennau*, the precise but arbitrary number suggests that Geoffrey might have known a version of the poem containing nineteen stanzas. The Black Book repetition of the first words in each stanza, *Afallen beren* 'Sweet apple-tree!', leaves it open to interpretation whether the wild-man is addressing a single tree or a succession of them, so Geoffrey could legitimately have thought of each stanza as being addressed to a separate tree. (In *Bedwenni* it is made clear that each of the three stanzas is addressed to a separate birch-tree, each growing in a different part of Wales.)

Immediately after lamenting the apple-trees in the *Vita*, Merlin complains of pigs which come and eat such ground-food as he can find; and then he sympathizes with his companion, a wolf, also weak from hunger (lines 99–112). The reference to the pigs could reflect either the two lines addressed to a piglet in *Afallennau*, or the refrain of *Oianau*.<sup>75</sup> Since *Oianau* follows directly on from *Afallennau* in the manuscripts, the successive reference to apple-trees, then pigs, in the *Vita* suggests that Geoffrey may have known a text containing both poems, similar to the extant ones. Geoffrey's wolf has no parallel in the Welsh poetry,<sup>76</sup> but later in the *Vita Merlin* appears riding on a stag to interrupt his wife's remarriage. Geoffrey's use of the stag and the earlier wolf as Merlin's

<sup>74</sup>e.g. Jackson, 'Motive of the Threefold Death', pp. 548–50. <sup>75</sup>*Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, pp. 26–27 (lines 6 and 31) and 29–35. <sup>76</sup>In the line *lluid yv vy bleit* 'grey is my wolf' (*Afallennau*, line 130) in the Black Book, *bleit* is a scribal error for *blev* 'hair' (*mlew* in Peniarth 3.ii), by anticipation of the word *treit* 'visits' later in the line: *Llyfr Du*, edited by Jarman, p. 99.

*Vita Merlini*, edited by Clarke, pp. 43–45; the recension of Minster, MS XVIQ.14, of c. 1200 or slightly later; *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, iv (Oxford, 1972), item no. 20; also Lapidge, 'Additional Manuscripts of the *Vita Merlini* using this important additional witness', *Lives*, edited by Forbes, p. 241. <sup>77</sup>West, 'Lailoken', *Lives*, edited by Clarke, pp. 229–31.

companions parallels an episode in Jocelin's later *Life*, where St Kentigern yokes together a wolf and a stag for ploughing, for lack of oxen — a frequent motif in saints' Lives, though usually only featuring stags.<sup>77</sup>

It therefore appears that Geoffrey, if it was he who merged the northern wild-man with his Merlin to create *Vita Merlini* in about 1148–51, probably drew both on Welsh poems (*Afalleinnau*, and perhaps *Oianau*, as well as the *Ymddiddan*) and on northern Latin material, the latter notably for the combined motif of the leaf betraying the queen's adultery plus the prophecy of the threefold death. We could envisage his source as something akin to 'Lailoken B', which bears an unclear relationship to the Herbertian *Life* of 1147 × 1164 and Jocelin's of about 1180. Jarman, too, supposed that Geoffrey probably used 'Scottish and Irish' as well as Welsh material, so the present modification of his scheme does not change anything in this respect.<sup>78</sup>

It is unclear how or where Geoffrey might have obtained such Latin material, and it remains unknown (as in Jarman's scheme) what relation his interest in the material has to his appointment at St Asaph, where St Kentigern was the patron saint of the cathedral; it seems unlikely to be coincidence. The neatest explanation would be to suppose that it was Geoffrey's appointment there which aroused his interest in St Kentigern, and hence in the legends in *Vita Merlini*. But that seems unlikely, first because the *Vita* is considered to have been written earlier than his appointment (although that is not certain), and also because it is uncertain whether Geoffrey ever actually visited his see, which was in territory disputed between the Welsh and English during his occupancy of it.<sup>79</sup> Clarke has adapted this theory by suggesting that Geoffrey had been looking at records at St Asaph before he become its bishop,<sup>80</sup> but we have no assurance that he was involved in such preliminary work, not even that the legend of St Kentigern was current at St Asaph so early. Indeed, the earliest definite evidence for an acknowledgement of St Kentigern's role at St Asaph itself seems to be as late as 1256.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Jocelin, §20; Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*, F.F. Communications, 252 (Helsinki, 1992), p. 89. We cannot know whether this motif was already present in the Herbertian *Life*, or its predecessor (which Geoffrey might have known). <sup>78</sup>Jarman, *Legend of Merlin*, p. 24. <sup>79</sup>Lloyd, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth', p. 465. <sup>80</sup>*Vita Merlini*, pp. 42 and 193–94; followed by Jarman, 'Merlin Legend', p. 139. <sup>81</sup>*Lives*, edited by Forbes, pp. lxxix–lxxx; cf. Jackson, 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', p. 317. Possible evidence for a pre-Norman association of St Kentigern with the see is given by Wendy Davies, 'The Latin Charter-Tradition in Western Britain, Brittany and Ireland in the Early Mediaeval Period', in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*.

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In fact, the more one tries to examine it, the murkier the diocese of St Asaph itself becomes. At its first appearance in the records, a generation before Geoffrey's accession, the diocese was not referred to by any name at all; it was merely a third diocese situated between those of Chester and Bangor, 'but lacking a bishop because of the desolation and barbarousness' (*tercium inter hos duos medium set pro uastitate et barbarie episcopo uacantem*).<sup>82</sup> The context was that in the 1120s all three sees were being considered for transferral from the archdiocese of Canterbury to that of York. The implication seems to be that a diocese was believed to have existed previously in the region, but that it had not been occupied, perhaps for some time. A decade later, when Henry of Huntingdon listed the Welsh dioceses in the 1130s, he failed to mention St Asaph.<sup>83</sup> Its actual emergence into history therefore comes with the consecration of Geoffrey's immediate predecessor, Gilbert, as bishop of Llandelwy in 1143, although it has been suggested that Richard, normally considered to have been Geoffrey's successor as bishop in 1154–55, was actually Gilbert's predecessor, and was consecrated in 1141.<sup>84</sup>

This is not the place to try to elucidate the obscure history of the diocese of St Asaph in the twelfth century. It will be enough here to draw attention to two relevant points: first, that even its name is uncertain, hovering between Llandelwy and St Asaph (a name which first appears with Geoffrey's election in 1151, unless Richard is accepted as its first bishop in 1141; see above);<sup>85</sup> and, second, that St Asaph's association with the see is hardly better attested than that of St Kentigern.<sup>86</sup> It seems possible that the latter's legendary role as first bishop, before Asaph, may

*Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, edited by Dorothy Whitelock and others (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 258–80 (p. 271, n. 44).<sup>82</sup> Hugh the Chanter, *The History of the Church of York 1066–1127*, edited and translated by Charles Johnson, revised by M. Brett and others (Oxford, 1990), pp. 206–7. See also Matthew J. Pearson, 'The Creation and Development of the St Asaph Cathedral Chapter, 1141–1293', *CMCS*, 40 (Winter 2000), 35–56 (pp. 36–39).<sup>83</sup> Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, edited and translated by Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996), 1.5 (pp. 18–19).<sup>84</sup> *Canterbury Professions*, edited by Richter, pp. 46 (no. 93: Gilbert) and 49 (no. 98: Richard); D. M. Smith, 'The Episcopate of Richard, Bishop of St Asaph: A Problem of Twelfth-Century Chronology', *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, 24 (1974), 9–12, and Pearson, 'St Asaph Cathedral Chapter', pp. 38–39; but this suggestion has not been adopted in *Handbook of British Chronology*, edited by Fryde and others, p. 295.<sup>85</sup> Salter, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Oxford', p. 384; so little known was its name that the Welsh Chronicles wrongly called Geoffrey bishop of 'Llandaf' on his death in 1155: Lloyd, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth', p. 466.<sup>86</sup> Silas M. Harris, 'Liturgical Commemorations of Welsh Saints, II: St Asaph', *JHSCW*, 6 (1956), 5–24.

*List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Saints of Wales*, Helsinki, 1992), p. 89. We cannot be certain in the Herbertian *Life*, or its predecessor, the *Vita Merlini*, pp. 42 and 184–5. <sup>85</sup> Jarman, *Legend of Merlin*, p. 139. <sup>86</sup> *Lives*, edited by Forbes, p. 317. Possibility of St Kentigern with the see is given in *Western Britain, Brittany and Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*



have begun as a claim made by Glasgow as part of a campaign to assert jurisdiction for itself, or for the York archdiocese, over this see.<sup>87</sup> Or could it be that Geoffrey's interest in the northern material sparked an interest in St Kentigern at the see, or even that Geoffrey himself recommended the adoption of Kentigern as a patron saint? So little was known of St Asaph at his see, that the story told there in 1256 seems only to repeat what had been written about him in the northern *Lives* of St Kentigern. Perhaps this lack of information suggested, either to Geoffrey or to others familiar with his writings, the desirability of adding the better-known Kentigern.

The conclusion, sadly, is that at present we cannot explain Geoffrey's use of the northern Latin materials in *Vita Merlini* by means of any assumptions or deductions from Geoffrey's association with the see of St Asaph, nor even by means of St Kentigern's association with the see. It remains very tempting to see some connection, however, and that might work equally well in reverse: that is, St Kentigern's association with the see may have arisen from Geoffrey's interest in the saint and his occupation of the bishopric. If so, then his original interest in the northern Latin materials, and how he obtained them, remains unexplained. It could have been the Welsh poems which aroused his interest in the northern Latin texts, though we should still need to explain how he came to know about them, and to appreciate their relevance to the Welsh prophetic poems. The present suggested alteration to Jarman's scheme does not improve upon this problem.

The last topic needing discussion is the interest of Gerald of Wales in the Merlin material and Welsh prophecy-poetry, and particularly his explanatory comment, made in the 1190s, that there were two Merlins:

Erant enim Merlini duo; iste qui et Ambrosius dictus est, quia binomius fuerat, et sub rege Vortigerno prophetizavit, ab incubo genitus, et apud Kaermerdyn inventus; unde ab ipso ibidem invento denominata est Kaermerdyn, id est, urbs Merlini; alter vero de Albania oriundus, qui et Celidonus dictus est, a Celidonia silva in qua prophetizavit, et Silvester, quia cum inter acies bellicas constitutus monstrum horribile nimis in aera suspiciendo prospiceret, dementire cœpit, et ad silvam transfugiendo silvestrem usque ad obitum vitam perduxit. Hic autem Merlinus tempore Arthuri fuit, et longe plenius et apertius quam alter prophetasse perhibetur.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup>On the diocese of Glasgow at this period see Dauvit Broun, 'The Welsh Identity of the Kingdom of Strathclyde c. 900–c. 1200', *Innes Review*, 55 (2004), 111–80 (pp. 117–18 and 140–71). <sup>88</sup>Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, II.8, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, edited by J. S. Brewer and others, 8 vols (London, 1861–91), VI, 133; for the reference to both Merlins together compare his *Descriptio Cambriae*, I.16, in *Opera*, edited by Brewer and others, VI, 196; and

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For there were two Merlins: the one who was also called *Ambrosius*, having two names, and who prophesied under King Vortigern, born from an incubus, and found at Carmarthen; whence Carmarthen, the town of Merlin, was named, from his having been found there; the other, however, coming from Scotland, is called both *Celidonius*, from the Caledonian forest where he prophesied, and *Silvester*, because he became demented when, placed between battle-lines, by looking up into the sky he saw an exceedingly frightful vision; and fleeing to the forest he led a forest existence until death. This Merlin was at the time of Arthur, and is claimed to have prophesied much more fully and openly than the other.

Gerald's comment and his general interest are relevant to the present discussion. He was interested in prophecy generally, as were others at the time (as is shown by the widespread interest in Merlin's prophecies through the currency of Geoffrey's *History*); he quoted prophecies of one or other Merlin, sometimes distinguishing which one, in various of his works.<sup>89</sup> His comment here demonstrates knowledge of Geoffrey's two works, but is at variance with them, since Geoffrey had made it clear that Merlin the northern wild-man was the same as Merlin Ambrosius who had prophesied to Vortigern; for Gerald they were distinct. One solution to this inconsistency would be to take Gerald's remarks as vindicating Jarman's scheme: Myrddin had already, before Geoffrey wrote, been merged with the northern wild-man (as portrayed in *Afallennau*) within Welsh literary culture. Geoffrey then confused the issue by creating the new figure of Merlin Ambrosius (through his use of the separate Ambrosius story from the *Historia Brittonum*), and Gerald was trying to reverse the damage by distinguishing between the two — the native Welsh Silvester (or Celidonius) and Geoffrey's Ambrosius.

If the alternative scheme proposed here is to be sustained, a different explanation is necessary, since both Merlins, Ambrosius and Celidonius-Silvester, were (by this hypothesis) created by Geoffrey, building upon the south-western Welsh Myrddin, who lacked any northern associations. Assuming that Gerald knew Welsh poems about Myrddin and also Geoffrey's two works, why should he have claimed that there were two separate Merlins, when Geoffrey had asserted the identity of his two creations? One solution would be to suppose that Geoffrey's creations were so different (chronologically and otherwise) that his statement equating them had no effect, and the two characters took off independently into Welsh literary culture, distinguished by their fields of action

Giraldus Cambrensis, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, edited by A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin, 1978), pp. 252–57 (Preface to Book III). <sup>89</sup>For example, *ibid.*, p. 313, nn. 161–62.

(Ambrosius in Wales, Silvester in the Caledonian forest). This explanation would be a reasonable one.

Another solution could be to suggest that Gerald had his own interests, perhaps his own agenda, in discussing Merlin and his prophecies, so he may have had particular reasons for wishing to distinguish between the two. Gerald displayed his interest in prophecies, particularly ones attributed to Merlin, throughout his works, but especially in those dealing with Wales and Ireland. In the Preface to the non-existent Book III of his *Expugnatio Hibernica* ('The Conquest of Ireland', which he also called his *Vaticinalis Historia* 'Prophetary History'), he claimed to have found an ancient copy of the prophecies of Merlin Silvester, which he had long sought:

... in remotissima quadam Venedocie provincia et Hibernico mari contermina que Lein vocatur, in veneracione quadam ab antiquo repositum, operam adhibens et impensam, diu quesitum desideratumque demum non absque labore libellum elicui.<sup>90</sup>

In a most remote region of Gwynedd, bordering on the Irish Sea, called Llyn, by applying considerable labour, and not without trouble, I finally obtained this booklet, long sought-for and desired, anciently deposited through some reverence.

Gerald promised a translation of these prophecies, on the grounds that they had not previously been known other than in the Welsh language, and that King Henry II had urgently requested them; and he had sought the assistance of persons better acquainted with Welsh poetry than himself. But then, in what seems a disingenuous retraction, he suddenly stated that the time was not yet ripe for this sensitive material:

Sed hec hactenus. Huius enim tercie distincionis edicio et nova vaticiniorum interpretacio suum adhuc saniori consilio tempus expectet. Satius est enim ut veritas, quamquam perutilis et desiderabilis, aliquamdiu tamen suppressa lateat, quam in lucem cum maiorum offensa prepropere pariter et periculose prorumpat.<sup>91</sup>

But no more of this; for let the publication of this third Book, and the new translation of the prophecies, still await their own moment, by wiser counsel. For it is preferable that the truth, though most useful and desirable, should nevertheless lie concealed for a while, than that it should burst forth into the light, over-hastily and dangerously, causing offence to greater powers.

As far as is known, Gerald never completed this promised work, and indeed it must remain uncertain whether he had ever really intended to

<sup>90</sup>ibid., p. 254. The work was first written in 1189, and was developed in the 1190s: Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 214-15.

<sup>91</sup>*Expugnatio Hibernica*, edited by Scott and Martin, p. 256.



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do so.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere Gerald specified more precisely where he had obtained the book:

Ea nocte iacuius apud Newein vigilia scilicet Paschae floridi. Ubi Merlinum Silvestrem, diu quesitum desideratumque, archidiaconus Menevensis invenit [sic dicitur invenisse].<sup>93</sup>

That night, the eve of Palm Sunday [Saturday, 9 April 1188], we slept at Nefyn; where the archdeacon of St Davids [i.e. Gerald himself] found [var. is said to have found] 'Merlin Silvester', long sought-for and desired.

Gerald regularly referred to himself in the third person, but the variation between his having 'found' and (in later versions) being 'said to have found' the book is curious. Referring to the book (as we know it to have been, from the earlier extract) simply by the prophet's name is also notable.

We wish to know what Gerald had obtained. Assuming that the book actually existed, it contained prophetic poetry in Welsh; since it was already ancient when Gerald obtained it, it was presumably a good half-century old, therefore older than Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*. Its prophecies were placed in the mouth of the northern wild-man, since Gerald confidently ascribed them to Merlin Silvester, rather than Merlin Ambrosius. We might envisage the book as containing something similar to *Afallenau* (with or without *Oianau* as well). If we could be sure that the prophecies were ascribed to Myrddin by name, then the present hypothesis would fail, since it would mean that Myrddin was already identified with the northern wild-man in this old manuscript, which must have antedated Geoffrey's *Vita*. The name, however, could have been provided by Gerald himself, from his knowledge of the literary legends. If he had obtained a text of (say) *Afallenau*, then because of the correspondence of its story to that of *Vita Merlini* he could have made the connection and ascribed it to Merlin Silvester, just as others have continued to ascribe these poems since his time.

It is not possible to offer here a full study of Gerald's allusions to Merlin and his wider interest in prophecy, though such a study is much needed.<sup>94</sup> When Gerald cited prophecies which he attributed to Merlin Ambrosius, unsurprisingly they tended to be ones from Geoffrey's

<sup>92</sup>For Gerald's possible motives in omitting the prophecies, see *ibid.*, pp. lx-lxviii. <sup>93</sup>*Itinerarium Cambriae*, II.6, in *Opera*, edited by Brewer and others, VI, 124. <sup>94</sup>cf. M. J. Curley, 'Gerallt Gymro a Siôn o Gernyw fel Cyfieithwyr Proffwydoliaethau Myrddin', *LIC*, 15 (1984-88), 23-33 (pp. 24-27); and Roberts, 'Gerald of Wales and Welsh Tradition', pp. 142-45. <sup>95</sup>e.g. *Itinerarium*, 1.5 and 10; cf. *Expugnatio Hibernica*, edited by Scott and Martin, p. lxxv and n.

*History*.<sup>95</sup> Of those which he ascribed to Merlin Silvester, one concerning Rhyd Pencarn in Gwent reappears in the poem *Gwasgargedd Fyrddeu* but no other correspondence between Gerald's prophecies and those found in Welsh prophetic poetry has been identified. There are also prophecies which Gerald ascribed to 'Merlin' without specifying which one.<sup>97</sup> It seems that some of the time (though perhaps not always) the distinction between the two Merlins was an important one for Gerald and was due to his knowledge both of Geoffrey's works and of the Welsh poetic material. He was not completely at home with the Welsh poetry but he seems to have thought that he had a good idea of its content.

As to why Gerald distinguished the two characters, in defiance of Geoffrey's statement, several explanations are possible, as we have seen. Either the literary differences between the two could have been too great (and it seems as if both of Geoffrey's Merlins, according to this scheme, may indeed already have embarked upon their own literary careers in Welsh by Gerald's time), or he wanted the two to be different in order to have something himself to offer the world in his planned translation of the prophecies of Merlin Silvester. Once again, then, evidence which appears to undermine the hypothesis offered in this paper need not be decisive.

This completes the survey of the evidence. I have tried to deal with those aspects of it which seem to contradict the theory proposed here by suggesting that Myrddin had a northern dimension in Welsh independently of Geoffrey's *Vita*: they are principally the two poems, *Cyfoeri Myrddin a Gwenddydd* (if independent of the *Vita*) and Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd's *Gorhoffedd*, showing Myrddin as a lover; and Gerald of Wales's explanation of the two Merlins. Although all these points can be answered in some way, some of the defences may seem rather strained, or, taken together, they may seem to form a formidable obstacle to acceptance of this theory. If so, then we must return to Jarman's scheme, as the most likely explanation for the various correspondences between the groups of texts; but perhaps the present attempt will encourage the production of a different, and more convincing, theory to explain those correspondences.

To conclude, if the present hypothesis is accepted, we must ask once more what we can say about the Welsh legend of Myrddin before Geoffrey began Merlin's international literary career in the 1130s. The answer would be that the poems, *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin* and

45. <sup>96</sup>Curley, 'Gerallt Gymro', p. 26. <sup>97</sup>For example, that of the 'talking stone' called *Lechlavar* at St Davids, defiantly crossed by King Henry II: *Expugnatio Hibernica*, §38 (edited by Scott and Martin, pp. 106-7), and *Itinerarium*, II.1.

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*Armes Prydein*, are the best source. Myrddin was presumably already associated with Carmarthen, if we accept that he derived his name thence, and since Geoffrey seems to have accepted Myrddin's earlier link with that town; he was evidently an authoritative voice, to whom pronouncements could be ascribed, and to whom even Taliesin might defer in matters of prophecy. A passing reference to him in the *Gododdin* suggests that he was also identified, perhaps by the tenth century, with Welsh poetic inspiration.<sup>98</sup> But whether he was more than a voice, whether there was a biographical story, we cannot say. Perhaps not: clearly if the name developed from that of Carmarthen, there must have been a stage when Myrddin was an authoritative voice but had not yet acquired a biography; and it is possible, according to the present scheme, that this stage had only recently been reached by (say) the tenth century. His legend need not have developed much beyond that stage when Geoffrey took it in hand and made the two contributions which were to prove so enduring.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup>*Canu Aneirin*, edited by Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1938), p. 19 (line 466): *gwenwawt Mirdyn* 'the fair poetry of Myrddin'; cf. Jarman, 'A Oedd Myrddin yn Fardd Hanesyddol?', pp. 187–88, and *The Gododdin: The Oldest Scottish Poem*, translated by K. H. Jackson (Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 49–50. <sup>99</sup>The germ of this article arose during a tutorial-session with Mark Zumbuhl in 1997, and I am indebted to him for the stimulating discussion which has given rise to the suggestion made here. I am also very grateful to Professor Richard Sharpe and Dr Dauvit Broun for commenting on this article, and to people at meetings of the Celtic Studies Association of North America in New York (April 1999), the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in Aberystwyth (January 2002), and the Oxford and Cambridge Celtic Colloquium, for their helpful comments.