

**Re-inventing Rhydderch Hael: history, myth,
hagiography from the 'Old North'.**

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Rhydderch Hael and the Kingdom of Strathclyde</i>	6
<i>The sources for Rhydderch Hael</i>	8
<i>Rhydderch Hael: history and myth</i>	26
<i>Genre-theory and Rhydderch Hael</i>	38
<i>Conclusion</i>	56
<i>Bibliography</i>	59

Abstract

This thesis aims to examine critically the available textual sources relating to the life and deeds of Rhydderch Hael, who is generally accepted to have been a ruler of the small Brythonic kingdom of Alt Clut in what is now south-west Scotland during the last half of the sixth century AD. These sources are analysed in terms of what they might be assumed to provide in terms of historical evidence for Rhydderch's reign. More significantly, however, given the scarcity and the ambiguities surrounding the sources, the thesis explores the use made of Rhydderch by writers from the late seventh century to the fifteenth century. These writers reinvent Rhydderch in terms of the geopolitical and religious landscapes of their times, often co-opting this figure from a remote north British past and placing him in terms of the struggles (both political and cultural) in which they operate. The influence on the depiction of Rhydderch of the different genre expectations of the underlying texts in which he is portrayed is also dealt with in detail. A framework drawn from reader reception theory is employed to investigate how readers/listeners contemporary to the dissemination of the texts might have viewed Rhydderch's depictions. The thesis concludes with a brief consideration of the legacy in high medieval Welsh literature of Rhydderch Hael and the wider 'Old North' of which he is a key component. The endurance of the Rhydderch Hael myth and the wide range of genres in which he is portrayed (especially considering the relatively small number of existing texts which deal with him) is seen as evidence of a strong tendency to view the north British milieu of the late sixth century as key to later 'Welsh/British' identities.

1) Introduction

Rhydderch Hael is a significant figure from early medieval literature relating to the area often referred to in Welsh as Yr Hen Ogledd (The Old North). He is associated more specifically with the kingdom of Alt Clut (often referred to anachronistically as 'Strathclyde') around what is now the town of Dumbarton and is generally accepted to have held the kingship of this region for a time. His name appears in a number of the key sources for the period of late sixth- and early seventh-century northern Britain across a range of genres: histories, hagiography, poetry and poetic triads. These sources are in either Latin or Middle Welsh. Two are known to have been written in northern Britain (the *Vita Sancti Columbae* of Adomnán and the *Vita Kentigerni* of Jocelin of Furness), the rest are generally assumed to have been written in what is now Wales.

This essay will begin with an examination of the available sources for Rhydderch Hael starting with the earliest known reference to him in the *Vita Sancti Columbae* and ending with a number of poetic sources which are of uncertain date in terms of their original form but were written down no later than the fifteenth century (based on what is known of the manuscripts which contain them). References to Rhydderch Hael which occur in the *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* and therefore date from the late thirteenth century or later in their original form will not be considered in this essay. The legacy of Rhydderch Hael as a figure whose name is alluded to in late medieval poetry will be considered briefly at the end of the final chapter. The reason for this delineation of subject matter is largely to do with constraints of space but also relates to my focus on what appear to be the earliest references to Rhydderch in his north British context. The *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* references almost certainly derive from what was carried forward into a wholly Welsh poetic tradition through texts such as the poetic triads.

Having established what these early sources appear to tell us about Rhydderch Hael and his north British context, I will consider the extent to

which they, individually and collectively, provide evidence of his historicity. I will draw on the work of Dumville and his proposed framework for considering historicity in early medieval texts and I will place the discussion within a wider debate about the reliability of texts concerned with the Old North which is often polarised between so-called 'authenticist' views and more sceptical viewpoints.¹ I will then move to a consideration of the texts in terms of genre expectations and what can be assumed about their reception by audiences contemporary with their dissemination, employing a theoretical framework developed by Suzanne Fleischmann based on Hans Robert Jauss's reader reception theory.² This final and most lengthy section of the essay will enable me to draw some conclusions about how the traditions which surround Rhydderch Hael are re-invented and re-shaped according to the political expediencies of the time of composition (or perhaps re-composition) of the various texts which refer to him.

2) Rhydderch Hael and the Kingdom of Strathclyde

There is general agreement amongst early medieval historians dealing with North Britain and South West Scotland that Rhydderch Hael was a historical figure with kingly status who is localisable to a specific historical and geographical context: Alt Clut (modern Dumbarton) in the mid to late sixth century A.D.³ I will follow the practice of recent researchers such as Thomas Owen Clancy who caution against the use of Strathclyde as the name of Rhydderch's assumed kingdom, as this term is only properly applied to the much later (late ninth-century) kingdom of Strathclyde which emerges after the Viking take-over of Dumbarton.⁴

¹ D.N. Dumville, 'Early Welsh Poetry: Problems of Historicity' in B.F. Roberts ed., *Early Welsh Poetry: Studies in the Book of Aneirin* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1988), pp. 1-15.

² S. Fleischman, 'On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages', *History and Theory*, Vol. 22. No.3 (Oct 1983), pp. 278-310.

³ A. Macquarrie, 'The Kings of Strathclyde, c.400-1018' in A. Grant and K.J. Stringer, eds., *Medieval Scotland Crown, Lordship and Community, Essays presented to G.W.S Barrow* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 1-19, p.5.

⁴ T.O Clancy 'The Kingdoms of the North: Poetry, Places, Politics' in A. Woolf, ed., *Beyond the Gododdin: Dark Age Scotland in Medieval Wales, The Proceedings of a Day*

The extent of the kingdom of Alt Clut in the supposed period of Rhydderch Hael's kingship is highly uncertain. The safest estimate of this appears to be that it was concentrated around Alt Clut itself (the modern Dumbarton Rock), an imposing natural fortress which has yielded archaeological evidence of high status occupation in the period in question and which is strategically very well situated at an entry point to the Forth of Clyde and with access to Loch Lomond.⁵ Clarkson speculates the kings of Alt Clut must have held sway over a 'core territory comprising the vale of Leven, together with a narrow swathe of land running east along the northern shore of the Clyde as far as the Kelvin' with the possibility of land to the south into what is now northern Renfrewshire.⁶ His logic for this is that a sizeable estate would be required to maintain the kind of warrior-nobility evidenced through the archaeology found at Alt Clut itself.

Rhydderch is not the earliest king to be associated with Alt Clut. This honour belongs to Coroticus (Welsh, Ceretic) who is referred to in a letter attributed to St Patrick which complains about slave-taking raids mounted by Coroticus' men on his monastic lands in Armagh. Although Patrick does not himself name Coroticus as king of Alt Clut, a later source, the ninth century Book of Armagh, does so in a section of chapter headings for Muirchú's seventh century *vita* of Patrick.⁷ The wording used is 'rex Aloo' (King of the Rock), with Aloo being generally read as an abbreviated version of *Alt Cluaide*, the Irish version of the Brittonic Alt Clut.⁸ Apart from this very limited reference, Coroticus only really figures in a much later Welsh genealogy dating from the tenth century (Harleian MS. 3859).⁹ In this genealogy he appears as Ceretic Guletic, son of Cynloyp and father of

Conference held on 19 February 2005, St Andrews St John's House Papers No 13 (St Andrews, 2013), pp. 153-177, p. 160.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ T. Clarkson, *The Men of the North: The Britons of Southern Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010), p. 40.

⁷ Ibid, p. 41

⁸ Ibid, p. 40.

⁹ Charles Edwards dates this as last three quarters of tenth century. T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350-1064*, The History of Wales (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 346-7.

Cynwyd¹⁰. As he is given as five generations previous to a king known to have ruled in around 600, Clarkson feels that the association with Patrick (mid to late fifth century) seems plausible.¹¹ However, Macquarrie argues that such 'generation counting' is 'hazardous' and throws up inconsistencies when we put against what are felt to be the reliable dates for later descendants.¹²

The more distant origins of the kingdom of Alt Clut appear to lie with the people known to the Romans as the *Damnonii*, a British tribe who occupied the valley and estuary of the Clyde¹³. However, as there is no written evidence of the political and cultural context of the area for around two centuries after the fall of Roman power in Britain, very little can be stated with any confidence about how exactly the kingdom of Alt Clut emerged. Aside from the rather tentative linkage of Coroticus with the kingdom, it is only really with the various sources which name Rhydderch Hael that any tangible evidence for its existence emerges. This supports Molly Miller's identification of Rhydderch's reign as a kind of 'historical horizon' for Alt Clut and indeed for the wider history of the post-Roman North.¹⁴ These sources will now each be examined in turn, in their assumed chronological order.

3) The sources for Rhydderch Hael

The sources upon which our knowledge of Rhydderch Hael and his kingdom is based are a reference in Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae* (late seventh century); a passage in the *Historia Brittonum* (possibly early ninth century);

¹⁰ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. Peter C. Bartrum (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), p. 10.

¹¹ T. Clarkson, *The Men of the North*, p. 40.

¹² A. Macquarrie, 'The Kings of Strathclyde', p. 3.

¹³ T. Clarkson, *The Men of the North*, p. 38.

¹⁴ M. Miller, 'Historicity and the Pedigrees of the Northcountrymen' *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, Vol. XXVI, Part III (1975), pp. 255-280, p. 262 and 264.

mentions in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (mid-twelfth century); sections of Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni* (late twelfth century); four middle Welsh poems from *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (mid-thirteenth century), the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (late fourteenth century) and Peniarth 50; a reference in the *Chirk Codex* (thirteenth century); three references in the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (possibly late thirteenth century), three medieval Welsh genealogical sources (tenth to fifteenth centuries) and a reference in the fifteenth century *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain*.

The earliest source for Rhydderch Hael is, in many ways, the most historically significant. This is because it was written within around a century of his presumed *floruit* and in fact is one of only two texts from which at least an approximate date range for his life can be calculated. The text is Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae* (Life of St Columba). This hagiographical text has been securely dated to the late seventh or early eighth century and comprises of accounts of the miracles of Columba, the founder of the monastic community of Iona and the saint often credited with bringing Christianity to the furthest reaches of western Scotland and the Hebrides.¹⁵ Despite the clear hagiographical focus, the text is regarded as a credible source for the sixth-century context of the northern Irish sea region. It provides a date for the death of Columba of 9 June 597. The author of the *Vita*, Adomnán, is recorded as having been a later successor of Columba as abbot of Iona between 679 and 704.¹⁶ This means that Adomnán may only be separated from the life of his subject by around half a century. This is significant for by naming Rhydderch, as he does in Book 1 section 115 of his text, he provides the closest we can get to a contemporary validation for his existence. This can be usefully contrasted with all other kings or heroes of the Old North whose existence can only be inferred from much later sources such as the *Historia Brittonum*, the content of which is

¹⁵ Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba*, ed. and trans. Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 235.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 1 – 3.

generally accepted to be no earlier than the early ninth century and the surviving manuscripts of which are much later still.

Adomnán's reference to Rhydderch comes amongst a sequence of short passages recalling Columba's prophecies regarding various kings and noblemen. It has the chapter heading:

De Rege Rederco Filio Tothail, Qui In Petra Cloithe Regnabit, Beati Viri Prophetia

(The blessed man's prophecy about Rhydderch ap Tudwal, King of Dumbarton.)¹⁷

The passage recounts that Rhydderch sent a messenger, Luigbe moccu Min on a 'secret mission' to find out whether or not he would be killed by his enemies.¹⁸ St Columba delivers the prophecy that Rhydderch will 'nunquam in manus tradetur inimicorum, sed in super plumatiunculam, morietur domo.' ('never be delivered into enemies' hands but he will die at home on his own pillow.')¹⁹ The final sentence of the passage confirms that the saint's prophecy was completely fulfilled as Rhydderch 'in domo sua morte placida obiit' ('died peacefully in his own home.')²⁰

The primary purpose of the passage in the context of the *Vita* seems clearly to give further evidence for Columba's miraculous power and specifically his power of prophecy. However, if we do accept that this meeting did take place as recorded, it does seem to give us some important insights into Rhydderch and his historical context. One of the main implications is that it seems firmly to place Rhydderch into a Christian context – one in which guidance about the future is to be sought from Christian holy men rather

¹⁷ Adomnán of Iona, *Vitae Sancti Columbae*, Sourcebooks Fordham.edu [online]. Available at <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/columba-l.asp> <accessed 25 November 2015>; translation Richard Sharpe in Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba*, ed. and trans. Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1991), p.123.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

than secular or pagan sources. It is also of interest that Rhydderch should seek guidance from Columba who is firmly associated with the kingdoms of the Dál Riata (he was himself born into Dál Riata nobility). As we shall see later, some of our later sources imply a strong enmity between Rhydderch and a contemporary king of the Dál Riata – Aedan Mac Gabráin. There is no direct sense of this in Adomnán's account. However, Clarkson has speculated that if the meeting did take place, a hidden motive of Rhydderch might have been to acquire intelligence from a man who may well have been party to information about the intentions of Dál Riata rulers. An intriguing element of the passage is the description of Columba questioning Luigbe about Rhydderch, his kingdom and his people. This might imply that the intelligence gathering went the other way as well with Columba probing the messenger for useful information to relay back to the Dál Riatans.

A final possible insight from the passage, concerns Rhydderch's state of mind and even perhaps his character. The messenger responds to Columba's questions with the rather plaintive, 'Why do you put questions about the unhappy man, who cannot know at what hour he may be killed by his enemies?' This provides a quite plausible portrait of Rhydderch as beset by worry and depressed by the constant fear of attack from hostile neighbouring lands. The impression derived from this is of a weak king rather than a heroic warlord, something which is absent from later accounts of Rhydderch. However, we must operate with great caution here and remember that this is an account of a conversation which, if it took place at all, did so at least half a century before Adomnán described it. We must also bear in mind the hagiographical context and recognise that what is being contrasted here is a common topos of weak humankind fearing mortality against the certainty of God's foreknowledge of human fate.

The next source, in chronological terms, to make mention of Rhydderch is the *Historia Brittonum* (henceforth *HB*). This Latin text is generally accepted

as having been composed in north-west Wales in 829-30.²¹ It covers a period from the creation of the world to 685 AD and concentrates on material relating to the post-Roman period in Britain. The reference to Rhydderch comes in a section which John Morris subtitles as 'The Northern History, Part 2'. This section deals with the Saxon invasion of northern Britain in the sixth and seventh centuries and the resistance by the Britons. Immediately preceding the Rhydderch reference, the text names the Bernician (Saxon) kings: Adda, Aethelric, Theodoric, Freodwald and Husa. It then states:

Contra illum quattuor reges, Urbgen, et Riderchhen, et Guallauc, et Morcant.

(Four kings fought against them, Urien, and Rhydderch Hen, and Gwallawg and Morcant.)²²

The remainder of the passage focuses on Urien's campaigns against Theodoric and ends with a brief account of Urien's death at the instigation of his fellow British king, Morcant, 'pro invidia' ('out of jealousy') at his military prowess and leadership.

The passage is highly significant in terms of our understanding of the possible context for Rhydderch's kingdom and activities. It situates him firmly within the struggle of the Britons against Saxon aggression. It places him as a contemporary of other kings of the 'Old North' whose names are also known from Welsh *hengerdd* and medieval genealogies. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, an appearance in the *HB* is no guarantee of historicity in the modern sense. Well-known previous sections of the *HB* deal with events which are clearly mythological rather than historical such as the tale of Emrys and the dragons beneath Vortigern's tower and others which are more plausible but which are now largely seen as fictitious, such as the battles of Arthur.

²¹ O. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013) p. 3.

²² *Historia Brittonum* in *Arthurian Sources*, Vol. 8 ed. and trans. John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1980), p.79 and p.38 (translation).

Closely connected with the *HB* is genealogical material relating to both Wales and the 'Old North'. This material is present as an appendix to the main text in the important Harleian manuscript MS. 3859, which is known to date from circa 1100.²³ Bartrum argues that the focus on the family of Owain ap Hywel Dda in these genealogies dates them to much earlier than MS. 3859 – probably to around the middle of the tenth century.²⁴ In the Harleian genealogy Rhydderch is listed as follows:

Riderch hen map Tutagual map Clincoch map Dumgaul hen.²⁵

A later and briefer genealogical source, the *Bonedd Gwyr y Gogledd* ('The Lineage of the Men of the North'), focuses on the sixth-century north British aristocracy. This text has survived to us in a late thirteenth century manuscript but Bartrum suggests that it was likely to have been compiled during the twelfth century. The text is similar in many respects to the relevant sections of the Harleian genealogy but appears to have undergone a process of redaction and 'tidying'.²⁶ Its listing of Rhydderch seems unchanged from that in the Harleian text apart from its orthography and an additional element 'Tutclyt' to Rhydderch's father's name:

Ryderch hael m. Tutwal Tutclyt m. Kedic m. Dyuynwal hen.²⁷

A later genealogy, associated with Llyywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd (d. 1240), thought to have been copied from the lost manuscript Hengwrt 33 also gives Rhydderch as the son of Tudwal Tudclud and expands his name to include the ephithet 'glaer ag Ardderchddrud' ('brilliant and splendid-

²³ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, ed. Peter C. Bartrum, p.5; T. Charles Edwards places it in the last three-quarters of the tenth century, *Wales and Britons*, p. 346-7.

²⁴ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, p.9.

²⁵ *ibid*, p.10.

²⁶ M. Miller, 'Historicity and the Pedigrees of the Northcountrymen', p.257.

²⁷ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, R. Bromwich, ed., University of Wales Press; 3rd edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), p.238.

brave').²⁸ This version, however, also tells us that a certain Morgant *mwynvawr* was Rhydderch's brother. This has led to speculation by Bromich and others that the Morgant referred to here may be the Morcant of the *HB* referred to above.²⁹ This genealogy was dated by Bartrum as between 1400 and 1450 but recent work by Ben Guy suggests that it should be dated to the early fourteenth century based on evidence relating to the historical context of other texts thought to be derived from Hengrwt 33 and on orthographical grounds.³⁰

Following the *HB* and associated genealogical material there is a gap in existing references to Rhydderch Hael which are clearly datable to the period between the late ninth century and the middle of the twelfth century. This cannot be taken as evidence that interest in Rhydderch evaporated during this period, only that nothing to evidence such interest has been preserved in the written record. As will be discussed later, it is quite plausible that some of the post-twelfth-century sources were based on material either written or oral in nature which was actively discussed and disseminated in the intervening centuries.

Two Latin language sources from the twelfth century mark the re-emergence of Rhydderch Hael into the existing written record. The first is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, a verse text composed sometime between 1148 and 1151.³¹ As Geoffrey of Monmouth worked in south-east Wales and western England, this is the first of the sources dealing with Rhydderch which is composed outside of the 'Old North'. The second is Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni* composed around 1180 in Furness, modern-day

²⁸ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, p. 78, translation is by R. Bromwich in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p.495.

²⁹ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, p. 455.

³⁰ B, Guy, 'A Lost Medieval Manuscript from North Wales: Hengrwt 33, the Hanesyn Hen', *Studia Celtica* 50 (2016, forthcoming), p. 28.

³¹ K. Jankulak, *Geoffrey of Monmouth, Writers of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 78.

Cumbria, so an area which was part of the 'Old North'.³² Both texts give an extended treatment of Rhydderch, however, in both cases the king is not the chief protagonist but is subordinate in narrative terms to Merlin and St Kentigern in the respective texts.

In the *Vita Merlini*, Rhydderch (Rodarcus) is identified as 'Rex cambrorum' ('King of the Cumbrians') as having gone to battle with king of the south Welsh, Merlin, in support of Peredur, king of the north Welsh, against king of the Scots, Gwenddoleu. Rhydderch together with Peredur are described in terms which emphasise their martial prowess and fearlessness: 'seuus uterque / Cedunt obstantes inuisis ensibus hostes' ('both furiously resisting the enemy').³³

Although the battle in question is not named, it is usually assumed to be Arfderydd, which the *Annales Cambriae* dates at 573 and which receives extensive treatment in Welsh poetic material from the thirteenth century onwards. As here in the *Vita Merlini*, this battle is presented in a variety of texts as the cause of Merlin's (Welsh: Myrddin) madness and retreat into the Caledonian forest. Specifically, in the *Vita Merlini*, it is the untimely death of Peredur's three young sons which drives Merlin to lose his wits and adopt the life of a wild man of the forest.

Rhydderch is presented in the rest of the main narrative of the text as an honourable king and caring husband to Merlin's sister, Ganiada. Rhydderch is moved by Ganiada's grief over her brother's downcast state to attempt on several occasions to cure him of his madness and draw him away from the primitive life he has adopted. Rhydderch is seen as an upholder of the benefits of courtly, civilised life. At one point in the text, he arranges for

³² K. H. Jackson, 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern' in N.K. Chadwick, K. Hughes, C. Brooke, K. Jackson eds., *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 273-357, p. 274.

³³ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Vita Merlini*, trans. John Jay Parry (BiblioBazaar, 2008), p.48, translation p. 7-8.

Merlin to be led through the streets of his city in the belief that exposure to urban life and its pleasures will restore the madman to his previous way of life. This and other attempts fail and it is instead Merlin who begins to try to open his brother-in-law's eyes to some truths he has missed such as Ganieda's infidelity and Rhydderch's approaching death. This emphasises Merlin's prophetic capabilities which become more prominent still in the section of the text which follows Rhydderch's death in which both Merlin and his friend, the bard Taliesin, deliver lengthy prophecies about the future of the isle of Britain.

A notable section of the text for the purposes of this study is Ganieda's eulogy to him:

Largus erat-nam multa dabat-uix quid retinebat
Omnibus omnis erat faciens quodcumque decebat
Flos equitum-regumque decor regni que columpna

He was generous, for he gave away much and kept scarcely anything.
He was all things to all men, doing whatever was seemly; flower of
knights, glory of kings, pillar of the kingdom.)³⁴

The generosity of Rhydderch is further immortalised by Ganieda in the verse she inscribes on his tomb:

Rodarchus largus – quo largior alter in orbe:
Non erat – hic modica magnus requiescit in urna.

(Rhydderch the Generous, than whom there was no one more
generous in the world, a great man rests in this small urn.)³⁵

The most extended source in terms of its treatment of Rhydderch Hael is the Latin *Vita Kentigerni*. This text is generally understood to be the work of Jocelin (or Jocelyn) a monk of Furness Abbey (in what is now south-west Cumbria). The *Vita* is dated by John Reuben Davies to between 1175 and 1199.³⁶ It was composed, the writer states, for the Bishop of Glasgow, also

³⁴ *Vita Merlini*, p.65.

³⁵ *Vita Merlini*, p.66.

³⁶ J.R. Davies, 'Bishop Kentigern among the Britons' in S. Boardman, J.R. Davies and E. Williamson, eds. *Saints' Cults in The Celtic World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 66-90, p.67.

called Jocelin, who held that role between 1175 and 1190. Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni* is not the earliest known Life of the saint as there exists as fragment of a previous work on the saint, generally referred to as 'The Herbertian Life'. Jocelin's, however, is the only medieval *Life of Kentigern* which draws together the saint's story with that of his supposed royal patron, Rhydderch. A later text, the Aberdeen breviary (early sixteenth century) also connects Rhydderch (Redrath) and Kentigern but is seen as largely drawing on Jocelin for this material albeit with a number of small variations.³⁷

The Rhydderch material in Jocelin's *Vita* covers a number of episodes, each presenting in typical hagiographical style, Kentigern's miraculous works in the 'kingdom of Cumbria'. These episodes are: Kentigern's arrival in the kingdom and his preaching which results in the rising up of a hill at Holdelm; Kentigern curing Rhydderch's queen of barrenness, leading to the birth of a son, Constantine; a folk-tale type story of how Kentigern assists Langueth to save her from the jealous wrath of her husband who has imprisoned her because of an adulterous relationship; a story of how Kentigern saves Rhydderch's reputation for generosity by helping him provide out of season mulberries for a visitor to his court; and a story of Rhydderch's fool, Laloecen, who is consumed by grief when Kentigern dies and then prophecies that Rhydderch will also die within the year (which happens).

In terms of the portrayal of Rhydderch, the material about him in Jocelin's *Vita* is stereotypically that of a good Christian king who relies upon the saint he has co-opted into his realm to help him prosper both secularly and spiritually. The text states that Rhydderch was:

qui a discipulis Sancti Patrici in Hibernia baptizatus fide
Christianissima: qui, et toto corde queret Dominum, et repare
studeret Christianismum.

³⁷ K.H. Jackson, 'The Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', p.339.

(baptised in Ireland in the most Christian manner by the disciples of St. Patrick [and] sought the Lord with all his heart, and strove to restore Christianity.)³⁸

An important aspect which Jackson's detailed analysis of the probable sources for *Vita Kentigerni* uncovers is that the text's sources appear to draw upon both Norman (Latin) and Gaelic material but there is little evidence of the influence of any Brittonic (Cumbric) material. This reflects the context of its composition by a monk of Furness, part of a Norman Cistercian order but also working in a region strongly influenced by its proximity to the Gaelic sphere of influence in Ireland, western Scotland and the Isle of Man.

Vita Kentigerni is the last known medieval source produced in the area of the Old North itself to deal with Rhydderch. Beyond the end of the twelfth century all the remaining sources come from manuscripts produced in Wales, albeit with the possibility that these sources bear the influence of earlier, now lost, texts produced in northern Britain. This possibility will be discussed in the next section.

Amongst the medieval Welsh texts which mention Rhydderch are four poems: two from the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (mid-thirteenth century), one from the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (late-fourteenth century), and one from the manuscript Peniarth 50 (around 1450).³⁹ These poems all share a common focus on the mythological figure of Myrddin Wyllt (Merlin) and are usually read as being in the voice of the Myrddin persona. Another specific interconnection between the poems is that they preoccupy themselves with the battle of Arfderydd (now usually associated with Arthuret, near Carlisle)

³⁸ Jocelin of Furness, *Vitae Kentigerni in Vitae antiquae sanctorum qui habitaverunt in ea parte Britanniae nunc vocata Scotia vel in ejus insulis*: ed. Johannes Pinkerton (London, 1789). Translation from *Two Celtic Saints, The Lives of Ninian and Kentigern* (Llanerch Press, 1989), p. 88.

³⁹ Dates are from D. Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press and The National Library of Wales, 2000), p. 70, p.82 and p.150n.

and the disastrous outcome of this battle for Myrddin. This is highly significant for the Rhydderch story as the king is strongly associated with this battle in these poetic sources, although it is unclear from the poems whether or not he was supposed to have been an active participant in the battle.

The two poems in question from the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* are *Afallennau* (Merlin's Apple Trees) and *Oianau* (The Ohs of Merlin). In both poems the narrative situation is that Myrddin is in hiding from his enemies deep in the countryside. In the *Afallennau*, the Myrddin persona explains:

Awallen pen atif in llanerch. Y hangert ae hargel rac riev Rydderch.

(Sweet apple-tree
that in Llanerch grows,
its mystique
will hide it
from Rhydderch the king.)⁴⁰

He soon provides more detail of his plight and how it is connected to Rhydderch and his followers:

Oef kas gan gwassauc guaessaf Ryddirch. Ryrewineis y mab aemerch.
Ag heve aduc paup. pa rac nam kyureirch. a. guydi guendolev nep riev
impeirch.

(I am hated by Gwasawg,
Rhydderch's protector:
I brought about the ruin
of his son and daughter.
Death took everybody away,
that is why they don't talk to me.
Now that Gwenddolau's gone,
no king respects me.)⁴¹

Myrddin clearly identifies the source of his suffering as 'igueith arywderit' 'the battle of Arfderydd' where 'oet eur. wy gorthorch' he 'wore a golden

⁴⁰ *The Black Book of Camarthen*, ed. and trans. Meirion Pennar (Llanerch Press, 1989), p. 68 and p.73 (trans).

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 69 and 73 (trans).

torque.⁴² He contemplates his downcast state and loss of his wits but finds hope in the protective power of the apple trees and the visions he has received from the seer, Chwyfleian.

The poem itself is a striking amalgam of fear, loss, guilt, folklore and prophecy. It can clearly be identified with the genre of middle Welsh vaticinary poetry with its repeated theme of foreseeing the eventual victory of the 'Kymry' and their allies against the 'Saesson'. The second poem from the *Llyfr Du Caefyrddin* to mention Rhydderch, *Oianau*, occupies very similar territory both literally and metaphorically. Here too, Myrddin appears to be in hiding after the battle of Arfderyd. In this poem, Myrddin's comfort comes not from trees but from the piglets who are his companions in his hiding place. Each stanza of the poem begins with an address to a piglet 'Hoian aparchellan'. The pigs like the trees in *Afallennau* have a supernatural significance, being associated in Welsh story-telling with the otherworld and they are also a symbol of innocence against the background of slaughter and mayhem which preoccupies Myrddin. The poem is also strongly vaticinary, with each stanza bringing forth a further vision of English defeat at the hands of a roll-call of Brythonic heroes such as Cadwaladr, Llywelyn, Rhys and Deiniol mab Dunawd Deinwyn. There is, however, a counter-strain of foreboding, which the Myrddin persona associates with the threat he feels from,

Rac erwis ritech hael ruyfadur fit.

(..the fierce Rhydderch the Generous,
the tiller-man of the faith.)⁴³

He displaces some of this threat onto the piglets whom he warns not to,

Nachuste hun bore. Nachalt imprisc. Rac dyuod. Riderch hael. ae cvn
kyfruys. Kin caffael ohonautte y coed reddaud. dychuis.

(take your morning nap,

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid, p.77 and p.87 (trans).

don't rummage in the undergrowth,
lest Rhydderch the Generous comes with his clever hounds,
before you're able to snuffle the root
that you sweated to find.)⁴⁴

He contrasts his own troubled state with that of Rhydderch who,

Bychan a wir ryderch hael heno y ar y wlet. aporth eise neithuir o
anhunet.

(at his carousel
little does he know tonight
the extent
last night
of my insomnia.)⁴⁵

The juxtaposition is of victor and defeated, noble lord and disgraced outcast.
This creates a fascinating tension in the poem as although Myrddin's visions
are largely of Brythonic triumph – past, present and future – over the
English and the Normans; Myrddin himself is deeply aware that he is hunted
by a fellow Briton and that his own lord, Gwenddolau, cannot protect him:

In cynull preitev opop eithaw. y dan vyguerid rut nv neud araf. Pen
teernt gogeet llaret mvyhaw.

(Under my red earth
is he now
all quiet like,
the greatest king of the North,
the greatest too
in tenderness.)⁴⁶

This duality of anticipated triumph and the bitterness of known defeat
colours the final stanza of the poem which returns to the matter of
Arfderydd:

Yr gueith arywderit mi nymdorbi kynduguitei awir y lavr. allyr. enlli.

(Since the battle of Arfderydd,

⁴⁴ Ibid p. 81-2 and p.93 (trans).

⁴⁵ Ibid p. 80-1 and p.91-92 (trans).

⁴⁶ Ibid p.78 and p.88 (trans).

it doesn't matter to me
even if the sky falls down
and the oceans flood the earth.)⁴⁷

This sense of coming apocalypse is followed with a riddling prophecy about 'breenhin na breenhin brithwyd dybi' ('a king who isn't a king in a shady world') who will come 'gvydi henri' ('after Henry') and another foreseeing war in Dyfed when 'ban vo pont. ar taw. Ac arall ar tywi. ydav y dyved ryvel iti.' ('there'll be a bridge on the Taf and another on the Tywi and war will come to Dyfed')⁴⁸ The sense of a victorious future seems to have evaporated into a vision of confusion and darkness.

Two further poems both also associated with Myrddin make mention of Rhydderch, though less prominently than the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems discussed above. One is the *Kyuoessi myrdin agwendyd ychwaer* ('The prophecy of Myrddin and Gwenddydd, his sister') from the *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, a late-fourteenth-century manuscript.⁴⁹ Bollard argues that the poem may have been composed before 1100.⁵⁰ The poem lists Rhydderch first amongst a number of British/Welsh heroes who will lead their people but does not seem to present him as a threat to Myrddin. The second, *Peiryan Vaban* ('Commanding Boy') from a still later manuscript (Peniarth 50) only references Rhydderch twice. The focus of the poem appears to be reassuring the unspecified 'peiryan vaban' that he need not fear his enemies. It is not entirely clear from the poem who these enemies are, however. The opening lines suggest that it is the 'gwyddyl gynt' ('Irish heathens') from whom he is to be protected.⁵¹ However, the poem then goes on to praise the martial prowess of Aeddan, presumably the sixth-century king of Dál Riada,

⁴⁷ Ibid p. 86 and p.99 (trans).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ D. Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, p.82.

⁵⁰ 'Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition', ed. and trans. John K. Bollard in *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, ed. Peter Goodrich (United States: Garland, 1990), pp. 13 – 53, p.30.

⁵¹ Trans. J.K. Bollard in the *Romance of Merlin* ed. P. Goodrich, p.51. Original text is from Peniarth 50, mary.jones.us [online]. Available at <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/peirian.html> <accessed 17 February 2017>

Aedán mac Gabráin. This Irish leader (whom the Welsh knew as Aeddan ap Gafran) is wished success: 'tyfo gafran' ('May Gafran prosper').⁵² There is a tradition within the Welsh poetic triads which will be considered next that Rhydderch and Aeddan were sworn enemies and this enmity is hinted at in the fifth stanza of the poem: 'o gyfrang ryderch ac aedan clotleu mor hygleu y ciywir or gogledd yr deheu' ('From the encounter of Rhydderch and renowned Aeddan so clearly it is heard from the north to the south').⁵³ An earlier reference to Rhydderch in the poem portrays the Briton as entirely on the right the side of the battle, describing him as 'rydderch hael an hepkor' ('Rhydderch the Generous, the indispensable one').⁵⁴

Dating from a period similar to that of the poetic material concerning Rhydderch in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, are three triads from the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* which also make reference to the north British king. The three triads in question are 2, 43 and 54 in Rachel Bromwich's edition. Triads 2 and 43 are present in the manuscript Peniarth 16 which was compiled between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵⁵ Bromwich argues that the triadic material from this manuscript can be dated to the early thirteenth century.⁵⁶ The Rhydderch reference is missing from triad 54 in its earliest manuscript versions but is present in Peniarth 50 (c. 1425 – 56) which is known to contain material from much earlier sources.⁵⁷

It is worth briefly examining each of the three triads in turn for their treatment of Rhydderch. Firstly, triad 2: this is titled 'Tri Hael Enys Prydein' ('Three Generous (Noble/Victorious) Men of the Island of Britain'). This triad simply lists Rhydderch's name (including the patronymic reference 'mab Tudwal Tutclyt'). Rhydderch is the third of the 'hael' to be listed; the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p.52

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.51.

⁵⁵ D. Huws, *Welsh Manuscripts*, p. 58 and 61.

⁵⁶ *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, (henceforth *TYP*) ed. R. Bromwich, University of Wales Press; 3rd edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), xvi.

⁵⁷ *TYP*, p.155

others are Nud Hael mab Senyllt and Mordaf Hael mab Seruan. Nud Hael is mentioned elsewhere in medieval Welsh genealogical texts as a noble of the 'Old North', Mordaf is only ever alluded to in the medieval period in connection with both Nud and Rhydderch – presumably as a reference to the triad itself.⁵⁸

Interestingly, the names of these three nobles of the 'Old North' occur together in what appears to be a replication of part of triad 2 in the version of the Welsh laws known as the Chirk Codex. This text is generally dated to circa 1250 so is certainly from a similar period to that in which the triads were first written down in the form we have available to us now. The reference comes as part of an account of an attack on Arfon in Gwynedd by a party of north Britons, led by the Nudd Hael, Mordaf Hael and Rhydderch Hael along with another, Clydno. This attack was launched because of the killing at Aber Meuhedus in Arfon of 'gur or kocled' ('a man of the north'), Elidir Mwynfawr.⁵⁹ The attack on Arfon then provokes an apparently successful tit-for-tat raid by Rhun son of Maelgwn and men of Gwynedd who travel to the north (specifically the valley of the Lune near Lancaster, 'eglan guerit en e kocled') to meet their northern enemies. The passage dealing with this incident ends with a verse attributed to Taliesin,

Kikleu odures en llaueneu, Can Run en rudhur bedineu, Guir Aruon
rudyon eu redyeu.⁶⁰

(I heard the clash of their blades, With Rhun in the rush of armies,
The men of Arfon of red spears.)

Triad 43 is titled 'Tri Thom Edystyr Enys Prydein' ('Three Steeds of Burden') (Draft Horses) of the Island of Britain. Rhydderch (or rather his horse) occupies the third position in this triad with the line: 'a Rudlwyt, march Rydderch Hael' (and Dun-Grey, horse of Rhydderch Hael). Bromwich notes

⁵⁸ *TYP*, p. 451.

⁵⁹ *TYP*, p. 491.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 491

that there are variants for the name of the horse: the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* has 'Drudluid' ('Spirited Grey') and Peniarth 50 has 'Llemenic' ('Leaping').⁶¹

The final triad bearing a Rhydderch reference is entitled 'Teir Drut Heirua Ynys Brydein' ('Three Violent (reckless, costly) Ravaging of the Island of Britain'). Once again Rhydderch is named last:

Ar trydydd Drut (Heirua), pan ddeuth Aydan Vrada6t hyt yn Alclut y
lys Rydderch Hael, ac nyt adewis na bwyt na llyn na ll6d6n yn vy6.

(And the third Costly Ravaging (was) when Aeddan the Treacherous
came to the court of Rhydderch Hael at Alclud (=Dumbarton); he left
neither food nor drink nor beast alive.)⁶²

Triad 54 is especially interesting from the historical perspective as it appears to contextualise Rhydderch as being involved in struggles with the Dál Riata nobility. Bromwich identifies the Aydan Vrada6t mentioned here as Aedan m. Gauran, the sixth-century king of the Dál Riata.⁶³ This connects us back to the story in Adomnan's *Vita Sancti Columbae* discussed earlier in which Rhydderch seems to be seeking via a messenger assurances that Columba's Irish countrymen will not attack him. It also connects with a reference in the Welsh poem, *Peiryan Vaban* to the 'cyfrang ryderch ac aedan clotheu' ('contention between Rhydderch and Aedan Clotheu').⁶⁴

A final source which I will consider is the *Tri Thlws ar Ddeg Ynys Brydain* ('The Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain'). This is quite a late text in the context of this study, deriving in its earliest known form from a section of the manuscript Peniarth 51 which Bromwich dates to around 1460 – 70.⁶⁵ However, it seems to bear a close relationship to the milieu of the triads discussed and may derive ultimately from now lost written material or oral sources which are much older than the manuscript.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.114.

⁶² Ibid, p.153.

⁶³ Ibid, p.273.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.155.

⁶⁵ *TYP*, cvi.

The passage relevant to Rhydderch is listed first amongst the thirteen treasures:

Dyrnwyn, gleddyf Rhydderch Hael: os tynnai ddyn mwyn ef i hun, ef a ennynai yn y fflam o'i groes hyd i flaen; a ffawb o'r a'i harchai ef a'i kaei, ag o blygid y gyneddf honno, hwy a'l gwrthodynt; ag am hyn(n)u i gelwyd ef Rhydderch Hael.

(Dyrnwyn ('White-Hilt'), the Sword of Rhydderch the Generous: if a well-born man drew it himself, it burst into flame from its hilt to its tip. And everyone who used to ask for it would receive it; but because of this peculiarity everyone used to reject it. And therefore he was called Rhydderch the Generous.)⁶⁶

This appears to be the only instance in which Rhydderch's sword is named and this, together with the slightly tortuous reasoning by which the passage says Rhydderch acquired his epithet 'Hael', may suggest that this is a late concoction rather than a surviving piece of tradition. However, the text does at least seem to attest to Rhydderch's fame in fifteenth-century Wales as a mythic hero of the 'Old North' around whom such stories could be told.

4) *Rhydderch Hael: history and myth*

Having surveyed the known texts which feature Rhydderch Hael from the eighth to fifteenth centuries, I will now draw these texts together in a consideration of what we can reasonably deduce about the historical evidence for his existence as a north British king of the late sixth century. The problems relating to determining historicity in the context of sixth century Britain are manifold and well-documented. The principal difficulties are clearly stated, for example by David Dumville in his essay 'Early Welsh Poetry: Problems of Historicity' where he describes 'the scepticism which the historian must feel when faced with using as primary sources essentially undated mediaeval texts of a determinedly literary quality.'⁶⁷ Both of Dumville's reservations apply to the sources which have been presented in the previous section. Only the texts of Geoffrey of

⁶⁶ *TYP*, p. 258.

⁶⁷ D.N. Dumville, 'Early Welsh Poetry: Problems of Historicity', p. 1.

Monmouth and Jocelin of Furness can be dated with any precision, due to what is known about the *floruit* of their authors. For the rest, we are reliant on a date range which works back from the accepted dating of the manuscript (or manuscripts) where they appear, to a speculative dating of their earliest composition in written form based on a mixture of linguistic and contextual evidence. The texts under consideration can also generally be described as being 'literary' rather than avowedly 'historical'. It could be argued that the annalistic style of the *Historia Brittonum* and the terse, list-based approach of the genealogies might give them a stronger claim to be reporting facts rather than telling tales, but as we will see, even their claims to historical validity in the modern sense are questionable. This touches upon a theoretical problem which underlies all historical investigation of early medieval Britain, which is that the writers of the period (and indeed of the later medieval period) had a conception of history which was very different from that of modern scholarship. The forensic sifting of documentary evidence and sources which we expect from our historians does not appear to have been an approach adopted in the medieval period. Instead, other considerations such as consistency with established tradition and with underpinning religious or ethnically-defined narratives were decisive in framing the way in which the past was represented. The internal expectations of the particular genre in which the material from the past was re-told also had a crucial bearing on how such material was treated, for example, hagiographical texts tend to work according to recognisable formulae in terms of narrative and characterisation and this affects how the source material is re-interpreted.

In this section I will concentrate on the question of the extent to which we can discern a plausible 'historical' (in the modern sense) Rhydderch Hael. In the next section I will employ some of the insights of genre theory, especially when applied to the medieval period, to explore how the nature of the texts themselves, and the traditions to which they belong, cast light on how the material relating to this north British king may have been interpreted by contemporary audiences.

Dumville has provided a framework for the investigation of the historicity in early medieval texts ‘proceeding from first principles’.⁶⁸ He suggests that the ‘question of historicity’ needs to be approached using a three-fold approach: external validation, historical context and transmission.⁶⁹ External validation means the presence of some other reliable evidence beyond the text in question to support what it says e.g. to support a dating or the existence of a particular person. Historical context here means what is generally established about the chronology and key political developments of the period in which the text is being placed. Transmission concerns what can be deduced about the history of the text itself and its development through its various manuscript versions. It is notable that in the case of the specific matter discussed by Dumville when he presented his framework, the ‘historicity of the cynfeirdd and the poetry attributed to them’, especially *Y Gododdin*, he concludes that it is only the third aspect of the framework which really provides any realistic route to an answer: ‘The problem of historicity is thus, in my view, largely one of transmission.’⁷⁰

What then of the question of the historicity of Rhydderch Hael? Taking the first element of the framework and the sources we have available to us. What external validation is there for his existence and, assuming we accept his existence, for the nature of his kingship? The key text in this respect is Adomnán’s reference to Rhydderch in his *Vita Sancti Columbae*. As a result of the strong body of evidence surrounding Columba and his chronology from various sources such as the Irish Annals (the earliest versions of which are generally assumed to have been compiled in Iona) and the Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, there is felt to be sufficient trustworthiness to the dating of the saint’s life. For instance, in a recent essay, one of the acknowledged experts on early medieval Scotland, Thomas Owen Clancy, cites Adomnán as ample evidence of Rhydderch Hael’s existence.⁷¹ As discussed in the

⁶⁸ D.N. Dumville, ‘Early Welsh Poetry: Problems of Historicity’, p.1

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.8.

⁷¹ T.O. Clancy, ‘The Kingdoms of the North: Poetry, Places, Politics’, p. 160.

previous section, Adomnán's text has a secure manuscript history, which helps fulfill Dumville's criteria of secure transmission and is by far the closest in time to the assumed *flourit* of Rhydderch – less than a century. Moreover, the reference's implied background of tension between Dál Riata and Alt Clut is fully plausible given what is known about the historical context of the two kingdoms as powerful neighbours during the period in question. There is also no particular reason to assume that the reference is a later invention – why would Adomnán himself or the named scribe who wrote the existing copy of the manuscript in Iona at the turn of the eighth century have cause to fabricate this incident? It seems highly unlikely, although not impossible, that any issues of southern Scottish politics contemporary with the writing of the text would be sufficient grounds for such an interpolation.

However convincing we may find Adomnán's reference to Rhydderch, a single mention does not on its own provide sufficient evidence to be firm about the king's historicity. We have to wait at least a further full century before the textual record available to us gives us the reference in the *HB* to Rhydderch as one of four north British kings fighting the Saxons. This reference is also too brief to glean much from other than a general positioning of Rhydderch as an apparently noteworthy leader amongst those defending British territory against the Saxons during the late sixth or early seventh centuries. His fellow Britons, Urien, and the seemingly treacherous, Morcant, receive substantially more attention. Apart from the brevity of the reference, there are two further difficulties with deriving any strong sense of historical validity from this reference. The first is the problematic nature of the *HB* as a reliable 'historical' source in the modern sense. This has been explored by recent writers such as Charles-Edwards and Higham, especially in the context of the enduring debate over the historicity or otherwise of Arthur.⁷² The basic problem being that the text's

⁷² T.M Charles-Edwards, 'The Arthur of History' in R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts, eds., *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in*

narrative appears to be driven by concerns with biblical parallels and with the mythic origins of the British people, a combination of what Charles Edwards calls 'synchronistic' and 'synthetic' history.⁷³ These concerns of the ninth-century writer or redactor seem, from the point of view of the modern historian, to undermine any confidence in the validity of what is recounted. The inclusion of figures such as Vortigern and Arthur for whom there is little or no historical evidence alongside fully accepted historical figures such as the Bernician king, Oswy and the Welsh king, Maelgwn the Great, makes the line between myth and history in the text almost impossible to draw. Whilst, as Charles Edwards points out, this does not necessarily preclude there being genuine historical material within the text, it would seem safest to avoid using the text as validation of the historicity of material present in other texts.⁷⁴

The second difficulty with using the *HB* as historical validation for Rhydderch Hael is that other texts which deal with approximately the same period of British and Saxon conflict do not make mention of Rhydderch either singly or as part of the same quartet of British kings. He is absent for instance from the *Annales Cambriae* which is closely associated with the *HB* in terms of its co-occurrence with that text in early manuscript versions such as Harleian MS 3859. Interestingly, from the point of view of this analysis, some of the figures associated with Rhydderch in other texts such as Columba, Aidan son of Gabran and Merlin *are* mentioned in the time frame of Rhydderch's apparent *floruit*. The text also gives a date to the battle of Arfderydd (573), but unlike later Welsh poetic texts, it does not link Rhydderch with this battle.⁷⁵ However, the cursory nature of the dated entries in these annals does not allow for much in the way of exposition on each event and it is clearly just possible that Rhydderch was not considered

Medieval Welsh literature (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp.15-32; N.J. Higham, *King Arthur: Myth-making and History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).

⁷³ T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.20.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ *Annales Cambriae* in *Arthurian Sources*, Vol. 8 ed. and trans. John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1980), p.85.

significant enough by any of the collators of the annals (or indeed the writers of the sources on which they were based) to warrant a mention.

There is, then at least some external validation of Rhydderch's existence in the surviving texts which can reasonably be thought to have been composed in the tenth century or earlier – we have Adomnán's treatment of Rhydderch's messenger and a naming in the *HB*. The genealogies, especially the Harleian genealogy (which is closely associated through manuscript history with the *HB*) seem to offer some further support for his historicity but these are difficult to date as earlier than around 1100 and also, as will be discussed in the next chapter, are extremely questionable in terms of historical validity and chronology. All that we can perhaps say for sure is that they are consistent with what we glean about Rhydderch from Adomnán – that he is a son of Tudwal – and that by placing Rhydderch amongst other north British kings, the genealogies are also consistent with the mention he receives in the *HB* alongside Urien (Urbgen), Gwallawg (Gwallauc) and Morcant who also appear in the same first generation in the Harleian genealogy.⁷⁶

A noteworthy feature of the Rhydderch references in the *HB* and the Harleian genealogies which may have some relevance to questions of his historicity is the use of the epithet which accompanies his name – *Hen* ('the Old'). These appear to be the only instances where this epithet is used of Rhydderch – in other texts the preferred epithet is *Hael* ('generous, noble'). Bromwich suggests that as *Hen* is used of Dyfnwal, Rhydderch's supposed ancestor in the same genealogy, the intent seems to be to anchor Rhydderch to one of the two mythic progenitors of the two branches of a main north British post-Roman dynasty; the other being Coel to whom the same epithet is customarily applied.⁷⁷ It is tempting to see this as a more authentic or original designation for Rhydderch. However, this is very difficult to assess as *Hael* seems to have deep roots as is demonstrated its use in the 'tri hael'

⁷⁶ *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ *TYP*, p. 494.

triad and its use in the *Chirk Codex* account of the attack on Arfon to describe Rhydderch and his fellow north Britons, Nudd and Mordaf. Indeed, the latter instance may suggest that *Hael* had a significance beyond the meaning of 'generous' and may have also been a dynastic designation as the Harleian genealogy presents the 'tri hael' as cousins. In support of this, Bromwich points to the Latin inscription on a sixth century stone found in Yarrowkirk, Selkirkshire which commemorates two sons of *Liberalis* (the Latin equivalent of *Hael*) one of which was named Nudd.⁷⁸ Bromwich's dating has been supported more recently by University College London's Celtic Inscribed Stones database which puts the inscription in question as between 500 and 599.⁷⁹ The established chronology seems to suggest that it is unlikely that this Nudd is the same Nudd Hael of the triad and the *Chirk Codex* but it may be that he was an ancestor. This is the sole piece of archaeology which seems, albeit very tentatively, to provide some degree of historical validation for the existence of at least one of the *gwyr y Gogledd*.

After the *HB*, the remaining sources for Rhydderch are (with the exception of Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni*) composed within a wholly Welsh post-eleventh century context so are remote both geographically and chronologically from the Old North and its history. They are interesting, however, from a historical perspective in that whilst they do serve to reinforce some key aspects of Rhydderch such as his lineage and status as a king of the Old North, they also introduce material which is not present in the earliest references to him such as the association with the battle of Arfderydd and his supposed relationships towards other significant figures associated, at least in part, with the Old North of the sixth century, mainly St Kentigern and Merlin/Myrddin.

⁷⁸ *TYP*, p. 465.

⁷⁹ University College London's Celtic Inscribed Stones database [Online]. Available at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/> <accessed 25 November 2016>.

As noted in the previous chapter, two twelfth-century texts, the Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (c.1150) and Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni* (c.1180) both make use of Rhydderch as an important foil to the main protagonists of their *vitae*. In both, Rhydderch is presented as a generous king (perhaps indicating that the epithet *hael* was beginning to be applied in a moral, as well as a honorific sense) and a specific object of his generosity is the central figure of both texts: Merlin and Kentigern. In both texts he has an unfaithful wife (Ganieda – Merlin's own sister - in *Vita Merlini* and Languoreth in *Vita Kentigerni*) and in both cases this rift in his marriage is repaired through the actions of Merlin/Kentigern. In both texts Rhydderch experiences the prophecies of a wild man – Merlin himself in *Vita Merlini* during the period of his madness in the forest and in *Vita Kentigerni* through his encounter with the 'fool' Laloecen, who correctly foretells Rhydderch's death. These parallels may suggest that both texts are drawing on a common body of material associated with Rhydderch, possibly from earlier (now lost) texts but perhaps more probably from oral traditions still current in the twelfth century. This suggestion is further supported by the poetic treatment of mad Merlin's fear of Rhydderch in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems such as 'Yr Afallenau'. Jarman has argued in his discussion of the development of the Merlin legend that the key to understanding the parallels may lie in the transmission of saga material related to the Laloecen 'wild' or 'madman' figure from north Britain to Wales in two stages: an initial oral transfer in the ninth or tenth century and a further early twelfth-century transmission through Latin sources which were precursors to both *Vita Merlini* and *Vita Kentigerni*.⁸⁰ Jarman also argues that this complex of material surrounding the 'madman' figure also relates to the existence of 'a considerable saga' concerning the battle of Arfderydd at which a northern Merlin-figure (possibly identifiable with Laloecen) was thought to have participated.⁸¹ This remains necessarily speculative but it does seem to provide a plausible

⁸⁰ A.O.H. Jarman, 'The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy' in R. Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and B. F. Roberts, eds., *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 117-146, p. 139.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 121.

explanation of how material joining Rhydderch/Merlin/Laloecen and Arfderydd is combined in various ways in the cluster of surviving texts available to us.

The *Vita Merlini* is mainly concerned with its eponymous mystical protagonist and his prophecies. It seems largely devoid of any references which would link it to any recognisable historical occurrences. Its general milieu is that of a folktale or *fabula* and Rhydderch's kingdom in which much of the action takes place is a generalised version of a high medieval Norman court. Only its opening passage seems to pay any regard to a supposed sixth-century context. Geoffrey of Monmouth describes Merlin's arrival as a king of the south Welsh to fight alongside fellow kings Peredur of North Wales and Rhydderch of the Cumbrians in their war on Gwenddolau of Scotland. The bitter battle which ensues sees victory for Peredur and his allies but also results in the mad grief of Merlin after he sees Peredur's three young brothers cut down. The name of the battle is not given but it does seem to relate closely to Arfderydd and reflects closely the *Annales Cambriae* entry for 573:

an. Bellum Armterid [inter filios Elifer et Guendoleu filium Keidiau; in quo bello Guendolau cecidit; Merlinus insanus effectus est]

(The battle of Arfderydd between the sons of Eliffer and Gwenddolau son of Ceidio; in which battle Gwenddolau fell; Merlin went mad.)⁸²

The *Vita Kentigerni* places Rhydderch in the context of the struggle to preserve and spread the Christian faith in northern Britain of the seventh century. Jackson dismisses this from having any historical value not only because it was written around five hundred years after the period of Rhydderch's supposed reign but also because of erroneous assumptions it makes.⁸³ For example, Jackson points out that Kentigern would not have

⁸² *Annales Cambriae*, p. 85.

⁸³ Jackson, K.H., 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', p. 341.

had to convert Rhydderch's people from worship of the Saxon god, Woden, as they, being a Brythonic people would have already have been Christians.⁸⁴ However, given the complete lack of any near contemporary sources for the dates of Kentigern's lifespan, it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions about whether he would have been operating in a fully Christianised context or not.⁸⁵

MacQuarie has suggested that the material on the death of Kentigern may derive from genuinely old material close to the period of the saint's life but he advances no evidence for this.⁸⁶ The linkage of Kentigern and Rhydderch may instead relate to Jocelin's patronage by the then Bishop of Glasgow whose interests stretched beyond Scotland to the Cumbria borderlands: by connecting his diocese with a venerated local saint and a powerful king of the past, he would have gathered some important reflected glory.⁸⁷

The source history of Jocelin's *Vita Kentigerni* is extremely convoluted. Jackson's study of these sources identified at least six sources or potential textual sources for the *Vita*, some of which are lost or fragmentary.⁸⁸ These include a fragment of the so-called Herbertian *Vita*, which John Reuben Davies tentatively attributes to Simeon, archdeacon of Teviotdale during the episcopate of Herbert, Bishop of Glasgow between 1147 and 1164.⁸⁹ This fragment breaks off early in the story of Kentigern's life so unfortunately does not contain any material relating to Rhydderch. None of the known sources for Jocelin's *Vita* appear to pre-date the tenth century so are necessarily remote from the events which it relates. This means that it is difficult if not impossible to derive any sense of historical validation for

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 321.

⁸⁵ The *Annales Cambriae* give the saint's date of death at 612. However, this text like the *Historia Brittonum* is found in its earliest known form in Harleian MS 3859, which, as noted elsewhere in this essay is thought to date from the last three-quarters of the tenth century, is far removed in time from the assumed period of the saint's life.

⁸⁶ A. Macquarie, 'The Kings of Strathcylde', p.8.

⁸⁷ T. Clarkson, *The Men of the North*, p.59.

⁸⁸ Jackson, K.H., 'Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', p. 342.

⁸⁹ J.R. Davies, 'Bishop Kentigern among the Britons', p. 67.

Rhydderch from the *vita*. However, the appearance of Rhydderch in a twelfth-century *vita* known to have been composed in a Cumbrian / Scottish context does demonstrate that the memory of a former king of Alt Clut had been preserved in the Old North for around half a millennium.

Based on Dumville's criteria for historical validity, we can say that there is at least some level of external validation for his existence. Most historians of early medieval Scotland seem to rely solely on the *Vita Sancti Columbae* reference for this and this can be bolstered by his appearance in the *Historia Brittonum* and the Harleian genealogies in historical contexts and timeframes which are mutually supportive. None of this is conclusive, but it does suggest that it is entirely plausible to treat him as an historical figure in a way which is not possible for other sixth-century Brythonic heroes such as Arthur, who lacks any reference earlier than the tenth century.⁹⁰ The application of Dumville's criteria of historical validity through textual transmission is much more problematic when applied to Rhydderch. Each of the texts in which he appears up to and including *Vita Kentigerni*, the poetic texts dealing with the Arfderydd and the triads have labyrinthine source and manuscript histories which are far from well-established or complete.

This discussion of the historicity of Rhydderch Hael in the context of the various sources in which he appears can be usefully framed within the wider debate about the status of references to the Old North and its supposed heroes in 'Welsh' literature from the *cynfeirdd* onwards. Do such references really derive at all from events and traditions which are genuinely 'northern' or are they a form of mythologising by writers who are keen to conjure up a lost heroic age of Brythonic glory? The different positions taken by Oliver Padel and John Koch in conference papers

⁹⁰ The earliest dateable references to Arthur are in the *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae*, both in Harleian MS 3859 and generally dated as from the mid-to late tenth century.

presented in *Beyond the Gododdin: Dark Age Scotland in Medieval Wales* help delineate the debate:⁹¹

Padel states, 'I do not at present think it likely that we have in this body of material any words or lines which were composed in what is now Scotland or northern England, nor anything earlier than about the ninth century.'⁹² Koch, however, cautions against adopting the 'inauthenticist' belief that all poems about the Old North must have been written in Wales after the restriction of Wales to roughly the current boundaries.⁹³ This position he says needs to produce its evidence rather than just dismissing the 'authenticist' position. He argues that linguistic evidence does seem to point to at least some forms used in *Y Gododdin* that are genuinely older than c.750 AD and so may plausibly derive from the Old North.⁹⁴

Rhydderch is an instructive figure for consideration in this debate – he clearly has a textual existence which pre-dates that of the *cynfeirdd*, namely the reference to him by Adomnán. His appearance in the *Vita Kentigerni* also shows that he continued to occupy a place in the cultural memories of north Britain and Scotland well into the twelfth century. There thus remains the possibility that when Welsh poets of the twelfth century onwards refer to him they are genuinely drawing on material which has been transmitted from the Old North itself to Wales.

Rhydderch is also important because we are almost certainly dealing with a historical figure of the Old North – something which is extremely difficult to maintain for almost any other north British king of the early medieval period. The fact that he is represented in a Hiberno-Latin / Dálriadic text, a

⁹¹ O.J. Padel 'Aneirin and Taliesin: Sceptical Speculations' and J.T. Koch 'Waiting for Gododdin: thoughts on Taliesin and Iudic-Hael, Catraeth and unripe times in Celtic Studies' in A. Woolf ed., *Beyond the Gododdin: Dark Age Scotland in Medieval Wales, The Proceedings of a Day Conference held on 19 February 2005*, St Andrews St John's House Papers No 13 (St Andrews, 2013), pp. 115-152 and pp. 177-204.

⁹² O.J. Padel 'Aneirin and Taliesin', p.116.

⁹³ J. T Koch 'Waiting for Gododdin', p. 178.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 190.

number of Latin texts of Welsh origin, Latin texts of Anglo-Norman tradition and Welsh vernacular texts means that he is a crucial entry-point to uncover how events from northern Britain in the late sixth/early seventh century were transmitted through these different traditions, each with their own priorities and expectations. Crucial in this respect are the expectations of genre which will be explored in the next section.

5) Genre-theory and *Rhydderch Hael*

Having considered questions surrounding the historicity of *Rhydderch Hael*, I now wish to examine how the surviving texts dealing with this figure of the Old North may have been received by audiences contemporary to their creation and dissemination. Such an examination needs to draw on an understanding of how the various genres to which these texts belong may have shaped the readers' (or listeners') perception of what was being related and of how the set of expectations attached to these genres may be quite different in nature from those of equivalent modern genres (if indeed, such genres exist). As already indicated in the discussion of the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*, we must not assume that an early medieval audience had the same expectations as a modern audience has of what 'historical' exposition should involve.

Suzanne Fleischmann in her essay 'On the representation of history and fiction in the middle ages' draws on the work of Hans-Robert Jauss to provide a useful framework for the interpretation of medieval texts in terms of their genre assumptions, especially texts which are concerned in the broadest sense with historical representation.⁹⁵ Fleischmann proposes that texts be considered from six perspectives: authenticity; intent; reception; social function; narrative syntax and narrator involvement.⁹⁶ These are largely self-explanatory labels, except perhaps for the last two. By 'narrative

⁹⁵ S. Fleischman, 'On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages', *History and Theory*, Vol. 22. No.3 (Oct 1983), pp. 278-310.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

syntax', Fleischmann refers to the way in which events within the text are related to one another, primarily whether this is done 'paratactically' as in annalistic texts where one event follows the previous one in chronological order or whether there is a more complex narrative structure in which causality is implied.⁹⁷ By 'narrator involvement', Fleischmann is referring to the presence or otherwise of a 'narrating ego', and the degree to which such a narrator is seen to explain or interpret the events described.⁹⁸

Fleischmann uses her framework to explore the question of how medieval audiences may have viewed the distinction between history and fiction as part of their response to texts about the past. This is clearly a highly relevant focus for my consideration of texts relating to Rhydderch Hael. However, I wish to use the framework to explore broader considerations about the depiction of Rhydderch and why he may have been considered a suitable subject for inclusion in these texts. It should be noted, however, that I will not use the first of Fleischmann's perspectives 'authenticity' as this has already been considered in the previous chapter in terms of historical validation for the material presented in the sources.

For this analysis, I will cluster the texts into their broad genre groupings: hagiography, history, genealogy, poetry and triads; and will then consider the texts belonging to each group in terms of Fleischmann's framework. These genre definitions are far from discrete or watertight and there is a degree of overlap between the genres. For example, the *Vita Merlini* shares some commonality with hagiography (as a *vita*). It has some apparent historical characteristics as it purports to recount the events following a battle in which Merlin and Rhydderch fought together and it is written in verse with a strong prophetic element so could also be classed as poetry.

The first genre category I will consider is hagiography. Two of the Rhydderch Hael sources: *Vita Sancti Columbae* and *Vita Kentigerni* are clearly hagiographical in their focus. They recount the lives of their

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 291.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 295.

eponymous British early Christian saints. Their intent is predominantly to present the lives and deeds of their respective saints as paradigms for the holy life. A key element of this which is evident in the material which involves Rhydderch is the exposition of the miraculous powers of the saint. In the *Vita Sancti Columbae* this is largely the prophetic ability of Columba to correctly predict Rhydderch's avoidance of death at the hands of his enemies. In the *Vita Kentigerni*, Kentigern performs a series of miracles in aid of his secular patron, Rhydderch, including producing a bowl of mulberries out of season to save Rhydderch from the shame of not being able to provide a guest with what he had requested.

However, aside from this obvious focus on magnifying and celebrating the holiness and miraculous nature of the saints, an underlying intent of both texts is political in nature. For Adomnán, an abbot of Iona, a key intent is to assert the power and authority of his monastery through disseminating the great works of the monastery's founder. By showing the king of Alt Clut seeking out Columba's spiritual guidance through sending an envoy, Adomnán brings further reflected glory to Iona. Similarly, Jocelin of Furness, working under the patronage of the Bishop of Glasgow delivers a hagiography which celebrates the bishopric's patron saint, Kentigern. Moreover, the positioning of Rhydderch as Kentigern's protector has particular political resonance contemporary with the text's composition. As John Reuben Davies has noted, Jocelin has Rhydderch transfer the kingship and sovereignty of his kingdom of Cumbria to Kentigern.⁹⁹ Davies sees this as 'a literary device' drawing attention to the idea of the Kentigern's diocese being both a religious and royal power.¹⁰⁰ In the last quarter of the twelfth century when Jocelin composed the *Vita*, Glasgow was emphasising its independence from the power of the archbishopric of York, following William the Lion's concession to Henry II of the 'ecclesiastical subjection' of Scotland to England.¹⁰¹ This political expediency of drawing Kentigern

⁹⁹ J. R. Davies, 'Bishop Kentigern among the Britons' p. 74

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 75.

together with a notable regional king of the early Christian era is an example of what T.O. Clancy has called 'magpie hagiography' – drawing together distinct elements and sources to produce a narrative which fits the specific agenda of the hagiographer and his context of patronage.¹⁰²

In terms of Fleischmann's framework, the category of 'social function' can be closely connected to 'intent' but perhaps with a wider focus on how the likely intent of the text was shared in a wider social context. In the case of the two hagiographical texts under consideration, the sections which include Rhydderch Hael contribute to functions of veneration and the assertion of shared identity. The former relates to the communication of religious teaching and tradition, the second relates to an assumed identification of the primary audience of the texts with a particular regional identity. The latter is particularly apparent in the *Vita Kentigerni* where the presence of Rhydderch as a key secular supporter of Kentigern seems designed to elicit patriotic responses from the south Scottish ecclesiastical audience for which the text was initially prepared.

There is relatively little to say about narrator involvement in the relevant sections of the two texts – both present their material in a way unmediated by any direct narrator intervention. In terms of narrative syntax, there is a sophistication which distinguishes these texts from simple annalistic accounts. In the *Vita Columbae*, the story of Rhydderch's envoy's encounter with Columba is structured in terms of problem (will Rhydderch die at the hands of his enemies?), response (Columba saying no) and resolution (the narrator confirms that Columba's prophecy came true). This tripartite structure simply but elegantly demonstrates Columba's God-inspired wisdom and foresight and his importance as a spiritual counsellor respected by powerful kings. Similarly, in *Vita Kentigerni*, Kentigern's various miracles which aid Rhydderch and his kingdom are also structured as problem,

¹⁰² T.O. Clancy, 'Magpie hagiography in twelfth-century Scotland: the case of Libellus de nativitate Sancti Cuthberti' in J. Cartwright, (ed.) *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2003).

saint's intervention and resulting resolution. For example, the story of the mulberries out of season already alluded to follows this pattern closely. Such structuring serves to heighten the impact on the reader/listener of what is being said about the saints' powers and helps to preserve them in memory (rather like the poetic triads).

Amongst the source texts on Rhydderch, the *Vita Merlini*, is as already noted the most difficult to assign to a specific genre. As a *vita* presenting the life and deeds of a specific individual, it seems to bear some resemblance to the hagiographical tradition and as it is written in verse it could be discussed in the context of poetry. However, taken as a whole, the 'best fit' for the text is the genre of prophecy and it can be closely related to Geoffrey of Monmouth's earlier *Prophetiae Merlini* (circa 1135) which are usually taken as part of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Both include prophecies about the future of the kingdom of Britain and, in particular, the future struggles of the Brythonic people against current and future invaders and aggressors. A key point of difference, however, is that the Merlin figure in the *Prophetiae Merlini* is identifiable with the Ambrosius (Welsh Emrys) of the *Historia Brittonum* whereas the Merlin of the *Vita Merlini*, as was discussed in the previous chapter, seems to derive from the Lailocen tradition of north Britain.

In terms of intent, the Rhydderch-related sections of the *Vita Merlini* seem to be concerned mainly with providing what the contemporary twelfth-century reader or listener would recognise as the context of a north British background from the distant but heroic past. The opening of the text seems to assume some familiarity with the traditions of Arfderydd (although the battle is not specifically named) and the northern Merlin's resulting madness. The development of the Merlin – Rhydderch relationship in the text seems to draw upon traditions of Rhydderch's generosity (in attempting to provide care and the comforts of civilisation for the wild Merlin) but also seems to cast Merlin in the Lailoken role of apparently deranged but mystically-wise guide. There is a particular resonance in Merlin correctly

propheying Rhydderch's death. This prophecy clearly draws on the Lailoken tradition as it recurs in *Vita Kentigerni*. It also perhaps gestures back to the tradition of Columba providing foresight of Rhydderch's untroubled death. In the text itself, Merlin's prophecy about Rhydderch comes at the start of a lengthy speech about the fate of the Britons, foreseeing the Saxon, Danish and Norman invasions which are portrayed as the result of the Britons' own civil strife. The speech ends with a cryptic, riddling reference to six kings, of whom the last will lead to the victory of the 'pious and prudent [who] shall renew the people and their cities'.¹⁰³ This all relates closely the tradition of the *mab darogan* or 'son of prophecy' whom Helen Fulton describes as 'the leader who would return to rout the Saxons, unite the island of Britain and restore the Welsh to their rightful place at the centre of political power', a tradition which is traceable back as far as the early Welsh poem, *Armes Prydein*.¹⁰⁴

Once again, intent is difficult to separate from reception – it is to be assumed that the twelfth-century readers/listeners were familiar with the kinds of association with the imagined north British heroic past which Rhydderch's presence helps provide. It is almost certain that they would be fully aware of the prophetic traditions associated with Merlin, especially from the *Prophetiae Merlini*. Geoffrey of Monmouth drives home this connection by ending the speech mentioned above with a direct reference to his own earlier text, speaking of the 'mystic war of the two dragons' which his Merlin Ambrosius figure had told to the British king Vortigern.¹⁰⁵ It is interesting that it is Rhydderch's death (or impending death) which seems to trigger Merlin's switch to political rather than personal prophecy. In terms of narrative syntax this sequencing appears to emphasise Rhydderch's position as a key figure in the pantheon of great British kings who preceded the collapse of Britain to foreign invaders.

¹⁰³ *Vita Merlini*, p.22.

¹⁰⁴ H. Fulton, 'Owain Glyndŵr and the Prophetic Tradition' in M. Livingston and J.K. Bollard eds., *Owain Glyndŵr: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.475.

¹⁰⁵ *Vita Merlini*, p. 22.

Two texts which deal very briefly with Rhydderch, the passage from the *HB* and the passage from the *Chirk Codex*, may be viewed as belonging to a genre of 'historical' writing. As previously indicated, it should not be assumed that the conception of what constituted 'historical' writing in the medieval period bears any close resemblance to what we generally view as history writing in our time. However, in both passages there is a clear intent to re-tell a past event of political importance. The *HB* passage seems aimed to provide a succinct summary of a period of warfare in North Britain between the Anglo-Saxon invader Theodoric and four British kings, including Rhydderch. Below the seemingly straightforward narrative, however, is the subtext of destructive rivalry between British kings with the reference to Urien's assassination at the 'instigation' of fellow Briton, Morcant, 'from jealousy'.¹⁰⁶ This fits into one of the unifying themes of the *HB* which is apparent from its treatment of Vortigern and later British kings: the Britons' propensity for self-defeating malice. What looks like a chronicle-like recounting of the outcome of battles, is in fact part of a synchronistic and providential narrative of paralleled episodes demonstrating the folly of diverting from a righteous path. Morcant's treachery mirrors the self-serving misrule of Vortigern who ill-advisedly sought allies amongst the English to protect his kingdom. Notably, for our purposes here, Rhydderch remains on the side of the heroic defence against Saxon aggression rather than following Morcant's route of internecine strife.

The *Chirk Codex* passage similarly has a surface impression of a simple account – the defence of Gwynedd by Rhun mab Maelgwn. This time, however, the account is framed as an episode of blood feud and revenge. The Men of the North, four kings including Rhydderch, come to Gwynedd to avenge the killing of their kinsman, Elidir Mwynfawr. Their raid results in the torching of Arfon. This in turn is avenged by Rhun and his Gwynedd armies in their attack on the North. The account does not contain the same sense of moral judgment as is present in the *HB* passage and it seems

¹⁰⁶ *HB*, p.38.

perhaps a more credible account of inter-British warfare from the sixth or seventh centuries. Bromwich notes that a background to the passage, referenced in a triad, is the disputed succession to the crown of Gwynedd following the death of Maelgwn between Rhun (son to Maelgwn) and Elidir (Maelgwn's son-in-law).¹⁰⁷ As the *Chirk Codex* is legal treatise, the context of the complexities of succession and inheritance is clearly of relevance to the intended reader. Morfydd E. Owen has explored the significance of the inclusion of this and various other apparently historical or pseudo-historical accounts of heroes of the Old North.¹⁰⁸ She argues that the 'professional lawmen' of Gwynedd who put together the north Walian redactions of the law-texts such as the *Chirk Codex* acted as 'propagandists' for powerful families such as those of Iorwerth ap Madog and Einion ap Gwalchmai.¹⁰⁹ A particular political expediency behind the *Chirk Codex* passage which mentions Rhydderch appears to be the implied linkage between the thirteenth-century rulers of Gwynedd and the Old North hero, Rhun mab Maelgwn.¹¹⁰ The account has a further more localisable propaganda-value for the Men of Arfon ('Gwyr Aruon'). In the account it is these men who are granted the privilege of leading the Gwynedd army across the river Forth to face Rhydderch and his allies. Their success leads to them being granted a set of fourteen privileges ('breintiau') which are listed immediately after the account. Owen examines the 'fiscal' and 'legal' nature of these rights and maintains that they 'can be associated with grievances voiced in the thirteenth century', for example the third clause which absolves the Men of Arfon from any requirement to make payments for their animals.¹¹¹ Owen suspects that this clause may have been of use as a means to challenge the tax imposed by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd on owners of large farm animals in the 1270s during his wars with the English.¹¹² In this light, the use of Rhydderch

¹⁰⁷ TYP, p. 491.

¹⁰⁸ M. E. Owen, 'Royal Propaganda: Stories from the Law-texts' in T.M. Charles-Edwards, M. E. Owen, and P. Russell, eds., *The Welsh king and his court* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 224–254, p. 225.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 239.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 242.

¹¹² Ibid.

and other Old North figures in the *Chirk Codex* account appears to be much less about the communication of ancient Brythonic history but rather a narrative and allusive means to assert political status and legal autonomy in the thirteenth century. It is notable, however, at the level of the story itself that Rhydderch is positioned as an enemy of Rhun and hence an enemy of Gwynedd. There is no apparent sense of any pan-Brythonic identity or fellowship.

To apply Fleischmann's framework to the *HB* and the *Chirk Codex* passage it would appear that in both cases the intention can be interpreted as something quite separate from simply relating the past. In the former, there is an underlying emphasis on the folly of a divided British cause and in the latter, there is a focus on political and legal resonance contemporary with the compilation of the text. Both are presented as straightforward narratives with no overt narrator intervention. The *Chirk Codex* passage however, employs an englyn, attributed to Taliesin at the end of the account, immediately preceding the enumeration of the *breintiau Arfon*:

Kygleu urth wres eu llaweu
Gan Run ynrudher bydyneu;
Gwyr Aruon rudyon yn rydieu.

(I heard that from the heat of their blades
By Rhun armies are made red,
The men of Arfon, red their fords.)¹¹³

This shifts the narrative to a more emotive and heavily allusive level, heightening the sense of glory and by implication strengthening the claims of the *Gwyr Aruon* to their continuing power and autonomy.

A genre of text which would seem to have a close relationship to 'historical' accounts is genealogy. As we have seen, Rhydderch Hael's names makes several appearances in genealogies relating to the Men of the North. It has

¹¹³ M.E Owen, 'Royal Propaganda: Stories from the Law-texts', p 252-3 (trans by M.E. Owen).

been noted that, whilst these genealogies cannot be taken as reliable in terms of the way that their lines of descent or ascent relate to any firm, independently verifiable chronology, the references to Rhydderch do seem to be generally in line with what we can glean about him from the other available sources in terms of his status and approximate historical context. It is important, however, to understand as best as we can how these genealogies may have been understood by readers or listeners who were contemporary to their creation and early dissemination.

Nia M. W. Powell has written of the importance of genealogies in the Welsh cultural and political context from the early medieval period until into the sixteenth century and beyond.¹¹⁴ She argues that, 'During the medieval period lineage was central to the structure of society in Wales, and knowledge of descent was thus all-important.'¹¹⁵

The nature of this importance lay in matters of inheritance and ownership of land, setting up the grounds for social interaction and 'establishing and maintaining regal status and authority'.¹¹⁶ In Powell's view then, the obsession with knowing your line of descent was something which cut across most of the society of medieval Wales and especially those who had any stake in the ownership of land and property or the assertion of political power. She cites early tangible evidence of this social phenomenon in the Pillar of Eliseg near Llangollen, thought to date from the mid-ninth century, the inscription on which traces the line of descent of Cyngen, king of Powys, back to the semi-mythic Romano-British ruler, Magnus Maximus. An interesting aspect of Powell's analysis for this current study is her assertion that, "What is most apparent in the MS Harley 3859 series [of genealogies] is the strong awareness of historical links between rulers of

¹¹⁴ N. M. W. Powell, 'Genealogical Narratives and Kingship in Medieval Wales' in *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Late-Medieval Britain and France, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Europe*; 16, ed. Raluca L. Radulesca and Edward Donald Kennedy, 2008, Brepols, Turnhout, pp. 175-202.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 176

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

tenth-century Wales and the older and wider British context. Lineages of *Gwŷr y Gogledd* (The Men of the North), of Man, and of Strathclyde are thus taken *ipso facto* as pertaining to the ancestry of rulers in Wales.¹¹⁷ She argues that the genealogies were used by tenth-century (and later) Welsh rulers to legitimise their rule based on their supposed descent from Brythonic heroes from the main dynasties of the Old North. The implication being that they had inherited not only a blood-line but at least some of the heroic nature of their forbears, especially in defending Britons from the Saxon threat.

Powell finds an even more specific historical context for this process of legitimisation of power through genealogy, pointing to the trend towards the unification of small kingdoms in Wales during the mid-ninth and tenth centuries under the rule of over-kings such as Rhodri Mawr (d. 878) and Hywel Dda (d. 950). Through concentrating lines of descent back to a few key figures from the ancient British past, contemporary rulers could presumably point to their unique status as inheritors of the right to be rulers of substantial tracts of British land and substantial numbers of British subjects. Powell also analyses the context of the later Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd genealogy which survives in copies of the lost Hengwrt 33 manuscript, which, as discussed above, Ben Guy has dated to the early fourteenth century. Llywelyn's legitimacy as ruler of Gwynedd and eventually much of Wales was much disputed. Assuming that the genealogy itself was in circulation either in written form or orally during his reign, it can be assumed to have been used to bolster his claims to dominate Wales, linking him as it does with ancient Brythonic heroes such as Cunedda and Beli and of course Rhydderch Hael. What is interesting is that the same genealogy continues to be promulgated well beyond both Llywelyn's death in 1240 and the Edwardian conquest of Wales in 1282. This could represent a continuing assertion of the rights of native Welsh kings to rule over

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 183.

Britons or more modestly as a legitimisation of whatever remaining power Llywelyn's own descendants had in the fourteenth century.

It can thus be seen that in Fleischmann's terms, the genealogical texts under consideration which feature Rhydderch Hael, perform a 'social function' which is mainly concerned with providing a legitimisation for those currently holding power and perhaps also a continuing claim to power by those who claimed descent from the ancient British heroes but had lost it to the Anglo-Normans. This, it can be assumed, was a much greater reason for their continued presence in Welsh manuscripts into the fourteenth century than any straightforward sense of family history as we would understand it.

A final important aspect to consider about these genealogical texts is that they were highly likely to have been much more prominent as oral recitation than in their written form. Powell, citing evidence from Giraldus argues that 'the presentation of genealogical knowledge relating to kingship belonged to a separate genre that was oral and may have involved repetition before an audience that ensured memorisation by a wider group.'¹¹⁸ Such recitation would have been, it is assumed, part of the role of the court bards, for whom genealogy was one of the *Tri Chof*, or three types of knowledge/memory in which they were expected to be accomplished.¹¹⁹ This links us to the final genres I will consider – those of poetry and triads – which were also the domain of the bards.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the two poetic texts from the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, *Afallennau* and *Oianau*, both present Rhydderch as a threat to the narrator/persona of the poem, which is traditionally associated with Myrddin. This is a clear contrast in portrayal to almost all the other texts under consideration which represent Rhydderch Hael in a wholly heroic light, with the exception of the passage from the *Chirk Codex*, where he is described as one of the enemies of the Men of Arfon and perhaps the

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p. 197

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 194

passage from *Vita Sancti Columbae* where there is an implication of fearfulness on Rhydderch's behalf. To understand the positioning of Rhydderch Hael in the *Llyfr Du* poems requires an examination of the likely context in which the poems were created and some of the complexities of the genre expectations surrounding the poems.

Meirion Pennar in his edition of the *Llyfr Du* points to the 'striking and emotional loyalty to the southern dynasty of Deheubarth in the poems.'¹²⁰ He follows the generally established dating of the manuscript to c.1250 and identifies the possible place of its creation as the Augustinian priory of St. John's in Carmarthen.¹²¹ Pennar points to the political context of Carmarthen and the wider region of Dyfed as this period as being caught between the rival domination of the Anglo-Normans and the kings of Gwynedd. He sees this context of a deep threat to the independence and indeed the existence of Deheubarth as highly formative in terms of the subject matter and outlook of the *Llyfr Du* poems. This analysis is useful in attempting to understand how the references to Rhydderch Hael within the poems may have been understood by a contemporary audience.

Both poems which refer to Rhydderch Hael are voiced in what is generally thought to be the persona of Myrddin. The key evidence for this is that the first poem of the collection, *Ymddiddan Myrddin a Thaliesin*, establishes this persona in a conversation with the legendary bard of the Old North, Taliesin. The poem also provides what appears to be the backstory to the Myrddin-linked poems later in the collection, namely a parallel between the defeat of a king of Deheubarth, Elgan by Maelgwn Gwynedd, and the battle of Arfderydd. Both battles are a source of grief to Myrddin and the poem starts with the lament, 'Mor truan gen hy mor truan,' (So sad am I, so sad..').¹²² The defeat and killing of Elgan is identified in the poem as the cause of the battle of Arfderydd in the Old North. Pennar explains that this chain of causation

¹²⁰ *The Black Book of Carmarthen*, p.9.

¹²¹ *ibid*, p. 7.

¹²² *ibid*, p.40

seems to lie in an internecine feud between the descendants of two of the great dynasties of the Old North: Dynfwal and Coel.¹²³ Elgan was a descendant of Coel and Maelgwn a descendant of Dynfwal. Pennar argues that Arfderydd was a battle to avenge the death of Elgan and resulted in the killing of Gwenddolau (a Coel descendant) by the forces of the descendants of Dynfwal, which may or may not have included Rhydderch Hael. As discussed previously, it is very difficult indeed to assume any degree of historicity for Arfderydd but the legendary power of the supposed battle and its aftermath is clearly apparent from the *Llyfr Du* Myrddin-linked poems. Myrddin's supposed involvement in the battle was on the side of Gwenddolau who is described by the Myrddin persona in terms that suggest that he was Myrddin's patron and protector. Both the *Afallennau* and the *Oianau* are pervaded by a deep sense of the Myrddin-persona's sense of loss, fear and guilt which seem to arise from his participation in Arfderydd. Arfderydd seems to serve as a metaphor for the futility and waste of war, especially war fought between fellow Britons. This lends the poems an elegiac quality but there are also other genre elements – nature poetry and prophetic poetry. The former is most apparent through the evocation of the peaceful apple orchard in the *Afallennau* which contrasts with Myrddin's recollections of bloody Arfderydd but is also fleetingly present in the *Oianau* with the narrator's affection for the piglets he addresses in the poem. The prophetic elements are, however, much more dominant in the poems, especially the *Oianau*, and these give the poems a political resonance which links the legendary material of Myrddin and the Old North both to the familiar medieval Welsh topos of eventual liberation from the Saxon yoke and to the more specific context of Deheubarth's perilous position in the mid-thirteenth century between rival superpowers – Gwynedd and the Normans.

This superposition of historical and political narratives from different periods of Welsh history is well illustrated in the first two stanzas of the

¹²³ Ibid, p. 18.

Oianau where the Myrddin persona juxtaposes Rhydderch Hael with Llywelyn Gwynedd. It is clear that he is in hiding from the former who he describes as 'rwyfadur fit' ('lord of the faith') and his attention then turns to a prophesy that Llywelyn will 'carry the day.'¹²⁴ In the scope of the poem as a whole which returns frequently to prophecies of the defeat of the English/Normans at the hands of the Welsh, the reference to Llywelyn may be taken as a favourable one but the next lines, at the start of the second stanza, immediately return to the sense of threat:

Oidan aparchellan. Oet reid myned rac.
Kinytion mordei bei llafaffed. Rac diuod
Erlid arnamme acingueled. Ac or diaghune
Ny chuinune in lluted. A mi difgoganafe.

(Oh little piglet,
we had to go
away from the hunters of the halls
and all the daring-do,
lest revenge come upon us
lest we're found out.)¹²⁵

The implication seems to be that the likes of Rhydderch and Llywelyn, whilst being revered as British heroes are also 'hunters of the halls', who bring destruction in their wake for the likes of Myrddin and his vulnerable forest-dwelling friends. The poem thus achieves an unlikely balance between hope of eventual Welsh victory and deep sadness about the mayhem and violence which conflict brings. It is tempting to feel that this would strike a chord with a mid-thirteenth century Welsh-speaking audience, especially in Deheubarth, facing seemingly intractable conflict between rival enemies and an existential threat to their survival as an independent entity. In this poetry, Rhydderch holds a dual identity as hero of the Old North and bringer of vengeance. This sense of ambivalence is achieved largely through the use of what Fleischmann calls 'narrator involvement' – the Myrddin narrator persona's dual sense of being both

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 87.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 87.

victim of aggression and also part of a Brythonic cause, creates a tension which gives the poems a troubling and complex feel. This is a subtle and fascinating use of legendary material within a contemporary political narrative.

The *Llyfr Coch Hergest* poem, *Kyuoessi myrdin agŵendyd ychŵaer* covers similar prophetic ground to the two *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems discussed above. The basic structure is of a conversation between Myrdin and his sister about the future fate of the British from the battle of Arferydd onwards and which British rulers will rise to the fore. The poem has some of the same sense of loss and foreboding as the *Llyfr Du* poems but its presentation of Rhydderch is largely eulogical. The Myrddin persona sees him as the first in a line of British heroes who will lead his people in their struggles:

Kyuarach auel rôyd yŵ arôyd ryderch hael.
Kany ryderch bieu ffaŵ. achymry oll y danaŵ,
neu gŵedy ynteu kŵdaŵ.

(Bounteous is the banner of Rhydderch the Generous.
Since Rhydderch possesses glory
and all Wales under him,
after him, who will come?)¹²⁶

The only hint of any underlying fear or ambivalence comes a few lines later in a partially indecipherable reference,

Ryderch hael dan yspeit ge [...] lyn,

(Rhydderch the Generous, an enemy for a while (?))¹²⁷

This seems to maintain a trace of the fear which the Myrddin persona holds for Rhydderch in the two *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems, but it is fleeting impression amongst an otherwise much more straightforward endorsement

¹²⁶ Trans. J.K. Bollard in the *Romance of Merlin* ed. P. Goodrich, p.32. Original text is from <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/h01w.html> <accessed 20 February 2017>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

of Rhydderch's heroic qualities. It is interesting to speculate whether it is the probable later date of the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* poem compared to those in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* which may explain the loss of some of the ambivalence around Rhydderch Hael, due perhaps to the influence of material such as the poetic triads which will be discussed next or loss of transmission of some of the subtler elements of the Arfderydd/Myrddin story. It may be though that it was the particular political context of the construction of the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems which led to this element being accentuated for specific rhetorical purposes. The still later (at least in terms of manuscript date) poem *Peiryan Vaban* with its two fleeting references to Rhydderch Hael would seem to support the thesis that the passage of time led to a simplifying of the poetic representation of Rhydderch Hael. Both references concentrate on his martial prowess and there is no clear sense that the Myrddin persona voicing the poem fears Rhydderch in any personal capacity.

The last genre grouping which I will consider here is the triads. These have been discussed in chapter four in terms of their content and range of references. Compared to the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* poems or the *Chirk Codex*, they seem relatively straightforward in their presentation of Rhydderch Hael as a Brythonic hero of the Old North – one famed for his generosity, valour and mythic power. A general intention of these short texts seems to be to celebrate and immortalise the prowess and good character of this northern hero.

Analysis of the probable context of the creation and dissemination of the triads from the twelfth century onwards suggests that other priorities were present in the texts. The triads are thought to have been created primarily as *aides memoires* for medieval Welsh bards, especially bards in training, helping them to recall legendary material which could then be worked into their recitations.¹²⁸ Bromwich notes in her introduction to her edition of the

¹²⁸ TYP, lvii.

Trioedd Ynys Prydein that there seems to be no attempt in the triads to 'give much information...about the heroes of past ages'.¹²⁹ The focus, she argues, is not on a recapitulation of past deeds of heroes but on how these figures from the past can be employed in contemporary contexts 'as symbols of valour, generosity and courtesy'. For Bromwich, the 'impressionistic' nature of the character portraits given in the triads seems to suggest that the references to past heroes had become 'divorced from their original context'.¹³⁰ As we have seen, it is extremely questionable whether we can ever really know what the 'original context' of the Old North in the sixth or seventh centuries entailed; however, Bromwich's point is a useful one on which to draw this analysis of the re-invention of Rhydderch Hael to a close. In the Welsh medieval context, Rhydderch Hael was one of a number of barely remembered figures from an Old North, the history of which was largely unrecorded and most probably largely forgotten. His significance, however, was as a symbol or archetype of qualities which were felt worthy of celebration and inculcation, especially that of generosity ('hael') which formed part of his customary name. One telling piece of evidence for this comes in the final verse of Dafydd ap Gwilym's poem *Moliant Hywel, Deon Bangor*:

Ni wŷr, cymraw llwyr, Cymro llariaidd,
Roddi i eirchiaid yn Rhydderchaid.

(No gentle Welshman (this is truly frightening),
knows how to reward suppliants in the manner of Rhydderch.)¹³¹

Here Dafydd ap Gwilym, writing in the mid-fourteenth century converts Rhydderch Hael's name into adjectival form ('yn Rhydderchaid') in order to deliver his praise for the Dean of Bangor's generous behaviour towards those who come to him in supplication. This not only attests to the poet's

¹²⁹ Ibid, lxii.

¹³⁰ Ibid, lxiii.

¹³¹ Dafydd ap Gwilym, Dafydd ap Gwilym.net [online]. Available at <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/eng/3win.htm> <accessed 25 November 2016>.

linguistic inventiveness but also to the symbolic resonance and legacy of Rhydderch's name over six hundred years after his supposed existence.

6) Conclusion

This thesis has shown that Rhydderch Hael was a significant figure within the textual material produced about the 'Old North' either within northern Britain or later in Wales from the seventh century to at least the fifteenth century. In terms of his historicity, there does not seem to be any substantial reason to doubt that there was a king of Alt Clut of his name. Rhydderch is referenced first relatively quickly after his supposed *floruit* by Adonmnán and the later references to him from the tenth century onwards seem generally supportive of the idea that he was thought of as a genuine late sixth-century king from what is now termed Strathclyde. However, as for all other figures of the 'Old North' any assertions of existence need to be accompanied by a great degree of caution, largely because of the paucity of corroborating textual sources and also because, as we have seen, the priorities of the writers who mention Rhydderch Hael do not include a forensic approach to historical validation.

What we can be sure of, however, is that the figure of Rhydderch Hael was one which offered writers, across a diverse range of genres and over more than half a millennium, an opportunity to explore themes associated with the Old North – heroism and military prowess, generosity, Christian kingship. In general terms these fairly stereotypical characteristics of the early medieval British hero become increasingly simplified during the period in question and they are also most apparent in the Latin texts of the Anglo-Norman period, namely the *Vita Merlini* and the *Vita Kentigerni*. Here Rhydderch seems to be a convenient 'peg' with vague historical resonance and a degree of 'local colour' onto which hagiographical or semi-mythic narrative can be built. Rhydderch's depiction in the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* also seems to be consistent with this view of him, especially where he is

largely defined by the eponymous generosity contained within the adjective 'hael'.

What is perhaps more interesting is that within the Welsh poetic sources associated with Myrddin Wyllt, Rhydderch is regarded with a certain amount of ambivalence – a hero, certainly, and one whose name is worthy in any vaticinatory roll call of Brythonic leaders who will free Britain from the Saxon aggressors; but also a figure who brings a certain amount of dread to the Myrddin persona. The reasons for this appear to lie in material associated with the battle of Arfderydd and Rhydderch's antagonism to his fellow Briton Gwendolau, Myrddin's supposed patron. These are all fleeting references to what may have been a much greater body of material but are certainly intriguing. They not only lend the poems additional interest but also point to the survival in literary form of feuds between rival British kings which were of little interest to Anglo-Norman writers or their patrons. The seemingly unlikely appearance of Rhydderch's name in a legalistic text, the *Chirk Codex*, again in the context of an intra-British dispute over five hundred years before the text was written is another small piece of evidence that Rhydderch was not universally viewed as a stereotypical 'Old North' hero, but as a warrior operating within a world of bitter political rivalries.

It is indeed the political aspect of Rhydderch Hael and his depictions which is perhaps the most important finding of this thesis. Each of the writers or collators responsible for the surviving texts dealing with Rhydderch Hael used this figure of the 'Old North' to a political end. They did so through the skilled manipulation of genre expectations. For example, to Jocelin of Furness, Rhydderch is the embodiment of an ideal of the good Christian king and the use of his still potent name helps strengthen the claims of Jocelin's patron, the Bishop of Glasgow, to assert his political and spiritual power. For the unnamed monastic poet behind the extraordinary Myrddin poems in the *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, Rhydderch represents both the promise and the threat of political leadership – the promise of a resurgent British/Welsh political identity but also the threat of bitter internecine struggle.

Rhydderch's name, it appears, was ample enough to provide all the writers whose work has been considered within this thesis with a connection to the distant and legendary 'Old North' but more significantly perhaps, with a means of speaking to their contemporary audiences about the political present.

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