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THE LIVES OF ST WENEFRED (BHL 8847-8851)*

I. THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF ST WENEFRED: CONTEXT OF STUDY

The Welsh virgin martyr Wenefred commands an imposing host of apparently intractable difficulties that make her one of the most enigmatic, and consequently most intriguing, insular saints¹. The earliest extant literature concerning her dates from the twelfth century and comprises two *vitae*: the anonymous *Vita S. Wenefrede* [BHL 8847-8] and the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* [BHL 8849-51]. The latter presents few immediate problems as it is known to have been written by Robert (d. 1168)², prior of the Benedictine abbey of SS Peter and Paul in Shrewsbury, and is dated to 1140 when Gwarin (1124-1142)³, to whom the work is dedicated, was prior of Worcester Cathedral⁴. At this time, Shrewsbury Abbey was a relatively new foundation: construction had begun in 1083, at which time the acquisition of a new saint had also been planned, since holy relics were the most effective way of bringing both gravitas and financial benefits to a religious house⁵. Prior Robert was charged with bringing the relics of the chosen saint, Wenefred, from North Wales to Shrewsbury in the years 1137-8, and he relates an account of this trip and of the translation of the relics to the abbey⁶. Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* is preserved in three manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 114 (s. XII, 'possibly the original')⁷;

* List of abbreviations: p. 131.

¹ The author Ellis Peters was inspired to write a Cadfael mystery around the saint's translation in *A Morbid Taste for Bones*, London, 1977.

² KNOWLES, *Religious Houses*, p. 79.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴ LAPIDGE – SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 22; KNOWLES, *Religious Houses*, p. 83.

⁵ M. LAPIDGE, *The Saintry Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, in M. GODDEN – M. LAPIDGE (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 244-6.

⁶ H. PRYCE, *Pastoral Care in Early Medieval Wales*, in J. BLAIR – R. SHARPE (ed.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, Leicester, 1992, p. 60.

⁷ LBS, vol. III, p. 186.

Cambridge, Trinity College O. 4. 42 (s. XIII); and Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 8072 (s. XVII)⁸.

The history of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*⁹, however, is less straightforward. It is preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Claudius A. v, an early thirteenth-century manuscript thought to have been written at Worcester, the only *vita* with a Welsh connection in a collection of four saints' lives¹⁰. The date and origin of this anonymous *vita* are contestable. It is widely held to be Wenefred's *vita prima* since it makes no mention of her disinterment in 1138, which date is agreed as the *terminus ante quem*¹¹. An appendix of miracles must be dated after 1135 when the Normans were expelled from Gwynedd, but it has been suggested that this appendix may be a later addition¹². Although preserved only in the Worcester manuscript, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is generally believed to hail from Wenefred's locality, Englefield, modern-day Flintshire, in North Wales¹³. However, whether it may be described as belonging naturally to the corpus of Cambro-Latin hagiography is also debatable: Arthur Wade-Evans and William Fleetwood are convinced of Welsh authorship¹⁴; Sabine Baring-Gould and John Fisher believe the author to be a monk of the nearby Basingwerk Abbey, Flintshire, which was populated by Savignac Normans¹⁵; Julia Smith suggests that the *libellus miraculorum*

⁸It is edited by the Bollandists as *Vita secunda Sanctae Wenefredae et ejusdem translatio*, in AASS, Nov. t. I, pp. 708-31 (hereafter VETSW).

⁹LAPIDGE - SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 38. The following editions have been published: *Vita S. Wenefrede*, in AASS, Nov. t. I, pp. 691-708; *Vita Sanctae Winfrede*, in W. REES (ed.), *Lives of the Cambro-British Saints*, London, 1853, pp. 198-209, with a translation at pp. 515-29 (see K. MEYER, *A Collation of Rees' Lives of the Cambro-Latin Saints*, in *Y Cymmrodor*, 13 [1900], pp. 88-9, for corrections); *Vita Sancte Wenefrede*, in A. W. WADE-EVANS (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, Cardiff, 1944 (hereafter VSBG), pp. 299-309, with a facing translation. Wade-Evans' edition (hereafter VSW) will be used for the purposes of this article because it is the most accessible, but see reviews by T. JONES, in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1943-4), pp. 157-65, and J. C. DAVIES, in *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, 1 (1947), pp. 141-53 for corrections.

¹⁰VSBG, pp. XVI-XVII.

¹¹LBS, vol. III, p. 186; AASS, Nov. t. I, p. 691.

¹²LBS, vol. III, p. 185.

¹³VSBG, p. xvi.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. xvi; FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, p. 61.

¹⁵LBS, vol. III, p. 186.

attached to the *vita* was written for the monks there but does not propose by whom¹⁶.

It has been suggested that the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* are independent of each other on the grounds that the *Vita S. Wenefrede* contains a reference to Wenefred's pilgrimage to Rome, but Robert states in his *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* that he is not prepared to recount the episode not having found it 'in libris'¹⁷. Meanwhile it seems likely that the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, traditionally considered the *vita prima*, is not in fact based upon the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* because it does not contain the lengthy account of Wenefred's journey from Holywell to Gwytherin, it does not mention Wenefred's translation to Shrewsbury, and it contains more place-names than the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*. However, the similarity of the stories recounted demonstrates clearly that there is some relationship between the two *vitae*. Both agree that Wenefred was a Welsh virgin living in Tegeingl in North Wales (in a town now called Holywell); the *Vita S. Wenefrede* places the events of her life in the reign of Cadfan in Gwynedd, which is dated to the early seventh century¹⁸. Wenefred is left at home while her parents are at church hearing St Beuno give mass one Sunday when Caradog, a man of royal stock, comes from hunting to the house to ask for a drink. Finding Wenefred alone, his desire changes to one of a more amorous nature and he propositions her. Wenefred had from an early age devoted herself to God and is not amenable to his suggestion. Asking for permission to change into clothes more appropriate for a royal bride-to-be, Wenefred takes the opportunity of being out of sight to escape from her chamber through the valley to Beuno's church. Caradog, realising that she is escaping, catches up with her and beheads her at the threshold of the church. A healing fountain springs up where her blood fell to the ground. St Beuno curses the murderer so that he melts away, and then revives the girl. Some years later, Wenefred ends her life in the village of Gwytherin in Denbighshire, some nine miles from Holywell. The uniformity of the basic story would appear to demand that we posit at least one common source from which both *vitae* are derived. This hypothesis

¹⁶SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 341.

¹⁷LBS, vol. III, p. 186; FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, p. 31; VETSW, p. 709.

¹⁸VSW, p. 288; AASS, Nov. t. I, p. 695; J. DAVIES, *Hanes Cymru*, London, 1990, p. 54.

is strengthened when we consider what would otherwise seem like simple recasting:

VSW: Area uero sanguine eius infecta crepuit, torrensque fons ibidem iriguus scaturiuit. Cuius lapides usque in hodiernum diem utpote in die prima sanguinolenti uidentur. Mussa etiam, ut thus, odorat, et diuersis languoribus medetur. (p. 292)

VETSW: Et quoniam de corpore in descensu devexi montis iacente multus fuerat effusus sanguis, lapides aspergine ipsius infecti tam in fontis scaturigine quam in rivo illius seu in amborum margine passim iacebant ... Muscicula vero, quae eisdem lapidibus adhaeret, quasi thus redolet. (p. 714)

However, scholarly attention has thus far focused not so much on the problems surrounding the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and its relationship with the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*, but rather, under the influence of the now outmoded tendency to take hagiography at face value, on questions concerning the actual existence of the saint and the authenticity of her cult. One of the earliest Wenefred scholars was William Fleetwood, Bishop of St Asaph, who, as a good Protestant, was concerned over the popularity of Philip Metcalf's 1712 edition, *The Life of St Winefride*, itself based upon a paraphrase by J[ohn] F[alconer] of Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*¹⁹. Fleetwood responded in 1713 with *The Life and Miracles of St Wenefrede*, reproducing Metcalf's English text with an extremely damning and scholarly introduction as well as incredulous footnotes on Catholic gullibility: 'his treatise strongly supported the view that the cult of St Winefride was a monkish post-Conquest fabrication'²⁰. This opinion was later expressed by John Willis-Bund, who counted Wenefred the most striking example of the tendency for the Latin church to incorporate entirely fictitious Welsh saints: 'If she ever existed (which is doubtful), she had nothing to do with Wales, but the Latin writers have palmed her off as a Welsh virgin martyr of the seventh century'²¹. While outdated concerns about 'the truth' do not really deserve discussion here, the accusation that Wenefred herself 'had nothing to do with Wales' inevitably has relevance for the authorship

¹⁹ P. METCALF, *Life of St Winefride*, ed. H. THURSTON, London, 1917; J. F[ALCONER], *The Admirable Life of Saint Wenefride*, St Omer, 1635, reprinted (= *English Recusant Literature*, 319), Ilkley, 1976.

²⁰ FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede* (cf. note 13); HALL, *Pilgrimage*, p. 21.

²¹ WILLIS-BUND, *Characteristics*, pp. 290-1; see also A. W. HADDAN and W. E. STUBBS (ed.), *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. I, Oxford, 1869, p. 161.

debate over the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, as it might seem to preclude native Welsh authorship. Furthermore, it carries implications for the possible common source of Wenefred's *vitae*. It is perhaps worth addressing briefly why this scepticism may be unfounded.

The lack of any extant reference to Wenefred before her two *vitae* were written is a traditional complaint²². Although it was not until the end of the eleventh century that the church's religious and political needs gave rise to most of the *vitae* of saints in Wales, over three hundred years later than their beginnings in Brittany, Ireland and England²³, there is considerable circumstantial evidence to demonstrate that saints' cults had long been flourishing. As Wendy Davies notes, 'We do not lack pre-Conquest references to saints and the virtue of saintly powers: Dewi and Mary are called upon in the tenth-century poem *Armes Prydein*; Dewi, Teilo and Padarn are mentioned in the *Triads*; we have dedications to local saints from the eighth century in the charters of Llandaff'²⁴. It is consequently perhaps surprising to some that Wenefred is not found in this tradition and did not capture the imagination of poets until the fifteenth century²⁵. However, a number of reasons for her absence from extant texts present themselves, the most obvious being the poor survival of manuscripts inside Wales. Secondly, as Julia Smith has said of Brittany, 'we may suspect that written texts are but the tip of the iceberg whose submerged mass was formed of oral stories, irrecoverably lost'²⁶. Davies would seem to support this notion in Wales on the grounds that the characteristics of the late eleventh- and early twelfth-century *vitae* are sufficiently distinctive to suggest the continuation of a tradition rather than the emergence of a new one²⁷. Thirdly, the silence in Wales surrounding Wenefred is explicable in terms of the localisation of Welsh saints: as Willis-Bund has discussed, the Welsh saint was a saint of a district²⁸. Smith has developed this idea, pointing out that the intensely local nature of cults in Wales manifests itself clearly in one pre-Conquest

²² LBS, vol. III, p. 187; FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, p. 15.

²³ HENKEN, *Traditions*, p. 5.

²⁴ DAVIES, *Property Rights*, pp. 517-18.

²⁵ HENKEN, *Traditions*, p. 28.

²⁶ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 338.

²⁷ DAVIES, *Property Rights*, p. 517.

²⁸ WILLIS-BUND, *Characteristics*, p. 287. See also O. PADEL, *A Popular Dictionary of Cornish Place-Names*, Penzance, 1988, p. 19.

liturgical manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College 50) containing the 'Martyrology of Rhigyfarch', compiled c. 1076-81²⁹, a version of the Hieronymian martyrology with many Irish and a few Breton saints added: 'the only Welsh saint listed is Padarn, the patron of the church at which the martyrology was written'³⁰. Consequently it seems incongruous to read the absence of a local saint in particular extant texts as proof of inauthenticity. With only one dedication in Flintshire³¹, not only was Wenefred a very local saint, but her position itself in the north of Wales would have isolated her to a certain degree from other hagiographic activity. The saints for whom we have pre-Conquest mention are almost exclusively from west and south-west Wales. Moreover, other saints are not subjected to such reasoning, and the manner of Wenefred's treatment is perhaps the consequence of the widespread development of her cult in the fifteenth century – the popularity of which continues up to the present day³² – making more modern minds susceptible to forgetting the early, more humble beginnings of her cult. The slightly more unexpected silences that followed the composition of Wenefred's *vitae* – which Fleetwood and Baring-Gould and Fisher read as reflecting scepticism towards Wenefred's cult – are perhaps also explicable in the same terms³³.

Despite the fact that neither of Wenefred's *vitae* refer to Holywell specifically, preferring to describe the place as Wenefred's Spring, the lack of early references to Holywell, and particularly its absence from the 1086 Domesday survey, has also caused concern³⁴. However, De Smedt and Baring-Gould and Fisher have suggested that Holywell may possibly be the otherwise unidentified place called *Weltune* in the

²⁹ *The Psalter and Martyrology of Ricemarch*, ed. H. J. LAWLOR (= Henry Bradshaw Society, 47-8), 2 vols., London, 1914; LAPIDGE – SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 41.

³⁰ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 339, n. 132.

³¹ LBS, vol. III, p. 193.

³² HALL, *Pilgrimage*, p. 43.

³³ See, for example, her absence from the Calendar of Welsh saints in the early thirteenth-century manuscript London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. xiv (*The Kalendar of the Vitae Sanctorum Wallensium*, ed. S. M. HARRIS, in *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, 3 (1953), pp. 3-53). Kathleen Hughes has demonstrated that the compilers' interests were centered on saints from west and south-east Wales in *British Library MS. Cotton Vespasian A. xiv (Vitae sanctorum Wallensium): Its Purpose and Provenance*, in her *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D. N. DUMVILLE, Woodbridge, 1980, p. 57.

³⁴ LBS, vol. III, p. 187; AASS, Nov. t. I, p. 694; FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, pp. 23-4.

survey, since Holywell is Trefynnon, literally 'well-town', in Welsh³⁵. The 'first record to the shrine as a place of pilgrimage' has been dated to 1115 by three scholars who do not give clear reference to their source³⁶. They all agree that Earl Richard of Chester (d. 1120)³⁷ made a pilgrimage to the well. However, the only obvious source for this story appears to be a metrical life of St Werburg of Chester, of sixteenth century origin³⁸. James Tait has pointed out that this life also relates how Richard took shelter at Basingwerk Abbey, which was not founded until 1131 – there seems no reason to believe that the Life is a reliable source³⁹. More promising is a charter of Earl Richard in 1119 confirming gifts given to Chester Abbey in his time and in his father's time. Among the grants is the first reference to Holywell demonstrating that a church existed there: 'Burel dedit ecclesiam de Haliwella, et decimam de molendino suo et de omnibus rebus suis'⁴⁰. Although the charter is taken from an *inspeximus* of 1280, Tait seems to look favourably upon its authenticity, and the 1119 date fits in with the ownership battle over Holywell that Chester Abbey waged with Basingwerk Abbey for the rest of the century⁴¹.

Meanwhile, the landscape of Holywell itself would have recommended it as an ideal site for a saint's cult. Considerable evidence has been compiled by both Anne Ross and Francis Jones pertaining to early British veneration of water in the form of wells, springs, pools and boggy places: 'The numbers of shrines which have a well or spring as their focal point, pertaining to the pre-Christian period is impressive, while votive deposits from wells and deities associated with such places are numerous'⁴². Jones details the subsequent attempts of the Christian church to forbid such worship with conciliar edicts, secular pressure from kings like Ecgerht, Edgar and Cnut in England, and from individual churchmen such as Gildas, who

³⁵ Cheshire, ed. P. MORGAN (= *Domesday Book*, 26), Chichester, 1978, p. 269b; LBS, vol. III, p. 187; AASS, Nov. t. I, p. 694.

³⁶ E. HUBBARD, *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd*, Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 371; see also JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 49, and HALL, *Pilgrimage*, p. 26.

³⁷ TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. 26.

³⁸ Henry BRADSHAW, *The Life of St Werburge of Chester*, ed. C. HORSTMAN (= *Early English Text Society*, 88), London, 1887, pp. 179-80.

³⁹ TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. 44, n. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3 and pp. 236-7.

⁴² ROSS, *Severed-Heads*, p. 32; JONES, *Holy Wells*, pp. 34-6.

denounced the old beliefs in 'mountains and hills and rivers ... on which, in those days, a blind people heaped divine honours'⁴³. However, both Jones and Ross argue that the church was eventually forced to incorporate the well-cult, particularly in Celtic areas: Ross goes as far as to state that 'we find practically every early Celtic saint having a holy well associated with him, while his local "cult legend" is often a practically unmodified perpetuation of the earlier pagan tradition'⁴⁴. Jones counts some two hundred examples of chapels and churches built at or near holy wells in Wales, asserting that while it is impossible to prove that all owe their location to a pre-Christian holy well, 'the tradition of the siting is too consistent and widespread to be set aside lightly'⁴⁵. As Elissa Henken notes, the extraordinary volume of water that gushed from Wenefred's well has been recorded by later poets and historians⁴⁶, and Baring-Gould and Fisher report that the well was believed to supply water at the rate of one hundred tons per minute⁴⁷. That Holywell should have been one such site of pre-Christian veneration does not seem surprising, nor consequently does its development into a Christian cult. As Smith notes, 'beyond literate, narrowly clerical concerns, saints were part of that preliterate Welsh society of oral and visual referents and collective memory, linked through local landmark or physical object to the communities whose devotion they inspired'⁴⁸.

The notion that Wenefred's cult was a twelfth-century invention implies that the second half of Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* is a fabrication. Although Robert is foremost a hagiographer, and therefore cannot be trusted as a reliable source for events concerning Wenefred's life⁴⁹, there is some reason to suggest that his account of the translation of Wenefred from Gwytherin to Shrewsbury – which operation he led – is reliable, such as his willingness to detail in what year of whose reign events occur (which is a marked

⁴³ JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 22; *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. M. WINTERBOTTOM (= *Arthurian Period Sources*, 7) London, 1978, p. 90, with a translation at p. 17.

⁴⁴ ROSS, *Severed-Heads*, p. 32; JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 24.

⁴⁶ HENKEN, *Traditions*, pp. 147-8.

⁴⁷ *LBS*, vol. III, p. 195.

⁴⁸ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 342.

⁴⁹ For discussion of the pseudo-historical tendencies of hagiographers, see DAVIES, *Property Rights*, p. 525, and HUGHES, *MS. Cotton Vespasian A. xiv*, p. 54.

difference to his silence with regard to dates of any kind in his account of Wenefred's *vita*)⁵⁰. Robert openly explains that the monks of Shrewsbury had been searching for a new saint for fifty years, especially looking towards Wales for a saint for their new monastery:

Et quoniam in Wallia, quae vicina erat eis, multorum corpora sanctorum retineri audierant, quia eadem provincia ante multis inhabitata sit sanctis quorum merita diversis in locis praedicabantur, qualiter aliquem illorum habere possent omnimodis perscrutari studuerunt⁵¹.

Are we to assume that Robert's account of the Shrewsbury monks' visit to the Bishop of Bangor and the disinterment of Wenefred from Gwytherin are also fictitious⁵²? It seems a little surprising that Robert would invent such factual events in the period in which he – and his readers – were living. The question must be asked, moreover, that if Wenefred had no cult before the twelfth century and had not proved herself a powerful saint, why did the monks of Shrewsbury spend some four years attempting to acquire her relics? If her cult were indeed a twelfth-century fabrication, it would seem easier to have invented a legend around a more accessible saint, closer to home.

Further discussion of the viability of an early cult is unnecessary here: any modern reader wishing to consult the relevant critical material will see that many of the concerns expressed about Wenefred are now hopelessly outdated and often entirely irrelevant⁵³. It is clear that Wenefred has traditionally caused puzzlement among early scholars, and also that she has not been assessed in the light of recent progress made in the field of Cambro-Latin hagiography. This article will seek to redress this balance, to examine the dynamics between the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefrede*, and to attempt to clarify issues of origin, date and authorship for the *Vita S. Wenefrede*.

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⁵⁰ *VETSW*, pp. 726-7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 727.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 728-30.

⁵³ See, for example, Fleetwood and Baring-Gould and Fisher wondering why Wenefred is not included in Bede (*St Wenefrede*, p. 46; *LBS*, vol. III, p. 187).

II. THE *VITA S. WENEFREDE*: THE QUEST FOR AUTHORSHIP*The Vita*

While it is possible to speculate that there was already a cult at Holywell based on the spring before the twelfth century, to what extent the *Vita S. Wenefrede* may be described as having 'nothing to do with Wales' is yet to be determined. It is usually assumed that a saint's life owes its origin to the place in which the cult is established, especially since the hagiographer's main aim was often to promote the interests of the specific religious house with which the saint is connected⁵⁴. However, in Wenefred's case, a number of options present themselves in connection with the *Vita S. Wenefrede* due both to the various houses with which Wenefred was associated and to the political tug-of-war between the Normans and the Welsh over Flintshire at the start of the twelfth century. The first mention of Holywell, as has also been noted above, comes in a charter granting it to St Werburg's Abbey, Chester, in 1119⁵⁵. At some point during the earldom of Ranulf II (1129-53)⁵⁶, however, Holywell was given to Basingwerk Abbey by Robert de Pierrepont despite the earlier grant to Chester⁵⁷. Under the earldom of Hugh II (1153-81)⁵⁸, Holywell was once again restored to St Werburg's, but it had fallen into Welsh hands due to attacks on Flintshire by the end of the twelfth century, and was confirmed as belonging to Basingwerk in 1240 by Dafydd ap Llywelyn, prince of Wales⁵⁹. Authorship is thus linked to a great extent with dating, depending on who, at any one particular time, would have had vested interests in the fortunes of Holywell. The divide over possible authorship for the *Vita S. Wenefrede* has been noted above, the two main theories being that the author was either Welsh (at a time when there was call to fight back against Norman encroachment on Welsh churches and the consequent trend for re-dedication to foreign saints)⁶⁰, or was a Norman monk from Basing-

⁵⁴ DAVIES, *Property Rights*, p. 525.

⁵⁵ TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁵⁷ JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 171; TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. 45, n. 5.

⁵⁸ TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. iv.

⁵⁹ JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 172; TAIT, *Chartulary*, p. 45, n. 5, and p. 236-7.

⁶⁰ HENKEN, *Traditions*, p. 5.

werk Abbey, initially a Savignac foundation established in 1131 but absorbed by the Cistercians in 1147-8⁶¹. A third possibility is that the author was an Anglo-Norman monk of St Werburg's Abbey, Chester, of which Holywell was a dependency at various times in the eleventh century – when it did not belong to Basingwerk. The fact that the Chester monks colluded with the Shrewsbury monks in removing Wenefred's relics from Gwytherin might imply that they could not have written the *vita*, since it would seem unlikely that they would be so keen to help remove Wenefred's relics and set up a second pilgrimage centre in Shrewsbury. However, the Chester monks might have felt that an alliance between their fellow Benedictine monks at Shrewsbury might have given them a stronger claim over Wenefred's cult (and thus Holywell) in the struggle with the Savignac, and then Cistercian, monks of Basingwerk, with Chester managing her shrine and Shrewsbury holding her relics. However, it seems extremely unlikely that Robert would not have seen the *Vita S. Wenefrede* if it were of Chester authorship – assuming, of course, that it had indeed been written by that time⁶².

The dating of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* to before 1138, as was noted above, is based upon the fact that it makes no mention of Wenefred's disinterment from Gwytherin by the Shrewsbury monks. However, this reasoning is not incontestable: there seems little reason for an author concerned exclusively with promoting Holywell either to be aware of Wenefred's translation from Gwytherin or – if he was – even to feel it deserved mention in his *vita*. Furthermore, the question why Robert had not seen the saint's *vita prima* – whether of Chester authorship or otherwise – must be asked, especially since he states that he has collected materials from the churches related to the saint⁶³. Similarly, the bishop of Bangor regarded Wenefred as a neglected saint in 1138, and this seems unlikely if a *vita* had already been composed⁶⁴. However, explanations for these problems are not impossible – for example, localisation may once again have prevented the bishop from being aware of a *vita*, and those in possession of the

⁶¹ JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 170.

⁶² VETSW, p. 727.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 708. It has been suggested that the original site of the Abbey is not the same as where the ruins stand today, about a mile away from Holywell. However, the only definite site put forward as the possible original is still only three miles away from Holywell. See WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 89.

⁶⁴ VETSW, p. 728.

Vita S. Wenefrede may have withheld it from Robert, feeling that co-operation with the Shrewsbury monks was not in their interest. Although this would seem to defeat the propagandising purpose of writing a *vita* in the first place, Robert was not making any direct claim on Holywell itself. The traditionally posited date for the *Vita S. Wenefrede* of before 1138 is unhelpful in ascertaining authorship, since it is in the earldom of Ranulf II, during which – at a some point – Holywell was taken from Chester and given to Basingwerk. If the *Vita S. Wenefrede* was not the *vita prima*, it is not just the perplexities of Ranulf II's earldom that must be dealt with. To find a solution to these problems, it seems sensible to assess the *Vita S. Wenefrede* for clues as to authorship, and any light this may shed upon dating. For the time being, and in order to move on, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* will be assumed the *vita prima*.

The *Vita S. Wenefrede* is somewhat idiosyncratic in the context of extant contemporary Cambro-Latin hagiography. Even temporarily leaving aside the *libellus miraculorum* (which itself makes Wenefred unique among Welsh saints) because of allegations that it may be a later addition, there are two main problems with the *Vita S. Wenefrede* which might suggest complications in assigning it to a Welsh writer in Flintshire: Wenefred's name and her unique position as the only early female Welsh saint with her own *vita*.

Wenefred's Name

The first extant record of her Latin name, *Wenefreda*, is in the saint's *vita prima*. Although not recorded properly until 1346⁶⁵, her Welsh name, *Gwenfrewy*, is clearly known to Robert, who explains it as a compound of *Wen*, 'white', and her original name, *Brewa*⁶⁶. Baring-Gould and Fisher have noted that it is impossible to square the two names philologically, and that it seems likely that *Gwenfrewy* was 'guessed into the partly English name Winefred'⁶⁷. Since only unsatisfactory attempts have been made to interpret the unique Welsh *Gwenfrewy*⁶⁸, it seems as plausible to wonder if *Gwenfrewy* could be

⁶⁵ *Hystoria o Uuched Beuno*, in *VSBG*, pp. 16-22 (hereafter *HoUB*), at p. 19; HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ *VETSW*, p. 714, for Welsh *gwen* + *brewy*.

⁶⁷ *LBS*, vol. III, pp. 190-1.

⁶⁸ For discussion of *frewy*, see J. RHYS, *The Loss of Indo-European P in the Celtic Languages*, in *Revue Celtique*, 2 (1875), p. 336, who suggests a relation to *ffrwd*, 'brook',

a Welsh approximation of *Wenefreda*. Either way, the invention of *Wenefreda* might suggest that the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* was not a Welshman. However, if *Gwenfrewy* was indeed 'guessed into' *Wenefreda*, this leaves the problem of how Robert came to use the same strange Latinization when he had not seen the *vita prima*. Two possibilities immediately present themselves. Firstly, *Wenefreda* may have come into general circulation from the *vita prima* and may have been used, for example, in the legendaries of the churches that Robert is believed to have consulted⁶⁹. He would therefore not have had to see the *vita prima* to be aware of the saint's Latinization. Secondly, the source from which both Robert and the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* drew their material may have been a Latin source, already containing Wenefred's Latinized name. On the evidence above, therefore, this original source could not have been written by a Welshman either.

However, this argument can be disputed. Firstly, despite problems of interpretation, there is evidence to suggest that *Gwenfrewy* is an authentic Welsh name. *Gwen*, the first component, can mean both 'white' and by extension 'holy' and is an extremely common name-element both in vernacular literature (cf. *Gwenhwyfar*, *Gwenwledyr*, *Gwenlliant*) and as part of other saints' names (cf. *Gwynllyw*, *Gwynnog*, *Gwenfyl*). Francis Jones has moreover noted the common use of *gwyn* both as prefix and suffix in names connected with Welsh wells and lists twenty-one examples⁷⁰. Of the second component, *frewy*, or *brewy*, which has caused the interpretational difficulties⁷¹, there is only one known parallel in the vernacular *Triads*, in which one of the Three Powerful Swineherds is named *Coll mab Collfrewy*⁷². Rachel Bromwich suggests that, mindful of *Gwenfrewy*, *Collfrewy* (where *coll* may mean 'hazel') may also denote a woman's name, but reminds us that 'common elements in the names of father and son occur frequently in Welsh as in Anglo-Saxon and other

echoing the common South Wales brook-name *Gwenffrwd*, and BARING-GOULD and FISHER's rebuttal of this suggestion in their *LBS*, vol. III, p. 190.

⁶⁹ *LBS*, vol. III, p. 186.

⁷⁰ JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 49.

⁷¹ On Robert's evidence of the circumstances surrounding the later *gwen* addition, it seems possible to wonder if *brewy* could be derived from *briw*, meaning 'wound' or 'fragment'. See BARTRUM, *Genealogical Tracts*, p. 149, n. 5, for *Briw* as the name of one of Llywarch Hen's sons.

⁷² *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, ed. R. BROMWICH, 2nd ed., London, 1978, p. 45.

languages⁷³. The suffix -wy may be found in both female names (cf. Creirwy, Euronwy) and male names (cf. Rhonabwy, Gilfaethwy) however, and furthermore names that are not gender-specific are found in Welsh: Sanan, Nefydd and Gwawr are used for both sexes⁷⁴. The more similar Gwenabwy is likewise found as the daughter of Kaw in *Culhwch and Olwen* but as the son of Gwen in *The Gododdin*⁷⁵. Consequently the Collfrewy parallel need not be seen as troublesome, but rather as positive evidence for Welsh usage of the second element.

Relevant to the question of whether Gwenfrewy was 'guessed into the partly English name Winefred'⁷⁶, meanwhile, is the way the name of the Cornish saint Minver has been treated. St Minver first appears as *Menfre* in a list of the children of Broccan (the Welsh patriarch Brychan) contained in the *Vita S. Nectani*⁷⁷, written at Hartland, Devon, in the twelfth century⁷⁸. As Nicholas Orme points out, the Hartland tradition differs dramatically from the lists found in Wales, but the children are mostly named in the vernacular with surrounding text in Latin, as in the Welsh lists⁷⁹. *Menfre*'s appearance in the list, along with SS. Endelient, Dilic and Tedda, the patrons of nearby parishes, would suggest that her church can be inferred to have existed when the list was written⁸⁰. Intriguingly, *Menfre* is Latinized to *Menfreda* in the first documentary reference to her and her church in 1256; later *Menefreda*⁸¹. There is a clear similarity between the vernacular *Menfre* and *Gwenfrewy*. While imitation cannot be ruled out, and moreover Orme warns that spelling corruptions are possible since the earliest surviving text originates in the fourteenth century⁸², it is nevertheless an interesting parallel, and might suggest that the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁷⁴ See BARTRUM, *Genealogical Tracts*, pp. 212, 206 and 192, respectively.

⁷⁵ *Culhwch and Olwen*, ed. R. BROMWICH and D. SIMON EVANS, Cardiff, 1992, p. 10, line 258; *Canu Aneirin*, p. 12, line 299.

⁷⁶ LBS, vol. III, p. 191.

⁷⁷ See LAPIDGE – SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 38.

⁷⁸ *Vie ... de S. Nectan*, ed. GROSJEAN, p. 377; BARTRUM, *Genealogical Tracts*, p. 29; *Roscarrock's Lives*, ed. ORME, p. 42.

⁷⁹ *Roscarrock's Lives*, ed. ORME, p. 45.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154; *Vie ... de S. Nectan*, ed. GROSJEAN, p. 378. *Wenefred* occurs as *Wenefreda* in the initial and final rubric of the *vita prima*.

⁸² *Roscarrock's Lives*, ed. ORME, p. 46.

development of *Gwenfrewy* into *Wenefreda* in a Welsh context is not necessarily as surprising – nor as dubious – as has been thought.

However, extremely problematic in ascribing the *Vita S. Wenefrede* in particular to a Welsh author is the bungled legend concerning how *Wenefred* received the full form of her name. It has been described above how Robert explains in his *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* that the original name *Brewa* was prefixed with *Wen*, which happened following *Wenefred*'s decapitation and resuscitation because of the white wound circling her neck that remained⁸³. In the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, however, only a muddled version of this legend is known to the author:

Sermones quippe elogij ipsius melle dulciores lacteque nitidiores in sensibus audientium reputabantur. Unde et ab omnibus publice Candida Wenefræda prenominata est, candore enim sophie eloquebatur, et confirmiter degebat⁸⁴.

It seems extremely unlikely that a Welshman, knowing that the first element of *Wenefred*'s name meant 'white', would then call her *Candida Wenefræda*, 'White *Wenefred*'⁸⁵.

Wenefred as Female Saint

The second idiosyncrasy of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* in terms of Cambro-Latin hagiography is that it is the only extant life of a female Welsh saint from the twelfth century. Indeed, the only other extant Latin *vita* of a female Welsh saint is that of Melangell in a manuscript written in 1640⁸⁶. There is plentiful evidence for the existence of cults of many other female saints before the twelfth century, and a few are glimpsed through the *vitae* of their male contemporaries. However, the early formation of a legend concerning a female saint into a *vita* seems to be unique in Wales. While the poor survival of manuscripts must of course be taken into account as a possible reason for this paucity of female *vitae*, a more immediate reason presents itself when

⁸³ VETSW, p. 714.

⁸⁴ VSW, p. 294.

⁸⁵ Fleetwood notes this peculiarity, although maintains that the author is Welsh in *St Wenefrede*, p. 61.

⁸⁶ Anon., *Pennant Melangell, Montgomeryshire*, in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 3 (1848), p. 139. See also *The Montgomery Collections*, in *Journal of the Powysland Club*, 82 (1994).

the purpose of the hagiographer is recalled. It was noted above that *vitae* were written mainly to protect the property rights of the saint's church. In a Welsh context, however, the laws of inheritance do not place women in a strong position: 'In a society where title to land depends on membership of a patrilineage and is restricted to the male members of a four-generation agnatic group, the woman has strictly speaking no role to play other than as bearer of male offspring'⁸⁷. Davies notes that some law texts do concede the right of the daughter to inherit land if no son existed, but it is clear that at the daughter's death claims on the land would be forfeited⁸⁸. Elissa Henken's theory that Welsh women saints do not tend to found churches nor journey as missionaries but that they settle quietly in one area might equally find explanation in these terms⁸⁹. Consequently, suspicions of non-Welsh authorship for the *Vita S. Wenefrede* are naturally aroused, particularly because the hagiography of female saints had long been flourishing over the border in England. In the second half of the eleventh century Goscelin had completed the *vitae* of around thirteen women for English houses⁹⁰. Among these was the *Vita S. Werburge* [BHL 8855], which would have been in the possession of the Chester monks who had recently acquired her relics⁹¹. Holywell's close connections with the abbey at Chester have already been noted. Nevertheless, it is quite evident that the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* understands the Welsh position on female inheritance and is at pains to stress the male influence involved in the property rights: the first seven chapters are concerned mainly with relating at length how Beuno acquired the land from Teuyth, after Teuyth had himself gained permission from the king, to whom the land would have otherwise eventually reverted⁹². Consequently, the *vita* demonstrates that it is not St Wenefred who secures the sanctity of Holywell but the dealings of the three men. Such effort would seem to suggest that the *vita* was written either by a Welshman or by someone very well acquainted with Welsh inheritance laws. However, it should be noted

⁸⁷ R. R. DAVIES, *The Status of Women and the Practice of Marriage*, in *The Welsh Law of Women*, ed. D. JENKINS and M. E. OWEN, Cardiff, 1980, p. 101.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 22.

⁸⁹ *The Welsh Saints*, p. 8.

⁹⁰ MILLINGER, *Humility and Power*, p. 115.

⁹¹ AASS, Feb. t. I, 386-94 at 386. David Rollason makes a convincing case for the *Life* not having been written specifically for the Chester monks (*Mildrith Legend*, p. 27).

⁹² VSW, pp. 288-90.

that, most mysteriously, Holywell is not mentioned by name, even though we have seen above that it appears in charters from 1119 as *Haliwel*. Instead, we hear only that Beuno has built the church in an estate named *Abeluyc*⁹³.

Two fundamental characteristics of the lives of female Welsh saints have been established by Henken: that unlike a male saint whose sanctity is established from birth, a woman's sanctity is defined by different criteria, most particularly through chastity, and that tradition pays virtually no attention to the women's lives until they are confronted with male sexuality (which she sees as echoing patterns in vernacular literature)⁹⁴. The first of these characteristics, while clearly true of Wenefred, is unhelpful in ascertaining the nationality of the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, as it was the case over the border in England as well as in Wales. Susan Millinger notes that a favourite motif of Goscelin, working in England in the eleventh century, was the saint overcoming royal pursuit or resisting parental pressure for marriage⁹⁵. In Goscelin's *Vita S. Wulfildae* [BHL 8737]⁹⁶, Wulfhild's aunt plots to have the virgin marry king Edgar, Wulfhild escapes from her bedroom and flees from her suitor, and there is a brief struggle at the threshold of a church. The parallels with Wenefred's life are manifest, but instead of decapitation, Wulfhild's cloak is ripped before she scrambles to safety. However, although the motif was popular across the border, in Cambro-Latin hagiography it is found not just with regard to female saints such as Non in the *Vita S. Davidis*⁹⁷, and, of course, Wenefred, but a number of the male saints must also deal with unwanted sexual attention. Pagan rebels send naked women to tempt David and his followers in the *Vita S. Davidis*⁹⁸; Cyngar runs away from impending marriage by disguising himself as a beggar in the *Vita S. Cungari* [BHL 2013]⁹⁹; in the *Vita S. Bernachii* [BHL 1186], Brynach must face the charms and aphrodisiac potion of a noble girl possessed by the devil, whose thwarted passion turns to hate just as

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁹⁴ *The Welsh Saints*, pp. 6-8.

⁹⁵ *Humility and Power*, p. 124.

⁹⁶ COLKER, *Joscelin of Canterbury*, pp. 418-34.

⁹⁷ *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, p. 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁹ J. ROBINSON (ed.), *A Fragment of the Life of St Cungar*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 20 (1918-19), pp. 99-100.

happens to Caradog when he is spurned by Wenefred¹⁰⁰. Although male chastity was not the defining quality of their sanctity, therefore, it was nevertheless a popular Welsh concept.

Henken's second notion that the *rites de passage* of birth and death are frequently not reported of female saints, and that they seem almost not to exist before contact with men, seems inevitable considering that most female saints are minor players in the *vitae* of male saints: the absence of further biographical details would seem to be symptomatic of role rather than of gender. However, it is interesting to note that Wenefred's birth goes unreported even though she is the main saint of the *vita*, and that furthermore her eventual death, some years after her decapitation and resuscitation, is very sketchily reported¹⁰¹. Furthermore, as has already been described, the first seven chapters of Wenefred's *vita* are concerned almost exclusively with the dynamics between three men, namely her father (Teuyth), St Beuno and the king. Wenefred is only once seen to make a wilful decision in these seven chapters, which is to spurn mortal men from an early age¹⁰². It is her father, Teuyth, who is then instrumental in her progress towards a holy life: her father resolves to devote her to the liberal arts and he entrusts his daughter to Beuno for religious instruction¹⁰³. Wenefred does not behave independently, nor does she speak, until the encounter with her would-be lover Caradog. Even her choice to commit herself to a chaste life is portrayed to some extent as Wenefred's will being subject to that of someone else: while she declines to marry a mortal man, she nevertheless yields (*subdere*) herself to the rule of God¹⁰⁴. This idea is made clearer when she tells Caradog, 'desponsata sum enim alteri uiro'¹⁰⁵. The first seven chapters of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* are particularly reminiscent in nature and attitude towards women to those found in *Branwen*, in which the two kings Brân and Matholwch are united by using Branwen as a bartering tool, with a considerable portion of the episode relating

¹⁰⁰ *Vita S. Bernacii*, in *VSBG*, pp. 4-6.

¹⁰¹ *VSW*, p. 294.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

discussion between the men¹⁰⁶. Similarly, Beuno barter with Teuyth: in exchange for land he will take on his daughter¹⁰⁷.

However, in the context of the passive Welsh female saints who tend to find themselves at the mercy of their pursuers¹⁰⁸, Wenefred's cunning when she is finally confronted by male sexuality once again aligns her more with the English women saints: she is able (for a time) to escape her suitor by outwitting him before finally being overcome by male violence. When Caradog embarks upon his proposal, Wenefred initially attempts to reason with his pride, pointing out the inequality in status between them, and then to reason with his sense of honour, although she phrases the truth ambiguously, explaining that she is already betrothed and should respect the commitment¹⁰⁹. Failing to persuade him, Wenefred 'ad industriam se uertens' pretends to agree to his desire, receiving leave to retire to her chamber in order to clothe herself more suitably and then escaping through the valley towards Beuno's church¹¹⁰. Close parallels may be found in the English lives: Wulfhild escapes from her chamber through the drains¹¹¹; Mildrith sends a lock of hair torn out by the wicked abbess of Chelles (who wishes the saint to marry a relative) to her mother as a sign that she needs help to escape after she is shut in a hot oven for three hours¹¹².

The open deceit in which Wenefred engages nevertheless finds closer parallels in the manipulation of men found in Welsh vernacular literature. In *Pwyll*, Rhiannon is seen as admirable rather than dishonourable when she tricks an unwelcome suitor, persuading him by playing deliberately upon his sense of nobility, to climb into a bag, in which he is then beaten¹¹³. Similarly, although perhaps with more authorial disapproval, Blodeuwedd carefully tricks her unwanted husband into revealing the key to his destruction¹¹⁴. Aranrhod denies

¹⁰⁶ *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, p. 30.

¹⁰⁷ *VSW*, p. 288.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, the rape of Non in *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, pp. 3-4, and the murder of Machuta in the *Vita S. Tathei*, in *VSBG*, pp. 280-1.

¹⁰⁹ *VSW*, p. 291.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-2.

¹¹¹ COLKER, *Joscelin of Canterbury*, pp. 421-2.

¹¹² ROLLASON, *Mildrith Legend*, pp. 124-33 [BHL 5960].

¹¹³ *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

that she is not a virgin, then gives birth to two sons¹¹⁵. Such dishonest orchestration from the women is clearly regarded as commonplace: Blodeuwedd's lover pleads almost successfully with her wronged husband that he should have mercy upon him since it was *dry-cystryw gwreic*, or 'woman's wiles', that prompted his own ignoble behaviour¹¹⁶. Within this context, Wenefred seems less out of place.

Wenefred's pursuer himself is also peculiarly Welsh. Although, like the suitors of Goscelin's women, he is of royal stock, he comes upon Wenefred's father's house when out hunting and looking for means to quench his thirst¹¹⁷. The demanding figure on the way back from hunting coming into conflict with a saint is a motif of Cambro-Latin hagiography¹¹⁸: Brynach suffers the appetite of King Maelgwn¹¹⁹; Illtud describes how Cadog was ordered to provide a meal for the royal household of King Poullentus¹²⁰; and Cadog, in addition to this, also endures the demands of Rhun, son of King Maelgwn¹²¹. Caradog also marks himself out as being of dishonest intent when he attacks Wenefred's reasoning. It is clear from vernacular literature that it was her conversation that commanded male respect for a woman: in the Four Branches, the elegance or sense with which a woman speaks is admired by Pwyll and Manawydan, the more honourable men; the men of lesser integrity, Gilfaethwy and Matholwch, are interested solely in physical attraction¹²². The lack of respect with which the lustful Caradog regards Wenefred is manifest from his reply to her: 'Dimittite insulsa hec friuola nugatoria loqui, et mecum commisceri consenti'¹²³. Caradog thus shows himself to be an unworthy suitor according to the vernacular literary tradition. It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that even if trends across the border influenced the formation of the legend into a literary *vita*, Wenefred herself is convincingly portrayed as a Welsh woman undergoing a manifestly Welsh trial.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹¹⁷ VSW, p. 290.

¹¹⁸ HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 33.

¹¹⁹ *Vita S. Bernachii*, in VSBG, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *Vita S. Illuti*, in VSBG, p. 196.

¹²¹ *Vita S. Cadoci* (hereafter VSC), in VSBG, pp. 62 and 76.

¹²² *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, pp. 4, 50, 74 and 30.

¹²³ VSW, p. 290.

Evidence of Cambro-Latin Motifs

Decapitated saints surviving their 'deaths' – if only for a short period of time – is by no means a purely Celtic topos, although it does distinguish Wenefred from her female counterparts in England¹²⁴. Nevertheless, Wenefred does follow the Celtic tradition that the decapitated victim is able to return to normal life after resuscitation: heads amputated from their bodies are able to communicate with Padarn and Cadog in their *vitae*, and the saints are able to make the men whole again¹²⁵. In the *Vita S. Cadoci* [BHL 1491], the power of an amputated head is such that it is able to free its truncated body, tied to a huge stone, from the bottom of a river and, held by the body's arms, make its way to the saint¹²⁶. There are some suggestions, moreover, that this was not simply a motif borrowed from foreign hagiography, but that it was the continuation of early pre-Christian religion. In a thorough survey of archaeological and vernacular literary evidence, Anne Ross has demonstrated that the Celts possessed a reverence for the human head that developed into a sophisticated cult¹²⁷. Sculpted heads, heads in relief on altars and pillars, and heads figuring in metalwork objects have been excavated all over Britain from the period just prior to and during the Roman occupation¹²⁸. Ross has also traced fragments of these pre-Christian beliefs in vernacular literature, where the Irish evidence is particularly rich, as in the talking decapitated heads of Conaire Mór in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and that of Fothad Canainne in *Reicne Fothaid Canainne*, or the vengeful decapitated heads at Slíabh Fúaid which attack Suibhne Geilt in *Buile Shuibhne*¹²⁹. The later date of literary output and increased ecclesiastical censorship is cited by Ross to explain the relative paucity of Welsh evidence for reminiscences of head veneration, and she unearths only one example in the form of the talking head of Brân in *Branwen*, which proves itself as jovial a companion to Brân's men

¹²⁴ A. Simonetti (*Santi cefaloforesi*) discusses the spread of the tradition from Celtic origins to France and Italy.

¹²⁵ VSBG, p. 266 and VSC, p. 66. See also SIMONETTI, *Santi cefaloforesi*, p. 104, for examples of Irish and Breton survivors.

¹²⁶ VSC, p. 66.

¹²⁷ Ross, *Human Head*, pp. 42-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-35.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

as Brân had been when he was whole¹³⁰. Interestingly, it is Brân's head that receives burial; we hear nothing of what becomes of his body¹³¹. In fact, further suggestions of a Welsh human head preoccupation may be discerned in Welsh poetry, where violence towards heads is often graphically reported: *Armes Prydein*, c. 930, announces, 'Atui pen gaflaw heb emmenyd' ('There will be heads split open without brains')¹³², and the poet of the *Gododdin* laments, 'aphenn dyvynwal a breych brein ae cnoyn' ('And the head of Domnall Brecc, ravens gnawed it'), Domnall being one of the *gwyr tyllfawr*, or great sturdy men¹³³. Returning to prose, a further example may be found in *Branwen*, when Efnisien discovers Irishmen waiting in ambush hidden in sacks:

'Sef a wnaeth ynteu, y deimlaw hyt ban gauas y benn, a guascu y benn, nny glyw y uyssed yn ymanodi yn y ureichell drwy yr ascwrn' ('This is what he did, felt until he touched his head, and squeezed his head, until he perceived his fingers sinking through the bone into the brain')¹³⁴.

This interest in the violation of the skull seems to corroborate in Welsh tradition Ross's belief that the Celts regarded the head as 'the seat of the soul, the centre of the vital essence, symbolic of the regenerative forces of life'¹³⁵. Simple decapitation is therefore not effective in destroying the soul, as Brân's talking head demonstrates. Such notions of the head containing the soul bring an uneasy poignancy to the early poem *Pen Urien*, in which a traitor apparently soliloquises his regret at having just killed his lord, the dramatic focus of each stanza being that he currently carries his lord's head on his shoulder¹³⁶.

The association between decapitated saints and wells is frequent in the Celtic context¹³⁷, and may again have roots in pre-Christian religion: Ross has identified archaeological evidence of wells dedicated to a specific deity containing a human head or being

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

¹³¹ *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, pp. 45-7.

¹³² *Armes Prydein*, ed. I. WILLIAMS, Dublin, 1982, p. 10, line 117.

¹³³ *Canu Aneirin*, ed. WILLIAMS, p. 39, line 971.

¹³⁴ *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, p. 42.

¹³⁵ ROSS, *Human Heads*, p. 11. See also SIMONETTI, *Santi cefalofori*, p. 104.

¹³⁶ J. ROWLAND (ed.), *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 420-22.

¹³⁷ Once again, however, the tradition is not exclusively Celtic: see SIMONETTI, *Santi cefalofori*, pp. 109-10 for French examples.

associated with them¹³⁸, and corroborative literary evidence for the custom of placing severed heads in sacred pools and wells, drawing particularly on the topographical legends of the Irish *Dindshenchas*: Slíabh Gam, was named after the decapitation of a young man called Gam beside a well on the hill, into which his head was then cast, and the well Tipra Brothlaige was thus named when three men of Finn ua Baiscne's household were decapitated and their heads thrown into the well¹³⁹. Both Ross and Francis Jones have discussed the association between decapitated Celtic saints and wells: Ross describes how the amputated head of Melor in Cornwall instructed his thirsty killer how to make a spring gush from the earth¹⁴⁰; Jones relates how Decuman in Somerset carried his amputated head to where the spring now flows, and how the head of Justinian on Ramsey Island, off the coast of Pembrokeshire, caused a spring to erupt before the body carried it to the mainland¹⁴¹. Jones even states that 'wells of beheaded virgins appear frequently in the Lives' with a constant pattern, supporting this claim with the story of Lludd, whose head rolled down Slwch hill, having been cut off by a pursuer, and caused a fountain to erupt¹⁴².

However, all of the examples given by Ross and Jones are late; most are only recorded in John of Tynemouth's early fourteenth-century *Sanctilogium Angliae, Walliae, Scotiae et Hiberniae* (subsequently rearranged by an anonymous compiler as *Nova Legenda Anglie*). While it is highly likely that the late date of the extant material in no way reflects a late emergence of such cults and legends, it is difficult to use these legends as proof that Wenefred's own legend is authentically Celtic. However, there are in fact three early examples which neither Ross nor Jones mentions in this context. The most obvious of these is in the *Vita S. Davidis* [BHL 2107] by Rhigyfarch (d. 1099)¹⁴³, which has perhaps been passed over since it is not the saint himself whom the story concerns. In this *vita* the wife of the pagan Baia, on a trip to procure cucumbers from the Alun valley with

¹³⁸ ROSS, *Severed-Heads*, p. 32-5.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37-8; *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. E. GWYNN, vol. III, Dublin, 1913, p. 436, and vol. IV, Dublin, 1924, p. 300.

¹⁴⁰ ROSS, *Severed-Heads*, pp. 38-9; *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. HORSTMAN, vol. II, p. 184 [BHL 5905].

¹⁴¹ JONES, *Holy Wells*, pp. 36-7; *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. HORSTMAN, vol. I, p. 265 [BHL 2118] and vol. II, pp. 93-5 [BHL 4576].

¹⁴² JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 38.

¹⁴³ LAPIDGE - SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 14.

her pious stepdaughter Dunawd, cuts off the girl's head with a razor, whereupon a healing fountain springs up¹⁴⁴. The other two examples come from the West country, and are deemed of Celtic origin¹⁴⁵. In the first of these, the twelfth-century *Vita S. Nectani*, the saint, having been murdered by thieves, carries his decapitated head back to his well¹⁴⁶. The second example is that of Juthwara, whose legend is recorded fully in John of Tynemouth's *Sanctilogium*¹⁴⁷ but who qualifies as a useful parallel here since there is mention of her story in Goscelin's *Vita S. Wlsini* [BHL 8753] (ante c. 1080), which describes the translation of her relics at Sherborne¹⁴⁸. Juthwara, who is thought to be the same person as the Breton saint Aude¹⁴⁹, is told by her wicked stepmother that she may alleviate chest pain by placing a milk-curd on each breast. Her stepbrother is led to believe that she is pregnant, taking her apparent lactation as definite evidence, and he cuts off her head. A spring bursts forth before Juthwara takes up her head in her hands and walks. This example must be treated with some caution, however, as the appearance of a fountain is recorded only by John of Tynemouth, not by Goscelin. Nevertheless, these legends of early date, taken together with the sheer quantity of later reports based on the same idea, seem to point irrefutably to a flourishing Celtic hagiographic tradition of heads and wells into which Wenefred fits. It should be noted, however, that none of the male saints die violently in their *vitae* (Cadog is an exception, but he *chooses* martyrdom), and in this Wenefred is unique.

Finally, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* contains two Cambro-Latin hagiographic motifs that are seen to have pre-Christian roots, once again suggesting a case for Welsh authorship. The Cambro-Latin hagiographic topos of saints being able to defy the elements and the laws of nature has been regarded as an inheritance from old Celtic water

¹⁴⁴ Rhigyfarch's *Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, p. 11. It is necessary to bear in mind that although the *Vita S. Davidis* must have been written before 1099, this story is not preserved in the earliest manuscripts of the work from around 1150 but is first recorded c. 1200; see pp. vii and xlii of James' edition.

¹⁴⁵ LAPIDGE – SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 38; *LBS*, vol. I, pp. 185–8.

¹⁴⁶ *Vie ... de S. Nectan*, ed. GROSJEAN, p. 401.

¹⁴⁷ *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. HORSTMAN, vol. I, pp. 98–100 [BHL 4613].

¹⁴⁸ *The Life of St Wulsin of Sherborne by Goscelin*, ed. C. H. TALBOT, in *Revue Bénédictine*, 69 (1959), p. 84.

¹⁴⁹ *LBS*, vol. I, pp. 185–8.

deities by G. Hartwell Jones¹⁵⁰. Traces found in vernacular literature – such as Dylan, son of Ton (literally 'wave') jumping into the sea at birth and being able to swim as well as the fish¹⁵¹, or Brân, son of Llŷr (literally 'sea') being able to wade through the ocean from Wales to Ireland¹⁵² – find their parallels in miracles such as those of the *Vita S. Davidis*, in which Barre, travelling on the back of a horse, meets St Brendan on a sea monster in the middle of the Irish Channel¹⁵³. Similar control of the elements may be witnessed in Wenefred's *vita*, when a stone with a cloak placed upon it transports itself along the river and through the sea to Beuno each year, the cloak remaining completely dry¹⁵⁴. Such a magic journey over water by rock may be found also in the *vitae* of Brynach (in which the saint travels on a floating stone from Brittany to Wales)¹⁵⁵, Padarn (in which a disciple travels on a rock to his teacher)¹⁵⁶, and Cybi (in which a boat stuck between a cleft rock is transported to Anglesey)¹⁵⁷.

A further example of a Celtic-Latin motif in the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is the malediction, by the use of which Beuno causes the murderer Caradog to dissolve into a molten pool¹⁵⁸. The malediction is a common motif in Welsh saints' *vitae*, as it is in those of their Irish counterparts, and Baring-Gould sees the saints' use of cursing as their 'simply step[ping] into the prerogatives of the ... Druids'¹⁵⁹. In support of this notion, Karen Borst has noted that the *Vita S. Cadoci* in particular contains frequent and unforgiving maledictions, one of which the saint even places on his own disciples, who are drowned while Cadog looks on for the crime of forgetting a book¹⁶⁰. Although

¹⁵⁰ G. H. JONES, *Primitive Magic in the Lives of the Celtic Saints*, in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1936), p. 78.

¹⁵¹ *Pedeir Keinc*, ed. WILLIAMS, p. 77.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁵³ Rhigyfarch's *Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, pp. 17–18.

¹⁵⁴ VSW, p. 294.

¹⁵⁵ *Vita S. Bernachii*, in VSBG, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ *Vita S. Paterni*, in VSBG, p. 256.

¹⁵⁷ *Vita S. Cybi*, in VSBG, p. 244.

¹⁵⁸ VSW, p. 292.

¹⁵⁹ S. BARING-GOULD, *The Celtic Saints*, in *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 14 (1899–1900), p. 25.

¹⁶⁰ K. G. BORST, *A Reconsideration of the Vita Sancti Cadoci*, in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, ed. P. K. FORD, Santa Barbara, CA, 1983, p. 7.

also found in other Welsh *vitae*¹⁶¹, the specific malediction whereby an evil-doer is melted in the *Vita S. Wenefrede* finds a particular verbal echo in Cadog's life:

VSC: Quo facto, feretri illius infaustus uiolator in conspectu totius exercitus liquefactus est, prout cera ante faciem ignis. (p. 112)

VSW: Statimque in conspectu eius ille liquefactus est, ut ab igne cera. (p. 292)

The simile of wax melting before fire is itself biblical, and is also found in the *Vita S. Illuti*, but the analogous stylistic arrangements here might suggest a relationship between the *vitae* of Cadog and Wenefred¹⁶². A further example hinting at a connection may be seen concerning Wenefred's hasty pilgrimage to Rome, itself a frequent motif in Cambro-Latin hagiography found also in the *vitae* of Cybi, Cyngar, David, Gildas, Padarn, Petroc and Teilo¹⁶³:

VSC: In illo tempore, cum uenerande memorie Cadocus Romam adisset, et omnia sanctorum loca per Italiam atque Galliam constituta peragrasset, gratia uisendi reliquias sanctorum... (p. 96)

VSW: Eo tempore, ut memorant, Romam peciit uisitandi causa sanctorum apostolorum loca, ut ibi in presentia reliquiarum sanctorum se totam Deo deuote offerret. (p. 294)

Although there are considerable problems with assigning the *Vita S. Wenefrede* with a Welsh origin, namely its uniqueness as a female *vita* and the confusion over the legend of the saint's name, the bulk of the work would appear to square with the Cambro-Latin hagiographic tradition, and it possibly even contains allusions to the *Vita S. Cadoci*. Before determining what help this evidence provides in the questions of dating and authorship, it is necessary to examine whether, as has been suggested, the *libellus miraculorum* could be a later addition, and therefore probably of different authorship.

The Libellus miraculorum

As has been noted above, the *libellus miraculorum* must be dated after 1135 because of a reference to when the Normans were expelled from North Wales. If the *vita* itself were correctly dated to pre-1138,

¹⁶¹ HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 145.

¹⁶² Ps. LXVII.3; *Vita S. Illuti*, in VSBG, p. 218.

¹⁶³ HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 141.

then the whole composition would be datable to 1135/1138. The theory that Wenefred's miracles are of a later date than her *vita* has been posited by Baring-Gould and Fisher, perhaps unhappy with the otherwise necessary proximity between the *vita prima* and Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* of 1140, and by Fleetwood, who noted that the author of the *libellus* uses phrases such as 'in Norman times', or 'in the days of the Normans', which seems a strange way to refer to extremely recent events¹⁶⁴. However, we have seen above that the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is not necessarily the *vita prima*, and if this is the case this line of argument is no longer valid: both the *vita* and the *libellus* could have been composed together at a later date. Nevertheless, there are certain stylistic disparities between the *vita* and the *libellus* that do seem to give credence to the theory of later addition. The prose of the *vita* is plain and factual, and this contrasts notably with the exclamative, exhortative rhetorical asides of the *libellus* ('O res satis horrenda!', 'Non est mirum, fratres', 'Quid dicam uobis?')¹⁶⁵. Secondly, while Wenefred is mainly referred to in the *libellus* as *martyr*, in the *vita* she is referred to either as *uirgo* or *puella* even after her martyrdom and resurrection.

A convincing argument for the *libellus* of post-mortem miracles being a later addition to what appears to be a Cambro-Latin *vita* is that it is unique in this corpus of hagiography¹⁶⁶. Smith points out that post-mortem miracles are extremely rare even when incorporated into the main text of other Cambro-Latin saints' *vitae*, and furthermore that the nature of Wenefred's miracles – a considerable proportion of which are curative – differs from that of the post-mortem miracles that do occur in other *vitae*, where 'the hagiographer's preference for recounting vengeance miracles has obscured less spectacular healing functions'¹⁶⁷. In eleventh- and twelfth-century France, meanwhile, three-quarters of all post-mortem miracles are of a curative nature, and the statistics are even more heavily weighed in favour of these in England¹⁶⁸. As noted above, Smith has suggested that the miracles were probably written for the Norman monks at nearby Basingwerk, 'of which Holywell was a dependency', on the grounds that the pre-

¹⁶⁴ LBS, vol. III, pp. 185-6; FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede*, pp. 296 and 298.

¹⁶⁶ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 341.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

sence of a foreign order would require proof of the miraculous powers that would otherwise have been transmitted orally among inhabitants of the region¹⁶⁹. This theory may be backed up by clues that the author of the *libellus* was not a Welshman native to Flintshire: he refers to those living in Holywell as *incolae* and *indigenae*, which might imply that he did not count himself among their number, and he also refers to the region with phrases such as 'in eadem terra', 'in eadem regione', as if he himself were not a lifelong inhabitant¹⁷⁰.

However, some features of the *libellus* are suggestive of Welsh provenance. All the miracles centre on Wenefred's well rather than her relics, a tendency typical of Celtic hagiography in which the presence of corporeal remains was not necessary for a flourishing cult, as may be witnessed in the *vitae* of Illtud, Gwynllyw and Cadog¹⁷¹. Although many of Wenefred's miracles are curative, meanwhile, the *libellus* begins with a number of typically Cambro-Latin vengeance miracles. It is only half way through that the author may be seen worrying over the fact that he might be giving the wrong impression of Wenefred before he launches into a litany of healing miracles:

Nunc uero ad castigationem scelestorum, ne aliquod nefas in iure uirginis facere oblectent, ista sufficient, quia alias ad sulcandum aratrum nostrum est prouehendum, scilicet, ad uirginis beneficia erga egros reuelanda¹⁷².

Furthermore, having catalogued the great number of Wenefred's curing feats, the author cannot resist adding one more vengeance-miracle concerning clerics who stole holy books from Wenefred's chapel, one of whom was hanged, 'quia promeruit'¹⁷³.

Some particulars of the miracles are meanwhile suggestive of Welsh origin. Among her vengeance miracles is the description of how three very bright pebbles ('lapilli ... tres limpidissimi') that used to be tossed up and down in the spring vanished forever when one was stolen¹⁷⁴. It is possible to trace the presence of stones in a well to

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* It is worth pointing out in passing that one item of evidence used by Smith in her case, the appearance of the exhortative 'fratres' proving that a male community was being addressed (p. 341), would seem to be undermined by the later exhortation, 'pendite, uiri, pendite, mulieres' (VSW, p. 302).

¹⁷⁰ VSW, pp. 294 and 306, and pp. 296 and 300.

¹⁷¹ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 340.

¹⁷² VSW, p. 300.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

a Welsh custom by which white or quartz stones were offered at wells, as demonstrated by archaeological evidence at Ffynnon Degla in Denbighshire and Ffynnon Gwenfaen in Anglesey¹⁷⁵. Such an association between white stones and healing wells may relate to a pre-Christian Welsh and Scots custom of using quartz charms to give water magical potency¹⁷⁶. Three healing miracles performed by St Wenefred have parallels in other Cambro-Latin *vitae*: Wenefred raises a girl from the dead – a feat performed by Cadog, David, Gildas, Padarn, Petroc, Samson and Teilo¹⁷⁷ –, she frees a man from his iron chains, which are then hung above her altar – a story also found in the *Vita S. Cadoci*¹⁷⁸ –, and it is reported that her fountain flowed with, and tasted of, milky liquor for three days – once again a miracle also found in the *Vita S. Cadoci*¹⁷⁹. Finally, some of Wenefred's miracles have a distinctly anti-Norman flavour: an over-ambitious nobleman wanting to build over the site of Wenefred's well is soundly punished, as is his Norman wife when she bathes in the well without good reason¹⁸⁰; Wenefred's fountain runs with milk in celebration of the expulsion of the Normans from North Wales¹⁸¹. It might seem unlikely that such an emphasis would be placed by a Norman scribe. However, it is possible that an author writing for a Norman audience would include stories of past history the saint had had with their countrymen. Demonstrating that Wenefred grants no mercy to violators whether they be Norman or otherwise would also be appropriate, since the purpose of the *libellus* is to demonstrate the power and preserve the sanctity of the saint.

Examining the form, proportion and nature of Wenefred's miracles therefore provides conflicting evidence as to the nationality of the author. It seems possible, however, that the miracles were not written by a Welshman, but were written in a Welsh context, drawing on Welsh oral tradition, or – as the author of the *libellus* states at the

¹⁷⁵ JONES, *Holy Wells*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁶ A. D. REES, *Folk-lore with Reference to Recent Excavations at Ffynnon Degla, Denbighshire*, in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (November, 1935), pp. 87-90.

¹⁷⁷ HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁸ VSC, p. 112.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-300.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-6.

start – 'quedam incolis cognita uel uisa, digna relatu'¹⁸². The sheer quantity of vengeance miracles would suggest that the *libellus* was written by someone with a vested interest in preserving Holywell from violation. This description does seem to suit the Norman monks of Basingwerk Abbey. However, to suggest Norman authorship for the *vita* is extremely problematic, as has been discussed above, and further investigation into source material is required.

* * *

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WENEFRED'S *VITAE*: EVIDENCE FOR A COMMON SOURCE?

In order to begin to speculate upon the sources of Wenefred's *vitae*, it is first necessary briefly to recapitulate the problems so far. The *Vita S. Wenefrede* contains contradictory clues as to authorship and origin. The *vita* of a female and the existence of a separate book of post-mortem miracles are unique in the context of extant Cambro-Latin hagiography from the twelfth century or earlier. The style of most of the *vita* differs considerably from the rhetoric-laden *libellus miraculorum*. Both the *vita* and the *libellus* contain demonstrably Cambro-Latin material as well as suggestions that they may not be the work of a native Welshman.

Robert of Shrewsbury's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* is around six times longer than the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, although Baring-Gould and Fisher describe Robert's *vita* as containing few facts and much 'frothy declamation and exhortation'¹⁸³. The only major difference in the story between the two *vitae* is that Robert describes Wenefred's trip from Holywell to Gwytherin. Robert's emphases differ considerably from those of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*: in order to suit the new non-Welsh audience, the number of place-names found in the *vita prima* is reduced, and most dramatically altered is the nature of Wenefred's sanctity. While the *vita prima* seems almost satisfied with the credentials provided by her martyrdom, Robert fashions her into a holy abbess as well: she provides an example of perfection to all nuns and takes over from St Theonia on her death as *praelata* of Gwy-

¹⁸² VSW, p. 294.

¹⁸³ LBS, vol. III, p. 186.

therin, although still under the aegis of the abbot, St Elerius¹⁸⁴. This is in keeping with the trends of female saints' lives being written in England at the time¹⁸⁵. Wenefred herself is more vividly delineated, meanwhile: Robert grants her free will (she, not her father, chooses the religious life from the start) and a generous amount of direct speech, presumably to satisfy the demands of an audience accustomed to more audible female heroines¹⁸⁶. Curiously, the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* also contains Cambro-Latin hagiographic motifs not found in the *Vita S. Wenefrede*. Firstly, Caradog not only melts into a pool but he is also swallowed by the earth gaping open, a fate often dealt out to wrong-doers, as in the *vitae* of Cadog, Padarn and Illtud¹⁸⁷. Secondly, Robert describes Beuno telling Wenefred that any suppliant who deserves divine help will receive it after asking at her well by the third time he makes his request¹⁸⁸. The *Vita S. Davidis* contains a similar idea, when David refuses the first three invitations to attend a synod, but complies on the fourth occasion (in the later vernacular Welsh life he complies on the third occasion)¹⁸⁹. However, the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* is clearly based upon the same story as the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and contains at least one verbal echo to suggest a common written source¹⁹⁰. Taking the above evidence into account, it seems sensible to infer a Cambro-Latin written source for both of the *vitae*, and the clue to what this source may have been lies in the appearance of St Beuno in Wenefred's story.

The appearance of important saints other than the main protagonist of a *vita* in Cambro-Latin hagiography is not unusual, and indeed the association with other holy men would seem to aid a saint's claim to sanctity: Cadog, Gildas, Patrick, Illtud and Padarn all have cameos in *vitae* other than their own¹⁹¹. However, there is no

¹⁸⁴ VETSW, p. 722.

¹⁸⁵ J. T. SCHULENBURG, *Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles*, ca. 500-1100, in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. M. ERLER and M. KOWALESKI, Athens, GA, 1988, pp. 102-25.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Goscelin's Mildrith, in ROLLASON, *Mildrith Legend*, p. 130.

¹⁸⁷ HENKEN, *Welsh Saints*, p. 145.

¹⁸⁸ VETSW, p. 716.

¹⁸⁹ Rhigyfarch's *Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, p. 22; *The Welsh Life of St David*, ed. D. S. EVANS, Cardiff, 1988, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ Compare VSW, p. 292 and VETSW, p. 714, as above.

¹⁹¹ See, for example, VSC, p. 84, *Vita S. Illtuti*, p. 196, *Vita S. Paterni*, p. 258 (all in VSBG); and Rhigyfarch's *Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, pp. 2 and 20.

other extant material relating to St Beuno until 1346, from which year a Welsh life, *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*, is found in Oxford, Jesus College 2¹⁹². Baring-Gould and Fisher have noted that the abstract of Wenefred's story found in the Life 'does not appear to be derived from either of [Wenefred's] Latin lives'¹⁹³. Wade-Evans has suggested that there are indications that *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* may be 'an abbreviated translation, paraphrase, or both of a lost Latin life of the saint', although he does not elucidate further¹⁹⁴. Molly Miller is similarly concerned by what she sees as the unusual nature of *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*: 'its narrative is orderly, precise, sequential, and detailed – qualities not encountered often, even singly, in Welsh hagiography'¹⁹⁵. In the absence of any study upon the language of, and relationship between, vernacular Welsh literature and its Latin sources, certain evidence to suggest that *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* was based on an early Latin original may still be gleaned by other means. In the text itself, there is at least one clue to suggest that the extant Welsh life is a paraphrase: an allusion is made to a story about Beuno resuscitating a dead Irishman whose wife was responsible for his death with no further details or explanation offered, and this appears awkward in an otherwise 'precise' narrative¹⁹⁶. Further illumination is found in the *vita* of Wenefred, meanwhile, particularly when examined in conjunction with the episode recounting Wenefred's decollation in *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*, of which it forms a twelfth, or around 500 words¹⁹⁷. The *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* contains the most immediately compelling evidence for the existence of an earlier *vita* of St Beuno. The narrative begins with the focus upon Beuno, not Wenefred's family as in the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, and appears to be giving a summary of 'the story so far': a most distinguished saint, Beuno, has rejected the ruinous allurements of the world, been made a monk, established a number of churches and stationed monks in these; due to divine will, he has not yet settled

¹⁹² VSBG, p. xix and pp. 16–22, where the text is edited. WADE-EVANS has also translated the life as *Beuno Sant*, in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 85 (1930), pp. 315–22.

¹⁹³ LBS, vol. III, p. 186.

¹⁹⁴ VSBG, p. xix.

¹⁹⁵ M. MILLER, *Saints of Gwynedd* (= *Studies in Celtic History*, 1), Woodbridge, 1979, p. 79.

¹⁹⁶ HoUB, p. 17.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; the decollation episode is found at pp. 18–19.

down himself¹⁹⁸. It is not until we have been brought up to date with events that Robert launches into the story of Wenefred. Moreover, Robert's *vita* contains a few details concerning the decollation found in *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* but not in the *Vita S. Wenefrede*: Beuno spreads his cloak along the virgin's body, having replaced her head; the saint stares Caradog full in the face while cursing him; Wenefred, upon revival, wipes herself clean of sweat; a group of bystanders are converted to Christianity upon witnessing this miracle¹⁹⁹. Most convincing of all, meanwhile, is what appears to be a direct reference to this lost source:

De cujus [Beuno] vita vel obitu, et quae juvenis egerit, vel quae post mortem mirabilia fecerit, habentur adhuc in reverenti memoria monumenta, illius vitae modum et mores designantia²⁰⁰.

It is possible to construe *memoria* as either 'recollection, remembrance' or 'account, narration', and *monumentum* as either 'remembrance, memorial' or 'written work, chronicle', but the use of *designans* would seem to suggest that a written, rather than an oral, source is being described. Robert himself says that the source of his material is partly written and partly from the oral report of people in whose words he has faith²⁰¹. It seems plausible to posit the lost *vita* of Beuno as his main written source, and that he supplemented this with information derived from oral report, such as the description of Wenefred's journey to Gwytherin, which is not found in either *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* or the *Vita S. Wenefrede*.

What evidence is there that this early Latin *vita* of Beuno was also the source for the *Vita S. Wenefrede*? The *Vita S. Wenefrede* shares some detail with *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* not found in the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*: the story unfolds in the reign of King Cadfan, and Beuno comes to Teuyth having been deprived of a dwelling by the sons of Selym (*Selyf* in *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*)²⁰². Furthermore, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* share some information that is either different or absent alto-

¹⁹⁸ VETSW, p. 709.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 713–14; and HoUB, pp. 18–19.

²⁰⁰ VETSW, p. 718: 'Concerning whose life or death, and what things he did as a youth, or what post-mortem miracles he performed, chronicles are to be found even now in a respectful account, describing the manner and customs of his life'.

²⁰¹ VETSW, p. 708.

²⁰² VSW, p. 288; HoUB, pp. 18 and 19.

gether from that contained within *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*: Caradog is not a king but is from royal stock; Wenefred's excuse for going to her chamber is to dress herself in more seemly attire; stones spattered with her blood remain so today; the moss of the well smells like incense; Wenefred sends a magical cloak to Beuno on a floating stone each year, earning the male saint the epithet 'casul sych' or 'dry cloak'²⁰³. These shared details – in two independent *vitae* – once again affirm the notion that *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* is, as Wade-Evans suggested, a paraphrase of an early Latin original from which both of Wenefred's *vitae* drew. Once we hypothesise this lost Latin source for the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, and understand that it is Wenefred who makes the initial cameo appearance in Beuno's *vita*, the problems traditionally associated with it begin to be explained.

Wenefred's gender and her violent death, so unusual for the protagonists of the Cambro-Latin *vitae*, are no longer surprising if we regard her as a minor character in the life of a male saint: male and female 'extras' abound in the *vitae* and frequently suffer a nasty fate, two female examples of the type being Dunawd in the *Vita S. Davidis* and Machuta in the *Vita S. Tatheï*²⁰⁴. Dunawd's ill fortune has been discussed above; Machuta is brutally murdered by a gang of thieves. Both are held up as pious innocents – Dunawd's martyrdom prompts a healing spring. Wenefred's virtual non-existence until she comes into contact with male sexuality and the lack of detail surrounding her death may also be regarded as related to role: we do not hear of the childhoods of Dunawd or Machuta either, and the author naturally loses all interest in characters once they are no longer connected with events in his own saint's life. In Wenefred's case, it seems possible that these details have been patched on to the ends of the account found in the lost Latin *vita* of Beuno in order to fashion a *vita* for her: the same technique could equally have been applied to the cameo appearance of Dunawd in the *Vita S. Davidis* or of Machuta in the *Vita S. Tatheï*. The same may perhaps be said of the equally unconvincing and sketchy reports of Wenefred's trip to Rome and her attendance at a synod, which smack of the author imposing typical credentials to sanctity and importance upon her. The fact that Wenefred is never specifically referred to as *sancta* (unlike her male counterparts who are often given the prefix *sanctus*) is also explained

²⁰³ VSW, pp. 290, 292 and 294; VETSW, pp. 712, 714 and 717.

²⁰⁴ *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed. JAMES, p. 11; *Vita S. Tatheï*, in VSBG, pp. 280-1.

if we see her as an extracted character – like Dunawd and Machuta she is a *uirgo* or a *puella*, and while the author grants her *beata*, he omits to insert a *sancta* into the narrative with which he is working. It is also at least conceivable that Wenefred's *vitae* being extracted from an earlier source explains why Holywell is given no explicit mention: the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* refers only to *Wenefred's Spring*, which it asserts was originally Sicca Vallis, or the 'Dry Valley', and – the more surprising of the two considering it had a greater interest in property rights – the *Vita S. Wenefrede* refers only to the estate of *Abeluyc*, which Teuyth granted to Beuno, and to the valley of *Sechnant* (clearly based on Welsh *sych*, 'dry', and *nant*, 'brook'), where Beuno built his hut and church. *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* refers only to *Ffynnawn Wenvrewy*, but the legend implying that before the eruption of Wenefred's spring the valley was without water must have originated in the lost *vita* of Beuno. It seems possible that in Wales, Wenefred's Well or Spring was known as such (and thus that the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* thought to name it directly unnecessary); it is in a Chester charter that it is first referred to as *Haliwel*. The Welsh name for Holywell is Trefynnon, meanwhile, which is closer to the names used in the two *vitae*.

The hypothesis of the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* manipulating an extract from an earlier Cambro-Latin *vita* solves the problems involved with asserting Welsh authorship for the *Vita S. Wenefrede*: the raw materials are of Welsh provenance, but their manipulator need not be. The basis of the lost *vita* accounts for the Cambro-Latin motifs in the *Vita S. Wenefrede*, and particularly for the reminiscences from the *Vita S. Cadoci*, since similarities between *Hystoria o Uched Beuno* and the *Vita S. Cadoci* seem to suggest a relationship between the two: a dying father sends for his son the saint²⁰⁵; a barren woman becomes pregnant after promising the child to a religious life²⁰⁶; an animal improperly taken for food will not cook²⁰⁷; a conflict occurs across a river²⁰⁸. However, it must be remembered that only one of the verbal echoes, concerning the melting of Caradog, from the *Vita S. Cadoci* is located within the decollation episode of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*. The second echo, concerning the trip to Rome, has been

²⁰⁵ VSC, p. 86; *HoUB*, p. 16.

²⁰⁶ VSC, p. 56; *HoUB*, p. 16.

²⁰⁷ VSC, p. 112; *HoUB*, p. 17.

²⁰⁸ VSC, pp. 68, 72 and 114; *HoUB*, p. 19.

transparently tacked on to the end of the story. It seems possible that the lost *vita* contained an episode in which Beuno travelled to Rome (since this was a hagiographic commonplace) which the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* simply lifted and transferred to Wenefred's *vita*, but there is no mention of such a trip in *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*. It seems equally likely, therefore, that either the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* knew the *Vita S. Cadoci*, or that it was known to his sources. Meanwhile, the evidence that the author of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* could not have been a Welshman, namely the bungling of the legend concerning Wenefred's name, becomes explicable: the author was not a native but was writing in a Welsh context using Cambro-Latin material. That the author was writing in Wales would seem to be suggested by the convincing spellings of un-Latinized Welsh names (Abeluyc, Maynguen, Guenphennaun), and by the avoidance of Norman corruptions found in the *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* such as affixing an 'h' to names (Chadocus, Theuith). Consequently, it does seem apposite to look towards the Norman monks of Basingwerk – which, as David Williams describes, 'was "in Wales", but not "of it"'²⁰⁹ – for authorship of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*. It should be noted, however, that the *Vita S. Wenefrede* contains no mention of Basingwerk, although a mention is inserted in John of Tynemouth's mid-fourteenth-century *Sanctilogium Angliae* version, which seems otherwise to have been abridged from Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*²¹⁰. Furthermore, Williams has noted that evidence of Basingwerk's cultural heritage is scarce – it was not until the late fifteenth century during the abbacy of Thomas Pennant (1481-1522) that Basingwerk held a flourishing literary reputation due to hospitality extended to bards such as Guttyn Owain and Tudur Aled²¹¹. However, some early indications of literary leanings may be discerned: a dispute over five books with Aberconwy in 1215 offers proof of the abbey's library; the *Brut y Tywysogion*, the *Book of Aneirin* and the *Black Book of Basing* have all been assigned at some time to the abbey, suggestive of an active scriptorium, but all of a much later date than concerns the *Vita S. Wenefrede*²¹². Gilbert of Louth (d. 1153), abbot of Basingwerk from the late 1140s, is

²⁰⁹ WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 91.

²¹⁰ *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. HORSTMAN, vol. II, p. 418.

²¹¹ WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, pp. 100 and 104; JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 169.

²¹² WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 104.

described as the author in one manuscript containing the *Purgatorium S. Patricii*, an account of the vision of hell seen by Owen, Gilbert's interpreter during his years in Ireland²¹³. However, all other copies attribute the *Purgatorium* to Henry of Saltrey, to whom Gilbert related the vision. Nevertheless, this might be seen as evidence of literary concerns in the mid-twelfth century.

* * *

IV. DATING THE *VITA S. WENEFREDE*

To what extent does the conclusion of Basingwerk authorship help to date the *Vita S. Wenefrede*? It seems unlikely that the lost Latin *vita* would have been written before the end of the eleventh century, because of the echoes from the *Vita S. Cadoci*, which is thought to have been one of the first *vitae* to be written in Wales, c. 1095/1104²¹⁴. Basingwerk was not founded until 1131, meanwhile, and thus this is the earliest possible date for the formation of the *Vita S. Wenefrede*²¹⁵. However, as discussed above, at this time Holywell was a dependency of St Werburg's, Chester, and it seems more likely that the Basingwerk monks would have written the *vita* at a time when Wenefred's Well was in their possession. Precise dates are unclear, but Holywell was under Basingwerk's charge at some point during the earldom of Ranulf II (1129-53), and was officially confirmed to the abbey again by Dafydd ap Llywelyn in 1240. However, although Holywell was granted a dependency of St Werburg's Chester at some point during the earldom of Hugh II (1153-81), it did not remain so for long:

Holywell had fallen into the hands of the Welsh by the end of the twelfth century. In a petition to Archbishop Hubert Walter (1193-1207) to be allowed to appropriate their church of Chipping Campden, the abbot and monks of Chester state that in the wars with the princes of Wales they have lost their church of 'Hallewell', which was of £100 value²¹⁶.

²¹³ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. XXI, p. 314.

²¹⁴ LAPIDGE – SHARPE, *Bibliography*, p. 15.

²¹⁵ WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 89.

²¹⁶ TAIT, *Chartulary*, pp. 236-7, n. 1.

It has been noted by Arthur Jones that the loss of £100 value 'must have been the accumulation of years'²¹⁷. However, not only is the date at which Chester lost Holywell uncertain, but it is also mere hypothesis to suggest that it reverted to the possession of Basingwerk at this time²¹⁸. Holywell may well have been left without a benefactor during the years leading up to 1240. It was not until 1253 that the abbot of Basingwerk, and the abbot of its then-mother house at Buildwas, received permission from the general chapter for Wenefred's feast-day to be a Feast of Twelve Lessons. However, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* had long been in circulation by these dates, since it is preserved in the Worcester manuscript of c. 1203²¹⁹. There are two further complications to be added to this hazy history. Firstly, if, as has always been supposed, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is the *vita prima*, and therefore written in the period 1131-8, why had Robert of Shrewsbury not seen it before he came to write his own *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*? While Robert does not mention it directly, we must assume that he had been to Holywell since, as was noted above, he states in his preface that he collected material from the churches relevant to Wenefred (which Baring-Gould and Fisher suggest to have been the legends of Gwytherin and Basingwerk)²²⁰. We know for certain that a delegation of Shrewsbury monks visited Holywell without Robert after the saint cured a sick monk among their number²²¹. It seems hard to believe that the Shrewsbury monks would not have been aware of any *vita* in circulation. If the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is indeed the *vita prima* and had already been written before Shrewsbury took an interest in the saint, do we assume that the monks of Basingwerk withheld their *vita* intentionally? This would seem to defeat the propagandising purposes of writing a *vita* in the first place. However, if the Basingwerk monks were not deliberately concealing information from the Shrewsbury monks, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* cannot have been written by the time the Shrewsbury monks came to Wales. Secondly, the silence of

²¹⁷ JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 172.

²¹⁸ See, however, DUGDALE's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. V, London, 1825, p. 263, for an undatable charter by Dafydd's father Llewelyn concerning Basingwerk's rights to Holywell.

²¹⁹ *VSBG*, p. xvii.

²²⁰ *LBS*, vol. III, p. 186.

²²¹ *VETSW*, p. 727.

Gerald of Wales upon the subject of Wenefred when he visited Basingwerk in 1188 is also problematic. Gerald, 'always eager to chronicle anything miraculous or extraordinary', does comment on the nearby silver mines and Coleshill, but not on Wenefred's well²²². Are we to suppose that the *Vita S. Wenefrede* had not been written by this date either?

It is perhaps sensible to turn to investigating possible political motivation for the composition of a saint's *vita*. The threat posed by Robert and the Shrewsbury delegation (who were in alliance with fellow Benedictine monks at Chester) to Basingwerk's local saint might have provided the Savignac monks there with the impetus to produce a written record: although native Welshmen were not concerned about corporeal relics, the Norman monks, more familiar with continental customs, would have understood the financial and political relevance of possessing Wenefred's remains. The increasing importance of being in possession of relics is illustrated by Bishop Urban (1107-34)²²³, who had St Dyfrig translated from Bardsey to Llandaff in 1120²²⁴. In the absence of Wenefred's relics, the Basingwerk monks may have felt it necessary to preserve the sanctity and property rights of their dependency through something more concrete than oral legend, and the two *vitae* may even have been written contemporaneously, the *Vita S. Wenefrede* more directly reliant upon the earlier lost *vita* of Beuno perhaps due to this state of exigency. However, if the *vita* was composed this early, why was it not until some eighty years later that permission was sought to celebrate Wenefred's feast-day? A possible explanation for this discrepancy may be aired: Basingwerk Abbey was populated by Savignac monks until 1147-8, when, along with all Savignac abbeys, it was absorbed into the Cistercian order²²⁵. Jones notes that 'whether it was immediately repopulated or temporarily abandoned to be revived at some future time is a moot point'²²⁶. If the *Vita S. Wenefrede* were written by the Savignac monks before the abbey's transference, it seems plausible that the Cistercians all but forgot about Wenefred until Holywell was returned

²²² JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 170.

²²³ E. B. FRYDE *et al.* (ed.), *Handbook of British Chronology* (= *Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks*, 2), 3rd ed., Cambridge, 1996, p. 293.

²²⁴ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 340, n. 133.

²²⁵ JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 170.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-1.

to them by Dafydd ap Llywelyn in 1240, explaining also the silence of Gerald of Wales. However, the disruption caused by the incorporation of Basingwerk into the Cistercian order may have been exaggerated by Jones: repopulation would seem to be refuted by the fact that the abbey remained answerable to the abbot of Savigny, who dealt with matters of discipline in 1192 and 1195 when Basingwerk tries to become independent of their mother-house, Buildwas²²⁷. Furthermore, even if the abbey were repopulated, a pre-1148 date would be problematic for the *libellus miraculorum*, which was in existence by the end of the twelfth century and could not have been composed until after 1135 when the Normans were expelled from Gwynedd. References to 'the days of the Normans' may suggest that pre-1148 is too early a date, which would suggest later Cistercian authorship, destroying any theory of neglect in the second half of the twelfth century. Consequently, it seems equally plausible to suggest that both *vita* and *libellus* were written after Gerald's stay in 1188, or – disregarding Gerald's silence – at some other time during the mid- to second half of the twelfth century.

In conclusion, therefore, the uncertainty and turbulence of Flintshire history in the twelfth century make it difficult to guess a precise date for authorship, but the primacy of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* should no longer be taken for granted. Since both authors of Wenefred's *vitae* appear to have been Norman, there is some truth in Willis-Bund's condemnation of the *literary* Wenefred as a fabrication by Latin writers. However, it is clear that the *legendary* Wenefred had convincing credentials to Welsh nationality and that a cult almost certainly existed before the twelfth century, revolving around her well. Nevertheless, until recast by Robert of Shrewsbury and a monk of Basingwerk, Wenefred was almost certainly a subsidiary figure in a lost Latin *vita* of St Beuno.

It is hoped that these few conjectures solve more problems than they create, but clearly Wenefred's cult remains riddled with unanswered – and perhaps unanswerable – questions. Indeed, yet more puzzles present themselves with regard to the growth of the legend from the twelfth century. The 'Cambro-Latin' *Vita S. Wenefrede*, which we have placed at Basingwerk Abbey, seems to disappear without trace from Wales. As was noted above, the only extant copy

²²⁷ WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, p. 90.

was written at Worcester at the start of the thirteenth century; 'quite outside the main channels of transmission of other twelfth-century lives of Welsh saints'²²⁸, even though it was to the prior of Worcester, Gwarin, that Robert dedicated his *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* in 1140²²⁹. The Worcester connection becomes even more intriguing when we take into account that Wenefred is found in the Calendar of the early thirteenth century Worcester Antiphasser, where she is given twelve lessons²³⁰. In later English breviaries, she receives nine lessons²³¹. Could the twelve lessons of Worcester be the same as those that Basingwerk and Buildwas implemented in 1253? The second and final appearance of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* is the redaction in the collection of saints' *vitae* in British Library, Lansdowne 436, thought to have been produced at Romsey (Hants.)²³², into which the occasional passage of Robert's frothy verbiage has been added. However, it appears that it was Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* that formed the basis of later tradition despite its prolixity in England, where it was abridged to shape the *Nova Legenda Angliae* life and the sixteenth-century breviary lections²³³. More surprisingly, however, it was Robert's *vita* that formed the basis of the later cult in Wales. Extant from the late sixteenth century is a vernacular life of the saint, *Buchedd Gwenfrewy*, which appears to be a translation into Welsh of Robert's *vita*²³⁴. Even more curious, however, are the earlier

²²⁸ SMITH, *Oral and Written*, p. 339.

²²⁹ VETSW, p. 708.

²³⁰ Wenefred appears in the Calendar at September 19, rather than on the usual Feast day of November 3, of A. MOCQUEREAU's edition in *Paléographie Musicale*, 12 (1922), p. 37.

²³¹ See for example *Ordinale Exoniensis*, ed. J. N. DALTON (= *Henry Bradshaw Society*, 37, 38, 63, 79), London, 1909-40, vol. I, p. 273.

²³² For a description of the manuscript, see R. C. LOVE, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, Oxford, 1996, p. lxxxii; discussion of contents may be found by P. GROSJEAN, *Vita S. Roberti novi monasterii in Anglia abbatis*, in *AB*, 56 (1938), pp. 334-9.

²³³ *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. HORSTMAN, vol. II, pp. 415-21 [BHL 8853]; *Breviarii ad usum insignis ecclesiae Sarum*, ed. F. PROCTER and C. WORDSWORTH, Cambridge, 1879-86, vol. III, pp. 989-1000 (see also AASS, Nov. t. I, pp. 732-3); *The Hereford Breviary*, ed. W. H. FRERE and L. E. G. BROWN (= *Henry Bradshaw Society*, 26, 40, 46), London, 1904-15, vol. II, pp. 392-3. There is evidence to suggest that the lections of the former breviary had been established as early as 1398 – see HALL, *Pilgrimage*, p. 29.

²³⁴ *Buchedd Gwenfrewi* is edited as an appendix by BARING-GOULD and FISHER in their *LBS*, vol. IV, pp. 397-423; see also LISA JONES, *Golygiad o Buchedd Gwenfrewi*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wales, Cardiff, 1998, for a more modern edition and discussion of the Welsh text.

influences seen in the poetry of the *Cywyddwyr*, particularly because some poets were composing while actually resident at Basingwerk Abbey under the aegis of Thomas Pennant (1481-1522)²³⁵. Writing at Basingwerk in the early sixteenth century in his poem *Stori Gwenfrewy a'i Ffynnon*, Tudur Aled describes how Caradog dies after having beheaded Wenefred:

'Llyn tawdd a'i llyncawdd i'r llawr' ('[there was] a molten lake which swallowed him into the ground')²³⁶.

This follows Robert's description of events, the man first melting and then being swallowed, rather than those of the *Vita S. Wenefrede* and *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*, in which Caradog simply melts. We have seen above that being swallowed by the earth is a Cambro-Latin motif, and thus we may suspect that it was present in the lost Latin *vita* of Beuno. While we cannot be sure if the Basingwerk poets were using Beuno's *vita* or Robert's *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae*, it is clear that they were not using the *Vita S. Wenefrede*. Even such a cursory glance at these later materials demonstrates that there is much work to be done on the dissemination of the *vitae* and the development of the cult of St Wenefred during the later Middle Ages.²³⁷

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Résumé. À la lumière des progrès réalisés dans la connaissance de l'hagiographie latine du Pays de Galles, l'article tente d'apporter un éclairage nouveau aux questions qui entourent le dossier de la vierge martyre Wénéfride. On y aborde la datation et l'identification de l'auteur de la *Vita S. Wenefredae* (BHL 8847-8848), traditionnellement considérée comme la pièce la plus ancienne, ainsi que ses relations avec un autre texte, la *Vita et translatio S. Wenefredae* (BHL 8849-51), écrit par Robert de Shrewsbury en 1140. Les deux compositions pourraient avoir utilisé une source commune.

²³⁵ For a list of the Welsh poets who wrote about Wenefred, see HENKEN, *Traditions*, p. 28; some discussion of material is found at pp. 141-51.

²³⁶ *Gwaith Tudur Aled*, ed. T. GWYNN JONES, Cardiff, 1926, p. 523.

²³⁷ I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Prof. Michael Lapidge for his advice and patience during the preparation of this article, and to the Cambridge Board of Graduate Studies for a research studentship.

ABBREVIATIONS

BARTRUM, *Genealogical Tracts* = P. BARTRUM (ed.), *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, Cardiff, 1966.

Canu Aneirin = *Canu Aneirin*, ed. I. WILLIAMS, Cardiff, 1938.

COLKER, *Joscelin of Canterbury* = M. COLKER, *Texts of Joscelin of Canterbury Which Relate to the History of Barking Abbey*, in *Studia Monastica*, 7 (1965), pp. 418-34.

DAVIES, *Property Rights* = W. E. DAVIES, *Property Rights and Property Claims in Welsh vitae of the Eleventh Century*, in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés, IV^e-XII^e siècles* (= *Études augustinienes*), Paris, 1981, pp. 515-33.

FLEETWOOD, *St Wenefrede* = W. FLEETWOOD, *The Life and Miracles of St Wenefrede*, 2nd ed., London, 1713.

HALL, *Pilgrimage* = D. J. HALL, *English Mediaeval Pilgrimage*, London, 1965.

HENKEN, *Traditions* = E. R. HENKEN, *Traditions of The Welsh Saints*, Cambridge, 1987.

HENKEN, *Welsh Saints* = E. R. HENKEN, *The Welsh Saints: A Study in Patterned Lives*, Cambridge, 1991.

HoUB = *Hystoria o Uched Beuno*, in VSBG, pp. 16-22.

HUGHES, MS. Cotton Vespasian A. xiv = K. HUGHES, MS. Cotton Vespasian A. xiv. *Its Purpose and Provenance*, in *her Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D. N. DUMVILLE, Woodbridge, 1980, pp. 53-66.

JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey* = A. JONES, *Basingwerk Abbey*, in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. EDWARDS, V. H. GALBRAITH and E. F. JACOB, Manchester, 1933, pp. 169-178.

JONES, *Holy Wells* = F. JONES, *The Holy Wells of Wales*, Cardiff, 1954.

KNOWLES, *Religious Houses* = D. KNOWLES, C. N. L. BROOKE and V. C. M. LONDON, *Heads of Religious Houses*, Cambridge, 1972.

LAPIDGE - SHARPE, *Bibliography* = M. LAPIDGE - R. SHARPE, *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature*, Dublin, 1985.

LBS = S. BARING-GOULD and J. FISHER, *The Lives of the British Saints*, 4 vols., London, 1907-13.

MILLINGER, *Humility and Power* = S. MILLINGER, *Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Anglo-Norman Hagiography*, in *Distant Echoes*, ed. J. A. NICHOLS and L. T. SHANK (= *Medieval Religious Women*, 1), Kalamazoo, MI, 1984, pp. 115-29.

- Nova Legenda Anglie* = *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ed. C. HORSTMAN, 2 vols., Oxford, 1901.
- Pedeir Keinc* = *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, ed. I. WILLIAMS, 2nd ed., Cardiff, 1951.
- Rhigyfarch's Life of St David* = *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed. J. W. JAMES, Cardiff, 1967.
- ROLLASON, *Mildrith Legend* = D. ROLLASON, *The Mildrith Legend*, Leicester, 1982.
- Roscarrock's Lives* = *Nicholas Roscarrock's Lives of the Saints: Cornwall and Devon*, ed. N. ORME (= *Devon and Cornwall Record Society New Series*, 35), Exeter, 1992.
- ROSS, *Human Heads* = A. ROSS, *The Human Head in Insular Pagan Celtic Religion*, in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 91 (1957-8), pp. 10-43.
- ROSS, *Severed-Heads* = A. ROSS, *Severed-Heads in Wells: An Aspect of the Well Cult*, in *Scottish Studies*, 6 (1962), pp. 13-48.
- SIMONETTI, *Santi cefalofoi* = A. SIMONETTI, *Santi cefalofoi altomedievali*, in *Studi medievali*, Ser. 3, 28 (1987), pp. 67-121.
- SMITH, *Oral and Written* = J. SMITH, *Oral and Written: Saints, Miracles, and Relics in Brittany*, c. 850-1250, in *Speculum*, 65 (1990), pp. 309-43.
- TAIT, *Chartulary* = J. TAIT (ed.), *The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St Werburgh, Chester*, Manchester, 1920.
- VETSW = *Vita secunda Sanctae Wenefredae et ejusdem translatio*, in AASS, Nov. t. I, pp. 708-31.
- Vie ... de S. Nectan = *Vie, Invention et Miracles de S. Nectan*, ed. P. GROSJEAN, in AB, 71 (1953), pp. 397-414.
- VSBG = A. W. WADE-EVANS (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae*, Cardiff, 1944.
- VSC = *Vita S. Cadoci*, in VSBG, pp. 24-141.
- VSU = *Vita Sancte Wenefrede*, in VSBG, pp. 299-309.
- WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey* = D. WILLIAMS, *Basingwerk Abbey*, in *Cîteaux*, 32 (1981), pp. 87-113.
- WILLIS-BUND, *Characteristics* = J. W. WILLIS-BUND, *Some Characteristics of Welsh and Irish Saints*, in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 5th series, 11 (1894), pp. 276-91.