

Lhwyd, Edward (c. 1660-1709) was a Welsh naturalist, antiquary and philologist who pioneered modern methods of comparative linguistics. He is best known for his seminal work *Archaeologia Britannica*, of which only the first volume, *Glossography*, was published before his untimely death at the age of 49. Lhwyd was born the illegitimate son of Edward Lloyd of Llanforda, Oswestry, and Bridget Pryse of Glanfred, Tal-y-bont, Cardiganshire. His father, a passionate loyalist and a member of the landed gentry, was in constant financial difficulties. Being an ardent Welshman, he strove to preserve old Welsh spellings, and that, coupled with his desire to distance himself from his father and half-brothers, resulted in various spellings of his surname, among which the spelling Lhwyd stands out as the most prevalent form he used in his numerous correspondences. He was brought up by his father who had a strong enthusiasm for botany and experimental science.

After his father's death Lhwyd entered Jesus College Oxford in 1682. Driven by poverty, not too long after his matriculation he took on the position as an assistant at the new Ashmolean Museum of which his tutor Robert Plot was Keeper. He took this position very seriously and threw himself into a number of studies, e.g. chemistry, geology, anatomy and philology, which resulted in him drifting away from law, his initial discipline. He was also an active participant of the newly established Oxford Philosophical Society and gained the friendship of many learned men of the day. He became Under-keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in 1689 and subsequently Keeper after Plot's retirement in 1691. The role as Under-keeper was an unhappy one for Lhwyd; not only did he personally dislike Plot, his mentor and overseer, but tethered to the museum, he felt frustrated and anxious due to a lack of liberty to engage in field research in far off locales. He still made the best of this time making short research trips to various places in the British Isles. His excursions were often accompanied by unusual parties, including undergraduates whom he tutored, a college cook, and even little village children, all who helped him with various research related tasks. These trips were necessary not only for the museum but also for the purposes of his own research, and it led to the production of an eagerly anticipated catalogue of British fossils, which was finally published in 1699. During this period he also developed his interest in the field of antiquities and the languages of Britain.

In 1693, a new English edition of Camden's *Britannia* was begun with Edmund Gibson, Lhwyd's friend, as the editor. Gibson invited Lhwyd to be part of this project and asked him to supply additions for the north Wales counties. Lhwyd initially agreed to cover two or three counties, but eventually, due to other scholars' abandonment of their parts, he undertook the whole of Wales. This altered arrangement was not settled easily, however, for the publishers thought Lhwyd's proposed research methods and

the modest compensation he requested were unnecessary and ridiculous. Believing in the new Baconian philosophy of first-hand study of evidence in the field, he was determined to take speedy and yet thorough trips throughout Wales, focusing on south Wales, the region he was less familiar with. Also, in spite of Lhwyd's dislike of him, Robert Plot's recently published descriptions of English counties, namely *The Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677) and *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686), which employed the method of using questionnaires as a way to collect data, were influential in forming a clear research method in his mind and this influence lasted through the initial stages of his next project, *Archaeologia Britannica*.

Lhwyd's contribution to the new edition of Camden's *Britannia* received high praise; with detailed descriptions of the monuments and phenomena and the keen comments that accompany them, it was considered by consensus gentium as the most memorable of all the additions made to the book. In addition to its scholarly success, his revisions also inspired enthusiasm for Welsh heritage among the Welsh gentry. This newly kindled patriotism paved the way for *Archaeologia Britannica*, motivating some Welsh gentry members to sponsor Lhwyd to undertake a natural history of Wales. Encouraged by this enthusiastic reception, he published a 'Design' in 1695 describing the project and seeking support, and it was widely distributed in London and throughout Wales. Even though there were many refusals, mainly on account of the length of time that Lhwyd stated to be necessary for research and writing, on the whole the proposal was successful.

To Lhwyd it was obvious that comprehensive study of the history of Wales must include all of the British Isles. His aim was to discover traces of the pre-Roman inhabitants of Britain, as opposed to Camden's *Britannia*, which focused on the period of the Roman occupation and afterward. To achieve this goal, it was inevitable to survey all of the regions in which Celtic-speaking peoples lived. He first sent out extensive questionnaires, titled 'Parochial Queries', to Welsh parishes the following year and to Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland subsequently. The responses, while incomplete and fragmentary, played an important role in providing him with the basis of his study. In May 1697, with his three assistants, Lhwyd embarked on a long research tour of Wales, Cornwall, the Scottish Highlands, Ireland and Brittany. He returned to Oxford in 1701.

His original plan included multiple volumes: *A Historical & Geographical Dictionary*; *Archaeologia Britannica* in four parts; and the *Natural History of Wales*. Upon his return to Oxford, however, he changed his plan and decided to publish *Archaeologia Britannica* first partly because of financial reasons. As his research went on the enthusiastic initial response of subscribers had died down, and many had failed to keep their promises of financial support. By publishing what he thought was a more appealing part of the project, he hoped to appease the subscribers and secure further

funding. In November 1703, the writing of *Glossography*, the first part of *Archaeologia Britannica*, was finished, and after a slow printing process it was finally published in 1707. This volume contains formal grammars of Irish, Breton and Cornish; Irish, Breton and Welsh dictionaries; catalogues of Irish and Welsh manuscripts and discussions of etymologies with examples of phonetic change. In particular, sections titled 'Comparative etymology', 'Comparative vocabulary of the original languages of Britain and Ireland' and 'British etymologicon' reveal Lhwyd's preoccupation with the question of the origins and inter-relationships of the languages of Britain and Ireland. Focusing on borrowings and cognates between the languages, he attempted to show the historical relationships of the peoples of these lands and ultimately justified the use of the term, 'Celtic languages'. Although it caused some disappointment among his supporters (because they were expecting a work of natural history,) *Glossography* is recognized as a ground-breaking work that laid the foundations for the phonetics of comparative European linguistics.

Further Reading

Evans & Roberts, *Edward Lhwyd Archaeologia Britannica: Texts & Translations*; Ellis, 'Some Incidents in the Life of Edward Lhuyd' in *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1908, 1-51 ; R. T. Gunther, *Life and Letters of Edward Lhwyd* (vol. xiv of 'Early Science in Oxford'); N. Edwards, *The Antiquaries Journal* 87, 165-96; B. F. Roberts, *Folklore* 120, 36-56;

STUDIA CELTICA

Nicholas J. Higham, *King Arthur: The Making of the Legend* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018). Pp. 392. £25.00. ISBN 978-0-300-21092-7

This is a thoroughly researched and clearly organised survey on the various origination theories regarding King Arthur. Instead of stopping at merely presenting and investigating each theory, Higham offers a conclusion that encompasses all of the Arthur theories that have been postulated up until now. With clear objectives stated in the introduction and the unflagging execution of those objectives throughout the book, it is a one-stop shop for a comprehensive study of the historicity of that ever-fascinating figure, King Arthur.

This book is largely divided into two parts with each part consisting of four chapters. Part I examines theories that identify Arthur as a non-British figure and Part II reviews the evidence on which the British Arthur theories are based followed by a conclusion. Chapter 1 examines the hypothesis that the legend of Arthur began from the Roman soldier and administrator L. Artorius Castus. First postulated by the American linguist Kemp Malone in 1925, this theory is backed by the phonological resemblance between the Welsh name Arthur and the Roman name Artorius and the two inscriptions found in Roman Dalmatia (modern-day Podstrana, Croatia), which mentions that L. Artorius Castus was stationed in Britain some time during his career. With in-depth scrutiny of the inscriptions and the sociohistorical background of the time, the author resolutely concludes that the claims that King Arthur originated from the 'Dalmatian' L. Artorius Castus are unconvincing. I am particularly struck by his fair and unbiased treatment of the hypothesis, not only in this chapter but also throughout the entire book; it is clear that Higham tries to stick only to what can be known in his deductive process, making well-educated speculations when necessary. This prevents his conclusions from being far-fetched or muddled with hopeful and yet incorrect assumptions.

Chapters 2 and 3 address two 'Sarmatian connection' theories that argue for their legitimacy based on cultural and literary similarities to the Arthurian legends. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, the author plays each theory out and investigates them engaging in detailed historical studies and comparative literary analysis. Despite its seemingly stimulating possibility, Higham disproves the claim that the Sarmatian cultural and religious elements were transmitted to Britain and ultimately to the medieval Arthurian stories by Iazygan warriors recruited into Roman armies. He spends a lot of time exploring the Nart sagas in chapter 3, focusing on the story of

Batraz and other important literary motifs such as the sword in the water, Avalon and the Holy Grail. His analysis of various versions of the Nart sagas, densely and yet efficiently compiled and boiled down, naturally flows to the conclusion that historical connections cannot be assumed solely based on shared motifs of literary sources, especially from a time when oral tradition was the main method on which information was carried.

The fourth chapter, devoted to scrutiny on the 'Greek connection' hypothesis which was first posited by the classicist Graham Anderson in 2004, is the most linguistically oriented section of the book. This is only natural since the main strength of the theory lies in the presence of names very similar to Arthur in pre-classical Greek literature. The author takes us through the investigation of the roles of these names in early Greek literature, the possibility of dissemination of the 'Greek Arthur' stories into the west, and the survivability of the disseminated stories through late Antiquity. Finally he ends the chapter with a parallel analysis of the British Arthur and the postulated pre-Arthur figures in Greek mythology.

The book changes its course with chapter 5 as the focus of the discussion turns to the British Isles. In an effort to untangle a myriad of sources from early post-Roman Britain regarding who Arthur may have been, the author aims to consider mainly three possibilities; Arthur as a Celtic god or demi-god of the pre-Roman or Roman periods, Arthur as Riothamus, the fifth-century British ruler, and finally the Arthur depicted in Latin or Old Welsh works written in Britain between c. 500 and c. 800. After concise attention given to the first two, the bulk of the discussion is spent on British texts written in the sub-Roman period, chiefly Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*. Higham points out that the absence of Arthur in the only near-contemporary account available to us creates an obvious problem in an attempt to prove him as a historical figure. More importantly, he argues that the discrepancies on the conception of history between the time of Gildas's writing and today should be taken into consideration. This is the main idea that forms the grand conclusion of the book in chapter 8.

Chapter 6 and 7 deals with written works from the Middle Ages that establish Arthur as a British hero. The entirety of chapter 6 is focused on the *Historia Brittonum*; more specifically the purpose of the work, the sources of the information the writer collected, and the ways in which the gleaned information are presented. Higham's main argument here is that it is difficult to view the *Historia Brittonum* as a work of history; rather it should be viewed as a pastoral sermon or political propaganda since, despite its title 'Historia', it displays an approach to history which is vastly different from the ways we think of the subject today. He concludes, therefore, it would be problematic to accept Arthur's achievements depicted in chapter 56 of the *Historia Brittonum* as real events.

The eighth and final chapter, titled “‘Fire’, ‘Smoke’ and ‘Highland Mist’”, is a reflective summary of all of the theories considered in the previous chapters and a firm invitation to a new way to view Arthur and the numerous versions of the stories surrounding him. Supported by the fact that Arthur was not always at the center of attention throughout history, namely during the age of Renaissance when very little was written about him, Higham contends that historical or pseudo-historical materials relevant to the study of Arthur should be viewed within their historiographical contexts and that inquiries on when and why of his popularity should precede arguments on whether he actually existed or not. While many scholars employ the ‘no smoke without fire’ theory in their approaches to Arthur, the author asserts that there is neither smoke in the air nor fire beneath, but fantastical ‘highland mist’. This ‘highland mist’, however, he concludes, has its value in that it provides us with insights to the world-views and purposes of the creators of the mist. This conclusion, while fitting within the stated objectives of the book, seems incomplete and asks for a second volume focusing on this ‘highland mist’.

Such a brief review cannot do justice to the extensive collection and objective analysis of materials neatly organised in less than 400 pages. While the ending leaves something more to desire, there is no doubt that anyone who is in search of more information about the historicity of King Arthur, whether as an academic or a non-academic enthusiast, will learn a great deal from reading this book.