THE 'ARTHURIAN BATTLE LIST' OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*

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Introduction

Perhaps the most widely discussed and most contested aspect of the early ninth-century Cambro-Latin *Historia Brittonum* is the evidence it contains for the figure of Arthur. The character is central to a vast body of later literature and the most important of insular literary creations. It is the earliest certain record of the name of a British hero who was to develop into a larger-than-life individual known throughout medieval Europe and subsequently much of the rest of the world; potentially earlier mentions in the poetic cycle *Y Gododdin* and in *Marwnad Cynddylan* are not accepted by all. The controversy at the core of the 'Arthurian problem', at least in so far as it involves the history of fifth- and sixth-century Britain, derives from the lack of contemporary or even near-contemporary evidence for the person bearing this name, who is supposed in these later sources to have lived around AD 500. Supporters of an 'historical Arthur' have generally seen the *Historia* as the most persuasive confirmation of the existence of a person who led the British resistance to the Anglo-Saxon settlement of eastern Britain (e.g. Alcock 1971, 88). Others have seen the document as a carefully crafted political statement, reflecting the concerns of early ninth-century Gwynedd and containing little or nothing of value to the history of earlier ages (e.g. Higham 2002, 169). For most twenty-first century historians, the character of Arthur inhabits the realm of folklore, not history (e.g. Green 2007, 91-2).

Between these extremes lies a huge variety of opinion, but the major challenge to the academic historian must be to confront the perception that this chapter of the *Historia Brittonum* is a straightforward record listing late fifth- or early sixth-century battles incorporated *verbatim* or at only one remove into a ninth-century compilation, a perception that continues to dominate the popular literature on Arthur (e.g. Ashe 2003; Castleden 2000; Gidlow 2004; Moffat 1999; Pace 2008). Such a confrontation need not, of course, be hostile or destructive. Indeed, if it can be shown that the list consists of information that makes sense only in terms of a late fifth- or early sixth-century historical context, then it provides considerable support for the existence of an 'historical Arthur' at that period. If, on the other hand, it contains information that makes better sense in terms of a seventh-century or later context, then it is perhaps the final nail in his academic coffin. Understanding the data contained in this brief textual snippet is therefore the single most important element in assessing the historicity or otherwise of the character known as Arthur. The list clearly implies a context, which might include an heroic warrior whose *floruit* lay around 500, an early ninth-century imaginative author inventing a British hero to counter English claims to hegemony over Britain or a record of folklore whose origin and date are unknowable. However, to understand what the context implied by the list might be, it is necessary to locate the sites of the battles it purports to name. To achieve this, an accurate text of the *Historia Brittonum* must be established, as it exists in a number of quite different

recensions and, as will be shown, the majority of texts so far published contain errors – one of major importance – that influence its interpretation.

The text

Specialists working on the *Historia Brittonum* during the last generation have tended to dismiss its evidential value for the history of early medieval Britain, apart from what it can tell us about the cultural milieu in which it was composed (e.g. Dumville 1977, 177; 1986, 12; Higham 2002, 121; Halsall 2013, 62ff). In particular, there has been a near-unanimous rejection of the view that its writing involved what the (certainly spurious) preface attributing it to Nennius claims, *coaceruaui omne quod inueni* 'I heaped up all that I found' (Dumville 1976a, 94); only P J C Field (1996, 164) and David Howlett (1998, 103) have offered serious defences of the Nennian attribution. The former is effectively an appeal to the linguistic parallels between the preface and the main body of the text, while the latter combines this argument with complex word and letter counts. Neither has found favour with other specialists and neither explains the loss of the preface from the textual tradition in all but two manuscripts. Howlett's hypothesis also depends on an acceptance of Harleian MS 3859 as containing the best version of the text, that closest to the archetype, a view accepted by all its editors since Stevenson (1838), apart from Henry Petrie (1848), who preferred Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139. This view has been reinforced by the authority of David Dumville, almost the only specialist to have worked on the *Historia Brittonum* during the second half of the twentieth century, whose opinions therefore carry most weight; his PhD thesis (1975) is the source of most of the critical deconstructions of the text as an historical source. As will be shown, the version on which he based his analysis of the text, Harleian MS 3859, cannot be close to the archetype and Howlett's entire hypothesis fails without need for detailed refutation. Critical historians, particularly following Dumville's lead, have instead shown the *Historia Brittonum* to be a well-constructed piece of synthetic historical writing, entirely at home in the early medieval British Isles and nothing like the 'heap' that its more enthusiastic promoters (e.g. J N L Myers (1986, 16), John Morris (1980, 1 ff.), Leslie Alcock (1971, 32) etc.) have tried to make it.

The bases of late twentieth-century critical arguments about the historical value of the text were that:

(a) Where it impinges upon history that can be tested by external sources (for instance, in its accounts of Roman Britain (§§19-30 in Mommsen's (1898) edition: all quoted chapter numbers are those of Mommsen) or Saint Germanus (§§32-35, 39 and 47)), it is demonstrably either wrong or it distorts the evidence to fit the author's preconceptions about British history. The pseudo-history constructed around the career of Magnus Maximus (§27) is an excellent example of this tendency.

(b) The weaving together of different strands of tradition (the clearly separate tales of Saint Garmon and Gwrtheyrn, and of Gwrtheyrn and Hengest, for instance (§§31-48)) betrays an author who is manipulating sources and manipulating them well, ample demonstration that the 'heap' interpretation is wrong. This is not a compilation along the lines of a twenty-first century academic *Reader* but a well crafted literary construction. At the same time, it is evident that the author was making the fullest use of scanty sources, many of which are derivative (the hagiography of Patrick, for instance (§§50-55)), many of which are of dubious

historicity (the account of the Roman emperors who visited Britain (§27)) and many of which are just plain fabulous (the tale of Gwrtheyrn, Emreis and the *uermes* (§§40-42)).

(c) The short Arthurian section dealt with here (§56), bears all the traces of being poetic in origin (Chadwick & Chadwick 1932, 154; Jones 1964, 10; Dumville 1977, 177; Jones 1996, 270; Snyder 2000, 77), although Nicholas Higham (2002, 146) believes that "*the only safe conclusion is that this battle-list was the author's own work*". This is by no means a "*safe conclusion*" as it has long been recognised that the battle list appears to fossilise an Old Welsh rhyming structure (**oper dubglas/*abon bassas*, *coit celidon/*cair guinnion*, **cair guinnion/*cair legion*, **in scuit/*traith tribruit* and *cat bregion/*minid badon* (*compare* Koch & Carey 2000, 286)), which must be explained rather than dismissed. Furthermore, it has a suspiciously symbolic number of battles, including a four-fold repeat, although this should not be pressed. More important is the observation that unlike, for instance, the battle list of Gwrthefyr (§44), which has both Old Welsh and Old English names for places, most of which can still be identified with little difficulty and which appear to correspond with battles attributed to Hengest and Æsc in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the 'Arthurian' list is full of obscurities that the author seems unwilling or, more likely, unable to expand upon. It is worth noting here that in the early twelfth century, Henry of Huntingdon (*Historia Anglorum* II.18) commented on the impossibility of identifying the names in his own day and used it as a moral lesson on the transitory nature of fame (*quę tamen omnia loca nostrę ętati incognita sunt; quod prouidentia Dei factum esse putamus, ad despectum popularis aurę, laudis adulatorię, famę transitorię.*).

(d) The Arthurian section occupies the narrative gap between the early fifth-century Patrick and the putatively mid sixth-century Ida; it is assumed to be evident that although the author clearly set Arthur in this historical context, there is nothing in the text that forces us to place the battles in this particular time frame. No characters said to be contemporaries of Arthur are named, there are no references to externally datable people or events, nor, indeed, are any dates given. An assessment of this section's historicity must depend on criteria other than those of its position within the overall scheme of the text since the reasons for the author's decision to place it here are unknown; separate from this is the question of whether the battles are historical or fictional (or a mixture of both) and whether any ought to be attributed to an individual named Arthur.

A new text of section 56

The textual history of the *Historia Brittonum* is well known to be complex to the point that it is all but impossible to determine what the original text contained (Dumville (1975) proposed a scheme of development that is here rejected). Some forty manuscripts are known to exist, not all of equal weight in reconstructing the text and not all of independent value, as some are clearly copies of known archetypes. The work was also quoted by several Anglo-Norman historians and even the French encyclopaedist Lambert of St-Omer (Dumville 1976b), who may have had access to manuscripts no longer extant. Most recent editions, though, have used British Library Harleian MS 3859, of *c* 1100, as their base, with commentators often stating that it is the 'best' text (e.g. Tolstoy 1961, 118; Dumville 1994, 406), although they are generally reticent about their reasons for regarding it as such. The principal reason appears to be that it is the fullest text without the clearly interpolated passages of the pseudo-Nennian recension: it is also a member of the only recension to contain the genealogies of Anglo-Saxon kings and the

so-called 'Northern History'. Since the preface attributing it to 'Nennius' – which is found only in another recension of manuscripts – specifically lists Saxon genealogies as among the materials he has heaped together, this has been seen as supporting the primacy of the Harleian text.

This attitude to the text is inconsistent with the contents of individual recensions, as the preface is not contained in any examples of the Harleian recension and appears only in two manuscripts containing interpolations from what may be termed the pseudo-Nennius recension. It is only copies derived ultimately from these two manuscripts that contain the attribution to Nennius: nowhere does a copy of the original pseudo-Nennius recension survive although the Irish translation, *Lebor Breatnach*, was evidently made from a text of this type (van Hamel 1932, xvii). To make matters worse, the preface appears in two quite different versions as well as in abbreviated form in *Lebor Breatnach*. It is now tolerably certain that this so-called Nennian preface is a later addition (Dumville 1976a, 94), in which case it cannot be taken as a guide to the contents of the archetype. Indeed, the inclusion of a genealogy of Hengest in §31, which was present in the archetype, may have given the author of the forged preface ample reason to include Saxon genealogies among his supposed sources. Another possibility is that as the pseudo-Nennius recension was a derivative of an ancestor of the Harleian, the Saxon genealogies had already been added, which is what 'Euben's' abridgement of the so-called Northern History appears to indicate (Clancy 2000, 89).

Moreover, it is also clear that the Harleian recension and its close relatives – the pseudo-Gildas, the Sawley and the pseudo-Nennius recensions – diverge widely from the two others, the Vatican and the unique Chartres text. It can be demonstrated that although an early redactor of the text that led to the Vatican recension made significant verbal changes to the original, frequently to improve the style and sense, the editor nevertheless often retained readings that were superior to the Harleian recension and its relatives. Its chronological preface, which is a replacement for the calculations that enable the archetype of all the other recensions with the exception of the Chartres to be dated to the fourth regnal year of Merfyn Frych, King of Gwynedd, 828×9, date it to the fifth year of the English king Eadmund, AD 976. Nevertheless, it retains the first half of the *computus* of §16, which clearly dates the archetype of all but the Chartres recension to 828×9.

Importantly, though, the Chartres recension not only lacks the *computus* of §16 but also contains a rambling passage towards the end of §31, which seems to indicate that it should be dated to some point after the mid-eighth century (*sicut libine abas iae in ripum ciuitate inuenit uel reperit*, 'as Slébine, Abbot of Iona (752-767) came across or discovered in the city of Ripon'). In other words, the passage dating the *Historia Brittonum* to 828×9 is secondary and must date the archetype of the remaining branches containing the Vatican, Harleian, pseudo-Gildas, pseudo-Nennius and Sawley recensions. The Chartres Recension thus derives from an earlier state of the text.

Cladistic analysis of contents and name forms (Figure 1) demonstrates that the Vatican and Chartres recensions are more closely related to each other than to any of the others; This gives them a greater authority in establishing the archetypal text than has previously been appreciated. The Harleian, pseudo-Gildas, pseudo-Nennius and Sawley recensions bear the mark of a redactor later than 828×9, which the second part of the *computus* at the end of §16 appears to date to 859. Dumville's (1974b) exposition of the muddled chronology of the *Historia*,

which points out the author's confusion between *anno domini* and *anno passionis* dating, completely avoids discussion of this date, which cannot be an error for 829 either on palaeographic grounds or on the basis of the confusions between AD and AP dating. This means that we should take the evidence of the Vatican and Chartres recensions a great deal more seriously than has generally been done[1], and although Heinrich Zimmer (1893, 22) suggested a similar conclusion only to reject it, it generally been ignored by subsequent commentators. There are therefore two broad groups of texts: that including the Harleian may be termed the Computistical because it contains the calculation of decemnovenal (nineteen-year) Easter cycles dating from 859 that is lacking in the Chartres and Vatican recensions and the other the Silvian because of its inclusion of an alternate genealogy of Silvius in §10, lost in the edition of 859. Previous editors have concentrated on the evidence of Computistical family instead of incorporating the occasionally superior evidence of the Silvian.
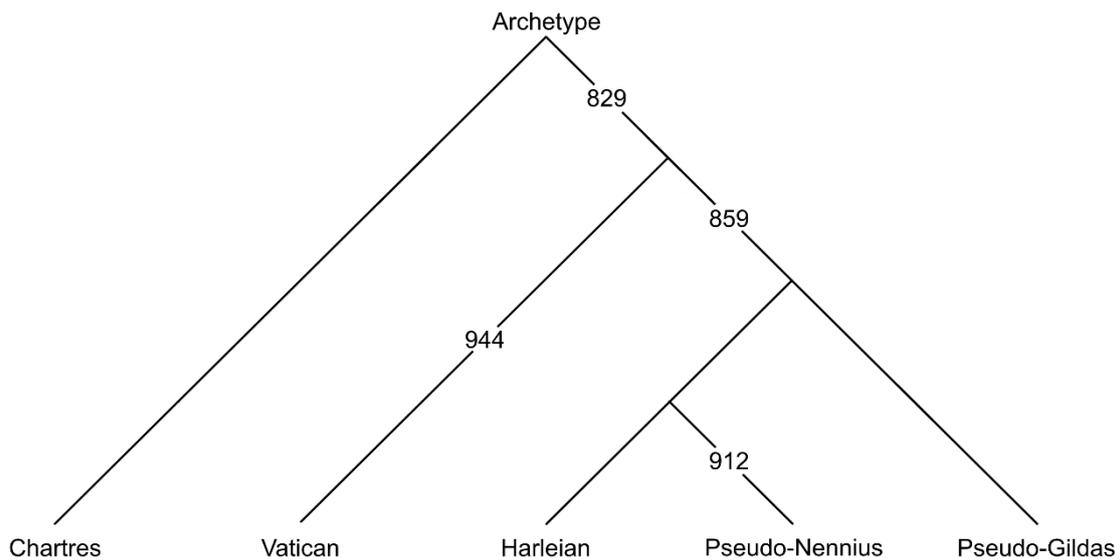

FIGURE 1: SIMPLIFIED CLADOGRAM OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PRINCIPAL RECENSIONS OF THE *HISTORIA BRITTONUM*; THE SAWLEY TEXT IS NOT INCLUDED AS IT IS A COMPOSITE DERIVING FROM THE INTERPOLATION OF A PSEUDO-GILDAS TEXT WITH MATERIAL FROM THE PSEUDO-NENNIUS RECENSION

The results of a cladistic analysis do not produce a text of the Arthurian section of §56 that is radically different from Mommsen's, but at least one well-known problem is cleared up: the difficult *in monte qui dicitur <agned>* of the Harleian recension. It has long been suspected to have been truncated, as its close relatives render the clause in longer form as *in monte qui dicitur <agned> cat bregomion*, but a consideration of the Vatican recension's *in monte qui nominatur breguoin, ubi illos in fugam uertit quem nos cat bregion appellamus* enables us to reject *<agned>* completely as an inferior reading (Figure 2). Although we cannot now be certain of the original text, we can reconstruct something along the lines of *in monte qui dicitur breguoin,* [*id est*] *cat bregion* (**id est* is added as in the other instance where an Old Welsh battle name is given, it is

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[1]   This is a subject I hope to deal with in greater detail elsewhere, as it has important ramifications for our understanding of the transmission of the text and for our views of its historical value.

MS	Reading		Archetype
		6	
M	breguoin... cat bregion	breguoin... cat bregion	
N	breuoin... cat bregion		
H	agned		
K	agned		
P	agned cat bregomion	agned cat bregomion	breguoin id est cat bregion
Q	agned tha bregomion		
		agned cat bregomion	
C	agned cath bregomion	agned cath bregomion	
L	agned cath bregomion		
		agned cath bregomion	agned cat bregomion
D	agned cath bregomion	agned cath bregomion	
G	agned cath bregomion		

FIGURE 2: STEMMA OF MANUSCRIPT AUTHORITIES FOR *BREGUOIN, *ID EST CAT BREGION* (MANUSCRIPT DESIGNATIONS ARE THOSE OF MOMMSEN)

introduced with the phrase *id est*). It is therefore apparent that the nonsensical <*agned*> must be a corrupt contraction of *breguoin, id…* In a quite different attempt to explain the textual confusion at this point, A W Wade-Evans (1910, 134) wrongly believed that *in monte badonis* was a late intrusion into the text and that <*agned*> and *breguoin* were the eleventh and twelfth battles respectively. There is no textual justification for this view, which was based on his eccentric views about the *Historia Brittonum* and the date of Gildas.

Other alterations include the rejection of the Harleian recension's *regnum cantorum* for *regnum cantuariorum*, bringing the spelling in this section into line with other parts of the *Historia*, the insertion of *traith (spelled *traht* in the Vatican recension) before *tribruit*, clarifying the meaning, and the alteration of the number of victims of a single attack by Arthur to 940. What is most remarkable is the stability of the placenames in the different versions: the variants are few in number, easily explicable in terms of palaeography and, with the sole exception of *in monte qui dicitur <agned>*, of little importance.

The archetypal text may be reconstructed as follows:

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant in multitudine et crescebant in britannia. mortuo autem hengisto, octha filius eius transiuit de sinistrali parte britanniae ad regnum cantuariorum et de ipso orti sunt reges cantuariorum. tunc arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum.

primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glein. secundum et tertium et quartum et quintum super aliud flumen quod dicitur dubglas et est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum fuit bellum in silua celidonis, id est cat coit celidon. octauum fuit bellum in castello guinnion, in quo arthur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae semper uirginis super humeros suos et pagani uersi sunt in fugam in illo die et caedes magna fuit super illos per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi et per uirtutem sanctae mariae genetricis eius. nonum bellum gestum est in urbe legionis, *id est cair *legion. decimum gessit bellum in litore fluminis quod uocatur *traith tribruit. undecimum bellum in monte qui dicitur breguoin, *id est cat bregion. duodecimum fuit bellum in monte badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die dccccxl uiri de uno impetu arthur; et nemo prostrauit eos nisi ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis uictor extitit.

Texts of the variants recorded in the manuscript tradition are presented as an Appendix, where detailed accounts of their departures from the archetype are noted.

The placenames of the battle sites

General principles

The interpretation of any text should be approached with no *a priori* assumptions; with a text whose transmission is as complex – and controversial – as the *Historia Brittonum*, it is all but impossible to be completely unbiased and there will always be assumptions implicit in any approach. It is therefore important to make explicit the assumptions made here before commencing interpretation. The first assumption is that the text as reconstructed above more or less accurately reproduces what the anonymous author intended it to say, provided that we recognise that it is a reconstruction unattested in any manuscript. It is impossible to know the author's intentions precisely, but a second assumption must be made either that he attempted to reproduce his source, whether written or oral, which contained names that could be written

in the way they have been transmitted, or that he compiled a list, without prior source, for any one of a number of reasons and that in doing so, he followed the spelling conventions of the Old Welsh of his day. In other words, the placenames are written according to the orthographic conventions of the author's cultural milieu, early ninth-century Wales. Either way, it is vital to avoid making unnecessary emendations to the spelling of placenames, no matter how small, especially those that have no linguistic or textual justification. Emendation must be treated as a last resort, when no other option for understanding the text is available.

It is also assumed – for the present – that it is unimportant whether the text contains a genuinely historical record of battles fought by a *dux bellorum* named Arthur or whether it is an entirely imaginative attempt to provide a list of battles for a legendary or even mythical figure. These are not textual considerations, nor have they any bearing on the identification of the placenames. The only important issue at the start of an investigation of the text is the analysis of the placenames and an assessment of likely identifications. There are two main techniques that can be used: linguistic and historical.

Linguistics

It would be difficult, even foolish, for a non-linguist to attempt to improve on the three papers of Kenneth Jackson dealing with the putative battle list (Jackson 1945; Jackson 1947; Jackson 1958), which must be regarded as a baseline statement, despite being over half a century old. However, the study of Celtic languages has not stood still since his day and there are new insights that may be worth pursuing; in some cases, it is possible to be more definite about what is and is not likely about the etymology of either a modern placename or of a name recorded in *Historia Brittonum*. The appearance in 1979 of A L F Rivet and Colin Smith's *The Place Names of Roman Britain* put the study of names attested from the Roman period and earlier on a new and more rigorous footing than previously, while the linguistic notes by D Ellis Evans represent the best scholarship of the period. The works of Delamarre (2003; 2007; 2012) are an important contribution to the understanding of Celtic vocabulary and toponymy that have appeared too recently to have had an impact on the study of Romano-British placenames, although that impact is potentially significant. Another important recent element in the study of early medieval placenames not appreciated a generation or more ago is a growing recognition of the potential rôle of bilingualism – especially Neo-Brittonic or Primitive Welsh/Old English bilingualism – in their transmission (Higham 1992, 203). It is important not to dismiss possible identifications with names for which only Old English etymologies have hitherto been proposed, although the potential pitfalls of such an approach are self-evident.

Historical considerations

Since the devastating critiques of the *Historia Brittonum* published by David Dumville in the 1970s and 1980s (especially Dumville 1976a; Dumville 1977; Dumville 1986), it has become impossible to view the text as the straightforward narrative that so many earlier historians believed it to be. Part of the effect of Dumville's work has been a realisation that, as it stands, the *Historia* does not provide cast iron evidence for the existence of a character named Arthur at the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century, at least among the majority of academic historians. From the confident assertions of the 1960s and 1970s about the historicity of Arthur (or, for the more timid, an 'Arthur-like' figure), historians have now withdrawn into a state more akin to outright denial than to agnosticism about Arthur. This is unreasonable; despite attempts to show otherwise (e.g. Higham 2002, 144), it is clear that by the time that the *Historia*

Britonnum was composed early in the ninth or late in the eighth century, Welsh scholars believed that there had been a war leader named Arthur, who was well attested in contemporary folklore. It is incumbent on us to assess how reasonable their beliefs were, not simply to dismiss them without examination. The position taken at this point in the analysis will be one of pure agnosticism; only once the evidence of the battle list can be interpreted will it become possible to assess its relevance to the historicity or otherwise of its central character.

The names

in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glein

ETYMOLOGY

The Old Welsh spelling must be a derivative of Brittonic *glano-*, 'pure, clear' (Delamarre 2003, 179), with a suffix *-i̯o-* or *-i̯ā* (Jackson 1946, 46). There can be no possibility of identifying the name with anything that derives from Old Welsh *glinn*, 'valley', or its Old Irish cognate *glenn*, source of the modern English and Scots word glen with a sense of 'valley'. The element *glano-* is attested in the Romano-British placename *Glano* recorded corruptly in the Ravenna Cosmography 105$_{46}$ as <giano>, referring to an unidentified place next to the River Taw (<eltabo>) in south-west England (Rivet & Smith 1979, 367). As this form lacks the *-i̯o-/-i̯ā* suffix, it cannot be the source of this particular name. Delamarre (2012. 159) lists a number of continental eltic placenames, mostly in simplex forms *Glanos* or *Glanā*, but a spring called *Glanis*, home to the *Matres Glanicae*, might offer a closer parallel.

IDENTIFICATIONS

The most commonly supported identification of this battle site is the River Glen in Northumberland, at its junction with the Till (Skene 1868, 52; Anscombe 1904, 106; Crawford 1935, 285; Johnstone 1934, 381; Jackson 1945, 46; Jackson 1953, 589; Jackson 1959, 4; Tolstoy 1961, 121; Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 63; Malcor 1999; Moffatt 1999, 208; Reid 2001, 58; Gidlow 2004, 54; Hunt 2012, 95; Field 2008, 13). Although some have raised objections to the use of the word *ostium* to refer to a confluence inland rather than to a mouth on the coast (e.g. Crawford 1935, 285; Field 2008, 13), there are no real problems: elsewhere in the *Historia Brittonum*, *ostium* is used in exactly the same way. In §67, part of the *Mirabilia Britanniae* added to some versions of the text, *ostium trahannoni fluminis*

FIGURE 3: GLEIN

is the confluence of the River Trent with the Humber, while in §69, *oper linn liuan; ostium fluminis illius fluit in sabrina* refers to a tributary of the Severn. Moreover, as it appears likely that the author was translating an Old Welsh source, it perhaps appeared as *oper* in the original and the Modern Welsh *aber* is used in exactly this sense (Crawford 1935, 285).
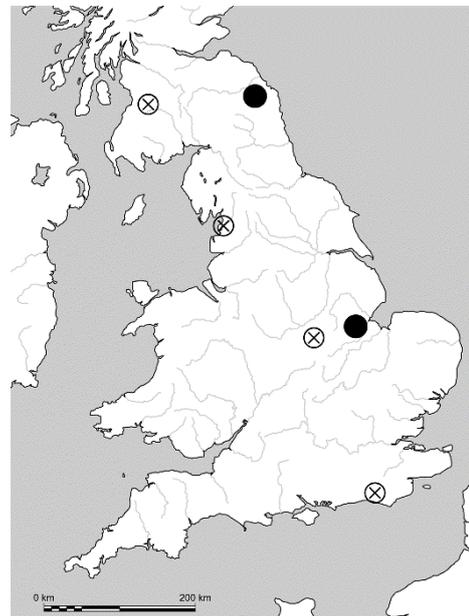
Ferdinand Lot (1934, 68) believed that the name had been taken directly from Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* II.14, in which it occurs as a genitive singular *gleni*), where it certainly does refer to this river. Linda Malcor (1999) points out that the site of the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513 is

nearby, while Alistair Moffatt (1999, 210) also mentions the Battle of Humbleton Hill of 1402, the Battle of Geteryne of 1415 and the Battle of Yeavering of 1465, all within 5 km of the river; they suggest that this is a likely location for a battle at any period, a form of determinism that instantly sounds warning bells.

There is also no linguistic objection to identifying it with the Lincolnshire Glen (Johnstone 1934, 381; Jackson 1945, 46; Jackson 1959, 4; Ashe 1971, 41; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 56; Reid 2001, 58; Ashe 2003, 73; Green 2007, 214; Field 2008, 13; Pace 2008, 114). Again, this is a river with an inland *ostium*, as it is a tributary of the River Welland. Both identifications are possible and there is no evidence by which a choice can be made between them on purely linguistic grounds.

A number of alternative suggestions have also been made. Identifications using *glein<*glaṇi̯o-* include the Ayrshire Glen Water (Skene 1868, 52) or a lost river name preserved in the names of two Leicestershire villages (Johnstone 1934, 381). Collingwood (1929, 294) thought that the name might be found in the Sussex stream name Glynde, which is linguistically impossible. Anscombe (1904, 106) tried to emend *gloin*, which he identified with the River Lune, quite unnecessarily, as the name is not corrupt and *gloin* could not account for any of the recorded forms of Lune (Ekwall 1928, 270). John Morris (1973, 111) curiously counts this among his unlocatable names, seeming not to be happy to offer alternatives.

super aliud flumen quod dicitur dubglas

ETYMOLOGY

This is a very straightforward name, being clearly Brittonic *duboglasso-*, 'black-blue' (Jackson 1945, 46), and it contains elements that are found in other Brittonic and continental Celtic placenames. Although *duboglasso-* is not directly attested among known Romano-British placenames, there are numerous rivers and streams whose current or historically recorded names must derive from this original (Ekwall 1928, 129-133).

IDENTIFICATIONS

On the face of it, this ought to be an easy site to identify, as the name is well recorded, surviving as Douglas (and a number of variants) and, uniquely in the text, there is a clarifying statement that it was *in regione linnuis*. This clarification, however, is part of the problem: we have to ensure consistency between proposed identifications for both the names. This has led to two separate approaches, with one school of thought preferring to recognise *dubglas* as one of the Rivers Douglas (e.g. Reid 2001, 58), the other preferring to identify *regio linnuis* and suggest an identification with a river there that no longer necessarily has a Douglas name.

FIGURE 4: DUBGLAS

Of the former approach, the favoured rivers have been the Douglas Water flowing into Loch Lomond (Skene 1868, 53; Lot 1934, 68; Tolstoy 1961, 124; Reid 2001, 58), the River Douglas in Lanarkshire (Moffatt 1999, 212), the River Douglas in Lancashire (Anscombe 1904, 107; Faral 1929, I 141; Malcor 1999; Reid 2001, 58) or the Devil's Water in
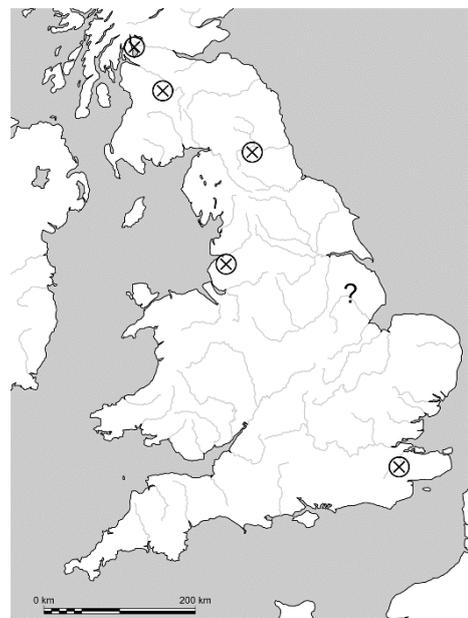
Northumberland (Hunt 2012, 97). The first two identifications depend on Skene's untenable identification of *regio linnuis* with Lennox (Gaelic *Leamhnach* from Brittonic **lemanāco-* (Watson 2004 [1926], 119)), although Tolstoy (1961, 124) attempts to show that there was a *regio linnuis* in this general area unrelated to Lennox. The third depends on assuming that the gloss is wrong (which was one of the suggestions of Anscombe (1904, 107)), that there is an otherwise unrecorded *regio linnuis* in Lancashire or that the name is somehow corrupt (Anscombe 1904, 107 suggested that it derived from **Legionensis*, 'of the Legion', referring to Chester, which is quite impossible). The fourth concludes, wrongly, that *linnuis* survives in the placename Linnels (*below*). Linda Malcor (1999) simply avoids discussion of *linnuis* to enable her to state that "*the river Douglas in Lancashire and the Douglas Waterway south of Glasgow are excellent possibilities*". Gidlow (2004, 141) identifies it with the River Parrett in Somerset, thanks to his untenable identification of *linnuis* with Ilchester (the Romano-British *Lindinis*). For reasons that will become clear in the discussion of the next name, none of these options is possible. Finally, W G Collingwood (1929, 294) suggested that Kent Water in Kent, a tributary of the Medway, could be identified with *dubglas* on the grounds that a document of 1288 referred to it as *le Black*; Jackson (1945, 47) dryly notes that '*comment would be superfluous*'. Not one of these suggested identifications is acceptable on one or more grounds and all must be rejected.

This means that it is necessary to turn to the identification of *regio linnuis*, which must be Lindsey, despite dissenting voices (*below*). The principal reason for rejecting Lindsey has generally been that it contains no known River Douglas; where Lindsey has been accepted, most writers have preferred to leave the river unidentified (Johnstone 1934, 381; Crawford 1935, 286; Jackson 1945, 47; Jackson 1959, 4; Alcock 1971, 65; Pace 2008, 106), although John Morris (1973, 112) suggested that it ought to be the River Witham as this is the most significant river in the region. This is a clearly fallacious argument and it is best to conclude that we do not currently have the data by which *dubglas* can be identified with any certainty, although it must have been a water-course somewhere in Lindsey and presumably one that no longer bears a name of Brittonic origin.

in regione linnuis

ETYMOLOGY

This name must derive from a British Latin **lindenses* (Jackson 1945, 48; Jackson 1953, 332; Rivet & Smith 1979, 393), which depends on a Brittonic **lindo-*, 'lake, pool' (Rivet & Smith 1979, 392; Delamarre 2003, 202). Importantly, region names ending in *-ûïs* in Primitive Welsh do not derive from natural features such as lakes, but from the names of their principal settlements (Koch 1997, 133). It is therefore necessary to locate a settlement named **lindo-*.

IDENTIFICATIONS

The most commonly preferred identification is with Lindsey (Anscombe 1904, 107; Crawford 1935, 286; Johnstone 1934, 381; Jackson 1945, 48; Jackson 1958, 4; Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 66; Morris 1973, 112; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 56; Ashe 2003, 73; Green 2007, 212; Field 2008, 13; Pace 2008, 106), the name of an early Saxon kingdom, later a subdivision of English Lincolnshire, and a name which also derives ultimately from the Romano-British name *Lindum*, Lincoln. Lindsey is therefore the 'region of the *Lindenses*', exactly as the etymology of *linnuis* demands. Others, generally those who prefer a 'northern Arthur', have occasionally pointed to the etymology of Lindisfarne (Crawford 1935, 286), which derives from Old English *Lindisfarone* ('*Lindenses*-travellers'). However, the most logical understanding of this name is that it refers to

a group of settlers on the island whose origin was among the *Lindenses* and it would therefore be an Old English name, not Brittonic (Green 2012, 235-42). This does not mean that it can be regarded as a translation from an earlier Brittonic name, as a different name for the island is recorded in the *Historia Brittonum* §63, where it is given as *Medcaut*, deriving from *Medicata*, a Latin loan-word meaning 'healing (island)' (Breeze 2005, 188).

Some have equated it with a region named after the *Λίνδον* listed by Ptolemy (*Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑφήγησις* II.3.6) as a *πόλις* of the <*Δαμνόνιοι*>, more correctly **Dumnoṇii*, of central Scotland (Tolstoy 1961, 124; Alcock 1971, 66), or with *Lindinis*, Ilchester in Somerset (Gidlow 2004, 112). While the former might be behind a regional name **lindenses*, the latter would have produced the form **lindinenses*, which could not have

FIGURE 5: LINNUIS

developed into the attested *linnuis*. August Hunt (2005), quoting personal correspondence with Richard Coates, concludes that it survives as Linnels (>**lindolīn*) on the Devil's Water in Northumberland (Hunt 2012, 98): while both names share the element **lindo-*, they are emphatically not the same name; nor can *linnuis* derive from **lindolīnenses*, which would be necessary if the identification of the name were correct. These, as well as the identification with Lindisfarne, can also be discounted on the grounds that this type of name seems never to derive from the names of minor localities: instead, it requires a regionally important settlement named **Lindo-* and only Lincoln, the Romano-British *Lindum* (Rivet & Smith 1979, 393) fulfils this requirement.

Nevertheless, this has not prevented identifications with Lennox (Skene 1868, 53; Lot 1934, 68), the area around the Firth of Forth, the Gaelic *Linn Guidan* (Moffatt 1999, 212), Chester by way of an unnecessary emendation (Anscombe 1904, 107), a region around the River East Rother, the Romano-British **Lemana* (Collingwood 1929, 294) or, most fantastically, with the Lingones of *Cohors I Lingonum equitata*, who were stationed at *Bremenium*, High Rochester, in the mid-second century (Malcor 1999).

None of this will do. The *in regione linnuis* must be Lindsey. All other identifications require special pleading to disregard the linguistic and contextual information that makes the identification the most certain in the entire battle list (*pace* Halsall 2013, 67).

super flumen quod uocatur bassas

ETYMOLOGY

This has caused all previous commentators difficulties; Johnstone (1934, 381) and Jackson (1945, 48) suggest that it contains an element **basso-* that gives Modern Welsh *bas*, 'shallow'. The word is related to Latin *bassus*, 'low'. Jackson believed the putative Brittonic form of the name as given in the text, **Bassass-*, to be barbarous. His proposed emendation **bas* would be acceptable from a philological standpoint, but as he admitted, the complete agreement of the manuscripts on *bassas* causes palaeographical difficulties. If it is a spelling error, it goes back to
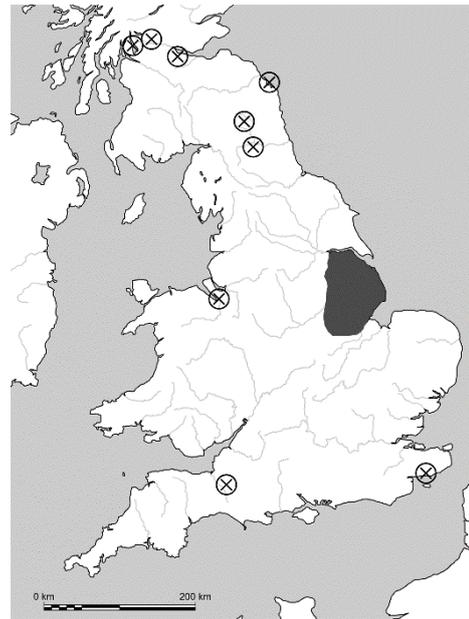
the exemplar of all surviving texts. Moreover, as it appears to provide a rhyme for *dubglas*, the spelling with two syllables may derive from the hypothetical source poem. It is therefore possible that the name should be alaysed as **bas-* with a nominal suffix **-asso-,* giving a sense 'the shallow one'. August Hunt (2005) quotes personal correspondence with Graham Isaac as suggesting that the name "*is probably English*" on the grounds that *-as* is an Old English genitive ending. An Old English origin seems unlikely in view of a plausible Brittonic etymology for the name.

IDENTIFICATIONS

Most writers have found this site to be unlocatable (Collingwood 1929, 295; Johnstone 1934, 381; Jackson 1945, 48; Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 67; Morris 1973, 111; Gidlow 2004, 54; Hunt 2005; Field 2008, 14). However, Crawford (1935, 286) suggested Baschurch, Shropshire, as the site intended; the place is probably named in *Canu Heledd* as *Eglwysseu Bassa*, the site of Cynddylan's *stafell* or hall (Williams 1935, 38). It is unclear whether an Old English placename Baschurch was translated into Old Welsh by the poet of *Canu Heledd* or whether the Old English form is a translation from an Old Welsh original: either way, it is possible to accept Jackson's or Isaac's different etymologies. Phillips and Keatman (1992, 172) accept the identification as it confirms their equation of Arthur with Owain Ddantgwyn, whom they make ruler of sub-Roman Wroxeter.
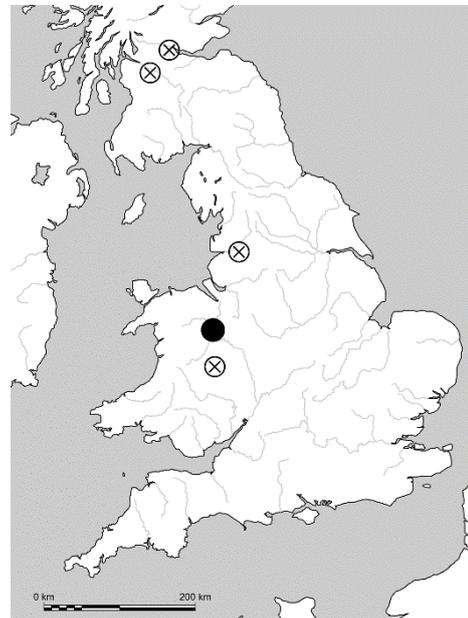
FIGURE 6: BASSAS

Among those seeking a northern Arthur, Skene (1868, 53) suggested the River Bonny, a tributary of the Carron, which joins it near Dunipace, and Tolstoy (1961, 127) identified it with a stream at Cambuslang. Anscombe (1904, 108) proposed an emendation *Bascan to identify the site with Baxenden in Lancashire; Jackson (1945, 48) described this as '*pointless*'. Linda Malcor (1999) believed that this battle was fought somewhere between the Scottish lowlands and the highlands, but provides no evidence to back up her claim, while Alistair Moffatt (1999, 214) is insistent that it cannot be in Scotland, suggesting a connection with three Staffordshire villages named Basford. August Hunt (2012, 106) conneted it with Lower Shilford ('shallow ford', of Old English origin) on the Tyne; in a comment that reveals his underlying assumptions, he states "*it is reasonable to assume that Bassas must be located somewhere in this approximate region of the North*".

Whilst the name has proved problematical for other writers, the identification with the *Eglwysau Bassa* of *Canu Heledd* is attractive; the cultural milieu of the author of the *Historia Brittonum* was the same as that in which the *Canu Heledd* were composed (Rowland 1991, 138-141) or (if a seventh-century origin for the cycle be preferred) modernised and the name would probably have been familiar to the author.

in silua celidonis, id est cat coit celidon

This is absolutely clear: the Latin *silua celidonis* and Old Welsh *coit celidon* both mean 'wood of Celyddon' (Jackson 1945, 48), the latter being related to the Classical *Calidonia* (Jackson 1953, 607; Clarke 1969, 191; Rivet & Smith 1979, 290).

IDENTIFICATIONS

Given the fact that *Coed Celyddon* is so well known and well located around the headwaters of the Rivers Clyde and Tweed in Welsh literature, it is difficult to see why some commentators have struggled to find locations outside the southern uplands of Scotland; certainly most agree on this identification (Lot 1934, 69; Crawford 1935, 286; Jackson 1945, 49; Johnstone 1934, 381; Jackson 1959, 4; Tolstoy 1961, 127; Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 61; Morris 1973, 111; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 56; Malcor 1999; Moffatt 1999, 215; Reid 2001, 57; Ashe 2003, 73; Gidlow 2004, 54; Field 2008, 14; Pace 2008, 115; Hujnt 2012, 107f.). *Coed Celyddon* is particularly associated with Myrddin, the Merlin of legend, appearing in poems such as *Yr Afallennau* and *Ymddiddan*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* and *Ystorya Trystan* (Jarman 1991, 118 ff.;

FIGURE 7: COIT CELIDON

Bromwich 1991, 217). As such, there can be little doubt of its location, but this did not prevent Faral (1929, i 142) from identifying it with the Classical *Silua Caledoniae*, which must be located in the Scottish Highlands. More eccentrically, Anscombe (1904, 108) located it vaguely in the English Midlands and Collingwood (1929, 295) in the Weald; in both instances, the identifications were driven by the authors' preconceptions about the location of Arthur's field of operation. This is another battle site we can identify with considerable confidence.
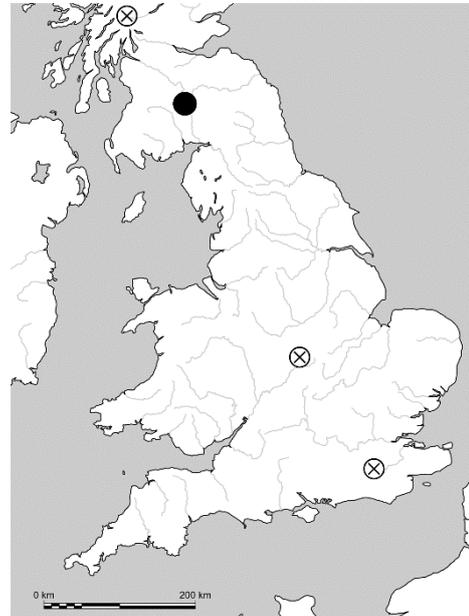
in castello guinnion

ETYMOLOGY

This name, which is evidently a partial latinisation of **cair guinnion*, may be analysed as deriving from **u̯indi̯on-*, 'white (people)' (Jackson 1945, 49) and is perhaps therefore a folk-name in origin. It is a regular plural of Old Welsh *guinn*, 'white', **u̯indo-* in Brittonic (Delamarre 2003, 319-20), and would mean 'fort of the **U̯indi̯ones* (white people)', not 'white fort'. It can have nothing to do with the Romano-British *U̯inou̯i̯um*, which contains **u̯in-*, an element of unknown meaning, not **u̯indo-* (Rivet & Smith 1979, 504). The element **u̯indo-* is found in a number of Romano-British placenames, including *U̯indocladi̯a* (Badbury Rings), **U̯indoni̯o* (Neatham) and *U̯indolanda* (Chesterholm), none of which, however, can be the ancestor of this name.

IDENTIFICATIONS

This name has popularly been identified with Binchester in County Durham, the Romano-British *U̯inou̯i̯um* (Anscombe 1904, 110; Faral 1929, i 142; Lot 1934, 69; Johnstone 1934, 381; Crawford 1935, 287; Rivet & Smith 1979, 505; Malcor 1999; Gidlow 2004, 55; Field 2008, 15; Hunt 2012, 113-4) on the basis of the superficial similarity of the name. Jackson (1945, 49) was insistent that

the two places cannot be identified without an emendation to the text, which is not necessary as the name *guinnion* is not corrupt, so we can rule out Binchester, despite its popularity.

Beyond this negative identification, there is no certainty. Skene (1868, 54), followed by Moffatt (1999, 222), favoured Stow in Wedale, Tolstoy (1961, 132) proposed *Caerguidn*, a lost name at Land's End, and Collingwood (1929, 295) wanted to emend **Caer Wen or *Caer Gwent* (by which he presumably meant **Cair Guen* or **Cair Guent*) to enable him to identify the site with Winchester. Pace (2008, 118) appears to identify it with the sub-Roman fortified amphitheatre at Cirencester, although he gives no real grounds— linguistic, palaeographic or otherwise—for his assertion. It seems best to conclude that this site is unlocatable on present evidence (Jackson 1945, 50;

FIGURE 8: GUINNION

Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 67; Morris 1973, 111) and it is difficult to see how we might be able to identify it in the future without the discovery of new epigraphic or documentary data.
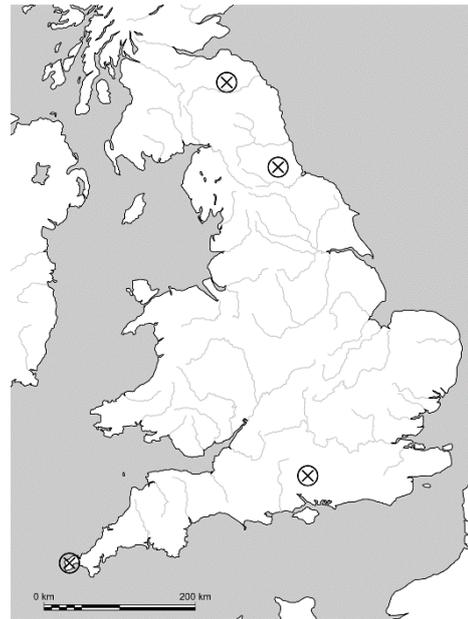
in urbe legionis

ETYMOLOGY

The name is pure Latin and means 'city of the legion', from which it has been identified with the *legionum urbis/ciuitatem legionum* and *carlegion* of Gildas and Bede (*de Excidio Britanniae* 10; *Historia Ecclesiastica* II.2), the *cair legion* of *Historia Brittonum* §66a (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2015, 6) and the *urbis legion/cair legion* of the *Annales Cambrię*. The possibility that the text originally contained an Old Welsh version, **cair legion*, or gloss, **id est cair legion*, should not be dismissed automatically, although it is found only in the Vatican recension, a version that has good claim to be closer to the archetyp than others.

IDENTIFICATIONS

There has long been general agreement that the site of this battle can be identified with Chester (Anscombe 1904, 112; Faral 1929, i 142; Johnstone 1934, 381; Lot 1934, 69; Crawford 1935, 287; Jackson 1945, 50; Jackson 1959, 4; Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 63; Thomas 1971, 40; Morris 1973, 111; Rivet & Smith 1979, 337; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 172; Ashe 2003, 73; Gidlow 2004, 55; Pace 2008, 130). While some have recognised that it is not altogether possible to reject Caerleon-on-Usk (Ashe 1971, 41; Alcock 1971, 63; Morris 1973, 111; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 56; Reid 2001, 58; Gidlow 2004, 55), Chester remains the most plausible identification. A recent attempt to identify it with York (Field 1999; Malcor 1999; Reid 1999, 223; Field 2008, 15; Hunt 2012, 115) is misguided, as there
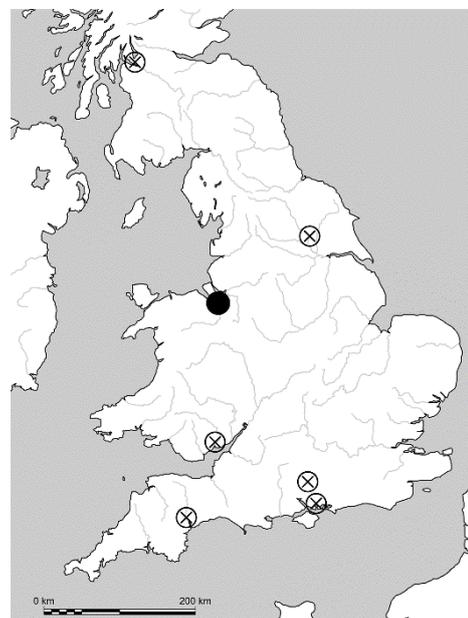
FIGURE9: URBE LEGIONIS

is no evidence to indicate that York was ever known as anything other than *Eburacum/Eboracum* in British Latin or *Cair Ebrauc* in Old Welsh (Rivet & Smith 1979, 337; Green 2007, 209). Other identifications, which include Dumbarton (Skene 1868, 55), Portchester (Collingwood 1929, 296) and Exeter (Tolstoy 1961, 136), are equally mistaken and depend on special pleading to support the authors' beliefs about the regions in which their Arthur operated. Once again, a high level of confidence can be expressed in an identification with Chester.

in litore fluminis quod uocatur *traith tribruit

ETYMOLOGY

The Computistical group truncates this name by omitting *traith*, which is found only in the Vatican recension. This is important, as it means that it has been possible for those working from the standard texts based on the Harleian family to seek a river-name, whereas Old Welsh *traith* makes it clear that it refers to the name of the shore of the river, resolving the ambiguity of the Latin: it was the *litus*, not the *flumen*, that was called *tribruit*. The second element is found as an adjective in Middle Welsh, *tryfrwyd*, meaning 'pierced through', and consists of *tri-*, 'through, very, excessive' (Delamarre 2003, 299), compounded with Old Welsh *bruit*, 'pierced, broken' (Jackson 1945, 51), from Brittonic *tribreito-*. It could also mean 'speckled' (Jackson 1958, 4 note 1), which Sims-Williams (1991, 41) suggests could be figurative, with the sense 'spattered with blood'.

IDENTIFICATIONS

There has been more disagreement about the identification of this name than about any other, although there is a general consensus that it should be connected with the poetic *trywruid/traethev trywruid* of *Pa Gur yv y Porthaur?* lines 22 and 48 (Sims-Williams 1991, 41; Koch & Carey 2000, 298). The context of the poem appears to indicate that it is in *y gogledd*, the Scottish lowlands or northern England, although this is not conclusive (Skene 1868, 56; Lot 1934, 69; Jackson 1945, 52; Ashe 1971, 21; Moffatt 1999, 225; Hunt 2000). Attempts have been made to be more precise about the location, but they are typically contradictory. Skene (1868, 56), followed by Lot (1934, 69), identified it with the Firth of Forth, taking one of the variant spellings *trywruid* to contain a version of its Welsh name, *Gwerid* (Watson 2004 [1926], 52), which is not

FIGURE 10: TRAITH TRIBRUIT

possible. Johnstone (1934, 382) accepted that it is lost, but suggested that it might be some stream flowing into the Firth of Forth. Crawford (1935, 288) suggested the Fords of Frew in the Vale of Menteith (Gaelic *na Friùthachan* (Watson 2004 [1926], 350)), but despite the origin of the placename in Old Welsh *frut*, 'stream', there can be no connection with *tribruit*. August Hunt (2012, 123-5) identified it with Broken Heugh at the mouth of the River Avon that flows into the Firth of Forth close to the eastern end of the Antonine Wall.

Other identifications depend on abandoning the identification of the battle name with *traethev trywruid*, on assuming that *traethev trywruid* were not in *y gogledd* or on finding an emendation for the name. None is really acceptable. Collingwood (1929, 296) used a false etymology *tri-*

brut, which he mistakenly believed would mean 'three streams', to identify the site with Chichester Harbour, which is untenable, while Malcor (1999) was also misled by *tri-* in wanting to find an estuary with the confluence of three rivers, which she identified with the Ribble Estuary in Lancashire, to suit her identification of battle sites in northern England. Tolstoy (1961, 143) identified the site with Stert and Berrow Flats in the Parrett Estuary in Somerset, as part of his identification of a south-western campaign of Arthur, while Pace (2008, 131) opted for the estuary of the River Brue; a more general identification with the mouth of the River Severn has also been suggested (Reid 2001, 58). Anscombe (1904, 113) emended **traetheu goit*, which he identified with the River Goyt in Cheshire. Most recent commentators believe that the site is unlocatable (Alcock 1971, 67; Morris 1973, 111; Sims-Williams 1991, 41; Field 2008, 16).

John Koch (1997, 178) has identified the *vanawyt* of *Y Gododdin* line 35 with the *manawid* of *Pa Gur, yv y Porthaur?* who brought back the broken spear from *Traith Tribruit*, and suggests that his kingdom lay in the east, in what is now England. If this be accepted, there is no longer any reason to insist that *traith tribruit* lay in *Y Gogledd*. This leaves the identification of the battle site completely open, although it is clear that the name was well known in early Welsh saga.

in monte qui dicitur breguoin, *id est cat bregion

ETYMOLOGY

The usually accepted form of the name of the eleventh battle, <agned>, is unexplained. Jackson (1945, 53) states that it '*can only represent a spelling error for **Angned', which would derive from an unknown Brittonic **angned-* or an Old Welsh compound **an*, 'very', with **gned*, also of unknown meaning. It is clearly corrupt and an emendation should be sought; Andrew Breeze (2002, 126) suggests a connection with Welsh *angau*, 'death', and would emend **angued*. In view of the manuscript tradition, this is ingenious but unlikely. It also leaves the final *-d* unexplained. Although Jackson (1959, 5, followed by Higham 2002, 147) thought *breguoin* a "*substitution*" in the Vatican recension and possibly "*an interpolation*", the evidence assembled above shows that this cannot be the case: it carries greater authority than <agned> in the textual tradition and the explanation of the corruption lies in recognising this.

A solution to the muddle lies in the observation that this name is recorded correctly only in manuscripts of the Vatican recension (Jackson 1945, 52); the ancestor of the Computistical family seems to have mangled **in monte qui dicitur breguoin, id est cat bregion* into *in monte qui dicitur <agned> cat bregomion*, which was further truncated in the Harleian recension to *in monte qui dicitur <agned>*. It is easy to derive *breguoin* from a Brittonic **bremeṇio-*, containing **brem-* 'roar' with derivational suffixes *-en-* and *-ịo-* (Rivet & Smith 1979, 276; Delamarre 2012, 87), a name that is attested in Roman Britain (Jackson 1947, 49; Jackson 1953, 392, 415; Rivet & Smith 1979, 276). Despite the superficial similarity of the names in Old Welsh orthography, there is no connection between **breguoin* and the gloss *cat bregion*, which means 'battle of the highlands' (Jackson 1945, 54).

IDENTIFICATIONS

Identification of the name has been bedevilled by the almost universal acceptance of the barbarous and corrupt *agned* as the definitive form of the name, and it was Jackson's (1947, 49) solution of what he regarded as an 'alternative' name *breguoin* that enables this battle to be identified with considerable certainty; the name is clearly the same as that of the Roman auxiliary fort of *Bremeṇium* at High Rochester, Northumberland (Jackson 1959, 4). This was also

the scene of a battle, known as *kat gellawr brewyn*, 'the battle of the cells of *Bremenịo-', attributed to Urien of Rheged by the poet of *Ardwyre Reget, ryssed rieu* (Koch & Carey 2000, 349). The identification is accepted by Leslie Alcock (1971, 64), Rivet & Smith (1979, 277), who nevertheless misunderstand Jackson's argument, Phillips & Keatman (1992, 173), Alistair Moffatt (1999, 226) and P J C Field (2008, 16), but most others have failed to take note of Jackson's etymology.

Linda Malcor (1999) does make use of it, though, feeling able to identify the site with Ribchester, the Romano-British *Bremetennacum*, believing the first part of the name, which she renders **Breme*[*n*], to be a tribal name based on '*Jackson's etymology for Bremenium, *Bremeno*... [which] *could just as easily indicate Bremetennacum*' as the '"tennacum" *part*

FIGURE 11: BREGUOIN

means "holding"... [the] *first part of the name, then... works out to Breguoin for the same reasons that Bremenium does*'. This convoluted amateur etymologising is clearly nonsensical and is safe to ignore: the name *Bremetennacum* can be analysed as containing **brem-*, 'roar', as in *Bremenịum*, together with derivational suffixes *-et-*, *-on*(*o*)*-* and *-aco-*, meaning 'place on the roaring river' (Rivet & Smith 1979, 277): it cannot have given Old Welsh *breguoin*.

Others have opted for locations that can also be discounted. Occasionally, the site of *mons \<agned\>* has been identified with Edinburgh (Skene 1868, 57; Johnstone 1934, 382), following Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Brittannię* §27 (Wright 1985, 17)), or with Aconbury, Herefordshire (Anscombe 1904, 115). Andrew Breeze (2002, 126) identified it with the lost *Pennango*, near Hawick, suggesting that *breguoin* is a later substitution for a name that a copyist did not recognise. In view of the other unrecognisable placenames in this list, this is a somewhat implausible argument and is shown to be wrong by analysis of the manuscript tradition. August Hunt (2012, 127ff), while accepting Breeze's emendation, preferred to view the 'Arthurian' battle as a mistaken reference to the Battle of *Catraeth*, a disaster recalled in the collection attributed to Aneirin, *Y Gododdin* (Koch 1997), on the grounds that the campaign ended in mass slaughter. He does not explain why the name *Catraeth* was not used in the *Historia Brittonum*, though.

The name *breguoin* has also been identified with Leintwardine, the Romano-British **Braɥonịo* (Anscombe 1904, 115; Faral 1929, i 144; Alcock 1971, 64; Gidlow 2004, 55), or with Brougham, Cumbria, the Romano-British **Brocaɥo* (Lot 1934, 70); neither is linguistically possible. The Old Welsh identifier *cat bregion* has been identified with Brent Knoll, Somerset (Tolstoy 1961, 140); while the modern name does derive from **briganțịā*, which contains the root **brigā* that is also at the root of *bregion*, this is a generic word for 'high (place)'. In the case of Brent Knoll, it is singular whereas *bregion* is plural and there is no connection with the specific name *breguoin*. Pace (2008), 132) saw \<agned\> as part of a campaign that took Arthur's army from the River Brue towards Bath, suggesting that "*virtually any rise in this area might be the site of the eleventh battle*". Collingwood (1929, 297) wanted to identify it as a Sussex hillfort without any

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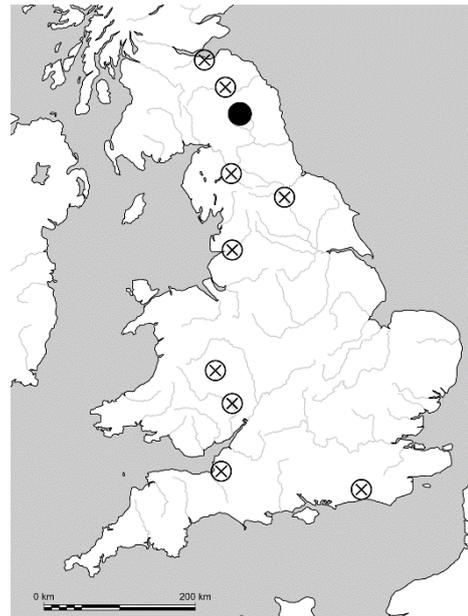
placename support. Yet others, including Jackson in his earlier paper, have classed it as unlocatable (Crawford 1935, 289; Jackson 1945, 53; Morris 1973, 111).

The directly attested Romano-British *Bremeṇium* at High Rochester remains the only plausible identification of this name. The barbarous <*agned*> is a ghost created by uncritical acceptance of the primacy of the Harleian recension and should have no place in attempts to identify the battle location.

in monte badonis

ETYMOLOGY

Despite being a well attested name, many have had problems finding a convincing Brittonic etymology for *badon*. Breeze (2015, 26-7) has attempted to cut the Gordian knot by suggesting that Gildas's *in monte Badonici* is corrupt and that it could be emended **bladonicus* or **bradonicus*. This is ingenious but, in view of the universal spelling *badon-*, unnecessary. Moreover, Jackson (1945, 55; 1958, 153) dismissed any connection with English placenames containing the Old English personal name Badda, suggesting that if there were borrowing, it could have been from a Neo-Brittonic stem **badon-* of unknown meaning. He also suggested that **mons badonis* is a latinisation of Old Welsh **din badon*. Delamarre (2007, 37) lists a number of personal names – Badardus, Badia and Badiolus – that demonstrate the existence of a rood **bad-* in Continental Celtic, which mean that we cannot dismiss *badon* as a Brittonic name.

However, it is evident from Gildas (*de Excidio* 26) that it was not the hill that was called *badon*, as he uses an adjectival form *badonici*, 'Badonic', which suggests that it was near a place called *badon*. The name may be connected with the Welsh verb *boddi*, 'drown, flood', and the noun *badd*, 'bath', with its variant *baddon*; the *-ono-* suffix could therefore be an intensive, suggesting an etymology 'very wet/frequently flooded place'. Delamarre (2003, 63) also records the Continental Celtic words *badios/bodios* ('yellow', 'blond') and *baditis* ('water-lily') that may have a bearing on the etymology. The battle should therefore have been fought on a hill perhaps amid, or at least close to, marshes or fens.

IDENTIFICATIONS

This is the only one of the battles in the list that we can be certain actually took place at the general time the text claims it did, as it is recorded as *obsessio badonici montis* by Gildas (Chapter 26). Unfortunately, this contemporary attestation does not aid identification, as it is quite unclear which part of Britain Gildas was writing about (other than that his interest seems to have been in the late Roman diocese of *Britanniae*). In medieval Welsh tradition, *Caer Vadon* was identified with Bath (Roberts 1991, 106), following Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Brittannię* §30 (Wright 1985, 18)) and this identification has been supported by several twentieth-century writers (Tolstoy 1961, 144; Alcock 1971, 70; Morris 1973, 112; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 86-7; Moffatt 1999, 229; Pace 2008,
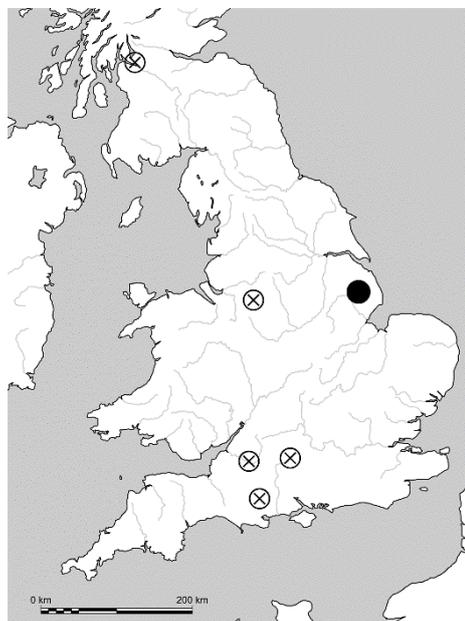
FIGURE 12: MONTE BADONIS

133). However, the phrase *in quo balnea sunt badonis* that Morris (1980, 81) inserted into his text of *Historia Brittonum* §67 derives from the chapter titles of the Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.27 of the *Historia* and is not in any manuscript of the text. Given that this manuscript is a thirteenth-century document belonging to the conflated and interpolated Sawley recension (and the version that contains the long preface attributing the text to Nennius), it post-dates Geoffrey of Monmouth, and is of no independent value for locating the site. Morris's editorial decision was perhaps made to support his preferred identification of *badon* with Bath. This section forms part of the *Mirabilia Britanniae*, which was not included in the archetypal *Historia Brittonum*.

Nevertheless, despite the general and understandable reluctance to follow Geoffrey of Monmouth's identifications of placenames as so many of them are arbitrary and demonstrably wrong, there is no *a priori* reason to exclude the possibility that *badon* was Bath. The proposed Brittonic etymology is a good description of the place, especially if it were coined before the Roman construction of therapeutic facilities that controlled the thermal springs lent them the name *Aquae Sulis*. It is also curious that the early Old English form of the name, *Acemannesceaster* ('Aching man's Chester', presumably referring to the supposed therapeutic qualities of the water), is not the origin of the modern placename, suggesting that it has had a complex history. Moreover, as already noted, the battle did not take place at *badon*, according to its only contemporary witness, but nearby, on *mons badonicus*, 'the Badonic mount', wherever that may have been. John Morris (1973, 113) suggested Solsbury Hill and was followed by Phillips & Keatman (1992, 88), while Edwin Pace (2008, 133) opted for Lansdowne Hill, although other nearby hills would be equally plausible if *badon* is to be identified with Bath.

Most commentators, though, have been wary of following Geoffrey of Monmouth but nevertheless seek a location in southern England (Jackson 1945, 56; 1959, 2-3; Phillips & Keatman 1992, 56; Field 2008, 16; Breeze 2015, 26), often with varying degrees of precision. To P K Johnstone (1946, 160), it ought to be somewhere on the lower Severn, while the numerous hillforts named Badbury have also proved popular (Alcock 1971, 70). The most commonly cited Badbury is the hillfort at Badbury Rings, Dorset (Jackson 1958, 155; Alcock 1971, 70); however, this can probably be discounted as it was the Romano-British *Ṿindocladịa*, 'white ditches', a reference to exposed chalk bedrock (Rivet & Smith 1979, 500). Ashe (1971, 41) favoured Liddington Castle (Wiltshire), while Lot (1934, 70) suggested Great Bedwyn (Wiltshire) and is followed by Gidlow (2004, 60), who identifies it with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's *Bedanheafod*, following Plummer's (1899, 338) location of the late seventh-century battle, which is not, however, likely to contain this putatively Brittonic name. Breeze's (2015, 26-7) proposed emendations, **Bladonicus* and **Bradonicus* respectively, enable him to identify the site with Bladon in Oxfordshire or Braydon in Wiltshire, preferring the latter; however, the agreement on the spelling *badon-* found in all sources renders this solution one based on a counsel of despair in seeking a Brittonic etymology for the name.

A few have sought an identification in the north, largely because it suits their hypotheses about Arthur's sphere of operation. Skene (1868, 57) thought he could detect the name in Bowden Hill in Lothian, whereas Linda Malcor (1999) opted for Dumbarton, largely because Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Britanniẹ* §148 (Wright 1985, 104)) sets Arthur's decisive battle against the Picts and Scots there, despite his identification of *Kaer Badum* with Bath and the unanimity of the ancient sources that it was a victory against a Saxon foe. Moreover, she argues

that '[t]*his scenario... fits quite well with what we can surmise happened in the second century*', which is when she places her particular variant of the 'historical Arthur', demonstrating that her hypothesised historical scenario and nothing else lies behind the identification. August Hunt (2012, 136ff) suggested Buxton on the spurious and inverted grounds that *badonis* "must *derive from a Bath name*" and there are fifteenth- and sixteenth-century records of a road called *Bathamgate*, identified with Roman road 713 (Margary 1973, 313) leading south-west from the town.

Going against the two prevailing views of where the battle ought to have been fought, Caitlin Green (2007, 213) has suggested a site at Baumber (>*Badeburg* in Domesday Book) near Horncastle, Lincolnshire. Her reasoning is based around the archaeological evidence for the early (and apparently mass) settlement of Lindsey in the fifth century by people identified as Anglo-Saxon (Leahy 1993, 36) and the presence of possibly two other sites in the battle list (*glein* and *dubglas*) in the region of the **lindenses*. Her argument that these were battles of Ambrosius Aurelianus that were later credited to Arthur (Green 2007, 204-7) in the process of the historicisation of a previously folkloric or mythological figure will be examined below as it is not relevant to the identification of the site.

There have been few who have decided that the site of the battle cannot be identified (Collingwood 1929, 297; Faral 1929, i 144; Crawford 1935, 289), largely because it must be suspected that most commentators are not content to leave unlocated a battle that looms so large in Gildas, Bede and the *Historia Brittonum* as the high point of British resistance to the Anglo-Saxons. This evident desperation to find a location may be behind many of the more popular identifications, including the numerous southern English Badburies and Bath.

An important clue to its location has been thought to be given in *Annales Cambrię* (Field 2008, 18), for a year that is probably intended to be 664 (or, at a pinch, 665): *Primum pasca apud saxones celebratur. Bellum badonis secundo. morcant moritur* ("The first Easter was celebrated among the Saxons. The Battle of Badon for a second time. Morgan died"). The first sentence is almost certainly a garbled report of the outcome of the Synod of Whitby, held in that year, while the third refers to the death of a Welsh king. No English sources appear to mention this battle, although it has sometimes been equated with the battle of *Bedanheafod*, recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s.a. 675 (Plummer 1899, 30). This is unlikely, though, given that the entry precedes the death of Oswiu in 670 in *Annales Cambrię*: although the chronology of the *Annales* is occasionally confused and often at variance with other sources (Hughes 1973, 238 note 6), its sequence of events is apparently trustworthy.

If this seventh-century battle were a Welsh defeat of an Anglo-Saxon army, which is what the entry in *Annales Cambrię* most plausibly implies, it suggests that the battle was fought somewhere close to the interface between areas controlled by Britons and those controlled by Saxons. This suggests the English West Country, the Welsh Marches or the eastern Pennine fringes, if we assume that the distribution of early Anglo-Saxon material culture corresponds with areas of settlement or control. On the other hand, an important engagement between rival Welsh or Saxon armies at the location of the original battle cannot be ruled out, either, although it would then be less clear why it was regarded as *bellum badonis secundo*, 'the Battle of Badon for the second time', as the phrase does not mean 'the second Battle of Badon', as some have mistakenly understood it (e.g. Morris 1973, 230). A final possibility is that the name *badonis* was

used in a purely figurative sense to mean that a battle in an entirely different location had the same significance as the original battle of *badonicus mons*, although this is perhaps implausible.

It is also entirely possible that the exact location of Badon was lost to later historians. Indeed, this seems likely. This is presumably why Bede does not give an alternative name for that of Gildas when he is usually at pains to give a British, English and Latin name whenever he can. At the same time, the location may have remained well known enough among the Welsh not to need further explanation in *Annales Cambrię* unless *bellum badonis secundo* is figurative. By the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth, though, it had presumably been forgotten, as there appears to have been universal acceptance of his equation of *Kaer Badum* with Bath by later medieval chroniclers.

Equally, it is worth noting that attempts at identification of the battle site have generally been hamstrung by the three assumptions that it must (1) have taken place in south-west England, (2) around the year 500 and (3) at the interface between areas settled and/or controlled by the Anglo-Saxons and those still controlled by Britons. The reasoning behind these assumptions is generally unstated and rarely, if ever, questioned and it is by no means certain that even one of them should constrain attempts to locate *badonicus mons*. The only exceptions to these assumptions are made by those who seek a 'northern Arthur' (e.g. Skene 1868, 57; Malcor 1999; Hunt 2012) and Caitlin Green's (2007, 213) identification with Baumber in Lincolnshire, an identification so far removed from the mainstream yet based on sound reasoning that it deserves serious consideration. The implications will be explored below.

gueith camlann

ETYMOLOGY

There is one other battle attributed to an historical Arthur (those only found in the later poetry, Geoffrey of Monmouth and the romances will not be considered here): the *gueith camlann* of *Annales Cambrię*, placed twenty-one years after the victory of *bellum badonis*, which, on the chronology proposed below, would have occurred *c* 500. The spelling *camblan* found in Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Brittannię* §178 (Wright 1985, 131)) is an earlier form than that of the *Annales* and shows that the Brittonic form of the name must have been **camboglanno-* ('bent or crooked bank'; Rivet & Smith 1979, 294; Delamarre 2003, 99, 179 & 195; Delamarre 2012, 99) or **cambolando-* ('bent or crooked enclosure'). The latter name has been seen in the corrupt <cambroianna> of the Ravenna Cosmography 107$_{36}$ (Sir Ifor Williams, *in* Richmond & Crawford 1949, 27 suggested **Cambolanna*). While this is possible, the independence of <cambroianna> as a placename is doubtful, as it is more plausibly a duplication of *Camboglanna* in a text notoriously full of such errors (Rivet & Smith 1979, 293).

Edwin Pace (2008) adopts a more eccentric etymology for the name. Accepting that "cam *in Welsh means 'crooked', with an added connotation of 'unjust' or evil'*", he finds *lann* "*more problematic—until we remember that there is a Welsh word, '*lannw*', which means 'flood-tide'. Together they give the idea of a 'treacherous flood-tide'*". This argument appears to have been constructed purely to support his proposed identification of the site of *camlann*.

IDENTIFICATION

The site of the battle has long been identified with the Romano-British *Camboglanna*, once thought to be Birdoswald (Thomas 1971, 41) but now more convincingly located at Castlesteads, a short distance to the west (Rivet & Smith 1979, 294). A northern location may be suspected

from its association in the Triads as one of the *Tair Ourgat Ynys Pridein* ('Three Futile Battles', Triad 85 (Coe & Young 1995, 86)), the other two being *Arfderydd* (Arthuret, Cumbria) and *Kat Godeu*, fought by the trees of *Coed Celyddon* at the behest of the sons of Dôn (Green 2007, 64).

There are also three possible identifications in Wales: Camlan near Mallwyd (Sims-Williams 1991, 51), a mountainside 8 km east of Dolgellau (Castleden 2000, 182) and Pont ar Gamlan near Ganllwyd (Castleden 2000, 185). All these places are in Gwynedd. The name has also been seen in the River Camel in Cornwall, which is where Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia Regum Brittannię* §178 (Wright 1985, 131)) locates it, or the River Cam in Somerset. The Welsh placenames are not attested in ancient sources, while the Somerset Cam is more convincingly derived from Brittonic
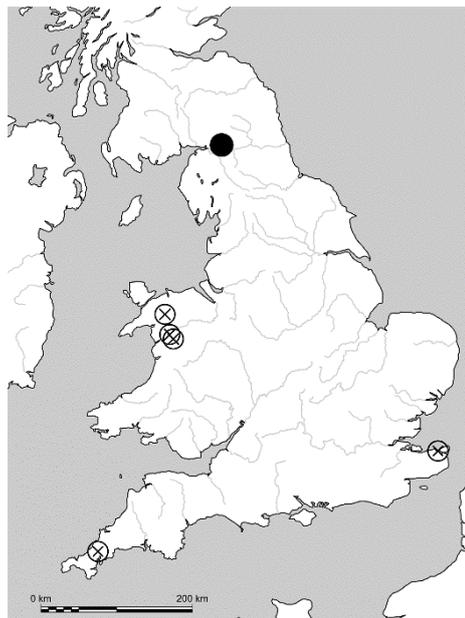
FIGURE 13: CAMLANN

Canțiā, recorded corruptly in the Ravenna Cosmography (106_{11}) as *canza* (Rivet & Smith 1979, 297-9, who do not, however, identify the location). Pace's (2008, 254) suggestion that the battle occurred during a flood tide in the Wantsum Channel between the Isle of Thanet and the Kentish mainland involves the identification of Arthur with the Categirn son of Guorthigirn of *Historia Brittonum* §44 (despite identifying Arthur with Vortigern on other occasions) and *camlann* with the battle at *rithergabail*. The argument is convoluted, implausible and its equivalences extremely unlikely; it need not detain us further. Despite these alternative possibilities, Castlesteads remains the most plausible location.

General observations on identifications

Many writers – especially the more popular – have tended to ignore historical linguistics when identifying the sites of battles. This is especially noticeable in the case of *castello guinnion*, despite Kenneth Jackson's vigorous (and quite correct) insistence that it cannot be connected with the Romano-British *Ŭinoŭịum/Ŭinoŭịa*: any attempt to make the connection shows that the writer has an agenda based on preconceptions about the nature of the text and the nature of the 'Arthur' being promoted, be he mythological, legendary or historical. The same can be said of those who use tendentious emendations of the text to identify sites when there is no reason to believe it corrupt: the names given by the text are obscure rather than corrupt and need no emendation. Similarly, it may be suggested that those who attempt to fix the locations of battles in a circumscribed region by emending and offering unlikely identifications for well established names (such as rejecting *linnuis* as Lindsey, Chester as *urbe legionis* or High Rochester as *breguoin* in favour of other places) are forcing the evidence to fit their hypotheses. As Geoffrey Ashe (1971, 41) has pointed out, such attempts "*are unconvincing and tend to cancel each other*".

Most commentaries on the text have been concerned with identifying the sites listed and with using this data to locate the campaigns (and perhaps even strategy) of a sub-Roman general named Arthur. This is evidently what the anonymous author intended us to understand: his

narrative history of Britain from its first occupation after the Flood of Noah to the destruction of *Y Gogledd* at the hands of the Saxons places Arthur between Patrick in the fifth century and the rise of the English kingdom of Bernicia in the mid sixth and purports to name his victories in sequence. He is evidently fleshing out the period of resistance covered by the text of Gildas (Chapter 26: *ex eo tempore nunc ciues, nunc hostes, uincebant*: "from that time on (i.e. the rise of Ambrosius Aurelianus), sometimes the citizens, sometimes the enemy were winning"), which culminated in the siege of the Badonic Hill (*usque ad annum obsessionis badonici montis*: "up to the year of the siege of the Badonic Mount"), which he (or his source) made the final victory of Arthur. The author clearly harmonises with what Gildas has to say, which has been taken as supporting evidence for a brief period dominated by a single British battle-leader, who was able to stem the influx of Saxon migrants.

However, it is possible to go further than this rather underwhelming conclusion. Firstly, the list is part of an attempt to write a national history of the Britons, perhaps as a reply to Bede's national history of the English (Higham 2002, 164) and, as such, it will inform us of the views of its author and, presumably, his patron(s). Secondly, it purports to record the activities of a warrior hero whose historical context is placed in the late fifth or early sixth century by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* and there are no *a priori* reasons to reject this context; if we wish to reject it, we must provide better grounds for doing so than have hitherto been offered. Thirdly, there remains a possibility that the battle list is a genuinely ancient record; even if it cannot be contemporary with the supposed historical context of the battles it lists (but see below), it may well record what was believed about Arthur more than two centuries before the *Historia Brittonum* was written. Again, there are no *a priori* reasons to believe otherwise (Field 2008, 19).

The nature of the battle list

It has long been suspected that a poetic source underlies the chapter (Chadwick & Chadwick 1932, 154), although this has not gone unchallenged (e.g. Higham 2002, 146). As a rhyming scheme can be detected in the names and possibly also in putative Old Welsh words translated into Latin (Jones 1964, 10; *see also below*), the case against a poetic source must account for these apparent coincidences. Moreover, these rhymes are not isolated but include all the placenames with the exceptions of *glein* and *linnuis*, a total of nine placenames and possibly one other word out of eleven placenames, an impressive number that is difficult to explain on the grounds of coincidence, especially when the rhymes appear to form alternating pairs.

Battle listing poems are known to have been composed for Urien Rheged (*Ardwyre reget*, Williams 1960, 7), Cynan Garwyn (*Trawsganu kynan garwin*, Williams 1960, 1; Koch 2013, 105 ff)) and Cadwallon ap Cadfan (*Marwnad cadwallon ap cadfan*, Gruffydd 1978, 34). It is unclear whether they should be regarded as contemporary with their subjects (or at least with their subjects' deaths) or whether they were composed later in commemoration of famous heroes, which is the view taken by Dumville (1977, 188), who provides no evidence for his assertion. If we assume them to be contemporary, they all seem to belong in a brief time window (*c* 580-634), suggesting that the genre (if so few examples can be said to constitute a genre) was short-lived. This alone makes it unlikely that they were composed retrospectively, centuries after the deaths of their subjects: why restrict the honorands to individuals to just these two generations?

They would also – along with *Y Gododdin* – have a good claim to be among the oldest vernacular poetry in Europe.

A poem in this genre cannot have been composed for an Arthur active *c* 500 both on these grounds and on the grounds that the Old Welsh implied by the rhyming scheme did not yet exist as a language (we might expect traces of inflected endings, for instance). It must therefore be a retrospective listing and not just an updating of a Neo-Brittonic poem into Old Welsh, as the rhyming scheme makes sense only in Old Welsh. Nevertheless, it is possible that it could date from before the end of the sixth century, within a century of the likely *floruit* of the Arthur described in the *Historia Brittonum*. Indeed, Koch (2013, 84-90) has presented a strong case for regarding the composition of *Marwnad Cunedda* as taking place originally in the fifth century, much earlier than previous commentators have dared suppose. This raises the possibility – no more – that the poem underlying this section of the *Historia Brittonum* might have been composed as early as the early sixth century.

To attempt a reconstruction of a poem whose very existence is no more than an hypothesis might be seen as a presumptuous and futile exercise. Nevertheless, it does not seem to have been attempted before and the attempt may yield clues to its form. The last seven rhyming names suggest a structure of four lines per stanza, with a rhyme for *breguoin* wanting, perhaps to be supplied by a word ending in a similar way. The previous group of four possible lines has a rhyming pair in *dubglas* and *bassas*, while *linnuis* and *celidon* do not form a pair; is it possible that *in linnuis* was at the start of a line that was completed with a word ending *...don*? Only the first name is without a rhyming structure and, if this reconstruction is correct, it ought to have been part of a four-line stanza, perhaps introducing Arthur, elaborating on his enemies and victories over them.

In this way, it is possible to hypothesise an Old Welsh poem consisting of four stanzas of four lines each, with a proem naming only one battle; the ends of the second and fourth stanzas (*celidon* and *badon*) would also rhyme, giving the poem structural unity.

…
… [...ein]
...
... oper glein

...abon dubglas
in linnuis … [...don]
... abon bassas
... cat coit celidon

... cair guinnion
...inscuit
... cair legion
... traith tribruit

... minid breguoin
… cat bregion

… [...oin]

… minid badon

This reconstruction is, of course, highly speculative and open to all manner of objections. Nevertheless, there is a coherence and consistency to it that must be explained by those who deny a poetic source. Acceptance of the hypothesis that there was a poem earlier than the composition of the *Historia Brittonum* that provided its author with the names of battles allegedly fought by a famous warrior named Arthur would at the very least suggest a pre ninth-century origin for stories concerning the character; it does not, however, demonstrate that there was an historical warrior called Arthur in the decades around 500.

The list as historical document

In recent years, critics have pointed to the lack of analytical understanding inherent in the view that the battle list should be regarded as a primary document detailing historical military campaigns by an equally historical general named Arthur. Such a view naïvely treats the text at face value; if we are content to accept the 'heap' interpretation of the spurious preface, then it provides good evidence for the historicity of Arthur, but if we treat the text as a carefully crafted piece of polemical writing – even as political 'spin' – produced more than three centuries later than the events it purports to document, then, so the argument runs, it has no evidential value whatsoever. It has to be pointed out, though, that it is equally useless in this context as evidence for a legendary or mythological Arthur.

There can be little doubt that the 'heap' interpretation of the *Historia Brittonum* is wrong. The author was clearly able to manipulate his probably meagre sources and understood the ways in which political interpretations could be hung on them, as with the use of the origin myth of the Cadelling dynasty of Powys. He was familiar with Gildas (and probably also with Bede) and would have understood the general pattern of history the earlier writer(s) had constructed; he therefore needed to say something about the time between the Saxon rebellion and the origins of Northumbria. This covering of the 'gap' between Gildas and Bede is part of the evidence that he was familiar with the latter author: Nicholas Higham (2002, 164ff) provides other evidence that he intended to write a rebuttal of Bede. In many ways, the *Historia Brittonum* can be regarded as an *Historia ante Bedam*, a narrative history of Britain before the English domination of the island, the point at which Bede becomes a primary source, no longer dependent on Gildas, Orosius or others. Of course, this is precisely what Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed to be doing in *Historia Regum Britannię* (§1 (Wright 1985, 1)).

Of course, recognising that the text is slanted in a particular direction does not invalidate its contents: even holocaust denying 'historians' of the twenty-first century do not doubt the anti-Semitism of the Nazi party or the reality of the Second World War. Whatever the purpose behind §56 of the *Historia Brittonum*, even if its contents were shown to be a ninth-century invention, the existence of a battle-leader named Arthur in the late fifth or early sixth century must remain an open question that cannot be negated by views of the origin of this particular text. On the other hand, it does not confirm his existence, any more than the circumstantial story of how Brutus fled Italy to become the first settler in Britain (§10) is evidence for a Late Bronze Age invasion of the island by Italians of Trojan origin. The plausibility or otherwise of a national (or, at least, regional) leader in the years around 500 must rest on other evidence: the known

historical context, the information contained in the text in question and on archaeological evidence (Field 2008, 21).

A further issue in understanding the text is the danger of attempting to derive historical context from its interpretation, when any interpretation necessarily involves hypotheses about the identification of placenames, an exercise fraught with difficulties, as shown above. In many of the twentieth-century attempts to identify the battle sites, a conclusion is reached on very unsafe grounds that there must have been a national leader at this period, as the battle list seems to range so widely; thus the list has been used as proof that an 'historical Arthur' really existed. The circularity of the argument is obvious, yet it continues to be used in popular publications. The same evidence is used by critical historians to demonstrate the impossibility of a character named Arthur having existed at the right period: no-one could have ranged so widely in his campaigns at the period in question. Again, the argument is circular and may be dismissed. The identifications accepted here as the most plausible on linguistic grounds do not support either a widespread distribution of battle sites, nor do they support a highly restricted distribution: curiously, this may be evidence for the historical validity of the list.

A seventh- to ninth-century synthetic context

The orthodox interpretation of the *Historia Brittonum* since Dumville's important and pioneering work in the 1970s sees it as a synthesising work, with a clear political purpose and of no value in understanding the history of periods before its composition (Dumville 1986, 26). Although its author undoubtedly drew on existing documents as well as oral traditions, he manipulated them in ways not envisaged by those who have sought to see its composition as artless, in line with what the spurious preface claimed it to be. In this way, Higham (2002, 143) asserts, he created Arthur almost *ex nihilo* to act as a Joshua counterpart to the Moses of Patrick (the *Historia Brittonum* explicitly compares Patrick with Moses in §55: *quatuor modis aequantur moyses et patricius*, although it does not make a similar comment on Arthur's hypothesised equivalence with Joshua). If this scenario is correct, the battle list is of no evidential value for the late fifth to early sixth centuries but is a curiosity that enables us to understand how the author of the text thought about the past and wanted to portray it, inventing characters for polemical reasons. He would have taken battles known as famous engagements in the more or less distant past to weave into an imagined narrative.

This is given some support by several of the placenames, which plausibly correspond with names of battles that would have been famous at least as names to the author's contemporaries, but which they might not be able to place in a correct historical context. In this way, the battle *super flumen quod uocatur bassas* would indeed be the burning of Cynddylan's *stafell* at Baschurch in the mid seventh century; the battle *in urbe legionis* would be the early seventh-century Battle of Chester; the battle *in litore fluminis quod uocatur *traith tribruit* would relate to the unhistorical stories in *Pa Gur*; the battle *in monte qui dicitur breguoin* would be the sixth-century Urien's battle at *gellawr brewyn*; and the battle *in monte badonis* would be that regarded as so significant by Gildas. Thus, four of the placenames provided can be identified with battles that took place a century or more after the purported date of Arthur while the victor of the most famous remains unnamed.

Can the other names be identified in the same way with later events? As mentioned above, Ferdinand Lot (1934, 68) believed that the author had taken the placename *glein* directly from

Bede, although he gives no reasons for that belief. It was certainly not named by Bede as the site of a battle, so the grounds for any borrowing must be considered doubtful, as must the equation itself. The battle on *flumen quod dicitur dubglas et est in regione linnuis* is more difficult and has equally proved a problem for those seeking an historical Arthur around the year 500. However, an identification in seventh-century Lindsey might well be with the battle on the river *Winwæd* (Bede *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.24), named as *in campo gai* in the so-called Northern History of the Harleian recension of the *Historia Brittonum*, at which Penda, king of Mercia, was defeated, part of the same series of events that saw the destruction of Cynddylan's kingdom. As a river name, *Winwæd* may be identified with the River Went, a tributary of the Don, generally regarded as being on the border between Mercia and Northumbria, while Bede states it to have been in the *regio* of *Loidis*, Leeds (Plummer 1896, II 183). Other possibilities include Bede's Battles of *Hæþfelð* (*Historia Ecclesiastica* II.20), in the Hatfield area immediately east of Lindsey, or the River *Idlae* (*Historia Ecclesiastica* II.12), the Idle, a tributary of the Trent. All are in the same general area as *Winwæd* and in an area listed as part of the territory of the *Lindisfarona* in Tribal Hidage (*mid hæþ feld Lande*).

This leaves the battles at *silua caledonis* and *in castello guinnion*. In neither case can they be identified conclusively with a known battle of the later sixth century onwards. It is possible that *coit celidon* was the name used in Strathclyde for Bede's battle at *Degsastan* (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I.34) but this cannot be demonstrated and there are numerous other battles in this general area that could be regarded as the archetype of *silua caledonis*. It is equally fruitless to seek identifications with better attested battles for *in castello guinnion* when its location remains unknown and the name occurs in no other context (there is no linguistic reason to identify it with *Winwæd* despite a superficial resemblance between the names).

Although it is possible to suggest that the battle list is an early ninth-century fiction compiled from the author's imperfect memory, this is a very weak hypothesis. Firstly, the *Historia Brittonum* treats them as British victories against the Saxons and it might reasonably be expected that an author who was inventing a list of Arthur's battles could name sufficient defeats of the Saxons to enable him to come up with a list of twelve placenames. This is not the case with most of the battles: not all involve the Britons; not all were against the Saxons; not all were British victories. The reasons for the author's selection of names are therefore completely unknown, undermining the hypothesis that they were chosen for their fame as great British victories. Secondly, they vary widely in time, from the late sixth century to the late seventh, and again, it is impossible to know why individual names were picked. If the author was picking more-or-less famous battles to attribute to a fictional or folkloric hero, he did a poor job by including names that cannot be regarded as in any way famous.

An historical context *c* 500

Given the weakness of a scenario involving the selection of battles for a fictional hero close in time to the composition of the *Historia Brittonum* and plausibly as late as the early ninth century, it becomes important to understand whether an earlier composition for the list is more plausible or less. The historical context intended by the author of the *Historia Brittonum* is hotly debated and has almost no contemporary historical documentation. The only earlier insular text that is relevant is Gildas, as Bede's account of the period is derived entirely from him (with the exception of the account of Germanus of Auxerre). However, Gildas perpetrates some well-

known historical howlers, such as placing the construction of Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall in the period between the fall of Magnus Maximus in 383 and the rise of Vortigern in the second quarter of the fifth century. Gildas's treatment of supposedly early fifth-century history is therefore impossible. Not only does he place the Roman walls in the wrong century (three centuries out, to be precise), but also in the wrong relative sequence; Gildas shared the problem of most ancient authors with regard to the dating of the two British walls. Perhaps it was his own conjecture that they were post-Roman, or perhaps it came from a garbled epitome of Roman history that lacked dates (and although he denies having any insular sources for the history of earlier ages in Chapter 4, he certainly knew some continental texts, including Virgil, Jerome (whom he misquotes) and Rufinus (Winterbottom 1978, 7; 148)). This part of his 'historical' narrative is demonstrably wrong, and no amount of scholarly adjustment will make it fit into what we now understand.

Nevertheless, Gildas's account of fifth-century British history was the only connected narrative available to later writers and thereby had an enormous influence. The author of *Historia Brittonum* is under no doubt that the usurpation of Magnus Maximus was the event that brought Roman rule in Britain to an end, following Gildas (Jones 1996, 137). He is equally certain that Guorthigirn – the Vortigern whom Bede identified with Gildas's *superbus tyrannus* – was responsible for inviting the Saxons to settle in Thanet, adding geographical precision to Bede's and Gildas's generic *in orientali parte insulae* (Bede *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.15 and Gildas Chapter 23). Patrick – about whom Bede apparently knew nothing – is placed after Guorthigirn and Arthur after him. The Harleian recension's chronological summary (Mommsen's §66) places the start of Vortigern's reign in AD 425 (Dumville 1974b, 445), although there is no guarantee that this date was known or intended by the original author as it is a late addition to the text. According to the *Historia Brittonum*, Patrick's *floruit* was around the middle of the fifth century, with §16 placing his arrival in Ireland in AD 405 (*recte* AP, i.e. AD 432 (Dumville 1974b, 440)). Arthur should therefore have lived between then and the reign of Ida, king of Bernicia, which Bede had placed in 547, a broad bracket of up to a century in which he was supposed to have been active. The *Historia* provides no data to fix Arthur's supposed *floruit* more precisely; presumably the author had no information to enable him to do so, but this should not compel us to conclude with Higham (2002 156) that he made up a fifth-/sixth-century Arthur out of whole cloth. The author therefore intends us to understand that Arthur was active around this time. The redactor of the Harleian recension (or his source) subsequently synchronised the time of Ida with Maglocunus, whose death is dated around 547 by the *Annales Cambrię*, although it is possible that the redactor took the date from the *Annales*, as he may have been working as late as *c* 1070 and he embedded them within the *Historia*.

Dating the siege of *mons Badonicus*

However, if the author of the *Historia Brittonum* is correct in making Arthur *dux bellorum* the victor at *bellum badonis*, this then places him roughly in the period at which Gildas was writing; most contemporary scholars reject any such link, regarding Arthur as a later addition to the battle, perhaps not being associated with it before the composition of the *Historia Brittonum*. Instead, many have seen Ambrosius Aurelianus as the victor at *badonicus mons* (e.g. Green 2007, 204), an interpretation that the text of Gildas will not allow, as will be shown. However, it is necessary to examine the reasons why Arthur might be linked with the victory and to see if

Gildas is of any use in fixing a date for it; this enables us to be more precise about the date the author may have intended for his Arthur.

Gildas is explicit (if almost incomprehensible) in providing a date for the siege of *badonicus mons*, giving the one piece of chronological precision in the whole text, which is unfortunately entirely opaque. Bede evidently read him as placing the battle forty-four years after the Saxon invasion, which he interpreted as meaning around 493×9; some have seen this as evidence that Bede possessed a better text of Gildas than surviving versions (e.g. Jones 1996, 45; Wiseman 2002; Gidlow 2004, 84), but this does not seem likely. Most modern scholarship has generally read the text as meaning that the battle was fought in the forty-fourth year before Gildas wrote; the tenth-century *Annales Cambrię* apparently took it as meaning fifty-four years before Gildas died (in 570, according to the Irish annals), presumably to give him time to live a bit longer after writing his 'little book'. However, a suggestion by Ian Wood (1984, 23) makes Badon the forty-fourth year after Gildas's birth in the year of Ambrosius's victory, but one month before he was writing. This interpretation does no violence to the Latin, whereas Bede's does, and it reveals why the battle is *nouissimae*, 'most new' (Chapter 26) and *nostris temporibus*, 'in our times' (Chapter 2). It is surprising that few seem to have taken up this eminently sensible suggestion, which a close reading of the Latin and construing it carefully indicates is the only reasonable interpretation.

The Latin of the clause in question reads: *usque ad annum obsessionis badonici montis, nouissimaeque ferme de furciferis non minimae stragis, quique quadragesimus quartus ut noui orditur annus mense iam uno emenso, qui et meae natiuitatis est*. There is no manuscript justification for regarding any part of this clause as corrupt. A literal translation could run: [this went on] "up to the year of the siege of the Badonic Mount and almost the newest, not least slaughter of the villains, and which begins (as I know) the forty-fourth year, one month already having been spent; this also is of my nativity". The phrase *quadragesimus quartus* ('forty-fourth') refers to a year, the *annus* that follows shortly; logically, this must refer back to the *annum* with which Gildas almost starts his sentence, the year of the Siege of the Badonic Mount. So the year of the siege is the forty-fourth, but Gildas unfortunately does not appear to specify from what. He is also curiously insistent that he knows it is the forty-fourth year. Most commentators have assumed that his certainty is linked with the final clause, *qui et meae natiuitatis est* ('this is also of my birth'). This seems reasonable enough; it is superficially worrying that the ablative absolute *mense iam uno emenso* ('one month already having been spent') intrudes, but grammatically it is perfectly reasonable for it to fall between two linked phrases. The real crux for understanding the sentence is to determine what the *qui* of the final clause refers back to. Most have seen it as the *annum* of the siege, while Ian Wood saw it as Ambrosius's victory.

The orthodox view is perfectly reasonable and grammatically justified: *qui* in this context would refer back to *annum/annus*. It is equally justifiable, though, to see the *qui* as referring more obliquely to the *quadragesimus quartus* so that final phrase should be understood to mean 'which is also the (forty-fourth year) of my nativity'. Whatever Gildas is referring to in this phrase, it is in the present tense. Gildas may have faults (obscurity would be a candidate), but sloppiness is not one of them. Had he intended to say that a siege of forty-three years ago had been in the year of his birth, he would surely have written *qui et meae natiuitatis erat* ('which was also the year of my birth'). The fact that he did not write that is a sure sign that we should avoid understanding and translating it in the past tense. Appeals to his use of the historic present

elsewhere in the work fail to take into account that he is being chronologically precise at this point and offering evidence for his precision.

The *ex eo tempore* with which Chapter 26 begins is a perfectly normal indication of a sequence of events; 'from that time' ought to refer back to the previous 'time' Gildas had described. This can only be the *uictoria* of the previous sentence, that of Ambrosius. It is worth noting that the Avranches manuscript of the text, which may sometimes contain better readings than those preferred by Mommsen (Dumville 1977, 183-4), does not indicate a chapter or paragraph break at this point: *ex eo tempore* should not be seen as heralding the start of a new era but rather as an exposition of the aftermath of Ambrosius Aurelianus's unexpected help. The time after the *uictoria* of Ambrosius would then be Gildas's 'new era', if we want to think in such terms: the date at which his countrymen first rallied against the Saxons. This means that Ambrosius Aurelianus cannot have been the British victor at *badonicus mons*, who must therefore have been someone else. Writing just a month after 'not the least slaughter of the villains', it might (briefly) have looked as if the Britons were about to gain the upper hand. No wonder Ambrosius's victory of forty-three years previously was so important to Gildas: it was the first stirrings of a resistance that appeared to have reached its culmination in a recent (and apparently conclusive) victory over the invaders. Hindsight shows his optimism to have been unfounded.

The section following the sentence about Badon then looks very much like a summary of the present state of affairs: it is not an account of history lasting well over a generation, the forty-three years of the conventional reading of Gildas. There is no sequence of events, but a sudden *sed... nunc*, 'but now...', bringing us right up to his own time. What has happened to the intervening forty-three years if his dating clause was supposed to set the siege of the Badonic Mount in the year of his birth? The towns have already gone (Chapter 24); the *externis bellis* may refer to the *duabus... gentibus transmarinis*, 'the two... overseas peoples', the Picts and the Scots (Chapter 14) rather than to wars against the Saxons, who inhabit the same island, which could be among the [*bellis*] *ciuilibus* on this reading, although this is probably stretching a point; the *insperati... auxilii*, 'of unhoped-for help' is surely the rise of Ambrosius and his unexpected victory (Chapter 25) and perhaps also of the unnamed victor of *badonicus mons*.

The usual reaction has been to see in the *reges, publici, priuati, sacerdotes, ecclesiastici, suum quiques ordinem seruarunt* of the next part of the paragraph a group of people ("kings, public officials, private individuals, priests and churchmen") who were going about their daily business as they ought during this interim forty-three years. That lasted until *illis decentibus*, "with them dying", *successisset aetas tempestatis illius nescia*, "there would succeed an age ignorant of that storm". The 'storm' is usually taken as the unspecified period of war between Ambrosius and *badonicus mons*, but Gildas also says that Ambrosius *solus forte romanae gentis tantae tempestatis… superfuerat*, "almost alone of the Roman peoples had survived such a storm". In other words, the 'storm' was specifically the period before Ambrosius. As his rise occurred forty-three years into the past, it is unsurprising that those who had lived through the storm were dead by the time Gildas was writing. He calls only two events *tempestates*, 'storms': the renewed attacks of Picts and Scots after the first Roman rescue (placed long ago, in the early fifth century, Chapter 16) and the Saxon rebellion that Ambrosius had survived (further into the fifth century, Chapter 25). The forty-three years between the rise of Ambrosius and Gildas's own day can then

be seen as the period when people stopped behaving as they ought and when those who form the bulk of his diatribe (Maglocunus and the rest) rose to power.

It is also worth recalling that in Chapter 2, the *postrema patriae uictoria*, the 'final victory of the fatherland', has been granted *nostris temporibus*, 'in our times'. It is stretching the meaning of Gildas to breaking point to suggest that 'our times' can mean forty-three years ago and the very year of his birth. As he was writing an essentially political and moral pamphlet, addressed to the people of his day, he cannot on the one hand say that 'an age ignorant of that storm' has grown up, if that 'storm' were quelled by the victory of Badon, yet have that same victory 'in our times'. Gildas may be an occasionally florid and obscure writer, but he is not given to illogic or contradiction.

What it does, of course, is make a calculation of the date of the battle completely impossible unless we can determine either when Gildas was writing or when Ambrosius's famous victory took place. There is unfortunately nothing that can enable us to do either with any precision. The date of the battle in *Annales Cambrię* is based on retrocalculation, using the lost Irish World Chronicle or Bede's *Chronica Maiora* (Hughes 1973, 236; Dumville 1977, 176; Miller 1991, 79; Wiseman 2000, 2), not from a contemporary record, although Leslie Alcock (1971, 39f.) mistakenly hypothesised that the *Annales* derived from an Easter table, going so far as to refer to them inappropriately as the *Easter Annals*. They placed the Battle of Badon in 516, which would make Ambrosius's victory occur in 473. However, Maglocunus would already be reigning in 516 and continue to reign until 547. This would be a not impossible reign length of somewhat more than thirty years if Gildas did not hint that Maglocunus was already mature at the time of writing and had been reigning for some time (Chapters 33-5). Allowing a reign of fifty or more years is stretching the bounds of credibility. As a dating source, the *Annales Cambrię* are too late, of secondary value and too full of irreconcilable inconsistencies to be of assistance.

There is also little merit in adopting the catastrophic interpretation of sixth-century history that allowed Mike Baillie (1999, 156) to date Arthur's death to the period 536×45. Baillie's uncritical use of written sources led to him to accept dates from highly derivative and late documents, combining them with clearly fictional episodes in High Medieval romances and may safely be dismissed as having no bearing on the likely date of an 'historical Arthur'.

Adopting the chronology of the *Historia Brittonum* might be seen as a last resort. Turning to the calculations of the Harleian recension's §66a, we discover that Guorthigirn and Ambrosius fought in a year that should be 437. Although some have identified this Ambrosius with the father of Gildas's Ambrosius Aurelianus (e.g. Morris 1973, 71), there is no reason not to identify him with Gildas's leader, especially if we adopt the chronology outlined above. In this case, using Gildas's calculation that the year of writing and of the victory of *mons Badonicus* was the forty-fourth year after Ambrosius's unexpected victory, and assuming that this victory occurred around the time of Ambrosius's 'strife' with Guorthigirn at *guoloppum* in 437 or within a few years of it, perhaps after the events of 441×2 in the Gallic Chronicle of 452, we can calculate that the battle took place around 480×490. This is somewhat earlier than the generally accepted date for the battle and much earlier than the accepted *floruit* of Gildas, but both of these are generally calculated on very poor grounds.

It is, of course, a valid criticism that the date calculated here depends on controversial evidence – the highly contested calculations of the Harleian recension's §66a – but there are reasons to

believe that this brief section incorporates data of authentically fifth-century origin (Vermaat 1999). Consular dating was certainly current in sixth-century North Wales, when the monument of an unnamed son of Avitorius at Penmachno was erected in 540, in the consulship of Justinus (Nash-Williams 1950, 93 no 40; Knight 1995, 2); Chiu (2006) has already connected this inscription with the consular dating employed in the Harleian recension of the *Historia Brittonum* and it is reasonable to assume that this was a dating method known and employed in fifth-century Britain. This suggests that the original calculations were expressed simply as consular dates. David Dumville's (1974b, 442) demonstration of the author's muddling of *anno passionis* and *anno domini* dates does not invalidate the original data used by the author, as the consular dates are not in dispute; nor does it demonstrate that it cannot derive from a genuinely fifth-century memorandum.

The victory of *badonicus mons* is generally portrayed as the culmination of the war against the Saxons, ushering in an era of peace (Castleden 2000, 92), which is certainly how Bede and later writers understood it. However, given the dating discussed above, this is based on an incorrect reading of Gildas and the peace may not have lasted more than a few years and certainly not the more than forty-three years of the conventional interpretation. Nevertheless, it is of interest that Constantius of Lyons appears to have regarded Britain as prosperous at the time he was writing (§27: *in illis locis etiam nunc fides interemata perduret, itaque, conpositis omnibus, beatissimi sacerdotes ea qua uenerunt prosperitate redierunt* (Krusch & Levison 1920, 271)). The *Vita Sancti Germani* is believed to have been written between 480 and 494 (Koch 2006, 805), an era not generally regarded as one of peace or prosperity in Britain. It has often been suggested that Constantius was not well informed about the island (e.g. Esmonde Cleary 1989, 165), but it is equally possible that, like Classical historians who had good sources of information about Britain, he chose not to reproduce details that would have been of little interest or importance to his Gallo-Roman audience. It may be suggested, on the basis of the chronology proposed here, that Constantius was writing in a brief era of peace that followed the victory of *badonicus mons*.

The locations of the battles

As remarked above, the battle sites suggested by those names that can be identified more-or-less accurately are neither wide-ranging nor geographically restricted. Instead, they concentrate in two somewhat circumscribed areas: the Scottish lowlands and the north English Midlands (Figure 14). Is it possible to envisage an historical context in which battles attributable to a single commander could take place in these areas?

A possible clue may be derived from Roger White's (2007, 149ff) suggestion that *Britannia Prima*, the late Roman province encompassing Wales and south-western England, survived into the early medieval period as a coherent entity. This is a large scale extension of Dark's (1994, 255) hypothesis that sub-Roman to early medieval political continuity can be
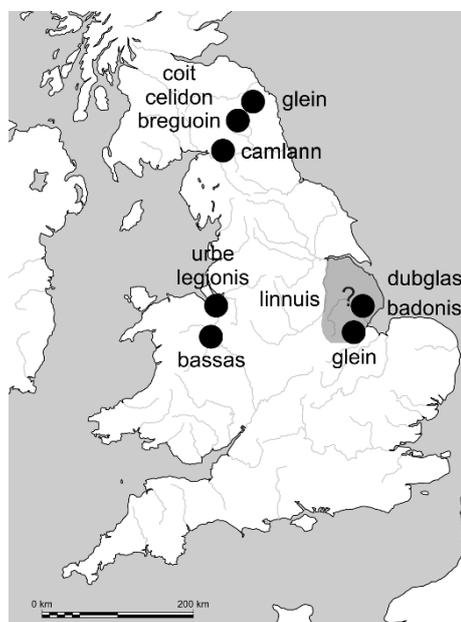

FIGURE 14: THE MOST PLAUSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR THE BATTLES

detected at the level of the *civitas*. Following White's (2007, 199) logic about the distribution of early germanic metalwork and its relationship to Roman provincial boundaries *c* 400, this enables us to identify the region between the two zones in which the identified battles occurred with the late Roman province of *Britannia Secunda*. Although he suggests that the former province fell early to settlers from Scandinavia, in contrast to *Britannia Prima*, this is not as well attested as in the remaining former provinces of *Maxima Caesariensis* and *Flavia Caesariensis*. The archaeological evidence for early germanic settlement in northern England is equivocal and its dating is not secure. It is therefore conceivable that an indigenous authority remained in control of the former province of *Britannia Secunda* throughout the fifth century and that the battles of *Historia Brittonum* §56 preserve a record of conflict on and slightly beyond its borders. Those in the south would be against Saxon foes settled in *Flavia Caesariensis* and it is possible to regard the battles at *bassas* and *urbs legionis* as assistance provided to the ruler(s) of *Britannia Prima* against Saxons who were marauding as far as the 'western sea' according to Gildas (Chapter 24). Those in the north are in an area with no archaeological evidence for early widespread germanic settlement, but it is worth recalling that the *Historia Brittonum* §38 places Hengest's son Octha and nephew Ebissa in this area, around the suggestively named Dumfries.

The scene of Arthur's death at *camlann>Camboglanna* is on the very border of *Britannia Secunda* and fits the late fifth-century context outlined above for the battles of an historical Arthur, so the identification with Castlesteads deserves serious consideration. Moreover, it is difficult to see how or why the compiler of the *Annales Cambrię* chose or invented the name for a battle that, according to the currently prevailing Arthursceptic viewpoint, never happened yet hit upon a location consistent with the unrelated battle list of the *Historia Brittonum*.

The archaeological evidence is typically equivocal and capable of diametrically opposed interpretations. In a review of early Anglian settlement around Catterick (Wilson *et al*. 1996, 54), Pete Wilson concludes that "*the Anglian settlement pattern was integrated with that of the indigenous population*". To the south, Dominic Powlesland (Montgomery *et al*. 2005) has suggested that there were immigrants buried in the cemetery at West Heslerton not only from southern Scandinavia, but also from west of the Pennines. If Wilson and Powlesland are correct – and the isotope evidence is controversial – the settlement of Anglo-Saxons in northern England during the fifth century was neither uncontrolled nor random: most of the evidence comes from the region between the River Humber and the Yorkshire Wolds (O'Brien 1999, 71), with smaller concentrations in the hinterlands of the Roman fort at Catterick, the coastal strip between the Tees and the Tyne and the small town at Corbridge (O'Brien 1999, 62). The placement of these settlements is highly suggestive of control by a central authority determined to defend the remaining urban centres of the former province using hired mercenaries. The possibility that 'small towns' such as Catterick and Corbridge could have survived into the later fifth century is one that has not generally been considered, but there is evidence that the 'small town' at Baldock (Herts) in *Maxima Caesariensis* survived well past AD 500 (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2010, 146): Baldock may not be as anomalous as it initially appears.

The pattern of fifth-century germanic settlement in the former *Britannia Secunda* contrasts with the situation north of Hadrian's Wall, where there is virtually no evidence for fifth-century Anglo-Saxon settlement, and south of the River Humber, where it is both widespread and early (Leahy 1993, 36). These two areas lay outside *Britannia Secunda*, suggesting that the settlement within the former province was under the supervision of a continuing central authority. The very
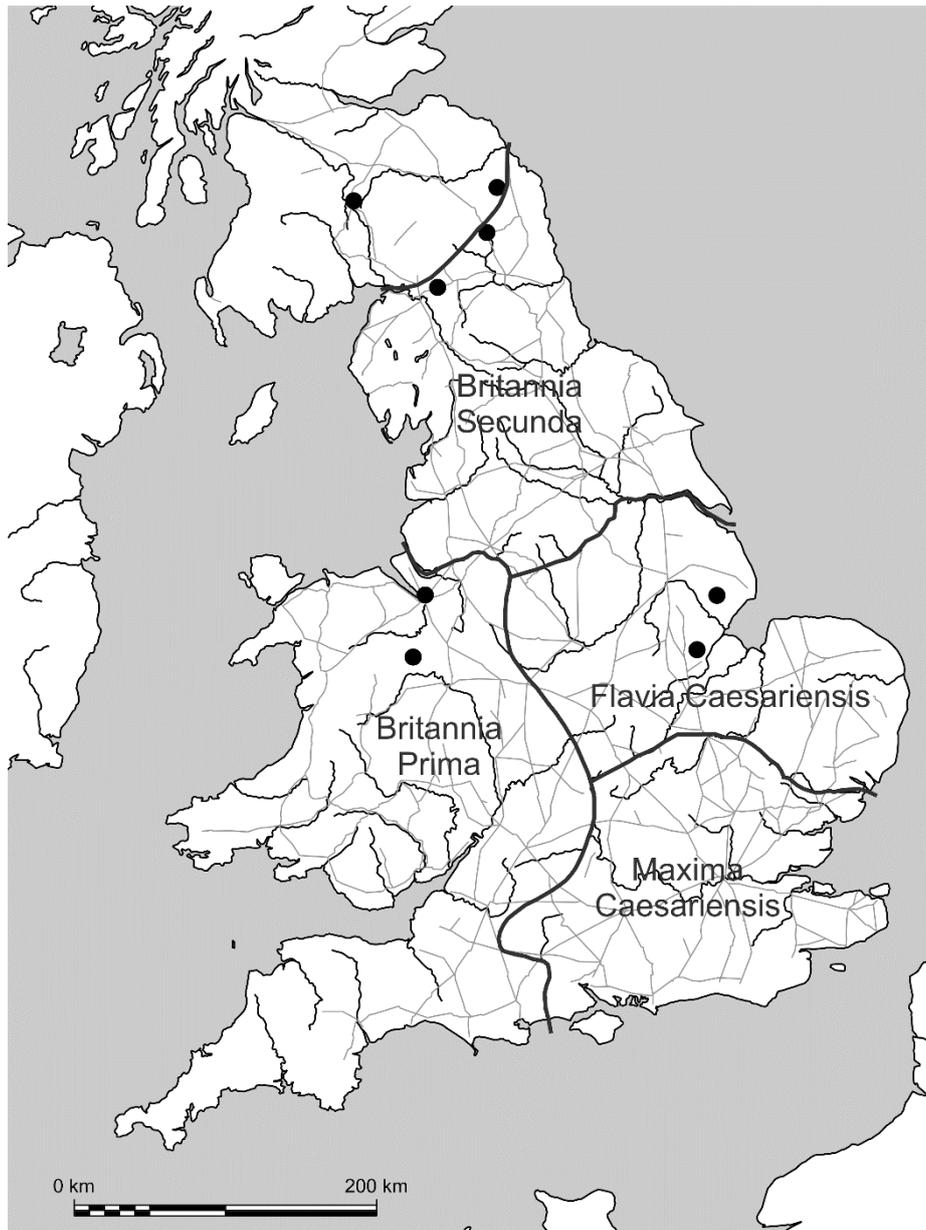
different situation in Lincolnshire closely matches that in Norfolk and Suffolk, areas presumably within the former province of *Flavia Caesariensis*. It is here, *in orientali parte insulae* (Gildas Chapter 23), that the mercenaries hired at the instigation of Gildas's *superbus tyrannus* are best placed, rather than on Thanet, for which the *Historia Brittonum* is the earliest authority.

There ought to be no doubt about the historicity of the British victory at *badonicus mons* following the rebellion of these mercenaries and it is certain that Gildas does not name the British commander. Caitlin Green's (2007, 213) location of the battle site at Baumber in Lincolnshire and her association of it with the *Historia Brittonum*'s battles *in ostium fluminis… glein* and *flumen… dubglas… in regione linnuis* are arguments in favour of the historicity of at least part of the list, as she recognises. However, her attribution of the battles to Ambrosius Aurelianus is impossible on the contemporary evidence of Gildas and appears to be nothing more than a result of having to reject Arthur as the victor or abandon her thesis that Arthur was

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a purely folkloric character. On the contrary, there appear to be no sound reasons why we cannot name the victor as Arthur.

Indeed, this highlights a methodological problem. Once an hypothesis is formed that Arthur was "really" Vortigern (Pace 2008, 45ff), Ambrosius Aurelianus (Green 2007, 204), Riothamus (Ashe 2003, 104), Owain Ddantgwyn (Phillips & Keatman (1992, 160), Lucius Artorius Castus (Littleton & Malcor 2000, xxiii) or some other figure, we are no longer dealing with the Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum*. These hypotheses transfer the responsibility for the deeds attributed to Arthur to another, generally better attested character whose historicity is not in doubt. While the temptation to do this is understandable, especially in view of the current consensus that Arthur is inadmissible as an historical character and must therefore be of legendary or mythological origin, it prevents a real assessment of the Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum* and pads out sketches of his career with details drawn in from unrelated sources. In other words, these discussions are no longer about Arthur. While we may choose to doubt the existence of Arthur, we must nevertheless accept that someone, whose name was not recorded by the only contemporary writer whose work survives, did at least some of the things attributed to him at the right time. If we cannot call him Arthur, then he must remain anonymous.

However, what this paper has attempted to demonstrate is that the person whose victories are supposedly listed in the *Historia Brittonum* is indeed worthy of consideration as an historical character. Nothing can really be gleaned from the simple list of victories about the personality of the man and there can be no certainty about any official position he may have held. The phrase *dux bellorum* is unlikely to have been a title (Higham 2002, 144), but the authors of the *Historia* and the related *Mirabilia Britanniae* incorporated into it never refer to him as a king; rather he is a *miles*, a soldier, who led the kings of the Britons through twelve (or possibly more) victories and an unknown number of defeats and who was ultimately killed in battle close to Hadrian's Wall. This, ultimately, is the best evidence for the existence of a commander named Arthur, whose victory at *badonicus mons* was recorded by a contemporary, Gildas, whose failure to name him has had repercussions for over a millennium and a half. The most economical of all hypotheses about the battle list is that it derives from an Old Welsh poem, composed perhaps a century after the events it described in honour of a military commander who was developing a legendary reputation as the greatest leader of his day, the late fifth century. His sphere of operation appears to have been the former province of *Britannia Secunda*, whose borders and perhaps allies he successfully defended.

Conclusions

The value of the *Historia Brittonum* as a source for the history of the Roman and sub-Roman Britain has been systematically destroyed since the mid 1970s, largely as a result of the research of David Dumville. His (still largely unpublished) work on its textual history has shown that numerous assumptions about its authorship, method of composition and purpose current since Heinrich Zimmer's (1893) extensive analysis were plainly wrong. No longer attributable to Nennius/Ninnius, 'disciple of Elfoddw', it is now seen as an anonymous tract composed in North Wales in the early ninth century, almost as political spin for a new dynasty in Gwynedd at the expense of the longer established Cadellings of Powys.

However, the evidence marshalled above forces us to confront the current academic consensus and to question its validity. While there is no doubt that Dumville's deconstruction of the 'heap'

interpretation of the text is correct, he has not actually demonstrated that it really is a synchronising text of the type produced in early medieval Ireland (Field 2008, 6). While it may be true that the work is a valiant attempt to produce a history of the Britons from their arrival in the island to the middle of the sixth century (and we must ask why the author chose to end his work at that point) using very poor source material, it does not really attempt synchronisations with universal (Biblical) history that characterises the work of the Irish scholars.

Instead, we have a work of a rather different character, which Charles-Edwards (1991, 21) suggests should be regarded as a fusion between an *historia gentis* and an *historia ecclesiastica*, closer to Bede's conception of his *magnum opus* (although Dumville (1994, 419) disagrees). There are hints that the original compiler of the *Historia Brittonum* was not really interested in detailed chronology, although he certainly provided broad synchronisms, conveniently summarised by Dumville (1994, 420). However, it was the revision of 829 that established a broad chronological framework, based on the *Sex Aetatibus Mundi* popularised by Bede and only being specific about the date of the revision. The later history of the individual recensions shows that they tended to grow by the accretion of additional material (as already emphasised by Koch (1997, cxxvi)), including the chronological summary of fifth-century history inserted as §66a into the Harleian recension. There are reasons to suppose that at least some of this additional material was pre-existing in much the form in which it was incorporated.

Ultimately, this analysis of §56 suggests that genuinely historical data is enshrined in the Latin prose. It almost certainly derives from an Early Medieval Brittonic poem, which was perhaps composed a few decades either side of AD 600 or even up to a century earlier. This supports the popular notion that Arthur was famed as a military leader by the end of the sixth century, confirming the controversial mention of his name in *Y Gododdin*. Indeed, the existence of a poem in praise of the leader of the resistance to the Saxons may have provided the model for late sixth-/early seventh-century poems in praise of later British kings. The plausibility of the selection of placenames purporting to be the sites of his victories and the separate mention of a battle at which he met his end lend considerable support to the idea that the list is of genuine battles fought in the late fifth century; if we reject Arthur, we are nevertheless left with a series of British victories commemorated in a poem composed a century or so later whose commander has to remain anonymous. Application of Occam's razor to the problem means that we remain on safer ground by accepting Arthur as an historical figure than we do if we try to pass him off as a figure of folklore or legend.

The genesis of this paper was a discussion in 2002 on the Arthurnet electronic mailing list, in which I cast doubt on the historicity of the 'Arthurian battle list'. At the time, I believed that it would be possible to go further than previous critics by identifying most of the placenames with the sites of seventh-century battles. There was certainly no expectation that the research would lead to a conclusion that an historical Arthur could be recognised as operating in late fifth-century northern England. Indeed, to suggest as much challenges the current orthodoxy to an extent that might be seen as almost heretical.

Nevertheless, the evidence is compelling. Dumville's (1977, 188) dictum that "*... there is no historical evidence about Arthur; we must reject him from our histories...*" was premature, if necessary at the time to correct the excesses of the pro-Arthur camp. However, the acceptance of an historical Arthur in the decades before 500 resolves at least one historical puzzle

(Constantius of Lyon's opinion of the prosperity of Britain in the 480s) and is the most economical hypothesis for the identity of the victor at *badonicus mons*. Arthur can – and should – be restored to a position he has not enjoyed among academic historians for more than a generation, much to this writer's surprise.

Appendix: variant readings from the manuscript recensions

The Harleian recension

This recension is best represented in the early twelfth-century British Library MS Harley 3859, which is, however, interpolated, as it uniquely contains a text of the *Annales Cambrię* and a set of Welsh genealogies, both apparently dating from 954. It is also found in British Library MSS Cotton Vespasian D XXI, Cotton Vespasian B XXV and Cotton Vitellius A XIII, all early twelfth century texts and all considered by Mommsen to be copies of the Harleian manuscript, which they cannot be as they do not share the same spelling errors of names as that manuscript. A fifth manuscript, Cambridge Trinity College MS O.5.37, is a transcript of Cotton MS Vitellius A XIII by Roger Gale (1672-1744), collated with readings from other manuscripts. A sixth, Salisbury Cathedral 146, is another twelfth-century production. Excerpts from a text of this type are included in the *Liber Floridus* by Lambert of Saint-Omer, a massive compendium of material including early medieval insular texts (Dumville 1976b, 103). The *Chronica Imperfecta* of Christ Church, Canterbury, in Oxford Bodleian MS Latin D.13/30/14 contains an expanded version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Dumville 1993, 222) as do British Library MS Cotton Titus A XXVII and British Library MS Cotton Domition A VIII.

For reasons explained above, the Harleian recension should not be treated as primary. Instead, it appears to be the best representative of one of two major traditions within the transmission of the text, which is here labelled the Computistical family. The Harleian recension appears to be an expanded but generally faithful reproduction of the Computistical text, which was produced in Gwynedd in 859; Dumville (1975, 41) placed it in "*the second quarter of the ninth century*". Although modern commentators such as Dumville (1976a, 78) regard the recension as essentially reproducing the original text of the *Historia Brittonum*, the late date of surviving manuscripts suggests that it may be the result of eleventh century textual work. Thomas Clancy's (2000) work on the Irish text points to scholarly activity in later eleventh-century Scotland as the source of the pseudo-Nennius recension, which provides a *terminus ante quem* for the Harleian, from which it was derived. It is important to note that as this is the only recension to contain the Saxon genealogies and the so-called Northern History, they cannot have been part of the original work and could have been added at any time between 859 and *c* 1070 using texts available to the editor. An early to mid eleventh-century date for this version may therefore be suggested provisionally.

The archetypal Computistical text of 859 seems to have contained an error by which *in monte qui dicitur breguoin, *id est cat bregion* was transmuted into *in monte qui dicitur <agned> cat bregomion*; in the Harleian recension, it has also been truncated by the removal of *cat bregomion*, either accidentally or through the work of a redactor who recognised that his exemplar was mutilated at this point. The name of the Kentish kingdom has also been altered, turning the *regnum cantuariorum* of the archetype, with its obviously Old English origins, into a more Classical looking *regnum cantorum*.

There are other changes: *semper uirginis* in all the other recensions becomes *perpetuae uirginis*, presumably an error, **traith* has been lost before *tribruit*, a loss that must go back to the exemplar of the Computistical family, and *dccccxl* (which is the reading of all the other recensions) has been transformed into *dcccclx*, allowing unwarranted speculation about number symbolism (such as "three three hundreds and three twenties" as an otherwise unattested Celtic commonplace (Jackson 1959, 7; Field 2008, 20)).

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant in multitudine et crescebant in brittannia. mortuo autem hengisto octha filius eius transiuit de sinistrali parte britanniae ad regnum cantorum et de ipso orti sunt reges cantorum. tunc arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum.

primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glein. secundum et tertium et quartum et quintum super aliud flumen quod dicitur dubglas et est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum fuit bellum in silua celidonis, id est cat coit celidon. octauum fuit bellum in castello guinnion, in quo arthur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae perpetuae uirginis super humeros suos et pagani uersi sunt in fugam in illo die et caedes magna fuit super illos per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi et per uirtutem sanctae mariae genetricis eius. nonum bellum gestum est in urbe legionis. decimum gessit bellum in litore fluminis quod uocatur tribruit. undecimum factum est bellum in monte qui dicitur agned. duodecimum fuit bellum in monte badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die dcccclx uiri de uno impetu arthur; et nemo prostrauit eos nisi ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis uictor extitit.

The pseudo-Gildas recension

Versions of this text are found in more manuscripts than any other recension, which led Dumville (1994, 407) to describe it as a 'vulgate' version, and there are suggestions that Geoffrey of Monmouth was familiar with a text of this type, as he attributes to Gildas details from the *Historia Brittonum* (*Historia Regum Brittanię* §100 (Wright 1985, 67)). Some twenty-three manuscripts of this type are known, with subtle differences in their ascription to Gildas. One version begins *incipit res gesta britonum gilda sapiente composita* with minor variations. This is found in Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodley 163 (twelfth century), which Dumville (1994, 417 note 73) conjectured to be the archetype of this recension, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A VIII (mid twelfth century) and its copies in Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Latin 5232 (twelfth century) and Durham Cathedral Library MS B II 35 (mid twelfth century, with additions from a copy attributing it to Nennius, itself copied in British Library MS Burney 310, dated 1381); the others are Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.27 (ff 21-36) (a Sawley production, dated 1160), British Library MS Royal 13 D V (thirteenth century), Cambridge University Library MS Ii.VI.11 (thirteenth century), London College of Arms MS Arundel 30 (sometimes referred to as Norfolk MS 30), British Library MS Cotton Julius D V (late fourteenth century) and British Library MS Royal 13 B XV (sixteenth century, copied from BL MS Royal 13 D V, according to Stevenson (1838, xxix)).

A second variant begins *incipit res gesta britonum a gilda sapiente edita* and is found in two manuscripts: Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Latin 6274 (early thirteenth century) and Oxford Bodleian Library MS Carte 113 (an eighteenth century copy of the preceding manuscript). The third version has the rubric *incipit gesta britonum a gilda sapiente collecta* and is found in two manuscripts: Cambridge University Library MS Mm.V.29 (twelfth century) and British Library MS

Cotton Vitellius E I (thirteenth century). A fourth variant is given the title *exceptiones de libro gildę sapientis* (or variants), found in four manuscripts: British Library MS Cotton Nero D VIII (early thirteenth century), Évreux Bibliothèque Municipale MS 41 (thirteenth century), Rennes Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole MS I.F.1003 (late fifteenth century) and British Library MS Cotton Vitellius F IX (sixteenth century). The fifth version begins *incipit liber gildę sapientis* and is found in two manuscripts: Rouen Bibliothèque Municipale MS U 74 (twelfth or thirteenth century) and Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 363 (fourteenth century). A sixth type, found only in Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Latin 15009 (1166), is headed *de anglia secundum sapientem gildam*. A manuscript described variously by Petrie (Petrie & Sharpe 1848, 67) and Mommsen (1898, 132) as a Conybear or Dering possession is attributed to Gildas, but the precise group is not known.

The attribution of the text to Gildas is an impossible identification of its author, dating, as it does, from several centuries after his death; the style of the Latin is also quite unlike that of the *de Excidio* of Gildas. On the other hand, as it is now possible to see that the work originally closed with the final victory of Arthur and a brief note about Ida of Bernicia, it was possible for a medieval redactor wrongly to conclude that it was composed around that time and that Gildas, whose death was placed in 570 by *Annales Cambrię*, was its author. It is also evident that the text is closely related to the Harleian recension, although it does not share its peculiarities in the changing of the name of the *regnum cantuariorum* or the truncation of *cat bregomion*. However, *dubglas* becomes *<duglas>*, a modernised spelling, while *glein* is transformed into *<glem>*, *guinnion* into *<guinnon>* and *tribruit* into *<ribroit>*, the last three all by simple misreading. A further misreading has reduced *dccccxl* as the number of Arthur's victims at *mons badonis* to *dcccxl*.

Other changes include the alteration of *reges cantuariorum* into *reges illius patriae* and *caedes magna fuit super illos* into *multi ceciderunt plagaque magna super eos uenit*, while *per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi et per uirtutem sanctae mariae genetricis eius* is shortened to *per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi sanctaeque suae genetricis*. In addition, *non modice* has been inserted between *crescebant* and *in britannia*, *tunc* lost before *arthur*, which is in turn Latinised as *arturus*, and *uidelicet saxones* inserted between *illis diebus* and *cum regibus Brittonum*. The reasons for these changes appear to be purely stylistic.

There is no evidence by which to date the creation of this recension other than the dates of its earliest manuscript witnesses, no earlier than the twelfth century. The form *<duglas>* for *dubglas* may indicate a date no earlier than the eleventh century (Jackson 1953, 438), while use of the text by the Sawley redactor in the twelfth century (Dumville 1974a, 369) provides a *terminus ante quem*.

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant et crescebant non modice in brittannia. mortuo autem hengisto ochta filius eius transiuit de sinistrali parte britanniae ad regem cantuariorum et de ipso orti sunt reges illius patriae. arturus pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus uidelicet saxones cum regibus brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum.

primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glem. secundum et tertium et quartum et quintum super aliud flumen quod uocatur duglas et est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum bellum fuit in silua calidonis, id est cat coit celidon. octauum fuit bellum in castello guinnon, in quo artur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae semper

uirginis super humeros suos et pagani uersi sunt in fugam in illo die et multi ceciderunt plagaque magna super eos uenit per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi sanctaeque suae genetricis. nonum bellum gestum est in urbe legionis. decimum bellum gestum est in litore fluminis quod uocatur ribroit. undecimum bellum fuit in monte qui dicitur agned cat bregomion. duodecimum fuit bellum in monte badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die dcccxl uiri de uno impetu arthuri; et nemo eos prostrauit nisi ipse solus.

Fourth variant

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant et crescebant non modice in brittannia. mortuo autem hengisto ochta filius eius transiuit de sinistrali parte britanniae ad regem cantuariorum et de ipso orti sunt reges illius patriae. artur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus uidelicet saxones cum regibus brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum.

primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glem. secundum et tertium et quartum et quintum super aliud flumen quod dicitur duglas quod est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum bellum fuit in silua calidonis, id est cat toit celidon. octauum fuit bellum in castello guinnion, in quo arthur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae semper uirginis super humeros suos et pagani uersi sunt in fugam in illo die et multi ceciderunt plagaque magna super eos uenit per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi sanctaeque suae genetricis. nonum bellum gestum est in urbe legionis. decimum bellum gestum est in litore fluminis quod uocatur ribroit. undecimum bellum fuit in monte qui dicitur agned cath regomion. duodecimum fuit bellum in monte badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die dcccxl uiri de uno impetu arthuri; et nemo eos prostrauit nisi ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis uictor extitit.

The pseudo-Nennius recension

There is no surviving complete manuscript of this text, which is known only from interpolations to Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139, originally an early twelfth-century text of the fourth variant attributed to Gildas. The interpolations date from after 1166; it is copied in British Library MS Royal 13 B VII (Sixteenth century) and Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 101 (seventeenth century), where the interpolations are inserted into the body of the text. A second group is represented by Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.27 (ff 7-20) of the early thirteenth century, itself copied from Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139 with additions, and its copies in Oxford College of St John the Baptist MS 99.3 (early thirteenth century), British Library MS Harley 624 (seventeenth century) and Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 318 (seventeenth century). Another interpolated version is found in Durham Cathedral MS B II 35 and its copy in British Library MS Burney 310; again, these derive from Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139, which is therefore the sole authority for the pseudo-Nennian additions.

There is thus no surviving manuscript of this recension and the available readings of all but the interpolations in Cambridge Corpus Christi MS 139 are derived from a pseudo-Gildas text; the statement of the interpolator that he has omitted the Saxon genealogies as *inutiles* shows that the original pseudo-Nennian recension was a derivative either of the Harleian or of a common ancestor that already contained the Saxon genealogies. However, Mommsen's device of printing what he termed the *Additamenta Nennii* as additions to a Harleian recension text masks the relationships and differences between these three versions and misleadingly implies that we can be certain that the pseudo-Nennian recension differed from the Harleian in no ways other than those recorded by the interpolator of Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139.

It is unclear when the pseudo-Nennius recension was created. A *terminus ante quem* is provided by its use in the Irish translation known as *Lebor Bretnach*, associated with Gilla-Cóemáin, whose death date of 1072 is supported by the internal evidence of the text. Dumville (*apud* Clancy 2000) thought it dated from the eleventh century and was from North Wales, although Thomas Clancy (2000, 88) has suggested a Scottish origin in the second half of the eleventh century.

There are no readings for the battle names of §56 in the surviving texts that do not derive from a pseudo-Gildasian original, so a 'Nennian' text cannot be reconstructed.

Lebor Bretnach

The Latin *Historia Brittonum* was translated into Late Old or Early Middle Irish in the later eleventh century, supposedly by the scholar Gilla-Cóemáin mac Gillai Samthainne (*fl*. 1072) according to the versions in Trinity College MS H 3.17 and the Book of Uí Mhaine. However, its most recent editor, Anton van Hamel (1932, xii) considered this version a secondary development, with modernised spellings and grammar. More recently, Thomas Clancy (2000, 105) has suggested that Gilla-Cóemáin was its intended dedicatee and that the work was produced in Scotland. It is found in four versions contained in five manuscripts, whose development is almost as complex as that of the Latin original. Two very different versions are contained in the Great Book of Lecan (Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 2, written between 1397 and 1418); one in the Book of Ballymote (*Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta*, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 P 12, written in 1390/1 by Robert Mac Sithigh) is closely related to one of these two. A text in Dublin Trinity College MS H.3.17 and another in the Book of Uí Mhaine (Royal Irish Academy MS D ii 1, written in 1394) are closely related to this version. A fragment in the Book of the Dun Cow (*Lebor na hUidre*, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 25, a twelfth-century text) is perhaps more closely related to the second version in the Great Book of Lecan.

Lebor Bretnach derives from a text of the pseudo-Nennius recension, as it contains a truncated version of the shorter preface attributing it to 'Nennius', although van Hamel (1932, xxi) thought that this was among material added by Gilla-Cóemáin from a text of the pseudo-Nennian recension (which he called the Cantabrian recension) to an existing Old Irish translation. The Irish text begins *ego nemnius eluodugi discipulus aliqua excerpta scribere curauai .i. rodeithniges gorasgribaind araile dolomarta, & me nenamnis disgibail eludaig*…, giving the purported author's name in the Nemnius/Nemniuus variant. The text contains a list of kings of the Picts (and, after the unification with the Kingdom of the Scots, of kings of the joint kingdom), ending with Máel Coluim III mac Donnchada (1058-1093). The Arthurian section forms Chapter 24 in this translation.

Lebor Breatnach contains a number of peculiarities suggesting that it was the product of careful scholarly comparison between a number of variants, not simply a translation of a single manuscript of the pseudo-Nennius recension. For instance, the list of *civitates* found at the end of the work in members of the Computistical family is brought forward to Chapter 2, as in the Vatican recension, while it lacks the genealogy of Silvius found in the Silvian family to which the Vatican recension belongs.

As with the pseudo-Gildas recension, *robroit* is missing the initial *t-*, unlike the Harleian; on the other hand, *glein* is spelled correctly. There are two omissions in the Irish version: the eleventh battle is not listed and the name of the twelfth is absent. It is unclear if the translator worked from a defective original or if the error was his. The final *-s* of *bassas* is also missing, while there

is an intrusive *-d-* in *uinnion*, curiously closer to the hypothesised Brittonic form (*above*), although this is not evidence for an archaic form in the translator's archetype but rather of Middle Irish orthographic practice. The number of Saxons killed at the unnamed Badon is 840, as in the pseudo-Gildas version.

rogab tra nert saxan for breatnu iar n-ec gorthigern & rogab ochta mac engist, rige forro.

araide nocathaiget artur & breatain riu co calma, & dorat da cath dec doib .i. in cet-chath i n-inbiur glein. in tanaise & in tres & in ceathramad & in coiced cath for bru dubglassi. in sesed cath for bru bassa. in uii i caill calidoin .i. cait coit cleduman; in uiii in les guindoin. is andsin roimmarchuir artur deilb maire fora gualaind & roteichiestar na pagáin. ix i cathraig ind legdin. x in robroit. xii is andside romarb lam artúir xl ar ocht cetaib i n-oen lo, & ba les coscar intib uile.

The Sawley recension

This is an interpolated text, which David Dumville has identified as deriving from twelfth-century scholarly activity at Sawley, in which the pseudo-Gildas and pseudo-Nennius recensions were conflated and further material interpolated (Dumville 1974a, 369). The Sawley library contained a manuscript of the pseudo-Gildas recension written in the early thirteenth century (Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.27) that copies the Sawley original into which the material from a now lost pseudo-Nennius recension text had been interpolated (Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 139). At least three hands added material to the original manuscript before 1166, at which point it was copied at Durham (Dumville 1974a, 372). Subsequent additions to the text were made up to the early sixteenth century. Dumville (1985, 37) has also shown that the redactor was familiar with a text of the Vatican recension. The recension is therefore a composite, which provides evidence about other recensions in addition to the scholarly activity underlying its own production, much of which derives either from sources other than the *Historia Brittonum* or from now lost versions.

It includes two long interpolations. The first, *mab uter britannice filius horribilis latine, quoniam a puericia sua crudelis fuit. artur latine translatum sonat ursum horribilem uel malleum ferreum, quo confringuntur mole leonum* is an attempt to provide etymologies for the patronymic *mab uter* and for Arthur himself. The second, *nam artur hierosolymum perrexit et ibi crucem ad quantitatem salutiferae crucis fecit et ibi consecrata est et per tres continuos dies ieiunauit, uigilauit et orauit coram cruce dominica, ut ei dominus uictoriam daret per hoc signum de paganis, quod et factum est. atque secum imaginem sanctae mariae detulit, cuius fracturae adhuc apud uuedale in magna seruantur ueneratione* relates a story about how Arthur brought back pieces of the True Cross and an image of the Virgin from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and that they remain objects of veneration at Wedale. This image is presumably to be identified by implication with that carried by Arthur at *castello guinnion* (a spelling which demonstrates the use of a pseudo-Nennian rather than pseudo-Gildasian text as the basis for this section of the conflated texts). Various errors have crept in, however, including <*toit*> for *coit* and <*cath regomion*>.

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant et crescebant non modice in brittannia. mortuo autem hengisto ochta filius eius transiuit de sinistrali parte britanniae ad regem cantuariorum et de ipso orti sunt reges illius patriae. artur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus uidelicet saxones cum regibus brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum et in omnibus bellis uictor extitit. mab uter

britannice filius horribilis latine, quoniam a puericia sua crudelis fuit. artur latine translatum sonat ursum horribilem uel malleum ferreum, quo confringuntur mole leonum.

primum bellum fuit in ostium fluminis quod dicitur glem. secundum et tertium et quartum et quintum super aliud flumen quod uocatur duglas quod est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum bellum fuit in silua calidonis, id est cat toit celidon. octauum fuit bellum in castello guinnion, in quo arthur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae semper uirginis super humeros suos et pagani uersi sunt in fugam in illo die et multi ceciderunt plagaque magna super eos uenit per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi sanctaeque suae genetricis. nonum bellum gestum est in urbe legionis. decimum bellum est gestum in litore fluminis quod uocatur ribroit. undecimum bellum fuit in monte quod dicitur agned cath regomion. duodecimum fuit bellum in monte badonis, in quo corruerunt in uno die dccccxl uiri de uno impetu arthuri. nam artur hierosolymum perrexit et ibi crucem ad quantitatem salutiferae crucis fecit et ibi consecrata est et per tres continuos dies ieiunauit, uigilauit et orauit coram cruce dominica, ut ei dominus uictoriam daret per hoc signum de paganis, quod et factum est. atque secum imaginem sanctae mariae detulit, cuius fracturae adhuc apud uuedale in magna seruantur ueneratione. et nemo eos prostrauit nisi ipse solus, et in omnibus bellis uictor extitit.

The Vatican recension

This is the only version so far to have appeared in David Dumville's ambitious programme of publishing all the variants of the text (Dumville 1985), which appears to have stalled. However, his edition of this recension marked an important addition to understanding it, as he located two previously unidentified manuscripts, doubling the number of witnesses to it. The manuscripts are Vatican MS Reginensis 1164 (eleventh century), Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS Latin 11108 (twelfth century), Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MD Latin 8048 (thirteenth century) and British Library MS Additional 11702 (early fourteenth century).

This recension differs in major respects from those previously discussed. In many cases, the changes are stylistic; *britannia* (and its variants) becomes *bryttannia* and the vocabulary is considerably altered, improving the Latinity (Dumville 1985, 6-7). While these features have previously led critics to dismiss the recension as able to contribute to a better understanding of the archetypal text, there is evidence that it belongs to an entirely separate family of texts, represented by two recensions – this and the Chartres – the archetype of which predates that containing the section dating the ancestor of the other recensions to 859. This means that its readings are of considerable interest, especially where those in the other recensions are clearly corrupt. It is to be regretted that the destroyed Chartres manuscript, the sole representative of the other recension in the Silvian family, was incomplete and broke off before this chapter. At the same time, this recension is self-dated to 944, the fifth year of Eadmund, King of England.

Apart from the changes in vocabulary, the principal differences in the spellings of names are <*duglas*> for *dubglas*, a modernised spelling of the Old Welsh name, *urbe* <*leogis*> for *urbe legionis* and <*traht treuroit*> for **traith tribruit*, which also includes a modernisation of the name. It is unclear if the addition of *quae brittannicae cair lion dicitur* after *urbe* <*leogis*> was an addition or if it was in the archetype; I have treated it cautiously as an addition but it is entirely possible that the original contained something along the lines of **id est cair legion*. The modernisation of several spellings shows that the author of this recension was at least familiar with contemporary Welsh orthography; this makes it difficult to agree with Dumville (1985, 5)

that it shows "*an updating of English forms which only an Englishman was likely to have carried out*": it is much more likely that only a Welsh writer would be able to update the Welsh names whilst being able also to update English forms rather than the reverse. Additions to the list of *civitates* suggest that he was a native of south-east Wales.

in illo tempore saxones inualescebant in multitudine magna et crescebant in bryttannia. mortuo hencgisto octha filius eius aduenit de sinistrali parte bryttanniae ad regnum cantuariorum et de ipso omnes reges cantuariorum usque in hodiernum diem. tunc belliger arthur cum militibus bryttanniae atque regibus contra illos pugnabat et licet multi ipso nobiliores essent ipse tamen duodecies dux belli fuit uictorque bellorum.

primum bellum contra illos iniit iuxta hostium fluminis quod dicitur glein. secundum et tertium et quartumque ac quintum super aliam amnem quae nominatur brittannicae duglas quae est in regione linnuis. sextum bellum super flumen quod uocatur bassas. septimum contra illos iniit bellum in silua celidonis, quae bryttannicae cat coit celidon nominatur. octauum contra barbaros aegit bellum iuxta castellum guinnion, in quo idem arthur portauit imaginem sanctae mariae dei genetricis semperque uirginis super humeros suos et tota illa die saxones per uirtutem domini nostri iesu christi et sanctae mariae matris eius in fugam uersi sunt et magna cede multi ex eis perierunt. nonum egit bellum in urbe leogis quae brittannicae cair lion dicitur. decimum uero gessit bellum in litore fluminis quod nos uocamus traht treuroit. undecimum in monte qui nominatur breguoin, ubi illos in fugam uertit quem nos cat bregion appellamus. duodecimum contra saxones durissime arthur bellum in monte badonis perpetrauit, in quo corruerunt impetu illius una die dccccxl uiri; nullo sibi brittonum in adiutorium adherente preter ipsum solum domino se confortante. in omnibus autem supra dictis bellis protestantur semper eum fuisse uictorem sicut fuerunt et alii perplures militarii brittones sed nulla fortitudo uel consilium contra dei uoluntatem.

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