CONCEPTS OF
ARTHUR

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THE ARTHUR OF HISTORY: THE EVIDENCE AND ITS CRITICS

INTRODUCTION: 'NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE'?

The principle of 'no smoke without fire' is both popular and ancient. It is also a creed of credulity. Why, it is asked, would anyone claim a person or place existed without having a solid basis for the belief? An inability to conceive a situation in which this might happen means that any hint of history is often seized upon with a zeal that can surprise those of a more cautious or sceptical bent. These sometimes brief and ambiguous hints are the 'smoke', and adherents to this creed often expend an astonishing amount of time and energy searching for the 'fire' they believe must have produced them.

This credulity often appears to be increasingly unchecked. We find the *Epic of Gilgamesh* interpreted as a true story that proves aliens visited ancient Mesopotamia. Plato's exemplar of utopia, Atlantis, is similarly made into a real country that existed, exactly as Plato describes it, at the end of the last Ice Age before being destroyed by some geological catastrophe. We also encounter elaborate theories about the origins of the Merovingian kings of France, built upon the most transparently false legends. Even avowedly fictional and literary heroes such as Sherlock Holmes are, on the strength of a 'real' address being assigned to him by Conan Doyle, treated as historical by some readers, who go so far as to write him personal letters that they mail to his Baker Street lodgings (Ashe, 1995: 6).

Arthur suffers from this creed of credulity perhaps more than any other single figure of folklore and legend. The shelves of bookshops are heavy with tomes that claim to have 'finally' identified the 'true' Arthur, from whom the whole vast body of medieval and modern legend and fantasy stemmed. Sometimes these are modest and claim him only as a local fifth- or sixth-century warlord; other times we are told that Arthur was indeed an emperor and all the tales

of his knights, the Round Table, Guinevere and the rest have their origins in history.

The question we must ask, naturally, is whether this creed is right in its *a priori* assumption that, for figures of medieval legend, where there is smoke there *must* be fire? Whether the supporters of this creed are right to assume that, if one of these figures is portrayed as historical in some sources, there must be some reason for this, some element of truth to the portrayal? Certainly it is not a wholly foolish belief. Charlemagne is a fine and oft-cited example of someone who was, like Arthur, at the centre of a vast legend in the medieval period but who is indisputably historical in his origins. But, contrary to what many Arthurian enthusiasts seem to think, his is not the only relevant parallel to Arthur that can be found. There are in fact numerous examples of the opposite development – not a move from history to legend, but from legend, folklore and myth to history.

Fionn mac Cumhaill is a particularly splendid example of this. He, like Arthur, has a vast legend associated with him in the medieval period, this dominating in the Gaelic-speaking areas (Ireland and parts of Scotland) of the British Isles, in contrast to the Arthurian legend which was strongest in the Brittonic (British-speaking) regions, such as Wales, Cornwall, parts of southern Scotland and also Brittany. Fionn, in fact, is often said to be the 'Irish' Arthur on the basis of the close similarities and parallels between their native legends. Fionn, like Arthur in the early British tradition (see below), exists in a world of giants and magical animals, taking part most especially in supernatural boar-hunts and appearing constantly in legends connected with remarkable features in the landscape. He arbitrates in disputes between mythical and divine beings and he defends the land from demoniacal and supernatural invaders and threats, such as the Fomore, submarine demons.

Nevertheless, Fionn is also assigned by medieval writers, like Arthur, a place in the history books – he is frequently associated with the winning of great battles against the Viking invaders of Ireland and this became a dominant feature of his legend (Arthur is, of course, ascribed a role in the – temporary – defeat of the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain). However, in this case 'no smoke without fire' clearly cannot work – a detailed study of the Fenian legends reveals that Fionn's role as a figure of myth, folklore and legend comes first, and his historical associations are a later (and natural) development of these. Indeed, not only was he not genuinely a historical figure, he was quite clearly originally a pagan god (see Ó hÓgáin, 1988; Ó hÓgáin, 1999; Murphy, 1953, especially pp.lxx–lxxxvii; Padel, 1994: 19–23; Van Hamel, 1934; MacKillop, 1986). In this case, then, despite there being smoke, there is no fire to be found: if Charlemagne is an example of a historical figure mythicized, then Fionn is an example of a mythical figure historicized.

Another interesting instance of this concerns the two famous brothers, Hengest and Horsa. This pair, once a staple of British schoolroom history, owe their modern

renown to their supposed role in the fifth-century conquest of Kent by Germanic invaders. Bede is the first to mention them in this context, this notoriously careful historian saying rather tentatively of the Kentish settlers that 'the first chieftains are said [Latin *perhibentur*] to have been the brothers Hengest and Horsa' (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, I, 15). Although these figures were assigned this important role in earlier histories of the period, and still have it in many popular accounts, Bede seems to have been correct in his doubts over their existence. They are now considered to be, in fact, totemic dioscuric horse-gods of the type well-known on the continent, who were historicized by the eighth century with an important role in the fifth-century Anglo-Saxon conquest of eastern Britain, though their original nature survived on the continent as the protective horse-heads named Hengest and Hors carved above the crossing gables of houses (see Turville-Petre, 1953-7; Ward, 1969; Brooks, 1989; Stanley, 1990: 62; Yorke, 1993a. Moisl, 1981: 223-6, looks at a similar royal animal-cult, with its divine representative made progenitor, amongst the Franks).

There are plenty of other examples of this type of development, which is unsurprising given that the portrayal of mythical or folkloric figures as historical is a common and widely recognized feature of medieval literature. In fact, it has been noted that the process of historicizing legends was a particularly widespread feature of 'Celtic' literary activity in the Middle Ages, an important conclusion in the present context (Padel, 1994: 23; Dumville, 1977-9). Merlin, Welsh *Myrddin*, for example, despite claims that he was a genuine sixth-century poet, has been shown to be in fact an eponymous founder-figure derived from the place-name *Caer-fyrddin* and historicized with the deeds of one Lailoken (Jarman, 1991; Bromwich, 1978: 559-60). Similarly if we turn to Ireland, we find divinities historicized. St Bridget (Bride) is perhaps the best known example of this, but Nuada, Lug and the others are all assigned a 'real' place in the history of Ireland by medieval authors too. A final interesting example of the historicization of myth is that of the Norse demigod Sigurd/Siegfried, who was historicized by being associated in the *Nibelungenlied* with a famous historical battle in AD 437 between the Huns and the Burgundians (Thomas, 1995: 390).

To sum up, anyone with any serious or academic interest in medieval history and the sources that claim to record it should be aware that 'no smoke without fire' is very poor methodology when it is used as an *a priori* assumption. Medieval texts include examples of both historical figures mythicized and mythical and folkloric figures historicized, with no *a priori* grounds for privileging one explanation of such figures over the other. Fundamentally, the historical existence of figures from medieval legend *cannot* simply be assumed – there is no possible justification for doing this. It must be demonstrated to be likely, possible or proven via a detailed and critical examination of the relevant sources, taking into account the date of the various concepts of that person, the reliability of the sources they appear in, and the whole weight of the evidence in question. Charlemagne isn't accepted

by historians as a historical figure because of some *a priori* assumption that he *must* have existed. He is accepted because there are numerous clearly reliable contemporary/near-contemporary historical references to him, his reign and his deeds. Good historians are led by evidence, not assumptions. Good history is written by those who first aim to understand the nature of their sources and their wider context before 'mining' them for facts.

This, then, is the context and aim of the present study. It sets out to question the fundamental assumptions that lie behind most theories of a historical Arthur. It asks whether those sources which portray Arthur as historical can be relied upon to accurately reflect the historical reality of the era in which he is supposed to have lived (the late fifth and early sixth centuries). Do these sources represent the earliest and dominant concept of Arthur? In essence, once we reject an *a priori* assumption that he *must* have existed as methodologically foolish, does the evidence indicate that he was, like Charlemagne, a historical figure drawn into legend over time, or was he a creature of folklore, myth and/or legend who – like Hengest and Fionn – was at some point portrayed as historical? On *a priori* grounds both are equally likely. The correct explanation can only be determined through a proper and critical examination of the evidence.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

In what follows, the major early sources for a concept of Arthur as a figure of history will be examined in some detail, in order to establish whether they can provide the necessary proof for us to be able to believe that the Arthur they tell of did, in fact, exist. The focus here is solely on those sources that modern historians accept as potentially reliable and useful, that is those texts which pre-date the publication of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

The King Arthur we encounter in the later medieval texts, and with which people are often most familiar, is not the Arthur of earlier works – shortly before AD 1139 Geoffrey of Monmouth (in Latin, *Galfridus Monemutensis*) completed his *Historia Regum Britanniae* ('History of the Kings of Britain') which glorified Arthur and made him an international warlord, considerably altering the legend as a result. Geoffrey's work, although titled a history and certainly a masterpiece by any standard, is highly inventive and cannot be considered to be in any way a reliable source of evidence for the history of the periods it describes or the existence of its subjects, as is now usually acknowledged. It is too late, too legendary, too untrustworthy and too full of evidence for it having been constructed and written with a strong and guiding authorial viewpoint, to have any value in these regards. Furthermore, this work quickly became influential throughout Western Europe and affected the Arthurian legend in all areas. The result of this is a general consensus that researchers must look to sources written

before Geoffrey's *Historia* for the 'original' Arthur (these sources are known as 'pre-Galfridian'[1] sources; see Tatlock, 1950; Thorpe, 1966; Hanning, 1966; Wright, 1985; Roberts, 1991b and Padel, 2000: chapter 6, for some discussion of the nature of Geoffrey's *Historia* and its sources).[2]

These concerns have not, however, always been given the weight that is due to them. So Geoffrey Ashe has argued that Riotamus, a fifth-century 'king' of the Britons who campaigned on the continent, is the actual historical prototype of Arthur on the basis that he believes he can observe the outlines of this shadowy figure in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *magnum opus* (Ashe, 1981; 1985; 1995). This theory immediately runs into difficulties because of its very reliance upon Geoffrey's work and the assumption that it contains material that is usable and reliably reflects fifth- and sixth-century reality. Ashe attempts to circumvent this tricky reality by pointing to Geoffrey of Monmouth's claim that his work was not, in fact, his own, but rather that he had simply translated 'a very ancient book in the British language'. Ashe uses this to justify his speculations on the basis that – if true – it might, just possibly, allow us to believe that Geoffrey could have something of historical value to say on Arthur's existence and original nature, unaltered by his own authorial and twelfth-century concerns. It is a notion that is, nonetheless, impossible to accept given the nature of the *Historia*. As Roberts has argued, the 'Arthurian section is Geoffrey's literary creation and it owes nothing to prior narrative' – there is no merit to the belief that this section is anything other than Geoffrey's individually composed narrative, reflecting his concerns. Whilst elements of the story, such as the names of Arthur's men and possessions, are derived from Welsh tradition, the *Historia* bears all the marks of being created by Geoffrey from these materials, a story designed to reflect the author's own literary needs. His claims to be simply a translator must be seen, as Howlett and others have recognized, as consequently an example of the 'old book' topos, designed to enhance the status of his very individual and creative masterpiece, and should not be taken at face value (see especially Hanning, 1966; Roberts, 1991b; and Howlett, 1995a).[3]

Even more damaging for the above theory is the fact that it is rightly dismissed by most serious researchers of the early Arthurian legend as nothing more than 'straws in the wind' on the grounds that, while Riotamus (or Breton traditions about this figure) could be somehow the (partial) inspiration for Geoffrey's own *portrayal* of Arthur, he has nothing at all in common with the insular traditions of Arthur that pre-date Geoffrey. As such, he cannot be the prototype for Arthur as a whole. Indeed, he doesn't even have the correct name. Ashe explains this by saying that Riotamus was a title and Arthur was his real name, but Padel has shown this to be untenable assumption – Riotamus 'is a personal name and nothing else; it follows that the person bearing it was called that, and not Arthur; and there is no reason at all to suppose that he did have another name' (see further Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 6-7, quotation at p.6; Padel, 1994: 31, n.113; Hanning, 1995; Padel, 1995).

So what sources are at least plausible as evidence (or even proof) for the existence of a historical Arthur? Geoffrey of Monmouth and those texts influenced by him are clearly unusable, for the reasons outlined above. Similarly, there is now a general agreement that the late Saints' Lives and Welsh poetry that John Morris utilized in his *Age of Arthur* are not sources that can be at all relied upon or used to write history (see Morris, 1973; Kirby and Caerwyn Williams, 1975-6; Dumville, 1977a). Despite recent media pronouncements, there is also no archaeological evidence that sheds light on the problem – the Tintagel stone, found in 1998, has nothing whatsoever to do with Arthur,[4] whilst the Glastonbury inscription 'discovered' in the late twelfth century is now clearly seen as the product of a late twelfth-century fraud and derivative of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*,[5] and thus of no use in the search for a historical Arthur (see Gransden, 1976; Rahtz, 1993; Carey, 1999; Carley, 1999; Crick, 1999; there was a copy of Geoffrey's *Historia* at Glastonbury from *c.*1170).

Allowing all this, there are, in fact, only four pieces of evidence which are generally agreed to possibly contain information of real historical value: the *Annales Cambriae* (Phillimore, 1888; Morris, 1980); the *Historia Brittonum* (Morris, 1980; Dumville, 1985; Koch and Carey, 2003: 289-304); the collection of heroic death-songs known as *Y Gododdin* (Jackson, 1969; Jarman, 1988; Koch, 1997); and the four or five occurrences of the name Arthur in sixth- and seventh-century contexts (Bromwich 1975-6: 178-80; Coe and Young, 1995: 156-65). It is on these that the following analysis is based.

Y GODODDIN AND SOME MEN NAMED ARTHUR

Dealing with the last of these first, the occurrence of four (or possibly five) people named 'Arthur'[6] between the mid sixth and early seventh centuries in southern Scotland and southern Wales has often been seen as one of the best pieces of evidence for a historical Arthur – the argument being, essentially, that the appearance of these names reflects the commemoration of an earlier historical figure (see, for example, Chadwick and Chadwick, 1932).[7] However, such a *mass* commemoration by name of an earlier historical hero would be totally unparalleled in the Celtic world and as such cannot be easily supported as an explanation of these names, as Dr Bromwich has made clear (see Bromwich, 1975-6: 178-9). This, naturally, causes considerable problems with regards to explaining the apparent brief popularity of this name at this time. Indeed, if they cannot all be named directly after a historical figure, it may be that the only plausible explanation for these names is that the four men were named after a *non*-historical figure – the folkloric warrior-hero called Arthur who appears in the early Welsh Arthurian material, such as the mid seventh-century *Marwnad Cynddylan* – with no necessary privileging of any particular explanation for the origins of this figure. This folkloric character *may* represent a historical

Arthur who has been drawn (fairly rapidly) into legend and folklore, with the four men in our sources being called after this resulting hero. However, these names cannot be used to prove that any such historical Arthur actually existed because, at least equally as well, they could simply represent a genuinely folkloric or mythical warrior after whom these men are being named. There is nothing in these names to enable us to decide between the two explanations and, as such, these names cannot be used as evidence for a historical Arthur (see further Chapter 2 and Padel, 1994: 24 for a fuller discussion and explanation of these names, including their distribution). Indeed, it is worth noting that the possibility that these names could reflect a folkloric or mythical warrior would exist even if direct commemoration of a historical figure did not have to be ruled out, as Bromwich indicates.[8]

The second source for consideration is the collection of heroic death-songs known as *Y Gododdin*, relating to a battle fought in the late sixth century (probably *c*.AD 570). In recent years there has been considerable debate over the statement in *Y Gododdin* that Gwawrddur 'fed black ravens on the rampart of a fort, although he was no Arthur' (B.38; Koch, 1997, numbers this B².38). There is a full discussion of the dating and significance of this collection of heroic death-songs in Chapter 2, but some key points ought to be made here. First, with regards the date of *Y Gododdin*, the Book of Aneirin text that we have is actually a compilation of two earlier versions of *Y Gododdin*, conventionally labelled A and B, with the B text being additionally subdivided into a B¹ text and a B² text. Professor Charles-Edwards, building on his theory of textual transmission, has concluded that, as the reference to Arthur only occurs in the B version and not the A version of *Y Gododdin*, it need be no older than the ninth or tenth century – only those poems (or stanzas) shared by all the texts, he suggests, can be positively seen as going back to an assumed late sixth- or early seventh-century version of the poem, either written or oral (Charles-Edwards, 1991: 14; Charles-Edwards, 1978).

Recently this has been challenged. On linguistic and orthographic grounds Koch has made a convincing case for there being a written pre-ninth-century, and possibly even a pre-mid seventh-century, version of a number of the individual poems/stanzas (Koch, 1985-6). Unfortunately the Arthurian stanza is not one of these. Nevertheless Koch proposes that the Arthurian reference does have its origins in the period before AD 638, on the basis of his reconstruction of the textual history of the poem which makes the B² text (of which the stanza in question is a part) representative of the 'original' seventh-century *Y Gododdin*, as well as using an extrapolation of his linguistic dating of individual poems/stanzas for the text as a whole (Koch, 1997).

This is, needless to say, a controversial conclusion. As one reviewer has commented, Koch's recent 'reconstruction' of *Y Gododdin* does not actually prove that *Y Gododdin* as a whole was composed in this period, only what it might have looked like *if* it had been (Padel, 1998). Isaac has gone further, arguing that Koch's whole theory of the transmission of *Y Gododdin*, most especially the idea that

B² represents the 'original' *Y Gododdin*, cannot be supported (Isaac, 1999). Given these arguments, it seems obvious that despite Koch's assertions, the date of the Arthurian reference remains as unclear as ever – it could belong to the late sixth or seventh century, but equally it may be no older than the ninth or even the tenth century.

Turning to the 'Arthurian' reference itself, how does this reference affect the question of Arthur's historicity, given that Arthur only appears as a comparison to a warrior of (supposedly) the late sixth century? One common argument is that in works such as *Y Gododdin* the figures named are always believed to be historical and therefore the Arthurian *reference* would seem to indicate that, by the ninth or tenth century, Arthur was believed to have been a historical personage, at least by the author of *Y Gododdin* (see Jarman, 1989-90; Bromwich *et al.*, 1991). Whilst superficially convincing, there are considerable problems with such a judgement. First, the simple fact of the matter is that we can only identify a few of the characters that appear in early Welsh heroic poetry. Many of the people in the poems appear only there, so that we have no knowledge of whether they were (or were thought to be) historical or not – it is an assumption, nothing more, that everyone in these poems was a real historical figure and, as such, we cannot take Arthur's presence in *Y Gododdin* as evidence either for his historicity or a belief in his historicity. Second, in *Y Gododdin* Arthur is in the remarkable position of appearing 'only not to appear' (Padel, 1994: 14). Unlike Gwawrddur or the other warriors he is not actually present at the battle:

> In the allusion, Arthur is presented as the unrivalled paragon of martial valour and is thus used to form a highly unusual comparison by rendering explicitly inferior the honorand of the *awdl* ('stanza'). Therefore, if the relevant *awdl* and lines can be sustained as Aneirin's original, this would tell us that by the later sixth century there existed in North Britain a tradition of a Brittonic superhero Arthur ... (Koch, 1996: 242)

Whilst we might not be able to uncritically accept Koch's assertions on dating, we can say that Arthur is essentially a 'highly unusual comparison', not a warrior who is being honoured; he is not envisaged as being present at the battle and he is a military 'superhero', someone to whose heights of valour not even a man who killed 300 could compare. Arthur is therefore in a different league to the rest of the figures who appear in *Y Gododdin*. In consequence, there is no reason to think that assumptions drawn from the identifications of a few characters in the text as a whole, even if they were viable, would apply to him.

In summary, all the *Y Gododdin* reference tells us is that Arthur was seen, by the ninth or tenth century at the latest, as 'the impossible comparison' (Padel, 1994: 14), a 'superhero' to whom not even the greatest living warrior could compare; it does *not* tell us whether this reflects a mythical 'superhero' named Arthur or a

historical Arthur mythicized and Arthur is, in the text, in no way associated with the defence of post-Roman Britain or any specific period of history.

THE NATURE OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*

In light of the fact that neither of the above potential sources of evidence can help in the investigation of Arthur's possible 'historicity' – neither comes close to a proof of Arthur's existence and both arguably reflect a concept of Arthur as a figure of legend, not history – the case for a historical Arthur rests entirely on the final two sources that historians are willing to consider, the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*. Importantly both of these texts appear to have a concept of Arthur that is (at least partly) unequivocally historical.

   As was made clear in the introduction to this chapter, we need to understand the character of our sources before we can make use of their evidence – in this context it must be recognized that there has been considerable debate over the nature of the *Historia Brittonum*, 'The History of the Britons'. It is important to recognize that this was a very popular work in the Middle Ages and highly influential (see Hanning, 1966, chapters 4-6 for some examples of its influence). The 'original' text, as written in the ninth century, has to be reconstructed from multiple surviving manuscripts, but it has been shown that a version very close to it exists in manuscripts of *c*.AD 1100 and later, known as the 'Harleian Recension' after the principle witness to this tradition, British Library MS. Harley 3859.

   As part of this 'original' version we find a whole chapter – usually termed chapter 56, though it varies from manuscript to manuscript – devoted to Arthur, in which it is said that 'Arthur fought against them [the Anglo-Saxon invaders] in those days, together with the kings of the Britons, but he was the leader in battles [*dux bellorum*]', and he is ascribed 12 battles against the invaders as apparent proof of this. The placing of this chapter between the two definite end-points of Hengest's death in the late fifth century and the rule of the Anglian kings of Northern Britain from the mid sixth century makes the author's concept of Arthur's period of operation clear. This is confirmed by the fact that Arthur's last battle against the Anglo-Saxons, fought on 'Badon Hill' (*in monte Badonis*), is also mentioned in a sixth-century work by Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* – though Gildas does not mention Arthur in connection with it (see below) – which indicates, it is now generally agreed, a probable date of *c*.500 for this event.[9]

   We thus have, in the *Historia Brittonum*, a clear concept of Arthur as a warrior who fought against the Germanic invaders in the late fifth century. The question must therefore be asked whether we can believe in this. It is certainly 'smoke', but are we justified in believing that a genuine late fifth-century 'fire' produced it? In other words, is this evidence that can be used – in the absence of *a priori* assumptions about 'no smoke without fire' – to prove that Arthur really existed,

or is it possible, or even just as likely, that it could simply represent a mythical or folkloric figure drawn into history? Is the *Historia Brittonum* the kind of text that we, as historians, can rely upon and accept the statements of, so that we can thus make a decision between the two rival models of the development of the Arthurian legend outlined in the introduction?

Influential in early examinations of the value of the *Historia*'s evidence was the 'Nennian' prologue, in which the supposed author of the *Historia* portrayed himself as an ignorant and incompetent compiler who simply 'made a heap' of earlier sources:

> I, Nennius, a disciple of the holy Elbodugus have taken the trouble to write down some excerpts which the idleness of the people of Britain had caused to be thrown aside … I, however, have made a heap of all that I have found, both of the annals of Rome and of the chronicles of the holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Irish and of the English and from information handed down by the old men of our people (Morris, 1980: 9)

Obviously this has been seen as enormously important from the perspective of the reference to Arthur the *Historia* contains – if true then, although it may have been compiled in the early ninth century, the *Historia* may be seen as an archive and library of much earlier sources, simply gathered unaltered by the original editor. Can this really be the case, though? In fact, our understanding of the *Historia Brittonum* has now been placed on a very secure footing by the exemplary research of David Dumville. He has shown convincingly that the *Historia* was written in AD 829/30 and that the 'Nennian' prologue, including the attribution of the *Historia Brittonum* to 'Nennius' (more correctly, *Ninnius*) and the claim the original writer of the *Historia* was naught but a simple compiler, is actually not original to the text. Rather it must be regarded as a false and late addition to the manuscript tradition of the *Historia*, created perhaps as late as the mid eleventh century (Dumville, 1974; 1975-6; cf. Field, 1996).

Dumville has countered the 'heap' theory not simply from a textual history perspective, however. His ongoing studies of the nature of the text indicate that in no way can the *Historia* be considered a simple compilation – rather he makes an extremely powerful argument that the anonymous writer of AD 829/30 was in fact an 'author' who wrote the *Historia Brittonum* with a unity of structure and outlook, and engaged in the active processing of his sources in order to bring them into accord with this outlook. Indeed, as a number of recent commentators have recognized, the *Historia Brittonum* is in fact a synchronising and synthetic history of the type well known from medieval Ireland, fusing sources for its own political ends and involved in the creation of a full national pseudo-history, a process which was closely allied with the historicizing of legend (see most especially Dumville, 1986 and 1994, but also Coe and Young, 1995: 6; Padel, 1994: 23; Carey, 1994).

This conclusion is in fact further strengthened by the researches of David Howlett, who has shown the *Historia* to be a work of architectonic genius, making use of the sophisticated 'Biblical style' throughout the text and in its construction. This demonstrates the utter fallacy of the 'heap' theory – the presence of inset dates and information within the text demonstrates that, whatever the sources of the *Historia* may have been, they have been completely rewritten by the author of the *Historia* and used to emphasize his own concerns and needs (Howlett, *pers. comm.*; 1998: 69ff. For the Celtic-Latin tradition of Biblical style see Howlett, 1995). Furthermore, not only was this a text written by an author, who processed his sources in order to create a synthetic national pseudo-history reflecting his own outlook and needs, it also seems to have been written, to some degree, with a moral purpose. Hinton and Hanning both suggest that he was engaging in something more akin to that which we would call sermonising and this must be remembered in any analysis of the *Historia*. To try and read such works as the *Historia* as linear, academic, reliable history is thus to be completely false to the methods and assumptions with which they were composed (Hanning, 1966; Howlett, 1998a; N. Hinton, *pers. comm.*).

The *Historia* must consequently be seen as, to quote Higham's recent survey of the text, not a simple amalgam of existing pieces, but instead 'a highly original piece of writing … it is important to realize that this is an ideological and rhetorical tract, which has been written both for, and against, particular ideas and specific groups.' Indeed, Higham argues that we need to read the *Historia*, like the Irish pseudo-histories, as a text written with explicit political aims and needs, suggesting that 'there should be little doubt that his text was written expressly for Merfyn [King of Gwynedd in 829/30] and his circle' and that the text was, at least partially, aimed at presenting the Britons as 'the people of the Lord' and contradicting Gildas' vision of the Britons as a sinful and unmartial race (Higham, 2002: 121-4). Arthur and St Patrick are paired together in the *Historia* as a result of this, both being intended as exemplars for the ninth century of, respectively, Christian behaviour and correct, successful British martial spirit, in contrast to the Britons of the fifth-century reign of Vortigern. Higham makes a powerful argument that the *Historia*'s concept of Arthur was in fact based upon the Old Testament figure of Joshua, who is – like Arthur in the *Historia* – depicted as a war-leader, triumphant over his people's pagan enemies through God's aid. Joshua is, indeed, described in the Old Testament as a *dux belli*, 'leader in battle' – contrast Arthur as *dux bellorum*, 'leader in battles' – and his deeds are repeatedly associated with the number 12, which Higham argues is the main inspiration for Arthur being somewhat clumsily ascribed this number of battles in the *Historia* (Higham, 2002: 136-57, 164-5; the ascription to Arthur of 12 battles is done by naming nine battle-sites and then claiming that, in fact, four battles were fought at one of these sites; an additional inspiration for this attempt to credit Arthur with 12 battles may well be a desire to consolidate the above-mentioned pairing of Arthur with

St Patrick, via Patrick's 12 apostolic deeds, as Hanning, 1966: 119-20, noted long ago). Arthur and the nature of his portrayal in the *Historia* were thus important to the organization of the work as a whole – as Charles-Edwards (1991: 22ff.) has also recognized – and, in particular, to the ultimate aim of the *Historia* as a national and instructive pseudo-history.

Given the above, we must naturally question to what extent the Arthurian evidence can be treated as potentially reliable and usable evidence for the late fifth century. The *Historia* can clearly no longer be seen as a repository of earlier texts – it is the original work of an author who was writing with a specific aim, who used and processed his source material in order to achieve this. Dumville has taken a very pessimistic line on the question of whether we – as historians who cannot adopt the 'no smoke without fire' creed of credulity – can rely upon the *Historia* in any way for usable and reliable information on the immediate post-Roman period. In fact, for the period from the fourth century through to the mid sixth century he has concluded that, as history, 'it has no value whatsoever.'

Even for the history of seventh-century Britain the *Historia* 'is not even a reliable – much less a contemporary – witness … I cannot point to any item in it, other than the material deriving from English sources already known, that is not open to serious question,' with most of the materials used by the author, where identifiable, having themselves an origin in the late eighth or early ninth centuries. Moreover, 'Even where credit might be given to the supposed source, the author's methods – praiseworthy enough for a writer not constrained by modern rules of evidence – do not encourage us to be confident about the possibility of recovering usable information about the period whose history he was narrating. His procedures were synthetic and interpretive, his sources overwhelmingly non-contemporaneous with the events which they purport to describe' (Dumville, 1994: 417-9, quotations at pp.417 and 419; Dumville, 1986; Higham, 2002: 121). The *Historia Brittonum* is thus a source of the first importance only for the ninth century, its intellectual climate and its concerns, not any earlier periods of history.

This view has, to a limited degree, been challenged by Charles-Edwards. He suggests that, as the *Historia* is a fusion of the two historical genres (*historia gentis* and *historia ecclesiastica*) it should be seen as not entirely unreliable (note, not reliable) in the same way as the works of Bede and Paul the Deacon are. This is, however, an untenable argument, as Dumville has noted in his response to Charles-Edwards (Charles-Edwards, 1991; Dumville, 1994: 418-9). Not only does it not engage with the arguments noted above with regards to the nature of the *Historia*, but the reputations of Bede and Paul the Deacon as 'reliable' historians are solely a result of the fact that they deal mainly with contemporary and near-contemporary events. The author of the *Historia* was dealing with events 300 years or more in the past and for such distant periods both Bede and Paul the Deacon are equally unreliable and unusable by modern historians:

> The quality of *Historia Brittonum* as a source for the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries cannot be enhanced by an appeal to Bede and Paul the Deacon, for the very act of comparison will show what the modern historian will find in their work which is lacking from the Welshman's (Dumville, 1994: 419)

Given the above it is therefore still clearly the case that the *Historia* is of very dubious historical value and this naturally raises enormous questions over the confidence we can have in its Arthurian reference, particularly as the creation of such pseudo-histories was often closely allied with the historicizing of legend. All these doubts become even more pronounced when we realize that, in addition to many of its sources being of a similar date to itself and suspect in nature, the *Historia* can be shown to portray characters who are decidedly mythical in origin as genuinely historical – the brothers Hengest and Horsa, whose origin as totemic dioscuric horse-gods was discussed in the introduction, are the most prominent examples of this, but not the only ones. Whilst there is no suggestion that the author of the *Historia* himself originally historicized these particular figures, only that his 'history' included such historicized fictional and mythical beings, the presence of these characters tells us much about the reliability of the *Historia* for reconstructing genuine history and about the nature of the text, its sources, and its author's claim to be a historian in the modern sense of the word.

A more detailed look at chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* itself, which contains the references to a 'historical' Arthur, is instructive. The contents of this chapter have been described as 'a pseudo-historical account of a suspiciously formulaic list of 12 battles against Germanic invaders' supposedly fought by Arthur (Coe and Young, 1995: 6). Some scholars have suggested that the Arthurian content of this chapter could have been based on a battle-listing poem written in Old Welsh that was translated into Latin by the author of the *Historia*, which – it is claimed – would make the information contained within it more reliable than a survey of the *Historia* as a whole would suggest.

Whilst this is an interesting suggestion it has to be recognized that such a notion is largely pure speculation. The main basis for this notion is merely that some of the names of the battles listed in chapter 56 appear to rhyme, as well as the *Historia*'s strange claim that Arthur carried an image of Mary on his *shoulders* at the battle at *Guinnon*, which is taken as indicative of an Old Welsh source for this part of the text due to a proposed confusion by the author of the *Historia* of Old Welsh *iscuit* 'shield' with OW *iscuid* 'shoulder' (Chadwick and Chadwick, 1932: 154–5; Jones, 1964). On this exceptionally slender evidence great theories have been built. The insubstantial nature of all this is underlined by a number of considerations. Not least of these is that only *some*, not all, of the battles fit into this supposed scheme and, of those that do, several appear not to be 'genuine' Arthurian battles, but rather to have been appropriated from the deeds of other warriors and only associated with Arthur in texts related to the *Historia Brittonum*

(see further below). Indeed, the only one of the battles in chapter 56 that is generally agreed to be associated with Arthur in an actual Old Welsh source (the tenth battle, at *Tribruit*) does not, in fact, fit with the hypothetical rhyming scheme!

Additionally, for this rhyming scheme to work in even this very limited and dubious way it requires that we assume that the mid tenth-century English Vatican Recension of the *Historia Brittonum* should take priority over the early ninth-century Welsh Harleian Recension, something that Dr Dumville's studies have shown is most definitely not the case – unfortunately one of the battles that forms part of this rhyme scheme, *Breguoin*, is absent from the earliest and original version of the *Historia*, which further calls this scheme into doubt.

Finally, we must take note of the work discussed above, particularly that of Howlett and Higham, which rejects the 'heap' theory and indicates that chapter 56 looks like the deliberate creation of the author of the *Historia*, with the contents (including the number of battles and the description of Arthur) reflecting his concerns, aims and design rather than anything else. In light of this we cannot consider the notion of an underlying Old Welsh poem as anything other than highly speculative and based on the most dubious of evidence. Higham has, indeed, recently indicated his support for my original proposal that we ought to reject this hypothetical poem and makes the important point that the 'whole argument is upheld more by length of service and the authority of its several proponents than the quality of the case propounded' (Higham, 2002: 146; Green, 1998).

In his opinion, and especially considering Howlett's demonstration that chapter 56, like the rest of the *Historia*, was written and composed in 'Biblical style' Latin, 'the only safe conclusion is that this battle-list was the author's own work' and therefore that this whole concept of Arthur as a historical warrior could well simply have its origins in the *Historia*'s need for such a figure. He suggests that, given the nature of the *Historia* as a whole, the author required a post-Vortigern British martial hero who could be used as an exemplar. The obvious candidate, Ambrosius Aurelianus, was too Roman and he had already been associated with the corrupt reign of Vortigern and Vortimer earlier in the *Historia*, due to the author's dubious understanding of the chronology of the fifth century (see Higham, 2002: 155-6). As a result he took the 'Brittonic superhero' of the *Y Gododdin* and related texts – the earliest being the mid seventh-century *Marwnad Cynddylan* – and simply made him historical (Higham, 2002: 152-7).

Certainly this is a highly interesting interpretation and what we know of the *Historia Brittonum* in no way conflicts with it – the author of the *Historia* clearly did, as has been noted above, include mythical and legendary figures in his 'history' and the process of historicising legends was a widespread feature of Celtic literary activity, especially pseudo-histories, in the Middle Ages. Once again it is worth emphasizing that we would be wrong to think of the author of the *Historia* as operating like a modern academic historian. His narrative as a whole

shows little real interest in distinguishing between legendary figures and those who genuinely belonged to history, the author treating all as historical when they could be utilized and suited his purpose (for example, Brutus and the Trojan origins of the British, or Hengest, or Lucius).

Even if we could accept the hypothesis of a lost Old Welsh battle-listing poem, it would not allow us to give this section of the *Historia* an early date or place any particular confidence in it. Indeed, various considerations indicate that in any case such a hypothetical poem would date to much the same period as the *Historia*.[10] In particular it is worth looking once more at the claimed confusion by the *Historia*'s author concerning Arthur's display of an icon of the Virgin Mary at the Battle of *Guinnon* – his shoulder in the *Historia* being substituted for a suggested 'original' shield, which it is argued makes better sense. This apparent confusion is often taken as indicative of an underlying Old Welsh poem, due to the similarity of these words in Old Welsh (*iscuit* 'shield' versus *iscuid* 'shoulder'). In truth it must be said that this apparent confusion over where the image of the Virgin Mary was carried cannot actually be treated as any sort of proof of the existence of the hypothetical Arthurian poem – the author of the *Historia*, if he 'created' his historical Arthur as suggested above, could, for example, have had the icon story already present and attached to the Battle of *Guinnon* in whatever non-Arthurian source he borrowed this battle from to give to his Arthur (that some of the battles ascribed to Arthur in the various versions of the *Historia*, either by the author of the *Historia* or his hypothetical source, were 'borrowed' from other historical leaders is undisputed, see below and Chapter 6). He might have added the icon story to the Battle of *Guinnon* himself – his interest in the Virgin Mary, to whom this confusion relates, is suggested in the 'Biblical style' of his text (Howlett, 1998a) – and have always meant that the icon was carried on/around Arthur's shoulders, a not at all unlikely solution; or it could even have been part of a *non*-historical poem on Arthur's attack on the fort of *Guinnon*, rather than the 'historical' poem that has often been assumed. All of these solutions are entirely possible and undermine any faith we might place in this as 'proof' of a supposed historical Arthurian poem.

In fact, it is worth pointing out that the last suggestion, specifically, is not as implausible as might be assumed. It is worth remembering that the first element of the word *Guinnon* has the meanings 'pure, white, sacred, holy, Otherworldly', which brings to mind Arthur's many mythical assaults on Otherworld fortresses such as the *Caer Vandwy*, 'the Fort of the Divine Place', reported in Old Welsh poetry (see below, Chapter 2; Ford, 1983, sees *gwyn*/*gwen* as a name-element that has pagan, Celtic and sacred connotations in the Arthurian legend and elsewhere). If *Guinnon* was originally part of a Welsh story of Arthur's attack on the Otherworld, then the reference to the Virgin Mary might be seen to stem from this tale being transmitted to the author of the *Historia* via a poem perhaps composed by a monastic author. Certainly in the probably eighth-century

Preideu Annwfyn, which records many Arthurian Otherworld exploits, we have a very similar situation. There, allusions to underlying and pre-existing 'mythical' Arthurian tales that the poem drew upon are combined with overtly Christian passages, reflecting the interests of the author of the poem, such as lines 59-60 in which Taliesin is made to say, after recounting Arthur's attacks on six Otherworld forts, that 'I shall worship the Lord – the great prince. / May I not be sad, Christ endows me' (Coe and Young, 1995: 139; Haycock, 1983-4: 55; see Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of this poem).

Nevertheless, if the hypothetical 'historical' battle-listing poem *did* exist then, given that the claimed shoulders-for-shield confusion is part of the already dubious supposed evidence for this poem, we must assume that the poem included the icon story that this confusion is part of (as Koch, 1996: 248). The problem with this is that the shoulder/shield confusion relates directly to an icon of the Virgin Mary, 'perpetual virgin', something which is unlikely to come from anything other than a ninth-century monastic context given the history of the Marian cult, as Barber has demonstrated (Barber, 1972: 101-3). As such the icon story actually implies a place and time of origin for any such hypothetical underlying poem that is very similar to the *Historia* itself.

This is unsurprising, of course, given that most of the identifiable sources used by the author of the *Historia* themselves dated from the late eighth or early ninth centuries, as Dumville notes – as such, there must be a presumption that *any* postulated source used by this author had a similar origin in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Obviously the above suggests that this presumption is justified in the case of the hypothesized 'Arthur poem', as part of the supposed evidence for the existence of this poem actually necessitates such a date for the composition of this poem.

Is there any other evidence which might be brought to bear on the issue of the hypothetical poem? One area of information that we might usefully examine is that of the names given to Arthur's battles in chapter 56 – do these give any possible justification for separating this poem from the general dating of the *Historia*'s sources (assuming, of course, that it did exist)? Given that the author of the *Historia* was writing in the early ninth century and thus at the beginning of the Old Welsh period (*c*.AD 800-1200), any Welsh sources and poems he used older than perhaps half a century should have contained Archaic Welsh (*c*.AD 600-800) name-forms. We do in fact very occasionally see this reflected in the *Historia*. Thus, for example, the form of the name *Cunedag* (Cunedda) used elsewhere in the *Historia* has been seen as an Archaic Welsh form, reflecting possibly a pre-800 – to what degree is unclear – source being used for this information by the author of the *Historia* (Jackson, 1963; reasserted by Koch, 1997: cxxi-cxxiii, who also point to some other possible Archaic forms. Cf. Dumville 1986: 18-19, however, for some serious doubts about this instance).

Such rare evidence might indeed allow us the justification needed for an assumption that a particular speculative source *may* have been older than the rest of the material the author of the *Historia* clearly *did* use. Unfortunately there is no possible excuse for such an assumption in the case of chapter 56. Instead the name-forms found there are all Old Welsh, so that the *Historia* gives, for instance, Old Welsh *Linnuis* rather than the earlier eighth-century Archaic Welsh *Linnēs* or even older *Lindēs* (see Sims-Williams, 1991b: 58-9 for the dating of the move from inherited *ē* > *ui* in written texts). This ought to be seen as significant – there is no evidence of an underlying Archaic Welsh form, as there might just be with the material relating to Cunedda. Especially in light of the implications of the *Guinnon* 'evidence' for the hypothesized poem's existence, it is difficult to conceive of any good reason for thinking that any such poem was, in the form it may have reached the author of the *Historia*, any more than a couple of decades older than the *Historia* itself, if even that. It could, of course, have been an older poem that was thoroughly modernized. However, given the absence of archaic forms and the Marian reference, we have no justification for thinking this to be the case or, therefore, for an *a priori* removal of this speculative poem from the general context of the other sources of the *Historia Brittonum*, that is dating to the later eighth century and the early ninth century.

Consequently even if the hypothetical battle-listing poem could be believed in, there is no reason to think that it would strengthen the case for Arthur's existence. Composed probably, like the *Historia* and the majority of its identifiable sources, around the early ninth century, it would simply show that, by that time there *may* have been a belief amongst some that Arthur was a figure of history – a position little different to that allowed by the *Historia* itself – if it could do even that much. After all, even if we allow the possibility of its existence, we still do not have the poem itself and, as a result, we cannot know whether any Arthur it described was conceived of as historical or not.

Koch (1996: 249) has attempted to surmount this problem by suggesting that the dubious rhyme scheme used to hypothesize the existence of the battle-listing poem would imply a mono-rhyming *awdl* metre for any such poem. Although this has no necessary implications for the date of the poem – as this metre continued in use throughout the Old Welsh period – it would, Koch argues, indicate that the author of any such poem probably saw Arthur as solidly historical, as the handful of other *awdl* metre battle-lists we possess all belong to historical figures. There are, however, good reasons to be wary of accepting this judgement uncritically, not least being that it is a generalization based on a small corpus of evidence, which is always a dangerous position to adopt. Furthermore, the entirely *mythical* Arthurian poem *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* perhaps written in the tenth century or even before, provides an example of an Old Welsh battle-listing poem (as Padel, 2000: 5, notes) in which the main protagonist is portrayed as entirely non-historical and, most importantly, this too uses long sections of

mono-rhyme (Koch's suggestion is based solely on the presence of an apparent mono-rhyme; see Chapter 2 on the dating of *Pa gur?*). This example surely has to be seen as a plausible analogue to the highly hypothetical poem – especially as it presents the only generally accepted instance of one of the *Historia*'s battles being associated with Arthur in Old Welsh literature – and it is one that critically undermines Koch's argument. Clearly, any battle-listing poem that might have existed could just as well have been a mythical rather than a historical or pseudo-historical text, at least on the basis of its rhyme structure and the fact that it is a battle-listing poem.

Such doubts over the actual concept of Arthur which would be present in any such poem, and how securely it was held, are not confined to simply structural matters and their implications. It cannot, after all, be forgotten that, with the writer of the *Historia Brittonum* now seen as an author actively manipulating his text to create a synthetic pseudo-history rather than a simple compiler, chapter 56 was, to some large extent, his creation anyway. This is underlined by Howlett's discovery that this section is written in the highly complex 'Biblical style' (1998, chapter 5), showing that chapter 56 was an integral part of the *Historia* that was created, engineered and planned by the author in accordance with his aims and methodology. As such, the notion that chapter 56 might represent anything like a postulated earlier source incorporated bodily into the text of the *Historia* can be rejected. The obvious corollary of this is that, even if the considerable doubts over the poem's existence were to be ignored, we cannot hope to know what this hypothesized poem actually had to say about Arthur or, indeed, what its concept of him and his historicity necessarily was, if it did exist.

To give one example of this, and develop the points made previously, we cannot even know if all the battles ascribed to Arthur in the *Historia* were found associated with his name in this postulated and speculative poem, or if the author of the *Historia* made additions to these to suit his own purposes. Certainly the figure of 12 battles is highly suspicious, as Higham (2002: 143) and Hanning (1966: 119–20) have both pointed out. Was, for instance, Badon associated with Arthur in this poem? It does fit with the hypothetical rhyme scheme but, contrary to the assumptions of many Arthurian enthusiasts, coincidences *do* happen, the rhyme scheme may be as much a modern assumption as a reality even if the poem did exist, and the addition of this battle would make sense given the aims of the author of the *Historia*, as Higham has indicated. It could easily be, it is worth stating once more, that any underlying poem was more akin to the mythical Arthurian battle-listing poem *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* referred to above and that the author of the *Historia* took such a text and, through additions and rewriting, made its mythical Arthur a figure of history (for the reasons referred to above, as discussed most fully by Higham, 2002).

Indeed, even if we make the leap of faith and assume that Badon, along with all the other battles given in the *Historia*, were indeed part of an Old Welsh poem, it

would tell us little more about the nature of this poem or the concept of Arthur within it – as is discussed further below, several of the other battles attributed to Arthur appear to be mythical in origin, and it has been argued that two or three of the battles were actually borrowed from other historical figures who lived as late as the early seventh century. With regards to the latter, Bromwich has pointed out that even famous battles could become simply stock events, part of a corpus of movable formulaic elements in Welsh tradition, whose original details have been lost and which can thus be easily re-assigned and used in new creations. Badon too could easily be one of these stock events (Bromwich, 1975-6: 170-2 and below on Badon; see Chapter 6 for further discussion, particularly on the issue of Badon's 'fame' being no barrier to this). As such its use in any poem need carry no implications of historicity – it could simply have been used to pad out a *Pa gur* style poem as a famous battle which had become a movable formulaic element and whose details had been forgotten (or ignored), with the historical implications only being picked up and utilized – for his own ends – by the author of the *Historia*.

What, then, are we left with? If, in spite of all this, we assume that the concept of Arthur was clearly historical in any such underlying postulated poem – a hypothesis built upon the hypotheses of this poem's existence, based around the assumption that Badon was present in this supposed poem and that it was there as a historical battle, not simply a stock event – it tells us nothing of how old this belief might be or whether we should trust it. It only tells us what this particular ninth-century, or possibly late eighth-century, poet may have thought, writing around 300 years after the events he is purporting to describe. It should incidentally also be mentioned that, if we could believe in this poem and that its concept was historical, it would represent the only instance of Arthur being portrayed as the historical defeater of the Anglo-Saxons and the victor of Badon in non-Galfridian Welsh literature (see Padel, 1994 and Chapter 2 below; he is, in fact, never associated with either the Saxons or Badon in any of this material). Furthermore, the question of whether we could place any faith in this concept, if it did exist, is particularly important and a study of the nature of the battles ascribed to Arthur in chapter 56 does not in any way inspire confidence that any such speculative poem might have anything to say that could be relied upon by historians (see further below; the nature of the battles in the *Historia* does, itself, imply and confirm a late date for any hypothetical poem). Once more, it must be emphasized that the historicization of legend was a regular and widespread feature of Celtic literary activity in the Middle Ages. Poetry is not history, and a postulated and speculative single example of unreliable and very late poetry, whose concept of Arthur is arguably uncertain, cannot be taken to represent the kind of evidence (or even proof) of Arthur's historical reality that we are here looking for.

In conclusion it seems clear that this chapter, along with its concept of Arthur, cannot be separated from the *Historia* as a whole – the aims, methodology, unity of structure and outlook with which it was created, or, indeed, the nature of

the *Historia* and its sources. The best we can honestly say is that in the *Historia Brittonum*, a source of very dubious historical value (which can be shown to portray legendary and mythical figures as genuinely historical), we have evidence for the idea that Arthur was a historical figure being current by AD 829/30 at the latest. It is simply not of a type, or reliable enough, for us to feel confident in saying any more than this – indeed, there is a strong argument to be made that this 'historical Arthur' should be considered in fact the creation of the author of the *Historia* himself. Even if he did have a source for this concept, which is highly debatable both in terms of the source itself and its concept, there is no reason to think that a positive conclusion could be reached about the ability of such a source to allow us, as historians, to make a decision between the two rival models of the development of the Arthurian legend outlined in the introduction.

THE NATURE OF THE *ANNALES CAMBRIAE*

Our last source for consideration is the Latin *Annales Cambriae*, 'The Welsh Annals'. This text is, like the *Historia Brittonum*, a product of Welsh monastic learning. The earliest version of the *Annales* is actually found in the *c.*1100 British Library Harley MS. 3859, where also is to be found the earliest version of the 'Harleian Recension' of the *Historia Brittonum*. Its last entry is dated AD 954 and its compilation as a text is now agreed to have happened at some point close to this time (Grabowski and Dumville, 1984b).

There are two references to Arthur in this chronicle, both of which have often been claimed by Arthurian enthusiasts as strong evidence for Arthur's existence as a historical figure. The entry for AD 516 (or 518) tells of the 'battle of Badon, in which Arthur carried the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights, and the Britons were the victors' whilst that for AD 537 (or 539) refers to 'the battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell.'

In assessing the value of these entries, considerable attention should be paid to the date of these annals. Both Jones and Alcock have been inclined to see at least one of these annals as a contemporary record of Arthur and, if this could be accepted, such a conclusion would indeed 'prove' Arthur's historicity (Jones, 1964; Alcock, 1971). Such a view was not, however, based on a detailed consideration of the nature of the *Annales* and where it found its information. The late Dr Hughes, in her important and extensive studies of the *Annales Cambriae*, reached a rather different and convincing conclusion, and this has been built upon in recent work by Dumville (see Hughes, 1973 and 1980; Dumville, 1977-8; Grabowski and Dumville, 1984b: 209-26; Dumville, 1990).

The core of the *Annales Cambriae* is in fact a chronicle kept at St Davids in Dyfed from the late eighth century onwards. To this core, Hughes demonstrated, were added a set of annals derived from a North British source, beginning in 624,

and a set of Irish annals, mainly used for the period up to 613 – Hughes showed that both these sources were used to extend the St Davids chronicle back beyond 796, when this first began to be kept. When exactly these two sources were used to do this is the key question, as all authorities are now agreed that the North British source did not extend back beyond the early seventh century and that the Arthurian entries (and the other non-Irish sixth-century entries) were not present in the 'Chronicle of Ireland' that was used before this. Instead they must be seen as retrospective creations, interpolated into the St Davids chronicle after it had been extended back to the fifth century, during its combination with the two sources described above.

So when did this occur? Hughes suggested that this compilation – and hence the creation and interpolation of the Arthurian entries – occurred at some unknowable point between the late eighth century and the 950s, when the final compilation of the *Annales Cambriae*, 'the Welsh Annals', was made. However, further work by Dumville indicates that, in fact, both the version of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' (a Clonmacnoise-group text) and the North British annals used extended beyond the late eighth century, inevitably pushing the date of their combination with the St Davids chronicle forward. The last North British entry may in fact be that of 870, whilst the 'Chronicle of Ireland' that was used to extend the St Davids chronicle backwards appears to have extended to at least 888 and, as a Clonmacnoise-group text, it must have run until at least 911. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that it may have run until 941 (Grabowski and Dumville, 1984b, especially 211-4, 224-6). As such the date of the Arthurian entries, as interpolations created after the St Davids chronicle was extended backwards into the fifth century using these two sources, must be placed in the early to mid tenth century, if not after 941. Given this there seems little reason to separate their creation from the final compilation of the *Annales Cambriae* itself, probably undertaken in 954-5 according to Dumville, though potentially as late as 977, the date of the last blank annal.[11]

Clearly then the Arthurian annals cannot be treated as anything like a contemporary source – instead they look to have been created over 400 years after the events they purport to describe and were not found in the historical sources that the compiler of the *Annales Cambriae* used. This automatically raises enormous questions over the degree to which they can be used by a historian as 'proof' of Arthur's existence, given that we can no longer rely on the principle of 'no smoke without fire'. Their presence indicates that the compiler of the *Annales* in the mid to late tenth century believed Arthur to exist, but it is difficult to go beyond this, especially given that the author of the *Annales* had no historical source for this period and seems to have relied instead on legendary and literary sources current in the tenth century (Charles-Edwards, 1991, n. 45; Dumville, 1984b: 54).[12] Arthur's presence in this text thus cannot be assumed to prove his historicity and the *Annales* must be seen as a source

of dubious value which cannot be relied upon for information about the sixth century or Arthur.

To some large degree a look at the contents of the Arthurian references make this conclusion all the firmer. One very important point must be made: the Badon entry in the *Annales* is not an independent witness to Arthur's historicity. Instead it is clearly related to the *Historia Brittonum*'s account (chapter 56) of Arthur's eighth battle at the fort of *Guinnon*, in which Arthur carries an icon (of the Virgin Mary) on his shoulders into battle with him. What is going on here? Charles-Edwards has suggested that the two versions should be seen as dual elaborations (perhaps, in the *Annales*'s case, at several removes) of a single original, the entry in neither case being very much older than the text it is contained in (829/30 for the *Historia* and the 950s for the *Annales*: Charles-Edwards, 1991: 27-8; Padel, 1994: 15). This single original would presumably be – if we accept this proposition – the ninth-century monastic Old Welsh source that is claimed to lie behind the *Historia*'s tale of *Guinnon*. Note, however, that this need not be the hypothetical battle-listing poem that the *Historia* is supposed by some to have used; it could, for example, have been a Christianized tale in which Arthur attacks an Otherworld fort, along the lines of *Preideu Annwfyn* (see above).

This is certainly possible and it would place the reliability of the *Annales* reference to Arthur on much the same level as that of the *Historia*, discussed above. This does, however, overcomplicate things and it cannot be forgotten that there is no certainty that the author of the *Historia* did not come up with this tale of Arthur carrying an icon into battle himself – it seems to have had its origins in a ninth-century monastic context and the 'Biblical style' of the *Historia* may reveal its author's interest in the Marian cult. It is far simpler, in fact, as Jones long ago observed, to see this entry as directly influenced by and derivative of the *Historia Brittonum* (Jones, 1964: 6).[13] Higham has recently strongly supported this with a demonstration that of the 23 words in the *Annales* entry only three are original to that text and not found in the *Historia*'s account (either in chapter 56 or in close-by chapters) and that these borrowed words are phrases, not simply individual words – he thus convincingly argues that the author of the *Annales Cambriae* entry knew the *Historia* and heavily plagiarized the language of this text for his annal (Higham, 2002: 201-2).

If the author of the *Historia* created the tale of Arthur and the icon then no more needs to be said, and the *Annales*'s Badon annal is of little use to us. However, even if he did *not* create the tale of Arthur carrying an icon into battle and there *was* an pre-*Historia* source for this tale – again, note, there is no presumption in favour of the dubious battle-listing poem here; for example, a non-historical poem, or a tale of some other hero's deeds borrowed wholesale by the author of the *Historia* would do equally as well, if not better, bearing in mind the arguments made previously – this scenario of the *Annales* being directly derivative of the *Historia* remains most plausible. This is particularly true given that the main evidence

cited for the icon tale's pre-existence comes from the supposed confusion of the Old Welsh words for shoulder and shield. The key point here is that this claimed confusion is present in the *Annales Cambriae* text too. As Koch observes 'that error of transmission is hardly likely to have come about twice.' In other words the confusion suggests, if we accept that it implies an Old Welsh stage to the icon tale and that the author of the *Historia* didn't simply create the story, that, 'within the history shared between these accounts, the icon story has first been written down in Old Welsh and then mistranslated into Latin; the divergence is a subsequent third stage.' Thus even if we do have the tale existing before the *Historia*, the nature of our evidence for this is such that we still have to see the *Annales* version as directly derivative of the *Historia*, not this hypothetical text.

All told, that the *Annales* Badon entry derived directly from the *Historia Brittonum* seems to be by far the best, if not the only plausible, explanation, whether or not we believe that the author of the *Historia* had a source for the icon tale (whatever that may have been). The *Annales* version simply looks to be an understandable elaboration of the *Historia*'s account. To quote Koch once more, in all details the *Annales Cambriae* entry is most easily understood as derived from *Historia Brittonum*'s account: the '*Annales Cambriae*'s "three days and three nights" sounds like a baroque elaboration [and one borrowed from chapter 63 of the *Historia*: Higham, 2002: 201], the icon story was more likely transferred to the more famous battle (Badon) than from it, and the substitution of the more common icon (the cross) for Mary is more understandable than the reverse' (Koch, 1996: 252-3). The only original element not derivative of the *Historia* is, as Higham has shown, the use of the Cross as the icon and this is perfectly explicable as 'the idea of an image of the Virgin being an unusual one, the chronicler has replaced it by the more familiar cross' (Barber, 1972: 105; see Higham, 2002, especially p.207 for some speculation as to additional reasons why he may have done this).

Whatever the case may be, whether the author of the *Historia* invented the tale or if he had a source, it seems clear that the *Annales* reference is closely related to that found in the *Historia* and as such it can be of no additional value or weight in making the case for a genuinely historical Arthur. In fact, in light of all of the above (on both the nature of the *Annales* and the Arthurian annals), and especially Higham's observations on the language of the entry, it seems extremely difficult to give any credit whatsoever to the *Annales Cambriae*'s account of Badon – it must almost certainly be treated as simply a mid to late tenth-century creation which is directly derivative and an elaboration of the *Historia Brittonum*'s version of this tale.

The reference to Arthur fighting at Camlann fares little better. It too must be seen as a creation of the mid to late tenth century, given the textual history of the *Annales*, and for it too the *Annales* appears to have had no historical source (as for all the sixth-century British entries) and to have relied instead on legends current in the tenth century, contrary to assertions and assumptions made by

earlier historians such as Alcock (1971). In addition, there is no other historical record of this battle (unlike Badon, which we know to be historical from Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* of AD 540, although here the battle is not associated with Arthur), which automatically raises questions about whether this entry can be relied upon.

These are indeed important questions. An examination of the many early references to this battle indicates that it is only in the *Annales* that Camlann is claimed as a historical battle – it is never given any historical context in the other early sources. Indeed, the first mention of this battle occurs in a ninth-century (or a little earlier) catalogue of topographic *folklore*, wherein it is associated with Arthur's legendary and superhuman companion Bedwyr and a little later in the text we get the very clearly non-historical concept of Arthur as someone who has never been, and can never be, killed. Similarly, it appears in the wholly forkloric and mythic tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and early and non-Galfridian Welsh tradition gives it a decidedly Otherworldly aspect, cause and participants, including Arthur's fairy-wife Gwenhwyfar ('sacred enchantress') and Morfran ('Great Raven'), the mythical son of Ceridwen. Furthermore the Battle of Camlann seems to have been treated very differently by the 'guardians of Welsh tradition' when compared to, for example, the Battle of Badon, implying that this event had a very different conception, portrayal and origin in Welsh tradition to that of the historical Badon. Both Bromwich and Jarman, in fact, seem to consider Camlann to be just one of several legendary versions of Arthur's demise circulating in early medieval Wales, perhaps replacing over time an earlier even more folkloric tale in which he was killed by an enormous cat-monster (see further Chapters 2 and 4; Bromwich, 1978a: 487; Jarman, 1983: 109; Charles-Edwards, 1991: 28). All this raises the very real suspicion that the compiler of the *Annales Cambriae*, having devoted an extended annal to Arthur already, felt that he should finish off his story by including an entry regarding his final battle and in so doing historicized the folkloric Battle of Camlann (of course, from the annalist's perspective, he already thought of Arthur as historical so he would have had no compunctions about treating a folkloric battle as historical; he did, after all, use non-historical and legendary sources for most of the sixth-century interpolations to the Irish chronicle he had before him).

THE BATTLES OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*

The *Annales Cambriae* thus cannot furnish us with any independent information that can be relied upon by historians. There is nothing in it that is of the quality, date or nature that would allow us to determine whether Arthur was really a historical figure mythicized or a mythical or folkloric figure historicized. Its references to Arthur are both late and untrustworthy; the most important of these

includes legendary elements (such as fighting for three days and three nights) and it – and thus the concept of Arthur it represents – is closely related to and almost certainly directly derivative of the *Historia Brittonum*, whilst the other reference seems most likely to simply represent a folkloric battle that has been historicized. If the *Annales*'s evidence favours any conclusion, therefore, it is that of historicization. At best it tells us that a monastic annalist in the mid to late tenth century, who seems to have known of the *Historia Brittonum*'s concept of Arthur, was sufficiently convinced of Arthur's existence to interpolate him into his chronicle.

Given this we are forced to return once more to the text of the *Historia Brittonum* as the only source of any potential value in the quest to establish whether or not there ever was a historical Arthur. Whilst general comments on chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* have already been made, a more detailed examination of the information contained within it may prove enlightening.

It is easy to assume that all the battles mentioned in chapter 56 were remembered as being those fought by Arthur, but such assumptions may well be incorrect. Perhaps the most famous 'Arthurian' battle is that of Badon (*in monte badonis*) but the reference to this has serious problems. It has long been accepted that this is the same battle as the *obsessio Badonici montis* of Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* §26, fought *c*.AD 500 (see Winterbottom, 1978 and above). Unfortunately, Arthur is not mentioned here in association with this battle – nor, indeed, is he mentioned by Gildas, one of our main sources for the period, at all.[14] As this battle is the only one of the 12 listed by the *Historia Brittonum* for which we have any external confirmation of its existence as a real conflict, this is of the utmost importance.

It is sometimes countered (as Jackson, 1959a: 3) that Arthur was deliberately omitted, either because Gildas didn't approve of him or because his contribution to the victory was too well known, but recent work suggests that this is not the case. Instead, the reason Arthur was not mentioned appears to indeed be because he was not associated with the battle when Gildas wrote. The key point is that, rather than not naming anyone as the British leader at Badon, Gildas does indeed assign Badon a victor – Ambrosius Aurelianus. In the *De Excidio Britanniae* Ambrosius is given prominence as the initiator of the British counter-attack against the Anglo-Saxon invaders which, after the fighting of several battles, culminates in the Battle of Badon. The idea that this figure was the true victor of Badon was previously dismissed on the grounds that the chief manuscript (British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.vi) implies a major interval between Ambrosius and Badon. Padel has, however, re-examined the original manuscript and has been able to show that the break implied in Winterbottom's edition (1978) has no manuscript authority. The passage as a whole, seen as it appears in the manuscript rather than modern editions of the same, has the Battle of Mount Badon now reading 'naturally as the victory that crowned the

career of Ambrosius Aurelianus' (Padel, 1994: 16-18 at p.17; Wood, 1999: 34-8, has also returned to the original manuscript, apparently independently of Padel, and reaches an identical conclusion).

This is all, of course, of the utmost significance, as it further undermines what little faith we might have remaining in the 'traditions' recorded in the *Historia Brittonum* – it seems very probable that in the case of Badon, the only battle that has a historical existence beyond the *Historia*, we are seeing a battle that had originally been fought by another leader being attributed to Arthur in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. It is worth remembering, in this context, that early Welsh literary tradition seems to have had few qualms about attributing battles to people who did not fight them, as Bromwich has demonstrated (Bromwich, 1975-6). In fact, Arthurian scholars have long been aware that there is something amiss with the association between Arthur and this battle. Given the above conclusions on the links between the *Annales Cambriae* and the *Historia*, which mean that the former cannot be treated as an independent witness to Arthur's supposed historicity, it is worth noting that outside of the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56, the *Annales Cambriae*, the possibly eleventh-century Breton *Life of Saint Goueznou* (which paraphrases the *Historia Brittonum*) and William of Malmesbury's *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* of *c*.AD 1125 (which again paraphrases the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*), Arthur is *never* associated in the whole body of pre-Galfridian literature with Badon – a very strange situation surely for one who is supposed to be famed *because* of such an association. It does, however, fit with the fact that there seems to be good reason to believe that there was a separate non-Arthurian tradition regarding the Battle of Badon, the single event which puts Arthur's supposed victories into the realms of history and which, in essence, defines his role as defeater of the Saxons – this is supported by the few early Welsh references to the battle as, in sources that are not connected in some obvious way with the *Historia*, not only is Arthur not linked with Badon, but Badon is in fact not linked with Arthur (see Bromwich, 1978a: 276; Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 3-4; Higham, 2002: 147).

This is not the end, however, of the problems that the battles ascribed to Arthur cause to those who wish to place any faith in the *Historia*'s account of Arthur. It has also long been recognized that the locations of these battles, where they can be identified, would have any historical figure who took part in all of them fighting all across Britain – a situation happily accepted by Alcock (1971 and 1972: 15-17), but which is rightly rejected by nearly all other modern researchers as historically highly implausible, especially given that some of the battles are said to be in areas where there were no Anglo-Saxons in the late fifth century and there were not to be any for some time after (for example, Jackson, 1945-6; Jackson, 1959a: 7-8; Jones, 1964: 8; Bromwich, 1975-6: 168; Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 2-3). Furthermore, the attribution of battles to Arthur that can be shown to have not belonged to him seems not to be restricted to the Battle of Badon – similar cases

can and have been made for the eleventh, ninth and seventh battles recorded in the *Historia*, in all three cases the argument being that these were battles fought by other leaders several generations *after* Arthur is supposed to have lived being ascribed to him (see Chapter 6 and Jackson, 1945-6; Jackson, 1949; Bromwich, 1975-6 and Padel, 1994: 18-19).[15]

Indeed, I see no certainty whatsoever that some of the battles ascribed to Arthur as historical conflicts against the *Saxones* (as the *Historia Brittonum*, chapter 56, makes it clear it saw them all as being) were not in fact mythical battles involving Arthur, which are simply here portrayed as historical. A possible case has been outlined above for the otherwise unidentifiable attack on the fort of *Guinnon* being an Otherworldly battle of the sort recorded of Arthur in the potentially eighth-century (or earlier) *Preideu Annwfyn*. Far stronger cases can be made for two of the other battles. The tenth, the 'battle on the bank of a river which is called *Tribruit*', is the only *Historia* battle attributed to Arthur in a Welsh non-Galfridian source (*Pa gur?*), and here it is recorded – in a potentially very early source – as a traditional Arthurian battle against werewolves, thus casting further doubt on the *Historia*'s value; similarly a good case can be made for seeing *Cat Coit Celidon* in chapter 56 as the entirely mythical and magical battle of trees recorded in the archaic poem from the Book of Taliesin, *Kat Godeu*, in which Arthur seems to have played a leading role (see further Chapter 2 for a full discussion of both of these battles).

We have already seen that the general portrayal of Arthur, including his role as a post-Vortigern *dux bellorum* and the number of his battles, would seem to reflect the needs of the author of the *Historia*, and that there is a good case to be made for thinking that the entire concept of Arthur being a figure of history is a creation of the *Historia*. A consideration of the battles can only reinforce these concerns – they appear, in general, highly implausible, as anything like a reflection of the deeds of a genuine late fifth-century warrior who fought against the invading Anglo-Saxons. Furthermore, there are good reasons for doubting Arthur's association with some of these outside of texts derivative of the *Historia Brittonum*, including the highly important Battle of Badon, the single event which puts Arthur's supposed victories into the realms of history and which, in essence, defines his role as defeater of the Saxons. Some, indeed, appear to be in fact mythical Arthurian battles, historicized for their role in the *Historia*. These conclusions and concerns hold, of course, whether we believe in an underlying battle-listing poem or not. Whatever the origins of this list, it clearly is of no real value to historians interested in the late fifth century and there is surely no way in which it can be considered anything even close to proof of Arthur's genuine historicity, especially in light of the nature of the *Historia* references.

All told, this does suggest that our earlier conclusions on the *Historia* are correct and we must consider again whether this entire list of battles was simply the creation of the author of the *Historia*, with no antecedents for the entire piece,

historical or mythical. Certainly we have already seen that the case for such an antecedent is, in fact, highly dubious and hypothetical. The nature of the battles can give us no good reason for overturning this judgement. Charles-Edwards and Higham have, after all, pointed out that the author of the *Historia* is known to have constructed battle-lists for other characters in his pseudo-history (Vortimer, chapter 44 – Charles-Edwards, 1991: 28; Higham, 2002: 148). Seen in this light the whole passage is at least understandable. The implausibly wide geographical spread of the identifiable battles – and the non-Arthurian and/or non-historical origins of many of them – can be seen as reflecting the *Historia*'s need to have a pan-British historical *dux bellorum* as an exemplar for the ninth century, utilising the concept of Arthur as a 'Brittonic superhero' found in *Y Gododdin*, *Marwnad Cynddylan* and other early sources to this end (including the folk-legends that the author of the *Historia Brittonum* was aware of and included in his chapter 73).

Whether or not all of the above conclusions regarding the specific identifications of the battles are accepted, it can be said that in the *Historia Brittonum*, our only really usable source for a 'historical' Arthur, we have a text which cannot be at all relied upon to predate the ninth century and the contents of which can be described as being, at the very least, suspect. As such it can tell us virtually nothing certain about any possible 'historical' Arthur or his genuineness. Indeed, the whole portrayal of Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum* might be seen to reflect the needs and aims of the ninth-century author rather than genuinely ancient tradition, as we might expect given the nature of the text as a whole. Even if we could assume that there was an underlying battle-listing poem this would change our overall conclusions little. The failure of the *Historia* as a source of information regarding any historical Arthur and the consequent intangibility of this 'historical' Arthur is a fact which has often been remarked upon: as Dumville has commented, 'This is not the stuff of which history can be made' (1977a: 188).

'NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE'? SOME CONCLUSIONS ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE

What then of the case for Arthur's historicity? It should be obvious that, even when we restrict ourselves to the best potential sources for a 'historical' Arthur, as discussed above, we can come to no solid conclusions regarding his historicity. The four occurrences of the name Arthur in southern Scotland and southern Wales between the mid sixth and the early seventh centuries cannot be seen as evidence for a historical Arthur and are best explained as reflecting a legend of Arthur as great warrior, with no implications as to this figure's origin in either history or legend (see further Chapter 2).

The *Y Gododdin* reference clearly reflects a ninth or tenth-century concept of Arthur as a military 'superhero', with its origins potentially in the early seventh

century, but this concept of Arthur could result either from a mythical figure being used as 'the impossible comparison' or a historical figure being mythicized as a paragon of military valour. There is no merit to the belief that, just because Arthur appears in *Y Gododdin*, he must have been historical. As such this reference cannot help us to reach any solid conclusions. At best all either of these sources tells us is that, as early as the mid sixth and early seventh century, Arthur was renowned in legend, myth or folklore as a great warrior to whom no-one could hope to compare, if we are to believe the *Y Gododdin* reference.

The case for a historical Arthur must therefore be based on only two sources, the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*. Neither of these can be seen as a reliable witness to historicity, both being late in date and suspect in content, with the latter very probably being derivative of the former and the former being a synthetic pseudo-history which utilized often very poor sources that the author used and rewrote to suit his own ends and which is known to portray mythical figures as historical. As such, these sources cannot in any way prove that there was a historical late fifth- or early sixth-century Arthur who led the fight against the Germanic invaders. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that no contemporary or near-contemporary source makes any mention of such a figure and, once more, that there are good reasons to suspect that this figure could have been the creation of the author of the *Historia*.

The former point is, in fact, a very important one. If any investigation into the history of the post-Roman period in Britain is to have any validity at all (and appear acceptable to academic historians) then it must be done with a sound methodology. This impinges directly on the problem of Arthur in view of the fact that no contemporary or near-contemporary source makes any mention of him. Dumville has made the important observation that 'History must be written from contemporary sources or with the aid of testimony carried to a later era by an identified and acceptable line of transmission' or 'it will not be worth the paper it is printed on' (Dumville, 1990, X: 55). He rightly rejects 'the old foolish game of trying to write narrative history of an effectively pre-historic period with the aid of unhistorical and non-contemporary sources' (Dumville, 1990, IV: 4). As Snyder has recently commented, 'If you are trying to argue for an historical Arthur …, you cannot stray from the primary sources for the period: i.e. Patrick, the Gallic Chronicles, Constantius of Lyon, Gildas, etc. *None* of these sources mention Arthur. Therefore, building an Arthur theory by starting with later sources (e.g. 'Nennius', the Welsh Annals, the Gododdin, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Welsh genealogies, Geoffrey of Monmouth) and then trying to argue backwards to Gildas and Badon is an unsound methodology according to modern historiographic principles.'[16]

The best we can say is that there existed by the ninth century at the latest a concept of Arthur as a historical figure; our sources are simply not of the quality that would allow us to come to any firmer conclusion than this.[17] If anything

they point very much in the opposite direction, implying the historicization
of mythical battles, and thus of Arthur himself. Against this we have to set the
evidence for the existence of a concept of Arthur as a folkloric and mythical
figure. Whatever else we might say about it, *Y Gododdin* (and, it might be added,
Marwnad Cynddylan) very clearly possesses a concept of Arthur as a mythical
'superhero', not a historical figure. Similarly in the *Historia Brittonum*, the earliest
source to portray Arthur as historical, Arthur appears not only in the 'historical'
light of chapter 56, but also in a manifestly legendary and folkloric light in chapter
73 (an important point that is too often overlooked, particularly as the legends
recorded here *are* often considered to pre-date the ninth century, see Chapter 2
and Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxvi). Indeed, this same concept of Arthur as a
mythical hero is found in a number of other early sources, such as the probably
eighth-century *Preideu Annwfyn*, in which Arthur is associated with pagan deities,
magical creatures and the Otherworld (see further Chapter 2 and Padel, 1994).

Given this, a concept of Arthur as a figure of myth and legend can be
demonstrated to be present at least as early as a concept of Arthur as a historical
figure. Here we must return to the methodological comments made at the
beginning of this study. As was there noted, there are numerous examples of
mythical or fictional figures being historicized, often in association with some
important event of the past, and consequently no *a priori* judgements can be
made as to whether a figure is, in origin, historical, mythical or fictional – each
individual case must (and can only) be decided by a close examination of all the
relevant material. Each of these possibilities is equally as likely to be true, on *a
priori* grounds, as the others; the burden of proof lies with all sides. In the absence
of such proof we simply cannot assume – in the 'no smoke without fire' mould
– that one explanation of figures such as Arthur enjoys priority over the others: it
does not. Thus whilst the above 'folkloric or mythical Arthur' might be the result
of a historical figure being mythicized, it is at least equally as likely that, in the
absence of good evidence either way, the above 'historical Arthur' was a result of a
folkloric figure being historicized.

So what conclusions can be drawn in answer to the question of whether we can,
in light of this, believe in a historical Arthur? Such a belief cannot be assumed, it
must be proven or shown to be likely using the available evidence. It must be clear
by now that the only early and potentially usable sources that possess a concept
of Arthur as historical are highly deficient in this regard. They certainly do not
even approximate the kind of evidence that would be required for us to assume
that Arthur, like Charlemagne, probably did exist. At best, by their possession of
this concept, they might demonstrate that by the early mid ninth century – over
300 years after the Battle of Badon – some people believed that Arthur fought
this battle and did therefore exist. We can have no confidence as to how correct
this belief was, or how ancient it was – there are good arguments to be made for
assuming it to be the author of the *Historia*'s own invention and, even if this was

not the case, any hypothetical earlier source would date from much the same period as the *Historia* and be equally dubious and untrustworthy in its testimony.

The nature and quality of the sources for a historical Arthur is quite simply such that they neither show nor demand a historical figure to lie behind them and we most definitely cannot assume one in the absence of this. This is not to say that such a figure is impossible – these sources *cannot* say this. However, whilst it is thus possible that chapter 56 of the *Historia* reflects, to some extent, the distorted but genuine traditions of a 'historical Arthur', it is at least equally as likely – if not in fact very much more so, given the nature of our sources, their claims to reliability, the historical Arthur's absence from pre-ninth century sources, and the fact that a concept of Arthur as a mythical hero existed from at least the eighth century – that the opposite is true and that these references simply reflect a folkloric or mythical figure (such as that of chapter 73 of the *Historia Brittonum*) historicized by the ninth century. The evidence is such that Arthur could well be a mythical figure portrayed as historical by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* in just the same way as Hengest and Horsa were mythical figures portrayed as historical by both Bede and the author of the *Historia*. We therefore end up with an answer to the question of 'Was there a historical Arthur?' of 'it is just possible but it certainly cannot be proven', or 'perhaps, but probably not' or, probably best and most honest, 'it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely on the basis of this evidence alone.'

Such considerations have, to a large extent, led to the adoption of Dumville's concluding remarks on Arthur by academic historians, namely that 'The fact of the matter is that there is no historical evidence about Arthur; we must reject him from our histories and, above all, from the titles of our books' (1977a: 188), and Arthur is noticeably absent from – or dismissed in – the latest research concerned with the post-Roman period (for example, Bassett (ed.) 1989; Esmonde-Cleary, 1989; Higham, 1992; Dark, 1994; Yorke, 1995; Snyder, 1998). Even if one could accept that Arthur did exist, one could go no further: the evidence simply is not of the quality that it would allow us to say anything at all concrete about any possible historical Arthur. Charles-Thomas perhaps best summed up the modern historian's attitude to such figures as Arthur, only recorded in very late and highly untrustworthy sources, when he wrote that 'Many will agree with Dr Dumville's *cri de coeur* … Any sane person would agree. These enticing Will-of-the-wisps have too long dominated, and deflected, useful advances in our study' (Thomas, 1981: 245).

To conclude, in the absence of *a priori* assumptions regarding historicity, a detailed investigation of the 'relevant material' (as required by the above methodology) has hence left us with a situation in which the information contained within these late references could reflect *either* a historical figure *or* a non-historical figure historicized, with the *Historia* account being so untrustworthy that in many ways the latter seems by far the more plausible

solution to the problem but no final, definitive conclusion on this matter being as yet possible. Certainly we have no reason to adopt the creed of credulity of 'no smoke without fire' but equally we cannot rule out *completely* that there may have been a fire once. To put it another way, there is no obvious reason from the material discussed above to prefer the portrayal of Arthur in chapter 56 of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* over that in chapter 73 (discussed further in Chapter 2, below) but, at present and from an investigation of the evidence discussed above, we cannot with full confidence claim that chapter 73 should certainly enjoy priority either. It is likely, but unproven. Nevertheless, given the nature of all this and the considerable and justifiable doubt and scepticism over Arthur's existence that must be expressed after an examination of the evidence, modern historians' dismissal of Arthur is perfectly understandable.

TOWARDS A NEW METHODOLOGY

The degree to which the uncertainty expressed above can justifiably be taken as our final conclusions on this matter is to be debated, however. Part of the problem, of course, lies with methodology. When the case for a historical late fifth- or early sixth-century Arthur is made, it involves trawling the pre-Galfridian source material for anything that might be used to back it up. The interest is not with the pre-Galfridian material itself and with what it tells us, but rather with what it can tell us about a possibly historical figure called Arthur. The texts selected to answer this question are thus divorced from the context of the whole body of pre-Galfridian material in which they must surely be viewed and of which they form an integral part. By asking 'Was there a historical Arthur?' one *forces* the texts to answer 'perhaps, possibly'; they have no other choice because, on the basis of the few sources selected, the concepts they possess and the viewing of these few sources in isolation, they are incapable of denying that there was such a figure just as they are manifestly incapable of confirming it. To some extent, therefore, this 'perhaps, maybe, it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely on the basis of this evidence' cannot represent the last word on the subject of Arthur's existence.

    This sort of limited, cherry-picking analysis is not a full and proper method-ology for addressing the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, as recent commentators have begun to realize. Conclusions regarding Arthur's historicity can, and should only, be drawn via a sound methodology, namely by looking at *all* the available evidence, not just that which might be suitable for proving only one side of the case or the other. In order for any ultimately meaningful conclusions to be drawn and the uncertainty in the above judgements to be potentially eliminated, the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae* references

must be seen in the context of all the early Arthurian material, not as discrete pieces of information that can be mined for 'facts'. To quote Padel, 'the nature of the inquiry, which hitherto has always started with the natural question 'was there a historical Arthur?', has determined its outcome', namely 'perhaps', or 'he cannot be *disproven…*'' (Padel, 1994: 2. Ashe, 1995, also makes this point). By commencing an examination of the pre-Galfridian material with a view to discovering (or, at least, investigating) a truly historical figure of the post-Roman period, we end up looking only at evidence that might prove this and, as such, the conclusions reached are unavoidably biased towards such a final judgement and the investigation ignores the majority of the available early evidence. How could it reach any other judgement than 'it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely on the basis of this evidence'? We have already rejected at the start of the enquiry any evidence that might disagree with the notion of a historical Arthur by looking only at that which might potentially prove he exists.

We must therefore ask, if we are to arrive at a more secure conclusion as to Arthur's historicity, what is the nature of Arthur in *all* the pre-Galfridian sources with which we are here primarily concerned? Where does the 'weight' of the evidence 'lead' us? What is the context of the 'historical' sources? If the rest of the evidence, including poetry, prose tales and Saints' Lives, indicates that Arthur was generally portrayed as a figure of history, then this would suggest that – despite our reservations and scepticism over the *Historia*'s evidence – Arthur *could* well have been originally historical. If, on the other hand, this material convincingly paints a picture of Arthur as a creature of myth, legend and folklore from the very earliest period, then the explanation that he was such a figure, historicized only in the *Historia Brittonum* and texts derived from it, must surely be given even greater priority.

THE CONTEXT OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*

This, then, is the main aim of the rest of this study. It aims to investigate and define the nature of Arthur in non-Galfridian British tradition and, through such a definition, answer the above methodological points. By putting the *Historia Brittonum*'s reference to Arthur in chapter 56 in context, and by examining all the available evidence, it is hoped that the above conclusion that Arthur is probably, but not certainly, a mythical, legendary or folkloric creature who was historicized can be firmed up (or, indeed, toned down). Before beginning our own study of this material, however, it is useful to briefly look at what has already been written on this topic and how the judgements that previous researchers have reached affect our understanding of Arthur's historicity, according to the above outlined methodology.

The most recent attempt to define this 'nature' has been that of Oliver Padel, who undertook a detailed study of the non-literary evidence for the Arthurian legend (1994; see also now Padel, 2000, for a brief consideration of the literary sources too). His well-argued and convincing conclusion was that in non-Galfridian British folk-tradition, Arthur was very clearly uniformly portrayed as 'the leader of a band of heroes who live outside society, whose main world is one of magical animals, giants and other wonderful happenings, located in the wild parts of the landscape' (Padel 1994: 14). Arthur is portrayed as a figure of pan-Brittonic folklore and mythology, associated with the Otherworld, supernatural enemies and superhuman deeds, not history. 'Pan-Brittonic' means here 'found across all the British-speaking regions', that is to say that the Arthurian legend was not localized in any particular region. That Arthur was indeed 'pan-Brittonic' from the very first is clearly evidenced in the pre-Galfridian material, which places him in southern Scotland, south-western Britain, Wales and Brittany (see Padel, 1994: 1–14 for a demonstration of this). In fact, it is true even of the earliest references to him – the 4 or 5 people named 'Arthur' in the sixth and seventh centuries are to be found as far apart as South Wales and south Scotland, whilst *Marwnad Cynddylan* indicates a knowledge of Arthur in mid seventh century Shropshire.

Padel points out that this concept of Arthur occurs in both the very earliest of these sources (potentially earlier than and contemporary with the earliest references to a possibly 'historical Arthur') and in the vast majority of the non-Galfridian sources, with these sources consistent in their portrayal of Arthur until as late as the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries in popular folklore. This is, of course, crucial and its implications for our understanding of whether we can achieve a greater degree of certainty in our conclusions on Arthur's origins, given the above methodology, are obvious. If we look at the whole weight of the early evidence for Arthur as set out by Padel, rather than just at the pieces that might relate to a historical figure, it becomes, as Padel himself points out using this methodology, more difficult than ever to place any faith in the *Historia*'s claims that there was a 'historical Arthur'. Rather than the folkloric Arthur evidenced in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 being an elaboration of the 'historical' Arthur of chapter 56 – as has so often been simply *a priori* assumed on the basis of 'no smoke without fire' – this 'legendary' Arthur would appear to be 'the true one, and the 'historical' Arthur … the secondary development' (Padel, 1994: 30).

Padel is not at all alone in seeing the 'nature' of Arthur in the early sources as reflecting a uniformly legendary, folkloric or mythical figure, though he has given the subject its fullest treatment to date. One of the foremost authorities on early Welsh and Arthurian literature, Rachel Bromwich, has recently written that:

> Arthur was above all else … a defender of his country against every kind of danger, both internal and external: a slayer of giants and witches, a hunter of

monstrous animals – giant boars, a savage cat monster, a winged serpent (or dragon) – and also, as it appears from *Culhwch* and *Preiddeu Annwn*, a releaser of prisoners. This concept of Arthur is substantiated from all the early sources: the poems *Pa Gur* and *Preiddeu Annwn*, the Triads, the Saints Lives, and the *Mirabilia* attached to the *Historia Brittonum* … in early literature he belongs, like Fionn, to the realm of mythology rather than to that of history. (Bromwich and Evans (eds), 1992: xxviii–xxix)

It has to be said that the above comments on the 'nature of Arthur' in early literature represent the general view amongst Celtic scholars of this question (see for example Ford 1996; Jarman, 1983: 110; Roberts, 1991a; Ross, 2001, chapter 4). In essence, the vast majority of the non-Galfridian material, including some of the earliest sources, paints a picture of Arthur as a pan-Brittonic folkloric hero, a peerless warrior of giant-like stature who leads a band of superhuman heroes that roam the wild places of the landscape, who raids the Otherworld whilst being intimately associated with it, who fights and protects Britain from supernatural enemies, who hunts wondrous animals and who takes part in mythical battles. As such the weight of this evidence strongly indicates a folkloric or mythical origin for Arthur (it is worth noting once more in this context that Arthur is *never* associated with either the Saxons or Badon in the vast majority of the material, despite the fact that such an association is usually said to be the reason for his fame, and when this association does appear it is *only* present in those sources which are directly derivative of *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56).[18]

In fact, the Fionn parallel in the above quotation is also noted by Padel in his article. Padel demonstrates that the nature of Arthur evidenced in the pre-Galfridian sources he investigates is *very* similar indeed to the nature of Fionn in Gaelic literature, this Fionn being an entirely mythical character – originally a god – who became associated (i.e. historicized) with the repelling of the Viking invasions of Ireland and who had a list of battles against his 'foes' attached to his name (Ó hÓgáin, 1988; Murphy, 1953; Padel, 1994, summarises some of the parallels, pp. 19-23). Van Hamel long ago also made some very similar observations regarding the nature of Arthur in the early sources and the very close parallels between him and Fionn (Van Hamel, 1934). His suggestion was that in both cases their essential nature, in the tales we have of them, was that of the monster-slaying and supernatural tutelary Hero Protector of their respective lands, emerging from the needs of their individual societies – a persuasive contention supported by the work of Padel and recently strongly endorsed by Bromwich and Evans, who reference his research in their summary of the nature of Arthur. As Padel observes, Fionn 'had a particular role as the defender of the island of Ireland' (Padel, 1994: 20), just like Arthur had in Britain, and he and Arthur both seem to have been primarily very similar 'defenders, hunters, and slayers of monsters' in the tales they appear in (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii).

This is, of course, of the utmost importance in the present context. We have in Fionn a figure who is, in the tales we have of him, in many ways virtually identical to the pre-Galfridian Arthur – fulfilling the same basic role in society, as Padel notes – and he has clear origins as a non-historical character, indeed a divinity. This lends itself naturally to the conclusion, given the nature of the legendary Arthur described above and the quality of the 'historical' material, that it is 'not considered necessary to hypothesize a historical figure behind the cycle of folklore and literature centred on Fionn, and there is no more need to postulate one behind the similar cycle centred on Arthur' (Padel, 1994: 30). Indeed, Bromwich has recently indicated her acceptance of Padel's argument in favour of the priority of the folkloric Arthur on this basis, in the latest revision of her *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Bromwich, 2006: 282–3). As Van Hamel says, 'Arthurian story shows that in Britain he [Arthur] performs the same function as Finn in Ireland. He protects the land in every way. It was but natural to represent a hero of this type as the victor over the Saxons' (1934: 27), just as happened with Fionn and the Vikings.

How does all this affect the question of Arthur's historicity? What then of those references to a 'historical' Arthur which, when viewed in isolation, can only answer the question 'Was there a historical Arthur?' with 'perhaps, maybe, just possibly, it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely on the basis of this evidence' and could at least just as easily, if not very much more so, represent a non-historical figure historicized as the distorted remembrances of a 'genuinely' historical figure?

To recapitulate and illustrate the methodology outlined above, whilst it is true to say that *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 could well reflect a non-historical figure historicized as much, if not more so, as a genuinely historical personage, this method of analysis fails to answer the question of Arthur's historicity satisfactorily. By treating the 'historical Arthur' sources in isolation rather than in the context of the whole body of non-Galfridian Arthurian literature of which they form an integral part, valuable information is ignored that is essential to the interpretation of these sources and, as such, no conclusions of any value can be drawn. To give an example, we might have a charter purporting to be a grant of land to a monastery from a king. When this charter is viewed on its own, the evidence internal to the charter may be such that no decision can be made over whether it is genuine or a forgery. If, however, this charter is looked at in the context of all the other charters from that monastery then the situation is rather different: thus if, for example, all the other charters from that monastery appear to be forgeries then it seems very likely indeed that this charter too is a forgery. In the context of the body of material of which it forms an integral and inseparable part, it becomes clear that the two possibilities allowed by the internal evidence are not in fact equally as likely – when viewed in light of all the other material it remains remotely possible

that the charter may be genuine but it is infinitely more probable that it is a forgery.

The serious possibility that the charter is genuine only really existed because the charter was being analysed outside the body of material of which it is an integral part, something which caused information essential to the interpretation of the charter to be ignored – when it is viewed within the context of all the material, there is simply no reason to think that it might be genuine; the charter's context is such that this is not, in the absence of evidence in its favour, a serious possibility. In the same way, the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae* references must be viewed in the context of all the early Arthurian material, not as discrete pieces of information that can be mined for 'facts'. To do otherwise simply biases the conclusions and ignores the vast majority of the available early evidence.

In this light, and given the above conclusions drawn by previous surveys of the early Arthurian legend, there would seem to be only one possible conclusion. The weight of the non-Galfridian material (early and late) provides, it has frequently been asserted, a very clear and consistent picture of Arthur as a thoroughly legendary figure of folklore and myth not associated in any way with either the Saxons or Badon, and with this figure resembling in many of its characteristics the Gaelic Fionn who was a mythical figure – originally a god – later historicized with battles against foreign invaders. If we can accept this judgement, then we can eliminate most of the uncertainties in our original conclusion – both the nature and the context of the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 is such that, in all probability this 'historical' Arthur must be seen as a secondary development of an originally legendary, folkloric or mythical figure. Whilst we might never be able to reach an absolutely certain verdict on the question of Arthur's existence (proving a negative being notoriously difficult), the nature of Arthur in the earliest sources would indicate that there is really no possible justification for believing there to have been a historical figure of the fifth or sixth century named Arthur who is the basis for all later legends. In the blatant absence of anything even approaching proof of his historicity (and in the absence of *a priori* assumptions and the forcing of preconceived agendas onto the sources) there is simply no reason to think that a 'historical Arthur' is a serious possibility.

This, then, is what current verdicts on the nature of Arthur in the non-Galfridian sources indicate is the only acceptable solution to the problem of Arthur's origins. The remainder of this study aims to investigate this fully and to properly substantiate (or dispute) these conclusions. By doing this not only will a greater understanding of the earliest stage of the Arthurian legend (and the figure of Arthur within it) be possible but, it is to be hoped, new perspectives on all of this will become possible, especially in light of recent work on the nature and dating of certain literary sources. Furthermore, it will allow the question of Arthur's origins to be investigated in far more detail than has hitherto been possible. Was he indeed, like Fionn, not simply a supernatural Hero Protector of Britain but in

fact originally some form of pagan divinity? This question and others like it are amenable, it is felt, to some at least tentative answers, but the widespread *a priori* assumption that a historical Arthur did exist has, to date, prevented their fuller investigation.

2

THE EARLIEST STRATUM
OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

INTRODUCTION

Although this study is primarily an examination of the idea that the early
references to Arthur make him a folkloric or mythical figure, there is a case for
taking the very earliest datable references as a class in their own right, deserving
of especially detailed consideration. Whilst, as Padel has argued, a consideration of
the early (i.e. pre-Galfridian) material as a whole is essential for understanding the
context of chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* (1994), obviously an examination
of the very earliest stratum of this material may prove both useful and important
when looking at the ultimate origins of the Arthurian legend. This is the rationale
behind the present chapter. It aims to look specifically at that material which
can be seen as belonging to roughly the same period as the 'historical' references
to Arthur, or even earlier. The focus is on the key question of what concepts
of Arthur are present in this material and hence, ultimately, what the immediate
context of the *Historia Brittonum* is; what this very earliest stratum of the Arthurian
legend does indicate is the right answer to whether the *Historia*'s Arthur is a
legendary and mythical figure historicized, or a historical figure mythicized?

Some brief note ought to be made of the methodology underlying the
selection of texts for this survey. The mid sixth century has been chosen as the
starting point for the very good reason that the earliest indisputable evidence
for the existence of any knowledge of Arthur comes in the form of four men
born between *c*.AD 550 and *c*.625. Quite simply, we now possess no evidence
that can be dated to the period before this. This is not, of course, to say that
none ever existed; it is important to recognize that absence of evidence is not
necessarily evidence of absence. The problem is that the mid sixth century is
right at the beginning of the historical horizon (see, for example, Dumville,
1977b; Dumville, 1986: 11). The fact that there are no references to the name

'Arthur' in documents datable before this may simply reflect pure chance. There are so few documents that can be dated before this from Britain and which are of a type that might mention this name, that there can be no certainty that Arthur was not known before this time. For example, the existence of the British war- and hunting-god *Mars Alator* is only recorded through the chance discoveries of the two Roman-period inscriptions. Without these he would not be known at all, something which might hamper our understanding of some parts of the Arthurian legend (Chapter 5 and Green, forthcoming b).

The upper limit of this 'earliest stratum' is, to some degree, more flexible. In attempting to achieve the primary aim of this chapter we obviously have to consider sources which are roughly contemporary to (or earlier than) our two earliest references to Arthur as a figure of history: the *Historia Brittonum* (AD 829/30) and the *Annales Cambriae* (*c*.AD 955x977). As such, only texts which are generally considered to probably belong to the tenth century or before have been considered here. Furthermore, and with one exception, only texts for which a date in the ninth century or before can be defended have been selected from these, in order that we might more closely approach the context of the *Historia Brittonum* itself. The following points ought to be made with regards to how these texts were identified.

There has been, in recent years, a trend towards dating early Welsh poems broadly to the ninth to eleventh centuries, or even the first half of the twelfth century. In general this seems a very sensible, if very cautious, position to adopt. It certainly reflects the difficulty of establishing absolute and general dating criteria for Old Welsh poetry, as long as it is recognized that, for such poems, a ninth-century date must be considered at least equally as likely as an eleventh-century date (as Sims-Williams, 1991a: 35-6, notes). This latter point cannot be taken too lightly. Some seem to feel that most Old Welsh poetry ought, because of the uncertainty, to be placed as late as possible and given a *c*.1100 dating, but this is neither a defensible position nor what Sims-Williams implied in his recent survey (see further Koch, 1997: lxxxix, n.1). Basing conclusions – be they about the character of Welsh tradition in general or the development of the Arthurian legend in particular – on an *a priori* assumption of a late date for an Old Welsh poem is no more (or less) 'moral' than using an *a priori* assumption of a *c*.800 dating in an analysis. Both represent poor methodology, and it is important to keep this in mind. Although it is sometimes summarily dismissed, much of the 'Arthurian' Old Welsh poetry may be as old, if not a little older, than the *Annales* or the *Historia* entries. Naturally the uncertainty surrounding the dating of this evidence means that such generally-dated material can only be used for illustrative purposes in the present context, but clearly this material is not without value.

If this general Old Welsh dating does severely limit the sources we can use in the present endeavour, it does not do so to a fatal degree. Whilst the above holds for a number of texts, it is not universally true. Given suitable linguistic

and textual evidence, more precise relative (or even, occasionally, absolute) dates can be – and have been – argued for some texts, sometimes very strongly. All the texts analyzed in detail here have been chosen first and foremost because they have been considered to display such features as would allow them, on this basis, to have their composition placed at least within the broadest definition of our 'earliest stratum'.

Looking at the specific texts, the dating of the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 to the early ninth century is secure, as is that for the four men named Arthur from sixth- and seventh-century Britain and the ninth-century Breton Arthurs. None of these derive from a Welsh poetic source, it should be noted. The dating of the *Y Gododdin* reference to Arthur has been controversial. Although it is agreed that it must go back to at least the ninth or the tenth century, there is still considerable debate over whether an early seventh-century date for it can in fact be accepted. A full discussion of the evidence is included below. I have followed Rowland's monumental *Early Welsh Saga Poetry* (1990) for the mid seventh-century dating of *Marwnad Cynddylan* and the ninth-century dating of *Englynion y Beddau* and *Gereint filius Erbin*. Additionally I have followed the editor of *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, Brynley Roberts, for the (tentative) tenth-century dating of this poem, which seems to largely consist of a catalogue of pre-existing folkloric tales (as Roberts, 1991a: 78; Roberts has recently slightly modified this to '9th-10th centur[y]' in Roberts, 2006: 125).

It might be suggested that in what follows I have adopted radically early dates for two poems, *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Kat Godeu*, although many would perhaps suggest these deserve a place within our 'earliest stratum' anyway, even without this (see Sir Ifor Williams' oft-quoted comments on *Preideu Annwfyn*, placing it *c.*900 or earlier, in Loomis, 1956a: 131, and Coe and Young, 1995: 141; Bartrum, 1993: 594-6; see Ford, 1977: 183 for *Kat Godeu*). I am guided in this regard by the linguistic expertise of John Koch. Whatever one may think of his reconstruction of the textual history of *Y Gododdin* (see Isaac, 1999, for a detailed critique), there is no doubting the excellence of his linguistic scholarship. As Padel says, 'linguistically we feel safe in his hands', although he does criticize Koch's recent version of *Y Gododdin* for not separating out clearly enough stanzas dated on good linguistic grounds from those dated using other more debatable methods, such as textual history (Padel, 1998, quote at p.45).

Koch has repeatedly demonstrated that certain linguistic, orthographic, syntactical and metrical features within some stanzas of *Y Gododdin* are indicative of either a pre-800 or even a pre-mid-seventh-century written origin for these stanzas and he has used this same methodology to look at *Preideu Annwfyn*. He maintains that this poem too attained written form very early, quite possibly before the late eighth century, thus confirming Sir Ifor Williams' dating. Koch argues for this from both a linguistic and an orthographic perspective and his case seems reasonably strong – more so, even, than that for several of the stanzas he

so identifies in *Y Gododdin* (Koch, 1984; Koch, 1985-6; Koch, 1996: 264-5; Koch, 1997). Something similar may be said with regards to *Kat Godeu*. Although Koch himself has not explicitly set out the case, his work on 'Archaic' features in early Welsh poetry – including this text – is also used here to help construct a potentially similar case for the poem *Kat Godeu* (though this is often considered an 'archaic' piece and likely member of our 'earliest stratum' in any case). Consequently, I would strongly defend the *Preideu Annwfyn* dating adopted here, and potentially that of *Kat Godeu* too, whilst noting that even if this were not the case these poems ought nevertheless to be considered in the present survey.

This then is the basis of the selection of the texts considered in this study. Aside from *Pa gur* they all arguably date from before *c.*AD 900, if not considerably so, and as such they can be seen as the direct context of the 'historical' Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum* itself. It is to this context that we must now turn.

FOUR MEN NAMED ARTHUR

The earliest datable and indisputable evidence for the existence of the Arthurian legend comes in the form of four men who bear this name, all born between the mid sixth and the early seventh centuries. What does the appearance of these names tell us about the concepts of Arthur that existed in this period? Perhaps the most intriguing point to note is the wide geographical distribution. Three of the names relate to persons, or are connected with places, in Scottish Dalriada (southern Scotland): *Arturius*, the son of King Aedán mac Gabráin of Dalriada, who died in battle sometime before AD 597; *Artuir* son of Bicoir, who killed Mongan mac Fiachna of Ulster in Kintyre in AD 620 or 625; and *Artur*, the grandfather of Feradach, a churchman who stood surety for the law *Cáin Adamnain* in AD 697. The other, however, occurs as the name of a prince of Dyfed in southern Wales, *Arthur map Pedr*. He was born perhaps *c.*AD 570 or a little earlier into the Irish-descended ruling family of Dyfed and is mentioned in both the *Harleian Genealogies* and the eighth-century Irish *Expulsion of the Déisi* (Bromwich, 1975-6: 178-9). This is an extremely important point, and one which has often been overlooked.

Leaving the distribution to one side for the moment, the key question has to be what do these names actually signify? It is important to first of all recognize that none of these Arthurs can plausibly be considered as the 'original' Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum*. They are separated from the events of the late fifth century and the Battle of Badon by several generations, and are not renowned Saxon-killers, meaning that if we were to believe this then we would be put in the awkward position of having to utterly reject all of our early sources which have a demonstrable concept of Arthur as a historical figure. They all appear at the same

time, with none of them being obviously much older than the others (*Arturius* of Dalriada and *Arthur* of Dyfed were probably the earliest and they seem to have both been born *c*.AD 570 or thereabouts). Finally, what we know of their histories does not make them plausible models for the Arthurian legend (see Bromwich, 1975-6: 179; Roberts, 1973-4).[1]

Why then do these four men suddenly appear in the historical record? The usual assumption is one that satisfies many people's desire for a historical Arthur and would imply that such a person did exist – that is that they are all named after some renowned British warrior, perhaps of the previous generation. Sadly this would seem to be untenable. To have all four 'named after 'the historical Arthur' … would be a type of commemoration for which Celtic tradition offers no parallel,' as no less an authority than Rachel Bromwich has made clear (1975-6: 178-9).[2] So what can the solution be?

The only plausible explanation that has been proposed to this problem requires that, at the time these men were named, they were not being named in memory of some historical figure, but rather after a character already famed in legend and myth. Padel has observed, as others have done before him, that all the occurrences of the name 'Arthur' are recorded in Gaelic sources and occur in the context of the Irish settlers in western Wales and Scotland – who founded the kingdoms and royal houses of Dyfed and Dalriada – despite the fact that all of the early Arthurian sources portray Arthur as a Briton (see Bromwich 1975-6; Padel, 1994: 24). He suggests that the absence of this name from British contexts is due to Arthur being regarded 'with exceptional awe' as a legendary hero of folklore, whilst the Irish 'when they came into contact with the folklore as a result of their settlements in western Britain, need not have felt such reverence or reluctance' (Padel, 1994: 24). Consequently they made use of this name, perhaps in fact because of the above presumed overtones that were attached to it – certainly it would seem, on the basis of the other early sources discussed below, that Arthur's name may well have been commended to them as that of a 'peerless warrior' and even a military 'superhero' (see below on *Y Gododdin* and *Marwnad Cynddylan*, for example). Such would explain why some people with Irish connections at this time might have wished to possess this name in spite of any native British superstitions against its use.

As well as explaining satisfactorily all the available evidence, this suggestion gains considerable credence from the fact that a detailed study of the Welsh genealogical tracts reveals that not one single person of British descent in Wales (rather than Irish, as with Arthur map Pedr) bore the name 'Arthur' in the genealogies until the late sixteenth century at the earliest, a situation Bartrum suggests may well exist because the name had some sort of awe and superstition attached to it (Bartrum, 1965). Given this highly intriguing situation the above hypothesis gains considerable credence as the correct interpretation of the use of these names. Indeed, such a unique cultural contact situation combined with a

British awe of Arthur is the only explanation which accounts both for the curious
Welsh avoidance of the name Arthur and the appearance of the four names in
Irish-immigrant contexts, as well as Arthur's resolutely British nature in the early
material.

   This does, naturally, carry with it important implications for the concept of
Arthur that these names represent. Their presence, in light of the above, implies
that – whatever his ultimate origins may be – Arthur was seen by the mid sixth
century at least as a legendary and/or mythical figure whose name carried with
it sufficient awe and superstition that no Briton would make use of it, this 'taboo'
against his name only able to be broken by cultural 'outsiders'. Indeed, the most
obvious parallel is with Cú Chulainn – whose name was likewise avoided by
the Irish – suggesting that Arthur was seen in a similar light to this thoroughly
mythical figure (Sims-Williams, 1990a: 632; see now Olmsted, 1994 on Cú
Chulainn).[3] Furthermore, the wide geographical spread of those with Irish
connections who did make use of this name suggests that, even in the mid sixth
century, Arthur's fame was not limited to one particular area of Britain. He is a
figure of pan-Brittonic reputation according to even the earliest sources, who
happens to be recorded in these areas of Britain due to the presence there of
Irish settlements.

Y GODODDIN AND ARTHUR

There has been considerable debate in recent years over this poem. Essentially
it purports to tell the story of a battle fought by the war-band of the British
kingdom of the Gododdin, based in southern Scotland. This war-band seems
to have travelled to *Catraeth*, modern Catterick in the Vale of York, to fight the
Deirans, who may or may not be Anglian invaders, perhaps *c*.AD 570. Arthur
appears once in this poem – or, more correctly, collection of heroic death-songs
– in the following *awdl* (stanza):

> More than three hundred of the finest were slain.
> He struck down at both the middle and the extremities.
> The most generous man was splendid before the host.
> From the herd, he used to distribute horses in winter.
> [Gorddur] used to bring black crows down in front of the wall
> of the fortified town – though he was not Arthur –
> amongst men mighty in feats
> in front of the barrier of alder wood – Gorddur (Koch, 1997: 23)

It is generally agreed that *Y Gododdin* probably goes back to an original
composed sometime before AD 638. The relationship between this 'original' and

the later version known as the Book of Aneirin text is, however, problematical. The most important recent contribution to this debate has been that of John Koch. He has drawn attention to certain linguistic, orthographic, syntactical and metrical features internal to the text of a number of individual poems (stanzas) contained in *Y Gododdin*. These are highly suggestive of an underlying pre-ninth-century, and very likely even a pre-mid seventh-century, written original on which the current text is based (Koch, 1985-6; Koch, 1987a; Koch, 1991; Koch, 1997).

In general there seems to be a widespread agreement that Koch has made an extremely powerful case for Welsh literature, and parts of *Y Gododdin* in particular, having written origins in the period before the middle of the seventh century. Moreover, he has established a good methodology for identifying texts which belong to this earliest period (*Marwnad Cynddylan* is one very good and almost universally acknowledged example of seventh-century Welsh literature, confirming the reality of written transmission from this period). We must concur with Padel, Caerwyn Williams and others in recognizing the quality of Koch's scholarship and achievement in this regard. Caerwyn Williams is surely right in recognizing Koch's recent reconstruction of *Y Gododdin* as an 'excellent piece of scholarship and an outstanding contribution' to our understanding of the poem (Caerwyn Williams, 1998: 282-91 at p.291; Padel, 1998, at p.45; Clarkson, 1999: 1. cf. Isaac, 1996, for some debate on the use of syntax as dating criteria, however).

Nevertheless, even concluding that parts of *Y Gododdin* probably do go back beyond the ninth century does not necessarily remove all the problems associated with the Arthurian stanza. Unfortunately there are none of the pre-Old Welsh features in this stanza which might certainly indicate an early date for this. This is a general problem. It is unclear at present whether an early date can be extrapolated for some of the poems (stanzas) within the collection of heroic death-songs known as *Y Gododdin*, to all or to the majority of these. Koch has argued that this extrapolation should be made, at least for some of the other death-songs, on the basis of his reconstruction of both the history of the period and the history of the text of *Y Gododdin* itself. This is open, however, to debate and requires some further consideration.[4]

There are, as has often been noted, at least two different versions of *Y Gododdin* that have been combined to create the Book of Aneirin text. Charles-Edwards has suggested that one alternative way to approach the 'original' *Y Gododdin* is to look at which stanzas are shared by all texts. The absence of the Arthurian stanza from the A-text is thus seen as highly significant – it is only found in the B-text – and Charles-Edwards suggests that it should consequently be considered an interpolation into the text, probably belonging to the ninth or tenth century, which fits with its lack of Archaic features (Charles-Edwards, 1978 and 1991: 15). Koch, in his recent 'reconstruction' of the pre-638 *Gododdin*,

has nonetheless included this stanza in the 'original' poem. This is done on the basis of his notions of the development and transmission of the poem. He suggests that in addition to there being an A and a B text of *Y Gododdin*, the B text can itself be split into a B^1 and a B^2 text, which combined together to form the current version. According to Koch's proposed textual history of the poem, this B^2-text represents an 'Ur-text', that is the 'first recension' of the *Y Gododdin* composed before AD 638 in North Britain. In contrast, the B^1 and the A texts are considered to represent later, altered versions of the text. On this basis Koch assumes that the linguistic dating, for example, of some of the stanzas (poems) in the B^2-text to the early seventh century can be extrapolated to those stanzas which contain none of these features, one of which contains the Arthurian reference.

Certainly Koch has a very interesting case to make, based on orthography and the contents of the different texts. However, his arguments on the textual history of *Y Gododdin* have been strongly challenged by Isaac, on whose original research Koch based his theory of textual transmission. Even if this was not the case, doubts would still remain whether – in the absence of any definite linguistic or orthographic evidence from within the text of the stanza – the simple presence of the Arthurian reference in the B^2-text would be sufficient to guarantee its antiquity in the face of potential later interpolation (see Koch, 1996: 244-5; Koch, 1997; Isaac, 1999).

Whatever the date of this *awdl*, the nature of the Arthurian reference and its concept of Arthur does deserve comment. First it must be noted that the old assumption that the mention of Arthur in *Y Gododdin* 'proves' he was considered by the author of the poem to have been historical can no longer be accepted – the arguments with regards to this have already been rehearsed in Chapter 1. Given this we must look at what the poem actually has to say about Arthur. With regards to this its concept of Arthur is unambiguous. Although the hero of the *awdl* used to 'bring black [carrion] crows down' (i.e. slaughter his enemies), butchering 300 in this battle, he cannot be considered as valorous as Arthur – 'he was not Arthur/he was no Arthur'. As Koch has observed, 'Arthur is presented as the unrivalled paragon of martial valour and is thus used to form a highly unusual comparison by rendering explicitly inferior the honorand of the *awdl*.' Arthur was clearly viewed by the poet as 'the impossible comparison', a 'Brittonic superhero' and legendary paragon of heroism to whose heights of valour not even a man who killed 300 could compare (Koch, 1996: 242; Padel, 1994: 14). This concept of Arthur is highly interesting, especially if Koch is right about the early dating of this *awdl*, which is not impossible. It is certainly a concept that is not restricted to this poem, as is discussed further below. Finally, as the above comments make clear, it has to be recognized that this is a thoroughly legendary concept of Arthur – Arthur is implicitly portrayed as superhuman, not human, in *Y Gododdin*.

MARWNAD CYNDDYLAN AND SEVENTH-CENTURY CONCEPTS OF ARTHUR

If we cannot rely with confidence on *Y Gododdin* to tell us what concepts of Arthur existed in the seventh century, rather than in (as presently it seems safest to assume) perhaps the ninth century, there is another source which has much the same concept of Arthur as a paragon of valour which can be fairly certainly dated to the seventh century.

The archaic heroic elegy *Marwnad Cynddylan* ('The Death-song of Cynddylan', a seventh-century prince of Powys) only survives in manuscripts dating from *c.*1631 and later (the earliest is NLW 4973: 108ff, copied by Dr John Davies of Mallwyd). However, these are now accepted as accurate and reliable copies of much earlier originals. In fact the best and most recent survey of the evidence indicates that *Marwnad Cynddylan* was composed in East Powys immediately after Cynddylan's death at the famous Battle of *Winwæd* in AD 655 (Rowland, 1990; see also Koch, 1996: 245-6; Bromwich, 1975-6: 177; Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 5).

The concept of Arthur possessed by this poem is expressed through the implication that the military deeds of Cynddylan and his brothers are of such great and astonishing valour that these warriors might be seen as *canawon Artur fras, dinas dengyn*, 'whelps (children) of great Arthur, a mighty fortress/defender'.[5] Arthur's status as the ultimate standard of comparison and the greatest of warriors is of course apparent from both the praising of Cynddylan and his brothers as being of comparable valour to Arthur's children – note, but not Arthur himself – and Arthur's description as 'great' and 'a mighty defender' (the word *dinas* literally means 'fortress' but here has the sense of 'defender': Bromwich, 1975-6, p.177 n.3).

Clearly, therefore, the very legendary concept of Arthur as a 'paragon of heroism and valour,' the ultimate standard of comparison, was present in East Powys (roughly modern Shropshire) by the mid seventh century. This is most interesting and it confirms that this concept of Arthur is an extremely early one. It also shows that this concept of Arthur as a superhuman and legendary warrior was widespread even at this early date – it was known of in the Shropshire region, in northern Britain/southern Scotland if we accept Koch's arguments and in southern Wales and Scottish Dalriada, if we are to consider the use of the name by Arthur map Pedr and others as deriving from this concept, as seems very plausible. Even if the *Y Gododdin* reference dates to the ninth rather than the seventh century, this would still make it part of the earliest stratum of the legend and the frequent examples of this concept of Arthur as a legendary and superhuman warrior, the 'paragon of military valour', within non-Galfridian literature testifies to this being a fairly universal and popular concept. It is found in, for example, the poems *Kadeir Teyrnon*, *Gereint fil[ius] Erbin*, *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, and *Marwnat vthyr pen[dragon]*, as well as the works of the *Gogynfeirdd*, the court poets of the Welsh princes, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In addition to the concept of Arthur as the ultimate warrior and standard of comparison, there is also present in *Marwnad Cynddylan* a concept of Arthur as a 'mighty defender'. What is meant by this is not made explicit by the poem due to the brevity of its Arthurian reference, but it must surely be related to more detailed concepts of Arthur in which he is the Protector of Britain from all threats, usually supernatural but very occasionally historical (see further below and Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii–xxix; Van Hamel, 1934). As such it represents very good evidence that this concept of Arthur as a 'great' Protector was present even at the very earliest recorded stage of the Arthurian legend, though not, of course, what was actually meant by this in the context of this poem.

Overall, therefore, the concept of Arthur present in *Marwnad Cynddylan* is again legendary, not historical, and bears direct comparison to that of *Y Gododdin*, demonstrating the existence of this vision of Arthur in the mid seventh century. It is, nevertheless, unclear as to why exactly Arthur was famed as a mighty defender (see below for other and more detailed examples of this concept in the earliest stratum of evidence).

PREIDEU ANNWFYN: ARTHUR AND THE OTHERWORLD

The poem *Preideu Annwfyn* ('The Spoils of the Otherworld') is extremely intriguing; it is also, unfortunately, extremely difficult to interpret. Nonetheless there are considerable treasures contained within it for any consideration of what concepts and tales of Arthur existed in the earliest period. For this reason it, along with a related poem (*Kat Godeu*), is given extensive treatment below. The poem itself is contained within the Book of Taliesin (NLW Peniarth MS 2; *Preideu Annwfyn* is poem XXX), a manuscript which seems to date from the fourteenth century, but which contains some poems that probably belong to the authentic work of a sixth-century poet called Taliesin. Needless to say, *Preideu Annwfyn* is almost certainly not one of these. Rather it is a poem ascribed to what might be termed the mythical or semi-divine bard Taliesin (a separate character, whose relationship to the historical poet is still unclear), who seems to have been considered by some a son of the goddess Dôn, and others to have been made by the sons of Dôn (see Koch and Carey, 1995: 387, 388, for an explicit reference to his divine parentage).

As to *Preideu Annwfyn*'s date, this is a most interesting issue. If we follow Haycock (1983-4: 57), who has suggested that the date of composition cannot easily be narrowed further than to the Old Welsh period in general, then this poem does not deserve its place in the current discussion. There are, however, solid reasons for potentially rejecting her conclusions in this regard. In particular, Koch has made a reasonably powerful argument for a written version of the present text existing by no later than mid late eighth century, on the basis of certain linguistic

and orthographic features. These are namely the presence of inherited third plural mediopassive verbs in the poem, which had died out and are completely absent from Old Welsh texts, and a clear case of an incorrect modernization of -*or* > -*aur*, which is indicative of a written exemplar of *Preideu Annwfyn* being in existence before the later eighth century (Koch, 1984; Koch, 1985-6: 48, 57, 59; Koch, 1996: 264-5). Koch's research therefore confirms, vindicates and takes further Sir Ifor Williams' opinion that *Preideu Annwfyn* should be dated to *c*.900 or before, a position which has been supported by numerous researchers since, including Jarman, Budgey and Roberts (Williams in Loomis, 1956a: 131 – note that Williams, after comparing the poem to texts of a *c*.900 date, makes it clear that he feels that it may have pre-dated this to some unknowable degree; Jarman, 1981: 14 – 'a ninth-century work'; Budgey, 1992: 297; Roberts, 2006: 125). It thus seems that this poem not only deserves consideration here, it could well be almost as early a witness to concepts of Arthur as *Marwnad Cynddylan* is. The mid late eighth century is, after all, a *terminus ante quem* and the features Koch observes to provide this dating would be present in compositions of the seventh century too.

Given this, what concepts of Arthur are present in this text? The first and most important thing to understand about *Preideu Annwfyn* is that it is highly allusive. Like several other Arthurian texts, it appears to summarize a number of Arthurian tales that already had a separate existence when it was written and which must have been familiar to the poet's audience (Haycock, 1983-4: 55; compare *Pa gur*, discussed below, and *Culhwch ac Olwen*). Indeed, three of the allusions in the poem can certainly be shown to refer to tales that had an independent existence beyond this poem, and at least a fourth seems likely too – namely, the freeing from imprisonment of Gweir; the seizing of an Otherworld cauldron; the battle at Caer Ochren/Cad Achren; and probably also a battle at Caer Vandwy/a story of Arthur and the *Ych Brych* (see further below). This is, of course, significant, as the allusive nature of *Preideu Annwfyn* necessarily implies that the tales here summarized must pre-date the poem. Furthermore, if we are to understand the poem's concept of Arthur, we have the challenge of reconstructing these stories from the hints that it provides.

All the stories appear primarily to be tales of Arthur leading expeditions into the Celtic Otherworld in order to achieve various tasks, here brought together in a rough framework reminiscent of the gathering of independent Arthurian tales into the 'wooing' framework in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (Edel, 1983). The first stanza alludes to Arthur freeing a prisoner named Gweir from his bondage in an Otherworld island-fortress named *Kaer Sidi*, literally 'the fortress abode of the gods', later 'fairies' (Sims-Williams, 1982: 244; Haycock, 1983-4: 65). The basic nature of this tale demonstrates that the concept of Arthur found in this stanza is clearly mythical in character. This impression is further confirmed by the fact that *Kaer Sidi* also appears in poem XIV in the Book of Taliesin, where it is described as a place where 'sickness and old age are unknown, where there is music and

marvellous drink, and where the Otherworld divinities Manawydan [the Welsh equivalent of the Irish sea-god Manannán mac Lir] and Pryderi dwell' (Jackson, 1959b: 17; see also Loomis, 1958: 148-9).

This concept of Arthur as a liberator of prisoners from the Otherworld is a strong one in the pre-Galfridian British tradition. In the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* Arthur is responsible for freeing the former pagan god Mabon ap Modron from the probably euhemerized Otherworldly 'radiant fortress' (that is to say, a fortress falsely assigned a place in the 'real' world as part of a rationalization of a mythical tale). Similarly in both the probably twelfth-century *Ymddiddan Melwas ac Gwenhwyfar* and the *Vita Gildae* of Caradoc of Llancarfan (1120s or 1130s), as well as in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charette*, we find a pre-Galfridian Welsh story concerned with the rescue of Gwenhwyfar ('white/sacred fairy/enchantress') by Arthur from an Otherworld 'Island or Fortress of Glass'.

As to Gweir, Triad 52 refers to him as one of the 'Three exalted prisoners of the Island of Britain', confirming the traditional and independent existence of this tale (Bromwich, 1978a: 140-3). Further information on the nature of this underlying tale, and confirmation of its independent pre-existence, is also provided from the reference in line four of *Preideu Annwfyn*, where it is stated that Gweir's imprisonment was part of 'the tale of Pwyll and Pryderi', a description that has greatly interested many Celticists (Koch and Carey, 2003: 309). Pryderi, the son of Pwyll, is the prisoner in the Otherworldly fortress in the 'Third Branch of the Mabinogi', which is intriguing in itself. Furthermore, in the Third Branch the redactor gives the section on the imprisonment of Pryderi and Rhiannon the garbled title *Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord*, which Bromwich has pointed out may well contain a lenited (where a consonant is softened, or weakened – in this case until it is lost completely) form of the name *Gweir*. This obviously adds weight to Gruffydd's contention that *Gweir = Gwri Wallt Euryn*, the name given to the young Pryderi in the First Branch (Bromwich, 1978a: 377; Gruffydd, 1953: 33; Haycock, 1983-4: 65).

The possibility therefore would seem to exist that the tale of the Arthurian imprisonment and rescue of Gweir alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn* may be an early and alternative (more heroic) version of the imprisonment of Pryderi in the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi', in which Arthur played a major part according to the poem under consideration (as Jackson, 1959b: 18, and Jones, 1964: 14, have hinted). In this context the presence of Pryderi and Manawydan at *Kaer Sidi* fortress in the Book of Taliesin poem XIV may be both significant and potentially confirmatory of this hypothesis. After all, this is the only other appearance in medieval Welsh literature of the Otherworld fort that Arthur attacks in *Preideu Annwfyn* and at which Gweir is imprisoned. However, although this Manawydan is in fact also intimately associated with Arthur in the poem *Pa gur* (see below), one would not wish to push all this too far, given that the reference in *Preideu Annwfyn* is both brief and highly allusive.

We thus have in the first stanza of *Preideu Annwfyn* good evidence for the very early existence of an apparently thoroughly mythical Arthurian tale which is

here simply alluded to by the author on the assumption that it was familiar to his audience. Finally, before moving on, mention ought to be made of the ship in which Arthur is doing his rescuing, *Prytwenn*. This ship is named repeatedly throughout the poem and it also makes an appearance in the later tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The name literally means 'white shape', but in this context Ford's comments on the frequency and meaning of *gwen* ('white') with regards to the names of Arthur's possessions need to be borne in mind. *Gwen* carries with it the sense of 'pure, sacred, holy, Otherworldly' and Ford argues cogently that it should be taken to imply that most of Arthur's possessions emanated from the Otherworld (Ford, 1983). The name of Arthur's ship thus underlines Arthur's Otherworldliness in the concept of Arthur that is found in *Preideu Annwfyn*.

Moving onto the second and longest stanza, this alludes to a tale of Arthur stealing a magical cauldron from the Otherworld. This is said to be the cauldron of the Chief of *Annwfyn*, the Otherworld, which will refuse to boil the food of a coward and which is kindled by the breath of nine maidens (see Loomis, 1956a: 154-6). This testing, or discerning, cauldron has often been compared with the magical goblet of the Irish sea-god Manannán, which can distinguish truth from falsehood and was also won from the Otherworld (Budgey, 1992: 394-5). This particular raid on the Otherworld also has several analogues, including the much fuller episode in *Culhwch ac Olwen* in which Arthur sets sail with his war-band to Ireland to capture the cauldron of Diwrnach Wyddel (this tale seems to have been partly derived from pre-existing onomastic folklore, see Koch, 1996: 256-7. See generally on the traditional origins of the tales in *Culhwch*, Koch, 1996: 256-62; Edel, 1983; Roberts, 1991a: 74-81; Bromwich and Evans, 1992). The destination is obviously different, but Ireland ought to be seen, as Bromwich and Evans have noted, as a euhemerism for the Otherworld. In fact, the description of the cauldron of Diwrnach 'the Giant' in *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain*, 'The Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain', indicates that the *Culhwch* version is indeed a later development and rationalization of the Otherworldly tale in *Preideu Annwfyn*, as Bromwich and Evans contend:

> if meat for a coward were put in it to boil, it would never boil; but if meat for a brave man were put into it, it would boil quickly (and thus the brave could be distinguished from the cowardly) (Coe and Young, 1995: 89)

This clearly must be related to the description of the cauldron in *Preideu Annwfyn*. So here, again, we seem to have a genuine tale of Arthur raiding the Otherworld, this time for a magical vessel belonging, presumably, to a divine figure (it is not clear exactly who the 'Chief of the Otherworld' is to be identified with), with the tale's existence as an independent story of Arthur beyond this poem and its framework confirmed by the references to it in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and early onomastic folklore (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lviii-lix; Roberts, 1991a: 78, 87).

It is unclear, however, what the relationship is between this tale and its sole specific Welsh analogue, the divine Brân's expedition to Ireland in the late eleventh- or twelfth-century 'Second Branch of the Mabinogi', which was probably originally a raiding of the Otherworld for a magical cauldron (see Mac Cana, 1992: 39-40, strongly supported by Ford, 1983: 272; see also Chapter 4). Sims-Williams is of the opinion that we should think of a common story-pattern attached to different characters, rather than these tales being directly related to each other. This may certainly be true. Nevertheless his conclusion is partly based around his assumption that the whole of *Preideu Annwfyn* reflects a single expedition, a position which is disputed here and which means that he includes supposed analogues in his consideration that bear no relationship to this particular stanza (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 55-7; see Chapter 4 for a suggestion as to how they might be linked, if they are). Even if he is right, however, the fact that the sole Welsh analogue is to an expedition by a divine figure, probably originally the pagan Brittonic god of death (Koch, 1997: 199; Koch, 1989: 8-9), is in itself highly important in the present context for understanding the nature of the concepts of Arthur that existed in the eighth century or before.

One or two of Arthur's companions in this endeavour appear to be named in *Preideu Annwfyn* and their identity has caused some controversy. They occur immediately after the description of the cauldron of the Chief of the Otherworld:

cledyf lluch lleawc	The sword of Lluch Lleawc / flashing sword of Lleawc
idaw rydyrchit.	was raised for (or thrust into?) it.
Ac yn llaw leminawc	And in the hand of Lleminawc
yd edewit.	it was left.

Lleawc would certainly seem to be to be an Arthurian figure as, in the euhemerized version of this story found in *Culhwch*, a certain *Llen Lleawc* uses Arthur's Otherworldly sword Caledfwlch to kill Diwrnach and enable Arthur and his men to seize the magical cauldron (which again serves to demonstrate that the story in *Culhwch* is the same as the one alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*). It is possible that we can go further than just this, though. Loomis considered *lluch lleawc* as a whole to be a personal name and argued that 'Lluch Lleawc' and 'Lleminawc' ought to be considered one and the same person (a hypothesis which the nature of the passage above would seem to support), who can then be identified additionally with *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*'s Arthurian warrior *Lluch Llauynnauc/Llwch Llawwynnyawc*, who is in turn generally accepted as being the god *Lugus* (Irish *Lug(h)*, Welsh *Lleu*: Loomis, 1956a: 161-4; Foster, 1959: 34; Jarman, 1983, n.46; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 74; Bartrum, 1993: 418).

Most recently Haycock has, however, backed away from this, preferring to treat *lluch* as an adjective rather than a personal name, giving 'the flashing sword

of Lleawc', and thus expressing scepticism that we have here a *Lluch (Lleawc) Lleminawc* who can be equated with *Pa gur*'s *Lluch Llauynnauc* (Haycock, 1983-4: 70-1). Nevertheless both translations of *cledyf lluch lleawc* are possible and Bromwich and Evans have suggested that *Culhwch*'s *llenlleawc* was in fact originally *lluchlleawc*, *llen* having replaced *lluch* under the influence of the second element, an argument which would clearly seem to support the treatment of *lluch lleawc* as a single unit and hence a personal name (and which suggests that these authors see it in this light too: Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 88-9. Coe and Young, 1995: 137 similarly treat *lluch lleawc* as a name).

Once it is allowed that *lluch lleawc* can be treated as a personal name then there seems no good reason to reject Loomis' equation of a *Lluch (Lleawc) Lleminawc* with *Pa gur*'s *Lluch Llauynnauc*, despite the scepticism that has been expressed. Certainly Professor Jackson considered Loomis's equation of *lluch lleawc* and *lleminawc* with *Lluch Llauynnauc* as very plausible if *lluch lleawc* is treated in the above manner. On the whole it seems a perfectly reasonable notion which, if accepted, does then necessarily imply that here we have the god *Lugus*, given the accepted identification of *Lluch Llauynnauc* (Jackson, 1959b: 27. Bartrum, 1993: 407 and Foster, 1959: 34 also support equating *Llenlleawc/Lluchlleawc* with *Lluch Llauynnauc* and the pagan god *Lugus*/Lug(h)/Lleu). At any rate, even if Arthur were not to be seen as accompanied by *Lugus* in this tale, he is widely agreed to be so accompanied in other Arthurian sources (see especially *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, but potentially also *Kat Godeu*, discussed below; this very fact does, of course, in fact strengthen the case for believing that *Lugus* might be present here in *Preideu Annwfyn*).

The third stanza is difficult to interpret and little of value can be said of it. It seems more like a description of the Otherworld than an independent tale of a raid, though it finishes with the refrain that 'Three fullnesses of Prydwen, we went to sea, / Except seven, none returned from the frigid fort (*Caer Rigor*)' (Koch and Carey, 1995: 291). This suggests that just possibly some tale of Arthurian exploits in a frozen hell may have existed, if all the stanzas did refer to different tales, which is not certain (though the independent existence of many of the tales alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn* may be seen to support such an assumption).

The fourth stanza is also highly allusive, referring to an assault on a fortress guarded by 6000 men. Some idea of the tale underlying this stanza may be had from the fact that the fortress that Arthur sails to in his ship *Prytwenn* is the 'Fort of Glass', *Caer Wydyr*. Glass is a material that is associated with the Otherworld in Welsh tradition and the present Arthurian context also strongly brings to mind the Otherworldly 'Island/Kingdom/City of Glass' from which Arthur rescues his pre-Galfridian wife Gwenhwyfar ('white/sacred/Otherworld fairy/enchantress') after she has been abducted by Melwas, who in later Welsh poetry appears as a magician and enchanter who went to the 'end of the world' (as discussed in Sims-Williams, 1991: 58-61). As was mentioned briefly above, this tale is recorded in a number of sources – non-Galfridian Welsh, pre-Galfridian Cambro-Latin and

twelfth-century continental – signifying that it was a popular and widely known pre-Galfridian story and the location seems to be a secure part of this. Thus Melwas is the lord of *Ynys Wydrin*, the 'Island of Glass', in the non-Galfridian Welsh dialogue poem(s) known as *Ymddiddan Melwas ac Gwenhwyfar*, which is probably mid twelfth century in origin (Bromwich, 1978a: 383-4). Similarly Melwas is described in Chrétien's *Erec* and his *Le Chevalier de la Charette* as ruling over the 'Kingdom' or 'Isle' of *Go(i)rre / Voirre*, 'Glass' – where no thunder is heard, nor does lightening strike nor tempests blow; neither do toads or snakes stay there and it is never too hot or too cold, making its Otherworldly nature very clear.

Of particular importance, however, is the name given to Melwas' base in the *Vita Gildae* of Caradoc of Llancarfan, written in the 1120s or 1130s – *urbs vitrae* – which Caradoc also euhemerizes in his text as Glastonbury on the basis of a (mistaken) etymology for the place-name Glastonbury. *Urbs vitrae* is usually translated as the 'City of Glass', but as Caradoc seems to have been following a pre-existing euhemerised tale, not inventing a new one, this must be a Latin translation of an original name in the 'British tongue' – as Caradoc puts it – which would have been *Caer Wydyr* (compare *urbe Legionis*, which is translated into Welsh as *Caer Lion* in the Vatican Recension of the *Historia Brittonum*). *Caer Wydyr* would thus seem to be a genuine alternative for the *Ynys Witrin* that is elsewhere attached to this tale and to Glastonbury, and thus a genuine alternative name for the Otherworld that *Ynys Witrin* originally described and which was being euhemerized as Glastonbury (see further Sims–Williams, 1991a: 58-61). Given all this, it can be suggested that the appearance of an Otherworldly *Caer Wydyr* ('Fort of Glass') that has to be sailed to in *Preideu Annwfyn* ought, in fact, to be interpreted in light of the tale of Gwenhwyfar, Arthur and Melwas. As such it may perhaps be taken to indicate that this tale was known in *some* form as early as the eighth century (it should be remembered, of course, that this form could have been very different from that found in the sources that now survive).

Two other points can be made with regards to this stanza. First, Sims–Williams has suggested that the reason Arthur found it impossible to speak with the guards of the Fort is probably because this was an Otherworld fort that was defended by the dead (Sims–Williams, 1991a: 56; see the 'Second Branch of the Mabinogi' for the magically revived dead being deprived of the power of speech). Second, the phrase in line 30, *ny welsynt wrhyt Arthur*, can be translated either as 'they did not see Arthur's courage' or 'they did not see Arthur's size' (Haycock, 1983-4: 73). The former obviously fits well with the concept of Arthur as a paragon of valour, as outlined above. The latter fits well with the very clear concept of Arthur as a giant, which has been discussed by Grooms (1993) and Padel (1994) and is mentioned further below. It could well be that the poet used the word *wrhyt* deliberately to play on this ambiguity and reference both concepts of Arthur.

The fifth stanza is a little clearer. It seems to refer to a tale of Arthur retrieving from the Otherworld the *ych brych*, the 'speckled ox with its massive headring, /

one hundred and forty facets to its collar' (Koch and Carey, 2003: 311). Certainly this does seem to have been a well-known gigantic beast and Arthurian tale, as yoking it is one of the impossible tasks given to Arthur in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, which probably represents genuine pre-existing tales (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: li, 122-3; Chapter 4). It is also listed as 'one of the Three Prominent Oxen of the Island of Britain' in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* no. 45. Presumably, therefore, this stanza of *Preideu Annwfyn* is an allusion to an originally independent tale of Arthur capturing this massive beast in the Otherworld.

The fortress mentioned in relation to this endeavour, which *Preideu Annwfyn* remembers as 'an appalling tribulation', is *Caer Vandwy*, meaning something like 'the Fort of the Divine Place' (Koch and Carey, 1995: 291). This is significant for our understanding of the underlying tale because this fort is also known from a poem in the Black Book of Carmarthen, *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*, 'The Dialogue of Gwyddno Garanhir and Gwyn ap Nudd', which may be dated tentatively to the tenth century or perhaps a little later (Bromwich, 1978b: 20-1; Roberts, 1978; Rowland, 1990: 389). Here the former pagan god Gwyn ap Nudd declares that he 'saw conflict/battle before *kaer wandvy*' and speaks of the splendour and renown of he who led the host there, this *kaer wandvy* being unmistakably identifiable with the *gaer vandwy* of *Preideu Annwfyn* (Haycock, 1983-4: 75; Roberts, 1978: 314, 317; Rowland, 1990: 243-7, 506; see Chapter 4 on Gwyn ap Nudd).

This is most interesting. Clearly, given the fact that *Caer Vandwy* is otherwise unknown, the unnamed but 'honoured' assailant of *Caer Vandwy* is most naturally taken as a reference to Arthur and the above implies either that Gwyn ap Nudd was a member of Arthur's host when attacking this Otherworld fortress, or that he witnessed it (perhaps because he was inside and had the treasure Arthur sought). It may in this context be significant that six stanzas later in the Black Book text Gwyn ap Nudd appears to tell how he has been 'where Llachau was slain, / the son of Arthur, awesome in songs, / when ravens kept croaking over gore' (Padel, 2000: 50-1). Certainly Arthur and this former pagan god had several encounters, as *Culhwch ac Olwen* makes reference to two such tales, one in which Arthur has to capture Gwyn and another in which Arthur steps in as an arbitrator between Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr ap Greidawl, in the same way as Fionn does between the members of the Irish Divine Tuatha Dé Danann. This is, incidentally, yet another parallel between the two legendary story-cycles to add to those already convincingly demonstrated by Padel and Van Hamel (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii-xxix). Gwyn ap Nudd also appears as one of Arthur's men in *Culhwch* when Arthur travels to 'the Uplands of Hell' to kill the Very Black Witch, another tale which seems ultimately to stem from pre-existing folklore, though whether Gwyn was always associated with it is, of course, unknown. Whatever the case may be, it seems clear that the concept of Arthur here is one in which he belongs and functions in the realm of myth, having dealings with past gods and monstrous, Otherworldly beasts.

We can summarize our findings here as follows. *Preideu Annwfyn* is an archaic poem which has internal features indicating that it was probably first written down before the late eighth century. Indeed, it is not without the bounds of possibility that it could have been as early as the seventh century, on the basis of the features Koch observes. In addition it is a highly allusive poem which can be considered not to be inventing the stories of Arthur that it refers to, but rather summarizing several originally independent ones that were already in circulation, brought together here in a rough framework reminiscent perhaps of the use of Arthurian material in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Fuller versions of these stories must, by necessity, have been part of the mental furniture of the audience of *Preideu Annwfyn* in order that they might understand the now obscure allusions contained within it and therefore these stories must pre-date to some unknowable degree the composition of the poem (Haycock, 1983-4: 55).

The concept of Arthur found in these tales is an entirely mythical one. He is the possessor of an Otherworldly ship (which prefigures the fact that in *Culhwch* and other texts almost all his possessions seem to come from the Otherworld); he is a creature of mythological battles in the Otherworld, who rescues (probably divine) prisoners from the 'fortress abode of the gods' and who possibly played a role in some earlier and more heroic version of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi; he raids the Otherworld in pursuit of magical artefacts belonging to the ruler of that place, arguably assisted in his quest by the pagan god Lleu/Lug(h)/*Lugus*; he is clearly seen as a splendid and magnificently valorous warrior, with the implication that he may have been considered a giant in the underlying tales, something which other early texts also point to; he sails to and attacks a 'Fort of Glass', an endeavour that could be related to the apparently popular tale of the rescue of Arthur's fairy wife Gwenhwyfar from the Otherworld 'Island of Glass' ruled by Melwas, recorded more fully in later pre-Galfridian and non-Galfridian sources; and he pursues magical and monstrous beasts in the Otherworld, probably either in concert with or against the former pagan god Gwyn ap Nudd, with whom in later recorded stories he has several dealings. How old these stories are is unclear – though they were clearly well-known enough by the date of *Preideu Annwfyn* so as to need only the most obscure of allusions to be made in the poem – but the meaning of them is not. In the earliest literature which gives us more than the briefest mention of his name, Arthur 'belongs, like Fionn, to the realm of mythology rather than to that of history' (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxix).

PREIDEU ANNWFYN AND THE BATTLE OF THE BRANCHY TREES

There is still, however, one final stanza in the poem *Preideu Annwfyn* that needs discussion. The sixth stanza would seem ultimately to be another tale of Arthur's

capture of Otherworld animals, this time the 'beast they keep with a silver head', which is probably not a repetition of the *ych brych* (Budgey, 1992: 396). The reference is highly difficult and allusive once again, but the site of this struggle – 'a woeful conflict' according to *Preideu Annwfyn* – is most informative: it is fought at *Caer Ochren*, perhaps 'the enclosed fort'.

As Haycock has observed, *Predieu Annwfyn*'s Arthurian battle at *Caer Ochren* appears in later Welsh literature as *Cad Achren*, the 'battle of Achren/Ochren' (Haycock, 1983-4: 75; see also Budgey, 1992: 396). A fragment of a story about the battle *Cad Achren*, along with two early *englynion*, is preserved in the manuscript Peniarth 98B, which tells us that the conflict was between Arawn, Lord of Annwfyn, and the divine sons of Dôn 'because of a white roebuck and a greyhound pup' which were stolen from the Otherworld (Bromwich, 1978: 207). Clearly this fits very well with the story that is alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*, giving us confidence that this fragment represents the same genuine traditions that *Preideu Annwfyn* also drew upon. The fact that the divine sons of the goddess Dôn seem to have been involved is also very interesting, given the above comments on how the tales underlying *Preideu Annwfyn* often have Arthur consorting with and perhaps fighting alongside gods (*Dôn* being either related to Old Irish *Danu*, which lies behind *Tuatha Dé Danann*, or < *ghdh (n), *ghdhonos*, 'earth', i.e. '(Mother) Earth' – Koch, 1997). The fact that Arthur himself is not mentioned in the fragment should not concern us too much – it is, after all, fragmentary. Whatever the case, it is clear from *Preideu Annwfyn* that it was considered to be a battle in which Arthur was the primary participant in probably the eighth century.[6]

Can anything else be learnt of this battle? The answer, surprisingly, is yes. The fragment in question states unambiguously that *Cad Achren* is actually an alternative name for a battle called *Cad Goddeu* or *Cat Godeu*. That these two battles are in fact the same and are to be linked with the Arthurian battle at *Caer Ochren* is made clear from the various references to this conflict. Thus *Cat Godeu* makes its appearance in Triad 84 of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* as one of the 'Three Futile Battles of the Island of Britain', these being so-named because their cause was 'so barren'. Obviously this fits well with the description of the assault on *Caer Ochren* as a 'woeful conflict' in *Preideu Annwfyn*. The link is secured by the cause of *Cat Godeu* in the Triads: 'it was brought about by the cause of the bitch, together with the roebuck and plover' (Bromwich, 1978: 206). Further, in the Old Welsh poem *Golychafi Gulwyd* in the Book of Taliesin it is stated that the former gods Lleu and, most significantly, Gwydion, the son of Dôn, were present at the Battle of *Kat Godeu*, thus establishing another confirmatory link between *Cad Achren* and *Cat Godeu* (see Jones and Jones, 1949: xiii for the suggestion that this poem has its origins in the ninth century).

Taken together it seems that *Caer Ochren/Cad Achren/Cat Godeu* are one and the same Otherworldly and mythical battle in which, in the eighth century or before, Arthur was considered to have played a principle part. It seems clear that

it was a conflict that came about due to the stealing of one or more animals with a 'silver head' from the Otherworld and that it seems to have involved the divine sons of the goddess Dôn and possibly also the former god Lleu, Irish Lug(h), Common Celtic *Lugus* (presumably on Arthur's side as they fight against the Lord of Annwfyn).[7]

More details about the battle and confirmation of this mythical conflict's Arthurian associations are to be found with the highly archaic and difficult poem, again found in the Book of Taliesin, known as *Kat Godeu*. The name itself can be translated as something like 'The Battle of the Branchy Trees' or 'The Army of the Branchy Trees' and the highly mythical nature of this battle is made even more apparent. In the poem it is quite clear that the battle itself is actually being fought by trees, magically animated by the divine sons of Dôn and all fighting on the same side, against the forces of Annwfyn (Haycock, 1990: 310 n.7). This fact certainly helps explain why the alternative name *Cat Godeu* existed for this conflict and other occurrences of the name *Godeu* indicate that the forest which was seen as being animated by the sons of Dôn to fight this battle was the famed *Coed Celyddon*, 'the Caledonian Forest' (Bromwich, 1978: 540; Haycock, 1990: 308-9). Furthermore, the nature of the battle as an Otherworld struggle is embellished in this poem – the poet (the Taliesin of myth, rather than history) claims that he was at the battle itself and that the forces of Annwfyn faced by this magical and supernatural army of the sons of Dôn included monstrous and demonical creatures:

> I wounded a great scaly animal: a hundred heads on him
> And a fierce host beneath the base of his tongue,
> And another host is on his necks.
> A black, forked toad: a hundred claws on him.
> An enchanted, crested snake in whose skin a hundred souls are punished.
> (Ford, 1977: 184)

What is particularly significant about this poem is that Arthur was clearly conceived of as being present at this battle, as, towards the end of the poem, 'the druids of the wise one' are commanded to 'prophecy to Arthur' (lines 237-8, see Sims-Williams, 1991a: 51-2). Furthermore, Haycock – in the only detailed academic study of the poem – has argued convincingly that the 'Lord of Britain', whom the poet claims sang in 'the van of the tree-battalion', is probably meant to be Arthur too, here leading the army of magically animated trees – presumably for the sons of Dôn – an interpretation and role that is supported by, and is fully understandable in the context of, *Preideu Annwfyn* (Haycock, 1990: 298).

Obviously this poem and the *Preideu Annwfyn* reference work extremely well together to confirm both the mythical – even divine – nature of the battle and Arthur's principle role in leading this assault on Annwfyn and at least one of the

strongholds of the Lord of the Otherworld. Indeed, the Arthurian associations of this conflict, as evidenced in *Kat Godeu*, might be further supported by the fact that, in addition to *Caer Ochren*, the battle also seems to have involved another Otherworld fort, '*Kaer Nefenhir* where grass and trees attacked' (Ford, 1977: 184). As was the case with *Caer Ochren*, there is only one other reference in Welsh to a *Kaer Nefenhir*. This occurs in the Arthurian tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where Arthur's porter says he was with Arthur 'in the Caer of Nefenhyr of the Nine Teeth [*Caer Nefenhyr naw Nawt*]'. This is highly interesting, especially given that in the Book of Taliesin text of *Kat Godeu*, the name *Kaer Nefenhir* was immediately followed by the word *naw* ('nine'), but this word was then deleted. The implication is that the scribe was instinctively going to give a full name to *Kaer Nefenhir* that must surely be that found in *Culhwch* – indicating that he believed the two to be indeed the same – but then changed his mind as it would alter the metre of the poem.

In support of this it should be observed, moreover, that the fuller *Culhwch* version of the name fits very well with the nature of the battle as described in *Kat Godeu*, as 'Nefenhyr of the Nine Teeth' sounds very like the kind of monstrous enemy said to oppose the army of trees in the poem (Padel, 2000: 16 similarly sees this Nefenhyr as a 'fearful creature'). It might be objected that the section of *Culhwch* in which *Caer Nefenhyr* appears is actually a formulaic boast involving exotic and/or invented places to create a sense of wonder, rather than a true Arthurian tale (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 58-60). However there is no reason to think that some of these places mentioned by the porter could not have been traditional or the sites of genuine Arthurian adventures or episodes. *Caer Nefenhyr* clearly wasn't invented by the author of *Culhwch*, given its presence in *Kat Godeu*, and it is in fact paired in the speech with *Caer Oeth ac Anoeth*. This latter fortress is named in an otherwise lost tale of Arthur's imprisonment, mentioned in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* no. 52, and the war-band of this place is referred to in the *Englynion y Beddau*. Given this there is no reason to think that the reference in *Culhwch ac Olwen* to *Caer Nefenhyr naw Nant* should be seen as anything other than an allusion to the mythical battle here under discussion and additional confirmation of the Arthurian associations with this.

Given all this it has to be asked what then is the date of the poem *Kat Godeu*? Is it an earlier or later witness than *Preideu Annwfyn* to Arthur's involvement in, and the nature of, *Caer Ochren/Cad Achren/Cat Godeu*? Coe and Young have noted that, as it stands, the poem itself dates from later than the sixth century – they tentatively suggest a tenth-century date in its present form, which of course makes it part of our 'earliest stratum' – but they also note that it contains elements which may reflect much older sources, for example the possible survival of pagan tree-lore, a conclusion endorsed by Patrick Ford (Coe and Young, 1995: 141; Ford, 1977: 183).

Certainly the text of the poem is archaic and very difficult to understand. In fact the suggestion of a pre-tenth-century dating is supported by a number of

features internal to the text, and widely spread throughout it, which Koch has identified as indicators of a late eighth-century or earlier written original. These include what Koch considers two certain cases of a faulty modernization of pre-Old Welsh *uu-* (reflecting a pre-ninth-century, and potentially a seventh-century, written original of the text, though the exact dating of the change within written Archaic Welsh from *uu-* > *gu-*, which an original with *u(u)-* must have pre-dated, is disputed between Koch and Sims–Williams) and four instances of the use of the Archaic *(g)writh*, 'was made', rather than Old Welsh and later *gwnaethpwyt* (Koch, 1991: 112-3, 116; see Koch, 1985-6: 48-9, 55, 59; Sims–Williams, 1991b: 71-4; Koch, 1997: cxxviii, 90-3, 208, 209; Koch, 2003: 52-4). In this context the unusually high frequency of absolute verbal forms and especially Subject + Verb sentence constructions might well be seen to support an early date for the poem, with Koch and others seeing the latter particularly as archaic even by the time of the Cynfeirdd (Haycock, 1990: 307; see especially Koch, 1988: 28-30; Fife and Poppe, 1991; Koch, 1991; cf. Isaac, 1996).

Further to (and independent of) all this, Bartrum has recently suggested that *Kat Godeu* should be considered the only surviving example of Sir Ifor Williams' Form I of the Taliesin legend. Williams saw this Form as a pagan and mythological ('druidic') version of the Taliesin legend which underlies and pre-dates that which has come down to us in the *Ystoria Taliesin* – Form III – and the Book of Taliesin poems of the ninth and tenth centuries, such as *Angar Kyfyndawt* – Form II (Williams, 1954: 59-63 and 1957; Bartrum, 1993: 594-6; Ford, 1977: 17-21; Ford, 1992; Davies, 1996, chapter 4). This notion that *Kat Godeu* represents the only surviving member of the early and *originally* pagan Form I (it must be noted that there are Christian references throughout the text as we now have it) is both highly interesting and does, of course, fit well with the other opinions and dating evidence outlined above.

What can we say in conclusion? The fact that Arthur is involved in some major capacity in both of the earliest references to the conflict indicates that we have, in the sixth stanza of *Preideu Annwfyn*, the poem *Kat Godeu*, and *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a genuine Arthurian mythological battle which was quite widely known and (looking at the dates of both poems as argued above) in existence by just possibly as early as the seventh century and very probably by the mid to late eighth century. Of course, the story itself must predate its earliest appearance in the poems by some unknowable degree and it may potentially have pagan origins, though these must remain speculative.

As to the concept of Arthur, he is clearly mythological here – he appears (to judge from all the evidence) to be the leader of a magically animated army of trees against the monstrous forces of the Lord of the Otherworld, hence the ascription of the battle to him in *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Culhwch*, and his role in *Kat Godeu*. The battle seems to have been fought over one or more Otherworldly animals and to have involved the divine sons of the goddess Dôn too.

This is, of course, of the utmost importance for understanding the nature of the earliest concepts of Arthur and it supports to a very considerable degree the conclusions drawn at the end of the last section. One further point may also be noted, with regards to Arthur's association with this battle. As was outlined above, it is generally agreed that the trees magically animated for Arthur's battle were those of *Coed Celyddon*, 'the Caledonian Forest'. In this context it is difficult to avoid connecting this mythological Arthurian battle, which appears to have been known of by at least the mid late eighth century, with the *Cat Coit Celidon* ('the battle of *Coed Celyddon*') attributed to Arthur in chapter 56 of the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* and which is mentioned in no other 'historical' source. As with the *Historia*'s tenth battle, which appears as a battle against werewolves involving the former sea-god Manawydan son of Llŷr in *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, we may well have a situation in which a mythical Arthurian battle has been borrowed and historicized by the author of the *Historia* (or his hypothetical source) for his list of Arthur's supposed victories against the Saxons. Furthermore, in this case, unlike that of *Pa gur*, the texts in which this battle appear as mythical are clearly earlier (potentially by some large degree) than the *Historia Brittonum*'s claim that the battle was historical.

THE HUNTING OF *TWRCH TRWYTH*

The *Historia Brittonum* of AD 829/30 is often seen solely as the text in which the concept of Arthur as a historical figure first appears. It is important to recognize, however, that there are in fact two further references to the Arthurian legend in this work, in chapter 73. These occur amongst the *Historia*'s list of *Mirabilia*, 'marvels' or 'miracles' that were remarkable features in the landscape whose existence was explained by folk-tales. Significantly, the Arthurian *mirabilia* occur in a context that suggests that the author of the *Historia* was personally acquainted with them.

The most important of these is the tale of Arthur and the hunting of the giant boar Troit (also known as *Twrch Trwyth/Trwyd*). One episode of this hunt is located, in the folktale related in the *Historia Brittonum*, on the top of the mountain Corn Cafallt near Rhayader, Powys (SN9464):

> There is another marvel in the region which is called Buellt. There is a pile of stones there, and one stone with a dog's paw-mark on it is placed on top of the pile. When he hunted the boar Troit, Cabal – who was the dog of Arthur the warrior – left the imprint of his paw on the stone, and Arthur afterwards collected a heap of stones beneath the stone on which was the paw-mark of his dog, and it is called Carn Cabal [i.e. Corn Cafallt]. And men come and take the stone away in their hands, for the space of a day and

a night, and on the next day it is found again upon the pile (Bromwich and
Evans, 1992: lxvi)

Obviously, as it occurs in a work composed in AD 829/30, it clearly deserves a
place in this survey. Indeed, Dr Bromwich and Professor Evans consider that this
piece of folklore 'was already ancient by the ninth century', it being an example
of popular folk-legend which must have been in circulation before the *Historia*
was written (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxvi). Certainly it seems to be a tale that
was rooted in the local landscape, with a moorland tract named Rhos y Gaffallt
existing nearby, which may well have played some part in the story of the removal
and magical return of the stone from Carn Cabal, along with a lost Talken y
Gayallt (Roberts, 1991a: 90; Grooms, 1993: 148).

   The Carn Cabal topographic tale is, at least partly, an explanation of a
remarkable natural rock feature with reference to a magical animal belonging
to Arthur. This is a good fit with his character in this period, as revealed by the
sources discussed above. It also establishes for the first time a concept of Arthur
in which he is seen as a hero of popular topographic folklore, inhabiting the
remotest and wildest parts of the landscape, something which is clearly a major
part of his pre-Galfridian legend to judge from Padel's researches (Padel, 1994).
That the two *Historia Brittonum* references are the only certainly ninth-century
or earlier occurrences of this concept should not greatly surprise us, however.
The *Historia* is one of the only texts from this period that records such local
and 'vulgar' legends. Many examples of 'place-lore' did, in fact, escape written
record for many centuries and it is largely by sheer chance that we have these
two pieces recorded at such an early date (see Padel, 1994: 19). An interesting
Arthurian example of this unfortunate reality is that of the name *Caer Ogrfan* in
central Wales. This indicates the supposed site of the fortress of the giant Ogrfan,
father of Gwenhwyfar. This interesting name, however, is only known to date
back to at least the twelfth century due to the chance discovery of a charter in the
1950s; otherwise it went unrecorded until 1834.[8]

   The tale of Carn Cabal itself would seem ultimately to be part of a larger
saga, which told of Arthur hunting the giant and destructive boar *Troit*, and
protecting Britain from its ravages. It reflects, of course, the well-recorded
concept of Arthur in which he was the hunter of monstrous animals and the
protector of Britain from the damage these beasts cause (Bromwich and Evans,
1992: xxviii; Padel, 1994). The fullest version of this particular tale is found in
the probably late eleventh-century prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where the boar
is called *Twrch Trwyth*. Here the giant boar is said to have laid waste to one of
the five provinces of Ireland before threatening to 'go into Arthur's country,
and there … do all the mischief' – that is damage – it could, a promise it
then fulfils, massacring men and livestock throughout South Wales and hence
confirming the essential character of this event as a defence of Britain from

a destructive monster (see further Chapter 3; Jones and Jones, 1949: 131-2). Although the details of this are only recorded in the eleventh century, the nature of the reference in the *Historia* demonstrates that the core of the tale of Arthur's hunt and protection of Britain already existed by the early ninth century at the latest and that Arthur was always the hero of this (Padel, 1994: 3. See, for example, Edel, 1983; Roberts, 1991a: 74-81; Koch, 1996: 256-62; and Bromwich and Evans, 1992, for the folkloric origins of the Arthurian material in *Culhwch*). As to the boar being hunted, it is worth noting that, as Bromwich and Evans have pointed out, the *Twrch Trwyth* is not just any huge boar – it is a giant supernatural boar and, moreover, it would appear to originally have been 'a divine being in animal form', thus emphasizing the mythical nature of the concept of Arthur that we are here discussing (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxvii–lxx; Ford, 1977: 15-16; Ford, 1990).

In *Culhwch* the hunt is localized in a number of places across South Wales, such as Cwm Kerwyn, the highest point on the Preselly mountains, and various sites with names associated – either correctly or through folk-etymology – with pigs, these localizations perhaps deriving from local onomastic and topographic lore similar to that found in the *Historia Brittonum* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxviiff. and ln. 1095ff.; Rhys, 1901, chapter 9; Padel, 1994: 12; Roberts, 1991a: 76-7, 78, 91). It is interesting to note that *Carn Cabal* is not mentioned in *Culhwch*'s account of the hunt's itinerary: this might indicate that it was part of a separate localization of the path of the hunt or, less likely perhaps (though see Roberts, 1991a: 95 n.47), simply absent from this telling of the hunt, suggesting that the author of *Culhwch* was selecting for his account only a few of the sites linked with the boar-hunt in pre-Galfridian folklore. Both possibilities obviously imply that this was a popular and ancient – already ancient in the early ninth century, in all probability – pre-Galfridian tale in South Wales that was expressed through a significant body of Arthurian topographic folklore, much of which may have been lost.

We have already seen that the story of Arthur and this monstrous boar is considered 'already ancient' by the ninth century. Just how ancient may be indicated by the fact that *Twrch Trwyd* (the correct form of the name) appears in the *Gorchan* of Cynfelyn, found attached to *Y Gododdin* in the Book of Aneirin. In this the prowess of the hero of the poem is compared to that of the mythical giant boar *Twrch Trwyd* as it resisted its hunters. Given that *Twrch Trwyd* is always hunted by Arthur, this occurrence must be seen as being ultimately an Arthurian reference, as Jackson and many others have recognized (Jackson, 1969: 155; indeed, it may refer to a specific episode from *Culhwch*'s telling of the tale, as noted in Chapter 3).

The key question, therefore, is when was the *Gorchan* written? From how early was the tale of Arthur's hunting of the divine boar *Twrch Trwyd* known? Jarman suggests that the *Gorchan* is early and that it dates from some point after

the arrival of the A-text of *Y Gododdin* in Gwynedd, which he places in the seventh century, a position that R. Geraint Gruffydd concurs with when he proposes that the *Gorchan* of Cynfelyn 'seems perfectly acceptable as an example of seventh-century Gwynedd praise poetry.' Similarly Jackson agrees that the *Gorchan* considerably pre-dates the ninth century and thus 'bears witness to the existence of this tale [of Arthur hunting *Twrch Trwyd*] very early' (Jarman, 1989/90: 24; R. Geraint Gruffydd quoted in Klar, 1988: 122, n.15; Jackson, 1969: 155).

Obviously this is very important. It would seem that the *Gorchan* of Cynfelyn confirms Bromwich and Evans' verdict that the story and concept of Arthur hunting the monstrous boar was 'already ancient' by the ninth century. Indeed, the nature and likely dating of this reference suggests that it was well-known enough in seventh-century North Wales for an allusion to it to be understood. In fact, Klar and Sweetser go further and suggest that the Book of Aneirin *gwarchanau*, as we have them, are generally more archaic than *Y Gododdin* itself. As such they could well pre-date it and be a source for it, a conclusion Ford seems to agree with. Before accepting this uncritically it should be noted that there are some problems with this idea, as Jarman has observed (Klar, 1988; Klar and Sweetser, 1996: 91-2; Ford, 1987: 49-50; Jarman, 1988: lxvii–lxviii, lxxvii; see also Isaac, 2002, on Klar and Sweetser). On the other hand, Koch has addressed a number of the objections to dating *Gorchan Cynfelyn* to the sixth century and appears to believe that at least some parts of the poem might well belong to this period (Koch, 1987a: 273). Whether this is enough is to be debated, however, and, therefore, a sixth- or very early seventh-century date for the *Gorchan* of Cynfelyn – and thus potentially the tale of Arthur and the divine *Twrch Trwyd* – whilst tempting, is worth noting but not pursuing here, for the moment at any rate.

Finally, in addition to illustrating the non-Galfridian concept of Arthur as a hunter of supernatural and divine monsters in the wilderness and a protector of Britain from their depredations, the *Historia Brittonum* also points us to another popular concept of Arthur: that of Arthur the giant. This stems from the name of Arthur's hound, Cabal – *Cabal* (Modern Welsh *Cafall*) actually means 'horse'. The question must obviously be why Arthur's dog was named 'horse'? Bromwich and Evans (1992: lxvi–lxvii) suggest it may have been a mistake, that *Cabal* was in fact originally his horse. However *Cafall* is also used for Arthur's dog in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, implying a consistent Arthurian tradition and no mistake. Padel and Roberts have, conversely, argued that the answer is more plausibly that it was so named because it was a giant dog, as large as a horse, indicating in turn that Arthur may well have been seen as a giant too (Padel, 1994: 2-3, 14; Roberts, 1991a: 91). Certainly this concept of Arthur is very well supported in later traditions and it may well also have put in an appearance in the very early *Preideu Annwfyn* (see above and Grooms, 1993). This concept, at least with regard to Arthur's son,

is perhaps also present in the other piece of Arthurian folklore recorded in the *Historia Brittonum*:

> There is another wonder in the country called Ergyng (*Ercing*). There is a tomb there by a spring, called Llygad Amr (*Licat Amr*); the name of the man who was buried in the tomb was Amr. He was the son of the warrior Arthur, and he killed him there and buried him. Men come to measure the tomb, and it is sometimes six feet long, sometimes nine, sometimes twelve, sometimes fifteen. At whatever measure you measure it on one occasion, you never find it again of the same measure, and I have tried it myself (Morris, 1980: 42)

The region *Ercing* is Archenfield (Herefordshire) and the usual identification of the spring *Licat Amr* 'the eye [or source] of *Amr*' is the River Gamber in Herefordshire and its source Gamber Head in Llanwarne, next to which is a now-destroyed prehistoric tumulus which is presumably the grave. Clearly this 'marvel' is, like the one discussed previously, an onomastic topographic tale drawn from local popular folklore and here designed to explain the name *Licat Amr* and an associated grave. It thus supports and further evidences that concept of Arthur as a figure of local folklore and magic.

As to the notion of Arthur being a giant, the grave of his son which sometimes measures 15ft long is very suggestive in this regard, in the same manner as his dog which was as big as a horse. In this context it is also worth noting that an analogous piece of folklore, this time about Arthur's nephew *Walwen*, is recorded in William of Malmesbury's *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* of *c*.AD 1125, where the said grave is 14ft long (Padel, 1994: 10–11). Similarly Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyfar, and his constant literary companion, Cei, are also portrayed as giants in early sources (see, for example, Gowans, 1988 and *Pa gur*, below).

To sum up, in the *Historia Brittonum* we have two very valuable fragments of the early Arthurian legend. Their primary concept of Arthur is of him as a hero of popular folklore, inhabiting the remotest and wildest parts of the landscape. His world is one of magic and the supernatural: rocks that move themselves, giant, mysterious and magical graves, dogs as large as horses and mythical giant boars. Arthur is possibly already in the ninth century, if not even earlier, the giant he is recorded as being in later folklore. Furthermore he is portrayed as a great hunter, pursuing a mythical and divine monstrous boar all across the landscape of Britain, with the intention of both capturing this Otherworldly beast and – most importantly – protecting Britain from its ravages. This concept of Arthur appears from the *Historia* itself to have been 'already ancient' by the ninth century and other evidence indicates that his hunting of the boar *Twrch Trwyd* was in fact probably already well-known in the seventh century in Wales, if not indeed before. Once again we find that, in the earliest stratum of the Arthurian legend,

Arthur himself belongs to the realm of mythology and folklore, rather than to
that of history.

ENGLYNION Y BEDDAU AND THE MYSTERY OF ARTHUR'S GRAVE

The *Englynion y Beddau* ('Stanzas of the Graves') is a text which is, in essence, a
compilation of local Welsh place-lore. It explains unusual features in the landscape
with reference to the supposed resting places of dead heroes, who 'belong to
legend and folklore rather than to history'. As such the material found in it is most
closely comparable to the folklore recorded in the *Historia Brittonum*, which would
seem in its allusion to Amr's grave to represent the kind of stories that are being
summarized in the *Englynion y Beddau* (Sims–Williams, 1991a: 49; Padel, 1981: 64
and n.35; Jarman, 1983: 111). Whilst the earliest extant manuscript containing them
– the Black Book of Carmarthen – dates to the thirteenth century, there can be
no doubt that the vast majority of the *englynion* are far older than this. Thus the
Black Book text lacks the later *englynion*, such as those on Llywarch Hen which
date from the eleventh century, found in other manuscripts of the 'Stanzas'. In
fact, Rowland has recently dated the Black Book version to the mid to late ninth
century, supporting Jones' previous dating of this text to the ninth or tenth century.
As antiquarian records of oral tales and topographic folklore, they do, of course,
represent much older traditions than the date of the text itself (Rowland, 1990:
295, 388-9; see also Jones, 1967 and Koch, 1994: 1127 on the date).

   From the perspective of this survey, the *Englynion y Beddau* possesses an
extremely important and interesting concept of Arthur. The forty-fourth *englynion*
is generally considered to provide the earliest recorded evidence for a concept of
Arthur as a hero who had never died and would never die:

   Bet y March, Bet y Guythur
   Bet y Gugaun Cledyfrat
   Anoeth bid bet y Arthur

   A grave for March, a grave for Gwythur.
   A grave for Gwgon Red-Sword.
   The world's wonder a grave for Arthur.
   (Coe and Young, 1995: 100-1)

The interpretation of this passage hinges on the rare and archaic word translated
'wonder' in the above, *anoeth*. This literally signifies something very difficult/
impossible to obtain and/or achieve – it is also used in *Culhwch ac Olwen* to
describe the tasks that Ysbaddaden Chief Giant sets Culhwch and Arthur in the
expectation and hope that they will find them impossible to achieve – and the

above should be read in light of this (Jarman, 1983: 111; Bromwich and Evans, 1992; Sims-Williams, 1991: 49). The meaning is clear: Arthur's grave is a 'wonder/ marvel', a thing that is 'impossible to find/obtain/achieve'. He stands apart in this from the other great heroes of folklore and legend mentioned in the poem, a situation which is usually seen as being because Arthur – unlike the other warriors mentioned in the poem – was widely believed to still be alive (see Padel, 1994: 8-12; Bullock-Davies, 1980-2; Caerwyn Williams 1991: 262; and Loomis, 1959). That this is indeed the correct interpretation of this passage is demonstrated by two pre-Galfridian texts and a whole host of other material. Thus Herman's *De Miraculis Sanctae Mariae Laudensis* ('The Miracles of St Mary of Laon') records that in 1113 a denial that Arthur was still alive almost produced a riot in Bodmin, Cornwall:

> In just the same way as the Bretons are accustomed to arguing with the French about King Arthur, the same man [who had come to a shrine set up by visiting canons from Laon, northern France] began to bicker with one from our community by the name of Hangello of the community of Lord Guidon, Archdeacon of Laon, saying that Arthur still lived. Then there arose not a small tumult; many men rushed into the church with arms and if the aforementioned cleric Algardus had not prevented it, it would almost certainly have come to the spilling of blood. We believe the struggle at her shrine caused the displeasure of Our Lady, for the same man, having a withered hand, who made a fight about Arthur, did not receive a cure (Coe and Young, 1995: 46-7)

It is clear from this that the concept of Arthur as someone who had never died and was still living was common to the folklore of at least the Cornish and the Bretons. Furthermore, it was obviously very dear to the hearts of the populace in general and thus not an elite belief, as is occasionally claimed (as Padel, 1994: 9, has demonstrated). This provides a very good context for interpreting the *Englynion* reference and the latter must surely be seen in light of this. That this ought to be the case is, in fact, further confirmed by the following comment found in William of Malmesbury's pre-Galfridian *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, written in the mid 1120s:

> *Sed Arthuris sepulcrum nusquam visitur, unde antiquitas naeniarum adhuc eum venturum fabulatur.*

> But Arthur's grave is nowhere seen, whence antiquity of fables still claims that he will return. (Padel, 1994: 10)

The first part of this very clearly must be related to the description of Arthur's grave as *anoeth* in the *Englynion y Beddau*, whilst the second part confirms that

anoeth does indeed imply what it appears to – that Arthur's grave is 'impossible to obtain/find/achieve' because he has never died (hence the possibility of his expected return) just as the Cornish and Bretons believed according to Herman's *De Miraculis Sanctae Mariae Laudensis*. This concept of Arthur is further corroborated by the Anglo-Norman poetic text *The Description of England*, written in the 1140s, which attributes a belief in Arthur's continued existence and expected return to the Welsh (Padel, 1994: 11). It is also mentioned in a commentary on the *Prophetiae Merlini*, written in the second half of the twelfth century, which informs us that this notion was common to the Bretons, the Welsh and the Cornish (Caerwyn Williams, 1991: 262; see also Geoffrey of Monmouth's treatment of the last deeds of Arthur: Padel, 1994: 11-2). Indeed, a belief in Arthur's eternal nature is repeatedly and often scornfully referred to in a number of other texts from the twelfth century onwards (see Bullock-Davies, 1980-2). As such, and given that local people appear to have been willing, in Cornwall at least, to riot about this, this concept must be seen as powerful, pan-Brittonic and ancient, going back at least to the ninth century – in light of the texts discussed above there is no other plausible interpretation of the *Englynion* reference.

This is clearly a thoroughly folkloric and mythical concept of Arthur as eternal. Although in Anglo-Norman and post-Galfridian texts of the mid twelfth century and afterwards, we find Arthur's continued life and expected return linked with the expulsion of the English from Britain, there is no reason to think that this was part of the concept reflected in the *Englynion y Beddau* reference. There is no hint of it in this text, nor do the other pre-Galfridian sources – Herman's *De Miraculis* and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* – make any such reference, and it would seem implausible that such a belief might be part of the Breton conception of Arthur's immortality that clearly existed in the pre-Galfridian period. Most notably in this respect Arthur is conspicuously absent from *Armes Prydein*, a poem of the tenth century in which ancient heroes and other characters (including Cynan, Cadwaladr and Myrddin/Merlin) are called upon to return to lead and rally the Britons and their allies into battle against the English. This strongly argues that Arthur was not part of the group of heroes expected to lead this action, as Padel has noted (1994: 9-10; see also Padel, 2000: 61-2 for further examples of this situation).

Indeed, the return motif itself is not to be found in either the *Englynion y Beddau* or the *De Miraculis*, suggesting that it too may be an accretion to an originally simply eternal concept of Arthur. Thus the description of Arthur's grave as *anoeth*, 'impossible to achieve', might well be best seen as purely a reference to him being still living because he will not, and cannot, die or be killed. This may, indeed, be paralleled and understood in light of the fact that Arthur's closest companion, Cei, is described in *Pa gur* in the following manner: 'Unless it were God who worked [*or* accomplished] it, Kei's death could not be achieved', or 'would be

impossible/unattainable' (Koch and Carey, 2003: 313; see Chapter 4 for Cei and his very close relationship with Arthur).

To conclude, this concept of Arthur as effectively 'eternal' must be seen, once again, as a concept in which he is believed to be somehow fundamentally different from the other, non-Arthurian, legendary warriors of folklore he is collocated with, as in *Y Gododdin*. It is also one in which Arthur clearly belongs to the realms of myth. He was a warrior whose grave was *anoeth* – something impossible to find or achieve – as he, unlike all the other renowned and folkloric heroes mentioned in the *Englynion y Beddau*, has never been buried and never will be, presumably because he was never, and could never be, slain. In the present context this is, of course, potentially highly significant.

In addition to this concept of Arthur, there is one other stanza of the *Englynion y Beddau* that deserves mention:

> The grave of Osfran's son is at Camlann,
> after many a slaughter;
> the grave of Bedwyr is on Tryfan hill.
> (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 50)

Camlann is, of course, Arthur's last legendary defeat – as it is always associated with Arthur, this *englynion* must be considered to be an Arthurian reference. Its presence in this text indicates that it was a tale that was current from at least the ninth century, if not earlier, and from the very beginning it was renowned as a ferocious and bloody conflict.

What concept of Arthur is present with the reference to this battle? By its very appearance in the *Englynion y Beddau* it is revealed as a battle associated with local legend and topographic folklore, which is a highly important point in itself. Going beyond this text and looking at the many early Welsh references to this battle, it has to be said that the milieu of Camlann seems to be wholly legendary and mythical – thus it appears in folkloric and mythical texts such as *Culhwch ac Olwen*. This impression is furthered by the fact that a central role in its cause is ascribed by the Triads, the medieval Welsh poets and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, to Arthur's wife, Gwenhwyfar. This 'white/sacred fairy/ enchantress' has been persuasively argued by Ford, on the basis of her name, to be in origin another of Arthur's Otherworldly possessions, reinforcing the idea that this is a battle that belongs to myth and folklore rather than anything else (Ford, 1983; see Chapter 4 on Gwenhwyfar).

This becomes even clearer when we realise that, aside from Camlann itself, the other major early tale regarding Gwenhwyfar sees her being rescued from an Otherworldly fortress in a manner reminiscent of *Preideu Annwfyn* – something which makes one wonder about Camlann's nature too (Sims-Williams, 1991: 58–61). Indeed, it is intriguing in this context that in Welsh tradition there were

only seven survivors of the Battle of Camlann, a narrative element which is visibly paralleled in *Preideu Annwfyn*'s constant refrain at the end of each tale of an Arthurian Otherworld battle that, 'but for seven, none returned' (Bromwich, 1978a: 161–2). It is also perhaps significant that, from *Culhwch* onwards, one of these few survivors of Arthur's war-band was consistently the mythical Morfran ('Great Raven') son of Tegid, who appears in the *Hanes Taliesin* as the son of Ceridwen and of whom it was said in *Culhwch* that:

> no man put his weapon into him at the Battle of Camlann because he was so ugly, everyone supposed he was an attendant devil; there was hair on him like the hair of a stag (Coe and Young, 1995: 63)

This is particularly relevant in the present context because, as Sims–Williams notes, it seems likely that there is some relationship between this mythical survivor Morfran and the 'Osfran's son' of the *Englynion y Beddau*, suggesting that the mythical elements go back to the very earliest reference to Camlann (Sims-Williams, 1991: 51; Ford, 1977: 159–64 on Morfran and Ceridwen).

In fact it is only in the mid tenth-century Latin *Annales Cambriae* (and texts that are derivative of this) that Camlann is claimed as a historical battle. The authority of the *Annales* on sixth-century matters is highly dubious, however, and as such no real faith can be placed in this claim (see Chapter 1). In addition to the important points mentioned above, it should be remembered that the Battle of Camlann is absent from the only source that modern historians are even willing to consider putting any faith in, the *Historia Brittonum* battle-list, and there are no hints of it possessing any historicity in the Welsh references. Indeed, the Battle of Camlann seems to have been treated very differently by the 'guardians of Welsh tradition' when compared to, for example, Badon – something which implies, in Welsh tradition, a very different conception, portrayal and origin when compared with Badon (Bromwich, 1978a: 160–2, 276). Thus Badon is completely absent from both *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, unlike Camlann, and it never gathers such consistent mythical overtones as Camlann had.

Finally, and most importantly, let us not forget that the earliest reference to this battle is in the *Englynion y Beddau* itself, a text which deals with 'folklore and legend, rather than … history' and which was in existence by the ninth century. Camlann's presence here testifies to it being intimately linked from the very earliest period with local folklore and the explanation of unusual features in the landscape, something much more comparable with the concept of Arthur found in chapter 73 of the *Historia Brittonum*, discussed above, than that found in chapter 56 (Jarman, 1983: 111; Padel, 1981: 64 and n.35; Jones, 1967). Given all the above, and the legendary context of the battle in the other non-Galfridian Welsh references, Camlann must be treated here as a battle belonging properly to the Arthurian legend rather than to any possible Arthurian history.

If Camlann should thus be seen as a legendary and folkloric concept of Arthur, involving Arthur's Otherworldly wife in some way, it is also true that the fundamental concept of Arthur implied by this stanza of *Englynion y Beddau* is obviously at variance with that discussed above, given that Arthur is obviously thought to have died in this battle. How can this be squared with the very strong and equally early tradition that Arthur never died and never could die? In fact a solution is fairly obvious. The existence of two conflicting concepts may well simply reflect the fact that both concepts appear to have their origins in popular folklore. There is no reason to think that this would have been uniform across Britain and both concepts could very easily have co-existed within different communities. This situation can be paralleled from the folklore surrounding the Gaelic Fionn mac Cumhaill. Fionn has, as noted earlier, long been recognized as an extremely close analogue of the early Brittonic Arthur and he is reputed to have died both in battle (sometimes involving treachery) and also when he attempted in his old age the leaping feats of his youth (see Padel, 1994, particularly p.22).

Before concluding, the presence of Bedwyr in the *Englynion y Beddau* similarly deserves comment. Bedwyr is one of Arthur's main – and superhuman – companions in the Welsh Arthurian legend, found in *Pa gur* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*, and his appearance in one of the Arthurian stanzas implies that even in the earliest stratum of the legend he was considered a companion of Arthur (indeed, it also emphasizes the legendary associations, even at this very early date, of the Battle of Camlann). *Alld Tryvan* probably refers to Tryfan in Snowdonia, but unfortunately no other non-Galfridian references to a tale of Bedwyr's death have survived – nevertheless, however he died, it is worth noting that he is here a figure of topographic folklore in the same way as Arthur is in the *Historia Brittonum*. This is further confirmed by another text that belongs to this 'earliest stratum', the ninth- or (probably) tenth-century poem *Marwnat Cadwallon ap Cadfan*, which records one of the battle-sites of the seventh-century King Cadwallon (d.634) as *Ffynnawn Uetwyr*, 'Bedwyr's Spring', a name which must stem from some kind of topographic legend (Koch and Carey, 2003: 373; see Bromwich, 1978a: 151 and Rowland, 1990: 388-9, for the dating and Skene, 1868, II: 443 for an identification of the site).

This then is the evidence of the *Englynion y Beddau*, a text which is a compilation of local Welsh place-lore, explaining unusual features in the landscape with reference to the supposed resting places of mythical/folkloric heroes. These pieces of local folklore seem to have been first brought together in the 'Stanzas of the Graves' in the ninth century (some think even potentially the eighth century), but by their very nature they must represent antiquarian folklore that was already current at that point in time and which was therefore older than the *Englynion* to some unknowable degree. The concepts of Arthur alluded to here are clearly folkloric by their very appearance in this text.

This initial impression is reinforced and taken much further by an examination of the references themselves. Of particular importance is the belief that Arthur was still alive and could not be killed, which seems (from other references) to have been very widespread and strongly held. Various other aspects of the Welsh Arthurian legend also make their first appearance in this text, suggesting that they too belong to the earliest stratum of the Arthurian legend and that from the earliest recorded period they were associated with local folklore and legends. These aspects include the Battle of Camlann, which was viewed in Welsh literature as a purely Arthurian and legendary conflict, that had Otherworldly overtones and which involved Arthur's 'fairy' wife, and Bedwyr, the constant superhuman companion of Arthur in the later Welsh legends.

BRETON ARTHURS AND *GEREINT FILIUS ERBIN*

There are two final sources of information about the nature and spread of the Arthurian legend which can be dated with a reasonable degree of confidence to the period before *c.*AD 900. The first requires little detailed discussion but is illuminating: four names corresponding to Arthur appear in charters from Redon, Brittany, dating to between 868 and 878. These should probably be viewed in the same light as the earlier occurrences of the name Arthur in Wales. Most significant from our perspective is that they indicate that Arthur's name (and presumably therefore some element of his legend) was known in Brittany from at least the ninth century. The importance of this is obvious – in the 'earliest stratum' of the Arthurian legend it appears (from all the evidence discussed here) that Arthur was known in southern Scotland, North and South Wales, Shropshire and Brittany. He seems, by *c.*AD 900 at least, to have been a genuinely pan-Brittonic figure, famous wherever British-speakers were to be found (the absence of references from Cornwall is not significant given the paucity of surviving early material from this region).

The second source of information is a reference in the poem *Gereint fil[ius] Erbin* ('Geraint son of Erbin'). The date of this poem is often given as falling between the ninth and eleventh centuries, but Dr Rowland would seem to consider a mid to late ninth-century date as defensible, a position recently supported by Roberts, hence its consideration in this survey (Rowland, 1990: 241, 389; Roberts, 2006: 125; Sims-Williams, 1991a: 46; see also Bromwich, 1978b: 20-1; Roberts, 1978; Koch, 1994: 1127, as with *Englynion y Beddau*, has suggested that this poem too could have its origins in the eighth century). The poem concerns a battle fought at 'Llongborth' and it takes the form of a eulogy to one Geraint. Geraint himself is usually identified as a Dumnonian prince from the late sixth century, whilst Llongborth could be Langport (Somerset) or some miscellaneous *llongborth*, 'ship harbour' (Jarman, 1983: 106; cf. Sims-Williams, 1991a: 46-7).

The Arthurian reference comes in the eighth stanza and it is best translated as follows: 'At Llongborth were slain brave men of Arthur – (they) used to slay with steel – the emperor [*ameraudur*], the ruler of battle' (see Sims-Williams, 1991a: 47–8 for the solution to the different readings in the Black Book and the Red Book, whose translation is adopted here). What can this mean? Despite many tortured attempts to read this poem as proving particular theories about Arthur, such as that of Morris (1973: 104-6), there is a simple and well-paralleled explanation for this reference that requires no such convoluted theorizing and shameless speculation. The formula 'brave men of Arthur … the emperor, the ruler of battle' essentially represents a comparison such as that universally agreed upon as lying behind the phrase 'whelps of great Arthur, a mighty defender' in the seventh-century poem *Marwnad Cynddylan*. The formula in both texts is clearly identical. It is a comparison honouring (and referring to) the subjects of the poem, in this case Geraint and his slain brothers-in-arms who feature in the next stanza, which forms a clear doublet with this one. The sense is clearly that they were so valorous that they might be called/likened to 'brave men of Arthur' just as Cynddylan and his brothers are of such great valour that they might be called/likened to 'whelps of great Arthur'.

This fully and satisfactorily explains this reference to Arthur, and the underlying concept of Arthur implied by such an honorific comparison – that of him as a 'peerless warrior' – is in fact just that very concept that the poem displays in its description of Arthur as the 'ruler of battle' (literally 'the leader/ruler/lord (in the) toil/labour (of battle)'). There is no cogent reason or justification for interpreting this passage any differently to the virtually identical reference in *Marwnad Cynddylan*.[9]

The reference in *Gereint* must thus be seen as another reference to Arthur as the great 'military superhero' of British legend, the ultimate standard of comparison. Looking at the rest of the reference, the description of Arthur as 'emperor', *ameraudur* (< Latin *imperator*), might just possibly foreshadow Geoffrey of Monmouth's imperial Arthur of the twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*. More interestingly in the present context, his role as the 'ruler of Britain' in the mythical poem discussed above, *Kat Godeu*, might also be compared. Indeed, the imperial character of the concept of Arthur in this poem should not be overemphasized, given that 'the strict meaning of the word is probably closer to 'general, commander', etc.' (Jarman, 1983: 106).

PA GUR YV Y PORTHAUR? AND STORIES OF ARTHUR

The final poem to be investigated in this study comes once more from the Black Book of Carmarthen. *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* ('What man is the gatekeeper/porter?', also known as *Ymddiddan Arthur a Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr*, 'The Dialogue of Arthur and Glewlwyd Great-Grasp') is an important pre-Galfridian Arthurian dialogue poem.

Whether it can really be said to belong to the very earliest stratum of the legend (i.e. that in existence before *c.*AD 900) is, however, open to question. For this reason it is dealt with last and is perhaps best used as context for the other references and as an illustration of the types of stories of Arthur that were circulating in the Old Welsh period, rather than anything else.

With regards to the date, *Pa gur*'s composition is often placed around the same period as the other Black Book *Ymddiddan*, that is the tenth century (as suggested most recently by its editor, Roberts, 1991a: 78), illustrating the above concerns. Indeed, it does need to be borne in mind that later dates for the poem have been proposed and, further, that Koch has suggested that not only is a date of initial composition in the ninth century not implausible, one in the eighth century also cannot be ruled out (Bromwich, 1978b; Roberts, 1978; Jarman, 1981: 6; Bromwich, 1983: 45; Roberts, 1991a: 78; Koch, 1994: 1127; see also Koch, 1996: 254). As such, the poem could potentially be very early indeed, or may not be. However, whatever the date, it must be recognized that *Pa gur* is, itself, simply a summary of many earlier mythical Arthurian tales that are simply brought together in this poem (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 38). Thus even if we accept the likely tenth-century date proposed for the composition of this poem by the poem's editor (and thus its presence in the earliest stratum, if not the very earliest), as seems very reasonable, the stories it relates must necessarily pre-date the poem and therefore they might well have been in existence by *c.*AD 900. As Roberts has recently observed, *Pa gur* can consequently be taken as indicative of 'the nature of the Arthurian world in Welsh literature of entertainment in the 9th-10th centuries' (Roberts, 2006: 125; see further Chapter 4 for some of the individual tales alluded to being in existence in the early ninth century).

Accepting this judgement, the key question must henceforth be what the natures of these stories are and what concepts of Arthur are displayed in them? This is easily answered, as the world of *Pa gur* is very clear: Arthur is the head of a wandering company of folkloric heroes and pagan gods who exercise magical and superhuman powers. In the extant portion of the poem Bedwyr and Cei are Arthur's main henchmen and its general world is one in which Arthur and his men fight battles against numerous enemies, including cynocephali (dog-headed men), witches and the monstrous Palug's Cat.

Some brief mention ought to be made of the character of Cei in early Arthurian tradition, given his prominence in this poem. He is, along with his almost constant companion Bedwyr, Arthur's chief companion in the pre-Galfridian legend. He is also the 'Sir Kay' of later Romance. In *Pa gur* he appears as a perfect and superhuman warrior: 'Vain was a host / compared with Cei in battle', who would 'slay enough for a hundred' and who could not be killed by anyone other than God himself (an interesting point of comparison with the concept of Arthur himself, discussed above). Furthermore Cei is consistently portrayed as a giant

in Welsh tradition – this too is referenced in *Pa gur* – and in the probably late eleventh-century *Culhwch ac Olwen* prose tale, which has the space to go into much more detail than the allusive *Pa gur*, Cei's magical and supernatural nature is very clear indeed:

> Cei had this peculiarity, nine nights and nine days his breath lasted under water, nine nights and nine days could he be without sleep. A wound from Cei's sword no physician might heal. A wondrous gift had Cei: when it pleased him he would be as tall as the tallest tree in the forest. Another peculiarity had he: when the rain was heaviest, a handbreadth before his hand and another behind his hand, whatever would be in his hand would remain dry, by reason of the greatness of his heat; and when the cold was hardest on his comrades, that would be to them kindling to light a fire (based on Jones and Jones, 1949: 107)

Finally Cei is, like Arthur, a folkloric figure whose name appears to have been often associated with topographic features and folklore. Thus, for example, a pass in Snowdonia had, by the twelfth century, the name *Gwryd Cei*, 'Cei's fathom, Cei's armspan', in reference to his giant size (Padel, 2000: 111; Richards, 1969: 262-3; Grooms, 1993).

Returning to *Pa gur*, the poem begins as a dialogue between Arthur and Glewlwyd:

> 'What man is the gatekeeper?'
> – 'Glewlwyd Great Grasp;
> what man asks it?'
> – 'Arthur and [*or* with] Cei the fair.'[10]
> – 'What [band] goes with you?'
> – 'The best men in the world.'
> – 'Into my house you will not come
> unless you vouch for them'
> – 'I shall vouch for them,
> and you will see them,'
> (Lines 1-10: Sims-Williams, 1991a: 40)

This porter scene is probably a stock narrative formula of vernacular story-telling – analogous scenes are to be had in chapter 32 of the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* and in *Culhwch ac Olwen* – which is ultimately derived from Celtic mythology and associated with the god *Lugus* (see Koch, 1996: 261; Koch, 1992).[11] Interestingly, it has been suggested that the word *gwared*, which Sims-Williams translates as 'vouch for', may be best translated as 'disclose, discover, reveal', which would give 'I shall reveal them, and you shall see them' with reference to Arthur's men. Thomas Jones

has brought attention to this word and has intriguingly argued in light of this that the sense of the passage should thus be taken as indicating that when Arthur and his followers arrive at the gate they are invisible and that, 'since Arthur promises to reveal them' so that the porter can 'see them', one of Arthur's "endowments' or magical gifts in the background story was the power to make his men invisible'. Certainly this fits well with the early and strong tradition that Arthur possessed an Otherworldly mantle called Gwenn ('white, pure, sacred, holy, Otherworldly') that granted invisibility (Jones, 1964: 16-7; Bromwich, 1983: 45; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxxv; Ford, 1983: 270). It also fits with the fact that in *Culhwch* one of Arthur's men, Menw son of Teirgwaedd, had this same ability. In the Triads (no. 28W) Menw is said to have been taught the, unspecified, 'Enchantment of Uthyr Pendragon' by Arthur's father himself – this might well be seen as significant in the present context (see further below on Uthyr; Bromwich, 1978a: 56, 520-3). This 'ability', if this can be taken as a reference to it, obviously implies that Arthur was considered to be a figure of magic and folklore by the author of *Pa gur*. It would also help confirm the picture drawn from the other sources of Arthur as someone inhabiting a world of magic and who may well possess supernatural characteristics himself, such as his potential giant-like stature.

After the above passage the poem develops into a list of Arthur's men and their exploits, recounted by Arthur himself. It is worth briefly dwelling on the names of the figures who are said to be part of Arthur's war-band and thus his dependents. Cei has already been mentioned and his legendary and folkloric nature is abundantly clear. Aside from Cei, one particularly interesting warrior is Mabon son of Modron, who is indisputably the pagan Celtic god *Maponos*. Aside from in *Pa gur*, Mabon is also closely associated with Arthur in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where he is rescued by Arthur's men from his imprisonment and he takes part in the hunting of *Twrch Trwyd*. As well as being one of Arthur's warriors in *Pa gur*, Mabon is, most curiously, said to have been the servant of Arthur's father, Uthyr Pendragon – however, the import of this is unclear (on Uthyr, see Chapter 4 – he does seem to have been Arthur's father in pre-Galfridian tradition, as well as later, and the possibility exists that he was the Brittonic god of death, Brân, under one of his bynames: Koch and Carey, 2003: 314-5, 419; Koch, 1997: 199. On Mabon, see Jarman, 1983: 108, and Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 152).

Another is Manawydan son of Llŷr, who is famous from the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. He is generally considered to have originally been identical with the Irish sea-god Manannán mac Lir, though recently it has been suggested that he was actually the pre-Roman King Mandubracios of the Trinovantes who had in fact become equated and conflated with the sea-god by the time of *Pa gur* and other early Welsh literature (Jarman, 1983: 108; Bromwich, 1978a: 442; Koch, 1987b; see, however, Olmsted, 1994: 306, who argues that the Irish god is a borrowing from the Brittonic Manawydan, this figure being originally 'the

ruler of the otherworld dwelling in the Elysian fields in the West, bordering the Ocean', which fits with his description in Poem XIV in the Book of Taliesin). The latter point is crucial, if Koch's notion is accepted, as we are here concerned with the concepts of the characters that are present in the Arthurian sources that we have and thus what they can tell us of the concepts of Arthur that existed, not the ultimate origins of these characters themselves. As such Manawydan's presence must be taken as indicative of a mythical concept of Arthur in this poem, whatever this figure's origins may be. Indeed, Manawydan as this Otherworldly figure is also briefly associated with Arthur in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (where he helps hunt the *Twrch Trwyd*), and in poem XIV in the Book of Taliesin he is said to dwell with Pryderi in the Otherworld fortress *Kaer Sidi*, literally 'the fortress abode of the gods'. This latter is particularly interesting given that, in *Preideu Annwfyn*, a tale is alluded to of Arthur and his men travelling to *Kaer Sidi* to rescue Gweir, who should probably be seen as Pryderi (see above for full discussion).

Finally, Arthur mentions as one of his men *Lluch Llauynnauc*, 'Lluch of the Striking Hand', whom Idris Foster has identified with the god *Lugus* (Irish *Lug(h)*, Welsh *Lleu*: Foster, 1959: 34; Jarman, 1983, n.46; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 74). We have already seen that this former divinity is perhaps present as one of Arthur's men in *Preideu Annwfyn* and it also ought to be remembered that an early Book of Taliesin poem placed him with Gwydion, the son of Dôn, at the Battle of *Kat Godeu*, which seems to have been originally an Arthurian conflict (he also appears in *Culhwch ac Olwen*: see Chapter 4).

Obviously all this is of considerable interest given the stories discussed earlier in which Arthur seems to have been intimately involved with various former deities and possibly fought alongside or for them. This is clearly a strong and abiding element in the earliest Arthurian tradition. Even though these specific figures might ultimately be considered accretions to the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend, the concept of Arthur found here – which is what we are primarily concerned with – is indisputable and extremely clear. The evidence cited above suggests that such mythical and Otherworldly associations were both very early and well-established.

Once these introductions are made in *Pa gur*, Arthur – as now the only speaker in this dialogue poem – proceeds to summarize a number of Arthurian tales that were clearly already in existence and known to the author and audience in a much more detailed form (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 38). There is a brief mention of Cei fighting at *Celli*, which is usually taken as the earliest reference to Arthur's traditional court of *Kelliwic*, a place often located somewhere in Cornwall, but which means 'forest grove' and thus may have no 'real' location. Indeed, Ford has suggested that it may have originally been envisaged as somewhere Otherworldly – sacred groves being common in Celtic myth – and only later might a specific location have been ascribed to it (Ford, 1983).

The poem then briefly lists some of the exploits of Arthur himself and Bedwyr:

> Though Arthur laughed [*or* ?played]
> he caused the/her blood to flow
> in Awarnach's hall,
> fighting with a witch.
> He pierced Cudgel(?) Head
> in the dwellings of Disethach.
> On the mountain of Edinburgh
> he fought with dogheads.
> y the hundred they fell;
> they fell by the hundred
> before Bedwyr the Perfect [*or* Perfect-Sinew].
> On the shores of Tryfrwyd,
> fighting with Rough-Grey,
> furious was his nature,
> with sword and shield.
> (Lines 37–51: Sims–Williams, 1991a: 41–2)

Arthur is clearly not the chivalrous knight of the Middle Ages – he is rather a folk-hero who laughs as he bloodily kills a witch in the hall of *Awarnach*, who was probably the giant *Wrnach* killed by Arthur's men in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, indicating that this was probably already a tale associated with Arthur in some form by the time of *Pa gur*. Certainly Arthur is frequently portrayed as a giant-killer in non–Galfridian literature and folklore and this story fits well with this. The killing of witches, and thus the protection of Britain from their power, also recurs in early Arthurian legend, with a further nine witches killed in an Arthurian battle referred to in *Pa gur* itself. It is similarly found in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, where Arthur is accompanied by the divine Gwyn ap Nudd when he goes to kill the Very Black Witch *yg gwrthtir Uffern*, 'in the Uplands of Hell', a task he achieves by using his Otherworldly knife, Carnwennan, to cut her in two.

Nothing more is known of the story of Arthur's fight with *Penpalach*, 'Cudgel-head' – he too is presumably some kind of threatening and monstrous enemy that Arthur must fight. As for the dog-heads, or werewolves if we prefer, it is perhaps significant that they are fought at Edinburgh by Arthur, on the very edge of the Brittonic world, reflecting very clearly Arthur's role as a defender of Britain from all attacks, supernatural or otherwise (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii, xxxvii and Chapter 3).

The conflict at Tryfrwyd would also appear to be another battle against dog-heads, with 'Rough-Grey' being the famous *Gwrgi* ('Man-Dog') 'Rough-Grey'. Furthermore, a reference earlier in the poem indicates that not only was Bedwyr there, but so too was the former sea-god Manawydan son of Llŷr

(Sims–Williams, 1991a: 40-2; Bromwich, 1978a). This latter Arthurian battle is particularly interesting as it is mentioned once more in Arthurian literature: it appears in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 as one of the 'historical' battles that Arthur is supposed to have fought! Clearly the story here attached to the battle, where it is clearly mythical in nature, associated with werewolves and former gods, is incompatible with such a notion and we must surely think in terms of its appearance in the *Historia* as being a historicization of a mythical conflict, as discussed in the section on *Kat Godeu* (see further Chapter 6).

In the rest of the poem we have several allusions to lost Arthurian tales, involving Cei, Bedwyr and Llacheu (who we know from other sources to have been Arthur's son in early Welsh tradition) fighting, for example, nine witches, along with various descriptions of these people which emphasize their legendary and mythical status. The final conflict mentioned by the poem (lines 81-90) is a battle against *lleuon*, 'lions, wild-cats' and the monstrous and enormous sea-cat *Cath Paluc* ('Clawing Cat', later 'Palug's Cat') which can only be defeated using a polished shield, here attributed to Cei. In other texts this features Arthur rather than Cei and it seems probable that all the sources are recounting a generally Arthurian battle, with Cei simply made prominent in *Pa gur*'s telling and Arthur used elsewhere (see further Chapter 3 on this tale; Bromwich, 1978a: 486-7; Jarman, 1983: 109; Sims–Williams, 1991: 45-6). Indeed, this probably applies to all the battles referred to in the poem – certainly, as we have already seen, the Arthurian battle against werewolves at *Traeth Tryfrwyd*, mentioned in *Pa gur* (lines 19-22, 48-51) as involving both Bedwyr and the sea-god Manawydan son of Llŷr, is included in *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 as Arthur's tenth battle (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of this phenomenon).

The poem *Pa gur* thus can be seen to confirm and extend many of the characteristics of the earliest stratum of the Arthurian legend that we have already identified. Whilst its date is not certainly within the very earliest part of our period, it is probably tenth century in date and it is clearly based on earlier tales that might well have their origins before the tenth century, even if the poem itself does not. Furthermore its concept of Arthur is an entirely mythical and folkloric one. Arthur leads a band of superhuman warriors (there are hints in *Pa gur* of the magical abilities of Cei that are found in later texts, including the fact that he was a giant) and former gods, who engage in battles against witches, werewolves and cat-monsters with the aim of defending Britain from supernatural threats, whilst Arthur himself may have the ability to make his followers invisible.

THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM* CHAPTER 56 IN CONTEXT

This, then, is the context of the 'historical Arthur' of chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the nature and reliability of

this text is such that it can only be said to show that, for one author in the ninth century, Arthur was a historical warrior who won battles against the Anglo-Saxons over 300 years earlier, in the late fifth century. It thus cannot *prove* that Arthur was historical and no modern historian is willing to consider it in this way. At best it might be taken to suggest that such a figure just *might* have existed, and even then the evidence arguably points heavily the other way, towards a conclusion of 'it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely on the basis of this evidence'. The question is can the *Historia* even do this? Is the *Historia*'s evidence sufficient to allow this even very uncertain conclusion to be drawn?

Taking the *Historia* on its own, we might be justified in accepting the idea that it is unlikely given the nature of the evidence, but it cannot be ruled out entirely. However this is very poor methodology, as has been outlined above. We have no good reason for considering the *Historia* reference in splendid isolation, distinct from the other Arthurian references of which it forms an integral part. In reality, the only way to decide whether the *Historia Brittonum*'s chapter 56 might even possibly reflect reality or whether this Arthur is in fact a legendary or mythical creature made historical by this text, or its hypothetical source, is to place this reference in the context of all the rest of the early Arthurian literature.

Dr Padel has made one attempt to do this, reaching the conclusion that this context points clearly to Arthur being seen as a figure of folklore, myth and legend, the leader of a band of heroes who live outside of society, whose main world is one of magical animals, giants and other wonderful happenings, located in the wild parts of the landscape, and in all aspects he appears to be closely paralleled by the character of the former deity Fionn mac Cumhaill. Arthur is associated with the Otherworld, supernatural enemies and superhuman deeds, not history, in virtually all the sources other than the *Historia* and those few texts derivative of it – he appears to be, as others have observed, the monster-slaying and peerless tutelary Protector of Britain against all supernatural threats (Padel, 1994; Van Hamel, 1934; Bromwich and Evans (eds), 1992: xxviii–xxix). As such the balance of probabilities must heavily lie with the *Historia*'s Arthur being this figure historicized.

This chapter has taken a similar approach, but focuses specifically on the earliest material, including some literary sources that Padel only briefly touched upon (such as *Preideu Annwfyn*). The conclusion from this present survey is clear – in *all* the sources which seem to be as old as and, in some cases, perhaps up to two centuries older than chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*, Arthur appears to be conceived of as a figure of myth, legend and folklore, not history. The focus on these early sources only, along with the very clearly mythical nature of Arthur in many of these, does in many ways make our conclusion even more robust and clear-cut.

The evidence for this conclusion is discussed fully above, but it is worth here recapping the key issues. No early sources other than the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 have the concept of a 'historical' Arthur found in that text. Arthur is never made to fight the Germanic invaders, nor is he placed at Badon. Even in the shortest and most ambiguous and 'sober' allusions to Arthur, such as *Y Gododdin* and *Marwnad Cynddylan*, where he is a warrior and not associated with supernatural events, mythical battles or the Otherworld, Arthur is still a figure of legend. He is, as Koch and others note, the 'ultimate comparison', a 'Brittonic superhero' to whom even a man who killed 300 in one rush cannot compare.[12] He is thus, in conception, a warrior of legend and folk-tale, not history.

In those texts which include more than the briefest of allusions to Arthur this picture becomes even clearer, with Arthur's mythical, legendary and folkloric nature obvious and indisputable – and these texts dominate the 'earliest stratum', especially when we consider that several of them seem to be drawing on (or imply the existence of) multiple popular tales that pre-date these sources to some considerable degree. They thus indicate the existence of a corpus of *very* early Arthurian tales with an Otherworldly or supernatural bent which is far greater and more extensive than that which we now possess. When we consider that there are so few sources datable to the ninth century and before – and that so few of these are of the type that would record, for example, topographic folklore – we must count ourselves lucky that we have as much evidence as we do.

In these tales Arthur is a Fionn-like hero of popular folklore, inhabiting the remotest and wildest parts of the landscape. His world is one of magic and the supernatural and he hunts monstrous and divine creatures in this world and the Otherworld, in part protecting Britain from their ravages. He is clearly a 'mighty defender' of Britain from supernatural threats in even the very earliest recorded period, and he would appear to be the leader of a band of superhuman and mythical beings in his adventures. He leads an army of magically-animated trees in a mythical battle against the Otherworld and its demonic defenders, alongside the divine sons of Dôn, a tale which seems to have been widely known and quite probably underlies one of the *Historia Brittonum* battles. He is frequently associated with both the Otherworld and former pagan gods, either fighting against or with them. Arthur is, for example, the releaser of a divine prisoner from an Otherworld fortress and he raids another Otherworld stronghold in search of a magical cauldron belonging to the Chief of Annwfyn, quite possibly with the assistance of the god Lug/Lleu/*Lugus* (if we allow *Pa gur* as an early source then it becomes even clearer that his band of warriors actually regularly included several of these former divinities). His ship is portrayed as Otherworldly in origin, as is his wife (though her presence in this material is inferred), and he himself would seem to be thought by some to be a character who has never died and who can never be killed. Indeed, there are clear hints that he was considered to have been a giant, with gigantic relatives, companions and hunting dogs, and furthermore – in *Pa gur*

– he may have the power to make his men invisible. Most interestingly, his name appears to have been deliberately avoided by Britons from the very beginning, implying that it was viewed by them with considerable awe and superstition.

All these concepts are present in the 'earliest stratum' of the Arthurian legend and many aspects of all this would potentially seem to have been known by the seventh or eighth centuries, if not earlier.[13] As such this picture of the nature of Arthur in the earliest sources would remain largely unchanged even if we restricted ourselves to references that seem to fairly certainly pre-date chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*. Indeed, it is worth noting that *Pa gur* was included above as illustrative material. If, however, the possibility that it (or, even more plausibly, its folkloric sources) had its origins in the ninth century is admitted then the above case becomes even more overwhelming. This is especially the case given that it features Arthur defending Britain from numerous supernatural enemies (witches, werewolves, cat-monsters and probably giants). Most significantly, another one of the supposedly historical battles from the *Historia* appears in this text as a conflict involving dog-heads, the supernatural hero Bedwyr and the former sea-god Manawydan son of Llŷr.

The context of chapter 56 of the *Historia* is thus made clear. When the 'historical' reference in the *Historia* is pulled out of its context and viewed in isolation then, as we have seen, it *may just possibly* represent the distorted traditions of a historical figure, but at least equally as well, if not very much more so, it may not. The only way to decide once and for all between these two options is by placing chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* in the context of the whole body of Arthurian material – as we have seen here, the conclusion that must be drawn from such an exercise is inescapable. When chapter 56 is viewed, as it must be, in the context of the body of material of which it is an integral part, this 'just possibly but probably not' evaporates.

All the other evidence that belongs to the 'earliest stratum' of the legend – indeed, the vast majority of all the pre-Galfridian material, it must be remembered[14] – portrays Arthur as an entirely legendary and mythical figure of the same type as the Gaelic Fionn and he is never connected in this material in any way with either the Saxons or Badon. As such, given the methodology outlined previously, there is simply no reason to think that there was a historical Arthur – there is, on the evidence we have, no more need to believe in a historical Arthur than there is to postulate a historical Fionn. The 'just possibly' only appears when it is forced to, when the few references to a 'historical' Arthur are divorced from their context and made to answer questions regarding the possibility of a historical Arthur. If we ask what the material as a whole actually says then it appears to very clearly tell of a legendary figure of folklore named Arthur who was historicized in one text in much the same way as Hengest or Fionn were – the serious possibility of there ever having been a 'historical Arthur' who was the 'original' from whom all the later tales spring is simply

a construct based on a misuse of the sources. Once we understand the nature of Arthur in the early sources, the choice of explanation for chapter 56 of the *Historia* is made for us.

The fact is that the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* – an untrustworthy and unreliable source for events in the late fifth century – does not in itself provide the necessary proof that would allow us to disregard the context of the earliest material (which, in parts, can be dated up to two centuries before the *Historia* was composed). Thus on the basis of this evidence reviewed so far we are forced to conclude that there is, at present, no cogent reason to think that there was a historical post-Roman Arthur. The 'true' Arthur must therefore be considered to be that figure described above and in the work of Padel and others (see further below). A historical late fifth- or early sixth-century Arthur is not in any way necessary to the understanding of the pre-Galfridian Arthur and the evidence we have makes the postulation of such a figure not only unnecessary but also unjustifiable.

THE NATURE OF ARTHUR: SOME CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis obviously means that the entirely mythical and folkloric Arthur that has been observed in the 'earliest stratum' of the pre-Galfridian legend must be seen as the original Arthur. For methodological reasons we have restricted ourselves only to these earliest sources, but the general picture painted here is to be found in all the other non-Galfridian material, which would seem to be indicative of this concept's longevity and strength. Nevertheless, only concentrating on material that can be dated with some degree of confidence to the ninth century or before does bias the overall picture somewhat towards those types of stories recorded in these particular texts and perhaps under-represents concepts which might be equally as early, but are not recorded in such sources (some of these other sources not considered, it must be emphasized, could in fact actually date from as early as the ninth century, as was noted in the introduction to this chapter). For this reason – and now that the main point of this chapter has been made – before going on to look at the ultimate origins of this folkloric and mythical Arthur, it is worth bringing all of the non-Galfridian evidence back together. The aim of this is to allow us to briefly enumerate the key aspects of the character of this very unhistorical Arthur, and ensure that we move forward based on a balanced assessment and understanding of his nature.

First and foremost Arthur was a peerless warrior, to whom no-one else could compare. This concept is clearly found throughout both the early and late non-Galfridian material, such as in *Y Gododdin*, *Marwnad Cynddylan*, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Kadeir Teyrnon*, *Gereint fil[ius] Erbin*, *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* and the works of the *Gogynfeirdd*. Indeed, this fact seems to both underlie the

Historia's account of Arthur in chapter 56 (see Chapter 6) and it might well be why the name Arthur proved briefly so attractive to some people between the mid sixth and early seventh centuries.

This concept clearly has to be related to (and probably derived from) Arthur's very clear role in non-Galfridian tradition as the monster-hunting and slaying Protector of Britain from all supernatural threats, including destructive divine boars, cat-monsters, witches and dragons. That this was Arthur's main role in non-Galfridian tales has long been recognized and the primacy of this concept has recently been reaffirmed by Bromwich and Evans (1992: xxviii-xxix; also Roberts, 1991a: 84). Indeed, it must be this key aspect of his nature that led to him being historicized in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 (see Chapter 6). To quote Van Hamel, the 'Arthurian story shows that in Britain he [Arthur] performs the same function as Finn in Ireland. He protects the land in every way. It was but natural to represent a hero of this type as the victor over the Saxons' (1934: 27). Associated with this may well be the long-lived and pervasive notion that Arthur had never died and could never be killed, which is also clearly present in the 'earliest stratum' of the legend. It is easy to see how this concept of Arthur as an eternal warrior might emerge in popular folklore from his role as the peerless Protector of Britain; if he is to fulfil this role then he must always be at hand to fight supernatural threats.

In addition to this role, Arthur himself was a figure of magic and folklore – particularly topographic folklore – from the very earliest stages of his legend, as exemplified by *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73. He is the leader of a band of superhuman heroes who live outside of everyday society in the wilds of the landscape, associated with magical creatures, strange rock formations and wonderful happenings, and both he and his companions are often portrayed as beneficent giants. This giganticism is maintained even in some post-Galfridian Welsh tales, such as the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Breuddwyd Rhonabwy, 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', but it finds its primary expression within British topographic folklore, from the beginning of our records of this right through to the modern era (Padel, 1994; Grooms, 1993: 113-28; Lloyd-Morgan, 1991). This magical and supernatural side of Arthur's character is further glimpsed in the fact that he may have originally had the ability to make his men invisible, whilst his father is an enchanter and, it seems, a shape-shifter, according to the Triads. Lastly, that Arthur's name was viewed by Britons with remarkable awe and superstition at least as far back as the sixth century, fits with this concept of his nature.

Finally, Arthur was intimately connected with the Otherworld, a concept to some degree related to the above. This aspect of the early Arthurian legend comes out very strongly in the 'earliest stratum' of the pre-Galfridian evidence and the present survey has emphasized that this was a robust and established part of Arthur's character. The concept of Arthur as being closely connected with the Otherworld is in fact rather more dominant in this material as compared with the concept of Arthur as a Protector of Britain, although a

wider view of the pre-Galfridian legend does redress this balance. Nevertheless, it may be worth keeping this in mind when looking at the ultimate origins of Arthur and even in those texts which cannot be certainly dated into the 'earliest stratum' this concept is still widely evidenced. Arthur frees prisoners from Otherworldly fortresses, he arbitrates between mythical and divine beings, he is frequently associated with both the Otherworld and former pagan gods, and his possessions are clearly Otherworldly in origin. This concept is found in *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Kat Godeu*, but also appears strongly in, for example, *Pa gur yv u porthaur?*, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Ymddiddan Melwas ac Gwenhwyfar* and the *Vita Gildae* of Caradoc of Llancarfan.

In all of his fundamental characteristics this non-Galfridian Arthur very closely parallels Fionn Mac Cumhaill. Thus, as Van Hamel notes, 'all the tales of Finn's heroes are about some form of protection of the land' (1934: 24), often against demoniacal enemies, with Ó hÓgáin arguing that the concept of Fionn as a martial protector against the supernatural goes back to before the Fenian legend began to attain written form (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 28, 30, 36). Indeed, the earliest written reference to Fionn, dating back to perhaps the sixth century, describes Fionn as 'best amongst warriors', and Fionn's struggle against Otherworld foes was a 'perennial theme' of the earliest stratum of the Fenian legend (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 3, 51). In addition, one of the primary expressions of Fionn's legend was through topographic folklore, which made him the leader of a group of heroes who lived in the wild parts of the landscape, associated with monsters, magical animals – including giant boars that must be hunted – and giants (Padel, 1994; Ó hÓgáin, 1988). Finally, Fionn is intimately connected with the Otherworld, he arbitrates between members of the Tuatha Dé Danann and hunts enchanted animals into the Otherworld. He also interacts with divinities such as the Morrígán, Nuada, Donn, Midir and Oenghus, fighting both for and against them.

The parallels between these these two extend to even minor details in the two legends (see Padel, 1994: 21-3). Given all this there is every reason to agree with Van Hamel's and Padel's assessment that Arthur and Fionn fulfilled an almost identical, and thoroughly non-historical, role in their respective societies, as evidenced by the tales of them which survive. Both are monster-slaying and supernatural Hero Protectors of the land, living in the wilds of the landscape with their band of warriors, with Fionn reflecting the Irish expression of this and Arthur the Brittonic expression. This is not to say that one is derivative of the other – such notions do not fit with the nature of the evidence. Rather, whilst perhaps reflecting a common 'Celtic' idea and requirement, they should both be seen as emerging independently from the needs of their individual, but very similar, societies.

This then is the original Arthur, as he appears in both the earliest and the latest non-Galfridian sources. He is, fundamentally, a monster-slaying and peerless

Protector of Britain against all supernatural threats, a thoroughly mythical and folkloric creature who is intimately associated with the Otherworld. Obviously this is only a very broad portrait of his nature – further details are found in the earlier sections of this chapter, and the next two chapters – but it does cover the major aspects and starts to provide us with a secure basis from which to move onto the ultimate question of 'the origins of Arthur'.

3

THE NATURE OF ARTHUR: 'A MIGHTY DEFENDER'?

INTRODUCTION: 'ARTHUR OF THE TERRIBLE SWORD'

At the end of the last chapter a brief outline of Arthur's nature was provided. The present chapter aims to expand on this through an examination of Arthur's defensive role. Arthur's associations with the Otherworld have been extensively treated in the previous chapter (and the next chapter too), whilst his role in topographic and onomastic folklore has been fully set out by Padel and Grooms (Padel, 1994; Grooms, 1993). In contrast, the idea of Arthur as the Hero Protector of Britain has not been thoroughly examined in previous works, despite recent agreement as to its likely priority and status reflected by the link between Arthur and Fionn's role in their respective countries. Before moving on to look at the ultimate origins of the name Arthur, and thus the character himself, such an investigation is important, not least to establish whether this assumption of priority is justified. The defensive role is certainly one element in the 'earliest stratum', as we have already seen – the hunting of and defence of Britain from *Twrch Trwyth* appears to be one of the earliest Arthurian tales, and Arthur is clearly conceived of as a great defender of Britain in *Marwnad Cynddylan* and *Pa gur*. Can it be shown to be the most important of his roles?

The idea of Arthur as the 'mighty defender' of Britain from supernatural threats and the notion that he was a 'Brittonic superhero' and paragon of military valour are, of course, closely related and not easily separated. In order to fulfil his role as the protector of Britain, Arthur would need to be such a figure and it is easy to see how an admirable martial reputation could have its origins in such defensive activities. Thus when *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* has Arthur's father declare that 'the world would not exist if it were not for my offspring' – which must be related to Arthur's protective role and the non-Galfridian interpretation of the nature and scope of this – it is surely implicit that Arthur

has to be a great warrior in order for this to be the case. In fact this poem does indeed possess this concept, as Uthyr – a warrior who 'broke a hundred forts … [and] cut a hundred heads' – declares that he has only 'a ninth share in Arthur's valour' (see Chapter 4 on Uthyr and his relationship to Arthur in the pre-Galfridian material).

Perhaps the earliest reference to both these concepts comes in the mid seventh-century *Marwnad Cynddylan*. Here Arthur is used as the ultimate standard of comparison to praise the valour of Cynddylan and his brothers (though they can only be compared with his sons, not Arthur himself) and he is described as 'great Arthur, a mighty defender', indicating very clearly the reason for his fame and suitability for use as the ultimate comparison. Similarly in *Kadeir Teyrnon* Arthur is 'blessed Arthur', a 'defender in battle' and a 'trampler' of his enemies, including, it would seem from the poem, the giant Cawrnur (giants being generally considered a scourge from whose demands and ravages society needed to be protected). In the probably mid twelfth-century non-Galfridian poem *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, 'The Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle', Arthur is also praised as a great military hero. He is 'Arthur of the terrible sword', whose 'enemies stand not before your rush'. He is also 'strongest in valour', the 'bear of the host' and a 'joy of shelter', the latter again referencing his protective role. Indeed, Arthur seems to have trusted so greatly in his own martial ability to protect Britain that in the Later Version of the Triads he is said to have 'disclosed the Head of Brân the blessed', thus breaking its magical protection of Britain, 'because it did not seem right to him that this Island should be defended by the strength of anyone, but by his own' (Bromwich, 1978a, No. 37R).

These few references clearly demonstrate the existence of both of the concepts mentioned above and their intimate relationship, something which is further verified throughout the rest of this chapter. Indeed, looking more widely, the concept of Arthur as a great and peerless warrior is found in almost every early Arthurian text. *Y Gododdin* has already been discussed, but its concept of Arthur is clear. Even a man who slew 300 cannot hope to compare himself with the valour of Arthur, an idea which probably also underlies the brief popularity of the name Arthur in the sixth and early seventh centuries. Likewise 'Arthur's courage' is mentioned admiringly in the highly allusive *Preideu Annwfyn* and in *Gereint filius Erbin* he is the 'ruler of battle'. In the *Historia Brittonum* he appears to be similarly conceived of, being *dux bellorum* in chapter 56 and 'the warrior Arthur' in chapter 73, whilst in the *Vita Gildae* Arthur is *rex rebellis*, 'the war-like king'. A particularly interesting example of this occurs in the Triads where, in the pre-Galfridian Early Version, Arthur is described as the first of the 'Red Ravagers [*or* Reapers] of the Island of Britain', a description embellished in the Later Version so that 'neither grass nor plants used to spring up' where he walked for seven years. In both versions the implication is that Arthur was a great 'reaper' of his enemies in battle (presumably a compliment, as Padel, 2000: 86, notes).

In the poetry of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century *Gogynfeirdd* (the court poets of the Welsh princes) this concept of Arthur continues to dominate, with the mid twelfth-century poet Gwalchmai ap Meilyr – who seems to have been named after Arthur's nephew in the non-Galfridian tradition – praising Madog ap Maredudd, King of Powys (d.1160) for having *Arthur gedernyd* ('Arthur's Strength'). Similarly Seisyll Bryffwrch attributes *lluch ryfig Arthur*, 'the lightening confidence of Arthur', to Owain ap Gruffudd, King of Gwynedd (d.1170), and Cynddelw (c.1170) comparing the fearsome shout of Madog's army to that of Arthur's host. Prydydd y Moch (who flourished c.1170-1220), although a post-Galfridian writer, perhaps also ought to be considered as continuing in this tradition when he refers to 'Generous Arthur, the battle-famous lord' and says that 'he was a whirlwind, attacking beyond measure' (Padel, 2000).

An excellent illustration of all this is found in what is the single most important early Arthurian story, the long prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Arthur has gathered together a huge war-band and has travelled to Ireland to hunt the *Twrch Trwyth* and its seven young pigs. The Irish fight against this supernatural boar, but fail to achieve anything – indeed, *Trwyth* lays waste to 'one of the five provinces of Ireland'. Arthur's war-band then attack and do little better: 'save for what evil they got from him, they got nothing good' (Jones and Jones, 1949: 131). Finally, faced with this universal failure, Arthur himself is forced to join battle, alone, with *Twrch Trwyth*. Clearly this can only reflect Arthur as a thoroughly matchless warrior, superior to all others, something confirmed by the fact that Arthur, unlike the previous hordes of warriors, manages to slay one of the young pigs of the great boar. This treatment is not unique in the tale. A similar situation occurs later too, when Arthur's men fail utterly to defeat the Very Black Witch in the Uplands of Hell, so that Arthur is once more forced to step in and slices the witch in two with his Otherworldly knife Carnwennan.

DEFENDING BRITAIN: 'A FERVENT TWRCH' AND OTHER MONSTERS

The above demonstrates that the concept of Arthur as a 'great' warrior is thoroughly entrenched in non-Galfridian tradition and is related from the earliest period to Arthur as a 'mighty defender', with these two ideas being clearly closely linked. The question must therefore be asked who, exactly, is this peerless warrior, this 'Brittonic superhero', exercising his martial abilities against – from whom is he defending the Britons? This has, of course, been the focus thus far – where the notion that his original enemies were the *Saxones* was rejected – but it is worth dwelling on in greater depth and three categories of enemies are identified in the present chapter. The first to be considered, and a very frequent threat for Arthur to defend against, are the various monstrous animals which are claimed to have roamed and threatened the mythical landscape of Britain and Brittany.

The most notable of these monsters is the divine *Twrch Trwyth*, a king, Arthur tells us, who had been turned into a giant boar (see further Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxvii-lxx; Ford, 1977: 15-16; Ford, 1990). The most extensive account of Arthur's conflict with this beast comes in the prose tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Before investigating this in more depth some brief comment ought to be first made on the date of this text. The final version of *Culhwch* is now generally dated to the very late eleventh century, following Bromwich and Evans (1992) magisterial edition, but other dates for this story are possible – whilst we might not uncritically adopt these, they are worth noting. Thus Koch (1997: civ, cv) has recently opted to place the origins of this tale *c.*AD 1000, supporting previous opinions such as that of Edel (1983: 3), who believed that at least some parts of *Culhwch* may have reached written expression in the second half of the tenth century, even if the final compilation as a whole is of a later date than this. Ford has also supported a very late tenth-century origin, following Kenneth Jackson and Thomas Jones who both opted for a tenth-century original (Ford, 1996a: 104; Jackson, 1971: 197-204; Jones and Jones, 1949: ix). It is worth noting that, if these alternate perspectives are accepted – and it is not here suggested that they necessarily should be[1] – then *Culhwch ac Olwen* ought really to be considered part of the broadest definition of the 'earliest stratum' as discussed in Chapter 2, something which would obviously add even more weight to the conclusions there drawn. In any case, in what follows all quotations from *Culhwch* are taken from the standard and reliable translation of Jones and Jones (1949), unless otherwise stated.

Returning to the text of *Culhwch* and what it tells us about Arthur and *Twrch Trwyth*, the reason given in *Culhwch* as to why Arthur ends up hunting this god-cum-monster is part of the preparation for the shaving of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant. This reason does, of course, belong to the 'giant's daughter' folk-tale framework of *Culhwch* rather than the genuine pre-existing Arthurian adventures which seem to have been fused with this by the author. As Edel says, what we are seeing here is a modification of the underlying adventure to suit the needs of the author of *Culhwch*, reworking what was originally a tale about the protection of Britain and the 'expulsion of the destructive monster … from the Island' into something with a slightly different focus (see Edel, 1983, esp. pp.7, 9; Roberts, 1991a: 74-81; Bromwich and Evans, 1992; Koch, 1996: 256-62). However, even though a new explanation has been tacked onto the tale, its fundamental nature remains very clear. We have already seen how *Twrch Trwyth* managed to lay waste to one-fifth of Ireland in the prologue to the tale and it then threatens to 'go into Arthur's country, and there … do all the mischief [i.e. damage]' it can, a promise it fulfils, massacring men and livestock throughout South Wales in the course of the tale. Essentially it is a battle between Arthur and a pestilence on the land, taking the form of almost total war between Arthur's men and the monstrous boar, the result of which was an enormous death toll that included one of Arthur's own sons, Gwydre. In

fact this destruction is so great that the tale as we have it is less of a hunt than a eulogistic listing of combat casualties:

> On the morrow Arthur was told they had gone by, and he overtook him [Twrch Trwyth] killing the cattle of Cynwas Cwryfagyl, after slaying what men and beasts were in Deu Gleddyf before the coming of Arthur … And he then slew four of Arthur's champions, Gwarthegydd son of Caw, Tarawg of Alt Clwyd, Rheiddwn son of Eli Adfer, and Isgofan the Generous. And after he had slain those men, again he stood at bay against them there, and slew Gwydre son of Arthur, Garselit the Irishman, Glew son of Ysgawd, and Isgawyn son of Banon … And over and above those he slew many a man of the country, and Gwlyddyn the Craftsman, Arthur's chief builder … Thereupon all the huntsmen went to hunt the pigs as far as Dyffryn Llychwr. And Grugyn Silver-bristle and Llwydawg the Hewer [two of Twrch's piglings] dashed into them and slew the huntsmen so that not a soul of them escaped alive, save one man only … (Jones and Jones, 1949: 132–3)

The protective element in all this comes particularly to the fore when the boar heads for Cornwall, an area which appears to have special significance for Arthur in *Culhwch* (his court is placed there), to which Arthur replies: 'By the valour of men, not while I'm alive shall he go into Cornwall. I will pursue him no further but join with him life for life'. Arthur clearly feels that Cornwall must be protected from this vicious and destructive beast, even if it be with his own life.

Before moving on from this tale, it is worth noting once more the following. First, the protective hunting of this creature is only associated with Arthur in Welsh tradition. Second, the topographic folklore relating to this event in the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 is considered to be 'already ancient' by the time it appears in this text, an important point suggestive of its existence in the eighth century if not before (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxvi; see further Chapter 2). Finally, potentially the earliest reference to the hunting of this monstrous boar is actually found in the *Gorchan* of Cynfelyn, a poem which has been dated to the seventh century (and possibly even earlier). In the latter the prowess of the hero, attacking in a river as well as at a number of other places, is compared to that of *Twrch Trwyth* as it resisted its hunters. Jackson is surely right to see this as a reference to the Arthurian hunt, given the above – indeed, he suggests that the episode in which *Twrch* fought Arthur and his men in the River Severn may be implicitly what is being referred to here, with the hero's attack in a river being what brought this comparison to the poet's mind (Jackson, 1969: 155; see also Koch, 1987: 273).

These points are crucial. The hunting of, and protection from, *Twrch Trwyth* is clearly an early and important part of the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend and the nature of the tale in *Culhwch ac Olwen* suggests that not only was it a

pre-existing tale incorporated into this story, but that it may well also have been widely expressed through topographic and onomastic folklore (as discussed in Chapters 2 and confirmed by the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73). In this light it is thought-provoking to look at the ultimate origins of this creature. It must be remembered, with regard to this, that *Twrch Trwyth* (correctly *Trwyd*, earlier *Troit*) has an exact Irish cognate *Torc Tríath*. This appears in a handful of early Irish sources, one of which is a list of the members of the mythical *Tuatha Dé Danann* ('People of the Goddess Dana') in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*:

> Brigid the woman-poet, it is she who possessed Fé and Menn, the two royal oxen … And with them was Torc Triath, king of the boars of Ireland, from whom Magh Triathairne is named (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lxviii)

Clearly this is the same divine boar that appears to have been hunted by Arthur in Welsh tradition from perhaps the seventh century at least – Arthur states in *Culhwch* that 'He was a king, and for his wickedness god transformed him into a swine', which fits well with the above, as does the onomastic folkloric element which is also found throughout the Welsh treatment of the divine boar. Most interesting of all is the fact that from at least the ninth century we have attested an *oenach Tuirc Thréith*, 'assembly *or* festival of the boar [*Torc*] *Tríath*'. Torc Tríath also appears in *Cormac's Glossary* where it interpreted as a 'name for a king's son' and thus when the festival is mentioned it is treated as *oinach n-uire treith*, 'assembly of 'a king's son'', which again fits with the concept of this boar in *Culhwch*. The main import lies, however, in what comes immediately after this in *Cormac's Glossary*, namely the only Fenian anecdote in the entire Glossary.

  Boar-hunts do, of course, have a major place in the tales of Fionn mac Cumhaill and the mention of Torc Tríath may have simply brought Fionn to mind. Nevertheless it can be suggested that, in fact, the Fenian allusion may well have been prompted by a pre-existing association between Fionn and the hunting of Torc Tríath. Fionn is, after all, the premier boar-hunter of Irish tradition – if anyone ought to hunt Torc Tríath, it should be Fionn. Indeed, as Van Hamel comments, 'in Fenian story boar-hunting is the perpetual *lietmotiv*' and 'the boar is generally of a supernatural character; in some Irish traditions it comports itself exactly like the Welsh Twrch Trwyth'. Thus in the story of the death of Diarmaid Ui Dhuibhne, the unnamed monstrous Boar of Ben Gublan that eventually kills Diarmaid is being hunted by Fionn and his men. Like *Trwyd* it is highly dangerous, slaying many of Fionn's warriors in the pursuit, it possesses venomous bristles and it has its origins in a human who has been turned into a boar (Murphy, 1953: lxxvi; Rees and Rees, 1961: 70-1; Van Hamel, 1934: 16; Ford, 1977: 16). Certainly no other hunter of Torc Tríath is recorded in Irish tradition and, given the above, a Fenian equation surely does not seem impossible. This equation is, in fact, also made by Ó hÓgáin, who notes that the

Magh Triathairne, which was named for Torc Tríath, is close by Cullen, where Fionn killed a great pig according to *Macgnímartha Find*, the 'Boyhood-Deeds of Fionn'. He comments that 'the conclusion suggests itself that this pig was in fact Torc Tríath and that Fionn was reputed to have hunted the enormous boar' (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 129).

The above is highly interesting of course, given the closeness of the relationship between Fionn and Arthur as discussed above – how should we interpret the above suggestion that Arthur was the hunter of this monstrous and marvellous beast in Britain and Fionn was its hunter in Ireland? Some kind of borrowing might be suggested – Ó hÓgáin thinks Irish to Welsh – but the forms of the name of the divine boar do not readily support such an idea. Rather they both appear to be independent developments of a Common Celtic form **Trētos*, whose long *-e-* developed into *-oi-* in Archaic Welsh (as in the *Historia*'s early ninth-century *Troit*, later *-wy-*) and *-ía-* in Old Irish – a development comparable to that of Old Irish *líath*, Middle Welsh *llwyd*, 'grey' (< Common Celtic **lētos*). If there was borrowing then this must have taken place very early, before these linguistic changes were in effect, in order for the borrowed name to arrive at its recorded forms. Thus if, for example, the story was originally attached to Fionn and only later was attracted to Arthur's name, this borrowing must have occurred before the Welsh dipthongization of *ē*, in the seventh century, as Sims-Williams has noted (1983: 239; Jackson, 1953: 697). Indeed, the date given above by Sims-Williams for this dipthongization was based on Jackson's chronology of Welsh sound-changes – Sims-Williams has, however, recently himself shown that this actually occurred early in the first half of the sixth century, an important point in the present context, supported by McCone (Sims-Williams, 1990b: 252-60; Sims-Williams, 1991b: 47-9; Sims-Williams, 2003: 286-7; McCone, 1996: 158-62).

All told, we may very well be mistaken in trying to see one as directly derivative of the other. Bromwich and Evans have recently commented that we ought not to think 'that either Wales or Ireland borrowed the concept of the royal boar *Trwyd/Tríath* from the other country' (1992: lxix), but rather look to common Celtic pagan beliefs, a position that Sims-Williams has supported, concluding that *Tríath* and *Troit/Trwyd* are cognate forms, rather than borrowings (1983: 239). If this line is pursued then the hunting of the boar by both Arthur and Fionn (if, of course, we accept that the evidence does indicate that the latter may have hunted this creature) might be seen as independent and coincidental developments of the character of these two Hero Protectors within their own cultures. This is certainly also not impossible. One is forced, nevertheless, to cautiously wonder if it might not in fact be more plausible to see this story of the hunting of a divine boar named *Trwyd/Tríath* as part of a speculative common stock of 'protective' and divine tales from which Arthur and Fionn could both originally have independently developed as their own region's Hero Protector, though such a

notion might imply a far greater relationship between Arthur and Fionn than was allowed earlier. Having said this, it should be remembered that this hypothesis cannot be proven and, even if Fionn *was* the Gaelic hunter of Torc Tríath, either Arthur or Fionn's role in the hunt could still have been borrowed or derived from the other (though quite possibly at an extremely early stage, given the above observations).

Returning to the main point of this chapter and leaving for now speculation regarding this just possibly original and thus ancient element of the legend of Arthur, there are numerous other monsters which Arthur hunts and defends Britain from in non-Galfridian tradition that deserve mention. Thus in *Culhwch ac Olwen* we meet a creature known as 'the bitch Rhymhi', who is clearly some sort of shape-shifter. When Arthur enquires of Tringad what shape she is currently in, he is told that she is in 'the shape of a she-wolf … and she goes about with her two whelps. Often she has slain my stock, and she is down in Aber Cleddyf in a cave'. The last sentence suggests that here we again have an originally protective Arthurian tale against a pestilential monster of a similar nature to the *Twrch Trwyth* (and localized near to Milford Haven), reused once again by the author of *Culhwch* for his own purposes.

One of the most interesting of the monsters fought by Arthur and his men is *Cath Paluc*, which first appears in *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* Dr Bromwich has suggested that it ought to be compared with the monstrous and enormous sea-cats of Irish tradition – given that in the Triads it swam the Menai Straits – such as that described in the Life of St Brendan:

> Bigger than a brazen cauldron was each of his eyes: a boar's tusks had he: furzy hair upon him; and he had the maw of a leopard with the strength of a lion, and the voracity of a hound (Bromwich, 1978a: 485)

The episode has already been discussed previously but it must clearly be seen as another instance of Arthur's war-band protecting Britain. Thus this monster appears in the Triads (no. 26) as one of the 'Three Oppressions of Anglesey' – consequently the battling of this monster was a liberation and defence of this part of Britain. Indeed, in *Pa gur* (where Cei is made the focus of the telling) it is said that 'nine score warriors used to fall as its food', indicating the threat it posed. Obviously this was quite a widely known tale as it was passed – with Arthur at the centre of the story – to continental authors and story-tellers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This was probably via a lost Old Welsh written text, given that the beast maintains its essential nature as a monstrous water-cat opposed to the Arthurian heroes and its name was borrowed with the initial 'p' of *paluc* unlenited (Bromwich, 1978a: 486-7). Thus, for example, the late twelfth-century Norman poem *Romanz des Franceis* by André records that:

The French have made a poem about him, that king Arthur was pushed by
Capalu in the bog; and the cat killed him in war, then passed over to England,
and was not slow to conquer it – then wore the crown in the land and was
lord of the country. Where did they get such a tale? It is a proven lie, God
knows (Bromwich, 1978a: 486)

It is interesting to note that, in some renderings of the tale, including this one,
Arthur appears to have failed in his quest to deliver his people from this threat
and is in fact killed by the beast. This is not always the case – and it might well
be seen as a folkloric development of the tale, given that Arthur is clearly alive in
Pa gur when he starts to relate the tale of *Cath Paluc* there – but both Bromwich
and Jarman consider that this was a genuine variant Brittonic version of Arthur's
heroic death, protecting Britain from its enemies (Bromwich, 1978a: 487; Jarman,
1983: 109).

A further mid twelfth-century non-written reference to Arthur's fight with
Cath Paluc may be found on the Otranto Mosaic of 1163-5, in the Norman
cathedral at Otranto in Italy, the tale presumably having been brought to
Otranto with the Normans (see the mosaic and Stokstad, 1996a: 348). Again this
indicates that it was a widely known tale and it further supports the notion that
the variant involving Arthur was a genuinely non-Galfridian tale. With regards
to the mosaic it is worth noting two points. First that the tale it alludes to would
seem to be the same as that given by André later in the twelfth century, as just
below the main picture of Arthur facing a cat-monster there is a smaller image
which looks to show the same creature killing Arthur. Second Arthur himself is
portrayed as carrying what looks like a club (see further below) and riding on
what is clearly a goat. Without pressing the point too far, it should be recalled
that Loomis has compared this to a medieval account of a subterranean Welsh
Otherworld ruled over by a king who rode on a goat (Loomis, 1956c: 72-4). Is
Arthur here conceived of as both a combatant with *Cath Paluc* and some sort of
Otherworld monarch?

Probably also related to this story are the various tales of Arthur and his men
fighting lions and wildcats. In *Pa gur* it is said that 'Cei the fair went to Anglesey
to destroy lions [or wild-cats; *lleuon*]', of which it seems highly likely that
Cath Paluc was one, given the reference in the Triads and the proximity of this
allusion to the battle with *Cath Paluc* in the poem. Similarly a fifteenth-century
English writer tells how Arthur fought some wild-cats (either in Cornwall or
at Glastonbury) using a glass shield. This is obviously a close analogue to Cei's
fight with *lleuon*, 'lions, wild-cats', and the use of a polished shield against *Cath
Paluc* in *Pa gur* (Sims-Williams, 1991: 45-6; note, Arthur survives in this version
of the tale). Finally, in the Sawley Glosses to the *Historia Brittonum* a story of
Arthur breaking the 'jaws of lions' with an 'iron hammer' is referred to, though
no specifics are given. This could again be a reference to this tale, though it is

not impossible that we have here reflected an entirely independent tale of the defeat of, and protection of Britain from, a monstrous animal (Coe and Young, 1995: 11).[2]

Thus Arthur hunts divine and enormous boars, shape-shifting she-wolves, and vicious cat-monsters in early non-Galfridian tradition – it is surely unsurprising that this tally includes dragons too. In the twelfth-century non-Galfridian Cambro-Latin *Vita Carantoci* ('Life of Carannog') we find one example of this. Arthur is termed a king in this text, which helps legitimize his supposed land-grants to the monastery of the author, but his essential character is that of the pre-Galfridian monster-killer who roamed the landscape. When we first meet him he is in Somerset 'wandering about in order that he might find a most powerful dragon, vast and terrible, which had been putting to waste the twelve portions of the territory of Carrum' (Coe and Young, 1995: 19).

As is more fully discussed below, the Cambro-Latin Saints' *Lives* in general appear to have taken genuine non-Galfridian Arthurian folktales and used them for their own ends. This episode fits into that general pattern and must be seen as yet another example of Arthur's role as the Protector of Britain from monstrous threats, though in the *Vita Carantoci*'s version the tale is altered so that Arthur has to ask St Carannog for help in ridding Somerset of the dragon. Thus the prestige and power of the saint was enhanced at Arthur's expense, and furthermore Arthur was portrayed as being so grateful that he granted Carrum and other lands to St Carranog (see further Chapter 6 on the use of Arthur in the Saints' *Lives*; Roberts, 1991a: 82-4; Padel, 1994: 7-8; Padel, 2000: 41-2).

Another example of Arthur' protection of the Britons from the wrath and destruction of dragons is found in the twelfth-century Breton *Vita Euflami*, 'Life of Saint Euflamm' (Coe and Young, 1995: 38-43; de la Borderie, 1892). This is of the greatest importance as not only does it offer further evidence of Arthur's protective role but it confirms that this concept of Arthur was indeed pan-Brittonic, common to both Britons and the Bretons. The depiction of this tale on the *c.* 1110 Perros Relief in the church of St Efflam in Perros-Guirec on the north coast of Brittany is similarly significant, not least because it would seem to confirm the pre-Galfridian origins of this tale (Lacy, 1996: xxxiv; Stokstad, 1996b: 359; Lacy and Ashe, 1997: 199, 205; see also below). Here, once again, we appear to have a genuine fragment of pre-Galfridian Arthurian folklore which has been taken by a monastic author and manipulated so that, as in the *Vita Carantoci*, Arthur is forced to rely on the saint to fulfil his traditional role as protector and monster-slayer, to the benefit and prestige of St Euflamm. In the *Vita Euflami* the dragon is said to have:

> constantly avoided an encounter with the most powerful Arthur who in that
> time used to seek out monsters in this part of Brittany. Nevertheless, after a
> while, with God granting, the cunning of the destructive beast was defeated,

for it happened by chance that Arthur, giving all his attention to its deeds, sought it everywhere (Coe and Young, 1995: 39)

The destructive nature of the beast is clear from the first here and, furthermore, the concept of Arthur is fully folkloric – he is a hero who wanders the Brittonic lands seeking out destructive monsters to fight with. After this introduction the author describes how Arthur, after searching around 'some concealing rocks', meets several holy men – the party of St Euflamm – on the seashore and asks them how 'they might dare to live in such vast and horrible solitudes', which does, of course, fit well with the pre-Galfridian nature of Arthur as a figure of the wilds of the landscape (as Padel, 1994). In the process of answering Arthur's questions the holy men tell him the location of the cave of the dragon, for which Arthur 'rejoiced with all his heart' as he could now find and defeat this menace to Breton society. We then come across a highly curious passage. In preparation for his battle Arthur:

> armed himself with the triple-knotted club [*claua trinodi*] and defended his eager torso with the shield which a lion-skin covered, and then alone went he vigorously attacked the public enemy, fighting for all (Coe and Young, 1995: 39)

This is important for several reasons. First, the concept of Arthur as a peerless and fearless warrior is made very clear indeed, as is his role – he fights 'for all', attacking the 'public enemy'. This is an extremely good illustration of the concept of 'great Arthur, the mighty defender' and it is further developed later in the tale when Arthur asks St Euflamm to bless him:

> seeing that he often used, in uncertainty, to undergo many mortal risks for the liberation of the people.

Second, the way Arthur arms himself in this Breton story is most intriguing and suggestive of the concept of Arthur that was found in this tale. A full interpretation of this description perhaps ought to additionally include the evidence of the related Perros Relief, where Arthur appears to have gone into battle against this creature stark naked (reflecting Arthur's 'eager torso' defended by his shield in the *Vita*?) and in which he is portrayed as possessing large genitalia. Given that the Perros Relief shows the naked Arthur, presumably exhausted, being dominated by the saint, it must most probably be seen as derivative of the manipulated folk-tale found in the *Vita Euflami* and thus ought to be taken into account. So what can we make of all this?

The nakedness, the large genitals, and the triple-knotted club do in fact bring to mind the Cerne Abbas giant (a hill-figure in Dorset) more than anything else.

Though the antiquity of this hill-figure is as yet unclear, it can perhaps point us towards a possible interpretation of this pre-Galfridian Breton concept of Arthur: just as the Cerne Abbas figure has been interpreted as a representation of Hercules/Heracles, so might this be seen in the same light (Westwood, 1985: 46-50; Darvill *et al.*, 1999). Certainly the phrase 'triple-knotted club' is suggestive of Hercules/Heracles, whose symbol was the club. In Ovid's *Fasti* (I.575) Hercules/Heracles is in fact said to have used his *clava trinodis*, 'triple-knotted club', in his fight with the fire-breathing monster Cacus (a 'triple-knotted club' is also used by the Attic Heracles, Theseus, against the Minotaur in Ovid's *Heroides* IV.115). Similarly Arthur's defence of his 'eager torso with the shield which a lion-skin covered' is reminiscent of the skin of the Nemean Lion that Heracles wore as his armour. Given this it may be suggested that we have here an equation in pre-Galfridian Brittany of Arthur with the mythological hero Hercules/Heracles.

It seems most likely that this concept and portrayal of Arthur was the invention of the (apparently very well read) author of the *Vita Euflami*, though it should be noted that Arthur does appear to be wielding a club as he fights the lion-like *Cath Paluc* on the mid twelfth-century mosaic in the Norman cathedral at Otranto. It may be significant that this tale has sometimes been seen as being brought to southern Italy by the apparently ubiquitous Bretons, though this is perhaps now less certain than once was the case (see Caerwyn Williams, 1991; Bromwich, 1991b). Whatever the case, the implications are obvious. Arthur was very clearly primarily conceived of as a great and wandering monster killer who protected the land, a being of such stature that he can be equated and compared with, and assigned the attributes of, the mythical Heracles.[3]

After making this comparison the *Vita* goes into greater detail on the battle between Arthur and the dragon itself, making sure to emphasize the valour and strength of Arthur in his enterprise:

> Conversely the horrible monster defended itself with its arms. Indeed it made the first attack on Arthur, furious that it might be set upon by one man, when it had often, as the victor, overcome many people … [Arthur] harshly attacked the enemy. Walls might have been destroyed by such a blow …

In the end, of course, the saint has to step in to help Arthur and defeat the dragon, as he must given the nature of the source. Nevertheless, the fact that the original Arthurian story must have had its origins in local folklore is made transparent throughout the episode, with references to certain 'remarkable' natural features in the landscape which are explained by this conflict. Thus when describing an attack by the dragon in which the 'great shield of Arthur' was easily pierced by the monster's sharpened claws, the author says in an aside:

> Is it surprising? For the hardness of stone would yield to the keenness of the
> monster's claw, as that place bears witness by showing the marks.

Similarly, when telling of the destructive beast's death the author relates that:

> the monster, rearing on the rock, rolled his eyes all around and let out a great
> clamour mingled with a pitiable groan, from whose horror even remote places
> trembled. Then with its head bowed, it coughed up bloody vomit from its
> nostrils and mouth with gaspings. The rock of that place still appears to be red,
> as if with fresh blood … (Coe and Young, 1995: 43)

Given all this it can be said, therefore, that dragon-slaying was a traditional part of
Arthur's defensive repertory. Further it was one which was, in Brittany, expressed
through popular folklore, with such exploits actually leading to comparisons
between Arthur and the great mythical monster-hunters of antiquity, Heracles
and possibly Theseus.

Overall this concept of Arthur as a Protector of Britain (and Brittany)
from the ravages of monstrous creatures is a powerful and long-lived one. For
example the 'Black Beast son of Dugum' mentioned in *Culhwch ac Olwen* may
well be another such creature that Arthur had to defeat and protect the land
from, as probably too was the *Penpalach*, 'Cudgel-head', which Arthur fights
in *Pa gur* (we should also not forget the threatening and demonic creatures
featured in *Kat Godeu*). In later popular folklore this concept continued right
up until the nineteenth century, when Arthur is credited with the defeat of the
well-known lake-monster, the *Afanc*. Supposedly Arthur dragged this fearsome
creature from the water of *Llyn Barfog* with the aid of his horse, the proof of
this being offered in the shape of a stone bearing the impression of a horse's
hoof known as *Carn March Arthur*, to be compared with the similarly-marked
stone associated with the hunting of *Twrch Trwyd* in the *Historia Brittonum*
(Rhys, 1901: 142).

In conclusion, the evidence paints a very clear picture of Arthur as a defender
of all the Brittonic peoples from destructive and dangerous monsters. Two points
deserve to be particularly drawn out here. The first is that there are hints that
one element of all this – the hunting and protection from *Twrch Trwyd* – could
just possibly have its origins at an extremely early stage in the development
of the Arthurian legend, if not with its very genesis. The second is that often
these protective adventures and stories seem to stem from pre-existing folklore
which manifested itself through onomastic and topographic folk-explanations.
This is particularly clear in the case of the *Twrch Trwyd* and the Breton dragon,
and it ultimately reflects the deep-seated and popular nature of this concept of
Arthur.

DEFENDING BRITAIN: WITCHES, GIANTS AND OTHER NEAR-HUMAN
THREATS

Thus far we have dealt with the monstrous threats that Arthur combated. There was,
however, another class of supernatural threat that Britain faced – that of the near-
human beings. That is to say, those creatures that possess human characteristics but
which are generally implacably opposed to human-kind and which are magical
or unnatural in their appearance and abilities. As with the 'monsters' these too are
found fighting Arthur from the earliest stratum of evidence and such fights – by
the very nature of these creatures – must be generally interpreted as a protection
of Britain from their influence and ravages.

Witches are one interesting category of such beings, these being seen as the
'female counterparts of Giants' and thus treated as hostile monsters that Arthur
and his men must defend Britain from (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: liv). The
earliest Arthurian reference to witches comes in the early poem *Pa gur*, where a
pre-existing tale of a fight between Arthur and a witch is alluded to:

> Though Arthur laughed [*or* ?played]
> he caused the/her blood to flow
> in Awarnach's hall,
> fighting with a witch.
> (lines 37-40: Sims-Williams, 1991: 41)

Here we very clearly have Arthur the folkloric hero and monster-killer, not the aged
king of later Romance. Arthur is fighting with a witch, probably in the hall of a giant
(see below), and he is clearly enjoying his bloody defeat of this supernatural threat.

Later in the same poem we find another allusion to an Arthurian battle against
witches, when it is said that:

> On the uplands/summit of *Ystawingun*
> Cei slew nine witches.

Although the site of this battle cannot be identified with confidence, Sims-Williams
(1991: 45) has recently suggested that it should be connected with Porth Ysgewin
in the extreme south-east of Wales, on the basis that an Old Welsh spelling of this –
★Yscauguin – might be easily corrupted into the above form. If this is accepted then
the character *Cysceint* m. Banon who is mentioned at the beginning of *Pa gur* was
probably involved in this conflict, as he is also found in *Culhwch* as *Yscawin/Iscawin
mab Panon* and his name indicates that he may well have been the eponymous
figure of Porth Ysgewin (as noted by Sims-Williams, 1991: 64 n.31).

The fullest early account of Arthur's battling with such creatures comes,
however, in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. In this Arthur apparently travels to *Uffern*,

Hell (= the Otherworld) to confront the Very Black Witch, with the aim of collecting her blood. Incidentally, the author of *Culhwch* suggests that the 'highlands of Hell' were actually to be found in North Britain, *Y Gogledd*, which must be taken as a euhemerism of an original Otherworld location. In fact, this was not the only such euhemerism and localisation of this tale, as another is indicated in the onomastic folklore of Pumlumon, Ceredigion, where we find the place-names *Foel Wyddon*, *Padell Nant Wyddon* etc, something which of course supports the notion that *Culhwch* was once more drawing upon apparently popular Welsh folk-tales (see for this and *Uffern* as synonymous with *Annwfyn*, Bromwich and Evan, 1992: 129-30).

Certainly the concept of witches as evil and demonic creatures that threaten humanity is made very clear in *Culhwch* by the fact that the Very Black Witch comes from the 'Valley of Pain in the highlands of Hell' and Bromwich and Evans do indeed treat this tale as part of the primary Arthurian traditions in which Arthur and his men feature as the defenders of Britain against hostile monsters (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: liv). Whether or not there is some relationship between Arthur's witch-killing – and thus defence of Britain from these Hellish beings – in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Pa gur* is not clear, though the fact that blood is shed and collected in the *Culhwch* version may be significant in this context, given the allusion in *Pa gur* to Arthur causing the witch's 'blood to flow'.

Looking in more detail at the tale as it exists in *Culhwch*, it begins as follows:

> Arthur said, 'Are any of the wonders still not obtained?' One of the men said, 'Yes, the blood of the Very Black Witch, daughter of the Very White Witch from the head of the Valley of Pain in the highlands of Hell.' Arthur set out towards the North, and came to where the hag's cave was. And Gwyn son of Nudd and Gwythyr son of Greidol advised sending Cacmwri and Hygwydd, his brother, to fight with the hag (Coe and Young, 1995: 71)

It is interesting to note the presence of Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr ap Greidawl as part of Arthur's war-band, given their mythological status – they may simply have been added by the author of *Culhwch*, but this is by no means certain. We have already seen that Gwyn ap Nudd ought to be considered, to some degree, a pre-Galfridian Arthurian character. With regards to the fight with the witch, Arthur's two servants are utterly defeated by the Very Black Witch, who batters, disarms and almost kills them. Two more of Arthur's men are sent in and suffer the same fate. Faced with this failure Arthur decides to act decisively:

> And then Arthur did rush to the entrance of the cave, and from the entrance he could aim at the hag with Carnwennan, his knife. And he struck her down the middle until she was like two tubs. And Caw of Scotland took the witch's blood and kept it with him (Coe and Young, 1995: 73)

Arthur's role here is once more that of the folk-hero. Though Gwyn and Gwythyr try to hold him back, for dignity's sake (reflecting most probably the conflict between the author of *Culhwch*'s literary concept of Arthur as the magnificent 'Chief of the Lords of this Island' and Arthur's more primitive nature in the Arthurian stories that the author reused and manipulated in order to create his tale), Arthur does in the end intervene. Through his status as the greatest of warriors – and with the help of his Otherworldly knife – Arthur triumphs easily and savagely over this near-human Hellish creature.

   In addition to these pre-Galfridian tales of witch-slaying we find something similar in the post-Galfridian (late twelfth or early thirteenth century?) Welsh Romance *Peredur*, where the hero Peredur son of Efrawg decides to fight the nine witches of *Caer Loyw*:

> And Peredur and Gwalchmei resolved to send to Arthur and his war-band, to ask him to come against the witches. And they began to fight with the witches. And one of the witches slew a man of Arthur's before Peredur's eyes, and Peredur bade her to desist. And a second time the witch slew a man before Peredur's eyes, and a second time Peredur bade her to desist. And the third time the witch slew a man before Peredur's eyes, and Peredur drew his sword and smote the witch on the crest of her helm, so that the helm and all the armour and the head were split in two … And then Arthur and his war-band fell upon the witches, and the witches of Caer Loyw were all slain (Jones and Jones, 1949: 227)

The relationship of *Peredur* to Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval ou le conte du grail* (of 1181) is controversial and part of the general debate over the connection between all of the Welsh 'Three Romances' and Chrétien's work. Some posit the derivation of the former from the latter (perhaps via oral versions of the tales) whilst many others prefer to see them both stemming from earlier, lost redactions of the same tales. With regards to this Chrétien's statement that he obtained the story of *Perceval* from a book given him by the Count of Flanders may be significant, though it is perhaps *Peredur* that is most likely of all the Romances to have included Chrétien's work as one of its probable several sources (Bromwich, 1991b: 282-3; Lovecy, 1991; Padel, 2000: 77-83; see Koch, 1996: 280-8 for a summary of opinions and Breeze, 2003a, on the dating of *Peredur*).

   Whatever the case may be, the witch episode is generally agreed to represent a 'Celtic tradition' and not a continental invention. Thus it is absent from Chrétien and the muddled nature of the whole of the last section of Peredur (of which the witch-slaughter is the very final episode) suggests that the Welsh author was drawing together 'confused or half-remembered stories about the hero' (Lovecy, 1991: 76, 79). Given this, Peredur's killing of the nine witches may reflect Welsh

story, rather than the continental. As such it may be of some value with regards to the place of witches in the non-Galfridian legend.

In this context it is important to emphasize that, unlike many of the other episodes in *Peredur*, the Arthurian nature of this one is very evident, with 'Arthur and his war-band' falling on and massacring the witches. Similarly the number of these witches in *Peredur* recalls the Arthurian battle against nine witches 'on the uplands of *Ystawingun*' alluded to in *Pa gur*. Indeed, the splitting in two of the head of one of the witches of *Caer Loyw* is also reminiscent of Arthur's savage slaughter of the Very Black Witch. In light of this it can be suggested that we have could well have in *Peredur* a reflection of the type of Arthurian stories (not necessarily the same ones, it should be remembered) that we have already encountered. Here, however, they are reused and interpreted so that the non-traditional Arthurian character Peredur is the primary figure in the action.

Certainly there is evidence to suggest that Arthurian tales were often thus reworked, with Arthur dominant in one telling and Cei (for example) in another. We find this in the tale of the fight with *Cath Paluc* and that of the battle at *Traeth Tryfrwyd*. Another example from *Pa gur* may be Cei's battle against nine witches. This probably originally included *Cysceint* m. Banon, as he could well have been the eponymous figure of the site of Cei's slaying of the witches. However, although he is mentioned earlier in the poem as one of Arthur's men, he is not linked explicitly with this battle in *Pa gur* (see above; Sims–Williams, 1991: 64 n.31). Some of the tales in *Culhwch* also ought to be seen in this light. For example, *Pa gur* seems to indicate that Arthur was present at the killing of *Wrnach* the giant, in some versions of this story, but he is absent from the telling in *Culhwch*. Similarly the story of the killing of Dillus Farfawg by Cei and Bedwyr in *Culhwch* is a loose variant of Geoffrey of Monmouth's tale of Arthur's killing of the beard-collecting giant Ritho, which is considered to have been based on a genuine pre-Galfridian Arthurian folkloric tale (see further below; Roberts, 1991b: 108; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lvi–lvii).

Perhaps the most instructive episode in this regard is that of the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyth*, in which many of Arthur's warriors get to play a part. If such extended narratives existed for many of the Arthurian tales that we now only have allusions to (as seems quite likely), it is perhaps easy to see how this might result in battles and adventure being assigned to first one, then another, of the Arthurian war-band. In any case, it is clear that there can be no reason to think that different authors could not take generally Arthurian tales and simply choose to make different members of Arthur's war-band prominent in their versions of these. Indeed, it is equally possible that different episodes might be certainly 'Arthurian' but always have their focus on one particular warrior from Arthur's war-band.

In addition to the above we ought also to remember the effect of Arthur's increasing status in the literary tradition, which seems to have led to his

marginalization within his own legend. Thus, as we have already seen, the author of *Culhwch* seems to feel that many of the adventures that he found Arthur in, such as the killing of the Very Black Witch, were below his dignity as the ruler of legendary Britain. At one point Arthur's warriors even send him home, citing this as the reason:

> Lord, go home. You cannot go with your host to seek anything so petty as these (Coe and Young, 1995: 67)

Such marginalization may well explain, for example, the fact that, in the earliest versions of the abduction and rescue of Gwenhwyfar, it is Arthur who takes the leading role in her liberation. In contrast, by the time of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charette*, his central role is ceded to his knights. Given all of the above, and not forgetting the details of the battle itself, a treatment of the *Peredur* episode as a reflection of a genuinely non-Galfridian Arthurian battle against witches cannot be seen as implausible. Once Peredur had been drawn into the Arthurian legend (as was happening to many previously unrelated characters in the eleventh and twelfth centuries) he could easily have become the focus of a traditional Arthurian episode of this type.

Finally, before leaving this Arthurian conflict with nine witches, a last point and comparison ought to be highlighted. The only information we have from the Arthurian tales as to the origins of these supernatural terrors is that two witches, one of whom Arthur fights, are said to have come from a particularly nasty sounding part of *Uffern*, 'Hell'. This is perhaps significant. As was noted above, there is reason to think that *Uffern* and *Annwfyn*, the pagan British Otherworld, were synonymous (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 129-30, 135). This is made clear in *Preideu Annwfyn* itself, where in the allusion to Arthur's stealing of the cauldron of the 'Chief of *Annwfyn*' we find the following lines:

> By the breath of nine maidens it was kindled.
> It was the cauldron of the Chief of the Unworld [*Annwfyn*] that was sought
> a ridge of pearls about its brim.
> …
> And before the door of Hell's [*vffern*] gate, lanterns burned.
> And, when we went with Arthur – brilliant difficulty –
> except seven, none returned from the Fort of Intoxication.
> (Based on Koch and Carey, 2003: 310)

Clearly here *vffern* is *Annwfyn*. Consequently the Otherworldly origin of at least two witches that Arthur and his men encounter is confirmed. What is also particularly interesting, however, is the fact that the cauldron that Arthur is stealing in the above passage is 'kindled' by the breath of 'nine maidens'. This is

most intriguing. We have here nine women, who have their origins in *Annwfyn* and possess magical (fire-breathing?) abilities, with whom Arthur seems to have been in conflict.

Now, of course, we are not in a position to posit any direct genetic relationship between the nine witches we find in other texts and these nine 'maidens'. Nine (three threes) is a common number in Celtic stories and cannot be so relied upon. We may perhaps better compare these nine to the nine sisters found on the Otherworldly island that Arthur retires to after Camlann. These first appear in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* of *c*.AD 1150, but are generally agreed to have an insular origin. These nine are portrayed as skilled in healing, shape-shifting and flying, being led by Morgen, whom Giraldus Cambrensis describes as *dea quaedam fantastica*, 'a certain imaginary goddess' (see Loomis, 1956a: 154-5). However, it should not be forgotten that Arthur is helped by these maidens, rather than contending against them or their lord.

We might also recall the nine priestesses/enchantresses who lived on the Breton island of Sena, recorded by Pomponius Mela in *c*.AD 45, and the nine witches that appear in the possibly seventh-century *Life of St Samson* (Loomis, 1956a: 155; Sims-Williams, 1991: 45). These references should, in fact, make it very obvious that it would indeed be unwise to make too much of the coincidence of nine magical women. Nonetheless it is intriguing that Arthur and his warriors should be so often in conflict or associated with such creatures. It is not impossible that there may be some relationship between some or all of these tales, especially given the indications that the Arthurian witches also had their origins in *Annwfyn* (such links are usually hinted at but not pursued, see Jackson, 1959b: 17; Haycock, 1983-4: 69; Sims-Williams, 1991: 45; Budgey, 1992: 394; and Lovecy, 1991: 176. I do not propose to deviate further from this tradition).

The other major category of near-human threats to be considered here is that of the giants. The giants of Welsh tradition were always considered a hostile force and classed as *gormesoedd*, oppressions, on the people of Britain. Hugh Thomas noted in *c*.1704 (based on his collection of oral traditions) that the giants were a savage people, who destroyed houses, laid waste to 'whole countries in the Night and even Eate up men's flesh'. Such concepts – especially the nocturnal cruelty of these oppressions – are found throughout Welsh giant lore from its earliest recording (Grooms, 1993: xlv-xlix).

It is crucial to keep the above in mind in considering Arthur's relationships with these creatures. Although there are strong hints that he himself was considered a giant it has to be recognized that Arthur is also, in Welsh tradition, 'the greatest of Giant Killers', to quote Bromwich and Evans. It is, in fact, Arthur who is repeatedly said in Welsh folklore to have been finally responsible for ridding Wales of the race of giants. Siôn Dafydd Rhys, who at the beginning of the seventeenth century collected numerous giant tales from oral sources, credits Arthur in the same way (see the edition and translation of Peniarth 118 in Grooms, 1993: 249-316).

Indeed, in his collection 'Arthur is said to have slain several of these giants, and no other hero is credited with a similar achievement, except for Arthur's nephew Gwalchmei, who is said to have killed three witches, all of them sisters and wives of the giants' (Bromwich and Evans: liv, lvi; Grooms, 1993: xlix–l). This appears to have been, furthermore, a concept not confined to Wales. In Cornish folklore too we find a similar perspective, with Cornwall being said to have 'swarmed with giants, until Arthur, the good king, vanished them all with his cross-sword' (Hunt, 1881, II: 307).

Turning to our early sources we do indeed find hostile giants in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. We also, of course, encounter explanations as to why Arthur's men were in conflict with these creatures that have more to do with the framework of the story than the original underlying Arthurian tales. It cannot, however, be doubted that in their original form these were 'primary Arthurian traditions, which depict Arthur and his band of men as the defenders of the land against Giants', that have been taken up by the author and manipulated (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: liv).

In *Culhwch* the first of these feared oppressors that Arthur's men meet, aside from Ysbaddaden (who probably belongs to the framework of the tale), is *Wrnach*, from whom they supposedly require his sword so that it can be used to slay *Twrch Trwyth* (in fact, it never is so used in *Culhwch*, indicating the invented nature of this explanation). The dangerous nature of this creature is confirmed by the fact that, as they approach a fort – 'the greatest of forts in the world' – a gigantic black man, as big as three normal men, tells them to whom it belongs and fears for their safety when he hears they are to go there. He declares, 'God protect you! No guest has ever come thence with his life', which clearly associates *Wrnach* with the nature and specific characteristics of the giants of later Welsh folklore (Grooms, 1993: xlvii). Cei then tricks his way into the court and, through the stupidity of the giant, manages to persuade him to give him the sword and scabbard to mend, upon which he 'sank it into the giant's head and took off his head at a blow.'

In *Culhwch* this tale may be an interpolation into the text, made at some point after its initial composition, but before it reached its final form. Neverthless, the Arthurian slaughter of this giant would, in some form, appear to be a tale of some antiquity. Most significantly, in *Pa gur* we find Arthur fighting with a witch 'in Awarnach's hall', whom both Roberts and Bromwich and Evans rightly argue is identical with *Culhwch*'s Wrnach. This is important to recognize. It implies that Wrnach/Awarnach was an established Arthurian enemy and the tale of his slaughter was a traditional one, though of course both the witch and Arthur are in fact absent from *Culhwch*'s telling of the story, indicating some fundamental divergences from the version that has come down to us in the prose tale (Roberts, 1978: 305-6; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 138 for Awarnach and pp.l, liv, for the episode as a possible Arthurian interpolation to *Culhwch*). This may not be the end of it, however. There may well be another reference to this tale, in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* of all places. In the partly-historical, partly-folkloric,

list of the 28 supposed cities of Britain that forms chapter 66 of the *Historia*, we find an otherwise unknown and unidentified *Cair Urnarc/Urnach*, 'the Fort of Wrnach'. In the absence of any other explanation, it may be tentatively suggested that we have here a localization of this Arthurian tale of the defence of Britain that has been adopted into the *Historia*'s list (Grooms, 1993: 233, a position supported by Gowans, 1988: 19. Gowans also notes that the following city is *Cair Celemion*, which she links to the name of Cei's daughter in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Celemon).

Another element of the tale in *Culhwch* which is of particular interest, and may again be reflected in *Pa gur*, is the porter sequence. Here Arthur's men speak with Wrnach's porter in the following manner:

> 'Open the gate.' 'I will not.' 'Why wilt thou not open it?' 'Knife has gone into meat, and drink into horn, and a thronging [dancing?] in Wrnach's hall. Save for a craftsman who brings his craft, it will not be opened again this night.' Quoth Cei, 'Porter, I have a craft.' 'What craft hat thou?' 'I am the best furbisher of swords in the world.' 'I will go and tell that to Wrnach the Giant and will bring thee an answer.' (Jones and Jones, 1949: 121)

Wrnach asks his porter if the company 'had a craft with them'. On hearing that Cei is supposedly a sword furbisher, he declares 'Let that man in, since he has a craft,' beginning the sequence of events that ends in the removal of his head.

This debate over entry and the need for the prospective entrants to justify themselves has often been commented upon and compared to the earlier scene in which Culhwch seeks entry to Arthur's Court from Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr, Arthur's gigantic porter. It has also been associated with the scene in *Pa gur* where Arthur and his men themselves seek admission to a court (not Arthur's) of which Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr is the porter. Bromwich, looking at all of these, has argued that the *Pa gur* episode underlies (or, rather, alludes to the story that underlies) both of the scenes in *Culhwch*, with Glewlwyd originally the gigantic porter of Wrnach/Awarnach and this being the court that Arthur's men are seeking entry to in *Pa gur*. If accepted this obviously further strengthens the case for the Wrnach/Awarnach adventure being a well-established Arthurian tale and concept. It also represents a strong narrative link between the tale as alluded to in *Pa gur* and recounted in *Culhwch*. As to the first episode in *Culhwch*, Bromwich suggests that Glewlwyd has been deliberately relocated to Arthur's Court. The whole scene involving Culhwch ought, in her view, to be interpreted as a 'farcical burlesque of the situation' presented in the poem's source, with Glewlwyd's later role as Arthur's porter in the Welsh Romances being derivative of *Culhwch* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lv, 58; Bromwich, 1978a: 362). It should, with regards to the import and antiquity of all this, be noted that *Pa gur*'s version is highly allusive, obscure and divergent from that in *Culhwch*. Furthermore, the compiler of *Culhwch* does not appear to have had access to a copy of the poem, as Sims-

Williams has observed (Sims–Williams, 1991: 39). There can thus be no plausible suggestion of literary borrowing in this matter (or in other matters) – rather we must indeed see both texts reflecting an underlying 'core' of Arthurian material.

If both the porter scene and the whole tale of the killing of Wrnach/Awarnach would seem to be reflected in the poem *Pa gur*, and thus be part of an Arthurian adventure of some antiquity (though the details of this differ between the two versions we have surviving), there is more still to be said. With regards to the ultimate origin of the porter scene, Koch has recently proposed that it derives from Celtic mythology (Koch, 1992: 255-6; 1996: 261). In this the original protagonist was, as in the Old Irish *Cath Miage Tuired*, 'The Battle of Moytura', the Common Celtic god *Lugus* (Irish *Lug(h)*, Welsh *Lleu*). In *Cath Miage Tuired* Lug has to apply for entry into the fortress of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* at Tara. The porter blocks his entrance and declares:

> What craft do you practice? For none without a craft goes into Tara

Obviously this bears comparison with stance of both the porter of Wrnach to Arthur's men and, indeed, Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr's response to Culhwch, which is almost identical to that of Wrnach's porter, again suggesting their original equation:

> 'Open the gate.' 'I will not.' 'Why wilt thou not open it?' 'Knife has gone into meat, and drink into horn, and a thronging [dancing?] in Arthur's hall. Save for the son of a king of a rightful domain, or a craftsman who brings his craft, none may enter …' (Jones and Jones, 1949: 97-8)

Now this latter condition is not, of course, explicitly present in *Pa gur*. As such it could be something introduced to the scene by the author of *Culhwch*, possibly under the influence of Irish traditions of Lug, or Common Celtic mythology if we follow Koch. On the other hand if Bromwich is right in her treatment of the porter scenes then the possibility that it may go back to the tale that underlies both *Culhwch* and *Pa gur* (where Lug is present as one of Arthur's men, see Chapter 2) ought to be at least borne in mind.

Nevertheless, Koch has suggested that the parallels between *Culhwch* and the story of Lug go further than the porter scene. Thus Ysbaddaden Penkawr ('Chief Giant') possesses drooping eyelids that have to be propped up with forks by his servants. This has a unique parallel in the giant Balor, who Lug faces in *Cath Miage Tuired* and who also needs his eyelids lifting in order that he can see his adversary. Similarly in the latter tale Lug blinds the giant with a sling stone cast into his eye, whilst in *Culhwch ac Olwen* Culhwch does the same using a stone spear.[4] Finally, at the end of *Culhwch*, Ysbaddaden's head is displayed on a stake, just as is also done to the giant Balor in a later recorded version of the Battle of Moytura. This is

most intriguing. It is perhaps easiest to see these specific parallels as an innovation of *Culhwch* (or its source), given that they are associated with Ysbaddaden rather than with Wrnach or one of the other Arthurian tales. Whether this consequently carries implications for the porter scene or not is to be debated (Koch, 1992: 256; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lv-lvi, 119; Grooms, 1993: 233-6).

Returning to the giants themselves, in the above context it is worth noting that Ysbaddaden Penkawr can also be considered to be another threatening giant that Arthur has to defeat. Although he was part of the 'wooing' tale that forms the framework to which the genuine Arthurian adventures have been attached (and thus not a traditional Arthurian giant[5]), by his very association with Arthur he ought to be seen in this light. Indeed, this concept may well have been one motivation for the attachment of this framing tale to Arthur's name and deeds. In any case Ysbaddaden is, despite his probably non-Arthurian origins, drawn into the Arthurian orbit in *Culhwch*. He is quite plainly portrayed by the author as a threat to Arthur's rule and the good governance of Britain. He has been killing off Arthur's maternal cousins (the brothers of Goreu) and he claims of Arthur that *dan ny llaw i y mae*, 'he is under my hand'. The implication is unambiguous: Ysbaddaden is trying to claim that he was the overlord of *Culhwch*'s 'Chief of the Lords of this Island' (Edel, 1983: 7-8). Given this controversial claim, his eventual slaughter makes perfect sense. It is inevitable, as a result of this, that the 'Chief Giant' must be killed. It is Arthur's duty, as the Hero Protector of Britain from gigantic oppression, to free himself from this oppression.

Aside from Ysbaddaden there are two other giants in *Culhwch* that Arthur's men defeat: Diwrnach Wyddel and Dillus Farfawg. With regards to the former, that his killing for his Otherworldly cauldron in *Culhwch* ought also to be seen as a giant-slaying is indicated by the fact that he is termed Diwrnach 'the Giant' in *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain*. This character would seem to have replaced the 'Chief of Annwfyn' as possessor the magical cauldron, and thus the opponent of Arthur, when the Otherworld raid alluded to in Preideu Annwfyn was euhemerized (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lviii-lix, 127; is there some relationship with Wrnach?).

Dillus Farfawg, 'the Bearded', is a most interesting giant. His tale in *Culhwch* shows clear signs of being drawn from a pre-existing topographic and onomastic folktale, here based around a lost Carn Gwylathyr 'on top of Pumlumon' (see Grooms, 1993: 167-8; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lvii-lviii, 148). Here the tale starts off with Cei and Bedwyr sat 'on top of Pumlumon'. This hill-top setting recalls the common Fenian motif of adventures which begin with the heroes sat on top of 'hunting-hills' or 'mounds'. It also brings to mind the first Arthurian tale in Lifris of Llancarfan's *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, which starts in a similar fashion. These are Arthurian heroes in the wilds of the landscape, awaiting adventure. In *Culhwch* the focus of the adventure is to gain Dillus's beard, so that it may be made into a leash for a hound involved in hunting of *Twrch Trwyth*. Once again,

however, we are most probably looking at a new motive imposed on an old story, that of Arthurian protection of the country from fearsome giants. Certainly the tale in *Culhwch* includes the suggestion of previous Arthurian defensive conflicts involving this figure, when it describes Dillus as 'the mightiest warrior that ever fled from Arthur'.

In fact the killing of Dillus is just one variant of a number of tales about giants associated with hill-top 'castles', spread over a wide area of Wales and with Arthur as their only frequent vanquisher (see above on Siôn Dafydd Rhys). Another variant appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* of *c*.AD 1138. Here Arthur remembers how the giant Ritho/Retho had been terrorizing Britain by killing the kings of Britain and taking their beards to sew into a fur cloak. Arthur, after being threatened by this creature, was challenged to single combat in which the winner would get the fur cloak and the loser's beard. 'Soon after the battle began, Arthur was victorious. He took the giant's beard and the trophy too. From that day on, as he had just said, he had met nobody stronger than Retho' (Thorpe, 1966: 240). As Tatlock says, this looks to have the 'grotesque humor of the Welsh', and in Geoffrey's text it is localized *in Arauio monte*, at 'Mount Arvaius', which *Brut y Brenhinedd* identifies with Eryri, that is Snowdon. Given its nature, and its relationship to the tale of Dillus, it is now generally agreed to represent 'a genuine and unadapted piece of Welsh tradition' – a fragment of Arthurian topographic and defensive lore that Geoffrey simply repeats and reuses for his own ends (Roberts, 1991b: 108; Tatlock, 1950).

Indeed, this beard-stealing giant that Arthur must fight reappears all across Wales, known by the Welsh form of his name *Rita Gawr* and variants. Siôn Dafydd Rhys clearly knew of multiple topographic localizations of this tale in his day, noting that 'in the land of Meirionydd also, and close to Pen Aran in Penllyn, and under the place called Bwlch-y-groes, is a grave of great size, where they say Lytta or Ritta or Rithonwy or Itto Gawr was buried …'. It has recently been argued that these later stories and localizations cannot all have been derivative of Geoffrey's work. Rather they owe their origin to the underlying and ancient Arthurian giant-slaying tales that he himself was repeating (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lvii). Certainly a *Tref Rita* is recorded in the twelfth-century *Book of Llandaff*, indicating that this tale was indeed an established part of the onomastic landscape around the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth. A variant form of the name, *Ricca*, is also found associated with Arthur in *Culhwch*'s pre-Galfridian Court List, which may be significant. Further confirmation of the antiquity of Siôn Dafydd Rhys' tales of Rita Gawr, in Penllyn at least, is found in the poems of Tudur Penllyn, *c*.1420–85, where mention of this tale is made (see further Grooms, 1993: 214–8 for this and the persistence of these traditions and tales into the nineteenth century).

This is not, however, the only piece of pre-existing giant-lore that Geoffrey seems to reproduce in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The motivation for Arthur's recall of his fight with Ritho was Geoffrey's recounting of Arthur's killing of the

Breton giant of Mont St Michel. This immediately precedes the Ritho episode in the *Historia*. Again it appears to be a traditional (presumably Breton) onomastic story, but here placed in a new and pseudo-historical context by Geoffrey. The latter point is important to remember – this tale is manipulated to a much greater degree than that of Ritho, in order to fit in with the rest of Geoffrey's account, with which it is made contemporary (Roberts, 1991b: 108).

The tale begins when Arthur learns of 'a giant of monstrous size' that has come from Spain and snatched up a local maiden, the niece of Duke Hoel, taking her to the top of Mont St Michel in Brittany. The local knights were unable to do anything – the giant sank their ships with huge rocks and killed many of the knights. Those he captured, 'and there were quite a few, he ate while they were still half alive.' Arthur 'being a man of such outstanding courage' decided that he had no need of an army (a clear sign we are moving away from Geoffrey's pseudo-history) and took only Cei and Bedwyr with him to destroy this monstrous threat to Breton society. During their attack on Mont St Michel, Bedwyr discovers the aged nurse-maid of the niece, who claims that the giant has repeatedly raped her and tells how he has already killed the girl. Arthur on hearing this resolves to attack the giant alone. He is quite clearly the peerless and fearless warrior we met earlier here. He comes across and rushes on this inhuman beast, whose face was 'smeared with the clotted blood of a number of pigs at which he had been gnawing'. Arthur and the giant then engage in a vicious battle which ends as follows:

> Moving like lightning, he [Arthur] struck the giant repeatedly with his sword, first in this place and then in that, giving him no respite until he had dealt him a lethal blow by driving the whole length of the blade into his head just where his brain was protected by his skull. At this the evil creature gave one shriek and toppled to the ground with a mighty crash, like some oak torn from its roots by the fury of the winds. The King laughed with relief. He ordered Bedevere to saw off the giant's head and to hand it over to one of their squires, so that it might be carried to the camp for all to go and stare at … All their men crowded round them to gape at it and praise the man who had freed the country from such a voracious monster. Hoel, however, grieved over the fate of his niece. He ordered a chapel to be built above her grave on the mountain-top where she had been buried. The peak took its name from the girl's burial-place, and to this very day it is called Helena's Tomb (Thorpe, 1966: 237-41)

The folkloric explanation of an existing name; the fact that Arthur leaves all his army behind and goes to fight with only Cei and Bedwyr by his side; the nature of the giant and its brutality; the furiousness and savagery of the violence; Arthur's ability to fight this monster, that had defeated armies, on his own and to emerge

ultimately unscathed; Arthur's laughing as the monster crashes to the ground like a torn-up oak – all these point to the genuine nature and folkloric origins of this tale and bear close comparison with the legendary materials that we have already discussed. In this episode Geoffrey's historical realism has come closest to slipping and, as Thomas Jones has noted, here, 'behind the royal features in Geoffrey … may be discerned the ruder lineaments of the folk hero' (Jones and Jones, 1949: xxv). Indeed, the protective nature of this tale is also made very clear. The giant steals maidens and swine from the surrounding region, it destroys all sent against it, and on Arthur's return from this feat he is praised for freeing the country 'from such a voracious monster.'

The above examples obviously indicate that Arthur's fame as a giant-killer was known from the very earliest period and was a key part of his nature, often apparently deriving from local topographic or onomastic folklore. *Culhwch*, as the only pre-Galfridian prose tale, is really our major early Welsh source for this concept. There are good reasons, however, to think that it was a concept known to the author of *Pa gur*. There may even be a reference to a localization of the Arthurian conflict with Wrnach/Awarnach in the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. In any case Geoffrey of Monmouth clearly knew of additional stories and Arthur continues to be renowned for his giant-slaying right into the modern period.

Alongside the above more detailed references to Arthur's exploits we ought, however, to also briefly mention that there are hints of other, lost, Arthurian adventures against giants in some of the pre-Galfridian Old Welsh poems. Most importantly in the Book of Taliesin poem *Marwnat Uthyr Pen*, which appears to be narrated by Uthyr himself, there is an allusion to a successful conflict with the 'sons of Cawrnur', indicating that this was an Arthurian battle. This 'Cawrnur' is also referred to in the Old Welsh poem *Kadeir Teyrnon* from the same manuscript. Here it is said of the subject of the first part of the poem – probably Arthur himself – that 'he brought from Cawrnur pale horses under saddle'. Taken together these two poems suggest the existence of a lost Arthurian tale about the defeat of giants, Welsh *cawr*, which presumably ended, like the killing of the giant Wrnach in *Culhwch*, in Arthur and his men destroying the giant(s)'s lair and taking away 'what treasures they would', in this case horses (see Sims-Williams, 1991a: 52-3 and Green, forthcoming b, on *Kadeir Teyrnon* and Cawrnur).

Finally, another intriguing reference comes in the thirteenth-century poetry of Bleddyn Fardd who describes his patron as being *gwaewddur ual Arthur wrth Gaer Uenlli*, 'spear-harsh, like Arthur against Benlli's fortress'. This Benlli must be the Benlli Gawr who was a well-known giant and oppressor of the Welsh and who is more usually said to have been dealt with by St Germanus (as in the *Historia Brittonum*). It would appear that we have here a reference to a divergent non-Galfridian Welsh version of the tale in which Arthur and his men led the assault on this tyrannous giant's fortress (Padel, 2000: 9).

The final near-human threat to be considered here is that of the dog-heads mentioned in *Pa gur*:

> Manawydan son of Llŷr,
> whose counsel was weighty;
> Manawyd brought
> Shattered spears [*or* shields] back from Tryfrwyd.
> And Mabon son of Mellt,
> he used to stain grass with blood.
> And Anwas the Winged
> and Lluch Llauynnauc ['of the Striking Hand']:
> they were accustomed to defend
> at Eidyn [Edinburgh] on the border.
> …
> On the mountain of Eidyn [Edinburgh]
> he [Arthur] fought with dogheads.
> By the hundred they fell;
> they fell by the hundred
> before Bedwyr the Perfect.
> On the shores of Tryfrwyd
> fighting with Rough Grey,
> furious was his nature
> with sword and shield.
> (Lines 19-28, 43-51)[6]

Two sections of the poem are quoted above. The first comes from Arthur's initial introduction of his warriors and the second from his elaboration on his own deeds and those of his warriors Cei, Bedwyr and Llacheu. It is interesting to note that in both sections two battle sites are mentioned one after the other: Eidyn and Tryfrwyd.

Dealing with Eidyn first, this is to be identified with Edinburgh (Koch, 1997: xiii; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxxvi-xxxvii). In the latter section the 'mountain of Eidyn', which is either Arthur's Seat or the Castle Rock of Edinburgh, comes immediately after Arthur's fight with the witch and the monstrous *Pen Palach* ('Cudgel Head', note the termination -*ach* which conveys unpleasantness). It continues the narration, so the person ('he') who fights the dog-heads is clearly also intended to be Arthur himself. The nature of these dog-heads as enemies of Arthur and Britain is transparent from the context of the passage and their name makes clear their essential nature. These are semi-human monsters, half-man, half-dog, who Arthur must slaughter and defend Britain from, just as he does the witch. These creatures have been equated with the mythical *Cynocephali* of India, who appear in Classical texts and St Augustine, but a better comparison is

perhaps with the mythical *coinchenn*, 'dog-heads', of early Irish texts, who appear as monsters alongside cat-heads and goat-heads (Bromwich, 1983: 231; Sims-Williams, 1991: 42).

   As Jackson rightly comments, the above allusion in *Pa gur* points to a lost tale of Arthur engaged in fighting monsters in Scotland. This tale presumably also had a very clear element of the Protection of Britain, as Edinburgh represented the northernmost border of the Britons (Jackson, 1959b: 15). This concept of Edinburgh is, in fact, referred to earlier in the poem (lines 27-8), where several of Arthur's men are said to have been defenders at Edinburgh 'on the border'. Indeed it is difficult to not see this as another reference to the same conflict. Certainly the two mentions of Tryfrwyd in the different sections quoted above are to be considered references to the same battle (which is also known from another source). In this context it is also worth noting that Eidyn is grouped with this battle in both sections. If this is the case, as it surely must be, then it reinforces the concept of this battle with the dog-heads as a defence of the borders of the Britons from supernatural threats. It also gives us the names of two of Arthur's men who were also involved in this: Anwas the Winged and Lluch of the Striking Hand.[7]

   This is of particular interest. The former is otherwise only known from the Court List of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, but his name seems a suitable one for a member of the pre-Galfridian Arthur's band of wandering, court-less warriors (*An + gwas*, 'no home': Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 74; see Padel, 1994, on nature of Arthur's war-band). Similarly his epithet implies that he possesses magical abilities, as do many of Arthur's warriors in pre-Galfridian tradition. The presence of *Lluch Llauynnauc*, 'Lluch of the Striking Hand', is also important, given that he is generally accepted as being the god *Lugus* (Irish *Lug(h)*, Welsh *Lleu*: Foster, 1959: 34; Jarman, 1983, n.46; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 74). The presence of this god at the battle at Eidyn obviously further emphasizes its mythical nature and that of Arthur's war-band. Indeed this becomes even more intriguing when we remember that the area around Edinburgh, at which this defence of Britain's borders supposedly took place, appears to have been especially associated with *Lugus* as a pagan god. Lothian is, in Middle Welsh, *Lleuddinyawn*, which Koch takes to derive from **Lugu-duniana*, 'the Country of Lugu-dunon, i.e. the Fort of the God Lugus', with **Lugu-dunon* being perhaps an ancient alternative name, or epithet, for Edinburgh's stronghold (Koch, 1997: 131). It is thus highly appropriate that we should find this god fighting alongside Arthur at Edinburgh in *Pa gur* against a supernatural threat, although this is not his only Arthurian appearance. He also seems to have had a major role in the seizing of the cauldron of the Chief of Annwfyn in *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Culhwch ac Olwen*, whilst one poem in the Book of Taliesin places him at the apparently Arthurian Battle of *Cat Godeu* (see Chapter 2).[8]

   What then of the second battle named in the sections from *Pa gur* quoted above, that of Tryfrwyd, at which the Arthurian hero Bedwyr is placed? This

too would seem to be a battle against dog-heads. Sims-Williams suggests that the nature of the poem at this point suggests that Bedwyr is conceived of as an assistant to Arthur's fight against dog-heads. As Bedwyr becomes the main focus of the poem from line 48, the nature of the Battle of Tryfrwyd that he is fighting at becomes even clearer as the adversary is named as Garwlwyd, 'Rough Grey'. This Garwlwyd must be the monster known from the Triads (no. 32) as *Gwrgi Garwlwyd*, whose first name transparently means 'man-dog', *Gwr + gi*. As such it is very likely that he was indeed one of the dog-heads that Arthur has been battling, perhaps here engaged in battle for a second time, given that the conflict is given a different location to that which Arthur is placed at (Padel, 2000: 29; Sims-Williams, 1991: 42–3; Bromwich, 1978a: 371). Certainly the Triads imply that the monster *Gwrgi Garwlwyd* was a creature of the north and thus Tryfrwyd is best interpreted in the same manner, suggesting that a link between it and the battle at Edinburgh to protect the border is not at all implausible. Such a connection would explain the linking of these two conflicts together in *Pa gur*.

In addition to the superhuman Arthurian hero Bedwyr, this battle also seems to have involved Manawydan son of Llŷr, who is said to have brought shattered spears or shields back from Tryfrwyd (i.e. they showed signs of his brave fighting there). This figure is, of course, famous from the Four Branches of the Mabinogi and is fundamentally mythical in nature. He is generally considered to have originally been in some way identical with the Irish sea-god Manannán mac Lir and his presence at Tryfrwyd can only add further to our perception of the fabulous character of this battle (see Chapter 2 and compare *Lluch Llauynnauc* at Edinburgh).

Indeed it cannot be at all assumed that Arthur himself was not actually present at this conflict despite his absence in *Pa gur* as, unlike the battle at Edinburgh, Tryfrwyd is not known only from *Pa gur*. It is also named as Arthur's tenth battle in the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56. As is discussed in Chapter 6, there is no reason to think that the reference to this conflict in *Pa gur* is derivative of the *Historia* and instead we must think of the author of the *Historia* bulking out his portrayal of a 'historical' Arthur with genuine fragments of Arthurian legend, of which the Battle of *Tribruit* (= *Tryfrwyd*) was one (Jackson, 1945–6: 51–2; Bromwich, 1983: 231). This in turn carries with it two important implications. Firstly, the author of the *Historia* clearly conceived of this as a battle in which Arthur played a major role. Secondly, this conflict against dog-heads was already known, and sufficiently famous, in the early ninth century to make it a candidate for such usage. This latter point is especially important and not just for the tale of Arthur's fight against dog-heads that is presently under discussion. It must surely also help to generally authenticate the antiquity of the stories mentioned in *Pa gur* and confirm that its allusions are indeed to pre-existing Arthurian tales (as Sims-Williams, 1991a: 38 argues they are).

To conclude this section, the evidence discussed above adds considerably to that reviewed in the previous section. In particular it further extends and develops the concept of Arthur outlined there as the Protector of Britain from all supernatural threats. Clearly this was a very widely acknowledged and powerful part of Arthur's character which saw him and his warriors involved in a large number of battles against near-human monsters. In the case of the giants, Arthur's reputation in popular oral tradition continued undiminished even in the post-Galfridian period, so that he emerges in the early modern period (and continues right through to the nineteenth century) as the greatest of giant-killers, responsible for liberating the British from these vicious and monstrous oppressors. Indeed it seems likely that those tales that we now have only represent a small proportion of those that were originally told, a point corroborated by the briefest of hints that we find in some early Welsh poetry to other, lost, legends.

That this defence against monstrous near-humans was always a part of Arthur's character, from the earliest stratum of the Arthurian legend, like that of his defence against monstrous beasts, is verified by the poem *Pa gur*. This text appears to reference conflicts with all three categories of such creatures discussed here and it can be seen as belonging to this 'earliest stratum'. This notion is further backed up by the fact that the antiquity of some of *its* stories, at least with regards to dog-heads and potentially also the tale of Wrnach the Giant, is confirmed by references in the early ninth century *Historia Brittonum*. As Bromwich and Evans have made clear, such tales as have been discussed in the previous two sections are 'primary Arthurian traditions' – the Arthur of these tales is the 'original' Arthur that is argued to underly the pseudo-historical figure of the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56.

DEFENDING BRITAIN: HUMAN THREATS TO THE ISLAND OF BRITAIN

Thus far we have dealt with the supernatural threats that Arthur protected the Britons from – dog-heads, cat-monsters, giants, dragons, witches, shape-shifters and divine boars included. This type of tale dominates the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend and it goes back to the very earliest recording of this. In addition to this, however, there are also a handful of instances in which Arthur's opponents are not fabulous near-humans or supernatural beasts but rather simply humans, albeit dangerous and threatening examples of this breed.

The chief manifestation of this has already been discussed fully and the points made there do not need repetition. In the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, Arthur is portrayed as the victor over the *Saxones*, the Germanic invaders and conquerors of lowland Britain. As argued earlier this concept of Arthur is a monastic one created with a particular purpose in mind. It is also, however, a

natural development of Arthur's monster-slaying, Britain-protecting personality
– its occurrence can be paralleled by the development of Arthur's close Irish
analogue Fionn mac Cumhaill. Indeed it can be interpreted in just the same way as
the more fantastic tales that we have been discussing. Although, in all probability,
a secondary development of Arthur's character, it again amply displays his martial
abilities and his role as primary Protector of Britain against external threats.
Thus Arthur is portrayed as spearheading the British resistance to these barbaric
invaders – who he defeats comprehensively in 12 engagements – with the last
of these involving Arthur slaughtering single-handedly 960 of his opponents in
one rush. This is clearly the Arthur that we have been discussing above. He is the
folkloric military 'superhero' and defender even in this supposedly more 'sober'
setting. Moreover, his presence and use here in this early ninth-century text offers
further confirmation of the fact that Arthur's martial and protective character was
a major part of his nature even from the very earliest period.

Two points are important in the above context. The first is that, even though Van
Hamel rightly considered that it 'was but natural to represent a hero of this type
[i.e. a Protector of Britain against supernatural threats] as a victor over the Saxons'
(1934: 231), this seems to have been a surprisingly unpopular, or unacknowledged,
concept of Arthur before Geoffrey of Monmouth's influence began to be felt.
Indeed Arthur and the Saxons are never, before the publication of Geoffrey's
Historia Regum Britanniae, linked outside of those few Latin texts which appear to
have some sort of genetic relationship with the *Historia Brittonum*. This is important
from the perspective of reconstructing the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend.
Arthur as the defender of Britain from the Saxons looks to be an innovation,
based on Arthur's pre-existing fame as a supernatural protector, of a single author.
It appears to be one that remained restricted only to those monastic Latin writers
who knew of this author's work and chose to make use of it. The second point is
that this is not the only such 'rationalization' and historicization of Arthur's role
that took place. As discussed in Chapter 6, his role as the Defender of Britain
came to encompass also the Irish invaders of Anglesey and the supposed ninth-
century Viking invaders of Cornwall.

If Arthur was occasionally portrayed as the defender of Britain from external
human enemies, he is also made to face an insular human threat to the peace of
Britain too: that of Hueil, son of Caw. In the Court List of *Culhwch ac Olwen*,
which it should be remembered is a non-Galfridian accretion to the tale, it is
stated that Hueil 'never submitted to a lord's hand'. Later in the same section a
certain 'Gwydre son of Llwydeu by Gwenabwy daughter of Caw' is said to have
been stabbed by his uncle Hueil and 'thereby there was a feud between Hueil
and Arthur because of the wound'. Some elucidation of the tale that underlies
both of these references is provided by a consideration of other sources. The
most important of these sources, in the present context, is the pre-Galfridian
Vita Gildae of Caradoc of Llancarfan, written between *c*.AD 1120 and *c*.1140.

This claims that Hueil 'submitted to no king, not even Arthur'. It is further claimed that he used to 'harass' Arthur and 'incite the greatest fury between the both of them'. The main manifestation of this appears to be through Hueil raiding Britain from Scotland, carrying off the spoils of his actions until Arthur hears of what he is doing and pursues and kills 'the young raider'.

Despite the fact that Caradoc seems to view Hueil in a positive light and Arthur as a 'war-like king' who wrongly tried to control him (which is perhaps unsurprising given that Hueil is claimed as the eldest brother of his subject, given the habitual bias of such professional hagiographers), these activities must surely be seen as, fundamentally, a threat to the northern Britons. These Britons, we must presume, suffered from both Hueil's attacks and the material losses that formed the spoils that he would 'carry off', with Arthur defending them from these, as well as apparently protecting his own honour. The subsequent repercussions of this incident are then used by Caradoc of Llancarfan to humble Arthur and glorify his saintly subject, as is the general pattern with these *Lives*.

The above certainly seems to explain the similarly phrased first reference in *Culhwch* and defines Hueil quite clearly as a threat to Britain who must be defended against, notwithstanding the fact that the author of the *Vita Gildae* clearly approves of Hueil's behaviour. Going beyond this – to ask, for example, who he is meant to be – is difficult, however. Important in this may be Hueil's father, Caw. He appears to have functioned as something of a legendary royal progenitor, to whose name various figures – many invented – were attached. Thus in *Culhwch* he supposedly has 20 sons and in the Triads Caw is specifically made the father of a family of royal saints (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 77-9; Bromwich, 1978a: 302-3). By the eleventh century Hueil was viewed as one of these supposed children, as too was the historical sixth-century Gildas and possibly also St Samson of Dol (who is, it should be noted, unconnected with this Caw in his seventh-century life). Nevertheless, whilst the former two were also so associated in the eleventh-century Breton *Life* of Gildas, the character of Caw and the nature and date of the sources for these relationships must bring their supposed parentage, fraternal relationships and chronological synchronism into very serious doubt. Indeed, the claim that Gildas was a son of Caw is now universally dismissed as a late legendary invention (as Higham, 1994: 90, 96; Lapidge and Dumville, 1984).

If these traditions of parentage can, therefore, be given no credence for genuinely historical saints who have been drawn to the name of this progenitor, Caw, what of Hueil himself? The above points do, in fact, mean that Hueil is effectively cut off from the chronological anchor provided by the *Vita Gildae*, as too is Caw – both are only temporally located in the late fifth/sixth centuries on the basis of their very late-recorded and now-rejected relationships with Gildas (in fact, as is discussed below, another early saints' life actually places Caw's reign some considerable period before the sixth century). Given this, can anything useful be said about Hueil and hence his conflict with Arthur?

It is worth noting that, as a character, there are no stories of Hueil in which Caw is not his supposed father, unlike with Gildas and Samson. He is not, however, obviously invented, like *Culhwch*'s *Etmic*, 'Fame', and *Neb*, 'Someone', both sons of Caw. As such the possibility that he was always one of Caw's sons, in contrast to the others, ought to be considered. Whilst Thomas Jones (1968) has argued for a lost 'saga' of Hueil and Arthur – in which both the stabbing incidents in *Culhwch* and the sixteenth-century *Chronicle* of Ellis Gruffudd, and Hueil's raiding and supposed 'routing' of Arthur before his final defeat, were all part of one cloth – it is perhaps thus worth investigating Hueil's raiding a little further, with particular reference to the deeds of his father Caw.

With regards to Caw's area of activity, he is always associated with Scotland in the earliest sources naming him. He is a ruler in Scotland in both of the *Lives* of Gildas and in *Culhwch* his name and epithet is correctly interpreted as 'Caw of *Prydyn* [Pictland]'. This needs to be borne in mind when considering Hueil's geographic origins, which appear derivative of Caw's in the *Vita Gildae*. Most significant in the present context, however, are the details of Caw's legend that are recorded in Lifris of Llancarfan's *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, written between 1061 and 1104 and thus very probably earlier in date than any of the references to Hueil's conflict with Arthur that we have. In this *Vita*, St Cadog visits Scotland and exhumes and resuscitates the bones of an enormous giant. This 'horrible and immense' monster declares that he 'reigned for very many years' in Pictland, from which base he pillaged and wasted the lands of the northern British with his band of 'plunderers', until he was slain by an unnamed British ruler. This giant then describes how, for such a sinful action, he has been long tortured in hell and finally names himself as '*Caw* of *Prydyn* [Pictland], or *Cawr* (= Giant)' (Bromwich, 1978a: 302). He begs for St Cadog's forgiveness, which he receives, and St Cadog (somewhat predictably) is granted lands for his monastery by the Scots for his role in this drama.

This is certainly an intriguing, early, and very negative portrayal of Caw. We must surely see it as relevant to understanding the threat that Hueil supposedly posed, as this depiction of Caw's activities is obviously in close accord with those deeds ascribed to his supposed eldest son Hueil in the *Vita Gildae* (though the presentation is, understandably, less positive given the context). It would seem that in the case of both Caw and his son Hueil, we are fundamentally dealing with someone from Scotland (i.e. Pictland) who raids and pillages the lands of the Britons to the south of their base and who is pursued and killed for this by some British hero. On the basis of this I would suggest that Hueil and his father perhaps ought indeed to be treated as closely linked legendary figures. In these two narratives we are seeing the same supposed 'threat' to Britain from outside forces, but with the father and son made prominent (or replacing one another) in different versions. The avenger and protector of the Britons who ends this threat is identified as Arthur in the more developed and sanitised version involving Hueil, but he is unnamed in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*.

Seen in this light, Hueil as a legendary Pictish (or certainly non-British) raider against whom Britain needs defending, fits very well with the other protective tales and stories discussed earlier in this chapter. In particular we might cite the defence of Britain's northern Pictish border from dog-heads in *Pa gur*. Indeed this is particularly true if Caw (and thus potentially his son) was generally seen as a giant rather than a human. This is an essential part of the story in Lifris's account, though it should be remembered that this portrayal may have its origins in folk-etymology rather than genuine tradition (as suggested by Bromwich, 1978a: 302).

If we thus can perhaps extract the above from Jones' supposed tale of Hueil and Arthur and treat it as potentially the core part of the legend, on the basis of the eleventh-century *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, is there anything else that can be said with regards to this? On the legend of the protection of Britain from northern pillagers and oppressions itself, it is worth reiterating that there are no good grounds to treat this as anything other than a late legend which lacks a specific location in time. Gildas and Samson *et al.* must be seen as accretions to Caw's legendary name and status, and thus the chronological synchronism for this episode cannot be relied upon. If the raiders were originally conceived of as giants, as might well be suspected on the basis of the earliest *Vita Sancti Cadoci* reference and which would fit with the types of Arthurian tales we know to have been in circulation in the pre-Galfridian period, then little more needs to be said. *If*, on the other hand, this notion is the result of folk-etymology and they were originally human, some further discussion may be worthwhile.

If Caw and Hueil were human, it must first and foremost be emphasized that this cannot, however, be taken to mean that the story under consideration here was authentically historical. Whilst it may be admitted that the episode could derive from remembrances of Pictish raids on northern Britain in the Roman and post-Roman periods, this is not necessary. It may in fact be better related to the clearly fictional battle at the border of Edinburgh against dog-heads. In any case there would be no reason to think that this tale, whose earliest recording is in the late eleventh century, reflects genuine traditions rather than simply folk-explanation and story based in some vague way upon these events. Indeed, that the story was originally temporally unlocated is further indicated by the date ascribed to it in the two saints' *Lives*. One placed it in the sixth century whilst the other, earlier, version placed it some considerable period *before* the sixth century, associating it with an 'ancient giant' who had long since died and rotted down to his bones by the time of St Cadog. In both cases the dating represents the needs of the authors. That the authors of Saints' *Lives* were happy to appropriate, relocate (both physically and temporally) and manipulate legendary, folkloric or mythical stories so that they could be retold to glorify their monastery and subject – about whom, if the saint lived in the sixth century or before, they usually had no reliable evidence – is, of course, well-known and is further discussed in Chapter 6.

Looking more generally at the story, whether this was always a legendary Arthurian battle against northern raiders, be they giants or men, is unclear, given that the ruler who ended the threat in the earlier *Vita Sancti Cadoci* is not named (despite the fact that Lifris knew of Arthur and used him twice elsewhere in the *Life*). What is clear though is that, by the time of the final composition of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, both Caw and Hueil seem to have been absorbed into the Arthurian 'Court'. Caw functions as a helper in two of Arthur's adventures in this text and, as we have already seen, Hueil is conceived of as being at his court and falling out with Arthur. If the raiding episode is viewed as 'core' and existing earlier than the final composition of *Culhwch*, as suggested above, then perhaps here we are seeing something analogous to the probable transformation of Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr from the porter of Arthur's enemy into the porter of Arthur himself. This is a process perhaps best also understood for Hueil and Caw in terms of the apparently increasing tendency of Arthur's Court to be treated as the embodiment of the Britain of legend and myth (discussed in subsequent chapters). As a result of this, many characters were increasingly drawn into and portrayed as members of Arthur's Court who were not previously part of it. The presence of Caw in two of the Arthurian episodes should not be made too much of, however. It seems likely that it does not reflect a genuine place for him in Arthurian tradition, but rather the humour of the author of *Culhwch*. His initial mention (line 647) gives him the name-form, *kadw*, and in both of the episodes he subsequently appears in he is there essentially to 'keep' (*o gadw*) the prized object won from Arthur's enemy in the battle. We clearly have here an instance of the author indulging in humorous wordplay on Caw's name. As such, his role as 'keeper' in both these adventures ought not to be seen as original to the underlying Arthurian folktales.

Thus whilst the two saints' *Lives* effectively portray both Caw and Hueil as the non-British enemies of Britain (though in one case the negative aspects are somewhat sanitised), we have them in *Culhwch* being absorbed into the expanding Arthurian war-band and a more positive presentation of them being offered. This perspective might well underlie the alternative explanation of Hueil and Arthur's conflict in the Court-List of *Culhwch*. It could also reflect too the fact that, somehow, Caw became the supposed father of Britain's royal saints by the eleventh century. Certainly his apparent legendary dominance of the north 'for very many years', attested in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, perhaps made him an appropriate figure for such development by those who wished to assign a royal and northern origin to saints such as Gildas. One can easily see how this would require a more positive concept of Caw and his family to be created than that found in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*. In any case, as Roberts has noted of Arthur himself, it is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility that both positive and negative portrayals of legendary figures could co-exist in non-Galfridian tradition (Roberts, 1991a, pp. 81–4).

This is really the sum total of the (possibly) human threats that Arthur defends Britain against in the early material. One is attested from very early and has Arthur protecting the Britons from the *Saxones*. This ought to be considered a secondary development of the Arthurian legend, a spin-off from Arthur's role as a supernatural Protector. Whilst it is certainly early and it does become extremely widespread after the publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, before this it only appears in sources which appear directly derivative of the original ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*. The second is concerned with Hueil, son of Caw, and is more difficult to exactly classify. In essence we appear to have a tale, recorded first in the later eleventh century, of some sort of destructive raiding from beyond the northern British borders, though the chronological synchronisms associated with this cannot be trusted. However, it is not entirely clear that this is indeed a human threat. Hueil may in fact have been conceived of as a giant, a quite likely solution given the earliest references and the nature of the Arthurian legend. Alternatively he may simply be a fictional 'enemy' of the northern border (compare the dog-heads), or even a vague remembrance of historical, Pictish, raids in the Roman and post-Roman periods which Arthur has been drafted in to fight (another historicization, if vague and undefined?).

Aside from these, the only other possibly relevant tale is also found in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. In this tale Arthur, Cei and Bedwyr are encountered in South Wales by St Cadog's father, Gwynllyw. This prince is in the process of abducting the saint's mother and has been hotly pursued to the very border of his own land by the said maiden's father. Arthur – after attempting to 'violently' abduct the girl for himself but being dissuaded from this by his companions – asks not what is happening but rather 'who is the holder of this land?' On learning that the saint's father is the 'holder' of the land being entered into, Arthur and his men fly into action, defeating the maiden's father so that Gwynllyw is said to be 'triumphal through Arthur's protection'.

This is clearly a protective tale, but it is also one of a very different character from those discussed above. It is concerned not with the protection of the land and people of Britain from a scourge and a physical threat, but rather simply preventing a border from being violated. It is also in many ways a shocking tale. Arthur does, of course, attack and defeat the wronged party. The key to understanding this may lie, however, in the Arthur's role as the defender of Britain's borders against Hueil and the dog-heads, referred to above, with this episode simply reflecting another aspect of this. As is suggested later on in this study, though Gwynllyw *et al.* are human (albeit also thoroughly legendary and probably fictional), Arthur himself appears to be acting in an almost mythological manner. He is not interested in the rights and wrongs of what is happening, only the border infraction itself. As Malone has observed, 'such automatism' better 'befits an offended deity' concerned with the defence of borders, albeit the 'broken down' remembrance of such a figure, rather than simply a folkloric hero (Malone, 1924: 482; Chapter 5).

The concept of Arthur represented in this chapter is thus not simply one of a monster-killer and defeater of clear physical threats, supernatural or otherwise. This is certainly a major part of the concept but the concept would also appear to be more fundamental than this – Arthur is there to protect the integrity of Britain's borders (internal and external) whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation or the nature of threat.

ARTHUR THE HERO PROTECTOR: SOME CONCLUSIONS

It should be clear from the above analysis that 'great Arthur, a mighty defender' and paragon of martial valour was an extremely common concept of Arthur in the non-Galfridian legend. It is found in virtually all the early sources – including *Culhwch ac Olwen*, *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, the *Historia Brittonum*, *Marwnad Cynddylan*, and the Celtic-Latin Saints' *Lives*. It dominates Arthur's role in the folkloric tradition recorded from the early modern period onwards in Wales, where Arthur is 'the greatest of Giant Killers'. Several of the stories are found in multiple sources, indicating their genuine place in the underlying 'shared Arthurian tradition'. Indeed, it is worth noting that even in the earliest material many of Arthur's protective activities seem to have their origins in pre-existing topographic and onomastic folklore. The widespread nature of this concept is further illustrated by the fact that it is found all across the Brittonic world, being present in non-Galfridian Welsh and Breton sources, as well as Cornish folklore. The twelfth-century Breton 'Life of St Euflamm' is especially interesting in the present context, as it seems to indicate a Breton equation of Arthur with Heracles.

Fundamentally this is primarily a supernatural and folkloric role for Arthur. Almost all the threats that Arthur faced – where there is more than the briefest allusion to this concept in the sources – were of this type, including giant divine boars, shape-shifting she-wolves, giant cat-monsters, dragons, dog-heads and numerous witches and giants. Aside from the curious and seemingly mythological incident in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, which revolves around a border infraction rather than a threat as such, there is only one menace that Arthur combats which is recorded in early sources and in which the protagonists are certainly human. This is that of the post-Roman Germanic invaders, and we have already seen that this is most probably a secondary and learned development which seems to have no echo in Welsh sources or, in fact, those which are not clearly directly derivative of the *Historia Brittonum*.

Finally, in addition to Arthur the Hero Protector being a very common and fully folkloric concept of Arthur, it is also clearly attested from the earliest period. Thus it is found in *Marwnad Cynddylan*, probably our earliest certainly datable Arthurian reference which provides more than just the name. The concept of

Arthur as a 'peerless warrior' also does most plausibly underlie the mid sixth-century Arthurs, discussed in the preceding chapters. Indeed, it can be argued that Arthur's hunting of the divine and highly destructive giant boar *Twrch Trwyd* goes back to the seventh century, on the basis of the *Gorchan Cynfelyn*, and just possibly even to the sixth century if some of the proposed datings for this are accepted. Furthermore, *if* Fionn was indeed the hunter of *Torc Triath* in Irish tradition (as suggested above) then it can be tentatively proposed that Arthur's association with *Trwyd* may go back to his very origins, and perhaps imply some greater relationship between the two characters than has previously been allowed.

Given our general lack of evidence from such an early period (especially with regards to mythical figures), the above ought to be seen as significant when it comes to establishing the importance of this concept of Arthur in the early legend. Placed alongside the obviously very widespread nature of this concept and its almost uniformly mythical and folkloric character, it helps confirm that a primary role for Arthur was indeed that of mythical Protector of Britain and a paragon of martial valour. Bromwich and Evans's claim that 'the popular and learned concept of Arthur was above all else that of a defender of his country against every kind of danger, both internal and external', is clearly fully defensible and, indeed, the suggested comparison with Fionn would also seem to be well-justified. As Van Hamel and others have observed, Arthur appears very clearly in the non-Galfridian material as first and foremost the British counterpart to Fionn's Hero Protector of the Irish, perhaps even from some of the same threats.

4

THE NATURE OF ARTHUR'S
WAR-BAND AND FAMILY

Arthur himself is, of course, the main focus of this study. Nonetheless, much can be learnt about him through a consideration of the figures that the story-tellers surrounded him with. Obviously there are literally hundreds of people associated with Arthur in the non-Galfridian tradition alone, never mind in the continental versions of the legend. In order to make some sense of all this, a simple methodology has been adopted for the analysis of these figures which combines two approaches.

The first approach is that of an examination of the evidence for common themes and broad concepts. What does an overview of all the early Arthurian figures have to tell us about their character and that of the legend as a whole? This has the advantage of allowing us to at least make some use of those many characters whose name only appears associated with that of Arthur once in the early material. The second approach attempts to go beyond this by looking for 'shared elements' that might be part of a basic pre-Galfridian Arthurian 'cycle', if we like. This approach requires we look for specific figures from the Arthurian legend that recur in several texts. Only by identifying apparently independent references to the same figures can we be confident that we have elements of such a 'common stock'. The independence of the references is, naturally, of particular importance. We are interested in those elements which make multiple appearances in the sources and derive from a common stock, rather than literary borrowings which simply show the influence of one particular text on others.

The table below represents a subjective and rough assessment of the general nature of Arthur's companions. The aim of this is to allow central (and transitory) members of his war-band and family to be easily identified, making

changes in the nature of these companions open to analysis. A couple of points should be made before going any further. First, for each character a very general judgement is offered on their nature, by placing them in one of three categories. The first is for mythical beings – those who are fundamentally Otherworldly in character and who may well, in some cases, have been originally pagan gods or mythological heroes. I have tried to keep this category relatively exclusive and only admit those whose Otherworldly nature is deemed reasonably transparent. The second is for folkloric and fictional characters. This includes magical and superhuman characters, such as Cei, who, despite their clearly supernatural nature do not show obvious signs of deriving from the Otherworld themselves, through to heroic figures who show no signs of being historical and obviously fictional characters (whose names suggest an entirely invented origin, such as *Neb*, 'Someone', son of Caw, mentioned in *Culhwch*'s Arthurian Court List). Finally, the third is for figures that appear to have a clear origin in history and, additionally, those whose concept in the Arthurian material may in some way reflect this (such as Maelgwn Gwynedd, associated with Arthur in one of the Triads).

With regards to the texts listed along the top of the table, arranged broadly chronologically left to right, only those in which Arthur appears associated in a narrative manner with other figures are included, for obvious reasons. This means that, for example, *Y Gododdin* and *Marwnad Cynddylan* are excluded from consideration, as Arthur is only found there for the purposes of comparison. As such there is no suggestion that the people he was linked with there were genuinely considered part of the Arthurian legend (at this point). Another important point is that *Culhwch ac Olwen* is not, for the purposes of this table, treated as a single story; the same too is the case for the poem *Pa gur*. There are good reasons to think that the actual adventures that occur in both these texts derive from independent folkloric Arthurian tales, as has already been discussed extensively, and so the presence of a character in each individual 'adventure' is treated as an independent occurrence of this figure (with some reservations – see Chapter 3, for example, on Caw's role in *Culhwch*). The initial encounter with Culhwch at Arthur's Court and the assignment of six helpers in the prose tale is treated as another single separate instance for the present purposes, representing the framework of the tale. On the other hand, the Arthurian Court List of *Culhwch* is regarded, following Bromwich and Evans (1992: xxxvii–xlvi), as something quite separate to (and later in date than) these tales and the basic framework. Given this, and also its enormous length, it is excluded from the table, though it is discussed in more general terms in the subsequent analysis. The focus here is on the legend itself rather than the purely literary embellishment of this.

Table 1: Members of Arthur's pre-Galfridian family and/or war-band

Character Name/Identification	Nature of Character (M – Mythical; F – Fictional or Folkloric; L – Legendary/Historical/Pseudo-Historical)	'Earliest Stratum'				Early Poetry						
		Preideu Annwfyn & Kat Godeu	Historia Brittonum	Englynion Y Beddau	Pa gur yv y porthaur?	Annales Cambriae	Book of Taliesin poems; Marwnat Cadwallon; Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir	Ymddiddan Melwas ac Gwenhwyfar; Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr	Eleventh-/twelfth-century Celtic Latin Saints' Lives	Culhwch ac Olwen – Arthurian Episodes	TYP – Early Version	William of Malmesbury
Lugus/Lleu/Lugh	M	1			1		1			1		
Gweir/Gwri/Pryderi	M	1					1?			1		
Gwydion m. Dôn	M	1										
Amr m. Arthur	F		1									
Bedwyr	F			1	2		1?		2	6	1	
'Osfran's son'	F/M			1								
Gwalchmei m. Gwyar	F			1						1	1	1
March (m. Meirchon?)	F/M			1							1	
Gwgawn Red-Sword	L/F?			1								
Gwythyr m. Greidawl	F/M?			1			1			2		
Cei	F				5			1	2	4	1	
Mabon m. Modron	M				1					2		
Mabon m. Mellt	M				1					1		
Manawydan m. Llŷr	M				1		1?			1		
Uthyr Pendragon	F/M?				1		1	1			1?	
Cyscaint m. Banon	F				1					1		
Gwyn Godybrion	F/M?				1							
Anwas the Winged	F				1							
Brydlaw	F				1							
Llacheu m. Arthur	F				1		1				1	
Medraut	F					1						
Gwawrddur	L – 6th cent.						1					
Gwyn ap Nudd	M						2			3		
Madawg m. Uthyr	F						1	1				
Eliwlod m. Madawg	F							1				
Gwenhwyfar	M							1	1	1		
Glewlwyd Great-Grasp	F				?					1		

Cynddylig the Guide	F?									1		
Gwrhyr Interpreter of Tongues	F									4		
Goreu m. Custennin	F									2		
Caw of Prydyn	L/F?									2		
Menw m. Teirgwaedd	F									3		
Hygwydd, A's servant	F									2		
Trachmyr	F									1		
The 3 sons of Cleddyf Difwlch	F									1		
Gwarthegydd m. Caw	F									1		
Tarawg of Allt Clwyd	F?									1		
Rheiddwn m. Eli Adfer	F									1		
Isgofan the Generous	F									1		
Gwydre m. Arthur	F									1		
Garselit the Irishman	F									1		
Glew, son of 'Ghost'	F									1		
Gwlyddyn the Craftsman	F									1		
Madawg m. Teithion	F									1		
Gwyn m. Tringad	F									1		
Eiriawn Penlloran	F									1		
Cynlas m. Cynan	F									1		
Gwilenhin k. of France	L – 11th cent.									1		
Echel 'Mighty Thigh' (=Achilles?)	F/M?									1		
Arwyli eil Gwydawc Gwyr	F									1		
Rhuddfyw Rhys	F									1		
Hir Peisawg	F									1		
Llygadrudd Emys	F									1		
Gwrfoddw the Old	L – 7th cent.									1		
Osla Big-Knife	L – 8th cent.									1		
Cacamwri, A's servant	F									2		
Gwyngelli	F									1		
Cyledyr the Wild	F									1		
Long Amren & Long Eiddil, A's servants	F									1		
Maelgwn Gwynedd	L – 6th cent.										1	
Caradawg Strong-Arm	L?										1	
Gerthmwl Wledig	L?										1	

Gobrwy m. Echel Mighty Thigh (above)	F										1	
Cadrieth 'Fine-Speech' m. Porthawr Gadw	F										1	
Fflewdwr Flam	F										1	
Drystan m. Tallwch	F										1	
Essyllt	F										1	

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON ARTHUR'S WARRIORS AND FAMILY

Before looking in detail at some of the most important Arthurian characters identified by this, a number of more general observations can be made. First and foremost, the almost entirely unhistorical nature of Arthur's companions is very clearly demonstrated in the above analysis. Of the 70 characters associated with Arthur in the above sources only between seven and nine are assigned to the 'legendary/historical' category, rather than the two 'fictional' categories. Furthermore, aside from the dubious case of Caw of Prydyn (who is portrayed as a giant in one early source and whose presence in two Arthurian adventures in *Culhwch* may owe more to a play on words than genuine tradition), none of these figures appear closely associated with Arthur on more than one instance in the above material.

Indeed, this becomes even more noticeable when one looks at the distribution of these characters and those of other categories. In the 'earliest stratum' those associated with Arthur are almost exclusively mythical or fictional/folkloric and there is in fact a much higher proportion of mythical figures than there is in the (probably) later poems and other sources. In contrast, in the adventures in *Culhwch* and in the Early Version of the Triads there are not only fewer of these figures, but far more characters of whom nothing else is known or who are historical in nature. In fact, of the nine potential instances of historical figures, seven appear first in *Culhwch* or the Triads and only one in the 'earliest stratum'. This latter is Gwgawn Red-Sword, who is found associated with Arthur in the *Englynion Y Beddau*, and then just once more in the post-Galfridian *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*:

> A grave for March, a grave for Gwythur,
> a grave for Gwgawn Red-sword;
> the world's wonder (*anoeth*) a grave for Arthur.
> (Sims-Williams, 1991: 49)

This is not a definite instance, however, as it is not certain that he was the ninth-century King of Ceredigion with whom he has been tentatively identified (Sims-Williams, 1991: 49). Furthermore, his association with Arthur in the pre-

Galfridian material is assumed on the basis of his appearance in the Arthurian *englynion* rather than any narrative or story or, indeed, other reference to him.

The other probably pre-*Culhwch* instance is another loose association, in the Book of Taliesin's *Kanu y Meirch*, where a certain Gwardur is linked with Arthur's name:

> And Gwythur's horse;
> And Gwardur's horse;
> And Arthur's horse,
> boldly bestowing pain;
> (Lines 30-3: Coe and Young, 1995: 149)

Although the grouping of the heroes was clearly dictated by rhyme, Gwythur was linked with Arthur in *Englynion Y Beddau* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* and thus it seems likely that Gwardur is here an Arthurian character too. This is particularly the case if he can be identified with the Gwa(w)rd(d)ur who is compared to Arthur in *Y Gododdin* (as noted by Sims-Williams, 1991: 53). The idea that he was historical stems from this identification. If it is accepted, however, then it is difficult to see Gwardur's appearance here as anything other than derivative of *Y Gododdin*'s comparison and, as such, Gwardur cannot be treated as a genuine Arthurian character. Nevertheless, it is an interesting case and is suggestive of one way in which non-Arthurian figures became drawn into the wider legend as it developed.

The legendary/historical characters in the later material are of a different sort – it seems clear that in *Culhwch* and the Triads Arthur's war-band is beginning to include figures of this type (though still only a few). However, it is also worth noting that the figures with which Arthur is so associated lack any real uniformity. They include Gwilenhin, King of France, who is generally agreed to be William of Normandy, King of England from 1066-87; Osla Big-Knife, who is almost certainly King Offa of Mercia, who ruled in the eighth century; Gwrfoddw the Old, who seems to have been a ruler of Ergyng in the seventh century; and Maelgwn Gwynedd, who is the mid sixth-century King of Gwynedd mentioned by Gildas in his *De Excidio Britanniae* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 88, 94, 136).

The fact that, in the earlier material (and the other Old Welsh poetry and the Saints' *Lives*), Arthur's companions appear to be conceived of as mythical and folkloric, with an almost complete lack of 'historical' figures as genuine Arthurian characters and a significant number of figures who seem to have their origins in the Otherworld and/or have been originally pagan gods, is most intriguing. This impression is confirmed by the fact that, of the characters that are *first* found associated with Arthur in the tales of *Culhwch* and the Triads, several are legendary/historical figures but none are undoubtedly mythical. Obviously this

runs counter to the often-made assumption that the Arthurian legend became more, not less, fantastic as it developed and was embellished. It is thus important to note given the overall focus of this study.

This change in the nature of Arthur's war-band is worth pursuing further and it can be related to the great expansion in Arthur's companions that can be seen in *Culhwch* and the Triads, with many names being associated there with Arthur that were not previously so linked (or, indeed, were previously unrecorded). It can be suggested that both of these phenomena are understandable in the context of the general trend of Arthur being assigned an increasingly high status in Welsh learned and literary tradition in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Thus in *Culhwch* he is *Penteyrnedd yr Ynys hon*, 'Chief of the Lords of this Island', and in the Triad (no. 1) in which three of the six remaining legendary/historical/pseudo-historical characters (Maelgwn Gwynedd; Caradawg Strong-Arm; Gerthmwl Wledig) all make their appearance, Arthur himself is similarly 'Chief Lord of the Three Tribal Thrones of the Island of Britain'. He is also granted grandiose titles in the Welsh-Latin Saints' *Lives* of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

What seems to be happening here is that Arthur's status and role is being inflated by those who are utilising and retelling his legend. At their hands Arthur's Court has, in fact, begun to represent and embody the Britain of legend and myth, with Arthur as its 'Lord', hence the titles. This development is particularly clear in the Triads, where even in the pre-Galfridian Early Version of the Triads we find *Llys Arthur*, 'Arthur's Court', replacing the phrase *Ynys Prydein*, 'The Island of Britain', in the classification of Welsh traditional material (for example, Triad no. 9, 'Three Chieftains of *Arthur's Court*'). This does, in fact, become more and more common in the Later Version of the Triads and testifies to Arthur's mounting dominance and status. Arthur's Court is clearly increasingly conceived of as the centre of legendary and mythical Britain, and the great expansion in the Arthurian personnel seen in *Culhwch* and the Triads, including the presence of characters such as Maelgwn, must be understood in light of this. Arthur is the mythical 'Chief of Britain'. As a consequence it is inevitable that other, originally unrelated, characters from Welsh myth and legend should be attracted to his name and court, and that he should be conceived of as having legitimate authority and power over these figures (see further Chapter 6 and Bromwich, 1978a; Roberts, 1991a; Bromwich and Evans, 1992).

This would certainly seem to explain why we find increasing numbers of historical/legendary figures associated with Arthur in *Culhwch* and the Triads, and why there are so many 'new' fictional characters present in this material too. They are not found in the 'earliest stratum' and there is no sense that these were originally Arthurian heroes or family-members. Arthur's association with them reflects the embellishment and expansion of his legend in insular tradition rather than anything else. This is particularly obvious in some cases. In Triad no. 26, for example, we find Arthur integrated into the Tristan and Isolt (Drystan and

Essyllt) legend, a legend which was undoubtedly non-Arthurian in origin (see Padel, 1981; Bromwich, 1991a). Indeed, the notion that this drawing of unrelated story-cycles and characters to Arthur's name becomes ever more pronounced over time is also confirmed in the Triads. For example, Arthur himself actually takes over some unrelated tales, so that in the Later Version it is he, not Coll m. Collfrewy, who pursues the destructive boar Henwen across Wales (Triad 26W), attracted presumably by his reputation as the hunter of the divine boar *Twrch Trwyd*. Similarly, further new names are drawn to his court in the later Triads, including Peredur, Owein m. Urien, Myrddin and Llywarch Hen.

This impression can be further supported by looking at the Court List inserted into the main text of *Culhwch* (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxxiv-xlvi for an analysis of this and its relationship to the rest of the tale). The Court List consists of a list of just under 260 characters who are supposed to be members of Arthur's Court and whose names Culhwch invokes as guarantors of the gift he demands from Arthur. Many of the 'new' names in the Arthurian adventures in *Culhwch* are also found in this – they are probably in fact derivative of this Court List – and it is a most valuable document for understanding the above referenced growth of the Arthurian legend.

In addition to the 'traditional' Arthurian figures that are mentioned in the List, such as Cei, we also have new characters from the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi' (including Teyrnon and Pwyll) and the Irish 'Ulster Cycle' (e.g. Cnychwr m. Nes = Conchobar mac Nessa, King of Ulster in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*) being drawn into Arthur's orbit. Drystan and Essyllt are similarly to be found in this list, as are mythical figures such as Edern m. Nudd. We also find a few further examples of historical/pseudo-historical figures that have been absorbed into legend and so are attracted to Arthur's Court, including Gildas and the sister of Owein m. Urien. Although still a minor element, it is worth noting that this does seem to have been a process that increasingly affected figures supposedly from the post-Roman 'Heroic Age'. This is understandable, given the paucity of accurate evidence from this period and thus its inevitably legendary nature, but it is clearly not confined to figures from this period, as we saw above. Finally there appears a whole host of additional farcical, fantastic, folkloric and/or invented names. These form the vast majority of the names and are to be placed alongside those listed in the table above.

This literary embellishment of Arthur was influential and must be distinguished from the actual 'core' Arthurian tales and characters. The existence of this problem lies behind the need for identifying specific 'common' elements which do not seem to stem from literary borrowing and which are recorded early. Furthermore, the expanded Arthurian court dominates post-Galfridian Welsh literary sources and this must be borne in mind in any analysis. Thus there is obviously some kind of relationship between all versions of the Triads and the Court List in *Culhwch*, whilst the lists of Arthur's counsellors in *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* and the hero's

companions in *Chewdl Gereint fab Erbin* are undoubtedly derivative of *Culhwch* (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xl–xlii).

This is not, of course, to say that there is nothing of use in the Court List. In addition to the attracted and invented characters focussed on above, it does make reference to a number of genuine Arthurian figures, going into detail with regards to their traditional gifts, powers and nature. Conversely, however, several Arthurian characters we might have expected to be named are absent, including Medraut and Arthur's son Llacheu. Even more importantly, it sometimes also makes reference to stories of them that don't appear elsewhere in *Culhwch*, such as the conflict between Arthur and Hueil m. Caw, or the tale of the survivors of Arthur's Battle of Camlann. The Court List consequently cannot be ignored. What is rather being suggested here is that caution must be exercised when dealing with this material. The author(s) of *Culhwch* and the Court List were clearly well-versed in the Welsh Arthurian legend, but they also were highly inventive and possessed of a specific concept of Arthur's Court as the centre of legendary Britain.

Whether this embellishment and concept was necessarily a positive thing for the Arthurian legend is debatable. Whilst it may well have inspired Geoffrey and others to take up Arthur and popularize him, his 'Lordship' of legendary Britain can be seen to lie behind some fundamental changes in his character. Although Arthur's original nature continued virtually unaltered in the 'vulgar traditions' of Wales, in literary sources Arthur becomes, as Roberts notes, perhaps too central and clearly established (Roberts, 1991a; Grooms, 1993; Padel, 1994; see Chapter 6 on Geoffrey). In this perhaps lay the seeds of Arthur's decline. At first he himself takes over others' deeds and their central role in the tales (as in Triad 26W). Increasingly, however, both Arthur and his legend do start to become simply stock features of British legend and sometimes little more than a story-telling device, with Arthur simply fleetingly present to provide a frame of reference for an unrelated legendary tale. A fine example of this is had from St Illtud's brief visit to Arthur's Court in his twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Vita*, but in the 'Three Romances' Arthur and his court similarly act as more of a framing device for the tales they tell than anything else. 'Knights' such as Peredur are clearly central and Arthur only occasionally resembles the folkloric hero of *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, who sees his men massacred by the dozen without worry and who laughs as he kills witches. Instead he is more of a dignified monarch, worrying over the absence and well-being of his men, as in *Owein* (Padel, 2000: 77, 80-2).

This then is the broad picture painted by an examination of Arthur's companions. In the earliest material he has relatively few companions, particular ones that recur in several tales, and these are almost wholly folkloric and mythical in nature. These are discussed in more detail in the next section. In the course of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, Arthur's war-

band is enormously embellished, reflecting his new and increasing literary status as the embodiment of legendary and mythical Britain. These new Arthurian companions include new characters from myth and the Mabinogi, folkloric and fantastic heroes (some of whom, at least, must have been invented purely for the purposes of embellishment and literary flamboyance), and historical and pseudo-historical figures of legend. The latter included people from almost all centuries, though increasingly over time the post-Roman 'Heroic Age' dominated this, which is understandable given that the 'Heroic Age' largely existed beyond the British historical horizon and was consequently largely legendary in nature (see, for example, Dumville, 1977b; Dumville, 1986: 11). This growth in the insular Arthurian legend, and the consequent attraction of much of legendary and mythical Britain to Arthur's Court, was a literary development but one which led to Arthur's eventual decline into a stock character and framing device.

ARTHUR'S WAR–BAND: THE CORE ARTHURIAN CHARACTERS

The general character of Arthur's companions, and the implications of this for the development and nature of the Arthurian legend, is made clear in the previous section. In this section the second proposed methodology is followed with the aim of defining exactly who the traditional Arthurian figures were and what their nature was. Indeed, to what extent was there a genuine 'core' Arthurian war-band which might be seen to reflect an insular cycle?

    The easiest approach to this is to first exclude those figures who are only associated with Arthur in one tale in the above table. This is primarily a methodology driven by caution and it has to be admitted that it may exclude figures that really ought to be included, but whose role has been obscured by the vagaries of our evidence. Thus Amr m. Arthur, recorded in what appears to be genuine folklore of the early ninth century, is excluded as no other pre-Galfridian reference is made to him. He does, nevertheless, appear in the post-Galfridian *Chewdl Gereint fab Erbin* as 'Amhar son of Arthur', one of Arthur's four chamberlains. This might well be taken to suggest that he did have a genuine, if minor and now largely lost, place in the pre-Galfridian legend (Jones and Jones, 1949: 231). Similarly 'Osfran's son', who is un–named but said to have been present at Camlann in *Englynion Y Beddau*, makes no other appearance. He is, though, probably related to the mythical Morfran, son of Tegid, who is said in *Culhwch*'s Court List and elsewhere to have been one of the only survivors of Camlann (Sims-Williams, 1991: 51. He also has a role in the mythical *Hanes Taliesin* as the son of Ceridwen – Ford, 1977: 159-64).

    Despite such reservations this is nevertheless the most plausible approach to detailed reconstruction and it does identify a number of characters who might be thought of as 'core' Arthurian heroes and/or family members. Some idea of this

core can be had through the rough-and-ready means of totting up the number of separate appearances for the various characters, producing the following 'league table':

1.	Cei	13
2.	Bedwyr	12
3.	*Maponos*	5
4.	Gwyn ap Nudd	4
5.	Uthyr Pendragon	4
6.	*Lugus*/Lleu/Lug	4
7.	Gwalchmei m. Gwyar	4
8.	Gwrhyr (Interpreter)	4
9.	Gweir/Gwri/Pryderi	3
10.	Manawydan m. Llŷr	3
11.	Llacheu m. Arthur	3
12.	Gwenhwyfar	3
13.	Gwythyr m. Greidawl	3
14.	Menw m. Teirgwaedd	3
15.	March m. Meirchon	2
16.	Cyscaint m. Banon	2
17.	Madawg m. Uthyr	2
18.	Glewlwyd Great-Grasp	2
19.	Goreu m. Custennin	2
20.	Caw of Prydyn	2
21.	Hygwydd, Arthur's servant	2
22.	Cacamwri, Arthur's servant	2

Two points are immediately obvious from a brief consideration of this 'league table'. First, only 22 characters appear more than once in the pre-Galfridian material (excluding the Court List of *Culhwch*, for obvious reasons). The number of regular members of Arthur's family and/or war-band is very restricted compared to the overall number of figures he is associated with. Second, several of these characters owe their position on this list to their appearance in two or more of the adventures in *Culhwch*. In particular, Gwrhyr, Interpreter of Tongues, Menw m. Teirgwaedd, Goreu m. Custennin, Caw of Prydyn, and Hygwydd and Cacamwri, Arthur's servants, owe their place in this list exclusively to *Culhwch* and their presence as part of the 'core' must thus be viewed with considerable scepticism (see further below). As such this list may be even more restricted than it first appears. In order to deal with this and other issues, and thus more closely define the 'core' characters of the early Arthurian tradition, some discussion of each character and its nature and relationship with Arthur is given below.

(a) Cei and Bedwyr

Cei and Bedwyr belong, it must be said, to an entirely different league from all the other characters considered here – they appear far more frequently than any of the other individuals and they usually appear together as a pair with Arthur. Thus in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci* Gwynllyw is fleeing back to his own land when:

> behold he saw three powerful champions. Arthur and his two knights, namely
> Cai and Bedwyr, were sitting on top of the aforesaid hill playing at dice
> (Coe and Young, 1995: 29)

No other Arthurian characters appear. These three on their own are enough to defeat the army that pursues Gwynllyw. Their treatment is also instructive. Although clearly subservient to Arthur (they do his bidding and act as his 'messengers'), they are described as 'companions' and Arthur is more first-among-equals than anything else, simply accepting it when Cei and Bedwyr refuse to go and 'snatch the girl violently' for him. There are numerous other examples of this, including in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* where only these two accompany Arthur against the giant of Mont St Michel (see Chapter 3).

   Given the number of references to them, their status as a 'pair' and the fact that frequently they are Arthur's only companions, there can be little doubt that they form the core of Arthur's companions and were very widely known. Indeed, both of these figures appear to be exclusively Arthurian, having no independent existence outside his legend (Padel, 2000: 109). Looking at the individual heroes in more detail, Cei is always named first when both characters are present and he appears to have the most developed character of the two. In *Pa gur* he is a perfect and superhuman warrior, famed for fighting monsters such as the giant sea-cat *Cath Paluc*:

> Vain was a host
> compared with Cai in battle.
> …
> Heavy was his vengeance,
> painful was his fury.
> When he would drink from a horn
> he would drink enough for four.
> When he came into battle,
> he would slay enough for a hundred.
> Unless it were God who accomplished it,
> Cai's death were unattainable.
> (Sims–Williams 1991: 43)

The latter point is particularly interesting given the strong tradition that Arthur too had never and would never die, recorded first in the *Englynion Y Beddau* (though Arthur's avenging of Cei's death is mentioned in the Court List of *Culhwch*). The fullest description of Cei is found, however, in *Culhwch*:

> Cei had this peculiarity, nine nights and nine days his breath lasted under water, nine nights and nine days could he be without sleep. A wound from Cei's sword no physician might heal. A wondrous gift had Cei: when it pleased him he would be as tall as the tallest tree in the forest. Another peculiarity had he: when the rain was heaviest, a handbreadth before his hand and another behind his hand, whatever would be in his hand would remain dry, by reason of the greatness of his heat; and when the cold was hardest on his comrades, that would be to them kindling to light a fire (Based on Jones and Jones, 1949: 107)

Cei's nature here is very clear: he is a magical and supernatural warrior. There are only a few hints in *Culhwch* of the surly and negative aspects of his character that come to dominate in the continental Romances – which is unsurprising, perhaps, given that they are ignored in Welsh poetry of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries (Bromwich, 1978a: 306; see further on Cei the detailed study of Gowans, 1988). In the story itself he plays a full part (until Arthur offends him), leading the attacks on two giants with valour and cunning, and being a prime mover in the freeing of the divine prisoner Mabon m. Modron from an euhemerized Otherworldly fortress.

One particularly strong element of his pre-Galfridian character is that he was seen as a giant himself, which again ought to be compared to Arthur's portrayal. This tradition is alluded to in *Pa gur* (he is the *gur hir*, 'tall man', reflecting his later epithet *Cai Hir*, 'Cai the Tall') and it found popular expression in topographic and onomastic folklore, such as the pass in Snowdonia named from at least the twelfth-century *Gwryd Cei*, 'Cei's fathom, Cei's armspan', in reference to his giant size (Padel, 2000: 111; Richards, 1969: 262–3). Cei is thus depicted as a perfect and superhuman warrior who cannot die and fights monstrous opponents and giants; he is of giant size himself and of clearly supernatural character; and he is a figure of popular folklore and onomastic legend. As such there can be little doubt that he belongs at the side of the pre-Galfridian Arthur, who is similarly conceived in the early Arthurian tradition.

Bedwyr too is clearly a hero of popular folklore and onomastic legend. Folklore regarding his grave is alluded to in the ninth-century *Englynion Y Beddau*, where it is located on Tryfan mountain, Snowdonia. Likewise, in the ninth- or tenth-century *Marwnat Cadwallon ap Cadfan*, a seventh-century battle is said to have been fought at *Ffynnawn Uetwyr*, 'Bedwyr's Spring', which looks like it is a place-name derived from some lost onomastic tale (its Arthurian association is not evident from the poem, but given that Bedwyr looks to be a purely Arthurian character,

it has been included in the above table). The latter folklore might, in fact, be compared to the Arthur's Well, found at or near to Cadbury Castle, Somerset, where Arthur and his men are said to water their horses during their Wild Hunt (Chambers, 1927: 184-5), or the *Fons Arthuri* that is recorded in Crawford parish, Lanarkshire (NS956205) as a landmark in a 1339 land grant.

In *Pa gur* Bedwyr is also portrayed as a great warrior, involved in the defence of northern Britain against dog-heads/werewolves, slaying them by the hundred and fighting the monstrous Gwrgi ('Man-Dog') Rough Grey:

> they [dog-heads] fell by the hundred
> before Bedwyr the Perfect [*or* Perfect-Sinew].
> On the shores of Tryfrwyd,
> fighting with Rough Grey,
> furious was his nature
> with sword and shield.
> (Sims-Williams, 1991: 42)

He is also very much at the centre of the adventures in *Culhwch*, helping Cei slay the giants and free Mabon, though he is always treated as the assistant to Cei. In the main narrative of *Culhwch*, Bedwyr is described in the following manner:

> Arthur called upon Bedwyr, who never shrank from an enterprise upon which Cei was bound. It was thus with Bedwyr, that none was so handsome [the text in the Red Book of Hergest reads 'so swift'] as he in this Island, save Arthur and Drych son of Cibdar, and this too: that though he was one-handed no three warriors drew blood in the same field faster than he. Another strange quality was his: one thrust would there be of his spear, and nine counter-thrusts (Jones and Jones, 1949: 107-8)

Clearly this describes a superhuman warrior, but it must be noted that Bedwyr is notably less 'supernatural' than Cei. He can clearly die, to judge from the *Englynion Y Beddau*, and he is ascribed no magical abilities beyond the simply martial in *Culhwch*, in contrast to Cei. On the other hand, his collocation with Drych is interesting, given that he is listed as an enchanter in Triad no. 27. He also does possess a magical spear, which Loth has suggested may be best paralleled by the *gae bolga* of Cú Chulainn in Irish legend (Loth, 1913).

These then are Arthur's main companions in the earliest material. Though Cei appears closest to Arthur in character, it is worth noting that all three of them are often named without patronymic, which may be significant. Indeed, both Cei and Bedwyr are present in the earliest stratum of material, with folklore regarding Bedwyr found as far back as probably the ninth century. Nevertheless, the possible etymology of *Cei* is intriguing and may suggest his priority over Bedwyr.

Bromwich strongly supports deriving the name from Latin *Caius*, though a native derivation is not impossible (Bromwich, 1978a: 303-4, 547). If this is the case then it could be taken to indicate that Cei goes back to a suggested Romano-British stage in the development of the Arthurian legend, though this can only be a suggestion, nothing more (see further Chapter 5).

(b) Uthyr Pendragon and Gwenhwyfar

Far too often Uthyr Pendragon is dismissed as a simply a scribal error or misreading rather than a genuine early Arthurian character; this is, however, no longer a tenable belief (see especially Bromwich, 1978a: 520-3). He is, in fact, present in the Arthurian battle- and warrior-listing poem *Pa gur*, when the recurrent Arthurian character Mabon m. Modron is named as 'Uthr Pendragon's servant', clearly treating him as a real character and connected from this early date with Arthur. Another important reference comes in the Old Welsh poem from the Book of Taliesin *Marwnat Uthyr Pen[dragon]*, which appears to be narrated by Uthyr himself (Sims–Williams, 1991: 53; the title is abbreviated in the manuscript). Again Uthyr appears associated with Arthur as he declares:

> I am the one whose champion's feats partook in
> a ninth part of Arthur's valour.
> (Koch and Carey, 2003: 314; Koch, 1987a: 256)

Clearly Uthyr is here defined as an Arthurian character. Indeed, Sims–Williams thinks that this latter reference may additionally indicate something more than Uthyr as someone with Arthurian associations. He proposes that it be read as implying that he has passed on his qualities to Arthur, which in turn suggests that Geoffrey of Monmouth was right to make Arthur the son of Uthyr. Further support for this comes later in the poem when Uthyr says that 'the world would not exist were it not to my offspring', which fits well with the concept of Arthur as the 'great defender' and Hero Protector. Someone, after all, must be this highly illustrious 'offspring' and Arthur is the obvious candidate. In this context it is also worth noting that Uthyr speaks of his conflicts with the 'sons of Cawrnur' just previous to the above quoted lines referring to Arthur. This Cawrnur appears in another apparently Arthurian poem, *Kadeir Terynon*, in the Book of Taliesin. Taken together these allusions seem to point to an established, but now lost, Arthurian battle, probably against giants (Welsh *cawr*), in which Uthyr seems to have played a part (see further Chapter 3 and Sims–Williams, 1991: 53).

Further confirmation of Uthyr's Arthurian connections and, most especially, his relationship with Arthur, is found in the mid twelfth-century non-Galfridian poem *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* ('The Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle'). Here the Eagle identifies himself as the deceased and transformed *Eliwlod m. Madawg*

m. Uthyr – the grandson of Uthyr – and then Arthur declares that Eliwlod was his nephew. The obvious implication is that Madawg and Arthur are brothers and both sons of Uthyr in non-Galfridian tradition. That Madawg is no invention and a genuine Welsh hero and son of Uthyr is, incidentally, confirmed by the Old Welsh poem *Madawg drut ac Erof* in the Book of Taliesin.

A final piece of evidence that ought to be taken into account comes from Triad 28, which in the pre-Galfridian Early Version confirms Uthyr as a real character when it makes the 'Enchantment of Uthyr Pendragon' one of the 'Three Great Enchantments of the Island of Britain'. In the White Book version of this he is additionally said to have taught it to Menw m. Teirgwaedd, who is one of Arthur's chief companions and an 'enchanter' in *Culhwch*, appearing in two of the Arthurian episodes and once in the initial appointment of 'Six Helpers'. Obviously the White Book version might be seen as a further Arthurian reference for Uthyr but in fact the main import comes from the fact that Uthyr is here an enchanter. Bromwich has suggested that this 'enchantment' may have involved shape-shifting (something supported by the fact that he is said to have taught it to Menw, who is a shape-shifter in *Culhwch*) and, if so, then we could well have here a pre-Galfridian reference to some form of the story of Arthur's conception that appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, in which Uthyr takes on the form of Gorlois (with Merlin as Geoffrey's own addition to the tale – Bromwich, 1978a: 56. See Chapter 3 for another probable pre-Galfridian story incorporated into Geoffrey's text). Indeed, as Koch has noted, Uthyr's claim – in *Marwnad Uthyr Pen* – that 'I am the one who is called *gorlassar*' may lie behind Geoffrey's Duke 'Gorlois', further emphasizing the potentially pre-Galfridian roots of Geoffrey's account (Koch, 2006: 1722).

In light of all the above it can be said that we have powerful evidence for Uthyr as a genuine pre-Galfridian and Arthurian figure and, furthermore, good reason to think that he was actually Arthur's father in the shared early Arthurian tradition as well as in Geoffrey's work. Indeed, accepting the latter means that the two references to a Madawg m. Uthyr imply that Arthur also had a brother in pre-Galfridian tradition, itself a point of interest (see further Sims-Williams, 1991: 53-4). Finally, the fact that Uthyr appears as an enchanter, and probably a shape-shifter, is itself of a great deal of interest, given some of the suggestions made in Chapter 2. Most especially it may provide a context for the fact that Arthur's nephew is transformed into an eagle in *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* and Arthur himself was transformed into a bird in some folklore traditions.

Can we say any more about Uthyr? In the above he appears thoroughly folkloric or even mythical. He is a renowned enchanter, whose skills probably included shape-shifting and perhaps also the ability to make himself invisible (as noted in Chapter 2), and the god *Maponos* is said in *Pa gur* to have been his servant. From the poem *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* it would also seem that Uthyr was some kind of bard, given that he seems to be the narrator of the poem – he

in fact states 'I am a bard' towards the end of the poem, and this ought to be compared with the similar hints of such a role for Arthur himself (in *Culhwch*, the Triads and *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, especially). This poem also makes it very clear that Uthyr was a great warrior too, claiming that he broke 100 forts and cut off 100 heads, an attribute very appropriate for one who is probably thought of as Arthur's father.

Was Uthyr any more than this? In this context it should be noted that Koch has recently revived the suggestion that Uthyr was, in actual fact, the mythical and divine Brân the Blessed under one of his bynames (Koch and Carey, 2003: 314, 419; Koch, 2006). The *Uthyr Pen* of *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* would thus be the earliest form of the name Uthyr (or Uthr) Pendragon and derive from an epithet of Brân, meaning 'Awesome/Terrible Head'. This epithet would reference Brân's weird decapitation and the 87 year period in which the animated head presides over Otherworldly feasts, which is referred to in *Branwen* as the *Yspydawt Urδawl[=Uthrawl] Benn*, the 'Assembly of the Wondrous Head' (Jones and Jones, 1949: 39; see Thomson, 1961: 39-40).

This is certainly an intriguing suggestion and one that cannot be summarily dismissed. Middle Welsh *Uthrawl*, 'Wondrous, Terrible' is obviously related to the word *uth(y)r* and as such the equation of *Uthrawl Benn* with *Uthr/Uthyr Pen* is certainly not without merit. It may further be significant that, in the Black Book of Carmarthen text of *Pa Gur*, *Uth(y)r*'s name is divided and written as *uthir pen dragon*, not *pendragon* (*dragon* is used in early Welsh poetry as a euphemism for a warrior and, on this model, was added later to *Uthyr Pen*, perhaps as a descriptor?). Undoubtedly the evidence discussed previously for Uthyr proves that he was a real pre-Galfridian character with this name, as Bromwich notes (1978a: 520-3). This does not mean, however, that *Uthyr Pen* was not originally an epithet or alternative name for Brân, and thus this divine figure under a different name. Compare, for example, another character from the 'Four Branches', Pryderi. He was also known by the name Gwri Wallt Euryn and, indeed, he seems to have featured in some Arthurian stories under this name, rather than that of Pryderi (see Bromwich, 1978a: 377; Gruffydd, 1953: 33; and Chapter 2. Such alternative names are, of course, generally common in insular and Gallo-Brittonic mythology, see Olmsted, 1994). The evidence for Uthyr as a 'real' Welsh personal name outside of the Arthurian legend is, in any case, dubious at best.

If Koch's suggestion is accepted then its implications are obvious, given the above argument. A key Arthurian character, who is quite likely Arthur's pre-Galfridian father, would thus be a divinity, a very important point. Indeed, Koch argues, on the basis of the early poetic references (including *Y Gododdin* A.4 and A.24) and the 'Second Branch of the Mabinogi', that Brân was the pre-Christian Brittonic god of death, associated with battle and especially the carrion birds – crows and ravens, the meaning of Old Welsh *bran* – that feed on corpses after a battle, comparable to the Irish Donn and continental *Dis Pater* (Koch and Carey,

2003: 314-5, 419; Koch, 1997: 199). The question must therefore be, is there any reason other than the obvious similarity between *Uth(γ)r Pen* and *Uthrawl Benn* to further recommend this equation of Uthyr and Brân?

In fact it may be suggested that, in this light, the poem *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* becomes a little more comprehensible. In addition to Uthyr implying he was related to, and probably the father of, Arthur, it also includes such obscure lines as the following:

> I am the one mighty in hosts in furore.
> I would not yield between war-bands without bloodshed.
> I am the one who is called [steely] lustrous blue.
> My battle-belt was a [captive's] collar to my enemies.
> …
> It is I who am a prince in the gloom,
> causing my appearance …
> I am like a second ?*cawyl* in the gloom
> …
> It is I who poured blood for victory.
> …
> It is I who have made the [?]thundering
> of the [?]fiery iron door of the mountaintop.
> …
> Let it be by means of crows and eagles and the rage of battle,
> [as when] perfect darkness descended so broadly,
> when the four men plied weapons between two hosts.
> Climbing to heaven was my desire,
> against eagles and fear of injury.
> …
> [with] my tongue to sing my death-song
> (Koch and Carey, 2003: 314-5)

These sections are difficult but fit well with Koch's suggestion, itself partly a revival of earlier analyses including that of Malone, who argued that the above lines and other similar passages from *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* indicated that Uthyr was originally a 'dark prince'– a god of death, battle and slaughter (Malone, 1924: 469-71). We might point especially to the focus on battle and blood-shedding throughout the poem as appropriate to a Brân-like figure. The first two lines and the three referring to crows and eagles, battle-rage, 'perfect darkness' and the curious plying of weapons 'between two hosts' – the causing of battles and bloodshed? – can be read in this light. They might well be seen as reflecting someone especially associated with battle and bloodshed – unwilling to see conflict end without it – and perhaps also responsible for encouraging it.

The notion that Uthyr was a 'prince in the gloom' ought too to be seen as significant, given that in some conceptions of the Welsh Otherworld it is 'dim and not illuminated with the full light of the sun', probably related to the tradition that the Otherworld had a subterranean location (as described in Giraldus Cambrensis's *Itinerarium Cambraie*: Loomis, 1956c: 66-7 and 1956a: 165). The statement that Uthyr was 'like a second *cawyl* in the gloom' is similarly intriguing, though its meaning is uncertain – Malone took *cawyl* as a divine name and has some interesting speculations on the first four lines too (1924: 469-70).

The reference to Uthyr being involved with the thundering of the 'fiery iron door of the mountain top' is also of interest. It could be another Otherworld reference – in *Preideu Annwfyn* Arthur comes across the 'door of Hell's gate' where 'lanterns burned', with the entrance to subterranean Otherworlds often being associated with mountains and hills. On the other hand, some sort of connection with the very fiery – 'white-hot' – door of the iron house that Matholwch tells Brân that he built to try and kill Llasar Llaes and his wife (whom he had met 'on top of a mound'), seems feasible too. This chamber is burst open to free these two – with a thundering sound, perhaps? – and they afterwards become Brân's vassals. It is not impossible that *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* may reflect a version of this tale that appears in *Branwen*, but with 'Uthyr' here taking a leading role (reflecting an earlier leading role by Brân in this?).

The rest of the poem is highly obscure but two points are worth making. First, Uthyr's claim that 'climbing to heaven was my desire' is perhaps best read in light of Arthur, Uthyr and Brân's expeditions to the Otherworld (or Ireland, as it is euhemerized), discussed further below. Second, the reference to '[with] my tongue to sing my death-song' brings to the forefront the fact that this poem is narrated by Uthyr Pen but it is also the 'Death-Song' of Uthyr Pen. The implication being that Uthyr's tongue is actually singing his own post-mortem 'death-song', which must surely bring to mind Brân's 'wonderful' severed head which continues to provide 'pleasant company', i.e. it speaks, after Brân's death (Jones and Jones, 1949: 38-9). This latter point is particularly salient in the present context.

This connection between Arthur's (probable) father and Brân possibly gains some further support from the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend itself. Thus in the 'Second Branch of the Mabinogi' Brân undertakes an expedition to Ireland (in search of his sister) which features a magical cauldron fought over in a hall – Mac Cana (1992: 39-40) suggests that the retrieval of this was the original aim of the tale, a point supported by etymology (Ford, 1983: 272) – and from which adventure there are only seven survivors that returned to Britain. This bears close comparison with Arthur's expedition to the Otherworld/Ireland in *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* in search of a magical cauldron, featuring a battle for this in a hall and resulting in only seven survivors returning (see Chapter 2). Whilst Sims–Williams (1991: 56) suggests that the Mabinogi version

and Arthur's deeds probably should not be seen as genetically related, if Arthur's father can be equated with Brân then this conclusion might well need revisiting. In any case, the parallel is striking in the present context. Indeed, one might also point to the fact that in Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Uthyr himself goes on a expedition to Ireland to seize by force some magical objects (in this case, stones), which Malone considers another euhemerized Arthurian raiding of the Otherworld (Thorpe, 1966: 197-8; Malone, 1924: 470).

It may similarly be worth noting that Arthur, like Brân, is referred to as 'the Blessed' in early sources, in this case the Book of Taliesin poem *Kadeir Teyrnon*, though this term is also found associated with other figures (its usage seeming to imply magical protection of Britain). Arthur is also linked with Brân in Triad 37R, where he 'disclosed the Head of Brân the Blessed', thus breaking its magical protection of Britain, 'because it did not seem right to him that this Island should be defended by the strength of anyone, but by his own' (Bromwich, 1978a, no. 37R). Indeed, in the early modern manuscripts which contain the prose fragment and early *englynion* relating to *Cad Achren*, Brân appears to be associated with this battle. Given that in other and early sources this seems to have been a conflict at which Arthur was present, this too may be significant (see Chapter 2; Bartrum, 1993: 289-90).

Finally, Arthur's well-known association with ravens or crows (*bran*) and other similar carrion-birds is intriguing in this light. A variety of material indicates that there was a folkloric belief that Arthur was transformed into a crow, raven or chough from at least the sixteenth century (in Welsh *bran Arthur* is a name for a chough) and he is certainly associated with ravens or crows in the medieval and largely non-Galfridian prose-tale *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* (Hunt, 1865, II: 308-9; Chambers, 1927: 229; Loomis, 1958: 16). Moreover the claim in *Y Gododdin* that Gwawrddur used to 'bring/send black crows/ravens down in front of the wall of the fort, though he were no Arthur' (i.e. he did this magnificently, but he still could not compete with the mythical Arthur in this regard) makes a connection between Arthur and Brân seem even more intriguing than it already is.

Whilst the above cannot prove that Uthyr and Brân were the same figure, as Koch seems to believe, it certainly adds to the evidence adduced previously. Given especially the close comparison between *Uth(γ)r Pen*, 'the Awesome/Terrible Head', and *Uthrawl Benn*, 'the Wondrous/Terrible Head', this contention does consequently appear to be at least partly defensible. If a relationship between Brân and Uthyr is accepted then it might well explain Uthyr's puzzling relationship with the god *Maponos* in *Pa gur*. It would also further strengthen the case, if any such strengthening is needed, for the pre-Galfridian Arthur being a thoroughly mythical figure (as does the nature of Uthyr in *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* in any case, whether or not the equation is accepted). In this context it may also be worth pointing out that Brân's mythological brother from the Mabinogi, Manawydan m. Llŷr – who accompanies him as part of his war-band to Ireland – also appears as a

member of Arthur's war-band in the earliest stratum of the legend, as is discussed below.[1]

If Uthyr Pendragon was a genuine, and potentially divine, member of Arthur's pre-Galfridian war-band and (most likely) family too, what then of his wife, Gwenhwyfar? In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Arthur offers to grant any boon to Culhwch:

> save only my ship [Prydwen] and my mantle [Gwenn], and Caledfwlch my sword, and Rhongomyniad my spear, and Wynebgwrthuher my shield, and Carnwennan my dagger, and Gwenhwyfar my wife (Jones and Jones, 1949: 100)

The company that this lady keeps is most intriguing. Ford has argued that all of Arthur's possessions named here ought to be considered as deriving from the Otherworld and many include the word *gwyn/gwen* in their names, having the meaning 'white, pure, sacred, holy, Otherworldly'. Gwenhwyfar is no exception to this – her name is literally *gwen* + 'phantom, wraith, spirit, fairy, enchantress'. This may be best read as something like 'the sacred/Otherworld fairy/enchantress' and thus she too would seem to clearly have her origins in the Otherworld (Ford, 1983, especially pp.270, 272; Richards, 1969: 257; compare Ford's reading of *Branwen* as 'the sacred Otherworld Bran', reflecting the 'pagan Celtic sacred notion of *gwyn/gwen*').

This fairly clear association between Gwenhwyfar and the Otherworld is also apparent in the main pre-Galfridian story that has survived about her. This is found or alluded to in a number of sources, including the pre-Galfridian *Vita Gildae* of Caradoc of Llancarfan (written in the 1120s or 1130s), the non-Galfridian *Ymddiddan Melwas ac Gwenhwyfar*, Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la Charette* and poems by medieval Welsh poets Dafydd ap Gwilym and Dafydd ap Edmwnd. It has been convincingly suggested that behind these tales lies a pre-Galfridian Welsh story concerned with the rescue of Gwenhwyfar from an Otherworld 'Island/Kingdom *etc.* of Glass', similar to *Preideu Annwfyn* and its analogues. This island is consistently stated to have been controlled by Melwas, 'Honey-Youth', who is described by Dafydd ap Edmwnd as a 'thief that by magic and enchantment' took Gwenhwyfar to the 'end of the world' (Sims-Williams, 1991: 58-61; see elsewhere in this study on the Saints' *Lives* as repositories of genuine, if manipulated, early Arthurian folk-tales). Indeed, as was proposed earlier, some form of this tale may even be alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*. There Arthur is there portrayed as attacking an Otherworldly *Caer Wydyr*, 'Fort of Glass', that has to be sailed to. This name clearly recalls the 'Island/Kingdom *etc.* of Glass' that Gwenhwyfar is taken to. Most especially it might be linked with the Latin *urbs vitrea*, 'City of Glass', of the *Vita Gildae*, which probably does in fact represent, 'in the British tongue', *Caer Wydyr* (see Chapter 2).

This seems most significant. Not only does the name *Gwenhwyfar* and her associations in *Culhwch ac Olwen* strongly indicate her Otherworldly origins, but the main early story regarding her appears to be a tale of her rescue from an Otherworld imprisonment. Was she perhaps, like the Cauldron of the 'Chief of Annwfn', originally one of the prizes, or 'spoils', that Arthur won during his raiding of *Annwfyn*?

Aside from the story cited above, there appear to have been a number of other tales of Gwenhwyfar in circulation. The most long-lasting and internationally popular of these stories assigned Gwenhwyfar a role as the cause of Arthur's final Battle of Camlann. This battle is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this work – it may, in fact, be Otherworldly itself, as is suggested in Chapter 2 – but the Later Version of the Triads, Geoffrey of Monmouth, the *Bruts* and the later medieval Welsh poets all agree that Gwenhwyfar had at least a part to play, though their account of this is not consistent. Thus Triad 84 lists the battle as one of the 'Three Futile Battles of the Island of Britain' because it was caused by a quarrel between Gwenhwyfar and Gwenhwyfach, Gwenhwyfar's sister, an explanation also advanced by Triad 53 ('Three Harmful Blows of the Island of Britain'). There it is explained that the battle was caused by Gwenhwyfach's striking of Gwenhwyfar. On the other hand, Geoffrey and the sources that follow him – including some of the Triads – have the cause instead as Mo(r)dred/Medraut's treacherous fornication with Guinevere/Gwenhwyfar.

Gwenhwyfar's role is thus central, if nothing else. The former explanation of how she brought this battle about, though absent from the earliest versions of the Triads, looks to be a purely Welsh and non-Galfridian tale. Padel has suggested that the appearance of allusions to this tale in the Later Version of the Triads reflects, fundamentally, an increase in the importance of these non-Galfridian traditions as a result of the prominence that Geoffrey gave to Camlann in his work, leading to them entering the written record (Padel, 2000: 88). Indeed, it may be significant that Gwenhwyfar and her sister Gwenhwyfach are mentioned in *Culhwch*'s Court List. This would seem to confirm that Gwenhwyfach was a character of some antiquity in Welsh legend and their joint presence in *Culhwch* might further be taken to suggest that the tradition of Gwenhwyfach and Gwenhwyfar's role in bringing about Camlann goes back at least as far, though as only their names appear in *Culhwch* with no tale attached this cannot be certain.

With regards to the latter explanation of Gwenhwyfar's causing of Camlann, as found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, there are good reasons to be cautious. Concerning the adultery and treachery of Guinevere/Gwenhwyfar and Modred/Medraut, Medraut does appear in one of the earliest references to the Battle of Camlann (in the mid to late tenth-century *Annales Cambriae*). However, there is no tradition of Medraut having fought against Arthur or being his nephew in the non-Galfridian insular material. Instead Medraut is portrayed as a paragon of valour and courtesy – amongst the poets,

he first appears as Arthur's enemy only in the work of the post-Galfridian and early sixteenth-century poet Tudur Aled. For example, the twelfth-century Gwalchmei ap Meilyr lauds Madog ap Maredudd, King of Powys, for possessing the 'good nature of Medraut', something which is highly curious if Medraut was treated in Welsh tradition as an adulterer and traitor. It is thus only in Geoffrey and texts which follow him that this story appears and develops. As such it seems unlikely to predate the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, despite Geoffrey's claim to know more and to be here retelling the story from pre-existing sources (see further Bromwich, 1978: 455; Padel, 2000: 113-7).

What can we make of all this? If, as seems likely, Geoffrey was the first to make Modred/Medraut a villain, rather than a heroic member of Arthur's war-band, was all of his account of the origin of Camlann his own invention? Against this might be placed Geoffrey's coyness over what his Modred and Guinevere were doing with each other that caused her to 'break the vows of her earlier marriage' – 'about this particular matter … Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing'. This does suggest he knew of some scandalous pre-existing tales, which may be significant. Indeed, in this context it may be worth noting that Geoffrey's sole explicit reference to an oral source is made in the next paragraph of his *magnum opus* (Roberts, 1991: 110).

On the other hand, as was noted in Chapter 1, Geoffrey's narrative seems generally to have been largely his own creation, reflecting his own concerns and freely using and altering pre-existing material, stories and characters, often beyond all recognition. This reality may, however, be more of a help than a hindrance in the present context, freeing us from the need to suspect a single tale underlying Geoffrey's version of events. In this light one has to wonder if Geoffrey's tale of Medraut taking Arthur's wife from him, and thus causing Camlann, might not result from the combination of the following: the seemingly quite well-known Otherworldly story of Gwenhwyfar's abduction by Melwas and Arthur's subsequent attack on this figure because of this, as discussed above; a pre-Galfridian tale of Gwenhwyfar being involved in the origins of the Battle of Camlann, which was perhaps related to that found in Triads 53 and 84; and the general traditions about Camlann itself, which the *Annales Cambriae* reference makes clear involved Medraut in some major way. What we have in Geoffrey may be all these mixed together, along with a very liberal dose of Geoffrey's own, most fertile, imagination. In this context Geoffrey's apparent allusion to pre-existing tales of scandalous sexual shenanigans is explicable, given that the lost original tale of Gwenhwyfar's abduction and imprisonment by Melwas seems to have involved her being 'violated', as attested in the pre-Galfridian *Vita Gildae* (with whose author, Caradoc of Llancarfan, Geoffrey is clearly familiar, as he mentions him in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*).

From the above it seems clear that Gwenhwyfar must be considered a genuine part of the early Arthurian tradition. She is herself Otherworldly in nature – the

'sacred/Otherworld fairy/enchantress' – and the main pre-Galfridian story that was told of Gwenhwyfar originally involved her abduction and imprisonment in an Otherworld 'Island/Fort of Glass' by one Melwas, from which Arthur rescued her. In addition to this there seems to be a non-Galfridian belief that Gwenhwyfar had some role to play in bringing about the famous Battle of Camlann, which seems itself have been mythical and possibly Otherworldly in nature (see Chapter 2). The exact nature of this role is unclear, but it is a strong tradition. Arguably Geoffrey's version of events in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* is best seen as his own creation deriving from a 're-imagining' of this tradition by combining it with the above tale of Gwenhwyfar's abduction and the early recorded belief that Medraut had a major role (probably, in reality, fighting with Arthur rather than against him) at Camlann. Whatever the case may be, Gwenhwyfar is nonetheless clearly conceived of as a mythical and folkloric figure in this early material and as such she parallels Arthur's father, Uthyr Pendragon, very nicely. Evidently Arthur was given at least two close family members in the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend and both of these appear to have been figures of myth, if not in fact mythology. This is, of course, a most significant point given the focus of this study.

Before leaving Arthur's immediate family, a final point with regards to Gwenhwyfar ought to be noted. Arthur, his hunting dog, his son Amr, his chief warrior Cei and (as we shall see below) his nephew Gwalchmei are all sometimes conceived of as giants in early sources. The evidence suggests that Arthur's wife too was at least the daughter of a giant, if not a giantess herself, for her father is claimed to have been one *Ogrfan Gawr*, 'Ogrfan the Giant'. This is an identification frequently cited in early Welsh sources, including the *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Triads and the later medieval poets (Bromwich, 1978a). As such it offers further confirmation both of a tradition of Arthurian gigantism and Gwenhwyfar's folkloric character. Indeed, Gwenhwyfar herself does appears as a giantess in later Welsh and British folklore, and Rhys records the following popular rhyme which probably refers to this concept: *Gwenhwyfar, ferch Ogrfan Gawr / Drwg yn fechan, gwaeth yn fawr*, 'Gwenhwyfar daughter of Ogfran the Giant, bad when little, worse when big' (Rhys, 1891: 49; see also Grooms, 1993: 119; Ashe, 1996a: 457).

Whilst there are no pre-Galfridian references to this concept of Gwenhwyfar, it is clearly an early tradition and one that is around from at least the thirteenth century based on the evidence of the *Bruts*. Can it be proven to be any older than this? From this perspective the fact that there is a *Caer Ogrfan* in central Wales – reflecting the supposed site of the fortress of Gwenhwyfar's father – may be highly significant, as this place-name is now known to date back to at least the twelfth century, on the basis of a charter of that period. The obvious implication of this name being so recorded is that Ogrfan was, at this time, an established figure of topographic folklore. Given that his only fame is as Gwenhwyfar's father, it can perhaps be further inferred from this that Gwenhwyfar's gigantic parentage too goes back to at least this period and, furthermore, that it may have had its

origins in popular folklore (Grooms, 1993: 208-10). Beyond this, however, we cannot go.

(c) Lugus (Welsh Lleu/Irish Lug(h)) and Gwyn ap Nudd

If Arthur's two chief and frequently recurring companions are clearly warriors of mythical stature (occasionally literally) and his immediate family is very clearly mythical in character, what of the other members of his war-band? Cei and Bedwyr clearly formed the essential nucleus of this and often Arthur seems to require no other assistance. However, there are several other characters who, whilst not as central as Cei and Bedwyr, clearly still play a recurring role in the early Arthurian tradition.

The first of these to be discussed is the pan-Celtic god *Lugus*, whose main medieval manifestations are the Irish *Lug(h)* and the Welsh *Lleu* and who appears under various variants of his name in Arthurian tradition from the very earliest period. As was noted in Chapter 2, it can be argued that the *Lluch Llauynnauc* of *Pa gur* and *Culhwch* should be treated as '*Lluch* of the Striking Hand'. As such he can be seen to be identical with *Lugus* – who appears in Irish literature as *Lugh Lonnbemnach*, '*Lugh* of the Fierce Blows' – and, furthermore, it can be strongly contended that the *Llenlleawc/Lluchlleawc Lleminawc* that appears in other Arthurian material is in fact this same character (see Chapter 2; Foster, 1959: 34; Jarman, 1983, n.46; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 74; Bartrum, 1993: 407).

Allowing this, the earliest reference to *Lugus* (via his medieval manifestations) being one of Arthur's companions actually occurs in the probably eighth-century poem *Preideu Annwfyn*. Here, on the basis of the reading proposed in Chapter 2, we find a character named *Lluchlleawc Lleminawc* being intimately involved in the stealing of the cauldron of the 'Chief of Annwfyn' from the Otherworld:

cledyf lluch lleawc	The sword of Lluch Lleawc
idaw rydyrchit.	was raised for it.
Ac yn llaw leminawc	And in the hand of Lleminawc
yd edewit.	it was left.

This becomes even more intriguing when we realise that in the altered and euhemerized version of this same mythical story found in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a certain *Llenlleawc* uses Arthur's Otherworldly sword Caledfwlch to kill Diwrnach and enable Arthur and his men to seize the magical cauldron. Bromwich and Evans have recently followed Foster in seeing this as essentially the same name as that found in *Preideu Annwfyn*, but with the first element altered from an original *Lluchlleawc* or *Lleulleawc* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 88-9; Foster, 1959: 34). Given the obvious differences between the *Culhwch* and the *Preideu Annwfyn* versions of the tale I see no good reason to suspect literary borrowing from the poem here

and the best explanation is surely that a character named *Lluchlleawc Lleminawc* – i.e. a medieval manifestation of the god *Lugus* – was always involved in this Arthurian Otherworld expedition and was renowned for his sword-play there.

This is clearly significant from the perspective of the nature of the Arthurian legend. On the basis of this alone it might be suggested that *Lugus* (i.e. *Lleu/Lug(h)* etc.) was a genuine Arthurian figure, if only for this one adventure. Indeed, it ought to be pointed out that *Lluchlleawc Lleminawc* is the only one of Arthur's companions named in *Preideu Annwfyn*. In this very early tale, at least, he seems to have been a prominent member of the Arthurian war-band, as his role in the later version of the tale in *Culhwch* does, of course, imply.

Before moving on it may also be important to note that, whilst in *Culhwch* the weapon that *Llenlleawc* uses is Caledfwlch, in *Preideu Annwfyn* it is described as the 'sword of *Lluch Lleawc*'. As Ford has noted, Arthur's sword Caledfwlch is most likely an Otherworldly weapon and cognate with the Irish sword Caladbolg, both of these probably deriving independently from a name, *Caletobolcos*, for a mythical Celtic sacred death-dealing sword. Ford has further supported O'Rahilly's view that this was also a 'sword of lightening', the second element being identical with the name of the god *Bolgos*. In Ireland, at least, this weapon was wielded by a number of different heroes and the name could be applied to a number of different swords (Ford, 1983: 271; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 64-5). Whilst *Lluchlleawc*'s own sword may have simply been replaced by Arthur's in *Culhwch*, the above explanation makes it clear that, originally, this *Caletobolcos* was not exclusively the property of Arthur, though it later became this in Britain. As such it is tempting to wonder if *Preideu Annwfyn*'s 'sword of *Lluch Lleawc*' was not in fact always one of these Common Celtic sacred swords, so that *Lugus* (*Lug(h)/Lleu*) and Arthur were both originally possessors of versions of this mythical weapon in Welsh tradition (the nature of the reference certainly implies that there was something special about this sword that made it worthy of being singled out and commented upon, despite the highly allusive character of the poem).

The above is not the only time that a medieval version of *Lugus* is portrayed as playing a significant part in the 'earliest stratum' of the Arthurian legend. He is also to be found in the poem *Pa gur*, where Arthur names him as one of his chief companions:

> And Anwas the Winged
> and Lluch Llauynnauc:
> they were accustomed to defend
> at Eidyn [Edinburgh] on the border.

His appearance in this poem was discussed at length in Chapter 3. There it is argued that not only do we here have a reference to *Lugus* being one of Arthur's chief warriors (in the earliest listing of these that has survived to us), but that

an underlying tale is being alluded to in the above. This looks to have involved Arthur fighting on the northernmost borders of Britain, defending the Britons against the monstrous 'dog-heads' with the assistance of *Lluch* 'of the Striking Hand' and Anwas 'the Winged'. Clearly this strongly supports the idea that *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h) was a genuine and early member of the Arthurian war-band. Given his clear role as a defender in *Pa gur* it can be plausibly suggested that he is, in fact, present here on the basis of his role as a divine 'protector' of the tribe, as is perhaps best demonstrated in the Old Irish *Cath Miage Tuired*. Such a divine 'protector' would fit into the world of Arthur extremely well, given that Arthur himself appears to be the 'Hero Protector' of the Britons.

Can anything else be said of this *Lluch Llauynnauc*? He and his children are mentioned in *Culhwch ac Olwen* as members of Arthur's Court, though no significant details are given. It is, however, interesting that *Lluch* is named alongside Anwas here again. Given that it is unlikely that the compiler of *Culhwch* had access to a copy of *Pa gur* itself (Sims-Williams, 1991: 39), the implication may be that the pairing of these two, presumably at the above battle, was an established and recognized part of the Arthurian legend. Similarly, immediately after the naming of *Lluch*'s children as part of the Court List we find the name *Llenlleawc*. This collocation is significant given the arguments equating this figure and *Lluch* and it adds further weight to this case, suggesting that there existed a traditional association between *Lluch*'s sons and *Llenlleawc* (=*Lluchlleawc*) but that the original nature of this had become obscured by the time it appears in *Culhwch*.

Finally, on the matter of the tale that seems to underlie the *Pa gur* allusion, it is worth noting that *Lugus*'s presence in a mythical Arthurian battle at Edinburgh could be more than just coincidence, given that Edinburgh may well have originally been known as *Lugu-dunon*, 'the Fort of the God *Lugus*' (Koch, 1997: 131; see Chapter 3). The exact significance of this is unclear. The tale itself looks Arthurian, with another battle against dog-heads described later in the poem and, indeed, named in the *Historia Brittonum*, so it seems implausible that this was a tale of *Lugus* to which Arthur has been attracted, thus creating his Arthurian associations. Similarly it is difficult to believe that this medieval version of *Lugus* was attracted to the Arthurian legend purely because in one tale Arthur was fighting at Edinburgh. Indeed, *Lugus*'s appearance in other very early tales which probably pre-date *Pa gur*, including that found in *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Cat Godeu* (below), argues strongly against both this and the previous theory. Perhaps rather we should think of this threatened border-region between the Britons and the Picts as being one which was, originally, conceived of as particularly under the protection of the divine tribal defender *Lugus* – Lothian being, in Middle Welsh, *Lleuddinyawn* < *Lugu-duniana*, 'the Country of *Lugu-dunon*'. Consequently, when Arthur is fighting in and defending this region as part of his pan-Brittonic role, it is only natural that this member of his war-band should play a major part.

The final piece of early evidence for *Lugus* (*Lug(h)/Lleu*) as a genuine Arthurian 'hero' is less direct than those discussed above but nonetheless still important. In *Preideu Annwfyn*, the Book of Taliesin poem *Kat Godeu* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* (and perhaps also the *Historia Brittonum*), we have independent evidence that the tale of *Cad Achren/Cat Godeu* was – at the earliest stage in its development – an Arthurian battle. In this mythical conflict Arthur would seem to have led an army of animated trees against the demoniacal hoards of Annwfyn, alongside Gwydion, son of the goddess Dôn, who was responsible for enchanting these trees (see Chapter 2). This, in itself, is highly significant, as in the 'Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi' and elsewhere Gwydion is, of course, the uncle/father of *Lleu Llaw Gyffes*, that is to say the main Welsh manifestation of the god *Lugus*. However we can go further than this. Both *Kat Godeu* and *Preideu Annwfyn* are extremely difficult and allusive, missing out much we might want to know, but the picture they paint can be filled in by using the other early sources that refer to *Cat Godeu*. Most important from our perspective is the following statement by Taliesin found in the possibly ninth-century (according to Thomas Jones) poem *Golychafi Gulwyd* in the Book of Taliesin:

> I was in the battle of Goddeu [*kat godeu*]
> With Lleu and Gwydion;
> They transformed the trees of the world and irises.
> (Jones and Jones, 1949: xiii)

This is early evidence from the same manuscript and reputed legendary author of the poem *Kat Godeu* and it thus needs to be taken seriously. Although he is not named in *Kat Godeu*, clearly in the underlying story Arthur and Gwydion were accompanied by Gwydion's nephew/son Lleu, *Lugus*, in this raid on the Otherworld.

Taken together this is all powerful evidence for the very earliest stratum of the Arthurian legend including *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h) as one of Arthur's constant companions. He appears to have accompanied Arthur in two of his earliest adventures, found in texts that go back to probably the eighth century, if not potentially even the seventh century: the raid for the cauldron of the 'Chief of Annwfyn' and the famous 'Battle of the Trees'. Both of these are Otherworldly and mythical tales, so his presence here is most fitting. The other major appearance by *Lugus* is in the early poem *Pa gur*, where he is listed as one of Arthur's chief companions and placed with Arthur at a battle against 'dog-heads' at Edinburgh. When we add to this the references to him in *Culhwch*, and the implications of these for the genuineness of his place in Arthurian story, it becomes very difficult to avoid the conclusion that in pre-Galfridian Arthurian tradition *Lugus* did actually have a genuine and perhaps even reasonably large part to play, and from a strikingly early stage in the development of this. How and why this figure became

associated with Arthur is beyond speculation, however, though the existence of two forms of his name – *Lleu*, the regular Welsh form, and *Lluch Llauynnauc*, which looks Irish in derivation but which is the form found in *Preideu Annwfyn*, *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, texts which cannot be easily seen as derivative of each other, especially in the case of the former two – is intriguing and needs to be accounted for in any consideration of this issue (see further below on the origins of Arthur's divine associations and their place in the overall development of his legend).

If the old pan-Celtic pagan god *Lugus* must thus be considered intimately associated with some of the earliest Arthurian tales via his medieval derivatives, this is not quite the end of it. There is in addition a strong case to be made that at least in *Culhwch*, and potentially also in *Pa gur*, the framework around the main Arthurian tales is actually derived from the myths of *Lugus* (or at least his Irish manifestation, Lug). This is most striking in the porter-scenes in *Culhwch*, which Bromwich has argued may derive from the story that underlies the porter-scene in *Pa gur*. However, it is also present in the description of Ysbaddaden Penkawr ('Chief Giant') and how he is dealt with, this having close and unique parallels with the description and treatment of Lug's enemy, the giant Balor, in the Old Irish *Cath Miage Tuired* (see Chapter 3 for details). What exactly this means is uncertain but it is intriguing in light of *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h)'s role in early Arthurian tradition and it is perhaps difficult to treat separately from all this.

Just as *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h) is not named as playing a part in *Cad Achren/ Cat Godeu* when this is alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*, but his presence in the underlying tale is confirmed by other early sources, so we encounter a similar situation with Gwyn ap Nudd. Gwyn ap Nudd is generally agreed also to be a former pagan god, with his father Nudd being the attested Romano-British god *Nodons* who had a shrine in the Late Roman period at Lydney Park on the Severn (to be identified with the Irish deity *Núadu*, Nuada) and his name perhaps meaning something like 'Sacred/Otherworld son of *Nodons*' (cf. Ford, 1983). In *Culhwch* and elsewhere he has clear origins in a sinister and forbidden mythology. It is said that God 'set the spirits of the demons of *Annwfyn*', the pagan Otherworld, in Gwyn ap Nudd, and in the Early Modern *Buchedd Collen*, the 'Life of St Collen', he is *Brenin Annwn*, the King of Annwfyn, a description repeated elsewhere. Gwyn is also portrayed in Welsh folklore as the leader in the Wild Hunt of the *cwn Annwn*, 'hell-hounds' or 'hounds of Annwfyn', when Arthur himself is not taking that role (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 134-5; Weston, 1985: 8, 19-20). Though this deity is not mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn*, there is good reason to think that he, like *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h), was present in one of the underlying Arthurian tales that this highly obscure and allusive poem refers to.

The fifth stanza of *Preideu Annwfyn* seems to allude to a pre-existing tale in which Arthur went to the Otherworld to retrieve the *ych brych*, the 'speckled ox with its massive headring, / one hundred and forty facets to its collar' (see Chapter 2). This enormous and wonderful creature is famous from the very early Triad 45,

'the Three Prominent Oxen of the Island of Britain', which seems to have been known in some form by the author of *Culhwch*. The Arthurian associations of this beast are in fact made very clear in *Culhwch*, where the yoking of 'the Ych Brych' is given as the title of one of the impossible tasks to be completed by Arthur for Culhwch. This task is one of those that the author does not choose to tell the full tale of (he only narrates 10 of the 40 tasks). Nevertheless, Bromwich and Evans suggest that stories may have existed for many of these untold tasks – similar to those narrated in the main body of *Culhwch* – and the *Preideu Annwfyn* reference would seem to confirm this for the Ych Brych at least (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: li, 122–3). Taken together these references can thus be taken to suggest an established tale in which Arthur had to retrieve this monstrous creature from the Otherworld (compare Gwydion's stealing of swine from Pryderi) and yoke it for some reason, with this being a story which had its origins in the eighth century if not before.

   Gwyn ap Nudd's association with this tale comes from the fact that, in *Preideu Annwfyn*, the battle to seize the Ych Brych was remembered as 'an appalling tribulation' fought at the Otherworldly fort known as Caer Vandwy, perhaps 'the Fort of the Divine Place' (Koch and Carey, 1995: 291). As was discussed in Chapter 2, this Otherworld fortress is named only once more in medieval Welsh literature, in *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*, 'The Dialogue of Gwyddno Garanhir and Gwyn ap Nudd' (see Roberts, 1978; perhaps tenth century or a little later?). In this Gwyn ap Nudd declares that he saw battle at Caer Vandwy and he goes on to speak of the splendour and renown of he who led the host there (Haycock, 1983–4: 75; Roberts, 1978: 314, 317). This is surely no coincidence. The unnamed but magnificent leader of the host at this Otherworld fort is naturally, in the present context, treated as a reference to Arthur and the statement as a whole must be taken as indicating that Gwyn ap Nudd played some role in the underlying Arthurian tale that is thus alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*, *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*. Whilst it is not quite clear from the *Ymddiddan* whether this role involved Gwyn being on Arthur's side or not, the complementary description of the leader of the assault, i.e. Arthur, suggests that the former may be the right interpretation. This might be supported by the *Ymddiddan's* concurrence with *Preideu Annwfyn's* description of the conflict at Caer Vandwy as a fundamentally negative event (though there is still considerable room for debate here). Whatever the case may be, in *Culhwch* Gwyn is indeed one of Arthur's men, as we shall see below.

   We therefore have another instance in which Arthur is associated with a former pagan god in one of the earliest tales of him that we have allusions to. This is far from the last Arthurian appearance of this figure, however. Indeed, six stanzas later in the *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*, Gwyn claims that he was present at the death of Arthur's son, Llacheu. Once again we might wish for further information. It is certainly possible that this is, in fact, to be related

to Gwyn's earlier claim that he was at Caer Vandwy, and that Llacheu perhaps died in this 'appalling tribulation'. Whatever the case may be, it does nonetheless offer further confirmation that Gwyn was an Arthurian figure, and its proximity to the other reference perhaps offers further support, if any is needed, for the identification of this Caer Vandwy with the identically named Arthurian fort.

The remaining references to Gwyn ap Nudd as an Arthurian figure come in *Culhwch ac Olwen*. The first of these is another one of the un-narrated 'impossible' tasks that Arthur needs to complete for Culhwch, which states that:

> Thou wilt not hunt the Twrch Trwyth until Gwyn son of Nudd be obtained [i.e. captured], in whom God has set the spirit of the demons of Annwn, lest this world be destroyed (Jones and Jones, 1949: 119)

Although no further details are given of how Arthur 'captured' Gwyn ap Nudd, Bromwich and Evans believe that the completion of this task is implicit in the rest of the tale and that it has simply been dropped, or superseded, in the final version of *Culhwch* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lii, 135).

The next appearance of Gwyn comes later in the tale and is more extensive, involving Arthur interceding in what appears to be a highly mythological dispute between Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr m. Greidawl over Creiddylad, daughter of Lludd Silver-Hand (and thus, if Rhys is right to identify Lludd with Nudd/ *Nodons*, Gwyn's own sister – Rhys, 1901: 447-8). Gwyn is said to have stolen Creiddylad away from Gwythyr and thus precipitated a great conflict between these two, with Gwyn capturing and torturing various warriors in the course of this, including Cyledyr the Wild, son of Nwython:

> He slew Nwython and took out his heart, and compelled Cyledyr to eat his father's heart; and because of this Cyledyr went mad (Jones and Jones, 1949: 128)

Arthur hears of all this and summons the warring mythical beings to him, arbitrating between them a peace to prevent this continuing: 'the maiden should remain in her father's house, unmolested by either side, and there should be a battle between Gwyn and Gwythyr each May-calends for ever and ever, from that day till doomsday; and the one of them that should be the victor on doomsday, let him have the maiden' (ibid.: 129).

The mythological nature of all this is very clear, as is Gwyn's cruelty and sinister nature, and it reinforces the idea of Gwyn and Arthur having a long-standing and significant connection. In this context it is worth noting that Gwyn's struggle for Creiddylad was certainly a pre-existing tale reused by *Culhwch*. Thus it is referred to in *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*, and Gwythyr m. Greidawl appears to have been a long-standing Arthurian character himself,

associated with Arthur in the early *Englynion Y Beddau* and in *Kanu y Meirch*, as well as in two other episodes in *Culhwch* (Sims–Williams, 1991: 49, 53). As such the present mythological story is best placed alongside those other Arthurian episodes found in *Culhwch* as a pre-existing Arthurian tale of unknown antiquity, reused by the author of *Culhwch* in his narrative. Certainly its interpolation into the action of *Culhwch* and its lack of relation to rest of this poem would support this contention, as would the character of Arthur's judgement (Roberts, 1991a: 78; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 149-50. See further on the traditional origins of the Arthurian tales used in *Culhwch*, Koch, 1996: 256-62; Edel, 1983; Roberts, 1991a: 74-81; Bromwich and Evans, 1992).

In addition to this myth, Gwyn makes two further appearances in *Culhwch*. The most important of these comes in the last Arthurian episode narrated in *Culhwch*. Once again we look to have a reflection of a pre-existing Arthurian tale – arguably also alluded to in *Pa gur* – that has been taken up and reused by the author of *Culhwch* (see Chapter 3 for a discussion; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 129, 169-70). In this adventure Gwyn and Gwythyr are both named as accompanying Arthur – presumably after Arthur has forced them to come to peace – in his quest to collect the blood of the Very Black Witch from the Uplands of Hell (Annwfyn). These two then play a significant role in this tale, advising Arthur on the strategy that he should use to obtain the blood (though they do not fight for it themselves).

Gwyn clearly here has a reasonably large role in an originally Otherworldly Arthurian folktale, perhaps fundamentally another raid on Annwfyn, though in *Culhwch* the Otherworld location has been partly euhemerized as northern Britain (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 129-30). The fact that Gwyn is accompanied by Gwythyr could possibly suggest, however, that these two have been added to this story under the influence of their earlier appearance in *Culhwch*. On the other hand this is not by any means a necessary assumption, especially given the evidence discussed above for both figures being genuine Arthurian characters. In fact this scenario is more likely to account for the final manifestation of Gwyn in *Culhwch*, during the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyd*. This is an episode for which there is clear evidence of previously unrelated names having been inserted into the narration of this traditional Arthurian episode by the final compiler of *Culhwch*. Here Gwyn seems simply to be present as a name-check – Arthur summons Gwyn to him in order to ask if he knows where the *Twrch Trwyd* is: he does not – and to fulfil Ysbaddaden's claim that Gwyn is necessary to the hunting of the divine and monstrous boar. Nonetheless, the existence of this brief dialogue does serve to further underline the fact that Gwyn ap Nudd was considered to have been a significant Arthurian character in the pre-Galfridian legend.

All told, we seem to have good reason to treat the former pagan god Gwyn ap Nudd as a genuine Arthurian character and one who was probably associated with Arthur from the very earliest stratum of evidence, though it is not clear from

any of the tales whether this figure ever actually fought alongside Arthur in his endeavours in the way that *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h) is said to have done. How Arthur and Gwyn became associated is unclear, though their association obviously once more tells us much about the character of the early Arthurian legend and emphasizes its close comparison with the legend of Fionn mac Cumhaill (who is similarly associated with a variety of deities, such as Nuada, Midir, and Oenghus). In fact, the comparison with Fionn may perhaps be particularly significant in this context, given that Fionn mac Cumhaill and Gwyn can be seen as one and the same figure.

In *Culhwch*'s Court List we find right at the start of the list a triad of Gwyns – Gwyn son of Esni, Gwyn son of Nwyfre, and Gwyn son of Nudd – who are all considered to be different emanations of Gwyn ap Nudd himself. Indeed, the positioning of this triad is itself of interest, especially as the Irish names that come just before this and separate these Gwyns from the initially-named Arthurian heroes such as Cei and Bedwyr, appear to be one of the later additions and interpolations into the list. As such, Gwyn appears as one of the first Arthurian companions named in the Court List (see further Bromwich and Evans, 1992, xxxviii, xlv). In any case, the key point here comes from the meaning of Gwyn's second alternative name, Gwyn son of Nwyfre, which is 'White/Sacred/ Otherworld son of Sky/Firmament'. Rhys argued that this name was exactly cognate to the Irish Fionn mac Cumhaill, 'White/Sacred/Otherworld son of Sky/Firmament', thus indicating that Gwyn ap Nudd and Fionn are one and the same (Rhys, 1898: 179; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 70, 134; see also Murphy, 1953: lxxxi–ii, 198–204). The identification of Gwyn ap Nudd with Fionn mac Cumhaill may also be confirmed, perhaps more convincingly so, by that fact that Fionn is stated in various early Irish texts, one perhaps as early as the sixth century (the earliest mention of Fionn), to have been a descendent of the Irish development of *Nodons*, *Núadu Necht* (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 3, 12–13). What, exactly, we ought to make of all this is naturally to be debated, as too is the actual relationship between Arthur and Fionn (see further Chapter 3 on *Troit/Trwyd/Traith* for some hints it may be closer than has been assumed).

Whilst we are on the matter of alternative names for Gwyn, it is also worth pointing out that in *Pa gur* one of Arthur's men is named as *Gwyn Godybrion*, with the latter element probably reflecting go·dubr-, 'underwater etc.', or something similar. If it is a place-name, as Sims-Williams thinks likely, then the name of this Arthurian warrior would be simply *Gwyn*, with no patronym and the second element as a description of where this Arthurian *Gwyn* comes from. This may be significant, given that one concept of Annwfyn was to locate it underwater. Could this *Godybrion* reflect yet another name for Annwfyn? If so *Gwyn Godybrion* might thus reflect a 'Gwyn from the Otherworld', which raises the possibility that here we have once more Gwyn ap Nudd in an Arthurian context beyond the level of pure speculation (Sims-Williams, 1991: 39–40; Haycock, 1983: 65).

Finally, before leaving Gwyn it should be noted that he appears to have had a brother, Edern son of Nudd (<*Aeternus* son of *Nodons*, 'Eternal son of the god *Nodons*'), who also has Arthurian associations. Whilst he has a very small role in pre-Galfridian Welsh legend compared to Gwyn – he is only mentioned in the Court List in *Culhwch* – he achieved far greater fame on the continent as the Arthurian hero *Yder/Ider* son of *Nut/Nuth/Nuc*, with even his own Romance. He probably also appears on the pre-Galfridian Arthurian sculpture known as the Modena Archivolt (*c.*1120-40) as *Isdernus*. All this suggests that, despite his apparent insular obscurity in the sources that survive to us, he may in fact have had a relatively significant part to play in the Arthurian legend that was transmitted to the continent in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries (see further Bromwich, 1991b: 278, 281, 294; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 70-1).

(d) Mabon and the Mabinogi

Arthur clearly has, in some of the earliest material, close links with recognized figures from myth and mythology. It is perhaps especially interesting that Arthur appears associated with characters from the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi' – and in texts sometimes much earlier than the 'Four Branches' – given that he does not appear in the 'Four Branches' themselves at all. Indeed, he is not only associated with these characters but also with some close narrative analogues to their adventures too. Thus he, like Brân (whom Koch thinks may be Uthyr Pen, Arthur's companion and probable father), sails to the Otherworld/Ireland in search of a magical cauldron. Similarly he raids the Otherworld alongside Gwydion and Lleu in search of some magical animals – a dog and a white roebuck – thus causing the Battle of Goddeu, *Cat Godeu*. Bromwich has, in fact, suggested that *Cat Godeu* should be seen as an earlier version of Gwydion's theft of the swine originating from Annwfn in the 'Fourth Branch', *Math*:

> Perhaps originally Gwydion won the swine, as well as the dog and the white roebuck, in a raid upon Annwfn itself, rather than upon Dyfed (Bromwich, 1978a: 208)

If this is correct then, given the clear early Arthurian associations of *Cat Godeu* (as discussed above), it is most interesting. This Arthur-Mabinogi link is not restricted to these elements, however. Another link is found in Manawydan m. Llŷr, who plays a large part in the 'Third Branch'. In Welsh tradition he is the brother of the probable Brittonic god of death, Brân, and he himself is either identical with, or had become equated and conflated with, the Irish sea-god Manannán mac Lir, as noted previously (alternatively, Olmsted has seen the Irish divinity as in fact deriving from the Welsh Manawydan, being an Otherworld deity dwelling in

the West – Olmsted, 1994: 306). In *Pa gur* he is named as one of Arthur's chief warriors:

> Manawydan son of Llŷr,
> whose counsel was weighty;
> Manawyd brought shattered spears [*or* shields] back from Tryfrwyd.
> (Sims-Williams, 1991: 40)

The allusion to Manawydan's 'profound' or 'weighty' counsel is appropriate, given that this is a crucial part of his character in the 'Third Branch'. The second reference clearly has Manawydan fighting at the early Arthurian Battle of *Traeth Tryfrwyd*, which was known from at least the early ninth century and is elsewhere described as a battle against dog-heads at which Bedwyr and Arthur would also seem to have been present (see Chapter 3). Manawydan is also found in *Culhwch* where he plays a part in Arthur's hunting of the *Twrch Trwyd*, helping attack this monstrous creature in the Severn. Taken together the above does suggest that there was some sort of tradition of Manawydan being a member of Arthur's war-band and taking part in his folkloric adventures.

There are no more explicit associations of Manawydan and Arthur but in a title-less and perhaps tenth-century poem in the Book of Taliesin we find *Manawyt* and *Phryderi* residing for some reason in an Otherworld fort known as *Kaer Sidi*. There is only one other occurrence of this fort in early Welsh poetry and that is in *Preideu Annwfyn* where it is the name of the first Otherworld fortress that Arthur attacks. This becomes even more intriguing when we realise that in this stanza Arthur is rescuing a certain Gweir from *Kaer Sidi*, who can quite probably be identified with Pryderi. Though Manawydan is not mentioned in *Preideu Annwfyn*, we may thus have an implicit association of Manawydan and Arthur via the tale of *Kaer Sidi* to add to those discussed above.

Although Manawydan would thus seem to be part of the 'shared' early Arthurian tradition, insofar as he fulfils the requirement of appearing in multiple allusions, what of Gweir/Pryderi himself? It was suggested in Chapter 2 that we might have, in *Preideu Annwfyn*, an earlier and more heroic version of Pryderi's Otherworld imprisonment as found in the 'Third Branch' and one in which Arthur played a major part. This is supported by the above-referenced Book of Taliesin poem. Was this, though, a one-off association, a divergent and non-traditional development restricted to the legendary Taliesin poems? The name Pryderi is certainly not found again in the Arthurian material examined here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in *Culhwch* an adventure is alluded to in which Arthur goes to Brittany to secure the two dogs of 'Glythfyr Ledewing', an endeavour on which he is accompanied by Gware (=Gwri) Gwallt Euryn, that is Pryderi. Although no further details are given, there is no reason to think that this was not a genuine adventure which the compiler of *Culhwch* has simply chosen

not to tell in detail (like the tale of the *Ych Brych*: Bromwich and Evans, 1992: li, 122-3). As such it does begin to look like Gweir/Gwri/Pryderi may have had a genuine place in the early Arthurian legend.

   With specific regard to the rescuing of Gweir/Gwri/Pryderi, it must be recognized that *Preideu Annwfyn* is highly allusive and its nature implies that the story alluded to was well known enough in perhaps the eighth century that it would be 'part of the audience's mental furniture' (Haycock, 1983-4: 55). This strongly argues that we are not simply looking at an adventure uniquely ascribed to Arthur in this one poem. In support of this, the imprisonment of Gweir *is* mentioned again, in Triad no. 52, where it is linked with the imprisonment of Mabon and Arthur himself. As Mabon is himself a prisoner released by Arthur, in *Culhwch*, Bromwich may well be right that Arthur's role has become somehow reversed in the triad and that this therefore confirms that the story of Gweir's imprisonment and release was a genuine Arthurian tale and part of the 'common core' (Bromwich, 1978a: 140-2; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lx-lxi). In any case, Manawydan – who fulfils the role of Pryderi's rescuer in the 'Third Branch' – would certainly seem to be an early Arthurian character, which suggests that it is certainly possible that an Arthurian version of Pryderi's rescue was part of the 'shared tradition'.

   The mention of Mabon may also be significant in the present context. He is the ancient *Maponos* son of *Mātronā* – 'the Divine Son', son of 'the Divine Mother' – known from numerous Roman-period inscriptions in north Britain, where his cult may have been brought by the migration of the *Parisī* in the pre-Roman Iron Age (Koch and Carey, 2003: 368-9; Bromwich, 1978a: 433-5). We appear to have a fragment of his and Modron's (< *Mātronā*) myth in *Culhwch*, where it is said that Mabon was a great huntsman who was 'taken away when three nights old from his mother' and never seen again. As noted above, in *Culhwch* one of the major episodes is the discovery of where Mabon has been taken – clearly originally an Otherworld fort, but euhemerised as *Kaer Loyw*, Gloucester, in *Culhwch*, under the influence of the other prisoner-release tale told there – and the freeing of him by Arthur and his men, which is the tale referred to in Triad no. 52. After his rescue by Arthur, Mabon appears to have joined his war-band. He plays a key role in the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyd* later in *Culhwch* and in *Pa gur* he seems to be mentioned twice as one of Arthur's key companions in the earliest stratum. His is, in fact, the second actual name mentioned by Arthur after Cei, with Mabon being described as Arthur's father's servant. He may also be named later in the poem under his patronymic, Mabon, son of Mellt, which may reflect a lightning god, *Meldos*. Under this name he also appears in *Culhwch*, where he too accompanies Arthur in the alluded tale of his gaining of the two dogs of Glythfyr Ledewing from Brittany (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 152-3; Jarman, 1983: 108).

   If Mabon is thus a genuine early Arthurian figure, his presence may also be relevant to the question of Pryderi, as Gruffydd saw Pryderi/Gweir/Gwri as

being in some way equatable with Mabon (Gruffydd, 1953: 90-110). Eric Hamp has similarly seen Mabon as having a role in some earlier version of the Mabinogi. Hamp demonstrated that the forms *mabinogi/mabiniogi* would in fact seem to derive from **mapon-āk-ijī/*mapon-j-āk-ijī*, meaning 'the material, or doings pertaining to the family of the divine *Maponos*' (Hamp, 1999: 104-10). He then suggests that the Mabinogi's Gwri/Pryderi should be treated as, originally, the father of Mabon/*Maponos*. In this context the fact that Mabon m. Mellt and Gware (=Gwri) Gwallt Euryn are paired as Arthur's companions, in *Culhwch*'s brief tale of the seeking of the two dogs of 'Glythfyr Ledewing', may be significant.

　　Such considerations as these are most interesting and stimulating, and add to what has already been written with regards to *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h), Gwydion and Brân. Clearly all three of the characters discussed in this section – Manawydan, Gweir/Gwri/Pryderi and Mabon – had a place in the 'shared' early Arthurian tradition, to some greater or lesser degree. Furthermore, all three appear in sources that can be placed in the 'earliest stratum' of the Arthurian legend. This is, in itself, significant and surely supports the contention that, in the earliest material, Arthur seems to have been quite closely associated with – certainly more so than he was later – both the events and characters from the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi'. Gruffydd dismisses Arthur's connection with Pryderi as simply an accretion to Arthur's legend, to be related to those other accretions seen in the Court List and the Triads, discussed above (Gruffydd, 1953: 97). Against this, however, we do have to lay the fact that Arthur's associations do not appear to be one-off literary borrowings, but genuine parts of the 'common' Arthurian legend, spread across a number of sources and that his associations occur in sources much earlier in some cases than the present version of the 'Four Branches' that we possess (or the Court List and the Triads). What is most interesting is that these 'accretions' from the Mabinogi do not greatly increase as we move through the centuries, as we might expect them to do given that this is the general pattern seen in the Arthurian legend, but rather they appear to decrease to some degree. Thus, later accounts of *Cat Godeu* make no mention of Arthur, despite three or four early references pointing to his presence there, and in the Mabinogi he is completely absent.

　　What is going on here is difficult to say. Perhaps as Arthur becomes ever more dominant he fell out of these myths, as to keep him in would have fundamentally altered their character? What this material does show, however, is that once again Arthur appears more, not less, truly mythical in nature the further back we go. This is not to say that many of these characters were not accretions to Arthur's name and legend – it seems unlikely that Mabon was originally, for example, Uthyr Pendragon's servant (though perhaps not Brân's?) – but rather that the associations cannot be so easily dismissed and ignored as they often have been. Indeed, they have much to tell us of the nature of Arthur in this earliest period, given that he could be repeatedly associated with so many of the fundamental characters of Welsh mythology and that his

war-band included so many former gods. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that all the associations are false accretions in any case. Thus, for example, Arthur's connection with *Cat Godeu*, and hence Gwydion and Lleu, looks both secure and very early (as discussed in Chapter 2 and given the dates proposed for *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Kat Godeu*). Such assumptions naturally rest, themselves, on the *a priori* belief that Arthur moved from history to legend and myth, a position that is methodologically unsound and untenable. If he was instead first and foremost a fictional, folkloric and mythical Hero Protector of Britain from supernatural threats, as has been argued here, then such associations would be more than natural in the tales he appeared in. Certainly Fionn mac Cumhaill is similarly portrayed as having dealings with numerous divinities, including the Morrígán, Nuada, Donn, Midir, and Oenghus, fighting either for or with them, or contending against them (Ó hÓgáin, 1988; Squires, 1912: 211ff.). Such divine connections are consequently to be expected, not explained away. Indeed, this may be even more the case if the possibility (discussed tentatively in the next chapter) of Arthur having divine origins, like Fionn, is recognized – compare the way that the various gods interact with each other in Irish myth, such as in *Cath Miage Tuired*.

(e) Llacheu m. Arthur and Gwalchmei m. Gwyar

In addition to Arthur's father and wife, two other members of his family appear to be more than ephemeral, recurring in early Arthurian tradition. The first is Llacheu, who is Arthur's son. Unlike Arthur's other early son, Amr, who looks to have had at best a very minor role in any Arthurian 'cycle', Llacheu seems to have played a reasonably large part. Although Llacheu is unaccountably missing from *Culhwch*, he is present in *Pa gur*:

> Cai the fair and Llacheu,
> they performed battles
> before the pain of blue spears (ended the conflict).
> (Sims-Williams, 1991: 43)

This appearance, though brief, does place him in the 'earliest stratum' with Cei and Bedwyr, and has him as a martial hero presumably fighting alongside Cei. A second early occurrence of Llacheu comes in the pre-Galfridian Early Version of the Triads (no. 4), where he is one of the 'Three Well-Endowed Men of the Island of Britain', alongside Arthur's nephew Gwalchmei (reflecting probably his inheritance, rather than anything else).

A third important reference, confirming Llacheu's status as part of the 'common stock', comes in a poem from the Black Book of Carmarthen, *Ymddiddan Gwyddno Garanhir ac Gwyn fab Nudd*, 'The Dialogue of Gwyddno Garanhir and Gwyn ap

Nudd', which may be dated tentatively to the tenth century or perhaps a little later (Bromwich, 1978b: 20-1; Roberts, 1978). Here the former pagan god Gwyn ap Nudd appears to tell how he has been 'where Llacheu was slain, / the son of Arthur, awesome in songs, / when ravens kept croaking over gore' (Padel, 2000: 50-1. The 'awesome songs' probably refers to Llacheu himself rather than Arthur: Jarman, 1981: 18 n.26). The circumstances of Llacheu's death are not made plain here, but six stanzas earlier in the *Ymddiddan* Gwyn ap Nudd claims to have seen 'conflict before *kaer wandvy*' and speaks of the splendour and renown of he who led the host there. As was noted above, this *kaer wandvy* appears only once more in early Welsh literature – as one of the Otherworld forts attacked by Arthur in *Preideu Annwfyn*. It is not impossible that there is some connection between these two apparent Arthurian references and that Llacheu's death ought thus to be associated with this Otherworld expedition at which Gwyn appears to claim he was present (see above and Chapter 2).

Aside from this there are a number of references to Llacheu in early poetry. In particular the twelfth-century poet Cynddelw seems most fond of him, referring to him four times and mentioning 'Llacheu's ferocity', his swiftness, and his generosity. He also praises the Lord Rhys (d.1197) as possessing 'Llacheu's purposefulness' (Padel, 2000: 55-6). Taken together these suggest that the *Ymddiddan* is right to refer to him as 'awesome in songs' and they indicate that Llacheu was a renowned warrior and standard of comparison, just like his father. Though lacking in detail, these references have further led to Llacheu being declared 'a figure of considerable importance in the early Arthurian saga' (Bromwich, 1978a: 416).

This lack of detail does mean, unfortunately, that we lack any real sense of the stories that Llacheu appeared in, other than that they were clearly martial, possibly Otherworldly, and in one he died. With regards to this latter it should be noted that, by the thirteenth century, Llacheu's death had been given a physical location suggestive of the existence of topographic folklore about this character, perhaps similar to that of the grave of Amr, Arthur's other son, recorded in the *Historia Brittonum*. Thus Bleddyn Fardd recalls that he was 'slain below Llech Ysgar', perhaps Crickheath Hill south of Oswestry, Shropshire (Padel, 2000: 99). Beyond this, however, it is difficult to go. No real credence can be given to the claim in the late fourteenth-century *Y Seint Greal* that Cei killed Llacheu. Although it is not quite clear if these two are fighting alongside or against each other in *Pa gur* ('alongside' is probably the correct answer, as above), this notion simply represents the French story of *Perlesvaus* (of which part two of *Y Seint Greal* is a translation). The only significant difference is that the non-Welsh and unfamiliar name of *Loholt*, son of Arthur – who is killed by Cei in the *Perlesvaus* – has been replaced by that of the Welsh Llacheu (Bromwich, 1978a: 417-18).

If Arthur's son was important, if somewhat undefined, what of his nephew, Gwalchmei? In *Culhwch* he is named as one of the Six Helpers who will assist

Arthur in gaining Olwen for Culhwch, though he plays no further part in the tale after this:

> He [Arthur] called Gwalchmei son of Gwyar, because he never came home without the quest he had gone to seek. He was the best of walkers and the best of riders. He was Arthur's nephew, his sister's son, and his first cousin (Jones and Jones, 1949: 108)

Gwalchmei is also found in another Arthurian association in the Early Version of the Triads (no. 4), where he is, like Llacheu, one of the 'Three Well-Endowed Men of the Island of Britain', though again there are no details of what legends caused Gwalchmei to be so described. The pre-Galfridian shared tradition that Arthur's war-band included his 'sister's son' is, nevertheless, confirmed by William of Malmesbury in his Latin *De Rebus Gestis Anglorum* of 1125:

> At this time (1066-87) was found in the province of Wales called R(h)os the tomb of Walwen, who was the not degenerate nephew of Arthur by his sister … [This] was found in the time of King William [the Conqueror, 1066-1087] upon the sea shore, fourteen feet in length; and here some say he was wounded by his foes and cast out in a shipwreck, but according to others he was killed by his fellow-citizens at a public banquet. Knowledge of the truth therefore remains doubtful, although neither story would be inconsistent with the defence of his fame (Chambers, 1927: 17)

As Bromwich has noted, there can be little doubt that this *Walwen* is the same person as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Gualgu(i)nus, Gualgwinus, Walwan(i)us etc.*, Arthur's nephew by his sister Anna (*Historia Regum Britanniae* IX, 9), and his relationship to Arthur and the fact that the *Brut* renders *Gualguinus* as *Gwalchmei* simply confirms that all of these are the same person, that is the Welsh Gwalchmei (Bromwich, 1978a: 370). Given this Gwalchmei must also be seen as the same figure as the *Gauvain* of French romance and the Gawain of the English, whose names are clearly related to the form given by Geoffrey and others. This is further confirmed by the fact that in the Old Welsh *Trioedd y Meirch*, 'Triads of the Horses', Gwalchmei's horse is named as *Keincaled*, which obviously must be related to *Guingalet*, the horse of Gauvain from Chrétien's *Erec* onwards (Bromwich, 1978a: 371).

   With regards to William of Malmesbury's tale regarding Walwen, several points are worth noting. First, Arthur's nephew is a giant, which fits well with the other evidence discussed here and elsewhere for Arthur, his family and his companions being giants. Second, the finding of the grave looks to be a folk explanation of a remarkable feature in the natural landscape, in this case an enormous tomb, which William has preserved. Such topographic folktales are a distinguishing feature

of the earliest Arthurian material and, indeed, the 14ft-long grave is strongly reminiscent of the variable and great length of the grave of Arthur's son, Amr (recorded in chapter 73 of the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*). That there was folklore regarding Walwen/Gwalchmei in the *cantref* of Rhos in Pembrokeshire is confirmed by the presence there of what is variously referred to as either *Kastell Gwalchmei*, 'Gwalchmei's Castle', or *castro Walwani* in medieval sources, something which also offers further confirmation of the fact that Gwalchmei and Walwen are one and the same (Grooms, 1993: 230).

The final early reference to Gwalchmei ought to perhaps be read in this light and offers further confirmation of *Walwen* being a Latinization of *Gwalchmei*. In the probably ninth-century antiquarian record of folklore, the Black Book *Englynion Y Beddau*, we find the following lines:

> The grave of Gwalchmei is in Peryddon (*periton*)
> as a reproach to men;
> (Sims–Williams, 1991: 50)

Clearly some sort of folklore regarding Gwalchmei's grave existed in even the earliest Welsh tradition and the above has several points of similarity with William's account. Thus the second line sounds like a reference to Gwalchmei's treacherous killing at a public banquet, whilst the location, 'in Peryddon', may well be similarly significant. It has often been assumed that it should be equated with the alternative name, Peryddon, for the River Dee in North Wales. However, Sims–Williams has shown that the tenth-century poem *Armes Prydein* implies that there was an *Aber Perydon* in South Wales too. He suggests further that it was the old Welsh name for the Sandyhaven Pill in Rhos, which runs down to the sea from *Kastell Gwalchmei*, and the statement that the grave was 'in' Peryddon means it was in its flood plain, which 'would agree neatly with what William says about Walwen's grave being on the sea-shore' (Sims–Williams, 1991: 50). In light of this we seem to have evidence for topographic folklore regarding Walwen/Gwalchmei's death belonging to the 'earliest stratum' of evidence, with William of Malmesbury's account confirming the Arthurian associations of these lines in the *Englynion Y Beddau*. William's claim that the tomb was 'found' in the eleventh century may, in this light, be taken to suggest that the traditional site of Gwalchmei's burial was opened or excavated at this time.

Taken together the above would seem to indicate that Arthur's nephew was part of the common stock of early Arthurian material, with one story of him going back to the mid to late ninth century and localised in South Wales (Walwen is, incidentally, associated with *Walweitha*, Galloway, by William of Malmesbury, but this clearly results from late and antiquarian folk-etymology rather than anything else). How big a role he played is again not clear, however. We have only the one story about him surviving, with the references in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Triads

confirming his place in the shared tradition, but giving no significant details. This might well be taken to indicate that he was not a truly core character like Cei or Bedwyr. Similarly he is clearly folkloric and supernatural, a warrior of gigantic size, but he isn't assigned any specific fantastic powers, unlike Cei or Uthyr.

Nevertheless, the fact that Gwalchmei was seen as someone who possessed admirable abilities and gifts is indicated by the naming of the poet Gwalchmei ap Meilyr (who wrote *c*.1130-80) after him, his place in the Triads, and the reference by the twelfth-century poet Cynddelw to Owain Gwynedd (d.1170) being 'fervently strong like Gwalchmei' (see also the annal for 1189 cited by Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 105, which described Maelgwn, son of the Lord Rhys, as 'the best Knight, a second Gwalchmei'). Furthermore in Welsh giant folklore, recorded in the sixteenth century, Gwalchmei figures as the slayer of three witches, all sisters and wives of giants (Bromwich, 1978a: 375; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lvi; see Chapter 3 for this Welsh giant-lore as often representing genuinely ancient traditions).

Indeed, before dismissing Gwalchmei as only a minor figure, his central role in continental and post-Galfridian fiction ought to be acknowledged. In this context the evidence from northern Spain may be particularly significant, not least because it dates to a period prior to any possibility of Galfridian influence – indeed, even from before the completion of Geoffrey's work, or that of Chrétien *et al*. Here the characters Arthur and Gwalchmei/Walwen (their names in the forms *Artus* and *Galvan* etc.) clearly appear to have been central to the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend that was known from there – in rural and non-elite contexts people are named after these two from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, whilst Cei and Bedwyr are not accorded the same honour. Similarly someone named *Galvan* is recorded at Guimaraes in northern Portugal by 1178, again before any conceivable Galfridian influence, with Geoffrey and Wace being probably unknown in the Iberian peninsula before the mid thirteenth century (Hook, 1991; Hook, 1993; Scarborough, 1995; Sharrer, 1996). Indeed, Loomis has suggested that something similar can be seen in Italy too, with boys being named *Artusius* and *Walwanus* there, again in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries (Loomis, 1956b: 208-13). All this suggests that there was a pre-Galfridian transmission of the Arthurian legend to the continent, and that Arthur and Gwalchmei/Walwen were central to those elements of the Arthurian tradition that took part in this (see further Bromwich, 1991b, on the transmission to the continent, which she too suggests occurred before *c*.AD 1100. Some speculation on the significance of the Iberian names is offered in Chapter 7).

Before leaving Gwalchmei some comment should be made on the etymology and original form of his name. Bromwich has suggested that *Walwen*, *(G)ualgua(i)nus* is sufficiently close to *Gwalchmei* by Arthurian standards (citing *Peredur, Perceval* and *Myrddin, Merlin*) to have the former as

derivative of the latter as the Welsh name was taken into non-Welsh sources, and the above evidence does support the notion that Walwen and Gwalchmei were one and the same. Certainly with regards to the original form of the name, there is every reason to think Bromwich correct, with the existence of an Old Breton cognate form *Uualcmoe(i)* in the ninth century as well as the *Englynion Y Beddau* reference clearly pointing to *Gwalchmei* as the 'genuine' form (Bromwich, 1978a: 370; one wonders if the appearance of this name in Brittany might be taken to indicate knowledge of this Arthurian character there too, given that the name is reserved for the Arthurian hero in Welsh contexts or those named after him – if so it offers further evidence of his early importance).

As to the name Gwalchmei itself, there are two likely derivations: it may mean 'Hawk of the Plain', from British *Walcos Magesos*. Alternatively, as has been most recently proposed, it may represent 'Wolf/Errant Warrior of the Plain', from British *Wolcos Magesos*. With regards to the latter, the sense might be taken as a 'landless young warrior', which would fit well with Arthur and his men being a band of wandering, court-less warriors, as Padel has argued (Padel, 1994; Koch, 1996: 267; Koch, 1990: 12-13). Whatever the case, Bromwich has noted that Gwalchmei, most unusually, lacks lenition in the second element, suggesting that it was a written form petrified through popular usage (Bromwich, 1978a: 369). This lack of lenition could, incidentally, partly explain the differences between the normal Welsh form *Gwalchmei* and the borrowed forms, if such an explanation is felt necessary. The continental forms could be borrowed from an oral version of the name, in which lenition had regularly occurred, giving *Gwalchuei*. By taking it directly from an oral source the apparently normal Middle Welsh 'correction' of the form to the unlenited *Gwalchmei* would be avoided, resulting in something like *Gwaluei* (Kitson, 2000: 153 suggests that *-ch-* would be regularly lost in many cases when Welsh names were borrowed into French and other languages). With the addition of an *-n* and a Latin suffix this would much more closely approach Geoffrey's forms such as *Gwalwanus*, *Galwainus*, *Waluuanus*; William of Malmesbury's *Walwen*; and the early continental names *Galvan*, *Galven* and *Walwanus*.

(f) Gwrhyr the Interpreter, Menw m. Teirgwaedd and other characters from Culhwch ac Olwen and Pa gur

The above are arguably the main pre-Galfridian figures, on the basis that the majority of the remaining recurring characters only appear in the tales in *Culhwch* in the material examined here. There are some exceptions to this. The first is that of Cyscaint m. Banon, who appears in *Pa gur* and is killed by the Twrch Trwyd in *Culhwch*. As Sims-Williams has observed, he is probably the eponymous figure of Porth Ysegewin in Gwent, and hence was probably

present in Arthurian tradition because of the battle against nine witches that was said to have been fought there in *Pa gur*. Glewlwyd Great-Grasp, Arthur's porter in *Culhwch*, similarly is to be found in *Pa gur*, as well as in later works. However, in *Pa gur* he appears to be guarding someone else's fort that Arthur is seeking entry to. This was probably his original role, which was then altered in *Culhwch* so that he became Arthur's man, as Bromwich has observed (Sims-Williams, 1991: 64 n.31; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: lv, 58; Bromwich, 1978a: 362; see further Chapter 3).

Another exception is March m. Meirchon, the King Mark of the Tristan legend. Although the Tristan legend clearly had independent and non-Arthurian origins, March at least seems to have been in someway associated with Arthur from an early stage as his name is collocated with that of Arthur in the Black Book *Englynion Y Beddau* (the Tristan legend is potentially an independent Cornish story, though there is still room for debate on this: compare Padel, 1981 and Bromwich, 1991a). However the only narrative context in which they appear together is that of Triad 26, which looks to be an episode from the Welsh Tristan legend that Arthur has been drawn into, rather than a truly Arthurian tale.

Aside from these, all the remaining characters are found only in *Culhwch* and sources that are not considered here. Of these, Menw m. Teirgwaedd – an enchanter and shape-shifter who possesses the gift of invisibility – and Gwrhyr, the Interpreter of Languages, are the most significant. They are both named as members of the original group of six who are to assist Culhwch in winning Olwen and they then recur several times throughout the tale. The latter negotiates for Arthur with the Twrch Trwyd and the Oldest Animals. It may be that he is best seen as a reflection of the late eleventh-/twelfth-century interpreters on the Welsh Marches and thus part of *Culhwch* itself, rather than the underlying and manipulated Arthurian traditions that it utilized (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 105). The former, Menw, is also known from the Triads (nos 27 and 28W) where he also appears again as an enchanter. Indeed, in the White Book version of Triad 28 he is said to have been taught the 'Enchantment of Uthyr Pendragon' by Uthyr himself. This appearance in the Triads indicates that Menw had some existence outside of *Culhwch*, and was therefore probably a member of the Arthurian 'shared' tradition, though he perhaps had only a minor part in this given his absence from *Pa gur* and other sources.

With regards to the four remaining characters, the brothers Hygwydd and Cacamwri, servants to Arthur, have no existence outside of *Culhwch*, whilst Caw of Prydyn is probably associated with Arthur here due to a play on words by the compiler of *Culhwch* and may have originally been Arthur's enemy and a giant (see Chapter 3). Finally, Goreu m. Custennin, like Culhwch himself, has no real existence outside of the *Culhwch* and those sources derivative of it, including Later Version Triad no. 52. He is the nephew of Ysbaddaden Penkawr

('Chief Giant'), via the gigantic Custennin, and he is probably simply a doublet of Culhwch in the tale, as Bromwich and Evans have noted, but named in such a way to add to the Cornish ambience of *Culhwch* (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxx–xxxi, lx–lxi).

RECONSTRUCTING ARTHUR'S WAR-BAND: SOME CONCLUSIONS

The application of the two key principles outlined in the introduction to this chapter can thus produce some interesting results. Taken as a whole the companions of Arthur in the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend are mainly non-historical in character, with those few who have historical origins being drawn from a wide range of periods and a great expansion of the court – drawing in many previously unrelated figures, mainly fictional, folkloric or mythical – occurring from the eleventh or twelfth century. By looking at only those figures that are recurring members of the early Arthurian tradition this impression is greatly strengthened. In total only 22 figures appear in more than one pre-Galfridian source or tale. These can be further pruned by removing those who look to belong to the narrative of *Culhwch* – and are thus inserted into several of the Arthurian tales found there – rather than genuine Arthurian tale, along with March and Glewlwyd whose associations are dubious, leaving just 15.

These 15 are discussed fully above, but a number of broad conclusions can be drawn. First, Cei and Bedwyr are indisputably Arthur's chief (and supernatural) companions in the early material, recurring throughout the tradition and usually found together as a pair, with Cei clearly dominant. Second, a number of these figures are relatives of Arthur, including his father, his wife, his son and his nephew. The reoccurrence of numerous figures throughout the early material indicates that we cannot treat the pre-Galfridian legend as simply a haphazard collection of folk-tales, unified by Arthur and little else. Cei and Bedwyr offer the best confirmation of this, found alongside Arthur in *Pa gur*, the Saints' *Lives*, the Triads, *Culhwch*, the folktale-elements in Geoffrey of Monmouth and other early poetry. It is difficult to explain this reality without a 'common core' of tradition that underlies the pre-Galfridian Arthurian material. This impression is furthered by Arthur's established and recurring family in the early material. Though clearly not as central as Cei, for example, they too are undoubtedly part of the 'shared tradition' that our pre-Galfridian tales were reflections of. Furthermore, their existence suggests that this 'cycle' was, in fact, reasonably well developed.

The third and final conclusion is that many of Arthur's closest and, most particularly, earliest associations are with figures who are clearly Otherworldly in origin – Uthyr (who *may* be Brân), Gwenhwyfar, *Lugus*/Lug(h)/Lleu, Gwyn ap Nudd, Mabon, Manawydan, Pryderi/Gweir/Gwri. These occur even in the

earliest stratum of the Arthurian tradition and, by their very presence, testify to both Arthur and the Arthurian legend being mythical from its earliest occurrence. In fact, this impression is arguably more apparent in the earlier material than the later. Whilst some, at least, are likely to be accretions to Arthur's name it ought to be remembered that for Arthur, as a fictional, folkloric and mythical Hero Protector of Britain from supernatural threats, such associations would be more than natural in the tales in which he appeared, just as they were in the tales of Fionn mac Cumhaill.

5

THE ORIGINS OF 'ARTHUR'

INTRODUCTION

The origins of Arthur are always going to be controversial. It is in the nature
of such things, especially when so many have a desire for their myths to have a
historical basis. The previous chapters have aimed to investigate this question from
a secure footing in recent academic work. The conclusions arrived at have far-
reaching implications for our understanding of the development of the Arthurian
legend and its nature. It is no longer possible for an assumption to be made that
Arthur 'must have' existed. Instead the opposite appears to be true – there is no
remotely reliable evidence for his existence and rather the balance of probabilities
lies very heavily with him being a figure of folklore, myth or legend historicized
by, or in, the ninth century. The postulation of a historical Arthur is not only
unnecessary but also, on present evidence, unjustifiable.

   This is not, however, quite the end of the story. Arthur is consistently
and indisputably associated in the earliest material with folklore, the wilds of
the landscape, the Otherworld and – most especially – the defence of Britain
from all possible supernatural threats. His nature is such that we can do little
other than agree with Padel's (and Van Hamel's) argument that Arthur fulfils for
Britain virtually the same role as Fionn mac Cumhaill fulfils for Ireland, with
the character of these two hero's 'cycles' showing striking points of similarity
(Padel, 1994; Van Hamel, 1934). The question is, what does this similarity mean,
beyond obviously offering confirmation that the assumption of any Arthurian
historicity is unwarranted and, in fact, completely uncalled for in order to explain
and understand the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend? No-one has yet seriously
suggested that one of the pair is directly derivative of the other. Instead they both
look to have emerged independently within their own, very similar, societies,
satisfying what would seem to be a common 'Celtic' idea and requirement

(though perhaps drawing on a common stock of tales appropriate for these types of Hero Protector, given the evidence of *Twrch Trwyd* / *Torc Triath*).

The question must therefore be, how did Arthur so emerge – from what, and in what manner? There is now a consensus that Fionn was originally some sort of pagan deity – indeed, the very earliest reference to him, in perhaps the sixth century, makes him a descendent of *Núadu Nect*, the Irish manifestation of the British god *Nodons* (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 3; see Chapter 7 for some discussion of the ultimate nature of the divine Fionn). Padel has nonetheless argued, rightly, that whilst Arthur might have fulfilled the very same role as Fionn in Brittonic folklore, there is no actual need for him to have emerged in *exactly* the same manner to fill this position – he might well be originally simply fictional and folkloric, rather than genuinely mythological (Padel, 1994: 20, 22). However, this does not mean that this is necessarily the case – it could be that Arthur *was* more than simply a folkloric and mythical Protector of his land, Britain. The question consequently becomes, is there any reason to think that Arthur had, like Fionn, a divine origin? Are there any other possible ultimate origins for this folkloric figure?

What follows is an attempt to address these issues. Who, or what, was this 'Arthur' who lies at the heart of a folkloric, mythical and legendary character who was probably historicized by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* in the ninth century? To some large degree our conclusions may be shaped by what view we take of the origins of the name 'Arthur' itself.

ARTHUR AND ARTORIUS

There is one frequently cited possibility for the origins of the name Arthur – it has often been claimed that *Art(h)ur* derives from Latin *Artōrius*, of obscure etymology. Kemp Malone suggested that the extremely rare Latin personal name *Artōrius* would have developed into *Art(h)ur* in Archaic Welsh quite regularly, as the long -*o*- of Latin loan-words regularly appears as -*u*- in Welsh (reflecting the British Latin pronunciation) and such endings as -*ius* are dropped in the post-Roman period, thus changing *Artōrius* into *Art(h)ur* (Malone, 1924-5).[1] This etymology for Arthur has often been enthusiastically endorsed, most frequently by those wish to have a 'historical Arthur' at the centre of the legends. This latter point does need to be borne in mind when assessing this etymology. Given that we have already rejected the notion that a real fifth- or sixth-century figure can be plausibly placed at the heart of the early Arthurian legend, the need to find a 'historical' etymology for Arthur is no longer so pressing. Thus whilst Arthur may well derive from the Latin *Artōrius*, we need to be critical both of the notion that there is no other plausible alternative to this derivation and of the conclusions that have often been drawn *a priori* from this derivation. The second section of

this chapter deals with the possibility of deriving Arthur from something other than Artorius. This section looks at what, exactly, such a derivation from Artorius might actually allow us to conclude, if it were to be accepted.

So what would a derivation from Artorius imply about the origins of the Arthurian legend? It is often assumed that it would necessarily mean either that Arthur himself was historical or that a historical person named Artorius gave his name to the figure of folklore, myth and legend we find in the non-Galfridian tradition. This is certainly a popular belief. However, I see no great certainty that it is not also simply an assumption. Other mechanisms could be at play here that have been left unconsidered by those wedded to a historical Arthur and those who did the initial etymologizing of Arthur from Artorius. If even the possibility of such an alternative mechanism can be demonstrated, then the assumption of at least some historicity that has accompanied the derivation of Arthur from Artorius becomes untenable – it becomes a possibility, rather than the certainty that it has often been presented as, and one that needs to be seen (like the other *a priori* historical assumptions) in the context of the early Arthurian material itself.

One possible mechanism might emerge from a realisation of some essential truths about the nature of Late Romano-British society. Britain in the third and fourth centuries is now seen as a highly Romanized region (in its lowland zones at least) and Latin seems to have been a genuinely living and spoken language within this region. The influence and importance of Latin in Britain is, in fact, well attested by its continuing use on numerous funeral monuments in the post-Roman period. These clearly indicate that it was still a commonly used language as late as the sixth century, and even in the least Romanized areas, such as Wales. As such a Latin name for a non-historical figure, even one elsewhere occasionally used as an extremely rare Roman personal name, might be perfectly plausible in these circumstances (see on Late/post-Roman Britain and the impact of Rome, Lapidge and Dumville (eds), 1984; Esmonde-Cleary, 1989; Dark, 1994; Charles-Edwards, 1995, especially pp.716-17; Howlett, 1998b; Dark, 1998).

How might this work in reality? One can, to develop this further, envisage a situation in which Artorius might in fact be an approximate Latinization, or an alternative or additional name, given to a British folkloric warrior and 'protector' who was already known by a Brittonic name. Such an action might be done in an attempt to Romanize him, as happened with many 'Celtic' divinities. Celtic gods in the Roman period are seldom mentioned only under their native names – more usually their name is, at the very least, Latinized, and often it is accompanied by, or subordinated to, a Latin name, usually through equation with a Roman god such as Mars. Indeed, their surviving Celtic name often represents simply their local or functional surname/epithet accompanied by such an equation rather than their 'true' name (Olmsted, 1994, especially pp.5-9, 106-16, 297-412). Sometimes, in fact, the Latin name could completely dominate, so that the original Celtic name is missing, for example *Silvanus Domesticus*.

Alternatively, a Latin name could replace a Celtic one due to its closeness to the Celtic name, hence the Pannonian *Silvanus Magnus*, with *Magnus* apparently reflecting the *Maglae* of another inscription, Gallo-Brittonic *Maglo-,* 'Prince' (see Meid, 2003 and below for the latter phenomenon).

Now, it has to be recognized that *Artōrius* is probably not a Latin divine name, such as Mars, that might be attached to a British divinity (though its etymology, it must be stressed, is not at all clear),[2] but the above principle needs to be borne in mind. Indeed, the latter points in the above demonstrate that this replacement is clearly not, in any case, restricted to simply Latin divine names. The essential point is that Latin names can quite clearly be attached to non-historical figures and can replace similar Celtic names, as with *Magnus* for *Maglae*. In further support of the reality of this process of the Romanization of Gallo-Brittonic nomenclature, we might cite the Romano-British divinity *Mars Alator*, recorded on two inscriptions from Britain.[3] This non-historical figure seems to have a Latinized second name, with a Brittonic stem Romanized by its combination with a Latin *-or* (or possibly *-ator*) ending, given that there does not seem to have been any Brittonic *-or* ending (Green, forthcoming b). Although clearly another approach to Romanization it does, nonetheless, exemplify the principle once more. These examples are instructive. It is not impossible that *Artōrius* could fit into this pattern and represent a Romanization-through-replacement of a Brittonic name for our Hero Protector. With regards to what the replaced name might have looked like, the common Gallo-Brittonic name-element *arto-*, 'bear', which also had the additional meanings of 'warrior' or 'hero' (judging from the Irish and Welsh evidence) would be highly suitable and has often been identified as a possible non-Latin original for the name Arthur (see further the next section of this chapter). The question must be, however, just how likely is this as an explanation?

That such a Romanization of Gallo-Brittonic nomenclature is not at all implausible or rare is, in fact, further evidenced and paralleled in Late Roman Gaul and elsewhere. Here the use of Latin (or Latin-like) names because they sound or look *similar* to existing native 'Celtic' names is an intriguing, important and well-evidenced phenomenon, such names being known as *Decknamen* or 'Cover Names' (see Coşkun and Zeidler, 2003, especially pp.4-5, 14-51). Thus, for example, Attius Patera's *cognomen* looks to have been chosen because it was a Latin word (*patera*, 'flat bowl') but it in fact 'covered' a similarly-formed Gaulish word meaning 'one initiated'. Similarly Avitianus, Avitus, is generally taken to derive from a Latin adjective *avitus* (< *avus*, 'grandfather') but its use ultimately represents a 'Cover Name' for, and Romanization of, an underlying Celtic name in Gaulish *avi-*, 'desire, favour'. A final interesting example is that of Callippio, which would seem to stem from a Gaulish name deriving from *callio-*, 'hoof', but here represented to the world through a name clearly modelled on the Greek name *Καλλιππος*. This situation is not restricted to the more intensively investigated continental regions

– it can also be demonstrated in Britain and Brittany too, where we find names such as *Carantorius*, *Cantiorius* and *Maglorius*, which are Romanizations (through replacement of the final element with a Latin-style *-orius* ending) of the native names *Carantorīx*, *Cantiorīx* and *Maglorīx* (Sims-Williams, 2003: 31–4). Given this, such a process of the Romanization of 'Celtic' nomenclature cannot be argued to be too rare to be considered, nor restricted only to divinities – it clearly applied throughout the Romanizing Celtic societies, often making use of a wide variety of Latin (and Greek) names that may have only looked similar to the name they replaced, or making the native name *look* Latinate through the use of Latin-style suffixes.

These are important points in the present context. In consequence, the above suggestion regarding the relationship of Arthur to Artorius – a Romanization of a name involving Gallo-Brittonic *arto-*, 'bear, warrior, hero' – is quite credible as an explanation of the supposed derivation, whether Arthur be originally a folkloric Hero or a divinity. *Arto- > Artōrius* would fit simply into the established pattern of such Romanizations, such as *Maglae > Magnus, Callio- > Callippio, Al(at)- > Alator, Carantorīx > Carantorius* and *Avi- > Avitus* etc. Indeed, further support for this alternative method of derivation is provided by the name Artorius itself. It is noticeable that in Gaul such Romanizations and approximate Latinizations sometimes purposefully used rare Latin or Greek names for this process. In one noteworthy case, the name so used (*Aeonia*) is only recorded in Egypt and then only once. This obviously has potentially important implications, given the great rarity of the name Artorius and its very specific and non-British distribution (Coşkun and Zeidler, 2003; Malone, 1924–5; Malcor, 1999; and further below).

That the name Artorius may have become attached to the Arthurian legend as a Romanization of an original name for a non-historical hero perhaps involving *arto-*, 'bear, warrior, hero', must thus be seen as a real alternative to the usual assumption that an Artorius derivation necessitates an origin in a specific historical person. This *Deckname* would then be borrowed into Brittonic and given, for whatever reason, priority, as occurs on the continent and in Britain, with *Cantiorius* probably a genuine and long-established by-form of the original *Cantiorīx* (arguably producing Old Welsh Cenuur, *Cennur*) and Welsh *Pyr, Meilyr* descending from Latinized *Porius, Maglorius* rather than *Porīx, Maglorīx* (Sims-Williams, 2003: 34). Indeed, it can be argued that the rare Welsh name *Aladur* < the Latinized divine name *(Mars) Alator*, via oblique *Alatōrem* (Green, forthcoming b). If this is the case, or even if it is a possibility (as it clearly is), then no assumptions of historicity need be drawn, or can be drawn, from any supposed derivation from Artorius.

Other possible mechanisms can, I'm sure, be proposed and that above could be expanded upon and argued in more detail. This should, nevertheless, serve as warning against simply accepting the assumptions of previous researchers who had a very different view of Arthur and his nature in the earliest material.

Even if we accept a derivation of Arthur from Artorius, this does not necessitate an origin for the name with a historical person – this is an assumption, nothing more. There are other explanations and processes that may be involved. Indeed, a potential Latin etymology cannot in any case be presumed to certainly imply ultimately historical origins, even without taking account of the *Decknamen* phenomenon. The early and blatantly mythical hero Cei has often had his name adduced from Latin *Caius* and few would wish to argue with any degree of even remote confidence that he must have had a historical origin because of this (see Bromwich, 1978: 303 for the etymology). Yet another possible explanation, for example, might be that the folkloric and mythical heroes in question could simply have their origins during the Roman period and amongst Romanized Britons. These people might have simply given them what they felt were appropriate names. Of course, here too the above cited phenomenon of *Decknamen* might also apply, a 'suitable' Latin name being perhaps one that was approximate to a suitable and meaningful Gallo-Brittonic name, word or stem, such as *arto-*. Indeed, we ought to note in this context that the attested Romano-British god *Nodons*, who had a shrine in the Late Roman period at Lydney Park on the Severn and is to be identified with the Irish deity *Núadu*, Nuada, had in Brittonic tradition two divine sons. One was Gwyn son of Nudd, whose origins as a pagan deity are made abundantly clear. The other was Edern son of Nudd, whose name derives from Latin *Aeternus*. This 'Eternal son of the god *Nodons*' confirms that mythical and mythological characters could indeed be remembered by Latin names in Britain (Bromwich and Evans, 1992: 70-1, 134-5).

These important preliminaries out of the way, we can turn back once more to the name Artorius. If this name does lie behind Arthur, the question is why was it chosen? What made this a suitable name for using, as argued above, as a *Deckname*? Was it simply its rarity and morphological closeness to Gallo-Brittonic *arto-*, or was there some other reason? Padel has recently commented that he sees no need for a historical Artorius to lie at the heart of the folkloric and mythical Arthur he identifies as being the 'original' Arthur. However, if we do wish to make something of the derivation of Arthur from Artorius (and, we might add, make an assumption that such a derivation implies an actual historical donor of the name), then there is only one possible candidate: Lucius Artorius Castus. This man was a Roman centurion who was possibly a native of Dalmatia (modern Croatia) or Italy, and who was stationed in Britain for a period in the second century. Here he was *praefectus* of the *VI legion Victrix* based at York, with whom he may well have seen action against the Pictish invasion of northern Britain in the late second century. At some point it is clear that he was appointed as a general to lead two legions from Britain to Armorica (Brittany) in order to put down a local rebellion (Malone, 1924-5; Padel, 1994: 31 and 1995: 111-2; Malcor, 1999).

This is intriguing. This Lucius Artorius Castus is the only Artorii known to have ever visited Britain and he clearly had a very distinguished military career,

possibly being involved in a major defence of north Britain. As someone who could potentially have therefore been a famous martial hero in Roman Britain, it is certainly not implausible that he may have made his obscure personal name one that was appropriate for attachment to a Fionn-like cycle of tales (a proposal with which Higham, 2002: 96, seems to agree). This would, indeed, work even without the *Decknamen* theory, but it is arguably an even stronger position in light of this – it is relatively easy to see how Lucius Artorius Castus's martial achievements could have made Artorius a suitable name for approximating Gallo–Brittonic *arto-* ('bear, warrior, hero'), or a name involving this element, with.

   This seems far more convincing than any attempt to make a historical Artorius the 'original' Arthur from which everything stemmed. Two points need to be made with regards to all this. First, Lucius Artorius Castus is the only Artorius we need concern ourselves with. This is demonstrated by the fact that this is the *only* recorded instance of this extremely rare personal name in Britain and, most significantly, the *gens Artorii* seem to have had a very limited and specific distribution, which did not include Britain (Malone, 1924-5, especially p.369; Malcor, 1999; it should not be forgotten that Lucius Artorius Castus did not settle in Britain, despite his service here, but rather in Dalmatia). This is an important point which can too easily be forgotten.

   Second, as to the idea that L. Artorius Castus could himself have been the 'original' Arthur, rather than simply the donor of the name (or an influence in its choice), it has to be noted that there is simply no reason to think this is the case. As has already been shown in the preceding chapters, there is in non-Galfridian tradition (aside from the ninth-century historicization of Arthur into the late fifth century found in the *Historia Brittonum* and the very few texts related to it) simply no trace of history. Arthur and his legend appear wholly as a product of legend, folklore and myth and there is certainly no hint that Arthur had his origins in a second-century Roman general or any other such figure. Indeed, Arthur's lack of obvious *romanitas*, at least in the Arthurian legend of the early ninth century, can be argued to have been the reason for his choice as a new 'Joshua' for the Welsh (see Chapter 1). Having disposed of one 'historical Arthur' as the origins of the legend, I see no need to set up another. If Lucius Artorius Castus, or indeed any other Artorius, is to be connected with the legend then he seems to have contributed his name and nothing else to it, if that much. In the absence of any sign that this Artorius influenced any part of the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend, and especially given the extremely close resemblance between Arthur's early legend and that of Fionn, the above scenario in which the name is somehow lent to a pre-existing cycle seems to me a full and plausible explanation of the origin of 'Arthur', if we wish to derive Arthur from Artorius.

   The following may therefore be suggested as the most plausible reconstruction of the early development of the Arthurian legend, assuming a derivation of Arthur from Artorius is correct. First, that the 'original' Arthurian legend was, as we have

seen, a story-cycle focussed on a folkloric Protector of Britain and a peerless warrior, a character of local wonder-tales and the wild parts of the landscape who is intimately connected with the Otherworld. This story-cycle is closely paralleled by that of the Gaelic Fionn, who would seem to have been originally some sort of pagan deity. At some point, probably in the Late Roman period, these tales somehow attracted the Latin personal name *Artōrius* to their lead character. This is quite possibly on account of the martial deeds of one Lucius Artorius Castus in the second half of the second century, perhaps a Dalmatian or Italian who was stationed in, and probably fought in, Britain for a period.

The above connection is made very plausible by the extreme rarity of the name Artorius, the fact that it has a very specific and non-British distribution, and the fact that Lucius Artorius Castus is the only Artorii known to have ever visited Britain. Such a situation may simply have come about through the already existing cycle being attached to his name, perhaps once legends had started to independently gather around this. It seems more probable, however, that the original cycle of legends was focussed around a figure whose name involved the Gallo-Brittonic element *arto-* 'bear, warrior, hero', given the discussion above. In the Late Roman period this name was then Romanized, like *Alator* and numerous other Gaulish and British names, in this case through an equation and merging with *Artōrius*, presumably under the influence of this name's close similarity to the original name in *arto-* and Lucius Artorius Castus's martial valour. Essentially, this *Deckname* seems to be an example of Romanization based upon an existing Latin name or word (like *Patera* and *Avitus*) rather than simply a rough Latinization, via a new suffix, of a Gallo–Brittonic name (like *Alator*, *Maglorius* and other Brittonic-Latin *-orius* names), with Lucius Artorius Castus' fame providing the mechanism by which this name became appropriate for such a usage. Such a situation does, of course, provide an explanation (if any explanation is deemed necessary) for the fact that the form was *Artōrius*, which is required to produce Welsh *Arthur*, rather than the *Artorius*, as might be expected if it were merely a roughly Latinized *Deckname*, such as *Porīx*, *Maglorīx* > *Porius*, *Maglorius* > *Pyr*, *Meilyr* (though see Sims–Williams, 2003: 34 and n.68 and Gruffydd, 1989–90: 9 on the possible sequence *Cantiorīx* > *Cantiōrius* > *Cenuur*/**Cennur*, for a potential instance of a *Deckname* involving *-ōrius* as a rough Latinization). The name *Artōrius* subsequently gained priority over whatever the original *arto-* name at the centre of these legends was,[4] just as seems to have happened in the other cases cited above, producing the 'Arthurian' legend that we now possess.

If we have to have Artorius as the etymology of Arthur, this seems the solution that is least problematical. Certainly it is far superior to the alternative, which would give Lucius Artorius Castus a far greater role in the origins of the Arthurian legend. Such a solution is not easily reconcilable with the evidence for the non–Galfridian legend that we possess. Indeed, it would necessitate the bizarre and convoluted notion that Arthur was first of all historical, then he became through

the process of mythicization *totally* absorbed into British folklore and myth (so that nothing of his original nature, aside from his name, was retained) and then, at some later point, he was historicized into a entirely different era from that in which he had his origins. This is not completely impossible. As Padel (1994: 31) notes, once we have dismissed the theory that a genuine fifth- or sixth-century figure lay behind the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend, we are theoretically free to consider any plausible possibility for the origins of this figure or his name. Nonetheless, some might well think it more than a little over complicated, to put it mildly.

The above does, of course, rely on our previous investigations into the nature of Arthur to some considerable degree. Nevertheless, although there is a general agreement that, if a historical Artorius influenced the attachment of this name to the folkloric and mythical tale-cycle we are here concerned with, he contributed nothing more than his name to non-Galfridian British tradition (as Padel, 1994; Bromwich *et al.*, 1991), it ought to be acknowledged by way of a conclusion that there have been a handful of dissenters from this. They would argue, contrary to the analysis conducted in this study, that non-insular and Galfridian sources do show some degree of indebtedness to Lucius Artorius Castus, which might argue against the above reconstruction. To bring this section to a close, these points must be briefly considered.

Kemp Malone was one of these dissenters. He claimed that Lucius Artorius Castus's expedition to Armorica was remembered in the Gallic campaign of Arthur, as described in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which would thus be a 'core' part of the Arthurian legend (Malone, 1924-5). Certainly this is an intriguing idea. Nevertheless it is impossible to accept, not least because it is based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's work. As has often been pointed out, there is nothing at all suggestive of such a notion of Arthur as a Gallic adventurer in the early British sources before Geoffrey of Monmouth's free and imaginative re-writing of the Arthurian legend. As such the notion that it was an ancient tradition borrowed at the same time as Arthur's name cannot be at all endorsed (see Chapter 1 and the references cited therein, especially Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 6-7, and Padel, 1995: 109-10; see Chapter 6 on the porter's speech in *Culhwch ac Olwen*). The only potentially pre-Galfridian reference to a 'historical' Gallic campaign occurs in the possibly eleventh-century Breton 'Life of Saint Goueznou'. Given the above and assuming that the proposed dating can be accepted for the entirety of the text – and thus that this story is not in fact inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth – then *if* Arthur fighting in France is an early element, it must be seen as absent from the insular British tradition and continental in origin.

Perhaps the best explanation is actually to see the Gallic campaign as either a Galfridian or a non-insular (i.e. Breton) historicization of the pan-Brittonic folkloric Arthur, in much the same way as suggested for *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 (the author of the Breton 'Life' clearly knew of and paraphrased

this chapter of the *Historia Brittonum*, as did Geoffrey himself). In this case the historicization would be with the addition of a composite remembrance of early British campaigns on the continent, to make this pseudo-historical Arthur more immediately relevant, in the case of the Breton author, or more imperial and hence important, in the case of Geoffrey. Attention might be particularly drawn to Riotamus (on the basis of Ashe's evidence, discussed in Chapter 1) and the powerful legend of the Emperor Maximus, the Welsh *Maxen Wledig*, who was believed to have conquered Rome and afterwards to have left his troops as the first colonisers of Brittany (Armorica), as candidates for such a 'historicization'.

Another theory, increasingly popular in recent years, has been the suggestion that Lucius Artorius Castus did in fact have a whole series of legends attached to his name in the medieval period and that these became absorbed into Arthurian tradition. Littleton and Malcor (1994) have argued that, in *post*-Galfridian Romance a number of features can be discerned in the Arthurian legend which could be Scythian in origin. The only evidence of Scythians in Britain comes from the second century, when a group of Sarmatians (from the Caucus mountains region) were brought over to northern Britain as Roman cavalry. It is consequently hypothesized that these Sarmatians were associated with Lucius Artorius Castus and their legends became attached to his name.

Essentially, Littleton and Malcor believe that the 'most important' of Arthurian figures and themes (which include, according to them, the sword in the stone, the Holy Grail and the return of Arthur's sword to the lake) must have, on the basis of the parallels they observe, originated in the culture of the nomadic horse-riding peoples who inhabited the Eurasian steppes (Scythia). For Littleton and Malcor, Arthur is in many ways simply a different name – that of Lucius Artorius Castus – attached to the legend of Batraz, the hero of the Scythian Narts tales (Lancelot is seen in almost identical terms, with 'Arthur' being the insular British development of this Batraz, via the Sarmatians, and 'Lancelot' the continental development, via the Alans, another Scythian tribe).

Certainly such a view of the process is both imaginative and intriguing. The parallels identified are, naturally, very interesting, and, if true, it would show that Lucius Artorius Castus was indeed a figure of martial legend. This would support the idea that his name came to be seen as one that could be – by whatever mechanism – attached to the Fionn-like folkloric and mythical tale-cycle identified here and elsewhere. Nonetheless there are major difficulties with this theory. In particular, it requires us to accept sometimes 1000 years or more of silent transmission, both in Britain and on the continent, of these Scythian folktales and stories which are supposedly central to the Arthurian legend! *All* the 'Scythian' elements appear only in the *post*-Galfridian texts, from Chrétien de Troyes onwards. Some of the most striking apparent parallels between the Arthurian legend and the eastern Batraz story make their very first appearances in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, at the end of the fifteenth century.

Furthermore, there is no trace of Lancelot in continental literature before Chrétien de Troyes in the twelfth century and, even more importantly, none of the 'most important of Arthurian themes' are even hinted at – as we might expect them to at least be – in the corpus of insular Arthurian traditions that we have preserved in *Culhwch*, *Pa gur*, the Welsh Triads and so forth. Arthur, as he appears in non-Galfridian tradition, looks like an entirely insular figure with an insular cycle (see the evidence discussed throughout the present work and, for example, Padel, 1994 and 1995; Bromwich and Evans, 1992; Ford, 1983; and Edel, 1983). It is only in post-Galfridian materials that he gains what Littleton and Malcor see as the 'essential elements' of his legend when making him simply Batraz by another name. Indeed, with regards to Lancelot, a large part of their thesis depends on, aside from 1000 years of silent transmission, an etymologising of his name from *(A)lanz-lot*, 'the Alan's parcel of land', the validity of which has been questioned by a recent reviewer (Wood, 1995: 126; see Bromwich, 1978a for a more orthodox look at the name 'Lancelot').

Certainly the evidence that Littleton and Malcor present is highly suggestive of *some sort* of connection between the post-Galfridian Arthurian legend and Scythian legend. However, the parallels they observe should, in the absence of any evidence for its presence in non-Galfridian tradition in Britain and previous to the twelfth century on the continent, very probably be seen as late additions to the Arthurian legend, not elements that are both early and central to the tradition, whatever the ultimate origins of these elements are in western Europe. There are, indeed, alternative methods of transmission that can be conceived of, such as a common Indo-European heritage or medieval contact, as Wadge and Kennedy have observed (see Wadge, 1987; Kennedy, 1995: 129-30. See now also Anderson, 2004, for an effective survey of Littleton and Malcor's thesis and how the same motifs they observe and argue from are found in Classical writings too). Therefore this argument with regards to Lucius Artorius Castus cannot be supported. It seems clear that the only thing he gave to the Arthurian legend, if we can accept the idea that he gave anything, was his name. In light of this, the above reconstruction still remains the most plausible explanation of the possible derivation of Welsh *Art(h)ur* from Latin *Artorius*, if this is indeed to be treated as the correct explanation of the name at the centre of the Arthurian legend.

ARTHUR AND THE BEAR

In the above reconstruction it was suggested that 'Artorius' could have been used as an approximate Latinization and Romanization of an original Gallo-Brittonic name, based around the common name-element *arto-*, at the centre of a story-cycle regarding a folkloric Protector of Britain from supernatural threats (much like the Gaelic Fionn). In what follows the thinking behind the suggestion of

arto- as the original root will be explained and some potential names that could have involved this element will be discussed. Finally, and most importantly, the hypothesis that only a derivation from Artorius is possible will be re-examined in light of all this.

The notion that the name Arthur may be related in some way to the Gallo-Brittonic *arto-* is by no means new. It is a highly suitable element, meaning literally 'bear', but also clearly in usage having the meaning of 'hero' or 'warrior'. Such an equation is of course understandable. The bear can walk on its hind legs, like a great, shaggy warrior, and it is renowned for its strength and ferociousness, as Ross has pointed out (Ross, 2001: 46; see also Bates, 2002: 157-9). Certainly in Welsh and Irish *arth/art* is frequently used figuratively to denote a warrior or hero (Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 5-6). As such it would be a highly appropriate name-element for a figure who is, in non-Galfridian tradition, a ferocious (bear-like) fighter and a 'peerless military superhero' (indeed, Arthur's close association with the wild parts of the landscape might be seen as similarly bear-like). The naming of legendary and superhumanly strong characters after the bear is, of course, not unusual – the name of the Old English hero, Beowulf, also seems to mean bear (Chambers, 1932: 365-81).

The connection between Arthur and the bear was certainly made by medieval authors. Thus in the non-Galfridian Welsh poem *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* ('The Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle'), Arthur is repeatedly described as 'bear of men' (*arth gwyr*), 'bear of the host', and so forth. The Sawley Glosses, which are marginal Latin additions to a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Historia Brittonum*, comment that ' "Arthur" translated into Latin means "horrible bear" ' (Coe and Young, 1995: 11). Additionally, as Bromwich has shown, *Arcturus* (from the Greek *arktos*, 'bear' + *ouros*, 'guardian, keeper') was a genuine, learned, pre-Galfridian form of Arthur's name, used apparently independently by Ailred of Rievaulx (*Speculum Charitatis*, *c.*1131) and Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Vita Merlini*, *c.*1150) amongst others, the appearance of which must surely reflect an early and common association between Arthur (or at least his name) and bears (Bromwich, 1978a: 544-5).

Gallo-Brittonic *arto-* (Welsh *arth-*) thus bears a close and recognized resemblance to the name Arthur and it is a highly appropriate name-element for a figure such as Arthur. In this context it is important to note that *arth-* is a very common first element in early Welsh names such as *Arthgen*, *Arthgal* and *Arthgloys*. Furthermore it is a well-attested name-element in the Roman period and it is frequently associated with non-historical beings. The most often cited example is that of *Dea Artio*, 'Bear Goddess', from Berne (Switzerland), but we can also point to a divine *Artaios*, 'Bearlike', from Isère, and an *Andarta*, '(Powerful) Bear' at Die, Drôme, as well as *Artgenos*, 'Son of a Bear'. Ross has, indeed, made a case for there being an archaeologically attested bear-cult in Britain – an area not as well-endowed with written/inscribed evidence as Roman Gaul – in the

Roman period, and Olmsted too notes a *Deo Matuno*, which may be taken as 'God of the Bear', from High Rochester, Northumberland (Ross, 2001: 46-7; MacCulloch, 1911: 212-3; Ford, 1996b: 509; Olmsted, 1994: 429-30, 431; Ross, 1967: 434-5).

Given all this it seems very plausible that, if Arthur did have a name with a Gallo-Brittonic origin, it would have involved this element – and, it must be said in light of the previous discussions, its Gallo-Brittonic form (*arto-*) is such that a satisfactory approximate Latinization of it, to create a *Deckname*, might indeed be Artorius.

Can we go any further than this? If we are looking for a Gallo-Brittonic name that might have been approximated by Artorius, then we are free to take quite a wide view of this issue. Some of those names cited above, for example, could conceivably have been so approximated, and *Artos* does appear in the Roman period as a name in its own right. However, as was noted above, there must be a particular interest in the question of whether Artorius is really the only plausible origin for the name Arthur. This has certainly often been assumed to have been the case, but it must be wondered whether this is any real recommendation. Is there any possibility that the name Arthur might have derived directly from a Gallo-Brittonic name and the supposed connection with Artorius is simply illusory?

In fact, the possibility that an alternative etymology for the name Arthur might exist and be identifiable is not such heresy as some seem to assume. Bromwich, Roberts and Jarman – indisputably three of the leading authorities on early Welsh literature – have proposed that an alternative derivation of Arthur could quite feasibly be, and perhaps ought to be, sought directly from Welsh *arth*, Irish *art*, Gallo-Brittonic *arto-*, their suggestion being that such a name lies behind *Y Gododdin*'s 'Arthur' (Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 4-5). As they say, this notion gains additional support from the fact that in Latin documents the name 'Arthur' is almost uniformly written *Art(h)ur/Art(h)urus* etc. and is never found in the form *Artorius*. The form *Art(h)urus* is, of course, fully in keeping with the British derivation as non-Latin names often had the normal ending -*us* added to give them a Latin appearance and to provide them with a basis for Latin case endings – thus Welsh *Art(h)ur* would have been Latinized as *Art(h)urus*. In the same way, the author of the *Historia Brittonum*, for example, always treats and considers 'Arthur' as a purely Old Welsh name, in chapter 56 adding no suffix to it and falsely Latinizing it in chapter 73. He was clearly unaware of any potential genuine Latin origin, otherwise he should have written *Artorius* (or possibly *Arturius*). This situation could, of course, result from an originally Latin name being thoroughly and completely absorbed into Brittonic and Welsh folklore, myth and legend (which would, naturally, suggest once more that our above reconstruction based on Artorius, with only the name being 'borrowed', is the most plausible sequence of events), but it is suggestive.

So what might such a Brittonic name as the above authors envisage have looked like, if it was to be the direct ancestor of 'Arthur'? Given the nature of our understanding of early Brittonic nomenclature, it may well be the case that we simply do not have enough knowledge to be able to correctly identify such an original name and we must be satisfied with simply observing that such a derivation is possible. Based on what we *do* know, there is one possible etymology that has been recently suggested, that is a derivation from Brittonic *Arto-uiros*, 'bear-man' (or perhaps, in its extended meaning, 'Hero': Griffen, 1994a and 1994b; Green, 1998).

There are problems with this derivation, however. Most importantly these refer to the ultimate form of the name Arthur. Whilst *Arto-uiros* would have, through regular changes, become Archaic Welsh *Art(u)ur*, it ought then to have developed into Old Welsh *Arthgur* and Middle Welsh *Arthwr* (see Schrijver, 1995: 151–2 for *-uiros* > *-(u)ur* > *-wr*. Sims–Williams, 1991b: 27, 72 discusses the dating of medial *-u-* > *-gu-*, which he sees as a ninth-century and later development; it is not, however, a universal change, so the name might have been regularly *Arthur* through the Old Welsh period – Jackson, 1953: 387, 392–3; Higham, 2002: 74). There are two possible solutions to this. The first is that the Archaic Welsh (and perhaps Old Welsh) version could have been petrified as *Art(h)ur* through popular usage, so that it did not participate in the expected later changes. Alternatively, Griffen has argued that *Arto-uiros* may have already taken the form *Artgur* by *c.*AD 500, at which point he argues it would have regularly become *Art(h)ur*, as *-g-* would be lost in this period (Griffen, 1994a: 85–6; Griffen, 1994b). This latter route is very doubtful, however, and we would still have to rely on petrification in an early form.

With regards to the plausibility of all this, *Arthur* is certainly called 'bear of men', *Arth gwyr*, in *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, which might be seen as a play on this etymology of his name. However, the reliance on petrification is troubling. Whilst it is perhaps possible, it is also highly debatable, especially given the folkloric nature of the early Arthurian legend. On the other hand, Arthurian names petrified in early spellings are not completely unknown. As was noted in Chapter 4, we would expect Old Welsh *Gwalchmei* to become Middle Welsh *Gwalchuei*, *Gwalhuei etc.* but, most exceptionally, it does not (as Bromwich, 1978a: 369 notes). This Gwalchmei was Arthur's nephew and himself a figure of folklore of some antiquity – the petrification of his name in the Old Welsh, unlenited, spelling is unexplained but certain, and is maintained into the modern period in Welsh (furthermore, as Koch, 1996: 267 has observed, the second element in *Gwalchmei* is, in any case, a petrified form, being an inflected genitive). This is not to say that such petrification is necessarily the case with Arthur, of course – it is, however, possible, though even then there might be other objections raised to the above derivation (such as whether an origin in *Arto-uiros* fits with the rhymes made with the name Arthur in early Welsh poetry).

If a pure British derivation is therefore a possibility, though its exact nature and form is still unclear and debatable, we must also return once more to *Decknamen* and Latin-style etymologies. In the previous section of this chapter, when examining possible Romanizations of a Brittonic name in *arto-*, Latin *Artorius* was the only possibility considered. However, the very nature of the *Decknamen* phenomenon means that Artorius can no longer be considered as the only potential Latinate root and, in fact, Artorius is not the only attested Latin root that might produce Arthur. Even more significantly, the Greco-Latin *Arctūrus* – which we have already seen appears to have been a genuinely pre-Galfridian version of Arthur's name – also needs to be considered. This name, derived from *arktos*, 'bear' + *ouros*, 'guardian, keeper', would have regularly become *Art(h)ur* when borrowed, as the *-c-* found in the Classical Latin form of the name would regularly be dropped in Late Latin. This would give, in the Late Roman period, from *Arctūrus*, *Artūrus* (a form which is, in fact, well-evidenced in the medieval period for the star), which when borrowed into Brittonic would regularly become Archaic Welsh *Artur*, Old Welsh and later *Arthur* (see Jackson, 1953: 302, 314-15, 321 and Sims-Williams, 1990b: 250-60 on the mechanics of this and its dating). Why this has not been considered before is perplexing, though in her second edition of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* Bromwich does appear to hint that she would allow this etymology (Bromwich, 1978a: 544; it is also supported in Griffen, 1994a and b). The only explanation is perhaps a desire by theorists to have Artorius as the derivation of Arthur, for historical reasons which we can no longer support.

With regards to the name itself, it is worth emphasizing that it is an astrological name and one derived from Greek mythology, namely the well-known myth of Zeus, Callisto and Arcas (which seems to have some kind of link with the worship of the great goddess Artemis). Callisto was raped by Zeus, becoming pregnant with Arcas. When she gave birth to him the jealous Hera turned her into a bear, whom years later Arcas – now King of Arcadia – encountered by chance. He, for whatever reason (accounts vary), failed to recognize her and Zeus had to intervene to stay his hand. Zeus then placed the pair in the heavens, Callisto as *Arctos*, the 'Great Bear' (Ursa Major) and Arcas as the brilliant star *Arcturus*, the 'Bear-guardian', to watch over her (March, 1998: 61, 93-4, 396; Cary *et al.*, 1949: 79, 159. This Arcturus was, according to Anderson, 2004, subsequently considered a divinity in Classical mythology).

Arcturus, as an astrological name, is correctly only applied to the brightest star in the constellation of Boötes (it is the fourth brightest star in the sky and the brightest in the northern half of the celestial sphere – a significant point, perhaps), its proximity to Ursa Major (the Great Bear) accounting for its status as the mythological guardian of this constellation. However, although this is the strict scientific definition, in practice Arcturus did in fact become popularly used for the whole constellation of Boötes and even of Ursa Major itself, with such usage being evidenced in, for example, Virgil's *Georgics* (I, 204, as noted by Lewis and

Short, 1879: 155; see also Dwyer, 1978). Indeed, this significant astrological name is not only known to Classical and later writers, but is also found in the Latin Bible too, where *Arcturus* seems to be similarly used to translate the constellation of Ursa Major (for example, Job IX, 9). As such a name, it would almost certainly have been known and used in Late Roman Britain (which was, as we have already seen, arguably highly Romanized, see for example Esmonde-Cleary, 1989; Dark, 1994; Howlett, 1998b).

This derivation seems particularly interesting in the present context. If it was attached to the British Hero Protector story-cycle, perhaps as a Latin *Deckname*, then it too, like Artorius, would have regularly developed into Welsh *Arthur*. Furthermore it does not carry with it any possible implications of historicity. In general it is a better fit to the nature of the non-Galfridian legend, with its mythological overtones and particularly its meaning of 'bear-guardian'. Such a meaning would make it a very suitable comparison or approximation to a name in Brittonic *arto-* ('bear, warrior, hero'), whilst the 'guardian' element might be further seen to parallel Arthur's well-evidenced role as a folkloric Protector – the derivation of Late Latin *Arcturus*, *Arturus* from 'bear-guardian' would, of course, have been kept current and reinforced by its astrological associations and the role of Arcturus in the night sky (and, presumably, the fact that in the Late Roman period it had a close morphological resemblance to Gallo-Brittonic *arto-*). Indeed, the Classical mythological tales surrounding Arcas-Arcturus, assuming these were transmitted to Britain too, would have made *Arcturus* an even more suitable approximation of a name in *arto-*, with Arcas-Arcturus being both a hunter and protector before his stellification, as Anderson has noted (Anderson, 2004: chapters 3-4). Lastly, it cannot be forgotten that Arcturus was a genuinely pre-Galfridian version of Arthur's name, going back to at least the early twelfth century, and used by a significant number of writers. This, in itself, is highly suggestive.

In this context it may, indeed, be additionally worth noting that Arthur seems to have been closely associated with the above-mentioned constellations of Boötes and Ursa Major in medieval and later tradition, with the names Arthur's Plough (Welsh, *Aradr Arthur*), Arthur's Wain, and Arthur's Hufe (Haunt) being variously used in both Wales and England for one or other of them (Parry, 1824; Trevelyan, 1909; Jenner, 1912-14; *Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. *Arthur's Hufe*, *Wain* (2), and *Charles's Wain*). Indeed, Lydgate refers explicitly in his *Fall of Princes* (1430s) to 'Arthur's constellation' (Boötes), this being Arthur's magnificent post-Camlann residence in the stars (see Dwyer, 1978). How far back such connections go is unclear, but it is worth noting that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. *Charles's Wain*, followed by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, volume 28: 210) would seem to see Arthur's association with Ursa Major as a concept that existed, in England at least, from the later tenth century, though its evidence in this matter is debatable.[5]

Given all this, *Arctūrus* > *Arthur* seems a more plausible non-Brittonic origin of the name Arthur – if we are to have a non-Brittonic root for the name – than does the very rare personal name Artorius. As such the reconstruction proposed for Artorius might be maintained, but with Arcturus in its place, chosen for its etymological and thematic closeness. As Bromwich says:

> *Arcturus*, like *Arctos* (=Ursa Major or 'the bear') was often used to denote the polar region, the far north, and there are references in Latin literature to the savage and tempestuous weather associated with the rising and setting of the star *Arcturus*. By extension, the name of the star gave rise to the adj. used by Lucan for the Gauls as *arctoas gentes* 'people of the (far) north', *Bellum Civile* V, 661. To name a hero *Arcturus* could therefore be taken to imply that he belonged to the north (i.e. to north-west Europe), and that he was 'bear-like' in his characteristics. (Bromwich, 1978a: 544)

We can therefore conclude our survey in the following way. The Arthur of non-Galfridian tradition would seem to be recorded and alluded to as far back as the sixth and seventh centuries. He appears to be the centre of a story-cycle in which he was the folkloric Protector of Britain and a peerless warrior, a character of local wonder-tales and the wild parts of the landscape who is intimately connected with the Otherworld. In many ways this character is related to the Gaelic Fionn mac Cumhaill and his basic nature remains consistent in folktales even as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In trying to ascertain his ultimate origins, the question of the etymology of the name 'Arthur' has often loomed large. However, this has often had more to do with the assumptions that are attached to proposed etymologies rather than anything else.

It is often assumed that Arthur derives from the extremely rare Latin personal name Artorius and that this somehow 'proves' that he has, at his heart, a historical figure. These assumptions are, however, without any real value. Even if we ignore any potential purely Brittonic etymologies, it can be argued that Artorius could well have been chosen as an approximate Latinization and Romanization of the native story-cycle, on the basis of the original centre of this having a name involving the Gallo-Brittonic element *arto-* and perhaps the martial deeds of one Lucius Artorius Castus making Artorius an appropriate Romanizing *Deckname* for this character. There is certainly no need to see any historical Artorius having a greater role in the ultimate origins of the 'Arthurian legend' than this. Finally, and most significantly, there is no great certainty that Artorius is the only possible Latin etymology of Arthur. Greco-Latin *Arctūrus* (Late Latin *Artūrus*) would equally well develop into Modern Welsh *Arthur*. Indeed, there are good reasons for preferring this latter to a derivation from Artorius, at least, so that the above theories regarding how Artorius was chosen as the *Deckname* with which

to Romanize the native story-cycle probably ought to be re-written with the mythological (and probably much better known, given its status in the night sky) name Arcturus in its place.

ARTHUR THE GOD?

A thorough investigation of the possible etymologies of the name Arthur thus produces some conclusions of use for the consideration of the ultimate origins of his legend. In particular, it seems likely that he had a name which included *arto-*, 'bear, warrior, hero', and is thus to be compared with a number of attested non-historical figures/divinities which also bore such names. Furthermore, if a Latin or pseudo-Latin etymology is to be preferred for Arthur then, at some point in the Late Roman period, it seems likely that a Fionn-like story-cycle was Romanized to the extent of having a Latin name attached to it, probably as an approximate Latinization of the original hero's name. Beyond this, however, the name itself is of little use in recovering specific information on the ultimate origins of the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend, except insofar as a detailed consideration indicates that the notion that the name proves that the Arthurian legend must have had some sort of historical origin can be seen as simply a highly debatable assumption.

What then of the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter? What is the significance – if there be any – of the similarities between the Fionn cycle and the Arthurian legend? How should Arthur's nature in the earliest stratum of the legend be interpreted – what does it imply about his origins? Of what degree of antiquity can we assume the non-Galfridian Arthurian legend to be? Is there any reason to believe that Arthur, like Fionn, might once have been a pagan god? We must be wary of straying too far from the evidence – it may well be the case that some of these questions cannot be properly answered in our present state of understanding. Nevertheless it is important to note that, if the analysis of the Arthurian names in Chapter 2 is correct, then it seems that even by *c.*AD 550 Arthur was already well established across Britain as a pan-Brittonic figure. He was known in southern Wales and southern Scotland, and his name was viewed with awe and superstition by the native population and thus only borrowed by a few outsiders, perhaps attracted by the concept of Arthur as a peerless warrior. This alone, never mind the other evidence discussed above, is highly interesting and suggestive. Certainly *c.*AD 550 is as early as we have any right to expect evidence of a non-historical figure of folklore and myth to be recorded from Britain, excluding the relatively rare and chance finds of Roman-period inscriptions. It surely implies that the origins of the non-Galfridian figure of Arthur must indeed be looked for at some point well before the mid sixth century, presumably in Roman-period British folklore and myth (as Padel would seem to agree, 1994: 24.

Obviously if Arthur is a Latin *Deckname* then the Arthurian legend to which this was attached must have existed in the Late Roman period).

As to the similarities between Arthur and Fionn, and what Arthur's nature can be taken to imply about his origins, we have already observed that there is no need to posit any derivation of one from the other and no-one has seriously suggested such a thing. Both Arthur and Fionn look to be closely parallel but independent folkloric monster-slaying Hero Protectors, living in the wilds of the landscape, reflecting the similar nature of the societies that they emerged from and a common 'Celtic' idea and requirement. Arthur was the specifically Brittonic 'Protector' of his land in contrast to the specifically Gaelic Fionn, with in both cases this function being reflected in their surviving early tales (Padel, 1994; Van Hamel, 1934; Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii-xxix). The question therefore must be, if they are not derivative but closely parallel, then did they emerge in a closely parallel manner too? Fionn was originally some sort of pagan god – can the same be said for Arthur as well? Or is it better and safer to follow Padel in arguing that, whilst Arthur might have fulfilled the very same role as Fionn in Brittonic folklore, there is no actual need for him to have emerged in *exactly* the same manner – i.e. from a pagan deity – to fill this position, treating him instead as always a fictional and folkloric hero, rather than a genuinely mythological being who became such a figure (Padel, 1994: 19-20, 22). Fundamentally, is there any merit whatsoever to the idea that Arthur might have had divine origins?

Such a question, naturally, can only be approached very tentatively, given the nature of our evidence. There is, after all, no solid inscriptional evidence that would prove Arthur to be divine, though this does not of course mean that the possibility can be, or should be, ruled out, contrary to the assumption of some commentators. Absence of evidence is not, on such issues and in an area such as Britain, evidence of absence. The British god *Mars Alator*, for example, is only known through the chance find of two inscriptions, one in the eighteenth century and one in the twentieth century, whilst even in Gaul, *Esus*, who was one of the three apparently important Gaulish divinities highlighted by the Roman poet Lucan in the first century AD, has only one inscription mentioning him specifically (Green, 1995: 473). Whilst admitting that there is no pressing need for Arthur to have originally been a deity in order for the nature of the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend to be explained and understood, it must be recognized that the idea cannot be said to be entirely outlandish and the lack of Romano-British epigraphic evidence is not conclusive. Bearing this in mind, I would argue that a tentative case for Arthur paralleling Fionn in having divine origins can, in fact, be suggested as at least a possibility on the basis of the following considerations.

Most significant perhaps, both in terms of dating and meaning, are the four (or possibly five) men named Arthur who appear to have been born to families

with Irish connections in the period *c.*AD 550-625. It has already been noted that their appearance indicates that knowledge of Arthur's legend was pan-Brittonic and well-established by *c.*AD 550. For the present context, however, much more important is their implication that Arthur's name was viewed by native Britons with superstition and 'exceptional awe', so much so that it was deliberately avoided, something which appears to be confirmed by the fact that not one single person of British descent in Wales bore the name 'Arthur' in the genealogies until the late sixteenth century at the earliest (Padel, 1994: 24; Bartrum, 1965). This deliberate avoidance is extremely interesting and divorces the name 'Arthur' from those of other human or folkloric figures. In this context one can't help but think of the numerous instances of the names of divinities being somehow taboo (with varying restrictions), such as Yahweh and the name of Rome's own tutelary god, as described by Pliny. This is paralleled closer to home with the deliberate avoidance by the Welsh, Irish and the Gauls of the name of Lugus in traditional oath-making and also perhaps a general avoidance of gods' 'true' names in Celtic world (Koch, 1992; Olmsted, 1994; see further, still, Frazer, 1922: 260-2).

The interesting and extremely powerful and long-lasting concept of Arthur that is found in ninth-century *Englynion Y Beddau* and related texts ought also to be considered here. In this Arthur is clearly considered to have been somehow fundamentally different from the other legendary warriors of folklore recorded in this text: unlike them, he was someone who never was and never could be killed. Riots were nearly started in early twelfth-century Cornwall by sceptical French claims that Arthur was not actually still alive and well. Certainly it is relatively easy to see how this concept of Arthur as an eternal warrior might emerge in popular folklore from his role as the peerless protector of Britain who lives outside of society. As the protector of the Britons from giants, witches, dragons, werewolves and other supernatural threats, he should always be at hand. Nonetheless, it also suggests that there was something unique and Otherworldly about this figure, which might well fit with him having a potentially divine origin.

In this context it is also worth noting that the folklore 'motif' of the sleeping hero under the mountain, i.e. in a subterranean Otherworld – which is clearly related to this concept of Arthur[6] and appears associated with his name as early as the mid twelfth century – is only recorded as being attached to one figure before the twelfth century.[7] This was an unnamed British deity (equated with the Greek Cronos) asleep in a deep enchanted cavern in an island near Britain, who is mentioned by Plutarch. The above is not, of course, a demonstrably pre-Galfridian concept of Arthur and there is no good reason to think that Arthur was the unnamed deity. Nevertheless, the associations of this 'motif' are both interesting and thought-provoking (Loomis, 1956c; Loomis, 1959, pp.68-70; Chambers, 1927: 221-30).[8]

Another interesting piece of evidence comes from the poem *Kadeir Teyrnon*. This is an obscure – garbled, as Haycock has described it – Old Welsh poem from the Book of Taliesin, which is rarely if ever discussed in surveys of early Arthurian literature. It may, however, be valuable in the present context:

> The third profound [song] of the sage
> [is] to bless Arthur,
> Arthur the blest,
> with harmonious art:
> the defender in battle,
> the trampler on nine [enemies]
> (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 52)

The description of Arthur as 'Arthur the blest, blessed Arthur' and the fact that, for some reason, the blessing of Arthur was a task of importance to the wise, is most intriguing, though there is no further explanation of this. *Arthur vendigat* (MS *vendigan*, emended for rhyme), 'Arthur the blessed', can obviously be compared to the Mabinogi's *Bendigeidfran*, 'Brân the Blessed', which Ford has seen as a Christianization of *Brân + gwen*, 'the sacred Otherworld Brân', Brân being the Brittonic god of death (Ford, 1983: 272, but see Chapter 4). These three lines, taken together, might thus offer some further support for the notion that Arthur had a divine origin in his role as Hero Protector. Indeed, if Arthur is the subject of the first part of *Kadeir Teyrnon* (as suggested in Sims-Williams, 1991a: 52 and argued in Green, forthcoming b) then this poem may offer further support for Arthur's potential divinity. The personal name *Aladur* found in this poem (and in two place-names identified in Ellis, 1954-6: 274) may well derive from the Romano-British theonym *Mars Alator*. The significance of this is that *Aladur* occurs here in a description of the subject of the poem, who is referred to as being *o echen aladur*. Accepting both the derivation of *Aladur* and Arthur as the subject of this poem, this can be consequently read as a statement that Arthur was 'from the family/tribe/lineage of *(Mars) Alator*'. Obviously this could be simply a conventional attempt to praise Arthur's much-famed valour, given that *Alator* was clearly some kind of war-god and thus his name may have retained strong martial associations (just as Cynddylan and his brothers are similarly praised through an association – 'welps of great Arthur' – with Arthur himself). However, in the present context it might well be seen as having significance beyond the merely laudatory (see further Green, forthcoming b on all this).

Finally, to the above might also be added the observation that if Arthur really does derive from a Latin *Deckname* Arcturus/Arturus, 'bear guardian', this too might be taken to indicate that he was, as far back as the Roman period, seen both as a fierce fighter and a 'guardian', and that he further might have been

himself a figure of mythology, given the mythological and even divine overtones of this name.

These specific points are themselves stimulating. However, perhaps the most relevant evidence for the question of origins is that of Arthur's intimate connection to the Otherworld in the early literature, especially given that this concept appears most dominant in the 'earliest stratum' of evidence, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. Almost all of his possessions – dog, ship, mantle, sword and so forth – appear to be Otherworldly or to have had their origins in the Otherworld, whilst his wife is literally the 'sacred/Otherworld fairy/enchantress'. His father is arguably the divine Brân, the Brittonic god of death, under one of his bynames, and clearly was known of (and associated with Arthur) well before Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote. His hall and his court, *Kelliwic*, also appear Otherworldly, with Ford noting that '*Celliwig* means "grove of trees"', and, as Celticists know, a sacred grove would be a good place to look for a figure like Arthur' (Ford, 1983: 271). Finally, he appears to be a giant and possibly to have had the power to make his men invisible.

Perhaps most significant of all, Arthur leads an army of magically-animated trees in a mythical battle against the one or more Otherworld forts, alongside the divine sons of Dôn and *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h), in a tale which appears to belong to the very earliest stratum of the recorded Arthurian legend. He is also responsible for hunting and defending Britain from the ravages of a giant divine boar, a tale which may go back to his very origins. Other significant tales include a raid on the Otherworld for a magical cauldron, probably accompanied by Lleu once again, and what is probably a separate raid for the *Ych Brych* with which Gwyn ap Nudd may have been involved. Indeed, he is frequently associated with both the Otherworld and former pagan gods, either fighting against or with them.[9] He releases divine prisoners from Otherworld fortresses and he steps in as an arbitrator between the former god Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwythyr ap Greidawl, in the same way as Fionn does between the Irish divine *Tuatha Dé Danann*. Indeed, Arthur frequently appears to have numbered former deities amongst his war-band, with Mabon mab Modron (< *Maponos* son of *Mātronā*, 'the Youth God son of the Mother Goddess') even said in *Pa gur* to have been his father's servant, and *Lugus*/Lleu/Lug(h) as apparently a reasonably regular companion.

It must, of course, be recognized that we cannot put much store in claims that the divine *Maponos* was Arthur's father's servant, for example, and these former gods could be accretions to the name of a folkloric Hero Protector as his legend developed. This does not, however, lessen their utility for telling us about the concepts of Arthur that existed in the pre-Galfridian period (hence their use in Chapter 2). Indeed, as was noted in the previous chapter, the links between Arthur and some of these figures are consistent, close and appear from the earliest period. As such we cannot assume that they are all false. If Arthur was a originally a divinity (perhaps a 'Divine Protector' of Britain from supernatural

threats, as Ross, 2001: 46–51, has suggested) then we would in fact expect such connections in the stories that existed of him – they are certainly found in Fionn mac Cumhaill's legends too, where Fionn interacts with, and fights both for and against, deities such as the Morrigán, Nuada, Midir, and Oenghus. We should compare also the way in which the various gods interact with each other in Irish myth, such as in *Cath Miage Tuired*. The existence of these links implies that the connection between Arthur and the Otherworld was both intimate and early – perhaps they might thus also be taken to imply that it was, potentially, original? It may additionally be worth pointing out, in this context, the possibility that some of these Otherworldly tales may reflect earlier, more heroic versions of certain episodes in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi.

Finally, we should look at a very interesting pre-Galfridian Arthurian tale, and one rarely discussed in detail. It is found in Lifris of Llancarfan's *Vita Sancti Cadoci*, written between 1061 and 1104, one of the early Saints' *Lives* which are considered to contain 'genuine', if manipulated, 'fragments of Arthurian legend', of the type found in *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the other non-Galfridian sources (Roberts, 1991a: 83; Padel, 1994: 7–8; Koch, 1996: 269). In this *Vita* we find the tale of how King Gwynllyw, the father of Saint Cadog, abducted 'by force' the daughter of a neighbouring prince, Brychan, to make her his wife. He was discovered in this deed and, after a battle in which most of Gwynllyw's war-band is killed, the unfortunate princess's father puts Gwynllyw to flight with his prize. As he reaches a hill that marked the border of his land, 'although pained at the very great slaughter in the fight with his opponents, behold he saw three powerful companions. Arthur and his two knights, named Cei and Bedwyr, were sitting atop the aforesaid hill playing at dice'. This situation is, incidentally, very similar to the start of one episode in *Culhwch ac Olwen* (and numerous Fenian tales) and it fits well with Arthur as the inhabitant of the wild and remote places of the landscape.

Interestingly, Arthur's first reaction to the sight of the abductor fleeing from the father of the 'maiden' is to abduct her for himself, but he is dissuaded from this by his companions. Instead he sends Cei and Bedwyr to inquire, not, as might be expected, what is going on, but rather 'who is the holder of this land.' On being questioned Gwynllyw replies, 'With God being witness and all those who are the most knowledgeable of the Britons, I swear that I am the holder of this land.' Once this is reported to Arthur he and his companions 'charged, armed, against Gwynllyw's opponents and made them retreat and fly in great bewilderment to their own land.' Gwynllyw, said to be 'triumphal through Arthur's protection', carries on riding with his prize until he gets back to his home (all quotes from Coe and Young, 1995: 28–31).

Obviously, as the subject of the *Vita* was the offspring of this coupling, it is natural that Arthur would support Gwynllyw over his enemies. Similarly his lustful advances to the Saint's eventual mother fit well with the general approach

of the Saints' *Lives*, in which traditional and originally unrelated folktales are taken and twisted to portray their heroes in a negative light (Roberts, 1991: 83). Nevertheless, the story seems very interesting in the present context. We have to wonder if we are not seeing here Arthur as a Protector of the Border, paralleling his overall Brittonic role in, for example, *Pa gur*, where he fights dog-heads at Edinburgh, on the very edge of the Brittonic world. Certainly it is intriguing that Arthur flies into action – and against the wronged party – only after discovering who was the 'holder of the land', and thus whose borders needed defending, driving the invaders back. He does not question, as Malone long ago observed, the 'rights of the case', i.e. of the abduction. He appears only interested in the border infraction. On its own it is certainly an interesting element of the non-Galfridian tradition. However, given our present concerns, it is worth wondering if Malone might not be right when he argues that 'such automatism however befits an offended deity', albeit the 'broken down' remembrance of such a figure, rather than simply a folkloric hero (Malone, 1924: 482).

This then is the case for 'Arthur the God'. It cannot be said to be in any way conclusive or 'proof'. Rather it takes the comparison of Arthur and Fionn and asks whether it can be extended to the question of divine origins too. I see no convincing reason why it cannot. We lack the kind of evidence needed to prove the case, but what we know of Arthur is suggestive. However, it could be that the evidence is being pressed too far. A folkloric Protector could have attracted to his name the Otherworldly connections outlined above, and the concept of Arthur in which he could never be killed might simply reflect the requirements of his nature as a peerless and always-present Protector of Britain from all threats. Nevertheless, the Fionn parallel is still there and the evidence is highly intriguing. In this context it may be worth finally mentioning the fact that both Fionn and Arthur seem to have been very early hunters of the *Twrch Trwyd* / *Torc Triath*, given the etymology and the date of the texts – I leave to one side, for the moment, the curious and difficult question of what implications this has for the ultimate relationship between Fionn and Arthur, but do note that this would certainly seem to strengthen the case for taking the Fionn parallel seriously in assessing the ultimate origins of Arthur and his legend (see further Chapter 7).

To conclude, whether Arthur was originally a god or not, it seems clear that he was a peerless Protector of Britain – treated with considerable awe, respect and superstition, and closely associated with the supernatural and folklore – of some considerable antiquity, his origins belonging to some time potentially significantly anterior to the sixth century and his name being of little actual value in assessing these origins, once unwarranted assumptions about the origin of his name and the significance of this have been stripped away. His ultimate origins – either as a folkloric Protector from all threats or as, presumably, some

benevolent and protective deity (a discussion of some possibilities as to the exact nature of this hypothetical deity will be saved for the final chapter of this study) – obviously belong to a period before we have good records. Whatever may be the case, he clearly must have emerged to fulfil many of the same needs within Brittonic society that Fionn fulfilled, in the tales we have of him, in Gaelic society. This is enough. It is the only truly plausible interpretation of the evidence that we have available to us and to go any further than this we would have to indulge in too large a degree of speculation than can be easily endorsed in the present chapter.

6

THE HISTORICIZATION OF ARTHUR

INTRODUCTION

In what has gone before the focus has been firmly on identifying what might be termed the 'original' Arthur. This is legitimate for many reasons, not least because *a priori* assumptions about this are frequently made, both by specialists and enthusiasts, which can then affect subsequent analysis. Nonetheless, this does not mean that those elements which are now to be regarded as 'secondary developments' of the Arthur of myth and folklore are without value. If the historical Arthur is but a secondary development of the wider non-Galfridian legend, this does not necessarily mean that this development lacks 'reality'.

Clearly, for the author of the *Historia Brittonum*, there was a 'historical Arthur'. The question is, where did this concept come from? Was the historicization of Arthur a complete invention or was it based, in some way, on genuinely historical events and characters? If the latter is the case then, even though the Arthur so portrayed cannot be considered to represent the 'original' Arthur, it is surely still a valuable exercise to inquire as to whose deeds were being later attributed to Arthur. These deeds are, after all, an integral part of many later portrayals of Arthur. As such they do constitute part of the origins of Arthur.

THE HISTORICAL ARTHUR OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*

The Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56 is the obvious place to start any investigation of this sort, as it is the earliest source to possess a concept of Arthur as a historical figure. First and foremost it has to be asked whether the whole idea

of a historical Arthur presented in this chapter was based on a single figure or if it was simply created from a selection of historical and mythical battles brought together to invent a historical Arthur?

It can be, in fact, suggested that the former was indeed the case, at least in general outline, once it has been recognized that Ambrosius Aurelianus was almost certainly the original victor of the Battle of Badon in the late fifth century (as discussed in Chapter 1). In Gildas' near-contemporary *De Excidio Britanniae*, Ambrosius is given prominence as the initiator of the British counterattack against the Germanic invaders which, after the fighting of several battles, culminates in the Battle of Badon, just as Arthur in the *Historia Brittonum* initiates the British counterattack against the Germanic invaders which, after the fighting of several battles, culminates in the Battle of Badon. This is striking and important. Not only can Badon – the only battle listed in the *Historia Brittonum* that can be confirmed to have actually have taken place in the sub-Roman period – be ascribed to Ambrosius, but so too, it would appear, can the general framework used in chapter 56 to historicize Arthur. On the basis of this we may well be able to say that, to some extent, we do have a historical Arthur – Ambrosius – in the sense that the concept of Arthur as a historical figure and the scaffold for historicization was based on his deeds.

Why the author of this historicization did not simply make use of Ambrosius himself, rather than take the trouble to ascribe his actions to Arthur, is a pertinent question. I would follow Higham in agreeing that the answer can only really be had from a consideration of the nature of the *Historia* and the aims of its author (2002: 136–57). In light of the conclusions reached in the previous chapters on the origins and nature of Arthur, it now seems that the 'historical Arthur' must indeed be seen as the creation of the author of the *Historia Brittonum*. It is only in a few Latin sources derivative of the *Historia* that Arthur appears as the victor of Badon and the defeater of the Saxons. There is now no cogent reason to believe that this concept had any existence before the *Historia*. It is certainly absent from all the non-Galfridian Welsh sources, a highly significant point (especially with regards to claims that a late and highly hypothetical Welsh poem with this concept underlies the *Historia*'s account). Given this, Higham's argument that the author was trying to create a British Joshua figure, an exemplar of British martial valour for the ninth century, in contrast to the sinful Britons of the reign of Vortigern – hence, for example, the number of battles and Arthur's description as *dux bellorum* – now seems even more convincing. Fundamentally there is no longer any reason to think that the concept of Arthur as a historical figure was not the creation of the author of the *Historia Brittonum* and Higham has shown that such an action is easily understandable given the nature of the text and the aims of the author. There is simply no need or justification for looking anywhere else for the origins of Arthur's historicization.

So, what happened to Ambrosius? Ambrosius Aurelianus was, Higham persuasively argues, ousted from his rightful position at Badon because of his

Romanity, which is emphasized by Gildas and the *Historia*, and which made him unsuitable as a potential purely British hero for a new age. Furthermore, the author of the *Historia*'s dubious understanding of fifth-century chronology and his knowledge of legends about Ambrosius meant that he had already associated him with the corrupt reign of Vortigern and portrayed him in an unmartial light. As such, some other, quintessentially British, warrior-hero was required to meet the rhetorical needs of the anonymous author. Arthur, as the peerless and temporally unlocated tutelary Protector of Britain described in previous chapters, would obviously be well-suited to fulfilling this rhetorical role, in pursuit of a contemporary political purpose, as the exemplary saviour of the Britons from their external foes (see Higham, 2002, especially pp. 136-57 and pp. 164-5, and compare especially Arthur's folkloric role defending the border in *Pa gur*, which is incidentally the only Old Welsh text to share an Arthurian battle with the *Historia*).

The question has to be asked, of course, why the author of the *Historia* felt able to make this alteration? Part of the answer must lie with the fact that he was not writing history, but rather a text with a clear purpose. Additionally, as we have already noted, the historicizing of legend and myth was a regular part of Celtic literary activity and, indeed, medieval literary activity in general (see Chapter 1). Taken together this means that there is no reason to think that the author would have had any particular qualms about what he was doing. This reality as regards the methods, assumptions and interests of medieval authors does, indeed, go beyond simple historicization to embrace all aspects of what we might term historical 'truth'. Thus early Welsh literary tradition treated even famous battles as movable formulaic elements that could be easily and readily reassigned to people who did not actually fight them, as Bromwich has shown (Bromwich, 1975-6: 170-2; Jackson, 1945-6: 50, 57; Jackson, 1949).

This situation obviously helps us to understand the changes that here concern us. A more in-depth look at the general pattern of medieval historicization does offer further support for the notion that Arthur's situation cannot be considered unusual. Thus folkloric and mythical characters are often assigned, like Arthur, a major role in some historically important event as part of their historicization. Hengest and Horsa, for example, were dioscuric horse-gods who were historicized with nothing less than a pivotal role in the Anglo-Saxon settlement of England by the eighth century, replacing the likely original players in this event (see especially Ward, 1969 and also Yorke, 1993). The Arthurian situation is clearly at home in this context.

On top of these important points, it is also worth emphasizing that it would be false to see Badon and the British counter-attack as too central to British tradition to allow such a borrowing of both the battle and the overall framework to easily occur. Even though Badon may have been a pivotal battle in the late fifth century, there is no reason to suspect that the Britons of later centuries

would have been particularly worried by its reassignment to Arthur. Whilst non-Galfridian Welsh sources do mention Badon (though not in association with Arthur, an important point in itself), this battle was not a major concern of theirs. Their main interest was rather with the sagas of later sixth- and seventh-century heroes such as Urien of Rheged and Llywarch Hen (see, for example, Rowland, 1990). Probably the most interesting evidence comes from the poem *Armes Prydein*, composed in the tenth century. In this the creation of a confederacy (of the Welsh, the Irish and the men of Strathclyde, Cornwall, Brittany and Dublin) to defeat the 'English' is both advocated and prophesied. This featured a number of important people from the past designed to rally the Britons and their allies against the Anglo-Saxons, including the seventh-century Cynan and Cadwaladr, who are expected to return to lead the Britons in their confederacy. However, neither Badon itself nor the victor of Badon (be he Ambrosius or Arthur) gets any mention whatsoever, surely a damning comment on the place of this much lauded – and apparently historically important – victory against the Saxons in the general British consciousness at this point. It should not be forgotten that this omission occurs in a source of roughly the same date as it is argued that Arthur's name becomes attached to the Battle of Badon.

In light of all of the above, it has to be concluded that the replacement of Ambrosius by Arthur as victor of Badon and the leader of the British counterattack is in fact quite understandable, given the nature of early Welsh tradition and medieval literary activity. There is no reason to think that the author of the *Historia* would have had any particular worries over his innovation, which was in accord with the general character and methodology of medieval literary activity and which was undertaken for the author's rhetorical needs in pursuit of a contemporary political and ideological purpose.

FILLING IN THE FRAMEWORK

If the 'original' historical Arthur – that is to say, the concept of a historical leader who led the British counterattack against the Germanic invaders in the late fifth century and who won a famous victory at Badon – must therefore be identified as Ambrosius Aurelianus, what of the rest of chapter 56? Did he influence the historicization in any other way?

Certainly it is clear that neither the number of battles nor the description of Arthur as *dux bellorum* can now be seen as anything other than the invention of the author of the *Historia* (Higham, 2002: 142-3; see also Hanning, 1966: 119-20 and Charles-Edwards, 1991: 24-5, 28). Similarly the description of Arthur as a great and peerless warrior, who might kill 960 men in one charge, must surely reflect the folkloric 'military superhero' of pre-Galfridian tradition. It is obviously to be compared with that concept found in *Y Gododdin* and is thus most plausibly

treated as part of Arthur's character which was carried over into the historicization, rather than Ambrosius's (it may have also been included, as Higham points out, to create another biblical parallel and magnify and glorify the *Historia*'s exemplar of martial valour, for maximum effect: Higham, 2002: 150). Finally, as we have already seen in Chapter 1, the explicit religious imagery of Arthur carrying an icon of the Virgin Mary into battle at *Guinnon* fits best in an early ninth-century monastic context. As such it is best understood as the author's own addition. Its presence reflects the need in his text for Arthur to be a very Christian paragon of martial valour, with victory coming both through strength of arms and, due to high moral standards, divine assistance and guidance (Higham, 2002: 121-4, 149).

As a result of this we are only left with the battles themselves to consider in more detail. These are, as has already been argued, a very mixed bag: the author of the *Historia* appears to have borrowed the basic framework of his historical Arthur from Ambrosius Aurelianus, only to have then filled this out with information from a wide variety of sources. As the above makes clear, parts of this 'filling' look to have been his own invention and we cannot escape the possibility that some of the battles may fall into this category too. Certainly it appears that some, if not most, of the battles that appear in the battle-lists of Fionn mac Cumhaill were invented spontaneously for the purposes of those lists (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 143, the significance of which was recognized by Padel, 1994: 21). The often-acknowledged impossibility of identifying some of the battles – such as that 'on the river which is called *Bassas*' – in the absence of linguistic gymnastics, might well have its origins in such spontaneous invention by the author of the *Historia* (see Chapter 1, note 15, on identifying battles; Jackson, 1945-6: 48, discusses *Bassas*).

If Badon belonged to Ambrosius and *Bassas* is unidentifiable, what of the others? I have made the case in the preceding discussions for three of the remaining seven battle-sites given in the *Historia* actually belonging to the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend. These battles were, it is argued, historicized along with Arthur himself. First, *Cat Coit Celidon* ('the battle of *Coed Celyddon*'). This would seem in fact to reflect a mythical battle involving Arthur leading an army of animated trees against the Otherworld, in association with the divine sons of the goddess Dôn and Lleu, an adventure probably known from at least the eighth century.[1]

Second, the battle 'on the bank of the river called *Tribruit*'. This appears in the early poem *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* as an entirely mythical Arthurian conflict involving werewolves, the former sea-god Manawydan son of Llŷr and the superhuman hero Bedwyr. Although the poem is usually dated later than the *Historia Brittonum*, there is no evidence for the author of the poem being aware of this text. His Arthur is thoroughly mythical and he draws his tales from pre-existing mythical Arthurian folktales (Sims-Williams, 1991a: 38). Given the above and the fact that we must now see the Arthur of the *Historia* as a secondary development and historicization of the 'original' Arthur of folklore and myth – who is clearly the character at the centre of *Pa gur* – there can be no reason to think that *Tribruit*

was not always a battle against werewolves which was historicized with Arthur in the early ninth century.

Lastly, the battle at the 'castle of *Guinnon*'. This has, like *Bassas*, always defied sensible identification by those who are willing to avoid applying copious quantities of imagination to the matter. The reason for this might very well be because it was not actually a fort in the 'real' world but rather one to be found in the Otherworld. In the very early poem *Preideu Annwfyn*, Arthur is related to have launched attacks on several Otherworld forts (or castles), including such ones as *Caer Vandwy*, 'the Fort of the Divine Place' and *Caer Siddi*, literally 'the fortress abode of the gods'. In this context the fact that the first element of the name of the 'castle' (which would in Welsh be *Caer*) of *Guinnon* means 'pure, white, sacred, holy, Otherworldly' might well be seen as significant (see Ford, 1983). The difficulty in identification would thus become quite explicable. It too may have belonged to a tale of Arthur attacking an Otherworld stronghold, like those in *Preideu Annwfyn* (which appears to simply allude to a number of tales that had a more developed and independent existence), with the battle fought here later being drawn into history along with Arthur himself.

Of the remaining four battle-sites, two appear to have been the sites of genuinely historical conflicts which were actually fought several generations after Arthur is supposed to have lived. The Harleian Recension's *Agned* is, as Jackson (1945-6) noted, unidentifiable and probably a corrupt reading and the other recensions gloss or replace it with *Breguoin* (see Breeze, 2003b, for an attempt to recover the original, uncorrupted, form of the name *Agned*). It has been convincingly argued that *Breguoin* in fact represents a victory originally of Urien of Rheged, recorded as such in one of the 'historical' Taliesin poems as *kat gellawr brewyn* and identified as taking place at Bremenium or High Rochester in the Cheviots (Jackson, 1949; Bromwich, 1975-6: 171). If the other recensions of the *Historia Brittonum* are correct in their apparent identification of the corrupted and probably unidentifiable *Agned* with this battle, then this would therefore suggest that the author of the *Historia* was constructing his Arthur not simply from the deeds of Ambrosius but also those of other leaders as well. Of course, the battle in question was by this point probably just a movable formulaic element which could be conveniently used by the author, with the original participant obscured or missing (as Bromwich, 1975-6: 171-2, who suggests that perhaps there was a whole corpus of such stock events that could be freely used and re-attributed by Welsh authors).

In the above context it is worth bearing in mind that we saw in Chapter 2 that a single conflict could be known by several names in Welsh tradition, which could be interchangeable. So *Cad Achren* was also known as *Cat Godeu* and, furthermore, a good argument can be made for it being known by a third name, *Cat Coit Celidon* (it would also seem to be the conflict remembered in *Culhwch* as the battle at *Caer Nefenhyr naw Nawt*). As such the Vatican

Recension's Welsh-speaking reviser of the *Historia Brittonum*, who seems to have first made the change, might well have substituted a corrupted name for this apparently famous battle for another that he knew. It must be emphasized that he may well have simply known of the battle and its names, but not necessarily of its original victor. Both its fame and the fact that it would seem to have been a movable formulaic element, whose actual participants seem to have been missing or obscured, is indicated by the fact that it also appears to have been assigned to a third person, Gwallawc, as one of his battles (Bromwich, 1975-6: 171-2). Of course, it could just be a case of *Agned* being deleted and replaced by an unrelated conflict, rather than the situation envisaged above. Nevertheless, the Welsh-speaking reviser did this nowhere else and would have no real motive for the attribution to a battle previously unlinked to Arthur, unlike the original author of the *Historia* who was involved in historicizing Arthur using the battles of other warriors. The reviser instead seems concerned with explaining and more fully identifying the battles listed in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 56.

This impression of the author of the *Historia* associating genuinely historical conflicts – which were actually fought several generations after Arthur and which had become 'stock events' – with Arthur's name would seem to be confirmed by the attribution to Arthur of a victory *in urbe Legionis*, glossed and explained as *Cair Lion* in the Vatican Recension. Jackson has argued convincingly that this indicates that Arthur's battle-list is here being padded out with the genuinely historical Battle of Chester of 616. This again would have been used by the author of the *Historia* most probably as one of the movable formulaic elements in Welsh tradition, whose original details have been lost and which can thus be easily re-assigned and used in the historicization of Arthur (see Jackson, 1945-6: 50 and 57, and Bromwich, 1975-6: 171-2; the recent notion of Field, 1999, that *in urbe Legionis* referred to York has no real merit, especially given the consistent medieval Welsh versions of the names of both York and Chester).

In light of the above it can be seen that the Arthur of chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* is very clearly a composite figure. The overall framework for Arthur's portrayal (along with the Battle of Badon) was borrowed from Ambrosius Aurelianus, making him, effectively, the 'historical Arthur', whilst much of the detail of the *Historia*'s concept arguably reflects the need of the author of the *Historia* to create a British Joshua. Other elements are borrowed from the mythical and folkloric tales from which Arthur himself was plucked, these being carried along in the historicization, whilst yet others are taken from the deeds of later historical leaders, which had become part of a corpus of movable formulaic elements that Welsh authors were accustomed to borrowing and using. The aim was to create the kind of Arthur the author of the *Historia* needed for his rhetorical purposes and multiple sources – myth, folklore, Gildas, the Bible and traditional historical battles – were harnessed in the pursuit of this.

ARTHUR, AMBROSIUS AND THE *LINDĒS

Unfortunately we have no context for the two remaining battles: that fought at the mouth of the river named *Glein* and that supposedly fought on the River *Dubglas* in the *regione Linnuis*. With regards to the latter, the *Historia* does state that four battles were actually fought in *Linnuis* on this river - however, we probably ought not to make too much of this statement. As was discussed earlier, one of the author of the *Historia*'s main aims was to assign Arthur 12 battles and it is likely that the exact details of these battles were generally not important to him, to the extent that he resorted to repetition (of the *Linnuis* conflict) after identifying only nine battle-sites. Granting this, what can be said about these two battles? For both these battles there are unfortunately no textual references which might indicate if we have here invented, mythical or originally historical battles. However, etymology may be of some help.

Looking at *Linnuis* first, it must be observed that this is a perfectly regular Old Welsh folk-name, *Linn* + *uis*, which before the ninth century would have taken the form *Linnēs, earlier *Lindēs (see Sims–Williams, 1991b: 58-9 for the dating of the move from inherited *ē* > *ui* in written texts). So, which 'folk' are referred to here? The answer is relatively straightforward as the Late British form of the folk-name underlies (with an uncertain suffix) the Old English kingdom-name *Lindesse/Lindesige*, modern Lindsey (part of Lincolnshire). This Anglo-Saxon kingdom is now considered to have developed out of a territory based around the Late Roman provincial capital Lincoln in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the Roman army, the territory being then known in Late British as that of the *Lindēs, 'the people of Lincoln' (Cameron, 1985; Eagles, 1989; Leahy, 1993; Yorke, 1993b; Green, forthcoming a). As such the identification of *Linnuis* is beyond reasonable doubt. The *regione Linnuis* must be this post-Roman territory, as *Linnuis* is the regular Old Welsh development of the same known and historical folk-name that *Lindesse/Lindesige* is the Old English development of.

Can we say anything else about this folk-group, the 'people of Lincoln'? In fact there is a whole host of archaeological, historical, etymological and linguistic evidence available to us, which can only be briefly summarized here (Green, forthcoming a, provides a detailed analysis). Clearly Lincoln was a major city in the Late Roman period – it was the capital of either the province *Flavia Caesariensis* or *Britannia Caesariensis*, encompassing the territories of the Coritani/Corieltauvi and the Iceni. Further, it seems to have still been remarkably prosperous in the very late fourth century, with evidence for specialist industry, a cohesive central organization, a considerable population and a thriving market right to the end of the coin sequence (Dobney *et al.*, 1996, particularly pp. 2-4, 57-61).

Whilst Lincoln inevitably felt the shock of the departure of the Roman army[2] it seems to have been able to maintain control over its *civitas* territory. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that the large Anglo-Saxon cremation cemeteries form a ring around the city, the closest being Lovedon Hill, 17 miles to the south, and Cleatham, 19 miles to the north, as Leahy has noted (Leahy, 1993: 36). This

is most unusual compared with other major Roman cities from the region, such as Leicester, Caistor-by-Norwich and York. The probable explanation for this distribution is that the post-Roman Britons retained control of Lincoln and its *civitas* territory throughout the fifth century. As a result they seem to have been able to control and manage the Anglian settlers within their territory, despite the fact that Lincolnshire is one of those regions of eastern England that saw mass Anglo-Saxon immigration in the fifth and sixth centuries (see Scull, 1995, on how the East Anglian evidence, and thus the closely related Lincolnshire material, must be interpreted as mass-migration rather than simply 'elite' migration).

Other evidence supports this interpretation. For example, in Lincoln itself excavations on the site of St Paul-in-the-Bail church have revealed a Late and post-Roman sequence of churches orientated precisely in the centre of, and attached to the western portico of, the Roman Forum. These are most plausibly associated with the historically-attested Romano-British Bishop of Lincoln, who was present at the fourth-century Council of Arles. The key thing here is that the available evidence indicates that the second church continued in use through the fifth century and very probably into the sixth century (Jones, 1994; Green, forthcoming a). The implications of this are that Lincoln had a continuing British Christian community into the sixth century and that, consequently, the Roman Forum also continued in use to this time (this situation can be paralleled in the West Midlands and elsewhere – see, for example, Bassett, 1992).

Combined with the cemetery evidence discussed above and the fact that the later kingdom of Lindsey appears to incorporate the name of a post-Roman British folk-group, this is very suggestive indeed. Other evidence can be used to amplify this, for example, the fact that the Old English king-list for Lindsey includes a British name, Cædbæd, for a man who would have ruled in the fifth or sixth century (Dumville, 1977: 90; Foot, 1993: 133). Similarly, the apparent Anglo-Saxon ruler of Lincoln in the early mid seventh century was called *praefectum Lindocolinae civitas*, which may be a title in which the name of the city is in its British form (indeed, OE *Lincolun*, modern Lincoln, is derived from Late British *Lindgolun* with little change, something which is not true for most other Roman cities in Britain). Archaeological evidence for 'British survival' also ought to be mentioned here, as the concentration of post-Roman 'British' metalwork in Lindsey is quite remarkable. Thus, for example, fifth- and sixth-century British Type F and G penannular brooches are very rare indeed – and widely distributed – in the 'Anglo-Saxon' areas of Britain. Recent work has, however, turned up an astonishing concentration of these items in Lincolnshire and, most particularly, in Lindsey itself, comparable with the total number known from all the rest of the 'Anglo-Saxon' area recorded by White. Interestingly some of these brooches look to have been imported from the west of Britain, but others appear to have been locally produced, presumably to meet local demand. This, obviously, is of a great

deal of interest in the present context (Leahy, 1998: 11; Leahy, 1999: 132, and *pers. comm.*; White, 1988 and 1990; see Green, forthcoming a).

Taken together, all of this indicates that the early fifth-century power vacuum in Lincoln's *civitas* territory may very well have been filled in the following manner. The local aristocracy/*curiales* took control of what was, *c.*AD 400, a remarkably prosperous and fully functioning provincial capital, this now self-governing *civitas* becoming known in the post-Roman vernacular as **Lindēs*. It would seem that the church (and potentially the episcopacy) within the city continued to function under the protection of these post-Roman rulers. The evidence suggests that Lincoln continued as a British power-base, controlling the Anglian immigrants within its *civitas* territory, potentially into (it is unclear exactly how far) the sixth century, this British polity then having some intimate relationship with the seventh-century kingdom of Lindsey. In this light it is worth noting that *Y Gododdin* refers to *lynwyssawr*, which may be translated as the 'Lindsey men', in a context suggesting that they, along with the men of the British kingdom of Elmet, were British warriors involved in the mid sixth-century battle recorded in the poem (Cessford, 1997: 220-1).

This, then, is the context of the *Historia Brittonum*'s four battles *in regione Linnuis*. Clearly it is unlikely that these can thus represent mythical battles or an invention of the author of the *Historia*. As a site for one or more successful battles against the Anglo-Saxon immigrants in the late fifth century, *Linnuis*/Lindsey is highly appropriate. We have a British-ruled territory in the heart of the region that saw mass Anglo-Saxon immigration, which (unlike other similar territories) seems to have been able to successfully resist pressure from the invaders and prevent them from encroaching on their chief settlement, Lincoln, during the fifth century and probably at least partway into the sixth century. In this light it is implausible to try to interpret the *Historia* reference as anything other than a ninth-century memory of a historical victory, here re-assigned to Arthur (like Badon) as part of his historicization. There is little else that it could possibly be and still have entered Welsh tradition. It must, nonetheless, be recognized that this battle, like *Agned/Breguoin* and *in urbe Legionis*, was probably by the ninth century just one of a corpus of movable formulaic elements, or 'stock events', whose original details were obscure.

Given the above, we seem to have three battles which were used to flesh out the framework of Arthur's historicization which was borrowed from Ambrosius Aurelianus. All of these were probably not borrowed with any sense of their original contexts, but rather as elements of a corpus of movable formulaic elements. Their original protagonists and details forgotten, their names were left to be freely used and re-assigned by later authors in their own creations. Two of the battles so re-assigned were probably actually fought several generations after the period Arthur was being historicized into, whilst one – almost certainly by chance – would appear to have probably originally have been a genuine fifth-

or sixth-century battle. On balance this seems the best and most convincing interpretation of this evidence.

Nevertheless, although speculative, the following possibility is worth noting with regards to the battle(s) *in regione Linnuis*. Given that the context of *Linnuis* is so good – especially when compared to the other two battles that appear to be genuinely historical conflicts attributed in the *Historia* to Arthur – one is tempted to wonder whether this battle might not be a fellow traveller with Badon, the only other battle so far identified in the *Historia*'s list which seems to have been fought against the Germanic invaders in the post-Roman period. Might it in fact also have been part of the 'framework' of historicization, one of the battles that Ambrosius Aurelianus fought against the Anglo-Saxons before the Battle of Badon? Though Gildas failed to identify any of these battles, they may well have been named in any Welsh legends of Ambrosius' conflicts with invaders (the author of the *Historia Brittonum* clearly knew of legends and battles concerning Ambrosius, see chapters 40-2, 66).

Obviously there can be no certainty in this regard but the following may be significant. First and foremost it has to be recognized that Badon has never been successfully identified. Surprisingly for such a significant victory its location has long been disputed. Bath is one possibility (Burkitt and Burkitt, 1990), but it is by no means a certainty. Jackson (1953-8) and Gelling (1988: 60-1) have convincingly argued that Badon could equally well be one of several sites whose name may derive from OW *Badon* + OE *burh* or *byrig* ('fort, stronghold'). Most of these are located in southern England, such as Badbury Rings in Dorset, leading to a wide consensus that this is where Badon was fought. However, there is no basis to this other than the fact that this is where the majority of possibilities are found. There is, in fact, one often-overlooked alternative. Baumber (*Badeburg* at Domesday), near Horncastle in Lindsey, is also considered to be a possible *Badon* + *burh* (Gelling, 1988: 60-1; Cox, 1997-8).

Strictly speaking, there is no reason why Baumber should be any less likely as a candidate for Badon than any of the others; all rest almost exclusively on etymological arguments. Certainly, as we have seen, the historical context of Lindsey *c.*AD 500 is no less plausible a place for a battle between Britons and the immigrants than, say, Bath.[3] If Baumber in Lindsey was indeed Badon then this might well explain the presence of battles in *Linnuis* in chapter 56 of the *Historia* and their impressive historical appropriateness (as compared to the other battles listed in this chapter, aside from Badon itself). We might be tempted thus to see either the *Linnuis* battle(s) as duplications of a battle at Baumber in Lindsey, or remembrances of other battles fought in the region.[4]

This is, of course, largely speculative – Badon could easily have been any of the other sites that have been suggested – but the coincidence is tempting. Two points can be made here. First, unlike many of the other battles, *Linnuis* has never been suggested as a battle that has been borrowed from myth, nor do we have any record of it being assigned to other leaders, as we have with *Breguoin*. Its very

obscurity outside of the *Historia* may thus point to it belonging to the original framework of historicization in the *Historia Brittonum*.

Second, the area of activity of Ambrosius Aurelianus has, like the location of Badon, never been satisfactorily established.[5] Welsh legend of the ninth century clearly claimed him as its own (*Historia Brittonum* chapter 41), but this is perfectly understandable and may well be of little significance. According to Gildas, *c*.AD 540 the grandchildren of Ambrosius were still active amongst the Britons, though he gives no clue as to *where* they were active. It is quite conceivable that Ambrosius Aurelianus was one of the ruling Britons based at the important former provincial capital of Lincoln who were, unlike most of the other post-Roman elites in eastern England below the Humber, successfully resisting the Anglian invaders and controlling them, perhaps even as late as Gildas was writing. The latter point is suggested by St Paul-in-the-Bail and the *Y Gododdin* reference, though the Anglian archaeology of the region indicates that if this was the case then their control was certainly crumbling by this point. Indeed, Cessford (1997: 220-1) argues that the 'Lindsey men' present at Catraeth *c*.AD 570 were warriors who had joined the war-band of Mynyddawg due to the recent final loss of their homeland to the Anglo-Saxons.

Finally, in this context it should be recalled that there is a highly respectable school of thought that holds that Gildas was, in his account of the British counter-attack in the late fifth century led by Ambrosius Aurelianus, writing about the north of Roman Britain and in particular about the region around the East Riding of Yorkshire (Thompson, 1979: 215-9; Sims-Williams, 1983: 7; Dumville, 1984a: 62-6; see, however, Higham, 1994: 90-117 for an alternative perspective). The East Riding and Lindsey are separated only by the River Humber and, as such, if the above interpretation of Gildas could be sustained, then the speculation floated here might become more substantial.

Whatever the case may be on all this, it seems clear that the battle(s) fought *in regione Linnuis* most probably represents a historical conflict which has been used by the author of the *Historia* to historicize Arthur, in the same way as he used either *Breguoin* or possibly Badon. Before leaving the *Historia*'s battle-list it must finally be asked what we should make of the last battle to be discussed, at the mouth of the River *Glein*, 'pure or clear (water)'? There is little that is concrete to say. It is not mentioned in any source other than the *Historia*, nor is it attached to any other historical figure. However, although its name means that this battle-site could have been placed almost anywhere in Britain, there are, in fact, only two rivers in England which still bear a name derived from *Glein*: one in Northumberland and one in south Lincolnshire (Jackson, 1945-6). Thus while we have no evidence for the existence of this battle outside of the *Historia* – and hence it may well be an invention, like *Bassas* (which seems to include the element *bas-*, 'shallow') could easily be – *if* it was a historical battle and *if* the Lincolnshire identification is correct, then the battle on the *Glein* might too be a fellow-traveller with Badon, if

Linnuis is to be interpreted in this light. This is, it must be pointed out once more, merely a very tentative suggestion to place beside those offered before.

HISTORICIZING IN THE *HISTORIA*: SOME CONCLUSIONS

What can we say in conclusion? The *Historia Brittonum*'s concept of Arthur appears to be very clearly a composite, reflecting, it must be assumed, the disparate and dubious sources used by the author of the *Historia* in pursuit of 12 battles for his British Joshua, according to Higham's intriguing and convincing reading of the text. The primary influence over the presentation of Arthur in chapter 56 seems to have been both Biblical and political. The author wanted a very British and very Christian war-leader who could parallel Joshua as an exemplar for good kingship in the ninth century (the idea of correct Christian kingship was, of course, of great interest to many Christian writers in the early medieval period).

Nevertheless, it would seem that the general framework of this exemplar – his chronological position, his mission and his most important battle – was not the invention of the *Historia* but rather borrowed from the genuinely historical Ambrosius Aurelianus. This man was, for various reasons, unsuitable for the rhetorical exemplar that the *Historia* needed and, because of this, the basic outlines of his deeds were transferred to the name of the peerless and folkloric tutelary Protector of Britain, Arthur. All this is, of course, in full accord with the nature of the *Historia Brittonum* as discussed in Chapter 1. In light of it we can say that there was a historical Arthur, insofar as we mean the person whose deeds underlie the concept of Arthur as a historical figure, and that person was Ambrosius Aurelianus.

How was this basic framework filled out? Some battles may well have been spontaneously invented for the purpose of the battle-list, as happened with the Gaelic Fionn. Others seem to have been originally mythical and folkloric Arthurian conflicts which became historicized along with Arthur himself. Still others look to be famous historical battles that had become part of a generalized corpus of stock famous battles, their original details having become obscured, and which were therefore easily available to Welsh authors, such as the monk who wrote the *Historia*, to freely use in their own creations.

Of all of these, only one battle other than Badon seems to have reflected a genuine conflict with the Germanic invaders in the post-Roman period, the battle(s) fought at *Linnuis*, a fact established through etymology and recent archaeological and historical research. This may simply have been another of these famous stock battles, chosen perhaps by chance. However, it is interesting to note that one possible site for Badon may have been within *Linnuis* and as such this conflict's unique status as the only other post-Roman battle *might* be taken to indicate that it was part of the original historicizing framework and

thus a battle of Ambrosius. This in turn may suggest that Ambrosius was based in Lincoln, a former provincial capital and the chief settlement of *Linnuis*, which would perhaps fit well with the 'northern Gildas' theory. However no certainty can, as yet, be had on these latter points.

   This new Arthur, based on Ambrosius Aurelianus, was in non-Galfridian Welsh tradition a very minor figure. Only that small handful of texts which seem to show a clear knowledge of the *Historia Brittonum* associate Arthur with either Badon or the Anglo-Saxons. Otherwise he is very clearly the figure of folklore, myth and legend investigated earlier in this study. However, ultimately, it was to be this 'historical' Arthur rather than the earlier non-Galfridian figure that was to dominate. Whilst the folkloric Arthur discussed here and by Padel remained largely unaltered into the modern era in the popular folklore of Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, the *Historia Brittonum*'s historical Arthur was taken up and popularized for both the insular and international stage by Geoffrey of Monmouth and thus has dictated most recent attempts to understand the nature of Arthur and the Arthurian legend. [6]

THE HISTORICIZATION OF ARTHUR AFTER THE *HISTORIA*

Although the *Historia* was the first text to present a historicized Arthur, it was not, of course, the last. Some brief mention ought to be made of these other claims regarding Arthur. Usually these additional historicizations occur in sources clearly derivative of the *Historia Brittonum* and its original concept of Arthur as a figure of history. Sometimes these additions could simply take the form of the historicization of another element of the Arthurian legend, as was argued to be the case with the *Annales Cambriae* and the Battle of Camlann. This is easily comprehensible. Once Arthur is accepted as historical then it follows that certain significant elements of his legend, such as his death, ought to be based on history too, so they are accordingly historicized. There is nothing unexpected about this. It is this exact same response which leads to many modern Arthurian enthusiasts trying to find the 'real' Camelot, or the 'real' Round Table, or the 'real' Merlin.

   On other occasions it seems that additions and alterations to the *Historia*'s concept of a historical Arthur reflect the wishes of later authors. Mention has already been made of the 'Gallic campaigns' of Arthur. These primarily feature in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, where Arthur fights on the continent, defeats the Roman army and marches on Italy before he is recalled home to take part in the Battle of Camlann. It is sometimes, however, claimed that there is an early reference to this in the possibly eleventh-century Breton 'Life of Saint Goueznou', if this is not in fact Galfridian-inspired. Whatever the case may be, both texts are clearly directly derivative of the *Historia Brittonum*,

with the author of the Breton *Vita* clearly knowing of and paraphrasing the *Historia*. As was noted earlier in this work, these events cannot be considered in any way an ancient part of the Arthurian legend.[7] Instead the best explanation of this extension of Arthur's 'historical' activities to areas outside of Britain is therefore to see it as an additional historicization of Arthur, derivative of, and added to, the *Historia Brittonum*'s concept.

If it was first done by the author of the Breton *Vita* then it may well have been with the aim of making the *Historia Brittonum*'s pseudo-historical Arthur more immediately relevant to a Breton audience. The Bretons clearly knew of the mythical and folkloric Arthur by the ninth century (and probably always had done, being Brittonic speakers) – as such this can be seen as a Breton attempt to associate Brittany with this new, historicized version of the legend. If it was Geoffrey, then this simply fits with his attempts at glorifying the history of the Britons along with both their and Arthur's importance in European 'history'. Geoffrey set Arthur up as an Imperial figure and thus, by definition, he had to have campaigned outside of Britain and on the continent. Was this, in either case, pure invention, or were the deeds 'borrowed' from other leaders, as was the case with Badon and other battles in the *Historia Brittonum*? In this regard particular attention might be drawn to the deeds of Riotamus (on the basis of Ashe's evidence, for example Ashe, 1995) and the powerful legend of the Roman Emperor Maximus, the Welsh *Maxen Wledig* – who was believed to have come from Britain to conquer Rome and afterwards to have left his troops as the first colonizers of Brittany (Armorica) – as potential donors of deeds for such a 'historicization'. The 'Gallic campaigns' might therefore be seen as a composite remembrance of these earlier 'British' campaigns on the continent.

The above is an example of the further historicization of Arthur through the attachment of additional battles. This is not the only way in which the 'historical' characterization of Arthur was altered. As well as gaining extra deeds, he also saw a change in his status. In the *Historia Brittonum* the 'Arthur of history' is described simply as a *dux bellorum*, 'leader of battles' – reflecting his Biblical model, Joshua, the *dux belli*, 'leader of battle' – who led other kings but who may not have been one himself. In Geoffrey of Monmouth, in contrast, he has become the overall King of Britain and even an Emperor, ruling over a territory stretching from Iceland and Scandinavia to the Alps. Arguably much of this is Geoffrey's invention – Arthur was being offered as an Anglo-Norman counterbalance to the French kings' use of the imperial Charlemagne as a historical icon, whilst Arthur's victory over Rome and his imperial status counters the historical reality of Roman conquest and imperium over Britain.

We would be wrong, though, to see this Arthur, King of Britain and Emperor, as entirely the invention of Geoffrey. Whilst the imperial aspects are almost certainly Galfridian, Arthur as the mythical and folkloric Protector of Britain was increasingly being assigned a very high status within Britain in Welsh literary

texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In *Culhwch ac Olwen* he is *Penteyrnedd yr Ynys hon*, 'Chief of the Lords of this Island', a status he also has in the Welsh Triads (*TYP* 1: Arthur is 'Chief Lord of the Three Tribal Thrones of the Island of Britain'). Here, indeed, *Llys Arthur*, 'Arthur's Court', appears even in the eleventh- or twelfth-century pre-Galfridian Early Version as an alternative to, and instead of, the phrase *Ynys Prydein*, 'The Island of Britain' (for example, Triad no. 9, 'Three Chieftains of Arthur's Court'). This is most interesting. We seem to be seeing Arthur becoming increasingly dominant in Welsh tradition by this period, so that he is conceived of as the mythical 'Chief of Britain' to whom numerous other characters from Welsh myth and legend are attracted and who has legitimate authority and power over these figures (Roberts, 1991a; Bromwich and Evans, 1992; Chapter 4).

This role ought to be seen as a natural development of Arthur's status as the pan-Brittonic peerless Protector of Britain from all threats. It is easy to conceive of how this figure might be expanded in eleventh- and twelfth-century Welsh literary sources towards its natural conclusion. As the undying mythical 'Protector' of Britain Arthur must surely be considered Britain's 'Lord' or 'Chief' (lordship, protection and defence being all closely associated in this period). It is but a small step from this to the assumption that, therefore, all other Welsh legendary and mythical figures should be subservient to Arthur. This in turn explains the increasing importance in non-Galfridian tradition of *Llys Arthur* and its use instead of *Ynys Prydein*. Arthur's Court was beginning to embody the Britain of legend and myth. Thus the Arthur who lives with his companions in the wild parts of the landscape continues to enjoy his adventures in such regions – the core nature of the tales does not change between *Pa gur* and *Culhwch*, for example, or indeed in later folklore – but his home in literary texts is increasingly now taken as a great 'court', with a porter and legendary guests and supplicants (its name, *Kelli wic*, meaning 'forest grove', nevertheless implies its status as somewhere outside of normal society and an Otherworldly place, though this might reflect its original character more than that in *Culhwch*: Ford, 1983: 271; Padel, 1994: 12–3). In *Pa gur* Arthur is the Hero Protector outside of the court, seeking entry from the wilderness; by the time of *Culhwch* he has been civilized to some degree. He is no longer outside the court, he owns it.

If the idea of Arthur's Court as the embodiment of legendary and mythical Britain might be seen as primarily a literary development of Arthur's original nature, based on the idea that a Protector of Britain must also be its Lord, this is not to say that Arthur had no such status before the eleventh century. The reference to Arthur as *ameraudur* (< Latin *imperator)* in the ninth-century *Gereint filius Erbin* has sometimes been seen in this light. Similarly the *Prydein wledic*, 'Lord of Britain', who led the magical army of trees against the Otherworld in the potentially very early *Kat Godeu*, has been identified as Arthur, suggesting that

Arthur's folkloric and mythical role led to him being accorded this status even in the earliest identifiable stratum of the legend.

In consequence Geoffrey of Monmouth's portrayal of Arthur, whilst reflecting his own needs, should be seen at least partially as a historicization not in terms of borrowing and adding material from other characters, but instead incorporating further elements of the mythical Arthurian legend into the character of the 'historical Arthur'. This borrowed concept of Arthur as the 'Lord of Britain', whose court embodied legendary Britain, is also to be found in the non-Galfridian Welsh Latin Saints' *Lives* of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries (and the twelfth-century Breton *Vita Euflami*), in which Arthur features and with some of which Geoffrey may well have been familiar, offering a further line of transmission. These Latin texts do, indeed, prefer to term Arthur a 'king' rather than simply 'Chief' or 'Lord' – *rex majoris Britannie*, *rex illustrissimus Britannie*, *rex universale Britannie* – which is suggestive for considering the origins of Geoffrey's portrayal of Arthur.

There is, however, a further question to be asked in the context of the present chapter on historicizations of Arthur – how should Arthur's presence in these *Vitae* be interpreted? To some degree these *Lives* perhaps could be considered another historicization of Arthur, as the authors have their saints (or their saints' relatives) coming into contact with Arthur. Is this legitimate, however? Certainly these *Lives* came from a context in which these authors might well have known the *Historia Brittonum*, but it must be argued that to treat these *Lives* as true historicizations is going far too far given the nature of the evidence. It is imperative to note that in these *Vitae* Arthur is, in each instance, in no way portrayed as a historical figure – there is certainly no hint of Saxons, Badon or anything else – but instead he appears entirely mythical and folkloric in his nature (when he is not simply being used as a 'celebrity' for the saint to meet). He is associated with Otherworldly animals, the fighting of dragons, the wild parts of the landscape, his superhuman companions Bedwyr and Cei, topographic folklore, and the rescue of his 'fairy' wife Gwenhwyfar from her euhemerised Otherworldly imprisonment, also recorded in other sources and perhaps referenced in *Preideu Annwfyn*. As both Padel and Roberts have observed, what we very clearly have in these *Vitae* are simply genuine fragments of mythical Arthurian story and folklore, borrowed and manipulated by the authors of the *Vitae* for their own purposes (Padel, 1994: 7-8; Padel, 2000: 37-46; Roberts, 1991: 82-3).

It is also most important to recognize that the authors of these works were writing half a millennium or more after their subjects had lived. Usually they had no reliable information about them *at all*, these being figures from beyond the British historical horizon in the late sixth century (see Dumville, 1977b; Dumville, 1986: 11). They had, as Padel writes, 'to fall back on literary borrowings, local legends and their own imaginations to provide their material' (2000: 37). Their aim was to glorify their saint, and the monastery where he was honoured,

in any way they could. By preference this would be done above and beyond other competing institutions and saints, whilst it would additionally justify and lay claim to privileges and land. These authors were writing and creating *legends* with a clear purpose, not history.

Given their complete poverty of genuine history for this period (with a consequent reliance on legend and their own imagination) and their transparent aims and requirements, what we see here is quite comprehensible. Arthur the legendary and folkloric 'Lord of Britain' – as he was developed in the contemporary *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Welsh Triads, with Arthur's Court increasingly the centre of legendary Britain and attracting many non-Arthurian legendary, and even historical, characters to it, over whom Arthur is portrayed as having legitimate authority and power – might simply be seen by these authors as a highly important and glorifying legendary figure for their very legendary saint to have dealings with and dominate. In consequence they borrowed and altered genuine stories from pre-Galfridian tales to fit their purposes; other figures borrowed and used for similar reasons by these *Lives* include the mythical and Otherworldly Melwas, along with totally legendary and semi-legendary kings such as Caw (see Chapter 3), Gwynllyw, Brychan and Maelgwn. This use might have been done with one eye on the *Historia Brittonum*, but there is no reason to think that this necessarily was the case. Given the nature of these texts, and especially the nature of Arthur within them, they are fully explicable simply in the above terms.

As such, the portrayal of Arthur in the Saints' *Lives* cannot be considered a true historicization. Rather they represent the use of Arthurian folklore and myth to create a legendary 'Life' of a saint about whom nothing was really known, by associating him with significant legendary and folkloric figures – of whom Arthur was one, and the giant Caw another – that the saint could usually dominate and best to his greater glory. This was accomplished via fragments of genuine folkloric and mythical Arthurian legend being manipulated to allow this conclusion to be reached and the specific needs of the author from his 'Life' to be met. Thus Arthur is, for example, humbled and made dependent on the saints by having to ask for their help in his traditional role as a dragon-killer or releaser of Otherworldly prisoners. Similarly, Arthur only appears as someone who owns land, rather than a wanderer in the wilderness (as he is in the *Vita Euflami* and the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*), when the author of the *Life* wanted to claim that Arthur had gratefully granted land to the saint, and hence the author's monastery, at the end of the manipulated tale.

Arthur and his deeds were essentially being treated as stock elements that could be freely reused and reinterpreted by these monastic authors to create their Saints' *Lives*. Given this, their appearance in these texts is not truly a historical 'concept' of Arthur. Arthur is associated with dragons, the Otherworld and wonderful happenings in the wilds of the landscape, and his appearance here represents rather

the rewriting and manipulation of folk-tale for legendary – and very political – purposes, with, as a result, no necessary implications about the concept of Arthur's historicity that the authors possessed. He was used because he fitted the requirements of the author, nothing more. Arthur was simply a highly appropriate legendary stock figure – due to his nature in the eleventh- and twelfth-century non-Galfridian sources and his increasing dominance of legendary Britain[8] – for use in the kind of legends that these authors were writing and creating in the absence of any genuine historical knowledge of their saintly subjects. Given this, the only concept of Arthur really present in these legendary and very late *Vitae* is thus that implied by the status he is assigned (discussed above) and the nature of the Arthurian tales themselves.

This then is the nature of the historicization of Arthur after the *Historia Brittonum*. Changes were made to the *Historia*'s concept, both in terms of the deeds assigned to the historicized Arthur and his status, and on the whole these ought to be seen as being undertaken according to the needs of the individual authors. It does, however, need to be borne in mind that a consideration of Arthur's nature in the eleventh- and twelfth-century non-Galfridian material suggests that the 'historical' Arthur's increase in status may also reflect developments in the literary treatments of the folkloric and mythical Arthur. It will not do to simply assume that 'historical' authors were ignorant of these changes. This examination of status in the non-Galfridian legend leads onto the question of the Saints' *Lives* and whether the Arthur of the Saints' *Lives* ought to be considered a genuine post-*Historia* historicization or not. In light of the nature of both the Arthurian references (involving, for example, dragons) and the Saints' *Lives* as a whole, the answer to this quite clearly is that they cannot be so interpreted. Instead what we seem to be seeing is a reflection of a general move towards Arthur being sufficiently dominant within legendary Britain that he becomes extremely attractive as a stock figure of legendary tales, whose deeds and stories are useful to contemporary authors and so are freely reused and reinterpreted by these in their own creations. In the case of the Saints' *Lives*, their authors were writing legends, not history. In the absence of any genuine historical knowledge of their subjects, Arthur was considered in these circumstances to be a highly appropriate stock character that could be used to glorify their saint and demonstrate his power. Indeed, this latter point is likely to be the key point and the chief determinant of which Saints' *Lives* used Arthur, as the presence or absence of any such genuine knowledge decided which authors could write at least some sort of history and which were writing pure legend and needed a figure like Arthur, with his attendant dragons and so forth, to glorify their saint.

By way of illustrating that the above situation was not confined to the Saints' *Lives* and is a normal process which cannot be equated with historicization (yet it is, of course, related to it, insofar as both see figures such as Arthur being reused and reinterpreted by authors in their own creations, though the concept

and intention of this reuse is obviously very different), the following parallel is worth noting. Although Arthur and Fionn are of a similar nature, their respective roles mean that they very rarely appear together – this does, however, occasionally happen. The best example of this comes from the non-Galfridian twelfth-century *Acallam na Senórach*, in which Arthur (*Artúir*) and his war-band appear in their traditional context of a hunt, but here they are made to make off with three of Fionn's marvellous hounds. Fionn pursues Arthur back to Britain – where he is found 'sitting there on his hunting-mound with his retinue' – and Fionn and his warriors' superiority to Arthur is convincingly demonstrated by their killing of all Arthur's men, the stealing Arthur's wondrous horses, and by making Arthur himself a prisoner of Fionn. Arthur is, in fact, made to 'enter into bonds with Fionn' and thus said to have remained Fionn's dependent until the end of his life (Coe and Young, 1995: 165-9; Gillies, 1982: 70).

This must all surely be seen in the same light as the Saints' *Lives* references. Here Arthur is being used as a famous character whose domination and humbling defeat by Fionn can be used to demonstrate Fionn's superiority over his British equivalent Arthur[9] (and, from a literary perspective, possibly also the increasingly popular Arthurian legend?) and further glorify Fionn and his men. As in the Saints' *Lives* the nature of Arthur appears to be solidly non-Galfridian. He is the leader of a band of warriors who live in the wilds of the landscape and who are associated with hunting and wondrous animals. Arthur also has an elevated secular status, just as in *Culhwch* and the Triads (though he is 'the son of the King of Britain', rather than king himself). The only significant difference between this Irish reference and the Saints' *Lives* is that here Arthur is attached to, and manipulated by and for, the legends of a thoroughly mythical figure rather than those of a legendary saint.

This is but one example of this – there are others. For example, Arthur elsewhere appears in Gaelic literature as *Artúr amra*, 'wondrous Arthur', who is supposedly slain by Goll mac Morna's war-band according to the oldest version of the twelfth-century *Lige Guill i mMaig Raigni*. This slaying – especially given the apparently increasingly strong British belief in the twelfth century that Arthur was still alive and could never die – might well have been done with the aim of glorifying Goll and his men (Gillies, 1982: 71). These examples of the treatment of the non-Galfridian Arthur in Gaelic literature thus provide valuable and close parallels to the portrayal of Arthur in the Saints' *Lives*. They confirm that this use of Arthur as a famous legendary stock character – who, through the manipulation of his genuine folkloric and mythical tales, could be used to make the other legendary and mythical figures, be it Fionn or a Welsh saint, seem both more powerful and glorious – was quite common in this period, cannot be considered as true historicization and must surely derive from Arthur's increasing status and fame, as evidenced in the Welsh Triads and elsewhere.

POSTSCRIPT: AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORICIZATION OF ARTHUR

So far we have discussed some of the most obvious changes to the 'historical Arthur' of chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*, both in terms of deeds and status, and we have also considered how the changing characterization of Arthur in Welsh sources may have partly inspired this. No more need be said on this. There are numerous studies of Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential re-invention of Arthur and this is not the place to go into greater depth on this issue than has already been done. There is, however, still one aspect of the historicization and characterization of Arthur after the *Historia Brittonum* that has not been fully discussed: that which is at complete variance to the *Historia*'s account.

Very occasionally we find a historicized Arthur who bears no relation to that of the *Historia Brittonum* and this is clearest in Cornish folklore. Before looking at the historicization, it is worth briefly considering the nature of Cornish Arthurian folklore. In Cornwall, Arthurian folklore – mainly recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – can be divided into two distinct categories. The first is that of the patently Galfridian and learned pseudo-folktales, which are of little interest in the present context. The second is that of folktales that show no such derivation. It is important to note that, even as late as the nineteenth century, Arthur was largely pre-Galfridian in his nature in these tales. His name was attached to a large number of 'remarkable' topographic features, in just the same way as it was in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 and other early sources (with similar features that were not associated with Arthur being ascribed to giants and the Devil). Arthur was additionally renowned as a great giant-killer and as someone who could not be killed (he was instead transformed into a Chough or raven), again paralleling Welsh traditions.

Unfortunately we have very few detailed examples of the actual tales associated with the topographic folklore of Cornwall, perhaps because of a lack of appropriate early antiquarian activity. Thus the mid nineteenth-century Cornish folklorist Robert Hunt states that in eastern Cornwall 'all the marks of any peculiar kind found on rocks … are almost always attributed to Arthur' and that 'King Arthur's beds, and chairs, and caves [and quoits] are frequently to be met with', but he is then content to describe more fully only one such site, the stone in St Columb, Cornwall, though this does itself closely parallel the Arthurian hunting folklore of *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 and as such is highly significant (Hunt, 1881, I: 186).

Despite the above, Arthur's basic nature is clear in Cornish non-Galfridian folklore and it has to be said that there is no trace of Arthur being renowned for fighting and defeating the Saxon invaders of post-Roman eastern and lowland Britain. This is not to say that he is not historicized, however – he is, with the defeat of *Viking* invaders in western Cornwall, on Vellandruchar Moor near Land's End:

> The Danes crossed the land down through the bottoms to the sea on the
> northern side of the promontory, spreading destruction in their path. Arthur
> met them on their return, and gave them battle near Vellan-Druchar. So
> terrible was the slaughter, that the [water-]mill was worked with blood that
> day. Not a single Dane of the vast army that had landed escaped … Thus
> perished the last army of the Danes who dared to land upon our western
> shores. (Hunt, 1881, II: 305-6)

Obviously this is recorded at a very late date – though, naturally, ascribed to ancient
local tradition – and is historically dubious, but it is nonetheless fascinating. It is
also, in all accounts, a legend that is also intimately attached to one or more local
topographic features:

> Where Madron, Gulval and Zennor meet, there is a flat stone where Prince
> Arthur and four Cornish kings dined, and the four kings collected the native
> Cornish who fought under them at the battle of Vellandrucher (Bottrell, quoted
> in Courtney, 1890: 74; this tale also attaches itself to Table Mên, Sennen)

What are we to make of this? There is no conceivable link between this and the
Historia Brittonum.[10] Furthermore, the nature of Arthur in this story is strongly
reminiscent of his folkloric role as a defender of Britons from all threats and his
reputation as a peerless and brutal warrior, whilst the association between the
battle and remarkable local rock features presents another link with the non-
Galfridian folkloric Arthur. As such the Battle of Vellandruchar Moor perhaps
ought to be considered an independent and local Cornish historicization of the
pan-Brittonic folkloric Arthur.

   This conclusion is obviously of a great deal of interest. The fact that Cornish
folklore was able to historicize Arthur into the Viking period suggests that there
was either no knowledge there of the *Historia Brittonum*'s concept of a historical
Arthur or that this was treated as just one more Arthurian story and no block to
other, alternate, historicizations (an equally interesting possibility). In addition,
the existence of this concept makes the parallels between the historicization of
Arthur and the historicization of Fionn mac Cumhaill even closer, as he too was
placed in several different eras (though usually he was said to have fought against
the Vikings).

   Why this historicization was undertaken is unclear. The accounts of the battle
tie it to an observation that in the Land's End region there were red-haired families
who were discriminated against because they were thought to be descendents of
Danes, and the fact that axe-, spear- and arrow-heads have been found in the peat
cut for fuel from Vellendruchar Moor. It might well be suggested that the idea of
a battle against the Danes emerged from a folk-explanation both of these families
and these finds, rather than any real battle, and that this was then drawn into local

topographic folklore and attached to the name of Arthur (Jenner, 1912-14, has some intriguing further thoughts on this battle and the Arthurian associations of this region).

This is perhaps the most interesting of these alternate historicizations of Arthur, but there are hints of others. For example, on Anglesey there was an *Ogof Arthur*, 'Arthur's Cave', which in the mid nineteenth century was said to have 'temporarily afforded Arthur shelter in the course of his wars with the *Gwyddelod* or Goidels'. This suggests that the Protector of Britain had here been historicized with battles against Irish invaders, rather than Anglo-Saxons, reflecting the concerns of the local area that produced this historicization, though almost certainly done with knowledge of the *Historia* historicization (Rhys, 1901). Both of these instances perhaps prove the point made by Van Hamel long ago. It is only natural that folkloric and mythical Hero Protectors such as Arthur and Fionn might become associated with historical foes as well as mythical. It was, after all, their role to defend their people from all potential threats.

In this light the *Historia*'s historicization of Arthur is both less surprising and less conclusive. Clearly Arthur was a figure who could be historicized into several eras (perhaps in part due to the fact that he could never die) as local tradition and requirement saw fit. It was only natural that each locality might wish to share in Arthur's protection from whatever menace they had, in the past, felt threatened by. The late fifth-century historicization of Arthur was one example of this natural development, albeit one that seems to have been first undertaken by a literary author, but by the very nature of the Arthurian legend it seems not to have precluded other, non-learned, historicizations, sometimes placed several hundred years after the *Historia*'s events. Once more it is worth pointing out that there is nothing unusual in the process of historicization, whatever those who believe in 'no smoke without fire' may think. It was a common feature of 'Celtic' literary and folkloric activity, as the above demonstrates, and our understanding of the origins of the Arthurian legend will suffer if we forget this.

7

'THE ARTHUR OF THE BRITISH': A MAXIMUM VIEW

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding discussion it has been argued that Arthur can no longer be assumed to have been a historical battle-leader of the late fifth century, around whose name legends gathered. Instead he must almost certainly be seen, in the absence of *a priori* assumptions, as a folkloric and mythical hero, the Protector of Britain, who became historicized with the late fifth-century British counterattack against the *Saxones* in one ninth-century text. This was then followed by a handful of later monastic writers until it was taken up by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who popularized this concept of Arthur. This is the bare bones of the case argued here. It would be foolish to claim that the matter is put beyond all doubt – we are dealing with probabilities here. Nevertheless, on present evidence I think it is fair to say that a historical late fifth- or early sixth-century Arthur is not in any way necessary to the understanding of the pre-Galfridian Arthur – a key point – and, furthermore, the evidence we have makes the postulation of such a figure not only unnecessary, but also unjustifiable.

The above is perhaps as strong a conclusion as is possible given the nature of the materials we have to work with. One can only very rarely actually *prove* that a particular figure never existed (just as one can never prove that aliens did not assist in the building of the Pyramids or Silbury Hill). Rather what is being said is that, by the adoption of a sound methodology and the consequent viewing of the very few 'historical' references in the context that they must surely be seen in, the burden of proof is transferred overwhelmingly to that party which would argue that Arthur was indeed a historical late fifth-century personage. Essentially our task has been to decide what is reasonable and what is not. In the absence of such proof – and Chapter 1 makes it amply clear that such proof is indeed very much absent – there is absolutely no reason to think that a real late fifth-century

warrior lies primarily behind the pre-Galfridian material. Instead we must follow the vast majority of the evidence in seeing Arthur as a folkloric and mythical figure, despite the ardent wishes of the 'historical' Arthur's many enthusiasts. In this context the following words would seem to be apposite:

> I wish to propose for the reader's favourable consideration a doctrine which may, I fear, appear wildly paradoxical and subversive. The doctrine in question is this: that it is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true. I must, of course, admit that if such an opinion became common it would completely transform our social life and our political system; since both are at present faultless, this must weigh against it (Russell, 1928: 11)

What is offered here by way of a conclusion to all this is not so much a summary of the previous chapters – by and large summaries are available at the end of each chapter, or subsection, in any case – but rather a short (and, in places, somewhat speculative) look at two questions which have, so far, been only briefly touched upon, despite their possible importance.

First, although it has been tentatively suggested that Arthur may have had his origins not simply as a folkloric and mythical hero (the Protector of Britain referred to above), but rather as a god, this has not been developed further. This naturally leaves open the question of what *type* of divinity he might have been, if he was one, beyond noting that it seems likely (given Arthur's recorded nature) that he had a benevolent and protective character. Partly this is a result of quite correct caution – our evidence is incapable of certainly demonstrating divinity, never mind what form this took. Nevertheless, it is an intriguing issue. As such some thoughts and speculations in this regards are offered below, on the understanding that conjecture is involved and that these only apply and are relevant if the hesitant claim for Arthur as a god is adopted with more vigour than some might think prudent, considering the nature of the evidence. This final chapter is subtitled 'A Maximum View' for the very good reason that what follows puts to one side some of the caveats, doubts, arguments and alternatives present in the main analysis and tries to go further than caution has previously allowed.

Second, the focus in this study has been firmly on the early Arthurian tradition, in existence before the influence of Geoffrey and the Romancers began to be felt. Such is to be expected, given the questions that have been here investigated. This has largely, however, meant that the question of the longevity and influence of this non-Galfridian Arthur have been left to one side. The final part of this chapter thus offers a brief overview of this question, in particular focussing on the matter of how the legend evolved and whether it might possibly have had any significant impact on the medieval literary manifestations of the Arthurian legend.

THE ORIGINS OF ARTHUR?

Though there is no solid proof on the matter, it can be suggested that in recent years we have been far too ready to abandon the notion that Arthur may have been some sort of protective and benevolent god. As Murphy has noted of the similarities between the legends that are associated with both Arthur and (the certainly originally divine) Fionn, it may be that 'like effects require like causes' (Murphy, 1953: 213). In light of the nature of the non-Galfridian legend – including the apparent superstition and awe surrounding Arthur's name in Wales from the earliest period, and the possible claim in *Kadeir Teyrnon* that Arthur was 'of the tribe/family/lineage' of the Romano-British war god *Mars Alator* – I see no reason to reject this interpretation *a priori* (whilst admitting that Arthur might, of course, have always been simply a fictional and folkloric 'Hero Protector' emerging from the needs of Brittonic society, as Padel argues).[1] The question is, what implications would such an origin for Arthur carry with it? This is the focus of the following section – *if* Arthur was *originally* a god, what *kind* of god would he have been?

It has already been observed that, given the types of adventures Arthur is involved with in his recorded legend, if he was a god then it is likely that he was a martial and protective deity of some sort (as Ross, 2001: 46-51 suggests, envisioning him as a 'Divine Protector' and a 'British Teutates'), with this being reflected in his name too. Thus it was earlier argued that the original name for this figure involved the Gallo-Brittonic element *arto-*, 'bear, warrior, hero', and the Latin *Deckname* for this, which gave us 'Arthur', could well have been *Arcturus*, 'bear-guardian'. Accepting this much, can we say anything else about the nature of this hypothetical god that Arthur may be the development of?

One understandable question is how popular and well-known could such a figure conceivably have been? As Olmsted notes, many commentators on Celtic deities have been led by the large number of divine names that we possess, from both Britain and other 'Celtic' regions, into believing that there were few or no widely venerated gods (for example, Ross, 1967), a situation which would cause some difficulties with regards to Arthur. Given his pan-Brittonic status from even the very earliest period it does, after all, seem implausible that he was one of these relatively restricted deities, which are all that the pagan Britons are allowed (aside from one or two more widely known figures, such as *Lugus*). However, such a view of 'Celtic' religion would seem to be no longer sustainable. Most importantly, recent research has argued decisively that it could well be a mistake to believe that each attested divine name signifies a new god. Increasingly the trend is now firmly away from such a very fragmented view of 'Celtic' religious beliefs, with discrete gods for each locality and tribe, and more towards recognizing a genuine 'pantheon', made up of widely known divinities with multiple local manifestations, as is found in Greece (Olmsted, 1994; see also Pedreño, 2005.

There is still room within this, of course, for very local deities; it is simply rather that they can no longer be seen to dominate).

This is obviously most significant. Given the above observations on the existence of a 'pantheon', we need to consider the possibility that 'the appearance of a new name … does not necessarily imply the existence of a new god' and that 'in the case of Gaul and the British Isles, the evidence shows that we are dealing with different names applied to the same deity' (as Sopeño, 2005: 350 puts it; see Olmsted, 1994 for a full treatment of this and Murphy, 1953: 205–8 for a similar situation in Irish mythology). Rather than being potentially a deity in his own right, it could well be that our *Ar(c)turus*/*Artorius*/**Arto-* was the result of a Romanization of a byname or epithet for one of these widely venerated gods, possibly reflecting one aspect of his personality or cult (presumably one in which he was a 'hero', given a suggested derivation from *arto-*, 'bear, warrior, hero'). This does now seem to be a general pattern for all but the most localised of deities; if this is to be pursued, who then could Arthur potentially really 'be'?

For an answer to this we must look to the most considerable recent contribution to our understanding of Celtic religion and deities, made by Garrett Olmsted, who has attempted to reconstruct both the Celtic and the underlying Indo-European 'pantheon'. Not only has Olmsted demonstrated the need for a new conception of the pagan Celtic region, but (crucially, for present purposes) he has also undertaken important and essential research with regards to the nature and composition of this 'pantheon', examining the question of to which of these deities the various recorded Gaulish and British bynames actually refer (Olmsted, 1994). Of the widely acknowledged (and ultimately Indo-European) deities he identifies from the supposed chaos of Celtic religion, the deity he calls *Vellaunos-Esus* would seem to be the only plausible god that any divine Arthur – as a protective and martial deity – might be a pan-Brittonic manifestation and byname of. This is the main martial divinity of the reconstructed pantheon, demonstrated by Olmsted to be lying behind virtually all of the instances of a Gallo-Brittonic name associated with Mars (e.g. *Mars Segomo*), reflecting the assimilation of *Vellaunos-Esus* with this deity as part of the *Interpretatio Romana*. The epigraphically recorded bynames for this deity, as identified by Olmsted, back up this contention with regards to Arthur's associations, including names such as *(Mars) Segomo*, 'the Victory Giver', *Toutatis*, 'Protector of the Tribe', *Anvalonnacos*, 'the Strong', *Degovexis*, 'the Good Fighter', *Dunatis*, 'Protector of the Fortified Town' and probably *Dinomogetiomaros*, 'The Great and Mighty Protector' and *Caturix*, 'the Ruler of Battle' (Olmsted, 1994: especially pp.106-9, 111-16, 153-5, 319-48; see also Olmsted, 1988 on this deity).[2]

In light of all this, our hypothetical divine 'Arthur' is best seen as a reasonably widely known Divine Protector of the Britons from supernatural threats, being in this role a byname for (and manifestation of) a divinity known to modern researchers as *Vellaunos-Esus*, presumably representing an aspect of his character

in which the protective hero was paramount (indeed, we may just possibly have some confirmation of this in *Kadeir Teyrnon*'s potential description of Arthur as being 'of the tribe/family/lineage' of *Mars Alator*, given that Olmsted's model would make *Mars Alator* himself a manifestation of *Vellaunos-Esus*). This, in itself, is an intriguing conclusion. Is this the limit of what can reasonably be suggested for his character, however? The answer to this is 'perhaps not'. There may be one more path open to us in our effort to define the range of possibilities as to the identity of Arthur, if he is taken to be a god – this is to look to the close comparison between the recorded legends of Arthur and Fionn. Can this tell us anything about Arthur's possible divine origins?

It may be helpful, in this context, to look in a little more depth at the ultimate origins of Fionn himself, to at least consider what kind of deity produced a legendary figure that is so close in nature to the pre-Galfridian Arthur. The first question must naturally be whether it is plausible that the ultimate origins of any divine Arthur might be illuminated by a consideration of Fionn's roots? Certainly the comparison between Arthur and Fionn's legends inspired a consideration of the possibility of Arthur's divine origins. However, Padel's comments on the need (or lack thereof) for an assumption of Arthur's divinity, on the basis of the Fenian parallel, can be extended to this question too – such a situation would be by no means necessarily the case (Padel, 1994: 20). Whilst Arthur might have been a god like Fionn, he need not automatically have been of ultimately the same type. Nonetheless, if we follow Van Hamel in treating Fionn as always a protective figure from his very beginnings – thus that it was from the first the case that 'all the tales of Finn's heroes [were] about some form of protection of the land' (1934: 24), often against demoniacal enemies – then the possibility of Fionn's origins being able to shed light on those of any divine, protective Arthur cannot be said to be incredible, given their later similarity. This is especially reflected in the fact that both Arthur and Fionn appear to be from apparently a very early date the hunters of the destructive divine boar *Trētos* in their respective countries. In support of this it can be noted that the earliest reference to Fionn, dating back to perhaps the sixth century, both refers to his divinity – he is a descendent of *Núadu Nect* – and describes him as 'best amongst warriors' (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 3, the latter surely offering a comparison with the allusions to Arthur in *Y Gododdin* and *Marwnad Cynddylan*).

On the other hand, Ó hÓgáin has shown that a role as a seer was also part of Fionn's portrayal from very early on, leading him to suggest that the concept of Fionn as a Hero Protector evolved in the fifth century (and into the sixth century) from that of a youthful seer-divinity named *Vindos*, Old Irish *Find*, Fionn – which Ó hÓgáin sees as related to or identical with the Gaulish god *Vindonnos* – from which point it came to dominate (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 3-51; Ó hÓgáin, 1999: 118-27). With regards to this theory, one does have to note that the associations of *Vindonnos* do not necessarily support Ó hÓgáin's contention as to

the original nature of Fionn/*Vindos*. *Vindonnos* looks to be a healer rather than a seer, a manifestation of a widely known water-god and healer that Olmsted terms *Neōtulos/*Nectionos*, and thus not an overly plausible candidate for the original of Fionn (Olmsted, 1994: 182-3, 185, 259, 384-401). Olmsted notes that several divine-names in *Vindo-* and closely related words look to be bynames for this god, though one name involving *Vindo-*, *Vindoroicos*, has been interpreted as 'the Fair Great Warrior' and may instead reflect a manifestation of *Vellaunos-Esus* rather than *Neōtulos/*Nectionos* (Olmsted, 1994: 394-5). This might be seen as significant, given that *Vellaunos-Esus* was a deity who certainly does seem to have had the seer as one significant aspect of his nature (see below). Thus it might cautiously be proposed that *Vindoroicos* is a better comparison for the theory of 'Fionn (*Vindos*) the seer' than *Vindonnos* is.[3]

What all this means is, of course, to be debated, as are Fionn's links to all of these figures. It ought nonetheless to be emphasized that Ó hÓgáin's concept of Fionn as a seer rests on the early Fenian texts as much as anything else and consequently deserves consideration, whatever the case may be. Such a deity as Ó hÓgáin envisages, who is originally a seer and nothing more, does not, of course, provide a particularly suitable original for Arthur (who has no obvious qualifications as a seer) and this has implications. If we follow Ó hÓgáin's conclusions, but continue to investigate the possibility of a divine Arthur (rather than following Padel in considering a fictional and folkloric origin for Arthur as most likely), then we must admit that any ultimate divine origins for Arthur may not be readily elucidated by those of Fionn, despite the close correspondence of their natures in the post-Roman tales and allusion that we have regarding them.

Nevertheless, whilst Ó hÓgáin's case is interesting, it should be acknowledged that his theory does, in actual fact, consider that Fionn the Hero Protector and leader of the *fianna* was already part of the Fionn legend by the time it first reached written expression, in the sixth century and afterwards (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 28, 30, 36). This is an important point. Indeed, in the seventh and eighth centuries, when we start to get a number of references to Fionn's legend, one of the 'perennial themes' of Fionn's early legend is clearly 'his struggle against an otherworld foe' (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 51). In fact, it might be tentatively suggested that there is no particular reason why the original Fionn could not have been originally both Ó hÓgáin's seer/acquirer of knowledge and the Hero Protector that Van Hamel and others see him as primarily being in the tales we have of him. It has to be, once again, recognized that recent opinion has turned decisively away from the idea of 'Celtic' mythology being composed of a chaotic multitude of different and local gods with not only specific localities, but also highly specific functions. We ought to, as Olmsted has cautioned, be aware of the ease of being misled into ascribing too restricted a knowledge and role for 'Celtic' deities and guard against this (Olmsted, 1994: 5-9).

In this context it is worth pointing out that a combination of knowledge-acquisition/possession and military prowess is, without a doubt, both natural and common-place in Indo-European deities. It is clearly present in the Irish myths of the god Lug, who is both the youthful divine leader and protector of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* against their demonic enemies, and also the *Samildánach*, the 'Equal in (any) Art' who was master of all skills and obtained knowledge of agriculture for the *Tuatha Dé Danann* (Olmsted, 1994: 116-19). Similarly (and perhaps most relevantly, given the above comments on names in *Vindo-*), the Celtic god *Vellaunos-Esus* is usually equated with the Roman Mars (as noted previously) but this martial role is not the only aspect of his character – *Vellaunos*'s bynames, according to Olmsted, included not only *Toutatis*, 'Protector of the Tribe' and *Segomo*, 'Victory Giver', but also *Vernostonos*, 'Wounds with Thunder', *Ocelos*, 'the Seer', and probably *Andovellicos*, 'the Great Seer', with Olmsted arguing that *Vellaunos* itself ultimately means 'the Seer', via the Indo-European root *uel-*, 'sight, insight, foresight'. The bynames *Mageniacos*, 'the Youth', and *Iovantucaros*, 'Lover/Friend of Youth' may also be relevant in the present context (see Olmsted, 1994: 111-16, 319-41; Olmsted, 1988).

Indeed, one might particularly direct attention to Kershaw's Indo-European Männerbund-gods as a possible explanation of Fionn, given his close association with the *fíanna*. Fionn's own *fian* seems to reflect a mythical version of the Irish *fíanna*, historical bands of young warriors who roamed the countryside, hunting and living outside of everyday society, being trained in both the arts of war and the lore they would need to take their adult place as members of the *túath* and defenders of their sept and province (Ó hÓgáin, 1988, especially pp.33-8; McCone, 1986). This band of young warriors-in-training, existing outside normal society, would seem to have been a generally Indo-European historical institution, recognized also in Greece, Phrygia, Germania and India, for example. As an institution it is now generally known as the Männerbünde or by the Proto-Indo-European *koryos*, a name by which McCone, for example, has in fact referred to the Irish *fíanna*. Indeed, Kershaw uses the Irish *fíanna* throughout her study to illustrate and illuminate the *koryos* (Kershaw, 2000).

This importance of all this comes from the fact that Kershaw has demonstrated that these groups have a distinctive god associated with them, this being the main focus of her study. The clearest examples of these Männerbund-gods are the Germanic Odin and the Vedic Rudra – these deities are typically demon-/monster-slayers (reflecting the fact that the 'most important function of the … Männerbünde is to be a bastion against hostile powers', Kershaw, 2000: 61), associated with war, death, the wolf or dog, and wisdom and the acquisition of knowledge. Again we see the linking of protective and martial powers with knowledge acquisition and possession. Can Fionn be interpreted in this light?

We have already noted that the *fíanna* are considered to be a good example of the Männerbünde. Kershaw does, in fact, note that 'there is certainly a strong

resemblance between Rudra and the Maruts [his *koryos] and Finn and the fíana',
suggesting that such an interpretation of Fionn as one of these deities is justified,
though she stops short of identifying Fionn as a Männerbund-god on the basis
of a lack of 'religion' in his stories (Kershaw, 2000: 180, 186). This is not really an
issue, however – as we have already seen, there is now, on the contrary, a consensus
that Fionn was in fact a pagan deity. Indeed, most significantly, Ó hÓgáin has
shown that Fionn was (or became before his legend reached written expression)
the god of the historical Irish fíanna groups, existing in the wilderness with his
own mythical fían (Ó hÓgáin, 1988: 36-8). Given the above, it would certainly
seem to be not implausible that Fionn could be seen as fundamentally such a god,
who would be by necessity both the Hero Protector and the knowledge-acquirer
that are discussed above. Fionn is not, it must be emphasized, a perfect match for
the Männerbund-god, but, as Kershaw notes, 'nowhere do we find the Männerbund
in its "pure" form' (Kershaw, 2000: 180). Ó hÓgáin's independent identification
of Fionn as the god of the Irish fíanna is significant, and Fionn, in addition to
being a monster-slaying protector, martial hero and a seer, certainly had an
association with dogs, animal transformations, and the dead (Kershaw, 2000: 159-
62; Ó hÓgáin, 1988: generally, and pp.61-6 and 135 for Fionn fighting alongside
Donn, the Irish god of death). It may also be relevant that Gwyn ap Nudd,
'etymologically the Welsh version of Finn' – and ultimately derivative of him via
an early borrowing/contact, according to Olmsted and Ó hÓgáin – led the Welsh
version of the Wild Hunt, another frequent function of the Männerbund-god
(Kersaw, 2000: 265-6; Olmsted, 1994; Ó hÓgáin, 1988; Chapter 4).

The implications of all this should be obvious. It can, on the basis of the above,
be cautiously suggested that Fionn's role as a Hero Protector might still be seen as
going back to the original divinity he emerged from, with him being conceivably
either simply one of those deities whose nature included both martial skill/
protective abilities and wisdom acquisition, or in fact a Männerbund-god. Indeed,
the options presented above need not be mutually exclusive, as a case can be made
for seeing any Celtic Männerbund-god as an aspect of Vellaunos-Esus. The various
bynames we have for Vellaunos-Esus confirm that he had a special relationship
with protection, knowledge-acquisition and young men, whilst other bynames
and sources of information link him with the wolf or dog and a 'gang of youthful
companions' (Olmsted, 1994: especially 111-16, 119-26, 153-4, and particularly
Olmsted, 1988). This would all certainly seem to be suggestive of a link, and in
support of this it can be noted that Olmsted does indeed see Vellaunos-Esus as the
Celtic development of the Indo-European god that also produced the Germanic
Odin (who is Kershaw's primary example of a Männerbund-god, before he develops
into the most important Germanic god), whilst Mars, with whom Vellaunos-
Esus was equated through the Interpretatio Romana, was also a Männerbund-god,
according to Kershaw (2000: 190-98). On the latter, Kershaw has argued that Mars'
role as a Männerbund-god derives from a merging of his cult with that of his son,

something which Kershaw interprets as ultimately representing a merging of the young warrior's *koryos*-god (Männerbund-god) with the adult warrior's *teutā*-god (Kershaw, 2000: 196). Given that the Celtic *Vellaunos-Esus* would seem also to be fundamentally a combination of two separate Indo-European deities, Olmsted's Night-time Upper-Realm Controller and his son, the Young Saviour-Champion (see, for example, Olmsted, 1994: 153–5), Kershaw's suggestion might be, to some degree, an appropriate interpretation here too.

Given all this, the possibility of Fionn's ultimate divine origins illuminating those of any divine Arthur becomes once more not an entirely implausible idea. If the above suggestions as to a possible protective element in Fionn's cult from the start have any merit, Fionn might thus be able to act as an at least partial analogue to the situation here hypothesized for Arthur's ultimate origins, in addition to his recorded role in Ireland being an undoubted analogue for Arthur's actual role in British society – that is that the folkloric Hero Protector of the surviving early written evidence might have emerged from a divinity whose primary role included the divine protection of the land. More significantly, if Fionn did always have protection as a key element of his personality and emerged in this way, this might then make more detailed comparisons over origins legitimate, given their later closeness. It may, for example, help explain the curious fact that both Arthur and Fionn arguably hunted the destructive divine boar *Trētos* (Welsh *Trwyd*, *Trwyth*, Irish *Tríath*) in early myth and folklore – conceivably this could be, in the present light, due to a postulated parallel emergence from a common stock of insular Celtic protective tales (something which might apply even if Arthur is not treated as a deity).

How far might such a comparison be maintained? Could Arthur, in fact, have been one of Kershaw's Männerbund-gods like Fionn is here suggested to have been? Can our postulated divine Arthur conceivably be seen in this light, as the divine leader of a group of landless young warriors who existed outside of normal society but who also protected it? Certainly, with regards to this, we have already suggested that a divine Arthur might have been a byname for *Vellaunos-Esus*, with whom the Männerbund-cult (and Fionn) may possibly be linked. Of the utmost significance in the present context, however, is the fact that Padel has argued that Arthur's war-band in the early Welsh literature and Fionn's *fían* are of the same fundamental character, suggesting that the 'primary definition of early Irish *fían* perfectly describes Arthur and his followers', the main difference being that there is a 'greater wealth of detail' in the surviving Irish sources as compared to the Welsh (Padel, 1994: 13, 20).[4] Early Gaelic tradition seems also to have recognized that Arthur and his band were the British equivalent of Fionn and his *fían*, as evidenced in the Fenian connections and nature of Arthur in *Acallam na Senórach* and the fact that a *c.*1200 ballad appears to describe Arthur as one of the 'kings of the Fian of the Britons' (Gillies, 1982: 71; Chapter 6). As the *fíanna* and the Männerbünde are intimately linked, this must be seen as significant – it would seem to put the first essential of any Männerbund-god in place. What, though, of the rest?

Whilst trying to avoid wading too deeply into the waters of speculation, it can be said that Arthur does seem to fulfil a number of the requirements for identification as a Männerbund-god, if he is to be treated as any kind of god. Not only does he seem to have a *fían* which lives in the wilderness, apart from everyday society (something supported by the names of his early companions, Gwalchmei and Anwas, as noted in previous chapters), but he is also clearly a monster- and dragon-slayer, protecting society, a key function of these deities and the war-bands (Kershaw, 2000: 56-62, 181, 234-6; the apparently naked one-on-one fight between Arthur and the dragon in the *Vita Euflami*, referenced on the Perros Relief, might be particularly interesting from a Männnerbünde perspective). This monster-slaying is found throughout the early material, but it assumes its most mythic quality in what has been proposed here to be one of the earliest recorded Arthurian tales, *Cat Godeu*, in which Arthur arguably fought against demonic creatures such as 'a great scaly animal: a hundred heads on him' and 'an enchanted, crested snake in whose skin a hundred souls are punished' (Ford, 1977: 184).

Arthur also has the Männnerbund's association with boundaries, as seen particularly in the *Vita Sancti Cadoci*; with forests – Arthur's earliest court being the Otherworldly *Kelliwic*, 'forest grove', and in *Cat Godeu* having what would seem to be an army consisting of a magically animated forest – and, of course, with hunting (see Kershaw, 2000: 109-13). Similarly he and his nephew Gwalchmei (< *Wolcos Magesos*, 'Wolf *or* Landless Young Warrior – i.e. member of the Männerbund, see Koch, 1990: 12-13 and Koch, 1996: 267 – of the Plain'), who is part of the earliest stratum of the legend, have names which look to reference the Männerbund and/or the wolf and the bear, whilst one of Arthur's earliest tales features his supernatural hunting-dog prominently (*Historia Brittonum* chapter 73). Aside from the fact that the etymology of Gwalchmei's name appears to confirm his membership of the Männerbund, a key element of the Männerbund and its god were associations with (and often transformations into) animal predators, wolves and dogs being the most frequent manifestation of this but with bears also playing a part, especially for the god himself. Thus Odin, as the Männerbund-god, has bynames referring to bears, but not wolves, though his men are so named and associated (Kershaw, 2000: 27, 60-1, 82-3, 118-19; Koch, 1996: 267; Koch, 1990: 12-13).[5]

Indeed, it might be argued that, if we treat Arthur as originally a divine being, the link to the Männerbund may extend beyond the simple meaning of Arthur's name. Unquestionably many 'Celtic' divinities had a close affinity with animals and could take on the partial persona of their associated animal, these animals' qualities (speed, aggression, virility and so forth) being woven into their portrayal. Furthermore, there are several Gallic examples of gods associated with bears and Ross has made a case for there being an archaeologically attested bear-cult in Britain in the Roman period, which may be placed alongside a possible

bear-god on a British inscription (Green, 1995: 465-6, 478-81; Olmsted, 1994: 433; Ross, 1967: 434-5; Ross, 2001: 46-7). As such it is clearly not an unlikely proposal that any deity with an original name in *arto-* would have been closely associated with the bear itself, perhaps taking on aspects of its character in his portrayal. In this context the proposed derivation of Arthur from Greco-Latin *Arcturus*, Late Latin *Arturus* (as a Romanization of an original name in *arto-*) might also be significant, given the large part played by bear-transformation in the myth of Arcturus (March, 1998: 61, 93-4, 396; Cary *et al.*, 1949: 79, 159). Whilst it must be admitted that Arthur shows no signs of bear transformation in the surviving early material (though he is described as 'bear of men', 'bear of the host'), it is perhaps interesting to note that, according to the Triads, Arthur's father was an enchanter, whose skills included (based on what Menw, to whom he supposedly taught them, can achieve in *Culhwch ac Olwen*) invisibility and shape-changing. In *Pa gur* there are hints that Arthur too possessed at least one of these powers, being possibly able to make himself and his men invisible, whilst certainly in much later folklore Arthur does shape-change (though here into a carrion bird).

In addition to the above, it may also be noteworthy from a Männerbund-god perspective that Arthur's probable pre-Galfridian father is associated with death, bloodshed and, apparently, the causing of battle in *Marwnat Uthyr Pen* – he 'poured blood for victory' and cryptically refers to the 'rage of battle', 'perfect darkness' and the plying of weapons between armies. Indeed, he may in fact be the Brittonic god of death, Brân, under one of his bynames (see Chapter 4), and in one passage in the above poem he states that 'battle would not exist if it were not for my progeny', that is presumably Arthur (see Sims-Williams, 1991: 53 for this and an alternate reading). All this is most noteworthy given the Männerbund-god's associations with death and battle (cf. Odin). Also relevant may be the fact that Arthur himself leads the Wild Hunt from at least the twelfth century[6] and in folklore referred to above he is transformed into a raven (or another member of the corvid family), a bird whose associations with death (and Brân) are well-known, as are its association with other Männerbund-gods. Indeed, it may be important with regards to the former point that the key and very early Arthurian episode of the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyd* largely takes the form, as related in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, of a relentless catalogue of slaughter – this, and its furious and wide-ranging nature, might be taken to suggest that it was, in fact, in some way a Wild Hunt itself (folklorist Jennifer Westwood does, indeed, class it as a manifestation of the Wild Hunt in her survey of British folklore – Westwood, 1985: 448).

Finally, these Männerbund-gods are often also knowledge-possessors and acquirers, particularly associated with poetry (poets obviously having close connections with inspired wisdom and divine truth in Indo-European, and Celtic, tradition: Kershaw, 2000: 77-9, 273; Ford, 1977: 18-20). In this context it might be

legitimate to point to Arthur's raiding of the Otherworld in the arguably very early *Preideu Annwfyn*. The objects he seems to be seeking include several Otherworldly animals, a lack of knowledge of which Taliesin taunts monks with, and (most importantly) a magical cauldron. With regards to the latter, its description in line 13 of the poem makes it clear that the cauldron that Arthur raids the Otherworld to obtain was in fact the source of poetic inspiration, an important point in the present context (see Koch and Carey, 2003: 310, and Higley, 1996, who support Loomis, 1956a, and Jackson, 1959b on the interpretation of line 13 – see also Haycock, 1983-4: 69). It would also, judging from line 17, seem to have allowed its owner to have knowledge of who was a coward and who was a hero, another useful trick for any Männerbund-god.

The raiding of the Otherworld for this cauldron does seem to have been, as was noted in Chapter 2, a genuine Arthurian tale which also found its way into onomastic folklore and *Culhwch ac Olwen*, though its nature changed somewhat over time. The motif of a cauldron or similar vessel being the source of poetic inspiration and knowledge is, indeed, a common one, and Ford cites a number of perhaps analogous stories of a contest over a vessel of poetry or inspired wisdom, involving, most interestingly, Fionn and Odin, as well as the more obvious Taliesin (Ford, 1977: 20-1). It may or may not be pertinent here that Arthur is, furthermore, referred to several times in Welsh literature as a bard or poet, though how serious or widespread this designation was is to be debated – it is found in, for example, *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*, the Triads (12 and 18W), *Culhwch ac Olwen* and MS Mostyn 131, p.770 (the latter quoted in Rowland, 1990: 251-2), whilst Arthur's father is a bard in *Marwnat Uthyr Pen*.

The above should not be taken to imply that the match between Arthur's character and that of the Männerbund-god is a perfect one – it is not. Some of the associations are not especially robust and we might, for example, want more wolf/dog comparisons and associations, or links to the changing seasons, or a more sinister or negative aspect to his character (though there are hints of this in at least Arthur's father's nature, for example, and Arthur's leadership of the Wild Hunt and – in much later recorded folklore – transformation into a raven, crow or chough). In the tales we have of Arthur it is the protective element that is overwhelming, rather than anything else. Nonetheless, that discussed above does suggest the possibility of some relationship, with the legends of Arthur potentially representing the 'broken-down' and somewhat confused remnants of a Brittonic Männerbund-god, reflecting the common Indo-European requirement for such a figure. Such confusion might be expected, of course, given the period of time elapsed and the numerous societal changes – including the conversion to Christianity – found between the relatively late date of recording of most of the pre-Galfridian Arthurian legend and the likely full practice of an Indo-European Männerbund-cult in Britain.[7] As Kershaw has said, '*nowhere* do we find the *Männerbund* in its "pure" form':

> If the cult from which this god took his being no longer existed in its
> original form in the historical period … if it had been suppressed, or if
> it had simply devolved and disappeared, leaving only traces in ritual and
> myth, as an advancing civilisation developed new methods of warfare and
> education, then we can expect that its god underwent similar changes.
> Where we can identify this god we find that he is changed indeed …
> (Kershaw, 2000: 181–2)

Obviously there can be no certainty in all of this – as was noted at the very
start, our sources are not well suited for an investigation of the type undertaken
here. Nevertheless, *if* we were to treat Arthur as originally being a god, then the
conclusions and speculations entered into here might provide some guidance as to
his character. First, if Arthur was a divinity then it would seem likely that he would
have been reasonably widely acknowledged and that he might potentially have
been a manifestation of some well-known deity, given that such a situation now
seems quite regular: 'in the case of Gaul and the British Isles, the evidence shows
that we are dealing with different names applied to the same deity' (Sopeño, 2005:
350). Second, as to any divine Arthur's nature, this would probably have included
martial and protective elements as his primary characteristics, given his nature
as discussed in previous chapters. In consequence, if Arthur was a manifestation
of some other deity, then *Vellaunos-Esus* – the divine protector and Champion-
Saviour – seems most plausible.

Now, the above may well have been all that Arthur was, if – *if* – he was a god
(or, at least, it may be all that we can know). It may be just possible, however, to
go a little further. Allowing for a degree of speculation and conjecture, it can be
cautiously suggested that if Arthur was a manifestation of *Vellaunos-Esus* then his
non-Galfridian legend may in fact be best seen as representing the remnants of (and
a development of) the cult of this god in his proposed role as the Celtic version of
the Indo-European Männerbund-god. Arthur might thus be the 'broken-down'
(to quote Murphy) form of this amongst Brittonic speakers, whilst Fionn can,
perhaps, be seen as the primary Irish expression of this. The case for Arthur to be
viewed in this light is both suggested and supported by the argument that Fionn
can be so interpreted, though it is not utterly reliant upon it. If both these figures
might be seen as bynames for *Vellaunos-Esus* as the Männerbund-god, then this
would certainly go some long way to explaining their close similarity in the
legends we have of them (which would seem to have been recognized by twelfth-
century Gaelic observers, as well as modern academics), including the hunting
of *Twrch Trwyd / Torc Tríath*. What differences there are in these legends (such as
Fionn's role as a seer) might also be explained by the above, being perhaps the
result of a differential preservation, development and emphasis upon the cult of
Vellaunos-Esus in these two similar but distinct societies, reflecting their differing
historical experiences and situation.

It is not, of course, by any means certain that Arthur was originally a god, rather than a simply a folkloric hero, but if he was, then the above is one possible interpretation of him and his role in Brittonic society.

CONCEPTS OF ARTHUR: CHANGE, CONTINUITY AND INFLUENCE

Leaving aside questions of divinity, origins and Männerbund-gods, when Arthur's legend begins to be recorded his nature is very clear. Whatever he was originally, he was now a fierce, bear-like, Protector of the Britons – a peerless warrior, to whom no-one, not even a man who slew 300, could compare – whose deeds look to have been primarily expressed through local topographic folklore throughout the Brittonic-speaking regions, as Padel has effectively argued (Padel, 1994). This folklore reflected stories such as the hunting and protection of Britain from the monstrous divine boar *Twrch Trwyd* and the defence of Britain against giants, dragons and dog-headed men. Within these tales Arthur, like Fionn, seems to be a leader of a group of landless young warriors, living in the wilds of the landscape in an atmosphere of irresponsibility, separated from everyday society and its constraints, and focussed on hunting and war (Padel, 1994: 12-14, 20).

In addition to this, Arthur appears to be consistently closely associated with the Otherworld. It cannot be denied that at least some elements of this look to be accretions to Arthur's name, such as the claim that the god *Maponos* was Arthur's father's servant. Nevertheless the concept these figures represent is very clear and they themselves only embody one part of the evidence for this close association between Arthur and the Otherworld. Indeed, such associations are arguably more than natural in the tales in which Arthur appears, just as they are in those of Fionn mac Cumhaill. One particularly interesting aspect of all this is the fact that Arthur appears, in *Preideu Annwfyn* and elsewhere, to be associated in some way with earlier, more heroic, versions of several of the episodes in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. One would not wish to press this too far, but in the present context it deserves mention, once more, as an intriguing possibility.

This Arthur is found throughout all the non-Galfridian material, including *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the Saints' *Lives* and the Welsh Triads, and, in fact, Arthur's portrayal remained remarkably consistent. The only significant change in the early material comes not in the adventures and fundamental nature of Arthur himself, but rather in his *status* and that of his war-band: over time Arthur becomes increasingly dominant in British legend, and his war-band becomes part of a court, rather than existing outside of normal society and living in the wilds of the landscape. In both cases these changes look to be largely learned and literary in inspiration and evolution, rather than folkloric. Arthur himself is granted ever more grandiose titles from at least the eleventh century in the literary tradition – such as *Penteyrnedd yr Ynys hon*, 'Chief of the Lords of this Island' – and he

draws into his orbit many previously unrelated characters. This reaches its height in the later versions of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (The Welsh Triads), where 'Arthur's Court' replaces 'The Island of Britain' as the main frame of reference in a number of legendary triads – Arthur appears to have become the Lord of legendary and mythical Britain, and his court a place which might encompass this. Elements of this are, however, present even in the eleventh- or twelfth-century Early Version of the Triads (nos 1 and 9), *Culhwch ac Olwen* and the Saints' *Lives*. Furthermore, Arthur's appearance in the latter indicates that he had already then become dominant enough that he was considered an appropriate and glorifying figure for legendary saints to visit and encounter, in the absence of any genuine historical tales of these saints that the authors of their *Vitae* could relate (arguably the determining factor with regards to which *Vitae* Arthur appeared in).[8]

These developments, as much as any historicization, might be seen as lying behind the Imperial and utterly dominant Arthur we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth and also in the continental Romances and post-Galfridian accounts of Arthur. Indeed, one might wonder if Arthur, the King of Faery, that is found in many of these latter texts might not derive from the portrayal of Arthur as both Lord of legendary and mythical Britain and 'un personage de féerie', to quote Loth, in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Welsh sources, especially *Culhwch ac Olwen* (without, of course, denying that considerable imagination and literary invention had a large part to play). The great increase in Arthur's status might also lie behind his absence from the Mabinogi and related tales, despite his earlier apparent association with these tales and the characters within them. Did he, perhaps, simply become too central and dominant to play a role in such mythological tales without fundamentally altering their character?

With regards to the former point, on the relationship between the Arthur of *Culhwch* and the Romance and post-Galfridian King of Faery, it is worth noting that there is evidence for the pre-Galfridian transmission of at least elements of the early Brittonic Arthurian legend to the continent, with variants of names such as Arthur and Walwen/Gwalchmei (Arthur's nephew in *Culhwch* and other early sources) appearing in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries in northern Spain[9] and possibly northern Italy too, either before the *Historia Regum Britanniae* existed or before its influence would have been felt (Hook, 1991; Hook, 1993; Scarborough, 1995; Sharrer, 1996: 407-8; Loomis, 1956b: 208-13). Indeed, that the transmission to the continent was not simply of names alone but also, sometimes, of stories too, is indicated by the fact that the entirely non-Galfridian and probably Welsh folktale of Arthur's death at the hands of Cath Palug, a cat-monster originally associated with Anglesey and mentioned in *Pa gur*, is found recorded in post-Galfridian French and Italian sources.

The late twelfth century Chrétien de Troyes is a good example of this. He seems, as Bromwich has argued, to have had access to a quantity of non-Galfridian material beyond that available in an Anglo-Norman (Wace's?) version

of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. This included, most interestingly, a version of the Arthurian tale of the abduction of Gwenhwyfar to an Otherworldly 'Island of Glass' by Melwas, discussed previously, and he continued and greatly extended the drawing to Arthur's name of originally independent legendary British figures that we have observed in the later Welsh Arthurian literature (Bromwich, 1991b: 277-8, 280-1; Sims–Williams, 1991a: 58-61). Bromwich suggests that some, at least, of the non-Galfridian British material may have been transmitted by both written and oral channels to France before AD 1100, perhaps via Breton or Norman contact with the Welsh after the Norman Conquest (Bromwich, 1991b: 276). Indeed, it is worth observing that knowledge of the – originally Cornish? – semi-Arthurian Tristan legend had reached the capital of Galicia, north-west Spain, by the early twelfth century, as can be seen on a column in the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela (Sharrer, 1996: 408). All this obviously suggests that such a notion as the above is not completely unfeasible. Continental authors had sources other than Geoffrey's work and knew of the non-Galfridian Brittonic Arthurian legend, so their vision of Arthur and his court may not be entirely their own invention. Rather it might be seen as, partly, a continuation and expansion of the British portrayal and development of this character, in a new, European, context.[10]

If pre-Galfridian Brittonic concepts of Arthur might accordingly lie behind at least some aspects of Arthur's international character in the Chronicle and Romance traditions, what of the insular Arthur? Certainly he had an increasing literary status – the Lord of legendary Britain – as we have already seen. Nonetheless, the basic character of the tales told of Arthur seems to have remained fairly constant, as has been said. So, although *Culhwch ac Olwen* is a literary composition which had Arthur as the 'Chief of the Lords of this Island', the Arthurian tales found within it look to be very similar, if not in some cases identical, to those alluded to in *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 and *Preideu Annwfyn*, the most significant differences being the euhemerizing of some of the Otherworldly aspects of the tales. In the same way, the following story was recorded *c.*1740 in Cornwall but its essential similarity to the concept of Arthur as a hunter, and the proof offered of this in the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 is obvious:

> Not far from this Coyt, at the edge of the Goss-moor, there is a large stone, wherein is deeply imprinted a mark, as if it were the impress of four horseshoes, and to this day called King Arthur's Stone; yea, tradition tells us they were made by King Arthur's horse's feet, when he resided at Castle Denis, and hunted in the Goss-Moor. But this stone is now overturned by some seekers for money (Padel, 1994: 28)[11]

Arthur the hunter is also found on Bodmin Moor in the eighteenth century, when rock basins where Arthur supposedly fed his hunting dogs are recorded as 'Arthur's Troughs', close by an early recorded 'Arthur's Hall', also known as

'Arthur's Hunting Lodge' (Padel, 1994: 29; Ashe, 1997. See also Palmer, 1976: 83; Chambers, 1927: 184-5).

The pre-Galfridian concept of Arthur as a great giant-killer is likewise maintained in the local folklore of Wales right through to the modern era, with Hugh Thomas in *c.*1704 noting that his oral sources believed that it was Arthur who was responsible for ridding Wales of giants (Grooms, 1993: xlvi). Correspondingly, in Cornwall in the nineteenth century Robert Hunt was told that 'the land at one time "swarmed with giants, until Arthur, the good king, vanished them all with his cross-sword" ' (Hunt, 1881: II, 307). This Arthur, the 'mighty defender', is also recorded in Wales in the nineteenth century in another role, when he drags the fearsome and destructive *Afanc* from the water of Llyn Barfog with the aid of his horse, this event being commemorated by a stone bearing the impression of a horse's hoof known as *Carreg Carn March Arthur*, the 'Stone of Arthur's Steed's Hoof', the relationship of this to both the *Historia* tale and the Cornish one cited above being obvious (Rhys, 1901: 142; Grooms, 1993: 117, lists this and yet another example of *Carreg Carn March Arthur*). Further evidence for the continuing vitality of the concept of Arthur the protector is to be had from the tale of the hunting of the *Twrch Trwyd/Trwyth*. Not only is this referred to in later medieval Welsh poetry from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, but in the sixteenth-century Welsh lists of the names of traditional musical compositions we find *Caniad y Twrch Trwyth*, suggesting that this tale could still happily be told as part of popular folk-entertainment long after the influence of Geoffrey and Romancers became apparent in the literary tradition (Sims-Williams, 1990a: 620).

This fundamental continuity in the types of tales that were told of Arthur in Brittonic folklore extends even further than this. Thus the concept of Arthur as a mythological being, associated with Arcturus, Boötes and/or Ursa Major, looks to be pre-Galfridian in origin (given that Arcturus was a genuine variant of Arthur's name) and potentially may go back to the Romano-British period – however, this association would seem to have been maintained, despite having virtually no reflection in the literary sources, through to the modern era, with Ursa Major being associated with Arthur in Welsh folklore and known as *Aradr Arthur*, 'Arthur's Plough' (Parry, 1824; Trevelyan, 1909; Jenner, 1912-14; see Chapter 5. 'The Plough' is, of course, a regular alternative name for *Ursa Major*). Similarly, the notion that Arthur and his men existed largely in the wilds of the landscape is, for example, found in some of the earliest material, with place-names such as *furnus Arturi*, Arthur's Oven, found in Cornwall and Scotland and suggesting wilderness camping and cooking spots, reminiscent of the Irish *fulachta*, ancient cooking-places in wild areas often attributed to Fionn (Padel, 1994: 5-6, 21). Surely related to this must be the *Ffynnon Cegin Arthur*, 'Stream of Arthur's Kitchen', mentioned in the nineteenth century by Myrddin Fardd, this site also being referred to, by the name *Cegin Arthur*, in the fifteenth century by the poet Ieuan ap Rhydderch (Grooms, 1993: 114, 127; Lloyd-Morgan, 2005, appears not to be aware of this

reference). Connected too are probably the *Crochan Arthur*, 'Arthur's Pot *or* Cauldron', in Caernarvonshire, and the tradition of Arthur dining at the Table Mên, Sennen, in Cornwall (Ashe, 1997; Hunt, 1881: I, 181).

The continuing use of names such as *Eisteddfa Arthur* or *Kadeir Arthur*, 'Arthur's Seat or Chair', and *Carreg Arthur* or *Maen Arthur*, 'Arthur's Stone', from the pre-Galfridian period through to the modern era, is also significant. This usage is to be related to the early concept of Arthur as a giant, which may be present in both the *Historia Brittonum* chapter 73 and *Preideu Annwfn* – these names are usually found attached to massive or exceptional rocks which Arthur used for furniture or which are said, for example, to have been found in his shoe and thrown for miles (Grooms, 1993: 115-17, 127-8; Padel, 1994: 4-5, 25-6. By their location and nature they also relate to the concept of Arthur as someone living in the wilds of the landscape). So, to illustrate, the 'Arthur's Stone' at SS 4913 9055, which is the capstone of a megalithic chambered tomb, was said to have its origins in the fact that 'when Arthur was walking through Carmarthenshire on his way to Camlann, he felt a pebble in his shoe and tossed it away. It flew seven miles over Burry Inlet and landed in Gower, on top of the smaller stones of Maen Cetti' (Grooms, 1993: 115).

That this concept was genuinely pan-Brittonic is indicated by the fact that, whilst many surviving examples are Welsh, the earliest recorded 'Arthur's Seat' (AD 1113) was located in Devon, with the early twelfth century being probably as early as we have any right to expect such folklore to have reached the written record, given the nature of our sources (Padel, 1994: 19; see Chapter 2). Indeed, in addition to the Arthur's stones and quoits (a related class of topographic folklore) that are currently known, Hunt informs us that in early mid nineteenth-century Cornwall 'all the marks of any peculiar kind found on rocks', when not ascribed to other giants or the Devil, 'are almost always attributed to Arthur'. Frustratingly, although he says that 'Arthur's beds, and chairs, and caves are frequently to be met with', he then seems content to describe more fully only one such site, the stone at the edge of Goss-Moor (Hunt, 1881: I, 186). Nonetheless, Borlase in the mid eighteenth century agreed with the basic principle, noting that, in Cornwall, 'whatever is great, and the use and Author unknown, is attributed to Arthur' (Padel, 1994: 29).

The large number of *Coeten Arthur*, 'Arthur's Quoit', found in Wales and Cornwall, may be of particular interest in the present context. The folklore regarding these stones is essentially the same as that attached to those named *Carreg Arthur etc.* – Arthur is a giant who hurls these great stone blocks, weighing tons, around the landscape, with the name *Coeten Arthur* here implying that he was playing quoits with them (a quoit being a discus thrown for sport). Myrddin Fardd relates that 'a cromlech recognized by the name "Coetan Arthur" is on the land of Trefgwm, in the parish of Myllteyrn; it consists of a great stone resting on three other stones. The tradition states that "Arthur the Giant" threw this coetan

from Carn Fadrun, a mountain several miles from Trefgwm, and his wife took three other stones in her apron and propped them up under the coetan.' What is significant, however, is the fact that these are *not* ancient pieces of folklore, going back to before the influence of Geoffrey and the Romancers began to be felt, but relatively new coinings, informed by (and fitting into) the continuing non-Galfridian tradition – they can be little else, given that Welsh *coeten* is a borrowing from English, first recorded in Wales in the sixteenth century and in England in 1388 (Grooms, 1993: 118-26; Padel, 1994: 26-7). As such they demonstrate both how widespread this folkloric concept of Arthur was, and that it was a living, vibrant and – most importantly – consistent tradition into the modern era.[12]

With all of the above there is no real evidence of influence from the literary legend, nor is there any reason to suspect that this had inspired the creation of such topographic folklore. If the increased status of Arthur and his 'court' in Welsh literature thus seems not to have greatly affected the nature of popular folktales of Arthur (being restricted often to the framing of these in literary texts such as the Saints' *Lives* and *Culhwch*), aside from perhaps making him too strong a character to continue in mythological tales such as *Cat Godeu*,[13] the same too can be said of the idea that Arthur was a late fifth-century warlord. This concept seems to have only been accepted by a handful of pre-Galfridian authors, and none of those writing in Old Welsh, despite the fact that such a belief would be in many ways a natural development of Arthur's folkloric role. In consequence the simplest and best explanation of what evidence there is for such a 'historical Arthur' is surely that he was the creation of the author of the *Historia Brittonum*. Whilst the idea that the *Historia* took this concept from an earlier Welsh poem is a venerable one, there is no real merit to it. We might especially here point to the nature of the *Historia Brittonum*, Arthur's role within it, and the fact that otherwise the 'historical' Saxon-slaying Arthur only appears in a handful of Latin, not Welsh, sources (all derivative of the *Historia*) – at least until after Geoffrey of Monmouth had applied his considerable imagination to the Arthurian legend and popularized his version of this.

The reasons why Arthur, the folkloric Protector of Britain, was historicized into a role in the counterattack against the *Saxones* in the late fifth century have been discussed in detail in previous chapters. On the whole this historical Arthur ought to be considered a composite figure, combining the pan-Brittonic nature of the mythical and folkloric Arthur (including some of his battles) with historical 'stock' conflicts. However, there does seem to be some sort of genuine core to this. The framework of historicization and the final, crowning Battle of Badon seem to have both been borrowed from the late fifth-century Ambrosius Aurelianus, whose historical role the *Historia*'s Arthur takes. Where the historical counterattack actually took place is uncertain but a tentative case can be made for it being in the region of Lincoln, with the battle(s) *in regione Linnuis* in the *Historia* possibly reflecting this. It does need to be recognized, nevertheless, that

this is a secondary development of the Arthurian legend and it is not the only historicization of Arthur that took place. Thus in Cornish tradition Arthur fought the Vikings near Land's End, not the Anglo-Saxons at Badon.

This then is the suggested development of the Arthurian legend. Arthur was primarily a folkloric and mythical Protector of Britain, who may have always been such a folkloric hero or who might, just possibly, have developed from a Brittonic protective deity of some sort. Whatever the case may be, from the earliest period through to the nineteenth century the stories told of this figure seem to have remained fairly consistent, associating him with the wild parts of the landscape, the hunting of monsters and the protection of Britain from their ravages, and the Otherworld. Although he was historicized in the ninth century with a role defending Britain against the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the fifth century, this seems to have had little effect on the nature of the 'Arthurian legend' proper until Geoffrey of Monmouth took this historicization, combined it with the legendary material circulating at that time (which saw Arthur being granted an increasingly dominant role in legendary Britain by learned authors in particular) and, through the considerable application of his own inventiveness and imagination, popularized this on the international stage. The evidence is complex and often difficult, but the above seems the best explanation of the origins of Arthur.

NOTES

1   The term 'non-Galfridian' is also used in this work, to indicate sources that show no sign of influence from Geoffrey's *Historia*, whatever their date.

2   The impossibility of using the *Historia Regum Britanniae* as a source of any reliable information on either the existence of Arthur, or the nature of any historical Arthur, applies to the Welsh translations of this text, the *Brut Y Brenhinedd*, too, despite recent Welsh 'nationalist' attempts to use them in this way.

3   A modern example of this 'old book' topos is found in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where Tolkien adopts the conceit that he is simply translating from the 'Red Book of Westmarch'.

4   This sixth-century stone was inscribed *PATER[?N-] COLIAVI FICIT ARTOGNOV COL FICIT*, which Charles Thomas has translated as 'Artognou, father of a descendant of Coll, has had (this) made/built/ constructed' (an alternative reading is 'Artognou descendant of Patern[us] Colus made (this). Colus made (this)', as offered by the *Celtic Inscribed Stones Project* at University College, London: www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/). The English Heritage press release and subsequent media articles (for example, De Bruxelles, 1998) chose to milk this find for publicity by pushing the supposed association between the names Arthur and Artognou. *Artognou* is, however, *not in any way* the same name as *Art(h)ur* – the only thing they have in common is the apparent presence of the very common personal- and place-name element *art(h)* (a relationship that the name *Art(h)ur* shares with many other names, from many different periods and places). Heather Rose Jones has noted that *Artognou* contains the same basic elements as the well-recorded British name *Artgen*, 'except that [*Artognou*] has the zero-grade form of the second element … Unless the legendary Arthur wasn't really named Arthur, I don't see how the inscription can have anything to do with him. It's a different name.' (Heather Rose Jones, alt.legend.king-arthur posting, 07 August 1998 17:42).

5   Radford (1968) and Alcock (1971) have suggested that the inscription can be dated to the mid tenth or eleventh century, but this is no longer considered a

plausible or effective argument, with the lettering now seen as solidly twelfth century: see Rahtz, 1993, and the references therein.

6   Dark's claim that a pre-Viking gravestone in Co. Tipperary, Ireland, records an *Artuir* has been dismissed as being based on a false reading of the text (Dark, 2000: 83; Okasha and Forsyth, 2001: 287-8). Only names in the form *Art(h)ur* and its latinizations concern us here as they are the only relevant forms. The case is occasionally made (though not in academic literature) that all names with the element *art(h)* should be considered – this is, however, simply a very common personal- and place-name element (in early Gaul, Ireland and Britain) meaning 'bear' (see note 4). As such there is absolutely no reason to think that there is any special relationship between the large number of names with *art(h)* as an element and the name *Art(h)ur* – they are all separate and distinct names.

7   It is worth noting that none of these 'Arthurs' can be in any way plausibly seen as the 'original' Arthur, *pace* Barber, 1972 and Dark, 2000 – see Chapter 2, below, and particularly Bromwich, 1975-6: 179, and Roberts, 1973-4.

8   That personal names could be formed from those of non-historical figures is well established – one interesting example is the name *Guallonir*, *Guallonor*, found in the Llandaf charters, which < *Vellaunorīx*, reflecting ultimately the pagan deity *Vellaunos* (on whom see Olmsted, 1994 and Chapter 7). Dark's (2000) argument in favour of an assumption that a historical Arthur – or rather, given Bromwich's comments, a legendarized historical Arthur – must lie behind these names is a little strange. It is based to some large degree around the view that, as there are no Romano-British religious inscriptions mentioning Arthur, he cannot have been a fictional, folkloric and/or mythical figure who might inspire naming during a unique cultural-contact situation, which Padel (1994: 24) suggests is the context of these names. At the very least this objection would only apply if we were to see any non-historical Arthur as a pagan deity – fictional and folkloric figures, such as Padel (1994) envisages the 'original' Arthur to be, would probably not be found in such inscriptions anyway. Furthermore, even for deities this notion is highly dubious, with many figures generally agreed to be Brittonic pagan divinities (including many of those found in the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi') lacking inscriptional evidence. Indeed, the god *Esus*, who was one of the three apparently important Gaulish divinities highlighted by the Roman poet Lucan in the first century AD (an importance confirmed by Olmsted, 1994, who sees him as a pan-Celtic divinity), has actually only one inscription mentioning him specifically! (Green, 1995: 473). Similarly the British god *Mars Alator* is only known through the chance-find of a single inscription in the eighteenth century and would not be otherwise recorded (a second inscription is only acknowledged as referring to him through comparison with the

earlier one, and would not allow his existence to be recognized on its own: Collingwood and Wright, 1965, nos 218 and 1055).

9   Dr Howlett (1998) has argued that the date AD 496 for Badon is inset into the Latin of early medieval texts as part of the Celtic-Latin tradition of Biblical Style (on which see Howlett, 1995b), with AD 540 being inset as the date that Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae* was completed. This accords well with the widely accepted 'orthodox' scheme for the dating of the *DEB*, championed by Dumville, which places the *DEB*'s composition in *c*.AD 545 and thus Badon in *c*.AD 500 (Dumville, 1984a – see Snyder, 1998: 45, 280-1, for some further discussion and references).

10 See Jackson, 1945-6: 57; Jackson, 1959a: 7-8; Dumville, 1977a: 188; Jarman, 1981: 2-3; Dumville, 1986: 13-4; Charles-Edwards, 1991: 21-29; and Padel, 1994: 16-19, on both these points.

11 Charles-Edwards, 1991: 27, suggests that Dumville believes that the Arthurian entries belonged to the North British source. This is emphatically not the case, however – his position is as summarized above and Charles-Edwards appears to misunderstand him on this point, as Dumville himself (1994, n. 78) has said.

12 Indeed this has long been recognized, for example by Bedwyr Lewis Jones, who noted that only *on the whole* are the people and events mentioned in the *Annales* genuinely historical (1975: 15). There is no justification for assuming that simply Arthur's presence in this text is enough to prove he existed, as P.J.C. Field has done (in postings during a June 1998 *Arthurnet* moderated debate on the question of Arthur's existence).

13 Jones thought that only the tale was borrowed and Badon was original to the *Annales*, but this is unnecessary and unjustified given what we now know about the origins of this text.

14 It is sometimes claimed, making an association between the name Arthur and the extremely common Welsh word and personal- and place-name element *art(h)* 'bear', that Gildas does mention Arthur when he refers to Cuneglasus as *urse* 'bear' – such an interpretation of Gildas is, however, wildly speculative and unacceptable; *art(h)* is a very common element and as such a mention of it (as was discussed above) cannot be assumed to refer to Arthur. In truth this is simply Gildas using an animal comparison in Latin for rhetorical purposes and making reference to Cuneglasus' apparent fortress of Dinarth. See Jackson, 1982: 32-4, for a full investigation of this passage, which is entirely understandable within the context of Gildas's text; Higham, 2002: 78 also briefly considers this theory.

15 In fact, it is worth remembering that some of the unidentifiable names may indeed have been invented, casting further doubt on the *Historia* (see Jackson, 1959a). A brief word should be said regarding the very many theories of a 'local' Arthur (a good example being Collingwood, 1929) which have

been based on the list of battles in chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum*. With sufficient 'imagination' and linguistic gymnastics the list of battles can be made to fit just about any locality one can think of and, as such these theories are mutually cancelling and methodologically indefensible – thus Collingwood succeeded in 'discovering' all the battles in the south-east, which happily fitted his theory that Arthur only fought the Jutes of Kent; Anscombe (1904) 'found' that all the battles were fought in the Midlands and Skene (1868) 'proved' that all the battles could be identified with places in Scotland! Such conclusions can only increase our concerns regarding the contents of the *Historia*. For a scholarly and level-headed approach to the identifications of the battles, and an admission that some are *not* identifiable, we have to start with the exemplary work of Professor Jackson (1945-6; 1949; 1953–8).

16   *Arthurnet* posting made during a moderated debate on the question of Arthur's existence, chaired by T. Green, 2nd June 1998.

17   With regards to the comment that 'our sources are simply not of the quality …,' this refers exclusively to their value as historical sources for the post-Roman centuries. As Dr Howlett has observed, 'The *Historia Brittonum* has received harsh criticism from modern historians,' but such criticism can deflect our attention from the intrinsic quality of the *Historia* as a text of the ninth century: 'His work shows that an early ninth-century Welsh scholar could cope with the difficult sixth-century prose of Gildas … He could interweave multiple arithmetic features into his prose, each different from the others, each discretely perfect, none impeding or thwarting any other, none drawing attention to itself flamboyantly, all contributing to the harmony of a richly polyphonic narrative. The *Historia* has for a long time been misprised and undervalued. It is time now to read and appreciate it properly' (Howlett, 1998a, chapter 5).

18   A further illustrative quotation may be permissible here, this time from Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones's translation of the *Mabinogion*: 'What of Arthur himself? His nature is unmistakable: he is the folk hero, a beneficent giant, who with his men rids the land of other giants, of witches and monsters; he undertakes journeys to the Otherworld to rescue prisoners and carry off treasures; he is rude, savage, heroic and protective … It is remarkable how much of this British Arthur has survived in the early twelfth-century *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the mid fifteenth-century *Morte D'arthur* of Malory. Arthur setting off with Kaius and Bedeuerus to slay the swine-eating Spanish giant, and bursting out laughing when the monster crashes like a torn-up oak, or his battle with the beard-collecting Ritho, are cases in point … Behind the royal features in Geoffrey and Malory may be discerned the ruder lineaments of the folk hero' (Jones and Jones, 1949: xxv).

CHAPTER 2: THE EARLIEST STRATUM OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

1   Dark's notion that the Dyfed Arthur is the 'original' Arthur fails on all these
     grounds and more (Dark, 2000). It is worth noting that Dark's theory of an
     Irish-origined Arthur rests to some significant degree upon the existence of
     an early gravestone in Ireland bearing the name *Artuir*, which is unfortunate
     given that this is now considered a misreading of the inscription (Okasha
     and Forsyth, 2001: 288). We might also note that the legendary Arthur is
     very clearly a Briton, not an Irish immigrant – his Britishness is one of his
     defining features, as Padel (1994) and others have noted. Indeed, there is
     no hint of a Dyfed origin (or primary localisation) in the Arthurian legend
     and the material discussed later in this chapter indicates that Arthur was not
     only solidly British, but also truly pan-Brittonic from the earliest identifiable
     stratum of the legend, not at all restricted to areas of 'Irish settlement', as
     Dark tries to claim. On the latter point, whilst Dark might not be expected
     to be aware of much of this material (such as *Gorchan Cynfelyn* and the
     dating and import of *Preideu Annwfyn* and *Kat Godeu*) he somewhat curiously
     forgets about the *Marwnad Cynddylan* reference – which places a knowledge
     of Arthur the 'Brittonic superhero', to use Koch's phrase, in mid seventh-
     century East Powys (roughly modern Shropshire) – despite the fact that the
     genuineness of this reference is strongly supported in Bromwich *et al.*, 1991,
     which he uses in his article. It should finally be pointed out that having the
     other three (or four) 'Arthurs' named after the Dyfed Arthur would also fall
     foul of Bromwich's observations, cited below.

2   Indeed, even if this were not the case, other explanations than that they were
     named after a historical figure are possible – the idea that they would be
     named after such a character is, after all, merely an assumption, nothing more
     (as noted and discussed in Chapter 1).

3   Sims-Williams (1990a) does, in fact, provide a possible partial analogue to the
     situation discussed above. Although the name Cú Chulainn was avoided by
     the Irish due to – most probably – superstition, it does seem to have been
     somehow used by the Welsh in the later medieval period (given the presence
     of a *gafael*, 'landholding', *Cocholyn*) in one area that saw thirteenth-century
     Irish immigration and cultural contact.

4   The main weakness in Koch's most recent study (Koch, 1997) is not a failure
     in methodology or practice, but rather the fact that the book is less of a
     proof of Koch's ideas than a translation of *Y Gododdin* into what it would
     have looked like assuming he is right. His expertise on linguistic matters is
     universally acknowledged by reviewers. Nevertheless, they have generally also
     felt that his study is in need of a structure that clearly separates out those
     poems (or stanzas) dated via, for example, linguistic or orthographic criteria,
     according to the methodologies set out in Koch's earlier studies, from

those placed in the reconstructed text on the basis of historical assumptions or proposed textual history (see especially Padel, 1998). Despite this, it remains an immensely significant work and one which all future studies of the poem will have to refer to and take account of – there is much of importance contained in both the endnotes (especially) and Koch's extensive introduction.

5   Rowland, 1990: 186, suggests an alternate, non-Arthurian emendation and reading for the text of the poem. The nature of the reference is, however, a good fit with the other evidence for the pre-Galfridian Arthur and the Arthurian reading – which does, of course, itself depend on an emendation of *artir > artur*, on which see below – has since been very confidently supported and reaffirmed by Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 5; see also Bromwich, 1975-6: 177) and it is the traditional and majority interpretation of this line, supported by the recent editor of *Marwnad Cynddylan* (Gruffydd, 1982: 23) and John Koch (Koch and Carey, 1995: 362). Indeed, Koch has noted that *artir* instead of *artur* is a normal and fully understandable confusion that is part of a general confusion over *i*, *y* and *u* in the Early Modern manuscript of the poem (Koch, 1987a: 262).

6   It should be remembered in this context that in many tales Arthur gradually loses his early prominence in favour of those who had previously been his helpers or simply members of his war-band (Roberts, 1991a: 85). A very good example of this is in the tale of the abduction of Gwenhwyfar to the Otherworld, where Arthur rapidly loses his originally central role as rescuer. The possibility that Arthur played a role in an earlier, more heroic version of the Third Branch of the Mabinogi, alluded to in *Preideu Annwfyn*, has already been referred to above.

7   It is worth noting here, in light of the possibility raised above that the first stanza of *Preideu Annwfyn* was alluding to an early and more heroic form of the Third Branch of the Mabinogi, that Dr Bromwich has suggested that *Cat Godeu* may be similarly related to the story of Gwydion (son of Dôn) stealing swine in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi (Bromwich, 1978: 207-8).

8   A point made by Chris Grooms during a moderated discussion on Arthurnet, 3rd April 1997.

9   In particular the idea that this reference should be read literally as having Arthur's men fighting alongside Geraint has no merit – no-one is willing to suggest that Cynddylan and his brothers were actually the children of Arthur, despite the fact that the formula of the reference is identical. It is worth bearing in mind that in both poems Arthur is not actually present and that the events described in both poems take place several generations after any possible historical Arthur is supposed to have lived – thus Gereint cannot be taken to prove any concept of Arthur as a 'historical' figure even if we were to interpret it literally, despite its very clear formulaic links with

the *Marwnad Cynddylan*. Therefore even a literal interpretation would leave the basic concept of Arthur found in the poem largely unchanged: in this case the subject of the poem would be being honoured by making Arthur's men present at his final battle, thus associating him directly with Arthur the legendary 'paragon of military valour'. Such a literal interpretation is, however, unnecessary and unlikely given the above.

10   *Chei guin*; this is usually translated as 'the fair' but *gwyn* sometimes has Otherworldly associations, as Ford has demonstrated, giving meanings such as 'the blessed' or even 'the sacred/pure/holy' (Ford, 1983). This needs to be at least borne in mind given the frequency of these associations amongst Arthur's possessions and close companions, though the word need not be so used here.

11   It is interesting in this context to note that this god appears as one of Arthur's men in *Pa gur*, see below.

12   This concept would also seem to lie behind the few early occurrences of the name Arthur, though here there seems to be a strong case for thinking that the distribution and number of these reflects the fact that Arthur's name was viewed with considerable superstition and awe by the Britons.

13   This is, of course, not consistent with notions of the Arthurian legend starting out in a very sober fashion and becoming more fantastic as the centuries pass, which often accompany assumptions that the 'historical Arthur' of the *Historia Brittonum* was the 'original' Arthur and his legend was a secondary development.

14   As has been mentioned above, Padel makes a similar case to that made here, using the whole pre-Galfridian corpus of non-literary evidence as context (Padel, 1994; Green, 1998). This is, itself, both powerful and very convincing and it stands on its own whatever verdicts may be reached on the present work. The present chapter extends and reinforces this notion through a much more detailed look at the some of the earliest evidence, in light of recent work on the dating of these sources. In particular such a detailed look reveals aspects of Arthur's character that were not previously fully brought out and considered, not least Arthur's close connection with the Otherworld and the former gods of Britain.

CHAPTER 3: THE NATURE OF ARTHUR

1   See, for example, Rodway, 2005, for an alternative perspective which would move the composition of *Culhwch* into the period after *c.* 1100.

2   In light of the links between the Fenian and Arthurian legends it may be worth noting here that Fionn similarly seems to have been troubled by such creatures, as he is recorded as slaying *cat neimhe a nAth Cliath*, 'a fierce cat in Dublin' (Bromwich, 1978a: 487, n.2).

3   It should, perhaps, be noted here that Arthur's legend does have some at least
     superficial points of similarity with that of Heracles. Thus he kills lions/lion-
     like creatures, hunts famous boars, and steals animals from the Otherworld
     (with regards to the latter, Heracles' voyage to islands in the far west could
     well have been interpreted in this light by 'Celtic' audiences, as such places
     were seen in 'Celtic' tradition as Otherworldly in nature). Obviously these
     are common motifs, to some extent, but they may have made an equation
     between Arthur and Heracles easier. How the Galfridian tale of Arthur's
     conception fits into this is to be debated. It certainly bears comparison with
     the Classical myth of Jupiter and Alcmene, which tells of how Jupiter took
     the form of Alcmene's husband in order to sleep with her and from which
     union Heracles is born.

4   It is perhaps worth noting that Grooms (1993: 236), following the lead of
     Jackson (1971: 316), has suggested that the word *llechwayw*, 'stone-spear' may
     be a misnomer for *lluchwayw*. The first element would thus derive from either
     lluchio, 'to hurl', or *lluch*, 'bright', + *gwayw*, 'spear' ('spear-like lightning'?). If
     this idea were to be pursued then one has to wonder, given the above points,
     about *Pa gur*'s and *Culhwch*'s *Lluch Llauynnauc*, generally identified as Lug (see
     Chapter 2).

5   Though he does look to have been a traditional character – his epithet
     contains a rare inflected genitive plural. As inflection disappeared in Brittonic
     *c.*AD 500, this implies an ancient basis in oral tradition for this at least and
     perhaps also the giant himself (Koch, 1996: 256). Ysbaddaden is also known
     from Welsh folklore, though the degree to which this is independent of
     Culhwch is debatable (Grooms, 1993: 233-8).

6   Translation based mainly upon Sims-Williams, 1991: 40-2, but also utilising
     Bromwich, 1983: 45 and Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxxv-xxxvi.

7   Mabon son of *Melld* may also be conceived of as one of the warriors at this
     battle, but this is not clear in the text of the poem. He could be associated
     with the preceding battle named in the poem, or associated with neither. If
     he was part of the defence at Edinburgh it is worth noting that his name
     means 'Mabon son of Lightning' and he is generally regarded as a doublet of
     the pagan god *Mabon uab Modron*, who is mentioned earlier in *Pa gur*, perhaps
     here with a patronymic reflecting a lightning god **Meldos* (Bromwich and
     Evans, 1992: 152; Jarman, 1983: 108).

8   This does, of course, make one wonder once again about the possibility that
     the Lug(h) parallel in the porter sequence in *Culhwch* does go back to the
     story underlying *Pa gur*. If so then the above points do perhaps suggest that
     the legends of god *Lugus* had become somehow bound up with those of
     Arthur to some greater degree than simply this god being one member of
     Arthur's war-band. These are, of course, similar issues to those referred to in
     Chapter 2. Thus Arthur appears linked with the myths of Gwydion son of

Dôn through (again) the battle known as *Cat Godeu*. Indeed, the possibility exists that Arthur may, in fact, have had some role in an earlier, more heroic version of a handful of episodes from the mythological Four Branches of the Mabinogi.

CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF ARTHUR'S WAR–BAND AND FAMILY

1   Is it at all relevant in this context that the supposed 'real' father of the re-incarnation of Fionn mac Cumhaill – Mongán mac Fiachna, a historical seventh-century ruler of Ulster – was said to have been Manawydan's Irish counterpart, Manannán mac Lir? Indeed, in this context it is interesting to observe that Mongán's supernatural conception 'bears striking points of similarity with the story which Geoffrey of Monmouth tells of the birth of Arthur' (Bromwich, 1975-6: 168; for Mongán as the reincarnation of Fionn and his conception, see Koch and Carey, 2003: 217-20).

CHAPTER 5: THE ORIGINS OF 'ARTHUR'

1   See Jackson, 1953: 307, 314, 321 on the development of Latin internal $\bar{o}$ in British. He considers that it would have either fallen together with British $\bar{o}$, to develop into British $\bar{u}$, or have been substituted for British $\bar{u}$, if borrowed before the end of the fifth century (with British $\bar{u} > \bar{\ddot{u}} > \ddot{u}$, see also Sims-Williams, 1990b: 250-60).

2   Note, however, that Classicist Graham Anderson has suggested that *Artorius* may be 'an early Latin vocalic variant of *Arturius*, an adjectival formation from *Ar(c)turus*, used to denote human names based on those of a god' (2004: 174-5). This may be of particular relevance given some of the suggestions made later in this chapter.

3   He is known from a Roman-period votive inscription, found in Hertfordshire in 1744, that declared *D MARTI ALATORI DUM. CENSORINUS GEMELLI FIL VSLM* ('To the god Mars Alator, Dumnonius Censorinus son of Gemellus paid his vow willingly to the god who deserved it') and an alter by G. Vinicius Celsus from South Shields, County Durham – Collingwood and Wright, 1965, nos 218 and 1055.

4   On the basis of a comparison with the similarly formed *-orius Decknames*, we might consider whether *Artōrius* might not stem from *Artorīx*, 'bear-king, hero-king', but here with a *-ō-* under the influence of the insular fame of this name in its proper form.

5   A further early association is, in fact, to be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, viii.14-18 (Thorpe, 1966: 200-3), where Arthur's father sees a 'star of great magnitude and brilliance' (a fair description of Arcturus, the brightest star in the northern sky) which gives off two

prophetic beams of light, one of which refers to Arthur and the other of which splits into seven smaller rays (note that there are seven key stars in the constellation of Ursa Major). Although Geoffrey doesn't actually say which star(s) he is referring to, very shortly after this event he mentions *Arctos*, Ursa Major/The Plough, in association with Uther (Geoffrey is, of course, one of those early authors who use the form *Arcturus* for Arthur).

6   With Arthur's present absence – despite his eternal nature – being ascribed in popular tradition to the fact that he was currently residing, still alive (though sometimes asleep), in the Celtic Otherworld, from which he would at some point return.

7   Other than Arthur this motif also appears to be attached, in the twelfth century, to Fionn mac Cumhaill, which is, of course, most interesting in the present context (Padel, 1994).

8   It is particularly intriguing given the association between Arthur and the bear. The following refers to the mythical qualities of the bear in early medieval north-western Europe as a whole but it seems to offer an explanation for the sleeping but returning hero motif and its relationship with Arthur. Bears, as mentioned previously, have numerous anthropomorphic characteristics, but they might also be seen to have other, more mythical, qualities: 'Bears seem to live *inside* the earth. Their subterranean den is like an entrance to the Underworld … and its long winter hibernation suggests that the bear has died, but knows how to come back to life in the spring.' (Bates, 2002: 157).

9   That originally mythological and divine figures could both be of the Otherworld and also in conflict with it is confirmed by the role of the sons of Dôn in *Cat Godeu* and by the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, in addition to the obvious Fenian parallel.

CHAPTER 6: THE HISTORICIZATION OF ARTHUR

1   An alternative interpretation would be to have this as a borrowing in the historicization process of the late sixth-century Battle of Arfderydd – see Padel, 1994: 18 and note 67. However, given that *Cat Godeu* is an Arthurian battle which looks to have involved the trees of *Coed Celyddon*, this now appears far less convincing.

2   The important consequences of this withdrawal for the towns and economy of Britain have been best discussed by Esmonde-Cleary, 1989, 1993 and 1995.

3   Indeed, it should be borne in mind that nearby Horncastle, a fortified Roman 'small town', is considered to be part of the Late Roman defenses of the east coast and 'one of the leading settlements in the Lincoln area' (Field and Hurst, 1983: 85). As such a battle at Baumber would not be at all implausible (the second element, *burh*, indicates that there was a fortification of some sort at Baumber). A chance find of an Anglo-Saxon bronze sword pommel dated to

the late fifth century from Baumber may or may not be significant here (there has been no significant in-depth archaeological investigation of the area).

4   The River *Dubglas* is unidentifiable in Lindsey, with many of the rivers now bearing Old English or Old Scandinavian names. Reavill, 2003, has suggested that it may have been the name of the River Witham (no longer so secure as an early name as it once seemed) on account of the peaty composition of the soil through which it flows.

5   It is sometimes claimed that Ambrosius can be shown to have been associated with the south of England, with claims that the hillfort at Amesbury was his home (as Myres, 1986: 160-1). Such a notion is, however, based more on wishful thinking than anything else, as is the idea that Ambrosius's battle at *Gwoloph* (*Historia Brittonum* chapter 66) is to be identified with one of the Wallops in Hampshire (Yorke, 1995: 15; Mills, 1991: 9, 343-4).

6   One example of where the historicization does, however, seem to have had a reasonably significant effect on the pre-existing Arthurian folkloric and mythical tales is that of Arthur's undying nature. From the 1140s the notion that Arthur was still alive, and of his potential return from his present absence, appears to have become increasingly linked to the expulsion of the English from Britain. Given the nature of the evidence this looks to be a twelfth-century development that was obviously influenced by the historicization of Arthur and, most probably, particularly by the massive and widespread interest in the historicized Arthur and his role as a 'historical' defender of Britain generated by the publication of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the late 1130s (see Chapter 2).

7   Such a concept of Arthur as a historical foreign conqueror is entirely alien to the non-Galfridian insular material, even that which portrays him as historical, as Bromwich, Padel and others have noted (Bromwich *et al.*, 1991: 6-7; Padel, 1994: 31 n.113; Padel, 1995). The only possible hint of such a thing occurs in *Culhwch ac Olwen* when Arthur's porter boasts about travelling to India, Africa, Greece and elsewhere with Arthur (lines 116-28). This appears, however, to be simply a formulaic speech attached here to Arthur. It closely parallels a Book of Taliesin list of Alexander the Great's conquests, as well as speech by Curoí mac Dairi in the Old Irish tale *Fled Bricrend*. The purpose of this was to create a sense of wonder by citing a list of strange and unfamiliar names. This literary flourish may, perhaps, have inspired Geoffrey if he knew of this, but this section of the tale could in fact equally well be a post-Galfridian interpolation into the text of *Culhwch* (see Bromwich and Evans, 1992: xxviii and lines 116-28 and note).

8   Thus Roberts (1991a: 82) suggests that Illtud's unmotivated visit to Arthur's Court in his *Life* can be taken as indicative of a situation in which the legendary hero's visit to Arthur's Court was becoming a stereotyped feature. Arthur's presence in this *Life* is simply a reflection of the fact that legendary

　　　　　heroes were now expected by convention to visit Arthur's Court, a place
　　　　　which embodied the Britain of legend and myth.

9　　　That Gaelic tradition recognized Arthur as the British equivalent of Fionn is
　　　　　shown by the fact that he appears to be described as one of the 'kings of the
　　　　　Fian of the Britons' in a *c.*1200 ballad (Gillies, 1982: 71).

10　　　Except just possibly in the gathering of kings by Arthur to fight this battle,
　　　　　though this is an extremely tenuous link not reflecting the major concept of
　　　　　Arthur in the *Historia* and easily otherwise explained.

CHAPTER 7: 'THE ARTHUR OF THE BRITISH'

1　　　As noted in Chapter 5, the lack of inscriptional evidence for such a figure is
　　　　　not overly concerning. Many Gallo-Brittonic divine names are only recorded
　　　　　in one or two inscriptions, as is the case with *Mars Alator* and also *Esus*, who
　　　　　was one of the three apparently important Gaulish divinities highlighted
　　　　　by the Roman poet Lucan in the first century AD (see Green, 1995: 472-3;
　　　　　Hutton, 1991: 155-6).

2　　　An alternative might be to follow Murphy in seeing Arthur (and Fionn) as
　　　　　'broken-down forms of Celtic legends about benevolent gods and spirits,
　　　　　such as Lug' (Murphy, 1953: 216-7), referencing Lug's role as the protector
　　　　　and leader of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* in *Cath Miage Tuired*. Certainly *Lugus/*
　　　　　Lleu/Lug(h) does have early and intriguing links to the Arthurian legend (as
　　　　　he does to the Fenian legend – Murphy, 1953: lxx-lxxxvi; Ó hÓgáin, 1988:
　　　　　6-15, 28; MacNeill, 1982: 415; Ross, 1999: 129-30), though his very appearance
　　　　　in it might mitigate against Arthur being ultimately a byname for him, as
　　　　　Murphy suggests for Fionn, if Arthur is to be interpreted in this light. Indeed,
　　　　　Lugus would seem to have a somewhat different character to that suggested
　　　　　for Arthur, and he seems to lie behind dedications to Mercury, rather than
　　　　　Mars – see Olmsted, 1994: 96, 109-11, 116-19, 152-3. In this context – and as
　　　　　an alternative explanation for *Lugus*' presence in the early Arthurian material
　　　　　– it is perhaps worth noting that *Lugus* and *Vellaunos-Esus* would seem to
　　　　　have been linked in their reconstructed myths, and by way of comparison
　　　　　we might point to Cú Chulainn, who is another probable manifestation of
　　　　　Vellaunos-Esus and one inextricably entwined with Lug/*Lugus* (Olmsted,
　　　　　1994: 119-26, 153-5, and particularly Olmsted, 1988. See Higley, 1996: 43-4
　　　　　and Gowans, 1988, for some interesting links between the early Arthurian
　　　　　legend and that of Cú Chulainn).

3　　　If a link with *Vindoroicos*, and thus possibly *Vellaunos-Esus*, is pursued then
　　　　　this might help explain Fionn's unclear relationship with *Núadu* in Irish
　　　　　tradition. The above God of Water, **Neōtulos/*Nectionos* (of whom *Núadu*
　　　　　is another manifestation and byname) would seem to have been originally
　　　　　linked to *Vellaunos-Esus* in a father-son relationship (though with *Vellaunos-*

Esus as the father), and Fionn's links with *Núadu* might be seen as the confused remnants of this (see Olmsted, 1994: 264-8 for a reconstruction of the *★Neōtulos/★Nectionos* myth).

4　Could this explain why the apparent Welsh development of the Gaelic Fionn, Gwyn ap Nudd (see above and Chapter 4), became so closely linked with Arthur in the pre-Galfridian legend?

5　One has to wonder here about the claim that the slain Cynddylan and his brothers were 'welps of great Arthur' (*Marwnad Cynddylan*), as treating Arthur as a Männerbund-god may put an interesting twist on the interpretation of these words.

6　An association with the Wild Hunt – the spectral and Otherworldly event, often said to involve the souls of the dead – is a regular feature of the Männerbund-gods (Kershaw, 2000: especially 20-40; Odin is often said to be the 'original' leader of this, with all other manifestations being borrowings from him, but Kershaw's analysis shows that Odin is the leader because he is a Männerbund-god. The other occurrences of this Hunt may thus reflect the myths of other such deities rather than a borrowing from Odin). In western France the Wild Hunt was known as *la Chasse Artu* from at least the twelfth century, with the widespread knowledge of this presumably having spread from Brittany (Loomis, 1959: 70; Taylor, 1921: 287-8). Gervase of Tilbury, writing *c.*1211, similarly records that foresters from the woods of both Britain and Brittany tell of companies of knights – clearly the Wild Hunt from their description – who meet for hunting beneath the full moon, with hounds and a din of horns; when questioned they reveal themselves to be of *familia Arturi*, 'Arthur's household' (Chambers, 1927: 227-8. See also Bruce, 1912; Taylor, 1921; Palmer, 1976: 83). Furthermore, Étienne de Bourbon, writing *c.*1250-60, says that Arthur's Wild Huntsmen were, in fact, devils, a point well worth noting in the present context. Whilst certainly a role given to a number of figures, Arthur has an early and strong association with this supernatural event – with later Welsh folk-tradition assigning it to both Gwyn ap Nudd and Arthur (Westwood, 1985: 8) – and Kershaw seems to have no problem with accepting later folklore as evidence of this role (Kershaw, 2000: 266). Finally, one might also wonder whether the description of Arthur as 'path of the fallen' in the non-Galfridian *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* is also relevant in this context (Coe and Young, 1995: 107).

7　If the remnants of the Männerbund-god may have continued (and developed) after this point, so too may the vestiges, at least, of the archaic Männerbünde themselves. Certainly the existence of *fianna*/Männerbünde into the medieval period in Ireland is well-evidenced, and Bremmer has, most interestingly, noted that one of the latest recorded examples of such archaic and once-widespread Indo-European youth-only war-bands actually comes from Wales, *Giraldus Cambrensis* relating a late twelfth-century encounter with such a

band in Anglesey in his *Itinerarium Cambriae* (Bremmer, 1987: 41; *Itinerarium Cambriae*, II, 7). British *fíanna*/Männerbünde are even clearer in *Y Gododdin*, where in B².33 and A.69 we find a Gwanar(?) described as a 'chief' to the 'wolves/landless young warriors', which would seem to be an unmistakable reference to him as a Männerbund-leader (see Koch, 1997: 14-15, 143, who places this in the pre-638 *Gododdin*, and generally Kershaw, 2000 and McCone, 1986).

8   Alongside this may be also placed a development of Arthur as a light-hearted or even comically undignified figure, as possibly seen in the evidence discussed in Padel, 2000, especially chapter 9.

9   It is interesting to note that some of the Spanish names appear in rural and non-elite contexts and as a whole they are found mainly in northern Spain as early as the late eleventh century or early twelfth century (and thus well before the *Historia Regum Britanniae*). In this light it may be significant that this area, specifically Galicia, appears to have seen, like Brittany, a migration from Britain in the sixth century (Thompson, 1968; Chadwick, 1965: 281-3; Young, 2002; Young, 2003). The first point is very curious, given the likely transmission methods, which does raise the possibility that the second point might be speculated to be, in some way, an explanation of this. That the British influence on this region was more long-lasting and significant than has often been thought – with the *Britones* who came to this area possibly maintaining, to some degree, their separate ethnicity through to as late as even the thirteenth century – has been indicated recently by Young's research (Young, 2001; Young, 2003-4).

10   Also relevant to explaining the post-Galfridian concept of Arthur as a Faery ruler may be the concept of him as both an Otherworld denizen and, sometimes, ruler. The first mention of this is found in Geoffrey's work but there are reasons to think that he may have borrowed this from Brittonic folklore, his contribution being, as Padel has argued, to combine this concept with the tale of Arthur's death at Camlann to try and reconcile two divergent folkloric traditions of Arthur's end (or lack thereof), something which was then maintained by later authors (Bromwich, 1978a: 267-8; Loomis, 1959: 65-6; Padel, 1994: 11-12; see also Bullock-Davies, 1968-70). Certainly Loomis has shown that an alternate version of Arthur's Otherworld residence and rule, where he resides in a subterranean Otherworld (in a *síd*?) rather than on a mystical island, would seem to be part of Brittonic belief – as something they could be mocked for – from the mid twelfth century onwards (see Loomis, 1956c; Loomis, 1958: 13; Loomis, 1959: 68-71; Chambers, 1927: 221-7; Ashe, 1996b; Padel, 1995 – see also Chapter 3 on the Otranto Mosaic and Chapter 5). Whether this went back beyond the twelfth century is unclear but if it was a genuine Brittonic belief, rather than the invention of literary authors, then it might certainly be relevant to the question of the degree to which

Arthur the Faery ruler derived from Brittonic concepts of Arthur. *If it is* an authentic part of twelfth-century Brittonic folklore then it must clearly be understood in the context of Arthur's 'expected return', with which it is always linked and which has been here suggested to be an accretion to Arthur's name and eternal nature (it is, after all, a widespread folk-motif, see Thompson, 1955-8, especially A580), perhaps as part of an attempt to explain Arthur's current apparent absence despite his strongly asserted immortality, informed by his intimate connection with the Otherworld – whether this concept of Arthur as an Otherworld denizen had any existence away from the 'return' motif and such an explanation is, of course, beyond speculation (though it might well fit with some of the suggestions made about the nature of Arthur in the present study).

11   If Arthur's legend continued to be expressed through folklore in Britain, it also seems to have found such a manifestation during the transmission to the continent too. It was noted above that Arthur's leadership of the Wild Hunt probably spread from Brittany to other areas of western France, with the folkloric *la Chasse Artu* becoming known even in the Pyrenees (Taylor, 1921: 287-9). In some cases it seems that at least elements of Brittonic folklore were in fact re-localized on the continent. The Arthurian fight with *Cath Paluc*, for example, is relocated in the early thirteenth-century *Estoire de Merlin* from its probably original Anglesey location (as in *Pa gur*) to near Lake Bourget in Savoy, where the memory of the battle is preserved in the local place-names *Mont du Chat*, *Col du Chat* and *Dent du Chat*, implying that the tale had entered local topographic folklore (Jarman, 1983: 109; Bromwich, 1978a: 487; the conflict is also localized on Lake Lausanne, Geneva). Interestingly, this is not the only Arthurian association of this place. Étienne de Bourbon in his *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus* (*c.*1250-60) says how on a moonlight night a woodcutter met the Wild Hunt (composed, says Étienne, of devils) near the *Mont du Chat*, and he was told that the hunting-party was Arthur's household and that his court was nearby. The woodcutter then followed the party into Arthur's faery palace, filled with knights and ladies, dancing and feasting, and lay as directed with a beautiful lady, only to wake up the next morning on a bundle of faggots.

12   One further area of continuity may be Arthur's role as leader of the Wild Hunt, if this is admitted as a genuine part of the 'British' Arthurian legend (see above). Gervase of Tilbury, writing *c.*1211, suggests that Arthur's leadership of this was common currency amongst British and Breton foresters and a widespread belief in this would seem to have continued right through until relatively recently. For example, in the sixteenth-century *Complaynt of Scotland*, we find amongst a list of medieval romance-titles to be told for recreation 'Arthour knycht he raid on nycht viht gyltin spur and candil lycht', which looks to be a charm referring to the Wild Hunt rather than an actual romance, on the

basis of a nineteenth-century Shetland charm which begins 'Arthur Knight / He rade a'night, / Wi' open swird / An' candle light' (Bruce, 1912: 192; Taylor, 1921: 286-7). In addition to Scotland, the Arthurian Wild Hunt also appears in Welsh, Cornish, Breton and Somerset folklore and Wordsworth, in a letter to Alan Cunningham (23 November 1823) remembers that in the Lake District as a child he used to hear the following rhyme at times of high winds: 'Arthur's bower has broken his band, / And he comes roaring up the land; / King o' Scots wi' a' his power / Cannot turn Arthur's bower' (Bruce, 1912: 192; Palmer, 1976: 83; Taylor, 1921: 287-8; Westwood, 1985: 8; Westwood and Simpson, 2005: 94 – is 'bower' here the *OED*'s fourth definition, an 'anchor'?). Devotees of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* will, of course, recognize this rhyme, which appears there (p. 50) in a slightly different form and thus perpetuates this concept of Arthur to the present day, though few perhaps realize this when they first encounter the tale!

13   As noted above. Whether or not the euhemerizing of other Arthurian tales, such as *Annwfyn* becoming Ireland in the quest for the magical cauldron related in *Culhwch*, ought to be placed alongside this is uncertain, such developments being, of course, part of the general treatment of the Otherworld and Otherworldly tales in Welsh tradition. Nonetheless, Arthur does maintain an Otherworldly aspect to his character in popular folklore, through the continued vitality of the concept of Arthur's supernatural and subterranean Otherworldly residence, discussed above; his gigantism; his leadership of the Wild Hunt; his astrological associations; and the curious tale of his being turned into a carrion-bird, usually a chough, raven or crow. The latter is first referenced in the sixteenth century, when Julian del Castillo's chronicle says that in England it was common talk (*fama comun*) that Arthur had been enchanted into the form of a crow and that many penalties were inflicted on anyone who killed one of these birds (Loomis, 1958: 16). That this was not merely the fancy of the Spanish chronicler – who in turn probably influenced Cervantes' account of this concept of Arthur – is demonstrated by, for example, Cornish popular folklore recorded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hunt, 1881: II, 308-9). How much older than the sixteenth century this belief was is impossible to say, but it should be remembered that Arthur's father appears to have been a shape-shifter in the pre-Galfridian tradition and his nephew was turned into an eagle in the mid twelfth-century poem *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr*. Indeed, it may also be worth noting that the former god Lleu (Irish Lug) was himself turned into a bird – an eagle – in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, making the mythical character of this concept abundantly clear.

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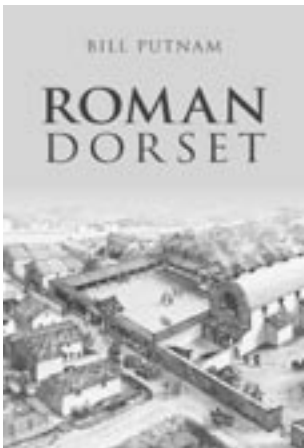
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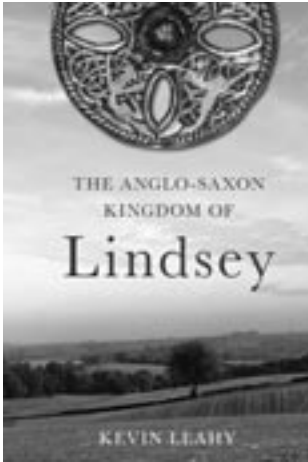
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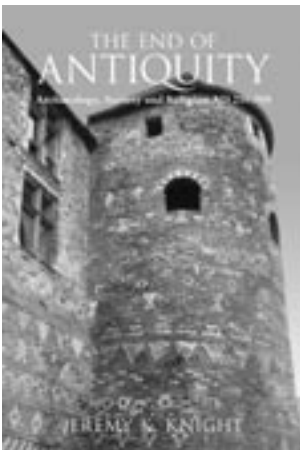
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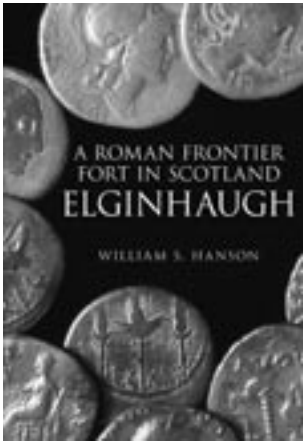
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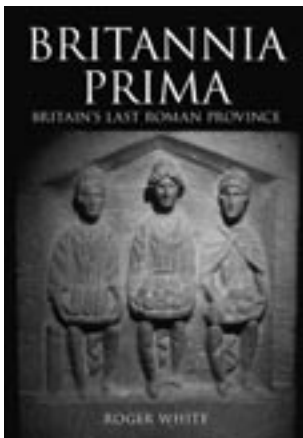
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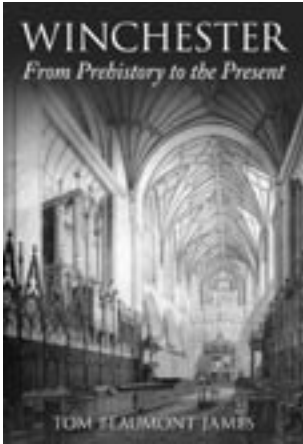
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