

What I want to do in this short paper is simply to show how one Welsh translator undertook the task of translating, adapting and supplementing Geoffrey's *Historia* but I believe that analysing the text that he produced will contribute to our understanding of the broader issue of how the Latin text itself could be combined with other historical material. The paper is, however, not definitive but rather, 'work in progress'.

This translation is one of a number of Welsh versions of the *Historia*. The 70 or so Welsh texts can be classified into 6 or 7 main groups, ignoring for the moment fragments or incomplete versions. Referring to the groups by the oldest ms in each (or the best known in one case), these are:

1. NLW Llanstephan ms 1, 13c.: selections edited (Roberts 1971); complete text edited and awaiting publication.
2. NLW Peniarth ms 44, 13c.: edited but not yet published (Roberts 1969).
3. NLW Dingestow ms 13c.: edited by Henry Lewis (Lewis 1942).

These are pretty close translations of the Latin vulgate text, especially Llanstephan 1 (apart from the opening section that appears to follow the variant version), while Peniarth 44 abbreviates as it goes and unfortunately the ms lacks a number of folios towards the end. These two tend to translate sentence by sentence but Dingestow is less bound to the text (Roberts 1977). All three make a few additions – personal names have traditional epithets and patronymics, there are some additional comments or references to inconsistencies, new adjectives may be added. Where Geoffrey's personal names could be recognised in the tradition, the translators gave them their usual Welsh forms; where they could not be recognised, approximate Welsh forms were used. A problem might arise where Geoffrey's narrative was not consistent with native tradition and translators sometimes commented on this. If Geoffrey was felt to have omitted a relevant piece of information or episode, these were inserted and are generally easy to spot.

The other four version are later:

4. A combination of Llanstephan 1 and Dingestow (as far as and including Prophecies + remainder) in the Red Book of Hergest version, 14 c. (Rhys & Evans 1890, Roberts 1977/78).
5. NLW Peniarth ms 21 and related Peniarth ms 23, 14 c..
6. BL ms Cotton Cleopatra Bv, NLW ms 7006D (Black Book of Basingwerk), 14 c.(Parry 1937).
7. Brut Tysilio, based on a combination of Peniarth 44 and Cotton Cleopatra Bv but long believed to represent Geoffrey's source (*Myvyrian*, 1870, Roberts 1980).

Some of the later texts in several of these groups are hybrid, i.e. based on more than one text. More interestingly, even the oldest versions were in contact with one another and they borrow from each other and have personal name forms in common (Roberts 1972-74). The nature of the possible contact between Pen. 21 and Cotton Cleo. needs to be examined more carefully.

I want to look here at the Cotton-Basingwerk version. The Cotton ms is dated ca 1330 (Huws, 2000). It is a composite ms of three parts: i, the Brut and a

continuation entitled *Brenhinedd y Saeson*, ‘the kings of the English’ (BS); ii, a law text; iii, *Ystoria Dared* (Dares Phrygius in Welsh). The Book of Basingwerk was written in the 15 c. (Huws, 2000) by two scribes, the second of which was the poet, scribe, herald, historian Gutun Owain (fl. second half 15 c.) . The Basingwerk texts appear to be derived from the same exemplar as the Cotton but include an edited form of the Cotton *Ystoria Dared* in its correct place as a prelude to the *Historia/Brut*. The first scribe copied *Dared* and part of the *Brut* as far as col. 88 (§ 53.363) and his work was continued by Gutun Owain who completed the *Brut* and BS. It is virtually certain that both the Cotton ms and the Basingwerk ms were written at the Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis (Glyn y Groes), near Llangollen, Denbighshire, and also that a text of *Brut y Tywysogion*, ‘the chronicle of the princes of Wales’, a continuation of the *Historia* was transcribed here in the 14 c. (Jones 1952, Jones 1971, Charles-Edwards 1994). Pen. 44 and Llan.1 belong here in the 13 c. Valle Crucis is central to the textual history of the bruts in Welsh.

The Cotton-Basingwerk text begins *Y llyvyr hvnn a elwir y brut nyt amgen noc ystoriaev brenhined ynys brydeyn ac ev henwev or kyntaf hyt y diwethaf* (‘This book is called the brut namely the histories of the kings of the island of Britain and their names from the first to the last’). It is unusual for Welsh texts to have a title in the mss and since this is not simply a translation but a compiled version – a composition, as we shall see – it seems appropriate to refer to it under this title, *Ystoriaeu Brehinedd Ynys Brydein*.

Ystoriaeu is a new translation of the *Historia* – the actual title suggests as much – and this was done by the same person that translated BS as is suggested by a number of lexical items and collocations that they have in common. At the moment I cannot share Parry’s belief that *Ystoriaeu* is the work of two different redactors but I need to look again.

Ystoriaeu Brehinedd Ynys Brydein is a condensed translation of Geoffrey’s *Historia* which nevertheless contains a number of elements additional to the usual vulgate text. It follows the narrative of HRB closely and refers to the same persons, though the personal names are often in a Welsh guise, either in their traditional form or an adopted one. It includes Myrddin’s Prophecy before Gortheyrn (Vortigern) and, unlike the other Welsh versions of HRB, it also translates the dedication (to Robert of Gloucester in this case). *Ystoriaeu* omits most of Geoffrey’s authorial comments, e.g. §§ 62, 70, 91, 177, 186, but retains some of those that reflect his themes of British history as divine retribution and social degeneration. The narrative is abbreviated skilfully – by changing speeches and letters to reportage (or the alternation of direct and indirect speech), by reducing their content, or simply by omitting them completely. The translator’s intention is made clear in his version of Avarwy’s (Androgeus’s) letter to Caesar, § 61, p.76, which does not repeat the account of the quarrel between the boys, as in HRB, but merely notes, *ac ef a rodet yn y llythyr y daruot val y buassei oll* (‘and he gave in the letter the contention as it had all been’). Some letters and speeches are translated more fully, e.g. §§ 55 (p.72, unlike Caesar’s speech that precedes Caswallon’s letter), 118 (pp.138-9), 125 (p.142), 133 (pp.148-9), 141 (p.156), 191 (pp. 203-4), 195 (pp.207-8, following a summary of Selyf’s (Solomon’s) speech on the same theme), and the series of battle speeches in §§ 158, 159, 160, 161 (pp. 173-5), 169, 170 (pp.184-5). The more fully translated ones tend to be those that are Geoffrey’s summaries of his British history and its underlying themes. Descriptions of battles, strategies and personal conflict are generally not as extended as in the Latin and they contain fewer details, though at p. 73 the

translator/compiler adds the comment, *Ac yna y llas gwyr Ruvein canmwiaf val y gellit kerdet ar y calanned heb ssenghi ar y daear deng hyt tir ar ugeint* ('And then the Romans were for the most part killed with the result that one could walk on the corpses without treading on the ground for 30 measure of land'). At p.180 he reports Gaius's taunt to the Britons, *y mae hwy llawer vyd auch tavodeu hwi noc auch gledyfeu* ('your tongues are much longer than your swords'), words that other texts also use to render *qui dicebat Britones magis iactantis atque minis habundare quam audatia et probitate ualere* (§166). Condensing the historical narrative, omitting details and abbreviating the context and content of speeches produce a free-flowing narration, e.g. the departure from Greece and the voyage to Britain, the final chapters pp. 214-7, §§ 201-7, but also a more informal narrative style. The translator has a natural feel for story-telling and speeches may be recast not only as reportage but as conversations, and episodes are condensed but also personalised or dramatised, e.g. the tragedy of Llyr (Leir) and his daughters (pp. 31-40, § 31), the story of Gortheyrn (Vortigern) (pp. 108-13, §§ 95-100), the arrival of Maxen (pp. 98-100, §§ 81-83). The translator writes in an established, straight-forward prose style but he has an ear for traditional Welsh prose rhetoric in his use of collocations, 42, 181, 60, 65, 165, 166, multiple, and sometimes compounded, adjectives, e.g. in describing the English, p.139 p.155, p. 203, and other 'villains', p.45, in setting out the virtues of some heroes, pp.10, 49, 140, 154, 156, 174, and in describing combats pp.106, 154,157,179, 192.

Ystoriaeu frequently adds information, comments or narrative details that enhance the quality of the account or serve to ground events more securely by giving naturalistic explanations or reasons for actions or events. The translator sometimes attempts to combine the *Historia* narrative with elements from Welsh tradition, written sources or less specific ones, relating, so he believed, to the same person, episode or period. The most extensive of these is the story of Lludd and his brother Llefelis which has already been inserted into the Llan. 1 text and which would take its place in all subsequent versions (Roberts 1975). There are other less extended or obvious changes where the text has been adapted to conform to the preferred Welsh tradition, e.g. the figure of Coel's daughter Elen who becomes the traditional Elen Luyddawg and also St Helena and her legend of the Invention of the Cross (p. 94, §78), the death of Maelgwn Gwynedd (p. 195, §183), the massacre of the monks of Bangor (pp. 199-201, §§ 188-9). The change in tone from a quasi-historical narrative to a naturalistic personalised composition is well marked in the account of the discovery of Myrddin (Merlin) in Caerfyrddin and the subsequent building of Gortheyrn's fortress (p. 120-4, §§ 106-8) with the mother's anguished cry, 'Oh Lord', she said, 'kill me but don't kill my son'. The episode is, however, of particular interest as it reveals the translator/compiler at work drawing his material from different sources: from Welsh texts like *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys* for details of the dragons' incarceration and the location of the fortress at Dinas Emrys, and from *Breiddwyt Maxen Wledig* for the onomastic explanation of Caerfyrddin (and the location of Maxen's legend at Caernarfon, p.100, and other details relating to Maxen elsewhere in the text); the boy's name is the traditional 'an ab y lleian' and he receives his name from his discovery at Caerfyrddin; Gortheyrn is advised not by honest but mistaken magicians (*magi*) but by scheming, self-serving chief poets. Myrddin was conceived upon a nun by an incubus, a species of demon given a different, and more theological, origin than the classical one given by Geoffrey; the description of the as yet unseen pool, the draining of the water and the dialogue all make this an absorbing episode. The compiler has cast his net wide but draws as well on his own literary experience.

He is concerned to underline the Welsh dimension of the *Historia* but he is also aware of the wider context and inserts material from non-Welsh sources. He inserts, and thus

implicitly contradicts Geoffrey, a translation of the prophecies of the eagle of Shaftsbury that Geoffrey refers to but rejects (§ 29). He includes the miraculous episodes associated with the mission of St Augustine to the English – the incendiary birds of Cirencester, the fish-tailed men of Dorchester and the well at ‘Cernel’ in Kent, the explanation of the county names Wessex, Essex, Sussex as being memorials of the night of the long knives, the effect of the speech announcing the departure of the Romans, all of which can be paralleled in Wace (rather than Laymon) but the correspondence is never close enough to be regarded as a translation but rather as a recollection; *Ystoriaeu* does not follow the sequence of events in Wace exactly. The opening section describing the arrival of Aeneas and his followers in Italy and the account of his descendants, including the two Silvii, echoes Wace but is more developed as a narrative. Wace alone has two Silvii (Weiss 2002) but whether the Welsh text follows another related source or is the work of the compiler is unclear. He is familiar with learned and religious popular tradition, like the legend of archdeacon Theophilus, or the phenomena in Rome the night of Christ’s birth. He reveals his chronicler’s background more specifically at other times, e.g. he dates regnal years as X years after the Flood, he inserts a chronology of central events in the life of Christ and he also has other synchronisms not found in Geoffrey. More classical in origin are the names of the seven early Greek philosophers, teachers and pupils, from Anaximander to Aristotle (the list is known elsewhere though the names do not always match). These additions are not unique to the Welsh text but it has proved difficult, as yet, to find close comparisons. But it is worth noting here that the compiler has taken care to ensure that all these additions are inserted at what he believes is the appropriate historical time; his attitude is consistently that of a chronicler.

At the close of the Arthurian section the translator, who had already translated Geoffrey’s claim that Arthur had been borne to ‘ynys Avallach’ to be healed of his mortal wounds (§ 178), inserts the Latin verses on Arthur’s presumed grave at Glastonbury. It is difficult to read these lines in the Cotton ms and Gutun Owain left a space for them in the Book of Basingwerk. The epitaph was apparently unclear in the exemplar. The Latin verses are first recorded about 1236 and then more fully by Adam of Domerham towards the end of the 13c. Cotton Cleopatra Bv, about 1330, is therefore among the earliest witnesses. Whatever the lines of communication with Glastonbury or with Adam’s chronicle may have been, Valle Crucis was in touch with recent developments in Arthurian matters. The translator follows the *Hic jacet* verses with a comment *Ac ny dywat yr ystoria hyspyssach am angheu Arthur no hynny* (‘And the *Historia* says nothing more explicit than that about Arthur’s death’, p.193). There is a very similar sentence at this point in the Dingestow text and the reference to uncertainty is not unexpected. Wace has a similar comment but in his case its purpose is to refute any belief in the return of the king.

The translator/compiler of *Ystoriaeu* had at his disposal a good library of historical works in Welsh and Latin (as did Gutun Owain in the 15 c.) but equally significant was his own comprehensive grasp of contemporary culture and his historian’s attitude. What remains unresolved is whether the additions to the *Historia* are the work of the translator or whether some, at least, were in his source. I have not found a copy of the *Historia* that has these non-Welsh features. A hint of how *Ystoriaeu* was compiled may be given by a comparison of this version and the Brut Tysilio, but for the moment it is enough to observe the range of historical texts and learning used by this 14 c. translator/compiler at Valle Crucis and to note that this activity follows on from the translating of Geoffrey here in the previous century and would be continued here by creative compiler scribes in the 15 c. In the history of the Welsh texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and in the development of medieval Welsh historiography Valle Crucis abbey played a crucial role.

In this paper § refers to chapters in Michael D. Reeve & Neil Wright, ed. & transl., *Geoffrey of Monmouth, The history of the Kings of Britain*, Woodbridge, 2007; p. refers to page numbers in Parry (1937).

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