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Brân, Brennos: An Instance of Early Gallo-Brittonic History and Mythology

John T. Koch

Harvard University

I.

IN the winter of 279–78 B.C., Brennos, the supreme chief of the Celtic horde that had invaded Greece, was wounded by a Greek missile at the disastrous assault on the sanctuary of Delphi. Fainting, he was borne away from the battlefield by his surviving comrades who, their will broken, commenced their prolonged and arduous retreat out of Greece.¹

Weighed down and near to death, he assembled his host there and spoke to the Gauls. He advised them to kill him and all the wounded, to burn their waggons, and to return home unburdened; he advised them also to make Cichorius king. Then, after drinking deeply of undiluted wine, Brennos slew himself. After Cichorius had given him burial, he killed the wounded and those who were victims of cold and starvation, some twenty thousand in all; and so he began the journey homeward by the same route [that they had come].²

Readers of the *Mabinogi* may find something here that is reminiscent of the death tale of a hero with a similar name and who, like Brennos, brought a vast host of his countrymen into a foreign land: Brân, after leading the Britons into Ireland, was wounded by an Irish poisoned spear in the near-total mutual slaughter of the climactic battle between the two nations.

Ac yna y peris Bendigeiduran llad y benn. 'A chymerwch chwi y penn,' heb ef, 'a dygwch hyt y Gwynuryn yn Llundain, a chledwch a'y wyneb ar Freinc ef. A chwi a uydwch ar y ford yn hir: yn Hardlech y bydwch seith mlyned ar ginyaw, ac Adar Riannon y canu ywch.'³

¹The principal sources for this episode are Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, translated by W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod, 5 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1918–35), iv, 498–507 [x.23]; M. Iunianus Iustinus, *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi*, edited by F. Rühl (Leipzig, 1886), pp. 163–66 [xxiv.6–8]. ²*Diodorus Siculus*, edited and translated by F. R. Walton and others, 12 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass. 1933–67), xi, 63 [xxii.9]. ³*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Ifor Williams (Cardiff, 1930), pp. 44–45.

And then Brân the Blessed ordered his head to be cut off. 'And take the head', he said, 'and bring it as far as the White Mount in London, and bury it with its face towards France. And you will be a long while on the way; in Harlech you will be seven years engaged in feasting, with the birds of Rhiannon singing above.'

Diodorus' account supplies a pragmatic motivation for the self-sacrificing heroism of the stricken general which is absent, and perhaps unnecessary, within the weird wondertale narrative of *Branwen*: the immobilized leader ordered himself to be killed so as to facilitate the retreat of his hard-pressed followers. The logistical motive would of course hold true *a fortiori* in the case of the gigantic Brân.

II.

Concerning the possible equivalence of the names, Old Celtic *Brennos* and Welsh *Brân* are not exact cognates. However, in so far as the etymology of neither is certain,⁴ ultimate derivation from the same root is not impossible. In the *Brutiau*, the legendary kings whose names occur in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* [HRB] as *Brennius* and *Belinus*⁵ are given as Welsh *Bran* and *Beli*.⁶ In the Old Welsh genealogies in London, British Library, MS Harley 3859, *Bran Hen* is the son of *Dumngual Moilmut*.⁷ In HRB, *Brennius* and *Belinus* are sons of *Dunvallo Molmutius*. So Geoffrey, who clearly had access to the Harleian genealogies or something very much like them, understood his *Brennius* to be the equivalent of native *Brân*.

Geoffrey's story of *Brennius*' conquest of Rome must derive from the accounts of the senior *Brennus* and the sack of Rome about 390 B.C.⁸ Tatlock proposed that Geoffrey had extracted *Belinus* as a mere name from *Historia Brittonum* §19 so as to 'jingle' with his *Brennius*.⁹

⁴See *Léxique étymologique d'irlandais ancien* de J. Vendryes, edited by E. Bachellery and P.-Y. Lambert (Dublin and Paris, 1959-), s.v. *bran*. ⁵The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, edited by A. Griscom (London, 1929), pp. 276-91 [m.1-10]. ⁶See, for example, *Brut Dingestow*, edited by Henry Lewis (Cardiff, 1942), pp. 33-39 [=m.1-10]. ⁷P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), p. 10. ⁸Accounts of the senior *Brennus* include *Livy*, edited by B. O. Foster and others, 14 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1919-67), m, 128-65 [v.38-48]; *Plutarch's Lives*, edited by B. Perrin, 11 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1914-26), ii, 128-69 [*Camillus* xvi-xxix]; *Appian's Roman History*, edited by Horace White, 4 vols, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1930), i, 106-9 [iv.3]; *Paulus Orosius, Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, edited by C. Zangemeister (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 60-62 [ii.19]; *Landolphus Sagax, Historia Romana*, edited by A. Crivellucci, 2 vols, Fonti per la Storia d'Italia (Rome, 1912), i, 22-23 [i.24]. ⁹J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley, 1950), p. 305, n. 1.

However, if we survey a wider range of sources, a less capricious process is indicated. R. S. Loomis and Helaine Newstead noted the similar doublets in Arthurian texts largely independent of Geoffrey, such as Bilis, king of the antipodean dwarves, and his gigantic brother Brien in the *Erec et Enide* of Chrétien de Troyes.¹⁰ Behind this pair, and the cognate *Belinus* and *Brennius*, they found the native Welsh mythological figures *Beli* and *Brân*. In vernacular sources, *Beli* (Mawr) appears largely as a legendary ancestor.¹¹ His genealogical function must be old, as shown by the occurrence of *Beli Magnus*, like *Bran Hen*, in the Harleian genealogies. *Beli* also appears (without the epithet) in the Old Breton genealogy of St Gurthiern.¹²

It is seen, then, that the bracketing together of *Brân* and *Beli* probably had a broader basis than linear derivation from Geoffrey, and that the currency of *Brân* and *Beli* as royal ancestors of mythological prehistory goes back to the Old Welsh period at least. At this stage of the argument, it is also possible that it was Geoffrey who first Latinized *Bran* as *Brennius* and did so because he knew the story of the Gaul who sacked Rome and he wished to make that *Brennus* a Briton. What we have yet to explain is how the pairing of *Brân* with *Beli* occurred in the first place. The two belong to the same lineage in Harley 3859, but *Beli* is the ultimate patriarch of the line, some seventeen generations before *Brân Hen*.

An answer can be supplied by returning to the story of the Gauls' invasion of Greece. Roughly a year before *Brennos* advanced on Delphi, another Celtic chief, *Bolgios*, invaded Macedonia. Accordingly, the accounts of these two invasions are usually presented in tandem.¹³ In Justinus' *Epitome*, *Bolgios* appears as *Belgius*. This text was popular in the Middle Ages and had circulated in Britain and northern France for centuries before Geoffrey's day.¹⁴ An educated early medieval Welshman might naturally take *Belgius* to be an old Latinized form of *Beli* and, with only slightly more ingenuity, equate *Brennus* with *Bran*. Furthermore, when it is assumed that such an equation took place, the 'jingling' of *Belgius* (the first-mentioned of the duo in Justinus, xxiv.5) will explain exactly why *Brennus* inevitably slid into *Brennius*.

¹⁰Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 110; Newstead, *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1939), pp. 155-67. ¹¹See R. Bromwich, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, second edition (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 281-83. ¹²See L. Fleuriot, 'Old Breton Genealogies and Early British Traditions', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 26 (1974-76), 1-6; J. T. Koch, 'A Welsh Window on the Iron Age: Manawydan, Mandubracios', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 14 (Winter 1987), 23 and n. 20. ¹³On *Bolgios/Belgius*, see Pausanias, edited by Jones, iv, 475 [x.19.7]; Justinus, edited by Rühl, pp. 162-63 [xxiv.5-6] and 167 [xxv.2]. ¹⁴See *Texts and Transmission*, edited by L. D. Reynolds (Oxford, 1983), pp. 197-99.

At the root of the vacillation between Celtic *bolg-* and *belg-*, there is Indo-European ablaut, as claimed by T. F. O'Rahilly.¹⁵ But Justinus' *Belgius* (probably continuing the form in Trogus' original) is likely to reflect a later and more complex analogical interplay. As a Gallo-Roman, it is probable that Trogus knew a common noun, Gallo-Latin *Belgius* (= Gaulish *Belgios* or *Belgijos*), understood to mean 'man of the Belgae, of Belgium'. (According to John Carey's recent explanation, the original sense was 'he who swells up with heroic fury, the bulger'.)¹⁶ Trogus, and all those around him, would naturally perceive *Βολγίος* to be an error for, or variant of, this *Belgios*. This raises a key question. Could *Belgios* not only look like the ancient precursor of Welsh *Beli*, but in fact be the derivation? O'Rahilly thought so,¹⁷ but there is some phonological rough sailing here, as both Celtic internal *g* and *j* have complex histories and show multiple reflexes in Brittonic. Original [j] sometimes gave [ij] in this position, the usual Welsh reflex of which was *yð*. But [ij] could give the byform [i:], whence Welsh *i*—thus MW *dyðyeu* and *dieu* 'days' < *[dijowes], *byð* and *bi* 'will be' < *[bijet], *trevyð* and *trevi* 'settlements' < *[trebij-].¹⁸ Celtic *g* could be lost or vocalized as the palatal glide [j] in all internal positions in Welsh by the tenth-century date at which the Harleian genealogies were compiled.¹⁹ The sequence [-lyi:o-] would be a particularly favourable setting for [γ] > [j] or nil on general phonetic principles. In contact with a following *i*, *g* was not infrequently lost or vocalized already in Gaulish, as seen in such pairs as *Magiorix* : *Maiorix* and *Tagia* : *Taia*.²⁰ In Breton, on the other hand, Celtic *lg* is expected to give Old Breton [ly] spelled *lg* (as in *delgim* 'to hold') and later become *lc'h*.²¹ However, the Breton treatment is perhaps not an obstacle when we realise that any such dynastic tradition would naturally involve inter-dialect transfer, in this case from Gaul to Britain (with the Belgae in the first place) and/or from Wales to Brittany (with the pedigree of Gurthiern = Vortigern). Incidentally, any reflex of *Bolgios* would have fallen together with those of *Belgios* by Neo-Brittonic vowel affection.

¹⁵Early Irish History and Mythology (Dublin, 1947), p. 54. ¹⁶John Carey, 'Fir Bolg: A Native Etymology Revisited', *CMCS*, 16 (Winter 1988), 77–83. ¹⁷Early Irish History, p. 67. ¹⁸Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), §§ 38 and 40. ¹⁹ibid., §89. In §77, Jackson's examples fail to prove that *g* was not lost early before *j* in West British. OW *legion* 'legion' is of course a loanword as well as being prone to late Latin orthographic influence. *Bregion* has added a suffix to a base form *breg* after this had arisen from Late British *ā*-affection of *brigā*. *Deigion* 'noblemen' likewise has a transparent morpheme boundary, a transparently separable base form *dag* 'good', and has replaced an older plural, Celtic **dagī*. T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Notes, Mostly Etymological', *Ériu*, 13 (1940–42), 154–55, proposed that *gj* regularly gave *j* in British. ²⁰D. Ellis Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (Oxford, 1967), p. 400. ²¹Kenneth Jackson, *A Historical Phonology of Breton* (Dublin, 1967), §§ 763–64 and 1012.

I think, then, that O'Rahilly was essentially right, *Beli* = *Belgios*, at least by early learned identification and quite possibly by derivation.

Let us now make the likely assumption that the Belgae, a powerful group of tribes in later pre-Roman Gaul and Britain, had an eponymous ancestor, like the Britons' Britto and Brutus, the Romans' Romulus, Cruithne of the Picts, and many more. The name of this ancestor would necessarily commence in *Belg-*. That the form was precisely *Belgios* is an a priori likelihood. It becomes something more than a possibility when we realise that *Belgios* is the only Old Celtic personal name in *Belg-* known to us and that it was specifically (indeed exclusively so far as our evidence goes) used of the great war-leader who flourished some two centuries earlier. Caesar reports that the Belgae had come from east of the Rhine long before his time.²² As we shall see presently, this tradition resonates with the Gaulish origin doctrines (attributed to the druids by Timagenes) of war-driven transrhine migrations, and there is some reason to think that Timagenes had in mind in this connection specific episodes of the aftermath of the Celtic invasion of Greece. It is probable, therefore, that the Celtic general *Bolgios* who attacked Macedonia in 280 B.C. came to be equated with, or originally gave rise to, the eponymous *Belgios* who directed the ancestral Belgae westwards across the Rhine. The principal coin types of Britain and northern Gaul, and of the Belgae in particular, were derived from mid- to late-fourth-century Macedonian issues. The most natural interpretation of this fact is that a more advanced form of social organization—reflected in the adoption of currency—had somehow diffused to the north-west from those eastern Celts who had had dealings with the Greeks in the early third century B.C. It is hard to avoid seeing a close connection between the facts that: (1) the chieftain remembered in Gaul as 'Belgios' paid his followers with shares of Macedonian loot, and (2) later dynasties calling themselves 'Belgae' distributed wealth to their followers in the form of derivatives of the staters of Philip II of Macedon (359–36 B.C.).²³ The veterans and their descendants who possessed portable mementoes of the campaigns of *Belgios* and *Brennos* doubtless had special honour which was articulated in the mighty story of the invasion.

In pre-Roman Britain, it was the Belgic *Catuvellaunī* who became the dominant tribe, and came closest to achieving a national hegemony, in the century preceding the Claudian invasion. The royal pedigree of the *Catuvellaunī* has several reflections in medieval

²²Caesar, *The Gallic War*, edited by H. J. Edwards, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1917), pp. 92–95 [II.4]. ²³On the coinage, see D. F. Allen, *Coins of the Ancient Celts*, edited by D. Nash (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 68–82 and Map 4, p. 8.

Welsh tradition, including the genealogies of Harley 3859.²⁴ If genealogical doctrines of royal descent from the eponymous Belgios were likewise preserved amongst the noble British Belgae and the Welsh bearers of their legacy, I believe the result would have been precisely the legendary ancestor *Beli*.

The process as I see it may now be summarized: (1) The Belgic dynasties of Gaul and Britain claimed descent from the eponymous Belgios. (2) In Gaul and perhaps in Britain, this Belgios was—or in any event came to be—identified with the Bolgios of the invasion of Greece. (3) As will be shown, Bolgios' colleague Brennos became the focus of similar Continental Celtic origin legends. (4) In Britain, Brennos merged with Brân < **Branos* 'The Raven' and Belgios/Bolgios evolved into Welsh *Beli* (Mawr) (or less probably converged with an originally separate character whose name became *Beli*). (5) Pre-Galfridian British *literati* identified the vernacular *Beli* and Brân with Justinus' *Belgius* and *Brennus*; the Latinized pair eventually 'jingled' into *Belgius* and *Brennius*. (6) Geoffrey or his immediate source had inherited this much. However, he lacked a coherent version of the invasion of Greece and therefore identified *Brennius*/Brân with the wrong *Brennus*, the conqueror of Rome (probably taking the story from Orosius). (7) Geoffrey or his source therefore had no authoritative text for the correct Latin form of *Beli*/*Belgius*. In order to make the 'Roman' *Brennus* a Briton, *Belinus* was selected as a preferable, more British-looking Latinized form for the elder partner. *Belinus* derives ultimately from the well-attested Gallo-Brittonic theonym *Belenos*/*Belinos*.²⁵

III.

In *Branwen*, the motive for interring Brân's head was for it to be a talisman against *gormes*, *gormes* being one of the many culturally charged, translation-resistant Welsh terms encountered in the early literature. It may be rendered by such various unsatisfactory glosses as 'plague', 'oppression', 'foreign invasion or domination'.²⁶ In read-

²⁴J. T. Koch, 'llawr en asseð [CA 932] "The Laureate Hero in the War-Chariot": Some Recollections of the Iron Age in the Gododdin', *Études celtiques*, 24 (1987), 264–72; 'Welsh Window', pp. 17–52. ²⁵In 'Welsh Window', p. 20, I suggested that Welsh *Beli* could directly continue *Belinos*, *Belenos*. Welsh *Belyn* is the direct reflex of those old forms. I now believe that an originally distinct *Beli* < *Belgios* was drawn to this set by popular etymology. ²⁶On *gormes*, see Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Some Functions of Origin Stories in Early Medieval Wales', in *History and Heroic Tale*, edited by Tore Nyberg and others (Odense, 1985), pp. 105–14. A comparable story of a Celtic king buried facing his foes occurs in *Tírechán*; see *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, edited by L. Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 10 (Dublin, 1979), pp. 132–33.

ing the Triads it becomes clear that the sort of *gormes* that the tradition was anticipating in Brân's story was invasion from the Continent and in particular invasion by the Anglo-Saxons:

Tri Matkud Ynys Prydein:

Penn Bendigeituran uab Llŷr, a guduwyd yn y Gvynuryn yn Llundain, a'e wyneb ar Freinc. A hyt tra uu yn yr ansavd y dodet yno, ny doei Ormes Saesson byth y'r Ynys honn.²⁷

Three Fortunate Concealments of the Island of Britain:

The Head of Brân the Blessed, son of Llŷr, which was concealed in the White Hill in London, with its face towards France. And as long as it was in the position in which it was put there, no Saxon Oppression would ever come to this Island.

One piece of evidence indicates that the idea that Brân protected Britain from the transmarine *gormes* *Saesson* is old. Brân's triads²⁸ bring him together with the very similar episode (which occurs first in *Historia Brittonum* (HB) §44) of the talismanic interment of a historical leader of the Britons' resistance to the invading Anglo-Saxons, namely Gwerthefyr or Vortimer, son of the infamous Vortigern. In Gwerthefyr's case, the site of burial appears to be the 'Saxon Shore fort' at Richborough, Kent,²⁹ or, according to the Red Book version, perhaps all of the Saxon Shore forts ('prif pyrth yr Ynys honn'). Those forts under the command of the *Comes Litoris Saxonici* are listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* of the early fifth century. The system itself—incorporating defensive works of varying dates—was organized and directed against seaborne Germanic incursions from the Continent from the later third or early fourth century of our era.³⁰ The northernmost fort in this series was the third-century Brancaster fort on the Norfolk coast, for which the Romano-British name given in the *Notitia* is *Branodūnum* 'the fort of (the god) Brân'.³¹ I would reject out of hand that it could be sheer coincidence that the one of the ten Saxon Shore forts whose name means 'the

²⁷Bromwich, *Triodd*, no. 37r. ²⁸*ibid.*, nos 37–37r, 'The Three Concealments and Disclosures'. ²⁹*Historia Brittonum*, in *Chronica Minora*, III, edited by T. Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, 13 (Berlin, 1898), pp. 187–88: 'in campo juxta lapidem tituli, qui est super ripam Gallici maris'. *Historia Brittonum* §§ 43–44 tell us that Gwerthefyr pushed the English back to Thanet, that he drove them off the land at the 'inscribed stone by the shore of the Gallic sea', that he was to be buried at the same place, and that it happened to be a port. As it was Richborough that possessed a major port and lay at the south-east end of the Wantsum Channel separating Thanet from the mainland, this seems to be the place. The fort at Reculver at the opposite end of the Wantsum is another possibility. On these forts, see Stephen Johnson, *The Roman Forts of the Saxon Shore*, second edition (London, 1979), pp. 44–51. ³⁰*ibid.* ³¹*ibid.*, pp. 34–37; A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 274–75.

fort of X' bears the name of one of the three concealments which is said to have prevented the Saxon conquest. Either the legend generated the name or vice versa. If the former, this role of Brân goes back to Roman times. Even if the latter, an onomastic tale of Brân's guardianship could only have arisen amongst Britons well informed about Roman installations on the far side of what was to become East Anglia. In other words, we need a frame of reference very different from, and very much earlier than, that which later placed the interment in London.

In the ancient accounts of the legend of Brennos the element of a talismanic deposition is also present:

The Gauls after their disastrous attack upon Delphi, in which they had felt the power of the divinity more than that of the enemy, and had lost their leader Brennus, had fled like exiles, partly into Asia, and partly into Thrace, and then returned by the same way which they had come, into their own country. Of these, a certain number settled at the conflux of the Danube and the Save, and took the name the Scordisci. The Tectosagi, on returning to their old settlements about Toulouse, were seized by pestilential distemper, and did not recover from it, until, being warned by the admonitions of their soothsayers, they threw the gold and silver, which they got in war and sacrilege, into the lake of Toulouse. . . .³²

As in *Branwen*, we here confront the notion of national *gormes* averted by a characteristically pagan Celtic ritual deposition as prescribed by inspired prophecy. It should also be noted that though the surviving Britons bore no otherworldly plunder out of Ireland in the extant version of *Branwen*, several leading authorities have shared the conclusion that in a more primitive version of the story the objective of the expedition to Ireland had been the supernatural *Peir Dadeni* ('Cauldron of Rebirth') rather than the rescue of Branwen.³³ It is not unlikely, then, that in such an ur-*Branwen* this piece of sacred treasure had constituted the talismanic deposition, or part of it.³⁴ (Note also that another immortalizing cauldron or vat (*kerwyn*) was employed in the interment of the third of the three

³²Justinus' Epitome of the Philippic Histories of Trogus Pompeius, xxxii.3, from the translation by J. S. Watson, *Justin, Cornelius Nepos, and Eutropius* (London, 1853), p. 233. ³³See W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon* (Cardiff, 1950), pp. 11 and 14; Roger S. Loomis, *Wales and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cardiff, 1956), pp. 131–78; Proinsias Mac Cana, *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr* (Cardiff, 1958), pp. 146–50. ³⁴One might speculate that in an earlier version the cauldron had been used to keep Brân's head alive. It is also worth noting that in the thirteenth-century romance *Fouke Fitz Warin a Chastiel Bran* (identified with Castell Dinas Brân near Llangollen), which was rebuilt by Bran Fitz Donwal, had a treasure concealed beneath it. See *Fouke Fitz Warin*, edited by L. Brandin (Paris, 1930), pp. 3–6; Loomis, *The Grail*, pp. 132–33; Newstead, *Bran*, pp. 95–106.

talismans, the two dragons entombed in Snowdonia.)³⁵ It should be emphasized that in the statements of Brennos' motives for the ill-fated invasion, the treasures of Delphi, including coined silver and gold, figured as his original prime aim.³⁶ In fact, coming from a background of Celtic tribalism, the cult centre of Greece—most nearly analogous to the Celtic sacred precincts of tribal assembly and kingly inauguration—would naturally be perceived as the true national *caput* of the foe, with their spiritual power to resist derived from its cult objects and their authority to rule confirmed by its priests.

A further parallel to be noted in this connection is that the supernatural forces invested in the sacred treasure are said to have intervened terrifyingly on the side of the defenders at the great battle. Thus, in *Branwen*, the *Peir Dadeni* was used to revivify the slain Irish warriors as zombie-like mutes. In the comparable overseas quest for magical spoils in the poem *Preideu Annwryn*, it appears to be otherworldly forces that virtually annihilated Arthur's host. We may compare in particular the phantom army of six thousand which was difficult to converse with at the glass stronghold *Caer Wydyr*.³⁷ According to Justinus [xxiv.8] and Pausanias [xxiii], heaven-sent earthquake and tempest battered the Gauls at Delphi as spectral Greek champions appeared.

Concerning the correct meaning of Justinus' phrase '[back] into their own country' used of the Tolosan Volcae Tectosages, there is some confusion evident here which is shared by Strabo (perhaps going back to Timagenes—see below), namely the notion that the Volcae Tectosages had originated in Narbonensis. On the basis of our general understanding of the direction of the movements of the La Tène Celts this is inherently unlikely, and the archaeology of southern Gaul in fact shows that the Narbonensian Volcae Tectosages—like the Galatian Tectosages around Ankara—arrived in their lands in the Middle La Tène period, specifically in the third quarter of the third century B.C., and had come from the Middle Danube region.³⁸ So the tradition that they were remnants of Brennos' host is, therefore, inherently possible. However, the original homeland of the Volcae Tectosages must have been not Narbonensis, but that mentioned by Caesar—the Hercynian Forest (that is, present-day south Germany, and Bohemia and Moravia in Czechoslovakia). So,

³⁵See *Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys*, edited by Brynley F. Roberts (Dublin, 1975), p. 5. ³⁶Pausanias, edited by Jones, iv, 474–77 [x.19.8]; Justinus, edited by Ruehl, p. 163 [xxiv.6]. ³⁷On *Preideu Annwryn*, see now Marged Haycock, '“Preiddeu Annwn” and the Figure of Taliesin', *Studia Celtica*, 18/19 (1983–84), 52–78. ³⁸See Venceslas Kruta, 'Les Celtes des Gaules d'après l'archéologie', in *History and Culture of the Celts / Geschichte und Kultur der Kelten*, edited by Karl Horst Schmidt with Rolf Ködderitzsch (Heidelberg, 1986), pp. 46–47.

the remnants of Brennos' horde who retreated with sacred relics towards Gaul were going back to their own country from the Greek and Roman perspective, in that they were going back to Celtia, but they actually settled in new lands far from the home of their kinsmen who had not been impelled towards Balkan exile in the first place. The confusion is likely to have arisen simply because most of the ancient writers—unlike Caesar, who laboured long extending the transalpine frontier of Rome—were unaware of the Hercynian Volcae, but did know that the Galatians had migrated from the west.

Another important implication of the passage above is that the story of Brennos had come to be used to explain the origins of several far-flung Celtic peoples—the Volcae Tectosages of Narbonensis, the Galatian Tectosages, the Slovenian Scordisci, and the Celts who established the kingdom of Tylis in Thrace. Therefore, like Brân, Brennos was paradoxically viewed as something of a legendary founder and talismanic protector of peoples, even though he had actually died in a foreign country that his followers never successfully conquered or settled, and this long before the completion of their travels.

Two passages attributed to the lost work of Timagenes throw light upon the migration/foundation traditions of the pagan Continental Celts in general and the origin legend of the Volcae Tectosages of Toulouse in particular:

The ancient writers in doubt as to the earliest origins of the Gauls, have left an incomplete account of the matter, but later Timagenes, a true Greek in accuracy as well as language, collected out of various books these facts that were long unknown: which, following his authority, and avoiding any obscurity, I shall state clearly and plainly. . . . The Drysidæ [that is, the Druids] say that a part of the people was in fact indigenous, but that others also poured in from remote islands and the regions across the Rhine, driven from their homes by continual wars and the inundation of the stormy sea. [Ammianus Marcellinus xv.9]³⁹

Above all, what is made plain by the foregoing is that—however much the extant versions of the British Brutus legend and the Irish *Lebor Gabála* scheme may be indebted to Vergil, the Bible, and their Late Antique derivatives—the native learned classes had from the very beginning conceived and transmitted origin doctrines cast in terms of warfare, deluge, and folk migration. To a certain extent this lore of the past would have had a mythological content, cataclysmic

³⁹*Ammianus Marcellinus*, edited and translated by J. C. Rolfe, 3 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1935–40), I, 177–79. As pointed out to me by John Carey, the sense of the Celtic etymon behind the river-name *Rhine* may imply that a broader and less localized meaning might be allowed for Ammianus' phrase 'ab insulis extimis confluisse et tractibus transrhenanensis'. Compare Old Irish *rian* 'sea' < Celtic **rěnos*.

events belonging to the coming into being of the world, in the epoch of proximity of man and god. However, we also know from archaeological evidence and the Greek and Roman historians that the transrhine movements were real enough and had affected the Celticization of vast zones of Europe in what was, for Timagenes, the recent past. So, along with the mythology, the druidic origin legends also contained what literate thought would categorize as history—which is to say recollections of real events and real persons in their midst.

The second citation from Timagenes is preserved by Strabo and recapitulates with fresh detail the story of the Volcae Tectosages and the treasure of Tolosa already presented. Timagenes was cited by Strabo here in specific counterdistinction to the alternative explanation of the treasure of Toulouse attributed to Posidonius:

The land adjacent to the Cevennes and also the southern flank of this mountain up to its summits is inhabited by the Volcae called Tectosages. . . . [They live] near the Pyrenees but also extend over a small part of the northern flank of the Cevennes, and their land is rich in gold. It appears that they once held a dominating position and were so strong in man-power that when civic conflict arose they banished a large part of their number from their native land, who were joined by other men from other tribes; belonging to this stock are the people settled in the part of Phrygia that borders Cappadocia and Paphlagonia. We have as proof of this the people still called the Tectosages, for there are three tribes [of Galatians in Asia Minor] and the one which dwells about the city of Ankara is called Tectosages, the remaining two being the Trocmi and Tolistobogii. In the case of these latter peoples their origin in Celtica is shown by their bond of kinship with the Tectosages, but I cannot say from what area they emigrated; for I have not learned of any tribe of Trocmi or Tolistobogii dwelling at present, either beyond the Alps or in the Alps, or south of them. Probably no trace is left of them by reason of their mass migrations, as happens with numerous peoples. For example, the second Brennus, the man who led the attack on Delphi, is said by some to have been a Prausan, but neither am I able to state in regard to the Prausans where on earth they lived formerly. The statement is also made that the Tectosages took part in the campaign against Delphi, and that the treasures which the Roman general, Caepio, found among them in the city of Toulouse [106 B.C.] were part of the Delphic plunder, the tribe adding to them from their own possessions by way of dedications in winning the favour of their god; the laying of hands on these treasures by Caepio was what caused him to end his days in misfortune, exiled by his native land as a temple-robber, and leaving daughters to succeed him who came to a bad end, becoming prostitutes as Timagenes says. [Strabo v.1.12–13].⁴⁰

⁴⁰From the translation of J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 60, Section C, no. 5 (1960), 261–62.

The idea that (a portion of) the gold and silver deposited in the sacred pools of Tolosa had been Brennos' Delphic plunder is more likely to have originated among the Gauls than among the Greeks or Romans because it specifically contradicts two important points of the principal Greek accounts of the war (those of Pausanias, Diodorus, and Justinus/Trogus), namely: (1) that the Gauls took no treasure from Delphi, and (2) that none of the Gauls who followed Brennos to Delphi made it out of Greece alive, though this second statement is likely to be hyperbolic and impressionistic, and is refuted by other traditions already cited. At this point there is no way for us to tell whether the passage from Ammianus and that from Strabo derive from the same portion of Timagenes' lost work, but it is, in any event, likely that Timagenes had considered the latter account a specific example consistent with his general ethnographic observation reflected in the former extract.

Another point where we might wish to clarify the facts supplied by the ancient writers is the use of the ethnonym *Volcae* as opposed to the 'double-barrelled' *Volcae Tectosages*. Understanding the qualifying surname—more correctly *Textosages*—to mean essentially 'Migratory', it seems as though the Hercynian group ought originally to have been merely the *Volcae* and that only those landless tribesmen dislocated by the great banishment were (*Volcae*) *Tectosages*. Caesar—or less probably some earlier writer upon whom he drew—mistakenly added the surname to the Bohemian branch, knowing of their connection with the Narbonensians. A further point in favour of the priority of the simplex *Volcae* is the tribal name of the south-western *Volcae Tectosages*' neighbours to the east, the *Volcae Arecomici*. The common Danubian origins of both are revealed in the archaeological record, showing that the shared ethnonym is a badge of a common central-European origin, rather than being, say, the artefact of some more recent and local hegemony.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is the more primary simplex *Volcae* which passed at an early date into Germanic, and thence to Slavic, to give a range of words for Celto-Romance aliens—Gothic *Walhoz*, Old English *Weal(h)as*, *Walas* > *Welsh*, Old Norse *Valir* 'Romanen und überreste des celtischen Stammes im westlichen Frankreich und in Britannien', Old High German *Walha* 'Die Romanen Frankreichs und Italiens', Slavic *Vlokh* 'Romanians', and so on.⁴² This borrowing implies that the group called simply the *Volcae* were, in pre-Roman times, the most important, noticeable, and northerly Celtic group in central Europe.

Volcae means 'wolves, beasts of prey', and, probably as a particularization of the latter, 'hawks', anticipating Welsh *gweilch*. With either sense one may compare the early Irish use of *cú glas* 'wolf'

⁴¹See Kruta, pp. 46–47. ⁴²See A. Holder, *Alt-celtischer Sprachschatz*, 3 vols (Leipzig, 1896–1907), III, 436–38.

to denote a raider or a foreigner without legal status.⁴³ The other important people of the Hercynian region were the Boii, who gave their name to their land as *Boi(i)ohaemum* (that is, present-day Bohemia). Their ethnonym goes back to an older **Bowjī* (< IE **g^wowjeH₃s*) and means 'freemen of property', literally 'cattle owners'; compare the Old Irish cognate (singular) *búe* < Common Celtic **bowjos* 'native, as opposed to foreign, person with legal rights' < 'cattle owner'.⁴⁴ It seems likely, therefore, that the original distinction of Boii as opposed to *Volcae* had been that of propertied, legally competent tribesmen as opposed to young landless men dispatched beyond the frontier to plunder and seek new lands. In this light, Continental Celtic traditions spun around the exploits of the *Volcae* can be viewed as an analogue to Gaelic *fiannaíocht* and to the foundation legend of Gwynedd with its warlike Gododdin exiles.

IV.

When we turn to Pausanias, who gives the fullest version of Brennos' invasion, further striking parallels to *Branwen* are found in the details of the logistics and strategy of the campaigns:

⁴³For the existence of this root (IE **w^l k^w-*) in Celtic, see Kim McCone, 'OIr. *Olc*, *Luch*- and IE **w^l k^w-os*, **lúk^w-os* "wolf"', *Ériu*, 36 (1985), 171–75. The derivation of Gallo-Brittonic **wolk-* from such a preform is no more vexed than that of Old Irish *olc* and ogam ULC-. The retention of the semi-vowel in Brittonic and Gaulish is analogous to the treatment in Welsh *gwlân*, Breton *gloan* 'wool' (and presumably the Gaulish underlying French *flanelle* also) as against Old Irish *olann*. The *-k^w-* has given *-k-* by the same delabializing dissimilation seen in ogam ULCAGNI. As to why the semi-vowel has syllabified as **wo-*, rather than **wu-*, either or both of two factors may be at work: (1) the lowering affection of the final *a*-stem terminations, (2) the popular perception of the very common prepositional formant **wo-* or *we-*, which often alternated with its weak grade *w*, *u*, as in (for example) the Gaulish tribal name *Venellī* and its variant *Unellī*. One may also consider the problematical phonology of Welsh *gwlyb* 'wet': *golch* 'wash' = Old Irish *fluich*: *folc* (< Indo-European root **wleik-*). On the etymology of *gwalch* and related Celtic forms, see now Dafydd Jenkins, 'gwalch: Welsh', *CMCS*, 19 (Summer 1990), 55–67. That Goidelic itself had possibly also preserved a reflex of Celtic **wolkō-* 'wolf' is suggested by an obscure word in an Old Irish prophecy: 'Ticfa tarrngoire na sruthe, / ní bat cesa: // coin, foilc, fianna, íalla glasa, / cit [= cid] ba[d] mesa?' 'the prophecy of the elders will come to pass . . . dogs/wolves, foilc (< **wolkī*), marauding warbands, grey swarms—what could be worse?': Kuno Meyer, 'Ein altirisches Gedicht über das Ende der Welt', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 8 (1912), 195. The semantic range of the parallel plurals in the series is consistent with taking *foilc* to mean 'wolves' and/or 'landless brigands' or 'birds of prey'. ⁴⁴See Kim R. McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fianna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland', *CMCS*, 12 (Winter 1986), 1–22 (p. 11). McCone's entire article is relevant to the opposition suggested here for Boii versus *Volcae*. See also Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 5–6.

When the Greeks . . . learned that the army of the Gauls was already in the neighbourhood of Magnesia and Phthiotis, . . . [they] broke down the bridges [over the river Spercheius]. . . . But Brennus himself was not utterly stupid, nor inexperienced, for a barbarian, in devising tricks of strategy. So on that very night he dispatched some troops to Spercheius, not to the places where the old bridges had stood, but lower down, where the Greeks would not notice the crossing, and just where the river spread over the plain and made a marsh and a lake instead of a narrow violent stream. Hither Brennus sent some ten thousand Gauls picking out the swimmers and the tallest men; and the Celts as a race are far taller than any other people. So these crossed in the night, swimming over the river where it expands into a lake; each man used his shield, his national buckler, as a raft, and the tallest of them were able to cross the water by wading. . . . Brennus ordered the dwellers around the Malian Gulf to build bridges across the Spercheius. . . . Brennus brought his army across the bridges and proceeded to Heracleia. [Pausanias x.20.5–8]⁴⁵

That it was Brennos' personal retinue that undertook the river-crossing is indicated by the passage below:

[At the attack on Delphi, the Greeks] surprised the Celts in their rear, shooting them down with arrows and javelins without anything to fear from the barbarians [who were not equipped with missiles]. At the beginning of the fight the Gauls offered spirited resistance, especially *the company attached to Brennus, which was composed of the tallest and bravest of the Gauls*, and that though they were shot from all sides, and no less distressed by the frost, especially the wounded men. But when Brennus himself was wounded, he was carried fainting from the battle, and the barbarians, harassed on all sides by the Greeks, fell back reluctantly. . . . [Pausanias x.23.5–6; my italics]⁴⁶

With the river-crossing by the tallest Gauls, compare Brân's crossing of the Irish Sea, which was not in those days actually a sea at all:

Bendigeiduran, a'r yniuer a dywedysam ni, a hwylyssant parth ac Iwerdon, ac nyt oed uawr y weilgi, yna y ueis yd aeth ef. Nyt oed namyn dwy auon, Lli ac Archan y gelwit. . . . Ac yna y kerdwys ef ac a oed o gerd arwest ar y geuyn e hun, a chyrchu tir Iwerdon.⁴⁷

Brân the Blessed and the aforementioned host sailed towards Ireland, and the sea was not vast then. [The gigantic Brân] went wading. There were only two rivers; they were called Lli and Archan. . . . And then

⁴⁵From the translation of W. H. S. Jones, iv, 483–85. ⁴⁶From the translation of Jones, iv, 501–3. ⁴⁷*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, edited by Williams, p. 39. *Cerd arwest*, which I have translated 'girded pack' (more literally 'strap' or 'string work'), is problematical as both words have more than one sense. Williams, *Pedeir Keinc*, p. 193, suggests *tannau* 'harp strings'. The following quotation is from pp. 40–41.

[Brân] advanced with all he had in a girded pack [?] on his own back, and he made for Ireland's land.

On receiving word of Brân's advance, the Irish mustered:

Yna dygyuor holl wyr ymlad Iwerdon a wnaethpwynt y gyt, a'r holl uorbennyd yn gyflym, a chynghor a gymerwynt. 'Arglwyd,' heb y wyrda wrth Uatholwch, 'Nyt oes gynghor namyn kilyaw drwy Linon (auon oed yn Iwerdon), a gadu Llinon y rot ac ef, a thorri y bont yssyd ar yr auon. A mein sugyn yssyd ygwaelawt yr auon, ny eill na llong na llestyr arnei.' Wynt a gilyssant drwy yr auon, ac a torryssant y bont.

Bendigeiduran a doeth y'r tir, a llynges y gyt ac ef, parth a glann yr auon. 'Arglwyd,' heb y wyrda, 'ti a wdest kynneddyf yr auon, ny eill neb uynet drwydi, nyt oes bont arnei hitheu. Mae dy gynghor am bont?' heb wy. 'Nit oes,' heb ynteu, 'namyn a uo penn bit pont. Mi a uydaf pont,' heb ef. . . . Ac yna guedy gorwed ohonaw ef ar draws yr auon. Y byrwynt clwydeu arnaw ef, ac yd aeth y luoed ef ar y draws ef drwod.

And then there was a mustering of all the fighting men of Ireland, and quickly the assembling of all the high chieftains, and they took counsel. 'Lord', said the noblemen of Matholwch [the king of Ireland] to him, 'there is no counsel but to retreat over the Llinon [Liffey] (a river that was in Ireland), and leave the Llinon between thee and him [Brân], and break the bridge that is on the river. And there are submerged stones in the bottom of the river, so that neither ship nor vessel can navigate on it'. They retreated across the river, and they destroyed the bridge.

Brân the Blessed came to the land, and the fleet with him, towards the river's bank. 'Lord', said his noblemen, 'thou knowest the nature of the river, that none may cross it, and there is no bridge on it. What is thy counsel concerning a bridge?' they said. 'There is none', said he, 'but that he who would be a chief, let him be a bridge. I shall be a bridge. . . . And after he lay down across the river, hurdles were put on him, and his hosts came across over him.

As has been recognized, the *clwydeu* 'hurdles' of this account represent a submerged reference to Irish *Áth Cliath* 'Ford of the Hurdles', that is, Dublin.⁴⁸ But to suppose that the onomastic tale has by itself motivated the entire bridge story would have our storyteller go very far out of the way to gain very little. The piece of place-name lore is less than integral, as is confirmed by the fact that the punchline ('and so it was called . . .') is missing. Conversely, what is absolutely essential in this episode is the proverb *a uo penn bit pont*, 'he who would be a chief, let him be a bridge', in other words 'he who would lead must be the way'. This is the thematic keynote of the heroism of Brân's leadership and invokes as well the heroic essence of the figure of Brennos.

⁴⁸Mac Cana, *Branwen*, p. 118.

V.

At this point it is possible to attempt to reconstruct a skeletal Tolosan foundation saga which might be viewed, on the other hand, as an approximation of a 'primitive' version of the invasion episode of *Branwen*. (The procedure of reconstruction is to be understood primarily as a statement of the historical relationship between extant sources and only more tentatively as an indication of an earlier stage.)

(i) Driven to part from their landed kinsmen (the Boii?) in the homeland, the Volcae Tectosages (the 'Migratory *Männerbund*') joined in a vast host and followed (Belgios and) Brennos into a foreign country.

(ii) Brennos sought supernatural treasure (including an immortalizing vessel (?)—see further below) in the great centre of assembly in this foreign land. It was intently guarded by the natives of the country.

(iii) The foreign nation mustered in their totality against Brennos.

(iv) The enemy broke down the bridge over an unfordable stretch of river to obstruct Brennos' advance.

(v) Brennos led the tallest Celts wading across the river and reconstructed the bridges for his entire host to cross over.

(vi) At the great centre, a climactic battle was fought in which many Celts were slain and Brennos himself was grievously wounded by an enemy missile.

(vii) The power of the supernatural treasure at the centre of assembly was used by the defenders to raise phantom warriors against the invaders.

(viii) The wounded Brennos ordered his surviving followers to kill him in order to expedite their withdrawal and gave orders for the retreat.

(ix) The doomed Brennos drank deeply a fatal libation of undiluted wine [= the otherworldly feast presided over by Brân's head].

(x) The decimated Celtic forces withdrew by the lengthy route they had come.

(xi) The Volcae Tectosages bore the supernatural treasure back to Celtia.

(xii) Re-established in a homeland, the Volcae Tectosages followed inspired prophecy to deposit relics of Brennos at their cult centre as a talisman to dispel *gormes*.

(xiii) Generations later, the Volcae Tectosages lost sovereignty (that is, succumbed to *gormes*) when the relics of Brennos were revealed and withdrawn by a vain and ill-fated general [= Arthur in the Triads].⁴⁹

⁴⁹Bromwich, *Trioedd*, pp. 88–89.

NOTE ON A PARALLEL

If it can be accepted that this much of the legend of the British Brân has evolved from that of the Continental Brennos, then the saga *englynion* on the head and corpse of the sixth-century north British high-commander Urien Rheged become more meaningful as sharing in the same complex of themes.⁵⁰ Urien led a confederated national army into the land of a foreign foe. There he was killed and decapitated by his own followers. They took the head and left the body in their hasty retreat (or so it has been assumed from the extant tradition).

VI.

In considering the possible agencies by which our story was transferred from a Continental Celtic milieu to a medieval Welsh one, the early currency of Justinus in Britain is a likely factor, particularly for the traditions which couple Beli/Belinus with Brân/Brennius. There are, however, several obstacles to accepting such a Latinate, literary source as the sole factor. First, Justinus tells us nothing of such key episodes as the breaking and rebuilding of the bridges, the wading of the tallest Celts, nor that Brennos ordered his followers to kill him (he tells only that Brennus stabbed himself because he was no longer able to bear his wounds).⁵¹ Secondly, the medieval Welsh do not seem generally to have appreciated their own close kinship with the ancient Celts of continental Europe, so for the Welsh, at some date between Nennius and Geoffrey, to have adopted Justinus' Brennus *Dux Gallorum*, failed invader of Greece, as a native king would be rather more poorly motivated than their borrowing the successful conqueror of Rome, unless they were otherwise predisposed to make the equation. Furthermore, any such late acquisition of the story—after the Welsh had forgotten the Roman forts of the eastern seaboard and their names—would sever the link with Branodūnum. In other words, unless it is a coincidence (1) that Brân's deposited head warded off *gormes Saesson*, (2) that a Saxon Shore fort was named 'The Fort of Brân', and (3) that deposited relics of Brennos' campaign protected Tolosa from pestilence and invasion, then the legend had passed to Britain at an early date. What I am suggesting is that the relationship between the historical events and the Welsh wondertale is deep and fairly complex. A mere laying end to end of extant literary texts leaves much to be explained. As I proposed in an earlier number of this journal, with reference

⁵⁰Urien's head and corpse: Ifor Williams, *Canu Llywarch Hen* (Cardiff, 1935), pp. 12–15. The context of the stanzas is inferred from internal evidence combined with the brief summary of Urien's career in *Historia Brittonum*, §63. See further *The Beginnings of Welsh Poetry: Studies by Sir Ifor Williams*, edited by Rachel Bromwich, second edition (Cardiff, 1980), pp. 143–44. ⁵¹Edited by Ruehl (1886), p. 166 [xxv.8].

to the relationship of the historical Mandubracios the Trinovantian to the literary Manawydan,⁵² a factor of long-term and long-range Celtic oral tradition must again be appreciated even if it cannot yet be gauged with precision.

The cataclysmic quest for the wealth of Greece had in a way become destined since wine and luxurious Greek-made artefacts, like the enormous funerary vessels of Vix and Hochdorf, were first imprinted upon the prestige ideology of the barbarian hinterland in Hallstatt D times. A tribal society preoccupied with raiding, status, the feast, and aristocratic immortalization was henceforth indissolubly bound to the profoundly alien classical world. Bolgios and Brennos' invasion proved to be the central event of the last great episode of Continental Celtic expansion. As such, it was remembered in the origin traditions of several tribes at the time of the Roman conquest. Because it is specifically the western, Tolosan form of the story that connects Brennos with supernatural spoils (comparable to the *Peir Dadeni*, and to the *Peir Penn Annwryn* of the Book of Taliesin) and with a talismanic deposition, it seems probable that British traditions derive most immediately from the Gaulish, as is of course likely on geographical grounds. We know of a general process whereby the traditions of pre-English, and even pre-Roman, Celtic Britain were dislocated from the Old North and south-east Britain to live on in Wales. A similar staged encroachment had earlier affected Gaul and may be anticipated to have had similar results. In the later second century B.C., free Celtia retreated from Narbonensis to the interior, and in Caesar's time a final swell of north Gaulish immigrants arrived in Britain as refugees. Dynastic legends could be spread simply as stories, through the agency of the peripatetic professional bards and storytellers. But in the era of the contraction of the free Celts, we find also episodes of entire warrior aristocracies displaced under their king. So, for example, Commios of the Continental Atrebates (a Belgic tribe) was forced out by Caesar to found the Insular lineage which was to persist beyond the Claudian invasion as the client kingship of the Regnenses of Sussex. Within Britain itself, a similar process brought Belgic nobles under Caratacos into Wales about A.D. 45.⁵³ It is thus probable, though not certain, that some Tectosagian chiefs withdrew northward after the victory of Caepio. Alternatively, the Belgae may have possessed their own version of the saga of Brennos, independently of Toulouse. We should also remember that between the native and literate paths the Roman provincial world possessed individuals like Trogus Pompeius, who were aware of both their Celtic and their classical backgrounds and were capable

⁵²Koch, 'Welsh Window', pp. 17–52. ⁵³On the survival of Catuvellaunian traditions in Wales, see Koch, 'llawr en asseð', pp. 264–72; 'Welsh Window', pp. 17–52.

of consciously blending the two.⁵⁴ Roman Britain doubtless had its bearers of mixed traditions, forerunners of the learned bilinguals of medieval Wales.

VII.

I wish to conclude by saying that the present proposal—though perhaps carrying wider implications for the possible sources of early Insular Neo-Celtic literature—is not intended as a thoroughgoing 'solution' to *Branwen*. I am concerned with only the episodes specifically mentioned above and the origin of only one character, quite probably only one component in the sources of a composite character. In my view, the greatest obstacle to progress in the study of *The Four Branches*, or at least the appearance of progress, has been the fallacious exclusivist stance. To identify the historical origin of a feature in the surviving narrative does not 'explain' it in the sense of absolving us from seeking its latter-day purpose, nor vice versa, any more than reconstructing Indo-European from Welsh implies that the Welsh language itself is a dysfunctional wreckage. A competent traditional literature, like a language, will have—indeed must have—both diachronic origins and synchronic functions. The former remain largely mysterious to the living practitioners of the medium. This is simply how human discourse works. And so, though we may quibble over the stature of the *Mabinogi*'s redactor and the quality of his creation, no successful exorcism has yet been performed on Matthew Arnold's haunting metaphor of the *Mabinogi*'s storyteller as an unknowing peasant who builds his hut of materials pillaged from the ruins of Halicarnassus or Ephesus:

he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely;—stones 'not of this building,' but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic.⁵⁵

In the same essay, Arnold wrote the following less-quoted words on the specific subject of the tale of Brân's expedition, decapitation, and otherworldly feast:

⁵⁴Justinus epitomizes Trogus' Vocontian origin in Book XLIII.5 (edited by Ruehl, p. 243). ⁵⁵*On the Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer* (London, 1893), pp. 46–47. For a recent critique of Arnold's view as a preliminary to a synchronic approach to *The First Branch*, see Andrew Welsh, 'Traditional Tales and the Harmonizing of Story in Pwyll Pendeyic Dyuet', *CMCS*, 17 (Summer 1989), 15–16.

There is evidently mixed here, with the newer legend, a *detritus*, as the geologists would say, of something far older; and the secret of Wales and its genius is not truly reached until this *detritus*, instead of being called recent because it is found in contact with what is recent, is disengaged, and is made to tell its own story.⁵⁶

If the present effort has suggested a diachronic key to the genius of Wales, then that key is Celtic antiquity—not just ancient Celtic Britain, of which Welsh tradition itself is well enough aware that it is a relic—but also that remoter era of Celtic expansion—the ceaseless wars, floods, and migrations—which brought La Tène civilization to the British Isles.⁵⁷

⁵⁶*On the Study of Celtic Literature*, p. 50. ⁵⁷ I wish to thank Philip Freeman and Richard F. Thomas for their help in locating classical sources, and John Carey, R. Geraint Gruffydd, Joseph C. Harris, Proinsias Mac Cana, Brinley Rees, Patrick Sims-Williams, and Calvert Watkins for their numerous helpful comments on an early draft of this paper, some of which I obstinately ignored.