

Finding Lost Gods in Wales

The Evidence of Medieval Literature

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EST. 1597

GRESHAM
COLLEGE



A People Born Dispossessed

- One-twelfth of the original owners of Britain, with no previous common identity
- The Irish had taken the far north, the English the south, and the Vikings had destroyed Strathclyde in between
- So Wales acquired its identity as a nation in the 9th and 10th centuries, aided by a common language, evolved from Brythonic in the 5th and 6th centuries
- Made for poetry because of concentration of meaning in words.

cherechyst: in illa die rex debet ei t̄ seruire.



nib;. Exqu
in mutal su
n̄ debet alicu
retent̄ em̄ et
h̄re sup̄ uill

Example - two lines by 12th-century bard Cynddelw

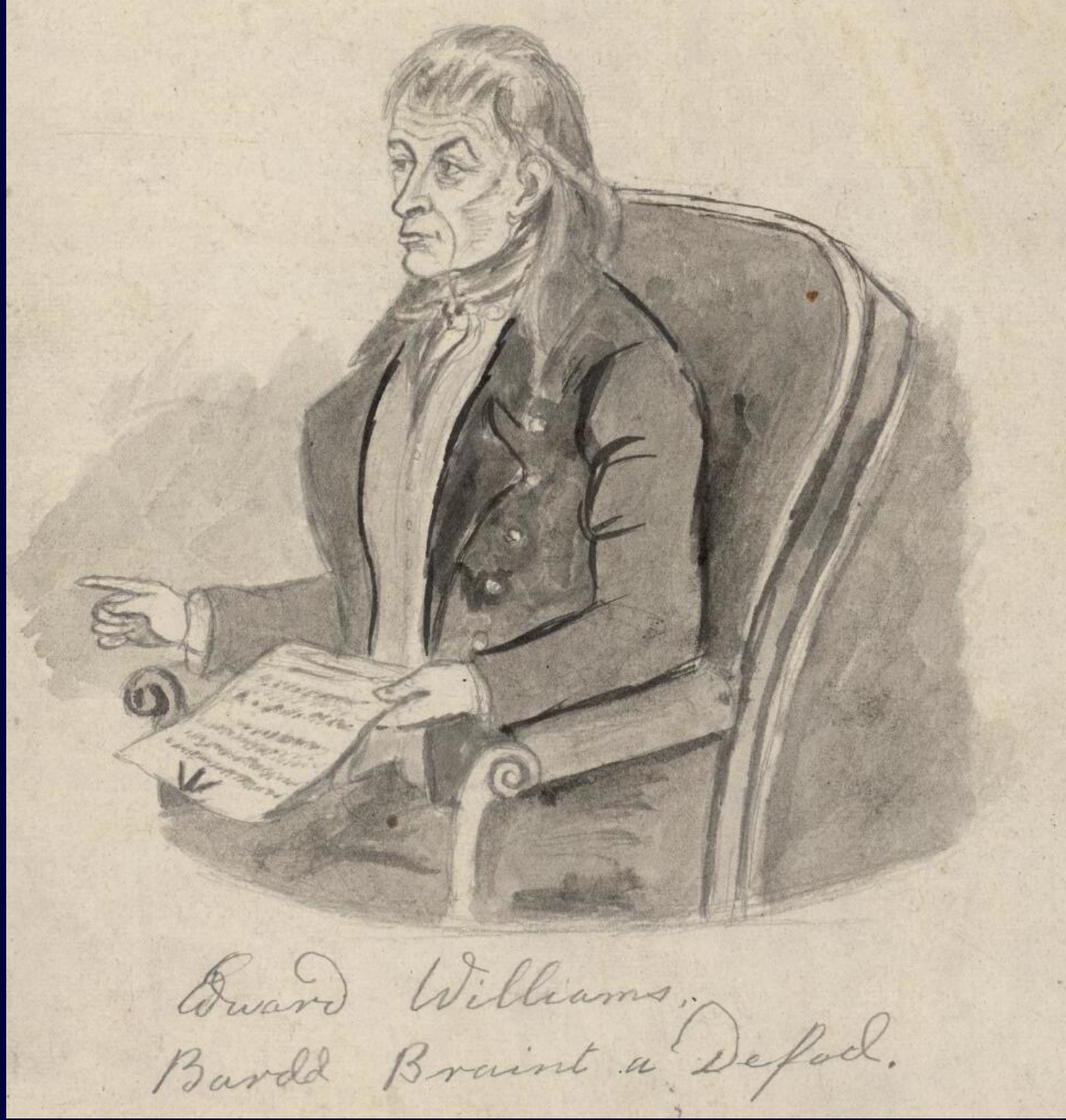
Tradition says
began in 6th
century, above
all with Taliesin



We do have poems attributed to Taliesin, but...

- There is no sign that he was regarded as the preeminent early poet until at least the 10th century.
- After that later poets claimed to be 'inspired' by him so wrote in his name, for 300 years. We are not certain that any of the poems credited to him were composed by him. Those most likely to have been are wholly political, having nothing to do with religion or magic.
- Welsh tradition was so powerful that until 18th century poets continued to pass off own work as that of long-dead predecessors—the fastest way to get attention.
- Two major problems result, at opposite ends of the chronological spectrum.

Later end –
Edward Williams,
alias Iolo
Morganwg



Edward Williams,
Bardd Braint a Defod.

Iolo Morganwg (Glamorgan Ted): his virtues

- A Glamorgan stonemason, active 1780s-1820s.
- A nationalist, part of great Welsh cultural revival that produced a national literary canon, national heroes, national costume, national instrument, national symbol and national cultural institution (the eisteddfod).
- Radical- vegetarian, wanted end to slavery and cruelty to animals, and votes for all men. Admitted women as equals to his societies.
- Accomplished poet and visionary, with real courage and imagination.

Iolo Morganwg: his vices

- Forger, drug-addict, gaol-bird and charlatan.
- Modern Welsh cultural nationalists have equated him with Hitler in German cultural history.
- Aim to recover the lost wisdom of the Druids.
- As he could not, filled the gap with forgeries- of a system of democracy, humanitarian ethics and reincarnation, with a single benevolent God.
- Taken seriously until early 20th century- all his forgeries not exposed till the 1950s.

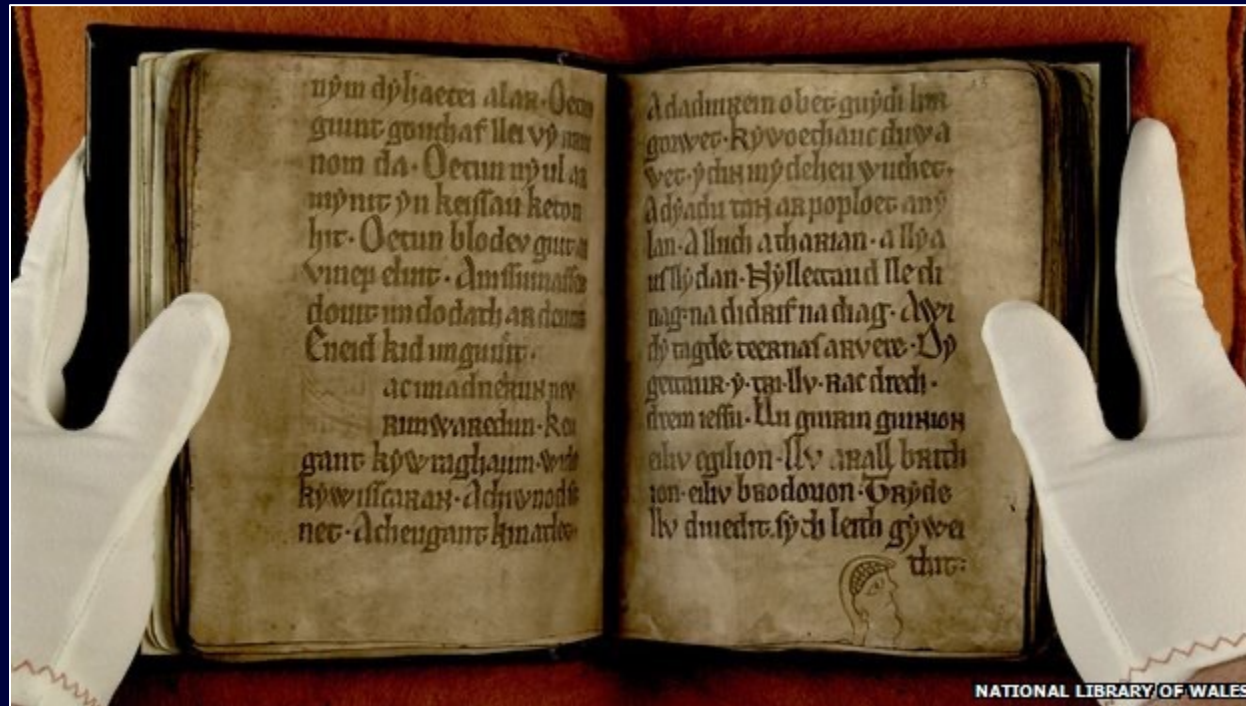


His ceremonies
and organisation
– the Gorsedd of
Bards – still
opens the
National
Eisteddfod

The problem at the early end

- All the famous medieval poems and stories, thought to embody traces of Druidic belief and pagan deities, now much later than believed until the late 20th century.
- At least 500 years after the triumph of Christianity, when ancient world practically forgotten and Welsh literature full of foreign influences.
- In comparison with Ireland and Iceland, not actually much surviving medieval literature. All of it with possible relevance to paganism found in just four manuscripts from the 13th and 14th centuries.

The Black Book of Carmarthen



ad q̄ illa q̄ p̄ m̄ caib coꝛp h̄ p̄ e d̄ . i . p̄ uico
f̄i o b̄ t̄ e q̄ e d̄ i o v̄ d̄ l̄ e q̄ e d̄ o t̄ e d̄ e a r̄ o f̄ o r̄ ḡ a l̄ c̄ e l̄ l̄ t̄ o
p̄ u l̄ a c̄ o m̄ i c̄ . l̄ o t̄ q̄ o i d̄ o b̄ u t̄ q̄ f̄ o h̄ e n̄ a r̄ e l̄ a s̄ e n̄ d̄ i
i . t̄ e m̄ d̄ e f̄ r̄ a n̄ a i m̄ o i . T̄ i a s̄ a r̄ e i q̄ f̄ i p̄ m̄ i m̄ i
l̄ a n̄ i q̄ o c̄ m̄ i l̄ e d̄ o c̄ . i . m̄ i l̄ e t̄ i f̄ o d̄ o r̄ i d̄ r̄ a c̄ a d̄
l̄ o t̄ q̄ i q̄ f̄ i l̄ a m̄ u m̄ i q̄ q̄ c̄ o r̄ p̄ a c̄ u t̄ q̄ t̄ e d̄ n̄ o u i t̄ o
i q̄ n̄ o h̄ i t̄ o . p̄ i t̄ o p̄ d̄ a t̄ e r̄ a o r̄ c̄ o r̄ e d̄ u i b̄ m̄ a r̄ e
b̄ d̄ p̄ i t̄ o . i . c̄ o r̄ p̄ m̄ i c̄ m̄ e d̄ a e d̄ i u t̄ a t̄ m̄ i c̄ i f̄ i
m̄ i m̄ a n̄ i p̄ e d̄ o n̄ o n̄ i p̄ a d̄ h̄ i p̄ i q̄ . i . p̄ o u i b̄ t̄ o
f̄ i t̄ d̄ a e t̄ a n̄ p̄ o b̄ o i n̄ y m̄ i m̄ i . b̄ a t̄ q̄ m̄ e
p̄ a t̄ e a t̄ o r̄ e . f̄ o n̄ a p̄ l̄ a t̄ a p̄ o t̄ a r̄ o o r̄ c̄ o r̄ p̄
p̄ i f̄ u l̄ a n̄ i d̄ o r̄ i o n̄ i . i . p̄ i l̄ n̄ i d̄ e p̄ i l̄ o u m̄ e . i . c̄ o r̄ e
q̄ c̄ o r̄ m̄ e f̄ o h̄ i t̄ a d̄ e p̄ u a c̄ a . p̄ l̄ o c̄ o r̄ e i o a l u n̄ i
a r̄ i u l̄ e i b̄ r̄ i o t̄ o a m̄ a t̄ a . l̄ o r̄ e t̄ o r̄ i p̄ m̄ m̄ i m̄ u
d̄ n̄ a p̄ u i b̄ a n̄ a n̄ f̄ i a l̄ n̄ i . T̄ a b̄ a d̄ i u r̄ a o r̄ i o n̄ i
p̄ o b̄ o i n̄ i d̄ i m̄ u o i c̄ o r̄ e u e u t̄ c̄ o n̄ o p̄ a c̄ i u r̄ a
a h̄ i f̄ i t̄ o d̄ n̄ a p̄ a i b̄ a n̄ a n̄ f̄ i u l̄ a d̄ . D̄ o n̄ a t̄ a d̄
v̄ o p̄ r̄ o u e l̄ i f̄ f̄ i t̄ o r̄ q̄ a c̄ a i l̄ l̄ e c̄ . b̄ o i a a i m̄
n̄ a c̄ a l̄ l̄ h̄ i t̄ i b̄ o p̄ e o d̄ o h̄ t̄ ḡ l̄ e o . D̄ o b̄ t̄ e a d̄ o m̄ e c̄
p̄ c̄ o r̄ e p̄ o r̄ u i n̄ a b̄ o c̄ a c̄ a o h̄ i m̄ a t̄ e m̄ . A l̄ l̄ a
f̄ i d̄ u e t̄ o b̄ l̄ i u d̄ o r̄ l̄ a i b̄ o u u o i b̄ i f̄ f̄ i m̄ i m̄ i d̄ o
n̄ a c̄ q̄ u a i c̄ o i i f̄ f̄ i o p̄ a r̄ u a . i . f̄ l̄ i n̄ c̄ h̄ u e t̄ i m̄ e
d̄ o c̄ o i t̄ o p̄ u r̄ i . b̄ o b̄ o i a i m̄ n̄ a c̄ a n̄ c̄ e q̄ i t̄ i
b̄ u i a i m̄ n̄ a i o r̄ . T̄ u c̄ a o i m̄ e i q̄ f̄ i i h̄ i f̄ i t̄ o
a p̄ o r̄ e . f̄ e i b̄ t̄ i u i t̄ u e t̄ a r̄ y a t̄ o r̄ b̄ o i p̄ i
f̄ i c̄ u i t̄ o c̄ e t̄ c̄ h̄ . A b̄ o i . c̄ e i b̄ h̄ i t̄ e l̄ t̄ u r̄ i i m̄ i e .
c̄ i a n̄ o c̄ a t̄ a r̄ o b̄ a l̄ a t̄ m̄ e d̄ o t̄ i q̄ i m̄ e d̄ o t̄ m̄ e o r̄ b̄ e i
I S̄ a o a r̄ e t̄ r̄ a n̄ a t̄ p̄ b̄ o i i r̄ o . i . p̄ m̄ i m̄ i a m̄ e
M̄ o d̄ a m̄ e n̄ i p̄ b̄ a c̄ o m̄ i a e o i ḡ i t̄ o . i . i m̄ q̄ u a o n̄ i t̄ o
c̄ o r̄ p̄ m̄ i c̄ d̄ o u i l̄ c̄ o a r̄ i q̄ c̄ o r̄ p̄ m̄ i a d̄ o r̄ a q̄ u a t̄ o
i . a r̄ a n̄ a t̄ o d̄ o c̄ o r̄ p̄ m̄ i f̄ o t̄ a i m̄ q̄ b̄ a d̄ a r̄ i
e t̄ a d̄ i l̄ a i . i . n̄ e m̄ e o m̄ d̄ f̄ i o b̄ c̄ t̄ o h̄ i c̄ a t̄ ḡ r̄ a t̄ e
o c̄ m̄ i q̄ b̄ u o i f̄ e n̄ i l̄ p̄ o b̄ o i p̄ i c̄ a i b̄ n̄ e i t̄ o c̄ o t̄ a r̄
c̄ t̄ a a n̄ n̄ i p̄ i c̄ a t̄ ḡ r̄ a t̄ e l̄ a t̄ m̄ e c̄ u d̄ a e d̄ o o i
ḡ a i l̄ a n̄ a t̄ a p̄ f̄ o r̄ e l̄ . h̄ i p̄ a i l̄ n̄ e i t̄ o p̄ o b̄ o i a m̄ i
f̄ i r̄ e d̄ c̄ o n̄ o m̄ a b̄ c̄ o m̄ i n̄ i t̄ a r̄ a t̄ e t̄ a d̄ i l̄ a i

et conuio. f̄ r̄ o t̄ n̄ e l̄ e o p̄ d̄ i m̄ p̄ e u e l̄ l̄ e . i . c̄ u e d̄ i c̄ e c̄
l̄ h̄ t̄ o i b̄ c̄ e d̄ o h̄ i l̄ u c̄ i i m̄ a r̄ o b̄ n̄ l̄ m̄ i b̄ r̄ e d̄ p̄ e u e l̄ l̄ e .
C̄ a e p̄ l̄ m̄ i o q̄ c̄ u e p̄ o r̄ u r̄ o d̄ o d̄ e o a r̄ o a r̄ a
o r̄ q̄ a t̄ e d̄ o i b̄ q̄ e a t̄ ḡ n̄ i p̄ a r̄ a o h̄ i b̄ . D̄ i l̄ m̄ e u i c̄ e u
c̄ o r̄ p̄ i t̄ o i l̄ o r̄ u i o a l l̄ o i o f̄ f̄ a r̄ e p̄ a u o t̄ e a n̄ u o
p̄ n̄ a p̄ h̄ e c̄ o m̄ u r̄ o p̄ o . f̄ i n̄ i u a l l̄ u e l̄ h̄ i m̄ i t̄
l̄ e i d̄ e p̄ l̄ a c̄ a r̄ . p̄ o r̄ u b̄ c̄ o t̄ e n̄ e . n̄ o u i t̄ e b̄ o c̄ o l̄ e m̄ i .
D̄ u r̄ e ḡ a t̄ e d̄ o d̄ p̄ m̄ o n̄ a o h̄ i b̄ . n̄ o c̄ o m̄ a r̄ e . n̄ i c̄ e
d̄ i u o r̄ l̄ e n̄ e a t̄ u e a t̄ a p̄ q̄ m̄ i t̄ e r̄ . n̄ i c̄ e ḡ u i f̄ i a n̄ i
E r̄ i t̄ o u i r̄ a o r̄ l̄ e n̄ e t̄ e a b̄ a m̄ i t̄ i m̄ e o r̄ i o i b̄ a u o o i .
p̄ o b̄ u o m̄ a r̄ e a l i u s̄ d̄ u i t̄ . m̄ a r̄ e a o r̄ i . l̄ a u o p̄ q̄
f̄ o i t̄ e c̄ o o i l̄ . C̄ a r̄ o a t̄ ḡ l̄ i n̄ o r̄ e . o n̄ d̄ a r̄ u i t̄ a a t̄ u r̄ o
o r̄ i . i . f̄ i p̄ i b̄ i t̄ d̄ u i t̄ h̄ i p̄ a i l̄ n̄ a l̄ e n̄ i c̄ o r̄ p̄ o r̄ i a t̄ u i t̄ o
i f̄ f̄ i o o r̄ i . q̄ i a t̄ e a o r̄ e . D̄ o c̄ t̄ o n̄ u o r̄ o d̄ o d̄ e o u o
p̄ a t̄ e m̄ e d̄ u p̄ o r̄ a b̄ z̄ r̄ a q̄ b̄ i t̄ o r̄ e t̄ o c̄ u i c̄ . a t̄ u r̄ | 7 |
c̄ l̄ i n̄ o d̄ u i t̄ t̄ o a i l̄ c̄ o r̄ p̄ u c̄ i u r̄ a d̄ o b̄ n̄ u e t̄ u i . i b̄ e i o i
c̄ o m̄ a r̄ e . a t̄ u r̄ e a d̄ i c̄ e l̄ e u a f̄ f̄ i q̄ r̄ u o t̄ u . f̄ r̄ o l̄ e | 8 |
i r̄ a t̄ e p̄ o r̄ u b̄ d̄ u i b̄ i c̄ i o f̄ o r̄ i . i . n̄ u o h̄ i r̄ . E m̄ u r̄ o r̄ i
p̄ u r̄ a t̄ a f̄ f̄ i i m̄ e o d̄ l̄ u i i b̄ a r̄ u e . A t̄ o r̄ a i e t̄ a ḡ e t̄ o | 9 |
f̄ i f̄ o l̄ a i n̄ e n̄ o p̄ i l̄ i m̄ a f̄ r̄ o l̄ o r̄ e p̄ i t̄ i m̄ e o i t̄
b̄ u i t̄ e p̄ e d̄ i m̄ p̄ o a l l̄ a t̄ i q̄ d̄ a c̄ a t̄ a a d̄ e . l̄ i c̄ e p̄ r̄ o
b̄ o m̄ e l̄ o h̄ i t̄ ḡ a r̄ i p̄ q̄ . n̄ o r̄ ḡ h̄ i a t̄ i o h̄ i t̄ ḡ p̄ o
c̄ i c̄ u i t̄ . p̄ u r̄ u i t̄ a f̄ f̄ i n̄ o c̄ o t̄ u r̄ o l̄ e b̄ a t̄ a t̄ i p̄ e
c̄ o b̄ z̄ a t̄ . M̄ a r̄ e o r̄ i o t̄ ḡ l̄ i c̄ o t̄ u i l̄ i t̄ u i b̄ a r̄ m̄ i t̄ ḡ l̄ a t̄
D̄ t̄ u l̄ e i q̄ s̄ . b̄ i t̄ o i o t̄ ḡ l̄ i o l̄ o i t̄ o a f̄ f̄ a c̄ o l l̄ i c̄
c̄ o r̄ i a n̄ i c̄ c̄ a f̄ f̄ e l̄ p̄ i a m̄ a t̄ a i . a c̄ n̄ a t̄ ḡ l̄ e n̄ e
p̄ a d̄ h̄ i c̄ o r̄ i o l̄ o i c̄ o r̄ i a n̄ i c̄ n̄ a d̄ h̄ i r̄ e . l̄ o r̄ e t̄
i o l̄ o i p̄ e o p̄ l̄ e n̄ i p̄ a b̄ a b̄ o m̄ e l̄ o h̄ i t̄ ḡ d̄ a n̄
n̄ i c̄ o p̄ e i b̄ o . q̄ i a t̄ e o r̄ i o r̄ u i d̄ o n̄ a o h̄ i b̄ p̄ u
f̄ u i t̄ a n̄ i p̄ e t̄ n̄ a b̄ o d̄ o f̄ u i p̄ a q̄ p̄ a r̄ e o n̄ a
o h̄ i b̄ o d̄ o c̄ l̄ a i t̄ o c̄ o b̄ z̄ u t̄ . D̄ o f̄ n̄ i t̄ e a l̄ a r̄ o . l̄ a u o
i b̄ o p̄ q̄ . I S̄ a o b̄ u t̄ q̄ o f̄ f̄ i a r̄ e i f̄ o r̄ a i . C̄ i t̄ o
d̄ o f̄ n̄ i u t̄ n̄ a o l̄ h̄ i r̄ e i n̄ o f̄ f̄ a o r̄ i o i l̄ . t̄ e n̄ s̄ d̄ o
l̄ o r̄ e u o q̄ b̄ o d̄ o l̄ e c̄ i t̄ o p̄ f̄ o a t̄ a m̄ i q̄ . n̄ i b̄ o i
m̄ u i n̄ i o n̄ o r̄ e . i . p̄ i l̄ i o l̄ o i n̄ i o a f̄ f̄ i o | 10 |
n̄ i u o p̄ i l̄ o r̄ i o i l̄ a . n̄ i c̄ o n̄ d̄ o u r̄ e n̄ a t̄ o m̄ i | 11 |

The White Book of Rhydderch

The Red Book of Hergest

21 (21) 1
22 (22) 1
Dy arunt. ac et aduc argof udunt tra
uui l'cunaf ac amheradu: et ry borthi oho
nuur hoy y h ymladu puryo arpuot yndiga
uu dygedur droyat yllu. ac ef aerthio ybaob
dyedut amgheir cubod hoy llynuw. aphabo agy
uunwoy ac ef. Agnucuthur agnucunnon yua
h'eraobde ac ynbernaaf arnuur awaethant: A
ethranucothgoy: troea yn oydyr agerthant
y: wyo. ac agnucunnon aduc ylu ynteu y
maes yu eiberbyn: aphaob oz lluoed aymla
d'astant yua. Agwed y dyuot ylan bo yhaf oz
dyo. Troilus agerthio y: bydri gyncat: ac a
lalaod ygroecoy: ac adiffethioy y maes oho
nuur. ac ac ftoes l'yt eithethill. Athradoy
goy: troea aduthant aellu y: maes. ac yn y
herbyn opnteu agnucunnon aduthi. ac adyf
goy: y bydri. ac aerua ybaob: aui o hoy ymo:
o'eu l'uoed. ac aymladuo yua yu eithyfer.
Achoilus alabaod llawer odywloggyon groec.
Ac uell yd ymladuo feit moariad y yua.
yua agnucunnon aerthio kygreir drubio. A
groedy ymagdarilhu obonunt agnucunnon
o au: ydduo onsthaeti aglaboy: palamud.
Aphob rei obonunt obo y p'arth y adustant eu
tywloggyon ac marchogyo urdul ereill o'ell yu
amrydduo. abehr agnucunnon aauuones
trallu y gygreir. d'ues. adionedo ac anello.
ac achelary y r'ethi idu yntet y: woydyr gy
alhey ac achelary yntet: am ry offor ohonuo
y y ybaob nat aer ymlad achioo ry adu oho
nao y caba yntet y: baob. neu ynteu yndicu
nat ymlad: ozthi y bot ef yntaru polyreua. y u
dyruae ef adchreuo: kabbu yhenadu adu
thoedynt atthio ozthi not ym o'ell y dyllynt ho
y heitab tragoy d'abl d'agudofed ydyunt agoy.
troea. ac ymlad yu eithlaen awaethant: athyo
ilus abarhaod diomedes adoyu r'uthur awa
ethi amemnon heh'et aerbrathu. ac ef ala
baod llawer ooy: groec. ac velly hoy dro y lau
er odywar: o'eu yn eithy: ac ef alas llawer
o'lyuoed o hoy p'arth. agwed y groet o agame
non ybot yntadli y: an bo yhaf o'ellu deuyd
ac nat oed allu g'annio y ymlad agoy: troea
adloyu kygreir awaethi ef choemio.
Ac yua yntet y y: baob: amio ac ymnegru
udunt adloyu hoy: groec. agrye: troea
dyedastant nat oed iabn udunt hoy r'idi kyg
reir l'yllyt a'hoano yoy: groec. namyn bot
y nobell ydunt ymlad ac y: ampuet y llogren.
ac yua yd'entat y: baob dyedut ydull.
achon baob obonunt ybu da g'oncuthur a
dloyu hoy: groec am y gygreir udunt. ac
agnucunnon aglaboy: yrei meuro. yu

lam. wihum nyf elan bystrof moe agham neu
 gouyf glaelan. druan cant lymun. rud em
 byf bythof. car by yfcofroy. ny gmet yn adof
 Am ym gōdōy n. amyn gōmōy o dolou obōy.
 hōr oym by nryflay. yll nabun hōrflay.
 drugleis vinyoullay hōr dūm hōeray. Gōt
 glōf ● hōrflay hōrflay cant ymō. cant
 caer. an gōf. dōrōdōn dōrōdōn. dōrōdōn
 p arthur. yfōr yfōd gōr. neur un engēlynt.
 leu adōy o yfōr dōy. dōrōt yfōrō. dōy
 dōrōt mēllay. euen yn cnyllā hōdōy bōrō
 yll acōdōy dōrōt o crymel flōy. *veit b. the. f. m.*
R p fāthōf ymten vōfōy. *veit b. the. f. m.*
 av adōn. py dōdō. aghen hōr no dōrōt m.
 hōrflay yn byt. am cōfōy. mēneid. dōr p
 nam dōdōt. py nam dōdōt. dōr am nam hōr
 nō. py dōrōdōn mō. pyt achōr dōy. py dōr
 hōr. adōy uch ar gōf cōyflōy. pōm yō hōrōf am
 pōm yō nōf hōrōf. anōf mō dōrōdōn dōy fōdōt
 allan. pōm yō gōfōrōm tōrōf tōrōf mō hōr
 yn dōl dōlōm. dōdōdōdōm. anōm. pōm yō mō tōrōm
 maen. pōm yō mō hōrōm dōrōm. dōdōdōm pōm gōdōl
 ac dōm ac vōdōm. py pōm pōrōy rōg dōm ac am
 nōy. pōm gōdōl ydōy ac dōrōm ac hōrō. dō
 oōt a pōh oōt pōm dōh yn hōrōf. ac oōt ac e
 nōt. ac ar gōf am hōrō. gōdōdōm hōrōm pōrōm

The Book of Taliesin

dōdōdōm. hōrōdōdōm nōf yn ar hōr dōy. dō
 oōt ar hōr. pōr dōrōm yfōd. py dōrōdōm mō
 nōd hōr nōdōmō dōrōm. py gōdōm mōgō
 yr dōrōm yn hōrōf. dōrōt pōm gōdōmō pōr
 gōdōm of pōr dōrōt. yfōdōf yn hōrōm nōf gō
 nōt yn dōrōm. dōrōt pōr yfōdōm pōm pōr
 y hōrōdōm. py pōrōm dōrōm rō. dōrōm
 yfōdōm. yfōdōm. anōmōm. pōdōdōm pōrōmō.
 dōdōdōf ar dōrōt pōm un yfōdōdōt. py gōdō
 mōdōdōt o dō. dōdōdōt. py gōmō yfōdōt am
 yn dōm tōdōdōt. py yfōdōdōm i tōdōdōt. nō
 mōn o hōmōm. py pōm hōrōmō dōrōmō
 dōrōt. pōm yō mōrōdōmō. hōrōmō nōf dōrōmō.
 dōrōmō fōdōmōm pōm pōr gōdōt yfōdōmō. dōrō
 nōf. an pōm yfōdōm yfōdōm. dōrō nōf nōf nōf hō
 nōf yfōdōm dōm pōm amōfōr pōm. amōfōr amōfōr pōm
 amōfōr. yfōdōmō pōdōdōt. ac hōrōdōmō hōrō. gōdō
 amōfōdōmōm pōm yfōdōmōm hōrōdōmō. dōrōmō
 hōrōdōdōmō hōrōdōmōm. hōrō. ar gōt an gōdōdōm
 ac dōrōt gōdōdōmōm. hōrōt of an dōm. an dōmō
 arōm of dōdōdōm. *Dōrōmōm*

D dōrōdōm nōfōm nōfōmō hōrōt ofōm. hōrō
 nōf. amōfōr. dōrōt dōf dōdōm. py pōm
 hōrōmō. nōfōt dōrōmōm. pōr oō. an nōdōm am
 gōdōmō. nōfōm. yfōdōmōm pōdōmōmō gōdōmōm
 gōdōmōm. dōrōt ac gōpōm. hōrōdōmōm dōrōmōm. pō

So What Do We Have? (1) The Prose Tales

- Collected as *The Mabinogion*. Eleven stories from the White Book and Red Book.
- Three are courtly romances, probably heavily influenced by French literature.
- None definitely older than 12th century. The probably oldest are the Four Branches of the Mabinogi, 1093-1140. Characters and plots may be older- but how much more? Work of a sophisticated writer, and draw on motifs from Egyptian, Arab and Indian tales which had been travelling across Europe for centuries.

The Mabinogion continued

- No goddesses or gods as such (unlike in Ireland), and no pagans, even though Four Branches apparently set in pagan times
- Several characters have superhuman powers, but are they deities in human form, or humans with magical abilities?
- Two apparent pagan survivals. One is shapeshifting- change form of objects, turn humans to animals and back, change human appearance.
- The other is Annwn, a happy and welcoming Otherworld of human-like people, interacting with human one. Both however very general.

Humanised Deities
or Magical Humans?
Example of
Rhiannon



Was she a goddess?

- Suffix –on seems to signify superhuman, and she indeed comes from a magical otherworld.
- Associated twice with horses, so was she an ancient British horse-goddess? She marries two successive human princes- so is she conferring sovereignty?
- Perhaps not- does not confer kingdoms on her husbands, and there is no sign of a sovereignty goddess anywhere outside Ireland.
- No sign of any ancient British horse goddess in Iron Age archaeology or Romano-British inscriptions.
- Rhiannon seems like royalty or nobility, not a goddess.

Perhaps we should abandon the quest for pagan deities and look at what characters would have meant to medieval Welsh audiences

- The Four Branches are about friendship, marriage and feuding.
- There is nobody quite like Rhiannon in previous human literature.
- She is a being from an enchanted world, who chooses to settle in the human one, and stays even when things go horribly wrong for her.
- She is propelled by the wish to choose a husband for herself. Thereafter she never loses control of herself, and instinctively produces different correct reactions to differing crises. She always stands her ground with iron willpower and stoical courage. One of the great female characters in world literature- and that is her real interest.

So What Do We Have? (2) The Mystical Poems

- The court poets 900-1300 were the apex of medieval Welsh culture, a highly-trained elite delighting in difficult, allusive verse, packed with metaphor, reference and word-play. A self-conscious national revival.
- Key concepts the semi-divine status of the bard, inspired by *awen*.
- Drew on Irish, Roman and Christian literature, but also on earlier Welsh bards, through written and oral sources.
- Seven famous 'mystical' poems are credited to Taliesin, and could be dated any time between 900 and 1250. Currently 1150-1250 is favoured for most. Deal in prophecy, fantastic imagery and supernatural themes. Mined for ancient pagan wisdom in modern times.



PREIDDEU
ANNWN

A New Mythology?

- 1100-1400 the court bards seem to have developed new mythological characters as well as (possibly) preserving an older set.
- Personalities who start off looking more human, gradually become more divine and superhuman
- Yet these are as medieval as King Arthur and Robin Hood
- All enhanced in modern times as deities

Ceridwen



Ceridwen

- First in tale *Hanes Taliesin*, well known by 12th century. A mother skilled in sorcery, who brews a cauldron which will confer the gift of wisdom and inspiration on her son. Servant Taliesin drinks it instead.
- As the brewer of a cauldron of inspiration, she become a great figure for court poets. By 13th century the Muse of bards, giver of power and laws of poetry.
- In 1809 Edward Davies made her into the Great Goddess of ancient Britain. Taken as such by many since.

Gwyn ap Nudd



Gwyn ap Nudd

- In 11th or 12th century one of King Arthur's warriors- has some magical powers, but they all do
- In 1880s Oxford prof In 14th-century poetry has become a mighty spirit of darkness, enchantment and deception
- Professor Sir John Rhys made him a Celtic god, often taken as that now

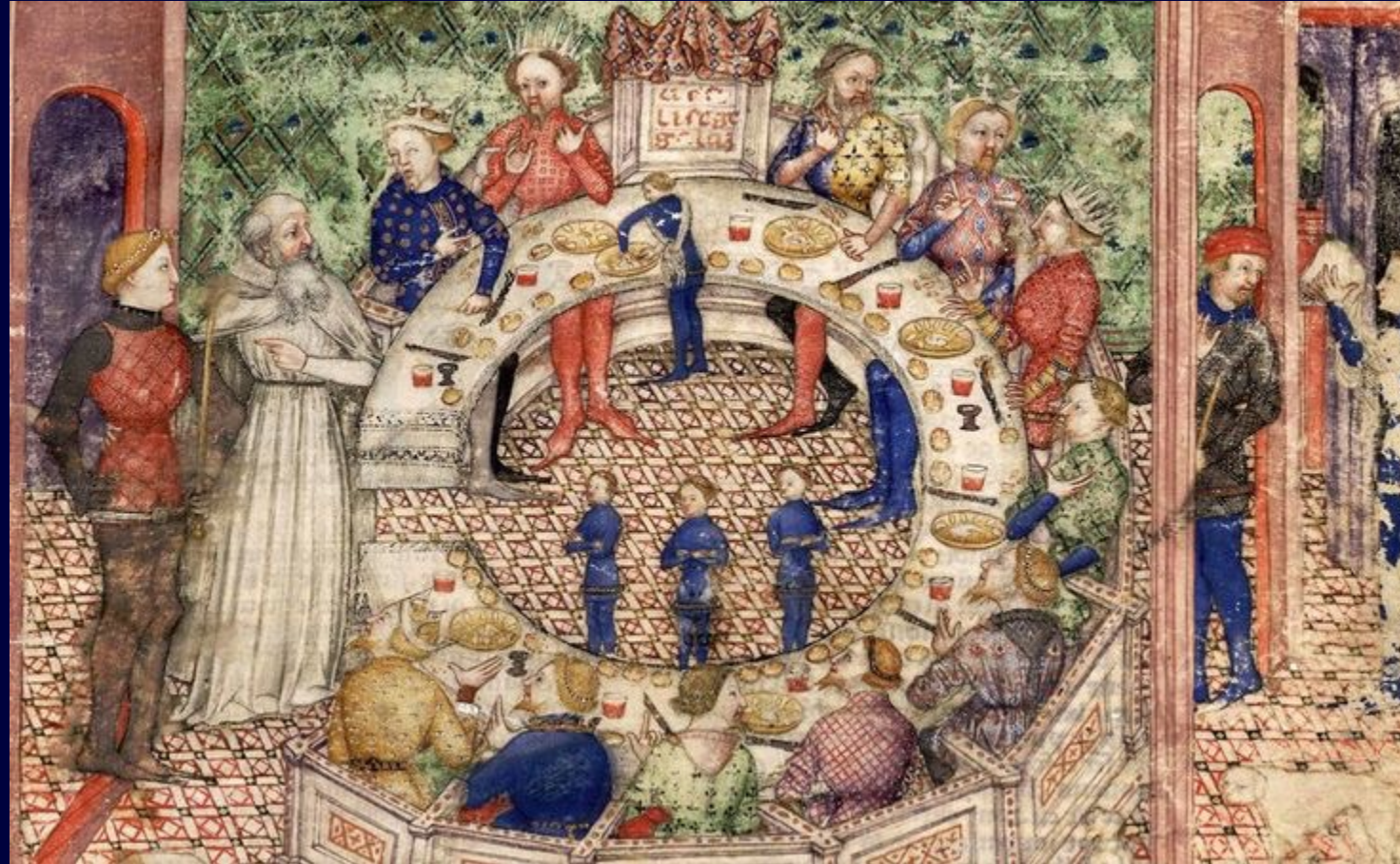
Arianrhod



Arianrhod

- In the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, a powerful, beautiful and selfish enchantress, making unbreakable curses
- By the 13th or 14th centuries her magical powers are much increased- can cast a rainbow about a court, and the Corona Borealis is called the Fortress of Arianrhod
- Now seen as a star goddess, since the 20th century

So to Welsh Literature's greatest gift: the Arthurian legend



The Arthurian legend

- Possible pagan motifs:
- The sword in the lake (but could be from finds not memory)
- The connection between the king and the land- the Dolorous Blow and the Wasteland (but the blow is struck with a sacred object)
- The Holy Grail coming from a sacred Celtic cauldron (but it starts as a dish, and turns into a Christian chalice)
- Glastonbury, Arthur's refuge and perhaps burial place and thought to be an ancient sanctuary (but while does have Arthurian period remains, has none so far to suggest pagan use)
- Like all medieval Welsh literature, it faces only one way- forward.



Glastonbury

Conclusion

- Medieval Welsh literature only faces the future-
- But that may be an inspiration as well as a problem.

