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King Arthur 'Dux Bellorum': Welsh Penteulu 'Chief of the Royal Host'

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Abstract: *Although the North British hero Arthur (d. 537) is described in medieval romance as a king, he is not so termed in the earliest documents relating to him. The ninth-century 'Historia Brittonum' states merely that he fought 'cum regibus Brittonum' ('alongside kings of the Britons'), but was himself merely 'dux bellorum'. What this means has been long disputed. It has been taken to represent a senior rank in the Roman army, with Arthur as a commander of cavalry forces fighting up and down Britain. Closer analysis shows this as a fantasy. Comparison with medieval Welsh texts indicates that 'dux bellorum' instead corresponds to the Welsh 'penteulu' ('captain of the bodyguard, chief of the royal host'). As commander of the king's bodyguard, the 'penteulu' was the most important of the 24 officers of the court. He had a position of supreme trust, invariably being the ruler's own son or nephew or another man of rank. Setting out his income and status (which included the right to praise by the official poet of the bodyguard), medieval Welsh legal and other sources are thus the most reliable sources of information on what the Arthur of history was and was not.*

Keywords: *King Arthur, Penteulu, Welsh Law, Britain in the Sixth Century CE.*

Résumé : *Bien que le héros britannique du Nord, Arthur (mort en 537), soit décrit comme un roi dans la romance médiévale, il n'est pas qualifié de tel dans les documents les plus anciens le concernant. Historia Brittonum, du IXe siècle, déclare simplement qu'il a combattu le « cum regibus Brittonum » (« aux côtés des rois des Bretons »), mais qu'il était lui-même simplement « dux bellorum ». Ce que cela signifie a longtemps été contesté. Il a été supposé représenter un haut rang de l'armée romaine, avec Arthur en tant que commandant des forces de cavalerie combattant à travers la Grande-Bretagne. Une analyse plus fine montre cela comme un fantasme. La comparaison avec les textes gallois médiévaux indique que "dux bellorum" correspond à la place du "penteulu" gallois ("capitaine du garde du corps, chef de l'armée royale)". En tant que commandant des gardes du corps du roi, le « penteulu » était le plus important des 24 officiers de la cour. Il avait une position de confiance suprême, étant invariablement son propre fils ou neveu ou un autre homme de rang. Etablissant ses revenus et son statut (y compris le droit de louange du poète officiel des gardes du corps), les sources légales et autres galloises médiévales sont donc les sources d'informations les plus fiables sur ce qu'était Arthur ou pas.*

Mots clés : *roi Arthur, Penteulu, loi galloise, la Grande-Bretagne au sixième siècle de notre ère.*

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Arthur, too easily thought of as a king, was not so regarded during the ninth century. In *Historia Brittonum* he is called *dux bellorum* (usually understood as 'leader of battles'). In this paper we thus look at what previous writers have made of the phrase, and then compare it with its closest equivalent in Welsh sources, *penteulu* or 'captain of the bodyguard', the élite corps who were a Welsh king's strength and protection. Because the term *dux bellorum* has no exact equivalent, but medieval sources tell us much of the *penteulu* and the *teulu* or warband which he commanded, they should make the figure of Arthur intelligible. They also cast a revealing light on what professional and amateur historians have written about Arthur.

A preface to the subject was offered by Sir John Rhŷs (1840-1915). Problems of security in fourth-century Britain led to the appointment of a *Dux Britanniarum* 'Commander of the Britains', the provinces into which Roman Britain was divided, and a *Comes Litoris Saxonici* 'Count of the Saxon Shore'. They were no petty people, the latter having authority over a chain of forts from Brancaster (in Norfolk) to Portchester (in Hampshire). Rhŷs thought that the office of these *generalissimos* continued with that of the Welsh *gwledig* 'ruler, prince' because, 'with the exception of Arthur, those who seem to have succeeded to supreme power here when the Romans left are always styled in Welsh literature *gwledig*' and not 'emperor' or 'king'. [1] The word is used in *The Mabinogion* of Magnus Maximus or Macsen Wledig (d. 388), a Spaniard who usurped power in Britain and beyond, and in *Historia Brittonum* of the fifth-century British leader Ambrosius Aurelianus. But it was, we note, never used of Arthur. This has not stopped writers from glamourizing him with the dignity of a Roman *dux*, and so trailing a glory that he neither possessed nor claimed. It contrasts with the plain translation by Hugh Williams (1843-1911) of Bala, who took Arthur as fighting the Saxons of Kent, aided by the kings of Britain, but himself 'the leader in the wars'.[2]

Our survey proper begins with Sir Edmund Chambers (1866-1954), who supplied (after Theodor Mommsen) the relevant passage from *Historia Brittonum* and a translation of it. Having heard of Vortigern and how the Saxons grew in power, we learn that Hengist's son Octha established a realm in Kent. 'Of him sprang the kings of the Kentishmen. Then Arthur fought against them in those days with the kings of the Britons, and it was he who led their battles (*Tunc Arthur pugnabat contra illos in illis diebus cum regibus Brittonum, sed ipse dux erat bellorum*)', the notorious list of those twelve battles coming after that.[3] By using a paraphrase, Chambers ducked the question of whether *dux bellorum* was or was not a title.

A pregnant remark was thereafter made by the Chadwicks, that the source of this passage was 'in all probability to be sought in a catalogue poem' which resembled other vernacular ones (still surviving) on the campaigns and triumphs of Welsh rulers.[4] The point is crucial. If the source was of native origin, it makes a world of difference. It imples that *dux bellorum* renders a North British or Welsh expression and is nothing to do with

[1] Rhys, 104.
[2] Hugh Williams, 350.
[3] Chambers, 1, 238.
[4] Chadwick and Chadwick, 155.

Rome. The observation in mind, we turn to Robin Collingwood (1889-1943), whose writings so brilliantly mix gold and dross. Collingwood was sure 'that Arthur really lived', as did Alexander, Aristotle, Vergil, and Roland, likewise transmuted into legend. Collingwood was here wiser than more recent critics. He added (also correctly) that Arthur's name is of Latin origin, from *Artorius*, but that 'he was not a king, still less king over all the kings of Britain' (again, correct). After this, Collingwood lurched into error. The phrase *dux bellorum* implies two things: first, 'the governments of his day entrusted him with a special military command'; second, the expression 'he fought "with the kings of the Britons" implies that this commission was valid all over the country' and so 'not in any one kingdom or region, but wherever he was wanted' as the commander of a mobile field-army'. Arthur was, in short, 'a new count of Britain'.[5] These bold assertions have sown confusion, despite the scepticism of Kenneth Jackson (1909-91) and others. Reactions to Collingwood's words provide the substance of what follows.

An early comment came from Albert Williams. Collingwood's 'rather ingenious explanation of the Arthurian legend' represents Arthur as a sixth-century equivalent to the fifth-century Count of Britain, dealing (like him) with 'the barbarian menace' and with an army modelled on those of the Romans after 'after the disaster of Adrianople in 378, when an effective cavalry force' put their infantry to flight. Arthur was not only thoroughly Roman, but (as Collingwood put it) 'the last of the Romans'.[6]

Jackson saw Collingwood with a colder eye. The British struggle with the Saxons 'seems to have been carried on by the shadowy figure of Arthur' as 'a leader of the official Roman kind' (a view 'ably' defended by Collingwood) or as 'another "tyrant" like Vortigern'; but 'we cannot really know' which, and 'nothing useful can be said' further. Jackson went on to locate the victory of 'Badon' near Swindon; the British leader 'may or may not have been' Arthur.[7] We agree in part. Although Arthur was neither a Roman commander nor a local Celtic ruler, but a captain of fighting men, 'Badon' was indeed a victory of Britons over Saxons of the south-east, and was won near Swindon (at the hillfort east of Braydon Forest), but had no link with Arthur. Jackson's caution was justified.

Although Jackson's pupil Rachel Bromwich (1915-2010) lacked his incisive intellect and style, she was nearer the truth on Arthur than he was. For her, Arthur was a Northern warrior who perhaps fought some of his battles 'against rival British factions' (not the Saxons) 'within the northern area', as one might gather from the very obscurity of the toponyms. She yet cited (as 'indirect evidence which points to his having been a great leader of the Britons during the chaotic period which followed the break-up of Roman rule') Collingwood on how Arthur as *dux bellorum* 'commanded a cavalry force whose mobility enabled it to pass rapidly from one area of Britain to another, opposing external invaders wherever the need was greatest.'[8] Jackson's hostility to the Northern Arthur and to his battles as northern ones is clear from his acid (but mistaken) remark that 'the philological evidence relied on by the proponents of this view does little to support it.'[9] In this debate, the meaning of *dux bellorum* is vital.

[5] Collingwood and Myers, 321-2.
[6] A. H. Williams, 73.
[7] K. H. Jackson, *Language*, 116, 199.
[8] Bromwich, 'Character', 124-5.
[9] K. H. Jackson, 'Britons', 81

So much appears from Geoffrey Ashe. Rhŷs and Collingwood had explained the form as an 'old Roman military title', granted to high-ranking officials and retained by the Britons. Ashe hence portrayed Arthur in flattering terms. He was a 'Roman-blooded aristocrat born about 470', who led 'a picked company' expert in 'cavalry fighting'. Arthur, having 'taught the smiths to forge armour and the troops to manage their horses', then set off with 'a mobile squadron that could hurtle from place to place carrying all before it.' [10] Fortunately, Ashe later retreated from these fantasies, as we shall see.

This was wise, given further comments from Jackson. He doubted that Arthur was granted any supreme Roman rank as *Dux Bellorum* (with appropriate initials). It corresponded to nothing in Rome or elsewhere. Bede in one of his minor works referred to St Germanus as *dux belli* and was here echoed by the Vatican recension of *Historia Brittorum*. Yet the phrase is merely descriptive. It was not a formal title. Jackson thus rendered *dux bellorum* as no more than 'commander in the battle'. On Collingwood he was terse. Jackson dismissed him as urging 'an argument which it would be an understatement to call "imaginative"'.[11] Jackson's reasoning on *dux bellorum* is, however, not as compelling as one might think. It does not account for the emphasis put upon the expression in *Historia Brittonum*'s Latin, which is clumsy, but still indicates a contrast between Arthur's rank and that of the kings who were his allies.

In his account of Arthur's twelve battles, Count Tolstoy was not primarily concerned with Arthur's identity. [12] He yet reminds us that the questions of who Arthur was and where he fought are inseparable. On the background to that we at this point make a digression. Jackson, in a lecture not directly concerned with Arthur, described a monument which brings us close to him. It stands at Yarrowkirk in Selkirkshire/Borders, and bears the inscription HIC MEMORIA PERPETUA/ IN LOCO INSIGNISIMI PRINCIPES NUDI DUMNOGENI/ HIC IACENT IN TUMULO DUO FILII LIBERALI.

'This is the eternal memorial: in this place lie the most illustrious princes Nudus and Dumnogenus. Here lie in the grave the two sons of Liberalis.' [13] It tells us more than one might think. The lettering dates it to the early sixth century, and so to the genuine 'Age of Arthur'. It shows the blend of Celtic and Roman in the culture of these chiefs (otherwise unknown), who were his contemporaries and neighbours. vThey lived beyond the Empire, but naturally wrote in Latin. Liberalis had a Latin name, his sons had Celtic ones. They were also Christians. Their epitaphs parallel those on similar monuments from Wales, Cornwall, and beyond. These people were in contact with the wider world. The household of Liberalis might have been provincial and lacking in polish: but it still looked to Rome, even though southern Scotland had lain beyond the Empire since the late second century. After this encounter with epigraphical fact, a return to standard histories. Sheppard Frere commented on Arthur as perhaps succeeding Ambrosius, continuing his governance of the Britons with a title going back to the late Empire, and leading 'mounted forces' in 'some sort of unified command arranged between several petty kingdoms'. [14]But by 1978 Geoffrey Ashe was acknowledging the 'grave criticism' against such views. Such aspects

[10] Ashe, King Arthur's Avalon, 75-6.
[11] K. H. Jackson, 'The Arthur of History', 8-9.
[12] Tolstoy, 118-62.
[13] K. H. Jackson, 'Angles and Britons', 63-4.
[14] Frere, 382.

of Roman rule would hardly have survived into sixth-century Britain. At the same time, rather than giving short shrift to Collingwood's notions, he half-believed them, with Arthur adopting 'a remembered title and organized cavalry of a sort'. [15] Error is always long a-dying. It here extended into the 1970s. On breathing its last, it was succeeded by new error, destined to live another forty years

The last years of this patient are hence of special interest. Leslie Alcock, despite reviewing military senses of the Word *dux*, moved in the right direction by proposing *dux bellorum* as translating a Welsh or Cumbric bardic expression, and so in no way a Roman 'formal rank or title'. Yet he did not follow the idea through in further remarks on Arthur. If he was not as a 'territorial ruler', he might have been a 'freelance who offered the services of himself and a band of followers to whatever king would pay best' (= a mercenary) or else 'an overall commander appointed collectively by the kings of the Britons' (= the wraith of Collingwood's 'new count of Britain'). Having it both ways, Alcock went on to devize a Latin formula for the second position, meaning 'General Officer Commanding British Land Forces'.[16] Despite rejecting *dux bellorum* as indicating an Imperial role for Arthur, Alcock still treated him as a *supremo*, on the shaky grounds of battles supposedly won throughout the length of Britain. This despite Gildas's failure to mention Arthur, a silence suggesting that 'the Arthur of history was a less imposing figure than the Arthur of legend'. [17]

Charles Thomas (1928-2016) marked further progress in the right direction. He correctly saw the earliest references to Arthur as 'categorically northern', so that 'the British tribes in what is now southern Scotland may have formed his native background'. Thomas could do this on the basis of arguments advanced by O. G. S. Crawford in 1935 for Arthur's final battle of Camlan as at *Camboglanna* on Hadrian's Wall, and of Jackson's 1969 translation of the seventh-century *Gododdin*, a Northern poem mentioning Arthur as a historical figure (not a legendary one). As regards *dux bellorum*, Thomas alluded to 'the disruptive quarrels of duces, war-leaders and would-be Arthurs connected with the network of native principalities to the west and north.' [18] In shunning all imperial echoes, Thomas here also approached the truth.

Advancing in the opposite direction, geographically and otherwise, was Leslie Alcock. His attempts to associate Arthur (on the basis of pseudo-etymology and post-medieval folklore) with the hillfort at South Cadbury, Somerset, can now be seen as an archaeological blunder, blemishing what his excavations actually revealed of the place. Alcock admitted to a disappointed public that they had disclosed no relic of Arthur, but still took him as '"leader of battles", *dux bellorum*, on behalf of several kingdoms' and so the 'direct successor to Ambrosius Aurelianus' (foe of the Anglo-Saxons) and commander of British forces 'owing general allegiance to an overlord or high king'. Alcock went further. Arthur's army might have had a thousand men, and Cadbury was 'a suitable base for such a body'. The place being refortified in the 470s or later, 'this date would fit Arthur, especially if we put his victory at Badon in AD 490 or 499'. [19] For all that, Alcock's

[15] Ashe, 'The Arthurian Fact', 53
[16] Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, 60-1, 86-7, 358.
[17] Stenton, 3.
[18] Thomas, *Britain and Ireland*, 38-42.
[19] Alcock, 'By South Cadbury', 193-4.

investigations will have new significance if we locate the victory of 'Badon' at Braydon in Wiltshire, and in the spring or early summer of 493. Refortification at South Cadbury may prove that Britons of the south-west had stiffened their resolve. Anglo-Saxon aggressors met a new spirit of resistance. The initiative behind that did not come from Arthur. But it may have come from Ambrosius Aurelianus.

Alcock's defects were yet minor compared with those of John Morris (d. 1977). If Arthurian Cadbury was an archaeological charade, Morris's imperial Arthur was a historical one, even if endowed with a poet's brilliance and vision. Behind it is the notion of the *dux*. In the fifth century, the Britons had 'repelled their enemies with outstanding success' because 'the *dux*, the *comes*, and the civil government worked together'. Their successor was Arthur, 'the supreme commander who defeated the English' and 'who long maintained in years of peace the empire of Britain', which 'his arms had recovered and restored'. [20] For page after page we see Morris wafting upwards on a balloon of stately fantasy. A needle to prick it was soon produced in a famous paper, if with a smokescreen of historical negativism being dispelled only now.[21]

In the meantime we find older counsels repeated. Hunter Blair, not given to hyberbole, regarded Arthur's part in Badon as unproven. He still thought Arthur historical, 'for Arthur's fame was great in the sixth century, though we do not know why'. [22] Hunter Blair was aware (after Heinrich Zimmer in 1893) that sixth-century Northern and other princes were named 'Arthur', a circumstance not explained by those who dismiss Arthur as a Celtic myth. He said nothing on *dux bellorum*. Nor did Rachel Bromwich, who yet noted how the 'oldest allusions to Arthur associate him with North Britain'. [23] In a useful student edition, Morris himself rendered *dux bellorum* merely as 'leader in battle'. [24] He gave no imperial overtones to the expression.

Morris's romantic extravanganzas and the reactions to them by Dumville and others left commentators in disarray. One spoke of how modern speculation had alighted on Arthur as leader of the Britons, when others denied his very existence. [25] Another remarked that conclusions on him, not least his assocation with 'actual places' including South Cadbury, should be 'held in abeyance' pending thorough examination of the texts. [26] (That examination is what the reader is getting in the present.) Charles Thomas turned 180 degrees, being now convinced of there being 'no historical evidence about Arthur'. [27] Over at Worcester College in Oxford, James Campbell understood *dux bellorum* as 'commander in wars', further remarking on how some had seen Arthur as 'the last of the emperors of Roman Britain, or as the commander of the field army for such an emperor'. Even if 'there were such emperors' or 'such an army', nothing was proven. [28]

None of this was heard by Morris, who died in 1977. But his ghost thereafter sidled

[20] Morris, *Age of Arthur*, 54, 116-41.
[21] Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain'.
[22] Hunter Blair, 30.
[23] Bromwich, 275.
[24] British History, 35
[25]Johnson, 123.
[26] Salway, 485, 501.
[27] Thomas, *Christianity*, 245.
[28] Campbell, 27.

into the scholarly uproar. In a posthumous book it proclaimed how Arthur 'fought for the preservation of Roman Britain', thereby becoming 'emperor, the last Roman emperor in Britain' and heir to those enthroned there since 410. This he related to the *duces* 'military commanders' mentioned by Gildas, who 'grew to manhood under Arthur's government'. The *duces* had by then made themselves petty kings and tyrants; but their name demonstrated the survival of some 'semblance of a Roman government'.[29] From wisps of evidence, Morris created a hallucinatory Imperial Britain. But it was doomed to vanish. A lay writer made the obvious objection. In 'the years after Badon, Arthur may have risen to be emperor over the shades of Roman Britain. If so, it is strange that Gildas does not mention him, for Gildas was writing less than half a century after these events.' [30] Ian Wood makes the further point that *dux* at this time was used 'without military connotations' at all. [31]

By the 1990s, the rout of the Morrisians was complete. Dumville's critique of the 'no smoke without fire' approach to sources, which for the most part allegedly show Arthur as 'a figure of legend', was quoted with approval. [32] Oliver Padel (b. 1948), thus represented Arthur as purely legendary, like the Irish folklore hero Fionn mac Cumhaill. [33] He glossed over the questions of *dux bellorum* and the identity of Arther's battles. Alcock (as already noted) observed that the 'Arthur/Camelot attribution seemed a reasonable inference' for South Cadbury until the late 1970s, when attacks began on Arthur's historicity. [34] Dr Padel translates *dux bellorum* as 'war-leader', adding that the battles attributed to Arthur 'cannot be identified' (i.e., cannot be identified by me, Dr Oliver Padel). [35] Ken Dark likewise starts with Dumville's denial of historical evidence for Arthur. Yet it makes a pointed objection. If Arthur was a mere folklore or legendary entity, why was his name given to Northern princes in the late sixth century, but not thereafter? [36]

Dark's paper was, however, ignored by most later writers. The received view of Arthur as non-historical appears in a well-known booklet. Its treatment of *dux bellorum* is revealing. It says this. 'Arthur is depicted as the great military leader (*dux bellorum*) who led the British kings against the second generation of English settlers'; but the context 'seems to imply that Arthur was not regarded as a king himself.' [37] Within 'great military leader' is still the ghost of Arthur as *supremo*. Let us exorcize it. Since we can be sure that Arthur did not fight the English, *dux bellorum* will have no implications for him as a 'great' national commander. We can also be certain that he was not a king. No early source calls him that. What we are left with is *dux bellorum* as indicating a status different from (*sed*), and inferior to, that of kings. There is no reason to take *dux bellorum* as a supra-regal title.

This ground cleared, we turn to Nick Higham. If Dr Padel sees Arthur as a British

[29] Morris, *Londinium*, 340-1.

[30] Robert Jackson, 49.
[31] Wood, 11.
[32] Cummins, 8.
[33] Padel, 'The Nature of Arthur', 19.
[34] Alcock, *Cadbury Castle*, 6.
[35] Padel, 'Arthur', 48.
[36] Dark, 77.
[37] Padel, *Arthur*, 3.

Fionn mac Cumhaill, Professor Higham sees him as a British Joshua, with the author of *Historia Brittonum* presenting him (on the strength of 'his own reading of Deuteronomy' and other Old Testament books) as a doughty smiter of foes. At the same time Arthur appears too in *Historia Brittonum* as 'a pan-British war-leader, a veritable *dux bellorum*'. [38] There are three things to say here. The supposed parallel with Joshua is not made in *Historia Brittorum*, which never actually mentions Joshua. Second, the notion of Arthur as a 'pan-British' leader is due to a mistaken locating of his battles all over Britain, from Wessex to Scotland. Third, the rhetoric of 'veritable' attributes to *dux bellorum* a grandeur that it hardly possessed. Such are the dangers of imposing meanings on a text which it will not bear. Better, if in merely taking the text *au pie de la lettre*, is Martin Aurell. He tells how Arthur, was '*chef de guerre (dux bellorum) luttant auprès des rois des Bretons et remportant douze batailles*'. [39] Less desirable, one fears, is the Welsh Academy encyclopaedia. On the *dux Britanniarum*, who from the early fourth century led 'a mobile army based at York', it adds that 'Arthur was possibly a commander in the same tradition a century after the title had ceased to exist.' [40] This is a last and faint echo of what Collingwood and Morris broadcast to the world. It should fade.

More up-to-date are Higham's observations on the passage as a whole. Its 186 words are 'embedded' within an account of the Germanic invasions of Britain, making up the 'filling of this Saxon sandwich'. Higham reaonably regards its inclusion as due to *Historia Brittonum*'s compiler, and not from 'some pre-existing source'. He thinks that the feats of this 'invariably successful Christian soldier' within the dismal record of the Loss of Britain made him 'a warrior type of the Messiah for his people' as 'a product of Biblical metaphor'. [41] One need not believe all that to see how Arthurian traditions served to bolster up Welsh morale. More significant is this inference. The Arthurian source had no original link with those on the English settlement of Kent. It is here as a more or less arbitrary interpolation. So we need not imagine that Arthur lived at the time of Hengest's son Octha. Higham provides another wedge to crack the graven image of Arthur, vanquisher of the Saxons.

The most recent comments are varied. In a glossy volume with sensational illustrations, a consultant endocrinologist in Udine asks 'è Artù un soprannome guerriero veneto? La risposta è sì, in forza di tutte le evidenze elencate.' [42] Professor Halsall of York takes seriously (but should not) the notion of how '"leader of battles" (*dux bellorum*) refers to a title, possibly a corruption of *dux britanniarum* (Duke of the Britains), one of the late Roman military commanders in Britain.' [43] Dr Padel, imagining that 'further work has not significantly affected the conclusions' given in his book, said the same on *dux bellorum* in 2013 as he did in 2000. [44]

New insights come from archaeology. There are important remarks by Rob Collins of Newcastle on papers of the 1990s by Ken and Petra Dark. These demonstrated post-Roman garrisoning of forts on Hadrian's Wall, the evidence consisting of earth defences

[38] Higham, *King Arthur*, 143, 148.
[39] Aurell, 83
[40] Anon., 'Dux Britanniarum', 227.
[41] Higham, 'Chroniclers', 12, 14, 16.
[42] Favero, *La Dea Veneta*, 169.
[43] Halsall, 20
[44] Padel, *Arthur*, 2nd edn, 1.

with stone or timber revetments, burials, British artifacts, or early Christian inscribed stones, including one (it seems) from Castlesteads itself. [45] That *Camlan* or Castlesteads was occupied by Britons in the years about 500 sheds a most interesting light on the death there of Arthur in 537. The papers by the Darks are further cited by John Koch. [46] Flint Johnson similarly notes how forts on Hadrian's Wall 'were either reoccupied or refortified in the fifth or sixth century' and that they should 'inexplicably come into use around 500' is 'an anomaly for post-Roman Britain'. Conventional accounts cannot explain it. Yet he relates this to 'a powerful kingdom in this area', as also to what he calls 'the office of the *dux brittonum* during the late Roman period'. [47] We develop the comments of Collins, Koch, and Johnson. O. G. S. Crawford in 1935 took the Camlan where Arthur fell as *Camboglanna*, now understood as Castlesteads, a fort near Carlisle reoccupied in around 500. Archaeological evidence for sixth-century reuse of forts on Hadrian's Wall hence accords with Crawford's observation. They will have been garrisoned and reinforced because of fighting between the North British peoples of Strathclyde, Gododdin, and Rheged. Finds from excavations at Castlesteads tally in a striking way with the record of Arthur's death there in 537, surely in a raid on Rheged. They provide real evidence for Arthur, as South Cadbury and Tintagel do not. An astute tourist board might promote Castlesteads as the site of Arthur's last battle.

Tim Clarkson of Manchester gives *dux bellorum* as 'leader in battle'. [48] He says nothing whatever on it as a supposed Roman military title, which is progress. In a book neatly printed and with many maps and illustrations, Kurt Liebhard of Waiblingen renders the *Historia Brittonum* sentence as 'Der grossmütige Arthur kämpfte mit all den Königen und militärischer Gewalt von Grossbritannien gengen die Sachsen.' [49] It interprets *dux bellorum* as reflecting an Imperial office. Finally, Dr Favero (whom the writer thanks for gifts of his books). In the English version of his original text (also provided with new illustrations), he does not comment directly on *dux bellorum*, but reposes confidence in Arthur as coming from Venedotia or Gwynedd (= north-west Wales), and thus being linked with the Veneti of Venice and north-east Italy. 'Venedotia is known as the land of the Venedoti and is connected with the dynasty of King Arthur, so the association between the Veneti and the Arthurian myth is clear.' [50] His study may be recommended for its startling and entertaining comments on Arthur and the ancient world alike.

As often in Celtic Studies, generations of comment have seen little advance. Scholars have merely repeated statements by other scholars. There has been (to adapt a phrase of Yeats) much coughing in ink. Let us now say something new. Because we can be certain that Arthur was a North British warrior, brought up beyond the bounds of Empire and fighting his battles there, we shall find evidence for his status not in the Roman army but in native tradition. Here the title to seek is the Welsh one of *penteulu* 'head of the retinue of a court, captain of the bodyguard'. In the modern language, *teulu* means 'family'.

[45] Collins, 22-5.
[46] Koch, 'Waiting', 189.
[47] Flint Johnson, *Evidence*, 127-32.
[48] Clarkson, 107.
[49] Liebhard, 62.
[50] Favero, King Arthur's Tribe, 43.

But in the laws and heroic poetry it has the further sense 'comitatus, bodyguard, household troops, war-band', the picked warriors who were the commandos of early and medieval warfare. Their commander had to have the sovereign's implicit trust. It seems evident that *dux bellorum* in *Historia Brittonum*'s version of an Old Welsh poem of battles is a flumbling attempt to render *penteulu* 'chief of the royal host'. This officer having received much attention, we are thus in a position to say much on the historical Arthur, his likely status and activity.

Welsh law, surviving in manuscripts of the twelfth century onwards, and thus evidence for the *penteulu* in the later period, gives him pride of place. He comes first of the officers of the court. Mistranslation of *teulu* as 'household' by earlier writers still led to absurdities. This position is reserved solely for 'a son of the king, or a nephew', or one of similar rank. Amongst many details of his rights are some gory ones. For medical treatment, his doctor gets nothing from him except 'his bloody clothes', unless he have 'a stroke on the head penetrating to the brain; a stroke in the body penetrating to the bowels; or the breaking of one of the four limbs.' [51] As soon as one sees him as no chamberlain but a military man, the above need for trust and the dangers of his profession will make sense. He was not telling cooks and footmen what to do.

The penteulu was mentioned in passing by Sir John Lloyd (1861-1947). He made this point. In Welsh law, the monarch's successor was the *edling* (a term borrowed from Old English), who might succeed 'by election' rather than 'mere right of birth'. Election was, however, weakened by the existence of the *penteulu*, responsible for 'the military needs of the tribe'. If a British *edling* felt more at home in council than at the head of his troops, it mattered less than it would elsewhere, for he had the *penteulu* to look after defence. As *penteulu*, Arthur would thus not have been first in line to rule, even if princes were to bear his name. Despite changes over the centuries for the office of *edling*, it is unlikely that Arthur would ever have been 'King Arthur'. Lloyd had further comments on the *teulu*. Its literal sense is not the modern one 'family', but 'house-host, house-troop'; it had nothing to do with the ruler's kin, although the *penteulu* himself 'was always a near relative of the reigning chief', for obvious reasons. It might have as many as 120 members; Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1047 had a warband of 140. Desertion of its lord was accounted a disgrace. It maintained order within a petty kingdom and defended it. During the fighting season, the *teulu* might attack the realms of distant rulers for the sake of plunder. Welsh law gives 'minute directions' for how the booty was divided when the warriors came home. It consisted for the most part of cattle. [52] Working from the laws, Lloyd provided an illuminating picture of the number and nature of the forces seemingly led by Arthur, including their function as raiders. The earlier evidence cited below tends to confirm what he said.

Misunderstanding *teulu* as 'household' and *penteulu* as 'chief of the household', Rees viewed the latter as a kind of steward.[53] He thus misinterpreted references in the laws on the substantial recompense which the *penteulu* received for maintaining order in the hall, or on where he sat with his men. The *teulu* comprised not servitors but professional

[51] Myvyrian Archaiology, 1015-16.
[52] Lloyd, 310, 318-20.
[53] Rees, 4, 208.

fighting men, who on occasion might throw their weight about. Hence the respectful consideration given to them in the laws, and to the *penteulu* responsible for their discipline.

The twelfth-century *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* have more on the *teulu*, regularly to be found at the court of a prince or king as its household guard. Sir Ifor Williams (1881-1965) set out its context and gave its exact Old Irish cognate as *teglach* 'household troops'.[54] Deriving from a Common Celtic original, *teulu* and *teglach* therefore represent an institution going back to pre-Christian times. No surprise that *teulu* should occur too in the seventh-century *Gododdin*, itself significantly alluding to Arthur as a ferocious man of war, who might glut crows with human carrion (though he was evidently not a man of the Gododdin in south-east Scotland).[55] The duties and rights of the *penteulu* appear again in a legal treatise edited by Stephen Williams (1896-1992) of Swansea and the young Enoch Powell, English politician.[56] A translation of the passage is quoted below.

A further indication of the teulu's antiquity comes from stray verses in the margin of a Cambridge manuscript. They are in a ninth-century hand, and begin

I shall not talk even for one hour tonight;

My retinue (*telu*) is not very large:

I and my Frank, round our cauldron.

Sir Ifor Williams regarded the speaker as a chieftain in low spirits. 'He has lost all his war-band, or retinue, in battle probably, except one foreign mercenary, whom he calls his Frank. His hall this night is empty, desolate.' There is no 'merry host of noble youths to share the feast' or drink mead from the bowl.[57] Williams's brilliant interpretation of the lines, composed within three centuries of Arthur's *floruit*, gives us a snapshot of the *teulu*'s mess life in good times and bad.

A later penteulu appears in the thirteenth-century *Mabinogion* tale of Rhonabwy's Dream, outlining difficulties of the Powys ruler Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160) with his violent brother, Iorwerth. Made penteulu, with a status equal to Madog himself, Iorwerth is kept busy by a grant of land near Oswestry (now in Shropshire). If a man did not succeed with a war-band there (says the storyteller), he would not succeed anywhere else in Powys. The implication is clear. It was the region of Powys closest to England, and liable to attack.[58] In the Book of Blegywryd, the passage on the *penteulu* (older and less developed than the thirteenth-century version translated in *The Myvyrian Archaiology*) has rights including those for booty. He receives 'the share of two men if he be with them, and any animal which he shall chose from the share of the king'. He is, of course, to be 'a son of the king or his nephew'.[59] Comparison of what the various recensions of Welsh law declare of the *penteulu* is a rewarding exercise. His rights become more elaborate. In the latest version, on the three great feasts of the year he hands the harp to the *bardd teulu* or poet

[54] Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi, 107-8.
[55] *Canu Aneirin*, 263, 343.
[56] Cyfreithiau Hywel Dda, 10-11.
[57] Ifor Williams, *Lectures*, 29.
[58] *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, 1-2, 25-6, 28.
[59]The Laws of Hywel Dda, 30.

of the warband; he can as well require a song from this bard whenever he wishes.[60] Pen and sword had struck an alliance.

T. Jones Pierce (1905-64) noted how in the last years of Welsh independence the position of *penteulu* was supplanted by that of 'constable', and how the *teulu*'s custom of making a 'circuit' independent of the prince figures in thirteenth-century records of the lordship of Denbigh. Its inhabitants were liable for 'the entertainment of a fixed number of men and the provisioning of a fixed number of horses and dogs each year'.[61] Billeting an animating rabble was doubtless a memorable event for local communities.

Kenneth Jackson had, as one might expect, lucid remarks on the *teulu* in the earliest poetry, together with a wonderously mistaken comment on Arthur. He doubted that the three hundred warriors whom the Gododdin poem describes as sent from Edinburgh, at a date after 600 CE, to fight at Catterick (in North Yorkshire) were a *teulu*. The *teulu* made up the 'life guard' of a monarch, attending upon him constantly. They 'were not at all the same as a whole royal army'. Nor did Jackson think of the early *teulu* as using cavalry to attack enemy infantry. Material set out by Jackson is precious evidence for warfare in early Britain; and his translation of verses on the warrior Tudfwlch, praised in his *teulu*, shows it as war to the death. With 'bloodstained blades covering the ground, the hero red in his fury' was 'a man-slaying champion' and 'joyful like a wolf at his post'. Before he was slain, Tudfwlch was 'the forceful in slaughter, the barrier of the fortress'. Following this are lines on the fighting man Gwawrddur, who 'stabbed over three hundred of the finest' and glutted 'black ravens on the rampart of the stronghold, though he was no Arthur.' Jackson observed that, if this passage belongs to the original poem, it dates from a time when people who remembered Arthur 'would still be alive'. He then made a final swipe at his ex-pupil Rachel Bromwich, asserting that because Arthur was the national hero of Britons from Scotland to Brittany, 'there is therefore no logic whatever in the idea' reveals Arthur as 'a Northern leader'.[62] Jackson was usually right. But when he was wrong, he was very wrong.

Ifor Williams's edition of the Juvencus verses, written down in 'the early ninth century', is now to be had in English.[63] It demonstrates what the *teulu* did in the hall and on the field of battle, with its potential for dramatic monologue. Nicolas Jacobs discusses the Anglo-Saxon *comitatus*, mentioning Professor Eric Hamp of Chicago as 'o blaid ystyried y *comitatus* fel benthyciad Celtaidd mewn sefydliad Germanaidd'.[64] The *teulu* long predated Arthur, originating amongst the Continental Celts. Hence, as noted above, Old Irish *teglach* as the exact cognate of *teulu*.

As for the *bardd teulu* 'poet of the warband', who (according to the Welsh laws) would sing a war-song to the king's warriors as they prepared for battle, his status was second to that of the *prydydd*.[65] The *prydydd* was the highest grade of poet, and the word for him means 'shaper, maker' (and so 'poet'). He was craftsman and artist in one (the secondary status of the *bardd teulu* perhaps indicating that Welsh military poetry bore the same relation to poetry as modern miltary music does to music).

[60] Llyfr Iorwerth, 4-5.
[61] Jones Pierce, 34, 116, 320.
[62] Jackson, *Gododdin*, 16-18, 84-6, 111, 112
[63] Ifor Williams, *Beginnings*, 95.
[64] Jacobs, 178 n. 22.
[65] Mac Cana, 27, 135, 138.

Praising Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160), whom we encountered above as the Powys ruler with a troublesome brother, the master-poet Cynddelw likened his warband to that of Arthur (*teulu Arthur*).[66] Even when Geoffrey of Monmouth's tamperings with the past were beginning to distort Welsh tradition, Cynddelw still thought of Arthur as leader of a band of warriors. What they might do is shown by Wendy Davies, whose dry-eyed comments on them, derived in part from her knowledge of saints' lives and Book of Llandaff charters, repay study. She remarks on how from 'the sixth to the eleventh centuries, kings moved about with soldiers (*milites*); we might term this a warband, a military retinue, a band of thugs, a bodyguard, depending upon our own perspective or that of the recording source.' These individuals had 'easy recourse to violence'. She quotes a sixth-century poem by Taliesin on 'Eight herds alike of calves and cattle' plundered from a neighbour, and the eleventh-century life of St Cadog on a raid by Gwynedd men on Gorfynydd (the area around Bridgend, Glamorgan), where local people fled and hid themselves 'in woods and thickets and holes and caves of the earth'. Her conclusion is crisp. 'Kings had force, and used it.'[67] The Juvencus verses of about 800 on one such warlord (who bit off more than he could chew) are again translated by Jenny Rowland.[68]

In the context of Arthur as *penteulu*, leading men whom some regarded as Patriot Heroes and others as Licensed Brigands, comments of Rachel Bromwich are revealing. She noted that the eleventh-century life of St Cadog styles him 'king of Britain'; verses on Geraint (¿as of the decades about 800?) in the Black Book of Carmarthen call him 'emperor'. In the tale of Culhwch he is 'Chief of Princes of this Island'. Everyone owns his sway. The porter Glewlwyd lists places even beyond Britain where Arthur rules; these have confused scholars, but can be identified as Mediterranean and Oriental toponyms (indicating the tale's author as surely a cleric) lifted from Orosius's *History*). They contast with older material in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, stating that Arthur was not a king.) With characteristic wordiness and lack of logic, she commented on how 'it is not easy to discount the likelihood that these allusions to Arthur's far-flung conquests owe something to the exalted status accorded to him' by Geoffrey of Monmouth and his Welsh translators. (Not so. Texts written before 1100 can owe nothing to those written from the 1130s onwards.) Better is her remark on how popular and learned sources alike present Arthur as 'defender of his country' against danger, whether in the form of foreign enemies, giants, witches, monsters, or dragons. He is also 'a releaser of prisoners'. (An interesting observation.) Citing the Dutch philologist A. G. van Hamel, she made Arthur out as a British peer of the mythical Irish champion Fionn mac Cumhaill. Both are 'defenders, hunters, and slaters of monsters'. She concluded that, whatever his 'ultimate origins', Arthur in the early texts belongs to 'the realm of mythology rather than that of history'.[69]

Another interpretation is, however, more compelling. The role of a *penteulu* in attack (for plunder, especially cattle) and defence (against those seeking plunder) has been made evident. No surprise that Arthur should be remembered as saviour of his country and huntsman. Even his links with Northern rulers may account for his eventual enthronement

[66] Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin, 77.
[67] Davies, 51, 68-70, 127.
[68] Rowland, 389, 510.
[69] Culhwch and Olwen, xxvii-xxix.

in legend. He acted in concert with British kings; his name was given to early princes; he was no rebel. (One contrasts legends of Robin Hood, also a hunter and defender, but associated with resistance to official tyranny.) The comment on Arthur as 'releaser of prisoners' may indicate how, in raids on other peoples, Arthur did just that, rescuing hostages taken by neighbouring kings, and thereby producing sagas of him as Liberator. What early Welsh accounts leave no space for is Arthur as a Romanized calvary commander. He will instead have been a native British warrior, albeit with a Latin name, from *Artorius* (a fact inconvenient for Dr Padel and others who depict Arthur as a Celtic sprite). As with Roland, whose legends preserve a historical core (war to the death in a Navarrese mountain-pass), or El Cid (ascendancy in the eleventh-century conflicts of Moor and Christian), so with Arthur, traditions of whom grew naturally out of genuine sixth-century events and show traces of their origin.

On those events, Ken Dark of Reading designates a task for researchers. He does not mention Arthur. But he does set out a problem on the warbands which he would have led: ¿did British kings preserve their ‘own type of warrior entourage’ from pre-Roman times? Or were such retinues 'organized by the Britons according to Roman military styles'? For the latter he refers to Latin borrowings in early Welsh. He also deals with the mixed evidence for Roman features versus native ones in Dark Age warfare, including its economic basis as discussed by Leslie Alcock.[70] A full answer of the question would make a big book; yet one may point out that *teulu* as a purely Celtic word tilts the argument towards the nativists. Irregulars fighting in a Third World country use Western military hardware and the words for it; but they are culturally far from the discipline and short haircuts of Sandhurst or West Point. There is a sidelight here from the *meddyg teulu* 'the warband's physician'. His status is revealing. Named in the earliest laws as near the end of the list of court officials, he ranked far lower than the *penteulu* whom he sat next to at feasts. Later laws (of Gwynedd) give him a higher status (in twelfth place) and state that he accompanies the warband on expeditions. He had the right to use of a horse. Details of his rights to compensation (six head of cattle and six score pence) are also those of a junior official.[71] This British army doctor sounds less of a professional than a modern MO or his equivalent in the Roman military, and one would like to know how much or little his stitching-up of troopers owed to Galen. Just as we seek to disengage what is Celtic from what is Roman for Arthur, we may do the same for the physician who treated men wounded under his command. Most recently, the most recent comprehensive study says nothing on the *teulu*, *penteulu*, or the historical Arthur; it nevertheless has perceptive analysis of the warrior ethos of the age as represented in Aneirin's *Gododdin*.[72] It brings us close to what drove Arthur's men into attack.

Early Celtic sources in Latin and the vernacular provide abundant material on the *teulu* and *penteulu*. Of course there will have been changes between the sixth century and the twelfth, when surviving copies of the Welsh laws first appear, so that scholars can exercise their wits on distinguishing the archaic from the innovative in their account of the *teulu* (as of much else). Despite that, they and other sources allow conclusions on what

[70] Dark, *Civitas*, 189-1, 197-200.
[71] Owen, 184.
[72] Charles-Edwards, 377.

Arthur as *dux bellorum* would have done. It will surprise those who think of him as a Roman cavalry general or as the chivalrous sovereign of romance. First is the interpretation of *dux bellorum* as *penteulu* 'commander of the royal warband'. Celtic records name no other office which in any way corresponds to what the *dux bellorum* would be. Second is the *penteulu*'s high status and crucial importance, with the post normally entrusted to an immediate relation of the king. We do not know the name of Arthur's father. But his position implies that he was of exalted birth. He did not rise from the people. Third is the functions of the warband, which were not always noble. A principal one was cattle-reaving, whereby Celtic chieftains exacted plunder from less fortunate neighbours. Arthur was a sort of land-pirate, lauded by his own, loathed by others. Fourth is the origin of his office. *Teulu* being a purely Celtic form (like *penteulu*), whatever his forces owed to Roman arms and tactics, the institution was an old one, going back to the earliest records of Celtic warfare and beyond. In this the best evidence is to be found in the poems of Taliesin and Aneirin's slightly later *Gododdin*, both surely composed (the doubts of timid scholars notwithstanding) within living memory of Arthur's raids in the 530s.

Finally come many details, of which each would make a study in its own right. Welsh laws give an indication on the protocol and privileges appertaining to the *dux bellorum/ penteulu*: where he sat in hall, his entitlement to mead, his salary, share of the loot, role in disputes, horse, *sarhad* or compensation for insult (related to the Roman law of *iniuria*), lodging, share of fines paid, linen and woollen garments, dogs, hawks, arms, horseshoes from the smith, presiding at court in the king's absence, and medical treatment. The laws tell of his right to hand the bard his harp at the three great feasts of the year, and a song from the bard whenever he wishes. They mention how his cook and other servants may demand the hides, tallow, and guts of beasts slaughtered on his official progress after Christmas through the king's realms. The legalistic elaboration of all this is medieval, and does not go back to the sixth century. But the office described does, and some of the attendant powers and dues listed above will date from then. One of these will be a bard's obligation to sing the *penteulu*'s praises, and so promote his honour and fame. Gildas (writing in 536) knew of Maelgwn Gwynedd's bards, whom he dismissed as 'gaolbirds' (*furciferi*). If Maelgwn had official flatterers, Arthur might have one too, which brings us back to the lost poem on his battles. It may be the oldest Welsh or Cumbric or Brittonic poem to survive in any form.

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