

**A reconsideration of the ‘Celtic sources’ of early British History,<sup>1</sup>**  
**by E.W. Williams.**

The early 1970s witnessed the publication of two important works on the history of post-Roman Britain, namely Leslie Alcock’s *Arthur’s Britain* and John Morris’s *The Age of Arthur*.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently these two volumes have receded into the academic background, but the more controversial of those works, that of John Morris, drew a critical response which was to have an important impact on the use of ‘Celtic sources’ by historians. Initially three reviews of Morris’s work will be briefly considered, before focusing in greater detail on the fourth, that by David N. Dumville.<sup>3</sup>

With Morris’s *The Age of Arthur* having been published in 1973, in 1975 the reviews of his work began to appear. What should probably be regarded as the more positive of those writings came from the pen of James Campbell of Worcester College, Oxford. He sought to relate Morris’s composition to the challenges of writing a history of the period.<sup>4</sup>

So difficult, diverse and inadequate are the sources that to seek to write a history of the British Isles from the fourth century to the seventh must be to abandon some of the usual principles of historiography. To permute the innumerable possibilities is to impose more on ordinary prose than it can bear and to carry reasoning to the point of agnostic chaos. Only a learned and imaginative man could, and only an imprudent one would, attempt a comprehensive survey. Mr Morris fills the bill. His imprudence is marked. He uses to excess the ancient historian’s black arts for making objects resembling bricks with odd stalks of what may or may not be straw. Supposition is repeatedly presented as fact. But, however easy experts may find it to use his book for target practice, it is of great importance. It is brave, comprehensive and imaginative. These qualities outweigh the flaws which are inevitable when a powerful and sensitive historical imagination is inadequately controlled and waxes dogmatic, and over-specific on particulars....

Mr Morris’s work is a great encouragement to speculate, that is to say think again, about this period. He is surely right in maintaining that many of the *idées reçues* about it are themselves no more than speculations, swaddled in the prudent language of cautious men and hallowed by repetition. As a text-book or a work of reference his work is a failure. He is not the Good King Wenceslas in whose footsteps the neophyte may safely plod. But the energy and sense of his general approach and the wonderful fertility of his mind give *The Age of*

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr D. Stephenson, R. van Kemenade and R. Suggett for their comments on this article. The responsibility for the views expressed and for any errors is entirely mine.

<sup>2</sup> Alcock L., *Arthur’s Britain. History and archaeology, A.D. 367-634* (Allen Lane, London, 1971) & Morris J., *The Age of Arthur: a history of the British Isles from 350 to 650* (Widenfield & Nicolson London, 1973)

<sup>3</sup> Dumville D.N., ‘Sub-Roman Britain: history and legend’, in *History* vol.62 1977 pp.173-92.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell J. Review ‘The Age of Arthur’ in *Studia Hibernica* vol. 15 1975 pp.175-85

*Arthur* lasting value. All future work on the period will, or should, be indebted to it.<sup>5</sup>

Campbell's recognition of the difficulties of writing a history of the period and consequent cautious appreciation of Morris's work coincided with the publication of a more negative assessment by the archaeologist J.N.L. Myres.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the archaeological evidence he argued that Morris's view of Arthurian Britain,

... can be challenged at almost every point on archaeological grounds.<sup>7</sup>

In 1976, an even more negative response emerged from two academics based within the University of Wales, Aberystwyth: the historian D.P. Kirby<sup>8</sup> and the Irish and Welsh linguist and historian of literature, J.E. Caerwyn Williams.<sup>8</sup>

Dr Morris ... has not only surveyed the whole period and the whole of the British Isles across ... three centuries, but has injected into every fibre of his book his own individualistic views and uncompromising conclusions. ... No scholarly satisfaction is to be derived from commenting unfavourably and at length on the labour of love of another historian, but this massive edifice needs so thoroughly dismantling that it is essential to treat, at least in passing, as many as possible (for even an extended critique cannot cover every defective statement) of the errors and misconceptions with which it abounds.<sup>9</sup>

Here, there is no hint here of the guarded appreciation of Morris's work to be found in James Campbell's review. Having declared their intentions, they set forth on a thirty page 'dismantling' of the work. Even then, they appear to have been reluctant to regard their task as having been completed, for in concluding their review they declared:

Though it has not been possible to deal with every pronouncement in *The Age of Arthur* in the course of this review,... one point of historical criticism is regrettably quite clear. Though the author may write of subjecting his texts to 'critical study' ... he does not do so by modern canons of analysis and source-criticism.<sup>10</sup>

By 1976, though Morris's work had already been subjected to lengthy and somewhat brutal criticism, in retrospect it is apparent that the process of challenging the foundations of his analysis had yet to run its course. In particular, the door still lay open to an extended critique of the sources, a process already initiated and highlighted as relevant by Kirby and Williams.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid pp.177 & 185

<sup>6</sup> Myres J.N.L. 'Review of *The Age of Arthur*', in *English Historical Review* vol.90, 1975 pp.113-6

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p.114

<sup>8</sup> Kirby D.P. & Williams J.E.C., 'Review John Morris, *The Age of Arthur*' in *Studia Celtica* vol.10-11, 1975-6 pp.454-96. Williams was also a graduate of the United Theological College, Aberystwyth

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p.454

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p.486

Subsequently, the most damning evaluation of the 'Arthurian' studies of both Morris and Alcock came from David N. Dumville. In an article titled, *Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend*, published in the journal *History* in 1977, what he regarded as the 'Celtic sources' were dismissed on the grounds that

... most of the available written 'evidence' is more apparent than real.<sup>11</sup>

This article proved to be of great significance, for it carried the analysis beyond the works of Morris and Alcock, to a consideration of the adequacy of key Celtic primary sources as foundations for the writing of post-Roman and particularly early Welsh history.

Dumville's critique of those primary sources constituted a multi-faceted challenge to their authenticity. At the core of his analysis lay a claim that many of the key sources had been fabricated in the tenth century so as to provide the ruling elites of Powys, Gwynedd and Dyfed with an historical legitimacy which they did not rightly possess.<sup>12</sup> That constituted a fundamental challenge to the foundations of Welsh history as initially developed by J.E. Lloyd in his two volume *A History of Wales*,<sup>13</sup> first published in 1911.

The nature of the dilemma which the publication of those volumes and reviews they engendered, created for contemporary Welsh historians can be discerned from the response of John Davies when composing his volume *Hanes Cymru*.<sup>14</sup> With regard to the *Historia Brittonum* he declared.

Anodd gwybod beth i'w wneud gyda'r fath ddeunydd anhydrin. Ar y naill begwn, dadleuir nad oes modd rhoi cyfrif cydlynol o'r hyn a ddigwyddodd ym Mhrydain rhwng 400 a 600; ar y llall ceir astudiaeth feiddgar John Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, lle y gwasga'r awdur gymaint o ystyr ag sydd bosibl allan o'r dystiolaeth ... Rywle rhwng y ddau begwn hyn y mae gwaith y rhan fwyaf o arbenigwyr ar y cyfnod, a dilyn esiampl y rheini a wneir yma gan geisio didoli o'r ffynonellau yr hyn sy'n ddichonadwy.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to know what to do with such intractable material. On the one hand, it has been argued that it is impossible to provide a coherent account of what happened in Britain between 400 and 600; on the other, there is the bold study of John Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, in which the author extracts from the evidence as much meaning as possible ... The work of most specialists lies somewhere in between these two extremes; their example will be followed here in an attempt to provide a plausible narrative without overtaxing the evidence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.173

<sup>12</sup>Ibid pp.180-1

<sup>13</sup>Lloyd J.E., *A History of Wales* (Longmans. Green, and Co., London 1911)

<sup>14</sup>Davies J., *Hanes Cymru* (Allen Lane, London 1990)

<sup>15</sup>Ibid p.48

<sup>16</sup>Davies J., *A History of Wales* (Allen Lane, London 1993) p.48

For John Davies, the route out of the difficulty was to seek a middle ground between the work of John Morris and David Dumville, but that was a solution which left major academic issues unresolved. More than twenty years later, Thomas Charles-Edwards in his *Wales and the Britons 350-1064*, adopted a similar strategy.<sup>17</sup>

The most sceptical view of the British evidence for the period 550-685 would dismiss the poetry ascribed to Aneirin and Taliesin as of dubious authenticity and date and would regard the *Annales Cambriae* and the northern material in the *Historia Brittonum* and in the Chronicle of Ireland as three later texts derived from one lost original of c.800 ... Such a view cannot be shown conclusively to be wrong, but a good case can be made that the *Gododdin* is an illuminating and very early text for the historian of culture, though less helpful for the history of events; and that the *Annales Cambriae* and the Northern History in the *Historia Brittonum* are not sister texts to the northern strand in the Chronicle of Ireland; the strongest element in the sceptical case is that there may be a textual relationship between the *Annales Cambriae* and the Northern History. A history of the relationship between the Britons and the English between the Justinianic plague and the battle of Nechtanesmere which balances British evidence against English evidence is a possibility.<sup>18</sup>

For a scholar of the stature of Charles-Edwards to express such a constrained appraisal of the *Gododdin* and to confine himself to declaring that a history of the period 'is a possibility', casts considerable light on the intellectual quandary confronting those working on the earliest phases of Welsh history by 2013.<sup>19</sup>

Davies and Charles-Edwards, however, constituted the more resilient end of the historiographic spectrum, for during the forty years which have elapsed since the publication of Dumville's article, leading academics in England have largely accepted his views and discounted the 'Celtic sources'. This academic consensus can be seen in the work of Sheppard Frere, Peter Salway, Roger White and Esmonde Cleary.<sup>20</sup> In recent years Dumville's outlook has even informed authoritative works on the history of Wales. In the volume *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales in 2010, his views were accepted as a basis for rejecting key early Romano-British sources.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Charles-Edwards T.M., *Wales and the Britons 350-1064* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p.380

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p.1. Aspects of Thomas Charles-Edwards's analysis will be considered further in due course.

<sup>20</sup> Frere S., *Britannia, a history of Roman Britannia* (Pimlico, London 1994). See footnote. 5 p.355 & p.375. See also Kent J.P.C. 'The end of Roman Britain: the literary and numismatic evidence reviewed' in Casey P.J., *The end of Roman Britain* (British Archaeological Reports, Oxford 1979) British Series 71. pp.15-28. See in particular p.15. Salway P., *Roman Britain* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1981). See pp.404, 468 and in particular the *Notes* on p.515 which grant extended consideration to Dumville's article. White R., *Britannia Prima* (Tempus, Stroud 2007) p.211 & footnote 6 p.236. Esmonde Cleary A.S., *The ending of Roman Britain* (Batsford, London 1989) See in particular p.168 & footnote 10 together with references p.217.

<sup>21</sup> See Casey P.J. 'The end of the Roman army in Wales and the Marches', in Burnham B.C. & Davies J.L. (eds.) *Roman Frontiers in Wales and the Marches* (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Aberystwyth 2010) pp.62-6. See in particular pp.64-5. See also Casey P.J., 'Coin evidence and the end of Roman Wales' in *The Archaeological Journal*, vol.146,1989 pp.320-9. See in particular p.321

Despite that, when Dumville's analysis is subjected to detailed scrutiny, it is apparent that the evidence he presented in support of his claims is very suspect. My aim in this paper is to consider the foundations on which his analysis was based, proceeding initially from the background to the composition of his article.

As noted earlier, Dumville was impelled to compose his critique by the publication of Alcock's *Arthur's Britain* and Morris's *The Age of Arthur*.<sup>22</sup> In publishing those works he regarded Alcock and Morris as entering new ground, for in

...breaking with the twentieth-century tradition of English historiography, [they] have seen fit to assign a great importance to written sources deriving from the Celtic-speaking countries.<sup>23</sup>

In his article Dumville assumed the role of guardian of what he presented as 'the twentieth-century tradition of English historiography,' of viewing the Celtic sources as being of little significance. The difficulty with that approach is that it considerably oversimplifies the nature of English historiography, for it is apparent that during the period in question very significant attempts had been made to integrate a Celtic dimension into the analysis of English history. The foundations of that approach were laid by J.E. Lloyd, for in an earlier context he had constructed a version of Welsh history which complemented the work of the Oxford school of Germanist historians. In effect Lloyd had been engaged in a project to construct a Brythonic paradigm which complemented the Germanist paradigm of the Oxford school. As a consequence, those two schools of thought could have advanced hand in hand.<sup>24</sup>

Within the field of literature and the history of literature, that did indeed occur. At Cambridge, under the leadership of Hector Munro Chadwick, the study of a modernised version of the Germanist and the Brythonic paradigms was combined within a department subsequently to be known as the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic of which Dumville himself was a graduate and within which he was appointed lecturer in 1977.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to that aspect, there is considerable evidence that rather than reflecting a consensus view, he was expounding a partisan perspective which existed not only within the field of English historiography but more specifically amongst the staff and students within the Department of Anglo-Saxon.<sup>26</sup> That background is worth considering for it casts considerable light upon the position from which the validity of the Celtic sources was being assessed.

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<sup>22</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>23</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.173

<sup>24</sup> This issue is considered further in Williams E.W., 'J.E.Lloyd and the intellectual foundations of Welsh history', in the *National Library of Wales Journal* vol.36 no.1 2014 pp.1-44. See in particular p.14 & pp.28-30

<sup>25</sup> See Lapidge M., 'Introduction: The study of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in Cambridge, 1878-1999' in Lapidge M.(ed.), H.M.Chadwick and the study of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in the *Cambridge, Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58. See in particular pp.13-24 & p.35 & footnote 131

<sup>26</sup> The department became known as the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in 1971 under the leadership of Peter Clemoes. See Leedham-Green E.S., *A concise history of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996) See Appendix 3 pp.226-7

Initially it should be noted that there exists a well-established tradition dating back to the closing decade of the 19th century whereby leading intellectuals within both England and Wales acknowledge the importance of 'Celtic' sources to understanding the social origins of England. In the present context it is sufficient to refer to the names of some of the more prominent figures who founded that position, proceeding from F.W. Maitland to Frederic Seebohm, Paul Vinogradoff, J.E.A. Jolliffe, H.M. Chadwick and G.R.J. Jones.<sup>27</sup>

It must also be acknowledged that there existed a contrary outlook which reflected a long entrenched view within English historiography. J.M. Kemble can be regarded as the founder of that alternative position, for in his volume *The Saxons in England*, published in 1849,<sup>28</sup> he dismissed the records which had survived from the Welsh and Latin-speaking western areas of Britannia, declaring,

... the details of a long and doubtful struggle between the Saxons and the Britons are obviously based upon no solid foundations; the dates and the events are alike traditional, - the usual and melancholy consolation of the vanquished.<sup>29</sup>

Kemble's approach bore major implications, for it cleared the ground for the construction of an Aryan racist account of English history. Given that the surviving records of western Britain could be disregarded, the history of the Anglo-Saxons could be written on a clean sheet, as if Anglo-Saxon England had not benefited from the achievements of earlier civilisations.

On that basis, Kemble, for instance, was able to interpret the *hide* as a measure which emanated from 'the storehouse of nations',<sup>30</sup> that is the Germanic tribes. In contrast, I have argued that the *hide* is far more likely to have originated as a Roman measure of land.<sup>31</sup> This highlights the importance of Kemble's approach towards the records of western Britannia to his construction of a racially based account of Anglo-Saxon and English history.

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<sup>27</sup> As the literature is voluminous, only key publications are referenced here. Maitland F.W. 'Northumbrian tenures', in the *English Historical Review*, vol.5 1890 pp.625-32. Frederic Seebohm's, *The English village community* (Longmans, Green, and Co, London 1890). In that volume Seebohm did scrutinise some evidence from Wales for parallels within the Anglo-Saxon context, see chapter VI pp.181-213. Vinogradoff built on the work of Seebohm, devoting the first two chapters of his study of the development of the manorial system of England to an analysis of its Celtic and Roman antecedents. See Vinogradoff P., *The growth of the manor* (Macmillan, London 1905) pp.3-114. See also Jolliffe J.E.A. 'Northumbrian institutions' in the *English Historical Review*, vol.41 1926 pp1-42; Jolliffe J.E.A. *Pre-Feudal England* (Oxford University Press, London 1933) & Jones G.R.J. 'Multiple estates and early settlement' in Sawyer P.H. (ed.) *Medieval settlement – continuity and change* (Arnold, London 1976) pp.15-40. The issue of whether the manorial system of Wales was of Roman origin and was also established in England is considered in Williams E.W., 'J.E.Lloyd and his intellectual legacy: the Roman conquest and its consequences reconsidered', in the *National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. 36 no.3 2016 pp.271-330. See in particular pp.315-324

<sup>28</sup> Kemble J.M., *The Saxons in England* (Bernard Quarich, London 1849) 2 vols.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* vol.1 p.18

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* vol.1 p.95-6

<sup>31</sup> See *op cit* Williams E.W. in the *National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. 36 no.3 2016 pp.271-330. See in particular pp.315-324

In England, Kemble's work secured a broad following. In particular, it proved to be a major influence on members of the Oxford school of Germanist historians referred to earlier, a school which included figures such as W. Stubbs, J.R. Green and E.A. Freeman.<sup>32</sup> During the latter half of the nineteenth century and through to the twentieth century, the paradigm established by Kemble constituted one key strand to English historiography. However, during the initial decades of the 20th century H.M. Chadwick, operating from within the Department of English at Cambridge, established an institutional base for an outlook which moved beyond that developed by Kemble. In seeking to outline the history of that departure, this analysis draws heavily on the valuable article by Michael Lapidge published in a recent issue of *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*.<sup>33</sup>

Lapidge explains that Chadwick had lectured at Cambridge since 1895. In 1910 he was appointed a University Lecturer in Scandinavian. At that point his teaching responsibilities were entirely philological but already it appears that he had begun to aspire to broaden the scope of the courses presented.<sup>34</sup>

Chadwick evidently had begun to harbour dreams of extending the scope of these studies to incorporate historical and cultural background...<sup>35</sup>

Having been appointed to the Elrington and Bosworth Professorship in 1912, he secured the separation of English from the Medieval and Modern Languages faculty in 1917. Subsequently he secured the relocation of the embryonic Department of Anglo-Saxon from the English Faculty to the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, thus securing the radical step of setting the study of Anglo-Saxon in its broader social context.<sup>36</sup>

From 1919, the implications of that departure were revealed within Section B of the English Tripos which was focused on 'Early Literature and History'. It now entailed the opportunity to study five of eight courses, three of which were either entirely or partly focused on the Celtic inheritance. Those courses are listed below.

5. The early history and antiquities of Britain.
6. The early history, life and literature of the Celtic peoples.
7. The Celtic languages, with special reference to early Welsh and early Irish...<sup>37</sup>

Michael Lapidge summarised the implications of that transition in the following terms.

The most striking feature of this new syllabus is that the wholly linguistic nature of its predecessor has been replaced by emphasis on

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<sup>32</sup> See Young R.J.C., *The idea of English ethnicity* (Blackwell, Oxford 2008) p.35

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit. Lapidge M., in Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p.13

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p.13

<sup>36</sup> Ibid pp.13-4

<sup>37</sup> Ibid p.16

the history, life and literature of both Celtic and Germanic peoples, including their archaeology ('antiquities'), alongside their languages and literatures.<sup>38</sup>

The far-reaching nature of the departure initiated by Chadwick is underlined by the fact that subsequently the study of Roman history was added to the curriculum.<sup>39</sup> That created an approach to the study of Anglo-Saxon history which constituted the antithesis of the vision originally set out by J.M. Kemble. Some of the changes introduced by Chadwick led inevitably to a conservative reaction. In particular, as Michael Lapidge explained, the elimination of the study of Old English as a compulsory aspect to the English tripos

...was a change which was vehemently opposed by the conservative element in the English faculty...<sup>40</sup>

Whilst Chadwick remained in post, the curriculum he had established, including as it did the teaching of a number of courses focused on the Celtic aspect, was securely entrenched. However, with his retirement in September 1941, though his wife Nora K. Chadwick continued in her role as lecturer within the department,<sup>41</sup> his inheritance was open to challenge. It is also possible that by then, the heroic perspective on the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic past which was entrenched within the department, had run its course and that the department's outlook was in need of intellectual renewal. That raised the issue of what form that process would assume.

Chadwick's successor, Bruce Dickens, dropped the teaching of history but in seeking to respect Chadwick's legacy sought the establishment of a Professorship of Celtic within the department.<sup>42</sup> However, when he retired in 1957, his successor Dorothy Whitelock was vehemently opposed to such a departure.<sup>43</sup> Once more Michael Lapidge provides an important insight into those events:

The depressing correspondence generated by the proposal to create a Chair of Celtic can be read in the University of Cambridge, University Archives ... Dorothy Whitelock's view was that Celtic had nothing whatsoever to do with Anglo-Saxon and that, in any case, she did not wish to have such a chair in *her* Department. It is not surprising that, in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid p.16

<sup>39</sup> Ibid p.26

<sup>40</sup> Ibid p.16

<sup>41</sup> Ibid p.26. In 1950, Bruce Dickins, H.M. Chadwick's successor created a university lectureship for Nora Chadwick.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid pp.26-7

<sup>43</sup> Whitelock's approach is somewhat surprising, for in her role as editor of volume one of *English Historical Documents, c.500 - 1042*, she had edited documents which exhibited the co-existence of Welsh, Roman and Anglo-Saxon influences during a key formative phase in the history of England. That connection is particularly evident within the *Laws of Ine*. It can be argued that Whitelock's failure to acknowledge the importance of the Roman agricultural system within early Wessex and the Welsh language concepts employed within it, had limited her ability as editor to offer an appropriate insight into those laws. Whitelock D. (ed.) *English Historical Documents c.500-1042* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, London 1955). The interpretation of that system is considered further in *op. cit.* Williams E.W. in the *National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. 36 no.3 2016 pp.1-60. See in particular pp.48-9



the face of such aggressive opposition, the General Board did not pursue the proposal to create a Chair of Celtic.<sup>44</sup>

What is evident is that under Whitelock a new outlook which was far less accommodative of a Celtic dimension was in the process of being entrenched within the department. In her new role in the Elrington and Bosworth Professorship at Cambridge, not only did she block the creation of a Chair of Celtic within the Anglo-Saxon Department but, in October 1967, the department itself was transferred back to the Faculty of English, where it had been from 1919 to 1926. Chadwick's legacy was further eroded.<sup>45</sup>

Those years also witnessed the retirement of Nora Chadwick from her lectureship in the Early History and Culture of the British Isles. Patrick Sims-Williams has highlighted the existence of a very profound clash of outlook between Nora Chadwick and Dorothy Whitelock over the interpretation of the Celtic sources, but there existed other deep tensions within the department.<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Hughes, who had been a lecturer in history at Newham College, Cambridge, was appointed as Chadwick's successor. In a context in which a new perspective was securing an ascendancy within the department, Michael Lapidge informs us that '... Rachel Bromwich and Kathleen Hughes refused to speak to each other at all.'<sup>47</sup>

Patrick Sims-Williams offers a further insight into the situation.

In 1968-72, when I was an undergraduate taking Old English, Norse and then Irish and Welsh papers from the Tripos, there was a clear *Kulturkampf* among the staff, who held passionate and conflicting views on the Department's future. Rachel Bromwich was an embattled Celtic survivor from the Chadwick era...<sup>48</sup>

David Dumville would have been familiar with this situation, for he graduated from the department in 1969.<sup>49</sup> His own experience at Cambridge would have highlighted for him the existence of two quite distinct traditions within English historiography, one which placed considerable value on the Celtic sources whilst the other stood askance, viewing the Brythonic paradigm as developed by Lloyd and then the Chadwicks with considerable and not entirely unmerited, suspicion.

It is reasonably clear that Dumville was located within the latter school of thought and that his article may be viewed not as an isolated creation but rather as the culmination of an intellectual outlook introduced into the department as a consequence of the appointment of Dorothy Whitelock to the Elrington and Bosworth Professorship in

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<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. Lapidge M., in Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58. See p.27 footnote 104

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.32

<sup>46</sup> Sims-Williams P., 'H.M.Chadwick and early Wales,' in op cit Lapidge M.(ed.) in the *Cambridge, Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 171- 82. See in particular pp.171-2

<sup>47</sup> Op. cit. Lapidge M., in op. cit. Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58. See p.35

<sup>48</sup> Op cit Sims-Williams P. in op. cit. Lapidge M.(ed.) in the *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 171- 82. See in particular pp.171-2

<sup>49</sup> Op. cit. Lapidge M., in op. cit. Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58. See p.34 footnote 131

1957. However, the stance he adopted in constructing his critique of the Celtic sources is of great interest. Though he was located intellectually outside the Brythonic paradigm, in constructing his critique, so as to highlight what he perceived to be the incoherencies that existed between the paradigm and the sources, he located himself within it. Moreover, his methodology drew heavily on the work of the Chadwicks.

Fundamental to his analysis was the allocation of the 'Celtic sources' into specific categories. This echoed the approach of the Chadwicks, who in their key work, *The Growth of Literature*,<sup>50</sup> had sought to identify specific genres within the massively broad spectrum of literatures which they studied. In considering their first volume which focused on the 'Ancient Literatures of Europe', namely the Greek, Welsh, Irish, Old English and Norse literatures, Máire Ni Mhaonaigh set out the rationale of their approach in the following terms:

The overarching question which the Chadwicks sought to address in their investigation of this diverse material was one which was very much of their time: can universal, general principles be discerned which govern the growth of literature? Their approach, therefore, fits into evolutionary paradigms which also informed the scholarship of other disciplines in the period...

The Chadwicks' method for tackling this fundamental question was set out clearly in the first volume of their work. 'In each literature we shall attempt a descriptive analysis of the available records with a view to ascertaining how far the genres and the general features of the various literatures correspond and wherein the chief differences lie'. What they described as their 'proper theme' was 'the comparative study of literary genres. With this in mind they developed a rigid taxonomy consisting of five basic types...'Narrative poems' ...; 'Poems dealing with situation or emotion and consisting wholly or mainly of speeches...; 'Poems of didactic interest'...; 'Elegies and panegyrics'...; 'Personal poems'...<sup>51</sup>

It must be acknowledged that in terms of the focus of his work, Dumville had moved beyond the concerns of the Chadwicks. Thus, following his appointment as lecturer at Cambridge, he had in 1980 established a course in the Palaeography of the British Isles (600-1100). That was entirely consistent with the thrust of his earlier doctoral thesis at Edinburgh.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, in composing his article *Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend*,<sup>53</sup> his methodology drew heavily on the earlier work of the Chadwicks, with all the potential difficulties which that entailed. In particular, their approach has been criticised for imposing invalid categories on the subject matter.<sup>54</sup> Dumville's approach entailed a similar danger. Initially, the extent to which his key

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<sup>50</sup> Chadwick H.M. & Chadwick N.K., *The growth of literature* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1932-40) 3 vols.

<sup>51</sup> Ni Mhaonaigh M., 'The growth of literature: the Celtic dimension' in op. cit. Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 183-97. See pp.184-5

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit. Lapidge M., in op. cit. Lapidge M.(ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 1-58. See p.34

<sup>53</sup> Op. cit. Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. Ni Mhaonaigh M. in op. cit. Lapidge M. (ed.), in *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, vols. 69/70, 2015 pp. 183-97. See pp.184-5

category - namely the 'Celtic sources' - did indeed constitute a valid entity will be considered.

In practice, Dumville's reference to 'Celtic sources' constituted a means of referring primarily to Romano British, Welsh and Irish sources. As a consequence, from the outset, the use of the category of 'Celtic sources' had its dangers, for whilst the societies concerned shared certain features, they were also characterised by important differences. Whereas the social structure of Britannia had been thoroughly Romanised, Ireland had remained a tribal society. As a consequence, if not carefully applied, the category of 'Celtic sources' could lead to an overemphasis on what was common to the two societies at the expense of what was distinctive. That was particularly the case given that Dumville's analysis was focused almost exclusively on the Romano-British and Welsh sources, with the Irish material being of only incidental significance. In practice, he was asserting that '... most of the available written 'evidence' [of the Romano-British and Welsh sources] is more apparent than real'.<sup>55</sup>

The manner in which he allocated those sources into sub-categories also needs to be considered. They were divided into four groups on the basis of 'age or type'.<sup>56</sup> The difficulty is that the age of a document was determined on palaeographic grounds, that is, based on the nature of the script rather than its content. The significance of the issue can be illustrated by reference to his analysis of the *The Tribal Hidage*. In his introduction to the texts, he declared that

'...it should be possible to carry the history of the text back into the tenth century at least ...'<sup>57</sup>

For Dumville, the key conclusion to be drawn from his study of the manuscripts of *The Tribal Hidage* was that it may eventually be possible to date the document in its earliest form to the tenth century. By contrast, on the basis of compelling historical grounds *The Tribal Hidage* is regarded by some historians as a document whose earliest content was drawn up in Northumbria, around the year 625.<sup>58</sup>

The existence of two different views relating to the dating of material should be noted. Moreover, Dumville was pursuing an approach which was heavily biased towards textual evidence and palaeographic analysis without acknowledging the existence of an alternative position which accorded weight to evidence drawn from the interpretation of social structural aspects such as the nature of the economy and social formation. This, as will become evident, constituted a significant methodological weakness at the heart of his analysis.

A further difficulty was that in creating categories of documents based on both palaeographic as well as on typological criteria, he was grouping primary sources in a

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<sup>55</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.173

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p.175

<sup>57</sup> Dumville D.N., 'The Tribal Hidage: an introduction to its texts and their history', in Bassett S. (ed.), *The origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms* (Leicester University Press, Leicester 1989) pp.225-30. See in particular p.230

<sup>58</sup> See Higham N.J., *The Kingdom of Northumbria AD.350-1100* (Alan Sutton, Stroud 1993) & op cit Williams E.W. *National Library of Wales Journal* vol. 36 no.3 2016 See in particular pp.47-8

manner which lacked coherence. This is readily evident with regard to the four categories into which he allocated the Romano-British and Welsh written sources. These were:

- the works of Gildas and St Patrick;
- *Aneirin and Taliesin* and the Welsh triads;
- the *Historia Brittonum*, *Annales Cambriae*, the Harleian royal genealogies and the Pillar of Eliseg;
- The Welsh romances, the Latin saints' lives of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries and the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth;

None of the above categories is entirely coherent. To take but two examples, it is difficult to identify the commonality between the poetry of Taliesin and the Welsh triads, or between the saints' lives and the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. One of the key difficulties with the work of the Chadwicks was being reproduced. Through the categories he had established, Dumville was already limiting the possibility of offering meaningful comment on the sources he was evaluating.

Moreover, whilst his claim that the evidence presented by those sources, was '...more apparent than real...',<sup>59</sup> constituted a claim relating to the whole body of primary sources, his analysis was focused on only part of that body of evidence. A significant number of sources were being overlooked.

The early *Life of St Samson*,<sup>60</sup> which sheds considerable light on the religious organisation of late fifth and early sixth century Britannia, did not feature in his analysis, whilst it could have been grouped with the works of St Patrick and St Gildas. Similarly a number of poems which on historical criteria must be regarded as early, works such as *Echrys Ynys*,<sup>61</sup> *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin*, *Gereint fil' Erbin*,<sup>62</sup> as well as the later poems of *Canu Cadwallon ap Cadfan*,<sup>63</sup> *Edmyg Dinbych*,<sup>64</sup> and *Armes Prydein*,<sup>65</sup> were completely ignored. In turn, a large body of genealogical material which existed beyond the Harleian manuscript 3859 and *The Pillar of Eliseg*, were overlooked,<sup>66</sup> as was the whole of what is regarded as Welsh Law.<sup>67</sup> By contrast the *Book of Llan Dâv*<sup>68</sup> received a somewhat more favourable treatment for it was considered in footnote 59, with further comment awaiting the publication of Wendy Davies's research.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. in *History* vol.62 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.173

<sup>60</sup> Taylor T., (ed.) *The Life of St Samson of Dol* (Llanerch, Felinfach 1991)

<sup>61</sup> Gruffydd R.G., 'A Welsh Dark Age Court Poem' in Carey J., Koch J.T. & Lamber P.Y. (eds.) *Idanach Ildirech* (Celtic Studies Publications Inc, Aberystwyth 1999) pp.39-48

<sup>62</sup> Jarman A.O.H. (ed.) *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1982). See poems numbers 1 & 21

<sup>63</sup> Gruffydd R.G., 'Canu Cadwallon ap Cadfan' in Bromwich R. & Jones R.B. (eds.) *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1978) pp.25-43

<sup>64</sup> Gruffydd R.G., *Edmyg Dinbych* (Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth 2002)

<sup>65</sup> Williams I. *Armes Prydein* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1955)

<sup>66</sup> Bartrum P.C., *Early Welsh genealogical tracts* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1966) See pp.14-122

<sup>67</sup> See eg. Williams S.J. & Powell J.E. (eds.) *Llyfr Blegywryd* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1942), Wiliam A.R. (ed.) *Llyfr Iorwerth* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1960) & Jenkins D. (ed.) *Llyfr Colan* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1982)

<sup>68</sup> Evans J.G. (ed.) *The text of the Book of Llan Dâv* (Published by the editor, Oxford 1893)

<sup>69</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.185

Given that background, it is evident that in making his sweeping assertion, Dumville considered only a fraction of the relevant sources, an aspect which detracted significantly from the credibility of his claim. Had he been able to substantiate his assessment of the 'Celtic sources', then his view would only be pertinent to those documents he had considered, rather than to the whole body of Romano-British and Welsh primary sources. From the outset, he was guilty of substantially overstating his position.

Even so, given the nature of the works he had prioritised for consideration, providing a summary assessment of such a diverse range of material constituted a major challenge. Accordingly, the manner in which he approached that task is of considerable interest.

With regard to the earliest material, which he viewed as the works of St Patrick and Gildas, he had little to say.<sup>70</sup> He then considered the works attributed to Aneirin and Taliesin, but again his assessment represented something of an anti-climax. He declared that

...as works which, *in principle*, cannot be dated more securely than between the late sixth century ... and the end of the eleventh century ... they cannot be used by the historian. Before he can press them into service in writing the history of any century, he must demand a more precise linguistic dating from the student of philology.<sup>71</sup>

Here is an expression of the palaeographic view without acknowledging the existence of a possible alternative historical perspective from which those poems could be studied. Moreover, he was failing to support his key claim. He was not providing evidence that the above works were irrelevant but rather stating that their location in history was not understood. The implication of his analysis was, that if the context of their composition was established, then they could prove to be a key source for historians.

A similar situation arose in relation to his critique of the *Historia Brittonum*. With regard to the fifth century material contained in that text, he stated that the author had drawn upon

... the chronicles of Prosper of Aquitaine and Isidore of Seville, both of which probably came as continuations of the Eusebius-Jerome Chronicle (to A.D. 378) which he also used; the *Cursus Paschalis*, with consular names perhaps extending to about A.D. 520 of Victorius of Aquitaine; a legendary account, or accounts, of St Patrick; a *Liber Beati Germani*, arguably written in the reign of Cadell of Powys, who died in 808; a Welsh (vernacular) poem on the battles of Arthur; and some English material, chiefly a legend of Hencgest and Horsa and their dealings with Gwrtheyrn (Vortigern) and Gwrthefyr (Vortimer). These were interwoven by our author to provide a discontinuous and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid p.179

<sup>71</sup> Ibid p.178

not entirely coherent attempt at an interpretation of fifth-century British history. I trust that the mere recital of these sources will suggest their utter flimsiness as records of this obscure century of our history.<sup>72</sup>

In identifying the use made by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* of works by Prosper of Aquitaine, Isidore of Seville, the Eusebius-Jerome Chronicle and the *Cursus Paschalis*, Dumville made an important contribution to the intellectual history of the text. However, his reference to subsequent sources, though presented as established fact was entirely conjectural. He was presenting a hypothesis as established truth, thus once more overstating his position. His assessment of those unidentified sources is open to challenge and it is entirely possible that future students of the text will advance very different sources. In the current context, Dumville's claim of the existence of a *Liber Beati Germani* composed in the reign of Cadell of Powys can surely be dismissed.

His consideration of the genealogies also calls for further consideration. He stated that

... Celtic genealogies are not a historical record. They express a legal or political claim. They may be historically accurate, but will only be so where they have not been corrupted in transmission and, ... where historical accuracy does not conflict with the claims made by the owner or author of the genealogy.<sup>73</sup>

He acknowledged that the existence of a legal or political interest within a genealogy did not in itself imply that the genealogy was corrupt. To the contrary, despite the fact that it embodied a political interest it could be entirely valid. Once more his analysis did not support his broader claim regarding the nature of the Romano-British and Welsh sources.

Included in Dumville's fourth category were the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Welsh romances. Those provided ample scope for criticism. Also inserted in that category were the late Latin saints' *Lives*, published in the *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* edited by Wade-Evans.<sup>74</sup> That source included fourteen charters relating to the Church of Llanccarfan.<sup>75</sup> Had they been grouped with the charters contained in the *Book of Llan Dâv*, that totality would have constituted a significant body of texts. For Dumville to substantiate his key claim, an incisive assessment was called for.

Amongst other things, we may expect a saint's Life to claim property and rights in the locality of its monastery. These claims will automatically be expressed – for such was the convention of hagiography throughout the Celtic-speaking world – in terms of an original grant, by the founder of the local royal dynasty, to the founder

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid p.177

<sup>73</sup> Ibid p.178

<sup>74</sup> Wade-Evans A.W. (ed. & trans.) *Vitae sanctorum Britanniae et genealogiae* (University of Wales Press Board, Cardiff 1944)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid pp.124-41

... of the monastic community or, later, the episcopal see which claims descent from the saint's own day in the fifth or sixth century.<sup>76</sup>

Once more we have a portrayal of the source rather than an assessment of its validity. This approach was more akin to literary criticism than to an historical assessment. In keeping with that literary approach, the critique of sources often concluded with the identification of a genre<sup>77</sup> and then proceeded no further. The identification of the category to which a source belonged was deemed to be sufficient. Crucially, the distinction between form and content was overlooked, for form was regarded as defining content. The possibility that a particular form could contain a diversity of content was not considered, thus allowing the analysis to remain largely at the level of categories. What is evident is that in considering the four groups of sources which he had earlier identified, Dumville did not support the sweeping claim he had advanced. That however, was not the end of the matter.

As he considered the work of Gildas, his narrative gained a new impetus, but that momentum was not achieved by addressing his primary theme. Rather his criticism of the Romano-British and Welsh sources was put to one side as he set off on a tangent into the history of medieval ideas. He viewed the work of Gildas as the source of what he considered to be one of the three key ideas of medieval Welsh scholarship regarding the end of Roman Britannia. The view that there existed three such concepts was in itself novel, but their form as presented by Dumville became even more contentious.<sup>78</sup>

The first idea presented concerned Gildas's view of the role played by Magnus Maximus in weakening the defences of Britannia through his usurpation of power.<sup>79</sup> Whether that idea had played an important role in the sixth and seventh centuries is open to dispute, but by the ninth century Dumville regarded that concept as having evolved into something quite different, but still focused on Magnus Maximus.

By the time he emerges again, in the ninth century, he has grown to be a figure of the greatest stature. He develops an invented family through which Brittonic rulers claim descent from him, either in the direct male line or by 'marrying' the head of their dynastic pedigree to a daughter of Maximus. He appears both as the last Roman emperor in Britain and as the first ruler of an independent Britain, from whom all legitimate power flowed ... From his death, therefore, begins the history of the independent Brittonic kingdoms. This view is attested for the three major Welsh kingdoms: for Gwynedd and Powys in ninth-century records and for Dyfed in a tenth-century text.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 p.175

<sup>77</sup> Ibid pp.173-92. See in particular the following instances; p.175 '...the literary *genre* in question...'; p.177 '...a synchronizing historian of the *type*...'; p.178 '... *Celtic genealogies* are not a historical record ...'; p.182 '... an origin-legend, a *genre* especially well known to students of Irish literature ...'; 'We must remember here the natures of the *genres* with which we are dealing ...'; p.186 '... it is an axiom of *Celtic hagiography* ...'; p.187 '...*'no smoke without fire'* school of thought'; p.188 '... this section is a Latin prose rendering of an *Old Welsh battle-catalogue-poem*...'.  
<sup>78</sup> Ibid p.179

<sup>79</sup> Ibid p.179

<sup>80</sup> Ibid p.180

Earlier, he had acknowledged that though a particular genealogy might express a political interest, that did not in itself exclude the possibility that it could be valid. Now in relation to the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys and Dyfed, he ignored the possibility that the Welsh genealogies could be valid, stating that they were 'invented'. In effect, he was claiming that the political histories of the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys and Dyfed reflected a political conspiracy by their elites to grant them an historical hinterland which they did not rightly possess. Moreover, the extent of that purported conspiracy should be noted, for according to Dumville, the conspirators acting in the ninth and tenth centuries constructed fictitious pedigrees extending back, at the very least to the late fourth century.

In the present context it is sufficient to note that in a society in which there existed a stratum of highly literate religious and poetic intellectuals who had a very clear concept of the past and access to a wider body of genealogical material, no political elite could ever have hoped to get away with such a conspiracy.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, whilst the genealogies do contain attempts at constructing fictitious lines of descent, they appear to have been formulated primarily by religious intellectuals seeking to carry specific lines of descent back from the fourth century to Jesus Christ himself. What is noteworthy is how transparent those efforts at constructing false genealogies are. They can be easily identified on the basis of the names used and an incorrect calculation of the number of generations required.<sup>82</sup>

Whilst the foundations of Dumville's conspiracy theory concerned the significance of Magnus Maximus to early Welsh history, subsequently, that concept was elaborated in relation to the kingdom of Gwynedd.

The second main idea, in early Welsh scholarship, about sub-Roman Britain is closely connected to the story of Maximus. It seeks to explain and justify the creation of the kingdoms of north and west Wales. This is, of course, the story of Cunedda. Cunedda is said by sources of the ninth century, and later, to have been ruler of the area known as Manaw of (the) Gododdin, a kingdom which bordered on the Firth of Forth. ... Cunedda is said to have come with eight of his sons, from the North to Wales from which he expelled the Irish who had settled there. ... This is in effect a statement of the foundation of Gwynedd. ... What is clear and important is that the perfectly incredible modern constructs of migrations from Manaw to Gwynedd organised by Maximus or Stilicho, Aetius or Vortigern, or some other pan-British representative of Roman imperial power, must be firmly rejected.<sup>83</sup>

Dumville asserts that the sources describe Cunedda as ruler of the kingdom of Manaw of the Gododdin, but the sources make no such claims. They do not refer to Cunedda as ruler, nor to Manaw as a kingdom. Moreover, whereas he claims that the material in question constituted 'a statement of the foundation of Gwynedd', in practice it was

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<sup>81</sup> *The existence* of such a view of the past is clearly illustrated for example in the poem Armes Prydein. See op cit Williams I. (ed.) 1955

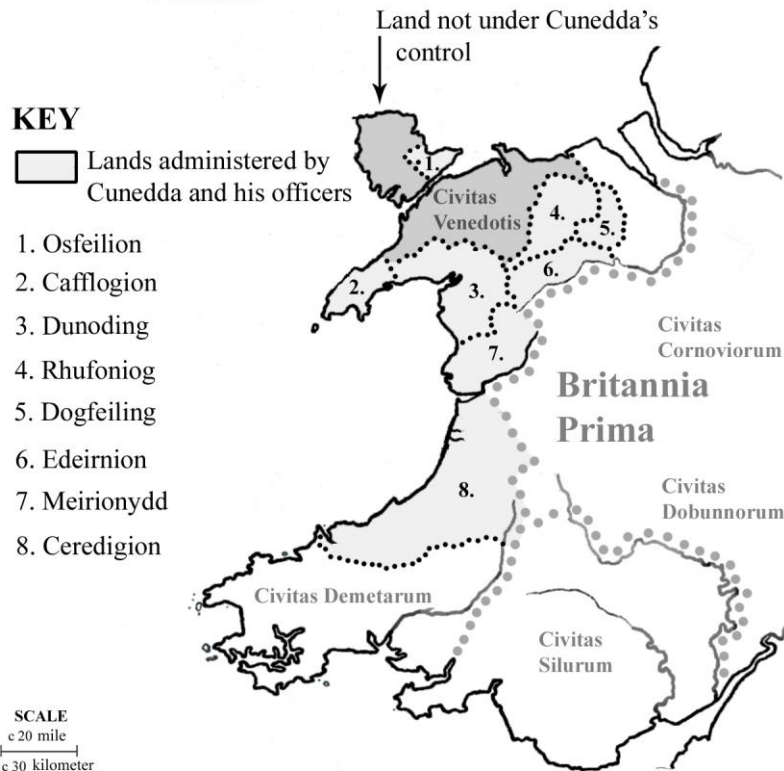
<sup>82</sup> Op cit Bartrum P.C. 1966. See eg. p.9 par.1 where the line of descent of Owen ap Hywel is traced back to Christ. The entries prior to Tacit are clearly false.

<sup>83</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977. See in particular pp.181 & 183



nothing of the sort. The territories referred to were on the fringes of *Civitas Venedotis*. Were the hypothesis being advanced correct, it can be assumed that any competent conspirator would have given pride of place to legitimising control of the core areas of Gwynedd, formerly within *Civitas Venedotis*. In fact, as illustrated in the map below, those areas are not referred to at all in the relevant section of the *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>84</sup>

Map 1. *Civitas Venedotis* and the lands administered by Cunedda



Dumville's dismissal of the transfer of Cunedda from Manaw to Gwynedd possibly by Stilicho or another commander is also misconceived, for if Manaw was part of the province of Valentia, then it would have been perfectly normal for the Roman high command to transfer forces from one frontier to another. That is what they did on a regular basis!<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Morris J. (ed. & trans.) *Nennius* (Phillimore, London 1980). See pars. 62 & op cit Bartrum P.C. 1966, p.13 par.32.

<sup>85</sup> With regard to the broader literature, it is worthy of note that Thomas Charles-Edwards in his volume *Wales and the Britons 350-1064*, (p.181) also implicitly rejects David Dumville's conspiracy theory. Despite that, it should be noted that Charles-Edwards's work shares the key theoretical weaknesses which characterises the work of Dumville, for it grants undue consideration to textual analysis at the expense of social structural considerations. As a consequence his view that the material relating to Cunedda within the *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian genealogies constitute 'very different versions', (Ibid p.181) and that the material

... in its literal form, ... [does not have] any chance of being true ... (ibid p.181)

must be regarded with caution. That reflects a view of the material as belonging to a post-Roman context, but if interpreted as belonging to a Roman context, not only can the different accounts be seen

Dumville, regarded the account of Cunedda's transfer from Manaw Gododdin contained in the *Historia Brittonum* as conforming to another key ideological aspect.

From 388, the date of Maximus's death, the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought derived its calculations. Maximus, as the only 'British' emperor identifiable in early Wales and as a person of the greatest historical significance in Gildas's work, becomes the founding figure of independent post-Roman Britain. ... The *Historia Brittonum* ... our oldest witness to the legend [of Cunedda] ... states that the 'migration' took place 146 years – note the precision of number – before the accession of Maelgwn of Gwynedd, which insular scholarship placed in 534. We are not entitled to explain away for *ex parte* reasons this figure of 146 years. If we do our sums, we arrive at the magic year of 388, that of the death of Maximus.<sup>86</sup>

Given the meagre documentation available, Dumville's bold definition of the nature of 'the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought' raises the issue of the basis upon which it was made. He cited the work of Molly Miller, who with regard to the death of Cadwallon of Gwynedd and the accession of Maelgwn, stated:

No Insular source for these events seems to survive, but an entry is found in the annals of Redon, abstracted by or for Robert of Torigny in the twelfth century, which reports for the year 534: *Occisus est Cavallonus rex fortissimus Majoris Britanniae*, no doubt originally referring (*fortissimus*) to Cadwallon's conquest of Anglesey and its annexation to the kingdom of Gwynedd.<sup>87</sup>

With regard to the authenticity of that record, Miller stated:

On internal evidence the annals come from a record begun at Redon, and continued by a group from Redon in exile at Angers. They are more or less continuous from the foundation of Redon in 823, but before that date have five entries which will have come from the records of older foundations, or from book history. The obit of 534 is safeguarded by its place in the series, so that the suggestion that it is an error for the obit of the younger Cadwallon in 634 ... will not stand.<sup>88</sup>

The death of Cadwallon and the ascent of Maelgwn were thus dated to 534 on the basis of the twelfth century Annals of Redon, which for the four centuries prior to

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as complementary, but moreover they can be viewed as providing important insights into the events of those times.

The historical role of figures such as Cunedda, Gwrtheyrn and Arthur call for extended consideration. I hope to pursue these aspects in further contributions to the *National Library of Wales Journal*.

<sup>86</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.180 & 182

<sup>87</sup> Miller M., 'Relative and absolute publication dates of Gildas's *De Excidio* in Medieval scholarship' in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vol.26 1974-6 pp.169-174. See in particular p.174

<sup>88</sup> Ibid footnote 1 p.174

823, contain a mere five entries, all of uncertain origin. With regard to the significance of the year 534, Miller stated further,

... it seems, however, to be presupposed by H[istoria] B[rittonum] 61, if the statement there ... that Cunedda came to Gwynedd 146 years before Maelgwn reigned, is intended to date Cunedda's arrival to the year of the death of Maximus, in 388.<sup>89</sup>

That was the foundation on which Dumville's claim was based. It should be observed that the above source does not provide any evidence that 'insular scholarship placed [the accession of Maelgwn of Gwynedd] to 534' or that 'the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought derived its calculations' from Maximus's death in 388. What that single record in the Annals of Redon demonstrates is that a small Breton monastic audience may have believed that Cadwallon had been killed in 534. Moreover, whereas Miller is tentative in suggesting the link between the years 388 and 534, Dumville is categorical in claiming that a relationship existed between the two dates. Given the importance of the issue to his analysis, the date and circumstances of Cadwallon's death calls for further scrutiny.

Gildas accused Maelgwn in his youth of having killed the king who was his uncle.

Nonne in primis adolescentiae tuae annis avunculum regem cum fortissimis propemodum militibus, quorum vultus non catulorum leonis in acie magnopere dispares visebantur, acerrime ense hasta igni oppressisti ...<sup>90</sup>

Did you not, in the first years of your youth, use sword and spear and flame in the cruel despatch of the king your uncle and nearly his bravest soldiers, whose faces in battle were not very different from those of lions' whelps? ...<sup>91</sup>

The Annals of Redon feature the concept '*fortissimus*',<sup>92</sup> a concept which is also employed by Gildas in his criticism of Maelgwn. Redon is located in eastern Brittany, some 68 km to the east of St Gildas-de-Rhuys where Gildas is reputed to have been buried.<sup>93</sup> Miller noted that the entry relating to Cadwallon Lawhir may have been derived from 'book history'. Those writing the Annals of Redon may have had access to Gildas's work and as Bretons, probably had an interest in the history of fifth century Britannia. This points to the possibility that the annal which dates the death of

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<sup>89</sup> Miller M., 'Date-guessing and pedigrees' in *Studia Celtica* vol. 10-11, 1975-6 pp.96-109. See in particular p.103

<sup>90</sup> Winterbottom M., *Gildas. The ruin of Britain and other works* (Phillimore, London 1978). See cap. 33.4 . As noted above, Winterbottom employed the title *The ruin of Britain* as the title of his volume but he also employed that as the title to his English language translation of the appropriate section of Gildas's work. However, somewhat surprisingly he adopted *De excidio Britonum* (The ruin of the Britons) as the Latin title of the latter text. In this article the title *De excidio Britanniae* will be used to refer to that Latin source.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid par. 33.4

<sup>92</sup> Op cit Miller M. in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vol.26 1974-6 pp.169-174. See in particular p.174

<sup>93</sup> Bartrum P.C., *A classical Welsh dictionary* (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth 1993) pp.277-82 **Gildas ap Caw**. See in particular p.278

Cadwallon Lawhir to 534 may have been conjectural, based on a reading of Gildas. Miller's claim was hardly based on firm foundations and as a consequence her work did not constitute a firm foundation for Dumville's hypothesis. What then of the location of Maelgwn in the genealogies?

Given that Cadwallon Lawhir was referred to by Gildas as Maelgwn's uncle, the assumption by Miller that Maelgwn was the son of Cadwallon is untenable.<sup>94</sup> The genealogies of Jesus College manuscript 20 offer another line of descent noting that Cadwallon had a half brother known as Einyaw[n].<sup>95</sup> Maelgwn was thus in all probability the son of Cadwallon's brother.

With regard to the length of his reign, the evidence points to his having ascended to power as a very young man, in the latter decades of the fifth century. Subsequently he appears to have enjoyed a reign of over half a century before his death from the plague in 547.<sup>96</sup> In his *'De Excidio Britanniae'* probably composed in the mid 540s,<sup>97</sup> Gildas compares Maelgwn to 'pingues tauri'<sup>98</sup> or fat bulls. That can safely be regarded as a reference to his physique at the end of his reign. The claim contained in the Annals of Redon that Cadwallon Lawhir survived until 534 should be dismissed as a corrupt record. Cadwallon is likely to have been killed at some point during the early 490s with Maelgwn ascending to the throne in that context. Dumville's attempt to link the dating of Cunedda's transfer to Gwynedd to the execution of Magnus Maximus in 388 must be rejected, as must his assertion that 'the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought derived its calculations' from the execution of Maximus in 388. That rejection is amply supported when the Annals of Redon are subjected to further scrutiny.

Miller claimed that the death of Cadwallon in 534 was

...safeguarded by its place in the series, so that the suggestion that it is an error for the obit of the younger Cadwallon in 634 ... will not stand.<sup>99</sup>

In advancing that claim, Miller was not being entirely transparent, for when the entry in question is viewed within the broader context of the series of five annals dating to the period before 823, the dubious nature of her assertion is revealed.

421. Natus est S.Gildas. His diebus fuit Artus rex Britannorum fortis, et facetus

515. Venerunt transmarini Britanni in Armoricam, id est Minorem Britanniam.

534. Occisus est Cavallonus rex fortissimus Majoris Britanniae.

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<sup>94</sup> Op cit Miller M. in *Studia Celtica* vol. 10-11, 1975-6 pp.96-109. See in particular Table 1 p.102, Table 2 p.104 & Table 3 p.108

<sup>95</sup> Ibid p.107 Miller does acknowledge this as a possibility. See p.107. Also op cit Bartrum P.C. 1966. See Jesus College Ms. 20 par.23

<sup>96</sup> Op cit Morris J. (ed. & trans.) 1980. See *Annales Cambriae*. I intend to consider the date of Maelgwn's ascent to power in a further article focused on J.E.Lloyd's interpretation of Welsh history.

<sup>97</sup> See eg. op cit Bartrum P.C. 1993 pp.277-82 **Gildas ap Caw**. See p.282

<sup>98</sup> Op cit Winterbottom M. 1978. See *De Excidio Britanniae* cap.34.2

<sup>99</sup> Op cit Miller M. in the *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* vol.26 1974-6 pp.169-174. See in particular footnote 1 p.174

580. Fuerunt sancti Samson, Maclous, Maglorius et Paulus episcopi.

643. Dagobertus, rex Francorum, et S. Judicael pacem fecerunt.<sup>100</sup>

The first annal confirms the annalist's interest in Gildas, but in granting him 421 as his date of birth, it is about eighty years too early. The second annal dates the advent of the British to Armorica to 515. This again is wildly inaccurate. According to this analysis, a date nearer to the Barbarian Conspiracy of 367 would be more acceptable. The third annal dating the death of Cadwallon Lawhir to 534 thus follows two significantly inaccurate annals. It suggests that the first two as well as the third were based on conjecture.

It is difficult to know what to make of the fourth annal, but the fifth, dating the death of Dagobert I king of the Franks to 643 appears to be reasonably accurate, for his *obit* is usually recorded as occurring in 639.<sup>101</sup> Dagobert's rule extended to the vicinity of Redon and thus the date of his death could have been the subject of local verification. However, it is clear that Dumville's assertion that 'the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought derived its calculations' from Maximus's death in 388 had not been supported.

The major difficulty with Dumville's analysis is that his claim that the evidence provided by the Romano British and Welsh sources is 'more apparent than real',<sup>102</sup> is based on the fragile foundations of a hypothesis of a vast conspiracy having existed amongst the political elites of Gwynedd, Powys and Dyfed. That thesis had evolved from a line of enquiry which had arisen earlier in his academic career. It is important to follow the rationale of that line of thought so as to identify the flaw at the heart of his analysis.

During the early 1970s, David N. Dumville, whilst under the supervision of Professor Kenneth Jackson, produced a doctoral thesis at the University of Edinburgh. The thesis, titled *The textual history of the Welsh-Latin Historia Brittonum*,<sup>103</sup> was accepted in 1975. In the course of that research, the genealogies and specifically the manner in which the royal line of Powys claimed descent from Gwrtheyrn emerged as a major issue for the young research student;

The ancient male line of Powys became extinct in 854, but this claim to descent from Gwrtheyrn is found in a source contemporary with the Historia Brittonum as well as one of much later date. The claim is not, however, allowed to pass unchallenged. Both the Historia Brittonum itself and the so-called 'Harleian Genealogies', ... provide an account of the origins of the Powys dynasty which is radically different from that of the official text. ...

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<sup>100</sup> Migne J.P. (ed) *Patrologia Latina*, vol.CCII, col.1323

<sup>101</sup> See eg. Fletched R., *The conversion of Europe* (Fontana Press, London 1997) p.141

<sup>102</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.173

<sup>103</sup> Dumville D.N., *The textual history of the Welsh-Latin Historia Brittonum*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh 1975. See in particular p.5. Dumville's thesis is downloadable as a PDF from the Edinburgh Research Archive.

These closely interrelated texts pose many problems which will not be elucidated in this brief survey. But it is obvious that the arrival on the genealogical scene of Cadell Ddyrnllug is a major disruptive factor. It is very difficult to distinguish between cause and effect when dealing with this type of material. However, one is bound to recognise the existence of a King Cadell of Powys at the beginning of the early ninth century (ob. 808) as a factor in this confusing situation. Whether he owes his name to that of the alleged founder of his line or Cadell ddyrnllug owes his 'existence' to the inventiveness of a genealogist of the time of Cadell ap Brochwel is something that cannot be decided for lack of evidence.<sup>104</sup>

The key difficulty for Dumville was that Gwrtheyrn and Cadell Ddyrnllug seemed to be two different persons. However, the genealogies in question contained no discontinuity for the supposed problem entailed in the emergence of Cadell Ddyrnllug is simply explained if we suppose that Cadell Ddyrnllug is another name for Gwrtheyrn. Dumville had identified a non-existent problem.<sup>105</sup>

The source of the difficulty lay in the fact that within the genealogies in question, leading individuals were referred to by different names at different times. What Dumville, his doctoral supervisor and eventually his doctoral examiner overlooked were the complexities of the Roman naming system. At the core of that system was the *tria nomina*, a naming convention whereby each man of standing was likely to have had at least three names. The *praenomen* represented his personal name, the *nomen* his family name, whilst he could also acquire a *cognomen* or nickname, with some individuals having multiple *cognomina*.<sup>106</sup> In addition individuals could acquire *cognomina ex virtute*, or *agnōmen/agnomina* which reflected particular virtuous achievements by that individual.

The name Cadell would have been a *praenomen* or a Welsh rendering of a Roman *praenomen*, whilst 'dyrnllug' constituted a *cognomen* reflecting his military prowess. In turn, 'Guitolin' or 'Guitaul' constituted a Welsh rendering of Vitalinus, which may have been either his *nomen* or another *cognomen*. By contrast Gwrtheyrn would have constituted Cadell's *cognomen ex virtute* reflecting the role he had fulfilled within Roman Britannia and on behalf of the wider empire. I am not aware of any aspect to the genealogies in question which could not have been resolved through a consideration of Roman naming conventions and the Roman system of family law. Certainly there is nothing in the genealogies referred to by Dumville on pages 57 and 58 of his thesis that justifies the conspiracy theory he then advanced in relation to early medieval Powys.

It is surprising that the complexities of the naming conventions in use within the *Historia Brittonum*, were not recognised, for it contained broader instances of that phenomenon, one example of which was particularly manifest. In paragraph 38 of the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid pp.57-9

<sup>105</sup> With regard to this issue, in *Wales and the Britons* Thomas Charles-Edwards references Dumville's article and follows his analysis. See op cit Charles-Edwards T.M. 2013 p.450

<sup>106</sup> Hornblower S. & Spawforth A. (eds.), *The Oxford Classical dictionary* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996) 3rd ed. See pp.1024-6 **names, personal, Roman**, & Speake G. (ed.) *A dictionary of ancient history* (Blackwell, Oxford 1994) p.427, **names**

text, reference is made to a figure who was known in Welsh as Emrys Wledig and in Latin as Ambrosius.<sup>107</sup> Beyond that source, in the work of Gildas there is a reference to that figure as Ambrosius Aurelianus.<sup>108</sup> That should have highlighted to all concerned that the naming conventions in use within the *Historia Brittonum* needed to be approached with caution and that radical conclusions should not be drawn without due consideration.

This analytical weakness reflected the broader methodological issue referred to earlier, whereby undue weight was granted to palaeographic considerations at the expense of social structural aspects. In this instance, had the need to consider the social conventions of early fifth century Britannia been recognised, the misinterpretation of the material could have been avoided.

However, having concluded that there existed a serious flaw in the genealogies relating to Powys, Dumville then advanced an explanation for the existence of that flaw. That led to the initial construction of his conspiracy theory and a consequent need to recast the version of Welsh history presented by J.E. Lloyd. In order to understand the manner in which that was achieved, it is necessary to briefly consider the rationale of Lloyd's work.

As an undergraduate student at Lincoln College, Oxford, Lloyd had sought to construct a model of Welsh history which conformed to the theoretical assumptions of the Oxford school of Germanist historians.<sup>109</sup> As a consequence he constructed an Aryan racist account of Welsh history which regarded the Brythonic people as having survived the Roman conquest without being assimilated into Roman society. Given that background, following the early fifth century crisis of the Roman Empire, the Brythons could be regarded as having re-emerged to secure political dominance within the western regions of Roman Britannia.<sup>110</sup>

The difficulty was that in writing the history of the latter period, Lloyd recognised that there existed a residual Roman aspect which he could not ignore. As a consequence, whilst he saw himself as writing the history of a barbarian Brythonic people, albeit a people who had been Christianised, he also recognised the need to acknowledge a continuing Roman dimension. That led to an element of equivocation in the post-Roman history which he composed. That aspect is particularly evident in his consideration of St Germanus of Auxerre.

Lloyd accepted that Germanus of Auxerre had visited Britain in 429 and recounted the history of his visit as presented by Constantius. Moreover, in keeping with his Brythonic paradigm Lloyd interpreted that visit as occurring within a tribal, post Roman context.<sup>111</sup> In two footnotes he offered a further insight into that context.

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<sup>107</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh 1975 par.38 pp.214-5

<sup>108</sup> Op cit Winterbottom M. 1978. See *De excidio Britonum* cap.35.3

<sup>109</sup> Price H., *J.E.Lloyd and the creation of Welsh History* (University of Wales Press., Cardiff 2011) pp.35-45 & op cit Williams E.W. in the *National Library of Wales Journal* vol.36 no.1 2014 pp.1-44. See in particular pp.12-30

<sup>110</sup> In addition to the article noted above, the manner in which Lloyd constructed that historical account has been considered in a further two articles. See Williams E.W., 'J.E.Lloyd and his intellectual legacy: the tribes of Wales reconsidered', in the *National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. 36 no.2 2015 pp.198-265 & op cit Williams E.W. in the *National Library of Wales Journal*, vol. 36 no.3 2016 pp.271-330.

<sup>111</sup> Op cit Lloyd J.E. 1911 pp.101, 106 & 243

There was a special cult of Germanus in Powys, for the five principal churches dedicated to him are within the old bounds of the province. ... In this connection it is interesting to note that the saint was mentioned in the inscription on Elise's pillar. ... "Clas Garmon" is the name of one of the two townships of St Harmon's ... [in Maelienydd, Radnorshire].<sup>112</sup>

Having quite incorrectly concluded that there existed a serious flaw in the genealogies relating to Powys and that the flaw reflected a conspiracy within the ruling elite, Dumville then developed a hypothesis of how that conspiracy was formed. That, it appears, was achieved by amending Lloyd's account of the visit of St Germanus to Britain.

It seems likely, though it cannot be proved, that the section of the Historia Brittonum in which this story occurs derived from the now lost Liber Sancti Germani used by our author (§ 40). If so, then the most likely inventor of the story of Cadell would be a cleric of the clas Garmon, presumably writing somewhere in Iâl, in the central area of the saint's cult.<sup>113</sup>

Though Dumville in that section of his work did not acknowledge an indebtedness to Lloyd, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was engaged in a process of recasting Lloyd's work. In particular it appears that Dumville relocated the Clas Garmon identified by Lloyd, shifting it from its original location in Radnorshire to Iâl, with that then being identified as the centre of the saint's cult. The extent to which Dumville was prepared to amend Lloyd's analysis without any acknowledgement that he was engaged in such a process or providing an academic justification for such a course of action is worthy of note.

That approach is again revealed in relation to aspects of Lloyd's account of Germanus's first visit, an account in which he regarded the description of those events presented by Bede as a secondary source.

Bede in this part of the Ecclesiastical History (i 17-20) is simply a transcriber, the original source being the Life of Germanus by Constantius, a presbyter of Lyons, written about A.D. 480.<sup>114</sup>

That did not accord with Dumville's view.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Germanus of our text has nothing whatever to do with St Germanus of Auxerre who, thanks to his appearance in Bede's History, was a perfect candidate for identification with Garmon of Powys. He is rather the dynastic or territorial saint of Powys. And it is an axiom of Celtic hagiography that

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid p.245 footnote 88 & p.254 footnote 143. See also Carlisle N., *A topographical dictionary of the Dominion of Wales* (Bulmer, London 1811) see **Harmon, St.**

<sup>113</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh 1975 p.59

<sup>114</sup> Op cit Lloyd J.E. 1911 p106 footnote 54



the ancestor of the dynasty with whose territory the saint is connected should be shown to be dependent on the favour of the saint.<sup>115</sup>

Once more there appears to be an unacknowledged relationship between Lloyd's work and that of Dumville. Moreover, the themes which were to become so characteristic of Dumville's subsequent compositions were already present. The claim that the case he was presenting did not require academic justification ('It is hardly necessary to say ...') is made; moreover Celtic hagiography is attributed certain characteristics, despite the fact that the text in question could only be regarded as Celtic on the basis of Dumville's own attribution of it as being so. Lloyd's view that Constantius constituted the source, with Bede being simply a transcriber, was also disregarded by Dumville who by contrast pointed to Bede as the source, whose work had then been absorbed into the hagiography of Powys.

The intellectual sequence entailed in this departure should be carefully observed. Having initially misinterpreted the genealogical sources relating to Powys, Dumville saw in that material a conspiracy to distort the past. He then identified the perpetrator of that conspiracy as a hypothetical cleric at a hypothetical Clas Garmon, then proceeded to recast Lloyd's interpretation of those events in accordance with his new outlook. Whatever the inadequacies of Lloyd's account of Welsh history, aspects of it were now being reinterpreted in accordance with the assumptions of Dumville's conspiracy theory.

Possibly motivated by the new critical approach towards the Celtic sources which had been introduced by Dorothy Whitelock into the Department of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, following the acceptance of his thesis at Edinburgh in 1975,<sup>116</sup> Dumville was already set upon a course which would see him elaborate that conspiracy theory to embrace most of early Welsh history. The evolution of the debate regarding the validity of John Morris's *The Age of Arthur*<sup>117</sup> provided an ideal context in which that conspiracy theory could be launched, hence his 1977 article *Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend*.<sup>118</sup>

Already in his doctoral thesis he had dismissed Germanus of Auxerre from Welsh history. In his subsequent article a number of other prominent historical figures were subjected to the same fate. Dumville's view of Cunedda has already been considered; somewhat reluctantly he subsequently accepted the existence of Gwrtheyrn,<sup>119</sup> but in the course of two paragraphs, what appears to be Dumville's third great idea of early Welsh scholarship, Arthur, was dismissed 'as a figure of legend'.<sup>120</sup>

Disconcertingly for Dumville, not only did the Annals of Redon prove an inadequate support for his broader thesis, but the first annal also contradicted his claims relating

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<sup>115</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh 1975 vol.1, p.59

<sup>116</sup> Ibid vol.1

<sup>117</sup> Op cit Morris J. 1973

<sup>118</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. in *History* vol.62 1977 pp.173-92

<sup>119</sup> Ibid pp.184-5

<sup>120</sup> Ibid pp.187-8 In his article 'Arthurian Origins' Christopher Snyder provides an illuminating overview of Arthurian scholarship. See Snyder C., 'Arthurian Origins', in Lacy N.J.(ed.) *A history of Arthurian scholarship* (D.S.Brewer, Cambridge 2006) pp.1-18

to Arthur, for Gildas is said to have lived in the days of King Arthur.<sup>121</sup> It is ironic that the source which Dumville had identified as providing a key lynchpin to his hypothesis, should not only prove so inadequate but also provide evidence to contradict his dismissal of Arthur from history.

We need not concern ourselves further with the detail of his arguments in relation to those figures, for essentially he was merely expanding on the perspective he had already formed. Like a snowball being rolled downhill, his thesis was becoming all consuming.

With his hypothesis having been accepted at doctoral level, Dumville, most particularly through his 1977 article, then augmented that initial theory relating to Powys, so that it encompassed the history of the kingdoms of Dyfed and Gwynedd and what he refers to as 'the earliest Welsh antiquarian scholarship and political thought'.<sup>122</sup> In turn his analysis of the *Historia Brittonum* extended to the interpretation of the earliest Welsh poetry. He explained the implications of his work in the following terms.

The sceptic can always point to the fact that the *Historia Brittonum* is a ninth-century pseudo-historical work, and without the evidence of that text, Aneirin and Taliesin have no external validation.<sup>123</sup>

The *Historia Brittonum* was only a 'pseudo-historical' work on the assumption that Dumville's hypothesis was valid, an aspect which he failed to establish. Despite that, on the basis of his critique, during the past forty years many eminent archaeologists and historians have been led to marginalise the importance of the Celtic sources in the writing of the history of both Wales and England. This for instance is evident in the work of Thomas Charles-Edwards.

In an article on 'The Authenticity of the Gododdin' published in 1978, Charles-Edwards located his analysis within a heroic framework and acknowledged his indebtedness to a number of authors, including H.M. Chadwick.<sup>124</sup> At that point the older Chadwickian framework was yet to be fully displaced and the work of D.N. Dumville though noted, had yet to establish itself centre stage.<sup>125</sup>

In a subsequent article on 'The Arthur of History' first published in 1991, Dumville's work had almost reached centre stage for Charles-Edwards assessed his contribution in the following terms.

Our understanding of th[e] 'History of the Britons', ... is in the process of being put on a much surer foundation by the series of critical editions of its successive versions being published by Dr D.N.

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<sup>121</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92. See in particular p.187-8 & op cit Migne J.P. (ed) *Patrologia Latina*, vol.CCII, col.1323. See in particular annal 1

<sup>122</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.180

<sup>123</sup> Dumville D.N., 'Early Welsh poetry: problems of historicity', in Roberts B.F. (ed.) *Early Welsh poetry* (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth 1988) pp.1-16. See in particular p.8

<sup>124</sup> Charles-Edwards T.M., 'The authenticity of the Gododdin: an historian's view', in Jones R.B. & Bromwich R. (gol.) *Astudiaethau ar yr Hengerdd* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd 1978) pp.44-71. See in particular p.45 and footnote 2

<sup>125</sup> Ibid pp.50 & 63

Dumville. Fortunately, he has also published a number of preliminary studies ... Nothing written at this stage of his great enterprise can pretend to any permanent value ...<sup>126</sup>

However, by then, in introducing his discussion of the subject, Thomas Charles-Edwards did regard it as necessary to pose the question 'Was Arthur a real person?'<sup>127</sup> At the end of his article he concluded:

At this stage of the enquiry, one can only say that there may well have been an historical Arthur ...[but] that the historian can as yet say nothing of value about him...<sup>128</sup>

By the time his key volume *Wales and the Britons 350-1064*, was published in 2013 a further shift had occurred in Charles-Edwards's outlook, for though Arthur was referred to, he was not acknowledged to have been a real person.<sup>129</sup>

Dumville's impact within the intellectual community is further underlined when J.N.L. Myres's view of Arthur is considered. In his 1976 review of John Morris's volume he declared:

That Arthur lived and really played a prominent part in the wars between the Britons and the Saxons in the years around 500 can be readily conceded. There is just enough recorded folk-memory from the following centuries to make his existence as a leading figure at that time reasonably certain. ... Beyond this the historical evidence will not take us: if we venture further, we pass at once from history to romance ...<sup>130</sup>

It is questionable whether Myres would venture to state such a view today. The transition in outlook that has occurred reflects the major impact Dumville's critique of the Celtic sources as presented in his article *Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend*,<sup>131</sup> has had since 1977. The trajectory which his work followed is reasonably clear.

His assessment of the primary sources led to a view of the early material which was based on a fundamentally incorrect premise. From the intellectual foundation which he then laid, he constructed a conspiracy theory which initially related specifically to Powys but then broadened to engulf the polities of Gwynedd and Dyfed: in temporal terms it extended from the death of Magnus Maximus in 388 through to the late tenth century. Dumville's concept thus became a factor of fundamental importance to the interpretation of Romano-British and Welsh history for a period extending from the late Roman imperial context through to the Norman Conquest.

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<sup>126</sup> Charles-Edwards T.M., 'The Arthur of history' in Bromwich R., Jarman A.O.H. & Roberts B.F., (eds.) *The Arthur of the Welsh* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1991), pp.15-32

<sup>127</sup> Ibid p.15

<sup>128</sup> Ibid p.29

<sup>129</sup> Op cit Charles-Edwards T.M. 2013 pp.297, 617 & 677

<sup>130</sup> Op cit Myres J.N.L. 1975 p.116

<sup>131</sup> Op cit Dumville D.N. 1977 pp.173-92

This, it should be noted, stemmed from a significant methodological weakness at the heart of his analysis. His approach granted undue weight to textual evidence and palaeographic considerations without acknowledging the importance to historical research of aspects such as the nature of the economy and social formation as well as social conventions.

In effect, through Dumville's work, historical research reached a position which was the polar opposite to that represented by the work of John Morris.<sup>132</sup> In his 1975 review of *The Age of Arthur*, James Campbell praised '... the energy ... and the wonderful fertility of [Morris's] mind ...',<sup>133</sup> but through the subsequent intervention by D.P. Kirby and J.E. Caerwyn Williams the need to respect the '... modern canons of analysis and source-criticism'<sup>134</sup> was not only acknowledged but through David Dumville's critique, secured a new intellectual ascendancy. That constituted a swing of the analytical pendulum, with the Arthur of the 1960s who had been regarded as a historical figure now being viewed with suspicion.<sup>135</sup>

During recent decades, the increased awareness of the importance of palaeographic considerations has made an important contribution to historical analysis, but the fact that the new approach has been pursued in an unbalanced manner which denies due weight to other social structural aspects constitutes an issue which needs to be addressed. It highlights the need for a more considered approach to the interpretation of early texts.

Moreover, given that Dumville's conspiracy theory appears misconceived and his assessment of the Celtic sources problematic, we as historians are now confronted by the challenge of developing a constructive debate which can lead to an advance beyond the very significant flaws which his work has nurtured in our understanding of Romano-British and Welsh history.

24 April 2017

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<sup>132</sup> Op cit Morris J. 1973

<sup>133</sup> Op cit Campbell J. Review in *Studia Hibernica* vol. 15 1975 pp.175-85. See p.185

<sup>134</sup> Op cit Kirby D.P. & Williams J.E.C., Review in *Studia Celtica* vol.10-11, 1975-6 pp.454-96. See p.496

<sup>135</sup> See Breeze A., 'The historical Arthur and sixth-century Scotland' in *Northern History*, vol.52, 2015 pp.158-181. See in particular pp.166-7