



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Kymry, Walenses, Brytaniaid, Britones: Naming the Welsh in the Middle Ages

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## Abstract

This article surveys how the Welsh and their territory have been described, from the early Middle Ages to the present. It begins by examining the terms used by Welsh writers in the early medieval period, before proceeding to consider English nomenclature and the important shift from *Brit(tones)* to *Walenses* in the twelfth century. This shift is re-examined through the lens of the *Vita Griffini*, which reveals the political motivations behind the increasing focus on Wales and the Welsh. Despite this development in nomenclature, the island of Britain remained central to the identity of the Welsh. This is evident in vernacular texts, especially poetry, and this article explores the different names used in this context. It concludes with a brief foray into the early modern period, ultimately illustrating the continued relevance and significance of the identities fashioned in the early Middle Ages to writers in subsequent centuries.

Anyone wishing to write about Wales and the Welsh in the early Middle Ages will face the challenge of definition. Wales as it would come to be known did not exist in this period, nor was the territory equivalent to the Wales of later centuries ever described as such. The names ‘Wales’ and ‘Welsh’ themselves fare somewhat better in that their precursors *wealas* and *wylisc* were used in English in this period, but with different and varying meaning.<sup>1</sup> The Welsh of the early Middle Ages, however, saw themselves as Britons and their territory as Britain, speaking the British language. Yet the exact territory that they inhabited fluctuated significantly over the course of the period. Referring to the Welsh on their own terms brings its own difficulties: how should we distinguish between the Welsh

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<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 8.

and the other Brittonic-speaking inhabitants that we might wish to discuss? Thomas Charles-Edwards has observed that it would be too ‘draconian’ to prohibit the use of Wales and Welsh in academic discourse, but that scholars need to be alert to the modern nature of these designations.<sup>2</sup>

This contribution introduces readers to the names used to describe the Welsh and the territory that they inhabited in the early Middle Ages and attempts to disentangle some of the issues involved. Whilst drawing on significant recent research in this area, it also develops this work in two key ways. Firstly, previous work on this topic has tended to focus on specific aspects, clusters of texts, or periods. Notable examples include Huw Pryce’s investigation of the shift in nomenclature from *Brit(t)ones* to *Walenses* in the twelfth century, and Thomas Charles Edwards’s discussion of the meaning of *Kymry* in early medieval texts.<sup>3</sup> This article takes a broader approach to examine nomenclature across the Middle Ages in both Latin and the vernacular. In so doing, it not only provides readers with a convenient single access point for an extensive body of scholarship on specific aspects, but also contextualizes key developments and draws out trends. Secondly, this article investigates a wider corpus of material. This includes utilizing important recent resources, such as the *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300–1425* database and Ann Parry Owen’s ‘Concordance of the Poets of the Princes Poetry’, to undertake a more comprehensive study of vernacular material, as well as consideration of texts such as the *Vita Griffini* that were not previously known to scholars.

The article will begin by surveying the terms used by Welsh writers in the early medieval period, before proceeding to consider English nomenclature and the important shift from *Brit(t)ones* to *Walenses* in the twelfth century. As well as an examination of trends in Cambro-Latin texts, this second section will investigate to what extent this trend can also be seen in the vernacular material. The article will conclude with a brief foray into the early modern period, ultimately illustrating the continued relevance and significance of the identities fashioned in the early Middle Ages to writers in subsequent centuries. Before proceeding, it is prudent to offer comment on the use of the label ‘Celtic’, which is now used in scholarship to refer to the Celtic languages as a group and a variety of cultural practices which may or may not be associated with speakers of these languages.<sup>4</sup> In the Middle Ages, Celtic-speakers did not see themselves as Celts.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the presentation of the Irish is often negative in medieval Welsh texts, and there is no indication that the Welsh saw themselves as having a particularly close relationship with the Irish.<sup>6</sup> The idea of ‘Celtic cousins’ is thus a modern one, whereas a

<sup>2</sup> T. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> H. Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?: National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales’, *EHR* 116 (2001), 775–801; T. Charles-Edwards, ‘Language and Society among the Insular Celts, AD 400–1000’, M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), pp. 703–36.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the development of Celticity, see P. Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’, *CMCS* 36 (1998), 1–35.

<sup>5</sup> Welsh is a Brittonic Celtic language, being closely related to the other Brittonic languages (Breton and Cornish) and more distantly to the Goidelic Celtic languages (Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Manx). There is no evidence of knowledge of this connection between the Brittonic and Goidelic Celtic languages in the Middle Ages; see Sims-Williams, ‘Celtomania and Celtoscepticism’, pp. 12–14.

<sup>6</sup> R. Thomas, *History and Identity in Early Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 121–7.

'British' affinity with other Brittonic-language speakers is highly relevant.<sup>7</sup> It is this affinity that will be at the centre of much of what follows.

## I

The Romans referred to the island of Britain as *Britannia* – the land of the *Britanni*. This name is also given to the Roman province of Britain.<sup>8</sup> Ethnonyms used for the inhabitants fluctuate across late-antique texts. The earliest form is *Britanni*, later *Britanni*, *Brittani*, and *Brittones*.<sup>9</sup> As with *Britannia*, Thomas F. O'Rahilly observes that Roman writers came to use *Britanni* to refer to the inhabitants of the Roman province (rather than the island). Thus, Ammianus Marcellinus describes the *Britanni* as experiencing attacks by the Picts, Saxons and Scots in the fourth century.<sup>10</sup> *Brittones* is the most common form in Cambro-Latin texts, and forms with initial b- and a double -tt- gave Welsh *Brython*, which occurs often in poetry, especially in the Book of Taliesin.<sup>11</sup> In Welsh, *Ynys Prydein* is used to refer to the island of Britain. However, *Pryden* or *Prydyn* is used to refer to Pictland and the Picts, as in an elegy to Morien that forms part of the *Gododdin*, which celebrates the subject fighting against the heathen, Irish and Picts.<sup>12</sup> There is occasionally confusion between these forms and *Prydein*. Thus, we sometimes see *Prydein* for Pictland and *Pryden/Prydyn* for Britain.<sup>13</sup> One can look to the tenth-century Welsh poem *Armes Prydein Vawr* for an example of this confusion. Both *Prydein* and *Prydyn* are used here, but a reference to 'ryfel heb dychwel y tir Prydyn' ('war will not return to the land of Britain') is certainly a reference to the land of Britain, rather than Pictland.<sup>14</sup>

How the identity of this *gens* referred to as *Brittones* developed is a contentious issue.<sup>15</sup> Evidence ranging from Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* to the language and

<sup>7</sup> See below, pp. 5–7.

<sup>8</sup> A. Woolf, 'British Ethnogenesis: a Late Antique Story', F. Kaminski-Jones and R. Kaminski-Jones (eds), *Celts, Romans, Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities* (Oxford, 2020), pp. 19–30, at 20.

<sup>9</sup> T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), pp. 444–52; A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1981), pp. 280–2.

<sup>10</sup> O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, p. 445.

<sup>11</sup> *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. *Brython* (published 2019): <https://www.geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>; J. Lloyd Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg*, pt 1 (Cardiff, 1931), s.v. *Brython*.

<sup>12</sup> 'ar gynt a gwydyl a phryden' ('against the heathen and the Gaels and the Picts'): *Y Gododdin*, line 492 (ed. I. Williams, *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff, 1961), p. 20; trans. K. Jackson, *The Gododdin* (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 101).

<sup>13</sup> On this confusion, see D. Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 81–3.

<sup>14</sup> *Armes Prydein Vawr*, line 67 (ed. and trans. I. Williams and R. Bromwich, *Armes Prydein: the Prophecy of Britain from the Book of Taliesin* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 6–7).

<sup>15</sup> Recent discussions include Woolf, 'British Ethnogenesis'; P. Wadden, 'British Identity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Some Aspects of Continuity and Change', *EME* 30 (2022), 45–72; A. Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to Barbarians', H. W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl (eds), *Regna and Gentes: the Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 345–80; E. Hustwit, 'The Britons in Late Antiquity: Power, Identity and Ethnicity' (unpubl. PhD thesis, Bangor Univ., 2014).

formulae used on inscribed stones point to a complex negotiation of British and Roman identities.<sup>16</sup> To give one well-known example of the latter, a stone from Ffestiniog has the inscription: ‘Cantiorix hic iacit Venedotis cive fuit [c] onsobrino Ma[g]li magistrati’ (‘Cantiorix, here he lies, he was a citizen of Gwynedd, cousin of Maglus the magistrate’).<sup>17</sup> In a single inscription we see a mix of Brittonic personal names, Roman titles, a Christian formula (*hic iacit*) and a reference to the kingdom of Gwynedd; all pointing to a complex interplay of identities.<sup>18</sup> In *De excidio Britanniae* the Britons and Romans are distinct *gentes* – indeed, comparison with the Romans serves to underscore the treacherous and cowardly nature of the Britons – yet the Roman takeover of Britain is presented as total, and for Gildas *nostra lingua* was Latin.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, certain key elements of an identity that would be subsequently expressed in early medieval texts were established in *De excidio Britanniae*, namely the importance of Britain’s island identity and its history as a series of invasions.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship of the Britons with the island of Britain was a key component of their identity as presented in Cambro-Latin texts; the Britons were the original inhabitants of the entire island, the *gens* that had reached Britain first, their dominion over the island only gradually eroded through successive invasions by other *gentes*. This scheme for understanding the history of the island and its inhabitants is set out in *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin history of the Britons composed in Gwynedd in 829/30. Britain was first populated, *Historia Brittonum* explains, by Britto (a descendant of Aeneas of Troy) and his followers. After being exiled from Italy, Britto wandered far and wide before reaching and settling an empty island – called Britain after him. In so doing, the text is not simply drawing a distinction between the Britons and other *gentes* but also emphasising their superiority – it is they who arrived first; it is they who are intimately connected to the island by name.<sup>21</sup> *Historia Brittonum* proceeds to describe a series of successive invasions

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of ethnic identities in Gildas, see A. Plassmann, *Origo Gentis. Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen* (Berlin, 2006), pp. 40–51; A. Plassmann, ‘Gildas and the Negative Image of the Cymry’, *CMCS* 41 (2001), 1–15; N. Higham, ‘Remembering the Romans in Early-Ninth-Century North Wales’, *CMCS* 81 (2021), 43–58. On inscribed stones, see N. Edwards, ‘Early Medieval Wales: Material Evidence and Identity’, *Studia Celtica* 51 (2017), 65–87.

<sup>17</sup> For a transcription, translation and images of the stone see N. Edwards, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, III: North Wales* (Cardiff, 2013), 385–9.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, ‘Early Medieval Wales’, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, §23 (ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: the Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London, 1978), pp. 26 and 97). On the comparison between the Britons and Romans see Plassmann, ‘Gildas and the Negative Image’; Plassmann, *Origo gentis*, p. 50. On the totality of the Roman takeover of Britain see Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 116–17.

<sup>20</sup> P. Sims-Williams, ‘Some Functions of Origin Stories in Early Medieval Wales’, T. Nyberg, I. Piø, P. Meulengracht Sørensen and A. Trommer (eds), *History and Heroic Tale: a Symposium* (Odense, 1985), pp. 97–131, at 115.

<sup>21</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §10 (ed. E. Faral, *La Légende Arthurienne*, 3 vols (Paris, 1929) III, 7–9). For further discussion of this origin legend, see Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 92–103; L. Brady, *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2022).

(by the Picts, Irish, Romans and Saxons), thus explaining the contracted contemporary position of the Britons relative to that of their ancestors who once possessed the island from sea to sea (*a mari usque ad mare*).<sup>22</sup> This depiction of the island's history as a series of *gormesoedd* or invasions was commonplace in Welsh texts throughout the medieval period.<sup>23</sup> No matter how contracted their territory might become, these texts kept sight of what had once been – and, in some cases, what might be once more. The most famous example is *Armes Prydein Vawr*, which prophesies the eviction of the English from Britain by a grand coalition of peoples headed by the Britons.<sup>24</sup>

Where are the Welsh in all this? They are Britons, presented as a single *gens* sharing a history and language. *Brittones* could, however, refer to the other Brittonic-speaking inhabitants of Britain – and often did. Thus, the Harleian Chronicle (the A-text of the *Annales Cambriae*) records a battle between the Picts and *Brittones* in 750, referring here to the Britons of Strathclyde.<sup>25</sup> English nomenclature will be discussed further below but, broadly speaking, prior to the ninth century forms of *Brettas* and *Wealas* are used without distinction. Thus, the D-text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to the Cornish king Geraint as *Weala cyning* ('king of (the) Wealas') in its annal for 710.<sup>26</sup> A similar ambiguity can be found in vernacular Welsh nomenclature too. *Armes Prydein* provides an insightful case study here. The poem uses *Brython* on occasion, but more often refers to these Britons as *Kymry*, which etymologically means people from the same *bro* ('region').<sup>27</sup> *Armes Prydein* is the first fairly-securely dated text to use this form, although it occurs too in *Moliant Cadwallon*, a poem of uncertain date in praise of Cadwallon of Gwynedd (d. 634).<sup>28</sup> It is borrowed into English by the seventh century as *Cumbras* (cf. *Cumber-land*), and *Combrec* to mean the language of the

<sup>22</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §9 (ed. Faral, III, 7).

<sup>23</sup> On the concept of *gormes* and its prevalence in Welsh texts, see Sims-Williams, 'Some Functions of Origin Stories', pp. 105–19. Successive invasions occur frequently in prophetic poetry (albeit rarely described as *gormesoedd*). See, for example, the reference in 'Glaswawt Taliessin' (line 17) to 'llu o Seis, eil o Ynt, trydyd dygnawt'; 'a host of Saxons, the second of Foreigners, the third a cruel one' (ed. and trans. M. Haycock, *Prophecies from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth, 2013), p. 46). The best-known prose example is *Cyfranc Lludd and Llefelys*, which tells of three plagues upon the island of Britain: B. F. Roberts (ed.), *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys* (Dublin, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> On the poem's date, see the most recent discussion in Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 17–19. For the prophetic tradition more broadly, see Haycock, *Prophecies from the Book of Taliesin*.

<sup>25</sup> Harleian Chronicle, s.a. 750 (ed. E. Phillimore, 'The *Annales Cambriae* and the Old Welsh Genealogies from Harleian MS. 3859', *Y Cymmrodor* 9 (1888), 141–83, at 161). For discussion of the context to the battle of 750, see Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 434–6; J. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp. 312–4.

<sup>26</sup> ASC D, s.a. 710 (ed. G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS D, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 6* (Cambridge, 1996)).

<sup>27</sup> J. T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: a Historical Encyclopaedia*, 5 vols (Oxford, 2005) II, 532; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, s.v. *Cymro* (published 1958): <https://www.geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Text in R. Geraint Gruffydd, 'Canu Cadwallon ap Cadfan', R. Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones (eds), *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd: Studies in Old Welsh Poetry. Cyflwynedig i Syr Idris Foster* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 25–43, at 29–30. For discussion of the poem's date, see A. Woolf, 'Caedualla Rex Brettonum and the Passing of the Old North', *NH* 41 (2004), 5–24, at 15–17; J. T. Koch, Cunedda, Cynan, Cadwallon, Cynddylan: Four Welsh Poems and Britain 383–655 (Aberystwyth, 2013), pp. 186–7; Thomas, *History and Identity*, p. 37, n. 128.

Britons (which occurs in Cormac's Glossary) was borrowed into Old Irish by this point too.<sup>29</sup> It is consequently likely that *Kymry* was in use as an ethnonym among the Welsh themselves in this period. The reasons for its development as an ethnonym are unclear, although Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested that it may be linked to a distinction that Brittonic-speakers drew between their own 'local' language and the Latin language of the empire and its trappings.<sup>30</sup> By the twelfth century, *Kymry* was being used to refer exclusively to the inhabitants of Wales, but its meaning in texts prior to this date is ambiguous and must be inferred from context.<sup>31</sup>

In the context of *Armes Prydein*, *Kymry* is understood as a synonym for *Brython* (which is also used in the poem). However, it is also very clear that *Kymry* is elastic – the poet refers to the *Cornyw* (Cornish) and *Cludwys* (Cumbrians) as being included among the *Kymry*; they are a distinct components of a single *gens*.<sup>32</sup> As observed by Charles-Edwards, there is a 'double sense' here – *Kymry* can mean both Welsh and Britons.<sup>33</sup> This elasticity and ambiguity is also evident in the use of *Britannia*. In his *Life of King Alfred*, Asser very clearly uses *Britannia* to refer to both Britain and Wales.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the latter, he states that Offa of Mercia built a dyke 'inter Britanniam atque Merciam de mari usque ad mare'.<sup>35</sup> *Britannia* in the broader sense did not necessarily cover the entire island either. Returning to *Historia Brittonum*, there is some evidence to suggest that *Britannia*, the kingdom of Gwrtheyrn, king of the Britons, did not include the third of the island that had been ceded to the Picts.<sup>36</sup> *Armes Prydein Vawr* may be expressing a similar view when the poet states that the prophesied land of the Britons will stretch 'o Vynaw hyt Lydaw' ('from Manaw to Brittany') – in other words, the land that will be possessed by the Britons will not include Alba.<sup>37</sup> It may be that

<sup>29</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', p. 710 and n. 34. For the borrowing into English, see F. Edmonds, 'The Emergence and Transformation of Medieval Cumbria', *Scottish Hist. Rev.* 93 (2014), 195–216, at 202.

<sup>30</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', pp. 711–14. Cf. Patrick Wadden's intriguing recent suggestion that the development could be connected to the range of meanings attested for Latin *cives*, which is used by Gildas to refer to the inhabitants of particular cities but also to the Britons as a whole. Wadden suggests that *Cymry* might have developed alongside *cives* as a vernacular equivalent: 'British Identity in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', pp. 67–72.

<sup>31</sup> On this shift, see below pp. 8–9.

<sup>32</sup> *Armes Prydein Vawr*, lines 9–11 (ed. and trans. Williams and Bromwich, pp. 2–3).

<sup>33</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', p. 712; Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 37–42.

<sup>34</sup> A. W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff, 1944), p. vii; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p. 1; Pryce, 'British or Welsh', p. 777.

<sup>35</sup> Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, §14 (ed. W. H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred; together with the Annals of St Neots Erroneously Ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1959), p. 12; trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great, Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London, 1983), p. 71): 'between Wales and Mercia from sea to sea'. For further discussion of Asser's use of *Britannia* to mean Wales and the significance of the description of the dyke as running from sea to sea, see Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 32–6 and 176–7.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 26–8.

<sup>37</sup> *Armes Prydein*, line 172 (ed. and trans. Williams and Bromwich, pp. 12–13). This may be the implication too of line 174: 'o Wawl hyt Weryt hyt eu hebyr' ('from the Wall to the Forth, along their estuaries'). For discussion see Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 28–30.

such conceptions of *Britannia* minus Alba were influenced by ideas of the extent of Roman Britain.<sup>38</sup>

They have been mentioned in passing already, but something more must be said here about the Cumbrians. By the tenth century, sources such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were increasingly referring to Cumbria and the Cumbrians, superseding references to the kings and kingdom of Strathclyde (*Stræclédwealas*).<sup>39</sup> Fiona Edmonds has argued that this shift in nomenclature reflected usage among the Cumbrians themselves and was linked to the movement of the kingdom's political centre away from the Clyde valley.<sup>40</sup> The shift was not respected by the Welsh of Wales, however – they continued to use Clyde-based terminology to refer to the Cumbrians, evident in *Armes Prydein's Cludwys* quoted above. Edmonds suggests that this might stem from a reluctance to apply an ethnonym deriving from the broader and more elastic *Kymry* to refer exclusively to the Cumbrians, with the possibility of significant resultant confusion.<sup>41</sup>

This whistlestop tour of early medieval ethnonyms applied to the Welsh and the toponyms applied to the territory that they inhabited has revealed significant shades of grey. *Brit(t)ones* and *Kymry* were flexible names, encompassing all Brittonic speakers of the island in some contexts, referring specifically to a narrower group in others. This speaks to a key component to the identity that these ethnonyms expressed that has not yet been discussed: language. Scholarship on identity construction in early medieval Wales is consistent in emphasising its importance.<sup>42</sup> It is clear from the sources that language was perceived to be a significant characteristic that bound the Britons or *Kymry* together and distinguished them from their neighbours. Thus, *Historia Brittonum* refers to the presence of a translator at an assembly of Hengyst's Saxons and Gwrtheyrn's Britons; and when Hengyst gives the order to attack, he does so in English.<sup>43</sup> Also important, and pertinent in this context, is the centrality of the island to the identity of the Welsh during this period. Their territory was *Britannia*, and although Asser may have set along the path of redefining its parameters, this broader association would remain important for centuries to come.

<sup>38</sup> B. F. Roberts, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Welsh Historical Tradition', *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 20 (1976), 29–40, at 32; D. G. Jones, *Gwlad y Brutiau* (Swansea, 1991), pp. 24–5; Broun, *Scottish Independence*, p. 95, n. 74.

<sup>39</sup> On *Stræclédwealas*, see below p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Edmonds, 'Emergence and Transformation', pp. 203–7. Cf. A. Woolf, 'Reporting Scotland in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', A. Jorgensen (ed.), *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Language, Literature, History*, Stud. in the Early Middle Ages 3 (Turnhout, 2010), 221–39, at 230–32.

<sup>41</sup> Edmonds, 'Emergence and Transformation', p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Making of Nations in Britain and Ireland in the Early Middle Ages', R. Evans (ed.), *Lordship and Learning: Studies in Memory of Trevor Aston* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 11–37, at 24–9; C. McKenna, 'Inventing Wales', W. Pohl, C. Gantner and R. Payne (eds), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: the West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100* (Farnham, 2012) pp. 137–52, at 148; Thomas, *History and Identity*, ch. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Historia Brittonum* §46 (ed. Faral, III, 34). For discussion, see Thomas, *History and Identity*, pp. 85–6. For discussion of multilingualism in medieval Britain more broadly, see L. Brady, *Multilingualism in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2023).

## II

Identity is not simply a matter of self-perception – how one is perceived by others is also crucially important. How English texts referred to the Welsh has been touched upon already, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* again offers a valuable case study. Although *Brettas* (singular *Bret*), a form likely borrowed from Latin, does occur, this is alongside the use of a form of *wealas* (singular *wealh*).<sup>44</sup> There is evidence that Germanic peoples used this word to refer to speakers of non-Germanic, specifically Romance, languages. In the context of the Britons, then, it may be that the English settlers perceived them to be Roman, or that *wealh* and *wealas* held the broader meaning of ‘foreigner’ – or someone who does not speak the same language.<sup>45</sup> It also later bears the meaning ‘slave’, but the connection between this sense and the ethnonym is unclear.<sup>46</sup> In the early entries of the Common Stock of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, forms of *Brettas* and *Wealas* are used to refer to the Britons in a fairly even distribution.<sup>47</sup> There is a shift in the ninth-century entries with a tendency towards greater specificity in references to the Britons. Thus, on occasion we find references to the *Westwealas* and the *Norðwealas*, likely distinguishing between the Britons of Cornwall and the Britons of Wales.<sup>48</sup> However, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is inconsistent on this point, with one reference to Hywel king of *Westwealas* likely referring to Hywel king of Dyfed.<sup>49</sup>

This usage was, however, ultimately influential. Huw Pryce has identified a shift in the twelfth century, when Cambro-Latin writers were increasingly referring to Wales and the Welsh as *Wallia* and *Walenses* – names deriving from forms of English *wealh*.<sup>50</sup> This constituted a move away from the use of the *Britannia* and *Britones* which we have seen to be so characteristic of early medieval texts and central to constructions of Welsh identity in this period. This shift is paralleled in vernacular nomenclature, as it seems that by the late eleventh

<sup>44</sup> For discussion of the origins of *Brettas/Bryttas*; singular *Bret/Bryt*, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Brett, noun<sup>1</sup> & adjective’ (discussion under ‘etymology’): [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/brett\\_n1?tab=etymology#13454631](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/brett_n1?tab=etymology#13454631); I. Milfull and K. Thier, ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, M. Clayton, A. Jorgensen and J. Mullins (eds), *England, Ireland, and the Insular World: Textual and Material Connections in the Early Middle Ages* (Tempe, 2017), pp. 199–223, at 211, who observe that ‘there is a strong bias towards historical contexts in the evidence for this word’. Cf. E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1946), s.v. ‘Britain, Great B-’ (p. 63).

<sup>45</sup> Milfull and Thier, ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, pp. 204–5.

<sup>46</sup> Milfull and Thier, ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, pp. 209–10; D. A. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England from the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 319–22; M. L. Faull, ‘The Semantic Development of Old English Wealh’, *Leeds Stud. in Eng.* 8 (1975), 20–44.

<sup>47</sup> For forms of *brettas*, see ASC A 449; 457; 491; 514; 519; 552; 556; 571; 577; 584 (ed. J. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS A*, *AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 3* (Cambridge, 1986)). For forms of *wealas*, see ASC A 465; 473; 477; 485; 495; 597; 614; 658; 710; 743; 753; 823; 937. A form of the compound *Brytwealas* also occurs on a couple of occasions: ASC A 682; 755. On this compound, see Milfull and Thier, ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, pp. 211–13.

<sup>48</sup> ASC A 828; 853; ASC A 813; 835. See also *Stræcled Wealas*: ASC A 875.

<sup>49</sup> ASC D 926 (ed. Cubbin); C. Insley, ‘Kings and Lords in Tenth-Century Cornwall’, *History* 98 (2013), 2–22, at 12. On these and other compounds more broadly, see Milfull and Thier, ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, pp. 206–8.

<sup>50</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’.



century *Cymry* was being used exclusively of the Welsh and Wales, in contrast to its earlier elasticity.<sup>51</sup> Thus, an anonymous poem in praise of Hywel ap Goronwy (d. 1106), *Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy*, imagines a circuit around *Kimry* which, from the places listed, is clearly understood as Wales.<sup>52</sup> Pryce also located this development in Latin and vernacular annalistic writing. A survey of the entries of *Brut y Tywysogyon* – three vernacular Welsh chronicles that are all translations of a Latin chronicle – found a shift from *Brytaniaid* to *Kymry* after 1135.<sup>53</sup> Subsequent references to *Brytaniaid* are rare, the last occurring in the obituary of the Lord Rhys in 1197.<sup>54</sup> The Red Book of Hergest version notes that ‘dolur a thrueni a doeth y holl genedyl y Brytanyeit’ (‘grief and misery come to the whole nation of the Britons’) and describes Rhys as ‘y gwr a oed ben a thar[y]an a chedernit y Deheu a holl Gymry a gobeith ac amdiffin holl genedlaeth y Brytanyeit’ (‘the man who was the head and the shield and the strength of the South and of all Wales and the hope and defence of all the nation of the Britons’).<sup>55</sup> The death of such a notable figure may have called for allusions to Britain and the Britons, but it is telling that no subsequent obituary uses the same nomenclature. Similarly, Pryce observes a drop-off in the use of *Britones* and *Britanni* in the Latin Breviate and Cottonian Chronicles (the B- and C-text of the *Annales Cambriae*) after 1136.<sup>56</sup> The significance of this trend in annalistic writing must, as Pryce emphasised, be caveated by the fact that there are extensive sections that simply do not make reference to Wales or the Welsh.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, these chronicles are characterised by a movement away from British terminology in the mid-twelfth century.

However, this shift was not comprehensive and nor did it not equate to the abandoning of a British identity.<sup>58</sup> A brief foray into the poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries shows a continued emphasis on the identity of the Welsh as inhabitants of the entire island of Britain in this material. The following analysis rests on Ann Parry Owen’s ‘Concordance of the Poets of the Princes Poetry’ – an invaluable resource for revealing patterns in nomenclature in this material.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, pp. 778–80 and 796.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Mawl Hywel ap Goronwy’, line 3 (ed. J. E. Caerwyn Williams with P. I. Lynch, *Gwaith Meilyr Brydydd a’i Ddisgynyddion*, Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion 1 (Cardiff, 1994), 6–7).

<sup>53</sup> The three closely-related chronicles are the Red Book of Hergest version, the Peniarth 20 version, and *Brenhinedd y Saesson*. They are independent translations of a lost Latin chronicle – and perhaps translations of different versions of that chronicles. For further discussion, see B. Guy, ‘Historical Scholars and Dishonest Charlatans: Studying the Chronicles of Medieval Wales’, B. Guy, G. Henley, N. W. Jones [published as O. W. Jones] and R. Thomas (eds), *The Chronicles of Medieval Wales and the March*, Med. Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 31 (Turnhout, 2020), 69–106; N. W. Jones [published as O. W. Jones], ‘Brut y Tywysogion: the History of the Princes and Twelfth-Century Cambro-Latin Historical Writing’, *Haskins Soc. Jnl* 26 (2014), 209–27, at 210–11.

<sup>54</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, pp. 782–3.

<sup>55</sup> *Brut y Tywysogion* (Red Book of Hergest), s.a. 1197 (ed. and trans. T. Jones, *Brut y Tywysogion or The Chronicle of the Princes: Red Book of Hergest Version* (Cardiff, 1955), pp. 178–9).

<sup>56</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, p. 783.

<sup>57</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, p. 782.

<sup>58</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, pp. 786–90.

<sup>59</sup> A. Parry Owen, ‘Concordans Barddoniaeth Beirdd y Tywysogion/Concordance of the Poets of the Princes Poetry’, available online at: <https://wales.academia.edu/AnnParryOwen>. This concordance is based on the modern orthography texts in *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*.

Interestingly, no form of *Brytaniaid* is attested, and *Brython* occurs relatively infrequently – nine times in total.<sup>60</sup> This can be juxtaposed with *Kymry*, forms of which occur on twenty-six occasions.<sup>61</sup> Significantly, however, there are over a hundred examples of forms of *Prydain*, compared to thirty-seven examples of *Kymry* referring to Wales.<sup>62</sup> Although geographical indicators predominate, there is a great degree of fluidity between these and ethnonyms. In other words, there are frequent references to the inhabitants of *Prydain* or *Kymry*, and when a ruler is described as protecting *Prydain* or *Kymry* this presumably covers both land and people.

References to *Prydain* are scattered across the corpus and occur in varying contexts, but the island's name is often used in praise of particular Welsh rulers. There are numerous examples of such usage in the poetry of Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (fl. c. 1155–c. 1195) and Llywarch ap Llywelyn, called Prydydd y Moch (fl. c. 1180–c. 1220). In poems by Cynddelw, Owain Gwynedd is *vugeil Prydain* ('Britain's shepherd'), *pria6denn Prydein* ('the legitimate ruler of Britain'), and even *Owain Prydain*.<sup>63</sup> Llywelyn ab Iorwerth is similarly described by Prydydd y Moch as *dreic Prydein* ('the dragon of Britain') and *lly6 Prydein* ('leader of Britain').<sup>64</sup> The poets thus emphasise the status of their subjects as rulers of the island of Britain, a status which stems from the identity of the Welsh as Britons, the original inhabitants of the entire island. The use of *Prydain* is not the only means by which the poets express this identity. Significant use is made of the historical and mythical past of the Britons, with references to figures such as Arthur and Urien Rheged. In so doing, the poets present their subjects as both successors and equivalent to the heroes of the past.<sup>65</sup> Thus, in Cynddelw's 'Arwyrain Owain Gwynedd', a battle fought by Owain at Cardigan is compared to the battle of Mount Badon (lines 39–40), and the way the Welsh ruler is presented echoes the

<sup>60</sup> Parry Owen, 'Concordans', s.v. *Brython* (6); *Frython* (3).

<sup>61</sup> Parry Owen, 'Concordans', s.v. *Cymry* (21); *Cymro* (6). For *Cymru*, see next note.

<sup>62</sup> Parry Owen, 'Concordans', s.v. *Prydain* (95); *Brydain* (13); *Cymru* (37). It is important to emphasise that *Kymry* is used of the land and people without orthographical distinction in this period. The examples listed under *Cymru* in the Concordance have been rendered as such in modern Welsh orthography by the editors of *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*, based on their interpretations of the poems.

<sup>63</sup> In the order listed: 'Arwyrain Owain Gwynedd', line 67 (ed. N. A. Jones and A. Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion* 4 (Cardiff, 1995), 7, poem 1) 'Marwnad Owain Gwynedd', line 96 (ed. Jones and Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, 50, poem 4); 'Marwnad Cadwallon ap Madog ab Idnerth', line 67 (ed. N. A. Jones and A. Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Bardd I*, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion* 3 (Cardiff, 1991), 255, poem 21. For discussion of *Owain Prydain*, a title also given to the king by Prydydd y Moch, see p. 273, n. 67).

<sup>64</sup> In the order listed: 'Mawl Llywelyn ab Iorwerth', line 4 (ed. E. M. Jones with N. A. Jones, *Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn 'Prydydd y Moch'*, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion* 5 (Cardiff, 1991), 172, poem 18); 'Mawl Llywelyn ab Iorwerth o Wynedd', lines 9 and 141 (ed. Jones with Jones, *Gwaith Llywarch ap Llywelyn*, pp. 213–17, poem 23).

<sup>65</sup> On the use of the 'Old North' in particular in this way, see M. Haycock, 'Early Welsh Poets Look North', A. Woolf (ed.), *Beyond the Gododdin: Dark Age Scotland in Medieval Wales* (St Andrews, 2013), pp. 9–39; N. A. Jones, 'Hengerdd in the Age of the Poets of the Princes', Woolf (ed.), *Beyond the Gododdin*, pp. 41–80.

presentation of Owain ab Urien in the Taliesin poems.<sup>66</sup> We see examples of the association with the island of Britain and its past across the corpus, in poems to Owain Gwynedd and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, but also to lesser-known Welsh rulers. Thus, in an elegy to Cadwallon ap Madog ab Idnerth, the lord of Maelienydd, Cynddelw questions who now will be *Prydein ogaŵn* ('the glory of Britain').<sup>67</sup> Crucially, however, the focus on these poems is not on Britain at the expense of all else. Cynddelw's 'Awdl Ddadolwch yr Arglwydd Rhys' serves as a good illustration of this point. Here, Rhys is described as *vugeil Kymry* (line 84) and *priodaŵr Prydain* (line 190), as well as being commended for protecting Deheubarth (line 37).<sup>68</sup> Different names might be used, and different associations and identities emphasised within a single poem.

We see some evidence of this too in vernacular prose texts. The Second Branch of the Mabinogi is the most striking example. Here, Bendigeidfran is described as 'urenhin coronawc ar yr ynys hon, ac ardyrchawc o goron Lundein' ('crowned king over this island and invested with the crown of London').<sup>69</sup> The island in question is Britain, but here called *Ynys y Kedyrn* ('the Island of the Mighty'). Generally, the tale keeps this geographical focus and nomenclature, as in the recounting of Branwen's death, who looks to Ireland and to *Ynys y Kedyrn* and laments the destruction of 'two good islands' (*da a dwy ynys*).<sup>70</sup> However, there is a cluster of references to *Kymry* that break with this pattern. These all occur when recounting Branwen's time in Ireland. Firstly we are told that, in the second year, 'llyma ymodwrdd yn Iwerdon am y guaradwyd a gawssei Matholwch yg Kymry' ('there was a murmuring of dissatisfaction in Ireland because of the insult that Matholwch had received in Wales').<sup>71</sup> Matholwch's men then advise him to prohibit all boats 'ual nat el neb y Gymry' ('so that no one may go to Wales'), and to imprison anyone who comes from Wales ('ac a del yma o Gymry, carchara wynt').<sup>72</sup> Finally, Branwen uses a starling to send a message to Bendigeidfran: 'a'r llythyr a rwymwynt am uon eskyll yr ederyn, a'y anuon parth a Chymry, a'r ederyn a doeth y'r ynys honn' ('the letter was tied to the base of the bird's wings, and it was sent to Wales, and the bird came to this island').<sup>73</sup>

It is intriguing that we find a cluster of references to *Kymry* in a tale that is otherwise framed entirely as a story of two islands: Ireland and *Ynys y Cedyrn*. This

<sup>66</sup> Jones and Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, 4; D. Myrddin Lloyd, 'Barddoniaeth Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II: Canu i Owain Gwynedd', *Y Llenor* 13 (1934), 49–59. Recent work by Nia Wyn Jones has illustrated how the Welsh triads may have been used in these contexts: 'Trioedd Ynys Prydein fel Testunau Hanes', R. Thomas, S. Jarrett and K. Olson (eds), *Memory and Nation: Writing the History of Wales* (Cardiff, forthcoming 2025).

<sup>67</sup> 'Marwnad Cadwallon ap Madog ab Idnerth', line 28 (ed. Jones and Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr I*, 254, poem 21).

<sup>68</sup> 'Awdl Ddadolwch yr Arglwydd Rhys' (ed. Jones and Parry Owen, *Gwaith Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr II*, 178–84, poem 9).

<sup>69</sup> D. S. Thomson (ed.), *Branwen uerch Lyr* (Dublin, 2003), p. 1; S. Davies (trans.), *The Mabinogion* (Oxford, 2007), p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Thomson (ed.), *Branwen*, p. 15; Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Thomson (ed.), *Branwen*, p. 8; Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Thomson (ed.), *Branwen*, p. 8; Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. 28.

<sup>73</sup> Thomson (ed.), *Branwen*, p. 9; Davies (trans.), *Mabinogion*, p. 28.

might simply be a slip, perhaps showing how interchangeable Britain and Wales could be in a mythological context. We see an example of this interchangeability in certain versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Middle Welsh translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum*, which start appearing in manuscripts from the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>74</sup> The Britons (*Britones*) are Geoffrey's subject for most of *De gestis Britonum*, until they lose the island and their name.<sup>75</sup> The versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd* are fairly consistent in using some form of *Brytaniaid* until that change in name. However, there is one example where this is not the case. Geoffrey tells us that Cadwallon was wearing the crown of Britain in London, attended by all the English kings (*Anglorum reges*) and leaders of the British (*Britonum duces*).<sup>76</sup> In certain versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, this is translated as *tywysogyon Kymry*.<sup>77</sup> Being the only example of using *Kymry* for Geoffrey's *Britones* in these versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, this is unlikely to have been intentional. Rather, it illustrates the interchangeability of the ethnonyms when writing about the pseudo-historical past.<sup>78</sup> We might interpret the references to *Kymry* in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi* in a similar vein. However, in the case of this text the pattern in the use of ethnonyms merits pause for thought. It is surely significant that each time *Kymry* is referred to, it is from the perspective of Ireland. Moreover, two of the references occur in the context of travel between the two islands. We might be seeing a contrast here, then, between how *Ynys y Cedyrn* is perceived by its inhabitants and how it is perceived by those looking over from Ireland. This contrast is at its clearest in the case of the starling, which is sent to *Kymry* but arrives *y'r ynys honn*. It may be additionally significant that the only other reference to *Kymry* in the eleven prose tales commonly referred to as the *Mabinogion* occurs in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, again in the context of travel from Ireland as the *Twrch Trwyth* goes 'ar y mor parth a Chymry' ('over the sea towards Wales').<sup>79</sup>

Broadly, vernacular poetry and prose show that the island was still very much to play for, even as we see a clear shift in nomenclature in annalistic writing.

<sup>74</sup> For discussion of these, see P. Sims Williams, *Rhai Addasiadau Cymraeg Canol o Sieffre o Fynwy* (Aberystwyth, 2011); N. W. Jones [published as O. W. Jones], 'The Most Excellent Princes: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Medieval Welsh Historical Writing', G. Henley and J. Byron Smith (eds), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Leiden, 2020), pp. 257–90, at 274–5.

<sup>75</sup> See further below, p. 13. All references to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Britonum* are to M. D. Reeve and N. Wright (ed. and trans.), *Geoffrey of Monmouth: the History of the Kings of Britain* (Woodbridge, 2007) [hereafter *DGB*]. The geographical unit of Wales, *Cambria*, does exist from the time when Britain is divided between Brutus's sons, Locrinus, Camber and Albanactus, and there are references to travel to and from *Cambria* throughout. See, for example, Vortigern's flight to *Cambria* (*DGB*, vi.106) and Uther marching into *Cambria* (*DGB*, viii.132).

<sup>76</sup> *DGB*, xi.200 (ed. and trans. Reeve and Wright, pp. 274–5).

<sup>77</sup> H. Lewis (ed.), *Brut Dingestow* (Cardiff, 1942), p. 202; J. Jay Parry (ed. and trans.), *Brut y Brenhinedd: Cotton Cleopatra Version* (Cambridge, MA, 1937), p. 212; Peniarth 46, p. 350 (D. Luft, P. W. Thomas and D. M. Smith (eds), *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300–1425* (Cardiff, 2007–13): <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloe.sol.caerdydd.ac.uk/>.

<sup>78</sup> It may be that the reference to English *reges* also influenced the translator, through bringing to mind a more contemporary political situation.

<sup>79</sup> *Culhwch ac Olwen*, line 1095 (ed. R. Bromwich and D. S. Evans (Cardiff, 1997), p. 38; trans. Davies, *Mabinogion*, p. 210).

Returning to our Cambro-Latin texts, it is intriguing that key writers of the twelfth century viewed this change in nomenclature negatively. Geoffrey of Monmouth linked the change in the name of the *gens* to the loss of their dominion over the island of Britain. Thus, from the late-seventh century, the Britons came to be called Welsh, either after their leader Gualo or queen Galaes; or from their barbarousness.<sup>80</sup> Whilst Gerald of Wales was closer to the mark in linking the name Welsh to the English word for ‘foreigner’, he likewise referred to the development negatively as a *barbara nuncupatio* (‘barbarous naming’).<sup>81</sup> The claim to the barbarous nature of these names likely rests on the understanding that they were names brought to Britain by the pagan Saxons.<sup>82</sup> Importantly, in both cases there is a sense that the Welsh had lost something through the shift in the name by which they were called. However, Huw Pryce argues that *wealas* had likely lost any negative connotations by the twelfth century and that the gradual nature of the shift suggests that, rather than being ideologically driven, the change was an experiment in pragmatism.<sup>83</sup> For an explanation, Pryce looks first to developments in the nomenclature employed in England after the Norman Conquest, where terms deriving from *wealas* came to be used far more consistently of the Welsh than before. This was likely because *Britannia* and *Britones* had other meanings – as well as the former referring to the island of Britain, it was these names that the Normans used for Brittany and the Bretons.<sup>84</sup>

Further, rather than being a change imposed upon the Welsh, it is likely that Welsh rulers especially saw the advantages of adopting this nomenclature in their communication with the wider world. Pryce points to Owain Gwynedd (d. 1170), for example, styling himself as ruler of *Wallia* in communication with the archbishop of Canterbury and the king of France.<sup>85</sup> Alongside practicality and pragmatism, Pryce makes an additional observation that has not received enough attention. He suggests that:

it is even possible that Owain (and perhaps his father, Gruffudd ap Cynan, before him) sought to appropriate and promote *Wallia* as an ideological statement of the hegemony claimed by Gwynedd over Wales, just as their thirteenth-century successors did.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>80</sup> DGB, xi.207 (ed. and trans. Reeve and Wright, pp. 281–2).

<sup>81</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Cambriae* i.7 (ed. J. F. Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI* (London, 1868), 179; trans. L. Thorpe, *Gerald of Wales. The Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales* (London, 1978), p. 232). For discussion of this connection with foreignness, see above p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> It is intriguing in this context that in vernacular Welsh texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, barbarity is often associated with speaking a different language. Thus, we often find *barbari* translated as *anghyfiaith* (‘not of the same language’). For further discussion, see R. Thomas, ‘Ystyr *Anghyfiaith* mewn Testunau Cymraeg Canol’, *Studia Celtica* 55 (2021), 75–96.

<sup>83</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, p. 794. Also of relevance here are comments on the negativity of *wealas* by Milfull and Thier, who observe ‘it may be that pejorative use is related to low social status (compare the sense “slave”), rather than foreign ethnicity’: ‘Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Celtic Peoples’, p. 210.

<sup>84</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, pp. 790–3.

<sup>85</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, p. 795.

<sup>86</sup> Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’, p. 797. J. Beverley Smith also drew comparison between the political strategies of Gruffudd ap Cynan and his thirteenth-century successors, arguing that the client kingship established by the former was what Llywelyn ap Gruffudd sought on a larger scale: ‘The

Turning to the sources, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this is not only possible but highly likely. Thus, we see Gruffudd ap Cynan addressing Ralph, archbishop of Canterbury, together with ‘universus clerus totius Gualis et populus’ (‘all the clergy and people of Wales’), requesting the consecration of a bishop-elect.<sup>87</sup> Owain would go further in a letter to Bernard, bishop of St Davids, styling himself *rex Wallie*.<sup>88</sup> In a separate publication, Pryce refers to the elegy for Gruffudd ap Cynan by Meilyr Brydydd (‘Marwnad Gruffudd ap Cynan’) and the thirteenth-century Welsh biography of the king (*Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*) as further evidence of the promotion of this idea of Wales-wide hegemony.<sup>89</sup>

The latter source merits further attention in this context. The *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* is a thirteenth-century Welsh translation of the Latin biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan (d. 1137), the *Vita Griffini filii Conani*, which was composed during the reign of Owain Gwynedd (d. 1170).<sup>90</sup> Most of the text is dedicated to describing how Gruffudd, who had been born and brought up in Dublin, sought to seize Gwynedd and retain the kingdom in face of numerous threats. Gruffudd’s legitimacy is a key theme, with much time spent on elucidating his royal status and the support he received from other kings.<sup>91</sup> The exact date and circumstances of the Latin biography’s composition and the production of the Welsh translation remain unknown.<sup>92</sup>

When Pryce published his article on twelfth-century nomenclature in *English Historical Review*, it was only the Welsh translation of the biography (the *Historia*

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Biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan: Literary Form and Historical Interpretation’, *Welsh Hist. Rev.* 29 (2019), 337–76, at 372–3. On the use of title styles by the Welsh rulers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see H. Pryce with C. Insley, *Acts of the Welsh Rulers 1120–1283* (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 74–9; M. Ritcher, ‘The Political and Institutional Background to National Consciousness in Medieval Wales’, T. W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence* (Belfast, 1978), pp. 37–55, at 43–7.

<sup>87</sup> Pryce, *Acts of the Welsh Rulers*, p. 321 (no. 191).

<sup>88</sup> Pryce, *Acts of the Welsh Rulers*, p. 322 (no. 192). See also no. 193 (p. 324), where Owain styles himself *rex Wallie* in communication with Louis VII of France; no. 194 (pp. 324–5), Owain is styled *rex Wallie* in a letter to Hugh de Chamfleury, bishop of Soissons and chancellor of the king of France; no. 195 (pp. 326–7), where Owain is *Walliarum rex* in a letter to Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury; no. 196 (pp. 327–8), where Owain is *Waliarum princeps* in a letter to Louis VII of France. For discussion of Owain’s letters to Louis VII, see Huw Pryce, ‘Owain Gwynedd and Louis VII: the Franco-Welsh Diplomacy of the First Prince of Wales’, *Welsh Hist. Rev.* 19 (1998–9), 1–28, with discussion of the titles used by Owain at 20–24.

<sup>89</sup> Pryce, ‘Owain Gwynedd and Louis VII’, p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> The Latin biography is edited by P. Russell: *Vita Griffini Filii Conani: the Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Cardiff, 2005). For the Welsh text, see D. S. Evans (ed.), *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* (Cardiff, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> Recent discussions of these themes include: R. Thomas, ‘An Irish Sea King?: Ethnicity and Legitimacy in the *Vita Griffini Filii Conani* and *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*’, C. A. Raffensperger (ed.), *Authorship, Worldview, and Identity in Medieval Europe* (London, 2022), pp. 238–55; E. Winkler, ‘The Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan, British Kingdoms and the Scandinavian Past’, *Welsh Hist. Rev.* 28 (2017), 425–56.

<sup>92</sup> J. Beverley Smith recently suggested 1143 × 1157, a period of conflict between Owain and his brother Cadwaladr: ‘Biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan’, pp. 365–9. Cf. Russell, *Vita Griffini*, pp. 43–7. K. Maund has suggested a later, thirteenth-century, date, see ‘“Gruffudd, Grandson of Iago”: *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* and the Construction of Legitimacy’, K. L. Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan: a Collaborative Biography* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 109–16. Cf. S. Duffy, ‘Review: *Gruffudd ap Cynan: a Collaborative Biography*’, *CMCS* 38 (1999), 102–3.

*Grufud vab Kenan*) that was known to scholars. The original Latin text was subsequently uncovered by Paul Russell, whose edition of the biography was published in 2005. Close comparison of the texts continues to yield interesting results. Curiously, the Welsh translation appears to be more firmly focused on the kingdom and inhabitants of Gwynedd. Thus, the status of the church of Clynnog Fawr is elevated, the men of Gwynedd are listed as additional participants in the pivotal battle of Mynydd Carn in 1081, and potentially derogative phrases are removed.<sup>93</sup> Paul Russell has consequently suggested that the Latin *Vita* was not in fact composed in its subject's kingdom, citing St Davids as a possible alternative. Among the positive evidence for St Davids as the site of composition, Russell points to the *Vita*'s frequent references to forms of *Cambria* and *Cambri*. These were used alongside *Wallia* and *Walenses* in the twelfth century, but less frequently so and largely in texts associated with St Davids.<sup>94</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth's influence should not be underestimated, however. Although clearly a Latinization of *Cymry*, it is in *De gestis Britonum* that we see *Cambria* and *Cambri* first used of the Welsh. Geoffrey's influence on the *Vita Griffini* can be detected in the biography's themes and structure, and so it seems likely that his work also inspired the nomenclature used.<sup>95</sup>

The significance of this explanation for the *Vita Griffini*'s use of Cambrian terminology has not been fully unpacked or appreciated. The biography is, after all, an account of how its subject obtained his status as king of Gwynedd. This status is emphasised from the very beginning, with both Gruffudd and his father described as *rex Venedotiae*.<sup>96</sup> Those ruling the kingdom during Gruffudd's period of exile in Dublin are described as usurpers (*male possessores*) and a foreign people (*gens extranea*), whilst Gruffudd is hailed as king of Gwynedd and liberator of the kingdom after their defeat.<sup>97</sup> There is no doubt in the biographer's mind, then, as to Gruffudd's status (and that of his descendants) – a clarity of thought that the *Vita Griffini* seeks to share with its audience. In this context, the decision to utilise Geoffrey's Cambrian terminology is intriguing, and one which complicates our understanding of the biography somewhat.

The use of Cambrian terminology is best elucidated when placed alongside the *Vita Griffini*'s account of the battle of Mynydd Carn, a victory for Gruffudd and Rhys ap Tewdwr (d. 1093), king of Deheubarth, over Trahaearn ap Caradog and

<sup>93</sup> Russell, *Vita Griffini*, pp. 33–4 and 43–4; Thomas, 'An Irish Sea King?', pp. 244–8.

<sup>94</sup> Russell, *Vita Griffini*, p. 45. On the association of Cambrian terminology with St Davids, see Pryce, 'British or Welsh?', pp. 797–8.

<sup>95</sup> R. Thomas, 'The View from Wales: Anglo-Welsh Relations during the time of England's Conquests', L. Ashe and E. Ward (eds), *Conquests in Eleventh-Century England: 1016, 1066* (Woodbridge, 2020), pp. 287–306, at 299; Winkler, 'The Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan', p. 439. David Thornton has also pointed to Geoffrey's possible influence on Gruffudd ap Cynan's genealogy as presented in the text: 'The Genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', K. L. Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan: a Collaborative Biography* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 79–108, at 82–7.

<sup>96</sup> *Vita Griffini*, §§1–2 (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 52–3). Cf. HGK, 2.3 and 2.8: *vrenhin Gwyned*.

<sup>97</sup> *Vita Griffini*, §§9 and 12 (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 58–9 and 62–3). Cf. HGK 6.16 (*estravn genedloed*) and 9.3 (*oresgynnvr*). For discussion of the significance of these labels, see Thomas, 'An Irish Sea King', pp. 243–4.

his allies. The *Vita* describes Gruffudd landing in the port of Porth Clais to be met by Rhys ap Tewdwr, and the bishop and entire community of St Davids:

Ad cuius adventum Rysus ap Theodvr, rex australium Cambrorum, Menevensis episcopus, doctores, chorus universus Sancti Davidis, clericique omnes Menevenses, in portum sunt profecti Rysusque Griffinum sic est allocutus: ‘Salve, Cambrorum regum rex, ad te confugio; tibi genua flecto supplex auxilium suppetiasque petens.’ ... Auditis vero nominibus oppressorum, ira indignationeque aestuans Griffinus quaerit quondam illi laboris praemium constitueret, si hostes eius oppugnaret. ‘Dimidium’, inquit, ‘ditionis meae tibi dabo, homagiumque tibi praestabo’. Conditionem accepit Griffinus.

Upon his arrival Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of the southern Welsh, the bishop of St David’s, scholars and the whole choir of St David’s, and all the clerics of St David’s, set out to the port, and Rhys addressed Gruffudd as follows: ‘Hail, king of the kings of Wales, I take refuge with you; I bend my knee as a suppliant to you seeking your help and support.’ ... When he heard the names of the oppressors, seething with anger and rage Gruffudd asked what reward he would offer for his efforts, if he were to attack his enemies. ‘I shall give you,’ he said, ‘half of my kingdom, and I shall offer you homage’. Gruffudd accepted the arrangements.<sup>98</sup>

Rhys ap Tewdwr addresses him as *Cambrorum regum rex*, bends the knee and offers half his kingdom and homage if Gruffudd agrees to assist him against the enemy. This is a highly stylized retelling of events, and implausible too – Rhys ap Tewdwr was king of Deheubarth; Gruffudd ap Cynan a king without a kingdom.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, J. Beverley Smith has recently drawn attention to the literary strategies at work in this passage, together with its anachronisms.<sup>100</sup> This passage contributes to the argument for Gruffudd’s royal status that runs through the biography, but it also goes further. Here, Gruffudd is not simply king of Gwynedd but foremost among the kings of the Welsh. There are hints of this status elsewhere too, as in the biographer’s statement that *Cambri, Hyberni ac Dani* lamented Gruffudd’s death.<sup>101</sup> This is consistent with the emphasis that the biographer places on Gruffudd’s close relationship with other kings and the support that he receives from them – including kings of England, Ireland, and

<sup>98</sup> *Vita Griffini*, §17 (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 68–9). Cf. *HGK*, 14–16.

<sup>99</sup> Compare with the account of the vernacular Welsh chronicle *Brut y Tywysogyon*, which presents Rhys ap Tewdwr as the one responsible for killing Trahaearn and Caradog, with Gruffudd ap Cynan in a supporting role: *Brut y Tywysogyon* (Red Book of Hergest version), s.a. 1081 (ed. and trans. Jones, pp. 30–1).

<sup>100</sup> Smith, ‘Biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan’, pp. 354–5. See also N. A. Jones, ‘The Mynydd Carn “Prophecy”: a Reassessment’, *CMCS* 38 (1999), 73–92.

<sup>101</sup> *Vita Griffini*, §35 (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 88–9). See also Merlin’s prophecy concerning Gruffudd as communicated to *Cambri* in §3 (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 58–9). Gruffudd’s sphere of activity is presented as wider than Gwynedd through repeated references to *Cambria* and *Cambri*. See, for example §10, Gruffudd is described as coming to *Cambria* (ed. and trans. Russell, pp. 60–1).



Man and the Isles. He is presented as their equal, which goes hand-in-hand with his presentation as the king of all Welsh kings.<sup>102</sup> It should be emphasised that this does not eclipse the presentation of Gruffudd as king of Gwynedd, but it is an additional, significant layer.

In this context, it seems likely that the use of Cambrian terminology specifically was a deliberate choice. Through presenting Gruffudd as *Cambrorum regum rex* and referring to *Cambri* lamenting his death, the biographer evokes the inheritance of Geoffrey's Camber who, in *De gestis Britonum*, received Wales on the death of his father Brutus. The later use of this strategy by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's council in a letter to Archbishop Pecham is well known: Llywelyn is presented as the heir to Camber son of Brutus, and Wales his rightful inheritance.<sup>103</sup> To return to Pryce's point, this can easily be construed as an ideological statement of the supremacy of Gwynedd during the reign of Owain Gwynedd. This raises the question of the biography's audience, intersecting with Pryce's argument that Welsh rulers adopted 'Welsh' nomenclature partly due to interaction with the wider world. The intended audience of the *Vita Griffini* is a thorny issue. There are two key points here – it is a Latin text, and it is the only extant biography of a Welsh king. Through the text's form, Gruffudd ap Cynan is placed alongside the English kings whose deeds were catalogued by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*; through its language, these deeds are accessible to an audience beyond Wales.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, it is an interesting contrast that Meilyr Brydydd's elegy for Gruffudd ap Cynan, which, although containing a reference to Gruffudd leading the *Kymry*, also describes its subject more broadly as the true possessor of Britain.<sup>105</sup> This is entirely in keeping of course with the preoccupation of the poets with the island of Britain discussed above – a preoccupation that continued even after the shift in nomenclature seen in other sources.<sup>106</sup> However, it may speak to the *Vita Griffini*'s audience and purpose that attention is here more firmly focused on the king of Gwynedd as the primary king of the Welsh, a ruler of importance alongside the other kings of Britain and Ireland. There is a broader point to be made here too about patterns in nomenclature. Significantly, it is in vernacular poetry intended for consumption by a Welsh audience that we see the most grandiose claims for contemporary rulers to the island of Britain. In Latin texts – either certainly intended for broader consumption in the case of letters, or perhaps so in the case of the *Vita Griffini* – the focus is narrower. This likely speaks to both political considerations and the expectations of the audience.

By the twelfth century, then, whatever the political realities, we find prominently the idea of Wales as a territory broadly corresponding to the modern

<sup>102</sup> Thomas, 'An Irish Sea King?', pp. 240–44.

<sup>103</sup> Pryce, *Acts of the Welsh Rulers*, pp. 626–8 (no. 431). For discussion, see J. Beverley Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd: Prince of Wales*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 2014), pp. 335–6 and 543–4. It should be stressed, however, that this is the only example of such an invocation in the corpus.

<sup>104</sup> J. Beverley Smith compares the *Vita Griffini* with these texts, see 'Biography of Gruffudd ap Cynan', pp. 343–6.

<sup>105</sup> 'Marwnad Gruffudd ap Cynan', reference to *Cymry* in line 68, *Britain* in line 23 (ed. Williams with Lynch, *Gwaith Meilyr Brydydd a'i Ddisgynyddion*, pp. 71–5).

<sup>106</sup> See above, pp. 9–11.

territory, and of the Welsh as its inhabitants.<sup>107</sup> While Gerald of Wales may have disparaged the terminological change, Wales as a unit within Britain is of course a concept he espouses and contributes towards creating, most obviously in his *Itinerarium Cambriae* (c. 1191) and *Descriptio Cambriae* (c. 1194).<sup>108</sup> In the latter, Gerald follows Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of the division of Britain between Brutus's sons (i.8) and, whilst noting that the Welsh maintain that they will one day reoccupy the entire island, observes that this is completely wrong (ii.7). Yet a more central part in the invention of Wales was played by the law, described by Michael Richter as 'an integrating element in Welsh native society'.<sup>109</sup> The medieval Welsh laws, attributed to tenth-century king Hywel Dda but extant only from the thirteenth century onwards, are explicitly presented as a product of Wales. In their preface, Hywel Dda is king of *Kymry oll* 'all Wales', and he draws upon clergy and learned men from every part of his kingdom to emend the laws of Wales.<sup>110</sup> This feeds into a final point for consideration, namely what did such writers understand Wales to be? The poem in praise of Hywel ap Goronwy discussed above illustrates its breadth through its imagined circuit around Wales, but the most potent symbol in the sources is Offa's Dyke.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in a development of Asser's initial reference to the Dyke demarcating Wales (*Britannia*) from Mercia, Gerald of Wales notes that Offa separated the Britons from the English by a long dyke ('et fossa finali, in longum extensa, Britones ab Anglis exclusit').<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the *Llyfr Iorwerth* redaction of the Welsh laws presents Offa's Dyke as a border beyond which foreigners dwelt.<sup>113</sup> By this point, then, Wales and the Welsh had found definition.

### III

Despite this increasing focus on Wales and the Welsh, the island of Britain and the identity of the Welsh as its original sole inhabitants remained important to

<sup>107</sup> For more detailed treatments of this development, see e.g. Richter, 'National Consciousness'; M. Richter, 'Giraldus Cambrensis: the Growth of the Welsh Nation', *Nat. Lib. of Wales Jnl* 16 (1970), 293–318; M. Richter, 'Giraldus Cambrensis: the Growth of the Welsh Nation (Concluded)', *Nat. Lib. of Wales Jnl* 17 (1971), 1–50; R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 3–20;

<sup>108</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Cambriae* (ed. Dimock); Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae* (ed. J. F. Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, 6 (London, 1868); trans. Thorpe, *Gerald of Wales*).

<sup>109</sup> Richter, 'National Consciousness', p. 49. On medieval Welsh law, see D. Jenkins (trans.), *Hywel Dda: the Law* (Llandysul, 1986); T. M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen, and P. Russell (eds), *The Welsh King and his Court* (Cardiff, 2000); R. Chapman Stacey, *Law and the Imagination in Medieval Wales* (Philadelphia, 2018); S. E. Roberts, *The Growth of Law in Medieval Wales, c. 1100–c.1500* (Woodbridge, 2022).

<sup>110</sup> S. J. Williams and J. E. Powell (eds), *Cyfreithiau Hywel Dda yn ôl Llyfr Blegywryd* (Cardiff, 1942), p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> See above, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Cambriae*, ii.7 (ed. Dimock, p. 217; trans. Thorpe, p. 266). For Asser, see above p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> A. Rh. Wiliam (ed.), *Llyfr Iorwerth: a Critical Text of the Venedotian Code of Medieval Welsh Law* (Cardiff, 1960), §89 (p. 59); Thomas, 'Ystyr anghyfiaith', p. 80.

the end of the Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>114</sup> This identity reveals itself across a variety of different sources and contexts. Prophetic poetry continued to fixate on the reclaiming of the island of Britain. Particularly notable in this regard is the depiction of Henry Tudor as the son of prophecy (*mab darogan*) in the work of fifteenth-century poets such as Dafydd Llwyd of Mathafarn.<sup>115</sup> The conflict that would culminate at Bosworth is couched as a conflict between the English and Welsh, with allusions to the treachery of the long knives and the age-old prophecy of expelling the English from Britain.<sup>116</sup> As Gruffydd Aled Williams has observed, from *Armes Prydein* onwards Welsh political prophecy unfolded ‘on a British stage’.<sup>117</sup>

The enduring importance of this identity in the early modern period can further be seen in historical writing.<sup>118</sup> In this context, the illustrious history of the Britons, the forebears of the Welsh, was to be defended. Doubts cast by Polydore Vergil in his *Anglica Historia* (1534) on the reliability of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *De gestis Britonum* elicited a robust response from Welsh antiquaries such as John Prise and Humphrey Llwyd. Whilst Vergil was also challenged by English antiquaries such as John Leland, Huw Pryce observes that the Welsh antiquaries went further in emphasising the position of the Welsh as the descendants of the Britons who had been the original inhabitants of the island.<sup>119</sup> This period also witnessed the writing of two influential histories of Wales – Humphrey Llwyd’s unpublished *Cronica Walliae* (completed in 1559) and David Powel’s *The Historie of Cambria, Now Called Wales a part of the most famous yland of Brytaine...* (1584), which used, expanded, and revised Llwyd’s text. These histories have been recently scrutinised by Huw Pryce for their role in the development of Welsh historical writing.<sup>120</sup> Both aimed to centre the history of Wales and emphasise its importance to the history of Britain; both emphasised the identity of the medieval Welsh kings and princes as successors to the ancient Britons. Importantly, however, Pryce observes that both too presented this history as a ‘prelude to the political assimilation with England’.<sup>121</sup> In other words, the identity of the Welsh as descendants of the ancient Britons is important, but for underscoring the significance of their history and their status within the

<sup>114</sup> The continued popularity of *Brut y Brenhinedd* serves to illustrate this point: Jones, ‘The Most Excellent Princes’.

<sup>115</sup> Discussions of this material and of the treatment of Henry Tudor in particular include: G. Williams, ‘Prophecy, Poetry and Politics in Medieval and Tudor Wales’, in his *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979), pp. 104–16; G. A. Williams, ‘The Bardic Road to Bosworth: a Welsh View of Henry Tudor’, *Trans. of the Honourable Soc. of Cymmrodorion* (1986), 7–31; C. L. Morgan, ‘Prophecy and Nationhood in the Fifteenth Century’, *Trans. of the Honourable Soc. of Cymmrodorion* (1985), 9–26; L. Bowen, *Early Modern Wales c. 1536–c. 1689: Ambiguous Nationhood* (Cardiff, 2022), pp. 115–21.

<sup>116</sup> On these allusions, see Williams, ‘The Bardic Road to Bosworth’, p. 24.

<sup>117</sup> Williams, ‘The Bardic Road to Bosworth’, p. 31.

<sup>118</sup> For an overview, see H. Pryce, *Writing Welsh History from the Early Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 91–112; Bowen, *Early Modern Wales*, pp. 19–38.

<sup>119</sup> Pryce, *Writing Welsh History*, p. 107.

<sup>120</sup> Pryce, *Writing Welsh History*, pp. 128–48.

<sup>121</sup> Pryce, *Writing Welsh History*, p. 133. Quotation refers to Llwyd’s *Cronica Walliae* specifically. For discussion of Powel’s work in this context, see pp. 146–7. See also Bowen, *Early Modern Wales*, pp. 27–9.

union with England. Indeed, the most recent study on Welsh nationhood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has emphasised the importance of Britishness and the positioning of Wales within Britain.<sup>122</sup>

A distinction must be drawn between modern Welsh nationalism and its pre-modern precursor, Gruffydd Aled Williams has argued. The latter had an important British dimension, rooted in the ancient relationship between the Welsh and the island of Britain.<sup>123</sup> This article has explored the centrality of this relationship in sources from the sixth century to the sixteenth. When writing of Wales and the Welsh in the early medieval period, we need to do so with an awareness that these were not the words contemporary writers used nor were they the main signifiers of identity – as far as our sources show, Wales was not the unit that was important to the Welsh at this point in time. While the concept of an island-based identity for the Welsh appears to have declined in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it cannot be said to have disappeared altogether. Indeed, when *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* (the Gorsedd of the Bards of the Island of Britain), the cultural society established by the eighteenth-century antiquarian Iolo Morgannwg, was swiftly renamed *Gorsedd Cymru* (the Gorsedd of Wales) in 2019, this move provoked significant criticism.<sup>124</sup> The relationship of the Welsh to the island of Britain remains a matter of discussion.

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<sup>122</sup> Bowen, *Early Modern Wales*, pp. 4 and 115–37.

<sup>123</sup> Williams, ‘The Bardic Road to Bosworth’, p. 31.

<sup>124</sup> S. Brooks, ‘Gorsedd Cymru a Lloegr Gymraeg’, *O’r Pedwar Gwynt*: <https://pedwargwynt.cymru/dadansoddi/gorsedd-cymru-a-lloegr-gymraeg>. For discussion of Iolo Morgannwg’s efforts at nation building, see G. H. Jenkins, *Bard of Liberty: the Political Radicalism of Iolo Morgannwg* (Cardiff, 2012), ch. 6; C. Charnell-White, *Bardic Circles: National, Regional and Personal Identity in the Bardic Vision of Iolo Morgannwg* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 44–81.

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