Place-Names in Three Prophecies from the Book of Taliesin

Toponimia en tres profecías del libro de Taliesin

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Abstract: The Book of Taliesin (now at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth) is a fourteenth-century manuscript of Welsh poetry, with some of its material going back to the late sixth century. But it includes poems of later date. Amongst them are three political prophecies: 'Taliesin's Verdant Song'; 'The Contention of Gwynedd and Deheubarth'; 'A Short Poem About Lludd's Discussion'. The first two are of the tenth century, the last of the eleventh. What follows deals with place-names in each. The first can be shown to allude to the English victory over Vikings and Scots at *Brunanburh,* near Durham, in 937. It is therefore somewhat later, of the period 940 to 987, and not of before 937, as has been thought. The second, dated to 942 x 960, is a polemic by a poet of Gwynedd or north-west Wales against the men of Deheubarth or southern Wales. Its author makes mocking reference to places which can be identified as in North Britain or on the Welsh border: even if Gwynedd's enemies flee there, they will not escape vengeance. Of most interest to Spanish readers is the third text. Its obscure references to enemies will be to Arab and Berber invaders of Andalusia in 1086, after which Alphonso VI appealed for international help. The poem can hence be dated to 1087 or 1088, and will be the earliest reference to Spain in Welsh poetry.

Keywords: Book of Taliesin. Welsh Poetry. Place-names. Alfonso VI. Almoravid Invasion of 1086.

Resumen: El libro de Taliesin (ahora en la Biblioteca Nacional de Gales, Aberystwyth) es un manuscrito de poesía galesa del siglo XIV, y parte de su material se remonta a finales del siglo VI. Pero incluye poemas de fecha posterior. Entre ellos se encuentran tres profecías políticas: 'Canción verde de Taliesin'; 'La disputa de Gwynedd y Deheubarth'; 'Un poema breve sobre la discusión de Lludd'. Los dos primeros son del siglo X, los últimos del XI. Lo que sigue trata sobre los nombres de lugares en cada uno. Se puede demostrar que el primero alude a la victoria inglesa sobre vikingos y escoceses en Brunanburh, cerca de Durham, en 937. Es, por tanto, algo posterior, del período 940 a 987, y no antes del 937, como se pensaba. El segundo, fechado en 942 x 960, es una polémica de un poeta de Gwynedd o del noroeste de Gales contra los hombres de Deheubarth o del sur de Gales. Su autor hace referencia burlona a lugares que pueden identificarse o en el norte de Gran Bretaña o en la frontera con Gales: incluso si los enemigos de Gwynedd huyen allí, no escaparán de la venganza. De mayor interés para los lectores españoles es el tercer texto. Sus oscuras referencias a enemigos serán los invasores árabes y bereberes de Andalucía en 1086, tras lo cual Alfonso VI pidió ayuda internacional. Por tanto, el poema puede estar fechado en 1087 o 1088, y será la primera referencia a España en la poesía galesa.

Palabras clave: Libro de Taliesin. Poesía galesa. Topónimos. Alfonso VI. Invasión almorávide de 1086.

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Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 2 is a volume better known as the Book of Taliesin[1]. Almost all its contents are poems in Welsh, of widely-varying date; most of them 'are concerned with North Wales' even though the manuscript (of the fourteenth century) was copied in South Wales[2]. Amongst these poems are *Glaswawd Taliesin* ('Taliesin's Verdant Song'); *Cy-wryssedd Gwynedd a Deheubarth* ('The Contention of Gwynedd and Deheubarth'); and *Ymarwar Llud Bychan* ('A Short Poem About Lludd's Discussion'). All three are prophecies, all three mention unidentified places. The first refers to battle at 'Tybrunawg'; the second, various strongholds where the defeated seek refuge in vain; the third, armies from 'Gafis' which threaten invasion. In this paper, explanations are offered for these mysterious locations, thereby informing us on the date and purpose of the three poems. They are discussed after their order in the manuscript, with one of them, on an eleventh-century Arab invasion of Andalusia, casting unexpected light on the history of Spain.

1. 'TALIESIN'S VERDANT SONG'

Glaswawd Taliesin is a prophecy not by the historical Taliesin (active in North Britain in the late sixth century), but put in the mouth of the legendary one, a wizard or wonder-worker. It was analysed by Sir Ifor Williams, greatest of Welsh scholars. Relating it to political instability (*helynt*) of the decades about 900, he took it as one of the few items in the pseudo-Taliesin corpus that could be dated. He explained its allusions to conflict on the Menai and Conwy, and hostile armies of Saxon or Viking, as relating to the killing by the English of Rhodri Mawr in 878 (an act avenged by his son Anarawd soon after). Because the prophecy alludes to a looked-for 'man of steel' of Anarawd's line, Williams believed that it was written after Anarawd's death in 916, but before 942, when Anarawd's successor Idwal Foel was himself killed in battle. The prophecy is probably of the period 916-42 ('yn wir gall berthyn i'r genhedlaeth 916-4[2]') and was perhaps written fairly late in that period ('oddeutu 940')[3]. What follows refines these conclusions.

The poem is now edited by Marged Haycock with commentary and this translation[4].

Messengers have come to me, how splendid they are!

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[1] Fulton, 2019.

[2] Jones, 2019.

[3] Williams, 1957, pp. 22-24.

[4] Haycock, 2013, pp. 19-22.

The whole preoccupation of my mind causes me grief;
Frequent an oar in the brine, Beli's drink;
Frequent, a light shield in the depth of night;
Frequent, ferocity and destruction emanating from a fortress of feasting,
And nine hundred stewards shall perish.
In May, on the Menai, there will be a place of carnage,
On the River Conwy there will be more suffering that will wreak vengeance.
Chilling the death which came about, ready reward,
From savage iron weapons, an immense blow.
Three trim invincible ones, heavy-laden in the water with hosts,
Three fleets in the flood, a tribulation before Judgement,
Three battles at dusk for three rightful land-rulers;
Death will necessitate a grave,
All three, three translations,
And will try the high ground of Eryri.
A host of Saxons, the second of Foreigners, the third a cruel one;
In Wales there will remain the widowhood of wives.
Before Cynon's tumult, fire will spread,
Cadwaladr will scourge them;
He will trample hill and rushes,
Thatch and the roofs of houses, a house conflagration.
A strange thing shall come to pass:
A man consorting with his brother's daughter.
They [the Welsh] shall summon a man of steel
From the line of Anarawd
From him shall stem
A ruddy one of the battle for the settlement in Brun's region
Who shall spare neither kin
Nor cousin nor brother.
At the call of the warrior's horn
Nine hundred men shall be sad.
Because of the powerful, harsh man
Whom the verdancy of the 'Glaswawd' declaimed:
He will swoop on those who inflame his mind.

Our concern is line 28, *Coch kattybrunawc* 'A ruddy one of the battle for the settlement in Brun's region', seen as perhaps alluding to the battle of *Brunanburh* in 937. The editor devotes to it a long note and other commentary. Emending the form (on the basis of *kattybrunawc* in a poem on St David by the twelfth-century poet Gwynfardd Brycheiniog), she finds a link with *Brunanburh* attractive, 'especially if the site is to be equated with Bromborough' on the north coast of the Wirral, for that 'sits well with the figures and North Wales battles' of about 900 mentioned by Ifor Williams. Nevertheless, she considers it risky to see the poem as 'an early source' for an allusion to *Brunanburh*. It may be much later, post-dating the tenth century.

Let us develop this. If the poem could be related securely to the battle of Brunanburh, it would be crucial evidence, because that engagement (in August or September 937) was decisive. Athelstan's defeat of combined Scottish, Strathclyde, and Viking invaders (the Welsh were not involved) was the Hastings of the tenth century, with permanent consequences for English national unity. The bibliography on it is immense, particularly as regards its location, which has perplexed historians for centuries. This is not the place to discuss the event in detail, but merely to cite sources that show where it was fought, the implications of its name, and what that suggests for the date of the poem.

Old English *Brunanburh* will mean 'stronghold of (the) *Brune*' and this River *Brune* can be identified as the Browney of County Durham[5]. If we consult maps, we find that north of the Browney, on a Roman road, is the Roman fort of Lanchester, near the small town of the same name. Because the early English often used *burh* for a Roman fort, as with Richborough in Kent or Burgh Castle in Norfolk, there is reason to take the fort at Lanchester as *Brunanburh* 'stronghold of (the River) Brune'. Bromborough on the Mersey Estuary can be ruled out on the simple grounds that, after invading England, no Scottish army ever returned home via the Wirral Peninsula of Cheshire, which in the event of English counter-attack would have been a death-trap. As late as the eighteenth century the Scots instead used the old Roman roads leading to and from the Roman Walls; as did English armies when they, in turn, invaded Scotland.

For 'A ruddy one of the battle for the settlement in Brun's region' we may thus translate 'A ruddy one of the Battle of *Brunanburh*'. The reference to the conflict being clear, the prophecy must postdate 937. By how much is an interesting question. Marged Haycock quotes M. E. Griffiths on the poem's failure to mention the Normans, so it surely predates them. A Welsh prophecy of after 1066 which ignored England's new masters would fall on deaf ears. Significant, too, is the mention in line 17 of *gynt* 'Vikings, Northmen' (as with the Pennine mountain of *Pen-y-Ghent* 'summit of Northmen', on the frontier between the Britons of Cumbria and the Viking Kingdom of York). That puts the poem before 1042, when England ceased to have Danish rulers. For Ifor Williams's 916 x 942 we may therefore substitute 937 x 1042, and specifically at a time when the men of Gwynedd felt threatened by Saxon and Norseman alike. In the years between 937 and 1042 there were many periods of instability and turbulence, but especially before 990. The annals mention Viking attacks on Holyhead and Llŷn in 961; on Tywyn in 963; in 967, the Saxons 'ravaged the kingdoms of the sons of Idwal'; there was further trouble in 972, on Anglesey, and in 978 at Clynnog Fawr, with

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yet more attacks in 980 and 987. If the poem alludes to rumours of any of these, we may reasonably place it to between about 940 and 987, as a tenth-century 'tract for the times'. Further research on historical background may give more exact dating, especially if we could identify the 'man of steel' from whom will stem the 'ruddy one of the Battle of *Brunanburh*'.

2. 'The Contention of Gwynedd and Deheubarth'.

The poem is of the tenth century, but its title is a nineteenth-century editorial one[6]. In the manuscript it is titleless[7]. The prophecy has the rare advantage of a variant text from MS Peniarth 111, of about 1610[8]. Lexicographers have thus quoted the poem with confidence, including the toponyms *dyn daryfon*, *dynclut*, *dyn maerut*, and *dyn riedon* discussed here[9]. Scholars were formerly agreed on its date and purpose, summed up by Sir Ifor Williams. The unknown author was 'a protagonist of Gwynedd' who declared that 'Venedotian troops will win renown in every battle; the men of Powys will join them'. Their conjoined forces will 'fight for Llys Llonion in Pembroke' so fiercely that enemies will find no refuge from them (even in the four strongholds mentioned above). As for the date, *Annales Cambriae* notes the death in 943 (*recte* 942) of Idwal ab Anarawd, killed by West Saxons after an unsuccessful revolt. A beneficiary of that was Hywel Dda, who drove out Idwal's heirs and made himself master of North Wales. The poem was hence dated to between 942 and 950 or so, a time of crisis for Gwynedd[10]. Thomas Charles-Edwards accepts this, though extending the *terminus ante quem* to about 960, when Idwal's doom began to fade from memory[11].

Marged Haycock now translates the prophecy thus[12].

> May God raise up over the people of the Britons
> The emblem of joy of the hosts of Anglesey.
> The battle of the men of Gwynedd, swift forces
> Of radiant fame, taking hostages from every fight.
> The men of Powys shall come, praised as keen ones in eulogy,
> Proud men who shall triumph over false laws.
> In two hosts they shall proceed, they shall be in harmony,
> With one instinct, one utterance, orderly and disciplined.

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[6] *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, p. 62.

[7] *The Text of the Book of Taliesin*, pp. 72-73.

[8] Williams, 1927, pp. 41-48.

[9] Lloyd-Jones, 1931-1963, pp. 301, 358, 359.

[10] *The Poems of Taliesin,* pp. XXVI-XXVIII.

[11] Charles-Edwards, p. 661, n. 52.

[12] *Prophecies from the Book of Taliesin*, 2013, pp. 109-122.

The men of Ceredigion shall play their part well.
When you see fierce men around the Vale of Aeron,
When the Tywi and the River Teifi shall be saddened,
They shall make battle in haste around the court of Llonion.
Those who held out fell silent in great numbers;
Citadels shall not protect them from their swift men;
Whether Din Clud, Din Maerud, Din Daryfon,
Not even Din Rhieddon/Rhiyddon would be entirely impregnable.
When Cadwallon came from over the Irish Sea
He re-established a court in Ardd Nefon.
Soon shall I hear the tribulations of the singers/poets;
How fierce the cavalry force around Chester,
And the avenging of Idwal on the white-cheeked ones,
And playing ball with the heads of the Saxons.
May he wreak havoc on the Speckled Cat and her foreigners
From the Ford of the Taradr as far as Porth Wygr in Anglesey:
He, the unassuming young man, the people's refuge.
From the time when honey and clover shall be seized
Their contention and their dispute will vanish;
Enmity toward the foe is not an unhappy inciting.
May God raise up over the people of the Britons
The emblem of joy of the hosts of Anglesey!

What follows deals with *Din Clud*, *Din Maerud*, *Din Daryfon*, and *Din Rhieddon*/*Rhiyddon*, the last three of them described in the commentary as 'unknown' and perhaps 'imagined names'. We shall see if that is really so. The editor correctly explains *Din Clud* as the fortress of Clyde (*Clud*) or Dumbarton Rock, Scotland. This spectacular volcanic stump was a natural defensive site and, as capital of the Strathclyde Britons, often figures in early Welsh sources, including *Annales Cambriae*[13]. Kenneth Jackson noted that the proper form is *Alt Clud* 'Rock of Clyde', with *din Al Clud*, *caer Al Clut*, *din Clut*, *caer Glut*, or (in Latin) *arx Alt Clut* being 'descriptive phrases rather than the true name'[14]. Glanville Jones nevertheless ignored the identification when commenting on 'The Integration of Upland and Lowland for Defence', and how 'in a poem of the mid-tenth century, a protagonist of Gwynedd prophesies that an army from Gwynedd will be joined by one from Powys and that together they will fight for Llys Llonion in Pembroke, but their enemies will find no refuge in *Din-clud*, *Din-maerud*, *Din-daryfon*, and *Din-rhieddon*'[15]. On this we remark that Dumbarton was in 870 well and truly sacked by the Vikings, an event fully known to the Welsh, because it figures in *Annales*

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[13] *Brut y Tywysogyon*, 1952, 5, p. 137.
[14] Jackson, 1969, p. 76.
[15] Jones, 1972.

Cambriae and later chronicles. The place was thereafter allegedly 'not mentioned again in any source until it emerged as a royal castle in the thirteenth century'[16]. It is true that the siege was grim[17]. Nevertheless, our Welsh poem (like *Armes Prydein* of 940) is interesting as a source of between 870 and 1200 which does mention the citadel. It was by then associated with ignominy and defeat, explaining the bard's tone of mockery. In that wrecked northern fortress, the men of Deheubarth will find no safety from the hosts of Gwynedd, Powys, and Ceredigion. For the poet, it had implications of military humiliation (like those of Caporetto or Dien Bien Phu in modern times). As a disobliging Welsh comment on the North Britons, it has a curious later parallel. After months of siege, the Strathclyders suffered slavery and worse from the Norse victors, but the tenth-century bard shed no tears on that. In the early twelfth century, the author of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* included the character of Gwawl fab Clud 'Wall son of Clyde', Rhiannon's undesired suitor, whose ludicrous name refers to the Antonine Wall (not Hadrian's) and the Clyde, as pointed out long ago by A. W. Wade-Evans[18]. Both instances suggest a disparaging attitude of the Welsh élite to Strathclyders, whether in the 940s or 1120s.

The three other obscure toponyms also possess overtones, if of different kinds. We start with *Din Maerud*. Commenting on this, Marged Haycock rejects Ifor Williams's hinted identification with Dinmeir (site of a battle in *Annales Cambriae* for 906), preferring to take the spot as unknown and even 'imagined'. The 'Dinmeir' of 906 is probably an error for Dineirth, by the River Arth, Ceredigion. It was an obscure fortlet (its very obscurity explaining how scribes misread its name) and hardly relates to our poem. We nevertheless reject the description of *Din Maerud*, with a first element related to *maer* 'steward', as 'imagined'. If *Din Clud* is Dumbarton, 'Din Maerud' will be real as well.

Let us look at the whole of *Din Maerud*, and not just its first letter. If we do this, the sole parallel to *Din Maerud* in Welsh sources is *Metcaud* or *Medcaut*, the island of Lindisfarne, Northumberland. The reading 'dyn maerut' ('dinmaerud' in MS Peniarth 111) will be corrupt, like many Book of Taliesin place-names. Yet we can take 'maerut' as still preserving the two syllables of proposed original *medcaut*, as also its initial *m* and final *ut*. Lindisfarne was famous in Welsh tradition as where Urien in the late sixth century besieged the Bernicians, only to be himself betrayed and killed by British enemies[19]. So, like Dumbarton, *Din Medcaut* (in Old Welsh spelling) or Lindisfarne had associations with defeat. The bard warns

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[16] Woolf, 2007, p. 109.
[17] Clarkson, 2010, pp. 159-160.
[18] *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet*, 1957, p. 34.
[19] Williams, 1972, p. 52.

the men of the South that, however far they flee, they will not escape the warriors of Gwynedd. Instead of 'Din Maerut' we thus read *Din Medcaut*, Holy Island or Lindisfarne, off the Northumberland coast. The name is of Latin origin (as suggested by Professor Richard Coates), from *medicata* 'healing (island)', perhaps because of medicinal herbs growing there. But the Gwynedd bard threatens that, even if Deheubarth troops hide themselves on Lindisfarne, it will do them no good.

We may say a little more on *Metcaud* or *Medcaut*. The ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* has a list of Britain's ancient cities, the basis for a longer list in the Red Book of Hergest[20]. There is a recent discussion[21]. It includes 'Meguaid', 'Meaguaid', 'Medguid', 'Meiguod', or 'Meguod', all representing *Metcaud* or *Medcaut*, the Welsh name of Lindisfarne, Northumberland. If, then, 'Din Maerud' in the Book of Taliesin prophecy is *Metcaud*, Lindisfarne (with its first element reinterpreted as *maer* 'steward'), it corresponds to 'Meguaid' in a list of Britain's twenty-eight cities (many of them not 'cities' in the normal sense, but Celtic monasteries at places between Usk and Wye, like Llandogo, Welsh Bicknor, or Much Dewchurch, their Old Welsh names added to *Historia Brittonum* by an unknown cleric in south-east Wales).

Now for the poem's 'Din Daryfon' (*din da rywon* in MS Peniarth 111). This is a harder crux. Marged Haycock suggests a blend of the names of Taradr, a tributary of the River Wye mentioned in line 24, and Peryddon, a stream near Monmouth referred to in the tenth-century *Armes Prydein* 'The Prophecy of Britain'. That is not convincing, although *Aber Peryddon* will help us with the next line. A clue is, however, again supplied by the termination, a stable element because of the demands of rhyme. Early Welsh toponyms ending in *-on* and alluding to a defensive site are few, and the only one to make sense here is *Guricon* or Wroxeter, Shropshire. It was the site of Roman *Viroconium*, capital of the Cornovii, its name transferred from that of a hillfort on the Wrekin, a massif of ancient rock four miles east of Wroxeter. (Fort, mountain, and town are all perhaps ultimately called after *Veregonus* 'great active one', an otherwise unknown king of the Cornovii.) Once a famous city, by the tenth century *Guricon* was a ruin (in part thanks to the rise of Shrewsbury, on a site easier to defend). Yet it remained familiar to Welsh poets, appearing as *Dinlle Ureconn* in ninth-century verse spoken by Princess Heledd, lamenting destruction wrought upon Powys[22]. Despite this, the form confused scribes. In his 1929 paper, Ifor Williams quoted the variants 'guorichon', 'guoricon', 'grycon', 'grugoin', and 'grugan'. 'Din Daryfon' would be more corrupt

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[20] Williams, 1929.

[21] Fitzpatrick-Matthews, 2015.

[22] Rowland, 1990, p. 603.

still, initial *D* perhaps being due to contamination from *Din*; but there are grounds to emend 'Din Daryfon' to *Din Guricon*, with the same number of letters and with -*r*- and -*on* retained. The poet again flashes out contempt. The enemies of Gwynedd will find no safety in sacked Dumbarton, in Lindisfarne, place of betrayal, or amongst the rubble of Wroxeter.

Finally, the hardest of the four cruxes, *Din Rhieddon/Rhiyddon*. The Book of Taliesin has *dyn riedon*, MS Peniarth 111 has *dyn rieton*. Marged Haycock notes a possible link with *ried* 'majesty' (not, however, a place-name element). The one thing sure is that the form ends in -*on*, necessary for the rhyme, but not common in Welsh toponymy.

Let us rule some solutions out. *Historia Brittonum*'s twenty-eight cities include *Cair Lerion*, where Ifor Williams in 1929 reproduced the medieval identification with Leicester. This is unsatisfactory, so that Dr Padel speaks of *Cair Lerion* as 'unintelligible and unidentified'[23]. Because it seems instead to be *Ros Cerion* or Much Dewchurch in Herefordshire, site of a major Celtic monastery, it can have no link with *dyn riedon*. Slightly more useful is *Iren*, given by a Breton-Latin life of Gildas as where the saint was educated, and taken by Professor Lapidge to mean 'Ireland'[24]. This 'Iren' seems instead to be a corrupt form of (unattested) Old Welsh *Cerin*, the expected development of British-Latin 'Corinium' (better, *Carinium*) or Cirencester. Cirencester was once the second city of Roman Britain. If Gildas acquired his command of Latin at its schools of law and rhetoric, it would be no surprise; although it is surprising that they should remain active in the early sixth century, when Gildas (493-570) will have been of student age.

Cirencester cannot be *dyn riedon*. But it points to a solution via the poem *Armes Prydein*, a fiery call for the Welsh to rise against English oppression, and probably written after West Saxon capitulation to the Vikings at Leicester (the *Lego* of the text) in 940, when a bard saw England's difficulty as Wales's opportunity. He denounced West Saxon tyranny, speaking of revenge against the stewards of *Caer Geri* or Cirencester[25]. They demonstrate the continuing importance for Celt and Saxon of Roman 'Corinium'/*Carinium* or Cirencester[26].

Armes Prydein shows that the Welsh thought of Cirencester as a synonym for English extortion and oppression. William of Malmesbury tells how Athelstan (924/5-39) brought Welsh princes to Hereford, and extracted from them a yearly tribute that included twenty pounds of gold, three hundred pounds of silver, and

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[23] Padel, 1988, p. 109.

[24] Lapidge, 1984.

[25] *Armes Prydein*, 1972, p. XXVIII.

[26] Rivet y Smith, 1979, pp. 321-322.

25,000 oxen, as well as many hounds and hawks[27]. Hence the thirst for vengeance expressed in *Armes Prydein*; a key place associated with it being *Aber Peryddon*, mentioned above after Marged Haycock. The poet offers menacing prophecies on it from the mouth of Merlin. 'In Aber Peryddon, the stewards of the Great King' of Wessex 'will lament death'; the 'stewards of Cirencester will lament bitterly.' It was 'Not fortunately that they came to Aber Peryddon, / Afflictions are the taxes (*tretheu*) that they will collect!' *Aber Peryddon* is identified with Rockfield, three miles north-west of Monmouth. It was a border spot, accessible from Cirencester by Roman roads and thus a suitable location for English tax-collectors to collect tribute. As a place of political humiliation it was known to the author of *Armes Prydein* in 940. It apparently had a similar reputation soon after for the poet of *Cywryssedd Gwynedd a Deheubarth*. For him, the locality where men of Deheubarth handed over gold, silver, and cattle to the English to gain protection will grant no protection against heroes of Gwynedd and Powys. In the light of the jibes in *Armes Prydein*, we emend 'Riedon' to *Perydon*, and see a sting in the line, *nyt oed lwyr degyn Dyn Perydon* 'Not even the fortress of Peryddon would be entirely impregnable!' Rockfield is situated on the end of a ridge immediately west of the River Monnow. It has no fort to speak of now, but this need not worry us. The bard uses the language of propaganda. He knew it as where men of the South paid ignominious tribute to the West Saxons. It was a toponym of shame, and is here used as such.

We end thus. We keep the poem's *Din Clud*, but for 'Din Maerud' read *Din Metcaud*, for 'Din Daryfon' read *Din Guricon*, and for 'Din Riedon' read *Din Perydon*. The bard is in vituperative mood. Whether they flee to Dumbarton or Holy Island in the North, or Wroxeter in the English Midlands, Gwynedd's enemies will find no security. They will not be safe even if they run to the English at Rockfield. For forces soon to be broken in battle by champions in attack,

> Citadels shall not protect them from their swift men;
> Whether Dumbarton, Lindisfarne, or shattered Wroxeter;
> Even Rockfield would not be completely strong!

3. 'THE SHORT POEM ABOUT LLUDD'S DISCUSSION'

This last prophecy has been dated to the late eleventh century and related to other poems of the period which refer to Lludd, where it is 'the earliest example of the association of Lludd with Llefelys'. It 'seems to describe the advent

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[27] Stenton, 1971, p. 340.

across the sea of a strange and hostile race, and, although the term is not used, the description is of a pagan *gormes* [oppression].' It suggests that Lludd and Llefelys 'were already known as two who had succeeded in ridding the land of one or more *gormesoedd*.' If so, the *Mabinogion* tale of Lludd and Llefelys, 'presumably in an oral form, was known late in the eleventh century'[28]. Rachel Bromwich agreed on the poem as 'perhaps composed in the late eleventh century'[29]. As for when the prose tale came to be written down, this is related to 'the twelfth and thirteenth centuries'[30]. The arguments below will confirm the ascription of the poem to the late eleventh century, but refine that of the prose tale.

Marged Haycock translates the text, which is incomplete, as follows.[31]

> In the name of God the Trinity, of wise charity,
> A myriad host of cruel violence
> Shall conquer Britain, the pre-eminent island:
> The men of the land of Asia and the land of Cafis/Gafis,
> A people of evil intent whose land is not known.
> A race with inclined lances, sea-raiders,
> Their tunics trailing, what others are like them,
> With a vain intent, a hostile action?
> Europeans, Arabians, Saracens,
> Christ was a true salvation to the bound and reviled
> Before the conversation of Lludd and Llefelys.
> The ruler of Albion shall be stirred/moved
> In the face of a lord from Rome, fair to behold the terror he provokes.
> It is not..., not a skilful king of great speech
> Who would see what I saw of the foreigners.
> There will be arranged a veritable swamp, a path needing lanterns
> In the face of a stout warrior with the roar of a great conflagration.
> May I merit the dear Son, of ready utterance.
> The Cymry gnashing their teeth and war on bondmen,
> I worry, I wonder what their course will be,
> The Brython-like ones who triumphed in Wessex.

The crux here is *gwlat Gafis* in line 4. In her note, the editor takes it as perhaps an ancient town north of Kabul, Afghanistan; or (after *Delw y Byd*) a town in Morocco; or Cadiz in Spain, which 'may well be relevant'; or islands near 'the Greek Sea' mentioned in Triad 35. She also cites Margaret E. Griffiths for links with the First Crusade of 1096-9, who yet noted difficulties in explaining why

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[28] *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, 1975, pp. XIX-XX.

[29] *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, 1978, p. 425.

[30] Roberts, 1992, p. 10.

[31] Haycock, 2013, pp. 176-185.

Saracens in Palestine might be about to attack Britain. The observation is correct. Muslims in the Eastern Mediterrean (or Afghanistan) were unlikely to be charging up beaches in Sussex or Glamorgan. We must exclude Palestine and Afghanistan. We also exclude Morocco. The medieval translators of *Delw y Byd* were misled by an error in *Imago Mundi*, their Latin original. Its author speaks of *urbs Gades*, founded by Phoenicians, which is obviously *Cadiz* in south-west Spain; but confusion of syntax has there lifted the place across the Straits of Gibraltar from Europe to Africa. We can say without any hesitation that the poem's *gwlad Gafis* is the area around Cadiz, a city under Muslim rule from 711 to 1250.

But why should a Welsh bard be concerned about invasion by Moors from Andalusia? An answer is supplied by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 1086 (*recte* 1087), with a unique reference to Spanish history. 'Also it happened in Spain that the heathen men went and raided against the Christian men, and bent much of it to their control: but the king of the Christians, who was called Alfonso, he sent everywhere into each land, and begged for support; and support came to him from each land which was Christian, and travelled and killed and drove off all that heathen people, and won their land through God's support'[32].

The English chronicler's words on Alfonso's difficulties with the Moors, and his appeal for international help, supply background for the Book of Taliesin poem. We can date it to 1087, when Alfonso's messages were telling West Europeans that Christendom was in peril. The Chronicle allows us to date the Welsh poem with unusual precision. It also shows it as an instance of Welsh contacts with Muslim Spain, predating by some four decades the references in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* to *cordwal* 'cordwain, fine Spanish leather', from the name of Cordoba in Andalusia, a city famed for artists and craftsmen[33].

The crisis was this. Alfonso captured Toledo in 1085, but next year suffered defeat on 23 October at Sagrajas (twenty-five miles north of Badajoz, in south-west Spain). The *Chronicle* entry, the sole contemporary English allusion to Alfonso's fortunes, says nothing on the fall of Toledo, but was repeated in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* and in the *Waverley Annals*, and is best understood as a confused account of Alfonso's failure at Sagrajas and his appeal for French help[34]. The same events are echoed in the Welsh poem.

Let us look in detail at what happened. In 1037 most of Spain and Portugal was in Muslim hands. The border between Moor and Christian ran through Oporto, Avila, then north-east to Navarre, into the Pyrenees, then south to the coast between Barcelona and Tarragona. Five decades later, however, so much

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[32] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 1996, pp. 221-222.

[33] *The Mabinogion*, 2007, p. 238.

[34] Scales, 1985.

had changed that in March 1085 Alfonso VI of Castile besieged Toledo. The city surrendered after little resistance, Alfonso entering in triumph on 25 May. His victory produced, however, a reaction amongst the Almoravids of North Africa. Troops described as 'hordes fanatisées, mêlées de Berbères et d'Arabes' and led by the formidable Yussuf ben Texufin landed at Algeciras (seventy-five miles from Cadiz) on 30 June 1086[35]. (In the light of this, 'gwlat yr Ascia' in line 4 of the Welsh prophecy should be emended to *gwlat yr Africa*. 'Asia' makes no sense in the context, but the bard will have known that fierce North Africans had invaded the Cadiz region and were forging their way northwards.) On 23 October the Almoravids routed Alfonso at the battle of Zalaca or Sagrajas (north of Badajoz and east of Alburquerque)[36]. Arab sources describe muezzins using piles of de-capitated Christian heads as minarets to call the troops to prayer, an image dom-inating opinion on the battle until lately[37]. Yet Muslim accounts of the period are often written for effect and should be read with caution.

The bloodbath of Sagrajas, and Alfonso's appeal for help from abroad, are in any case the subject of a careful study[38]. There are four contemporary sources: chronicles from Fleury and Tournus, a Spanish charter of 9 August 1087, and the chronicle of Saint-Maixent. Although the English chronicler says that Alfonso sent 'into each land', the only effective help came from France. It included barons from the Paris region, Champagne, Burgundy, Aquitaine, Normandy, Languedoc, and Gascony. Amongst its members was the Duke of Burgundy, Eudes Borel, and his brothers Robert and Henri; Raimond, Count of Amous in Franche-Comté; Hum-bert de Joinville (ancestor of St Louis's biographer); and Savary de Donzy, future Count of Châlons. All these are mentioned by the *Chronicon Trenorciense*, written at the abbey of Tournus, near Lyon. Partial confirmation of what it says comes from the 'Privilege of Astorga', of 25 April and 1 May 1087 (witnessed by Count Raimond), and a donation by Queen Constanza of 9 August 1087 to the abbey of Tournous, the result of Eudes Borel's visit (he was her son-in-law). Later sources describe how the men of Languedoc and Provence were led by Raimond de Saint-Gilles, Count of Toulouse, and how Guilhem de Poitou, Duke of Aqui-taine, was represented by Hugues VI 'the Devil', Lord of Lusignan. The French role in Spain divides historians. Some write of the intervention as a crusade. Oth-ers note that the French did not fight in Alfonso's own realm of Castile, but in Navarre and Aragon, far from the immediate Saracen threat. Most of the French soon went home. Only the Burgundians remained, helping their kinsman Alfonso

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[35] Boissonnade, 1923, p. 32.

[36] Menéndez Pidal, 1929, p. 359.

[37] Estepa Díez, 1985, p. 39.

[38] Saroïhandy, 1925.

to defend the frontier on the Douro and the Tagus, prior to an assault in the direction of Portugal. Far from driving off the infidel and reconquering the country (as the English chronicler thought), Alfonso spent the rest of his life doggedly holding on to his gains. The intervention has been regarded less as a crusade than as an opportunity for plunder: in military terms it was a 'complet échec'. Yet its long-term results were dramatic, for Sagrajas, Alfonso's appeal, and the arrival of Franco-Burgundian forces in Spain were a prologue to the Crusades.

The coming in 1086 of the Almoravids, described as 'masas fanatizadas' with a simple and intolerant form of Islam, and with many North African Berbers in their number, transformed the older, aristocratic society of Arab Spain. If the newcomers lacked culture, they made up for it in fighting prowess. Hence Alfonso's defeat at Sagrajas, seventeen months after his triumphant entry into Toledo; hence 'his call to Christendom via his good friends in the order of Cluny and Burgundian kinsfolk', claiming (with some exaggeration) that if Castile were lost to the Moorish invader, France would soon follow[39]. It was presumably via Cluniac channels that news of the appeal reached a Welsh bard, who was surely a cleric, mentioning the Trinity, the Pope, Christ, and perhaps the imagery of Hell as a swamp. The vagueness of 'a lord from Rome' is perhaps because of the vacancy between Gregory VII's death in 1085 and the election of Victor III in 1087 (he died later that year). The bardic description of Arab spears and tunics may echo that of Alfonso's appeal.

By now, students of the Book of Taliesin will have had enough of French magnates and Spanish campaigns. What should interest them is the relation of the poem, as also the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry, to events in Castile and Andalusia. The Welsh poet thinks that a Muslim attack on Britain is imminent; the English chronicler was misinformed and wildly over-optimistic. It will also be possible to answer the question on the 'priority between the [*Mabinogion*] tale [of Lludd and Llyfelys], our poem, and Geoffrey of Monmouth' posed by Marged Haycock. The poem will be of 1087, when Alfonso's appeal reached Wales. Geoffrey of Monmouth's history appeared in about 1138[40]. As for the tale of Lludd and Llyfelys, it is agreed as being later than the tale of Culhwch and Olwen and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Links with the first Latin life of St Cadog put the tale of Culhwch in the later 1090s; references (in the third branch) to Oxford as a seat of government, and complete absence of influence from Geoffrey, place the *Four Branches* in the later 1120s (after Henry I began issuing writs from Oxford) or earlier 1130s. The story of Lludd and Llefelys, coming after the *Four Branches*, is thus probably of the later twelfth century. Another implication comes

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[39] Suárez Fernández, 1975, 1, pp. 494, 501-507.
[40] "Geoffrey of Monmouth", 2008, p. 309.

in the final line's reference to triumph of the Britons over the West Saxons. This will not be to the subservient attitude of Hywel Dda and other Welsh kings to Athelstan and his dynasty, as Marged Haycock thinks. There was no Welsh triumph there. But it may be an allusion to the battle in 493 at Mount Badon, a British victory later attributed to Arthur. It has long been accepted that 'Badon' was in southern England (almost certainly at the hillfort of Ringsbury east of Braydon Forest, Wiltshire), and that the defeated were the West Saxons[41]. If so, the poem would be new and unexpected evidence for traditions of Badon (associated in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, quite unhistorically, with the Northern warrior Arthur, killed in 537 CE). Yet perhaps the most surprising conclusion as regards this Book of Taliesin poem is on Islam. The ferocious Almoravid attack on Andalusia in 1186, which left Castile in a desperate position, reveals it as an unusual item of eleventh-century propaganda, warning of threats to the West from dangerous Muslim fundamentalists.

Since this article was first submitted to an editor (in Wales), who apparently lost it and several years later asked the writer to resubmit (which he did not), the above poems have been discussed in two books. First is one by Dr Natalia Petrovskaia, who deals with the third text, on Lludd. She thinks that it 'concerns a threat to Britain, and in its identification of the threat as Arabic in origin' suggests that 'the *Corainieit* of the tale *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys* may be a reference to Saracens, and the word itself could be derived from *Qur'an*'[42]. Readers are now in a position to compare the above analysis of the poem with that of Dr Petrovskaia.

Second and more significant is a translation by two modern bards (one of them a former Archbishop of Canterbury) of sixty-one Book of Taliesin poems. Naturally, it puts study of the volume upon a new footing. It is of special importance because, citing research passed over in the chapters by Professor Fulton and Dr. Jones (referred to above), it means that what they say is instantly outdated. The translators comment too on the cruxes discussed here[43]. What they say can be corrected as follows.

(a) On 'Taliesin's Verdant Song', they are right in seeing an allusion to *Brunanburh* in 937. Yet the battle was not (as they state) fought at Bromborough in Cheshire, a suggestion going back to the historian Edward Gibson (who eventually became Bishop of London) in 1695. There is not a scrap of evidence for that view. *Brunanburh* was won and lost at the *burh* or Roman fort near Lanchester, west of Durham and north of the River *Brune* or Browney.

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[41] Jackson, 1959.

[42] Petrovskaia, 2015, pp. 157-159.

[43] *The Book of Taliesin,* pp. 133, 141-142, 152, 216.

(b) 'The Contention of Gwynedd and Deheubarth'. On *Din Clud*, 'Din Mae-rud', 'Din Daryfon', and 'Din Rhieddon/Rhiyddon', the translators correctly regard the first as Dumbarton, Strathclyde. The others are left unidentified. Yet, if what is said above holds water, it must disprove the translators' belief that the verses are of the 'early thirteenth century' (when Gwynedd was under threat from England). They will be of the 940s, when the enemies of Gwynedd scorned by the poet were in South Wales. He gives them short shrift. Whether they flee to the Clyde or Holy Island or Wroxeter, or even the spot near Monmouth where they pay tribute to West Saxons, they will find no security from the men of Gwynedd. These toponyms are, therefore, crucial in dating the poem to the 940s, as maintained by Sir Ifor Williams, and certainly not after 960, as proposed by Thomas Charles-Edwards. The four places make no sense as concerns thirteenth-century English aggression, particularly Dumbarton, which was not in England. The case for a later dating therefore collapses.

(c) For 'The Short Poem About Lludd's Discussion' the translators are correct in regarding 'Cafis' as Cadiz. But the context is not that of the First Crusade (1096-9). It will be the Amoravid invasion of Andalusia in 1086, which sent shock-waves throughout Christendom.

Place-names in the Book of Taliesin are therefore vital for an understanding of its contents, as also other aspects of Britain's early history, as now shown elsewhere[44].

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[44] Breeze, 2020.

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