

Who Was King Arthur's Sir Modred? *¿Quién fue el sir Modred del rey Arturo?*

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Abstract: Sir Modred was nephew to the King Arthur of legend; Medrawd was loyal comrade to the Arthur of history. In legend, Modred is a traitor and rebel who kills his uncle. In history, Medrawd was a warrior who fell (with Arthur) in 537 CE at «Camlan» (identified as the fort of Castlesteads, near Carlisle, northern England). Welsh bards long remembered Medrawd as a hero; Spanish readers have known Modred as a traitor since the Middle Ages. So this paper has three purposes. First, to reveal Medrawd as a historical character, a sixth-century hero of North Britain, like Arthur himself. Second, to show how Medrawd's reputation was permanently blackened in the twelfth century by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Third, to provide an etymology for *Medrawd*, a British form unrelated to the Cornish 'Modred' clamped upon the warrior by Geoffrey, with his usual cavalier attitude to history.

Keywords: King Arthur. Medrawd. Sir Modred. Camlan. Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Resumen: Sir Modred fue sobrino del rey Arturo de la leyenda; Medrawd fue un leal camarada del Arturo histórico. En la leyenda, Modred es un traidor y rebelde que mata a su tío. En la historia, Medrawd fue un guerrero que cayó (junto a Arturo) en el año 537 d.C. en «Camlan» (identificado como la fortificación de Castlesteads, cerca de Carlisle, en el norte de Inglaterra). Los bardos galeses recordaron a Medrawd largo tiempo como un héroe, mientras que los lectores españoles han conocido a Modred como un traidor desde la Edad Media. Así pues, este trabajo tiene tres objetivos. Primero, mostrar a Medrawd como un personaje histórico, un héroe del norte de Inglaterra en el siglo VI, como fue el propio Arturo. Segundo, exponer cómo la reputación de Medrawd quedó ensombrecida para siempre en el siglo XII por obra de Godofredo de Monmouth. Tercero, proponer una etimología para *Medrawd*, que es una forma británica no relacionada con la cornoica *Modred* que Godofredo aplicó al guerrero, con su habitual desdén hacia la historia.

Palabras clave: Rey Arturo. Medrawd. Sir Modred. Camlan. Godofredo de Monmouth.

1. THE MEDRAWD OF HISTORY, THE MODRED OF LEGEND

The sole historical evidence for Medrawd is in *Annales Cambriae*, a tenth-century collection of Welsh annals. The annal (for 537) in its original form reads: «Gueith Camlann, in qua Arthur et Medraut corruere; et mortalitas in Brittainia et in Hibernia fuit», where its brevity implies truth (Williams ab Ithel 1860, 4). That Arthur and Medrawd fell in a *gueith* (Old Welsh for ‘battle’) is confirmed by *mortalitas* or ‘death’. It denotes the world famine (known from Irish and other records) due to the ‘volcanic winter’ of 536-537. If the annal is right on the famine, it is surely right on the battle. As for ‘Camlann’, we shall locate it at (British-Latin) *Camboglanna* or Castlesteads, a fort on Hadrian’s Wall. Arthur and Medrawd were North Britons, not Welshmen or Cornishmen.

Move forward from the sixth century to the nineteenth and we find this. In ‘Guinevere’, the eleventh book of *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson (1896, 457) reported on how Arthur’s Queen came to fear Modred:

Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred’s narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and grey persistent eye...

– forebodings justified when Modred began a revolt against Arthur. But how did a Northern champion end up as a villain? It is as such that Modred is mentioned in Dante’s *Inferno* (canto 32):

Non quelli a cui fu rotto il petto e l’ombra
con esso un colpo per la man d’Artù

– a reference explained by its source, a French romance of Lancelot (Vandelli 1920, 291). Dante’s guide speaks of men worse than the villain Modred, whose chest and shadow were broken by one blow from Arthur; because, when the king pulled out his lance, Modred’s shadow was pierced by the sun, shining through his corpse.

This revolt of Modred against Arthur was known in Spain as early as the late 12th century. What is called *Anales de Navarra* (of 1196) is cited as an addition to *Fuero General de Navarra*, compiled between 1234 and the 15th century (edited in 1987 by Juan Utrilla and recently studied by González Ollé). For the year 580 it records «la bataylla al rey Artuyss con Mordret Equibleno». Its text compares with that in *Anales Toledanos Primeros* (here

dated to 1219) for 580: «Lidio el rey Zitus con Mordret su sobrino en Camblenc». In both cases the source is not Geoffrey of Monmouth, but Wace's *Roman de Brut* (Simó 2018, 283-84). Textual critics will note deterioration from the entries quoted by Alvar in 2015. Camlan is no longer «en Quibleno» but «Equibleno»; Arthur (via Artus) remains as «Zitus»; while Modred is now «Mordret». An interesting change.

2. COMMENTARY ON MEDRAWD 1927-1973

All this made clear, we turn to commentary on Medrawd/Modred over the years, starting with Sir Edmund Chambers. He offered much information, including the comment that early Welsh documents have nothing on how «Medraut was Arthur's nephew» (Chambers 1927, 87). It will be a late invention. There is also the problem of his name. Professor Kenneth Jackson (1909-1991) pointed out difficulties on Old Welsh *Medraut* and Old Cornish *Modred*, the latter used (of another) in a tenth-century manumission of slaves (recorded in the Bodmin Gospels, a codex now in the British Library). The first vowel of the two names cannot (as shown below) have the same origin, and Jackson took the Cornish form as perhaps corrupt (Jackson 1953, 708). This is impossible. Cornish *Modred* occurs elsewhere. Another explanation is needed. It is argued below that the names have different etymologies. While *Modred* is from Latin MODERATUS, *Medrawd* is a native Celtic form.

As to who Medrawd was, there are misleading remarks by Chadwick. Citing a royal genealogy from Gwent (in south-east Wales), he took its Medrawd son of Cawrdaf as «probably the man who fought with Arthur» (Chadwick 1954, 50-51). Not so. The Medrawd of this genealogy was first cousin to a man with a son born in about 490. By 537, even if Medrawd son of Cawrdaf were still alive, his fighting days were over. Why, too, should a prince from South Wales be fighting near Carlisle? Chadwick confused two men called Medrawd. There is more confusion elsewhere, in the notion that the (legendary) war of Modred and Arthur in Cornwall derived from «a conflict between two local chieftains, Arthur and Modred», with the latter name found in the Bodmin manumissions and «a few place-names». In Cornwall is thus a Tremodret near Roche, north of St Austell; another near Duloe, north of Looe, south-east Cornwall; and a Rose Modras near St Buryan, west of Penzance (Elliott-Binns 1955, 414). To this supposed Cornish conflict there are three objections. Early evidence puts Arthur and Camlan in North Britain,

not Cornwall; the authentic name is not *Modred*, but *Medrawd*; nor would Welsh bards remember Medrawd as a hero (see below) if he betrayed Arthur.

Further difficulties are shown by the following. In 1113, when canons of Laon (in north-east France) were in Cornwall to raise funds for their cathedral, local people told them stories of Arthur (and even showed them his «seat» and «oven»). This was over twenty years before Geoffrey of Monmouth published his fictions, proving that Cornish tales of Arthur (like Welsh and Breton ones) predated Geoffrey. But what we hear of those Cornish stories offers «no clue as to their content». On Modred, whose name is certainly Cornish, it is claimed that he «had no connection with Cornwall except that he died there» (Loomis 1956, 180-82). Yet Medrawd lacked even this last link. He died in Cumbria, not Cornwall. Loomis's discussion is at least superior to another, on how «Medraut» was a chief of Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall), and how Camlan (where Arthur killed him) was «either the River Camel [in north-east Cornwall] or the River Cam near Cadbury [in south-east Somerset]» (Ashe 1957, 82-83). This is wrong from beginning to end.

Returning to Kenneth Jackson, we find real scholarship. Despite life-long disbelief in the Northern Arthur, Jackson accepted an argument on Camlan put forward in 1935 by the archaeologist O. G. S. Crawford. While thinking Camlan's site unknown, Jackson admitted that Crawford's arguments for *Camboglanna*, near Carlisle, were «ingenious and by no means impossible» (Jackson 1959, 5). So, progress in the quest for Medrawd. There is progress too on genealogies, where Medrawd of Gwent is distinguished from Arthur's companion. Significantly, the latter is absent from early material. He appears in late tradition only, showing the corrupting influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth (Bartrum 1966, 62, 87).

A further comment on the annal of 537 blends reason and unreason. Medrawd's Camlan «could be» on Hadrian's Wall; although «the River Cam in Somerset, and the Camel in Cornwall, cannot be ruled out» (Ashe 1968, 43). To which the answer is that Hadrian's Wall is certain. Other sites are out of the question. Thereafter, in a final blast, Jackson declared that Arthur was the «national hero of the entire British people»; there was hence «no logic whatever» in quoting seventh-century Northern poetry by Aneirin to make him out as a North Briton (Jackson 1969, 112). His own lack of logic did not occur to Jackson. He failed to see that, if Arthur really existed, his fame began amongst one set of Britons. If it started in southern Scotland, it needed time to reach Wales and Brittany. No surprise, then, to find the bard Aneirin

alluding to Arthur in the very early seventh century, when (in Jackson's own words) «people who remembered him would still be alive».

The early 1970s saw belief in a historical Arthur at its most flourishing, before tares of doubt sown by Professor David Dumville in 1977 took root. The archaeologist Leslie Alcock quoted the annal for 537, remarking that we do not know «where or why Camlan was fought» or who Medrawd was. He yet (rightly) took it as authentic, with Arthur a fighting man of the early sixth century. Alcock noted further how early accounts have nothing on Arthur and Medrawd/Modred as enemies (Alcock 1971, 88). Time, which interrogates truth, also plays tricks. By 1995 (see below) Alcock had rejected belief in Arthur; and yet his previous view can today be shown as (with modifications) correct. At Camlan the battle was surely due to a cattle-raid, one of many in a year of famine, with Medrawd as Arthur's brave comrade. The location of the conflict points to attack from the north on Rheged, a British kingdom in what is now Cumbria. As for Medrawd's loyalty, it is proved as well by the silence on him of Taliesin, a Rheged poet of the late sixth century (who is likewise silent on Arthur). No reason, therefore, to think that Medrawd was defending Rheged against Arthur's aggressions. The two were attacking the place, probably for cattle and loot.

Just as Leslie Alcock the archaeologist eventually backed down (without need) on the Arthur of history, so also Charles Thomas, another archaeologist. In 1971 his opinions were forthright. Camlan was on Hadrian's Wall, if at Birdoswald (Thomas provided a photograph) and not Castlesteads, west of it. On the allusion to Arthur in Aneirin's (Northern) poems of the early seventh century, he quoted Thomas Jones of Aberystwyth on how no other person named in them is «legendary or unhistorical». Charles Thomas hence regarded Arthur as «categorically Northern» and his background as «what is now southern Scotland» (Thomas 1971, 40-41). The same, naturally, will be true for Medrawd.

There is biodata on Medrawd/Modred in an edition of Geoffrey's life of Merlin, including statements on Medrawd's good reputation in twelfth-century Wales, with Geoffrey exposed as a libeller who made him a «traitor and opponent of Arthur» (Geoffrey also describing King Loth of Lothian as Medrawd's father and Arthur's sister as his mother). *Modred* is further noted as a Cornish (or Breton) form. Implication: Geoffrey knew the annal for 537 only. He was unaware of what Welsh bards said on Medrawd (Clarke 1973, 202-03). Out of that came the fantasies of Modred's upbringing and his

treacherous campaign in south-west Britain. Geoffrey, a clever rogue, employed fact to create historical untruth.

Mention of which brings us to John Morris of London University, whose (more innocent) book on Arthur is not history but a novel, with Arthur as Britain's doomed Roman Emperor of the sixth century. Its author's good intentions notwithstanding, it has too much of the airport bestseller about it. Both qualities appear in words on Medrawd. Because Morris sincerely thought Arthur the victor at «Mount Badon» in 493 (which he was not), he put Camlan in about 515 (when 537 must be right). Despite acknowledging the favourable image of Medrawd in early Welsh poetry, he took Medrawd as perhaps Arthur's foe. (If so, why did bards praise Medrawd?) He also identified Medrawd the Northerner with Medrawd of Gwent, which is not so, for they were not contemporaries. He declared that nothing is known of Camlan's «whereabouts»; if Hadrian's Wall is a possibility, so is Camlan in north-west Wales. (But, if the catastrophe were in Wales, it is curious that the Welsh forgot this.) A declaration on Camlan, where «the unity of Britain» died with Arthur, brings Morris's strange blend of perception and hallucination to an end (Morris 1973, 140).

For Medrawd there is, in contrast, an informed account of his name in the context of Geoffrey's Welsh translators, who (wherever they could) assimilated such forms to Welsh ones. They hence replaced Cornish Modred with «the cognate Welsh name Medrawd». (We shall reject that «cognate».) Yet translation meant betrayal. In earlier Welsh poetry, Medrawd was a «heroic character», neither Arthur's nephew nor Guinevere's seducer. Modred's ill-fame changed that. By the late Middle Ages, the bards saw him as a villain (Roberts 1973). Character assassination was complete.

3. COMMENTARY ON MEDRAWD 1977-2020

Reaction to the excesses of Morris was at hand. For much of the above, a revolution took place in 1977 (the counter-revolution being in 2015). In a famous article, Professor David Dumville denied any historical basis to Arthur's existence (Dumville 1977). Unlike Caesar or Isabel la Católica, Arthur was (allegedly) not a figure of history. Evidence was (supposedly) lacking, making him a figure of folklore, like Robin Hood or Papá Noel. Dumville's arguments fastened themselves on established opinion in Britain for nearly forty years. They appeared too late to influence Rachel Bromwich's revised

handbook on Welsh tradition, with a long note on Camlan, although she did cite Jackson's point on how (Welsh/Cumbric) *Medrawd* and (Cornish) *Modred* cannot have the same origin (Bromwich 1978, 160-62, 454-55, 558). As for Camlan, it was then definitively placed on Hadrian's Wall at *Camboglanna* 'curved bank' or Castlesteads. It was not at Birdoswald, twelve kilometres to the east and now regarded as ancient *Banna* (Rivet/Smith 1979, 293-94). Elsewhere, the annal for 537 is translated «The battle of Camlann, in which Arthur and Medraut fell; and there was plague in Britain and Ireland» (Morris 1980, 45). While the first part is sound, «plague» mistranslates *mortalitas* 'death'; an allusion to the famine of 536-537, known from Irish and other sources, and due to a volcanic winter caused (it seems) by a mega-eruption in the Americas.

After 1980, fallout from Dumville's 1977 paper became apparent. Peter Salway began discussion with remarks on a growing movement for Arthur as a person of history, his Camelot taken as South Cadbury in south-east Somerset (a hillfort excavated in the late 1960s by Leslie Alcock). Then a postscript, showing a new distancing. After Dumville's arguments, readers should be «even less confident» on events of the period (Salway 1981, 485, 501). Also stepping backwards was Charles Thomas. Quoting Dumville on absence of historical evidence, he now styled Arthur a will-o'-the-wisp that had too long «deflected useful advances in our study» (Thomas 1981, 245). Quite unlike his confidence of 1971, which (we now maintain) was entirely justified. Yet, if Arthur is elusive, where does this leave *Medrawd*, on whom the annal for 537 appears factual and substantial?

Thereafter, a voice from the tomb. John Morris died in 1977. But a posthumous book on Roman London relays with unblinking hesitation his earlier views on Camlan. Place, persons, cause, all (we hear) are unknown. In the «main later tradition» *Medrawd* was «a faithless rebel subject», although a «differing version makes him Arthur's ally». The underlying reason for the engagement is still plain. «The British could not unite». It produced disaster. With Arthur fallen, «none succeeded him. His empire died with him» (Morris 1982, 343). The account is at least right on that. While we (in contrast) say that Camlan was near Carlisle, that Arthur was commander of a king's host with *Medrawd* as comrade, and that they died on a cattle-raid in time of famine, it is true that the British could indeed «not unite». Arthur's attack on Rheged is proof of that.

Now for Dr. Oliver Padel, who over the decades has on flimsy grounds defended Arthur's non-historicity. On *Medrawd* he first said this. The form

occurs in the annal for 537, without indication of «whether he was fighting against Arthur» or not. Modred in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth is, however, «not Welsh but Cornish», the form being «common in Cornwall» even after the Norman Conquest (despite the ill repute of Geoffrey's character). It occurs as late as 1327. Welsh *Medrawd* is «irregular» and «Modrawt» would be expected. But the forms are of «obscure derivation» because a link (proposed in 1921 by Sir Ifor Williams) with Welsh *medru* «aim, strike; be able» unfortunately «ignores the Cornish and Breton forms» (Padel 1984).

To that there are three objections. If *Medrawd* had been Arthur's enemy, Welsh poets would never have praised him. Nor is any Cornishman with *Modred* as a first name known after about 1150. Dr. Padel has not noticed how it then became a surname only. Geoffrey's writings of the 1130s were toxic for the given name. Its demise as such in the middle of the twelfth century implies that Geoffrey was read in Cornwall as elsewhere. As for the difficulties of relating *Medrawd* and *Modred*, they will vanish if the two are of different origin.

In 1992, Bromwich and Evans related *Camlan* to *Birdoswald* (unaware that Rivet/Smith, citing others, disproved the connection in the 1970s), and then sought refuge in vagueness. There were many «crooked banks» in Britain, and the site of the action (a «ferocious, tragic, and ill-fated contest» never forgotten by Welsh bards) is «impossible to determine» (Bromwich/Evans 1992, 84-85). This despite evidence for Arthur the Northerner, and the fact that *Castlesteads* (on a major Roman road) had a strategic value denied to other places. On how men fought at *Camlan*, there are clues in Gildas (493-570), writing in 536 and speaking of military equipment (spears, swords, shields, helmets) and military order. Troops moved in formation and used tactics (Dark 1994, 198). The men of 537 were not an undisciplined rabble.

A return to Dr. Padel. Ten years after his first comments, he dismissed the entry for 537 as not «very much older than the text in which it occurs» and so hardly predating the tenth century, when a compiler put *Annales Cambriae* together. It thus lacked historical value (Padel 1994). On this there are again three criticisms. (1) Dr. Padel is silent on *Camlan's* situation in North Britain, noted by Jackson and then Rivet/Smith. *Castlesteads* is far from Wales. Tenth-century Welshman would know nothing of the spot. Why should they concoct a legend of it? Conclusion: neither place nor battle is imaginary. (2) Similarly, no Welshman would invent *Medrawd*, occupying a minor part in Welsh tradition. He, too, will be historical. (3) Nor does Dr.

Padel comment on the *mortalitas* of the same annal, the accuracy of which is proved by Irish annals on «lack of bread» in 536-537. It reinforces the case for Camlan as a real event.

Yet scepticism is always easy and corrosive. By the 1990s former defenders of the historical Arthur were effectively cowering. Leslie Alcock felt obliged to admit «that he had rejected the historicity of Camelot by 1969», even before «sustained minimalist criticism» of Arthur was «launched publicly in the late 1970s»; although (in a British Academy lecture) he related Arthur to Cadbury Castle as late as 1982 (Alcock 1995, 6).

Further nihilist views are supplied by Dr. Padel. Arthur was a «legendary war-leader»; the twelve battles attributed to him (including Camlan) «cannot be identified» (that is, cannot be identified by Dr. Padel); they seem to «represent an accumulation of legend» around a leader (perhaps «historical») of «British resistance»; *Armes Prydein* ('The Prophecy of Britain'), an anti-English poem of 940, still makes «no mention of Arthur». As for the entry for 537, it dates from between the eighth century and 1100 and thus has «little or no historical value for the sixth century» (Padel 1999).

It is not difficult to see faulty reasoning here. On the twelve battles as «legendary», their very obscurity implies authentic tradition, not invention, as Jackson observed in 1959, pointing out that no forger would devise sites that nobody knew of. For *Armes Prydein* (of 940 CE), Dr. Padel has not noticed an allusion to vengeance for the Welsh after «four hundred and four years», meaning that in 941 the British shame of Camlan in 537 will be wiped out. The poem has a reference to Arthur after all. If the annal for 537 is devoid of «historical value», why should it mention Medrawd, a minor figure? Or does Dr. Padel take him too as legendary? As for what it says on famine in Britain and Ireland, that is perfectly historical. Dr. Padel's case must collapse. The same applies to arguments in Dr. Padel's book on Arthur (Padel 2000), cited below from its second impression of 2013.

Now for another researcher, more balanced, if equally negative. Professor Nicholas Higham of Manchester is a historian, not a linguist. That he knows nothing of the Celtic languages wreaks havoc, alas, on what he says of place-names. So on the entry for 537. Crawford's suggestion of 1935 for Camlan as by a fort on Hadrian's Wall «should probably be set aside»; there is «no good reason» to think the annal «of any great antiquity»; the story is «unverifiable» and potentially «entirely unhistorical» (Higham 2002, 202, 209). That even though Castlesteads is a place of obvious military significan-

ce; other evidence puts Arthur and Medrawd in North Britain; and the annal is demonstrably accurate on harvest failure in 537.

Better is the summary of Martin Aurell. He denies that Medrawd was Arthur's foe at Camlan. He was «*plutôt un compagnon loyal*» remembered as a hero (until Geoffrey of Monmouth appeared on the scene). Aurell also notes the *mortalitas* of the same annal, regarding it as an epidemic, perhaps then «*interprétée comme une punition divine*» of Britons and Irish for their «*lutttes intestines*» (Aurell 2007, 88). We turn this on its head. Civil strife did not bring about *mortalitas*, but vice versa. It was because of famine that Arthur and Medrawd set off on a raid (for cattle?) which led to their death.

At a lower level is a book from Wales, unhelpful on Medrawd and Camlan, the whereabouts of the latter asserted as being «*obscur*», like that of «*all Arthur's purported battles*» (Jankulak 2010, 72). No mention here of respected scholars (Crawford, Jackson, Rivet/Smith) who placed it near Carlisle. Nor do they count with Professor Higham, who makes the bizarre proposal that Camlan «*should be sought primarily in south-west Wales*» (Higham 2011, 20). He fails to notice that, if Arthur died near Carmarthen, it is astonishing that Welsh bards knew nothing of it. The detail is telling. It points to a site far from Wales, in lost territories of North Britain.

If some could not say where Camlan was, others were certain. In a sensational book (with flamboyant illustrations), an Italian endocrinologist cited an eighteenth-century Welsh writer for it as near Dinas Mawddwy (in north-west Wales), with a picture of its green hills (Favero 2012, 178, 180). In contrast, Guy Halsall (an archaeologist) rejected the annal for 537 as no more «*trustworthy*» than the ninth-century fable of Arthur's hound, its footprint miraculously preserved on a rock near Builth Wells, Powys (Halsall 2013, 74). In a reprint of his book of 2000, almost unaltered (if now with an index), Dr. Padel asserted that «*there is no way of telling*» whether Camlan was in Wales, the North, or elsewhere (Padel 2013, 9). He makes the remarkable assumption that, while Welsh bards always remembered the disaster of Camlan, they had no idea that it was perhaps in Wales. The contradiction is obvious, the explanation is evident. The bards say nothing on Camlan's location because it was far away, in the British kingdoms of the «*Old North*».

So much is shown by Flint Johnson, a lay historian based in Wisconsin, who sees what others do not. On the annal for 537 he says two things. Because its «*tterseness and phrasing*» resemble those of other annals, it «*has a strong claim for being historical*»; because all other sources for Camlan name Arthur

as a leader, he was surely there. (What academic sophistry, one wonders, could get round that?) As for Medrawd, he was «most probably a northern figure». While an allusion to Barry Hill (in southern Scotland) as where Medrawd fled with Guinevere is mere folklore, comments of the Scottish chroniclers John of Fordun (fourteenth century) and John Major (1469-1550) are of more interest. They took *Medrawd* as a Northern hero (Johnson 2014, 17, 101). His being a Northerner may or may not be due to Geoffrey, who described Modred as son to King Loth of Lothian. But his being a hero is another matter. It implies access to an authentic tradition, independent of Geoffrey. Such survivals from Scotland are precious. They deserve emphasis, like other British lore in Border ballads and similar texts.

In 2015 appeared *The Arthur of the Iberians*, a volume of more than 500 pages, edited by David Hook and with essays by himself and ten others. Unfortunately, its index excludes Arthurian places and people. One must work through the book page by page to discover Spanish or Portuguese allusions to locations (Camelot, Camlan, Avalon) or individuals (Arthur, Guenevere, Lancelot, Galahad, Gawain, Modred). Carlos Alvar yet has a useful account of the «first historiographical references to King Arthur in the Iberian Peninsula». They are in the *Anales Navarro-Aragoneses* of 1196 (edited in 1989 by Ubieto Arteta), where Camlan figures (corrupted) in an entry on *la bataylla el rey Artus con Modret en Quibleno*. There is further corruption in an entry from *Anales Toledanos Primeros* (here dated to 1214): *Lidio el rey Zitus con Modret su sobrino en Camblenc*. Both mentions of Camlan (to which we shall return) are related to royal contacts between England and Spain in the decades about 1200, as also the circulation of fashionable texts like Wace's *Roman du Brut* (Alvar 2015, 234-36).

In the same year arguments were published for Arthur as a military commander (not a king) in Strathclyde, fighting battles in what are now Scotland and northern England, and being killed, with Medrawd, near Castlesteads in 537 (Breeze 2015). If the case is compelling, that for Arthur as «myth» falls to the ground. The paper is cited (in neutral terms) by Tim Clarkson, who thinks that the annal for 537 referred originally to location only, with «a later scribe» adding words on Arthur and Medrawd (Clarkson 2016, 108). While this may be so, it cannot be proved or disproved. Even if true, it is no proof for Arthur and Medrawd as purely legendary (unlike Merlin, who without doubt never existed).

Progress is found in another book, its author having made efforts to reproduce maps of places associated with Arthur. It is refreshing to find one of

Castlesteads, on a ridge east of Hadrian's Wall, with a river separating the two. Celtic material on Medrawd is also set out, the oldest for him and Arthur being «im Zusammenhang mit der Schlacht von Camlann» (Liebhard 2016, 146, 204-06). This monograph deserves attention. Apart from maps of Arthurian locations, it gives convenient access to a mass of original material. Different again is the English version of the Italian book cited above. Besides adventurous accounts of ancient peoples and their mythologies, it merits commendation for relating Camlan (and Medrawd) to the volcanic winter of 536-537 (Favero 2017, 44). Lay historians are open to new ideas. Many in the academy are not.

Recent studies underline the point. Dr. Esmonde-Cleary of Birmingham proclaims himself «very sceptical» on a historical Arthur. If Arthur did exist, it would be «around the year AD 500», whether or not he fought at «Gildas's battle of Mount Badon» (which «seems to have occurred» about then). In any case, for any «reconstructions» of the background to Arthur's Twelve Battles (as listed in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*), the «importance of the Anglo-Saxons» is fundamental (Esmonde-Cleary 2017, 15-16). This is fog. A few statements blow it away. Arthur existed. He died in 537. He had nothing to do with «Badon», fought in 493 at Braydon, near Swindon in southern England. Yet the other eleven battles were his and took place in North Britain, if against other North Britons, not Anglo-Saxons (a people in the 530s restricted to south and east Britain). The views of Dr. Esmonde-Cleary lack any cogency.

Returning to other discussion on 537, we find Professor Higham rejecting a site on Hadrian's Wall on the grounds that a «Roman-period name» would hardly survive into «the central middle ages»; nor does *Annales Cambriae* have material from North Britain which predates the 570s. Like Piero Favero, he prefers the Camlan near Dinas Mawddwy in Gwynedd (also providing a picture of it). Its Arthur was perhaps a prince named in a Dyfed genealogy (Higham 2018, 225). His case leaks. It is not difficult to find North British toponyms known in medieval Wales, such as British-Latin *Bremenium* (name of the Roman fort at High Rochester, Northumberland), which the Welsh referred to as *Brewyn* (see Rivet/Smith 1979) and located (correctly, we think) near Arthur's encounter at «Agned». As for Camlan in Gwynedd, objections stare one in the face. Arthur was the national hero of the Britons; Camlan was where he met his doom; how could medieval Welshmen be so unaware that this catastrophe occurred in their own land? Eighteenth-century speculation can be dismissed. Camlan was in the Old North.

Professor Higham offers one kind of misguided statement; Dr. Drake provides others. For him, Arthur was a «legendary figure» and «pan-Brittonic hero»; medieval Cornishmen none the less believed in his «historical reality» and (after Geoffrey of Monmouth) put his defeat of Camlan on the River Camel in north-east Cornwall (Drake 2019, 58-59). Nothing here on Arthur as really existing and meeting his doom in 537 by the Roman Wall. Still less helpful is a complete book on Arthur. Despite frequent mention of Camlan and Medrawd, it has not a word on the site of the first or identity of the second, because one of its editors declares that «a putative historical Arthur is not the concern of this volume» (Lloyd-Morgan/Poppe 2019, 6). For present purposes it is hence useless. Elsewhere, in a chapter on Welsh saga, one also looks in vain for statements on whether Arthur (or Medrawd) really existed (Williams 2019, 57). Readers may compare Camlan's invisibility in these studies with a chapter on it in another book (Breeze 2020, 11-24). It contrasts with another misleading declaration on Camlan as «where the A470 crosses the Dyfi near Dinas Mawddwy» in Gwynedd (Jones 2020, 188). Once more, oblivion on Camlan by the Roman Wall.

Conclusion: there has been a decline in official scholarship during the last forty years. The best surveys of the present subject were given in 1959 by Kenneth Jackson, 1978 by Rachel Bromwich, and 1979 by Rivet and Smith. Bromwich believed in the Northern Arthur, Jackson (her former teacher) did not; yet even he admitted the force of Crawford's 1935 case for a site by the Wall. A modified version of it (with *Camboglanna* as Castlesteads and not Birdoswald) was accepted by Rivet and Smith. For many today, however, these writers might as well have put their pens away. Their work is simply ignored.

4. A NEW ETYMOLOGY FOR *MEDRAWD*

Finally, the names *Medrawd* and *Modred*. The latter is easily dealt with. It is derived from Latin *Moderatus*, familiar to Spaniards from L. Junius Moderatus Columella (10-80 CE), a writer on agriculture and a (good) minor poet commemorated by a statue at Cadiz, his birthplace. In Vulgar Latin the form would, it seems, be pronounced «Mod'ratus». Hence *Modred*. Nevertheless, the question deserves further investigation. The writer here gratefully acknowledges the comments of an anonymous referee on accent-shift in Brittonic. Jackson put it in the eleventh century, Peter Schrijver argued that in Old Welsh it took place in the ninth; the referee remarks on how, if in Old

Cornish it also long predated the eleventh century, any «problem disappears» for the above Latin derivation of tenth-century Cornish *Modred*.

But *Medrawd* has another derivation, a purely Celtic one. Welsh *Medrawd* is not some «irregular» borrowing from Latin, as Dr. Padel imagined in 1984; although a link cited by him (after Sir Ifor Williams in 1921) with Welsh *medru* ‘aim, strike; be able’ must also be set aside. The first element can be explained on the basis of Welsh *medel* ‘reaping-party’ or Breton *medi* ‘reap’, with cognates in Latin *meto* ‘I reap’ and Spanish *mies* ‘corn ready for harvest’ (Lewis/Pedersen 1937, 54). The idea is not that *Medrawd* was expert with a sickle. He was no farm-labourer, but a fighting man who reaped or mowed or cut down enemies in battle. The use of *medaf* ‘I reap’ in early Welsh poetry makes that clear. So, too, do the names of *Elmet*, a district near Leeds in northern England, and *Dyfed*, a former kingdom (and twentieth-century county) in south-west Wales. Both forms go back to tribal appellations. *Elmet* means ‘those who mow down many (in battle)’ (Breeze 2002). *Dyfed* (compare the British-Latin *Demetae*) means ‘those good at mowing down (enemies in battle)’ (Breeze 2005). Each shows in no uncertain terms the aggressiveness of early Celtic society, dominated by a warrior-aristocracy whose occupations were war and plunder.

This expression has an interesting parallel in late medieval Spanish literature. One of the ballads about the battle of Roncesvalles has the following passage on the warrior don Renaldo:

Así se entra por los moros como segador por pan,
así derriba cabezas como peras d'un peral. (Díaz-Mas 1994, 205)

‘So did he advance on the Moors like a reaper in harvest, / So did he bring down heads like pears from a pear-tree’. No doubt there are similar expressions in many other traditions (see García Ramón 2021 for a comparison of such expressions).

As for the second element, there is a Welsh word *rhawd* ‘troop, host of warriors’ (Morris-Jones 1913, 79). It is related to the Celtic root *ret-* ‘run’ (Evans 1967, 249). This occurs in Late Latin *paraveredus* ‘spare post-horse’ (a hybrid borrowing, used by the sixth-century monk and scholar Cassiodorus), which ultimately gives German *Pferd* ‘horse’ and Spanish *palafrén* ‘palfrey’ (Corominas 1973, 434). That might suggest for *Medrawd* a sense ‘host that cuts down (enemies in battle)’. Why, however, should a warrior should be known by a collective noun? It is more likely that *-rhawd* retains an older

meaning 'one who runs (forward)', so that *Medrawd* will, rather, be 'he who races ahead to cut down (foes in combat)'. An apt term for a Celtic warrior, like a merciless wolf in action.

The above brings us closer to events behind the annal for 537. It suggests that, behind the deeds of King Arthur, there is genuine history. Camlan 'curved bank, bent hillside' is a place on Hadrian's Wall; Arthur was a North Briton, whose name derived from Latin *Artorius* (as accepted by Kenneth Jackson in 1959); his comrade Medrawd, on the other hand, had a purely British name meaning (it seems) 'he who runs forward to cut down (enemy warriors)'. Different again is Modred, found in early Cornish sources and appropriated by Geoffrey of Monmouth when he transformed Medrawd into Modred, Arthur's nephew and betrayer. In short, linguistic analysis is a powerful weapon. It shows as sober historical fact what many even now dismiss as fable.

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