

(3) Imagine that you have to write an essay on the following topic:

Is it possible to determine who the 'author' of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi might have been? Evaluate the main theories that have been proposed in relation to this.

Introduction:

Define the situation. Stories of the Four Branches had origins in oral tradition, written down and preserved in the Red and White Books. Similarities between the versions. Likely the material came to the author in a variety of different ways. Unknown who redacted them into the form we currently know. Will examine some of the arguments put forward which look at a named author, those which consider one single author (not named) and those which consider multiple authors. Will also look at dating of the texts (variable) in order to narrow down potential time period.

Named author 1:

Iestyn Daniel argues for a single named author, comparing the stories of Y Mabinogi as a whole to *Ymborth yr Enaid*. Believes the majority of native tales belong to the same time period (mid 13th century) as *Ymborth yr Enaid*. Names a monk from the Dominican friary at Bangor as a likely author: Cnepyn Gwerthrynian (a nickname), probably also known as Llywelyn Offeiriad. Tentative suggestion. Provides copious examples of the similarities in language used between *Ymborth* and the different stories in *Y Mabinogi*.

Simon Rodway counters this argument. He is impressed by the theory but not the final naming.

Named author 2:

Andrew Breeze also argues for a single named author, naming Gwenllïan ferch Gruffydd ap Cynan, ruler of Gwynedd. She lived c.1098-1136. Breeze's arguments were novel, and based on his expectation of what a piece of literature written by a woman of that time would be like. Provides a list of 19 items as evidence for her authorship, and links events in Gwenllïan's life to the Four Branches showing how this would have influenced her writing.

S Rodway and Diane Luft, among others, have argued against this thesis. Breeze's arguments are circular and self-sustaining in Luft's eyes. Rodway notes Gwerful Mechain (earliest Welsh female author to whom a substantial body of work is attributed) tackled similar subject matter to her male contemporaries, so it is not a given that women would write about "women's topics" i.e. childbirth and children, clothing and appearance, prominence of strong female characters and weak bumbling male characters, no descriptions of battle.

Single author:

This is the classic view of authorship as first put forward by Sir Ifor Williams and William J Gruffydd. John Bollard expands on their work, looking at a pattern and structure running through

PKM linked by the themes of friendships, marriages and feuds. Bollard prefers to use the term 'redactor' or 'storyteller' rather than 'author'.

Ned Sturzer also argues for single authorship, looking at stylistic factors including negative sentence constructions, verbs to describe movement and by linking the different branches to each other.

Mac Cana suggests it is likely that the author was a cleric. Quote Mac Cana p.41 re the final redactor of the PKM being the author. It is generally accepted that whoever the author was they were knowledgeable about law codes, geography of different parts of Wales, and appropriate behaviour at court.

Multiple authors:

Sioned Davies has theorised that the PKM are the work of multiple authors. She has examined formulas in various tales which may serve as an indicator of authorship styles.

Professor Jackson assumes several compilers for the stories, although he does state that you cannot associate the author with the compilation or editing of the stories (p.43, Mac Cana).

Conclusion:

Most commentators consider PKM to be the work of a single author. Sioned Davies has done the most work recently to challenge this view. I do not think it is possible to identify a named author for the PKM, or even if it was one or many authors. Learned minds have argued their points intelligently, on the whole, but I agree with Rodway when he says 'we cannot confidently put names to anonymous texts, nor are we likely to be able to do that unless more evidence comes to light.' (p.66, Rodway)

Sample paragraph:

Breeze's theory was met with much scepticism. Luft and Rodway note the argument that the stories were written by a woman are based on what Breeze expects a piece of literature written by a woman to be like. Breeze lists nineteen items as evidence for female authorship, in particular for it being a woman of Gwenllian's status. Some of these seem reasonable at first glance, such as having an intimate knowledge of courtly or princely life, and being able to date Gwenllian's life to roughly the same period of time as which the Four Branches are normally dated (between 1050-1120). However, it starts to feel tenuous when Breeze tries to draw parallels between Gwenllian's life and the action described within the Four Branches. Breeze notes that Gwenllian's husband and father both went into exile in Ireland, which most likely influenced her negative view of the country in the Second Branch. Breeze goes on to state 'Presumably he [Gruffydd ap Rhys] went to Dublin, presumably with his wife. If so, it is possible Gwenllian composed the *Four Branches* on their return to Wales.'¹ This feels like a lot of

presumption upon which to base an argument, and is not the only example of circular arguments contained within his theory.

¹ Andrew Breeze, *The Origins of the Four Branches* (Gracewing) p.19

Bibliography

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Bollard, J. 'The Role of Myth and Tradition in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, Vol 6 Winter (1983) pp.67-86

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Luft, D. Review of 'The Origin of the Four Branches', *Celtic Studies Association Newsletter*, May 2010 pp.9-12

Mac Cana, P. *The Mabinogi* University of Wales Press

Roberts, B. 'Where were the Four Branches of the Mabinogion written?', in Nagy, J. (ed.) *The Individual in Celtic Literatures* (Four Courts Press)

Rodway, S. 'The Where, Who, When and Why of Medieval Prose Texts: Some Methodological Considerations', *Studia Celtica*, Vol XLI (2007), pp. 47-89

Sturzer, N. 'Inconsistencies and Infelicities in the Welsh Tales', *Studia Celtica*, Vol XXXVII (2003) pp.127-142

(4) Choose five websites relating to Celtic Studies. Not all of the websites have to be academic and scholarly. Indeed it is a good idea to choose a selection of websites of varying quality. Briefly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen sites, noting at the start where they can be found. Some points you may wish to consider: how useful is the information they contain? How reliable is this information? Can we ascertain who is responsible for the information? Do they acknowledge their sources? How well is the website presented? Is it easy to navigate? How could the websites be improved? Would you recommend them to other users? Are they useful for academic study?

Topic selected: St. Illtud

1. Wikipedia entry <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illtud>

The number one google result for St. Illtud is the Wikipedia entry. Wikipedia is a free encyclopaedia which can be updated by anyone with an account, so should for this reason be used with caution. As an overview of the subject it is useful, but should not be cited.

Author. Not stated, unable to identify.

Strengths. The site provides a very brief summary on the right hand side of the page with birth, death and other useful details. There is also an impressive picture of a stained glass window from Holy Trinity Church Abergavenny depicting Illtud Farchog, that is, Illtud the Knight. Alternate spellings of Illtud's name are provided in case the reader wishes to widen their search for information. There are hyperlinks throughout the article which redirect the reader to another Wikipedia page containing information relating to that topic. A list of references is provided at the end of the entry, and in general there are hyperlinks which can be followed to online sources.

Weaknesses. Wikipedia is updated anonymously, so it is not possible to cite the articles accurately. It is likely that multiple editors have been at work, and the updates can be undertaken by non-experts. The tone of the article is mixed, making the article feel like it has been created via cut and paste from other sites. In fact, it is quite clear when other websites have been utilised. The language used throughout is not consistent, changing from factual-seeming to vague very quickly. In the first line of the Hagiography section, the writer has stated that St. Illtud was 'popular among the very ancient Celts'. Admittedly, the use of "ancient" in a historical sense can be used to describe a wide time period which does stretch up to 500AD, but "very ancient" makes me think pre-Roman times. This is a weakly constructed sentence which feels very misleading. Another weak sentence section can be found in the Arthurian Connections segment, stating 'an area on the Herefordshire-Monmouthshire border, which retains many memories of Arthur and Illtud's family'. There are no references linked to this claim, and it is not clear what this statement actually means.

Verify information. Would need to cross reference with more reliable academic sources. Some of the references provided now link to inactive / dead websites which are no longer any use. I would not rely on solely for academic study.

2. Dictionary of Welsh Biography entry

<https://biography.wales/article/s-ILLT-UD0-0475>

This website contains over five thousand concise biographies of individuals who have made a significant contribution to national life, whether in Wales or more widely.

Author. Stated very clearly at the top of the page, this article was written by Emrys George Bowen. It is therefore attributable and citable. There is even a citation button that can be used for this purpose.

Strengths. This is a very clearly laid out website, with brief personal details in a box at the top of the page along with the author's name. This is a short article focusing on what factual information is available to us, not dwelling on any of the stories associated with Illtud's life. The second paragraph is concerned with church dedications which identify the area where the cult of St. Illtud was most likely at its strongest, mainly South Eastern Wales and Brittany. There are hyperlinks throughout the article which will take the reader to related pages, and a list of sources is provided for further reading.

Weaknesses. It is not a very attractive page to look at, even though the information it contains is very good.

Verify information. There are four logos across the bottom of the page which lend strength to the reliability of this web page. These are The National Library of Wales, The Welsh Government, The Honorable Society of Cymmrodorion and the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. Would recommend this site for academic study.

3. Saint Kateri website

<https://www.kateriirondequoit.org/resources/saints-alive/ignatius-ivo/st-illtud/>

This is the website of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Parish, a New York based Roman Catholic community.

Author. Father Robert F. McNamara.

Strengths. This article focuses mostly on the factual events that are known about Illtud's life rather than miracles, and displays a level of scepticism relating to the events surrounding Illtud becoming a hermit. It also dismisses attempts to identify Illtud Farchog as Sir Galahad, stating 'we move into the mists of Camelot, where there is more fancy than fact'.

Weaknesses. This website is the source of the Wikipedia statement about the 'very ancient Celts'. There are no references provided throughout the article, so it is unclear where the writer

obtained his information from, and no way to verify it. The presentation of this web page is a bit drab, with no pictures and just a block of text.

Verify information. The writer does not acknowledge any sources, which makes it very difficult to cross reference the reliability of the information provided. This site should not be used as a sole source of information for Illtud's life, however with caution it could be used to support information already gathered.

4. Celtic Culture A Historical Encyclopaedia

<http://www.encyclopedias.biz/dw/Encyclopedia%20of%20Celtic%20Culture.pdf>

John T. Koch, one of the world's foremost Celtic scholars, has assembled work from leading researchers worldwide to produce the first encyclopedic treatment of the Celts and Celtic scholarship. This is available in book format, or online as a searchable pdf. The entry on St. Illtud can be found on pp.957-8.

Author. J. T. Koch. Published by ABC Clio.

Strengths. This is a comprehensive and well researched piece of work by a prominent and respected scholar in the field of Celtic studies. Other entries contained in the document are denoted by capital letters, and the pdf version of this book is easily searchable. The entry is based on the *vita* of other saints, and references a *Life of St. Illtud* as well.

Weaknesses. Located in the middle of a dense body of text, with no hyperlinks to easily cross reference other entries. There are at least 48 mentions of the word Illtud, which makes identifying the location of the article slightly arduous.

Verify information. The author is an academic, historian and linguist who specializes in Celtic studies, especially prehistory and the early Middle Ages. This article is recommended for academic use.

5. The Lives of the British Saints

<https://archive.org/details/livesofbritishsa03bariuoft/page/n4>

A scanned copy of the original text of the book detailing the lives of Welsh and Cornish saints, and any Irish saints that had dedications to them in Britain. The relevant section about Illtud can be found in pp 303-17.

Author. S. Baring-Gould and J. Fisher. Both men were scholars with an interest in history.

Strengths. This is a scanned copy, which means that there will not be any transcription errors in uploading the document. There is a scroll bar beneath the viewer which can be used to find the correct pages that are required. It is possible to zoom in and out, however zooming in does not improve print quality on the screen. This entry provides the most detailed information about

Illtud's life, drawn from other hagiographies. It also details all the myths, legends and miracles associated with St. Illtud throughout his life, along with the writers' attempts to explain what these events may have actually been based on. It is very easy to navigate.

Weaknesses. It is difficult to read the text if you zoom in too much, and a struggle to read it on a smaller computer screen at all.

Verify information. There are many footnotes and references throughout this document. It is probably possible to follow up on the references if you can read them, however my laptop screen is quite small. I would recommend this source for academic study.